

Historic collection remains on hold pending Cultural review

By Brock Weir

Aurora's 150th anniversary celebrations have focused honouring on the past, celebrating the present and looking ahead to the future, but when it comes to securing artefacts documenting the Town's journey to where it is today, Council is right back to square one.

Councillors are set to once again voice their support this week for eventually taking ownership of the Aurora Collection, tens of thousands of acquired, donated, and otherwise cared for historic artefacts, but going beyond that point to put money behind the plan has proved tricky without a long term vision of what to do with it once they have it.

Aurora Council voted earlier this year to lend its support of the municipality acquiring the collection from the Aurora Historical Society but the project, which could cost over \$200,000 per year when one factors in new curatorial staff and preservation of the artefacts, keeps stalling on the lack of vision.

Council previously voted to hold off making a final decision until the completion of a Cultural Master Plan this fall or early next winter. The plan is expected to piece together a long-term vision on maintaining Aurora's Culture, factoring in such providers as the Aurora Public Library, the Aurora Cultural Centre, and the Aurora Historical Society (AHS), and how they work together.

Waiting for this to be drafted and approved by Council, however, shouldn't hold the Town back from acquiring the artefacts and investing the money in it to ensure they are preserved adequately for future generations, argued Councillor Sandra Humfries. The Councillor, a member of the Town's Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC), asked Council earlier this month to reconsider its position on the matter, bringing it up for discussion at last Tuesday's General Committee meeting.

She said under the terms of the Town's new agreement with the Cultural Centre, the re-acquired exhibition space that will be designated for the Aurora Collection on January 1, 2014, will sit empty and languish depending on how long it takes for the Cultural Master Plan to be put in place.

Previous studies have already laid adequate groundwork for a vision, she added.

"My concern with waiting for the Cultural Master Plan is that it is a strategic vision, much like we've done for the Town for the past 25 years," she said. "I think what we have done with staff, the AHS, and the residents is we already understand what the vision is to honour heritage and culture and I think we have already built that business plan. It is laid out before us."

"As of January 1, we will have that room vacant and nothing done until the Cultural Master Plan is finalized."

While Councillors voted the previous week to give her a chance to take another kick at the can, they were ultimately unmoved from their previous position.

Councillor John Abel, Chair of HAC, said he welcomed the opportunity to take another look at this as he did not originally vote to wait until the completion of the master plan. Two steps should be examined, he added, the first being to secure the collection and then develop the guidelines at budget time. He said he believed the report as is went beyond what Council initially intended.

"When this first came forward in 2013, I was very excited," he said. "Let's bring the collection forward so they can be displayed. However, I don't want to simply stamp a lot of money for three years that has not been given proper budgetary discussion and debate that we would not normally see. This year there is no need to put any money forward."

Looking for something new "to hang his hat on" during the course of the debate to change his mind, Councillor John Gallo came up empty handed. He said he did not hear anything new in terms of a need or an urgency, particularly in funding.

"We should be going through the budget process and allocating funds accordingly," he said. "I am still of the view that we need to

incorporate that plan.?

This view was supported by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, for whom it was just good business sense.

?I certainly support the transfer of the agreement, but I can't support at this point essentially making [administering the collection] a function of the Town without looking at the long-term ramifications because we can't just do one year and decide next year what we will do with it and the year after,? he said. ?That is incredibly bad planning and I don't want to be a part of it.?

The fact there isn't yet an agreement on the final location of the museum let alone how the artefacts are going to be displayed was a reason shared too by Councillor Michael Thompson, who questioned whether the collection would just be confined to one room on the second floor of the Aurora Cultural Centre, or whether the people in Town wanted something more.

?There is no clear indication. We don't know what the future is going to be and that is part of the reason why the discussion keeps going around in circles,? he said. ?If they want a clear indication, that is not going to happen until a permanent home is determined by Council that this is where this collection will be housed, whether it is a standalone museum or a one room.?