

Report on attracting hotel due back in June: treasurer

By Brock Weir

A report on what the Region of York will do to help communities like Aurora attract a new hotel development is expected to hit the Regional table in June and Aurora Treasurer Dan Elliott says he hopes Aurora "will be pleased with the outcome."

Mr. Elliott commented on further talks at the Region last week as Councillors once again took aim at fostering further dialogue on what Aurora can do to finally land itself a new hotel.

At the top of the list standing in the way of Aurora and a place for visitors and tourists to stay are exorbitant development charges (DCs) levied by the Region of York. While Aurora has taken steps to ensure local DCs, money paid by incoming developers to account for future growth, are deferred to make it more cost effective for hotel companies to move in, the Region has yet to follow suit.

"The report was challenged by Regional Council and, as a result of the challenges that were brought up by members of Regional Council, the CEO at the Region suggested it should go back to staff for them to evaluate," said Mayor Dawe at last week's Council meeting. "There are some issues with their report [which says] 23 hotels have been opened since 2000 and 2015, but none of those projects were started or completed under the new DC [bylaw] at the Region. That was one of the concerns that was expressed by Regional Council and there were a number of other areas in the report that were questioned."

In that time, dialogue has continued between the Region and Aurora and, according to Mr. Elliott, the Region had "lots of questions" about what Aurora has done with its own DCs.

"Hopefully this Council will be pleased with the outcome coming back from Regional staff," he said.

Some Councillors, however, remain less than pleased with the situation and how discussions have unfolded so far.

The Region passed its revised DC bylaw in 2012 and Councillor Michael Thompson questioned why there was not more discussion around the municipal table when the bylaw came forward about what its impact might be to Aurora.

"I would suggest that because hotels form such a small component of the whole DC charge bylaw schedule, and they do form a pretty small part, that it was, for want of a better word, overlooked as to what the ramifications might be," said Mayor Dawe.

More dialogue, however, needs to happen, contended Councillor Thompson.

"While I get the Region has many projects and maybe for the Region a hotel development was maybe not as big an issue as it was for Aurora, but Aurora at that time was still talking about the need for a hotel," he said. "In fact, we have been talking about it since I have been on Council, so having had a chance to go back to the report and look at those bylaws, the report does speak to one of the key issues will be how hotel development is being calculated.

"It goes back to the issue we may only have one seat at Regional Council but that doesn't mean we only have one voice. There are eight other voices around this table and I think we all want to work collaboratively on issues that impact our Town. That is a prime example that perhaps if we had the chance to collectively discuss that 2012 bylaw perhaps we could have tried to address the issue back then.

"I think that again let's work collaboratively on some of these issues so we are speaking with more than one voice and one seat. I hope you will bring forward other issues that were at the Regional table that we can weigh in on."

Outside of DCs, however, there are limited things a municipality can do to entice a hotel development, said Mr. Elliott. You can't

favour one business over another, but DC rates can be parcelled differently.

?Short of us lending money to the developer to pay their Regional DCs, that is one incentive, and I see there is no traction there,? said Councillor Abel.

Added Councillor Tom Mrakas: ?If the Region decides not to change those charges, what do we do then? Do we just give up on attracting a hotel??

For Mayor Dawe, that is one facet that will be looked at with staff to ?see what is the art of possible.?