

Options explored for architectural salvage program

By Brock Weir

After nearly nine years since its formal establishment, artefacts in Aurora's Architectural Salvage Program, a collection of bits and pieces rescued from demolished heritage homes and notable buildings, have been fully catalogued.

With a list in place, however, now the big question is what to do with the doors, windows, and other architectural features that have been collecting dust in storage. Members of Aurora's Heritage Advisory Committee are now grappling with this issue.

Foundations for the Architectural Salvage Program were established in 2005 to earmark and take in pieces from significant buildings soon to meet the wrecking ball with an eye of incorporating them into new and restored building projects. These pieces include windows, interior and exterior doors, trims and baseboards, timbers, beams and floorboards, fences, shutters, bricks, and banisters, among others.

Over 130 items have since been catalogued, the majority of which are beams and doors.

Now that the items have been catalogued, Vanessa Hicks, Manager of Heritage Planning for the Town of Aurora, a revised plan will include a review of applications from individuals in the community who might want to purchase or acquire these items for building projects and, consequently, a review process.

?The objectives [are] to develop a process for salvaging the building materials and to find a way of implementing that in a way that [would] develop a program criteria for receiving and distributing materials and do it in such a way that is operational, sustainable, and available to the general public,? Ms. Hicks told the committee.

According to Marco Ramunno, Director of Planning, items are largely stored today in the old Public Library building on Victoria Street, but will be moved to Aurora's planned new Joint Operations Centre on Industrial Parkway North, pending Council approval this year. When he came to the municipality in 2008, one of his personal objectives, he said, was to get the Architectural Salvage Program in order. Now, through Ms. Hicks and the assistance of local historians Jacqueline Stuart and John McIntyre, that job is done and now it is time to tackle the next step.

?The next phase is finally having the committee finalize the program and move forward with the approach that we know what items we have and we do want to make those available to our residents, or our development industry who may want to make use of those items and incorporating those into the renovation plans,? said Mr. Ramunno.

For members of the Heritage Advisory Committee, however, going forward with the plan, they will have to tread a fine line in terms of making these items available but steering clear of, in the words of committee member Irina Kelly, being seen being a ?retail business.?

?It is kind of experimental,? she said. ?It has to work on paper.?

As it stands now, those who want to incorporate a piece of Aurora's building history into their projects have to contact Aurora's planning department to get the ball rolling. They will review the catalogue with the applicant to identify the best materials for the project. Once the Town and the applicant have come up with a list of suitable items, it would be up to the Committee to determine whether their potential acquisition can go ahead.

If given the green light, the applicant will take on the responsibility for transportation and costs involved with moving and agree to the ?reasonable care and conservation? of what they have once installed.

Considering their options, committee members looked for ways to both streamline the process and ensure the safety materials, all the

while assuring Aurora wouldn't be liable should anything go wrong with the salvaged materials.

?Could it be simple enough just [for staff] to say yes, rather than come to the committee,? asked member Bob McRoberts. ?If someone needs a door and we don't meet for a couple of months, they might get cold! I don't know that I need to have a say in everything someone wants to have unless it is a tricky issue.?

Added Ms. Kelly: ?We have not discussed price or charging for this and I think this needs to be a part of the conversation. The project is costing a lot of money when you think about the hours you have put into cataloguing it.?

Councillor Abel was on the same wavelength.

?We should institute a framework,? he said. ?We're not giving it away for free. It is a revenue opportunity and that is what we are looking for.?

According to Ms. Stuart, at one time 95 per cent of the catalogue had been properly maintained. Before it was established, in the days when many ?significant? buildings like Castle Doane were razed, Aurora and the Aurora Historical Society removed architectural elements and either incorporated them into other buildings such as the Church Street School, or stored them. Many of these salvaged items are still under the umbrella of the Aurora Collection rather than the Salvage Program.