

New church, retirement home eyed for Aurora United Church site



By Brock Weir

A contemplative group gathered around a tree and the remains of a brick pathway at the corner of Yonge and Tyler Streets on Monday morning to remember what once was ? and consider what's yet to come.

Monday, April 11, was the second anniversary of the devastating fire which levelled the historic Aurora United Church.

Since the church burned to the ground, the congregation has remain strong and, well, united, under the roof of Trinity Anglican Church.

Time, according to Reverend Lorraine Newton-Comar, heals all wounds and now that they are starting to heal, the congregation is looking forward to redevelopment on the site.

?We have completed a process,? says Rod Johnson, Chair of the Aurora United Church (AUC) Parish Council. ?We did a request for proposal reaching out to invited guests, developers, to partner on a building, and it resulted in one being chosen. They are in the retirement residence business and we are working with them and we're close to a deal.

?The lawyers are going back and forth and the congregation has approved in concept moving forward with them.?

While the fine details are still to be released, Mr. Johnson confirmed that the plan they're looking at consists of two separate buildings ? the rebuilt Aurora United Church and the new retirement home.

?The idea in bringing in a partner is to provide the church with some up-front capital to build, as well as an ongoing residual to support the congregation and also retain ownership of the land,? said Mr. Johnson. ?There is a kind of lease arrangement that is being negotiated but the ink is not dry. The deal is close, but it is not quite done.?

As they gathered Monday on the land that once housed ? and will house again ? their spiritual home, they were reflective over the last two years.

?Last year we had a very large gathering here and this, the second year, we felt as though we are moving further away from the trauma that we wanted to mark the time in a quieter way,? said Lorraine. ?It was really important for folks to gather today. We retold the story together, shared recollections, and people added their own feelings around what it has been like to be waiting for what is coming next.

?It is an exciting time and the enthusiasm has stayed very high. The congregation has stayed very strong.?

As to when the public might be able to see the plans being considered for the redevelopment, "stay tuned," said Mr. Johnson.