

Developers to receive new guidelines on the cost of building in Aurora

By Brock Weir

New guidelines are in the works for a plan ensuring developers put their money where their mouths are before moving into Town.

Dan Elliott, Treasurer for the Town of Aurora, is expected to introduce new bylaws this fall surrounding Development Charges, funds paid to the Town by incoming developers to provide for future growth needs.

Development Charges have been the subject of significant debate in Aurora recently as funds are running significantly low. Over the next decade, these coffers are expected to be replenished in equally significant measure as thousands of new homes and buildings are built in the 2C Lands, a large chunk of Aurora roughly bordered by Highway 404, Wellington Street East, Bayview Avenue, and the boundary with Newmarket.

But this land, however, is the last swath of 'green field' land in Aurora and when this is filled in, the question will then shift to what comes next.

Indeed, this was the question when Councillors approved a 10 year vision for the Town of Aurora last month. The plan includes new strategies in keeping Aurora's reserves in check, but Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she wanted to ensure the separate plan to tackle DCs would carry Aurora through 'build out.'

'The concept of build-out is an ever changing target,' said Mr. Elliott. 'Build out now is 2031 based on the forecast period, however, we anticipate green field build-out will occur prior to that, probably in 2021 or 2022 based on the plan for the 2C.'

'That is the last major area of green field development to go. When that happens, in theory, if the Town ceases to grow, which means ceases all building activity, there will be no DCs to be collected in the future. There would be no DCs in the bank, all infrastructure, in theory, required to support the growth, is in place' but a municipality never stops growing. We have long-range plans.'

Long range plans due back this fall would, he said, address build-out targets and a timeline, maximum capacity in Aurora, and account for what he predicts will be handed down from the Ontario Government - namely a mandate to increase intensification.

'There will be intensification, maybe some new builds and, of course, the population will grow,' said Councillor Gaertner. 'Those DCs are precious to us and we need to be careful in what we do with them.'

From the perspective of Councillor John Abel, having limited money left in the DC Reserve account was a 'good thing.' That means, he said, that it is being used for what it is intended to provide in terms of infrastructure and addressing new growth.

'I am not going to raise any alarm bells because some of the DC funds are at a zero balance or just below because there is a plan in front of us for growth going forward,' he said. 'I think that is very important to bring that forward.'

Discussions over development charges stemmed not only from Council's approval of the new 10 Year Capital Plan, but also intentions to finance big ticket items like the new Joint Operations Centre and Community Space for Youth, both slated for Industrial Parkway North, the latter as an overhaul of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, by borrowing temporarily from the Hydro Reserve Account.

As The Auroran reported last month, Councillors approved a process to borrow more than \$20 million internally from the \$33+ million Hydro Fund to finance the two projects if no 'more attractive' grant options come forward.

The money would then be replenished back into the Hydro Reserves as DCs roll in.

?The situation [is] that we have overdrawn DC reserves at the moment and we have significant assets currently listed for sale in Town,? said Mr. Elliott. ?We have \$20 million worth of land for sale on Leslie Street and we have actually got a deal on Scanlon Court pending our move out of there. These are cash flow sources that are short term in nature, so I am recommending we use that as a funding source for these major projects we have committed to the community.?

Aurora's current Works Yard is located on Scanlon Court. When complete, it will join the Parks and Recreation department at the new \$17 million Joint Ops Centre.