

Council looks at options for the old Schomberg arena

By Angela Gismondi

Ideas for re-purposing the Schomberg Agricultural Arena and Community Centre were brought forward at the committee of the whole meeting Monday.

The staff report was presented to council at the meeting, serving as an update on the results of the Expressions of Interest (EOI) issued by the township. The report also made recommendations for the next steps in the process for redevelopment of the arena building and property.

Last year council decided to try and re-purpose the building and property instead of selling it. A number of factors were considered in the decision including the potential loss of an important community asset, the loss of future opportunity for re-use for community purpose, impact to the Schomberg Agricultural Fair and loss of green space. An alternative method would have been to develop the land and potentially have [prefab buildings](#) built, just so there is more variety of properties available. As part of the agreement, any future use should generate \$1.3 million in funding (the appraised value of the old arena) in order to recover costs which were supposed to go towards the Trisan Centre debt. The intent is to re-purpose the site through a public/private partnership by way of a sale or lease that will result in a multi-purpose, community use and/or mixed community/commercial use facility, explained Chris Fasciano, director of parks, recreation and culture for the Township of King. Staff were to report back to council with the results of that exercise and they did so Monday.

"Initially the Schomberg Arena was to be put up for sale but we wanted to look at ways to keep the building and the land and keep allowing the Schomberg Agricultural Society to use it for the fair while also recovering the debt of \$1.3 million to go towards the new Trisan Centre," said Mayor Steve Pellegrini. "Any proposal that can achieve that goal as well as keeping the facility, adding value and enhancing the community is great."

After an extensive public consultation process, council recommended the issuance of an EOI to interested individuals, businesses or organizations. Staff developed the EOI document taking into consideration input received from the community consultation. The document was issued at the end of February with the purpose of gathering options for the future use of the site. By the time the EOI closed at the end of April, three submissions were received and those options were presented to council at the meeting.

The first option proposed (Proposal A) is for a mixed commercial/light industrial including a micro-brewery, retail store, restaurant and community space. Potential commercial uses for the property include a micro-brewery, winery, bakery, boutiques, agricultural and rural businesses, community kitchens and indoor farmers market.

"Described as a destination craft-brewery, craft cidery, craft distillery, restaurant and retail site, the project is intended to build a state of the art world class facility that will act as a destination spot bringing tourism, employment and a significant positive financial impact to the area," reads the staff report.

The second proposal (Proposal B) is for a long-term care facility including onsite associated services such as medical offices and a pharmacy and community space.

"This proposal involves the redevelopment of the site with a new commercial/community centre building described as an institute for home and community care and the construction of approximately 30 individual living care units focused on the needs of seniors requiring a continuum of care," stated the staff report.

The third option (Proposal C) proposes a fair and agriplex facility. The year-round facility would host the annual agricultural fair, agricultural/community/equine events, an indoor equestrian centre and potential rental opportunities in the arena, hall or fairgrounds through a business partnership with the municipality.

This option was not selected as a preferred option by staff as it would present a financial risk to the township in that it would require continued financial investment by the town.

Furthermore, the public consultation process revealed that there was minimal support for residential development in that area as many people felt there were enough residential units available in Schomberg.

The next step is to move forward with a Request For Proposal (RFP) process taking into consideration the community's input while making sure the proposal will finance the current Trisan debt requirement. According to staff, Proposal A is the best option for the township, but some members of council were not so sure.

Pellegrini wanted to know why the proposal for the microbrewery, commercial and retail space was selected over the proposal for the long-term care facility.

"Recommendations in this report were discussed by your management team," explained Township CAO Susan Plamondon. "Based on what we understand to be the preferred approach that met the financial requirement, this proposal was the one that was most

consistent with the preferred alternative that came out of the public consultation."

She added the Township could issue an RFP that solicits proposals consistent with both Proposal A and B, if council prefers.

"One thing we heard loud and clear is the retention of the building if possible and allowing the Schomberg Agricultural Society to continue the Schomberg Fair," said Plamondon, explaining the long-term care facility option proposes removal of the existing building and redevelopment of the site. "The first proposal is more inline with the preferred alternatives we heard discussed during the community consultation."

Pellegrini said he wants to see the land retained, not necessarily the building.

"It's our land. You can't buy land like that anymore," said Pellegrini. "Let's try to keep it so that 50 years from now it will still be part of Schomberg. I think the building has passed its useful life. It may be cheaper to tear it down and put a new building. I really think both (options) have incredible merit."

He added that the proposal for a long-term care facility is innovative and he would like to further explore it to see whether it is feasible or not. He asked that a senior care centre be added to the list of possible uses in the RFP.

Councillor Peter Grandilli did not agree.

"In 2009, council approved the sale of this arena and the proceeds to go to the Trisan Centre. I do not know why we are dragging our feet," said Grandilli. "After four years I think it's time we came to a decision. We should reapprove the sale of the building. I don't think King Township should retain any of this land or the arena. We are not here to partner with private businesses."

Grandilli said that keeping the arena is costing the taxpayer money and he requested a report to find out exactly how much.

"Overall I am completely disappointed with this report and I expect something better than this," said Grandilli.

Pellegrini responded, stating exploring options for the property has not cost the taxpayers a penny.

"This is our opportunity to do what's right for the municipality, to do what's right for the community and to put something we want there instead of what a developer wants there," said Pellegrini. "I don't want to just put up a 'for sale' sign."

Councillor Debbie Schaefer said she didn't have enough information to make a decision between the two different proposals and asked that both be considered as part of the RFP process.

Grandilli requested a recorded vote on the matter.

"Council members voted to sell this arena in 2009 and this arena should be sold," said Grandilli adding so many people complain about the problems with the old building. "Keeping it would only please a few local groups that want to keep the arena at the expense of the taxpayers in King Township."

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti said he has no problem justifying the decision to repurpose the arena to his constituents in King City.

"My own constituents ask me why we are doing this," said Mortelliti. "The point is not selling the building, it's recovering the \$1.3 million. Why do we have to sell the building if we can recover the money without selling the property. It will enhance the community. I think we're going down a good path here."

A motion was made for the Township of King to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) to interested individuals, businesses or organizations for the re-purposing of the site by way of a sale or lease that will result in a mixed commercial/light industrial development including a micro-brewery, retail store, restaurant, community space and/or senior care facility. The proposals will be accepted until Aug. 31, 2013.

A recorded vote was taken on the matter. With six members of council in favour and Councillor Grandilli against, the motion carried.