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Town of Aurora
Committee of the Whole Report
No. CMS26-012

Subject: Aurora Town Square Shade Structures

Prepared by: Phil Rose, Manager, Cultural Services

Department: Community Services

Date: May 12, 2026

Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS26-012 be received; and
2. That the condition on the approval of and budget authority for Capital Project No. GN-F-0106 – Aurora Town Square Sail Shade Structure in the amount of \$150,000 be lifted, and the project be approved.

Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of outdoor shade solutions for Aurora Town Square, including preliminary pricing, estimated lifecycle, seasonal labour needs for sail installation and removal, and storage requirements.

- As summers become increasingly marked by extreme heat and higher exposure to ultraviolet radiation, shaded public spaces like Mirkopoulos Plateia at Aurora Town Square take on a greater role as valuable community amenities.
- Based on the shadow studies completed by RAW Design and the nature of current and proposed outdoor programming, staff have identified two locations where shade is needed most: over the amphitheatre and within the square.

Background

At a Special Meeting of Council on November 17, 2025, Council passed the following resolution:

1. That Project GN-F-0106: Aurora Town Square Sail Shade Structures be paused for further analysis; and

2. That staff report back with more information for Council to consider:
 - Alternative shade solutions, including portable, modular, or temporary structures; and
 - A comparison of capital cost, lifecycle cost, seasonal labour, storage needs, and functional effectiveness.

Analysis

As summers become increasingly marked by extreme heat and higher exposure to ultraviolet radiation, shaded public spaces like Mirkopoulos Plateia at Aurora Town Square take on a greater role as valuable community amenities.

Mirkopoulos Plateia (Outdoor Square) at Aurora Town Square (ATS) currently lacks adequate natural shade from the tree canopy, making it difficult to program this space during peak summer hours. The shadow studies undertaken in May 2019 (Attachment 1) show that there is consistent sun exposure in the Mirkopoulos Plateia in late June from 11:00 a.m. until after 6:00 p.m., when the sun begins to set below the Aurora Public Library to the west. These sunny conditions persist into late September.

Shade structures would keep this area significantly cooler, thereby encouraging higher and longer usage of ATS for the benefit of the community. The goal is to make the outdoor space as adaptable as possible so that it can host multiple programs throughout the year by combining natural shade from the tree canopy with built structures to provide long-term sustainability and protection.

Staff are proposing the installation of 2 permanent shade structures to provide protection from sun exposure, mitigate the heat island effect, reduce heat-related health impacts, and increase the overall usability of Mirkopoulos Plateia.

The short-term objective is to activate Mirkopoulos Plateia for at least 10 performances annually, plus 5 special events, including Multicultural Festival, Doors Open, Fall Faves Festival, Christmas Market, and Family First Night. Longer term, staff predict that the use of the outdoor space will steadily increase as it becomes established as an event and programming venue.

Staff also predict that the addition of permanent shaded areas within the outdoor space would make it more attractive to community organizers that wish to rent it for various events. Performance measurement would be monitored through increased number of programs, attendance, and booking revenue.

Based on the shadow studies completed by RAW Design and the nature of current and proposed outdoor programming, staff have identified two locations where shade is needed most: over the amphitheatre and within the square.

