

Old Town Hall may still have a future

BY CONRAD BOYCE

I've been to a lot of tumultuous municipal council meetings in my day, but I don't think I've ever seen a session quite so rowdy as the one on April 5 on the fourth floor of WS's town hall on Sandiford Drive. The topic, of course, was the proposed theatre for the Old Town Hall at 19 Civic Ave.

Things started off politely enough, but by the end of it all, Mayor Sue Sherban was furious. She accused her councillors of not listening to the people, and actually apologized to the people who'd come to back the plan.

"If you want to carry on, I wish you luck and I'll do everything I can personally to help you," she said. "But don't look for any help here from this council, because you're obviously not going to get it." The crowd gave her a standing ovation.

Councillors berating consultants, a mayor berating her council, the audience cheering and jeering and stomping their feet: it all kind of made me think I'd dropped into Dodge City.

As we left the council chamber, we got the feeling this was the last kick at the can for the idea of a performing arts space at the Old Town Hall. We also got the feeling that the municipality might have a tough time finding a consultant to ever work for them again; the boys from Wards 1, 2 and 3 sure burned a few bridges there.

But when I last talked to Her Worship, she was looking on the sunny side. She seemed to think cooler, more professional heads had prevailed.

The consultants hadn't sued. She and her councillors were actually working together civilly on a number of other

fronts. And most important, the basic idea embodied in the Ventin report was still alive. Maybe not kicking, but alive, like a dormant volcano perhaps.

What was eventually passed April 5 was a three-pronged motion that would see:

- staff come back with alternative proposals for 19 Civic Ave. (poor staff...);
- site location analysis for a theatre, preferably in the downtown core (just what is Stouffville's downtown core, do you think?); and

- the revival of our Cultural Policy Task Force, which would attempt to nail down the municipality's role in the area of arts and culture.

The mayor and the performing arts community seem to be banking their hopes on the task force, so even if the municipality doesn't build a theatre, at least some organization might be able to build it with municipal funds.

Maybe. But oh, lordy, task forces are famous for working at glacial speed. Meanwhile, Music Mania keeps having to perform in a school gym, and Motus O and YDAPA can't even perform here at all.

Perhaps everybody over-reacted on April 5. If councillors thought things were missing from the Ventin report, they had weeks to provide that input and get it revised, rather than lambasting its authors in public.

And anyway, the report was only a concept. Everything was negotiable. But obviously the majority of council were not prepared to negotiate. Will that change over the coming months? Should be interesting to watch, and maybe, just maybe, we can look forward to another rowdy meeting or two down the road to the ultimate answer.

LETTERS

A Threat Hanging Over Us For 30 Years

Open letter to our MPs, MPPs and Town Council:

Distinguished representatives, consider for a moment that you were elected to work for the good of Canadian citizens, your constituents. At least that's what you promised in your election campaign.

Now consider what the proposed Pickering airport will do to Canadians in the GTA:

- Hundreds of thousands in the surrounding area will be bothered by airplane noise — with more than one flight per minute, 24 hours a day. At capacity, they are projecting 630,000 aircraft movements per year — do the math!

- All these citizens will be exposed to pollution, noise stress, increasing health problems, etc. scattered by wind over a much larger area than just the flight paths.

- Residential property values will drop — experience in similar airport situations has been by seven to 10 per cent — and GTAA is not even considering any compensation.

And all this for what?

- The convenience of the small percentage of citizens who fly?

- The advantage of General Motors Oshawa getting parts shipments a little cheaper and/or faster?

- The potential profit for the Greater Toronto Airport Authority (GTAA)?

- The job security of the GTAA's employees?

This airport would have far more serious bad effects than the amount of good it will do. There is no satisfactory proof that this airport is really needed, projections of passenger activity are prepared by an organization that WANTS to build, based on its own self-interest.

Elected representatives, if you really believe you are working for the good of Canada's citizens, how can you NOT vote against this proposed airport? Stop it NOW, before wasting taxpayer money on an expensive environmental assess-

ment and imposing costly infrastructure projects and improvements on all three levels of government. Finally, stop the threat that's been hanging over our communities for over 30 years.

SIG KUSATZ
STOUFFVILLE



Reader identifies landmarks

Re: Looking Back, April '05

The building on the left was the Ratcliff Block. It was burned in 1971, and the CIBC is at that location now.

The middle building is Daley Hall, built in 1895. Its basement was a skating rink, with water supplied from Duffin's Creek. The main floor was a concert hall, and the second floor was used for the town band, led by Noah Stouffer. After Daley Hall burned in 1923, the old post office was built in its place, and it is now the Silver Jubilee Club.

The white house was owned by the Morden family, and is now a Chinese restaurant and Linda's Flowers. Main Street was not paved until the 1930s.

JEAN BARKEY

The night the lights went out on Main Street

BY RUTH LEBLANC

We filed into the Council Chambers on April 5, filled with great expectations.

Business owners from the downtown core sat with hopes high that, at last, new life would be injected into their beloved old Main Street. Creative minds looked forward to a new page in the life of Stouffville. Young parents stood expectantly, optimistically awaiting the news that would end the long drives to Vaughan for rehearsals and play dates.

All ages and incomes and personalities sat in hopes that a theatre would come to life, along with a revitalized downtown, if their vision was shared with the Council.

Built in 1896, the two-floor solid brick structure opened as a main floor market and a second floor concert hall. In 1923 the building was sold and the upper floor housed a silent movie theatre called the Auditorium Theatre. The first movie ever shown was *Two Reel Comedy*, starring Harold Lloyd.

In 1933 it became the Stanley Theatre, and

continued as a movie house until 1949. In 1959 the Village of Stouffville's municipal offices replaced the films and theatre goers, and the town staff remained in the building until 1998.

Then for a time she sat empty and forlorn, but there were signs of new and much needed life for this grand old gal. Citizens united, friends were made and dreams we dared to dream seemed within our reach, dreams of preserving a piece of our past for future generations. It was what our forefathers saw as nec-

essary for the heart of downtown Stouffville. It was a fine vision.

There were impassioned speeches and pleas from a cross section of residents with one thing in common: a theatre in the square, unique with unlimited possibilities. And then our dreams for its future were doused out quickly and sadly.

But somewhere, within that burning pile of disenchantment, a heart still beats and the dream still lives on, if only with the dreamers.

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