

TD Bank's upcoming closure is latest chapter in a bootlegging, gambling corner



By Brock Weir

Aurora's main crossroads will be down another bank this summer.

TD Bank, currently located on the northeast corner of Yonge and Wellington Streets, announced the closure of this branch last week, effective July 27, citing a decline in customer traffic.

Accounts will transfer to their branch on the southeast corner of Yonge Street and Dunning Avenue.

Aurora's historic downtown core was, until two short years ago, served by no less than three banks.

The CIBC shuttered its Wellington location two years ago, moving operations south on Yonge to the Aurora Shopping Centre.

Following TD's closure this summer, the Bank of Montreal will be the last one standing.

The current TD branch first opened its doors on May 1, 1973, replacing the Queen's Hotel, which stood on the site until its demolition in December 1970.

The corner first merits a mention in local lore, according to historian Jacqueline Stuart, in 1834 when the land was acquitted by Richard Machell, adding to his land holdings on the south side of Wellington, creating Machell's Corners, the name borne by what is now Aurora until the 1860s.

The first record of a building being on the land dates back to 1853 and, by 1865, it was established as the site of a hotel.

The hotel had an eventful history, housing dignitaries who gathered in Town for Edward Blake's historic 'Aurora Speech' in 1874, and later years were punctuated by busts for illegal alcohol sales, 'keeping liquor in an illegal place', the illegal sale of beer in 1934 and, one year later, seeing hotel owner John Ripley charged with running a gambling house out of the hotel.

Aurora had been a 'dry' community since 1916 and remained so until 1960.

The property was sold to the Toronto Dominion Bank in 1970.

Meanwhile, further south on Yonge Street, Canadian Tire is no longer selling its former store site on Yonge and Murray.

The space has stood largely vacant since the chain moved to Bayview and River Ridge Road two years ago, into the site vacated by Target. It had been up for sale through most of last year.

While the site itself might not be up for sale, the property owners are looking to maximise its potential future uses. It is currently zoned for a retail store selling home products, automotive, sports and leisure supplies 'general fare for Canadian Tire' but they are looking to expand potential uses to bake shops, banks, professional offices, clinics, dry cleaning stores, restaurants and a number of other options.

Council is holding off on granting a decision on their zoning amendment application.

'Canadian Tire did approach us a little while ago wanting to proceed with their zoning amendment application,' said Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning. 'They indicated the property was no longer for sale and they wanted to rezone the property for additional commercial uses and try and attract some tenants.'

Canadian Tire, he said, has asked for the staff report on their amendment application to be removed in the interests of pursuing partnerships with the neighbouring landowners.

With files from Jacqueline Stuart