

BROCK'S BANTER: Approaching the finish line

By Brock Weir

It's December.

We're in that weird time of year when everyone is getting ready for the holidays.

Churches, community groups, theatrical and choral performers, and worthy organizations of all stripes are putting their best collective feet forward. They're pulling out all the stops for special religious observances, holding food and clothing drives for those less fortunate, holiday-themed plays and performances are all around us, and we've still got ? as of this publication date ? 17 shopping days before the big day.

By the time you read this ? unless, of course, you read The Auroran online ? the Town's Christmas Tree has already been lit by a special surprise visitor from North Pole wearing a snazzy red velvet suit, the hot chocolate has been poured, and Mrs. Claus has given the kids her traditional razzle dazzle with ?Twas The Night Before Christmas.

Normally, this is the time of year when most everybody concerned is prepared to settle their brains down for a long winter's nap and wrap everything up before the Christmas preparations kick into full swing.

This is also the time of year when The Auroran looks both forward and back, considering the major milestones of this year, revisiting stories that have filled our pages over the past 12 months while also casting our eyes ahead to what issues might be on the horizon.

A perennial theme of these forecasts has been the future of Library Square and the certain brand of inertia which has, until very recently, been a hallmark of its redevelopment.

The same can be said of Aurora's dwindling inventory of historic and/or heritage homes, along with buildings that might be moved, modified or otherwise manhandled over the course of the next year or two.

Then, of course, there is the issue of just how much the average Aurora tax bill might go up in the year ahead.

2017, however, is turning out to be the perfect storm. All of these things are happening at once and, as luck would have it, this week.

After months of further review, stakeholders and residents alike were called in for public meetings to go over two draft plans for the future of Library Square, the recommendations for which could be offered by local lawmakers this week and ratified next Tuesday. Or, sent back to staff for further review.

After months of seemingly idle ? but, really, not so idle ? speculation on the future of the Aurora Armoury, that too is poised to go ahead, making the way for a much desired and much fought for semblance of a post-secondary presence in our Town.

And all this after year upon year with barely a trickle ? but, as the saying goes, when it rains it pours.

So, Aurora, have your umbrella handy because we're having a deluge.

Why now? Could it possibly be that we're now less than 12 months away from inaugurating a new Council? Perhaps; after all, the 2014 ? 2018 slate of Council was largely determined to bring Library Square in for some kind of landing as a legacy project.

Some members of Council expressed a similar enthusiasm for securing a post-secondary presence for Aurora by the end of this term, in accordance with the Town of Aurora's Strategic Plan.

The mission is almost accomplished in both cases, but is it a race to the finish line to get these projects done to show progress has been made over the last four years?

Maybe, but although it might cause some to be sceptical, I think excitement will ultimately win the day.

The plans are ambitious, to be sure, but they do have the potential to bring about a watershed moment for this community.

So many times in this Town, good ideas have been left to collect dust on a shelf, whether they were deemed too gutsy or, worse, too risky to be accomplished. They might have been seen as having the potential to ruffle a few feathers when every feather ruffled translated into a potentially ruffled voter. Some were tossed aside as mere change for the sake of change.

As a result, I think Aurora, in many ways has fallen behind some of its municipal contemporaries.

I've written before in this space how, as a one-time outsider looking in from the hinterland of Aurora, how this Town was once perceived. There was, and I'm sure I'm not alone here, a sense that Aurora was always one step ahead of the curve.

Arts and heritage were cultivated, storefronts in the downtown core were flourishing, their wares varied, offering something for everyone. All of this bolstered with a firm sense of identity, of both where Aurora has been and where, as a community, it was going.

But, by the time I moved to Aurora, I sensed a change.

Granted, the grass always seems greener from the other side, but by the time I became a fully fledged Auroran after a stint in Ottawa, it seemed the axis had shifted.

Newmarket's Main Street had transformed itself from the grubby thoroughfare of my youth to a flourishing community hub; new, innovative ideas were now being floated, embraced and lauded with alarming regularity? and Aurora?

Sure, the Aurora Cultural Centre has been an invaluable addition to our community which has only grown in relevance since its inception, but as Newmarket picked up awards for its transformation of the historic core, including its celebrated Riverwalk Commons, Aurora was stuck in nearly two decades of limbo over what to do with a crumbling block of mid-century buildings on Victoria Street.

With the creative plans for both Library Square and the Aurora Armoury up for consideration, I think the Town is on the brink of turning that tide and I, for one, am excited to see how it all unfolds.

The only thing standing in its way could be Council and whether the momentum that is already there will see them through to the push of the proverbial button.

Last week's Council meeting offered an exchange which held promise.

'We are proxies for residents of Aurora,' said Councillor Kim regarding the plans to renovate the Armoury. 'In situations like this you only have a short opportunity to make those decisions.'

And that is what's really at the heart of the matter.

All too often plans hit a fatal speed bump when faced with a few loud voices from within a very large whole, leading Council members to become gun-shy about making a final decision at the very last moment.

More public consultation, always welcome, is invariably prescribed to address these concerns; concerns which had already been dissected and deliberated through public consultation processes stretching back years, ultimately leading to the same result.

Sometimes it feels as though Councillors are torn between their role as representatives of the people who put them there and a perceived role as mere facilitators of public opinion.

At the end of the day, the people speak through just about every avenue available to them. They make their voices heard, and while this cacophony rarely uniformly agrees on everything, they take the time to provide their input.

But, there comes a time to act and that time, in my opinion, is now.