

Pub proposed for Nobleton Community Hall

By Mark PavilonsEditorLocal JournalismInitiative Reporter

A plan for a pub in the historic Nobleton Community Hall will help save the building. But some residents are afraid much will be lost in the deal. King council approved staff recommendations to look into the idea and work with the local proponents. Staff will work on a long-term lease with the company that satisfies all parties and reflects King's interests. Staff will also begin a zoning bylaw review to repurpose the building at 19 Old King Road, and apply for any necessary heritage permits. Councillors and the community struggled in the past to not only save the building, but find a renewed purpose. The cost, and finding that suitable purpose, has been plaguing officials for some time. Now, local citizens have come together with a novel idea of turning the building into a restaurant and pub, hoping it becomes the community's social hub. Rick Minicucci, Robert Forletta and Tom Dovgala presented their idea to council. The vision, according to Minicucci, who's also a local member of the Knights of Columbus, is to create the "Lions Den Sports Bar." They will preserve the building's charm and unique physical qualities, while undertaking the necessary improvements. The pub will not only be a local gathering place, but will showcase King's sports history. Councillor David Boyd wanted to know their previous restaurant experience, and whether they realize the massive costs of the undertaking. Minicucci said his family was in the restaurant business for decades and he's currently in the construction business. Boyd noted this is "not a little project," adding the hall is not in good shape. "You have your work cut out for you," he told Minicucci. He also added, though, he's enthusiastic about this local partnership. "It's a great example of adaptive reuse," he said. Councillor Jennifer Anstey wanted to know where customers will park, and Minicucci said likely in the arena's parking lot. He did point out, though, that almost all Nobleton residents can walk to the pub. Councillor Jordan Cescolini said he loves the concept and the name. He did ask if the proponents did their homework, and conducted any market research. Councillor Mary Asselstine agreed that the Township should look at repurposing heritage buildings, in order to save them. Mayor Steve Pellegrini said the Township has been trying to find uses and potential tenants, but there's been no real interest. Chris Fasciano, Director of Community Services, said the proposal does meet some needs and that's why staff brought it forward. This proposal, staff said, creates an opportunity for the Township to maintain ownership of the facility and financially sustainable management of the building. The Nobleton Community Hall has been noted as an underutilized municipal facility that requires significant rehabilitation and improvements if it is to remain as a municipal asset including basic asset management needs as well as facility improvements related to accessibility and energy management. Staff estimated these costs to be in the area of \$1.5 million to complete. Council had deferred a decision on the hall while the Neighbourhood Block Plan exercise underway by Growth Management Services was completed. At present that process is still under way. The proposal presented to the Township is based on a private entity obtaining a long-term lease of the facility to operate a restaurant and pub. Staff are seeking authority to enter into negotiations with the proponent to develop a unique agreement whereas the Township may receive less cash flow contributions (rent) from the proponent in lieu of significant financial and physical investments within the facility in order to upgrade the building to the needs of the organization for future operations. While final figures are still being determined by both parties, it is expected that the financial investment will exceed \$1.1 million which is consistent with previous staff analysis for ensuring all asset management and accessibility work is completed. It is likely any agreement will be required to be a minimum of 10 years to allow for adequate return on investment meaning that, as this is an exclusive use agreement, there will be no municipally led community use of the facility. That being said, as noted community use from a municipal perspective has been limited. This proposal allows for an alternate form of community use that will create investment in an existing heritage building that is currently under utilized and a focal point in the future core area development of the Village of Nobleton. "A community gathering point such as a restaurant or pub would become an anchor in the core area, working within initial concepts of the Nobleton Neighbourhood Plans previously presented to Council," staff said. The use of the building for a restaurant does conform to the permitted uses of the Official Plan. Staff will proceed with the works associated with the land-use planning process, applicable permits and the lease negotiations concurrently with the objective of reporting back to Council on any matters requiring approval in fall 2025. "This agreement provides significant long-term financial benefit to the municipality through the investment in a heritage municipal facility, annual financial contributions to the Township through a negotiated lease payment, and deferral of municipal asset management requirements for the facility. The benefits will provide additional revenue to the Township to help future offset future operating budgets pressures," staff pointed out. A lack of dedicated

community space didn't sit well with some residents. Long-time resident Nancy Hopkinson, on behalf of The Friends of the Nobleton Community Hall, noted much has been said about the lack of anyone or any organization using the Nobleton Community Hall, yet it was used for the Junior A team for its meetings and for its laundry as the Zancor Centre's opening had to be delayed. As well, during the Christmas period, it's prime time for rentals. The fact is, Nobleton is lacking in community space. Why does the Township rent space for children's programming at St. Paul's church when the Nobleton Community Hall is available? she asked. From my perspective, it looks like this Community Hall is being treated differently from other facilities in the Township. Much money was spent in King City for the new King City Library and Seniors' Centre, on the Zancor Centre, on making a basement for an old wooden structured church at the Heritage Centre, on Laskay Hall. Much money was spent in Schomberg on the Schomberg Community Hall. Hopkinson urged council to postpone making a decision about the Hall until the required studies are completed. She's not a fan of private arrangements, and objects to the . Director of Community Services acting as a real estate agent. Resident Nancy Broad had many questions about the future of the hall. She pointed out the interior is quite unique with its wooden floors, wooden wainscoting, wooden ceiling, old fashion light fixtures, etc. Would these historic elements be preserved? Who would be responsible for ensuring the heritage atmosphere of this building is maintained? she asked. Minicucci said they will keep the unique features of the interior because that's what makes it unique. Broad also wondered what would happen if the lease holder decides to step away from the lease agreement and renovations are only partially completed, who assumes the responsibility for a half finished project, with possibly some historic elements having been compromised? Broad also mentioned that often, restaurants/pubs in small towns are not viable. Has the company provided a business plan that supports their ability to make this venture workable? I am not a business person, but paying for a million dollar renovation, high rental fees, and ongoing maintenance does not sound like a profitable venture to me. That's a lot of fish and chips, she said. She also wondered if increased parking would be needed, something that's scarce in the core. The Nobleton Lions Club, she pointed out, has been an integral part of the Nobleton Community for generations. Their volunteerism is outstanding! Their leadership in fundraising has enabled many projects to flourish in Nobleton. Their home for bi-weekly meetings is the basement of the Nobleton Community Hall. Will the Nobleton Lions Club be given a comparable venue as their new home? She's appreciative of the efforts being made by the Township to come up with a workable plan to support the preservation of the Old Nobleton Town Hall. At this point, I feel it raises more questions than it provides answers and would strongly urge council to vote against this recommendation.