

Menorah Lighting Ceremony to become annual Aurora tradition

By Brock Weir

It's a storied tradition that was brought to Aurora this past December to cast some positive light onto some darker situations experienced in some areas of Town, but the light will now shine on for years to come.

On Tuesday, Council approved a motion from Mayor Geoff Dawe to make Aurora's first official Menorah Lighting Ceremony an annual event.

Planned by Mayor Dawe and Rabbi Yosef Hecht of Chabad Aurora, the first public Menorah Lighting Ceremony, which attracted dozens of people of all ages to the forecourt of Town Hall on a blustery evening, was intended as a symbolic response to a number of instances of anti-Semitic and racist graffiti throughout 2017.

In his motion calling for this ceremony to be made an annual tradition, Mayor Dawe said public feedback showed there was an appetite for the event to continue, a view that was shared at the podium by Rabbi Hecht prior to the vote.

“On December 18, here at Town Hall, we had a menorah lighting ceremony that was attended by a very beautiful crowd,” said Rabbi Hecht. “There was a lot of excitement and a lot of participation from the residents of Aurora and we have been speaking and in touch with the Mayor's office to perhaps have this as an annual event at the Town Hall. We have been doing programming for close to 15 years here in Aurora and it was a first to have it here at Town Hall with the members of Council who attended with the Mayor.

“The holiday is in December every year and the proposal here this evening is for the Town to have this as an annual event, and this would be in partnership with our organization. We would help plan it, help run it, and get the word out for the community to attend this event and this event can bring a great opportunity to service the residents of Aurora and to bring great excitement and participation from the residents in and around the holiday time.”

It was a suggestion greeted warmly by all members of Council, and Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who attended the ceremony, was the first to throw her support behind the motion.

“Aurora is a diverse society and we are becoming a more diverse society,” she said. “Any respect we can show to all of the diversity I think would be appreciated by Council and the community. There was a diversity motion that was passed by Council and it talked about communicating various celebrations that various ethnic groups or religions were going to be holding.

“If there is anybody who is listening or living in Town and would like to approach Council about celebrating their special holiday, we may not be able to do something as grand as the Menorah lighting, which was quite a feat given the wind that night and the height of the ladder, but this is sending a message that we're open to knowing about the diversity in Aurora.”

Speaking in favour of his motion, Mayor Dawe reiterated this message.

“I thank Rabbi Hecht for getting in touch with me a couple of weeks prior to that in discussing the opportunity to do this,” he said. “As Councillor Gaertner said, we are definitely changing in terms of the cultural diversity of our Town and this is one way to celebrate that cultural diversity and it is also a way to become familiar with cultures we are perhaps less than familiar with and the greater familiarity we have, the greater understanding we have of those diverse cultures, the more understanding we will all become. I think this is just a way to do that.”

Added Councillor John Abel: “I welcome this. I think it is just great that we would celebrate the diversity our community has and I am in full support of this.”