

Environmental overhauls help Aurora score big at Conservation Awards



By Brock Weir

You might not see it when you go and see your kids take the ice or watch the Aurora Tigers do battle with the best the OJHL has to offer, but where you drove, where you parked and how you walked are telling an environmental story.

That very environmental story, unfolding underfoot right now at the Aurora Community Centre, helped the Town of Aurora score big at the 2017 Conservation Awards hosted by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority on Thursday night, receiving the Healthy Water Award.

Green initiatives at the Aurora Community Centre have been an ongoing concern, but sustainability initiatives spearheaded in partnership with the LSRCA made Aurora stand out from the crowd, according to Richard Auger of the Conservation Authority. "It was a great opportunity on municipal land where there is ample impervious area that retrofits can implement better storm water management practices to improve water quality and ground water infiltration, and also the aesthetic of the site itself," said Mr. Auger. "The Town of Aurora are leaders in planning for better storm water management practices. They have had their rebate since 1998 and that helps them save and budget for various drainage improvements.

"They were on board with this project in trying to look for more innovative opportunities to set with us an example for other municipalities with this type of demonstration. The Aurora Community Centre was the first low-impact development site that we had secured and we had a design plan for and we moved forward for implementation in 2016."

Work on the site began with the resurfacing of the parking lot, along with a slight configuration of the parking area itself to optimise drainage with permeable options.

"What the new site optimizes is using roof water and channelling that into bio-retention, rain garden features to promote more infiltration into the ground using the parking area itself and there are three cells within the parking area that are permeable, which are further promoting what is called storm water volume reduction which slows down the water getting into the creek to offset higher flows and higher levels in the creek," said Mr. Auger.

"It is holding that water back, putting that water back into the ground and it is providing this better opportunity to meet all these objectives we're promoting for all of our sites moving forward in the Lake Simcoe Watershed."

The LSRCA is mandated within the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan and the Lake Simcoe Protection Act to reduce phosphorus loading into the lake itself. Every little step counts, he says, in meeting those goals and, as far as steps go, what is unfolding at the ACC now is a slightly larger stride.

They encourage everyone from municipalities to private property owners within the watershed to consider new innovations when retrofitting properties or taking on resurfacing projects. They try to showcase how things can be done better and look better in the process. Sometimes there can be a slight price bump, but there is added value elsewhere.

There is a misconception, he says, that these solutions always have to be more expensive, so it is a matter of taking each site in hand and learning how to optimise your options, understand constraints and barriers, and plan for them.

"It is going to help keep that within reach of affordability," says Mr. Auger. "You can apply so many different features to a site, but

you have to look at it from what are the objectives to the water quality? Where can you put certain features to reduce volumes to get water into the ground, meet certain objectives, and let's home in on that. Let's not necessarily do everything in everywhere possible. Let's look for the best opportunities.

?That is the job of the designer to realise, ?okay, maybe we can only afford to bring in one low impact development feature.'?
The Aurora Community Centre project is complete with a newly configured parking lot, rain gardens, bio-swales and a permeable perimeter walking trail, along with a maintenance area which implements a geo-grid for paving that provides structural stability and infiltration at the same time.

?Aurora deserves quite a bit of credit for working with us, collaborating, and realising this project from the beginning ? and being the first out of the gate to make it happen,? says Mr. Auger. ?We used that as a model [in] bringing people to the table.?