

Celebrate Aurora will focus on local talent as festival returns for second year

By Brock Weir

The second annual Celebrate Aurora Music Festival is officially a go, after Council gave the green light last week.

Councillors unanimously approved a permit for Town Park for the weekend of July 24 to Habachat, a local social media company, to hold the second installment which, despite rain in its inaugural event last summer, organizers plan to replicate much of what they deem to have been a tremendous success.

Ahead of last week's Council meeting, organizers took time to address some of the concerns identified by Councillors at the committee level when they took a first crack at their application.

Among these concerns were ensuring both Celebrate Aurora and the Aurora Farmers' Market, the latter of which has been a mainstay at Town Park for several years during most spring and fall Saturdays, and every Saturday of the summer, would be able to work together toward a plan that would suit everyone.

At the time, Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation, said he was unsure of any arrangements between the two groups, but Councillors said that was an important factor going forward.

"Traditionally, the Farmers' Market has worked with other groups so they can fill their obligations to the farmers that come out and to other vendors," said Councillor Michael Thompson. "It is well-loved, well-enjoyed and I wouldn't want to see anything impact their ability. For me, to vote on this positively, I will have to understand where the conversation has been."

Tim Newnham, a representative of Habachat, came forward last week to address some of these concerns head-on. The company was requested to appear before Council by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, who said he would have a hard time voting in favour of the permit until these issues were ironed out.

In addressing their worries, Mr. Newnham stressed the community atmosphere Habachat is trying to foster with their festival.

"We have a strong belief that engaging community members in a local event builds a vibrant community, and that is what this event is all about," he said. "Town Park is a great location [for] a cultural event that includes music, arts and crafts, local food provided by local restaurants, which helps support our local economy."

"Our desire is to have 100 per cent local involvement, which we did last year. All the entertainment came from the local area, the food was provided by the local area, face painters and so on were local. Our revenue generation is only based on local promotion and it is only derived from people who do attend. Last year, with the rain on Saturday, it was a bit difficult and we are trying to do a rain dance to eliminate that!"

Additional revenues, he said, were generated from a nominal entrance fee, and some revenue from food and beverage sales.

Additional concerns addressed last week was the perennially contentious issue of fencing around Town Park. Much of the layout this year, said Mr. Newnham, would be the same as last year, dividing the park into two segments. The first is the area around the band shell which would be the music and food showcase, and the second around the baseball diamond would be a children's play area with bouncy castles and other inflatable entertainment.

People would still be able to walk through Town Park freely and take advantage of amenities such as the playground and splash pad. Mr. Newnham added they are looking forward to working with the Farmers' Market to come to an agreement on scheduling and layout.

Supporting the motion, Councillor John Abel said existing and pre-booked activities were not affected by last year's Festival and he expected the same thing in 2014.

?The Farmers' Market was not impacted by the footprint, as it was previously, and people can walk through and they weren't able to do that either,? said Councillor Abel. ?It was fantastic how you aligned that to accommodate our regular people who go there to park on a daily basis.?

Also in support of the Festival was Councillor Evelyn Buck who expressed misgivings the previous week about permitting out the park for what sounded like a commercial venture.

?When I read the initial report it read like a commercial event to me,? said Councillor Buck of her position before last week's presentation. ?Now, I am very appreciative that Mr. Newnham has come forward and given us the details. I realise it is a community event and I wish you well.?

Added Mayor Geoffrey Dawe: ?We look forward to a successful event.?