

# New hotel hopes to break ground by April

By Brock Weir

Aurora will have a hotel once again.

MasterBUILT Hotels announced Monday their decision to build their flagship Microtel Inn & Suites by Wyndham in Aurora. Set to be their sixth location in Ontario, and the first within the GTA, the hotel will feature over 100 guest rooms and suites, a fitness centre, swimming pool and, of particular importance to the local business community, meeting room facilities.

"When we first visited Aurora over a year ago, we knew right away that the Town would be the ideal location to launch the new urban design of Microtel Inn & Suites by Wyndham in Canada," said Eric Watson, Chief Operating Officer of MasterBUILT Hotels in a statement. "Aurora is a vibrant community with a great deal of growth and opportunity and we look forward to being part of it. The Town has been very accommodating and a pleasure to work with in getting the project started and we look forward to bringing much needed accommodations to the community."

Aurora has been without a hotel since Howard Johnson's closed its doors over four years ago with the property owner having no intention of selling off or redeveloping the building.

The community's lack of hotel has been an ongoing concern for the Town's business, sport, and cultural communities since that time.

"We are extremely pleased," says Mayor Geoff Dawe. "[MasterBUILT Hotels] are very aggressive operators, so they want to be in the ground by April. We'll do whatever we can here to make that happen. They still have to come through here for site plan [approval] which is doable. I have seen some initial renderings and I think it looks pretty spiffy. That just has to go through Council. They have worked through what they need to do for the foundation permits and that kind of thing."

The new hotel will be located on Don Hillock Drive, part of the business and employment lands on the east side of Leslie Street near Highway 404. The area is home to the headquarters of York Regional Police and Bulk Barn and, on the north side of Wellington Street, by State Farm Insurance.

A hotel has been a long-identified need continually brought up by these businesses and organizations, says Mayor Dawe, as they often bring employees, franchisees and others into Aurora for multiday meetings and training courses, leaving them to find accommodations in Newmarket and Richmond Hill.

These have also been concerns long-echoed by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

"We are ecstatic and very excited at this opportunity," says Javed Khan, Chair of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. "We have been quite diligent in just keeping the conversation going and we are, collectively, very pleased."

Mr. Khan says he particularly welcomes the meeting spaces the hotel will bring to Aurora for businesses to use, not to mention the off-shoot benefits in-town accommodations will mean to local restaurants, shops, and others.

"Contrary to what some people say, it was development charges," says Mayor Dawe on the major factor that led to Monday's announcement. "We met with the Chair and the CAO (of York Region) as well as their finance staff a couple of times at the end of last year, highlighting the very basic economic shifts."

Last year, Aurora passed a resolution asking the Region to drop hefty development charges when it comes to hotels as it was identified as being a key barrier to bringing new hotels to York.

"We don't get as much in development charges this way, but the points I made on a number of occasions is I would rather make half of the development charges of a project that is built than 100 per cent on a project that isn't. It did take a while for the Region to come around, but they did finally agree to do that."

For that, Mayor Dawe says he sends his thanks to Regional Chair Wayne Emmerson.

On his part, Mr. Emmerson said the Region was "pleased" Aurora has been selected for a new Microtel, which will "not only create jobs for our residents, but it will offer visitors top notch, comfortable and friendly accommodations."

The development will be processed by Aurora's Business Concierge program, which "offers priority processing and service for qualifying non-residential development projects."