

BROCK'S BANTER: Central Perks

By Brock Weir

What's that old saying about the other man's grass always being greener?

Movies have been made on the subject, Petula Clark sung about it, throwing in the additional perspective that the sun shines brighter on the other side (does it?), and people throw it out left and right when trying to justify something questionable that has come into ? or gone out of ? their lives.

I wonder how many residents of Aurora were evaluating the truth in that hoary old chestnut last week when the Town of Newmarket announced its purchase of 11.6 acres of land at the corner of Mulock and Yonge to create what they envision to be a ?central park? just north of Aurora.

The Town to the north of us describes the chunk of land in question as ?iconic? and, despite the word ?iconic? being used with alarming frequency these days to describe people, places and things that don't come anywhere close to actually being iconic, this property actually is.

The graceful white mansion has stood on the site for well over a century and has been used as a landmark for generations and generations of people who have called this area home. For certain generations, it was an epicentre of society, serving as home to Sir William Mulock, this area's MP for many years, who served as Postmaster General, and being one of the few people of his generation to actually become a centenarian, lived long enough to be described as the ?grand old man? of Canadian politics.

His is a legacy that endures, with his living memory recently making the transition into history with the death of his granddaughter Kathleen, through the street which bears his name, a local high school which also proudly bears the name of Sir William Mulock and, here in Aurora, can be seen every November 11 when local residents gather at the Cenotaph, a monument in large part spearheaded, and ultimately dedicated by Mulock himself.

The purchase of the 11.6 acres of farmland will set the people of Newmarket back \$24 million, which will be financed through debt financing. In last week's announcement, the Town of Newmarket broke it down further, stating that it would ultimately cost a one-time \$50 increase in household taxes, or \$10 per year phased in over five.

The development of the property, they added, will be financed through growth with grant funding from the provincial and federal governments.

?This is a very significant day in the history of Newmarket,? said Regional Councillor John Taylor, Deputy Mayor of Newmarket, in a statement. ?The vision includes land to accommodate walking trails and a one kilometre skating trail throughout the site that could be programmed with lights, fire pits and market vendors, plus an outdoor skating rink. We look forward to further engagement with the public on the vision of Newmarket's new gathering place.?

The purchase was, of course, music to the ears of Mulock's heirs who have ultimately unloaded the property.

?Mulock Farms has been a very special place to our family for six generations and it will forever remain close to our hearts,? said Jenifer, Lindsay and William Mulock. ?Moving forward, it is our hope that the public, and particularly the residents of Newmarket, receive as much happiness and enjoyment from this property as we have.?

Added Debbie Mulock Barbour: ?Each generation of the Mulock family has taken great pride to maintain this beautiful and historical home and property as it is today. Every day is a gift and I have been so very privileged to have received so many gifts at Mulock Farms. Thank you to Sir William Mulock and the many people that worked so hard to keep us there for nearly 140 years. Enjoy, respect and protect our meeting place and home as a tribute to Sir William Mulock. May its beauty and love that comes from that beauty last forever.?

As someone with a not-so-casual interest in history, I read the news when it arrived in my inbox with some instant excitement. Having grown up in Newmarket less than 500 metres away from this house, I've always been interested in peeking inside for a look ? an interest that was heightened when I learned the Mulock Farmhouse was the starting point for the Prince of Wales' (later Edward VIII and, later still, Duke of Windsor) famous fox hunt through Newmarket, Aurora and King.

This excitement was tempered with the thought, ?Jeez. Newmarket is always trying to one-up us.?

Newmarket's announcement came little over a week after Aurora finally, after nearly 20 years, made a decision on what Library Square will largely look like with the approval of a new extension to the Church Street School joined to the historic landmark by an atrium which will connect the two to Library Square.

It was a long gestating decision, but it finally arrived, albeit without any sense of unanimity, and stakeholders and nearby residents were largely excited about all the possibilities it might bring.

And then, along comes Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen:

‘With unanimous support of Council, the vision is to secure this large, rare, natural property now, to become our Central Park, to service existing and future residents,’ he said in a statement. ‘As intensification takes place over the next two decades on the Yonge Street corridor, this oasis ‘connected by trails and transit’ will serve as a community meeting place for the people of Newmarket.’ Ultimately, with the exception of trails and environmental heritage, this is exactly what is hoped to be achieved at Library Square but the unanimous drive to get things done quickly in Newmarket is something to be envied.

But spare a moment for some groups in Aurora who have clamoured for similar initiatives here at home.

An effort to combine Hillary House, Aurora's only National Historic Site, with the two heritage building immediately to its south, including Horton Place at the corner of Irwin Avenue, into a heritage park, financed with the money in Aurora's Hydro Reserves, fizzled at the table amid dissention. Some around the table saw it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a park that would endure for generations, while others tut-tut-tutted the idea of a ‘Heritage Disneyland.’

And then there's the residents of Highland Gate who, before a deal was ultimately reached between the Town, ratepayers and developers, pushed the Town to buy the land ‘albeit an offer Mayor Dawe says came to the town with a price tag over \$90 million’ to create a ‘central park’ complete with many of the outdoor amenities suggested for Mullock Farm.

Aurora has Library Square coming, along with a revitalized Armoury to house a campus of Niagara College's Canadian Food and Wine Institute so we shouldn't feel too bad, but imagine the perks Aurora might have with a splash of unanimity.