

Design work on new rec centre set for 2018

By Brock Weir

Sports groups have weighed in, Council has set the budget, now the public at large will sound off as well as Aurora begins design work on a new recreation centre.

Last month, Council approved the 2018 Budget. Within this year's Capital Budget is a \$2.4 item which will be used to hire an architect to begin detailed design work on a new multiuse recreation complex.

According to Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Operations, the Town has eyed land on Bloomington Avenue West, just north of Cardinal Carter Catholic High School as a possible site for the new facility.

But, if that land currently owned by Infrastructure Ontario is not ultimately available, Mr. Downey says there is not, at the moment, a Plan B.

"Knowing that might be a potential site, I have already reached out to find out if there are any partnership opportunities between Cardinal Carter and ourselves," says Mr. Downey. "I am going to continue to explore that either until that location is solidified and I can step those conversations up or, if we look at someplace else.

"I haven't got another site pending right now, but that doesn't mean I'm not beating the bushes looking for something. There is always the potential that we might be looking at some place else, but I haven't got anything I can publically speak about right now." But first, the design.

"Council has made a decision that they want to move forward with the design elements for this facility and get a facility fit in place. My goal is certainly by the end of this term that I have those pieces in place, that I have an architect engaged, that I have a facility fit established, and I have the design process commenced so the next term of Council can move forward into tendering."

A picture of what the community needs and wants to see in a new recreation facility is already starting to take shape.

A meeting with athletic groups represented by Sport Aurora met this past fall to outline where current facilities might be falling short.

"We believe this next complex should have an aquatics facility," said Mr. Downey on early feedback. "Whether it is a 25 metre pool or a 50 metre pool or whatever, that is still up for debate but we think we need to address aquatics within the centre. We are in dire need of additional gymnasium space. The gymnasium that we have put on the Leisure Complex has been extremely popular and very high demand. In fact, at the meeting, there was a member of the Seniors' Association there and they would like to get in more pickle ball. But I also know they want to get into badminton. This is all a good problem to have. This is the demographic we want to get engaged. We want to create some facility space in order to accommodate them.

"We need some additional program rooms. We have a lot of programs going on in the Town that we're having difficulty finding space for. Certainly with the demolition of 52 and 56 Victoria, program space becomes even more of a premium. [The Aurora Bridge Club was at a recent meeting and] asked if we would be looking at providing space for groups. I think we need to. What we don't have is a policy on how we permit those spaces, to whom and for how much and how long. I think if those spaces are being provided in this new centre, we also need to enter into some new policies."

In what might be a surprise for Aurorans vying for ice time, however, is a conclusion that rinks will not be required in this new facility, however the design shakes down, as the current complement of rinks at the Aurora Community Centre, Aurora Family Leisure Complex, and Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex are currently addressing today's needs and are on track to serve the needs of tomorrow.

"I wanted to hear what people had to say, I wanted to hear what the numbers had to say," said Mr. Downey. "We see a growth in some areas within the ice users population and we see a decrease in other areas. I think that balance will be able to be maintained with our existing infrastructure. I didn't hear any feedback or anyone saying we really missed the mark on that. We know we have a changing demographic within Aurora. This is going to probably be our last major recreation facility and we want to make sure that we get it right. The best way of knowing that is to ensure we have as much public participation in this as possible.

"I am not rushing this process. I want to make sure that I present something to Council that is supportable by the community. I am also looking for operating partners, whether that is operating agreements with our community partners or a public private partnership where there is an opportunity to share operating governance of this facility. I am interested in hearing from those folks as well."