

First of new downtown mural series could be painted outside Catholic church

Aurora's historic downtown core could take a step towards a distinctly more colourful and poignant future this week as Council nails down the final details of a new street mural program.

First floated this spring by Mayor Tom Mrakas, the Downtown Street Mural program is intended to honour distinctly Aurora-related themes, as well as tributes to frontline workers who have been working diligently to keep the community healthy, safe and fed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sitting at the Committee level last week, Council approved guidelines for the mural program as well as funding to a maximum of \$5,000 for the installation of the first mural, funds which will come from Council's contingency budget if the decision is ratified this week.

The mural program will focus on a series of retaining walls along Yonge Street which were first constructed in the late 1960s. According to a report before Council by Library Square manager Phil Rose-Donahoe, each of the walls require repairs before any paint is applied to the concrete.

The wall spaces are also of varying heights, ranging from two to eight feet, while some are more visible to passers-by than others.

Although the Town will determine the exact location of the mural in collaboration with the successful artist based on assessment of size, condition, location and threat from future development, staff recommend that the first mural be installed on the west-facing retaining wall located just north of the Yonge Street and Catherine Avenue intersection, said Mr. Rose-Donahoe. This section of wall is in relatively good condition compared to other locations and provides adequate height and length for one or more murals.

The recommended initial price tag of \$5,000 includes approximately \$1,000 for repairs to the wall itself, with up to \$2,000 for artistic design and production fees, a further \$1,000 for materials and another \$1,000 for maintenance.

Should the recommendations be ratified, the Town will seek experienced artists to carry out the work. Theme guidelines are Aurora's history, signature events and physical environment and/or frontline workers in the fight against COVID-19.

Artists applying for the gig will need to include a high-resolution colour rendering of their concept, a letter of interest, a statement describing their work, and three to five examples of past work.

Finalists will be selected by a committee comprised of a community member, the Mayor, a municipal staff member, and an external art professional.

Speaking to the recommendations last week, Mayor Mrakas said considering the first mural is slated to be painted outside of Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, a member of the church's council should be invited to participate in the selection process.

When the rest of Council took their first sweep of the recommendations, local lawmakers focused on whether \$5,000 would be enough for the initial mural.

It is a very interesting idea and, in my opinion, although there are people out there who like the look of concrete as it ages and is, in a way, a design feature in itself, I like the idea of having a mural, said Councillor Wendy Gaertner before questioning whether \$1,000 was enough for supplies, including paint. I would like to say we should have some leeway on that. Wall paint is wall paint, but there are all different kinds of paints. I think if someone can present to the Committee the actual cost of what their paint would be, we should have some leeway to that.

Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services, said that once the submissions are seen, they will have a better handle on exact costs.

This gives us a bit of a ballpark to work with, she said, before tackling the issue of wall repairs. Staff have been out to the site, along with our Operations staff, to understand what would be needed for the basic surface treatment or repair. It depends on the site; if it is just a simple crack or a bigger structural [issue, this is] the wall with the least amount of concerns and I feel it would be the easiest to transition.

Mr. Rose-Donahoe added that the intention is not necessarily to paint the entire wall in this go round, but something roughly 10 feet in length to the height of the wall.

The intention wasn't to paint the entire wall, rather it was to paint a portion of the wall with the intention there could be subsequent murals down the road, he said.

By Brock Weir