

Aurora Town Square opens as 'cornerstone' of downtown revitalization



A new chapter in the Town's history began on Saturday when the community came together to celebrate the opening of Aurora Town Square.

It was a party atmosphere in the outdoor plaza space - now known as Mirkopoulos Plateia - as John Webster, Aurora's Official Town Crier, led residents from the Town's Multicultural Festival at Town Park to the brand-new space, where they were piped in by members of the St. Andrew's College Pipes and Drums.

Hundreds of people filled the outdoor Delmanor Amphitheatre to watch the formal ribbon-cutting ceremony before enjoying dozens of activities, initiatives and launches within the complex throughout the weekend.

Celebrations, however, began on Friday evening when Mayor Tom Mrakas and members of Council hosted a reception of thanks for individuals and businesses who had made financial contributions towards making Aurora Town Square a reality.

The reception, which preceded the debut performance in Aurora Town Square's performance hall - the Davide DeSimone Performance Hall on behalf of Royalpark Homes - by the Norman Dance Company, was also attended by Ontario Premier Doug Ford.

"Town Square is going to energize Aurora for a very, very long time," said Mayor Mrakas prior to the Friday night performance. "It's a stunning visual metaphor of our past and present coming together in one place."

"The reality is all great towns and cities have lively, dynamic downtowns with world-class amenities," he continued, showcasing the various amenities among the highlights of the project, from the Treasure Hill Bridge connecting the Aurora Public Library to the Church Street School addition, the outdoor plaza, which will serve as an all-season gathering space, top-notch display and storage areas for the Aurora Museum & Archives, and studios throughout the building.

"Aurora Town Square is a cornerstone of Aurora's downtown revitalization, integrating the Town's past, present and future," said Webster the following afternoon, as cloudy skies gave way to blazing sunlight. "We are standing in the midst of Aurora's proud history, in celebrating the official ribbon cutting of a project created with an inclusive and sustainable focus. Aurora Town Square is a dynamic and innovative hub in York Region for residents, local businesses, and visitors alike, celebrating everything arts, culture and heritage."

These sentiments were echoed by Mayor Mrakas, who was joined on stage for the ribbon-cutting by Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland, Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson, Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, former councillors Sandra Humfries and Jeff Thom, CAO Doug Nadorozny, and Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services.

“Aurora is now home to a world-class arts and culture hub, a central community gathering space where people can come watch a show, see a new museum exhibit, take an art class, or simply meet a friend for a coffee at the new Armoury Café on the lower level,” he said. “There will be an interactive water feature in the summer and skating on this outdoor square in the winter, now named the Mirkopoulos Plateia (plaza) after one of our very generous donors.

“It's truly hard to overstate just how big a moment this is for our community. It took a tremendous amount of work from so many people to complete Town Square – from members of Council, former members of Council and staff, to our contractor partners and architects. This not only was a four-year construction project, this is something our community has talked about for 20 – 30 years. It took a tremendous amount of financial support from so many generous donors in our community whose names are now enshrined on the donor wall in our atrium. I want to thank all of them for their tireless efforts and generosity in helping us complete Town Square, the largest project in the Town's history.”

Thanking the former Council members for “believing in this project and supporting it so vigorously,” the Mayor also thanked the community as a whole.

“This was a complex and long journey and without your support and patience, we simply couldn't have gotten to this spot we're at today. We're so grateful that so many of you saw the value in this project. I really do want you to feel connected to this building and this outdoor square because this is your building, your space, for all of you to enjoy.”

“Town Square really does have so much to offer our community and I can't wait for all of you to get inside and take a tour. The Davide DeSimone Performance Hall on behalf of Royalpark Homes, really the centrepiece of the indoor space, can be configured in so many different ways to support various events from concerts, to plays, to trade shows. In the coming days, it will host film premiers, musical and dance performances, including Sloan, our grand opening headliner on October 11. While Sloane is already sold out, there are many more performances, film screenings and events to attend.

“The Aurora Cultural Centre and Marquee Theatrical Productions, two of our wonderful community partners, will continue with exciting programming year-round in the performance hall. We've also ensured the building has a state of the art, environmentally-controlled collection space, including the Joyce and Jim McAlpine Storage Area so the Aurora Museum and Archives can safely exhibit our incredible local artefacts and they are preserved for future generations.”

The Treasure Hill Bridge, he added, is a “stunning architectural achievement” that is an event space in and of itself “as demonstrated at Friday night's reception” while the green roof will “reduce energy consumption and stormwater run-off while creating a habitat for birds and pollinators.”

“Town Square is set to truly become the beating heart of our community. But this is much more than an arts and culture hub. Town Square is a central part of our efforts to revitalize downtown,” said Mayor Mrakas. “It is our hope Town Square will help attract more people from across the Region into our downtown core, which will support existing businesses, encourage new ones to open up, and create new jobs and exciting opportunities. Town Square will usher in a new era for our downtown at a time when more and more people are moving to our community to seek that high quality of life Aurora has become known for.”

By Brock Weir