

Orangeville council chamber to get \$200,000 upgrade



By Mike Pickford

Orangeville's council chamber will be receiving a 'much-needed' facelift later this year, Council having signed off on almost \$200,000 worth of upgrades at Town Hall on Monday (March 5).

The plans call for a complete reshuffle of the room, located on the main floor of Town Hall. Led by Parks and Recreation Director Ray Osmond, the project will include a new state-of-the-art \$40,000 audio and visual system, brand new portable furniture for Council and Town staff and replacement of two 'problematic' pillars currently situated in the middle of the room. The pillars are to be replaced by a steel beam.

Speaking to the Citizen following Monday's meeting, Mayor Jeremy Williams stated his belief that the upgrades were long overdue. 'I'm excited that these upgrades are finally coming to Town Hall,' Mayor Williams said. 'The pillars that sit in the middle of the room right now have been a big issue for many, many years. There have been numerous instances of misunderstanding between Council members, simply due to the fact we can't all see each other. I'm really happy we're getting rid of the pillars.'

He added, 'Then there's the technology. The equipment we have in that room right now is ancient. We're talking about decades (since the last real investment). The sound system breaks down regularly, there are issues with our microphones. Sometimes it's really difficult to communicate, so these upgrades will help not only this Council, but many, many more Councils in the future.' The only real point of discussion for Council was deciding where to place the media table. Mr. Osmond had come up with two plans 'one that situated the media in front of the sitting public and another that placed them in the gallery. It was decided that, since the media's job is simply to observe and report, that they should sit amongst the gallery rather than closer to Council.'

'I think the one option has the media involved maybe a little too much,' Councillor Scott Wilson said.

Continuing with his report, Mr. Osmond noted the redesign, which will include a means of creating two separate spaces, would allow the Town to use the chamber for a variety of functions moving forward. He also noted there would be significantly more room for seats in the gallery.

Councillor Don Kidd spoke against the project, stating he has never been in favour of a total rebuild of Council chambers.

'I feel if we had some audio equipment that was maybe a little different, new and more modern, and some new chairs, we'd be okay,' he said. 'These ones we're using now are past being worn out. In my opinion, comfortable chairs leads to good conversations.'

The project was approved by a vote of four to one, with Mayor Williams, Deputy Mayor Warren Maycock, Councillors Nick Garisto and Wilson voting in favour and Councillor Kidd voting against. (Councillors Sylvia Bradley and Gail Campbell were absent.) Mayor Williams said he is hopeful the project will be finished before the end of the year.

'This whole project is being done with one eye on the future. This is about becoming more efficient. This will open up a lot more seats for the public and allow us to use the space for other things, if necessary. It's a project that is long overdue.'