

YORK REGION

Towns asked to back bid to freeze development

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Staff Writer

Aurora council is once again threatening to put the pinch on growth.

This time it's over provincial legislation, councillors say will force existing taxpayers to pay for residential growth, possibly raising taxes by 13 per cent.

Council passed a resolution last month telling the provincial Tories it would put all new development on hold until growth pays for itself. It's a position Aurora council hopes will be adopted by other York Region municipalities.

Aurora politicians blame changes to the Development Charges Act that require some growth-related costs to be passed on to existing residents.

Forcing existing residents to help pay for growth is an unacceptable obligation.

The resolution, introduced by Deputy Mayor John West last month, says forcing existing residents to help pay for growth is an "unacceptable obligation."

"All future residential development (should) be put on hold until such time as there is a resolution to the financial cost to our citizens," the resolution states.

But Mayor Tim Jones said a move to freeze development could end up hurting taxpayers, too.

Jones said, without growth, the town's tax base will stagnate, placing the cost of future mega-projects, such as the \$4.8-million library, on the backs of existing taxpayers.

"New tax assessment is responsible for the fact we haven't had a tax increase for the past nine years," Jones said. "Just because you stop growth doesn't mean your expenses disappear."

Jones added municipalities can still strike their own deals with developers such as front-ending the cost of infrastructure to support new development.

Under new development charge regulations, developers can't be forced to pay for new town halls or the entire cost of soft services, such as new arenas and libraries.

Jones said he agrees new homeowners, who pay the cost of development charges through house prices, shouldn't pay the entire cost of a new library.

"Obviously that will be to the benefit of every resident," he said.

Council is expected to debate the development freeze and alternative solutions at its Aug. 25 meeting.

A report commissioned by council says the town will pay an extra \$23 million to \$34 million over the long term, if alternatives aren't found.

Jones said he hopes blaming provincial legislation isn't a backhanded attempt by some councillors to close the town's borders to new residents.

Jones said opposition to a plan to pipe Lake Ontario water to Aurora is another smokescreen designed to stop residential growth.

"I wonder if, like the water, this is just another vehicle by some to stop us from growing," Jones said.



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