

New park to be dedicated in memory of late Deputy Mayor

An upcoming community park on Hartwell Way will be named John Abel Park, after the late two-term Deputy Mayor of Aurora.

Council, sitting at the Committee level last week, approved the dedication to John Abel, who served as Councillor and Deputy Mayor of Aurora from 2010 until 2018, along with the names of three additional parks.

The decision is expected to be ratified at Council on February 27.

The expansive community park will be a non-programmed space that is more naturalized than similarly-scaled parks in Town. But, while formal programs will not be offered, it will serve as a community destination not only for the parkland itself but as a gateway to the David Tomlinson Nature Reserve.

Other amenities will include a playground that plays into a nature theme, right down to the choice of building materials, a community garden, shade structure, and a small natural rock formation amphitheatre in a nod to Abel's love of live music.

In a report before Council this month from Sara Tienkamp, Aurora's Director of Operations, the park will serve as a tribute to Abel who had a strong passion for arts, culture, nature and the Indigenous community.?

Additional park names approved by lawmakers are Highland Park on Golf Links Drive, in remembrance of the Highland Gate golf course; Forsyth Parkette (currently Brookfield Parkette on Radial Drive) in honour of an early settler family on the land in question; and Thelma Fielding Park, a name selected in tribute to Aurora's first female Councillor elected in 1951, which will take pride of place in the Shining Hill development underway in the northwest quadrant of Yonge Street and St. John's Sideroad.

One of the goals outlined in the [Public Facility Naming Policy of 1997] is to remember/retain the memories of past residents, facilities or events which depict our heritage,? said Tienkamp in her report. In the early 1930s, Alvin and Frances Morton purchased the land and established a nine-hole golf course named the Aurora Golf & Country Club. In the late 1940s the course was expanded to 18-holes under new ownership ? Colin S. ?Pop? Nisbet, who changed the name to Highland Golf and Country Club. Mr. Nisbet was recently inducted into the Aurora Sport Hall of Fame for his contributions to the community.?

Regarding Forsyth Parkette, the report adds: The Graham and Forsyth Family both owned the lands at different times between the years 1798 ? 1939. The Town currently has a park named Graham Parkette.?

The new names were met positively by local lawmakers last week, with some asking whether historical context on these names, and others, could be provided through signage and other opportunities.

We're a historical community and I am wondering about plaquing and naming and we could maybe [start to] recognize the history of parks and the people who are being recognized by their naming,? said Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese.

Tienkamp replied there is a similar ?signage strategy? within the trails system but more is to come.

Part of that second phase is to work on the park signage,? she said. We want to make it in line with the trails signage and are actually exploring the possibility of putting some historical data on those primary signs that will identify the park.?

Park identification was key for Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo who said he was concerned the naming of Highland Park might conflict with a similarly-named Highland Field on Industrial Parkway South that is the long-time home of the Aurora Soccer Club.

Highland Golf Course was a longstanding amenity within Town,? Tienkamp explained. Everybody refers to that area as Highland Golf Course?and it has a longstanding community presence, so Highland Park was the suggestion. That being said, Council has the

option to change the name or provide another recommendation.?

Similar concerns over the Highland name were voiced by Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson who sought assurances that two similarly-dubbed spaces would not cause confusion with emergency services.

?We could have a conversation with them,? said Tienkamp. ?I think the primary driver with EMS and Central York (Fire Services) is that municipal signage actually has a?green property number that is standard on all properties?but we can take it back to them and see if there is a conflict or concern there.?

As a potential solution, Councillor Weese suggested ?Highland Gate Park? as a name that could avoid any concerns.

That could be an issue brought up before final approval at the end of the month.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter