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Aurora accepts keys to historic armoury



By Brock Weir

It was a homecoming of sorts 140 years in the making, but last Thursday the keys to the old Aurora Armoury were formally handed over to the Town of Aurora.

Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown was at the landmark located on the northeast corner of Town Park to present the keys to the building to Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, along with Councillors John Abel, Evelyn Buck, Don Constable, Wendy Gaertner, Paul Pirri, and Michael Thompson.

For Ms. Brown, the latest chapter in the history of the building was a ?monumental moment? both for it, and the Town.

?This is a facility that has been here and seen the lives of young men and women go out of here to go into conflict, many of whom never came back,? said Ms. Brown. ?The heart and soul of Aurora is wrapped up in this facility and I do hope that, whatever it becomes for the community, that we never forget those lives it represents.

?I was privileged to be here when the last contingent of Queen's York Rangers went over to Afghanistan, and to see those young men ? and it was all a group of young men who were going ? with aspirations for life, and aspirations of a great future, to know that they were going into conflict was a heart-wrenching moment. But this facility has the ability to bring laughter and joy to the community as well. Whatever the Town of Aurora decides to use this for, may we never forget.?

The presentation of the Aurora Armoury to the Town of Aurora, however, was not entirely altruistic.

Council approved the purchase of the Armoury from the Federal Government in September, with a $514,000 price tag. The building was home to the Queen's York Rangers until they moved to the Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe Armoury on Industrial Parkway South in 2012, after which the historic building was declared surplus by the Department of National Defence.

Nearly $130,000-worth of improvements are expected to be required to get the building back up to snuff for whatever use the Town ultimately decides for the building.

In the meantime, there have been no shortage of ideas for what to do with the building, the most common refrain floating it as a possible home for a winter or year-round home for the Aurora Farmers' Market.

?It is a great place to do it and it has great access,? said Mayor Dawe on the Market option. ?I know the Cultural Centre might not be too happy in terms of losing that, but I think it is really a better fit.?

Other options considered by the Mayor include a warming building that could be used as part of Aurora's Arctic Adventure celebrations on Family Day, and a community space that could be used by groups, such as Scouts, displaced by the April fire at Aurora United Church.

Councillor Abel is on the wavelength of the Farmers' Market, seeing the Armoury as a place for artisans, crafts, and a space for creativity.

?I think it is great we made good on a Council resolution made two years ago to go about acquiring this and we followed up with Lois Brown on several occasions on ways to get that done,? said Councillor Abel. ?It only took us three years, so I think that was good ? I was first told it would take up to eight. [Acquiring the Armoury] should have been put into negotiation when the Queen's York Rangers moved. The Department obviously had no plans for it. I really thought that was a no-brainer. The whole thing was erroneous, but now we have it, it has been out of our hands for 140 years, and now we have this back after we gave the land away.?

While Councillor Humfryes said she agreed that the building would be an ideal home for the Farmers' Market, it is also a great venue for other community groups, Town functions, and even summer camp programs. Councillor Gaertner is also keeping an open mind on the possibilities.
?Whatever we use it for, I want it to bring in money,? she said.

For Councillor Evelyn Buck, the building has a lot of potential, but future use should keep the surrounding neighbourhood in mind. Neighbours on Larmont and Mosley eventually got used to the hubbub of military services being run out of the building, but everyone has their limits, she said.

?The location gives it a lot of potential?but I think we need to take into consideration the fact this is a residential neighbourhood,? she said. ?The Farmers' Market is one option that comes to mind and I would be open to that, but that would be costly to the people using it. There are many questions that need to be answered.?