

\$5 million Library Extension clears first Council hurdle



By Brock Weir

A \$5 million corridor extension to the Aurora Public Library, the latest addition to Library Square's construction plans, cleared the first hurdle last week, receiving Council's approval at the Committee level Tuesday night.

The decision, which is due to be ratified at this week's Council meeting, would serve to both connect Library Square to Yonge Street and create more space within the Aurora Public Library (APL).

The plan, which clocks in at \$5,465,300, would create that connection to Yonge Street, while providing two multipurpose rooms, a reading garden, and an elevator which would increase accessibility for both Library patrons and those looking to access the bridge that will connect the Library to the addition planned for the Church Street School.

Aurora Public Library and community programming is continuing to grow in parallel with the growth of the Town, said Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services, in her report to Council. With that growth, the recent development charge study is showing significant future growth as the Town continues to attract a diverse population.

According to Ms. McDougall, the APL has the highest circulation per capita for a population between 50,000 and 100,000 people in Ontario, while site visits and demand for meeting and study rooms within the facility are also on the rise.

The six study rooms are all full almost every operating hour, she continued. While the recent interior renovation of the Library has revitalized existing space and created new spaces for residents, the demand will continue to exceed the supply. The addition of two new meeting rooms approximately 1,500 square feet each, an outdoor garden and a board room would have a remarkable impact on the Library and their ability to better serve and meet the needs of Aurorans. It would allow the Town to build on current

programming levels and advance rich, meaningful educational and community-driven programming as we navigate alongside the community in an increasingly complex and technology-driven world. It would further allow the Town to provide more spaces for the residents to gather, meet, learn and engage as they undertake the fulfilling activities of their lives.?

Plans for the corridor extension were presented to Councillors by Roland Rom Colthoff. Making his pitch, he said that in order for patrons to get into the Library from Yonge Street, there is a staircase and a ramp leading up to the front doors which, in and of themselves, present a barrier. A corridor extension and a new elevator would remove that barrier while opening up many further opportunities, he said.

?We're proposing that we would do some additional renovations on the ground floor of the building to provide that the elevator be accessed directly from sidewalk level,? said Colthoff. ?It is a much more generous and accessible way of getting into the structure itself. You would come in off the sidewalk on Yonge Street, enter into the elevator [and] you could go up to the Library floor proper, or you could proceed up to the second floor where there's a suite of two new program rooms, the reading garden, the corridor itself, and, also in conjunction with that, a new board room or lounge space on the Yonge Street frontage of the building.?

It would, he said, be a ?beacon onto Yonge Street.?

Council was receptive to the idea last week, but had questions as to the amount of work the proposed corridor extension would involve. Councillor Rachel Gilliland questioned whether the cost to relocate existing HVAC systems had been factored into the cost. It hadn't, but that was a figure Ms. McDougall said would be on the table in time for this week's Council meeting.

Councillor Michael Thompson, on the other hand, approached the matter from an accessibility standpoint, asking how removing the ramp and replacing it with a sidewalk-level elevator would impact requirements set out under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). In response, Ms. McDougall said the existing ramp is fine, but if the ramp were built today, the existing structure would not be up to code.

?While maybe it is better [to look at this corridor extension] down the road, I come back to the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex (SARC),? said Councillor Thompson. ?We talked about putting a gymnasium into the SARC and, from my perspective, that should have been done when the SARC was built. But now we're here 10 years later and talking about doing it again. Costs escalate, it becomes more problematic.

?I was pleased to learn it is not a significant cost to add the elevator to the ground floor. I was concerned it was a million or so, but I think the overall benefits of it all ? granted, it keeps bring the [Library Square] price up and we're close to \$50 million now, I think from a

long-term perspective it is a significant investment in our downtown core and I will be supporting tonight's recommendation.?