

Christmas Market put on ice until 2018 ? but preview expected at Tree Lighting

By Brock Weir

An inaugural outdoor ?Christmas Market? to give residents a flavour of Library Square's potential will be put on ice until next year. Council put plans for an outdoor market on hold this week after accepting recommendations from Town Staff that there simply isn't time enough planning time to make a market a resounding success.

That being said, those planning to attend this year's Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony at Town Hall on Wednesday, December 6, will get an appetizer.

Council originally approved a motion from Councillor Tom Mrakas earlier this fall tasking staff with exploring the possibility of instituting an Outdoor Christmas Market on Victoria Street in conjunction with the Santa Under the Stars Parade on November 25. This exploration, however, found impossibility.

?When establishing a new event such as the outdoor Christmas Market in Aurora, particularly with an overall objective of revitalizing the downtown core, it is important to gather information on best practices and features compared with similar successful events,? say Special Events Coordinator Shelley Ware and Manager of Recreation Lisa Warth in their report to Council. ?This can take approximately one to two months prior to any planning and, ideally, would include visiting other markets.

?Many of these vendors, entertainment, buskers, carollers and other features required to have a successful and authentic Christmas market would need to be procured six to 12 months in advance of the event in order to secure a commitment as the Holiday season is typically a very busy time of year for these services. Sourcing these services and planning the logistics, such as road closure permits, site set-up, electrical and acoustic services, etc., takes considerable time to plan properly.?

This view was greeted with disappointment from Councillors last week.

?I am very, very disappointed, but having read the staff report I think that staff put forward very sensible reasons on why we should wait until next year,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. ?When we do this, we want it to be successful, so I am in agreement with the report.?

This disappointment was shared by Councillor Mrakas.

?I do see the merit in holding off so we can put on something that will be spectacular,? he said. ?I get that aspect of it and I appreciate the work [Operational Services Director Al] Downey and Shelley Ware and the Special Events team have done in working on this and working on how we can provide a unique event in our Town. I look forward to it next year and it will be something that will be incredible.?

Rather than scrap the idea entirely, Council gave a thumbs up to Mr. Downey to explore the possibility of pulling together a ?mini preview market? at the Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony and vendors are now being sought.

Regardless of whether the mini-market takes place, the Christmas Market option raised questions from some Councillors on whether Aurora's Special Events Department ? and its associated budget ? were being spread too thin.

This issue was expressed first by Councillor Jeff Thom, and echoed by Councillors Wendy Gaertner and John Abel.

?I would love clarity on that,? said Councillor Abel. ?I would like to know what sort of demand [there is]. This report is highlighting that they are maximized and there is little capacity to support a new event. However, our Strategic Plan, and especially our Cultural Master Plan, is encouraging that we increase and promote new events.?

These numbers will be presented to Council in the weeks ahead, said CAO Doug Nadorozny.

?It was felt that if we're moving forward with a plan to do another significant event that we would at least like to get an opportunity to present to Council the staff required for all these special events so you can [consider] that in your deliberations and determine whether or not you would like to see extra resources added to these areas to support these special events.?