

Aurora reaffirms stance on diversity and inclusion

By Brock Weir

Strength is in our diversity, according to Aurora Council.

Local lawmakers reaffirmed the Town of Aurora's stance that "diversity is welcome and serves to make our community stronger" by giving the thumbs-up to a motion from Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

Last month, Councillor Gaertner put forward a motion for this reaffirmation that took matters one step further, calling on the Town to use its many platforms to "celebrate and recognize key community and global events that further LGBTQ rights, human rights, and serve to assist in the elimination of discrimination of any kind."

A sampling of events included in the motion ranged from Pride Week, to Aurora's annual Multicultural Festival, to the International Day of Racial Discrimination, Black History Month, Asian Heritage Month, and International Women's Day.

Her motion was, in part, a response to a Council discussion this past winter in which Councillor Sandra Humfries asked that Aurora endorse the City of Toronto's legislation re-affirming its own status as a "sanctuary city."

"The City of Toronto passed a comprehensive motion and it was a motion for a big metropolitan sanctuary city," said Councillor Gaertner last week. "Aurora's reality is very different from that and requires a different approach. In my opinion, this motion speaks to Aurora's reality and Aurora's future."

Council warmly received the motion, with Councillor Paul Pirri saying he "completely applauded it."

"It makes sense," he said, adding that the motion should also include provision for sexual orientation and all other forms of discrimination under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

With Councillor Gaertner's consent, that tweak gained momentum around the Council table.

Also gaining momentum, however, were other Council members who suggested other changes, revisions, and additions, that made the motion almost collapse onto itself.

"I am in support of the motion as well," said Councillor Harold Kim, suggesting it would be more inclusive to include all forms of discrimination outlined under the Ontario Human Rights Code, and proposing the motion also include religion. "We talk about the criteria of prejudice, whether it is LGBTQ rights, human rights, which is broad, and then the elimination of discrimination of any kind. Then it talks about events. If we do desire to keep that clause, I wonder if Councillor Gaertner is open to including other criteria like religion. I think religion is a pretty big one. It is like having [a list of] the greatest hockey players of all time and you leave out Bobby Orr."

Councillor Gaertner was eventually happy with "religion" being fine-tuned to "religious celebrations" but the rapid-fire suggestions prompted some Councillors to subscribe to the view that the more ingredients you add into the mix the more likely you are to leave something out "particularly as the motion said, "but not limited to" before going into the specifics.

"Clause one is a very broad statement that, in my opinion, does capture the intent of the second clause. Once you get into the second clause and you start identifying certain aspects there will always be those who say, why wasn't this or why wasn't that?" said Councillor Michael Thompson. "If we have learned anything from the Multicultural Festival, it was there is always going to be somebody who is going to feel left out as a result of what you try to do. I am absolutely supportive of it but sometimes it is easier to make a broader statement that is all inclusive than just to identify certain aspects."

Mayor Geoff Dawe offered a similar sentiment, suggesting that key to the motion were the first clause and the first part of the second, reading "that the Town utilize its communications opportunities to provide information, share knowledge, and promote events that celebrate the values of inclusion, acceptance and diversity; and that the Town's social media platforms be used to celebrate and recognize key community and global events that further [those causes]."

"That way you're not trying to cover everything out there because you will miss something," said Mayor Dawe. "That's inevitable."