

Party planners wanted for Canada's 150th birthday ? but there might be a catch

By Brock Weir

If you're a patriotic Canadian and looking for a good excuse to throw a party, Canada's 150th birthday coming up in 2017 might be the perfect opportunity.

The Town of Aurora will soon start the recruitment process for a new committee to help plan local celebrations to mark the historic occasion ? but there's a catch: your planning might be contingent on the Federal government stepping up to the plate to foot the bill.

Council approved applying to the Federal government for grant money to help make Canada's Sesquicentennial a local party to remember, as well as striking a committee to help make it happen.

Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, is proposing a fourfold party, based on the blueprint laid out by citizen members tasked with planning Aurora's own Sesquicentennial in 2013, based on the four seasons of Aurora.

Communities across the country, including Aurora, might have to wait as long as April 2016 to know if their grant applications for local celebrations have been successful but, in the meantime, planning can now get underway.

That, however, was a major sticking point at Council last week before they ultimately gave the thumbs-up to moving forward. Councillors went into a meeting facing a recommendation to wait for word from the Feds over the grant money before striking the committee, but some Councillors said this would put those members of the committee in an awkward position.

?After what we went through with Aurora 150, the sooner we put a committee together to put some ideas together, the better we will be able to do a celebration, rather than have our Town put some ideas together and wait for approval, then strike a committee,? said Councillor John Abel, citing the short turnaround time the 2013 committee had in planning the four community celebrations. ?I think that is going to put us a year behind and the time to move forward is now.?

This was a position shared by Councillor Jeff Thom, who said the extra time would allow for the community to decide just how they would like to commemorate the occasion, above and beyond the blueprint established two years ago.

?If we have a committee that is struck immediately, that committee might have input on what grants you might apply for,? he said.

Going forward with the Committee at this stage in the game was approved by Council in a 6 ? 3 vote, but for many of those Council members voting in favour ? including Mayor Geoff Dawe, who pointed out that, at the moment, there are no municipal dollars earmarked for the celebration ? it was a reluctant approval.

?It is important to note the reason we voted in this direction is if the Federal government decides that they want Aurora to hold a series of events within the year, that will give us the direction of whether or not to move forward,? said Councillor Paul Pirri. ?It is clear to me that if the Federal government doesn't want to give us money to celebrate Canada, the taxpayers of Aurora should be under no need to put forward that money if the Federal Government is not stepping up to the table. It is not our job to hold Canada's birthday party if they are not interested in showing up.?

For Councillor Michael Thompson, it needs to be clear from the outset that anything deriving from this committee is contingent on this Federal approval.

?If you are clear from the start and you manage those expectations?and they are comfortable with it, I see no reason not to proceed,? he said. ?I am thinking about some of the challenges we had with Aurora 150 and the compressed timelines. I am assured they had a lot of ideas and a lot of things they wished they could have done if they had more time, but it was what it was. So, why not allow people to help us put on some of these events and give them that additional time??

Added Councillor Harold Kim: ?I always believe that, in life, if you have a lot of passion and a desire for something, you can achieve it. Because I had a passion, I was able to woo my wife, so I don't want to stop anybody. If they have the passion and the desire to prepare early for a very significant event, I don't think I want to get in the way of these passionate people!?