

BROCK'S BANTER: Breakneck Speed

By Brock Weir

Perhaps I am not the best judge of time.

Last month, I was away in upstate New York for a few days of holidays. It was a brief respite I was so looking forward to as it was expected to be a chance for a reunion with very good friends who I have known for well over 20 years.

It was exactly what was promised.

Time seems to move differently when you're with friends, particularly those friends from whom you are separated by geography and have very few chances to catch up. Sometimes months and years, or even a decade go by, but the weird phenomenon is once you are actually in the same place it is like no time at all had passed.

You fall into your normal rhythms and seem to be able to pick up conversations almost right from where you left off.

To pick just one example, one friend and I sat down in the hotel for a quick talk around midnight on a Saturday and then, what felt like 15 minutes later, I checked my watch and it was actually close to 4.30 a.m.

Sure, some refreshment might have been involved, but the dials on the clock seemed like a simple impossibility. Yet, it wasn't.

Somewhere along the line we got wrapped up in that oft-mentioned wrinkle in time and it just underscored to me that time moves in a singular way in situations like these.

Now that the quiet season of the summer is ebbing to a close, and the machinery that is Aurora gears up aiming towards top speed, I am reminded once again that, in some quarters, time moves differently in this Town as well.

I am not implying that we're living in a quiet community. Sure, some might see Aurora as a so-called 'bedroom community' but we're far from a sleeper.

Unique to Aurora, time is very much in the eye of the beholder.

I touched upon this very issue in this very space, in fact almost exactly two years ago this week.

At the time, I was lamenting a Council discussion on pushing forward with a concrete vision for Aurora's Cultural Precinct, including the beleaguered concept of Library Square.

It was a time when the incumbent Council was just at the closing end of having a bloom of youth.

Nearly a year had passed since they were elected and sworn in, and several more months had passed since Chris Ballard was vaulted out of his Council seat to become this community's representative in Queen's Park, but not much had changed in the content of the talks.

'So, I momentarily cringed when Councillor John Abel suggested last week that moving ahead with hiring a consultant to flesh out this vision was 'rushing,' I wrote in September 2015, following another lengthy jaw session on the Cultural Precinct.

The concept of 'rushing' the job was floated in the previous term by Ballard and, as anyone who has driven through Aurora's downtown core can attest, nothing has been done.

Since then, there has been one significant stride forward - a firm decision by Council to finally demolish the two buildings, a vote reaffirmed this past spring.

That decision also brought out refrains of a 'rush' job as suitable locations elsewhere around Town for the various community groups currently using the old library were yet to be found, but the demo decision mercifully chugged through.

'There might be light at the end of the tunnel,' I wrote in the same column.

Two years later, what was once a pinprick of a beam is now ballooning to the size of a ballpoint pen tip; at this point, I'll take whatever I can get.

But we're not all that far along.

Near the end of last week, I was dismayed to once again see the 'rush' word when it comes to Library Square. I rolled my eyes at first but that soon gave way to bemusement.

The Aurora Public Library moved into its present location in 2001.

The ball for a new facility began to roll several years previous to that year's construction and opening.

The former home of the Aurora Public Library, therefore, has been surplus to requirements for nearly 17 years or, to put it into perspective, three mayors ago - including a good chunk of the term of Aurora's longest-serving mayor thus far.

When I say surplus, I mean surplus to its use as a Library.

Yes, other user groups have called it home but a conscious decision was made by successive Councils not to maintain the building to the standards it ought to have done and now it is past the point of no return unless Council lavishes millions of dollars on its

complete refurbishment.

Since 2001, the building and the adjacent former seniors' centre have been subject to countless public information sessions. The public, in turn, has done more than pull its weight in that regard, turning out each time to make very interesting, innovative and practical suggestions on what Aurora can ultimately do with the site.

Debates have been had, concepts have been drawn up, thrown out and the process cycles once more.

Seventeen years, innumerable public meetings and, by my count, over 40 reasonable suggestions on what can be done with the site have been offered.

It cannot be reasonably said that any of this has been rushed. Indeed, wars have been fought, won, and lost in a shorter period of time.

It is incumbent on this Council to make a firm decision on a concept, at the very least by the end of this term.

This Council is reaching that critical point where all too often elected members get gun shy about making the important decisions that matter to this community because an election is coming up. Whether or not it is because members are concerned about being re-elected or not is beside the point. The timing nevertheless provides an opportunity to trot out the hoary argument that it is too close to an election and this Council should not 'saddle' the incoming Council with carrying out their direction on such an important matter.

But, the fact remains, somebody has to do it and if it is not this Council then a newly sworn-in cast of characters, perhaps with a few new faces sitting around the table, will begin the process all over again, throwing the 'rush' word around willy-nilly and leaving it to the eleventh hour in the fall of 2021 to begin fretting about giving homework to their successors.

It is incumbent on this Council to give the next something to work with.

As I wrote last year, two years ago, and perhaps even three or four years ago, the public has been consulted, the public has taken time out of their busy schedules to weigh in and so far their suggestions have gone nowhere.

If you keep going back to the well, eventually it is going to dry out and there too the next cycle will begin: a lack of public engagement.