

INSIDE AURORA: Do not pass Go...

By Scott Johnston

The Town of Aurora is in the midst of a giant game of Monopoly.

You remember playing that board game as a kid, don't you? Moving your piece around, purchasing and trading properties, using strategy to consolidate your holdings, and hoping for that bit of luck that you ? or someone else ? would land on a space that would bring you good fortune.

Well, that's kind of what's going on in town lately. Not literally, mind you. There are no giant Fleury Plough or cenotaph-shaped pieces being moved around by unseen hands. But a similar sort of game seems to be going on with the focus on municipal real estate these days.

Look at the decision to purchase the three properties of Hillary House, Readman House and Horton Place. There's a sense the developed Heritage Park could be amazing, but right now there's no clear goal in mind or apparently any actual urgency to move ahead.

But the town's virtual playing piece has landed on it, so it is strongly being considered. After all, as in the game, it's hard to pass up on the opportunity to purchase a matched set of properties, whether you're ready to, or not.

Potential funding for this move could come from the proceeds of Aurora Hydro, which the town sold off years ago because, apparently just like in Monopoly, no one wants to own the utilities.

The Heritage Park situation seems similar to what happened with Petch House. The town somehow needed to do something with it right away, perhaps for fear that the logs that had lasted 100 plus years might suddenly turn to dust.

The result is that we have a lot of money invested in a restored building, but one without a purpose. Truly the local version of Monopoly's unappreciated Mediterranean Avenue. At least, for now.

On the opposite side, just like in the board game, there are some properties that apparently the town does not want at all.

Curiously, this includes the Hydro Building, which has a long term tenant in the form of the Queen's York Rangers. Not only do they have a lease that will keep them there almost 15 years, but a regimental history spanning hundreds of years that suggests they're likely to be around for a while after that.

Then there are the spots on the playing board that have been under consideration for ages, such as the former Seniors' Centre and Library. The town lands on these occasionally and puts a token amount of thought into whether they will be part of Aurora's long term plan, and if so, in what form.

Then the town moves on without any firm commitment, until it chances to land on them again the next time around, and the pondering recommences.

Another spot in the Library Square area is Free Parking, but good luck landing on it. You're likely to circle the board endlessly before you find a space.

A place you're guaranteed to land on at least once a year in Aurora is Luxury Tax, which this year has gone up 3.75%.

The latest property to take centre stage on our municipal Monopoly Board is the Joint Operations Centre. Based on its increasing price tag, it's truly the town's equivalent of the most expensive site in the game; Boardwalk.

Part of the strategy for winning at Monopoly is to be organized, concentrate on certain locations, prioritize, plan, time things well, and don't try to do everything at once.

I'm not sure exactly how the town is playing the municipal version of this game, but as taxpayers, I just hope we end up on the winning side.

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