

Live streaming committee meetings poses problems: Town

By Brock Weir

When Aurora Councillors sit down in the Council chamber week in and week out, their discussions and arguments are beamed onto the internet for anyone who cares to find them.

But, if plans go forward this week, the same isn't likely to be said for Aurora's citizen advisory committees.

Following a decision made at the Committee level last week, Councillors could put the brakes on an idea to stream groups for all to see.

Broadcasting the meetings on the internet was first explored early this spring with Council asking for a report on the feasibility of streaming all public meetings at Town Hall. But, according to Town Staff, it is not.

In his report to Council, Michael Kemp, Aurora's Manager of Corporate Communications, cites a number of reasons why it would not be feasible to live stream all committee meetings, including getting permission from each advisory committee member for broadcasting, scheduling conflicts between meetings, and cost.

'Council advisory committees often meet concurrently, which will require simultaneous broadcast of up to three meetings,' said Mr. Kemp in his report. 'This creates a number of challenges, including available broadcast bandwidth, the requirement for multiple user accounts and the creation of multiple video interfaces for those following each broadcast feed.'

Mr. Kemp goes on to say that if broadcasting the meetings went ahead, three sets of high definition video cameras, microphone systems, desktop computers, video digitizers, software licenses and streaming accounts would be needed.

Additional bandwidth could also be required for purchase, as well as installation of technology through a third party by an RFP process for 'technology-proficient installation' companies.

'Costs for the initial six-month live-streaming pilot were significantly minimized by using existing resources including computers, audio and video capture technology, software licenses, and existing web services. A starting estimate for sourcing, installing and implementing live-streaming of Council Advisory Committees would be approximately \$50,000.'

Councillors approved the recommendation at last Tuesday's General Committee meeting, Speaking in favour of the recommendation not to proceed, however, Mayor Geoffrey Dawe said it is something that should be given due consideration in the next term of Council.

'There might be members of committees right now that don't wish to be televised for some reason or another,' he said. 'I think that should be part of [the committee's] terms of reference for next term.'

Councillor Michael Thompson expressed a similar view.

'I tend to side with the comment that there might be committee members who object to the live streaming,' he said. 'It wasn't part of their terms of reference and they didn't sign up for it and they might be uncomfortable. I would think the appropriate time to revisit this really is the beginning of next term when you can make this a condition of being a committee member.'

For Councillor John Gallo, however, there were plenty of issues identified in the report but not enough to overcome them.

'When I first read [the report] I couldn't help but think this was an exercise in trying to find every possible problem and not a lot of solutions,' he said. 'I am in favour of this. I think it speaks to having the public involved in our discussions. I think if we have a

strategic plan of communicating that the public would have an opportunity to view these meetings, this is one more way of engaging them.?