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# Council eyes 55% target for ?real food? at concession stands

**By Brock Weir**

Aurora has upped the ante on getting healthy foods in the hands of young athletes and residents as a whole.

Following passionate appeals from local parents and kids, Council is poised to set the ball rolling next month transforming concession stands and vending machines in municipal facilities into hubs of healthy ?real food? options.

If approved this week, Aurora will resume discussion on March 20 on sending out a request for bids on potential vendors looking to provide food and beverage options at local recreation centres on the stipulation they provide at least 55 per cent healthy food selections.

Going into last week's Council meeting, Council faced a recommendation that the new contract, which will replace the current contract with Global Brand Food Service, set to expire on April 30, included a minimum 25 per cent of low-sugar and sugar-free products in cold beverage vending machines, a minimum of 20 per cent healthy snack foods in vending machines, 25% low-sugar and sugar free beverage options at concessions and at least five healthy food options on the counter.

But, for many Council members, these minimums didn't go far enough.

?There is a tremendous amount of merit in what the delegates have spoken to, but it is our responsibility to do our part,? said Councillor Michael Thompson, speaking in favour of a motion put on the floor by Mayor Geoff Dawe to up these minimums to 55 per cent. ?I've sat on the Mayor's Task Force for physical activity and taken positions and participated in Healthy Kids Challenges, Activate Aurora, promoting the sense that we want Aurora to be the fittest community in Canada, so we take these principled stands. It falls upon us to take a leadership role.?

Previous efforts to move in this direction, however, have proven less than successful.

Aurora, in conjunction with the Healthy Kids Community Challenge, launched a pilot project last year dubbed the Healthy Boost menu program, which offered a limited selection of healthy options, such as smoothies and fresh fruit, at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex and Stronach Aurora Recreation Centre concession stands. According to the report before Council by John Firman, Aurora's Manager of Business Support, only ?one or two? of these items were purchased beyond promotional coupons issued by the Town.

This factor gave some Council members pause in forging full speed ahead towards the 55 per cent target, asking for more information to come forward before a final decision was made.

?I am certainly very keen to see how we can move forward with this and get some different results, because certainly the results with the last one didn't speak favourably to looking at that,? said Mayor Dawe.

For others, concern was less about past successes ? or lack thereof ? and more about how to process the ample information supplied by advocates at the start of the meeting.

?There are too many moving parts and new information,? said Councillor Harold Kim. ?Frankly, this report was written weeks ago and most of the information that was brought forward to us by these various groups and stakeholders were provided within the last 10 days. I am not prepared to choose any option, nevermind the main motion or [the 55 per cent] motion.

?What I would prefer is to have staff go back armed with this new information and come back with more fulsome options we can actually vote on, and not just have a minimum or maximum.?

Taking time to process the information was a view shared by Councillor Jeff Thom, along with Councillor John Abel who said the matter seemed to be ?rushed.?

?[The outgoing vending contract] was a 10 year term and now we have been told we have to make a decision tonight,? said Councillor Abel. ?We didn't have the opportunity to take in all the excellent work. There was so much that was stated today that I don't think we can make good Terms of Reference to get a proper RFP (Request For Proposal) back from [potential vendors].

?If we're going to provide leadership, vision and insight in what our community is engaging and telling us, it is important for us to bring this forward at the time of the RFP, that this is what we want, this is where the successes are in other places, and not because we're rushed.?

Councillor Thompson, on the other hand, had a different viewpoint. It is important to get the ball rolling on the RFP now, he said, and the finer points can be developed at that time.

?It is our job to set policy and this amendment speaks to the policy that we're saying healthy food is more important that what is currently provided,? he said. ?We can ask staff on the implementation of it, we can ask staff to look at the merits of the presentation that was presented to us, and incorporate some of those different components, subsidies and so forth through the development while

the RFP is out there.?
Added Councillor Mrakas: ?We are just putting out an RFP and we were asked by residents to increase their choices from 20 per cent or five items to 55 per cent overall and that is just a simple RFP. We can get that information when the RFP comes back and [then we can decide] where to go from here.?
In the meantime, Lisa Warth, Acting Director of Parks and Recreation, said the department will be working with a nutritionist from the Regional Health Department on low fat, low salt, low sugar and high fibre options, and they are ready to vet any additional products prospective vendors might suggest when the RFPs roll in.