

"Voice of Aurora" readies to take to the airwaves



By Brock Weir

Following the 2013 Ice Storm, Mayor Geoff Dawe received several calls from people seeking updates over the radio on Aurora's situation. While those updates were duly made ? just on a station fewer people happened to be listening to ? a local solution could soon be in the offing.

?The Voice of Aurora?, a proposed local radio station, could take a significant step forward this week. The man behind the voice, Bradford-resident Ferguson Mobbs, a retired Lt. Col. in the Royal Canadian Air Force, made a further pitch to Council this week.

Mr. Mobbs' proposal is a radio station fully operated by community members who will be specially trained on the basics of broadcasting and equipment usage. While such a station would be open to all segments of the community, Mr. Mobbs said interest in becoming involved has already been expressed by the Royal Canadian Legion, the Queen's York Rangers, and the broadcasting department of Seneca College.

Mr. Mobbs first approached Council with his idea this past winter and in the intervening months, with support from Aurora's Community Grant Program and the Mayor's Charity Golf Classic, he has since secured call numbers and licences from the CRTC. Now it is up to Council to take the project to the next level.

Going into this week's Council meeting, municipal staff recommended Aurora's 2015 Capital Budget be increased by a quarter of a million dollars, funded from Growth and New Infrastructure Reserves. This money, according to a report from Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, would go towards the design and construction of space currently earmarked at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, which would house a community radio station and sound studio.

But, over the course of this week's deliberations, it was revealed this hefty price tag was included in the report in ?error? and they would actually only need up to \$10,000 to install carpeting and electricity in the designated space at the Leisure Complex.

With Council's approval, a radio antenna to complement the station will be installed on the Aurora Cultural Centre, a proposal which has already been okayed by the Ontario Heritage Trust.

?The recent renovations of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex have created an additional program space in the vicinity of the former entrance into the ice rink,? said Mr. Downey in his initial report to Council. ?This space is approximately 640 square feet and separated from the existing program area of the facility. Mr. Mobbs has indicated that this would be ideal space and address his needs for a radio station as well as a recording studio.

?The space at present is unfinished and would require capital improvements. During the recent reconstruction of the Aurora Family

Leisure Complex (AFLC), staff obtained a quote for improvements to the room in accordance with plans presented by Mr. Mobbs. The value of these improvements was estimated at \$222,000. Staff reviewed this cost estimate and feel it is too high and could be reduced through competitive tendering process. The requested improvements are unique to the proposed purpose with the need for sound proofing, electrical upgrade and separation of space to accommodate both programming and administrative purposes.?

The vision for ?The Voice of Aurora? tentatively includes not only the radio station itself, but services that would support the youth facility currently housed at the AFLC, providing an opportunity for budding musicians to perform at a lower-than-normal cost.

?The cost may be the engineer to do it, and a very minimal charge to be able to do it, which is not available to them anywhere else,? said Mr. Mobbs in his initial pitch. ?What it does do is bring them in and give them something to do. The various local groups, such as churches, can come in and make recordings.?

Broadcast hours between 4 and 6 p.m. would be specifically available to high school students, he added.

The Voice of Aurora would also be self-sufficient, powered by auxiliary generators if need be, in case of an emergency.