

Parents heartened by move to 'nourish community' with 'Real Food'?



By Brock Weir

When Kasie Savage stood at the Council podium last month, she was backed not only by a handful of parents, kids and advocates on either side of her – but by over 700 community members each sharing a vision for 'Real Food' across Aurora.

This vision is set to take the next step towards fruition when the Town puts out a Request for Proposal (RFP) that will require at least 55 per cent healthy options available at concession stands and vending machines throughout the municipality.

It's a bold move, she said, but one that Aurora is ready to pioneer.

As Council signed off on the 55 per cent requirement at the Committee level this week, Ms. Savage returned to the podium to encourage elected officials to roll with the momentum and carry this sentiment across the finish line.

'[We] asked you to make a tough decision,' she said. 'That decision was to reconsider the sad and unhealthy status quo of our recreation centre concessions and, instead, choose a path less travelled, a path with a few curves and bumps along the way, but ultimately a path that will lead to a healthier, more vital Aurora. As we gathered support, some naysayers said to us, 'Oh, you can't change their minds. Don't even bother. There's no point. They are just concessions.' We disagreed, and last month each and every one of you unanimously agreed there is a gross disconnect between the Town's mandate to promote health and physical activity and the junk and sugar dispensaries located near centres of wellness.'

'Each and every one of you agreed that we can do better, we must do better: 55 per cent real food to nourish our community and kids, junk food moved to less visible locations (out of sight, out of mind), affordable healthy options placed visibly up front where hands big and small can easily grab and go, and proper marketing and education, spiffing up the look aesthetically and making it look more appealing. It's an easy fix with huge and lasting implications, improving the health of Aurorans by providing choice. The new RFP that staff has worked on, that we reviewed, reflects these changes beautifully.'

Renewing the commitment of this parent and community group, Real Food First, to stay involved with the project through to completion, they were praised by Council members for their drive in steering this forward.

'I can't wait to see the change,' said Councillor Sandra Humfries. 'I am very proud of you coming forward and all the residents and not giving up.'

Councillor Harold Kim also thanked Ms. Savage as the group's representative, noting that the staff report on the RFP indicates the changes at the concession stands could cost anywhere between \$5,000 and \$30,000. He asked the group whether or not they would be willing to 'roll up their sleeves' to help with the creativity and labour to make this possible and while Ms. Savage said she couldn't make a \$30,000 commitment on the group's behalf, she said they were more than willing to commit to helping.

'I think it is a great jumping off point – that this becomes the standard for all communities,' she said. 'I am sure that 55 per cent will edge forward and become a larger percentage, but I can say on behalf of the group that we are more than satisfied with the recommendations as put forth.'

When Councillor Kim asked her thoughts on notes in the staff report on how similar projects were less than fully embraced in other communities, Ms. Savage said that it 'took my emotional excitement to an immediate low' but further research buoyed their spirits. 'Based on the research we've done, I would say that they encountered the same stumbling blocks the Town of Aurora might have encountered in terms of dipping your toe in but not going all the way in terms of placement of the items,' she said, referring to last year's lukewarmly-received pilot project offering a handful of healthy alternatives at select recreational centre concessions. 'These

pilot projects all had very similar execution plan and it wasn't successful for a variety of reasons.

?Aurora is in a really unique position demographically where I think citizens and residents, as opposed to some of those more rural communities, based on education, income level, are more accepting and interested in eating healthy foods, so I think it will be more successful here instead of testing it somewhere else. I understand why they tested it there, because the needs of the community were such they wanted to promote healthy living based on obesity levels and diabetes. I don't think we're necessarily in that situation but I think they rolled it out with the same stumbling block other communities did ? just like Aurora.?