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Precinct Plan calls for changes to Town Park, Armoury

By Brock Weir

The Aurora Farmers' Market has called Wells Street home for nearly a decade, but if the plan for Aurora's proposed Cultural Precinct is embraced, it might be able to find longer-lasting success within Town Park itself.

This was the long-term vision charted at the last Council meeting by planners Sarah Millar and Michael Stott of FOTENN, consultants tasked with charting a vision for Aurora's Downtown Core starting in Town Park and radiating out to Yonge Street in the west and the GO Tracks in the east.

?It is a beautiful site and quite a unique little gem for the Town of Aurora, but the question really was how do we program to maximise that space?? said Ms. Millar of Town Park. ?You already have a lot of great things happening there, but the question is: is it in the right place, and is it actually capturing the right audience and the key people in the precinct for as long as possible??

At this point, it's probably safe to assume that answer is no.

In their vision, the consultants suggest eliminating the current baseball diamond in the southwest corner of the park, relocating the existing band shell to this corner and creating a ?great lawn? spreading eastward to the edge of Town Park.

?This is to encourage everyone to have a space to sit down, have a picnic, throw a Frisbee, so it is not tied to structured recreational space,? she said.

The space currently occupied by the band shell, she added, would be the perfect place for a permanent outdoor Farmers' Market.

?This Central Plaza is where we see the Aurora Farmers' Market relocating longer-term,? said Ms. Millar. ?Currently, they operate on Wells Street and while we think that is wonderful, we think the opportunity to put them back into the park would offer a long-term solution to maintaining space for them in the heart of Aurora.?

Instrumental in the success of their vision for the north half of the park are radical changes to the historic Aurora Armoury, which was purchased by the Town of Aurora from the Department of National Defence last year.

In Ms. Millar's view, the Armory will prove to be a ?fantastic asset? to Town Park as a whole, if used in the right way ? specifically, opening up the west wall of the building to the rest of the park.

?Rather than just having a front door along Mosley Street, the idea would be to open that building to the park and create an indoor-outdoor space,? she said. ?We see the space immediately adjacent to the Armoury being a skating rink in the winter, possibly a roller skating rink or splash pad in the summer. The Armoury would be the place where you could rent skates, there could be a little café in there, and it would encourage parents to sit and give people reasons to stay.?

Town Park is the third of three sections of the Downtown Core tackled within the Cultural Precinct Plan. In addition to the wide-ranging possibilities in Block One, which includes the block bordered by Mosley Street and Church Street in the north and south, and Yonge and Victoria in the west and east, land occupied by Trinity Anglican Church is the lynchpin connecting this area to Town Park.

?It is obviously a beautiful site with a stunning church, some heritage trees and beautiful frontage, but we do see there are opportunities to re-organize that surface parking so you're not actually losing space, but will allow for pedestrian movement through that middle walk,? said Ms. Millar. ?It is in the interest of producing a pedestrian connection, a mid-block pedestrian connection from Yonge Street all the way to Town Park.?
The Cultural Precinct Draft Plan is expected to be debated by Council members beginning January 19.