

Community engagement coming for next phase of Library Square

By Brock Weir

Community engagement on the future of development of Library Square could resume as early as next week following Council's approval.

Sitting at the Committee level last week, Council members gave the green light to retaining the services of The Planning Partnership in preparing a design and site plan for Library Square.

Working hand in hand with that, they also approved giving notice to the public that Council will consider allocating a portion of Aurora's Hydro Reserves to fund the further development of the larger downtown Cultural Precinct.

Both decisions are up for final ratification this week and, if they clear the final hurdle, public engagement will be among the first steps in coming up with a site plan, and the consultants are ready to hit the ground running.

If all goes according to plan, this week will include a visioning exercise, the development of design principles, and a review of options surrounding a conceptual design, before moving next week into engagement of community, stakeholders, Council and staff.

While this week's Council meeting could be a very different story, when these long-discussed plans came up for a General Committee level vote last week, it passed with barely a ripple of discussion.

The one question asked pertained to the cost of the Planning Partnership, which raised an eyebrow from Councillor Wendy Gaertner. "We have got in trouble in the past, in my opinion, accepting RFPs with the lowest bid," she said. "I do believe it is said in the report that this is the lowest bid."

While it was indeed the lowest bid, CAO Doug Nadorozny said that final bid cost only accounted for 15 per cent of their score in the final evaluation.

"The Planning Partnership has an impressive record, but I don't see that they have actually done main street downtown revitalization," concluded Councillor Gaertner. "They have certainly done a lot of work for us and they are very familiar with our Official Plan, our Promenade Plan, etc."

The Planning Partnership's bid clocked in at \$132,635, and they scored an overall 82.5 per cent on their bid. The money to fund the next steps will be taken from Council's Discretionary Reserve Fund.

"[They are] a multidisciplinary firm comprised of landscape architects, urban designers, urban planners and communication professionals," said Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, in a further report to Council last week fleshing out why The Planning Partnership made the grade.

"In the last five years, the Planning Partnership's work has been recognized with over 20 awards and citations, both from peers and professional organizations, including the Canadian Institute of Planners, the Congress for New Urbanism, the American Association of Landscape Architects, the Canadian Association of Landscape Architects, and the Ontario Association of Architects. In addition, the firm has garnered awards from numerous municipalities and government agencies."

In painting a picture of some of the planning partnership's notable achievements, Mr. Ramunno cited many redevelopment projects from the City of Toronto, including lead consulting on the development of the West Don Lands, Bellvue Square in Kensington Market, the Distillery District, and something familiar to countless Aurora commuters each day, the Front Street façade of Union Station.

"The Planning Partnership was the lead public realm designer for the redesign of Front Street in front of Union Station," said Mr. Ramunno. "The design intent was to create a grand arrival plaza for one of the country's most active multi-modal transit terminals. Working closely with the City of Toronto's urban design, transportation and technical services divisions the project established a number of innovative precedents for the City."

"They include the creation of a table top pedestrian plaza that spans across Front Street and prioritizes pedestrians over vehicles and the introduction of vehicular calming techniques including cobble paving in the street, narrowed lanes and limited curbside and drop off and pickup."

Similarly, the Planning Partnership is working with architects on landscape rehabilitation for the Distillery District.

"As a former industrial site converted to residential and commercial uses, this now tourist destination lacked pedestrian realm amenities," said Mr. Ramunno. "The design concept preserves the essential heritage values of the place while introducing elements for comfort, safety and year-round interest."

"The landscape plan was based on a simple principle of minimum intervention to preserve the heritage qualities and character of the

site, combined with maximum social benefit, creating a series of programmable public squares and laneways that are activated by adjacent uses and active programming.?