

Town going ahead with rebuilding Orange hall, despite costs

By Nick Fernandes

Caledon East's Orange Lodge is still to be rebuilt.

This was established recently when Caledon council reviewed the costs of the project and voted to carry on after a lengthy debate. New enthusiasm for the project came about due to a clarification of the costs involved.

The hall stood on the Caledon East United Church property until it was taken apart earlier this year. The plan is to have it reassembled on the Town Hall property.

The current cost of the reconstruction still remains in the range of \$500,000 to \$1 million, but a breakdown of the expenses convinced some of the councillors that the project is worth it. According to a staff report that went to council, the actual dismantling and reassembly of the lodge will account for around \$250,000 of a budget that runs to a total of 678,000.

This new context of costs put a few councillors' fears at rest.

"I think it's a really exciting project," said Councillor Richard Whitehead, who appreciated that the plan gathers numerous facilities into one place. "I think the price is quite affordable and agreeable."

Councillor Richard Paterak went on to say the rebuilding of the hall would be a great way of showing the Town's commitment to heritage.

"It's a good opportunity to demonstrate that we don't have hollow rhetoric," he said, praising the team handling the project for their professionalism and for being "overwhelmingly enthusiastic."

Much of the cost will be going toward additional features, such as \$100,000 for mechanical and electrical installments like air conditioning units and swipe card access ports. Also included in the costs are ground floor and basement washrooms, a kitchenette, water access, a generator, and the landscaping work needed to connect hydro lines to the main campus buildings.

But the enthusiasm toward the project wasn't unanimous.

Councillor Doug Beffort in particular was outspoken against additional spending.

"I think at some point we need to stop and say that it's too much money," he said.

Beffort voted against the project when the costs were estimated at \$200,000, and was still against it, despite his own support of the preservation of heritage. "It could be three-fourths of a million dollars that I'm asking my taxpayers to pay," he said.

Councillor Patti Foley backed up his concerns, not believing that every heritage building is worth saving at these kind of costs.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli reluctantly withdrew his previous support for the project in the face of these issues, while still seeing saving the Lodge's heritage as worthwhile.

The hall is one of numerous bases of the Orange Order remaining in Ontario. Though the Protestant fraternal society no longer exists, its activities have been a substantial part of the country's history. The Orange Order was the central focus of many communities during the early to late 19th century, and many of Ontario and Toronto's most prominent politicians were members, including Sir John A. Macdonald. The Orange Order also reflects strong ties between Ontario's history and Ireland and Scotland. The building is to be used as a meeting space for town operations and a venue for private and community functions.