

Salaries for Mayor and Council to stay as-is?for now

By Brock Weir

Pegging salaries for the Mayor of Aurora and Councillors on a more predictable scale is likely to be an issue tackled by the class of 2018, following a Council decision this month.

Earlier in July, a report before Council said the salaries currently earned by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and Council were below their counterparts across York Region and the GTA. Municipal staff put forward a number of options to get Aurora's lawmakers up to snuff, as far as their colleagues were concerned, including using the same grading method used by Town Hall in setting salaries for Town employees.

?In keeping with the Corporate staff compensation policy of paying at the 50th percentile of the marketplace and eliminating the high and low, the mean annual salaries for the survey data set for Mayor and Councillor are \$80,737 and \$33,614 respectively,? said Aurora CEO Neil Garbe in his report to Council.

Currently, Mayor Dawe earns a salary of \$57,719 annually outside of what he earns as Aurora's representative at Regional Council. Councillors take in \$27,522 annually. Beginning in the next term of Council, the Mayor's salary will increase to \$66,719, following Council's approval of a \$9,000 pay increase last year.

For many members of Council, however, it was simply too late in the term to consider grading the salaries of Aurora's elected body.

?I think we would all recognize around the table we're paid fairly low for what we do and looking at an increase for the next term is probably warranted,? said Councillor Paul Pirri. ?With that said, in my view, I don't believe it is appropriate at this point in time to be doing that. I look at the environment we're in economically and it is not one that I am overly optimistic about in the near future. I have a more bearish view on this from an economic standpoint.

?If Council had looked at this in 2007, they would have thought this would be something great we should move forward on. If you wanted a year with this in 2008, people would recognize the timing just wasn't appropriate to do that. My preference is to leave things as they are.?

According to Mayor Dawe, the genesis of the options before Council stemmed back to request from Council to look at Council compensation wholesale, with an attempt to remove compensation out of the political realm and put it on the administrative shoulders of Town Staff. Earlier in their term, the incumbent Council established a citizens committee to look at salaries for Mayor and Council, but their suggestions were largely rejected by Council, with the exception of the \$9,000 mayoral boost for the next term.

?[This was to?] put it on the administrative side to define what our salary rates are, what the position of a Councillor would represent and what the position of Mayor would represent,? said Mayor Dawe. ?This is more from a responsibility point of view, as opposed to a necessary function point of view. It provides an objective level as to what your range should be, as it is always a challenging question to sit here and debate your own raise, whether or not there should even be one.?

The ?difficulty? in separating ?politics from policy? was one Councillor Michael Thompson said he recognized. At first blush, he said he believed the report provided a good methodology in setting these rates, but he wanted more information on the different financial levels available.

Voting upon a methodology was something he was prepared to do at that point, but he added further investigation was needed on just what the appropriate salary grade level would be.

?It is an awkward position to make and I think it is too bad we didn't have this discussion in the first year of our term,? added Councillor John Gallo. ?I believe early on in the term is when these discussions should take place. It is so close to an election and

my comfort level in approving any increases is not very high. My preference is to maintain the status quo.?

For some Councillors, however, the greater question around the table was not necessarily how much a Councillor makes, but whether they should be considered part-time positions, as they currently are.

?[The Council Compensation Committee] recommended a pay increase of the Mayor's salary by \$9,000 and when it came to Councillor's salaries, the economy would not support an increase for Councillors and I took exception to that,? said Councillor Buck. ?The economy has an effect on everybody and if a Councillor is doing his or her job properly, the number of hours that might be spent on it could easily be equated to a full time position, just as the Mayor's.?

Noting she agreed that this was not the right time to move forward with grading the salaries, Councillor Gaertner expressed a similar view. ?I am not entirely sure this is a part-time job. I do agree with Councillor Thompson it might be appropriate to discuss the methodology?so there is no political motivation attributed to it, after all I think many of us are going to be running in the next election, so we're not exactly arm's length.

?This is a problem that needs to be sorted out.?