

## Community Reflection Space could dramatically change entrance to Town Hall



Aurora's Community Reflection Space, a new place for residents to gather in times of reflection and grief, could see Town Hall get a dramatic outdoor transformation.

Plans for the Community Reflection Space continue to take shape, with Aurora's Accessibility Advisory Committee having the chance to look over concepts and make comments just before the New Year.

The latest plans show a significant overhaul of the front entrance of Town Hall, directly across from the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

Now dominated by an evergreen tree that is not in the best of health, the plans show the tree removed and replaced with a raised platform for gathering, and the forecourt of Town Hall converted to a series of pathways ? symbolic ?rivers? featuring diverse plantings and terrains.

The eastern section of the Town Hall outdoor space is will also be transformed, with hedges, a regrading of the adjacent hillside with new trees and forest plans, timber seating, and a ?sky ribbon,? which is described as a ?shallow linear water feature to reflect the sky, bring Earth and Sky together,? all with no pumps, no drains, and offering a space for community members to leave candles.

?This initiative, developed through extensive public and stakeholder consultation, aims to provide a dedicated area for residents to gather in times of collective grief and reflection,? said Michelle Johnson, Exhibition and Collections Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, in a report to the Committee. ?Town Hall was selected for its accessibility, quiet setting, and alignment with the space's intended purpose, avoiding recreational conflicts associated with community parks. The approved location reflects community feedback emphasizing the need for a respectful, inclusive, and peaceful environment. Staff are presenting a thirty-percent design proposal that sets the foundation for a space that is peaceful, culturally sensitive, and welcoming to all.

?[The design] proposal introduces key elements that support the space's mandate, including thoughtfully secluded layout within the Town Hall footprint, accessible pathways, and elements that encourage quiet reflection. The proposed design fosters a respectful environment that accommodates diverse expressions of grief, while maintaining a clear distinction from spaces typically associated with protest or political activity.

?As the Town's municipal headquarters, Town Hall offers both visibility and symbolic alignment with civic values, reinforcing Aurora's commitment to compassion and community wellbeing. It's public nature, however, requires a sensitive design approach to ensure the space remains emotionally safe and clearly non-political. The current proposal thoughtfully balances these considerations, and further refinements will be made as the project progresses towards final design and approval.?

Further details were provided at the Committee level by landscape architect Adam Norford, and while members raised question about the accessibility of pathways, snow storage, and clear signage, feedback was largely positive.

Norford told the Committee the designs thus far had been informed not just by Committee feedback, but also through consultation with Indigenous leaders, York Regional Police, Oasis Bereavement Group, and other stakeholders.

Given the current footprint of the space and what's proposed, he estimated that the Community Reflection Space could accommodate 450 people under the existing covered outdoor space.

?[Town Hall] is a nice piece of architecture; it's well-designed, it's well-built, and in the early morning or late in the day, the bricks just light up with the sun ? they glow. But the landscape surrounding it almost seemed like an afterthought. It didn't carry on that same level of thoughtfulness that the building did,? he said.

?The other thing, too, was the importance for a contemplation space, or even this being a valuable kind of pocket park or a place for people to spill out after events, we really wanted to bring more nature into the site, and especially from the Indigenous perspective, these non-human beings of our community. This allowed us to bring that even closer to the building.?

The plan, as it stands now, received a ringing endorsement at the Accessibility Advisory Committee by Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who said it was ?the best presentation I've ever heard? in her 22 years on Council.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter