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Town of Aurora
Committee of the Whole Report
No. CMS24-022

Subject: Community Reflection Space Location

Prepared by: Michelle Johnson, Collections and Exhibitions Coordinator

Department: Community Services

Date: July 2, 2024

Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS24-022 be received; and
2. That Town Hall be approved as the location for the Community Reflection Space; and
3. That staff report back to Council with a proposed design, timeline, and budget implications.

Executive Summary

The mandate of the Community Reflection Space will be to provide a consistent location for the community to come together in times of sorrow, with a unified purpose of paying respects to those affected by tragic events. Following Council direction, staff began public consultation in January 2024, the results of which are being shared in this report.

- Staff completed consultation with Council advisory committees, members of the public, and community organizations.
- Consultation did not result in a definitive consensus regarding the preferred location.
- Because community parks serve multiple functions they present a challenging environment for a Community Reflection Space.
- Residents have raised concerns about re-defining the purpose of an area within an existing community park.

- Although a preferred location was inconsistent across groups, there remains support for the creation of the Community Reflection Space.
- Considering all feedback, staff recommend Town Hall as the most viable option out of the four locations explored.
- As the municipal headquarters, Town Hall presents unique challenges and opportunities that will be considered during the design phase.

Background

The concept of a Community Reflection Space was first discussed on January 16, 2023, by the Town's Indigenous Relations Committee. Initially, it was in relation to matters related to Truth and Reconciliation, but following feedback from the Committee, the scope was expanded to include reflection for all tragic situations regardless of their location and cause.

As a result of inter-department consultation, staff identified the eastern parkette within the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park as an ideal location for a Community Reflection Space. On November 21, 2023, a report was submitted to Council, which contained the following recommendations:

1. That Report No. CMS23-050 be received; and
2. That Council approve proceeding with the design of a Community Reflection Space; and
3. That Council approve the eastern portion of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park as the preferred site for the Community Reflection Space.

The first two recommendations passed, and the third did not. Council requested that staff engage in public consultation prior to an area being selected.

Prior to beginning consultation, staff identified four areas to be considered as locations for the Community Reflection Space, including Lambert Willson Park, Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park, Town Hall, and Town Park (see Attachments 1-4). Within Lambert Willson Park (Attachment 1) and Town Park (Attachment 4) there were two areas that were identified as possible locations.

Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park, Town Hall and Town Park were previously selected and discussed by the Indigenous Relations Committee, while Lambert Willson Park was a new addition for the purposes of this consultation.

Analysis

Staff completed consultation with Council advisory committees, members of the public, and community organizations.

Consultation began in January 2024 and included the Accessibility Advisory Committee, Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, York Regional Police, Oasis Bereavement, and members of the public.

A memorandum was issued to the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee concerning the location of a Community Reflection Space. Staff attended the committee meetings to provide an overview of the memorandum and a visual review of the four proposed locations for the Committee's consideration.

Members of the public were asked for feedback during a public consultation campaign that ran from March 4 to April 8, 2024. This consultation utilized Engage Aurora, Town newsletters, social media, digital ads, and in person engagement at Hello Spring. A combined 172 people provided feedback during the public consultation campaign.

Staff met with representatives from Oasis Bereavement and the York Region Police to provide an overview of the project and review possible locations. Oasis Bereavement provided unique subject matter expertise regarding grief and gathering. Consultation with York Region Police was focused on gaining insight about creating an inclusive and equitable space that honoured complex sentiments while prioritizing peaceful gatherings.

Consultation did not result in a definitive consensus regarding the preferred location of a Community Reflection Space.

The following tables provide a summary of location preferences gathered from committees, community groups, and members of the public.

Table 1
Advisory Committee and Community Group Consultation Results

	Lambert Willson Park	Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park	Town Hall	Town Park
Accessibility Advisory Committee		X	X	
Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee		X		
Oasis Bereavement		X		
York Regional Police			X	
Total	0	3	2	0

Table 2
Public Consultation Results

	Lambert Willson Park	Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park	Town Hall	Town Park
Engage Aurora	13	12	5	10
Social Media Poll	10	17	14	33
Hello Spring – Outreach	14	20	14	10
Total	37 (3rd)	49 (2nd)	33 (4th)	53 (1st)

As identified in Table 1, each committee and community group expressed a distinct preference for Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park, or Town Hall. Table 2 demonstrates how most of the public voted in favour of having the Community Reflection Space located in Town Park, followed by Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park, Lambert Willson Park, and Town Hall.

During the consultation, participants had the opportunity to express their opinions about the proposed locations. From this process, several consistent insights emerged across groups, which are outlined in the sections that follow.

Because community parks serve multiple functions they present a challenging environment for a Community Reflection Space.

A designated Community Reflection Space acknowledges the complexity of emotions evoked during tragic circumstances. These sentiments are not consistent with those expressed during casual recreation activities, sport competitions, special events or celebratory gatherings. During consultation, staff heard that the juxtaposition of uses would not be conducive to the goals of the Community Reflection Space.

This concern is especially relevant for Town Park, where the density of existing amenities makes it challenging to re-define an area. Staff also heard this concern when discussing Lambert Willson Park, which has an active trail system, a playground, multiple types of sport fields, and regularly hosts baseball tournaments.

To a much lesser extent, this concern was shared when discussing Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park, which contains a playground, soccer field, and landscaped pathway. The layout and design of Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park tempered this concern as the recreation-based features are largely located at the west side, and the area being considered is at the far east side.

Residents have raised concerns about re-defining the purpose of an area within an existing community park to create a Community Reflection Space.

During consultation, staff heard from community members who expressed some hesitancy about having the Community Reflection Space located near their residence. Of the four locations identified, three are community parks that already have a history and pattern of use. Resident feedback consistently highlighted several common themes, including:

- An existing park should not have its functional purpose altered.
- Concern about the nature of gatherings.

- Altering existing amenities that presently have no concerns.
- Some residents selected other locations simply because they were not in their neighbourhood.

Town Hall is the only location out of the four that is not a community park and would not greatly alter the functionality of the existing area.

Although a preferred location was inconsistent across groups, there remains support for the creation of the Community Reflection Space.

During consultation, staff heard that the creation of a Community Reflection Space was a step in the right direction. The Accessibility Advisory Committee, Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, and many residents were supportive of the creation of such a space.

Creating space in public areas for expressions of shared grief is important for social wellbeing, as summarized by Inspector Kolin Alexander from York Regional Police:

“The creation of a reflection space provides a chance to express support for those directly affected by these situations. Through action, the Town can demonstrate intentional acts towards showing compassion to its citizens”.

The importance of gathering as a community in times of grief was also expressed by Michelle Nye, Chair, Oasis: A Centre for Bereavement and Healing. Ms. Nye spoke mindfully about the grief process and how important it is to make space for expressing these sentiments:

"A community reflection space is a valuable place for those who are grieving. Grief affects every member of our community at one time or another and everyone processes loss differently. This space can be a comfort to the bereaved, however they choose to grieve, and a catalyst for opening up the much needed conversation to normalize grief as a healthy human process."

Considering all feedback, staff recommend Town Hall as the most viable option out of the four locations explored.

During consultation, staff learned that selecting a location that is publicly connected and provides a level of privacy best supports the mandate of the Community Reflection Space. The area being considered at Town Hall (Attachment 3) provides close parking, nearby staff oversight, and a secluded space within a larger connected area. Town Hall is less impacted by the recreation-based activities that frequently occur at the other

locations, and the area identified does not have a pattern of use that is misaligned with the function of a Community Reflection Space.

As the municipal headquarters, Town Hall presents unique challenges and opportunities that will be considered during the design phase.

During conversation with Oasis, the importance of de-politicizing grief was shared. Ms. Nye cautioned about the confluence of shared grief and political protest. Ms. Nye shared concerns gatherings could be affected by political motivations in a space that is meant for shared grief. Concerns of this nature were also expressed by a member of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee.

In contrast, during consultations with the York Regional Police, staff heard that Town Hall should be selected specifically because it is the municipal headquarters. Inspector Alexander believed that this location would show that the mandate of the Community Reflection Space is aligned with the values of the municipality. Members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee also shared this opinion. On the topic of protest, Inspector Alexander didn't believe that Town Hall would necessarily be an attractor or detractor of any protest and mentioned that in today's rapidly changing world, protests can happen anywhere.

To best convey the purpose of the space, Inspector Alexander recommended incorporating words of Peace in the naming to help set the tone for the functionality of the space. Ms. Nye recommended including cross-cultural references to grief and loss to help create a more welcoming and inclusive space.

These important insights will be taken into consideration during the design phase of this project.

Advisory Committee Review

During the consultation phase, staff met with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee. Their feedback has been incorporated into this report. As the project progresses into the design phase, staff will continue to engage with the appropriate committees.

Legal Considerations

None.

Financial Implications

The Town adopted \$25,000 in budget authority for Project No. AM0337 – Town Hall – Community Reflections Space as part of its 2024 Budget. The sufficiency of this existing budget authority will be determined as part of staff’s report back to Council which will include a proposed design, timeline, and budget implications.

Communications Considerations

As mentioned, Communications assisted with engaging members of the public during a public consultation campaign that ran from March 4 to April 8, 2024 utilizing the Engage Aurora platform and surveys. A combined 172 people provided feedback during the public consultation campaign. Communications will inform members of the public regarding the final location chosen.

Climate Change Considerations

The recommendations from this report do not immediately impact greenhouse gas emissions or impact climate change adaptation; however, if approved, when the project progresses to detailed design, green infrastructure and green procurement will be considered to minimize the impacts of a changing climate.

Link to Strategic Plan

The Community Reflection Space supports the following Strategic Plan goals and key objectives:

Supporting an exceptional quality of life for all in its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the following key objectives within these goal statements:

- Celebrating and promoting our culture
- Strengthening the fabric of our community
- Encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle

Alternative(s) to the Recommendation

1. That Council provide further direction.

Conclusions

Staff recommend that Town Hall be selected as the location for the Community Reflection Space. This recommendation is informed by a community consultation campaign that took place from January to April 2024. Although consultation did not produce a definitive consensus concerning the ideal location, it did provide several shared insights across groups, many of which centered on whether not an established community park was the appropriate location. This led staff to recommend Town Hall as the location for the Community Reflection Space, while recognizing that as a municipal headquarters it presents its own set of unique challenges and opportunities.

Attachments

Maps of potential sites:

Attachment 1 - Lambert Willson Park

Attachment 2 - Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park

Attachment 3 - Town Park

Attachment 4 - Town Hall

Previous Reports

CMS23-050, Outdoor Community Reflection Space, November 21, 2023

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on June 12, 2024

Approvals

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer