

BROCK'S BANTER: Not-So-Candid Cameras

By Brock Weir

Take your minds back to a dark January evening.

2012 was barely cold yet while 2013 was already in full swing. Despite the fullness of the swing in question, people were still getting their minds back to where they should be, shaking off holiday hangovers (of the most metaphorical kind, of course) and focusing on the task at hand.

It was at this time that several people begrudgingly trudged over to Town Hall for another thrilling adventure in the world of municipal politics.

It was supposed to be a relatively benign meeting.

Aurora's 150 Committee were satisfied with the success of their Sesquicentennial Levee held at Town Park a few days previous.

Preparations were in full swing for the upcoming Aurora 150 Tattoo. You know, standard fare for this particular group.

Something was different that evening, however. Either I was hit with some leftover turkey with a particularly high octane level of tryptophan, or celebrities were filling the room.

Shaking some of the cobwebs away, I was certain I was not mistaken as CTV's Farley Flex, Christine Bentley and a few other familiar faces came to observe the proceedings. What possible interest could this cool collection of customers have in our Town's humble anniversary celebrations?

Well, the answer was soon clear when Lucid Community Development came forward to make their pitch on how they would like to become involved in our own community through the Sesquicentennial.

By January, of course, that ship had already sailed and the group then took their ideas outside to the hallway with Councillor John Abel to discuss further ideas. After all, there seemed to be a certain vacancy for a certain music festival on a certain holiday weekend.

We all know what happened next, to give a Coles' Notes synopsis, the group came forward with a music festival plan, a few wars of words later the festival was approved, Lucid imploded, most of the principals left together, hooked up with a local social media company, and forged ahead with Celebrate Aurora.

By this point you might be asking yourself why I'm digging up this old chestnut. The answer is simply that it is a prime example of some of the very interesting developments that have the potential to come out of Aurora's Advisory Committee meetings one needs to see to believe when, occasionally, mere words cannot do them justice.

Councillors are set to sign off this week on a plan that would bin any ideas of providing a live stream of what happens during these meetings for the general public, citing a myriad of concerns and potential problems in making it a reality. The laundry list of challenges is too extensive to list individually in this space, (please see Page 12), but tackling the issue at the committee level last week, Councillor John Gallo was astute to note that there was no shortage of problems listed but what was lacking was a list of ways to possibly overcome them.

Not being a technical whiz, I tend to agree.

One of the first problems listed is the lack of technology in each of the various committee rooms. That seems fair. After all, you can't have a live stream without the proper equipment. The second is meeting times occasionally overlap and would require ?simultaneous? live streams and ?substantial bandwidth.?

Overlapping meetings do not happen very often, but a possible solution could be to broadcast one meeting live and then a recording of the second one where there is time available.

Another problem is that room placements are not ?fixed? and that could pose a challenge. Strictly speaking, I have never once attended a meeting where the tables are in any different configurations.

Non-fixed furniture could be an advantage in that they could be tailored to suit the hardware and software on hand to make it happen.

The next issue is that technology would need to be ?replicated? in each meeting room, including high-def video and microphone systems, computers, and other things to make it a reality.

It would be interesting to note the disadvantages, for instance, of having a portable system that could be wheeled from room to room, complete with a camera, laptop, and any other ancillary equipment to avoid any cost overrun.

The report up for Council approval this week cites ?formidable organizational logistics?, ?substantial financial and technological resources? as two reasons hampering this ?difficult task.?

Admittedly, I have not tried my own hand at this, but the prospect seems neither formidable nor substantial financial resources necessary. A wall-mounted camera, and a simple microphone or two temporarily placed on the table top seems relatively straight forward.

When you get down to it, the image quality currently found on DVDs and live streams coming out of the Council chamber are only a few degrees removed from the best quality kinescopes. Surely it wouldn't be out of the realm of possibility to save a few bucks on a standard camera for each room.

Citizens at large, with their own life experiences, drives and passions apply their time and their skills to ensure their fellow citizens' interests, and specialized interests, are best represented when new initiatives come forward at Town Hall.

The community should have a chance to see what they're bringing to the table, if they are meeting the spirit of what Council has appointed them to do, and maybe hear a fresh perspective on the issues that might be important to them.

Aurorans might not give two licks about what happens during these meetings, but they deserve the chance to find out for themselves.