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Diamond Jubilee Park eyed as site for accessible playground

By Brock Weir

Aurora honoured the Queen's Diamond Jubilee with a park, renaming Civic Square Park, home of a soccer pitch and a garden, in her name last month.

If Councillor Paul Pirri gets his way, however, it will become something much more significant



Councillor Pirri proposes adding a fully accessible playground to the site, which is located on John West Way near the southern end of Hollandview Trail. Neighbours in the area, and citizens at large will have the final say, however, on whether this comes to fruition according to a decision by Council last week.

?I have voiced my concerns against renaming a park without a plan in place,? said Councillor Pirri. ?I believe we have to be doing something at this location. I think if we are going to be naming something in this regard, we need to have a park that we will all be proud of and this would be, not to use a too many puns, but a diamond in the crown jewel of Aurora.

?I can't think of a better location for this park because of the parking that is already there and, in addition because of the seniors homes that are around there as well, this to me just makes sense and [Council] looks at what next steps can be accomplished.?

As a neighbour of the park, however, Councillor John Gallo said there were ?a few things missing? in Councillor Pirri's plan. Given the initial establishment of the park he said it is important to poll the residents of the area, including those living in the nearby adult and seniors residences on their opinions. Those who were living there at the time, he said, rejected the original idea to put a playground on the site because there was one just up the road at Hollidge Boulevard and the additional funds were not seen as necessary.

Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation said building an accessible playground would easily fit on the existing site, but would likely impact on the existing soccer field, fields that are often said to be in direly short supply in Aurora.

?If this is approved, we would come back and Council would be fully aware of what impact, if any, the designs would have on the existing facilities, but I can't sit here tonight and say for sure they would,? he said. ?I would guess that it would have some impact [as] a fully accessible playground would generally take a very large footprint.

While Councillor Gallo suggested it is important to engage the surrounding community as well as municipal committees such as the Parks and Recreation, and Accessibility committees, Councillor Pirri said that would be premature. Designs and options, he said, should come back to Council first for debate and consideration of an information session. Mayor Geoffrey Dawe said there would be ?ample? opportunity for the public to make their views known through the committees, but Councillor Gallo said that would not be a ?fluid? process.

?The last thing we would want [is] we make a design and we go to them afterwards,? he said. ?I would want to get off on the right foot and have a community buy-in from the very beginning.?

Councillor Evelyn Buck, however, disagreed, saying they should brainstorm a number of options before taking them out to the neighbours.
?I think it would be more appropriate for the neighbourhood to receive a number of ideas of what changes they would like to see in this park if we are going to change the park from its present configuration,? she said. ?There are a number of things that could go there that would be more attractive to the elderly residents and give them a destination to walk to.?

At last week's meeting, Mr. Downey estimated it would likely take until August to come back with some preliminary designs and a budget for an accessible park. Given Council's hesitancy to conduct community consultation over the summer months, those opportunities aren't likely to take place before the middle of fall.

?The footprint of an accessibility playground can easily fit into a park,? said Mr. Downey. ?The question is whether it has any impact on the existing facility. We won't know until we actually explore it, where it might go, what it might look like, and what elements might be provided within the park.?

Is the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park the right place for an accessibility playground, or is it more important to retain the soccer field? Send your suggestions to letters@auroran.com.