

Second Heritage District plans get public roll-out



By Brock Weir

People want to see the communities they bought into and love evolve, yet still retain the same character.

That is the message being heard by consultants looking into establishing Aurora's second heritage conservation district? in southeast Aurora.

If brought to fruition, the new designated community would build upon the success of the Town's first Heritage Conservation District formed nearly 10 years ago in Downtown Aurora and stretching northeast from the corner of Yonge and Wellington Street East in the North, Centre Crescent at its most easterly point, and Kennedy Street East in the south. The area includes such landmarks as Town Park, the Aurora Cultural Centre, multiple churches, and, of course, several historic homes.

?It is a chance to enhance their lives, improve quality of place, to either stabilize or increase their property values, to encourage economic development in this fair burgh, and just keep what they like and manage the change they might not like,? says consultant Carl Bray, whose company Bray Heritage, is overseeing the project.

Mr. Bray recently spent the morning at the Aurora Farmers' Market with other municipal staff, including Heritage Planner Vanessa Hicks, to begin to engage ? and gauge ? the public's interest in the plan.

Change people might not like, adds Mr. Bray, include ?monster homes? and other buildings which might not be in keeping with the surrounding architecture.

?That has been one of the main things,? agrees Ms. Hicks. ?They want to see a lot of the mature trees that are here kept. They want to make sure houses fit in and are complementing the area. They really like that all of the houses are unique and it is not like looking into those new subdivisions and just about every home is the same.?

That, adds Mr. Bray, is representative of the feedback they have received so far.

?If you've invested in a property that is kind of like a little bit of insurance that something crazy is not going to happen here or across the street,? adds Mr. Bray of a historical designation.

While their initial inroads in engaging the community were deemed to be a success, there is still a lot of work to do, they agreed.

?Push back? will be inevitable, concludes Mr. Bray, but that is par for the course. Likely concerns include possible restrictions on what a property owner can or cannot do with their homes, and red tape. Then there is the challenge of keeping everyone happy in an area, such as Town Park, which has so many historical and emotional connections to so many longstanding residents of Aurora.

?It's not that someone is going to buy the park and build condos here, but the notion that we would like to keep what works,? he says. ?Part of our job in this phase is to find out what works. If it is a small town atmosphere, what can we define that as? What are the components of that? If those components can be written down, then you have some chance to discuss them in a rational way and you can put some policy and guidelines around that.

?If change is coming along at Town Hall and they have some notion of how they can control it, you can have the same notion about it and it is not seen as being subjective or a NIMBY reaction.?