

Library Square, SARC expansion dominate capital plan

By Brock Weir

Library Square and an expansion of the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex are the top priorities in the year ahead, according to Town's updated 10-year capital investment plan.

Presented at Council at the end of January, the defining projects of 2019 under the new municipal plan include an earmarked \$35 million for the redevelopment of Library Square and a further \$9.4 to expand the SARC to accommodate a new gymnasium.

Council is set to consider a number of revisions to proposed plans for Library Square at the next General Committee meeting this Tuesday, February 14, which will take place in Council Chambers at 7 p.m.

It will be an opportunity not only for Council members to weigh in on where things stand, but also a chance for the public to speak out on what they would like to see happen to the future downtown gathering space.

Aurora's 10-year Capital Investment Plan includes a total investment value of \$285,812,401 through to 2028, \$138.5 million of this forecast is allocated to the repair and replacement of existing infrastructure, including built resources such as recreation centres and other examples of municipal infrastructure. \$143 million is allocated for Growth and New projects, including Library Square and the SARC. The balance, \$3.99 million, is earmarked for studies and other projects.

“Over the course of this last year, we [completed] another 10-year capital investment plan,” said Jason Gaertner, Aurora's Acting Treasurer. “We continue to strengthen our cash to capital contributions to improve our reserves, especially with the sustainability of our capital assets. We have also ensured the continual alignment with [our] asset management plan.”

Strengthening the future sustainability of existing capital assets is essential, he said, as the cost to maintain, repair and replace these resources goes up as the years march on and experience more usage.

“Our assets are generally relatively young,” Mr. Gaertner continued, referencing charts illustrating the continued useful life of existing assets. “But, as our assets reach the end of their useful life, the cost of repair and replacement will grow. Now is the time to start building up our reserves in preparation for these increasing repair and replacement costs.”

The new 10-Year Capital plan, which was received by Council with little comment on January 22, has been a work in progress. By the end of that 10-year plan, Mr. Gaertner said staff hope to achieve an ending reserve balance equal to their average annual spend in relation to repair and replacement.

“Our current desire is to have two times the average annual need during that 10-year period,” he said. “We're halfway there and we're in the black. The growth and new proposed budget includes two placeholder budgets related to the proposed SARC additions ? the gymnasium ? as well as the redevelopment of Library Square. Those are simply meant to be placeholders that are subject to change?as staff reports to Council.”

Looking ahead to 2019, the \$35 million for the redevelopment of Library Square is the big ticket item that will dominate Council discussion. Mr. Gaertner stressed in his presentation that while this is merely a placeholder in the budget, this number could change depending on a number of factors, including money received from other levels of government to bring the project to fruition.

“The money, I believe, is coming from the Hydro Funds,” said Councillor Wendy Gaertner at the Council presentation.

The Hydro Funds were established by the Town in the early 2000s from the profits made on the sale of Aurora Hydro. The purpose of this fund was to invest in an asset that would be of equal or greater value for Aurora as a whole, but has been collecting interest since that time. Portions of the interest have been used in recent years to help cushion the blow of tax increases to residents and property owners, but Aurora has been tapering off its reliance on this funding source over the last four years.

“The funding sources have not been confirmed,” said Mr. Gaertner in response. “Depending on how much of the Hydro Funds will be used is still to be determined. Staff [in a future report] will recommend a strategy for Library Square. At this point, we're unclear on what that funding source is.”

In addition to the \$9.4 million earmarked for the SARC expansion, additional growth projects for 2019 include \$730,000 for the Aurora Promenade Streetscape, \$350,000 for upgraded street lighting on Wellington Street East from Berczy to Mary, \$300,000 for traffic work along John West Way, \$200,000 for the development of a Yonge Street parking plan, \$135,300 for a potential parking lot behind Hillary House National Historic Site, a further \$100,000 towards realising the goals of the Cultural Services Master Plan, \$60,000 for new signage at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, \$15,000 for restoration work to the historic Aurora Pet Cemetery, and \$10,000 to the Aurora Museum and Archives.

2020 will see a \$37 million investment in building a new recreation facility, a long-held goal of 10-Year Capital Forecasts.

A possible site floated for a new recreation complex is a plot of land on Bloomington Road just west of Yonge Street that is

currently owned by the Province. Negotiations continue between the Province and Municipality over the future of this acreage.