

Snow disposal plan has, well, snowballed, argue Councillors

By Brock Weir

Snow is the last thing people want to talk about during the lazy days of summer ? especially after the winter we're still recovering from ? but a decision on what to do with all the white stuff when it starts flying hit a snag at Council this month.

Councillors were due to approve a nearly \$800,000 plan for a new snow storage facility at Lambert Willson Park this month, a project which used to be part of the \$26 million plan for the new Joint Operations Centre, which is due for Council debate on August 12.

The decision, however, was delayed for a few weeks pending further information from Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Services.

A ?proper? snow storage site has been in the works since 2007. Initially with an approved budget of \$250,000 in its earliest days when the plan was more basic, this budget had doubled to \$500,000 for the 2009 budget, with the site still slated for Lambert Willson Park.

By the time of the 2011 budget, additional facilities were needed to make it a ?proper? site and an additional \$450,000 for the project was approved in the 2012 Budget, before being lumped in to the overall plans for the Joint Operations Centre, slated for the north end of Industrial Parkway North.

Most recently, however, plans for the snow disposal site were separated once again from the Joint Operations plan and shifted back to Lambert Willson Park, citing cost savings and ?efficiencies.?

?The project was consolidated with the Joint Operations Centre as an initial exercise in cost savings based on the tendering of a larger project,? said Mr. Simanovskis in his report to Council. ?However, the project was deemed to be more cost effective if delivered separately from the JOC due to cost savings in architectural fees required for joint project oversight, efficiency in the specialty of the work, and the in-house expertise available to oversee the project delivery.?

With the shift in plan, the total cost of the JOC is slated to be reduced by the \$814,355 already slated for the snow storage facility. As a separate item, however, the same facility can now be built at Lambert Willson for \$792,362.13.

Despite the report, some Councillors said they were having trouble ?following the bouncing ball? on this proposed facility, voting to defer the item until Mr. Simanovskis was on hand to answer questions.

?It is somewhat frustrating to see that the original project in 2007 was \$250,000,? said Councillor John Gallo, reviewing the fluctuating price tag tied to the plan. ?We had it at Lambert Willson, [then] the Joint Operations Centre came and we switched it. Then we figured we should separate the two and switched them back. I think this is the switch back and we're somewhere around \$800,000 to do this project. It seems somewhat ad-hoc.?

Councillor Gallo also said he took issue with the ?alternatives? outlined in the report, which were nil; simply stating ?the tender process meets all the requirements of the purchasing by-law and awarding this contract is the next step in fulfilling the requirements of the tendering process.?

?That is not an alternative; that is saying we need to move forward with this and you have no other options,? continued Councillor Gallo. ?It bothers me no end when I see that. At a minimum staff can suggest Council not move forward with this project. I believe this is an option and I believe we have many options. I am not interested in moving forward with this.?