

Aurora set to get a head start on Canada's 150th birthday

By Brock Weir

Whether you're standing in Confederation Park or about to stroll into the Aurora Community Centre, commemorations of Canada's Centennial in 1967 are still around us. Now, 50 years later, Aurora is preparing to lay the groundwork for the nation's 150th Birthday Bash in 2017.

Council will soon implement a Canada 150 Committee to oversee the celebrations in a similar way Aurora celebrated its own sesquicentennial in 2013, following a motion from Councillor Jeff Thom.

In his motion, Councillor Thom said the 150th anniversary of Confederation is a "major historic milestone" for the nation and a "cause for celebration." Public celebrations, he said, will help bring the community closer together, demonstrate the Town's pride in the country, and also provide educational opportunities for Canada's history, culture and heritage.

"It is an important milestone that should be celebrated," he said. "I am looking to maybe get ahead of the eight ball and make sure we plan for it accordingly."

The motion also calls for the Municipality to look at ways to collaborate with the Federal and Provincial governments for "synergies and cost savings" for commemorations.

"We have a responsibility to protect, promote and enhance our national history, culture and heritage and I think this is a great way to do it" to join with other municipalities, other provinces and all Canadians in celebrating the 150th anniversary of our country."

This was a sentiment shared by Councillor Harold Kim.

"Instilling Canadian identity must start at the municipal level," he said. "We're all proud Canadians and as we celebrate multiculturalism as well, that has to fall under the umbrella of Canadian identity."

While the motion was approved by Council last week, there was a sense that time was of the essence to get that "eight ball" rolling now to avoid some concerns voiced in the last term that Aurora's Sesquicentennial Committee was given too short a window to plan their activities.

This was a reason Councillor John Abel said he suggested a placeholder in last year's budget for this very purpose.

"There was some criticism going around that we didn't have enough time [and it was] a faux pas," said Councillor Abel. "It was a great celebration, thanks to a great committee, so I thought it would give two or three years and this Council wouldn't, in their busy schedule, let that slip by."

The Sesquicentennial Committee did a "great job", according to Councillor Michael Thompson, but he agreed they felt "a little bit of pressure to turn it around in a short timeframe."

"There is nothing wrong with planning in advance," he said.

Funding for Aurora's 150th Birthday Celebrations came out of the Town's Hydro Reserves, something Town Treasurer Dan Elliott said he would recommend follows suit for Canada 150 to avoid "any pressures on the tax rate." Funding structures would need to come back to Council with a budget and funding source, added Aurora CAO Neil Garbe.

Mr. Elliott added it is "likely" Federal funding would be made available for communities to celebrate the milestone and once that becomes clear, those opportunities would then be up for Council celebrations, whether those grand dollars would replace or augment

Aurora's budget for the bash.