

Light armoured vehicle to be installed at Peace Park next month

By Brock Weir

A decommissioned light armoured vehicle (LAV) intended to pay tribute to Canadian soldiers who served in the Afghanistan conflict will be installed at the Aurora Cenotaph next month.

With a cement pad to carry the weight of the LAV poured over a year ago, the long-awaited addition to the Cenotaph park could be in place as early as the first week of November.

"We have scheduled the installation of the LAV at the War Memorial prior to Remembrance Day," said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation. "We have everything in place. It was my recommendation that we don't install it until after Halloween so that we would then have an opportunity in those eleven days to bring it in. Hopefully they will start the very next day."

The addition of the LAV – a vehicle decommissioned by the Department of National Defence and distributed to select communities across Canada by the previous Conservative government – to complement the First World War Cenotaph and the Second World War Altar of Sacrifice was met with controversy when first approved by Council in 2015.

It was then Council signed off the receipt and placement of a LAV III, along with a cement pad and commemorative plaque to explain its significance.

An initiative brought to Council's attention by the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion as well as representatives of the Queen's York Rangers and their associated Regimental Council, it received the broad support of Council.

The same, however, can't be said of the community with some hailing the placement of the decommissioned vehicle as a long overdue tribute to Canadians who served – and, in many cases, laid down their lives for – Queen and Country in our nation's most recent theatre of war.

Others, however, said it missed the mark; that having a piece of weaponry in a reflective area of peace and remembrance didn't fit and, at worst, be a constant reminder of the instruments of war that might have protected soldiers but, in some cases, could be attributed to their injuries.

"The Department of National Defence announced up to 250 decommissioned light armoured vehicles would be available to communities across the country to be placed in prominent locations to recognize the service and sacrifices of Canadian Armed Forces personnel serving in Afghanistan.

"The criteria [the program is] looking for are ties with Afghanistan, the Armed Forces, sacrifice, ties with the military defence industry, and location of the monument," Kirk Corkery of the Queen's York Rangers told Council at the time. "70,000 soldiers went over to Afghanistan over 13 years and many of them do have connections to York Region. 158 of them did not come back. Of the Queen's York Rangers, the Regiment here in Town, approximately 40 per cent of the soldiers did serve over there. LAVs were used extensively in Afghanistan."

Following Council's approval, Aurora's LAV was refurbished and "rendered non-functional in any way, shape or form" by Fanshawe College students as part of their welding program.