

Cultural Festival aims for recipe to unite community

By Brock Weir

Railroad tracks might bisect Aurora, but food representing all the cultures that make up Aurora could be the recipe to make two halves a whole, according to Councillor Harold Kim.

Council voted in favour of looking at developing a cultural festival in Aurora's northeast quadrant following a motion from Councillor Kim.

Highlighting the growing multiculturalism in Aurora, as well as the fact potentially 12,000 new residents will soon be arriving when Aurora's 2C development is complete, such a festival would welcome and engage new residents, highlight the culture and history of Aurora, and help bridge the gap between older sections of Aurora and ones that have sprung up on the east side of Town.

"I have been a resident of Aurora for just under five years and immediately my wife and I fell in love with [the Town]," said Councillor Kim. "There is a lot to love about Aurora, but I quickly see, as I live in a fairly new section of Town and it is going to get newer as the 2C lands develop how the tradition and culture I fell in love with when I first moved here can get easily diluted.

"You have a demarcation in Town and that is not desirable. What brings people together? It is usually food. Ribfest is a screaming success and food is a common denominator for everybody. We have enough diversity and culture, and more will be coming in the next few years. Everybody would like to share their food at a common event. When you share food, you share conversation, you share ideas, and you gain relationships and friendships. Start it simple with food and expand on it. I think we have the right demographics and the right formula to make it a success here in Aurora because everyone goes all in."

The prospect of a multicultural food festival whetted the appetites of Council members, who suggested such a festival can build off a template created in 2013 for a multicultural celebration held at Ada Johnson Park to commemorate Aurora's 150th anniversary. Although the Sesquicentennial event was marred by an extended deluge of rain for almost the entire proceedings, had the weather been more cooperative, the event could have been a rousing success, they said.

"It was a great attempt to bridge the different cultures that are over on the eastern side of Aurora," said Councillor Michael Thompson. "Had it not been for the weather, I am sure it would have been a well-attended festival. I have always been supportive of trying to bring that back. I would encourage [staff] to look at what they did then to incorporate some of those aspects into what has been addressed here. I think it is long overdue."

As Aurora's Sesquicentennial Committee spent less than a third of their allotted budget on activities, they suggested the leftover funds could be used to lay the groundwork for an enduring festival. Last September, however, the Council of the day voted in favour of a recommendation from Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation, to nix the proposal to use the bulk of the remaining budget to establish an Arts & Culture Endowment Reserve to fund a continuing festival.

Establishing this endowment, he said, would duplicate his department's current Culture & Recreation Grant program, which disburses up to a total of \$1,000 a year for various cultural endeavours of individuals and organizations around Town.

Discussions that evening focused on using \$10,000 of the leftovers for the creation of a Remembrance Day DVD for students, but the ultimate decision to approve the DVD and reject the endowment might not have been the intention of members who were re-elected in October.

"I agree totally with the concept and I thought we were moving that way," said Councillor John Abel. "But I am glad it is brought back up. This is a way to get our new residents acclimatized to how we celebrate within and we can't always expect them to come to [the centre of Town Town Park]. We should all go out there and celebrate what they give to the community."

Councillor Wendy Gaertner expressed a similar view.

?I don't really remember Council not favouring that idea,? she said. ?I think it is a wonderful idea and it is true that anything that involves food is certainly a uniting and enjoyable experience.?