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Aurora to cover early costs in ex-mayor's lawsuit

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Aurora council has voted to pay more than \$55,000 in legal expenses incurred by former mayor Phyllis Morris in her \$6-million libel lawsuit against three local bloggers and others, but will seek to recoup that figure should she be awarded damages or recover costs.

Council voted last week to cover the legal expenses incurred by Mrs. Morris up until Dec. 15 for the amounts owed to Aird and Berlis and up to Dec. 21 for the additional outside legal services provided by Paterson MacDougall. The latter firm was retained in connection with the cross examination of now former town solicitor Chris Cooper's affidavit.

Council made its decision based on advice from lawyer George Rust-D'Eye of Weir Foulds, who was retained in February to determine whether or not the town had an obligation to pay the former mayor's legal bills.

"One of the reasons we went out and retained Mr. Rust-D'Eye was to get a sober second thought (and) he was pretty clear in saying, 'You don't have much choice, but to pay.'" Mayor Geoffrey Dawe said.

"If the town didn't pay, it leaves us open to being sued by the law firm."

The motion to pay the legal fees and pursue indemnity against the former mayor should she receive damages or costs passed on a 5-2 recorded vote. Councillors Evelyn Buck and Michael Thompson voted against the move, Councillor Wendy Gaertner left the table prior to the vote and Councillor Chris Ballard was absent.

The town ended its involvement in the former mayor's legal action against local bloggers Richard Johnson, Bill Hogg and Elizabeth Bishenden, a trio of anonymous blog participants and Word Press, the blog's web host in December.

That decision effectively reversed a September council ruling that staff retain external legal counsel and "take any and all actions to bring a resolution to the matter involving ongoing defamatory remarks against the mayor".

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