

Jubilee playground shouldn't be a ?hot potato?: advocate

By Brock Weir

Installing an accessible playground at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park shouldn't become a political ?hot potato?, according to a local accessibility advocate.

Tyler Barker, a member of Aurora's Accessibility Advisory Committee, has been a very vocal voice in promoting projects across Town that would lead to a more inclusive society. Mr. Barker himself, who has spoken about the challenges he has in getting around Aurora and York Region in his larger-sized electric wheelchair, says another playground such as this would provide today's youngsters with an opportunity he did not have himself.

?I believe that an accessible playground is a great opportunity for young youth with disabilities,? said Mr. Barker. ?I did not have the opportunity because a lot of playgrounds were inaccessible.?

Mr. Barker spoke to The Auroran after a heated discussion around the Council table on September 10 regarding the future use of the Diamond Jubilee Park. The park, formerly known as Civic Square Park, is located on John West Way, a stone's throw north of Town Hall.

It was selected by Council to be a permanent commemoration of the Queen's 60th anniversary as monarch in 2012 due to its prominence and visibility to many residents. The park is currently home to a junior-sized soccer pitch frequently used by members of the Aurora Youth Soccer Club, but Councillors voted in favour of doing something ?special? with the park.

Rising to the top of suggestions was an accessibility playground. While the proposal to go out to the neighbouring community to see just exactly what they would want in a park was passed earlier this month, several Councillors expressed dismay over the price \$180,000 price tag.

This breaks down to \$30,000 for public consultation and designs, and \$150,000 for the materials and installation. It is likely an accessibility playground would cause the size of the soccer field to be reduced or eliminated altogether.

?We can work together to find a solution,? said Mr. Barker. ?[If the cost] is why certain members voted against it, I am willing to explore all options for an accessible playground. Personally, I do not think the community would be against an accessible playground.

?I find that this is the latest hot potato. Perhaps the next time we can get PRAC (the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee) involved with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and we can team up and go over this before it goes out to tender.?

If the Accessibility Playground at Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park is eventually brought to fruition in 2014, it will be the second or third accessible playground in Aurora ? joining an already existing facility at Norm Weller Park near Bathurst Street and McClelland Way, and a proposed playground for Stewart Burnet Park near Leslie Street and Wellington Street East.

These types of facilities encourage barrier free play for everyone, including those using mobility aids such as wheelchairs and walkers.

Last year, many Councillors said they were in favour of increasing the number of accessible playgrounds across Aurora. In June of 2012, Councillors identified the need during debates over what should go in David English Park. Questioned by Councillor John Gallo if new playground equipment in this location could be fully accessible, Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, said while he supported providing accessible playgrounds, a more appropriate location would be a ?destination? rather than a smaller ?neighbourhood park.?

?I think what this Town needs to look at is instead of building one park in one location that children with disabilities have to be [taken] to, that they should be able to enjoy activities in their own neighbourhoods, just like all of their friends,? said Councillor Chris Ballard at the time.

?I'm not saying we retrofit all the parks, but perhaps it should be in our plan that as neighbourhood parks are retrofitted, as equipment is being replaced in neighbourhood parks, we try to at all times include at least one piece of equipment that meets the needs of all those who have mobility challenges.?