

Magna to leave Aurora for King by 2017

By Brock Weir

Magna International is planning on relocating its operations to King Township by the end of December 2017.

The company recently purchased 105 acres of land on the southeast corner of King Road and Jane Street, with an eye to constructing an amalgamated corporate office of 200,000 square feet of office space, plus research and development facilities, underground parking and various amenities for over 625 employees.

Presently leasing office and research and development space in Aurora, Newmarket, and into Peel Region and beyond, these deals expire at the end of 2017 and the company has been exploring moving all their corporate and group office operations under one roof.

The company planned to file for a formal rezoning application with King Township on Tuesday, May 19.

"We have been exploring the concept of relocating all our Magna Global and Canadian family corporate and group office operations under one roof," says Tracy Fuerst, Director of Corporate Communications, for Magna International. "We have progressed to the point where we made a formal rezoning application submission to King City Municipal Council."

Calling Magna's departure "disappointing" is "the understatement of the year", according to Aurora Mayor Geoff Dawe.

"It is hard to say [what the impact will be at this point]," he says. "It is 400 jobs [in Aurora] and we don't want to lose 400 jobs, but my understanding is this doesn't actually happen until the end of 2017, so there are certainly lots of opportunities for us to be out beating the bushes and find out whatever potential clients we may have for that."

As their current location on the Magna campus on Wellington Street East is a rented facility, Mayor Dawe adds he expects the owners of the building to be "working diligently" to find new tenants.

As word spread this week of Magna's intentions, there has been little opportunity to explore possible avenues to retain the business, he notes, but that is a conversation the municipality would like to have with Magna.

"I had some brief conversation with them a number of months ago and we talked about how they were starting to run out of room at their location," says Mayor Dawe. "I know the building itself has always been a challenge in it being an efficient building to operate. It is a pretty spectacular building, but I gather it is not the most effective building for their purposes."

As publicity started to roll out this week for the annual Wild, Wild West Hoedown, set to be hosted on the campus by Magna this September, the Mayor stressed the "generosity" Magna has displayed throughout the entirety of York Region and he did not expect that to change. At this point, however, it is too early to say the wider impacts Magna's departure will have on local business and the economy outside that particular sphere.

"I think we need to stress Magna has been an extremely good corporate citizen and [we] certainly thank them for the involvement they have had in the Town," says Mayor Dawe. "Obviously we would like to see them stay, but they need to do what is right for their business as well. We understand that. We don't necessarily like that, but we certainly understand that."

King Mayor Steve Pellegrini, on the other hand, welcomed the move, noting Magna's decision to stay in York Region.

"It's fabulous news," he said. "I'm so ecstatic. The plans are fantastic."

Magna's application is to formally rezone the lands from agricultural to commercial. The lands, in King City's Community Plan,

have always been designated as Prestige employment and King couldn't have secured a better corporate partner.

?Talk about Prestige,??Mayor Pellegrini added. ?We couldn't do any better. We are proud to welcome a highly regarded and globally significant corporation such as Magna to the King community.?

Mayor Pellegrini is hoping to have concept drawings and more information available at his June 4 business lunch. It will be held from 12 noon to 2 p.m. at the Cardinal Golf Club on Highway 9.

With files from Mark Pavilons.