

Further changes could be in store as Petch House seeks use



By Brock Weir

The house has been refurbished, the historical plaque has been unveiled, and now it is time to find a use for the Petch Log House.

Although the Petch House has been in place and technically "complete" since August, Councillors put the wheels in motion last week to find a good use for the historic house. Despite her initial reservations to put any money whatsoever into the restoration and reconstruction of the building, Councillor Evelyn Buck introduced a motion last week to find a use for Aurora's "newest asset."

Her suggestion? "A tourist information centre and retail facility for souvenirs unique to Aurora."

"It was mouldering and decaying and we were always hoping someone would come along with the idea to use it and the Town had no use for it," said Councillor Buck. "Now, it is reconstructed, it is beautiful, and we still don't have a specific idea of how it might be used. I think we need to go to the community and ask for ideas on what function this building could be put to enrich the assets we already have."

"When the province started building community colleges, their whole program as arts, carving, metalworking, [and] leatherworking. I am fairly positive there are people in the community who would welcome the opportunity to develop a small industry that would manufacture souvenirs unique to the Town of Aurora, exhibiting various aspects of the Town's history."

There are some problems and limitations, however, with possible uses. While the building is wired for electricity, there is no water and no plumbing "making the space particularly challenging for people who might need to use the bathroom."

"There are some practical issues for staffing and occupancy of that building for any significant period of time," said Councillor Michael Thompson. "If somebody is in there operating a tourist information centre or a retail facility, and they have to go to the washroom, what are they going to do, especially if it is on the weekend? You can't be expected to run down to Wendy's."

"Before you go to the community for ideas, I think the first step is [bringing] back a report on how this space can be occupied. Does it need any additional renovations to make it usable?"

These were concerns shared by Councillor Chris Ballard who questioned whether the reconstructed Petch House meets the Building Code and whether or not it is ready for occupancy. Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, said while the house meets the building code, it is not yet ready for occupancy.

"It is wired, however, it is not available for occupancy because it does not comply with all the conditions required for occupancy."

Added Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation: "The permit was issued based on the last occupancy as a

residential occupancy for the restoration without a use going forward. It was always understood when there is a use determined for the building that we would perhaps require a change of use. If it is not going to be a residence, it would require a change of use permit issued under the building code and may require some upgrades to comply with the building code.?

Now that the building is in place, it would be a good idea to figure out what to do with it, said Councillor Gallo, before highlighting some of Councillor Buck's earlier comments about the Petch House, including a letter to The Auroran in which she said it was ?insane to budget \$100,000 to fix up a rotting, mouldering old shack that has no use to anyone, has no historical significance.?

?I find the dichotomy between what you just said and what you wrote back then [to be] extreme,? said Councillor Gallo.

?When discovered the resources that were available to do this and there was a place to do it, I changed my position,? replied Councillor Buck. ?[At the time] Councillor Gallo's comment was ?You've gotta love politics!' Don't tell me you don't appreciate it.?

If uses come forward that don't comply with the current occupancy, some challenges Ms. van Leeuwen identified included stronger floors for the upper level loft to meet the code for assembly or retail occupancy.

?It looks like the spending isn't done yet,? concluded Councillor Ballard. ?Maybe Councillor Buck can find us more resources.?