

Politicians question whether too many politicians could spoil Canada's 150th

By Brock Weir

They don't yet have Federal funding to help throw the biggest party Canada has seen since 1967, but there is already jostling on who around Council can come forward as a party planner.

Tensions erupted at Council this month over the unlikely issue of just how many Council members should be on the recently-established citizen committee struck to first lay the groundwork for what the 2017 party to mark Canada's 150th anniversary might look like and, should Federal funds be approved, to carry the party planning over the finish line.

The bone of contention was the recommendation before Council in mid-February calling for the appointment of the Mayor, plus one other member of Council, to sit at the Canada 150 table. The brouhaha continued at Council last week.

'We should all participate,' said Councillor Jeff Thom, at Committee. 'With the Mayor being there as a conduit for Council, he can also chair the meetings to make sure there is some flow. It means we can all participate and it can be as inclusive as possible and those members of Council who would like to attend meetings and participate can.'

This was a view shared by Mayor Geoff Dawe who said the planning would benefit by having an additional member there so the reporting back to Council could be very specific.

In the opposing corner was Councillor Tom Mrakas, who said the purpose of striking a community-led committee was to 'take Councillors out of the equation' and let this group function in the same way as the Committee which led Aurora's 150th Anniversary celebrations in 2013, with no Council involvement.

'I don't see how on the one end we had people put on a great show, but didn't have anyone [from Council] there,' said Councillor Mrakas, whose wife, former councillor Alison Collins-Mrakas, chaired the 2013 committee, 'and on the other hand we are saying we need someone to be a conduit for the rest of Council. Clearly we didn't [need this] before and we didn't need that conduit, and we didn't need the interference from politicians.'

This was a view shared by Councillor Sandra Humfries, who said the Town's Sesquicentennial Celebrations 'Were beautifully done without any politicians in the mix.'

Councillor Thom, however, said the previous Committee benefited from having a former council member in the mix, someone equipped to chair and steer a meeting.

From the perspective of Mayor Dawe, the entire discussion was tinged with a bit of irony: 'politicians suggesting we shouldn't be having a politician on a committee because it will be too political.' This, he said, followed an update on this spring's Community Recognition Awards committee, a table at which Councillor Mrakas sits, and Mayor Dawe questioned, without naming the Councillor, whether Council should 'ask that person' to step down from the committee.

This prompted an objection from Councillor Mrakas, who said Mayor Dawe was insinuating he was 'playing politics.'

'I was pointing out that the concept we're suggesting, that some committees can have a politician on it, that's okay, and some committees can't have a politician on it because it is too political strikes me as ironic and I don't follow that,' replied Mayor Dawe. 'I don't agree with that.'

Heated debate continued between Mayor Dawe and Councillor Mrakas, with Councillors Thom and Paul Pirri joining the mix, each weighing in on the words of the other.

Ultimately, Council voted to just appoint the Mayor to the committee.