

## Value of attending conferences should be reported by Council members: motion

Members of Council attending conferences, seminars and other events at the expense of the Town could soon be required to report back on the trip's value to the community.

Council, sitting at the Committee level last week, gave the tentative green light to a motion from Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo calling for staff to develop a written reporting framework for elected members to report back on key topics, sessions, or discussions attended; summary of key learnings and takeaways; any relevant best practices or ideas that could be considered for implementation in the Town of Aurora, and that the resulting reports be made public.

Members of Council attend conferences, seminars, and external events at the expense of the Town of Aurora, either through direct funding, conference budgets, or reimbursements in accordance with the Compensation and Support for Members of Council policy, said Councillor Gallo, in his motion, which is expected to formally pass at the April 28 Council meeting. These events are intended to provide professional development, enhance municipal knowledge, and bring forward best practices that can benefit the Town and its residents.

There is currently no formal, standardized requirement for Members of Council to report back publicly on the value, insights or outcomes of their attendance. Transparency and accountability in the use of public funds are essential to maintaining public trust and sharing knowledge gained from conferences can support informed decision-making and provide value to the broader Council and community, ensuring transparency, accountability, and the value for taxpayer-funded conference attendance, while strengthening knowledge-sharing among Members of Council, is in the public interest.

Speaking to his motion at last week's Committee meeting, he said while all Council members attend sessions like these from time to time, we've never really reported back, perhaps informally at times, and things that we've learned, maybe we've implemented without really expressing it to other Council members or the public.

The motion passed Committee unanimously with Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland stating constituents want to know what their elected representatives do at these conferences.

I always post key takeaways that I've learned at conferences and try to make sure that the constituents are aware of the things that we're discussing. I think this is just providing that framework for us to provide, she said.

Mayor Tom Mrakas, whose expenses in his role as Regional Councillor have come under scrutiny given his role as York's representative on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, said it was great to make this reporting process formal.

I'll just say in my 12 years, I've constantly let the public know exactly where I am, what I'm doing, exactly what we've been talking about and what we're bringing back to the Town of Aurora, he said, asking whether the reporting framework would be ready by the time he and several Council members attend the upcoming Federation of Canadian Municipalities conference in Edmonton, AB, this June.

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