

Old hydro building could come under closer scrutiny as Council considers Joint Ops centre

By Brock Weir

Aurora residents could soon learn more about the deal which turned former home of Aurora Hydro into the new home of the Queen's York Rangers.

A motion put forward at the committee level by Councillor John Abel, which will be up for debate next week, calls on staff to make reports previously examined behind closed doors by this Council, as well as the last term of Council, public about the use of the Hydro Building on Industrial Parkway South.

"I would ask that we direct staff to release what they can on two closed sessions that took place prior to our Council, specifically two closed sessions on the Queen's York Rangers," said Councillor Abel. "There is information there that could be helpful and it is also business that wasn't completed last term and should be brought forward as well."

While the deal struck by the previous Council which saw the Queen's York Rangers, the military regiment which has called both Aurora and Toronto home since the mid-1800s, has been supported by many Councillors, it is an issue which regularly pops up for debate by some Councillors who would have liked to see the building used by something else.

Some have called for the outright sale of the building rather than the long-term lease with the Department of National Defence, but the majority have supported keeping the building as a municipal asset following the sale of Aurora Hydro to the Ontario Power Authority.

But what to do with it has been the question. Last winter, Councillor Evelyn Buck put forward a notice of motion calling for the termination of the lease and declaring the building surplus to the Town's needs while "realizing [the value] of the asset and using the proceeds towards funding" new facilities.

Although this motion was ultimately voted down by Council, one such new facility she had in mind was the funding of a new Joint Operations Centre, the plans for which are expected to be approved by Council this week.

Before work began to overhaul the building for use by the Regiment, the Hydro Building was a stop-gap home for the Aurora Parks department. In evaluating the increasing costs and expanding scope of the proposed Joint Operations Centre, the new building at the other end of Industrial Parkway combining parks and the Works Yard, the use of the Hydro Building once again became a bone of contention.

"If Parks had been left [in the Hydro Building] we would have no need to buy a problematic site and spend twice as much as making a developable site than the land cost," said Councillor Buck this month in relation to the future site of the Joint Ops Centre, for which a chunk of the \$19 million price tag will go towards making the land viable for the building. "From the beginning I have not been favourable towards this project and nothing I have seen persuades me that it is any more attractive or any more acceptable to the taxpayers than it was in the beginning."

A similar view was expressed by Councillor Abel about the use of the former Hydro building.

"We wouldn't even be dealing with this had it not been for the option of the old hydro building which we own and had not leased," he said.

Others, however, believed this was a moot point.

"With respect to the old Hydro building, it is nowhere near as large as we needed for the centre we're talking about," said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. "It would have been in no way done to accommodate this. We decided to keep it as an asset in Aurora although

many wanted to sell it.?

Ahead of next week's Council meeting, members of the public can take in for themselves the current condition at the current Works Yard at Scanlon Court. A public open house will be held on-site from 11.30 a.m. to 2 p.m., providing an opportunity for residents to ask questions about and tour the current facility and get up to speed on plans for the new Joint Ops Centre.