

New recreation centre accelerated at Council

By Brock Weir

A new sports and recreation facility has long been a part of Aurora's 10 year capital plan, but could become a reality sooner rather than later following a Council decision last week.

Stakeholder talks with local sports clubs and other users on a new multiuse recreation centre began last week after Council unanimously approved a motion from Councillor Harold Kim which could see the dollars for the design and construction in place for the 2018 Budget.

In his motion, Councillor Kim said it was important for Aurora to be prepared and have resources in place to account for expected population growth rather than wait until population growth is in place and current facilities become stretched to the limit.

"We want to be ahead of the curve and make sure services are in place when the need is there, not just when we need it now, otherwise it is too late," said Councillor Kim, noting he is already seeing aquatics at capacity when he uses facilities with his family. "Given that we have a hotel that is going to be built shortly and all the other things that are going to be happening in the next four to five years, I think it would be a good time to light a match under this, move this forward, have staff come back with a report in terms of the location, even a draft design and a budget commitment for the 2018 budget year."

If it is not in place by the 2018 budget, he said it would get bumped into another year and, in between, there will be a municipal election. Bringing a report to the Town's Financial Advisory Committee for review and back to Councillors at the Committee level would be the next logical step, he added.

The motion comes on the heels of a recent delegation to Council by Sport Aurora's Reg Chappell, which led to Council tasking staff with looking into a multipurpose sports facility. It also reaffirms Council's position on the matter, but gives staff a firm "albeit accelerated" timeframe in which to work.

Mr. Downey cautioned, however, that the acceleration makes a "tight" timeframe for turnaround on the report but it is ultimately doable.

As it stands, the Capital Plan earmarked \$15,250,000 over the next three years to make a new facility a reality, with \$2.4 million pencilled in for 2018, \$12 million in 2019, and \$850,000 in 2020. But, Mr. Downey noted that likely not enough money to build a facility and other resources "including private partnerships" will need to be explored.

For Council, these partnerships are integral, not only in completing the project from a financial perspective, but ensuring it meets all community needs.

"I believe it is important that we work with our partners and working with our seniors and Sport Aurora is invaluable in providing what they see as what we need," said Councillor John Abel. "It is so important that when we plan that we don't do something we shouldn't and waste resources otherwise. I applaud Councillor Kim for bringing this forward. I also think it is important we put something in a plan so that when this term ends we have an approved plan with community buy-in and that is important when we take on the scope of a multipurpose sport facility."

Council unanimously approved the motion, but some Council members voiced a note of caution.

"It will be a problem on how best to fund this for our community," said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. "It is going to be a difficult exercise to put all of the puzzle pieces together and hopefully support all of our various sports groups, so I am looking forward to seeing that report."

Added Councillor Jeff Thom: "I am in favour of moving forward. From my perspective, if it takes a little bit longer than the 2018 budget deliberations, I would rather take the time to do the consultation correctly and do everything we need to do because this is a \$20 million facility we're talking about. Everyone is in favour of doing it right the first time."