

Public art for Library Square in focus for redevelopment's vision

As Council considers a proposal for a significant installation of digital media as part of the Library Square development, some are looking for more traditional and varied forms of art to be a public draw to the area.

Work is currently underway on Victoria Street to bring Library Square to fruition, but as construction continues, thoughts are returning once again to the programs and services the \$52 million redevelopment project will be able to offer.

Following a presentation to Council last week from Arts Help, which proposed a digital and evolving vision for what could be on offer inside the extension to the historic Church Street School, Councillor John Gallo, a long-time proponent for public art, said it is time to 'analyse every aspect' of how public art will fit into the overall vision.

'My view is we should take our time and analyse every aspect of it and see how we can invest [in] and develop our public art policy as we deal with the funds we have put aside for Library Square,' he said.

Staff responded that a report on a public art policy is still in the works.

'Staff were still due to return to Council with a public art policy, and confirming the direction for public art in general, but certainly with the funds that were allocated for this project, we would be returning to Council seeking some guidance with how you wish to see those funds spent, whether it be on the property or within the properties themselves,' said Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services.

'We were due to come back to Council at this point. It certainly would be something we could anticipate in 2021 [but] in light of the presentation we may need to expedite that coming to Council.'

That presentation was received positively by local lawmakers, but it sparked further questions on just what Council's overall vision for public art will be once the project is complete.

'I believe the budget is to provide art for the Square and I was thinking it was going to be paintings and sculpture,' said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. 'I love the idea of sculpture as you see in big cities that people can climb on and sit on? I was thinking about that kind of art [as being] an interesting draw for people.'

Arts Help co-founder Mo Ghoneim said his group did explore the option of sculptures and getting the community involved in the creation of a mural, but they wanted to have something with legs.

'When we thought about the current trend in what is happening and how can we do this in a way that has longevity to it, we realized after a lot of the research and the work we have been doing with various organizations that when we do create a sculpture?as much as they are beautiful and appreciated, you've seen them once and that kind of takes away from bringing you back again.

'When we're thinking about this project being a really big project for the Town, we thought about, what is that solution to keep people continuing to come back and how can we have art as a driver, a key force to bringing them back and engaging with them through art and creativity. That is why we shifted to this proposal.'

Councillor Gallo also told the proponents he was more 'traditionalist' when it comes to the arts and wanted to see those options on the table as well.

'Either a collaboration with a prominent artist, local artists, something of that sort,' he said. 'To me, a lot of thought should be put into this.'

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter