

Library Square bridge gets the green light from Council



By Brock Weir

Aurora's ambitious Library Square project expanded its vision last week with the approval of an above ground bridge to link the Aurora Public Library with the new addition planned for the Church Street School.

The bridge will provide a link not only between the two buildings, but will include connections to a new entrance vestibule at the Library, and a café space.

The cost budgeted for the bridge, café, and library entrance vestibule clocks in at \$4,101,000, bringing the total budget for Library Square up to \$42,429,700.

All three components were hot button issues at the May 21 General Committee meeting.

There, Councillors John Gallo and Wendy Gaertner voiced support of the bridge link in principle, but raised significant concerns over both the café and expanding budget.

As The Auroran reported last week, both Councillors expressed misgivings about going forward with a café/concession space, in consultation with Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute, rather than going out to restaurants and other vendors to see how the space could best be a draw to bring people to Library Square.

Councillor Gallo, in particular, offered additional worries over Library Square's cost estimates, questioning how any future financial shortfalls could be covered if a Federal grant, a cornerstone of the Town's Library Square financial plan, fails to materialize.

Despite these

issues, expanding Library Square's scope passed on consent last week without a single question being raised. At the end of the meeting,

however, Councillor Gallo said he was remiss not to pull the items for future discussion so Councillors could weigh in on the matter in a recorded vote.

?I am still a little

confused with the process and I erred when you asked for [Agenda Item] S1, if anyone wanted to pull anything,? Councillor Gallo told Mayor Tom Mrakas during the New Business segment at the end of last week's Council meeting. ?I am not asking to pull it back now because I wanted to pull [the item] simply to have a vote because I am still not yet there to approve Library Square and everything that is involved in it. I don't want to go back [into the agenda] but I just wanted to make it public that I made that error and would have voted against that for now.?

The bridge link was

not the only item related to Library Square that was signed off on by Council on May 28. Council also received an updated report outlining the total approved budget sources earmarked to bring Library Square to fruition.

This report was

requested at the previous week's meeting following the concerns outlined by Councillors Gaertner and Gallo.

?Firstly, it is

important to note that the Library Square's total approved budget to date was not approved through a single decision by Council,? said Jason Gaertner, Aurora's Acting Treasurer. ?Rather, it was approved by Council in increments over the course of the past three years. Prior to Council's March 21, 2019 Library Square increment budget approvals, a total of \$2,340,100 had been previously approved to date by Council for Library Square. This budget was fully funded through draws of \$840,100 and \$1,500,000 from the Council Discretionary and the Hydro Sale Investment Reserves, respectfully. The recommended funding sources presented in both the March 21 and May 21 Library Square reports to Council related solely to the incremental funding decisions Council was making at the time.?

Of this \$42.4 million

price tag, Council and staff are hoping \$14.1 million will come from Federal grants. \$7.1 million is approved to come from the sale of municipal lands; primarily business lands in the Leslie Street corridor. Additionally, a \$2.6 million draw from the Community Benefits reserves, \$3.5 from outdoor recreation and library development charges, \$800,000 from Council's discretionary reserves, and \$7.6 million from Hydro funds are approved.

The balance, \$6.7 million,

is a tax levy funded twenty-year debenture, a one-time tax increase of one per cent spread over 2019 and 2020.

?The Hydro Sale

Investment Reserve Fund balance presently sits at \$30,991,700,? Mr. Gaertner notes. ?This balance is after all previous draws from this reserve relating to the Armoury renovation project as well as \$1.5 million in draws previously approved by Council for the Library Square project have been applied.?

Funding sources are set to be formally approved by Council this fall, he concluded.