

Canada 150 plans begin to take shape

By Brock Weir

Aurora may be forced to pare down its party to mark Canada's 150th anniversary this year after the Federal cash infusion to help spark the celebration came in less than was expected.

The Federal Government has ponied up \$20,000 in grant funding for an 'Indigenous Pow Wow' which is set to be a centrepiece in the Town's celebrations marking the nation's Sesquicentennial, but that is just one event Aurora was planning to throw.

This week, Aurora's Canada 150 Committee will meet to discuss the way forward following Council direction.

At the Committee level last week, Council members expressed doubt over some of the party pieces they had brainstormed so far, including a military tattoo at the Aurora Community Centre, a special water feature for a park to be named in honour of the national milestone, and a special New Year's Eve fireworks display as part of Family First Night to bring 2017 to a memorable close.

Over the course of the lengthy debate at last week's General Committee meeting, Councillors opted to move forward with all the components for further consideration, with the exception of the park and library feature, which, pending Council approval this week, will be incorporated into the future development of Library Square.

While the Military Tattoo might already be off the table due to timing constraints in properly planning such an event, Councillors expressed a degree of dismay over the lack of Federal funds. Previously approving a \$90,000 placeholder in the 2017.

They hoped most of this would flow from Federal coffers, but it was not to be.

For some, striking a committee to lay the groundwork for these events and being left, in the end, without the money for the follow-through was a problem they saw on the horizon and tried to avoid.

'Getting married, if I found out I was only willing to contribute less than a fifth of the costs for a wedding and I was expecting someone else to hold the wedding for me, I think people would question my wanting to get married,' said Councillor Paul Pirri.

'Ultimately, this is an event for Canada's 150th and they are prepared to give us \$20,000. We are looking ourselves to go over and above more than four times the amount of money the Federal Government is looking to support us and that was my issue from the very beginning: we put our hopes out for a big grant, we didn't get it, and now we're going to be left holding the bill for someone else's birthday. If that is what Council's will and want is, so be it.

'I have absolutely no issue with holding a Pow Wow and doing a little bit extra I think makes sense, but for us to go out and name something Canada's Sesquicentennial Park when we're funding it ourselves goes beyond the return on investment.'

Mayor Geoff Dawe said he 'appreciated' the Councillor's point, but this was something that had been debated before.

'We sat here and discussed whether or not we should actually put together a Committee before we had the funding, but Council wanted to go ahead with a Committee,' said Mayor Dawe. 'We did, and the Committee has worked, come up with good suggestions, had staff input, applied for funding, and now we're going to go back telling the Committee, 'thanks, but we don't really care what you came up with because we're not going to do it,' and I find that offensive, quite frankly.'

Although the suggestions weren't taken off the table completely, they were tweaked.

Some Councillors, for instance, said a cost-savings could be realized by removing the fireworks from the Family First Night program because of unpredictable weather at the end of December. Others, saw opportunities from other angles.

'I am certainly supportive of providing a budget confirmation for the Canada 150 group and I guess my only concern is I look at the amount of funds that have been given by the Federal Government; \$20,000 is nice and personally I would have hoped for something greater,' said Councillor Michael Thompson, turning his attention to the suggested legacy feature of a Canada 150 Park and water feature. 'It seems to me the legacy feature we're all working towards at this point is Library Square and the Cultural Precinct. We have all talked about a water feature and having an open space. I think I would like to see that come out of this particular budget and us continuing to work on the development of a legacy project that way. It may not be built and completed by 2017, but I think it is more of a legacy project than a particular park.'

This was duly supported by Council, as was the Tattoo, despite timing issues.

At the end of the day, however, they agreed it is important to make sure that the military and their contributions are recognized. Councillor Gaertner suggested the military ceremonial might be incorporated into the Canada Day Parade, an idea that failed to get traction around the table. Mayor Dawe, on the other hand, was confident a Tattoo might fall into place in the time allotted, citing a time frame similar to the Aurora 150 celebrations in 2013.

'It is also the 100th anniversary of Vimy Ridge,' noted the Mayor. 'I think that is relevant to the discussions we're having around this. I would certainly take the comments back to the Committee, but I won't do it with any joy.'

With a \$20,000 grant in place to foot the entire bill for the Pow Wow, a military tattoo is expected to cost \$40,000. A fireworks display on Family First Night is forecast to clock in at approximately \$12,000. An additional component, a Youth Innovation Fair, will be covered by State Farm Insurance and the Rotary Club of Aurora.