

Canada 150 invests in local infrastructure



By Brock Weir

Before coming to the Aurora Public Library last Tuesday with some Federal cash in hand, Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev overheard a few telling conversations.

One such conversation, she said, happened just a few days previous while out grocery shopping. She overheard Richmond Hill residents talking about the new Oak Ridges Public Library, currently under construction. Their verdict? It was a waste of taxpayers' dollars.

'Unfortunately, their perspective is it is a waste of taxpayers' dollars because we don't actually need libraries anymore because we have the internet and all this access to information digitally,' recalled Ms. Alleslev, removing her jacket to reveal a black t-shirt emblazoned with the Aurora Public Library's logo. 'That set me back on my heels for a minute, then I was speaking to some friends of mine, and maybe a close, personal relative, over the weekend [about Tuesday's presentation] and they said, 'It won't be long until we won't have libraries.'

'That got me to a point where I was able to say, we need to have a conversation about why libraries matter. Do libraries matter only because of the physical books that are in it, or are libraries more than just that?'

For her, the answer is clear and the answer is also clear for the Federal Government, who granted the Library \$97,000 for infrastructure upgrades as part of the Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Program. Earmarked for a new natural gas furnace to replace the current electric furnace system, converting the Library's lighting system to LED, and installing new security cameras, the money will not be going towards obvious changes, but changes that are nevertheless important.

'The library is not only the books that are here, it is an opportunity to be in a place where ideas are shared, where we have the opportunity to browse and see things we wouldn't otherwise see, that we don't always have the opportunity to do, only digitally, and to not only learn about where we have come from but who we are today and think about where we're going tomorrow,' said Ms. Alleslev.

'It is my privilege to be able to announce that the Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Program that marked a national commitment of \$300 million to support projects that renovate, expand and improve existing community and cultural infrastructure across Canada. This program aims to leave a lasting legacy for Canadians as part of our celebration of Canada's 150th anniversary.' For Aurora Public Library CEO Jill Foster, the skepticism about the future of public libraries has been there for decades, but it is a forecast libraries have continue to buck.

'I echo your wish that we stand up for libraries when we hear that,' said Ms. Foster. 'To tell you the truth, I have been hearing that for a long, long time, ever since the first internet came on the scene, and we're still here. We have repositioned ourselves, changed, adapted, and we're busier than ever. I don't like to hear those comments but I don't worry too much about it because libraries are very, very healthy in 2017.'

The Library isn't the only local project receiving a cash infusion through the Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Program. Although the cheque has not formally been presented, a further \$130,100 is expected to come from the Federal program to improve the Aurora Community Centre, itself a Centennial 1867-1967 project.

The grant will go towards the \$400,000 rehabilitation of the building which will include an upgrade of the ice plant, replacement chillers, and the replacement of ammonia compressors.

Six applications for the CIP 150 were submitted by staff, two of which were approved for funding by the program administrators, said Laura Sheardown, Financial Analyst for the Town of Aurora, in a report before Council this week. In an effort to make the wisest use of any grant funding received, it was ensured that all projects proposed for this funding were previously listed within our ten year capital investment plan as anticipated projects in the near term, thus allowing the Town to address some of its short term capital asset repair and replacement requirements slightly earlier than planned allowing it to achieve advantages of required capital investment subsidization as well as earlier on-going asset operation savings.