

Community Reflection Space could be gathering spot for Truth & Reconciliation

A community reflection space could become a focal point for Aurora's Truth & Reconciliation journey.

Sitting at the Committee level last week, Council was asked to approve going forward with a design for just such a space, with a proposed location earmarked for the eastern portion of Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park just off John West Way.

According to a report from Michelle Johnson, Collections and Exhibitions Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, there is a ?need for a dedicated public space within Aurora for the purpose of bringing the community together when faced with tragic histories and current events.?

A space for the community to gather in the name of Truth & Reconciliation was first discussed by the Town's Indigenous Relations Committee in January with a working group struck the following month to consider further.

?The scope of the space was modified to include reflection for all tragic situations regardless of their location and cause,? said Johnson in her report. ?Some recent examples include the conflicts in Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, respectively. As a result of inter-departmental consultation during the summer months, the eastern parkette, within Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park, was identified as an ideal location for a community reflection space.

?There is a need for a dedicated public space within Aurora for the purpose of bringing the community together when faced with tragic histories and current events. Events that provoke public grieving occur spontaneously at the local, national and global level. Whether it is a fatal accident, findings related to past atrocities, or the escalation of an armed conflict, members of the public are often confronted with tragic news. A Community Reflection Space would provide a location where individuals could gather in memorials and reflection when faced with these events.?

Public spaces to ?express private sentiments takes many forms,? she added, ?including roadside vigils and tangible offerings? and Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park was deemed as the ideal location due to the sensory garden, accessible pathways and other features already in place.

Potential costs for the construction of such a space were not included in the report but will be contingent on design work, which has a place in the proposed 2024 Capital Budget.

During last week's discussions, Council members were non-committal about the space, and offered concerns over the location and the amount of public consultation that has taken place so far.

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, who represents the area in which Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park is located, said he ?wasn't necessarily against? having a Community Reflection Space there but said there had been ?no communication? with him in his capacity as a Ward Councillor or with residents.

?I don't have enough information to ask questions because the first time I heard about this was when the agenda came out,? he said. ?I feel it is somewhat backwards where we could have had some public engagement to establish the need, establish the location. I feel like it is a budget item [and] there's a recommendation on where to have it ? and the public and the Ward Councillor had zero say in that.?

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, on the other hand, said she thought it was a ?good idea? but wanted further information on the location.

?I don't know what the community would think about having it in this location [and] I think that is something we should find out,? she said, suggesting an alternative site could be on the south front of Town Hall. ?My opinion, as we will be moving the Christmas

Tree from the area in front of Town Hall [to Aurora Town Square] I thought it would be appropriate to have it at Town Hall and there would be washrooms available depending on when people meet.?

Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services, said Town Hall was initially on the list of potential locations but several factors worked against it including the often-busy parking lot shared by Town Hall and the Aurora Seniors' Centre, and that washrooms would only be available when the building was open.

?Saying that, at Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the washrooms aren't there, either, so it is the same kind of challenge,? she said.

?However?there are lots of amenities already in place that would be interesting and considerate for a space like this where it is quiet, peaceful, surrounded by treed areas? there wouldn't be too much to enhance.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter