

Library Square decision: a long time coming or too much too soon?

By Brock Weir

Despite over a decade of discussions, Councillors have once again delayed making a decision on the future of Library Square.

The Victoria Street question had another airing at Council on Tuesday night, but a decision was put off until November pending a presentation to Council from the Region of York this month on turning the Old Library building into a "Fab Lab".

After over a decade, Councillors could finally answer the long-held question on just what to do with Library Square.

Ahead of the delay, Councillors, however, were divided on whether deciding its fate was long-overdue or moving too fast. Municipal staff recommended tearing down both the old home of the Aurora Public Library and the former home of the Aurora Seniors' Centre on Victoria Street.

But, if those buildings are torn down, the big question is ?then what??

Aside from the innovation hub tentatively proposed by the Region of York, Seneca College, and Aurora's Economic Development Advisory Committee, Councillors were facing two choices: demolish the buildings and replace them with a ?multi-use community facility?, or pave the land and put up a parking lot and ?urban square.?

Discussions on the land's future began in earnest with the first Council report on the subject back in the spring of 2001 after the old library was vacated.

Several reviews have taken place since then while community groups have enjoyed the use of the buildings. This current round of debates began in 2012 after Councillor Evelyn Buck put forward a motion to explore knocking down the two buildings and using funds out of Aurora's \$33+ million hydro reserve account to build a multi-use multi-storey building on the site.

Following her motion, Council in January then put forward a detailed action plan to gauge community interest and ideas for the site.

Two public meetings were held, fostering healthy debate but never amongst more than 20 people in attendance at any one time. Their recommendations were clear ? the buildings should go and whatever was built in their stead needed to address a shortage of parking in Aurora's downtown.

Nevertheless, taking that final step in sealing the building's fate this summer was too much too soon for some.

?I have been concerned about this report and this study from the get go,? said Councillor Chris Ballard. ?It just seems to me that public consultation could have been more robust and I just don't get a clear vision for what we want to do with that site.

?If it is a cost implication, it is going to drive one vision as opposed to another. I have concerns about that. But I think we need to make our mind up. It just seems to me there are so many questions still around this that we're really wasting our staff's time to go out and get quotes to demolish or construct a new facility. It seems too sudden in my mind and too rushed.?

Councillor Buck, however, disagreed.

?It makes me smile when I hear Councillor Ballard talk about rushing it,? she said. ?The decision has been pending since the old library was vacated and it has been pending since the old fire hall was vacated and the seniors moved into their facilities.

?The facilities continue to be used throughout all this time but this is the third or fourth Council that has failed to move forward with any kind of decision on these buildings. The decision should have been made when the decision was made to have a new Library. It

should not have been left to become a political football to be kicked around by this group and that.?

Looking at the future use of the buildings themselves, she added, does not address the most ?aggravating? thing singled out by the area neighbours and that is parking.