

Fire Department seeking land for new station, training centre

By Brock Weir

The hunt is on for land on which to build a new fire station and training central for the Central York Fire Services, serving Aurora and Newmarket.

Newmarket Council has approved a \$25,000 plan to hire an architectural consultant to help with land securement and, pending further funding, design the facility according to the land selected, that will house administration, a training facility, and a new fire crew.

A new fire station is one of many priorities outlined in the CYFS' draft update to their fire master plan. It is intended to be located centrally to both communities, and the Joint Council Committee (JCC), the group of Aurora and Newmarket Councillors tasked with overseeing the CYFS have, along with consultants drafting the plan update, been eyeing land located in the area of Yonge Street and St. John's Sideroad.

Discussions at JCC centred around the budget and the recommendation to move forward with what is in our Fire Master Plan, said Councillor John Abel, who sits on the JCC. What we recommended was moving forward with possibly looking at sites for the new fire hall and to only spend \$25,000 on an architectural consultant to give an idea of what piece of land we need and for the options of how big a building we're going to build for training facilities as well as administration, which isn't huge.

The bottom line is we want to start looking at securing some land.

Sitting in for Aurora CAO Neil Garbe at last week's Council meeting, Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation, said this is the first step in addressing the need for an additional station as well as where it might go.

It is not committing Council to a purchase, but rather we're exploring the opportunities that are out there to retain those parcels of land, and then we will be reporting back to JCC and ultimately Council, [on] moving forward with a purchase or not.

If appropriate land is found, and the JCC moves forward with a new purchase, a funding structure would need to be agreed to and finalized between Aurora and Newmarket, according to Aurora Treasurer Dan Elliott.

Due to a shortage of potentially available lands suitable for this purpose and the area we need them, they are starting to disappear and we would like to acquire these, narrow it down and make a recommendation as quickly as we can, said Mr. Elliott. In the meantime, we're going to sort out [financing], one of the issues that has hit the service agreement. It speaks to if the municipalities can't agree, it is split 50-50.

A potential new fire station is not the only change on the horizon for the CYFS. Overtures have been made recently by the JCC to gauge the interest of Richmond Hill in joining up in a three-way partnership.

The reason for choosing Richmond Hill specifically is we have heard there was interest when it comes to Richmond Hill, so we just wanted to see from the political side of it whether [their] Council would be interested in going down this road and possibly consolidating fire service, said Councillor Tom Mrakas, another member of the JCC, responding to questions from Councillor Harold Kim on why they approached Richmond Hill rather than other like-sized communities such as King Township and East Gwillimbury.

I personally think it is centrally located, so it would make us a true Central York Fire Service, and East Gwillimbury and a lot of the other ones have lots of volunteer firefighters. From that aspect of it, consolidating them might be a bit of a problem in terms of bringing everyone together and hiring actual crews. This makes the most sense at this time and we figure it is a good first step to take.