

Aurora Cycles aims to bring community together and harness pedal power for change



Putting your feet on the pedals and getting those spokes moving undoubtedly creates momentum, but, for Aurora Cycles, it's a matter of strength in numbers.

Aurora Cycles is a fledgling group of cyclists dedicated to celebrating and promoting self-propelled transportation.

Inspired by the success of Cycle Aurora, the Town's initiative to get people using their bikes to explore local trails, landmarks and businesses, Aurora resident Jen Turla and her husband Gio saw the community's interest in cycling and set out to not only harness that interest but ?create a way to bring residents together and connect with people who are interested in Aurora and biking in all its forms,? says Jen.

?It all started with the Santa Under the Stars parade last winter, she says. ?We thought, what a cool way to kick-off a community group if we could get some people interested in biking in the parade. We launched a community program through social media and it became a growing group. We started to get momentum and biked in the Santa Claus Parade, the Canada Day Parade, and we had a kick-off event where we had a guest speaker who calls himself the Biking Lawyer, who shared a lot of valuable content on people knowing their rights and responsibilities on the road. It has been great to connect with Aurorans interested in biking and, over time, we hope to start to grow that cycling culture in Aurora.

?We just want to make biking visible in Aurora. We're all for anything that increases its visibility in Town and over time we hope to advocate for biking infrastructure, provide education and have some bike gatherings.?

Following the kick-off event, the group developed a list of goals and then assembled the team to make it happen. One of their first objectives was to advocate for more bike racks in the community, particularly at Town Park where such infrastructure didn't exist.

Installed earlier this spring in conjunction with the Aurora Farmers' Market, it saw immediate use and Turla credits the energy in making that a reality to Aurora Cycles founding member Lissa Dwyer.

Goals down the bike path include a delegation to Council to ?demonstrate to local government that the need is there? and to encourage them to continue that forward direction.

Their goals also go beyond Town Hall.

?We want to add another positive voice to the choir; I think there's big opportunity for increasing our network of bikeways and multi-use paths, especially on the major arteries that are more Regional in nature,? says Turla. ?We would really like to get in front of the Region and have a conversation about that. When the Region redoes a road, if they are repaving, if they are doing Yonge Street or Bayview Avenue [they] take a complete streets approach where they look and say, ?Okay, how do we make this road work for everyone who is going to use it, including cyclists.'

?I am happy to see that, but there is just so much opportunity, especially for the key destinations around Town. How do we encourage people to cycle to Town Square when it is ready? How do we encourage people to cycle to local businesses or encourage local businesses to attract cyclists and bring them into their business.?

For Turla, the benefits of doing so are spread across the board.

She regularly bikes from her home to the GO Station if she's headed for Toronto.

It might take her ten minutes to get there rather than five by car, but fresh air wins the day ? and it's also an opportunity to meet neighbours in the community along the way, she says.

People live in all corners of Aurora, she adds, and while she often bikes within her neighbourhood and on her regular trails, she's excited about getting out and exploring more on her own power ? as are Cycle Aurora members.

?People just get excited about it and I think creating that visibility is really important,? she says. ?That's why I love biking in the parades because when you're going down the street, everyone sees a bunch of people on bikes [and it gets them] thinking it's pretty fun, I should pull my bike out of the garage and give it a try. We just want to keep growing visibility for biking in all its forms, whether it be for transportation, which is amazing, biking to the station in the morning versus driving, just because you love it.

?I've always been interested in what we can do in our own part for the environment and climate change; it feels very big, it's a big problem that no one can personally solve on their own, but cycling is such a positive thing it feels like such a great way to contribute in our own small way to becoming sustainable ? both for the health of our climate by choosing to get somewhere on a bike versus burning gas, but also the mental and physical health aspects of it. It has been a great start and we're really excited to just keep the momentum up.

?[In a year] I would love to have twice as many people coming out to our events as we have now. We usually have about 15 riders or so in the parades and I would love for that to be 30, or as many as the Town will let us have. I would love to have had conversations with the Town, with the Region and Metrolinx and to have a campaign for businesses that are bike friendly. Just another beautiful thing about biking is being able to be out there and feel more connected to your Town and your neighbours in it.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter