

Historic Willow Farm property acquired by St. Andrew's College



By Brock Weir

One of Aurora's oldest surviving houses is set to turn over a new leaf in its storied history.

Willow Farm, which has been on the southwest corner of Yonge Street and St. John's Sideroad for nearly 200 years, is now part of the St. Andrew's College campus, a deal the local private school has been eyeing for over 40 years.

The 15 acre acquisition extends the campus to 125 acres.

According to headmaster Kevin McHenry, it has been a long time coming but the various factors to make the deal a reality never aligned ? until now.

?Whenever you own a business or a school and there is an adjacent property in your community, you need to consider it,? he tells The Auroran. ?We have always considered it, but just the timing wasn't right for the school. If you go back three-and-a-half years to when the property last changed hands, personally, as head of the school, I was extremely interested, upbeat, and did everything I could with the Board to acquire it. However, a Board of Governors is there for a reason and they certainly did what they should have done; the timing wasn't right because we were in the middle of a \$45 million capital campaign and to be able to access those funds that are necessary to make this kind of purchase just wasn't the right timing.

?Fast forward to where we are today, we are through our building campaign it was very successful, we're now about to create and we're about to create and publish our new Strategic Plan. Now we're looking at what's next for the school and that philosophy coincided nicely with the opportunity that was present at Willow Farm again. The Board had a better appetite to consider acquiring the company and ultimately we received unanimous support from our Board and we went for it in the summer.?

The new property acquisition will play an integral role in answering that question of what might be next for St. Andrew's College, and that question mark extends to just how that property will be used. Following the completion of their \$45 million capital and building campaign, Mr. McHenry says ?it is not like we're flush with cash right now? to think about putting up brand new buildings right away, but they are in a position right now where they can look to the future.

?We have about 15 different ideas on what this could become,? he said.

One thing is certain, however, and that is Willow Farmhouse itself, which dates to the first half of the 1800s is one of the two remaining original buildings of what was once the hamlet of Cosford's Corners, will remain in place.

?We need to decide what the best use for the school is,? says Mr. McHenry, noting that, as of Monday, the building will be leased out to a retired couple through June 1. ?Through this, we're going to be working on the property a little bit and trying to develop it through cleaning it up and making it more desirable. It is not our decision alone. We are totally respectful of that. We must work with the Town and Conservation Authority and all those forces to ensure that it is not only great for the school but very good for the community.?