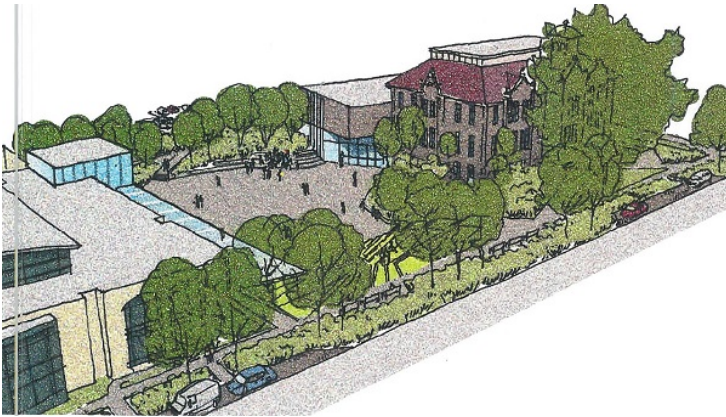


Library, Cultural Centre back different options for Library Square



By Brock Weir

Two concept plans for the future redevelopment of Library Square are set for Council consideration this week after a series of public information sessions.

Developed by the Planning Partnership, the two concepts focus on making a public space that will be a destination for people from all corners of Aurora, and well beyond.

At the heart of both plans is the parking area now lying between the Aurora Public Library and the Aurora Cultural Centre.

‘The vision is a space that links the [two buildings] with a gathering space which will be at the heart of Aurora’s Cultural Precinct,’ said planner Donna Hinde at the last of a series of Town Hall meetings which attracted dozens of area residents and stakeholders.

‘Over the course of these conversations, we [have compiled] page after page of notes from people that we spoke to and when I went through the list [we heard] things like a winter carnival, a tree lighting, gallery space for artists, a flea market and food trucks.

‘We’re trying to design a space where nothing is precluded. Everybody’s great ideas can find a space that would be ultimately programmed by the Town of Aurora with help from the Library and Cultural Centre.’

Indeed, that’s exactly what the two concepts entail – flexible spaces tailored for a variety of community uses. Both options feature a large programable space bordered by landscaping and other amenities, both also feature 80 on-site parking spaces, but how these spaces are configured tell a very different story.

The first option, dubbed the ‘Raised Square’ option will see the sloping area between the Library and Cultural Centre raised to the level of the Cultural Centre, providing a flat surface between the two well-used community hubs with parking configured below the surface.

This option, as presented to the public, will provide vehicular access from Victoria Street, divert parking below grade, while leaving a wide-open area above with significant potential.

This option, said Ms. Hinde, could include a marketplace and stalls for up to 80 vendors, the option of ‘giant harvest tables’ spread out across the area to accommodate a community dinner for over 300 people, a giant movie screen for public viewing, and a refrigerated platform area that would allow up to 400 people to enjoy outdoor skating.

The second option would lower Library Square to be flush with the ground level access to the Aurora Public Library, offering parking just off Victoria Street and most of the amenities proposed in Option One.

Both concepts feature an area set aside for possible future expansion of the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Victoria Hall remains just outside the area considered for Library Square.

Contained within the report presented to Council this week is a summary of stakeholder comments.

Members of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, which kicked off last Monday’s series of information sessions, voiced concerns over the cost and construction of Option 1, while the Aurora Public Library voiced its support for Option 1, adding the construction should be coordinated with a long-planned renovation of the Library itself.

The Library augmented its support by stating they would pick in a portion of their own development charges (charges paid by a developer coming into the community to offset the impact of growth) to realise Option #1.

The Aurora Cultural Centre, on the other hand, has voiced support for Option 2, noting that the proposed expansion to the Centre

itself would need to be built in order to relate the facility to the rest of Library Square.

While many of the people at the public information sessions offered their support for Option One, with some of this support tempered by concerns over the final price tag, Option Two is the one staff are recommending Council consider this week.

The Planning Partnership believes that both options are viable, however Option 2 with the lowered square has been identified as the preferred option, said Fausto Filipetto, Senior Policy Planner for the Town of Aurora. Both options have merit in creating a public gathering space that connects both the Library and the Cultural Centre buildings. However, Option 2 is preferred for the following reasons: visibility from the street and safety, architectural impact (the square would be framed by a two-storey library instead of just one storey; sense of space [in that] the lowered square would provide for an amphitheatre setting where seating would be designed into the retaining walls; cost of construction (\$2 million less than Option 1) and the cost of maintaining the underground parking and safety issues associated with it.

\$500,000 has been previously earmarked for demolition of Library Square and design services for what replaces it. Full costs and how the construction of Library Square will be funded is set for a future report.