

INSIDE AURORA: The Return Visit

By Scott Johnston

"Welcome to Aurora," the Mayor enthused, extending his hand to his Swedish colleague.

"Thank you, sir." Indicating her travelling companions, she noted; "It's an honour for us to be invited for a visit to one of our favourite twin cities."

"Yes, I'd forgotten that Leksand has several other twins around the world. Aurora only has one right now."

"Well, we're honoured," the delegate repeated. "We're also very curious to discuss how Aurora conducts its planning and business. We feel there is much we can learn."

"It has been several years," she continued, "since the last representatives were here from Leksand. I was reviewing their notes, and have some follow up questions."

"Fire away," said the Mayor, motioning them all to sit down.

"Let's see," said the Swede, taking a seat and referring to a notepad. "When our Town staff were here last there was much excitement about development of this downtown site you called Library Square."

"We are looking at updating our downtown, as well, and thought we might emulate your work. We expect that it may take as much as four years to fully engage our citizens, plan and implement our vision."

"Tell me, based on your experience, is this timeframe too long?"

"Well, actually," said the Mayor. "We have yet to make any decisions on that project."

"But that was ...?" the delegate referred to her notes, "...over 10 years ago. And at the time your predecessor identified it as the Town's priority project. You mean you haven't even come to a decision yet, let alone implement it?"

"We did just decide to tear down the existing buildings. But as for the long term plans, well ...these things take time."

The delegate shook her head, and flipped to the next page of her notes.

"Then perhaps we can discuss efforts to strengthen your Town's tax base. The last time we were here, Magna International had just established its corporate headquarters here in Aurora. That was quite a coup. Have they expanded their operations here?"

"We've had a very positive relationship with that business over the years, but sadly, they are moving out of Town soon."

"That's too bad," the delegate commiserated. "But I guess it's hard for a Town of your size to compete with the attractive nature of the huge megacities for such important business partners. Tell me, where are they moving; Toronto? Vancouver?"

"King City."

The delegate did a slight double-take. "What, that farming community of 7,000 residents we passed through on our way from the airport?"

"Umm, yes," the Mayor confirmed, shifting slightly in his seat.

At this point, one of the Swedish contingent leaned forward and whispered in the chief delegate's ear. She nodded in agreement.

"It has been along and tiring journey for all of us from Sweden, Mr. Mayor," the delegate said. "Perhaps we can continue these discussions tomorrow?"

"Of course, of course," agreed the Mayor, standing up with them.

"We'll just head to our hotel. The Howard Johnson is on Yonge Street, is it not?"

"I'm sorry, but that hotel closed a few years ago."

"My apologies. Then the one that replaced it in Town?"

"That hasn't been built, yet."

Seeing the delegate's eyes widen, he quickly asserted, "but we are getting a new hotel." After a slight pause he added for emphasis; "Really?"

"In the meantime, we've arranged accommodations for you in Newmarket."

"Thank you, Mr. Mayor. We'll see you tomorrow."

As she and her colleagues headed out of Town Hall, the Leksand delegate mused that yes, there was much they could learn this trip from the experiences of Aurora. But not necessarily in the way they originally intended.