

## Library Square options to get prices

**By Brock Weir**

There has been no shortage of options of what to do with Library Square – the stretch of Victoria Street occupied by the old Aurora Public Library and Seniors' Centre – but these options could soon have a few dollars and cents pegged to them.

Council is expected to approve a plan this week tasking staff to come up with a report attaching a dollar figure for the cost of two longstanding plans for the site – tear them down and build a new multiuse community facility, or knocking them down altogether to alleviate parking congestion in Downtown Aurora.

For some Councillors, this was a good step forward, but for others, it was a matter of not having a more concrete vision for the site, or moving too fast.

Councillor John Abel was first out of the gate, arguing more options should be put into the mix, including opening up the future of Library Square to a design contest among architects for coming up with new and creative ways to address all the concerns – ranging from parking to creative community spaces – in the finished product.

According to Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, it would be difficult to lay the foundation for a design competition because Council has yet to decide on a final vision for the site.

“Form follows function,” he said. “We need to determine what the function of that space is going to be and then they put their great minds to thinking what the form might be.”

There were discussions during public meetings earlier this year on various options for what to put in a community facility should a community facility come to pass, said Mr. Downey, but there wasn't anything close to a consensus.

For some, the possibility of the Town of Aurora, Region of York, and Seneca College collaborating for an innovation incubator known as a Fab Lab is putting a wrench into some of the forward planning.

“As long as that is out there, I would like to see what will happen from that,” said Mayor Geoffrey Dawe.

Councillor John Gallo added he shared a similar view to Mayor Dawe and Councillor Abel in getting to a point where they can actually pin down something to put on the site. That being said, he has yet to get a sense of what the public wants to put on the site.

“I can say I am disappointed and I have no idea why,” he said. “This, to me, is something that should have started a long time ago in our term of Council. These types of things take time to flesh out and make significant decisions. I am uncomfortable in this stage we are at to make any concrete decisions. We all realise we may or may not be here in less than a year's time. I am not interested in making decisions for other councils at this late in the game.”

Whether they thought things were moving too quickly or too slowly, one thing Councillors agreed on was timing was of the essence in getting things right.

“Who came there? The people who live there, the people who are inconvenienced with people parking across their driveways and not being able to get out,” said Councillor Evelyn Buck of residents who came out to two public meetings. “They like the library, they have those beautiful amenities on their doorstep, but these decisions have been pending for 12 years. It is the people who live there who are fully aware of how long and how many Councils have dragged their asses in coming to grips with this decision that has to be made.”

Speaking of backsides, Councillor Ballard, on the other hand, argued the Town as a whole will be kicking this Council's if they don't

get it right.

A few of the people who live near these buildings might be upset that the Councils of the past dragged their backsides on this, but I do believe the rest of the Town will kick our backsides if we rush to tear down a multimillion dollar asset [like the old Library] without fully discovering what the opportunities there are to redevelop that area.

After some consultation with a few Aurora residents, we're talking about demolition, demolition, demolition. The structure is phenomenally rugged. We could knock it down only to figure out a few years after that if we had just put a new façade on it, or maybe a new addition out on the side it would be fine and dandy. We are really rushing into this without really knowing what we want, what the citizens of Aurora want to put in this square.?

At the end of the day, however, what is going to be coming forward ? pending this week's Council approval ? is a report outlining what these two possibilities might cost.

Let that be the jumping off point. Let's see some of the cost implications,? said Councillor Michael Thompson