

Region spent \$39 million on consultants

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

Stepped-up due diligence and tighter cost controls are among the measures being proposed to trim the \$39 million York Region spends each year on consultants and other outside experts.

The region will now insist consultants bear some of the risk for rising costs for contracts, which cost the region more than the salaries of all its department commissioners and directors combined, said Chief Administrative Officer Alan Wells.

"It's a big-ticket item," Mr. Wells told members of the region's finance committee last Thursday morning.

"This is one of the most discretionary areas of expenditure that we have."

The problem is not so much that the region has to rely on consultants for environmental assessments, engineering design and other highly specialized jobs. Rather, it is the fact contracts so often run over-budget and require additional funds, Mr. Wells said.

Committee members heard contracts typically include a

15-per-cent contingency fund for cost overruns; a report indicates most of those funds were disbursed.

Not all contracts run over-budget, but some come back requiring hefty funding revisions.

"The change would sometimes be almost double what the original contract was," said regional chairperson Bill Fisch.

The committee endorsed a series of recommendations that include better due diligence on the region's behalf. From now on, candidates for contracts will be examined for

their past performance on contracts and their ability to get the job done, on time and on budget, Mr. Wells said.

Companies entering into agreements with the region will also be expected to share the risk of increased costs, Mr. Wells said. That may mean higher front-end costs, but should result in firmer prices, he said.

"And we're going to look for them to stick to that price," Mr. Wells said.

The majority of consultant con-

tracts awarded by the region each year are for transportation and works projects, which will total \$472 million this year.

"I'm not convinced (the measures are) going to save us anything," said Aurora Mayor Tim Jones, the committee chairperson.

But new procedures will create a more efficient system and better explain contract costs, he said.

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