

Library Square will be the measure of this Council: Thompson

By Brock Weir

There are little over 10 months left in this Council term before politicians ? would-be and otherwise ? hit the campaign trail, but there is still much work to be done, according to Councillor Michael Thompson.

None of these loose ends, however, are as important as deciding the future of Library Square.

Looking over the course of 2017 so far, Councillor Thompson cites the decision to demolish the former homes of the Aurora Public Library and Seniors' Centre on Victoria Street, the first step in redeveloping the area into a community asset as one of the most ?important milestones? this Council can look back on.

But how the dusts settles, however, will be the ultimate measure of success.

?Library Square has always been near and dear to my heart,? he says. ?As I look back over the last three years, I think this Council has done a good job in making a difference and adding value to the community through some of the initiatives and items that we have done, but personally, I think the deciding factor will be how much progress we have made on Library Square.

?Downtown revitalization has been a key theme for the past 10 years with every election I have participated in and I think it is our responsibility to make significant strides on that. We always talk about the number of vacancies we see in the commercial sector on Yonge and we set out at the beginning of this term to make a significant difference on Downtown Revitalization and that is how I will judge this term of Council ? how much of a difference we made on that.?

There are many factors in the air right now which will determine that judgement, not only Library Square, but the redevelopment of Highland Gate, the reconstruction of Aurora United Church and the associated seven storey retirement complex in the Downtown Core, and the Treasure Hill development on the northwest quadrant of Yonge and Wellington.

In Councillor Thompson's view, it is incumbent on Council to tackle many of the leftovers facing them before adding new things onto the plate.

As a member of the Joint Council Committee (JCC), the body of Aurora and Newmarket Council and staff members overseeing the Central York Fire Services, the decision to move forward with a new fire station and training facility near Bayview and St. John's Sideroad is a significant achievement, as well as the work he and Councillor Tom Mrakas have done towards facilitating potential reform of the Ontario Municipal Board, but those have yet to be completed, those recommendations have yet to be adopted and, for the latter, it is very much a wait-and-see-but-advocate-in-the-meantime scenario.

?Library Square will always be up there on what I'll be paying attention to this fall, but we're continuing to work on something for the Armoury I think is significant for our community and hope to have everything finalized and announced in the fall. We continue to work on acquiring more land to address some of our sports field and multipurpose facility needs and I think that is paramount,? he says. ?As the community continues to grow, we want to make sure we're keeping pace with that growth in terms of our service levels and we need to continually address that.

?The budget will be a bit of a challenge because we have a number of different pressures that may impact our abilities, so I think there will be a number of conversations around the budget table to make sure that any [tax] increases are reasonable.?

Council also needs to focus that any changes in how Aurorans live, work and play are reasonable as well.

Still pending are the outcomes of various pilot projects impacting how Aurorans get around. These include easing up winter on-street parking restrictions, winter service levels when it comes to snow plowing, and left hand turn restrictions at Yonge and Wellington during peak hours. The results of these pilots, particularly whether they should be permanent changes, will be up for consideration this fall.

There will also be talks on Aurora's new strategic plan and continued negotiations with Metrolinx and GO Transit on service to Aurora.

?I really do see a very busy 10 months once we get back in,? says Councillor Thompson on resuming Council following the summer recess and facing uncertainty on planning applications, including the fate of the former Canadian Tire location in Aurora's south end. ?I would like to see us complete a lot of the stuff we have on our pending list. I really think it is important for us to complete what we have on the agenda before we introduce anything new or significant because it is hard to say what is going to come up in the next 10 months as well. Who knows what is going to happen [with Canadian Tire]? All those things take Council's time, energy and focus and I want to make sure that whatever happens we continue to do those things we set out to do at the start of the year.?