

Hotel breaks ground with 12 month completion target



By Brock Weir

If rain is considered good luck, Aurora's incoming Microtel Inn & Suites by Wyndham will soon be a goldmine for investors and visitors alike.

Dignitaries gathered under umbrellas Monday evening to formally break ground on the new hotel site, which will be constructed at 180 Goulding Avenue just south of Leslie and Wellington.

A partnership between Wyndham and MasterBUILT hotels, principles of the project have set a 12 month target to finish the 108 unit building which will be complete with an indoor pool and waterslide, fitness centre and conference facilities.

'This is our first hotel in the Greater Toronto Area, which is particularly exciting for us,' said Eric Watson of MasterBUILT hotels at the groundbreaking. '[The GTA] is the biggest and most important hotel market in the country. If you're not in Toronto, you're not in Canada - put that in the paper!' and the Town of Aurora is still the GTA as far as we're concerned and is a great spot.'

MasterBUILT started looking at the possibility of bringing a hotel to Aurora as early as four years ago, said Mr. Watson, but back then the company encountered a stumbling block which was recently removed.

'People approached us and said, 'You need to do a hotel in Aurora,' and we took a look at it,' he recalled. 'We scour the country for opportunities to build new hotels and I took one look at the development costs and said, 'Thank you very much, we'll take a pass.' It was really through the efforts of the Town of Aurora, and ultimately through the Region with the incentives, obviously a positive shift in the marketplace as well, [and] the opportunity to purchase this land from the city which really provided the opportunity to be here today.'

Mayor Geoff Dawe, who took part in the groundbreaking along with Councillors John Abel, Harold Kim, Tom Mrakas, and Michael Thompson, was on the same page.

He praised the efforts of Town Staff in identifying what were seen as exorbitant development charges (fees that are paid by incoming developers to a municipality to account for growth) as a significant problem in attracting new hotels to York Region. Council took the ball and ran with it, bringing that message to York Region, where change ultimately came about.

'[Staff] first came to our Council in 2015 with a proposal for the Town to look at its development charges and then, as Eric mentioned, we managed to leverage that up to the region for the Region to do something with their development charges,' said Mayor Dawe. 'That kick-started a few hotel developments across the Region and I am quite pleased we were able to get that going. 'Microtel is not just the developer and operator of hotels; they are also a good community partner and I know over the last couple of years they have contributed extensively to the communities they work in and we do appreciate that. We're very much looking forward to not only having a hotel, which has been quite a while, but for the facilities you'll bring, the jobs you're going to create, and the ability for people to stay locally.'

Added Mr. Watson: 'Community is extraordinarily important to us. Hotels are a gathering place for the community. They are also a driver of economic activity and a hub. We're hoping to bring business back into Aurora with this hotel.'