

## Rainbow Crosswalk at Yonge & Wellington will celebrate community's diversity: Mayor

A Rainbow Crosswalk will celebrate Aurora's place as a community that celebrates diversity, according to Mayor Tom Mrakas.

Mayor Mrakas has put forward a notice of motion to be discussed July 14 which, if approved by Council, will transform the crosswalk on the south side of Yonge and Wellington into a sea of colour.

"Aurora and other communities across the Province have shown their support for Pride and the LGBTQ+ community by raising a Pride flag in June every year," said Mayor Mrakas in his motion. "The permanent installation of a rainbow crosswalk is a symbol of the Town of Aurora's acceptance of, support for, and commitment to diversity and inclusiveness. The intent of this initiative is to show vulnerable people in our community that Aurora is a Town where everyone is welcomed and accepted."

Mayor Mrakas first floated the idea of a Rainbow Crosswalk in Aurora's Downtown Core and hoped to have it complete by the end of Pride Month in June. Some logistical issues, however, got in the way of that end goal and if Council approves the idea next week it could be done by the end of July.

"We were discussing it for a while," the Mayor tells The Auroran. "Unfortunately, from a logistics standpoint with some of the construction timelines, it just wasn't going to be feasible."

The first thought, he says, was to have the Rainbow Crosswalk on Yonge Street at Mosley, but that area already has stamped concrete and the material necessary for the Rainbow Crosswalk is unable to adhere to such a surface.

Crosswalks at Church Street, near the Aurora Public Library and Aurora Cultural Centre, were also examined.

Eventually, it was decided Yonge and Wellington would be the perfect location and the Rainbow Crosswalk would serve as another gateway to delineate Aurora's historic Downtown Core.

"I think especially with some of the changes within the Downtown Core that we're looking at making, creating a more vibrant gathering space that is going to have more and more people come to visit the area? I think that there is no better place in Town than right centrally located to have something that speaks to the fact our Town is inclusive, diverse and welcoming to all."

The Rainbow Crosswalk, once approved, will be completed with pre-formed thermoplastic pavement markings that are non-slip and in keeping with requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

(AODA).

The project comes with an estimated price tag of just over \$12,000.

“We have discussed this idea with York Pride and Pflag York Region and they said it was [good to have this installed outside Pride month] because it allows for the continuation of discussion outside of regular Pride month,” says Mayor Mrakas. “I am glad they feel that way and are happy about that.”

As York Pride's Digital Pride Month celebrations came to an end, they said the motion for a Rainbow Crosswalk was “extremely exciting” for the Town.

“What better way to end Pride Month than with a symbol that will represent our community 365 days a year in one of Aurora's busiest intersections!” said York Pride's Jacob Gal. “This is the type of leadership from Tom Mrakas and Council we need in our community.”

“This will be the first ever permanent 2SLGBTQ+ art installation to be installed in York Region. This is a bold step forward in bringing visibility to York Region residents that Pride is for everyone and that building vibrant, healthy and accepting communities starts with the simplest gestures. For the last 20 years, York Pride has been working very hard to positively change how people view the 2SLGBTQ+ community, through our family friendly events and outreach to our growing region of 1.2 million residents. This will be a great opportunity for families to teach their kids about respecting others, regardless of their differences. Soon, families, friends and residents can go for a walk and make a day full of meaningful memories in the downtown core of Aurora.”

Pflag York offered similar sentiments.

“For LGBTQ2+ people, their lived experiences often involves repressing their true authentic self out of fear: fear of being disowned, fear of being attacked amongst other concerns,” says Tristan Coolman of Pflag York Region. “We, unfortunately, still live in a world and a community that is not always affirming or respectful of these lived experiences. A Rainbow Crosswalk serves as a visible sign of support from our elected officials and for LGBTQ2+ people. It's a sign to anyone who feels different to, quite frankly, educate themselves.”

“As many of us have learned over the last few weeks, social literacy is a skill many of us are lacking. It's in a way a new currency for how we measure our engagement with others. Agencies like Pflag York Region can support with those journeys and this rainbow crosswalk may be the start of that for many residents.”

**By Brock Weir**