

?Christmas Market? could be sneak peek of Library Square?s future: Councillor

By Brock Weir

If you have a hard time visualizing all the possibilities that could come to downtown Aurora once the redevelopment of Library Square gets underway, you could get an early flavour as soon as November ? if one Councillor gets his way.

This week, Councillor Tom Mrakas will make a pitch to Council which could set the wheels in motion for an outdoor Christmas market at Library Square, the large swath of land on Victoria Street currently occupied by the old homes of the Aurora Public Library and Seniors' Centre.

While these buildings are set for demolition within the coming months, their presence needn't get in the way of a proper yuletide party, says Councillor Mrakas, but showcase a path for the future.

?This is something I have been looking at and contemplating for a while,? says the Councillor, who has a motion up for Council's consideration this week calling on staff to come back with a report on options and costs to make an outdoor Christmas market a reality. ?I do visit Toronto's Distillery District during Christmas time and I thought it would be something that would work well and would be something the whole Town could enjoy.

?It is a time of year when everyone is in that joyful family-type spirit and atmosphere and they like getting together with other people. I think that by doing this, especially in the Downtown Core, it allows everyone from all parts of Aurora to come into the downtown core, mix, mingle and have a good time.?

Council reaffirmed its decision to demolish the two buildings earlier this year and went forward this month with retaining the services of The Planning Partnership, a firm active in the redevelopment of Toronto's Distillery District, to come up with a site plan and vision for the area.

Consultations with stakeholders and members of the public alike by The Planning Partnership are ongoing and while timelines are not yet clear on when the buildings themselves will meet the wrecking ball, that particular step should not get in the way of a Christmas market, says Councillor Mrakas.

Of course, something like this needs to get off the ground well in advance of the final Christmas rush and, to that end, he envisions an event that would align well with November's Santa Under the Stars Parade.

A new Christmas market combined with that popular Yonge Street tradition would create an after-parade destination where revellers can enjoy shopping, arts and crafts, hot chocolate, and maybe even an opportunity to skate.

?This will help with an economic development perspective,? says Councillor Mrakas. ?It lends itself well for tourism possibilities. Many people go to the Toronto Christmas Market, but it is overcrowded and they actually charge people to go in. If you establish an Aurora Christmas Market and get it to a point where it is well-known and well-run, I think a lot of people, especially in the Northern Six (York Region municipalities), and possibly Markham and Vaughan, might make the decision to come to Aurora instead of Toronto's Christmas Market.

?I think if we establish it and it is well-run, I think there are some very good opportunities. It will be one of those instances where it will help bring in certain businesses. Maybe they will see how great our Town is and they will decide to set up shop. It is a great way to showcase what Library Square will be, especially in this first year as we work through the process of redevelopment. I think this gives everyone, for that evening, a look into the future, what it could be, and what it will be.?