

Outdoor spaces draw questions in Library Square plan

By Brock Weir

Ice and coffee could help Library Square become a year-round attraction.

While the planned three-storey addition to the Church Street School building, the proposed 200+ seat theatre within it, and associated parking, has generated considerable Council discussions, turning the gathering space into a year-round attraction with a seasonal water and ice feature have raised their own questions.

As reported to The Auroran earlier this month, and discussed by Council last week, the centrepiece of the Library Square redevelopment is zeroing in on an attraction that would be a fountain-like water feature in the warmer weather and, come fall and winter, would pull double duty as a refrigerated skating rink.

Originally, Council approved the design without an ice rink, however, through discussions, it became evident that to activate the square year-round, aside from the attraction of special events, an ice rink was needed to draw the public to the space during the winter months, said Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services, for the Town of Aurora. This feature requires a refrigeration system, a mechanical building, and a small ice resurfacer. The ice rink would be located in the area where the summer water feature would take place. Approval of the additional ice rink would be required to proceed.

The outdoor space will serve as a place to gather to enjoy the peaceful environment or to take part in special events such as festivals, market fairs, movie nights, etc. Other features in the outdoor space include consideration for lighting, hydro, water sources, shade features, and a pathway connecting the Library and the new addition.

A type of café space the exact type of which is yet to be determined, but integrated into the build nearby is also being considered as part of the design to keep revellers refreshed, whether they're coming out of the water feature or off the ice.

The creation of the new outdoor attraction was hailed as a great addition to the land's transformation into a social area by Councillor Rachel Gilliland, who added with everything going on in the centre of Library Square patrons might want a slightly quieter place to sit and read.

We're still evaluating the function of the café, said Ms. McDougall in response. In cooperation with the Library and their food services, we don't want to be in a position where we're offering the same thing. We're trying to design it so it can be used as a refreshment space for events that spill out onto the Square. There could also be a place people could gather. We want to be careful not to compete with the Library; they have a specific intent with their food services and at least with that space it provides the flexibility to host events, pull people inside, or they can be gravitating outside and still have a place to gather, have a coffee [and] sit.

Councillors Wendy Gaertner and John Gallo also had concerns regarding the café space.

While Councillor Gaertner said the plans look fantastic, she questioned whether it was ever anticipated to have a dedicated space in Library Square for a café vendor or something similar, or a small restaurant.

I just feel this space could really use that type of venue for people to go and either eat and sit and have a coffee, she said.

Ms. McDougall replied that they want to be as cooperative a cultural partner as possible during the Library Square build process.

I am envisioning something a little

more elaborate, and perhaps even generating some income [and] if a particular vendor would see this as something attractive, there could be a revenue source, added Councillor Gallo. In the drawings, I don't see a space for any of that. Unless you're going to close that open space for a vendor to operate, it would be hard to do that after because it is just an open space [now] and how would you close that up afterward?

At the end of the day, Councillor Gaertner said the outdoor features missed the mark. A fountain, she said, was a definite want in community consultations on what residents would like to see within the square. Jets of water coming out of the ground just don't cut it.

Everybody wants a fountain, and these are jets of water, she said. We have jets of water in our Town Park for kids to play in and that is not a fountain. I'm just one person speaking on this, but I think the public will expect it. I don't mean a fountain of water standing in the middle of the square, I mean running water somehow coming out of a wall, some sort of water that doesn't squirt up from the ground.

Consultant David Leinster, a planner with the Planning Partnership, said additional fountain work could pose some challenges.

We're dealing with a Square that needs to be versatile, he said, noting he would look into adding a wall feature. I'm also concerned, for example, that you can't have standing water in a fountain any longer. If children or anybody engages with that water,

there are very strict controls now around that.?