

Helping hand extended ? again ? to relocate groups in Old Library

By Brock Weir

Council has once again extended a helping hand in finding the many community groups currently using the old Aurora Public Library building find a new home.

The move came after Council ratified its decision last week to move forward with the demolition of the building later this fall to pave the way for Library Square.

In deliberations, Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation said that while the existing community groups using the building ? including the Aurora Bridge Club and the Air Cadets ? do pay to use the facilities, Aurora is losing significant money maintaining the former Library and adjacent former Seniors' Centre.

While the buildings bring in \$30,120 in annual revenue, he said yearly operating costs clock in at \$72,948.

?Those buildings?.are in serious disrepair and I don't think it is a safe building to have those community groups in,? said Councillor Sandra Humfries. ?We need to move them. It is just postponing the pain when they have to be demolished. They have been told for the last 13 years that they have had to move, so maybe they thought it would never happen and they wouldn't have to worry about it. We are doing this for the better good of the entire Town and we're going to help these community groups continue to provide these services in a different location. I am fully confident that will happen.?

Speaking to the recommendation on the floor, Councillor Humfries took aim at Councillor John Abel who renewed his argument from the previous meeting that the buildings should remain in use until a plan for the land they sit on is complete. She objected, she said, to the characterization that the Town was ?kicking out? the groups.

?There has been a bit of a flip flop here, and the flip flop here is we're going to begin with the application to demolish, pending the relocation of the tenants, and we have not relocated the tenants,? argued Councillor Abel, who voted for the motion in the end on a recorded vote. ?Now we are saying you're going to be leaving and we're going to continue to try. We (Councillors) are ambassadors and when residents come forward and they have a fear or some insecurities it is understood that we should listen to what they have to say.

?The big thing I want is to move forward with an engaged community and with buy in and I want to do it in a responsible way. There is no reason to tear down a library and put these programs out if you have nothing to do. Theoretically it may take one, three years before that happens. To simply say that we're getting things done and we're going to throw them out is, to me, not a step forward. It is a step against what our jobs as Councillors are: to look after our community and show that we care. It is not to catch up for lost time.?

After what Councillor Jeff Thom described as Councillor Abel's ?filibuster? on the matter, other Council members expressed a degree of frustration that the debate seemed to be going around in circles. Councillor Tom Mrakas, for instance, took issue with Councillor Abel's comment that he wanted to move forward with Library Square since 2013, but when Councillor Mrakas asked him where he would have housed the community groups back then, Councillor Abel replied, ?The Armoury.?

?You didn't own the Armoury in 2013, so good luck putting them in there,? said Councillor Mrakas.

?It is quite frustrating to hear time and time again that we have no plan,? he said. ?I think everyone around this table realises we have a plan for Library Square. The community realises we have a plan, residents know we have a plan, community partners know we have a plan. We have been working on this plan since the beginning of this term and actually well beyond that for 15 years. People have been trying to pull this together. We aren't doing anything to try to rush anything. We're doing what the community wants to make the community better. As far as displacing groups, of course we all care about what is going to happen to the groups, where they are going to do, and staff has been working overtime to figure this out.?

Councillor Thom offered a similar viewpoint, stating that staff should be left to figure out the accommodations for the groups.

?I don't know why Council has to discuss this and the flavour of Cheese Doodles at the snack bar,? he said.

Councillor Michael Thompson agreed that Council has the responsibility to make ?best efforts? in finding a place for the groups, but said there is no guarantee Aurora will find them a place, as confirmed in a letter sent to each group by CAO Doug Nadorozny back in February.

?There is a plan,? he said. ?There has been a plan for many, many years but not everybody agrees with it. We have different perspectives on that, and I respect that, but this term we have been trying to work as a group in formulating that plan and trying to move that forward. Again, not everyone agrees. We have had different iterations of that plan, and the comments have all been valid with regards to certain aspects of it but I would certainly echo that we do have a plan, we continue to move forward with that plan,

but it continues to change as we move forward with this process?
The motion passed on a unanimous recorded vote of all Council members.