

Residents asked to weigh in on location of Community Reflection Space

The Town of Aurora is seeking input from residents on potential locations for a Community Reflection Space.

The Community Reflection Space has been in the works since 2023 and is an initiative that has come out of the Town's Indigenous Relations Committee (IRC) as part of its work towards Truth & Reconciliation.

Since it was first floated, the vision has evolved into a dedicated area where all members of the community ?can come together during difficult and tumultuous times regardless of location, cultural affiliation and cause.?

?It serves as a place for collective reflection and paying respects to those affected by tragic events,? said the Town in a statement.

Since the initial conception, the Community Reflection Space proposal has been presented to Council and members of the Town's Advisory Committees, along with several proposed locations: the forecourt of Town Hall, Lambert Willson Park, Town Park, and Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park.

Lawmakers and committee members have voiced pros and cons for each of the sites, and now it's time for residents to have their say ? or even propose a location that isn't presently on the shortlist.

?Right now, we're mainly focused on finding the ideal location for the reflection space,? says Phil Rose of the Town of Aurora. ?We had a report to Council and at that time we presented what we felt was our ideal location and Council wanted us to do a little bit more feedback. We're focusing on location and in the spring we will come back to Council and we will let them know what the public has said. We have done some presentations to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee as well as the Accessibility Advisory Committee and then we're doing some targeted consultation with certain stakeholders like the York Regional Police and we're going to combine all that information.?

A report is expected to come forward to Council in April with the location or locations that have risen to the top and staff will make recommendations based on those findings.

?The things we're looking for from an ideal location perspective are is there parking? Is it accessible from a walking and public transit perspective? Are there safety things associated with it such as lighting, washrooms as well, and proximity to other Town amenities that would allow us to have our staff maintain it as we need to?? says Rose. ?Once we get Council's direction, the next step will be going out to some of the design phase of the project.

?We looked at the amenities that are at different spots at the Town?different Town locations and we shortlisted. We looked at some of the space behind the Leisure Centre, Town Hall at the front, close to John West Way as you first come in by the flagpole, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park just down the street. One of the things we're trying to maintain is having a quiet space for reflection against competing uses. Town Park, for example, has come up and we've kind of quickly crossed it off the list because, of course, it is a very active space and it's not conducive to having a reflective space to think about community loss as well as, at the same time, the Arctic Adventure or baseball tournaments happening. We are slowly winnowing the list down.?

Since the idea was first brought forward, Rose says there hasn't been a lot of feedback on the appetite for such a space, but the Council and staff have concurred that there is a need.

?There really [aren't] a lot of communities that dedicate space for these kinds of memorials and community grieving and we think it is important that they're there,? he says. ?This project came up as part of our Indigenous Relations Committee and how do we address the findings related to the residential schools and the bodies that are found. I think based on the Town's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, there was an early buy-in for this, but realizing there was more than the residential schools to grieve and reflect on.

?We have feedback that it would be nice to have some additional shelter in those spaces for people who might want to go on a hot day, have a lot of tree canopy, somewhere to sit under while they are there. Seating is very important for a spot to sit and reflect. Public art has come up as well, something we're conscious of, and we have the Public Art plan coming forward. Having something that is created as a symbol of loss or reflection and? signage? letting people know what the space is about, what's allowed and not allowed in these spaces.?

To provide your input on the proposed Community Reflection Space, visit engageaurora.ca/ReflectionSpace.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter