

Town to buy Old Armoury for \$515,000



(The Queen's York Rangers parade out of the Aurora Armoury for the last time in 2012, en route to their new home, the Lt. Gov. John Graves Simcoe Armoury on Industrial Parkway South. Auroran photo by David Falconer)

By Brock Weir

It has been an important part of Aurora's history for nearly 140 years, but the old Aurora Armoury at Mosley and Larmont Streets is set to receive a new lease on life this week.

The Town of Aurora is set to approve a new bylaw authorising the purchase of the Old Armoury for \$514,800 from the Federal Department of Public Works and Government Services (PWGSC). Previously under the auspices of the Department of National Defence (DND) for use by the Queen's York Rangers, the local Regiment vacated their long-time Aurora base for new digs in the old Aurora Hydro building on Industrial Parkway South, leaving their historic home sporadically used by cadets and other service groups. A further \$120,000 is also expected to be set aside for building maintenance.

In a memo before Council, Aurora CAO Neil Garbe says this week's approval is part of the Terms and Conditions of Sale negotiated by staff and Councillors in a series of closed session meetings throughout the year.

Appraisals were completed on the property both by PWGSC in March 2013 and the Town in May 2014, said Mr. Garbe. Town Staff and PWGSC agreed to use the income approach value that was obtained by PWGSC as a basis for negotiating the purchase price. Town staff also negotiated a 10 per cent reduction in the purchase price, based on historical sale conditions that exist for the property. This reduction resulted in a final negotiated purchase price of \$514,800. The purchase price will be funded from the Cash-in-Lieu of Parkland reserve fund.

Council last discussed the armoury in public earlier this spring when they passed a bylaw giving the Old Armoury historical designation. According to Mr. Garbe, that too was a precondition to the disposal of the building by the DND. Those discussions, however, raised questions from Councillor Evelyn Buck on the logistics of who actually owned the land the drill shed sat on.

According to Town Solicitor Warren Mar, looking through old documents from the time, the property and everything contained on it is still under the name of Her Majesty the Queen, in the right of Victoria. It is in the Federal Government's hands, and it has been since whenever Queen Victoria last reigned.

Councillor Buck said she was, nevertheless, dissatisfied with that explanation because she believed the land the building rested on was still with the Town of Aurora for use by the Government as long as the Regiment was still using it as a base.

?In the original transfer deed from the Town to the Federal Government, that language was put in and specifically struck out,? Mr. Garbe told The Auroran, of the original suggestion that the land revert back to the Town once it was no longer needed for military use. ?The effect of the transfer was good as long as it was used for this purpose, but those words were specifically struck out from the document [in] the original transfer to the Crown.?

When negotiations began, Councillor John Abel was amongst those who suggested the Government should give the land and facility back to the Town for a nominal fee. Mr. Garbe said they went into negotiations with that in mind, but it didn't gain traction.

?The Government of Canada is really intent on getting value for every asset they own,? Mr. Garbe said. ?Across the country, it is the same principle, so we set a value and they have to demonstrate to their auditors that they were able to achieve that value.?

If Council passes the bylaw this week, the deal with the Federal Government is expected to close September 30. Once that time comes, however, there will still be more money that needs to be put into the building to bring it back to its former self.

?As is generally standard in these types of real estate transactions, the Property is being purchased by the Town in ?as ?is? condition with no warranties or representations,? concluded Mr. Garbe.

Unlike the recently restored and reconstructed Petch House, Town Staff have an idea of what they want to use the building for. Mr. Garbe said if the deal goes through it will be rented out for community space for the time being.

?We want to approach the Farmers' Market to see if there is any interest in having a year-round Farmers' Market there, get their feedback and see if that facility will work out,? he said. ?If it passes, we will move forward with having some discussions with them.?