

Grilled cheese battle could help Aurora sizzle, says Councillor

Can the humble grilled cheese sandwich help Aurora become a tourism destination? Maybe, suggests Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland.

An Ultimate Grilled Cheese Sandwich Challenge, involving local restaurants, has been floated by the Councillor through a Motion that will come before Council this week.

Discussed at last week's Committee of the Whole, Gilliland's motion says culinary events in other municipalities have proven successful in engaging residents and supported local businesses at the same time, citing Midland's Ontario's Best Butter Tart Festival as a prime example.

"An Ultimate Grilled Cheese Challenge in Aurora would provide a creative and enjoyable platform for local restaurants, regardless of their usual specialties, to showcase unique and inventive takes on a classic comfort food," said Gilliland in her motion. "Such an event can stimulate economic development by encouraging residents and visitors alike to explore Aurora's dining scene, thus supporting local businesses and fostering a sense of community pride."

"The proposed Ultimate Grilled Cheese Challenge is a relatively low-cost event to organize, requiring only minimal resources such as the printing of tasting passports and the coordination of participating restaurants, making it an accessible and financially feasible initiative for the Town."

Any such event will involve both the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and Aurora Economic Development Board, should the Motion be approved this week, and staff will report back with their recommendations.

Council was generally supportive of the suggestion at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting, but some didn't want to limit the challenge to grilled cheese sandwiches, at least not yet.

"I think it's a wonderful concept," said Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, adding, "no two things bring people together more than sports and food."

"I'm just wondering whether instead of dictating or just unilaterally telling residents and restaurants and business owners that we're going to do grilled cheese, would it be recommended to go to residents and ask them if grilled cheese is the food that we want to base this concept on, or [are] there other foods like burgers or something else that we can apply that would be equally or of greater value in this concept?"

Councillor Gilliland said municipal staff had the same question when she first discussed the issue and she didn't disagree that "maybe there's another food selection that would be appropriate. She said, however, she wanted to "overcomplicate" things and "make it really simple and focus on the grilled cheese because it seems to be a Canadian favourite."

"I wanted to have a real fun way, which is very low-cost, to bring people into our amazing Town and try the culinary experiences of various restaurants," she said, speaking to the Motion itself. "The concept is you could be of [a] different culture and create your own version of your grilled cheese and patrons can come within a certain period of time and try this grilled cheese based on whatever flair, but obviously it doesn't have to be a permanent menu, just something to attract people to come into the Town and try the other restaurants we have."

"Talking about the events we have currently, this is a very low-cost, easy thing to facilitate. Essentially you could have a passport with a bunch of restaurants who want to participate, put in a QR code, and people can vote. I'm not saying we have to do the exact same thing [as other municipalities] but I'm trying to think of a very innovative and creative way to where we can get the community involved in supporting our local restaurants."

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter