

Post-secondary future in the cards for historic Armoury

By Brock Weir

Speculation over the future use of the historic Aurora Armoury building has ranged from a maker space to a microbrewery, but it seems higher education is in the cards for the Town Park landmark.

The future of the Armoury has been the subject to numerous Council talks held behind closed doors. When Council approved the lease on the building on November 14, details on just what the lease held were scarce, with CAO Doug Nadorozny promising more details in due course.

Those formal details filling in the blanks of who, what, where, and when are still under wraps, but a picture is starting to emerge in a report before Council this week calling on increased funding to overhaul the building's interior.

Amid the recommendation to increase the budget to "renew" the building by \$100,000 is the big reveal the party interested in the building is a post-secondary institution.

"The Town has been working with a post-secondary partner on a potential business incubator and post-secondary facility since the spring of 2016 and the Aurora Armoury was recently identified as the ideal location for the proposed facility," reads the report by Anthony Ierullo, Manager of Long Range and Strategic Planning for the Town of Aurora.

"The Armoury site and location aligns well with the partner's vision for the facility and potential plans for Library Square. The proposed facility will provide professional training opportunities for businesses and residents. This type of training offers significant opportunities for business and community developments and aligns well with the Town's revitalization activities in the Aurora Promenade as well as the feedback received to date through the Cultural Precinct Plan consultation.

"This is a strategic priority for the Town, as outlined in the Strategic Plan & Economic Development Action Plan. Staff also believe that the establishment of the proposed training facility is a necessary first step towards the potential creation of a future larger scale training facility in Aurora. Council has authorized a lease agreement with the potential partner for use of the Armoury that is in the process of being finalized. Staff will provide additional information on the post-secondary partnership and related lease agreement once it has been finalized."

But first, the money.

Aurora purchased the Aurora Armoury from the Federal government in 2014 for \$524,000.

\$100,000 has since been approved for interior conceptual design, along with a further \$275,000 to remove hazardous materials from the building and complete necessary upgrades on infrastructure.

A further \$100,000 is being asked for this week to finish the design project "and the preliminary designs are ambitious.

To realise everything will cost an estimated \$4 million, proposed to be taken from Aurora's Hydro Reserves.

Working with a goal to transform the Armoury into a multipurpose facility, the architects, GOW Hastings Architects, have worked to maximize the short term and long-term future of the building while restoring both its heritage elements and the building's link to the surrounding Town Park neighbourhood.

Suggested uses include classrooms and meeting spaces, event and multipurpose space, and a small teaching kitchen on the south side of the building.

"The restoration includes maintaining the original building and roof configuration, maintaining or restoring original openings, where possible, and removing and replacing the existing aluminum and vinyl siding with vertical siding that better replicates the original materials and design," said Mr. Ierullo. "The result will be a building that better reflects the original design and function of the property."

"The Town's Repurposing Study first identified an opportunity to establish a physical and operational connection between the Aurora Armoury and Town Park. The architects also found historic evidence of a connection between the Aurora Armoury and Town Park. This connection is reintroduced with the removal of exterior barriers/fencing and the introduction of glass elements within the central areas and proposed extension. As such, a significant goal of the proposed renovation is to reintroduce a connection between Town Park and the Aurora Armoury."

The proposed total renovation project is currently pegged at \$4 million including contingency, landscaping and "other potential costs. These costs are "within the range that was previously anticipated for the project," Mr. Ierullo adds.

"The Town recognizes that the Armoury holds cultural significance for residents and is committed to developing a comprehensive communications and branding strategy that will keep the community up-to-date on the restoration efforts and, ultimately, serve to promote the Armoury as an important community hub," he said.