

Machell's Alley returns as community gathering space in downtown core



The grand opening of Aurora Town Square might still be two months away, but another community gathering space in Aurora's downtown core is now ready to welcome guests.

Lights have been hung, picnic tables have been placed, and umbrellas have unfurled on the east side of Yonge Street, just south of Wellington Street, signalling the return of Machell's Alley.

Located on the site of a vacant lot between Old Town Hall and the Clocktower building that once served as Aurora's post office, it is hoped that Machell's Alley will once again serve as a focal point for people in the core, and also as a venue for live music and other attractions this summer.

Machell's Alley, the name of which honours early founders of what is now Aurora, has been resurrected in partnership with the Town, the Aurora Economic Development Corporation, Downtown Aurora BIA, Aurora Chamber of Commerce, Explore Aurora, Central Counties Tourism, and property owner Yonge Developments Inc.

The space, according to Lisa Hausz, Manager of Economic Development and Policy for the Town of Aurora, has value in supporting local business and, of course, being complementary to Aurora Town Square, just metres down the street.

‘The value is in place-making in the downtown and supporting Aurora Town Square and the businesses in the local area, having a gathering space that is open air and casual for people just to come in and enjoy the space and downtown,’ she says. ‘The other value in revitalization is our future streetscape design and how it can incorporate parking and gathering space with businesses in the downtown.’

‘[This year] we had the opportunity of working with the owner and it took some time to really decide if we're going to be able to do it this year or not. We tried to get it open for Canada Day, we did, and we're pretty pleased about that.’

Since the launch of Machell's Alley in previous seasons, Joanne Russo of the Aurora BIA says she's been encouraged by the uptake from local residents and employees in the business community.

‘It was just a significant place of gathering,’ says Russo. ‘People were ordering dinners, having their dinners at the table, cars

driving by?were always looking at the space. It brought some livelihood to the area and [brought] a place of gathering. I thought it was a great success.?

Adds realtor and BIA Board Member Mauro Bucci: ?All these business owners want different ways to get people down here and this is following their request. This supports what they are looking for, so we're trying to get people in downtown Aurora [like] families. I think it is great. They can come and sit and have a meal or just be downtown.?

Representing the Town on the Board of the BIA are Councillors Ron Weese (Ward 1) and Rachel Gilliland (Ward 2). Councillor Weese says the Town has ?always been interested in the revitalization of this area? and the return of Machell's Alley is a step in the right direction.

?This is one part, a start of the process in doing that,? he says. ?It's not going to be done overnight; you have to start somewhere and this is a great place to start.?

Adds Councillor Gilliland: ?I attended a lot of the events when we had Machell's Alley before and saw how successful it was. I do feel the community did get an idea of what's going on in this space: it created that curiosity in what is going on downtown. I think it creates excitement and that's what we want. We want people walking, stores bustling, we want people to get excited being down here, and we want the businesses to thrive. Residents like to walk and shop, and socialize, and I think that's what we're really trying to do. We do have Town Square right down the road, so I think it is good connectivity between that, Town Square, Town Park and our markets. I think it brings it all together.?

One of the factors that made Machell's Alley a success in the previous seasons were live music performances.

Hausz says her office has received interest from performers and artists to once again activate the space going forward this season and interested parties can reach out through the Town's Engage Aurora platform at engageaurora.ca or to Hausz directly at LHausz@aurora.ca.

By Brock Weir