

Township purchase of property benefits all



In these frugal times, you wouldn't typically find much support in a township spending \$3 million to buy property.

But in King Township's case, we see this as exciting news for the entire municipality.

King agreed to purchase the former Holy Name school site on King Road just west of King City for almost \$3 million.

First of all, that's a pretty good deal for a 10-acre parcel in Canada's most affluent community.

Of this parcel, only 3 to 4 acres is usable, and the other 6 is considered environmentally sensitive.

It boasts a 38,000-square-foot school building, complete with offices, classrooms, a gymnasium, etc.

Currently the township offices in the strip mall in the heart of King City has roughly 14,000 square feet.

The money for the purchase of the property will come from Township reserves. Granted, \$3 million will drain the coffers, but as the mayor, councillors and staff are always apt to do, there are many options to explore.

And that's the beauty of this deal.

The Township owns the strip mall they're in, and could likely get more than \$5 million in today's market. So if it's a straight swap the Township favours, they're already ahead of the game, and could use the extra funds for renovations to the old school building. Since the new building is so large, there is adequate room for several tenants, generating revenue. Two law enforcement agencies ??York Regional Police and the OPP???serve the area, and patrol Highway 400. What better place to have a satellite station or office than one sitting a few hundred metres away from this busy highway? With either of these two as tenants, you have guaranteed income, provincial government assistance, and of course, security.

King Township would love to have an arts or cultural facility of sorts.

The gym and stage area of the school could be altered to lend itself to artistic presentations, concerts, theatre groups, etc. The gym could serve as a central community meeting place for events, annual meetings, conferences, even youth dances.

With an arts or cultural component, the municipality would be in line for various grants from various levels of government and private sources.

The building, when properly configured, could also serve as headquarters for a multitude of community groups, non-profit organizations and associations who serve King, but don't have a physical presence in our community. There is strength in numbers and becoming part of a central hub gives them more legitimacy and impact, and hence improves their ability to serve.

There is even a sports field to offer.

The possibilities are truly endless and the public has an ideal opportunity to put on their thinking caps and contribute to King's evolution. It's exciting, really, to be on the ground floor of what could be this community's new central public facility.

None of this will happen over night. It will take a year or two to explore all options, settle agreements and contracts and do the physical construction.

The reality is a municipality like King will never have a luxurious, palatial ?city hall???like our other urban counterparts. We don't

have to. But what we could have is a unique, made-in-King concept that could set a precedent among smaller townships. Mayor Pellegrini and council have always welcomed and embrace partnerships and collaborate efforts. These days it's really a necessity, and no longer an option. But not everyone has come to the realization that many hands make light work. Not to mention, it's vital in today's economy to leverage every funding source ??government, private, corporate ? to make inroads. This new facility, if it unfolds as envisioned by some, will become a centrepiece ??even a showpiece ? for this Township. Imagine a multi-use facility, a marriage of government and the community, nestled in a park-like oasis. It's what sustainability is all about. Isn't that the very definition of King?

And consider this.

This parcel was owned by the people, via the school board. It's only fitting that it be returned to public use.

Had the Township passed on the opportunity to purchase this property, it would likely have been snatched up by a developer or builder. They would have likely proposed high-density dwellings of some sort, drawing opposition from residents and council alike. That would have guaranteed a trip to the Ontario Municipal Board and legal costs of upwards of \$1 million.

All of this has been avoided.

I'm not diminishing the fact the Township is going to write a huge cheque with your tax dollars. They may have to incur some short-term debt. And some, even a councillor or two, may argue that municipalities shouldn't be in the land speculation business. But as well all know, if the Township just sits on the property for a decade, they would enjoy a pretty good windfall. You really can't go wrong with investing in real estate in King.

But more likely, it will become the Township's new office building.

It will be a place the community can be proud to call its new ?home.?

There are some great minds out there and a lot of talent.

Let's put it all to good use and come up with creative, innovative ideas to best serve the community in this facility. And let's do it with unbridled enthusiasm!