

Library Square could be razed by November, ahead of Christmas Market

By Brock Weir

The former homes of the Aurora Public Library and Seniors' Centre could be razed as early as November, according to municipal staff.

The comments were made last week by CAO Doug Nadorozny, who said there is the 'potential for demolition' by late November, but that will be confirmed 'in a couple of weeks' pending the results of a tender that went out near the end of September.

This clarification of timelines surrounding the development of Library Square came as Council set the wheels in motion on a plan which could see the vicinity of Library Square the scene of Aurora's very first 'Christmas Market.'

Floated by Councillor Tom Mrakas as a way to not only bring the Aurora community together in a different way but also give residents a flavour of Library Square's potential, his motion to task staff with coming up with a feasibility plan for just such an event received the green light.

'We always talk about downtown revitalization and I think that we're going through some exciting times moving forward with Library Square and the Cultural Precinct area,' said Councillor Mrakas in his pitch to Council. 'I think this is an opportunity for us to create a new event that can get in on the ground floor before we get to the development of that area that can, in essence, help showcase the area and get the residents engaged in the area, coming back down and making it that gathering place we have always been talking about and help promote it.'

A Christmas Market, inspired by the one which draws thousands annually to Toronto's Distillery District would be a unique event in York Region, one which would have the potential to spur economic and tourism development 'if done right.'

'I think with our staff it can be done right,' he said, adding his preferred time for a Market would be after the 2017 Santa Under the Stars parade on November 26. 'When I look at it, I envision lights. I envision a setup with market booths, hot chocolate being served, maybe a licensed area, kids skating and just everyone having a good time.'

The suggestion of a Christmas Market, or at least the idea of a Christmas Market, was warmly received around the table, with Councillor Michael Thompson stating he was interested to see what staff come back with not only on dates but how it can be put together.

'I am really excited about this motion,' said Councillor Sandra Humfries on what a Christmas Market would mean to Library Square's future. 'I know it is a great start to launch exactly what we have been striving for [over] the last two terms. It is one, but hopefully it will be one of an annual.'

Added Councillor Harold Kim: 'It is a great suggestion and a great way to refocus our efforts in a central part of Aurora, which is Library Square.'

Although still enthusiastic about the idea, some Councillors tempered their enthusiasm with some logistical concerns.

Councillor Jeff Thom, for instance, said while he was supportive of the concept, he was not fully on board with the Town shouldering 100 per cent of the costs. He said he hoped a future report would address ways Aurora will be able to partner with community groups to make the event a reality to help offset any cost to the taxpayer.

'I think there will be opportunities perhaps working with the Farmers' Market or local restaurants and food vendors, local establishments, as well as some of the churches in the area,' he said.

This was a view shared by Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who said she wanted the report to address ways to ensure area businesses are incorporated into the festivities.

She also said that November can bring about unpredictable weather and an alternative plan to the great outdoors should also be considered. Councillor John Abel was on a similar wavelength, suggesting the historic Aurora Armoury at Town Park would be the ideal venue.

The Councillor went on to offer that the former Fleury Foundry on Wellington Street, just west of Yonge, and now home to Bacon Basketware, would be an ideal location down the road for a permanent, longer-lasting seasonal outdoor market.

'The idea is there is there is not enough time to put in an extensive two or three-week market in this time frame right now, but how we can introduce it and get it to that point,' replied Councillor Mrakas. 'The idea is to have one night this year and grow it.'

Mayor Geoff Dawe also supported the report but with a reservation unique from the rest of Council.

'I am supportive of the concept, [but] I am not supportive of the name because, quite frankly, I don't feel it is inclusive,' said Mayor Dawe, adding that holding this event in conjunction with Santa Under the Stars might place an 'incredible burden' on municipal staff. 'I will support the concept, but that is just who I am and how I think.'