

Victoria Hall could get new lease on life as Town looks for new Armoury, café tenants

From a church, to a school, to a 20-year stint as Aurora's public library, the historic Victoria Hall on the southwest corner of Victoria and Mosley Streets, has seen many uses since it was first built in 1883.

But, while still in occasional rental use, it is somewhat overpowered these days by its immediate neighbour, Aurora Town Square.

The historic space, however, could see a new lease on life sooner rather than later, as the Town looks for new tenants of the Aurora Armoury and the Café serving Town Square.

According to Aurora CAO Doug Nadorozny, Victoria Hall will be included when the Town seeks expressions of interest on the facilities.

The CAO noted this potential new chapter for Victoria Hall at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting when Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese asked for more details on the anticipated calls for interest.

Nadorozny noted the Town is still looking for the best way to roll out the requests for interest as Niagara College's lease on the Town Square café is in place until the end of June – a marked difference from Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute which announced it would not renew its lease on the Armoury effective at the end of January.

'We're looking at putting out three requests for expressions of interest because they could sort of be related,' he said. 'One is the Café, which Niagara College is also looking after until the end of June [and] they have said they would continue to maintain the contract for that, the Armoury, as well as Victoria Hall, which was the subject of another meeting and the direction we received was to put that out to the public as well. We didn't want to put one (request) out and then have a potential proponent who said, 'If I had known about the other one, I might have been interested in combining it.'

'As you can imagine, they are very diverse opportunities and each of the opportunities could be pursued in different ways by potential venders, so we have left the request for expression of interest very wide open. We have covered basically what the facilities are about, how we hope these facilities contribute to a vibrant downtown, plans for Town Square and so on. We have put a lot of information out for consideration by the public and the intention is we would bring the results of that process back to Council. It is not something it is going to be a tender where the lowest price gets it; this will be very subjective and we have identified, for example, the Armoury is a community space and we're interested in how others view that space and how integrating with things that happen in Town Park, would occur based on their proposals.'

Nadorozny also assured Council would be provided with, as requested by Councillor Weese, 'an accounting of the lease agreements with Niagara College' including expenses, rentals, and the revenues that went back to the Town.

The Town announced Niagara College had opted to pull out of the Armoury on January 16, with their role there concluding at the end of January. They did, however, commit to honour existing bookings – including last weekend's presentation of King Charles III Coronation Medals hosted by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leah Taylor Roy on February 9.

'Since signing their lease with the Town in 2019, as the first tenant of our world class multi-purpose event space, Niagara College has been a valued partner, bringing their expertise and dedication to operating The Armoury and more recently to The Armoury Café,' said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement at the time. 'Together, we created dynamic spaces that offered residents and visitors exceptional dining experiences while showcasing innovative culinary education. We wish Niagara College further success as they pursue their new strategic priorities.'

By Brock Weir