

Council decides to keep Nobleton Hall

By Mark PavilonsEditor

The Nobleton Community Hall will remain as is. King council listened to the public, and backed off moving or demolishing the structure. In the face of numerous public delegations and an estimated two-hour debate, Mayor Steve Pellegrini told the audience in the council chambers of the move. Councillor David Boyd drafted a motion for council to withdraw its intention to repeal the designation bylaw. The move negated both options recommended by staff. "We are a council that listens to everybody," Mayor Pellegrini said. Councillor David Boyd noted the Township has received numerous correspondences indicating that many community members have an emotional attachment to the hall and recognize it as a vital part of Nobleton's history. There are many factors to consider. Boyd said while his motion was scheduled to come before council, he didn't want to curtail citizens' rights to speak. He did point out there is a difference of opinion in the community and all options have ramifications. "A motion like this doesn't come without hard work and balance," he said. Despite the efforts to mitigate superfluous debate, several residents still took to the podium to voice their concerns, essentially agreeing with council's move. The mayor's announcement apparently fell on deaf ears as resident after resident reiterated their opinions and calls against repealing the bylaw, something assured by the mayor at the outset. In summary, Mayor Pellegrini noted the building stands as a testament to King's local history. It remains for everyone's benefit and council will need to look at its long-term use, which may include retrofitting and repurposing. This building is a "definition of our values as a community" and this decision to keep it "transcends bricks and mortar." Resident Nancy Hopkinson urged council not to repeal the hall's heritage designation and she presented a video tour of the building, pointing to its unique physical attributes. "Many wanted to have the Hall stay where it was and keep its heritage designation." She said several community groups have inquired about using the building, contrary to data from the Township. "Vote to keep the Hall in situ, make it accessible and get air conditioning for it. Then advertise at a reasonable rent and they will come!" Staff presented two options for council to consider "demolition, or relocation. Staff pointed out that a public survey was done last fall and of the 225 responses, the majority of residents were in favour of demolition. A decision on the future of the Nobleton Community Hall (NCH) has been subject to review for more than 15 years, beginning around the time the building was being considered for heritage designation in 2007. At that time, staff focused heavily on the cultural value and emotional connection. Following the 2007 report, staff and the Hall Board continued to maintain the facility, investing capital and emergency funds where required, and where approved by council. This lease eliminated community use from the upstairs portion of the building but was vital in ensuring revenue was available to offset operational costs. In 2018, council endorsed an evaluation of service levels related to community halls across the Township as part of the Facility Services Master Plan process. Even at the time, staff pointed out that future consideration will need to be given to the facility. Last year, when council discussed the Nobleton Revitalization Strategy, it was decided to begin the process on removing the heritage designation associated with the Nobleton Community Hall and conduct a public survey outlining the options. Staff engaged ERA Architects Inc. to complete the heritage assessment. ERA "found the facility is not a "rare example of a Depression era vernacular institutional building" and holds nominal physical value tied to its representation of a rural Ontario community hall typology. ERA also noted the cultural value lies in its longstanding historical association as a space for community congregation and community-based service organizations, including the Nobleton Women's Institute and Nobleton Lions Club, and resulting community benefits. Further, the architects said the hall doesn't define or support the character of the street. They recommended demolition and commemoration that is informed by continued community engagement, including engagement with the Nobleton Lions, former members of the Nobleton Women's Institute and the Heritage Advisory Committee. "Understanding the cultural value of the NCH to the community, it must be commemorated." Staff met with the Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) on two occasions in 2023 to discuss the options listed within this report. While the initial discussion centered around demotion of the facility, HAC asked staff to explore the feasibility of relocating the building as an alternate option. Following this exercise, staff met with the HAC a second time to present the relocation option and HAC said they are not in support of "the de-designation or demolition of the Nobleton Community Hall based on the cultural heritage evaluation completed. The HAC continues to recommend to council that the HAC is in support of the relocation and moving of the Nobleton Community Hall based on the criteria in support of the retained cultural heritage value established in the Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment completed." Staff have continued to maintain and operate the facility since the 2019 report, with the facility closed for a portion of that period due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Community usage has steadily declined and

community groups that once used the building have relocated. Staff said the building has continued to deteriorate since 2019 although minor repairs have been made over that period. Demolition of the facility was estimated to cost \$200,000 inclusive of ensuring parts of the facility are preserved for future use to commemorate the history of the NCH. Relocation of the facility as noted in Option 2, including the construction of required infrastructure and restoration work was estimated to cost \$500,000. The Township is also embarking on a block planning exercise for the land surrounding the park focused on how this area should be revitalized and how best to maximize the potential of the Lions Community Sports Park and Old King Road to create a Main St. like area with amenities for the community to enjoy. Early ideas include closing Old King Road from Highway 27, limiting vehicle access, and implementing zoning that would encourage low-rise mixed-use development with small shops with a piazza-like feel.