

Bidder 'disappointed' over museum process: CAM

By Brock Weir

Her company might be based in Markham, but Shelley Falconer, partner in Cultural Asset Management (CAM), considers herself a local.

The King resident has expressed disappointment in the tone of Council debate that ultimately saw CAM's winning bid to take over the curation and management of the re-established museum get thrown out last week in favour of an earlier plan simply to hire a curator to manage the Aurora Collection and carry it forward.

Watching Council's discussion of the matter at last week's meeting as well as the previous week's discussion at the Committee level, she said she was disappointed by 'inaccurate' information being discussed and not having an opportunity to respond.

One of the primary pieces of misinformation, she said, were comments by the Aurora Historical Society (AHS) and repeated at the Council table that 900 artefacts were 'missing' from CAM's inventory, only to be found when the AHS came looking for them.

AHS contracted CAM to do a complete inventory and appraisal of the thousands of items in the Aurora Collection in a project that concluded last year with the Town of Aurora acquiring the artefacts.

'Our report indicates clearly in their database they had 900 objects missing but not labelled,' she said. 'That is all we said. We didn't say there was anything missing and, in fact, we offered to go and find them for them, and because there was a timeline on our contract, they said not to worry. That was something that was taken and extrapolated into something else.'

Looking over the discussion, Ms. Falconer said she found it 'astonishing' that they would be labelled 'outsiders' considering they passed Council's qualification round last year.

'The question has to be asked: if the AHS had won, would any of this have even happened?' she asks. 'It does sound like sour grapes. They had an opportunity to not use us back in December at the pre-qualification stage.'

The relationship between the AHS from this date leading up to last week's decision was a complicated one. Although CAM was hired by the AHS to work on the Aurora Collection last year, Ms. Falconer says they offered to go in with the AHS on a joint bid for museum services, but this offer was declined.

She also added that in speaking to Councillors, the AHS stepped over a blackout period imposed on all three bidders looking for the museum contract.

'Our proposal covered every single area of museological concern from access to care for the collection,' she said. 'Our report noted there are serious infestation issues with the collection; there are serious storage issues. There are a lot of conservation issues and that is part of the professional skillset that we outlined in the proposal that we would address that the historical society doesn't have, which is one of the reasons they hired us in the first place.'

Being online curators as well, they would be able to focus on 'community' access to the collection.

'It is nice to have these collections, but if no one can see it because it is owned by the taxpayers, then you have a problem.'

Another key factor was cost. According to information released by the Town, CAM proposed a five-year contract of \$556,500, while the AHS clocked in at \$1,248,250. Much of this price difference, Ms. Falconer speculates, can be attributed to their proposal to supply many museum materials, including displays, at cost, something she says they are in a unique position to do.

At the end of the day, however, it was being labelled as an outsider which Ms. Falconer says most irked her.

?I think anyone with a small business in and around Aurora should feel upset by this. I have been living in the community for years,? she said. ?My daughter went to school here; I go there every day to shop and work out. I am just really offended that I am called third party and an outsider.

?I find it shocking that Aurora is a growing community with new people coming in all the time. What message are they sending? Is it because I haven't been here for 20 years? Is that the problem? I have been here for about seven years now and I find that very insulting.?