

Multicultural Festival moving to September 10 ? and a different park

By Brock Weir

Aurora's first multicultural festival will now take place September 10 at Ada Johnson Park.

The celebration of the many cultures that make up Aurora is based on a similar event held at the same park in September of 2013 to commemorate Aurora's Sesquicentennial.

Originally proposed by Councillor Harold Kim, Council originally approved a recommendation last month to hold the multicultural event at Town Park on June 30 as part of the Town's traditional Dance in the Park event, rebilled as "Dance in the Park Celebrates Cultural Diversity." Councillors, however, raised questions about the timing and the location of the event and the event producer signed on to coordinate the event backed out shortly thereafter.

Councillor Kim made a motion to reconsider the plan at last week's Council meeting, moving both the timing and the location.

"Piggybacking off an existing successful event made a lot of sense to someone like myself without any experience in large event planning?but we talked about this to one another, to staff and residents who have been here a while, but the one [group of] stakeholders we didn't speak to was the newer residents in Town," said Councillor Kim. "This past week, when I spoke to about 12 to 15 of them to gauge their participation in a multicultural festival, they expressed to me there were some barriers to them attending and part of that was the location of Town Park, among other variables.

"I felt in order for this inaugural event to be successful, it had to be somewhere where they would have a higher probability or propensity to be in attendance, hence the change to Ada Johnson. The vision I have for the multicultural festival is you're not going to see it in one shot or one fell swoop. It is going to be an evolutionary process and I do trust our staff is well capable of having this inaugural festival be a successful one and a well-attended one."

The motion to reorganize the festival was seconded by Councillor Sandra Humfries who said she too received feedback from residents about the proposal "not all positive.

"I did have some discussions with residents both new and long-term and they felt a festival is a lot more of a family feel," she said. "With the date and timing of it, I felt concerned at the last meeting. We wanted it to work and try to move it up a bit so it would be before another event, and I just didn't feel good about that."

The move was also supported by Councillor John Abel, who initially proposed having the festival underneath the Magna tent in September before or after that month's Hoedown. In the end, however, he was supportive of the location. So too was Councillor Wendy Gartner, albeit with some reservations.

"One of the things I really want to encourage is the newer areas of Aurora come and get to know the older areas of Aurora," she said. "Maybe [this is fine] for a first time at Ada Johnson Park but, in the future, I would just love a multicultural day at Town Park and just get the newer residents to know the older parts of Town."

Ada Johnson Park is located on Hartwell Way at Conover Avenue.