

Canada Day parade shortened due to "accessibility" concerns

By Brock Weir

Aurora's Canada Day Parade will be shorter this year, following concerns raised over accessibility.

Participants in this year's Canada Day Parade will gather at Wellington Street to prepare for the parade, which formally begins just south of the intersection on Mosley Street.

According to Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation for the Town of Aurora, the decision to shorten the route, which normally begins at Orchard Heights Boulevard in the north, making its way south on Yonge Street to Murray, came on the heels of a few cases of heat exhaustion last year.

There were many who participated in the parade who suffered from heat exhaustion [and had concerns that] the parade route was too long and they asked that it be shorted or if somehow they could enter into the parade at a different time, he said.

We were concerned that the parade route was too long. It doesn't cause a problem with the Santa Claus Parade, but it certainly does on a hot July day. We had three instances last year where we had to have people drop out of the parade in order to recover from heat exhaustion.

Some of the concerns, he added, stemmed from the Colour Guard at the Royal Canadian Legion, but Shelley Ware, the Town's Special Events Coordinator, noted that marching bands expressed similar views.

We have had some accessibility queries in the past, she said. The parade was one of the longest parades in York Region, sitting at 2.4 km and there were some marching bands, and given the heat and temperature on July 1, that made 2.4 km a challenge. It was a struggle trying to get bands to commit to Aurora and part of it was the length of parade. As we went through the research and looking at [including] some marching bands halfway, the parade wouldn't see half of them. After the whole exploratory process, it made sense to go with the shorter route.

The challenge, she added, has produced a silver lining. Once the new route was devised, party planners signed on a number of new marching bands to participate this year including the Barrie Pipes and Drums, the Uxbridge Pipes and Drums, and other bands who weren't able to commit beforehand.

A new feature this year will be a float dedicated to the recent winners of Aurora's Community Recognition Awards, which Ms. Ware says was suggested by Councillor Sandra Humfryes following May's awards ceremony.

I actually think the streets will be fuller [in the shortened route] so the energy the spectators feel [will be heightened], said Ms. Ware. I think it is going to be a win-win for all the parties involved. It is definitely something new for everyone to adjust to, but I am getting really optimistic there will be even more benefits than we realise at this point, which originally stemmed from addressing an accessibility concern.

General concerns over the change in plan were tackled at Council last week with Councillor Michael Thompson raising alarm bells on behalf of residents who came to him with complaints.

In fact, a lot of them are actually upset that the route is being shortened, especially that it is not north of Wellington Street where a lot of people have homes, said Councillor Thompson. There seems to be some misunderstanding of the rationale behind it, even comments on why this wasn't better communicated.

Somehow we have to get that information out. I am surprised we didn't try to communicate that during the street festival because the feedback I get is people are still surprised.

Aurora's Canada Day Parade makes its way down Yonge Street from Wellington to Murray beginning at 10 a.m. Following the parade, a full day of Canada Day Festivities kick off at Lambert Willson Park runs through the spectacular fireworks display at Dusk.