

## Ground officially broken on Library Square development



Socially distant and braced against the rain, nearly two dozen community leaders converged on Victoria Street on Thursday afternoon for what Mayor Tom Mrakas described as a "historic" moment for Aurora.

The Mayor, along with Councillors Harold Kim, Sandra Humfries, and Michael Thompson, along with construction partners and representatives from local cultural groups, officially broke ground on the nearly \$52 million redevelopment of Library Square.

The project, which is aiming for completion in late 2022, will include a significant expansion of the historic Church Street School, which is home to the Aurora Cultural Centre and Aurora Museum & Archives, an expansion of the Aurora Public Library, a bridge connecting the two buildings and a public gathering space down below.

"I couldn't be more excited to be here with you all today for this historic event," said Mayor Mrakas. "This project has been such a long time coming and it is finally here - this is the beginning of the next era for the Town of Aurora."

Joining current members of Council at the event were former politicians who were part of many of the early discussions surrounding Library Square, including former mayors Tim Jones and Geoff Dawe, and former councillors Bob McRoberts, Alison Collins-Mrakas, and Jeff Thom.

"The Library Square project is the largest capital infrastructure project the Town has ever embarked on and will serve as a catalyst for downtown revitalization," Mayor Mrakas continued. "The project is the culmination of years of planning that demonstrates that strategic municipal investment in the downtown will leverage further investment, foster employment opportunities and support downtown resilience. It is also the culmination of years of partnerships, of community, government, individuals all coming together for the future of our Town."

The \$51.6 million capital project, he added, will "transform the downtown and bring the Town of Aurora into the forefront of the Region's Arts & Culture scene."

"When complete, Aurora will have a 32,000 square foot addition to the Church Street School that features performance space, visual arts studios, museum storage, multipurpose dance studio, program rooms, café and a catering kitchen, a vibrant open-air square featuring an amphitheatre, water feature, skating loop and seating areas. An enclosed pedestrian link between the new facility and existing Public Library with accessible connection to Yonge Street and downtown, new library programming space and a rooftop reading garden. The addition of a community space like Library Square will contribute to local economic activity and the growth of Aurora's creative sector."

Evidence from other communities that have made similar investments shows they have resulted in a multifold return on investment in the hundreds of millions of dollars," he contended.

Speaking on behalf of architects and designers who have been working on the Library Square concept was David Leinster, Principal of The Planning Partnership. Acknowledging the original vision of Library Square as a "programmable outdoor space", the evolution of the design was "inspired" by the "extraordinary setting" of downtown Aurora.

"In the many places our firm has worked, this is a very special place in our portfolio," said Mr. Leinster. "Also inspired by this architecturally significant 19th century schoolhouse building recognized Provincially for its significance, and right next to the much-loved 20th century Library. Our 21st century vision builds on the success of these two great institutions to realize the Town's vision for this project as a vibrant cultural centre, attracting and inspiring people to learn from and engage with the arts.

"Very importantly, the entire project is designed to improve accessibility through the Cultural Precinct, ensuring all members of the community are able to enjoy it in all seasons. Through its artful and disciplined design, the Cultural Centre addition reads as a distinctly contemporary compliment to this historic building."

The future of Library Square has been up for debate for more than 40 years.

Myriad public consultation sessions over the years helped inform the final vision for the redevelopment, which, following the demolition of the former Victoria Street homes of the Aurora Public Library and Aurora Seniors' Centre in the last term of Council, was ultimately greenlit by this Council on August 25.

The tender to Chandos construction was approved on a vote of 4 ? 3 with Councillors Wendy Gaertner, John Gallo and Rachel Gilliland opting against proceeding with Library Square at this time.

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