

Church Street School set for \$9m expansion as part of Library Square



By Brock Weir

The historic Church Street School, home to the Aurora Cultural Centre and the Aurora Museum and Archives is set for a multi-million dollar expansion after Council reaffirmed its vision for Library Square last week.

On Tuesday, Council voted 7 ? 2 to go ahead on a revised concept design for Library Square, along with a further \$977,000 to begin detailed design work on Library Square itself but also an expansion to the 22 Church Street landmark.

This design work for the addition, which is estimated by the Planning Partnership to clock in at \$9,477,500, will include further public consultation on how the addition will be used by the community as well as the amenities it should include.

The road to get to Tuesday's decision was fraught, however, with some Councillors objecting to the \$977,000 commitment coming directly to Council rather than to a General Committee meeting first, which would have afforded a further opportunity or public input.

?This has been a long time coming but, just because of that we shouldn't be rushing any part of the process,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner who, along with Councillor John Abel, voted against the plan ? albeit for different reasons. ?With respect to the design of Library Square and related Church Street School expansion, we don't even know what we want to put into that expanded building. We don't know if we're going to allow any community use space, or what the Library's part of it is going to be in this because it is going to be 12,000 square feet [but] the Library might have ideas on how they want to use this space.

?I am actually alarmed and can't possibly vote for this. I want the best for the Cultural Centre, but I want the best for the community and possibly the Library. I just can't believe that we would go ahead with a design. We haven't discussed at this table exactly what we would like to see in this building.?

Councillor Abel, who continues to advocate for a different vision and configuration for the Library Square site, reiterated his objections and echoed the concerns that the use for an expansion of the Church Street School was still up in the air.

?There is no real outline on exactly what that facility is going to be,? he said. ?In my opinion, we should have a study or a feasibility study on exactly what the community centre would be and why it should be located at the Cultural Centre. We have known for almost 20 years what programs we want, but what would the facility look like? Would it have the museum? Performing arts? Would it have visual media screens like you see in other civic centres? I think we're short-changing ourselves in not exploring something along those lines.?

For the majority of Council, on the other hand, the public has been speaking out for nearly 20 years on how such a building could be put to good use and voted down a motion to hold off on making a final decision for another couple of weeks, stating it is time to keep the momentum going.

It was also argued that moving ahead on design work for Library Square as whole rather than doing it piecemeal over time would save money in the long run on purchasing, construction and consulting costs.

?I don't want to see a perpetual construction site longer than it should be. I do understand people want to pause and reflect and plan and cross all the Ts and make sure all the residents contribute and everyone's ideas are put forward,? said Councillor Harold Kim. ?If we know we have a lot of time, chances are our minds are going to take a long time. We need to keep this momentum going and as

this momentum continues more ideas will come.?

Added Councillor Tom Mrakas: ?I think it is fiscally responsible of us to do it at the same time and it is the best cost benefit to do it all at once. We know we want extra community space and the way I read this is if we approve this we're saying we want that 12,000 square foot, two floor structure and that is what they are going to be designing with an atrium attaching it to the Church Street School, not necessarily the programming.?

From Councillor Sandra Humfryes' perspective, Council opted for the right process.

?We have already been over this so many times,? she stated, taking aim at the motion to delay this pending further public input. ?The concept is just being a little more refined tonight. Any time we stall, I think it will go right back to what has happened over the last 12 or 14 years in this area. We have got to this point, the concept is incredible, exciting, and I am looking forward to seeing it through. We're not saying one new thing at all. We have talked about this for years and years and years and we're talking about public consultation again? We did that. We sat in this room and people are saying the same thing over and over and over again. To me, it is a waste of everyone's time. It is an open area that is going to be the heart of our Town and I am really excited about it.?

Added Mayor Dawe: ?I am in favour of moving forward. I think we have to look at the long range. We have to look at what we're trying to create here.?

The design phase of this project, according to CAO Doug Nadorozny, will include a broader consultation with the community on various uses that can be accommodated with ?multiple partners? at the table, including stakeholders like the Aurora Cultural Centre, the Aurora Museum & Archives and the Aurora Public Library.

Discussions, he added, could include the consideration of transferring some of the uses currently in the Church Street School proper into the new facility.