

# New Master Plan aims for movement on Library Square

**By Brock Weir**

According to Greg Baeker, the consultant who steered public input on the plan, it is the product of "robust community engagement" through focus groups, surveys, and other means, to get an idea of how Aurora residents define the culture of the town.

Information was collected on just what constitutes a "cultural asset in Aurora, and they came up with a list of over 1,000 places, buildings and organizations that fit the bill.

Through consultations, including numerous meetings of the committee, as well as stakeholders and the public at large, one common theme kept coming up and that was a need for better collaboration between all these cultural groups in what is termed the "cultural sector" of Aurora.

To be more specific, this includes the area surrounding the Aurora Cultural Centre, Aurora Public Library, and Town Park.

"We heard very strongly there is a tremendous richness of assets here, but they are not well enough known and appreciated by both residents and visitors to the community," said Mr. Baeker. "We have heard that we needed to be concerned with the inclusion and access, that there is a new Aurora, a new part of Town with some significant development. There is an older part of the community, and there is a need that the Cultural Master Plan reaches out to everyone in the community.

"There was also a great deal of discussion as to what the role of the Town should play in supporting cultural development, where it should be located, where the responsibilities lie, and resources "human and financial " to implement the plan."

Presenting the plan to Councillors last week, he stressed the importance it places on culture to the "revitalization" of Downtown Aurora, the development of a "cultural economy" and making Aurora a generally more "appealing place to live, work, and invest."

Fostering a climate to attract "cultural businesses" would take advantage of one of the fastest growing sectors around, he added.

"[The first of four strategic directions] was to define the municipality's role in building partnerships and resource requirements to implement the plan," said Mr. Baeker. "The second is to build and sustain partnerships between the public and private voluntary sector. The strategic direction is to expand culture's role in the economy by leveraging cultural assets to support downtown revitalization, to growing creative cultural industries in Town, and to expand tourism. The third is to build a strong and vital cultural sector.

"Here again there is emphasis on strengthening collaboration, increasing awareness, and building on what are already some strengths in this area and to make them significant cultural assets."

The fourth strategy is an overall vision of "access" in making sure programs reach as many people as possible, regardless of age, gender, or what side of Bayview Avenue they happen to live on."

One of the keys to growing creative cultural industries is to facilitate networking and relationship building either through co-location facilities such as shared workspace or incubators, or through networking events."

One such idea floated within the plan is the conversion of current site of Bacon Basketware on Wellington Street, just west of Yonge. The site is part of a complex of buildings which used to be home to the Fleury Implement Works. Under proper guidance, the Cultural Master Plan likens this to Toronto's distillery district in "providing space to support creative cultural industry growth in the community."

"The third theme is culture and economic development related to tourism and development opportunities for the Town. Research has demonstrated that the majority of tourists to Aurora are family and friends of residents. Several individuals noted that the first step in

expanding tourism should be to ensure local residents are more aware of cultural resources or offerings in Aurora. People spoke of a campaign to be a 'tourist in your own town' as a necessary precursor to effective promotion of tourism to non-residents.?

The Master Plan addresses long-stalled issues, including the possible development of Library Square into a 'cultural hub for the community' or a public gathering space, but it also revisits the plan aborted by Seneca College and the Region of York to turn the old Aurora Public Library building into a 'fab lab' innovation incubator.

Considering whatever it takes to make Library Square a cultural destination, there are also efforts within the plan to make Yonge Street a similar 'destination' with a 'village' feel.