

Bidding for space, Bridge Club feels the squeeze



By Brock Weir

After a good run working with the Town, the Aurora Bridge Club is playing dummy laying their cards bare trying to find a new space.

As Aurora tiptoes closer to the next steps in developing Library Square, the Aurora Bridge Club is facing an increasingly uncertain future as their current home, the former Aurora Public Library building on Victoria Street, braces for the wrecking ball. Before demolition can begin, new homes, of course, need to be found for existing tenants, but the options provided have proved less than satisfactory with the Bridge Club.

According to president Anna Kennedy, the Club has been offered to lease new space from the Town. The problem? They currently pay \$1,600 in rent for their Library space, which is close to 2,000 square feet, but the new location offered to them is just 800 square feet.

'The Town is saying they have 800 square feet for us but no more,' says Ms. Kennedy. 'We need 2,000. When I went to look commercially, that requires about \$4,000 - \$5,000 a month and we can't do that. Even if we doubled our fees we wouldn't be able to do that, not to pay the heat and light and all the rest of it. It is not possible. Right now we pay the Town \$1,600. We say we could do it if we put another dollar on our fee, bringing it up that we could pay \$2,000 a month but we can't do more than that, not without losing people. We're talking about pensioners here.'

'You could say if you went to a movie it would cost you \$14 but you don't go to the movie every day and some of these people come to play bridge almost every day. It gets them out of their homes or wherever they are at and out socializing. We think we provide a very good service to the Town and we have been doing it for a long time, almost 50 years. With 800 square feet we would have to cut our games. Our club has been a very important part of this community for a long time and I think we have a valid reason to look for and to stay as part of Aurora.'

A similar view was offered by fellow member Lena Jackson, who has submitted a letter to Councillors ahead of this week's General Committee meeting stating the options do not meet their needs. This, she says, should be looked through the lens of healthy aging for seniors.

'It has been well documented that mental activities help stave off memory loss,' says Ms. Jackson, former Executive Director of the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region. 'Duplicate bridge also enhances the social wellbeing of seniors. Participating in these games gets people out and in contact with others, thus reducing feelings of isolation, which can often lead to depression. I am keenly aware of the devastating impact of depression, not only on the individual and their families, but also on the overall health system.'

'Competitive duplicate bridge is more than 'just a game.' In addition to the benefits cited above, because of the complexity of the game, it can open the door to a lifelong learning process. The Aurora Bridge Club offers lessons to both beginners and intermediates, but no matter the level of player, participants are constantly trying to hone their skills, even the professionals. It's the only game I know of where beginners can compete against professionals if they so choose.'

If a better solution cannot be found, she concludes, she questions whether the Town would be eligible for a grant to subsidize a new facility to meet market rent.

?In any case, the relatively small financial commitment from the Town, Region, or Province is miniscule compared to treating seniors suffering from memory issues, feelings of isolation, and depression.?

The non-profit Aurora Bridge Club was founded at Trinity Oak Ridges in 1965 with a membership of six tables. There are now often more than 20 tables, with games fielded by players aged between their teens and the eldest two members at 94.