

Plan for Diamond Jubilee Park raises Council eyebrows

By Brock Weir

A fully accessible playground at the recently renamed Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park could set the Town back \$180,000.

Councillors approved a plan last week to spend \$30,000 to design and develop an accessible playground ? including public consultation with the surrounding community ? and a further \$150,000 for its supply and construction.

The project has been up for Council approval since July but after being put off for discussion several times, it finally came up for discussion last week.

Council re-named Civic Square Park on John West Way in honour of the Queen's milestone anniversary this Spring. With that, came the idea to explore ?preparing designs and costs? for the playground for consideration in the 2014 Capital Budget.

The idea was first floated by Councillor Paul Pirri but by the time last Tuesday's Council meeting rolled around, he said the recommendation coming back wasn't all what he expected. Through the plan, public consultations will take place with neighbours on what they would like to see in the park. That, argued Councillor Pirri, is premature.

?We would be saving a good portion of the \$30,000 if we had a design made up first and then our staff could go out and consult with the public,? he said. ?I am not in favour of spending [that money] to go out to the public to have individuals design this without staff having a firm idea of what they're going to look for. It would be much more cost efficient to?come up with a plan and present that plan to the public.?

Councillors, however, had other issues surrounding the park. Chris Ballard, for instance, said he ?couldn't believe? how an idea to create a simple tribute to the Queen had snowballed into something this extensive.

?It has gone from something that was supposed to be somewhat frugal to something that is going to cost the taxpayers, I suspect, well over \$180,000 by the time it is done,? he said. ?I just don't think Her Majesty would be amused by the process.?

Also unamused was Councillor John Gallo, himself a neighbour of the park.

?I am not opposed to having accessible playgrounds; my issue with this particular park is: is it really money well spent?? he said. ?It's an eight year old park, \$280,000 to build what you see there. There were some savings because we did it in house and that was the budget. If we installed a playground we would be [significantly reducing] the soccer field.

?If you're designing something new for the community, it is one thing. When you're changing significantly the facility for an existing community, you need to go through a particular process.?

Councillor Wendy Gaertner agreed.

?We are here to listen to the voters and try to satisfy them,? she said. ?We need to hear what the established residents of the neighbourhood think of this idea before we take the park as it exists from them. That would be the minimum first step no matter what our Council opinions are.?

Going forward with the park plan was approved 6 ? 3, with Councillors Chris Ballard, John Gallo, and Wendy Gaertner voting against it. Speaking in favour of the motion, Councillor Evelyn Buck said the park was not something intended to be frugal, but something befitting as significant an occasion as the Diamond Jubilee.

?I thought we should do something really special in the park [such as a garden], but the idea of an accessible playground has far more appeal,? she said. ?I can't think of a more fitting tribute to our 87-year-old monarch, both to the children who need an

accessible playground and to the seniors who are part of her generation. We would be killing two birds with one stone.?

Councillor Michael Thompson said based on a visit to a similar playground in Richmond Hill, having a further accessible playground in Aurora would be beneficial.

?I think it would be a wonderful opportunity to create something special and I look forward to learning about the process,? he said.
?There is a way to design the park so that residents around it would be proud and the community would appreciate as well.?

An accessibility playground is intended to be a barrier free place to play for kids with mobility issues and physical challenges. An example can be seen at Norm Weller Park in southwest Aurora and a further playground is earmarked for Stewart Burnett Park near Leslie Street and Wellington.