

Deal to buy old Aurora Armoury to close this month



By Brock Weir

After nearly 140 years as property of the Crown, the old Aurora Armoury will soon become property of the Town of Aurora.

A bylaw to purchase the historic building at the northeast corner of Town Park for \$515,000 was approved in a 7 ? 2 vote at Council last week.

For those in favour of the purchase, it was both time to secure an important part of Aurora's heritage as well as ?complete? Town Park for future generations.

?This is a significant part of Aurora's history,? said Councillor John Abel. ?It belongs to us [and] it is our job, in my mind, to acquire it and bring it back to something that we can all use in the community. It is a great facility to put into our Town Park. I would hate to be on the receiving end of residents [if they hear] we turned it down. I do not want any part of that. It is going to be a great asset to our Town.?

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe was also vocal in his support for the deal, noting it will complement what Aurora's Town Park has to offer.

?I believe it is an essential part of the Town to finish its Town Park,? he said. ?It is a piece that has been out there for a number of years. I think there are all sorts of things we can use that for. It just makes sense to go ahead with it, and it is something that will actually bring value to our taxpayers.?

When the deal goes through, Aurora will acquire the building from the Federal Department of Public Works and Government Services for \$514,800. A further \$120,000 will also be required to fix up and maintain the building, according to reports from municipal staff, although the building itself is sound.

The buy will be funded by Aurora's Cash-in-Lieu of Parkland Reserve account, which currently stands at approximately \$13 million, according to Town Treasurer Dan Elliott.

Voting against the acquisition were Councillors Evelyn Buck and John Gallo.

The building was handed over to the Crown in Queen Victoria's name for the purposes of military training, she argued. Now that the Queen's York Rangers regiment has found a new home in the former Aurora Hydro building, since redubbed the Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe Armoury, the Government should give the land back to the Town.

?The property should come back to the Town at no cost whatsoever,? she said. ?They took it without paying for it, they have had it

for 140 years, and I don't think we should pay for it at all.?

Further to this, she said with bylaws zoning this land for industrial uses, there would be limited appeal from potential buyers if the Town did not take its opportunity to buy the building before it went on the open market.

?I cannot support expending Town money on this matter,? she concluded, noting concerns over ongoing operation costs of the building. ?There could be no other reason for [the Federal Government's] decision to get rid of it and if they can't afford it, I don't see how we can.?

Although Councillor Abel said he was in favour of ?exploring? the possibility of purchasing the property down the road, he said he objected to the ?speed? of the deal.

?We don't have a business study for it, we don't have a return on investment for it, we don't know what we're going to do with it,? he said. ?While I can sympathise it is a heritage building and we want it in the possession of the Town, the speed in which we are doing this I do not have a lot of comfort.

?The concept of spending tax dollars on properties with no identified purpose is on a trajectory that is unsustainable and we have to start thinking differently in municipalities in the way we are spending tax dollars.?

Town Staff, on the other hand, rejected the idea they were doing things in haste, stating that this is a limited opportunity and they have to follow the timelines of the Federal government.

?The timing is not our own,? said Aurora CAO Neil Garbe. ?The timing is dictated by Public Works and Government Canada in their disposal of surplus.?