

Bridge Club turns down Seniors? Centre option

By Brock Weir

Community groups displaced by the upcoming demolition of the former Aurora Public Library and Seniors' Centre buildings on Victoria Street will not pursue space at the Aurora Seniors' Centre after Council rejected a rent subsidy bid.

Council affirmed their decision to vote down a rent subsidy proposal which would have seen groups such as the local air cadets, the Aurora Bridge Club, Faith Fellowship Baptist Church, and others, receive a long-term lease subsidy agreement for space at the Aurora Seniors' Centre, keeping their rental fees more or less on par with what they had been paying for space on Victoria Street. Rejecting the rent subsidy itself at the last Council meeting was confirmed without a discussion, but talks turned to the unfinished business contained within the same report.

This last piece of the puzzle was a proposed increase to the budget of the Aurora Seniors' Centre for an additional staff person to be on hand to open, prepare and close the facilities for these groups on Sundays.

"We moved forward with receiving the report, but we failed to move forward on providing any form of subsidization," said Councillor Paul Pirri.

Councillor Pirri chaired the previous General Committee meeting and, therefore, did not fully chime in on the topic. Once it came to ratify the decision at Council, however, he waded in.

"The comments around the table at the time were about subsidization and that what was spoken about was much too long," he continued. "But we also failed to pass that Council would approve an increase to the Seniors' Centre's operating budget, and the reason that is important is if any other groups want to move forward on a non-subsidized basis, we have to approve this operating budget to provide staff [the resources] to be able to staff the site."

None of the groups, however, appear keen to move forward on the condition of paying full freight for the facility.

"The only group that contacted me with regards to the report is the Bridge Club," said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation. "I had a meeting with them [Tuesday] afternoon and made them aware of it. They are not interested in paying the full freight for the room.

"If any group comes in to book that, we wouldn't [need the extra budget item]. We were using the recommendation based on the fact there would be a subsidization level provided. If the subsidization level was not provided, we do not need [that item]. We would run over budget on our part time, but the additional revenue would offset those costs."

These groups, long-time tenants of the old library have found other places to go, with the Aurora Bridge Club, for example, finding a new home at the Newmarket Veterans Association hall.

Originally, Mr. Downey proposed a number of options for each of the groups.

"The 140 Air Cadet Squadron has been successful in finding an alternative space [to the old Library] to meet their needs; however, the new space has increased the present lease payment from \$870/year with the Town to \$8,400/year at the new location. They have requested subsidization from the Town to help bridge this gap. Staff are recommending the group be subsidized on a declining scale over the next 10 years.

"The 140 Air Cadet Squadron would receive 90 per cent of the new lease rate in year one and that would decrease by 10 per cent each subsequent year. That would permit a payment in year one similar to their existing rent and permit them time to raise funds gradually, towards independence from the Town."

A further request was made by the Aurora Bridge Club, which recently vacated the old library for a facility in Newmarket. Their request was for a waiver of permit fees to use the Craft Room at the Aurora Seniors' Centre on Sunday afternoons from September to June of each year. A subsidy would have clocked in at \$7,500 of lost revenue to the Town.

Faith Fellowship's request was similar, asking for a waiver of fees to use the Centre's West McKenzie Room on Sundays of \$8,000 to keep their rent similar to what they were paying for the old library.