

## Cultural partners say yes to Library Square

Aurora's business community and cultural partners voiced their support of the redevelopment of Library Square at a Special Council meeting held August 25.

The meeting ultimately saw Council approve a tender of nearly \$52 million to bring the project to fruition.

Once complete, the redevelopment plan will see an expansive addition to the Church Street School, now home to the Aurora Cultural Centre and the Aurora Museum & Archives, and improvements to the Aurora Public Library, including a bridge to connect the two buildings above the public gathering space that is the centrepiece of the build.

As such, representatives from both the Cultural Centre and Aurora Public Library came into Council Chambers to voice their support of forging ahead.

"We saw the benefits of the [Library Square] concept, but we had two major concerns that would have to be resolved before we could be fully supportive; the first one was how does the new facility get designed and constructed in such a way that it can become a magnificent asset which the residents can be proud of? Secondly, how would the new facility be best managed so as to ensure its long-term success?" Eric Acker, President of the Aurora Cultural Centre, told Council

"I want to say clearly that the Board of the Aurora Cultural Centre did not consider how the project would be funded and it did not consider the timing. With respect, we see those areas as the responsibility of those of you here in this room."

In his delegation, Mr. Acker highlighted the work Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre, and her team, put in to making sure this was the path forward they felt comfortable.

"The governance structure of the new facility was of critical importance to the Centre and the Board," he continued. "At least three models were considered. Suzanne's experience and knowledge of other governance structures across Canada was very valuable in working with senior Town staff to arrive at a hybrid governance model. That model combines the experience and the expertise of the Cultural Centre staff with that of the Town. The close working relationship of the past two years gave our Board the confidence [this facility would be well managed]."

On her part, Ms. Haines reiterated the Centre's support for the Library Square project was not contingent on a funding model or timing.

"Our feedback and support comes from the benefits to the community of investing in cultural infrastructure and how that investment impacts the livability and creativity of a community, [and] growth opportunities for artistic and cultural organizations and the benefits to businesses in the downtown of having bold and effective cultural infrastructure in their midst" she said. "Not to be tone-deaf to the community conversation, timing appears to be on the forefront of people's minds given the current global situation. While I am not an expert on costing or construction, history has shown that most cultural infrastructure gets built in times of a depressed economy due to costs of specialized buildings and no other funding sources. Cultural projects also provide hope to a community by building vibrancy, livability and a community voice through future opportunities for creative expression."

Funding, however, factored into the Aurora Public Library's decision to support Library Square, with their Board voting to make a commitment of \$5.4 million for the build.

"Our Board saw a real opportunity to enhance Library Square through a more integrated, holistic relationship and through the wisdom of our Board and you all at Council, we now have this remarkable connecting bridge and corridor," said Bruce Gorman, CEO of the Aurora Public Library. "The Library is all in, we're ready to go, and now is the time for this fabulous project. It has been planned for a long time and it is time for this project to start. This will be a community destination for activities, gatherings, and

events of all kinds for generations to come.

?I have had the good fortune of working on many public infrastructure plans in my career and have experienced firsthand their transformative abilities. This is exactly the opportunity that we have with Library Square. Rarely do you get the opportunity to develop an iconic beacon to our Town where the community can come together under any and all circumstances. Rarely do you see a centre of excellence which includes a Library, Cultural Centre and Town partnership of this magnitude. In fact, we have already begun discussions of working collaboratively together to bring a more fulsome programming experience to the residents of Aurora. Rarely do you have the opportunity to significantly affect the economy of our Town with the ability to host conventions and conferences right in our downtown core.?

In voicing his support, Mr. Gorman said ?self-imposed project delays? damage projects from both a scope and quality perspective and are a ?waste of taxpayer money? from increased project costs and currency valuations.

?Please do not delay or diminish this project. Nobody wants a lesser or lower quality Library Square and no one wants one that costs more money unnecessarily. There is no doubt that the coronavirus has been devastating across this planet, but we will emerge victorious sometime. Nobody knows when, but we will. When we do, more than ever, we need a place to come together,? Mr. Gorman concluded.

?For good times and bad, this will be the place your grandchildren take their kids. Hear me when I say this is a legacy, a facility that will change Aurora forever. Now is the time. Library Square will provide remarkable benefits for future generations.?

**By Brock Weir**