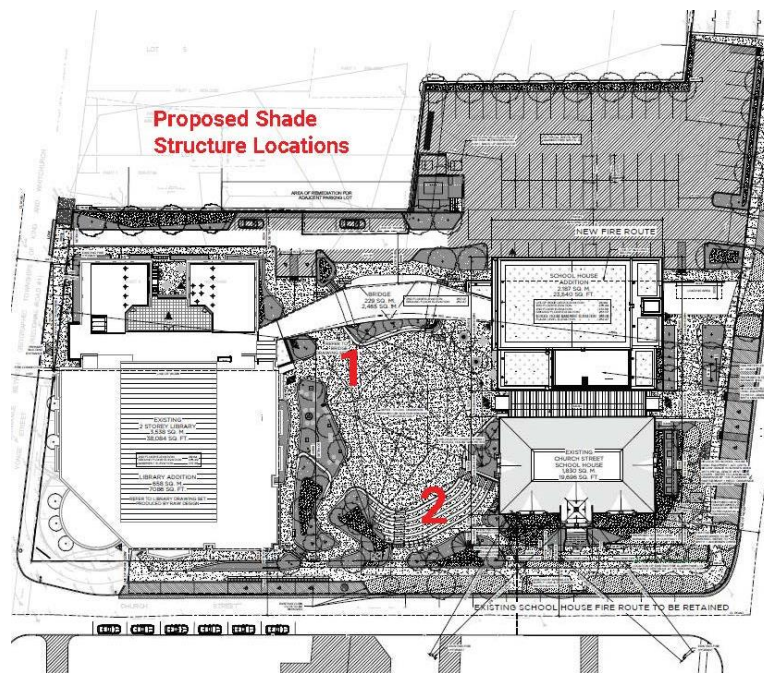


Figure 1: Proposed Shade Structure Locations

Portable, pop-up tents will continue to be deployed during events, however, they have a limited use, are labour intensive to set up and take down, are not as durable as the proposed sail structures, and are unable to provide adequate shade cover for large gatherings, especially over the raked amphitheatre seating. As such, staff recommend a permanent, tailored solution, to address shade needs at ATS, such as the sail structures proposed in this report.

The following table identifies shade options for both the square (Panels 1, 2 and 2A) and the amphitheatre (3A and B and 4A, B and C). Both shade structures are intended to be permanent with only the shade sails removed seasonally. Preliminary costs indicated are for information and initial design study costing purposes only. Final costs will be confirmed through the later stage detail design process and external cost solicitation. Also worth noting is that the concepts provided in Attachment 2 have been provided by suppliers the Town has worked with on previous projects but would need to be scaled appropriately for ATS.

Shade Structure Concepts (also refer to Attachment 2)

Panel	Description	Preliminary Pricing	Seasonal Requirements
1	<p>Curved fabric canopy with high-density sails supported by arched steel beams. This style provides shelter for entertainers without blocking views from the amphitheatre and café patio, however the view from the bridge would be restricted.</p> <p>This shade structure provides shelter for entertainers without blocking views from the amphitheatre, café patio, and bridge.</p> <p>Shade sail warranty is 10 years and 2 years for the beams and posts.</p>	<p>\$75,000 for the shade sail portion only. The customized stone-and-concrete stage is not in scope and would be extra, with the price to be determined based on design.</p>	<p>Fabrics can be easily removed for winter storage or extreme weather conditions.</p> <p>Approximately a half day or 3.5 hours for staff to install or remove the sails, for a total of 7 hours of staff time annually.</p>
2 and 2A	<p>Tensile membrane shade structure composed of multiple overlapping fabric panels designed for UV resistance, weather durability, and tension performance.</p> <p>The canopy is supported by inclined cylindrical steel columns that counteract tensile forces exerted by the stretched fabric.</p> <p>This shade structure also provides shelter for entertainers without blocking views from the amphitheatre, café patio, and bridge.</p>	<p>\$25,000 for 22' x 12' shade sail with 4 posts.</p>	<p>Fabrics can be easily removed for winter storage or extreme weather conditions.</p> <p>Approximately a half day or 3.5 hours for staff to install or remove the sails, for a total of 7 hours of staff time annually.</p>

