

Council takes "baby steps" towards new museum

By Brock Weir

Aurora could take the next tentative steps in re-establishing its museum this week with an eye to the Aurora 150 celebrations.

Council is set to ratify a plan to spend \$66,000 for an exhibit in the Aurora Room, a second floor exhibition space at the Aurora Cultural Centre, to mark the Town's Sesquicentennial celebrations. The plan, however, did not come off without a hitch at last week's committee meeting with Councillors raising concerns not only on the costs for new display cabinets (see below) but also on the amount of staff support would be required to make it happen.

"The creation of a display to celebrate Aurora's 150th birthday is an important addition to the many other activities this year," said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation in a report to Council. "In order to provide a display, however, capital investments must be made for the provision of display cases and staff resources must be assigned to the task.

"Staff have approached CAM (Cultural Asset Management) to provide their services in the creation of this exhibit. They are familiar with the collection since they recently inventoried the entire collection. They also have the expertise and available staff to complete this task on schedule. Engagement of another consultant would not permit sufficient time to prepare an RFP, evaluate submissions and prepare for the display by July 1."

Although it was been the expressed desire of some members of Council to have something in place in time for the Canada Day celebrations, some expressed disappointment it took as long as it did to get this point.

"There is no better time during the July 1 parade than to invite people into that event at the Church Street School," said Councillor Evelyn Buck. "I am desperate to get going with a museum no matter how small the beginnings but at the same time this continual demand for more money from the Town treasury [to make that happen] is digging a hole deeper and it will be so damned wide we will never be able to climb out of it."

Added Councillor Sandra Humfries: "Although it is not the ideal I had in mind, I was hoping we could celebrate the opening of the museum in the Church Street School. It is something I do think we need to start getting our artefacts out and on display. July 1 is really a target we should have so we can celebrate and after the parade welcome people back to the Church Street School."

Others balked at the idea of adding another curator to the roster solely for this exhibition above and beyond the resources already at the Aurora Cultural Centre and Historical Society. Councillor John Abel said there were existing staff in place at both to make it possible. He said he was "dumbfounded" that more expertise was needed to get the ball rolling.

"I think we should be able to do it with one curator to be able to oversee both the display in one room and all the cultural activities that go on there," he said.

Bringing on CAM, however, would help in determining what items should be selected to best represent highlights in Aurora's history, write the story of Aurora as a Town, determine how the selected items can best be displayed, and also devise a marketing, promotions, and managing strategy to get the word out not just to people in Town but beyond that this exhibition is taking place, countered Mr. Downey.

"We need somebody to really do the heavy lifting and put this display together," he said. "One of the other complications is that time is moving along and Council has the desire to get this going by July 1. One of our discussions with CAM was whether they had sufficient resources to get this together and, yes, they do."

For the investment required to make the exhibition a reality, however, some also expressed disappointment the particular parameters of the exhibition weren't planned with something with a bit more longevity in mind, going beyond the end of the Sesquicentennial

Year.

?I think we should be talking more about how we can celebrate our heritage, how can we preserve it and how we can promote it,? said Councillor Michael Thompson. ?I am supportive of the motion that is before me [but] my preference would be if a museum could be developed and installed there would be a bit more life to it and a bit more longevity so that doesn't necessarily have to be taken down by December 31.?

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe was also supportive of the recommendations but seemed to have fewer reservations than the others who were reluctant to give it the plan an unqualified endorsement.

?It is very frustrating to have this discussion,? he said. ?We all say we want to make a museum move forward, but there seems to be a general reluctance in how to do that. I would think if we wished to use the services of someone with the Cultural Centre and the AHS we should be asking those bodies if they have the time to do this. I think we, as a Council, need to move forward on this. Even if it is a baby step, we have to move forward and actually be able to show we're interested. If we're not interested, we sure can't expect the public to be interested.?