

One week delay would provide better options on Library Square: Councillors

By Brock Weir

It has taken 17 years and counting to determine the future of Library Square, but a delay of just a week or two would have provided lawmakers with a better picture of the future, argued some Councillors last week.

Before Council gave the final thumbs-up to going forward with the next phase in developing a concept plan for Library Square, Councillor John Abel motioned a brief delay to allow Council to answer some lingering questions over the options.

A long-time vocal critic of the design firm which brought forward controversial concept plans for Aurora's Cultural Precinct last year, he said he wanted answers on what the consequences might be in moving forward with Library Square under a different contractor.

"I think moving forward with that design concept of Library Square, I think we want to put our sights very big on the horizon and we know there is a great deal of interest out there," said Councillor Abel. "My thought is we could take a bit of time before we go ahead to ask FOTENN to bring conceptual plans forward when we really want to see the potential of what this site offers, from maybe engaging others in the planning and design industry, that we might have the very best options for long-term commitment in Library Square."

These concerns were bolstered by Councillor Wendy Gaertner who questioned what legal obligations the Town had to stick with FOTENN. These questions went unanswered and a brief deferral, they argued, would allow time for answers.

"It is hard to say at this stage," said CAO Doug Nadorozny on the contract, "depending on what exactly Council wants to do if they don't want to follow these steps. The next step is work that aligns with the contracted work FOTENN was engaged to do, then there could be a conflict. We haven't had those discussions. I don't know what their position would be on that matter, but they could perhaps argue that they [had] a competitive process, including body of work, and we stop that work and retender that same work" at the very least we have to be careful not to get ourselves into that situation."

Councillor Gaertner, however, said Council never approved Phase 2 concept designs, and she wanted someone with a specialization on downtown revitalization to carry out the work.

"From the work I have seen today, I don't believe that is FOTENN," she said. "I thought a deferral would give staff time to get us some extra information on whether or not we are obligated to go forward with this particular planner."

Councillor Abel agreed: "I would like the community and everyone engaged going forward because it should be quite a celebration and a great experience to put something like this together. We have some fabulous ideas and concepts going forward and this is where I thought we were going."

However, the idea of a delay left some Council members seeing red.

Councillor Tom Mrakas, for instance, said the community engagement has been done, so far, the process was slowed to allow even more consultation, and to hear "we're going too fast but we're not going fast enough was "double speak."

"I think everyone needs to get it through their heads that we need to make a decision on this and move forward," he said.

Councillor Sandra Humfries was on a similar wavelength.

"This is the one time we need to be a team, probably more than ever," she said. "We need to have faith in the process that has taken us almost two and a half years in this term, four years before that, and years and years before that. Deferring it is not going to change a single thing. We have come so far and I am really worried that this is going to stop, and it is a serious problem if that happens.

"FOTENN has a job to do. They have \$20,000 left [and] they have to finish what they started. Around the table we have to come up with something we're all going to be proud of, but deferring it because we want other things to happen at this point is, I think, a very serious mistake. Our residents and the business people looking at us tonight are going to watch very carefully to see how serious we are in pushing this vision forward, that we all say we believe in, yet at every corner, it is "How do we stop it from happening because we're not happy with this, this and this?"