

## 2017 Multicultural Festival moves to Town Park

**By Brock Weir**

After two events at Ada Johnson Park in northeast Aurora, third Aurora Multicultural Festival will take place at Town Park on Saturday, September 9.

Council okayed the staff recommendations at last week's meeting which stems, in part, from two open houses held this spring to gather input on what Aurorans would like to see in a festival.

According to a report before Council by members of the Town's Parks and Recreation team, just 19 people total attended the two open houses weighing in on the future of the Multicultural Festival. In their summary of the sessions, they said participants emphasised the importance of providing festival-goers with 'culinary experiences' while showcasing a 'variety of cultures.' 'Most participants were indifferent to which cultures are showcased,' noted the report. 'There was a strong consensus that having many cultures showcased was preferable to having a focused approach on a few specific cultures. Results indicated that they wanted to learn about other cultures they don't identify with or, conversely, others wanted to showcase what their culture is. Based on feedback, staff suggest the 2017 festival focus on four main pillars: culinary experiences, entertainment, artisan marketplace/exhibition, [and] cultural games/activities.'

These four pillars, however, take up resources and it was suggested if the event remain at Ada Johnson Park, there would be further costs for a stage, electrical services and tents. Enter: Town Park, with a covered band-shell and other amenities.

While Council members said they were pleased to see the second annual Aurora Multicultural Festival would take place 'based on a one-off held as part of the Aurora 150 Celebrations in 2014' the change in location received a mixed review.

'I am not terribly ecstatic about the Festival moving to Town Park,' said Councillor Harold Kim, who made the initial motion to revive the Festival for last September.

A similar view was offered by Councillor John Abel, who said Ada Johnson Park engages a section of the community that can often go overlooked as far as Town-run events is concerned.

'The idea of going to Ada Johnson Park is that people could walk in,' he said. 'If anyone has attended Rick Hansen [Public School's end-of-the-year fair] there are thousands of people there. It is packed. You can't move. I can sense that gives you an idea of what potential you have there.'

Adding that moving the festival from Ada Johnson to Town Park would take away the 'walkability' for east side residents, he said it will take additional efforts to get them to buy into making the trek.

'We have to get them to buy in to coming over to Town Park,' he said. 'If we do it right, I am sure we're going to be successful at it, but I think that should be one of the priorities highlighted in our strategy going forward. What are we going to do about it? Do we even recognize it? I would like to encourage people to get involved and buy in.'

Similarly, Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she saw an opportunity. Along with Councillor Abel, Councillor Gaertner said she was disappointed not in the amount of people who took part in last year's Multicultural Festival 'and between 400 and 600 were estimated to have attended that rainy day at Ada Johnson Park' but in the engagement that has taken place since then, whether it be on-site surveys, or the lacklustre turnout at the public open houses.

'I was certainly pleased with the turnout at the Festival and I thank Councillor Kim for bringing the idea to Council and making it a tradition, hopefully,' she said. 'I am very much in favour of using Town Park. I think there is a divide in Aurora between the old part of Town and the new part of Town. I welcome the opportunity to bring the new residents into Town Park and hopefully they will enjoy it and come back to the Concerts in the Park and really start to help us revitalize the Downtown Core. I am glad we're trying [this location] and I think logistically it does make more sense.'

Added Councillor Tom Mrakas: 'I am looking forward to this year's event. I think it is going to be bigger, better and every year it is going to get better. I have all the confidence in the world that with [Special Events Coordinator Shelley Ware and Parks and Recreation Director Al Downey] it will be a great event.'

\$24,400 has been set aside Aurora's 2017 budget for the Aurora Multicultural Festival.