

Leisure Complex set to re-open Saturday after delays

By Brock Weir

The long-awaited, renovated Aurora Family Leisure Complex (AFLC) is set to re-open to the public on Saturday after months of delays.

The project, originally set to be completed in October, will boast 'The Loft' Youth Centre, new community spaces, and the return of Club Aurora, with updated equipment and rooms, which has been housed during the renos at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex.

'The \$6 million restoration to enhance existing facilities and create a new community space for youth has numerous features to serve Aurora's growing needs,' said the Town in a statement. 'The 10,000 square foot addition includes an updated Club Aurora, The Loft Youth Room, a rock climbing wall for ages six and up, an outdoor skate park, a gourmet teaching kitchen, an indoor walking and running track, renovated change rooms and a variety of new programs.'

This Saturday and Sunday, the facility will be open from 7.45 a.m. to 5 p.m., while operating hours on weekdays run from 5.45 a.m. to 10 p.m.

The re-opening of the facility will be a relief to many residents who have expressed frustration over the delays, after new components kept being pushed back and additional costs were incurred due to the delays.

This frustration was shared by some members of Council who said reasons for the delay need to be better communicated to residents.

'I think all of us have gotten emails with regards to the Leisure Complex and some of the delays and issues around that,' said Councillor Michael Thompson. 'I [am] wondering if there was anything we could do in addition to what we have already done to put a bit more of an information packet for residents to help them understand the reasoning for the delays and to answer some of the questions that are floating out there about why it has taken so long to get up to speed when it seemed like back in October and November things were progressing okay.'

'Maybe some of these things could be posted at the [Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex] or the Leisure Complex to help them understand. There seem to be some challenges out there and I think it would be best to get as much information out there as possible.'

Similar sentiments were expressed by Councillor Sandra Humfries, who said the public was itching to get back into a complete and fully operational AFLC.

'I absolutely look forward to anything else we can add in terms of helping our public understand,' she said. 'The good news is they love it. I had some people call me and say, 'we just can't wait to get back there and get back to working out at the Centre.'

'They love it. They have other places and they have done okay, they appreciate the work that staff has done to get them the services they need to continue what they were doing at the Leisure Complex. They cannot wait to get back there and we can't wait either.'

Councillors approved a budget addition to the completion of the AFLC last month, after contractors upped their fees citing structural challenges found during the renovations of the centre, as well as mould that had to be removed. Additional fees were also requested by the contractors for administration fees racked up over the course of the delays.

Dismay was raised around the table when Council began to question the outcome of not going forward with increasing the budget. Municipal staff informed Council they were essentially over a barrel. Had they not approved the budget increase, work would cease at the AFLC and there was a chance of litigation, according to Town Staff.

Aurora's contract with the service providers included no penalty clause for delays or project overruns.

Ahead of his speech to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce last week, Mayor Geoff Dawe told The Auroran a penalty clause would be part of future discussions.

"We're going to be discussing how to make that work," said Mayor Dawe. "You have to look at how you implement penalty clauses and what the actual results of those penalty clauses will be. For example, there is a pumping station on Orchard Heights that has all sorts of penalty clauses in it, and it is still not finished.

"Penalty clauses are not necessarily the be all and end all. You have got to make sure you're working with the contractor and you're diligently working with these guys to keep them on track. We will be doing a project evaluation when it is over and there will be a public report on [where things went wrong]."