

Aurora and Newmarket make joint bid for university campus

By Brock Weir

Aurora and Newmarket have made details of their joint courtship to York University public.

The two municipalities made their pitch to York on Thursday afternoon on why 'Aurora-Newmarket' would be the ideal place for a new satellite campus for York and Seneca College.

In a joint statement released by Aurora and Newmarket, the two described theirs as a 'unique and innovative partnership' to host a York University/Seneca College campus straddling both communities.

Aurora Council approved details related to the bid following a closed session meeting last week. Meanwhile, the joint bid has also gained the support of neighbouring King Township.

'The Aurora-Newmarket proposal features a 60-acre property at Yonge Street and St. John's Sideroad with mature forested parkland, rivers and streams, nestled in a 240-acre parcel of land slated for future development,' said the proponents in a media release. 'The site is strategically located between the robust business centres of both communities, forming the centrepiece of an educational, economic, social and cultural corridor linking both municipalities.'

The bid also has the backing of Southlake Regional Health Centre, which sees further opportunities should York University, and ultimately the Province of Ontario, accept the Aurora-Newmarket bid.

'Southlake has enjoyed long-standing and mutually beneficial partnerships with both York University and Seneca College,' said Dave Williams, CEO of Southlake Regional Health Centre, in a statement. 'We have collaborated with York on a variety of research projects and hundreds of nursing and allied health students from both schools benefit from exposure to real-world experiences at Southlake each year.'

'We are expanding on these formidable partnerships with our CreateIT Now innovation centre that will bring private-sector organizations together with academic institutions and Southlake Resources to nurture entrepreneurship in the health sector. This will enable us to find and implement innovative ideas that have the ability to transform healthcare.'

In a joint statement made by both Aurora Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen ahead of their pitch, which also included Dr. Williams and Newmarket Regional Councillor John Taylor, both heralded the opportunities they see coming from a successful bid, as well as what makes this area the unique, ideal, and logical choice for a campus.

'Aurora-Newmarket offers York University/Seneca College the opportunity to become the pre-eminent institution that shapes the educational, social and cultural fabric of both host communities,' said Mayor Dawe. 'We are shovel-ready! We have the required infrastructure that is unavailable in northern locales and are the only location accessible in 30-minutes-or-less by car, rail or bus from York University's Keele campus, Seneca College's King, Markham and Seneca@York campuses, Bradford, Innisfil, Barrie, and other neighbouring communities.'

Added Mayor Van Bynen: 'Aurora and Newmarket have a long and established history of successful ventures together and this site is unmatched in York Region for access to an advanced gridlock-free transportation network, urban amenities in a rural backdrop and proximity [to the King Campus].'

'As the only site at the heart of York Region, Aurora-Newmarket is the logical location for York University/Seneca College to attract students from all areas of York Region, Simcoe County and Durham Region.'

Ahead of this week's bid, Aurora CAO Neil Garbe said benefits of bringing a university into the area has "well-documented" benefits, that have shown a \$1.75 return to the community for every \$1 invested.

"There are also the practical benefits to our residents," he said. "As the cost of education goes up, many people would be interested in staying at home and pursuing post-secondary education, so that has a direct benefit to our residents.

"Then, the spin-off effect that that has of people coming into our community and spending money is just a huge draw. It drives economic development, drives property values, and it is just a tremendous boon for any community."

Municipalities vying for York University's attention can expect to hear the results at a meeting of York Regional Council scheduled for mid-May. Proposals will then be submitted to the Province for ultimate approval, likely by the end of September.