

INSIDE AURORA: If you build it...

By Scott Johnston

If you build it, they will come.

At least, that's the theory according to the movie ?A Field of Dreams?.

It's also the situation we now face here in Aurora, not with Kevin Costner's construction of a baseball field perfect for spectral competitions, but with the completion of the Petch Log House.

As you'll know from recent media coverage, this is one of the oldest structures in Aurora (or for those purists, one of the oldest within its current boundaries).

Although bounced around to various locations in town over the years, and showing increasing stages of collapse, it has recently been saved and rebuilt near the Seniors' Centre.

What makes this building unique in one sense is that somehow, the Town managed to do the complete opposite of its usual course of action.

Typically, a need for a specific type of space is identified by a municipality. Then, before any sort of structure can be built to meet this demand, there must be a zillion reports, studies, and analyses completed to determine the resulting structure's overall use, viability, cost effectiveness, benefits over alternative options, and a host of other things.

Only after all those are in place and approved, a budget identified, and the perfect location determined (by which time usually several years have elapsed), can a shovel hit the ground.

Think of a still-on-the-drawing-board project like the Youth Centre, or Public Works Building, and you get the idea.

But in the case of the Petch House, Council approved its new location, reconstruction, and its not insignificant budget, without any clear idea of how the building would eventually be used.

Granted, the basic building blocks of the structure (i.e.: the logs) did exist, but they were not formed in the shape of an actual edifice, and it was missing several key elements that we take for granted in a building, such as a floor, roof, and windows. For the final product to take shape required considerable cost, planning, and materials salvaged from the town's architectural artifact collection.

Again all before a use was determined for it.

Don't get me wrong; I'm all for preserving the town's history, and think Petch House will make a fine addition. It also looks like they did a really nice job on it, although from the outside it's now hard to tell that it's a log house.

It's just unusual to see a structure being built, and then a use being determined for it as a kind of afterthought.

But maybe this will be a new trend in town planning, and going forward we'll see all new structures being built, and then a justification being reasoned out afterwards.

Here's a spare plot of land, let's throw up a 6,000 square foot, one story, T-shaped building. Now, will a new tennis facility fit in here? The roof's a bit low. That eliminates a skateboard park, too. Hmmm?. It's not watertight enough for a pool? Maybe it will be better used as a hall of fame or museum?

On the plus side, doing away with all that pesky ?do we actually need this, and what would we use it for, anyway?? pre-planning might just speed up the development of projects in town like Library Square or the Youth Centre. Just build ?em, and sort out the details later.

For now, there is a perfectly good, yet vacant building standing ready to be used here in town's own Field of Dreams. It will be interesting to see who steps out of the proverbial cornfields over the next few months to make use of it, and for what.

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