

Time for discussion ?has passed? on Library Square, say action-seeking Councillors

By Brock Weir

The time ?has passed? to gather options on what to do with Library Square, according to some Council members looking for long-awaited action on the future of Aurora's Downtown Core, but Council moved forward this week on another round of public consultation on the Town's Cultural Precinct.

Councillors gave the green light to a new public consultation schedule this week, following debate at the Committee level last month.

Consultation on Aurora's Cultural Precinct Plan, which proposes significant improvements and overhauls for the Town's historic downtown core, will begin as early this month focusing on meetings with area ratepayers' groups, public outreach at venues such as the Aurora's Concerts in the Park and the Aurora Farmers' Market, online surveys and via social media.

The consultation plan kicks into high gear in September, with two public consultation sessions ? one for ratepayers and one for the public as a whole ? followed by further meetings with community groups and a Council workshop for Council to consider the public input gathered to that point.

If all goes according to plan, a report for a ?final plan? on the Cultural Precinct will hit Council by November.

While Council voted in favour of the plan, several Council members expressed frustration that they were about to embark on another round of public talks, which have been taking place over the last decade-and-a-half.

?I am all for moving forward with the public consultation because that is what we do; we don't actually take action, but we do lots of consultation,? said Councillor John Abel, calling for this public consultation process to include a full report looking at all the commonalities within public input gathered so far.

According to Aurora CAO Doug Nadorozny, that is exactly the intent of this exercise: to reshape and gather all materials that have been put out there so far, put them together in an organized manner for public consumption, and make sure Council signs off on all the questions that will be posed to the public before the public meetings begin.

Councillor Abel, however, said he hoped there would be more coming forward, including potential ?visions? for all that could be placed on the site of the large swath of Victoria Street currently occupied by the former home of the Aurora Public Library and the former Aurora Seniors' Centre. This was a point reiterated by Councillor Harold Kim.

?I am all for doing it right and I am trying to bring forth new ideas to the table so we can explore what opportunities exist,? said Councillor Abel. ?I know it all sounds visionary and idealistic, but it is because there has been frustration in repeating the same process over and over again."

Added Councillor Kim: ?I just don't want October to be where we were at in January or February when we had a lot of feedback and we're still in the digesting process. I think we're beyond that and it would be nice to have something visual to offer to give them some options.?

Similar frustrations were offered by Councillor Michael Thompson, who questioned Mr. Nadorozny on just what ideas would ultimately get presented to the public. The CAO said he envisioned ?packaging up? various ideas around repurposing the existing buildings that have cropped up so far to show what can be done with them, as well as opportunities that will come up the ultimate decision is to demolish them.

"I think we can all agree that the time for discussion has passed," said Councillor Thompson. "We all want to take some action. I hope this process continues to move us forward so that we can start making some decisions and taking some actions, be it yes or no, or demolish or keep. This Library Square has been discussed [and] studied over the years and it is incumbent upon us to make some decisions and take some actions this fall. I am hopeful this process will help break the stalemate that occurred over the past 10 years."

Still, others around the Council table said they were left baffled by some of the resistance to further public consultation, including Councillor Paul Pirri who said conversations around Council sometimes left him "confused."

"We talk about how we're going to approve a consultation study and moving forward and, in the same breath, say we shouldn't be consulting, we should be doing it this way," he said, suggesting summer was the ideal time to send this issue to the Town's advisory committees for their input as well. "This is the opportunity; if we want to make any changes to the consultation process, this is the time that we do it."

Added Councillor Tom Mrakas, noting his continued preference for getting out the wrecking ball: "I do find it somewhat ironic that now that we are going public with some consultation we're hearing from some members that we don't need to go to public consultation, and when some wanted to take some action and move forward, we heard, "wait a sec, we haven't gone to public consultation and the public needs to be consulted."