

United Church ready to rebuild after parkland break from Council

It has been seven years of uncertainty for Aurora United Church since a fire devastated its venerable place of worship. Now, they're almost ready to put shovels in the ground at their spiritual home at Yonge and Tyler Streets.

Sitting at the Committee level last week, Council waived \$68,500-worth of cash-in-lieu-of-parkland fees being faced by Aurora United Church (AUC) ahead of the rebuild, a waiver which will remain in place until there is a change of use on the property.

Cash-in-lieu (CIL) is money developers are required to pay to the Town for the acquisition/building of parkland needed as a result of growth.

As AUC is slated to be rebuilt in conjunction with a multi-storey 150-unit retirement home on the north end of the property, the developers of the residential portion of the development will still be on the hook for \$166,500.

Recently we were informed that we are required to pay a CIL for the sum of \$235,000, of which \$68,500 is the portion payable by the church, said Brian North, Chair of the AUC Rebuilding Committee, in a letter to municipal staff. It is my understanding from past discussions that when a new, not replacement place of worship was built on Leslie Street that this cost was waived for them.

It is unfortunate the position we find ourselves in, but it is my belief that our rebuilding will have no change in affecting the parklands within our Town, we are the same congregation requiring new bricks and mortar.

Staff agreed with Mr. North's position and put forward the appropriate recommendation to Council, citing the CIL waiver for Northridge Community Church, which was constructed by the Salvation Army on Leslie Street, just north of Wellington Street East.

I am comfortable doing it for the church, said Councillor Michael Thompson. It is clear the only part we're deferring is the portion that would be associated with the church. The development is intertwined to a certain degree, but this is strictly just for the church and not for the retirement residence.

Councillor Harold Kim said he too was in favour of deferring the AUC's portion of the CIL bill.

The church existed before and they are just rebuilding what was already there, he said. Certainly it would be a just reason to defer the CIL. It is a place of worship and a congregation for many decades [providing] great service for the Town.

Mayor Mrakas agreed.

We have done it with the Salvation Army [and] I have no problem doing it here, he noted. Taxpayers will collect that money when the use changes. This is a way we can continue to make sure that a historic building in our Town gets rebuilt and comes back to the Downtown Core.

The former home of the Aurora United Church was demolished in 2014 after being gutted by a fire just prior to that year's Easter observances.

Since then, the AUC has shared space with Trinity Anglican Church at Church and Victoria Streets.

Extensive archaeological work has taken place on the site in the intervening years, including the excavation of more than 100 early settler graves, remains which are set to be reinterred together at Aurora Cemetery in due course.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter