

Canada 150 plans move ahead with \$62k budget

By Brock Weir

Planners behind Aurora's celebration of Canada's 150th Anniversary this year were hoping to have \$90,000 to work with to make it a party to remember, but plans are now moving forward with a \$62,000 budget.

As The Auroran reported this month, Council was facing a budget recommendation of \$87,000 to finance a series of events and projects to mark the Sesquicentennial, including a military tattoo, a pow wow celebrating Canada's indigenous peoples, a youth innovation fair, and a fireworks display on December 31 to close out the milestone year.

Despite high hopes for a large Federal grant, however, the Town was only successful in securing \$20,000 specifically for the pow wow, leaving the other events, with the exception of the State Farm and Rotary Club-sponsored youth innovation fair, to be funded from municipal coffers.

At the previous week's General Committee meeting, much of the discussion revolved around the merits of each component of the plan, which was devised by a group of citizen volunteers sitting on Aurora's Canada 150 Ad Hoc committee.

Their concerns ranged from an apparent lack of time to put together a Military Tattoo for the late spring at the Aurora Community Centre to whether unpredictable New Year's Eve weather would make the \$12,000 earmarked for the Family First Night fireworks display wasted. Ultimately, these components are all proceeding to the next level, with the exception of a legacy project of a park naming and water feature.

This \$25,000 item was taken out of the budget with an eye of incorporating the legacy feature into the future Library Square.

By the time these recommendations hit Council for final recommendation, discussions then turned to the process and timelines.

When this was all put together, there was no budget, said Mayor Geoff Dawe, responding to a comment from Councillor John Abel that the \$40,000 budgeted for the tattoo at the ACC, a venue which can accommodate just 3,000 people, might be better spent on an activity accessible to the entire town. Everything that was put together was based on the ability to put that particular item into a grant request.

This did not satisfy Councillor Abel, who said he was disappointed the Ad Hoc committee had, until last week only met once in nine months. Looking back to Aurora's own 150th Anniversary celebrations in 2013, he said Council and the Town as a whole encouraged every business and community group to incorporate the Aurora 150 logo into their activities to build awareness and enhance all programs to reflect the anniversary. He sought and received assurances that the door was not closed on reviving this concept for this year.

I think the reason there haven't been many meetings is because Council hasn't provided the approval to move forward, Councillor Sandra Humfries offered. The budget was up in the air and, in fact, many of us said we wouldn't approve anything unless it was a grant from the Federal Government. I don't blame the Committee for not having met more frequently.

Added Councillor Wendy Gaertner: We sincerely thank the Committee for all their hard work because it is not that we didn't appreciate their work, we're just trying to figure out the money.

From Councillor Abel's perspective, however, a large part of the money could have been figured out already. It is not the fault of the committee, he agreed, as this was the path set out by Council direction. He reminded Council that in 2014 and 2015 he suggested putting a \$10,000 place-holder in the budget so Aurora wouldn't be caught short in planning, a suggestion that was twice nixed.

We should have been putting in a little bit of money and being prepared to budget it, just like we are now. I am hoping we can take some of these great ideas that the Committee put forward and, beginning tomorrow, ramp up a couple of great ideas. I think there will be other ideas coming forward from Committee to do some celebrations for the Town so we can join together for Canada's 150th.