

Twinning with Indigenous community explored

By Brock Weir

Aurora has been 'twinning' with the Swedish community of Leksand for decades and now that Canada's 150th anniversary is approaching, the Town is exploring opportunities to twin with First Nations.

The move comes following a motion from Councillor John Abel last week.

In his proposal, which called on staff to explore the possibilities, he said twinning with an Indigenous community could be a 'municipal legacy' of the Canada 150 program.

'Aurora recognizes that the contributions and experiences of indigenous peoples are part of our country's shared history,' said Councillor Abel in his motion. 'Aurora supports the work of all levels of government in advancing reconciliation and renewing a nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous peoples based on mutual understanding and respect.'

In addition, the June 3 powwow hosted by First Nations at Lambert Willson Park, he said, is an indication the community 'wishes to make a commitment to ongoing conversation and partnership with Canada's Indigenous peoples.'

Councillor Abel said he was inspired to bring the motion forward after hearing a talk about Reconciliation from Chief Dr. Robert Joseph. The Councillor says Joseph spoke about the meaning of reconciliation and how it is to build 'meaningful relationships among indigenous people and all Canadians.'

'Twinning is something that came about at the end of World War Two,' said Councillor Abel. 'The British and the Allies twinning with German cities that had been bombed and were basically destitute. The idea of working together to rebuild and building a relationship is how twinning started. It then moved in to more of a relationship over the years. Aurora has twinned with Leksand in 1976 and my point is it is a way of building relationships and it is something that lasts a long time.'

As Canadians, he said, 'our future and wellbeing of all our children rests in the relationships we build today.'

'To live in a reconciled world is a life long journey, generation to generation, that we meet each other and we have to find one another,' he continued. 'I notice we often speak and thank the Indigenous Nation that occupied this land in Canada. My idea is to begin that with municipalities taking the lead and if each municipality were to twin with an Indigenous nation we could build an understanding. It is not about us giving resources, money and funding and anything along those lines, it is only about learning about each other and it can build into other things.'

Having already floated his idea with Indigenous leaders, Councillor Abel said it was warmly received.

The idea was also warmly received 'generally' around the Council table with members supporting the idea but wanting to know just what twinning would entail from a resources and exchange perspective.

'My only comment is there are a number of municipalities out there that have a criteria and policy with respect to twinning or sister cities and I think that would help us as we go through this process,' said Councillor Michael Thompson, asking for a report on best practices. 'We have a fantastic library. Maybe there are some services within Town that we can share with them. Not all Northern Communities have the same access to services that we do and maybe there are some ways we can share what we have with them and I am fine with that as well.'

Councillor Paul Pirri also requested further information, particularly on what the end goals of twinning would ultimately mean.

'I just think there has to be a reason that we're doing it beyond just learning. Everything we do should have goals identified, should be able to track metrics, maybe not in the most strict fashion, but so we all have a clear understanding of what we're getting to and how we can help and learn.'

'I think if we're reaching out as a municipality to other Aboriginal Councils I think it is important that we involve the groups who were here in Aurora first. It would make sense that if we were to begin twinning with any other First Nations it would be wise to either get the blessing or a greater understanding from the First Nation groups that inhabited our lands.'

The motion was also supported by Councillor Wendy Gaertner, but her support only went so far. While the principle was sound, she said, one component of the proposal made her uncomfortable.

'I am certainly not opposed to twinning with a First Nations, but the Canada 150 Municipal Legacy? I haven't heard a lot of comments in the media from Indigenous groups that I don't know if the word is insulted, but they have been around for a long time,' she said. '150 certainly doesn't mark any kind of a celebration for them. Twinning is fine. As a 150th municipal legacy, I am really not in favour of that part.'