

Form follows function in Petch House debate

By Brock Weir

Wide-ranging suggestions put forward as to what to do with Aurora's historic Petch House are set to get a few price tags.

Councillors voted to get a full cost breakdown of various options presented for the future of the Petch House last week. Suggestions came about 10 months after the house was rebuilt and dedicated behind the Aurora Seniors' Centre on John West Way.

The ideas for Petch House in the most recent report include a Community Non-Profit meeting room, a rental facility for small receptions ?including bridal showers and fundraisers?, a rental facility for yoga, tai-chi, qui-gong classes, and art exhibitions, a place to sell hand-made Aurora crafts, an Aurora Heritage Centre with exhibits, seminars and possible events in conjunction with the Aurora Historical Society and Aurora Cultural Centre, as a hub for various environmental initiatives, and an ?old time tea room or saloon with finger snacks.?

An additional suggestion has an idea to relocate the log cabin to behind the Aurora Retirement Centre on Murray Drive ?for access to water lines and seniors.?

On the staff side, they have put forward a number of suggestions including storage space, leased commercial use, a tourism information centre, the wedding option, a rest stop for hikers and walkers, a daycare facility, and even a home for the Aurora Sport Hall of Fame, among others.

?We were instructed to canvass the community, as well as our own staff for ideas and present those to Council,? said Aurora CAO Neil Garbe last week, responding to comments from Councillor Buck that the recommendations on the floor did nothing to move things along. ?I was presuming Council would provide direction with respect to the uses. We took it as far as Council directed us to, and one option is to direct some, or all, of the uses to be referred to us to include for budget discussions.?

Options could then be bundled into cost groups for further discussion, he said.

Questions were also raised by Councillor Buck on just what could be done right now to make Petch House usable, as it is currently without plumbing or a suitable floor. Usability, however, is in the eye of the beholder according to Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation.

?Used for what? is the big question that needs to be addressed before they can discuss usability, he said.

?A floor can't be put in until a determination is made about the wiring and where the outlets were going to be in the building,? said Mr. Downey. ?There might be additional work that needs to be done below the floor to accommodate that use, so we don't want to put the floor down and pull the floor up to accommodate a use. The only outstanding work to be done is the floor, and any other upgrades to the building will follow the use of the building. We have held back in putting the floor down until we had some indication from Council on what they wanted to do.?

If plumbing was required, the only option would be to put it under the floor. The original 160-year-old logs do not accommodate for any interior cavities for either plumbing or ductwork.

Looking at the options before them, Councillor Paul Pirri suggested a further report pricing out each option contained in the laundry list of potential uses, along with suggestions on which options could be grouped or priced together.

?I think a lot of them can be accommodated together and do them in bits and pieces,? said Councillor Pirri. ?We have [lots of] options and I am sure they can be grouped together into different categories to simplify the work. I think we should see if any of these?can work together.?

Councillor Michael Thompson said he agreed and said options should also be bundled according to the amount of investment each would require.

?I like the sense where we can bundle it and say this is what the impacts will be,? said Councillor Thompson.

Councillor Buck, on the other hand, suggested it was simply time to make a decision one way or another on what to do with the building ? then and there.

?It is like a train stalled on the railway tracks and I am trying to shove it,? she said. ?It is just totally a nightmare what is going on with this.?