

Wanted: Ideas for what to do with log house, 150 years old, three prev. owners



By Brock Weir

If you have any new and innovative ideas on what Aurora should do with Petch House now that it has been reconstructed, the Town is all ears.

Aurora is asking residents this month for their input into potential uses for the building.

Council approved a call for ideas this winter on just what should be done with the log home, restored and reconstructed behind the Aurora Seniors' Centre last year and officially dedicated last fall. It followed a report presented to Council at the committee level outlining further work that would need to be carried out on the site depending on its future use.

Currently, it is essentially an empty rectangle with rudimentary loft space, so extensive work will need to be continued once a final use is determined.

‘The reconstitution of the Petch House was done under the supervision of a structural engineer,’ said Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora’s Director of Building and Bylaw in a report to Council. ‘The second floor, as noted by the engineer, is to be used as an attic space only. No occupancy or storage is permitted as the loading would exceed design parameters. If the floor was structurally enhanced, only a small portion of the second floor could be used as minimum head room requirements would dictate space.’

Whereas the building is now just log walls, windows, doors, and floors, in order for any future use to comply with health codes, at least one washroom will need to be built, heating will have to be installed if it is going to be used year-round rather than seasonally, and it will have to be wired.

But none of these things can take place until the big question of use is resolved.

Building on a motion from Councillor Evelyn Buck at the suggestion of Mayor Geoffrey Dawe calling for the Town to issue a formal expression of interest on the future of the building, Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation cautioned that before you can issue a call for expressions of interest, Council first needs to hone just what that interest might be.

‘I think it would assist anyone who wants to put in an expression of interest if they had some indication that Council would like to see it as a commercial venture or whether it is something private, whether it is a partnership,’ he said. ‘Any parameters you can place on that would assist us in preparing the expression of interest and then submitting those results to Council.’

For Councillor Evelyn Buck, her previous suggestion the building could be used as a tourism and information centre was still very much in play. She further suggested it would be an ideal venue for new and emerging cultures in Aurora to have a space and flourish.

‘What a rich experience that would be for the young people in the Town and the people in our community,’ she said. ‘I think there

is no limit to the ideas that could come forward. It is just a matter of you putting the building to use and deciding how much more, if any, you want to invest in the building to make it a year-round facility. It could be baby steps and you could just let it grow.?

At the end of the day, Council was supportive of getting as many ideas as possible on the table before deciding on what needs to be done.

?Having sat around this table for so many years and for so many years having Petch House be a topic of conversation, now we finally have it on its concrete pad on our property, it would be a shame just to let it sit there and use it for storage. I would like to see what we can do with it.?

For some, however, it was a matter of pinning down a wider-ranging strategy for the building in keeping in mind Aurora's Strategic Plan. The plan has a series of objectives that could be solved in part through the Petch House, argued Councillor Michael Thompson.

?From that point, maybe there are two or three ideas that link to those strategic objectives and then we can invite the community to participate,? he said.

Councillor Chris Ballard added keeping the strategic plan in mind would save the Town from ?rushing? into something that would be found to be a bad fit a few years down the road.

?Let's take some time, talk to staff, figure out where this fits in with our overall strategy of where that area is going and let's not micromanage,? he said.

After being reconstructed behind the Seniors' Centre, Petch House was officially dedicated last fall by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, accompanied by Councillors Buck, Sandra Humfryes, John Abel, and Mr. Downey, along with Parks Manager Jim Tree who played a key role in the restoration.

To that point, the renovation, reconstruction, and restoration had come in at \$146,000.