

New chapter in the life of Armoury ? but what?

By Brock Weir

The Aurora Armoury is set to be one of the centrepieces of this Friday, June 30's public celebration marking the 150th anniversary of Town Park, but it became something of a political football last week in a heated exchange over the future of the Downtown Core. The fracas went down at last week's General Committee meeting between Councillors John Abel and Michael Thompson.

In a lengthy ? and oftentimes heated ? debate over accommodating the over 900 members of the Aurora Bridge Club who will be displaced to prepare for the demolition of Library Square, Councillor John Abel insisted the solution was right in front of them ? the Aurora Armoury.

This came as something of a surprise to other members of Council as they all met in a Closed Session meeting on May 23 to discuss a letter of intent regarding the use of the Aurora Armoury.

While we don't yet know what this proposal for the Armoury's use will ultimately be, many Councillors said it puts the historic Mosley Street building out of the running for a Bridge Club solution.

?The obvious place is in the Armoury and it is right there in Town Park,? said Councillor Abel. ?A letter of intent is a document containing a declaration of the intentions of the writer and, furthermore, a document outlining one or more agreements between two or more parties before the agreements are finalized. That is why we're not talking about the Armoury. It is Town-owned. We have a need for it. Why we're not talking about this in closed session when we have an obvious demand for that space is beyond me.

?It is perfect. It is perfect for the cadets, it is perfect for the bridge club and it is perfect for our community. When we do plan things, we think long-range and we have known for a long time that we need programmable space. It is a fact. I have known it since I started on Council six years ago. We do not have enough facilities. We shouldn't be moving our Town-owned facilities and entering into agreements when we need that space. It has got to be declared surplus.?

While Mayor Geoff Dawe cautioned Councillor Abel that he was straying into an area covered by Closed Session confidentiality, he said he had not revealed anything that was not already on the public record.

Continuing, he said Council decided in December to go ahead with the Library Square demolition all the while approving a further motion to preserve the main features of Town Park, with a report on future ?enhancements? at a later date as part of the ongoing strategy to realize Aurora's ?Cultural Precinct.?

?It's poor planning on the part of our Town that we have this conundrum,? he contended, addressing the Bridge Club. ?We really could have been repurposing the armoury knowing that we're going to displace the tenants and then put in some programmable space in Library Square so we can move you back. That armoury has been identified in report after report as something we can use for our community. We did repurposing studies. We know that we can find a use for that armoury and right now is a perfect example. I think it is our obligation to plan and I don't know why we can't use the armoury. It is just natural that we would be using the armoury.?

At this point, Councillor Thompson called a point of order to Councillor Tom Mrakas, who chaired last Tuesday's meeting.

?Councillor Abel knows full well why we can't use the armoury,? said Councillor Thompson. ?He is not being honest. He was in closed session, he voted for it, he knows full well what is happening with the armoury.?

Ultimately, Councillor Mrakas ruled in favour of Councillor Thompson's Point of Order, and added, ?It is knowledge of every Councillor sitting here at this table of the discussions in closed session. I agree with Councillor Thompson that you are fully aware of those discussions and the direction that was presented to staff and it is misleading to the public to state otherwise.?

Concluded Councillor Abel, making a failed notice of motion calling for demolition plans for Library Square be halted until a design for its replacement had been approved: ?We should be looking after our community. Let's bring the community back into this Council.?