

Alternative ways of providing "culture" explored at Town Hall

By Brock Weir

‘Fractured relationships’ need to be cast aside in favour of streamlining the delivery of ‘culture’ to Aurora residents, according to Councillor Harold Kim.

Local lawmakers approved a motion from the Councillor last week calling on Town Staff, namely CAO Doug Nadorozny, to come up with a definitive list of Aurora’s ‘cultural partners’ (those the Town and taxpayers support through funding) and come up with ‘possible alternative approaches in the delivery of cultural programs and services to Aurorans.’

The Town currently provides annual financial support to the Aurora Public Library, the Aurora Cultural Centre, the Aurora Historical Society and, most recently, the Aurora Museum & Archives, but now it is time to look closer at how each organization works together, according to the motion.

‘There are still some fractured relationships, whether they be on the political boundaries or whether they be cultural, but they are cultural relationship issues I think that need to be put in the past and we need to move forward as one Aurora to make Aurora a great place to live and work,’ said Councillor Kim at last week’s Council meeting. ‘Part of what makes Aurora interesting and creates our identity, our history and heritage and cultural plays a huge role in our enjoyment of life and how others perceive us.

‘We talk about tourism and the viability of Aurora as a cultural tourist destination and we certainly want that. At the Multicultural Festival (last month) I was talking to one of the Library staff and gave me great insight. I asked her, ‘How do you perceive our Auroran identity,’ and she said, ‘I don’t think we actually have an identity. Our identity is still evolving.’ I daresay our identity is an evolving thing. That is part of our future identity and that has to be part of the strategy all our cultural partners have.’

Without a study, Council doesn’t know if there are any gaps in cultural output or deficiencies in resources, he contended, and it is ‘about wanting to give them as much as they need to make them successful.’

‘Cultural experience is about the customer experience,’ he said. ‘Like any other business, you focus on the experience, then the revenues, the traction and that will all follow.’

The motion received widespread support around the Council table, although some had concerns that the Aurora Public Library, which is governed by the Ontario Public Libraries Act, be included in the equation.

‘I want to make sure they continue to run quite independent,’ said Councillor Sandra Humfries.

Added Councillor Michael Thompson: ‘I do see them separately from some of the other cultural partners that we support.’

Citing a service level review carried out in the last term of Council, Councillor Thompson said a dividing line was found between ‘core’ and ‘discretionary’ services and the Library was very much on the ‘core’ side of the ledger.

‘I see the Library as a core service,’ he said, turning his attention to a clause in the motion calling on the CAO to report to Council with a list of partners and terms of reference for the review. ‘There is a mandate for us to support them, and I am concerned that the process, by which I laid out here, is not necessarily [as] collaborative as I would like. I would like to see those cultural partners actually have input and be part of the discussion around possible alternative approaches or looking at economies of scale.’

While he said he supported the motion as it was last week, Councillor Thompson noted he would not support it if further reports came back suggesting ‘significant alterations’ to how the Library functions.

Mayor Geoff Dawe also expressed his reservations saying the motion ‘hamstrings’ the CAO by pre-defining what he is supposed to do.

‘Last term we went through a very robust discussion upon selecting who is a cultural partner when we were developing the Cultural Mater Plan,’ said Mayor Dawe. ‘I would rather leave it open that he comes back to us with the list [of those partners]. There are a lot of groups out there that we don’t necessarily directly support but certainly add to the culture of our Town.’

Other Council members, on the other hand, were quite happy to see gaps being closed and consider whatever results from the motion.

‘I would like to see what comes out of this,’ said Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

Added Councillor John Abel: ‘We have seen how they work independently. We can bring them in, see the spaces’ and then we can get goals and share resources. If we can identify through this notice of motion that the museum would like more space and what the [Cultural Centre and Library have in mind] while we’re planning on investing in building a building or an area, we should know that. It is invaluable when we go forward that we look at all the parties and everyone that is going to be affected.’