

INSIDE AURORA: Stability Crisis

By **Scott Johnston**

With winter almost at an end - fingers crossed - I was taking what I hoped was a final seasonal wander through the arboretum when I spied a small figure perched on a bench. To my surprise I saw it was Aurora Annie, the Town's weather prognosticating groundhog. Not unusually, because it was often the case when I ran into her, she looked depressed.

'What's the matter,' I asked, 'and what are you doing out and about? We usually don't see you after the beginning of February.'

'I'm stressed,' she responded, wringing her tiny paws together.

'But why? Was your prediction off this year?'

'Well, it's too early to know for sure. After all, it's only been a week. But I hope I'll be right,' she added with a small smile.

'So, what's the matter?'

'I'm being impacted by the Interim Control Bylaw regarding stable neighbourhoods that the Town's initiating.'

'Stable neighbourhoods? But you don't live downtown, do you?'

'No, I live here,' and with a wave of her arm, she indicated the snow covered valley surrounding us. 'But the rules will apply everywhere.'

There were no houses that I could see that would be impacted.

I must have looked perplexed, because she continued; 'With global warming, it's getting tough to predict the end of winter these days, and people expect more accurate assessments every year. So to help me prepare, I'm thinking of putting in a small meteorological station before next February.'

'You mean with a wind speed tower, precipitation gage, and that sort of thing?'

'Exactly. Not a very big one, but it should give me an edge in my predictions. Unfortunately, the other local groundhogs here feel it will spoil the look of the neighbourhood. After all, we all live in holes in the ground. They say building anything above ground will make my place stand out, and will go above and beyond the subterranean residential norm.'

'The Town may not give me a permit to build it,' she concluded with a sniff.

I looked around. Currently covered in a blanket of white, the usually green open fields and trees here in the heart of Aurora were a natural wonderland no matter what the season. Construction of any sort in this area would definitely stand out.

We sat for a moment, me in silence, and Annie looking down and sighing dramatically.

'I bet you don't need a weather station,' I suggested, looking over at her. 'After all, you've got a great track record without it.'

At this she started sobbing uncontrollably, her shoulders heaving and tears flowing. It was kind of startling.

'You ... don't know ... the pressure I'm under ... to forecast ... the end of winter!?' she managed to say between breaths.

'Maybe if it's not too large, it might be okay,' I added hastily. 'Or maybe you could disguise it with some grass or shrubs or rocks or something, so it doesn't stand out.'

'Perhaps,' she admitted, bringing herself more under control.

'Sure,' I enthused. 'A bit of strategically placed camouflage, and even if they know it's there, your neighbours won't be able to see it. They'd have nothing to complain about.'

'Thanks for the idea,' she said taking out a tiny handkerchief and blowing her nose quite loudly for such a small mammal. 'I'll look into it.'

I got up off of the bench, leaving her looking across the field, no doubt mentally envisioning where to place her carefully concealed weather equipment.

I just hoped the Town approved her proposal. Annie gets enough stress every year. It can't be good for her blood pressure.

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