

Cultural groups weigh in on next year's budget

By Brock Weir

A 2.7 per cent budget increase for the Town's 'Cultural Partners' - the Aurora Cultural Centre, the Aurora Public Library and Aurora Historical Society - cleared a hurdle last week at the committee level.

Aurora's Finance Advisory Committee passed a motion pegging a boost for each organization the Town supports at 2.7 per cent to account for inflation and growth, but just how much the Aurora Cultural Centre will get in the deal is expected to be a matter of Council consideration next week.

The Finance Advisory Committee (FAC) originally faced a recommendation calling on Council to increase the Aurora Public Library's Budget to from \$3.65 million last year to \$3.77 million this year, the Aurora Historical Society from \$70,500 to \$72,600, and the Cultural Centre from \$393,900 to \$405,600.

'The staff recommended allocations incorporate a component of inflation and growth related revenue,' said Town Treasurer Dan Elliott in his report to Council. 'The staff suggested increase to funding for each of its cultural partners is 2.97 per cent over the 2016 Town funding amount.'

While Craig Mather, President of the Aurora Cultural Centre Board, was on hand to lend his support to the recommendation of an indexed increase, he questioned the 2016 figures being used as a base.

Last year, Council voted to increase its support of the Cultural Centre by \$10,000 post budget. Therefore, he argued, the increase for 2017 should be calculated from a 2016 figure of \$403,900, leading to a 2017 budget of \$415,900.

While the Committee agreed this budget amount would have to be discussed at Council, Mr. Mather said indexed funding would be a help to the Centre.

'This is a much better process than showing up at Council kind of at the last minute and making a pitch, which I know was uncomfortable for us all,' he said. 'We haven't really started our budget for next year, to be honest, but with this guideline, and maybe with consideration of the additional \$10,000, it will allow us now to formulate our budget, speak to our Board, give direction and move forward.'

Added Mayor Dawe: 'One of our budget goals is to move to multiyear budgeting and it is a challenge to get there [but] in the end it makes it a lot easier for everybody.'

Last week's FAC meeting came on the heels of the July 12 Budget Meeting where Councillor Harold Kim, himself a member of the committee, voiced concerns over a secure funding model for the three organizations. Each, he said, need to show some improvements in their 'governance' he said in regards to funding.

'My hesitation regarding multiyear [funding] at this point is we agreed [staff] are not ready for that stage yet,' said Councillor Kim at last week's meeting. 'Just as we're doing due diligence with all the departments, starting off with Parks and Recreation, and we're going to move into IES (Infrastructure and Environmental Services) in a month, we're treating our external stakeholders in the same way as we are Town Departments.

'It seemed to me, before we have a steady funding formula and multiyear planning, we also have some kind of due diligence so we have appropriate funding for their needs and part of that would be structurally [and] is the delivery and service model the most optimal?'

Councillor Michael Thompson, on the other hand, offered some wariness on the three organizations being treated the same way in the budgetary process as 'cultural partners' because each offers Aurora a different service based on a different model.

?While you can argue they all reside in that Culture sector, I think they are all different,? he said. ?We have a purchase services agreement with the Cultural Centre. We have a specific relationship with our staff, the Library is governed by the Ontario Public Libraries act. It is a different entity than the AHS. My preference would be to split them out and deal with them individually as they are all related in one way and very different organizations and we should be treating them differently.?

This was a concern shared similarly by Jill Foster, CEO of the Aurora Public Library, who said the comments made at the last Council meeting suggested the Library was ?not being as fiscally responsible or as responsible as the other groups funded.?

?I don't look at the Library as a Cultural Partner,? said Ms. Foster. ?I see us as a municipal service primarily and I am glad to hear Mr. Thompson's comments because I do concur that the Library structure and its governance is quite different and really the only connection we have with the Historical Society and the Cultural Centre is we do partner with them on events.?