

BROCK'S BANTER: A walk in the park

By Brock Weir

Aurora was abuzz once again on Saturday as the blazing sun, along with a weather front or two, came together to provide us with an unseasonably warm respite from these long, agonizing final days of winter.

Yes, as far as Canadian winters go, this one has been a breeze, I know, but no matter how much snow and ice we were spared this season, by the second half of March we're usually all itching to get on with our lives and welcome the spring.

This past weekend, it seems Aurorans were more than eager to do just that.

Almost instantly, as though Mother Nature couldn't wait to suddenly flip a switch, everyone was outside and out of hibernation. Neighbours who hadn't seen each other in months found themselves chatting on sidewalks. Dogs found themselves being walked with some summer vigour, and even the Indoor Farmers Market teemed with people after a rather tepid turnout at their February offering.

Families, no doubt, stopped by a few neighbourhood parks to bask in the sun, take gulps of fresh air deep enough to secure them an audition for a Swiffer commercial, and, if they had a durable blanket to protect against the damp, perhaps they sat down for a picnic or two without becoming too soggy.

Picture postcard scenes, but what is important is often overlooked.

Case in point: Council's long awaited decision on what to do with a huge chunk of property on Mavrinac Boulevard.

As we all know, residents were clamouring to secure the six acre plot as parkland and green space after the York Catholic District School Board nixed plans to build a school on the site. But, it was a long road to get there.

After legal battles, considerable Council debate ? both out in the open and behind closed doors ? we finally have a decision, and the neighbours in Aurora's 2B neighbourhood can rest easy at night.

Well, they can rest a bit easier for a couple of months anyway before the real fun stuff comes in May when Council girds its collective loins to tackle just what kind of park they, and the neighbours, want to see built on the expansive land, along with the bells and whistles that are sure to come with each option.

No matter how prolonged the upcoming discussion might be ? and, let's face it, they almost always are ? the neighbours should spare a moment for local environmentalists who are just as keen to make the Aurora Wildlife Park ? officially known as the Ivy Jay Nature Reserve ? a reality.

This nearly 200 acre parcel of land, which begins at Wellington Street East in the south, spreading northward towards St. John's Sideroad to its most norther extent, might be a comparative stone's throw from the new Mavrinac Park, but it seems to be worlds apart.

The Mavrinac neighbours got their land secured within a two year window, but those fighting for the last steps for the Wildlife Park to be complete are zeroing in on a decade.

It is not as though they are cooling their heels waiting for nature to take its course.

Many of the plans are in place, most of the land deals appear to be secure, and the traversing wildlife this area is meant to protect are already making themselves at home, but there seems to be an impasse.

Last month, Councillor Wendy Gaertner questioned the current status of the Wildlife Park and was told the Town has engaged the services of a landscape architect who is continuing to work on the design phase and seeking approvals with the relevant conservation bodies on design elements that have been proposed within the park by local landscape architect David Tomlinson.

Up until that point, Councillor Gaertner pointed out there had been two opposing views presented at the podium on the future of the park, a point which was acknowledged by staff, who said these opposing views are one of the reasons it has taken so long to come to fruition.

They are trying to come to a ?consensus? on what can be done and what will be approved, the Councillor was told, and as of last month at least they have been unsuccessful in reaching one; and a consensus must be reached before a final design plan is submitted to the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority.

These opposing views, however, are not a new development. Many of the opposing views have been aired in various forums since I joined The Auroran in November of 2009, with the stalemate abating and reviving at regular intervals.

At times it seems stakeholders are locked in a staring contest just waiting for the other to blink first.

There often appears to be a strange phenomenon in Aurora where projects that have the potential to bring the most enjoyment to people, have the potential to be innovative and out-of-the-box, or could potentially reach sectors of unengaged residents take the

longest to get off the ground.

Take the seemingly endless round of Council debates over whether or not the back door of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex should be open, and to whom, and the increasingly bizarre and convoluted formulas offered to Council on how that answer can be arrived at.

Or consider well intentioned efforts from the Aurora Farmers' Market to extend slightly into Town Park to allow for traffic to and from the Wells Street Schoolhouse Lofts, efforts which seemed to be on a collision course in the Council chamber until being narrowly avoided ? at least for the next week or two ? following a motion from Councillor Humfryes.

There have been no shortage of plans for the future of Library Square, no shortage of ideas offered from residents, and no shortage of consultants consulted, and thus far, the only things Aurora has to show for it are stacks of reports, a steady outflow of public money, and an overflowing ward of hopes and dreams that are, if not broken, battered and bruised beyond recognition.

It's not that Council members do not share these frustrations, and they have become increasingly vocal about it, but there seems to be an overall reluctance to take these frustrations and spur themselves into action to ensure progress, innovation, and, as the Town's Strategic Plan is so often quoted, ?the quality of life for all.?