

Library looks at expansion to serve growing community

By Brock Weir

An expansion of the Aurora Public Library to meet the needs of a growing community is a possibility that has been bandied about for years ? now it is time for the Library to hear what the community wants to best serve their needs.

Over the next month or so, Aurora residents will have the opportunity to weigh in on what they want to see from a public library and how it can change to serve the needs of a growing ? and evolving ? community.

The future of the Aurora Public Library was a hot topic for Councillors and members of the Aurora Public Library Board last week, meeting separately to discuss how best to guide the way forward.

Helping to facilitate this discussion at the Council, Board, and community level is Steve Langlois of Monteith Brown Planning Consultants. It is essential to understand where the Aurora Public Library is headed as a system, including pressures being faced by the organization, to evaluate all possible outcomes, he said. Library renovations have been a growing source of concern, he noted, as has the possibility of another service point in town, but one thing that is lacking is a consistent view of what needs to be done.

?Libraries are critical destinations for community gathering, economic development, cultural expression, collaboration, and what we like to say is it is a great place to get work done, whether you are a student or adult trying to extend lifelong learning opportunities,? said Mr. Langlois.

More and more, the future will be about proper positioning of the library and in meeting the needs of changing demographics and changing tastes. While e-books are growing in popularity, their popularity in Canada is growing relatively slowly compare to the United States. Print books still hold an ?allure? with Aurora teens who recently participated in a brainstorming session with the Library, so there is a balance that needs to be struck.

?If there is justification for some other service points in the community, what could that be?? he continued. ?You could have a traditional branch, more of an express library with quick pick-up and drop off, kiosks in other community destinations, vending machines ? each one has substantial pros and cons, and quite different from what the model is at the present.?

While the current home of the Aurora Public Library ticked all the right boxes when it was constructed over a decade ago, things would be much different if construction began today. In the name of being a barrier-free facility, book stacks would be shorter, aisles would be wider, and more flexible space would be needed.

With the growth of activities in what has become Library Square, a different perspective might have been warranted over parking planning to accommodate today's traffic.

Mr. Langlois added that preliminary talks have indicated the Library has insufficient study and meeting spaces, and it might be beneficial for the Library to take over existing space in the Magna and Lebovic rooms, or potential facilities at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex.

Once development is concluded in Aurora's 2C area, growth in Town will slow, but as this community establishes itself, it is the logical location for library expansion.

?The Library is generally central to the community, but a lot of your residents are commuters and would relate more easily to the east side of Town,? said Mr. Langlois. ?If there is demand and justification for a second service location, the northeast is an area that would make sense to consider more strongly.?

Discussions continue on whether the best way forward would be a standalone facility, a small library facility built in partnership

with another facility, such as one of the existing recreation complexes, or something else entirely, and one thing the Aurora Public Library Board seemed to agree on is that whatever the result, it needs to have a strong mandate.

‘Maybe it is not an actual building, but maybe the Library itself needs to evolve to offer more outreach programs,’ said Matt Maddocks, Chair of the Library Board. ‘From this base here, we can get out into the community through other means.’

Added Board Member Charles Levine: ‘I always wonder if the Library should have an identity. Should it be known as a small business hub, among other things? It is always going to be known as a learning centre?but I wonder if it should sometimes have a theme or an identity where people come to know this is a meeting place, or a business hub or, for new Aurorans, a place to get oriented to Aurora. Creating many identities might be a way to appeal to segments that aren't using libraries.’

A ‘new library building’ has been in Aurora's capital budget for the better part five years with a \$7 million price tag to consider. From the perspective of Councillor Michael Thompson, that has caused a degree of confusion. Having that in there caused people to become too focused on the ‘bricks and mortar’ and not on the wider possibilities.

‘I am hesitant to talk about another traditional branch, but some of the things I am hearing about is something that is innovative or unique might be appealing to Council in general, but it has to be different, unique, alternative to that standalone,’ he said. ‘\$7 million doesn't build much anymore.’