

Business owners unhappy with "signs" of the times

By Brock Weir

It's back to the drawing board in drafting a sign bylaw that addresses concerns from businesses and members of the public alike. Council has tasked staff with undertaking another review of the municipal sign bylaw, which could pave the way for new rules on the placement of A-frame or sandwich board signs.

Following a motion from Councillor John Abel, staff are now looking at best practices in other municipalities on the hot-button signage which has, on the one hand, been seen by business owners as essential in promoting themselves and, in the other, derided as one of the main culprits in sign pollution.

In his motion, Councillor Abel recognized concerns and complaints with changes to A-Frame rules concerns and complaints reiterated by delegations from Javed Khan, former President of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce Board, and local chiropractor Brian Moore.

The new sign bylaw, he said, removed permissions for temporary A-frames, which adversely impacted the business community. He called on staff to report back on regulatory provisions that could be included, including nominal permit fees, in a new sign putting A-frames back into the mix.

I have heard from other businesses in Town, along with Dr. Moore, and in particular not just downtown Aurora but off of Industrial Parkway where there are some businesses that have units in behind, said Councillor Sandra Humfries in favour of the motion.

When some of the restrictions were placed upon these businesses, a few of them mentioned that people thought they were out of business or no longer there.

Having an A-frame will allow these businesses to thrive. One in particular said that more than 50 per cent of business was [from] people walking in from off the street into their store. I am looking forward to this being reviewed and for the report to come back on how we can take another look at this and see how we can provide a happy medium where we have our businesses thriving and using this type of media to show what their businesses offer.

Despite sign bylaw reviews being a well-worn path at Council, Councillor Michael Thompson said he was in favour of a second look.

I am good with going through a review process again. I appreciate the comments of the delegate and I appreciate the comments of the chamber as well. Some of the comments they made about parameters and guidelines I would like to see come out of that report, but I was intrigued by the one comment about a permit system.

Asked by the Councillor whether similar programs were in place in other municipalities, Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Corporate Services, said this was indeed the case and an option that could be explored.

Councillor Jeff Thom also expressed his support of the motion but only to a degree.

I appreciate engagement from our business community on this and certainly would be in favour of looking at ways we can encourage businesses to compete for economic growth, he said. The challenge I have [with the motion is] I would like to engage and look at this from a holistic point of view, as opposed to saying A-frames are the answer. I hear from a lot of residents that find A-frames are not fantastic and they don't like them at all. I get complaints all of the time.

For me, I think if we're going to go back to staff and engage the community we should engage them from a perspective where we're going to listen and perhaps come back with different solutions other than just A-frames.

These concerns were also voiced by Councillors Harold Kim and Wendy Gaertner.

One of the complaints Councillor Kim said he fielded was A-frames getting blown out of place in windy weather and, as a consequence, possible safety hazards.

I got a lot of complaints from residents that the A-frames were there all day long and all weekend, added Councillor Gaertner, touching upon the thorny issue of sign pollution. People were unhappy. There is a list of things I've gotten comments on over the years and certainly A-frames is one of them. I am really not in favour because I have seen what happens when you give leeway. It hasn't happened in Aurora, but some of those signs are not very sturdy and they do fly around. We have had some big winds this winter. Maybe that could be counteracted by having a different design of A-frame.

If it is the will of Council we can go back and look at this, but I think we need to take into consideration the possibility of having those signs removed when the businesses are not open, just for the visual sign pollution.