

Pan-Am Torch relay could be centre of community celebration next year

By Brock Weir

There are just over 300 days until the 2015 Pan Am Games arrive in Toronto, and Aurora could get a piece of the action.

While we might not be a host venue, the Pan Am Torch could be the centre of a community celebration next summer.

Councillors are due to sign off on formalizing a request from the Pan Am Organizing Committee to make the torch relay's trip through Aurora a day to remember, along with \$15,000 to make the event a reality.

According to a report from Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, Town Staff met with members of the TO2015 Committee last month to hammer out some of the finer details of the torch relay.

The torch itself is due to pass through Aurora at an as-yet-to-be-determined day in the last week of June 2015 and, if the plan is approved this week, a "small community celebration" for an hour at noon at Machell Park could well become the centrepiece of the day.

While the report notes that Newmarket, Richmond Hill and Markham have all agreed to participate, one thing they have not committed to is funding their respective parties just yet "and that is one detail which gave Councillors some pause when the recommendations hit General Committee last week.

"We're certainly talking to other neighbouring municipalities who are also participating in the torch run to see what levels of celebration they are looking at," said Mr. Downey, addressing a question from Councillor John Gallo on any additional expenses that might come from this. "They couldn't give us a clear indication, which is why we have been somewhat ambiguous as to what exactly we were required to do. We know [the timing] but we don't know to what degree of celebration they are looking for."

Another unknown is getting funding through sponsorship or grant opportunities, but those would only be explored once Council signs off on the plan, he added.

"This is where my hiccup is," said Councillor Gallo, of not knowing how "and to what degree" neighbouring municipalities are funding their legs of the torch relay. "I am in support of this, but to leave it open-ended, my comfort level isn't that high."

Another factor complicating things is how close to an election Council has to make a decision on this. Councillor Michael Thompson, for instance, said he too was in support of the idea, noting it was a "great opportunity" for a community event, and one which would provide great exposure, but he questioned the recommendation to fund the \$15,000 out of Council's contingency account at this point.

"At the last Council meeting, the treasurer presented a report that said they are projecting a surplus of \$400,000, so I see this as a special event," he said, suggesting the \$15,000 should come out of that pot. "I see this as a special event, I see this as an opportunity to mark in Aurora, so why not put it where it belongs?"

For Town Treasurer Dan Elliott, it is a matter of the funding not being spent until 2015, after a new Council is elected. If this Council wants Aurora to host a community celebration for the torch run, and firm it up, now is the time to do so, he suggested.

"This is a special event," said Mr. Elliott. "We have only hosted one other torch run. I know the numbers aren't that big, but I have gone through election situations where the new Council takes exception to some of the decisions of a prior Council and alters them. That would be unfortunate in this case where we have committed to an organizing committee to have that torch run come through. I just don't want to put a pressure on the next Council to make the funding decision.

?If this Council is the one that wants the torch run to come through Town?they should put it to bed.?

Other members of Council were more enthusiastic in their support, ultimately voting in favour of carrying the recommendation forward this week.

?This is a great idea,? said Councillor John Abel, noting area schools should very much be a part of the party. ?Our municipality is not going to get that close to a major event like this, so I am in full support, especially as it touches the residents.?