

Marquee could be Town Square's resident theatre group

Marquee Theatrical Productions could find a long-term home at Aurora Town Square.

A potential agreement between the Town and Marquee was reviewed by Council at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting.

Marquee has been a significant voice in the development of Town Square, particularly its performance hall, "with the understanding that they would be one of the key players activating the space upon opening," said Phil Rose, Cultural Services Manager for the Town of Aurora, in a report to lawmakers.

Should the Town formally ink the deal upon Council's approval on April 23, Marquee will be Town Square's resident theatre group for the next five years.

In the deal for "consistent use" of the facility, Marquee volunteers would lend a hand at special municipal events and receive a 25 per cent discount on facility rental.

"Mutually beneficial partnerships such as this strengthen the cultural sector and contribute to a wider range of quality programming at Town Square," said Rose.

"As detailed in the Town Square Business Plan, the Aurora Cultural Centre (ACC) will provide technical production services for all Town Square performances, including those to be hosted by Marquee. The executive directors of Marquee and ACC have met to discuss Marquee's technical production needs and have come to a mutual understanding of what's required for Marquee performances. Both organizations are excited to work together at Town Square." Marquee members, he noted, have long volunteered for municipal events including Santa Under the Stars, Haunted Forest, Christmas Market, Teen Idol, Movies in the Park, and much more.

"Should the Town proceed with an offer of a 25 per cent discount on its not-for-profit rental rates to Marquee, it will forego \$47,222 in rental revenues between 2025 and 2028," said Rose. "It is anticipated that this revenue loss will be offset through new revenue-generating programs supported by Marquee; as well as other expenditures savings through Marquee's provision of volunteer services and program support."

At last week's Committee meeting, Council members were generally supportive of the agreement but questioned the process "including if other local theatre groups and cultural partners, such as Theatre Aurora, were approached with a similar idea.

"I think [Marquee] are a great community partner, pleased to see, but I also want to understand the process and whether or not other groups were afforded the opportunity to also participate in the process and/or be chosen," said Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson.

Rose said that no official RFP process had taken place, but the realization "that Marquee wanted to be, since the beginning of planning for Town Square, having had insight into the design of the space, the intention always was Marquee would be one of the key players in terms of programming and space." The Cultural Centre and Theatre Aurora, he added, were also consulted.

"We kind of went through all the different theatre drama groups in Town that we have relationships with, not for profit organizations. There was no interest from Theatre Aurora," he said.

Councillor Thompson responded he wanted to make sure that, should Council approve the agreement, there wouldn't be another group coming to them to say they wanted a chance.

"Obviously you have done that due diligence and that's great," the Councillor concluded.

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner also sought clarification that this agreement wouldn't preclude other community groups from using the space and whether they too would receive a discount.

'There were a lot of community groups who wanted to use that space,' said Councillor Gaertner. 'Are we setting a precedent here, which is fine with me, for other community groups.'

Rose said they would be 'setting a precedent in some respect' but Marquee was the only local group that ticked all the boxes.

'We want something in return and Marquee has shown over the last 10 years they are willing to provide that to the Town,' he said. 'Hundreds of hours of volunteer service they provided will continue our relationship in terms of helping promote the programs we're going to have at Town Square and also the partnership we're going to have on programming.'

'When we developed this, where we're working on this relationship and developed to where we are now as far as the agreement is concerned, we're confident there is no other local organization that can meet the criteria or has the type of history and relationship Marquee does have with the Town. I guess there is a precedent there, but I don't think there are going to be a lot of organizations coming forward [saying] can we have the same deal because I don't think they have the capacity to provide what Marquee has provided us over the last 10 years.'

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