

INSIDE AURORA: Central Park

By Scott Johnston

One of the big local news stories recently is Newmarket's decision to develop a green space that is said will emulate New York's Central Park.

To be located at Mulock and Yonge, the 11 acre park is expected to include water features, trails, a skating rink, fire pits and market vendors.

The whole project is projected to cost \$24M.

It has been suggested that this once again shows that our neighbour to the north continues to be one step ahead of Aurora.

I beg to differ. In fact, in this case I think they're playing 'catch up.'

Sure, Newmarket may have some admirable infrastructure and programs that Aurora does not, but as far as a 'Central Park?', we beat them to that ages ago.

We know ours as Sheppard's Bush.

Like Newmarket's proposed park, it is centrally located within our municipality, and has extensive walking trails.

While it may not have market vendors, which Aurorans can experience elsewhere in Town at events such as the Street Sale or Farmers' Markets, Sheppard's Bush does have a number of elements that Newmarket's new park will not.

First is an extensive connection to other green spaces.

Unlike the new park, which will be surrounded by development, Sheppard's Bush is part of one contiguous park system that stretches right from the north to south borders of Aurora.

This not only expands the trail system, but provides an extended wildlife corridor along the Holland River, a significant water feature which burbles through the heavily forested Sheppard's Bush. A walk through this area may result in encounters with woodpeckers, deer, muskrats, owls and any other of the dozens of species found there.

Apart from waterways and an abundance of animal life, our park has a picnic pavilion, a historic log cabin, and even a fitness trail. There are about a dozen extensively used playing fields, including an artificial turf one.

Also unique to Sheppard's Bush is the Windfall Ecology Centre. Located within the park, this non-profit enterprise is dedicated to building sustainable communities through conservation, education, renewable energy and water protection.

Sheppard's Bush is also home to an increasing variety of special events throughout the year, such as Hallowe'en's Haunted Forest, the canine-themed Paws in the Park, and numerous soccer tournaments.

And no one wants to miss the annual Lions Club pancake breakfast that takes place late each winter. Enjoying a hot meal covered in maple syrup while sitting outside in the snow amidst this former sugar bush...well, you can't get much more Canadian than that.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the two parks is size. You could easily fit five of Newmarket's 'Central Park?' inside Sheppard's Bush, and still have room to spare.

So, while our park may not have all of the features suggested for Newmarket's proposed park, it has a lot going for it in any season.

Better yet, it's centrally located, and unlike our neighbour's proposed park, which is still a few years away, Sheppard's Bush is available for Aurorans to use any time, and we don't have to fork out an additional \$50 a household to purchase it.

So, well done to Newmarket's council for deciding to develop their own central park.

And in future, should you wish to copy any other successful ideas Aurora has already implemented and enjoyed for years, feel free. I'm sure your residents will appreciate it.

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