

Town should get fair shake in Theatre Aurora lease: former resident

The Town of Aurora owns a multi-million dollar property (ask any local agent) at 150 Henderson Drive that is currently being extremely underused and not generating any profit to taxpayers.

In a time where programming space is at a premium, the taxpayers own a facility that could reduce the overwhelming burden on its current operations, as well as be made available to a wide range of user groups to bring in facility booking dollars.

On June 1, The Auroran printed an article indicating that Theatre Aurora was calling for support from the town in a so-called 'battle.' Their president, Sal Aguila, says if the town wants to 'play the game?', they are ready.

The Town is representing taxpayer dollars and if they care enough to represent the electorate, it is definitely not a game to them. A relationship with the Town of Aurora that has a supreme beneficiary claiming to take 'battle' with them is not the kind of partnership that any Town should ever want.

There are many issues that were neglected to be mentioned in the article.

Firstly, Theatre Aurora has enjoyed a sweetheart deal for many years that any other theatre company could only wish to have. Their lease agreement is to maintain a Town property for what essentially amounts to a free lease. Their unsubstantiated claim made in the article of saving the Town of Aurora \$500,000 in labour costs are preposterous. Surely the town could put a single staff member in that location in the area of \$50,000 per year to attend the property daily, and in addition, scheduled when required.

Further to this, upon visiting this property surely you will agree that it is aged, dated and in a state of disrepair not in line with Town of Aurora standards.

According to government registered documents, the organization rarely seems to be able to turn a profit. The only reason why Theatre Aurora is still in existence today is a result of having been at the taxpayers' expense.

Based on their financial documents, there is no way they could afford any rent. This leads to the question of mismanagement, via monopolizing a town asset.

In looking at the Theatre Aurora website's current schedule from June forward, they have only 78.5 hours marked as 'busy' over June to September. Then, from September to December, they have blocked out approximately 74 days in order to accommodate 19 days of revenue generating performances.

Theatre Aurora is blocking the theatre from being used by other organizations, the town and its tax payers. It is obvious that the facility is being underused for revenue generation and mostly used for set building, storage and rehearsals that all other theatre companies would have to pay for on their own.

They quote a daily rate of \$850 for rental to other organizations, a rate they themselves could never afford.

By blocking the Town of Aurora and not giving them additional dates to be used by other organizations, Theatre Aurora has made a decision to exclude other theatre groups in the town. Theatre Aurora talks about inclusion, and creating a family through the arts in Aurora, however in fact they have created a clique that only benefits themselves.

Arts are an integral part of our societal fabric, but should not benefit approximately 50 people versus a town population of 50,000.

If a taxpayer responsible agreement cannot be reached, the Town should consider other options, perhaps putting the agreement out to tender. Ultimately, the time has come for the Town to make decisions that are beneficial to all involved.

Michelle Cutts
North York