

There is great excitement in the Town about Library Square.

On March 21, Council made the decision to move forward with the design for the Square and new cultural building.

I share this excitement.

I have put aside my concern that the process did not have a public meeting to comment on the building design and use. (Council received the schematic of the building early last summer.) I was worried about the negative implications of building in an area with underground water so close to the surface. The Planning Partnership is completely confident that it can be done without ramifications. I am relieved to know that.

One major concern that can not be taken lightly is parking in general; and parking for the thousands who already attend our Library yearly including those with disabilities. The design does provide more than the required accessible spots for the Square and new building. However, it does not compensate for the two spots currently at the Library; and parking provided on Victoria Street does nothing to help people with disabilities access the Library. Aurora has one of the largest growing senior populations. The parking design still needs to address this reality and the needs of young families.

I wonder if we are being overly optimistic about the use of the theatre and rehearsal space. Many of our consulted community groups expressed support for use; but not did not commit to be able to pay, especially full price. Most of our community/cultural groups struggle to make ends meet. Some are subsidized by the Town. The small size of the stage was mentioned as a limiting factor. I am not sure that there is room to accommodate storage or dedicated use requests.

A word of caution: should the Town consider using this venue to expand its programming in dance, theatre or visual arts, we must be careful not to compete with our local businesses.

Do groups outside of Aurora need our space? My understanding is that the theatres in Newmarket and Richmond Hill are not fully booked. And would groups want to use a venue of this size; and with the parking constraints? Our theatre consultants are knowledgeable and experienced. They are enthusiastically expressing their support; and predicting future success. I was pleased to hear this.

I think that it would be wise though to have a financial contingency plan in place if the predicted revenues are not realized.

Council does have an initial operations funding strategy. The estimated yearly cost for Library Square is \$720,000. The initial cost would be phased onto taxes over the next three years, \$240,000 or 0.5% per year starting this year. Also approved on Thursday is a 20-year debt financing plan. It will be repaid in part by a one-time tax levy increase of 1%.

I have reserved my support for the Square until we know how much money will be received in Grants. This knowledge is necessary to form a financial investment strategy for the capital cost of \$37,908,700 + possible options.

Councillor Wendy GaertnerAurora