

Diversity mural aims for summer completion

A final location is yet to be determined, but plans for a new mural celebrating Canada's diversity in Aurora are beginning to take shape.

A \$10,000 donation has been secured towards the mural's completion, Councillor Harold Kim told members of the Town's Anti-Black Racism and Anti-Racism Task Force, a contribution which has come from Smart Centres.

A new art installation for Aurora was first floated by Councillor Kim at the Council table, citing the Celebrating Canada mural on the southeast corner of Yonge and Wellington as an example. The mural, which has greeted southbound drivers on Yonge Street for nearly two decades, commemorates a number of notable Canadians and achievements but, bar one example, is completely devoid of Indigenous achievements and achievements made by Canadians of colour.

An art project to rectify this situation was approved by Council earlier this year and taken to the Task Force for their input.

Leading the project at this point is Phil Rose-Donahoe, Project Manager for Library Square, who came to the meeting with examples of similar murals elsewhere, including Toronto's The Faces of Regent Park. Possible locations looked at for the new mural included the southwest corner of Yonge and Wellington, an idea which was previously floated around the Council table, as well as the south-facing brick façade of Old Town Hall on Yonge Street, and a wall the apartment building on the northwest corner of Wellington Street East and Industrial Parkway North.

But, like everything, the devil is in the details.

'Each step [of the process] raises different questions,' Mr. Rose-Donahoe told the group. 'It's not [all about] the finished product, not just the mural that is important, but I think the process we go through in terms of planning for the project and selecting the artist is really important.'

Inclusivity, he said, was an important factor in the selection of contributing artists. Participating artists need to be insured, a process which might pose limitations for young artists, as is the provision for applying artists to provide examples from their portfolio.

'I think as we develop the guidelines, we want to think about how we can make sure that we're inclusive and we get a wide range of artists involved in this process as possible,' he said. 'Knowing the nature of the content of this mural and what it is meant to address in terms of correcting the historical narrative in terms of racialized communities I think is really important. Do we want to make sure that, as one of the criteria, the artist has to be an artist of colour? Should they be a local artist? It is important we think about these things.'

Members of the Anti-Black Racism and Anti-Racism Task Force agreed and suggested a smaller sub-committee be formed to address some of these questions and become involved in the creative process.

'Where I feel the Task Force should have a role is determining content,' said Task Force member Mark Lewis. 'We should have a voice in providing input along with the artists in terms of what should be depicted in the mural. I also want to add that I like the idea of considering multiple artists and pieces.'

One such contributing artist might be from the Task Force itself, with Keenan Hull, one of the youth involved in the planning of last year's Solidary Walk in conjunction with the Black Lives Matter movement, stepping forward.

'I would like to leave a stamp on the city I have lived in my whole life,' he said, adding that he wanted further information on what the Town was doing to remove some of the barriers artists might experience on the road to full inclusivity.

Responding to these concerns, Mr. Rose-Donahoe said that there are some methods being considered, recognizing that young artists might not have the same access to insurance as established creatives.

?You could say we want to have an artist who has done three similar projects and you have to show us a portfolio of five images,? he said. ?We can simply waive those or we can just come up with different criteria that is more about why you are passionate about it. You don't necessarily have to be a professional artist; you can be a young person and that is where Mark's point is really great: having a selection of artists, you may have one main artist who is then responsible for facilitating the others that may be involved. You could also say that a team of artists could apply through the process.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter