

BROCK'S BANTER: Hoping for the Best

By Brock Weir

The votes have been cast, the ink has dried on the signatures of Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and Town Clerk John Leach, giving last week's decision a certain ? and required ? degree of officialdom, and in just under a year's time, the doors to the Aurora Family Leisure Complex will usher in a new era for the well-used building.

Up until now, it has been a

well-used building. Its use, however, didn't necessarily translate into love. Over the decades since it first opened its doors, the Aurora Family Leisure Complex has been criticised from everything as minute from outdated mod-cons to its avant-garde floorplan.

But all that should be a thing of the past. At least, that is what the project proponents hope.

Now, with contracts awarded, the building will be radically overhauled to bring in, among other things, a new gym space, a significantly modernized and newly built fitness centre, new walking track and, in amongst the frills, a dedicated youth space with an associated climbing wall for the young and daring, smack in the middle of the newly created lobby space.

This youth space is the kernel of the whole operation. It was, after all, the 13-year-old demand for a dedicated youth centre that spurred this project along. What was once floated last year as a new addition to the Complex, fully dedicated to young Aurorans, has since evolved into a near-complete overhaul of the building.

As the hackneyed phrase goes, ?it is what it is.? More than ample column inches have been dedicated to the ongoing saga of the centre, outlining the arguments both for and against (and continue to do so this week). Those who were strong in their convictions remain so today.

More recently, the users who will be displaced by the renovations for the next year, have become more vocal in their opposition to what has transpired, resenting not only what they believe to have been inadequate consultation on what they wanted to see in their facility, but also resentment in having to traipse across town to the Stronach Aurora Recreation Centre (SARC), or further afield for all the amenities they once enjoyed all under one roof.

Nevertheless, all the arguments from multiple parties, the toing and froing which is such a hallmark of municipal governments, did nothing to change what appeared several months ago to have been a foregone conclusion.

There might be a few sighs of relief from its proponents, sighs of dismay intermingled with more than a few grunts from others, but now the deed is done and it is time (to borrow a phrase from Councillor Wendy Gaertner) to let the ?noble experiment? begin.

The Councillor made this in reference to Council's decision last year to reverse some of the failed traffic calming measures in downtown Aurora's northeast quadrant and I think it's an apt phrase to use as I'm not quite convinced we won't be revisiting what transpires at the AFLC in the not-too-distant future.

Personally, I have never been shy of expressing my own doubts about the feasibility of this project. The need for a dedicated youth centre in this town has been apparent long before I moved to Aurora in 2004. At that point, my 18th birthday was just slightly in my rear view mirror and to put myself back in those shoes, I simply can't see my friends or I buying into the idea or seeing it as a destination, as presented.

It is hard to counter the arguments put forward by Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, throughout this process, and strongly argued at last week's Council meeting by Councillor Paul Pirri, that opening up the program space in the new facility to all user groups is the fiscally responsible way forward. Of course, it is best to have all of these spaces bringing in revenue when not in use by their intended targets ? while the kids are at school ? but let's call a spade a spade and stick with the official name of ?Community Space for Youth.?

If I was still in this demographic, my idea of a youth centre would be a drop in space (ideally standalone, but not necessarily), staffed by my peers (suitably trained, of course), that was easy to get to, a place where I could hang out, listen to music, share ideas, learn something new, provide mentorship to others, or drop in over my school's lunch break to shoot a few hoops?and not have to worry about whether my plans would be thwarted by some of our more venerable citizens in the middle of a heated game of pickleball.

Recently, speaking in support of the project, Mayor Dawe said during a lunch at the Seniors' Centre they were ?really looking forward to the changes of the complex.? It's great that one demographic is satisfied with the ?youth centre?, but let's hope the youth cotton to this vision as well.

It's a vision that is a step up, said Councillor John Abel, on youth centres he had seen in other communities that were dedicated

?inclusive? spaces and yet simply a ?TV and a bit of music? crammed into a relatively small room.

?To get in there, you had to walk past teenagers and young people with tattoos and skateboards, and dyed hair,? he said. ?If I had my children, I wouldn't figure that would be too inclusive.?

One hopes Aurora parents won't find skateboards too objectionable when they have to pass through a newly-built skate park to access the finished product.