

## Multicultural Festival committee nixed due to time concerns

**By Brock Weir**

An initial move to make this year's second-annual Aurora Multicultural Festival a fully citizen-led affair was nixed by Council last week amid timing concerns.

Earlier this month, Council members signed off on scheduling two open houses for members of the public to provide input on what they would like to see in this year's festival, as well as tasking staff with coming up with terms of reference for a new Multicultural Festival Committee intended to steer the ship.

While the two public open houses will move forward on dates yet to be set, the Committee idea was scrapped. Council's initial motion called for terms of reference – informally, the purpose of the committee and duties of committee members – to come back for final approval later this month.

Some, however, said this was too tight a turnaround time to recruit members and have them in place to plan for a September festival.

“Thinking on this last week, I don't particularly support the idea of having a committee for this,” said Mayor Geoff Dawe. “We – and I – have spoken many times on our very efficient, effective and really good special events staff. I don't see any reason, quite frankly, [for] terms of reference [to] come back.”

The two open houses received unanimous approval, but the Committee was struck down on a vote of 5 – 3, with Councillor John Abel absent from the meeting.

Among those supporting Mayor Dawe's call to scrap the committee were Councillors Tom Mrakas, Jeff Thom, Michael Thompson, and Paul Pirri. Councillor Pirri said a week's reflection on the plan made him question the logistics.

“Although we did think this made sense last week, once we look at the numbers in terms of the timing, having this committee in place to get this back to us in February and then to go out and get committee members, we're losing all that time for staff to be planning an event. If we want to talk about having a separate Events Committee in the future, I am happy to have that discussion but [in terms of this event] I think we would be doing a disservice to the community because we would be missing out on the opportunity to go out and get all the work done.

“I think this event was run extremely well last year. I think there was fair representation from all cultures in Aurora last year, so I think, on the whole, we need to move forward.”

One member of the community, however, was less than enthusiastic about how the event was run last year. Former Council candidate Anthony Pullano has repeatedly criticized Council and planning staff for not including formal Italian representation in the first iteration of the festival, which highlighted five of Aurora's many cultures. He appeared before Council in Open Forum on January 24 to once again speak about the Festival.

Those in favour of the committee said putting one in place would make everyone accountable for the results.

“Our staff did a terrific job of organizing, implementing and executing the Festival last year,” said Councillor Harold Kim whose Notice of Motion saw the revival of the Multicultural Festival last year based on a template from the one-off event held in 2013 to mark Aurora's 150th Anniversary. “I have no doubt they will do an even more exemplary job given one year's experience under their belts.

“The one reason why I would be in favour of just maintaining the status quo and not having a committee on this is because of timelines. I do wish this was brought forward in November so the committee would have had more time to organize everything. With that said, we organized the first Multicultural Festival with one methodology and now I would like to see how it would work with just public participation. We have a dedicated group of residents here in Aurora who love to do these things and I would love to see new residents involved and put their names forward for the committee.”

A similar view was offered by Councillor Sandra Humfries, who said the more individuals helping engage the community the better.

“[The Town's] Special Events [staff] are just incredible, but I do like the idea of having a committee,” she said. “I don't want to waste anyone's time in doing something like this, but I do believe it allows for an open communication vehicle for staff to consider different ideas from individuals who might want to participate and volunteer that day. I see this as more individuals helping engage the community. For me, it is a great idea to support staff.”