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Temperance Street Precinct should be considered this fall: Abel

By Brock Weir

Aurora's Temperance Street neighbourhood might be dramatically changed by the incoming new Amica Retirement Residence set to be built in conjunction with the new Aurora United Church, but there is much potential left to make that area a key to downtown revitalization, according to Councillor John Abel.

As Council sits in summer recess, and set to get back to the business of the Town on September 5, the Councillor is looking to breathe new life into making the area just west of Yonge and Wellington an extension of Aurora's Cultural Precinct.

Councillor Abel first brought this idea forward in the winter of 2016.

The idea was, as the Town reviews its Official Plan (OP), that historic and heritage areas such as this, be considered for their distinct character and assets.

There was potential there, he said at the time, and Council generally agreed with him, but it is an idea which has been collecting dust since then. Now, he says, it is time to dust it off.

?It will not have any bearing, of course, on the United Church and retirement centre, but it may [make people realize] that there is still a potential on Temperance for the revitalization of the Heritage Downtown Core,? says Councillor Abel. ?There are some things in the Master Plan and Promenade Study which show there are some properties the Town should be looking at in developing and putting a plan forward.?

One such property, he says, is the historic Fleury Foundry on Wellington Street West, just west of Temperance Street, which is currently home to Bacon Basketware.

Considering the Temperance area in the context of a precinct could have the potential to ?preserve the heritage and cultural significance of Temperance Street? which, he says, is not being given ?full consideration.

?This is not about the United Church and the retirement centre they are putting in; this is about something positive and a plan we can put forward and get buy-in, move the pieces and keep them in mind when opportunities arise,? he says.

Buy-in will be key, but in the existing Cultural Precinct Area on the other side of Yonge Street, buy-in was far from uniform. There was a backlash to initial plans in some quarters, an issue Councillor Abel chalks up to a ?rush-rush job? to get options on the table, but the buy-in could be there if done correctly.

Over the course of the 2017 Council year so far, Councillor Abel says there have been a number of milestones to note. While he's reluctant to characterize them as ?achievements? he cites the Highland Gate redevelopment settlement and the approval of the new station and training facility for the Central York Fire Services (CYFS) in the Bayview Avenue and St. John's Sideroad area as ?significant issues? now behind Council.

That being said, there are still a number of outstanding issues that need to be resolved this fall, he says.

In the lead up to Council's summer recess, Council tempers flared around the upcoming demolition of former homes of the Aurora Public Library and Seniors' Centre to make way for Library Square.

At the heart of the contention was where to put user groups currently calling the buildings home, particularly the Aurora Bridge Club.

Councillor Abel ventured the historic Aurora Armoury, a building purchased by Council, would be the ideal location, but this argument rankled many members of Council who said the Armoury was unavailable pending a deal which made by Council in closed session which is expected to be made public this fall.

To that end, Councillor Abel says the Town needs to adopt a firm policy when they resume in September on how publically owned buildings should be allocated.

?I think one of the main things we should be doing is having a policy for the sale, disposition or leasing of any public facilities,? he says. ?Much like other levels of government do when they are considering something surplus, there is some public input and an order of refusal with levels like education and other government levels and perhaps organizations in the community before they do that. We don't have such a policy and that is going to play out shortly with the Armoury.

?It is a timely matter because there is no policy in place and we have seen in two instances where public owned facilities ? one being the Hydro building, which is still owned but leased out to the Department of Defence for the foreseeable decades ? and there are consequences when you don't have a proper policy in place. If we [kept the Hydro Building] we wouldn't have had to put $22 million into the JOC and similarly with the Armoury, we should have a process where anyone who is interested in working with the Town be allowed to step forward before we go into closed session and do something.?