

Policies being developed to foster public art in Aurora

Public art in Aurora could get a significant boost later this year.

This month, Council is set to get the ball rolling on a formal policy that will not only help allocate funds for public art throughout Aurora, but engage artists on how they would like to leave their stamp on the community.

Council, sitting at the Committee level, gave the tentative green light to the development of a public art policy earlier this month.

According to Phil Rose-Donahoe, Manager of Aurora's Library Square project, a fully developed policy would formalize a drive for public art set out in the Town's Official Plan, the Aurora Promenade Plan, and the Town's ongoing Cultural Master Plan.

“The Town has contributed funds to a Public Art Reserve Fund as part of three recent capital projects, however it has yet to develop a policy and plan to guide how these contributions are to be allocated,” said Mr. Rose-Donahoe. “While these contributions are an important first step in advancing public art initiatives within Aurora, a Public Art Policy and Plan must be developed to direct how these funds will be used to integrate public art into public spaces.”

Should Council ratify its support for the plan going forward this month, working groups will be formed with municipal staff, cultural partners and members of the public to help develop the final product.

Money for public art has been allocated for several municipal projects in recent years including Library Square and the new Central York Fire Services hall which is currently being constructed near St. John's Sideroad and Earl Stewart Drive.

For members of Council, the drafting of a formal policy has been a long time coming.

“I am in support of this and I am glad it is finally coming around,” said Councillor John Gallo. “It would have been ten years or so that we have put it into the Official Plan, so I am happy it is finally happening.”

Also glad to see it moving forward was Councillor Michael Thompson, but he sought further information on the financial impacts of the plan.

“We have talked about a public art policy for quite some time,” said Councillor Thompson. “One thing I would like to see for ours as we move forward and finalize it is financial parameters around things like the contribution to reserves and the cost of projects. I have seen some municipalities where what they have done is identify a percentage like we have done, but they have capped it at a certain amount. For example, for us, it is 1 per cent of a project, but I would like to see that capped to a maximum of \$100,000. Furthermore, what they have done is identify the funding for a project can't exceed X per cent of what is in the reserve.”

“I look at the policy before us and it certainly outlines a number of things, but it doesn't really speak to the funding and putting some of those measures in place.”

Councillor Gallo sought similar information, pointing out that the 1 per cent allocation for public art in the Library Square plan comes out to significantly more than \$100,000.

“The 1 per cent is of the project capital works, but it is not necessarily intended that those dollars collected go to that particular project,” responded Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services. “As an example, funds have been collected from the fire hall project, but it wouldn't necessarily constitute that we're putting public art at the fire hall. The capital project is an ability for us to earn or gain funds and have funds put aside for the purposes of public art, which could then be decided upon as to where that goes and what it looks like, and all sorts of parameters which would come through the plan itself.”

?We have not determined how much would be spent at Library Square or anywhere in particular.?

This was welcome news to Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said that how the funds are allocated for specific projects should depend on how public the setting ? such as the very public Library Square, once completed.

?Hopefully our whole community would be using Library Square at some point,? said Councillor Gaertner. ?It would make sense to me that there would be more money going there and perhaps less money going into the fire hall because, hopefully, we're not going to have that many members of the public going to the fire hall. I would like that to be kept in mind when we decide how much money we're going to be spending, of the money that is being collected, relative to the public use.?

Councillor Rachel Gilliland also expressed her support for a formal public art policy, but had some reservations on Councillor Thompson's suggestion of a financial cap.

?I hope that you come forward with hopefully some alternative options,? she said. ?I haven't gone online and looked at other policies in other municipalities to have a comparator [but] my opinion would be depending on the scope and significance of a project [maybe you] want to make more contribution to public art to some sort of a project. We probably don't have that many opportunities to be collecting maybe more than \$100,000. I just wouldn't want to exclude those opportunities where they exist because eventually maybe we won't have many opportunities to expand on our public art.?

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