

Library Square could be run as a not-for-profit entity

The shovels haven't yet hit the ground, but the future governance of Library Square is starting to take shape.

Last week, local lawmakers tentatively approved a not-for-profit/municipal hybrid governance model for the multi-million-dollar redevelopment that is intended to make Aurora's historic Downtown Core a destination once again.

Complete with an extension to the historic Church Street School, a bridge connecting the new building with the Aurora Public Library, and the construction of a public gathering space in between, the governance model, as approved at last week's General Committee meeting, would be similar to the Town's current agreement with the Aurora Cultural Centre.

While there is not one perfect governance model to choose from, one of the consistent messages throughout the governance review process was that the Town should leverage resources, skills and expertise already available to it, said Phil Rose-Donahoe, Project Manager for Library Square. Each of the Town's main partners on the Library Square initiative have historically exhibited good governance practices and possess proven track records of delivering quality programs and services to the community. Rather than start from scratch, therefore, the Town should adopt a governance model that builds on the past accomplishments and strengths of its partners.

The governance of Library Square, once complete, is not a subject new to Council.

Council received a short list of possible delivery options this past winter.

After a lengthy debate around the table, they settled on exploring further a direct delivery model as well as a not-for-profit/municipal hybrid structure.

In a direct delivery model, the Town would operate Library Square exclusively and take on the duties of delivering cultural programming, theatre performances, museum administration, and other uses that will be part of a fleshed-out Library Square plan.

But, in his report, Mr. Rose-Donahoe said it was agreed that the present model with the Aurora Cultural Centre provides expertise that can be built upon. Additionally, a direct delivery model could hamper Library Square's ability to fundraise through donors and granting bodies like the Ontario Trillium Foundation and add an extra layer of bureaucracy to the process.

Throughout the consulting phase, there was a unanimous feeling that as co-located organizations, the ACC and AMA (Aurora Cultural Centre and Aurora Museum & Archives) have successfully provided cultural

and heritage programs/services to the community under one roof," he said.
Furthermore, many stated that the hybrid model provides a solid foundation on which to build and should be sustained where possible.

Some benefits of the non-profit/municipal hybrid model include expertise in cultural and heritage program and service delivery; proven governance integrity as demonstrated by the ACC's accreditation from Imagine Canada, an organization whose mission is to strengthen Canada's charitable sector; ongoing development of the AMA's collection and important strides in exhibition development and public access to Aurora's material culture; Town oversight through the annual budget process, key performance indicator tracking and participation of two Council members on the ACC's Board of Directors; [and] a strong network of partnerships with artists, artisans, performers, heritage experts, volunteers, cultural organizations and professionals that demonstrate the municipality's commitment to local cultural development.

Challenges with the proposed model include potential for inefficient customer service due to the absence of centralized leadership and a unified direction for the facility as a whole; greater potential for duplication of program delivery and lack of municipal control over space allocation.

Therefore, if Council approves the adoption [of this model] for Library Square, the Town will need to continue to work with key stakeholders to determine how best to address these challenges.

At last week's General Committee meeting, the recommendation to proceed with the not-for-profit/municipal hybrid model passed with little discussion, but within the brief discussion, some Council members questioned whether now was the right time to move forward with the Library Square project as a whole.

I am supportive of this, but I do want to be consistent," said Councillor John Gallo. "Notwithstanding my support it remains the same: I don't support the overall project until such time as we get confirmation from the upper levels of government of the funding we've applied for. Should it move forward, should we get the funding, I agree that this should be the model to move forward with its governance."

Added Councillor Wendy Gaertner: "I thought about this quite a lot and, yes, I am voting on this as what I think is the appropriate governance model. Should all those things happen that Councillor Gallo said."

By Brock Weir