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Residents have second chance to plan Library Square?s future Thursday

By Brock Weir

From parking lots to a public piazza, ideas for the future of Library Square are set to come up for another review this Thursday.

It is the second of four public consultation sessions to look at the large swath of Victoria Street, currently occupied by the Aurora Cultural Centre, the old Aurora Public Library Building, the former home of the Aurora Seniors Centre, and Victoria Hall. Of particular attention are the Library and Seniors' Centre buildings whose future is far from certain.

The buildings, although continually used, have not served their original purposes for nearly a decade and calls have been made to bring in the bulldozers. But how that potential space can best serve the community, however, is the question of the day.

When the public last had a chance to sound off on the future of the buildings suggestions ranged from a public gathering space ? whether a place to relax, or a place to hold celebrations and festivals ? to ultimately being a solution to what many people perceive to be a severe parking problem in Aurora's Downtown Core.

Council's advisory committees have also taken a keen interest in the site. Adding onto the suggestions made at the earlier public sessions, which also included stipulations that whatever happens to the site should have a long-range vision for the community, were the Town's Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC). PRAC's suggestions included a sports campus or office space for sports groups and parking.

They also stipulated that plans ?be a part of a unified vision of downtown revitalization and of the Aurora Promenade? and that final plans be held off until the completion of the Southeast Old Aurora Heritage Conservation District Study, the ball for which got rolling earlier this year with the establishment of a committee to oversee what could become Aurora's second heritage district south of Wellington Street.

Bringing this together, the committee suggested Council consider hiring a ?professional planner? to offer input on options and opportunities and how it fits into the wider picture.
Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, told Councillors last week that a planner would look at the buildings of Library Square and their context within ongoing studies in the area.

Getting a wider view of the current situation and the future was something that garnered support from Council, but Councillor Evelyn Buck had a slightly different view of the project.

Councillor Buck gave the initial push over the winter to see some action in determining after years of uncertainty the future of the two buildings. Her initial suggestion was to raze the two buildings and use a significant chunk of Aurora's $34 million Hydro Reserve account to build a new multi-use building tailored to youth and to foster creativity within the wider community. At last week's Council meeting, she expressed frustration that concrete plans have yet to come forward.

?Council seems to be totally bereft of any ideas whatsoever,? she said. ?There are nine of us sitting around this table to ask a planner to throw some ideas at us to see what we think of them. ?We're not doing what we should be doing and that is putting out ideas.?

Councillors, however, supported the idea of taking a step back and getting a sense of the wider picture. They also voiced support of getting further input on the Town's citizen committees.

?We're moving in a concentrated, thoughtful way to do what is best to get input from several areas,? said Councillor John Abel. ?I think there are very some very exciting ideas going forward. [When you look at what Newmarket has done with Riverwalk Commons] what they have turned around in a short period of time is phenomenal and very impressive. I am all for moving forward

and I think we're doing the right thing.

Councillor Chris Ballard ventured a solution putting responsibility for fitting the pieces together with the Town's current heritage planner.

?I don't think it is a lack of ideas that concern PRAC, rather than the fact there are three independent studies moving forward that overlap into the so-called Library Square area,? he said. ?There was concern that three studies have their own scope of work, their own focuses [and they saw the benefit in having at least one person, one planner, and one committee that is responsible for it all.?

But in putting together all these visions and ideas, Council needs to come together and decide on the ultimate goals and objectives, argued Councillor Michael Thompson. Paving to put up a parking lot is a different direction than many of the other suggestions that have come forward, he said, noting the piazza and entertainment centre proposals.

?The list is endless and so are the goals and objectives,? he said. ?We need to define what that is and what we're trying to achieve in this location and I think there needs to be a steering committee [or planner] to guide the process [and we can look at] all different angles of what the community needs most in this space.?