

Not-For-Profit model a contender to run Library Square

Since its inception ten years ago, the Aurora Cultural Centre has operated in partnership with the Town on delivering cultural services to Aurora.

Now, as Aurora prepares to significantly boost cultural services with the redevelopment of Library Square, this model could be expanded to ensure the successful operation of what is intended to be a significant community destination.

A Not-For-Profit Municipal Hybrid model, such as that currently enjoyed between the Centre (ACC) and the Town, is one of two options that have risen to the top as local lawmakers go over the fine details of how Library Square will operate in the future.

Not-for-profit governance is a common approach to operating cultural facilities such as the ACC, said Phil Rose-Donahoe, Project Manager for Library Square, in a report to Council last week. Municipalities often use third-party cultural groups to provide cultural programming to the community. As mission-driven not-for-profit organizations, they possess the expertise required to run cultural venues and provide municipalities with cost-savings in delivering cultural services. On the other hand, most museums in Ontario started out as projects of volunteer-run, non-profit historical societies, but, over time, transitioned to municipally-run entities as historical societies became increasingly unable to sustain them.

Among the benefits of a Not-for-profit/Municipal Hybrid Model are expertise in programming, proven governance integrity (as demonstrated in the Town's cultural services agreement with the ACC), existing partnerships, potential cost-savings, and the ability to allow for municipal oversight.

Some drawbacks of this model outlined by the project manager include the potential for inefficient customer service due to an absence of centralized leadership, the potential for confusion, duplication, and uneven approaches to service delivery, some fragmentation in the delivery of Aurora's Cultural Master Plan and higher public sector compensation.

Given the challenge of maintaining the hybrid model, rather than a complete overhaul of what presently exists, there is an opportunity to mitigate these challenges by adopting some key improvements such as expand the ACC's board membership to include the Director of Community Services, or designate, the purpose of which is to enhance communication between the Town and the ACC; transition the responsibilities of all bookings/rentals to the Town for efficiency and offsetting the Town's investment in the facility.

While this is the model that received initial support around the Council table last week, the potential for a Direct Delivery model is still on

the table.

?As the largest community infrastructure project undertaken by the Town, the Library Square project provides an opportunity for the municipality to re-assess the decision-making process by integrating arts, culture and heritage programming into a refined

governance structure,? said Mr. Rose-Donahoe. ?Under a municipal direct delivery model, Library Square would become a function of the Community Services Department, which would be responsible for the development and delivery of municipal cultural programming (interior and exterior), theatre performances and box office management, museum administration, rentals and bookings, program registration, facility maintenance and repairs, among other responsibilities.

?A not-for-profit arm (e.g. foundation) is possible under this arrangement and could be responsible for financially supporting cultural services, and local arts and culture in general, by facilitating fundraising and advocacy activities.?

Examples of existing models of this kind include the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts and Flato Markham Theatre.

By Brock Weir