

## Church rebuild could provide opportunities for Aurora United and the Town at large: Council



(An "honour roll" of church members who served in the Second World War was salvaged from the AUC's rubble and is now on display at the Aurora Cultural Centre.)

**By Brock Weir**

The April 11 fire which decimated Aurora United Church was seen by many to be a significant blow to the entire community, but as the community looks to the future four months on, discussions should get underway to find the best opportunities ahead of a rebuild.

Aurora Council voted to lay the groundwork for such discussions last week following a motion from Councillor Evelyn Buck. In her motion, she called for the Town and church representatives to work together to "discover how the Town and Aurora United Church (AUC) might work together for the renewal of the Church and municipal functions, for the benefit of both."

Discussions, she added, are particularly timely as Council continues to consider just what to do with Library Square and the two discussions could go hand in hand.

"I think it is critical that we enter into discussions and invite the Church to enter into discussions with us and, at the very least, keep each other posted on what is happening," said Councillor Buck. "It is nothing more than opening up formal lines of communication between the Church and the Town, which I believe is essential."

After some debate over the semantics of the motion, the motion gained the unanimous support of Council.

Speaking in favour of the motion, Councillor Sandra Humfries said while there is still some work to be done from Town Hall's perspective regarding the potential of human remains left over from a cemetery which used to lie directly north of the church site under the existing parking lot, this was a good step forward.

"I believe this is a great initiative to work together and do what we need to do to help them as a municipality to give the Church any support they need," she said.

While the motion was supported by the rest of the table, there were some questions about what discussions had already taken place between the Town and Church officials in the months since the fire. Councillor Buck, for instance, said her motion would go a ways towards giving formal Council backing to the discussions Mayor Geoffrey Dawe has already had regularly with Church members, including Rod Johnson, Chair of the AUC Council.

?I do not question in any way your effort to be as much assistance to the church?as anyone in Aurora would like you to be,? said Councillor Buck to Mayor Dawe. ?I know you would have done that, and when I said you wouldn't have the authority of the Council, I want you to have that official authority to speak [on behalf of] Council.?

In response, Mayor Dawe said conversations have been ongoing to a point, but there are major issues that need to be clarified before more substantive talks can take place.

?At this point they are still very much working through how they wish to proceed,? said Mayor Dawe. ?[Discussions] are very much on the horizon. Do they rebuild the Church? Do they look at something that is more substantive in their public ministry? They are very much working through those conversations, starting with the day of the fire. That is quite an issue they have to deal with.

?We have managed to help them through with some issues and have been able to put them in touch with other people, [but] there is nothing at the formal level at this point.?

While she too supported the motion, Councillor Wendy Gaertner requested further clarification on what was meant by ?municipal functions? apart from, perhaps, a piece of parkland or a public square. From Councillor Buck's perspective, if the Church rebuilds on the site which spans from Yonge Street to Temperance Street, there is a chance what is built could have a different configuration, presenting different opportunities.

?I also think of Library Square and the decision we have to make about the buildings that are there,? she continued. ?It might be the needs of the Church congregation and the needs of the Town could meet in some way because the Church has that very important site and the Town has just a block away a very important site. Who knows what might come of it, but nothing will come of it if we don't talk to each other.?

Councillor Gaertner said she agreed.

?I believe we [also] have an interest because I believe the Town paved the Church's parking lot and the spaces are part of our downtown parking inventory.?