

Decision on historical collections delayed for Cultural Master Plan

By Brock Weir

The future of Aurora's historic collections could be decided this fall as Council postponed acquiring items from the Aurora Historical Society until a wider-ranging plan is drafted.

The delay will see continued interest expressed by the Town in taking ownership of the thousands of items donated over the years to the Society (AHS) until the completion of Aurora's Cultural Master Plan, which could be completed as early as the autumn.

The Cultural Master Plan will be a long-range plan devoted to guiding cultural, historical, and artistic endeavours in Aurora. According to terms of reference which will be considered by Councillors this week, it will cover topics ranging from raising awareness of cultural assets to residents and visitors, looking at investment opportunities in what is described as Aurora's Cultural Sector, to recommend approaches to protect, support, and enhance the cultural diversity and assets of Aurora and look at coordinating cultural assets, including partnership building between Cultural organizations.

I am really interested in knowing how this will fit into the overall Cultural Master Plan, said Councillor Chris Ballard, in favour of delaying the acquisition. I think this is an opportunity to take seven months and make sure we identify all the pieces of the puzzle and how they are going to fit together in a way that best suits the taxpayers of Aurora.

Others, however, were not quite as convinced. Among some Councillors, such as Councillors John Abel and Michael Thompson, there was a concern that the delay wasn't sending the right message to the AHS and giving them a positive indication they were ready to move forward with the plan when all was said and done. Councillor Evelyn Buck, for instance, said expressing continued interest was enough and deferring it contingent on the completion of the Cultural Master Plan was muddying the waters.

The original recommendation from Town Staff was to execute a transfer agreement between the Town and the AHS and an exhibition and management agreement with the AHS, allocate \$179,470 from Council's discretionary reserve account for the operating costs of the collection, and a further \$50,000 from the same account for capital costs.

While he was reluctant to set a dollar figure to the motion, it was this clause Councillor Michael Thomson said was the right way forward. Under the terms of the recently signed Cultural Services agreement between the Town and the Aurora Cultural Centre, the second floor Aurora Room will be allocated as permanent museum space for the collection. With the room ready to go, there has to be something to fill it beyond a one-off exhibition this spring and summer to mark Aurora's Sesquicentennial.

I fear as we continue to wait upon the Cultural Master Plan, the end result will be we miss out having a museum established in our 2013 year for Aurora's 150th, he said. We had a consultant and they spoke to the care of the collection, the status of it, and that is part of it. It is great that we're going to put an exhibit up and start exhibiting these artefacts, but what about all the artefacts that are not going to be displayed?

We can't just pick and choose pieces of being stewards and say it is great and promote this aspect of it, but those objects need some care, need to be properly conserved, and some resources dedicated to them to ensure the long-term preservation. If we wait to have all those pieces fall into place until after the master plan, some of those objects are posed to be at risk.

Another Councillor who was reluctant to assign a dollar figure to the transfer was Councillor Evelyn Buck who said the items in the collection were largely donated by the community as a whole.

The collection is already owned by the people of Aurora, she argued. They have already contributed to it, they have already paid for it, and they are being asked to pay another \$179,000 for something they already created over 50 years.

Councillor John Abel shared similar thoughts to Councillor Thompson on the matter and said waiting until the Cultural Master Plan is drafted and implemented is dragging [Council's] feet and delays getting a museum into the Cultural Centre.

?We have an agreement that they will [allocate] a room for the display of heritage artefacts that have been dormant for almost 10 years now,? he said.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, however, said she objected to the comment.

?I don't look at this as dragging our feet,? she said. ?I look at this as doing sound planning for our community and also sound fiscal planning because there is a lot of money involved here and we need to know about how we're going to go about that to really benefit the community.?