

SENIOR SCAPE: Older Demographic's Growing

By **Jim Abram**

The Town of Aurora recently updated its Parks and Recreation Master Plan and Sport Plan.

This is of particular importance to older adults and seniors living in our great community given the significant projected growth of this segment of our population.

Below is an excerpt from the Final Draft of the Master Plan as it relates to the needs of older adults:

There are an estimated 16,300 Aurora residents in the 55+ age group according to York Region forecasts. Older adults represent the fastest growing segment of the population having nearly doubled their 2006 Census population figure and will account for roughly one in three residents by 2031 with a total market population of 26,500 persons.

The Town of Aurora is a progressive example of a municipality that has proactively planned for its older adults, most notably through the construction of the Aurora Seniors' Centre, which is a highly regarded facility of its type to this day. The Aurora Seniors' Centre contains a number of rooms and lounges oriented to the interest of residents 55 years of age and over. It provides a lounge, games room with billiards table, library, fully equipped kitchen, woodworking shop, and computer area through which a wide variety of social activities and fitness programs are delivered to members.

The Aurora Seniors' Centre is an excellent example of stand-alone, yet multi-use, senior centre development as it consolidates multiple opportunities on site. While the facility is very well utilized throughout the day, the collective efforts of the Town and the Aurora Seniors Association are anticipated to be able to meet the needs of Aurora residents over the master planning period.

A review of utilization data for the various rooms in the Aurora Seniors' Centre demonstrates excellent growth with nearly 10,000 hours booked for rentals and programs (compared to 6,900 hours in 2010), however, usage data for the various program rooms shows utilization rates at no more than 25%. It is understood that peak daytime hours are very well used and is constraining the ability to grow programming during these peak times, though it is also understood that the Aurora Seniors' Centre has also achieved great success on a regional scale and that a sizeable portion of members come from outside of town.

The online survey ranks additional investments in older adult space as the seventh highest priority, suggesting a moderate level of support exists among survey respondents (whose average age was 52 years) ? other consultation activities did not yield significant input regarding older adult facilities but instead generally spoke to making sure older adult services as a whole continue to be considered as the population ages.

With no new major indoor facilities recommended through the Master Plan that could integrate new older adult space, the preferred strategy for meeting future growth needs is to continue to use the Aurora Seniors' Centre as the service centre and program delivery hub while enhancing older adult program delivery through an outreach model using other municipal community centres such as the [Aurora Family Leisure Complex, Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex] and within program rooms located in Victoria Hall, the Petch House (pending results of the ongoing usage study), the Aurora Community Centre., etc.

The former public library on Victoria Street could also be an option if it is renovated to accommodate recreational uses (including but not limited to the older adult market) as it would logically fit with the new Aurora Public Library and the Aurora Cultural Centre campus.

Applying an outreach model to multi-purpose spaces across Aurora, particularly in peak daytime hours, will help improve distribution of older programming and strengthening neighbourhood-based opportunities throughout the Town.

The preferred strategy to do so is something that could possibly be pursued in collaboration with the Aurora Seniors Association. As advanced in Recommendation #2 of the Community Centre assessment, the Town should also continue to explore opportunities to make its existing community centres more inviting and comfortable to older adults such as integration of additional seating and socialization areas in lobbies, and delivering programming through the common multi-purpose rooms or fitness studios. Doing so would make the facilities more ?Age Friendly? and complements the intent of the previously discussed youth space assessments.

The Master Plan recommends as follows: Continue to position the Aurora Seniors' Centre as the primary hub for 55+ programming while exploring ways to extend the reach of services into neighbourhoods through use of existing multi-use community centres, parks and other civic destinations (e.g. Aurora Public Library, the former public library branch, etc.).

For more information on the Aurora Seniors' Centre and all it has to offer, drop by 90 John West Way, visit the web site

www.auroraseniors.ca, email auroraseniors@rogers.com or call 905-726-4767 between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday to Friday.