

Community Sports Plan could be ready as early as this fall

By Brock Weir

A comprehensive plan to get Aurora in gear when it comes to sports could be ready as early as this fall.

Council has approved development of a ?Sport Plan for Aurora?, which will be piggy-backed onto the development of the Town's new Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The combining of the two projects will require a further \$20,000 from the Town's existing Master Plan Reserves to be put towards the existing \$75,000 budget for the Master Plan.

?We hope to have both documents in place so that if there are recommendations that have an impact on the 2016 Budget, that document will be in front of Council [for] any recommendations Council wants to consider for 2016, 2017 and 2018,? said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation at the last General Committee meeting, where the recommendation won the support of Councillors.

Council approved laying the ground work for a Sports Plan last month. Brought forward in a motion from Councillor Michael Thompson, it is intended to be a ?strategic document to provide direction and recommendations to support the sustainability and growth of sport? in Aurora, while also building on Aurora's potential to become a Canadian Sport for Life Community and improving health and healthy opportunities across the board.

In developing the framework of the plan, Councillor Thompson and municipal staff turned their attention towards similar plans in other communities, particularly Mississauga. In his report before Council, Mr. Downey said Mississauga re-assigned a staff member to act as project manager for the development of their sports plan, a move he suggested Aurora follow.

?[Mississauga's] sports plan was done in-house and it took well over a year to do that sports plan,? said Mr. Downey. ?We're concerned about the timing implications of this plan and we would like to get it in place [before next year's budget]. The other issue we do have is limited internal resources, so without looking at assigning or bringing on additional staff to address the workload, we feel it is best to bring on a consultant short-term, focus their attention on this one project, and move on from that.?

In his report, Mr. Downey said the ?the primary function of a sports plan is to assist in identifying Town capacities, advocacy and facility usage. This strategic plan would provide a series of recommendations designed to build a more collaborative and effective sport system in Aurora.?

Mississauga's plan focused on sport leadership, making sport inclusive, ensuring sports and fitness opportunities are available for people of all ages to promote life-long interests in sports, increasing ?capacity? of sports within the community, ranging from increasing programs to boosting support of sport providers, sport tourism, and sport infrastructure.

In talks leading up to last month's vote, sports tourism in particular was a key focus of Council, including ensuring Aurora is attractive in bringing in larger-scale tournaments and programs. An integral component in this, argued Council, was providing that incentive for companies to look at Aurora as a destination for a hotel, something Aurora currently lacks following the indefinite closure of Howard Johnson's.

Now that moving forward with the plan has been approved, meetings will be held with ?community stakeholders? to identify ?needs, strengths, opportunities and threats? to sport within Aurora, the findings of which will be compiled into a draft report of recommendations for Council's consideration.

?Staff feel that having a sustainable sport delivery system will assist the municipality in defining its role in addressing the changing community and demographic needs to ensure there is a place for all to play,? said Mr. Downey. ?It will also be a valuable tool to identify program and facility development that will support sports in line with the strategic goals.?