

Aurora Cares team aims to get meal programs, services for vulnerable back up and running

A task force established to help address the needs of Aurora's most vulnerable residents is focused on getting important services back up and running in whatever way they can.

As The Auroran reported last week, the Town of Aurora has brought together a cross-sector group of residents and community leaders to form the Aurora Cares Community Action Team aimed at examining the needs of vulnerable and at-risk residents and hammering out a plan of action during a time of unusual and difficult circumstances.

Meeting for the first time virtually last week, the group of twelve worked on a list of key action items for the next few weeks, including re-establishing important meal programs wherever possible.

Meal programs, such as the two offered by Welcoming Arms (Welcome Table and Martha's Table), have had to close their doors after trying different models of staying open while, at the same time, maintaining physical distancing.

'We're looking at the possibility of getting [these programs] back up and running,' said Mayor Tom Mrakas following the group's inaugural meeting. 'They had to shut down as places of gathering [and] have been unable to continue helping those that have come out to Welcome Table on a weekly basis, as well as the Welcoming Arms program. We're looking at 180 meals a week they provide and now that is 180 meals that are not available to those that were in need before this pandemic started, and there is probably much more of a need now.'

As the Aurora Cares members bring their concerns forward, rising to the top of the list has been helping the homeless and those who are currently in precarious living situations. The group is looking to see what kinds of programs can be offered to those who are 'living on that line,' said Mayor Mrakas.

'We also talked about our seniors, our most vulnerable, and what kind of help and services are provided as far as making sure they get food, they stay active, [and] that their mental health is continuously being kept in a positive frame of mind. We know in this time you keep someone locked up in a room with nowhere to go, it is very easy to become depressed, anxiety starts to kick in, so those are some of the things we're looking at [is] how can we provide some programming? A lot of individuals and businesses have taken up the mantle and said, 'We'll pick up groceries for seniors and help out where we can.'

'Another part of that is we also want to create one list that kind of lists everything that is available within the Town so people that

are feeling the pressure, feeling the stress and don't know where to turn, they will have a source that they will be able to have a better understanding of what is available to them, what they can do.?

Initiatives like these are expected to move forward in earnest next week as Council considers a motion from Mayor Tom Mrakas to redirect funds left over from last year's Mayor's Charity Golf Classic over to the Aurora Cares group to facilitate their work.

?The funds are supposed to be to help those who are less fortunate and at need in the community,? said Mayor Mrakas. ?We just need to be able to shift it properly to the proper process. We're looking at getting those funds over so we can utilize that in the committee.?

By Brock Weir