

## Library Square's future to be revisited next week

**By Brock Weir**

Whether you're looking for a new building, clamoring for more downtown parking, or intrigued by the new idea to turn the Old Library into a Fab Lab, clarity could come next week.

Councillors could come to a decision on the square's fate as early as July 16, or delay a decision further into the fall, pending interest from the Region of York and Seneca College.

They were due to tackle recommendations to demolish the old Aurora Public Library building and seniors' centre last month in favour of either a new, multi-purpose, multi-storey building with some additional parking, or making a clean sweep of the two central buildings in favour of a large parking lot and public gathering space.

As The Auroran reported in mid-June, however, the possibility of Seneca College being interested in converting the library building into a Fab Lab, an innovation incubator, threw a wrench into the proceedings.

As the Town awaits further concrete proposals from Seneca and any other manufacturing and technology businesses interested in exploring a Fab Lab further, they voted to hold off their decision until more clarity is available on the possible college partnership.

Councillor Thompson, chair of Aurora's Economic Development Advisory Committee, asked for a delay until next week give further consideration to the Fab Lab idea.

"I am asking that this be deferred until the July meeting, at which time we can have some more discussion around the potential of there being a new use for the old Library building," he added. "I just don't think it sends the right message to pass a motion asking staff to come back with a report to demolish it when there might be a viable use for it."

Councillor Evelyn Buck, however, said she saw no reason for delay, as the Fab Lab concept was not directed by Council.

"Staff have been directed to follow a particular course and they have done that," she said. "People have shown up for a couple of meetings and have participated and the thing has been going on for about 15 years now since the New Library which isn't 'new' anymore was originally built. I don't see why anything that hasn't been directed from Council should interfere with the process."

Options offered for a possible new building during public sessions included a central youth centre, a location for the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, a satellite of Southlake Hospital, and incorporating a new location for Petch House, which was recently reconstructed behind the new Aurora Seniors' Centre on John West Way.

Partners looking at the possibility of a Fab Lab for the Old Library have identified it as an ideal location for several reasons, including access to public transit, its proximity to the Aurora Public Library and Cultural Centre enabling the idea to become "a multi-disciplinary innovation hub featuring design, culture, arts, and research", and the reinforced floors and high ceilings of the building itself.

Whether the Fab Lab ultimately comes to fruition or not, reaching out and exploring the possibility has been nothing but a positive, according to Judy Marshall, Executive Director of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. Seneca stepping up to the plate with a potential partnership sends a "positive message" to other post-secondary institutions inspiring them to take another look at investing their time and talent in Aurora.

"[A Fab Lab] would be beneficial because they are offering new products and skills that are going to be developed," she said. "It is very positive that the Town is even engaging in conversations like this and just the possibilities of something like this happening here is very, very positive and is very strategic thinking on the part of the Town."

?This will bring businesses together. If you're starting businesses, many people have the same issues or problems, so I think bringing people together under one roof would be so helpful.?

In the intervening weeks, municipal staff have continued discussions with Seneca and the Region, and trying to gain and gauge interest within the two groups, according to Anthony Ierullo of the Town of Aurora. They have also talked to a dozen businesses, he said, and they are working to zero in on their needs.

?When you're talking about a facility like this, the needs can be very diverse depending on who you are speaking to from a manufacturer's perspective and the sectors they serve,? he said, noting the recommendation from the Economic Development Committee will be to hold off a decision until the fall.

?[Then] we can come forward with a presentation [to Council] as the concept develops with both Seneca and the Region and seek the appropriate approvals to bring that forward. We're in the process of putting together a variety of documents to establish the need and the business case and parameters around operating and timelines on how the concept would emerge.?