

Aurora to dig deep on Library Square



Demolition on the former Fire Hall and Seniors' Centre on Victoria Street on Tuesday.

By Brock Weir

Library Square has been nearly 20 years in the making, but Aurora Council turned a significant page in the project's long history last week ? settling on a concept.

In a 7 ? 1 vote on Tuesday night, Council decided to approve the second of two concepts planned for a new town square, which will be built in between the Aurora Public Library and the Aurora Cultural Centre.

The concept plan will see Aurora dig deep, picking the ?lowered square? option which would place Library Square on the same level as the ground floor of the current library building.

As a consequence, however, it will require digging deep around the base of the Aurora Cultural Centre to create a flat surface.

The plan also calls for a new public building, an extension of the Aurora Cultural Centre, to be built on the site of the former Aurora Public Library Building on Victoria Street, and parking to surface the new Library Square complex to be built on the footprint of the former Aurora Seniors' Centre, also on Victoria Street.

Demolition work on both buildings is currently ongoing.

Option Two was the option preferred by both The Planning Partnership, planners retained by the plan to come up with concept designs, as well as the Aurora Cultural Centre.

The Aurora Public Library, on the other hand, preferred an Option 1 which would have raised Library Square level to the library's second floor, allowing for parking underneath the public square's platform and, importantly to them, parking closer to the library building itself.

Nevertheless, Option Two won the day, albeit with a few tweaks from the previous week.

Presented by the Planning Partnership, these modifications allowed for a 9.3 metre laneway to be constructed on the north side of the Library, allowing for a loading area, and two varieties of accessible parking much closer to the busy community space than the planned parking lot off Victoria.

?[Accessibility] is a really important criteria in all public spaces and the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) are very high and should be exceeded where possible,? said planner David Leinster, outlining the modifications to Council.

His presentation followed a delegation to Council by Tyler Barker, chair of Aurora's Accessibility Advisory Committee. Mr. Barker, who lives with cerebral palsy and requires a large motorized wheelchair to get around, questioned the ?rush? in approving a concept plan before all the concerns regarding accessibility had been fully addressed.

?Frankly, staff and the able-bodied community mean the best intentions, but they do not see it with the accessible eyes I see it, or how many people that are in my situation see things,? he said. ?It is great that Concept Two has more parking, but if [the issue] wasn't brought up on Facebook, would that have been the case? I don't think so.

?I understand everybody is trying their best here, but what's the rush? I am saying that not just for this item or item. I want Aurora to

be the standard for accessibility. Why do they always say, 'It meets the minimum [AODA] standard?' Would you like the minimum standard on your home renovations? On your car? On your health care? I don't think so. We are one of the largest minorities in the world, so use us as a resource. We have a lot to give.'

His comments were noted by Council members.

'I think the consultant has heard those comments and we have made a big improvement and hopefully we can make some more to make it just a little bit easier for everybody,' said Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

Added Councillor Tom Mrakas, speaking to Mr. Leinster, 'You've stepped up and made some alterations and revisions that have answered a lot of those concerns.'

Councillor John Abel, the lone Council member who voted against the concept (Councillor Jeff Thom as not in attendance, recovering from surgery), was not convinced.

'It would be great if the parking was where Yonge Street and everyone could get in the library very quickly and easily there, but that is not the case and that is a huge challenge,' he said, also referencing the current shortage of area parking. 'You're eliminating what has worked for years, barely, and we're just creating more to it.'