

INSIDE AURORA: Panamania

By Scott Johnston

While we did get to see the torch passing by last week on its incredibly circuitous route to the Opening Ceremonies, Aurora was left off of the podium several years ago when it came to awarding the actual Pan Am events.

While we may feel, to some extent, left out of all the excitement, perhaps in the end, this was a good thing, as I'm not sure we were ready for it.

For example, over the past week traffic chaos has been gripping Toronto, with longer commutes, and frustrated drivers.

Up here, the intersection of Yonge and Wellington is already a vehicular nightmare at the best of times. Can you envision it with a few thousand more cars thrown into the mix at rush hour, and perhaps even worse, with carpool lanes?

Same goes for the area around the GO train station.

And while it would depend on the venue, where would people park?

The GO garage is full by 8 a.m. every morning. Town Hall, the Stronach Rec Complex and the Community Centre are all short on spaces. And one has a better chance of getting hit by lightning or staying awake during a Council meeting than parking in one of the few spots at the Cultural Centre.

Our only option might have been to park cars on the grass at Highland Gate. After all, the fairways and greens no longer need to be maintained, and with all the ongoing debate over how much of what is to be built where, it'll be ages before they stick a redevelopment shovel in the ground.

Vehicle congestion may not have been as much of an issue if visitors could have stayed overnight. But sadly, with Howard Johnson's closed and with no other hotels within our borders, those options would have been limited, unless we filled Petch House with cots and sleeping bags.

As for new facilities, it would be nice to see a few million dollars of outside money poured into the community, but it might not have been for a structure that would be a focal point for athletics for years to come, like a new tennis complex or Olympic sized pool (which we couldn't fill anyway, due to the annual water ban).

More likely it would have been something with limited numbers of users after all the athletes departed, such as a custom built fencing, trap shooting or Greco-Roman wrestling venue.

And in any case, based on Aurora's recent track record with infrastructure (think Leisure Complex and Joint Operations Centre), the new venue would probably not be completed in time for the Games anyway, and in either case would have been substantially over budget.

So, perhaps we dodged an 'embarrassment bullet' there.

I don't deny that hosting an event or two in Town would have been a boon to our shops and restaurants. And it would have been nice for Aurorans, especially the younger crowd, to see world (or at least, New World) class athletes competing in person within our borders.

But, that's all water under the bridge. The Games venues are set elsewhere, and we'll all be watching on TV, or for those attending events in person, listening on the car radio to the highlights they're missing because they're still stuck in traffic on their way there. Someday, we're likely to see another Olympic bid from the GTA, and whenever that time comes, perhaps Aurora will be a little more ready infrastructure-wise.

Maybe then the Town can assert itself, and push to the front of the venue line.

Until then - Go Canada!

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