

Downtown building purchased as part of Library Square plan

Aurora's vision for Library Square has expanded northward.

The Town has acquired the commercial building on the southeast corner of Yonge and Mosley Street as part of an overall vision for Library Square within the Town's historic Downtown Core.

Mayor Tom Mrakas announced the purchase on Friday.

The property, which is currently occupied by restaurants, professional services and other tenants have been purchased by the Town for \$7.5 million, excluding taxes.

The intention of the purchase, says Mayor Mrakas, is "not to hold onto the property" but "make sure it gets redeveloped maintaining the character and the historic value of the area" and that it is redeveloped in a way that dovetails with Library Square.

The money to purchase the properties has come from the sale of other lands and from municipal reserves, excluding Aurora's Hydro Funds, he noted.

The Town's acquisition has been considered as part of the overall vision for the Library Square redevelopment since the last term of Council.

A conditional sale was reached in June of 2019 but the deal was closed this week, says Mayor Mrakas.

"We have always looked at this as a complimentary piece to the overall location," he said. "Obviously, the area would eventually, over time, be redeveloped and part of that strategic goal is to ensure that it does get redeveloped in a way that complements the redevelopment of Library Square as a total project."

This redevelopment vision, he says, includes multi-use mixed residential on the upper floors and commercial components, such as cafes and restaurants complete with Library Square-facing patios, on the ground floors.

"We would also look at alleviating some of the parking issues," he adds, referring to concerns raised by nearby residents about the lack of parking in Aurora's Downtown Core, spaces which are already challenged by regular patrons of the Aurora Public Library and Aurora Cultural Centre, and parking by GO commuters. "We always believed there was enough parking in the surrounding area, but we always want to increase that parking. This is something that is going to allow us to work with a partner who comes in, or turn the property owner and sell it, but they come in and develop it under our terms, which would have to meet certain requirements, providing a certain amount of parking, making sure it maintains a height restriction and utilizes the fact we would like to see housing in there with commercial.

"The idea of purchasing the property is all about making sure it gets redeveloped, maintaining the character and historic value of the area, the look and feel, and making sure it gets redeveloped in a way that complements the actual Square and what the actual overall vision is.

"Without us moving in this direction, we wouldn't have that control over the site and someone can come in "as we have seen with many other applications" and pretty much do what they like. We felt the best way to go about making sure that our overall vision is maintained and it will actually come to fruition is if we purchased this property and then either partner with the development community or sell it to them with an understanding that these are the requirements to redevelop it."

There are no plans to evict current tenants, he adds.

Voting against this matter outside of Closed Session, however, was Councillor John Gallo, and he tells The Auroran he remains firm in his opposition to the purchase.

?I voted against it [coming out of the meeting] and some information has come out, obviously, like the purchase and the amount, but I am going to be asking that the full report from the Closed Session be released because I think the public should be aware of the details around that purchase,? says Councillor Gallo. ?Not unlike the [Rainbow Crosswalk], it might be a good idea, but the timing sucks.

?It's not the right time to be doing this kind of thing.?

By Brock Weir