

Council wants 'real numbers'

Budget overage jeopardizes library features

By Frances Niblock

Until they see the "real numbers" Town councillors won't make any financial decisions about the over-budget Acton library replacement project.

At the last council meeting Acton Councillor John Hurst, a member of the library project committee, acknowledged there had been "concerns about going ahead without hard and fast numbers."

Hurst suggested that staff report back with actual tender prices, with an accurate budget package, and not deal with a library committee request for \$365,000 to save some upgrades, possibly in jeopardy because of unexpected site preparation and tree saving costs that pushed the \$3.5-million

budget to over \$4-million. Two thirds of the cost is federal/provincial stimulus funding and the Town is responsible for one third.

Architect Stephen Blood, who said it's a "pity some things look more expensive than they are," explained how site work and retaining walls required by Credit Valley Conservation unexpectedly increased the cost.

Cost saving measures could include cheaper exterior finishes, removal of a plaza and reading deck, cutting plans for a major entrance on River Street and removal of what is called a clerestory – windows at the roof that let in light.

All talk of money ended very abruptly when Councillor Bryan Lewis who said he was troubled

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by the new costs figures, asked "how did we get to the point in the financing that we're \$84 a-square-foot out." Lewis saw something on Councillor Hurst's face that made him ask, "are you troubled by my question?"

When Hurst said, "Yes, I mind," Lewis closed his agenda and stopped his financial questions.

Acton Councillor Clark Somerville agreed that they needed to see all of the costs, but he also said he's want to maintain the historic front entrance to the library off River Street.

Library Board member and Georgetown Coun-

cillor Moya Johnson said the budget issue was not a case of the plans being too extravagant, but due to unforeseen site costs. She said it is premature to begin "hacking away" at the plans before they know the true costs and that the public wants a main entrance off River Street and it must be fully accessible.

Mayor Rick Bonnette complemented the architects for the "modern, fresh looking building." He suggested that the first cuts, if needed, should be to the outside to maintain the function of the library and things could be added later on

and paid with through fundraising.

Councillor Hurst asked why they would feel an obligation to offset unforeseen budget increases by reducing the quality, functionality or sustainability of the building. He said they trust staff to provide them with accurate cost analysis of all capital projects and asked why that should change now.

"We don't nickel and dime those projects to save money, so why should it be different here at the library? Why would we do it to the Acton library Hurst asked, adding that they hired qualified people for the project as questioned why they "tie their hands before the shovel is in the ground."

Hurst said the treasurer is "comfortable" fund-

ing the almost \$400,000 budget overage from the special infrastructure levy reserves, if required, and they might have to scale back on another future capital project to make up the money.

"We've been gifted with over \$2-million to fund this project, so we would still only be investing 50 per cent of the cost..." Hurst said, adding he hopes the tenders come back lower than expected.

In the next few weeks itemized tenders will be prepared for the trades that have pre-qualified to bid. Site work should begin in mid to late March, and the new library will be operational in December or January 2011. The old library would be demolished in spring 2011.

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