

Community to have say on accessible playground at Diamond Jubilee Park

By Brock Weir

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations wrapped over a year ago, but commemorations could still roll in at the recently named 'Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park' on John West Way.

Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park is the new name for Civic Square Park, a soccer field in a busy residential neighbourhood adjacent to Aurora Town Hall as well as the Target-Cineplex plaza on Bayview Avenue. Councillors approved rededicating the park in honour of the 60th anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne in May, but some Councillors wanted something above a simple name change to mark the anniversary.

The park is currently home to a soccer pitch, but Councillor Paul Pirri put the wheels in motion to transform the park with an accessible playground for the community.

As such, Councillors are due to sign off this week on a recommendation to approve up to \$30,000 to develop a playground in the park which, if borne to fruition, could be earmarked for \$150,000 in next year's Capital Budget. If approved, 90 per cent of the costs would be funded from Development Charges with the balance coming from Aurora's Cash in Lieu reserves.

If the plan gets the green light this week, public consultations will take place between Aurora residents, particularly neighbours living off John West Way, the Aurora community as a whole, and the landscape architect retained to steer the project.

'It will be necessary to conduct a significant consultation process with both the local residents and neighbours of the Jubilee Park as well as the users of this specialty playground,' said Parks Manager Jim Tree in a report to Council this week.

Mr. Tree looked to a new accessible playground in Toronto's Oriole Park as an inspiration of what could be. The Neshama Playground, he said, provides play opportunities for everyone, including those living with physical and mental disabilities.

'It was determined that the Jubilee Park would be an excellent location for an accessible playground and that playground designers followed up with staff in providing a proposal and scope of work that could be considered in moving forward with this project,' said Mr. Tree.

'Staff believe engaging an experienced design firm to head up this important process will result in the best possible outcome for accessibility playground design.'

If approved as is, the first public meeting will give residents a flavour of what an accessible playground could entail. It would be the first opportunity for neighbours to sound off on what they would like to see in a park, ages it could benefit, and other concerns in the minds of residents.

A follow-up meeting would get down to the nuts and bolts, including evaluating different equipment that could be accommodated, whittling down various options to a preferred plan, honing the budget for the park, and looking at any other bells and whistles that could make this more of a community hub, including new structures and uses for lands not taken up by the playground.

While Councillor Pirri says the costs of doing this would not impact the overall tax rate, he said the process outlined in the report is 'much longer' than he anticipated.

'It is neither right nor wrong. It is just larger right off the bat than I anticipated,' he said. 'I think we still have to build something. Ideally we wouldn't be seeing it as high for the design fees and consultation fees, but if that is what Council decided, I am in favour of moving forward with the project.'

If the accessible playground is not approved, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park will be distinguished in other ways. Council previously approved special signage incorporating both the official Canadian emblem designed by the Federal Government and the official United Kingdom logo designed by a student, as well as a plaque bearing the names of each Aurora resident awarded Canada's Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

A full list of local recipients is expected to be made public by Rideau Hall by the end of the summer.