

Contributions to Aurora Chamber examined as Home Show details ironed out

By Brock Weir

Tens of thousands of people from Aurora and beyond descend on Yonge Street each year on the first Sunday in June to take part on the annual Aurora Street Festival.

Hosted by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, the event is a showcase of local businesses, as well as an opportunity for families to get out and have some fun. While the event is a money maker for the Aurora Chamber, the Municipality puts forward over \$5,000 each year to make the festivities a reality.

That was the figure brought forward to Council this month in a report from Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation Services. His report came to Council at the request of Councillor Evelyn Buck, who asked for firm figures in how much staff resources from Town Hall contributed to the success of the event.

Councillor Buck's request, in turn, came in May, after the Chamber was forced to move their annual Home Show to the Stronach Aurora Recreation Centre (SARC) in 2015, after nearly three decades in operation at the Aurora Community Centre.

Despite eventually agreeing to the move, Chamber CEO Judy Marshall told Councillors at the time there would be significant challenges to them that would be hard to overcome.

Although many of these details have since been hammered out, there are still a few to be addressed.

Before Council ultimately signed off on the move this spring, Ms. Marshall requested to have the costs waived for the use of the SARC for the next five years. Although that plan failed to gain significant traction around the Council table, she said a waiver would cover ?additional expenses that would be incurred in a new show.?

?We are also projecting a decrease in the number of exhibitors and visitors due to the lack of familiarity with the Stronach Centre,? said Ms. Marshall at the time. ?Therefore, we are also forecasting a decrease in revenue. Please assist us in responding to the request so we can support and grow business in Aurora.?

Although Councillor Sandra Humfries said in subsequent discussions that she would be interested in discussing a cost waiver for just one year, Councillor Evelyn Buck, on the other hand, questioned why the Town of Aurora should take a hit on incoming revenue for an event which is a profit generator for the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

?I am wondering how you can justify asking for a reduction in rent, which comes out of taxpayers' pockets, so you can present a Home Show which produces revenue for your treasury,? said Councillor Buck.

In response, Ms. Marshall said any profits ultimately come back to the community.

?It actually goes back to programs and supporting the members,? said Ms. Marshall. ?We do make revenue, yes, but we are projecting we will have a reduction in the revenue we usually have and what we have always planned for over the last number of years.?

In his report to Council, Mr. Downey said the Town contributes \$1,035 to the Street Festival through the Parks Department in putting out over 40 garbage cans, requiring four staff members four hours to put into place, as well as a further \$225 to set up and take down the Town of Aurora's own booth. Both of these items are part of the Parks Department's budget.

A further \$4,098.34 can be attributed to garbage collection and disposal stemming from the festival, as well as the setting up of road barriers and traffic control.

"I think the public, and particularly Council, need to know there are many ways the Town of Aurora provides assistance to [the Chamber]," said Councillor Buck at the July 29 Council meeting, noting the waiver request for the Home Show. "This is one of them and we have never had that figure brought out before. Council and the public need to know how much of our tax resources go into the support of the Chamber of Commerce. That is not all of it, but the tip of the iceberg."

Councillor John Abel said he "welcomed" the information, and said Town support for the Chamber of Commerce gets a good return on investment.

"It is our small part," he said. "It is a cost, it is not huge, but the benefits are tremendous and it shows the partnering the Town has for events such as this. It should be noted the Town does this to participate and promote events and, in the end, it is good for the community, businesses, and anything else going on