Water meter inaccuracies result in a $1.2m hit, targeted in 9-year replacement plan

By Brock Weir

Poor readings from local water meters have resulted in a $1.2 million financial impact in Aurora, according to a Council report.

Aurora residents can expect a continued effort to replace 1,000 existing water meters per year over the next decade to replace the oldest water meters in the Town.

According to the report approved at Council last week, after the next nine years are up, water meter replacements will continue at a rate of up to 700 meters annually on a perpetual basis.

Aurora's water meter replacement program has come under increasing focus and Council discussions in recent weeks as members debate the best way forward. Some have suggested continuing the replacement program as is, while others have argued in favour of holding off as new and more accurate technologies ? such as WiFi water meter systems ? become increasingly available.

They have also questioned how this program is working hand in hand to reduce the amount of water loss in the system through underground pipes needing relining, and an adverse effect water loss has on the water bills of residents.

For some Councillors, however, there is only so much that can be done when bulk water prices have increased by 10 per cent year over year from the Region of York.

?That leads us to find efficiencies to respond where we can,? said Councillor john Abel. ?There is nothing we can do when the Region passes on 10 per cent through their sources and from what I understand it is money that is to be paid back to Toronto for their infrastructure lacking. In the long run, it is up to us to identify efficiencies.?

Tackling the issue at the previous week's General Committee meeting, Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, said it will take a nine year program to get to a point where the Town's oldest, and most inaccurate, water meters are replaced. After 20 years of use, meter accuracy tends to drop. In a pilot carried out by his department, inaccuracy can hit 6.9 per cent every year after that 20 year threshold.

?In the proposed change-out of the program, of 1,000 meters per year, we're actually looking at generating a net savings of about $274,000 per year over the 20 year life of the metering going forward,? he said. ?In the first year, we won't be making that much of a savings, but as the savings accumulate?you are averaging about $25,000 in net savings in additional revenue based on increased reader accuracy.?

New water meters installed throughout the Town will be able to be read by municipal workers from the street rather than going from house to house. As these become the norm, the system will be simplified, argued Mr. Simanovskis.

Nevertheless, at the time, Councillor Thompson questioned the timing and cost.

?I question us spending money at this point in time [on] something that is going to be obsolete in less than 10 years,? he said about the technology. ?I think if you look at technology today, how many things can transmit data like watches, GPS data, and everything else, I think it is going to be sooner rather than later that you can have water meters that are going to transmit the data. Would it not be better to fully investigate how far out some of these innovations are??

Mr. Simanovskis, however, said they have looked at what is available and what is to come, and more efficient means of bringing these forward are still many years away. A pilot project of transmitting data from the meters into the system via Power Stream had significant issues, he added.

?I think it is great we are doing this and something we should have been doing five years ago,? said Mayor Dawe. ?But, I would like to have seen a bit more information with respect to other issues regarding the other technology before I agree.?