

Additional sites examined for new Community Reflection Space

The Town continues the hunt for the right location for a Community Reflection Space, a dedicated area where members of the Aurora community can come together in times of difficulty and turmoil.

A Community Reflection Space was first identified as a community need by the Town of Aurora's Indigenous Relations Community (IRC) as the municipality continues its walk towards Truth & Reconciliation.

“There is a need for a dedicated public space within Aurora for the purpose of bringing the community together when faced with tragic histories and current events,” said Michelle Johnson, Collections and Exhibitions Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, in a report to Council. “Events that provoke public grieving occur spontaneously at the local, national and global level. Whether it is a fatal accident, findings related to past atrocities, or the escalation of an armed conflict, members of the public are often confronted with tragic news. A designated Community Reflection space acknowledges the complexity of emotions evoked during tragic circumstances and the importance of community gathering to our collective wellbeing.”

The creation of just such a space, she added, “would provide a consistent location for the community to come together in times of sorrow, with a unified purpose of paying respects to those affected by tragic events.”

The Community Reflection Space was presented to Council last fall and although local lawmakers approved proceeding with design work for the project, they were less than certain that the originally-proposed location of Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park on John West Way was the right one.

Additional locations were considered by members of the Town's Accessibility Advisory Committee last week in a meeting led by Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, at which Johnson presented the pros and cons of Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park, along with the potential locations of Town Hall, Lambert Willson Park, and Town Park.

The Town Hall option would situate the park in the forecourt of the seat of municipal government, where the evergreen formerly used each year as the Town's official Christmas tree currently stands.

This location, said Johnson, has several factors in its favour as it is “in need of an uplift.”

“The tree isn't in the best health and it has some amenities that would already be favourable as it is serviced in the winter months, is close to a Town facility right out front, and there are ways we can improve it by including lighting, seating, better shelter, different public art components, and other factors you'd want to see there,” said Johnson, noting its proximity to accessible parking spots.

Town Park, on the other hand, while already an established community gathering space, is “heavily used” for sports, cultural events and “just happenstance.”

Should the fate of the Community Reflection Space ultimately land at Town Park, Johnson and staff have looked at the treed area between the band shell and the historic Aurora Armoury.

“It is a more spontaneous space, certainly well-used during Concerts in the Park and other events,” said Johnson before turning her attention to two potential spaces at Lambert Willson Park.

The first was the vicinity of the park's gazebo, which is located just south of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, and another area that is part of the Aurora Community Arboretum.

“The gazebo is already in place” so there is a nice structure level with the pathway and there are a few benches as well,” she said, adding that location is 41 metres from an accessible parking spot. “The other location veers into the Arboretum territory and is

further down the pathway ? an open area that features benches and not a lot else, except for the Arboretum assets and a few places to sit??.?

But the eastern section of Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park was still the frontrunner for staff, as it has seating, a form of contemplative labyrinth, and other assets.

It was also a frontrunner for members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee along with the Town Hall option.

One Committee member gave the edge to Town Hall as it is close to amenities and could provide greater security options depending on the incident, observance or reflection that would make such a space a draw. But, by the same token, an indoor space, such as an under-used room within a Town facility, would be ideal, they said.

Another said that while Town Hall might be the most ?sensible? location, along with Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park due to its ?quick access to accessible parking? and proximity to transit.

The design for the Community Reflection Space, regardless of location, will likely come back to Council for review in September or October, staff added.

?We want to have everything lined up so we can begin the RFP and tender process?to begin the work as soon as possible in 2025,? said Phil Rose, Aurora's Manager of Cultural Services.

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