

Tragically Hip screening leaves organizers 'Up to Here' in Council debate

By Brock Weir

This Saturday's Town Park simulcast of the Tragically Hip's farewell concert became bogged down in Council debate last week amid accusations of 'roadblocks' being put in the way of the event.

Councillors expressed frustration over the lengthy debate which centred largely on whether or not the community event should be a Town-run affair or one driven by a team of community volunteers led by the Aurora Winter Blues Festival.

Last Tuesday's Council debate came after a week of back and forth between event organizers, elected officials and Town Staff on the fine details of who is going to do what 'and for how much' at the party, which was championed around the Council table by Councillor John Abel, who rented out Town Park for the event.

'It was never the intent of Councillor Abel for it to be a Town-run event; he wanted it to be a cooperative event,' said Aurora CAO Doug Nadorozny. 'The challenges started occurring when, number one, we couldn't find a screen within a reasonable budget so we were trying to source a different screen and there were various alternatives that came forward.'

'If I were to sum up the whole thing, perhaps Councillor Abel and his group felt the time was running out and [they decided] to move forward without the burden of the kind of questions we were raising. We raised a few other concerns, nothing that was a stop in our mind. We have two large tournaments that weekend, so we have a shortage of tables and garbage cans.'

'There was some concern about a larger crowd showing up and having 10 tables there for 5,000 people. It was those kinds of things we raised that we wanted to put on the table. They were probably interpreted as spokes on a wheel, if you will, so we tried to focus on the video streaming itself as a Town event and leaving the rest to the committee that has come forward wanting to make this a larger event.'

Councillor Abel, however, said 'no communication' raised alarm bells for he and his fellow organizers.

'Because we got stuck in a one week period [where] things were not moving there was a hang up on the screen,' he said. 'When we met on the Tuesday, there was only one quote brought forward and, for a week, I thought we wasted a lot of time. I don't want to get into if it is a Town-run event. That is the problem we got into before. When I came to the meeting, we could not move past that phrase. If it is a Town-run event, then they would get the screen and we stopped. They got stopped at one quote and there was no other way to move forward.'

'There are lots of screens available. The screen wasn't an issue for any group putting this together, nor is the sound system, nor is putting a local band together. We had to put an application in, get a strategy for communication, and some of the logistics. The logistics would have been all done by the community volunteers and it really is quite simple. With all the time we had put into this, we weren't doing anything.'

Mayor Geoff Dawe offered a very different perspective, however, slamming any suggestion that Town Staff were 'not moving' on the matter.

'That is what I was doing the last couple of days at the cottage: reading through the whole stream of emails,' said Mayor Dawe. 'To suggest that things are not moving implies that staff was not doing anything and that is just plain wrong. Our IT staff were working on it, our Communications staff were working on it, our Parks staff were working on it. Mr. Nadorozny put a lot of time in this. We have certain criteria the Town has to meet in order to move forward with a project. It might not fit what outside people would like to do, but there is criteria we have to follow.'

One criterion, he said, surrounds a potential beer garden 'an option which has now been nixed for Saturday's event. A beer garden

falls under the municipal alcohol policy, and that needed to be addressed, contended Mayor Dawe.

?There are rumours out there that the Town seems to be dragging its feet, that the Town has put roadblocks into this and that is just not the case,? he said. ?I am supportive of the project, I am supportive of a rebroadcast, I think it is a great idea, but I think we need to understand fully that Town Staff have worked extremely hard putting this together and I think it is incredibly unfair to brand Town Staff as not doing anything.?

As the debate continued, Councillors pointed out that it is important not to lose sight of the event itself.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, for instance, said she was initially opposed to the motion because bringing it forward meant waving procedural bylaw, not giving members of the public the chance to come out and weigh in on the proposal. But, with last Tuesday's session the only Council meeting on the August agenda, time was of the essence.

?I think if the public was in the chamber, they would be happy to know this is something that was being planned for their enjoyment, and I will be voting for it,? she said.

Added Councillor Michael Thompson: ?It has been quite a beaming moment for all of these municipalities. They talk about how great it is for their community and yet here we are diving into these details. Let's try and get past this and focus on what a great opportunity it is for the community.?

Ultimately, the motion passed 8 ? 1 with Councillor Paul Pirri the lone holdout.

?I think the event is a great idea. I think the event should move forward in some capacity,? he said. ?[As] it is before us, one member of Council has pulled out a permit and now that Councillor is bringing forward a motion asking that funds be allocated to make that event a success, I just don't feel comfortable with that.?