

Mayor to get pay boost in 2014-2018 term

By Brock Weir

Aurora's next mayor for the 2014-2018 term of Council will receive a \$9,000 boost, but other perks and benefits recommended by the Council Compensation Committee were rejected by elected officials last week.

The salary increase for the mayor was approved 5 ? 3 with Councillors Chris Ballard, Evelyn Buck, and Wendy Gaertner voting against the move. Councillor Sandra Humfries was not present at the meeting. Much of the other recommendations, including income protection for the mayor, long-term disability, and continuing to pay the mayor's salary ?in the event of extended illness or disability? until long-term disability payments come on board, were defeated outright. One measure defeated on a tie, however, was providing end of service ?transition? payments to the mayor if he or she has served two consecutive terms of Council.

Going into the meeting, this was set at one term, but following amendments from Councillors John Gallo and Michael Thompson, it was set for two consecutive.

?The only bullet point I have an issue with is ?must serve one full term' to qualify,? said Councillor Gallo. ?I think the intent of this is you're pulling an individual out of the employment world for an extended period of time and then when they get back into it, it is to help them integrate into whatever they choose to do. For one term, which is four years, I am not convinced enough time has passed in order to have to implement this type of thing.?

Councillors Ballard, Buck, Gaertner and Paul Pirri voted against the measure, with Councillor Buck being the most vocal in her opposition. She said running for office is a conscious decision one makes and there should not be compensation for people having to leave the regular workforce in order to serve.

?Nobody has to run for Council,? she said. ?Everyone makes a choice and there are far more people out there who are unable to take four years out of their working life and run as a candidate for Council. It would be out of the question. There are certain individuals on whom it is an advantage to be in public office. It gives the high visibility. A full term for a lawyer would establish a law office. People tend to trust elected officials ? why, I don't know ? but it does tend to give someone [clout].?

The Mayor, as a member of Regional Council, receives end of term transition payments from the Region, a month's salary for every year served on Regional Council up to 12 months.

The Council Compensation Ad-Hoc Committee, which was established by Council and made up of citizens to review the current salaries and expenses of Council and make recommendations on how much the next crop should make, also shied away from recommending health benefits to Councillors.

This was a lengthy topic of discussion when the recommendations initially came forward in February before reconsiderations began on March 19. Last week's meeting followed a similar track with Councillor Gaertner renewing her concerns over what she perceived as an inequity on Aurora's part when compared to other area municipalities.

?I find it wrong that all these other municipalities that were surveyed, no matter their population, no matter whether Councillors are full time or part time, Aurora is the only one that does not provide group health to its Councillors,? she said. ?Personally I find that is offensive. Why would we be the only municipality that wouldn't do that for Councillors that wanted that? I don't mind being the odd man out in this case. I think it is wrong and unfair.?

At the previous week's meeting, some Councillors, such as Councillor Ballard, pointed out that many Councillors work for companies and organizations that offer health coverage to their employees. After this week's meeting, however, Council voted to allow its members to opt in to municipal health coverage at their own expense.