

The Show Must Go On: Canada Day tradition salvaged at eleventh hour

By Brock Weir

For decades, Town Park has been Aurora's destination to get a head-start on Canada Day celebrations with the annual Dance in the Park.

But the yearly tradition was set to be consigned to the history books this year ? until an eleventh-hour intervention by Council last Tuesday night gave the Rotary Club a cash sponsorship to keep the party going this Sunday evening, June 30.

Council agree to provide the Rotary Club with financial and in-kind support up to \$5,000 at last week's General Committee meeting, a decision which will be ratified this week, following a motion from Councillor Sandra Humfries.

?The challenge Rotary had is they are saving money for a contribution gift for Library Square?and they really need some financial support to keep this ongoing tradition moving forward,? Councillor Humfries explained. ?The Dance has been going on for probably over 50 years in Town Park and I would really love for us to continue the tradition. Staff have been meeting with Rotary and have determined that they can, in fact, pull it together.

?They know how to put it on, they are really excited about putting it on, they have all their volunteers lined up and even have a band. They really can't wait to do it, but they need some financial support from our side, particularly this year because they would like to present something pretty exciting to the Town. This has taken a secondary seat in their strategic budgeting.?

Councillor Humfries' motion received enthusiastic support from her colleagues.

?There are a lot of people in Aurora who get to go away for weekends and long weekends and holidays, and there are a lot of people who aren't able to go away,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. ?Those people, I found, [particularly] love this event. I thank you very much and I think there will be a lot of people who are very appreciative because it is something they look forward to because that's how they celebrate: they don't go away, they stay in Town and they want to stay in Town Park.?

Added Councillor Rachel Gilliland: ?I am really big on tradition in this Town, and I think Aurora is really big on tradition in this Town. Residents will be really happy with this decision moving forward and I am glad the Town is going to be able to take this over.?

Indeed, this event sponsorship was framed as the stepping

stone for the Town taking this event over from the Rotary Club down the line, something which drew questions from Councillor Michael Thompson.

Councillor Thompson, a strong proponent of the Town's new sponsorship policy, which will see all community groups given equal footing in their asks for municipal dollars, however, questioned how this grant to Rotary would fit into that frame.

?We have talked about moving away from this type of situation and developing a sponsorship policy to fund all these kinds of requests, so why is [this money] coming out of the Council operating contingency budget and not the sponsorship budget we identified in the 2019 Budget as per our policy??

The sponsorship policy, responded CAO Doug Nadorozny, is an opportunity for staff to deal with requests that involve specific sponsorship activities, such as advertising, which is set forth in sponsorship guidelines. Councillor Humfryes' motion, he added, is a more unusual situation.

?This particular request is basically the funding of the entire project and would not fall within the guidelines of the sponsorship program,? said Mr. Nadorozny. ?This would be more than sponsorship. It would be funding the entire effort. We would need some council authority in order to fund what is a new, unbudgeted event.?

Mayor Tom Mrakas said he shared concerns about providing sponsorship outside the policy as the Town is trying to move away from that, but agreed this is a very different situation.

?Instead of taking a one-year hiatus on this event that everyone looks forward to and has been a staple for such a long period of time, eventually we would either have to take this event over and have to run it in partnership with the Rotary Club or we would have to say we're giving up on this event and it isn't happening ever again,? said Mayor Mrakas. ?Instead of taking that one year off? this is a way of continuing it and not having that miss of the one year.

?I would prefer to see it go through Sponsorship, but I think this is different because we're going to end up taking this event over and working in partnership with the Rotary Club and the Optimists who come out and provide food services for this event. It would be a partnership, but it would be more of a Town event.?

The Dance in the Park will take place at Town Park this Sunday, June 30, from 6 p.m. until midnight.