

Town looks at serving alcohol at this summer's Concerts in the Park events

The Town will investigate the feasibility of implementing a pilot project for this summer's Concerts in the Park, which would allow the sale and consumption of licensed beverages on August 23 and August 30.

Staff will also investigate a sustainable and equitable plan for establishing support for local restaurants and food vendors at the Concerts in the Park series for 2024.

'I love the Concerts in the Park. I know that's been a really great huge success here and it's been growing and we're putting ourselves on the map,' said Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland. 'And there's a lot of potential and opportunity to make it even greater and better.'

In talks with the Aurora Armoury, it was found that attendees drawn to the concert often booked reservations for dinner and enjoyed a glass of wine, prompting the Councillor to ask, 'so why not give the same opportunities for other vendors to also showcase their fine cuisines, whether it be pop up food or food trucks or whatnot?'

'The service industry really has taken a really big hit,' she said. 'It would be a way to be able to incorporate and include an opportunity for other vendors to come and experience not only Aurora's shows, but also give an opportunity for the residents say, 'Hey, I've been able to try this new samosa or this new noodle soup, and I never would have tried if it wasn't for the Concerts in the Park.' We're supporting your local business and increasing that attention to them.'

Conversation with local restaurants also revealed that the Special Food Vendor Policy has not been reviewed since 2014. As a result, some vendors said that the outdated bylaws were one of the reasons why they couldn't offer their products in Aurora.

Councillor Gilliland said this may be an opportunity to 'modernize' and 'streamline' bylaws so that more businesses are attracted to the Town.

More food vendors would attract more business and serve residents who may have a hard time getting a reservation at the Armoury, she said.

Other towns, such as Newmarket, has had success with similar efforts, said Councillor Gilliland, adding that if things work out this summer, Council can look at establishing plans for the summer of 2024.

'Vendor interest in serving alcohol or even a volunteer organization that wishes to serve alcohol certainly gives us some of that data that would help guide us as to whether this is a long-term addition that Council wishes going forward,' said Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services.

As for having food vendors at the summer events, McDougall said that staff may need extra time until 2024 due to bylaw implications and potential changes that need to be made.

'[There are] bylaws implications to consider that need to potentially be revised, which would require subsequent reports to council,' she said.

In the meantime, once a special permit for alcohol consumption is obtained, staff will have to look at how to facilitate the alcohol during the two concert events in August. McDougall noted that parameters will be needed based on the municipal alcohol policy and liquor permit.

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner believes that the pilot project allowing the consumption of licensed beverages this summer is a good idea.

"I think the pilot project will give us a feel for what the residents want," she said.

McDougall added that according to the Town's alcohol policy requirement, events involving alcohol would have to be within the parameters of a fenced area. While it's a requirement that could be waived by Council, the decision to serve alcohol in an open area could raise additional risks.

"We have to be prepared and be comfortable that alcohol is not leaving the premises without a fence and that could be challenging based on the type of site we have," she said.

Further information will be provided at a later date; however, in the meantime the recommendation is to have a fenced area if Council votes to permit alcohol consumption at the last two concert events this year.

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he is in favor of the motion and encouraged staff to speak with Ward 1 residents about the pilot project where concert events take place.

"I want to just encourage you to talk to the Town Park Area Resident Ratepayers Association and include them in there because many of them are at or around the Town Park area, and I think they would want to be included in your study," he said.

Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson agreed with Councillor Weese and made a motion to refer to the Parks and Recreation committee.

"We established the committee and their mandate specifically speaks to initiatives that involve a park, operational community services. I think this is right in their wheelhouse," he said.

After further discussion about whether there was enough time to have further comments from the Parks and Rec committee, the motion to refer to the committee was defeated.

Councillor Gilliland noted that the decision to move forward with the pilot project should be at Council's discretion and that prior conversations have already established that the pilot project would be a good way to collect more data, adding that there will be further opportunities closer to 2024 to consult the Parks and Rec committee.

"At that point, if there is any discomfort, we can go back to the Parks and Rec if that's really what we want to keep doing," she said. "So, either we want to have this event, we want to increase our events, we want to have some sort of investigation on this, or we don't. I think we're capable of making that decision."

By Elisa Nguyen