Panel	Description	Preliminary Pricing	Seasonal Requirements
	<p>Shade sail warranty is 10 years and 2 years for the beams and posts.</p>		
<p>3A and B</p>	<p>Large canopy structure for amphitheatre gathering area with tensile members in a radial structural configuration that allows the canopy to span a large area with minimal vertical supports, preserving unobstructed space below. The canopy is composed of several triangular or trapezoidal fabric panels, each tensioned independently.</p> <p>Shade sail warranty is 10 years and 2 years for the beams and posts.</p>	<p>\$125,000 dependent on design</p>	<p>Fabrics can be easily removed for winter storage or extreme weather conditions.</p> <p>Approximately a full day or 7 hours for staff to install or remove the sails, for a total of 14 hours of staff time annually.</p>
<p>4A, B and C</p>	<p>Cantilevered tensile canopy supported by a single, robust steel frame for over the amphitheatre seating area.</p> <p>The canopy surface is composed of a tense, multilayered fabric membrane shaped for rainwater runoff, wind load mitigation, and tension stability. The structure has minimal visual clutter and employs a reinforced concrete foundation designed to counteract bending and uplift forces.</p> <p>Shade sail warranty is 10 years and 2 years for the beams and posts.</p>	<p>\$100,000 dependent on design</p>	<p>Fabrics can be easily removed for winter storage or extreme weather conditions.</p> <p>Approximately a full day or 7 hours for staff to install or remove the sails, for a total of 14 hours of staff time annually.</p>

Based on the \$150,000 budget, staff recommend design concept Panel 2 for the square to accommodate entertainers and Panel 4 for the amphitheatre to accommodate the public.

Advisory Committee Review

None

Legal Considerations

As the owner and operator, the Town has a duty under the *Occupiers' Liability Act* to take reasonable steps to ensure that users of Aurora Town Square are reasonably safe. The installation of shade structures supports this obligation by helping to mitigate foreseeable risks associated with heat exposure and ultraviolet radiation, particularly as extreme weather events become more frequent.

There are also operational and liability considerations associated with the installation, maintenance, and seasonal removal of shade structures, including risks related to structural integrity, weather (e.g., high winds), and public interaction. These risks can be mitigated through appropriate design, engineering, inspection, and maintenance practices.

Financial Implications

Should Council approve staff's recommended options, the total estimated cost for the two shade structures is approximately \$125,000 plus minimal design costs. The previously conditionally approved capital budget authority of \$150,000 under project no. GN-F-0106 should be sufficient to enable the recommended shade options to proceed.

If Council is supportive of staff's proposed ATS shade options, it is recommended that the conditions on the approval of and budget authority for Capital Project No. GN-F-0106 in the amount of \$150,000 be lifted and this project be allowed to proceed. This capital budget authority will continue to be funded fully from the Growth & New reserve as was originally proposed. Upon Council's lifting of the condition on the approval of this project, an official project number will be issued for this project under which it will be identified moving forward.

Communications Considerations

There are no communications considerations as a result of this report.

Climate Change Considerations

The recommendations from this report will increase the Town's ability to adapt to a changing climate and supports the goals under the Town's Climate Change Adaptation Plan.

Shade structures in the Town's downtown community space supports climate adaptation by reducing heat exposure and improves comfort during increasingly frequent hot weather. This encourages social activities and protects vulnerable populations from heat stress. The Federal Government of Canada's Environment and Climate Change forecasts 2026 to be among the hottest years on record, breaking 2023 and 2024 record highs.

The recommendations from this report does not impact greenhouse gas emissions.

Link to Strategic Plan

Aurora Town Square 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. Council may provide further direction.
2. That staff continue to utilize portable canopies for Aurora Town Square shade needs.

Conclusion

Installing shade structures at ATS is a proactive public health initiative that provides immediate community benefits and maximizes outdoor programming opportunities at Aurora Town Square.

The addition of shade structures would result in a noticeable increase of outdoor activations available to residents and visitors and make the space more attractive as a rentable amenity, thereby generating additional revenue for the Town. This investment would also have a transformative impact on public space in the downtown neighbourhood, turning this area into an even more vibrant, diverse and unique cultural destination.

Attachments

Attachment 1 – Shadow Studies, Aurora Library Square with Bridge, May 2019

Attachment 2 – Aurora Town Square Shade Structure Concept Ideas

Previous Reports

None

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on April 23, 2026

Approvals

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer