

## Aurora takes step forward on Library Square's future

**By Brock Weir**

Aurora has taken the next step in deciding the future fate of Library Square.

Councillors voted to look into pinning down the costs of tearing down the old homes of the Aurora Public Library and Aurora Seniors' Centre/Fire Hall on Victoria Street last week to help weigh options on what to do with the site.

Ideas have ranged from a new, modern multipurpose building which could be used for arts and culture, to simply tearing them down to alleviate parking congestion in Aurora's downtown core. For some Councillors it was a step in the right direction in seeing some action after 12 years of uncertainty but for others it was an assumption the best course of action would be to tear down the buildings.

"This came to us a long time ago," said Councillor Michael Thompson. "This thing has been studied to death. We have reports after reports. We've been talking at the 35,000 foot level forever and it just keeps bouncing back and forth for 10 years. Let's do more than anybody else has. [This] becomes a springboard for the discussion."

Although Councillor John Abel was in favour the previous week of doing something more elaborate with the site rather than just getting dollar figures of what it would cost to tear the buildings down and either build a new building or create an open space, he agreed with arguments that the two buildings were long past their sell-by date.

"There is nothing worse for mental health than a social desert," said Councillor Abel. "The Library was built in 1967, it was a significant project and it was built for books. In 1967, there were no cell phones, no internet, and it was a whole different life. It is better as a bunker. It is not made for our lifestyles and how we have evolved as a community.

"I am sorry to say that after 45 years this Library has expired for usefulness. It was meant for books. We need something meant for computers, handhelds and wireless. It would be very nice to have it bookend with our library and cultural centre. One thing we have to do is provide that heritage aspect of that district and not encroach anymore on the parking and traffic they are enduring now."

For him, any motion to stop things and look for ways to "repurpose" the library was simply a matter of delaying things. Indeed, repurposing "and even re-cladding" the old public library building was something put on the table by Councillor Chris Ballard. Moving forward with two options to demolish the building was premature, he argued.

"There are examples of other communities where older buildings are re-clad, made to look more modern, and repurposed," he said. "We're talking about potentially knocking over a multimillion dollar building that is in good condition. I have talked to many residents in this area and the number one concern, of course, is parking. That can be addressed without necessarily demolishing both of these buildings.

"Fixing it up so it meets the current needs into the next 50 years is far cheaper for Aurora taxpayers than to knock it down and build a multimillion dollar building that we don't even have a clue what it is."

A similar viewpoint was shared by Councillor John Gallo who said it would be better to establish the vision of what Council wants to do with the site and get people to come up with their vision.

"I honestly believe we are jumping that step," he said.

Whichever way Council ultimately decides to go in making that final decision for the Victoria Street site, more needs to be done to get public input, said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. Having attended one of the two public meetings held for residents to knock around ideas for the site, she said the fact they only attracted about 20 people apiece means there are others who haven't weighed in.

?20 to 30 people is not a lot of people to come out and I know some of these people were Councillors and Library staff,? she said. ?I would like to know the cost of demolition and I would like to know the cost of underground parking, but I am not very happy that all this motion is talking about is demolition.?

Others, however, were simply happy something ? anything ? to do with the site was taking a step forward.

?We can't be champions of inertia,? said Councillor Paul Pirri. ?This can be used in extremely innovative ways, it doesn't have to be sleek to be innovative. A big, clunky building has a lot of life, but I don't think having a report coming back to us outlining costs does anything more than outline the costs of what a demolition would be.?