

King reviewing new 'civic centre' concept plan

By Mark Pavilons

Entering the hallowed halls of the former Holy Name school on King Road, you can see the potential. And hopes are the facility will become King's newest showpiece, a civic centre the entire community can be proud of.

King Township staff are excited about moving to a new municipal building, one that will not only be a modern corporate office, but reflect King's unique characteristics. It will be a place to call home.

King CAO Susan Plamondon is leading the charge in looking at what's necessary to transform the tired elementary school into new, efficient, workable space for all to enjoy.

Plamondon is preparing reports for council to consider. They will be a series of 'next steps' in a long process. The first stepping stone is a functional space assessment, indicating physical staff requirements. This will dictate future needs and can set the tone for the reconstruction of the building. Plamondon wants to plan this properly for the future because they really have just one shot at it. But they have a lot to work with.

The Township purchased the 9.48-acre property in 2013 from the York Catholic District School board for \$2.95 million. The property has a depth of 1,300 feet.

The school building on the site was constructed in two stages, the front section in 1968 and the two-storey addition at the rear was added in 1979. The total floor area is 37,641 square feet.

The property is immediately east of the planned prestige employment area and west of the Springhill Gardens condominium project. From the outset, it was seen as becoming a 'community hub,' providing additional community space and potentially generating some leasing options.

The building houses a large gymnasium, which would be ideal for community use. Part of the initial studies will examine whether it can be preserved for community programming. Depending on how the building is divided up, the Township may be able to use development charges to cover some costs. Other governmental agencies and groups will be consulted to see if they would like a community presence, and share some of the space.

Plamondon notes the possibilities are almost limitless.

It will be more than a municipal office, but a welcoming environment from which residents receive their services.

The wish list is quite long at this point and all potential uses will be reviewed to see what's practical.

Some expensive realities exist. The building requires many mechanical upgrades. The elevator will have to be replaced as well as the insulation. The large classrooms will have to be divided. But the footprint, and particularly the addition, has a solid foundation.

Repurposing the building definitely follows the mandates of King's Sustainability Plan and other strategies. Incorporating sustainable practices at the new building will show that King 'walks the talk.'

Staffers are looking forward to the extra space.

Currently crammed into some 15,000 square feet, the 85 staff in King City have to deal with some tight confines. The bottom line is they need the space.

Plamondon observed King is growing, and the office has to grow too, to meet the demands and expectations of residents.

'We want to continue to be efficient and productive,' she said. 'The current physical environment is not conducive to that.'

Ultimately, the goal is to get all 125 staffers under one roof. This alone will also open up more space currently being used by staff in other Township facilities in the villages.

'A municipal office needs to be a reflection of the community it serves,' Plamondon observed. 'Public buildings should make a statement about the community itself.'

And this place has plenty of curb appeal, and its topography is already a reflection of what King is. The natural features will be preserved and enhanced and it will be something the community can be proud of.

It's also an investment and represents very good value for the money. The property itself has already appreciated, as has the value of the current municipal building and strip mall in King City (owned by the Township).

If and when it comes time to sell the current site, the Township can set its own conditions and use requirements.

As reports come to council with cost estimates and game plans, the project will begin to take shape. While Plamondon wants to leave no stone unturned, she has an aggressive timeline and hopes to see the building completed within this term of council.