

# No theatre for old town hall; council to rent or sell building

BY JOAN RANSBERRY  
Staff Writer

A show of hands by members of Whitchurch-Stouffville council delivered the final blow, unanimously killing the move to convert the former town hall to a multi-purpose facility, including a theatre for the performing arts.

The Clock Tower Theatre Association's plan to put the cultural facility into the 6,800-square-foot Civic Avenue building, was officially aborted Tuesday when Whitchurch-Stouffville council agreed to sell or lease the century-old landmark.

Clock Tower Theatre Association president Eric Button said council's decision to sell or lease the building was done without his knowledge.

"I don't know anything about this decision," said Mr. Button. "I'm not aware of this."

While the theatre association will not occupy the old town hall, it doesn't mean the plan to bring such a multi-purpose facility to Stouffville is dead, stressed Mr. Button.

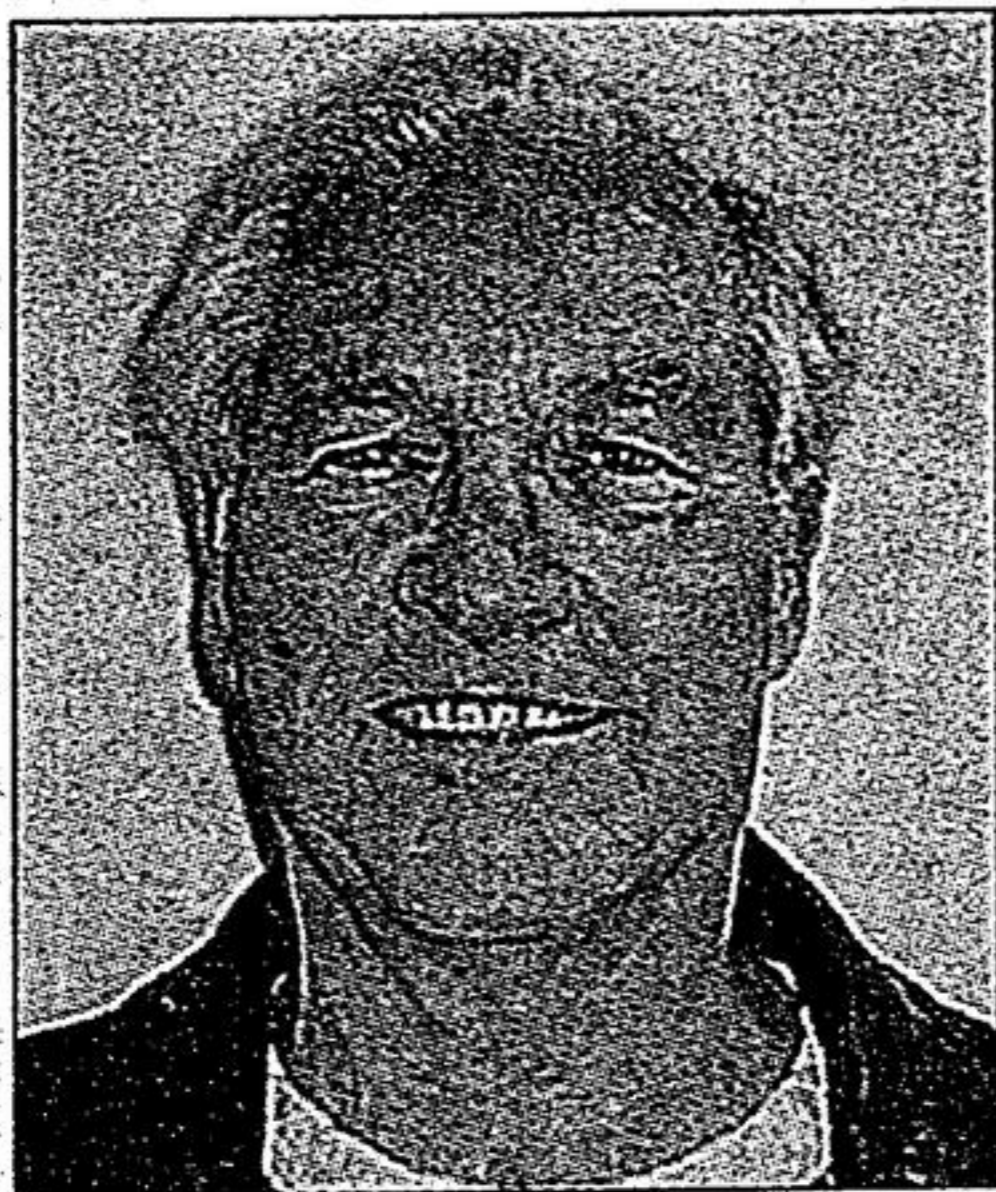
"We have been looking at other options," said Mr. Button. "The old town was one option. I did like the (old municipal) building but it had its drawbacks."

In determining the fate of the two-storey brick structure, located directly behind the clock tower, town staff was directed to apply a Request For Proposal plan to the facility.

The RFP method was used to deal with the old library property last summer when the library services moved to its new home in the just-built community complex in Memorial Park South. On a lease agreement with the town, The Care and Share Shoppe and the Latham Gallery both occupy the old library.

While the town still owns the old library property, council agreed to consider a private sale for the old town hall, providing the terms were right.

"We'll set the criteria," said the town's Chief Executive Officer Nick Kristoffy. "It starts the ball rolling," said Mr. Kristoffy. "There will be a rating system and it will not be determined just on financial



**WILF MORLEY:** Mobility transit group didn't know council was selling or leasing building it leases space in.

matters. But, also on what contribution there could be to the downtown area."

Under the RFP, interested parties will be asked to submit an application of interest. Applicants will be reviewed by staff and a recommendation regarding who would best occupy the former municipal building will be made to local council, explained the CEO.

About two years ago, the Clock Tower Theatre Association was given the go-ahead to renovate the former municipal building into a 400-seat multi-purpose facility, including live theatre. At the time, local council agreed to hand over the building in a five-year lease agreement at \$1 a year.

The Stouffville cultural facility, valued at between \$2 and \$3 million, came within reach when the municipal offices moved to the Imperial Centre on Sandiford Drive about three years ago.

The Clock Tower Theatre Association hired a theatre consultant to analysis the project. The theatre association also considered launching a fundraising campaign.

Veteran theatre consultant Roger Jones told council that with hard working volunteers, the cultural complex could be realized, providing it was multi-purpose. However, the association was not able to get the project off the ground. Under the terms of the orig-

inal agreement, the town was to take back the property if the theatre association failed to come up with a workable plan.

At present, the building is occupied by tenants including Wheels-On-Wheels, under the umbrella of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Mobility Transit and Stouffville This Month as well as an art group.

The move to leasing or sell the old town hall caught local mobility transit president Wilf Morley off guard. "I didn't know council had done this," said Mr. Morley.

Leasing or putting the old town hall on the auction block will have an impact on the local Wheels-On-Wheels program, designed to get hot meals to seniors and the handicapped, said Mr. Morley.

"If the meals program gets put out," said Mr. Morely. "We'll have to pursue another location. We put Wheels-On-Wheels in there so it would have a visible presence in town. We'll have to find another spot for it, at least until the region mobility transit gets rolling."



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