

Cultural Centre eyes fundraising for 2013 with budget in place

By Brock Weir

Fundraising for the Aurora Cultural Centre is expected to kick into high gear this year with Council's approval of their operating grant.

Council is set to formally approve a \$370,000 grant to the Aurora Cultural Centre this week, per the terms of the recently signed new Cultural Services Agreement between the Town and the Cultural Centre. In order to do their part, the Cultural Centre has set a \$200,000 revenue goal of their own through programming and fundraising.

According to Frank Pulumbarit, President of the Cultural Centre Board, the finishing touches are being made on a new fundraising plan. It has been in the works for the past several months and they have engaged outside help, an "expert in funding" to make sure the correct "and practical" targets are met.

"We have many elements to that plan, and that plan consists of corporate sponsorships, going out into the community and doing sponsorship and individual drives, and I understand there is a desire to look at membership drives to be part of the whole fundraising picture," he said. "That is not part of the plan at the moment, but something we can definitely accelerate and look into this year."

Their \$200,000 goal is one for self-revenue. This means the Centre will generate 40 per cent of its own revenue this year, as opposed to just 10 per cent three years ago, he added.

"The Centre has just gone up and up and up in its ability to generate its own revenue and contribute to its success," he said, noting \$150,000 of that is due to programming revenue, with \$50,000 each from fundraising and corporate sponsorship, almost double from 2012 numbers.

"I hope we are demonstrating to you real commitment to try and make that number as high as it can be in this particular year. We're trying to nearly double the amount of fundraising that we're going to be responsible for. The \$200,000 represents nearly an 8.5 per cent increase on revenues that we're going to be responsible for versus last year."

The Cultural Centre is also going to decrease costs by 4.6 per cent this year, he added. Revenue hits, however are going to come on board from no longer being able to rent out the Aurora Room by this time next year.

Under the terms of the new agreement, this second floor space will be handed over as permanent museum space for the Aurora Collection. The new agreement also calls on revenue generated by permitting out space to groups outside the mandate of the Cultural Services agreement to be handled by the municipality rather than the Centre.

"We felt [the issue of permit revenue] was a really important thing as part of our agreement, so we're going to do this in spite of the lost revenue," said Mr. Pulumbarit. "We're going to up that number by 8.5 per cent and we're going to decrease our costs by 4.6 per cent revenue. We're going to balance our budget and we're going to reduce the amount we're going to require from the Town. That's the delicate balancing act we're going to try and accomplish this year. Most for-profit companies would look at those objectives and cringe, but we're going to try."

"We've sharpened our pencils numerous times and we have looked at it up, down and sideways."

Mr. Pulumbarit made his comments to Councillors at the committee level last week. Joining him was Heidi Franken, a member of the Cultural Centre Board, and also an accountant overseeing some of the financial planning of the group. In her comments, she addressed concerns that several Councillors had the last time the subject was brought up over reserve funds held by the Cultural Centre, which currently hover around \$100,000. This, she said, represents about two months of operating funding.

?It is a critical component of our risk management plan having financial stability and having an appropriate contingency reserve is a part of that,? she said. ?The need for a reserve in general for non-profit charities is recognized as a best practice and it also meets one of the goals set out in our strategic plan to be a respected role model for a well-managed organization.

?Having a reserve is very critical to us in achieving a number of objectives. It is very important to us as we wrap up our fundraising plans and it is also important to protect the centre and the town. It acts as a shock absorber in the amount of an unforeseen circumstance such as legal fees. It ensures programming is not impacted in the event there is an unforeseen circumstance and so we can continue to fulfil our mandate under the cultural services agreement.?

Councillor John Abel, one of the more vocal opponents of Council's previous agreement with the Cultural Centre said the new initiatives show the community ?is moving and addressing? the concerns to make a ?sustainable model.? Although he said he thought about asking if the ask from the Cultural Centre could be reduced further, he said he wants to see how this will turn out this year.

?We're going into the fourth full year and [citizens have] established that they are supporting the Cultural Centre, and they are the ones who are using it,? he said. ?I am encouraged by that. I am pleased to see there is dialogue and they are listening to what we are saying and we're voicing what residents are telling us?