

Sports make the cut for Cultural Master Plan

By Brock Weir

The decision came at Council last week amid lengthy debates on just which community groups should be invited to the table to form a group to draft the new Cultural Master Plan.

Recommendations to Council called for groups such as various municipal departments, along with the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, Theatre Aurora, Aurora Cultural Centre, Aurora Historical Society, York Region Arts Council, the Aurora Public Library Board, and Sport Aurora to sit on the committee, but it was this last inclusion that caused a surge of debate.

As The Auroran reported last week, Councillors objected to the inclusion of Sport Aurora on the list. On the one hand, Councillor Wendy Gaertner wanted sport removed entirely from the Cultural Plan, but on the other, Councillor John Gallo, for instance, questioned its inclusion as Sport Aurora does not represent either the Aurora Minor Hockey Association or Aurora Youth Soccer, the Town's two largest sporting bodies.

Responding to criticism from Councillor Gaertner that including sporting groups didn't fit "the exact intent" of a Cultural Master plan, Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, said it was the intent of the plan to provide a "complete" cultural experience.

"We believe sport plays a critical and active role in providing that cultural aspect of the community," he said, noting Sport Aurora's efforts to create a Sport Hall of Fame. "We are trying to expand our palate as much as possible with regards to taking input from as many people as possible. Sport Aurora has many groups associated with it that can reach out and obtain information from the community."

From Mr. Downey's perspective, it was a matter of working with these consultants and ensuring numbers on the committee were "manageable." He added any groups that were not included on the ad-hoc committee would have an opportunity to have input to the group and, in turn, have their voices heard.

"There are 26 cultural groups here in town," he said. "We can't have them all at the table. Unfortunately, we need to limit it at some point and there are going to be people who wish to participate and provide [input]. We welcome those folks and we want to hear from them."

While Councillor Chris Ballard pointed out there is a significant difference from providing input to the community over actually sitting in the group and having a vote on how things move forward, the inclusion of sport in particular was still the sticky wicket.

"Common sense tells me that if we're selecting a group to give an opinion on sport and that group doesn't represent the two largest sorts organizations by far in this community then perhaps that is not the best group, or we augment it with the other two groups, or figure out a way to connect that puzzle," said Councillor Gallo.

Councillor Michael Thompson said he too would like to see representation from the other two sports groups, but said he "respected" the need to keep numbers down.

"I think culture and art can be very subjective and very personal," he said. "When I look at this, sport does belong on the table. There are links and there are interdependencies and exchanges. I think my only wish is I would like the group to be a little more."

Sport, however, was not the only concern raised at the table. In making their respective points, Councillors underscored the arts groups "some larger than Theatre Aurora, for instance" that did not make the cut. Others, such as Councillor Buck, said she viewed a glaring omission as to who was in the groups "namely area churches and religions."

"Have we changed so much that religion doesn't figure in there?" she pondered.

Building on that, Councillor Ballard asked what advice the Town received on including religious bodies in the group. Complicating things was the fact there is no one religious body that represents all, said Mr. Downey. Having several different religions represented around the table would make numbers climb.

?We had difficulty selecting one without the others, so they will all be invited to stakeholder meetings, but we don't believe one represents religion more than another.?

That struck a chord with Councillor Gallo in that in the absence of one group to represent the masses that religion was being excluded altogether while Sport Aurora does not represent all that the Aurora Sports Community had to offer. Mayor Geoffrey Dawe said in voting for the motion to include Sport Aurora over the others does not mean they are being ?insulted? or ?excluded.?

?Why don't we have the dance community in here?? asked Mayor Dawe. ?Why don't we have the walking club in there? Why don't we have the bird watching group my wife is a member of? They're all part of the culture we have in this town. It's ludicrous to suggest because someone is not included on the list that we don't want them.?

An amendment to add the AYSC and AMHA to the group failed, with support only coming from Councillors Ballard, Gallo and Humfries.