

## Town Square's outdoor gathering space begins taking shape



With additions and renovations to the Aurora Public Library now complete and open to the public, and the addition to the historic Church Street School still underway behind its Victoria Street façade, members of the public can now see the next phase of the Town Square renovation take shape.

With the eye-catching bridge connecting the Library and the historic landmark almost ready to be enclosed by glass, foundations were recently laid down below for the centrepiece of the outdoor gathering space – a feature that will serve as a summertime splashpad and water feature and double as wintertime skate loop for up to 75 ice enthusiasts.

As work continues unabated both indoors and outdoors, municipal staffers are steering the multi-million dollar redevelopment, one that is hoped will spur downtown revitalization, towards a construction completion of the end of this year.

“The first phase of construction being complete was on the Library side with the new façade, accessibility features, the reading garden, as well as the multipurpose rooms within the Library,” said Samantha Mahoney, Marketing and Communications Specialist about the Aurora Town Square team, on a hard hat tour of the site last week. “For the next phase of construction on the Square, our sights are set on the grand opening that will see the entire project from outdoor square being completed as well as the new addition inside, then fully enjoying all the amenities of the community hub.

“We have construction slated to be complete at the end of the year with grand opening celebrations early on in 2024. We're looking forward in the fall and early winter months being able to announce [what] the community can expect when it comes to our grand opening celebrations and earlier on in the wintertime we'll also have a Town Square website launched with lots of information.”

In recent months, residents have been able to follow the step-by-step redevelopment of Town Square through online channels, but scores of residents and community groups have also taken the chance to go on hard hat tours with Mahoney, and Project Manager Phil Rose, to see the myriad possibilities for how the spaces might be used and how they might fit within them.

“When we walk through the hardhat tours, we often get so much different feedback and so many suggestions,” says Mahoney. That's the beauty of collaboration. We get to hear everybody's ideas and so many people have come forward with interesting thoughts and perspectives, things they want to do as well. I think every time we bring a group through we learn something new and it's all opportunities we can bring forward, whether it's in the space [by the time of] the grand opening and down the road as well.

?We love to showcase the space and where we're at.?

For Mahoney, the project has a special resonance.

Having grown up in Aurora, Mahoney sees the possibilities and is excited to see them come to fruition.

?As a long-time resident, I was really excited to be on board with this project, helping to share with the community about it, help promote everything that is to come, and be a part of that cultural celebration. For me, growing up in Aurora, it is such an exciting component. It's going to help revitalize downtown, and just bring so much for everyone. It's been an amazing almost-year at this point and I am just looking forward to everything to come.?

By last Thursday afternoon, each component of Town Square yet-to-be-complete was a hive of activity as construction workers worked inside on the completion of the new centrepiece staircase between the historic schoolhouse and its new addition, the new parking lot to the north of the site, the bridge, and the outdoor amenities: the skate loop, water wall and amphitheatre seating.

?The bridge is one of my favourite perspectives of the outdoor Square,? said Mahoney. ?The bridge will be enclosed with glass windows and inside the bridge there will be cozy seating, lots of different areas for people to come, whether it is to hang out, study and they can look out onto the Square. The bridge is also a great accessibility component of the Square, linking guests from the Library through to the new Museum and Cultural Centre, and from the parking lot as well. In addition to the accessibility component, it is also great for days when the weather is unpredictable. Whether it is snowy or rainy, you can just cross through without getting rained or snowed on.

?Outdoors, about 75 people can skate at once. In the summertime, it converts into an interactive water feature so on really hot days you can run through, cool down, and whatnot. In addition, there is the water feature wall where the water will trickle down. The water will recirculate and feed into all the plant life at the Square, too ? over 60 different plants at the Square. The amphitheatre seating is about 90 per cent complete with wood seating mostly installed across? so it is that element of community events, gatherings, outdoor performances in the Square ? and behind the amphitheatre we'll have a holiday tree, a balsam fir, that is going to be decorated in the wintertime to add an ambiance to the Square.?

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