

## Council changes stance on heritage park

**By Brock Weir**

Promoters of Hillary-McIntyre Park, a \$10 million heritage park proposal bringing together three properties on Yonge Street, got a boost at Council this week as Councillors reversed their decision on the plan.

Councillors were set to reject a bid to spend up to \$25,000 for a feasibility study, an all-important next step before further work can begin, but following a delegation from project supporter Kathy Van Nosterand and other people with an interest in bringing people into Aurora's downtown they changed their mind -- voting 5-4 in favour of the study.

If it comes to fruition, Hillary-McIntyre Park will bring together Hillary House near Yonge and Aurora Heights Drive, Horton Place, the yellow-hued historic home at the corner of Yonge and Irwin Avenue, and Readman House, the two-storey Edwardian house sandwiched between the two, into a four acre heritage park.

Councillors received a further pitch from Bill Albino, a key driver behind the group, which includes local heritage advocates, to go ahead with exploring the feasibility of the plan at the previous week's General Committee meeting. At the time, Council took a step back from it after initially expressing their enthusiasm earlier this year.

A feasibility study of this nature would cover the appraisals of the three properties in question, fundraising opportunities, partnerships within the community and elsewhere, and governance, as well as a committee to steer the review, according to Jim Kyle, Special Projects Manager for the Town of Aurora.

"Before we could do a full business plan on a vision? I felt it would be better to really look at what needs to be the starting point of this project," Mr. Kyle told Councillors last week.

The business aspect, however, is what gave many Councillors second thoughts.

"I am of the opinion that the Town shouldn't pay for it and we shouldn't be saddled with it," said Councillor John Abel, an early and enthusiastic supporter of the project. "Whatever comes forward in maintaining it should be sustainable. [A feasibility study] is going to cost us \$25,000 and I think in the end I am going to be in the exact same position.

"It's a terrific idea. I just don't think it works in this place exactly as it has been given to us."

Councillor Michael Thompson said the idea was "a great one" but his support was conditional on it not requiring any Town money to make it happen. In his view, something like this "a project which would ultimately bring the three properties together and turned over to the Town as a municipal services corporation" could end up requiring a contribution from the Town in the millions. Indeed, of the estimated \$10 million to make it a reality, the vast majority of the money was suggested by the H-M committee to come from Aurora's Hydro Reserves.

"The struggle I have now is that a feasibility study [won't] change my mind," said Councillor Thompson. "If I vote in favour of that \$25,000, I may be wasting taxpayers' money. If Council votes for going forward with a feasibility study, I think it has got to be seen in conjunction with what is happening in Town. It has to be seen in conjunction?with our future infrastructure needs [and] strategic plan."

Mr. Albino and his committee found support in Mayor Geoffrey Dawe. Council put out the call for the public to come up with ideas on what to do with the \$33 million in the Hydro Reserves, collected from the sale of Aurora Hydro to the Province of Ontario "and this group did exactly that, he said.

"I think we do need to do a feasibility study," he said. "We need to make an informed decision of whether or not this is a project we

should go on with. I do think it should be done in conjunction with the Cultural Master Plan. We have been remiss in the past from looking at it from a global viewpoint? I very much believe this fits with the Town's strategic plan.? For the majority, this was not enough.

?If that feasibility study equals the municipality spending millions of dollars, am I comfortable with that? I don't even know that until I see a plan in front of me,? said Councillor John Gallo.

?I think because of the project and the dynamics behind what the group has put together and the amount of work they have put together and the fact that I just don't see this happening unless we get behind it, I am going to be supporting this in the hopes of getting a better picture so we can get things rolling and make something happen on that property.?