Community gathers to cast light into the darkness at Menorah lighting

Hannukah represents casting light out into the darkness, and as instances of antisemitism rise amid the Israel-Hamas war, that was needed now more than ever for the hundreds of people who gathered at Town Hall on Monday night for Aurora's annual Menorah Lighting Ceremony.

Hosted in partnership between the Town of Aurora and Chabad Aurora, the December 11 was punctuated by music, dance, and, of course, the lighting of the candelabrum itself.

Attended by Councillors Ron Weese, Rachel Gilliland, Wendy Gaertner and Harold Kim, the ceremony was led by Rabbi Yossi Hecht of Chabad Aurora and Mayor Tom Mrakas, who said it was an ?incredible honour? to help kindle the flame.

?This is the seventh anniversary of our partnership with Chabad Aurora to offer the community a chance to experience this very important celebration together,? said Mayor Tom Mrakas. ?This is one of my favourite ceremonies to participate in and connect with our local Jewish community.

?Hannukah represents going from darkness to light, giving us hope for better days ahead. Lighting the Menorah strengthens our perseverance and faith. It inspires us to unite together, embrace diversity and support our Jewish community ? especially during these recent times of conflict. Our Town is honoured to display the Menorah. This symbol of spiritual light empowers us to be proud of who we are and to value our freedom ? and my thoughts and prayers are with all the families here today and for all those facing the turmoil of this current conflict. I pray for peace, a world free from violence.?

For the first time this year, the Menorah Lighting Ceremony took place in Council Chambers, a welcome change that was greeted by applause after many years of the event being held outdoors in the frosty December air.

Not only was this a comfortable switch, it was somewhat symbolic from Rabbi Hecht's perspective as, in his view, Council Chambers represent a centre of democracy and freedom ? ?a beacon of light here for our entire community.?

Hannukah, he explained, represents ?a small group of determined Jews who stood up against hate and tyranny? in the time of the

Second Temple in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago.

?This year, my friends, the lighting of the Menorah has much more significance and meaning [with] hate and antisemitism raising its ugly head,? he said. ?For all of us who have witnessed or learned about the atrocities that occurred to our brothers and sisters in Israel, tonight, as we stand in the very chamber of morality, clarity, and the centre from where the light in our Town emanates? the message is clear: triumph over adversity, light over darkness, and the kindling of the Menorah will illuminate the world with warmth, love and kindness.

?The message for each and every one of us here this evening, and as we continue to celebrate the rest of the days of Hanukkah, is giving of one's self. Tonight, we stand proud, we stand together. Yes, we celebrate the miracle of the oil, the rededication of the temple, and we also celebrate perseverance. The Maccabee family stood up, they stood strong, they understood there are times when you need to take bold action, speak loud and speak clear; with the morality, with a sense of understanding, and a sense of clarity, and to hold on to what is dear and to what is right. The universal message of Hanukkah and the Menorah, for each and every one of us, is hold dear our freedoms. Be the light in the world [where] the Jewish people ? the clarity, morality, religious freedoms are being challenged that it all just seems overwhelming. [The light] clarifies, illuminates, and dispels a whole lot of darkness. As we gather here tonight, celebrating the great miracle of the few over the many, the few of the oil that kept burning ? we, each and every one of us here this evening, and to those we have an effect on, awaken our inner freedom, our inner light, and learn of the great strength and powerful light that lies in each and every one of us.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter