

Anti-idling enforcement eyed by Council

By Brock Weir

The heat is blazing and you might like nothing better than waiting in your car with the air conditioner blowing while you wait for your child at a local sports field or your spouse while they run errands, but you might have to be more mindful of that in the future. Council is looking at ways to develop an anti-idling policy for the Town of Aurora and possible enforcement mechanisms to get you to turn off your vehicles while waiting.

The move came following a motion from Councillor Wendy Gaertner, citing the environmental Blue Dot Movement, which encompasses a human right to clean air.

In her motion, Councillor Gaertner said putting a policy in place here in Aurora would be a first step in sending an important message that idling is not acceptable while increasing awareness of its negative environmental effects.

Anti-idling is not a new issue for Council. Previous attempts to crack down on idlers resulted in signs being placed in key locations across the municipality, particularly at recreation facilities, but further measures have failed on the issue of enforcement.

At the last Council meeting, Mike de Rond, Clerk for the Town of Aurora, said the Town's Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) recommended to Council that they approve an anti-idling bylaw be drafted and put into practice. This process, however, hit a snag when municipal staff spoke up on big concerns on how we would enforce.

It was sent back to Committee who agreed enforcement would be difficult and asked that the Mayor sign some letters to various agencies about anti-idling, said Mr. de Rond. There is no direction on the books for staff for anything anti-idling.

But the time is right to put matters back on the books.

Responding to the Clerk's comments, Councillor Gaertner said that she agreed anti-idling legislation would be very hard to enforce, she saw her motion as a starting point and, perhaps, a finishing point in trying to come up with a workable solution.

I would like to have an anti-idling policy in place so that if someone is idling their car, you can go up to them [and let them know we have a policy], she said. Maybe these things are small and individual, but they could become pretty big when we're looking at environmental protection and climate change as a whole. We did have an educational campaign at one point, but I don't think it was very effective; maybe we can revisit that. We do have anti-idling signs, but they are way above a driver's head. Perhaps we can have some more appropriate signs put in place.

While Council was supportive of exploring best practices and options around the issue, giving the green light to Councillor Gaertner's motion, they said they were hesitant about taking things a step further and formalizing an anti-idling policy into an actual bylaw.

I think everyone knows I care about the environment, but I think it is a very difficult practical hurdle to overcome, said Councillor Paul Pirri. I am happy to try new things, but I envision a situation where someone like me would walk up to an idling car, 'Excuse me, I think there is a policy in place that prevents you from doing this,' it might not end well for me! I could be told a number of expletives and the situation [doesn't] get resolved.

It is a step in the right direction, I understand there are massive problems with enforcement. You call, somebody drives off and a bylaw officer shows up. But there are some real concerns. GO Trains are examples, idling in the past to ensure that either the air conditioning or the heating stayed on within those, and would you rather have people in a hot cabin or would you rather then not idling? Are there other systems that can be inserted? I am happy to vote in favour of this, but I think there are some practical realistic concerns that even if we do this we might not have the intended outcomes that Councillor Gaertner is looking for. But that is not a reason not to try.

Councillor Michael Thompson offered a similar view, stating he was in favour of a public education campaign and looking at best practices in other municipalities that have reduced the amount of anti-idling taking place.

If our policy is we're going to do a public education campaign and new ways to reduce the amount of idling that happens in Town, that's great and a nice step forward, but [there is a] completely different connotation than the creation of a bylaw and having our bylaw enforcement officers enforce it, he said.