

Removing Code of Conduct is a 'step backward?', says Councillor

By Brock Weir

Aurora took a step backward last week in taking the Town's controversial Code of Conduct off the books, according to Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

Council passed a bylaw on Tuesday formally rescinding the document, which prescribed a series of guidelines to govern Council's behaviour, as well as an equally stringent list of ramifications that could be faced by Councillors if they deviate from the Code.

The document was instituted by the 2006 - 2010 Council after the Province opened up the Municipal Act to allow municipalities such as Aurora to put a Code on the books and to hire Integrity Commissioners to evaluate any complaints against elected officials incurred from a possible violation.

In that short period of time, however, Aurora has developed a considerable history when it comes to the document, including hours of Council debates, less than a handful of complaints, multiple Integrity Commissioners, all resulting in making it a hot button issue in the last Municipal election.

The majority of Councillors expressed concerns with the Code on the campaign trail and have taken multiple steps over the course of the current Council to remove it. Earlier this year, they voted to combine the existing Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics into a new, less stringent document, a revised 'Code of Ethics.'

According to Town Clerk John Leach, the revised document will be up for Council approval before Councillors break for summer recess at the end of June.

'I have no illusions I can change anybody's opinion,' said Councillor Gaertner on the issue, which was ultimately approved 6 - 3 with Councillors Chris Ballard and John Gallo joining her voting against the change. '[The Code of Conduct] was an interesting and important initiative of the last Council and what this did was allow politicians to stand up and say that they will uphold the principles of good conduct and ethics and that we will be held to a high standard. If our behaviour falls short of that, there will be consequences that we will accept as politicians.'

'There were mistakes made, it was a new initiative, it was a new initiative in the municipal act, but we tried to do something to increase our accountability to the community and I think that is something pretty special as politicians. I think this is a step backward for this community and it is a step backward for the politicians of this Council and I strongly object.'