

Canada 150 party could be part of 2017 budget plans

By Brock Weir

When Canada turned 100 in 1967, Aurora celebrated in style, but with the nation's 150th birthday just around the corner, next year's festivities could be contingent on the 2017 Budget.

Plans are underway for a year of festivities across the country and volunteers from across Aurora have been hard at work planning an itinerary for this community's celebrations.

At the moment, however, the planned military tattoo, pow wow, a legacy project, and a fireworks celebration on New Year's Eve 2017 to cap the end of a historic year is now hanging in the balance pending a federal grant.

Aurora could have to wait until March, at the latest, to find out whether their grant application was successful. So, to avoid last minute preparation, the committee tasked with organizing the party has asked Council to consider putting an earmark of \$94,000 into next year's budget to cover the events and legacy project if the Federal approval does not come through.

Council, in a decision set to be ratified this week, agreed to their request, but not without local lawmakers expressing their concerns. Speaking to Council's discussion, Town Treasurer Dan Elliott said while the Town hopes to hear back on the success of the grant application by the end of this year, it could take until March 31 to get the final word. Mayor Geoff Dawe, who sits on the Ad Hoc Committee, said the process was complicated by the change in Federal government last year which meant they had to re-apply for the same pot of money.

"The clock was reset and I think it is 26 weeks to for them to come back with a decision," said Mayor Dawe. "We have also applied to the Ontario 150 [fund]. We do have a number of grant requests out there just in the event this doesn't come to fruition, but it could be as late as February or March before we hear back."

For Councillor Sandra Humfries, there was a sense of disappointment in bringing community volunteers together to plan a town-wide celebration the very existence of which hinges on Federal support.

"It is a tough situation when we first started talking about this whole committee," said Councillor Humfries, echoing discussions made last year on the committee's formation to plan an event which has to remain purely hypothetical until the money rolls in. "We have this great committee and so much time [has been] spent that I don't know how we can say no [to their budget request]. It just puts us in an awkward position."

The same concern was echoed by Councillor John Abel who has made several attempts going back as early as 2013 to have a placeholder in the budget for Canada's 150 party, a request which was routinely turned down by the majority of Council.

Speaking against the request, however, was Councillor Paul Pirri who said the terms of reference were very clear that all events were pending word from the Federal Government.

"There were only three people who voted in favour of waiting to find out how much money was coming in before we went down this path," he said. "That motion was defeated. I think \$94,000 is a lot of money to be spending on these events. I am not going to be voting against it now because I do think it is important that I see all the information in front of us, but I am not inclined to be spending \$94,000 even as a contingency."