

No Princely opening for Diamond Jubilee Park playground

By Brock Weir

There will be no second princely outing for Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park.

Prince Harry has declined an invitation from the Town of Aurora to formally dedicate the Town's new accessible playground, now under construction at the John West Way Park, the signage for which was formally unveiled by his uncle, Prince Andrew, Duke of York, back in 2014.

Aurora formally issued the invitation for the younger son of the Prince of Wales to dedicate the playground, which is to be fully wheelchair accessible, when Prince Harry is in Toronto this September to preside over the Invictus Games.

Prince Harry founded the Invictus Games as an Olympics-style sporting event tailored for wounded and injured servicemen and women. The Town said they saw a perfect alignment between an event designed to be fully accessible and a fully accessible playground, but time constraints got in the way of another Royal Visit.

"The Prince was extremely grateful for your thoughtful invitation," wrote Heather Wong, Assistant Private Secretary to Prince Harry, responding to a letter to Mayor Geoff Dawe. "Having given careful consideration to the possibilities, however, I very much regret that His Royal Highness reluctantly feels he must decline.

"Prince Harry will be attending the Invictus Games but judging from previous experience, the schedule during the Invictus Games gets very busy and therefore it is not possible to add any further engagements at this time. I am sorry to send you this necessarily disappointing response, but do hope you understand."

Nevertheless, construction continues on the fully accessible playground.

Significant work has taken place since the fall to clear out existing trees and shrubs to make way for the new playground equipment, which will be followed by work on sensory features more tailored towards adults, seniors, and those looking for a bit more of a relaxing experience.

Formally Civic Square Park, Council approved a tender of nearly \$360,000 for the construction of a fully accessible playground and parkland on the site, which was re-named to mark the 60th anniversary in 2012 of the Queen's Accession to the Throne.

A fully accessible playground, along with other amenities, including a sensory garden, was proposed by Councillor Paul Pirri to make the park something of a destination, and concept plans have been making the rounds since 2014.

Following sign-off from the Town's Accessibility Advisory Committee, approvals that were a long-time coming, according to some members of Council, the path was cleared to break ground on the playground.

"Based on the input received from the attendees at the two open house meetings, staff believe that sufficient public consultation has occurred and that the final design of this park is representative of the comments received during the process," said Mr. Downey last year, outlining public suggestions ranging from parking to seating within the park, as Council prepared to give it the green light.

"In addition, our Accessibility Advisory staff member and our Accessibility Advisory Committee have both had an opportunity to make comments and review the proposed park plan and are satisfied with the design."

A full review by the Accessibility Advisory Committee was something of a sticking point when Council revisited the plans for Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park in May. Council faced a recommendation to move ahead with the plan without a final design hitting the table of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, a move which rankled some in Council chambers.