

Stakeholders to have say in Library Square development this week

By Brock Weir

Tentative designs proposed for Library Square are set to be presented to stakeholders for their input this week.

Members of The Planning Partnership, the company tasked by Council to develop a site plan for the large swath of land currently occupied by the former homes of the Aurora Public Library and Seniors' Centre on Victoria Street, are set to present their ideas to members of the Library Board on Wednesday.

The meeting will take place between planners and board members ahead of their regularly scheduled meeting.

According to Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, the Planning Partnership will come in with "a couple of their own conceptual plans" based on information that has been collected to date from members of Council and public alike over the years, ready to receive input.

The meeting comes after Council members raised concerns last week that meetings with local stakeholders "were being conducted in haste."

"Late last week, I received an email from staff trying to coordinate meetings [between the planners and stakeholders]," said Councillor Harold Kim, a member of the Library Board. "The feedback I got from the Board is it seemed very hastily drawn up and it didn't give the Library Board sufficient time to make themselves available. Is there a reason for trying to get all these ducks in order within the next week? Is there a certain timeline they are trying to reach, or can the meetings be extended for two or three weeks so everyone has their full exposure to the Planning Partnership?"

In response, Mr. Ramunno said they are "trying to continue moving forward" and that accommodations with stakeholders such as the Library Board, as well as the Aurora Cultural Centre, had been made for October 18.

Councillor Kim, however, contended the stakeholders needed more information in terms of what kind of input the Planning Partnership was looking for.

"We don't want to blue sky and waste everyone's time," he said, asking for "specific guidelines" beforehand.

Councillor John Abel also sought more information, questioning just what information, in light of recent activities pertaining to Aurora's Cultural Precinct as a whole, were being examined by the planners.

The material provided was work related specifically to the development of Library Square, said Mr. Ramunno, along with some of the original visioning work carried out by earlier consultants. Armed with that, the consultants were "focused in on coming up with a detailed plan" for Library Square.

Further questions from Councillor Abel related to the stakeholders themselves. While it was clear the Cultural Centre and the Library were in on the meetings, he asked whether the scope for these and future consultations included business owners in the downtown core as well as the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

"Based on the direction we received at this point last year, we're really focusing on consulting with those stakeholders being the Cultural Centre, the Library Board, the Town Park Ratepayers Association and Council," said Mr. Ramunno. "I am open to Council's direction, but based on the work that has transpired to date, I think we have a pretty good handle on what we wanted to focus in on, and that was preparing a more detailed plan related to the additional community space around Library Square and coming up with an appropriate design based on all the input we have received to date around the [public plaza] concept and some of the other features we had presented to Council originally."

In the end, Councillor Abel said this was an opportunity which should be extended to a wider range of ratepayers' groups including those in the Town's Northeast Heritage District and in the Highland Gate area.

"This is a great opportunity to get public input," said Councillor Abel.