Estimated costs of Mavrinac Park on the rise

By Brock Weir

It will cost over $1.5 million more than anticipated to realise the plan for Mavrinac Park.

Council is looking to approve a boost of nearly $424,000 this week to implement the plan for the six acre parkland on Mavrinac Boulevard, which includes two tennis courts, two pickle ball courts, a full size basketball court, play areas, gazebos, a fitness trail, and tree buffers between the parks and nearby homes.

Secured by Council at a cost of $2 million after a contentious battle involving the Town of Aurora, Minto Communities, and area residents who fought to keep the land open space, the topography of the site is proving to be a particularly costly factor, according to staff reports.

Substantial amounts of surplus dirt that will result from the park construction and removing it will cost a hefty $225,000.

?We have looked at a number of options to have material remain on site, building berms and grading alternatives, but it has been tweaked to the point where we have no more option in terms of dispersing this fill,? said Parks Manager Jim Tree at last week's General Committee meeting. ?There are other issues with the estimate that were included. There is a contingency fund and simply market related issues are a part of it. If it is any consolation, we did check with the market to make sure prices were in line with other similarly sized projects and, in fact, this shows it is actually a little bit lower than some of the more recent projects. It is a significant over budget amount, but it is within the budget parameters.?

The rising costs, however, ignited old debates around the Council table on whether or not this park should actually exist, with Mayor Geoff Dawe and Councillor Paul Pirri reiterating their firm position that it should not ? at least as proposed.

?I voted against this the last time because there was a general feeling around the Council table that this was a neighbourhood park and if Council is still of that mind, I will not support it,? said Mayor Geoff Dawe, proposing the park be designated a ?community park? rather than a neighbourhood park. ?If Council would be amenable to having a recommendation here that Council endorses this as a park for all residents of Aurora to use, I will support it.?

Councillor Pirri, on the other hand, would have none of that.

?You can put lipstick on a pig and it will still be a pig,? said Councillor Pirri. ?Regardless of whether we classify this park as a neighbourhood park or a community park, ultimately it was a park that was never called for in our official plans. It was a park that was not needed and it is a park that is costing the taxpayers of this community apparently more and more in every report. If this is what we want to do and this is the direction we want to move in, that's fine but I will be opposed to it because it is still a park that was never warranted or needed or justified.?

Those Council members who have supported the park development throughout the course of its relatively short history weren't impressed with Mayor Dawe's proposed change either. Councillor Wendy Gaertner, for instance, said there was a significant difference between a Community Park and a Neighbourhood Park in the Town's Parks and Recreation Master Plan, primarily that a Community Park would require parking.

?We can play around with the name, but according to our plan this follows the parameters of a neighbourhood park,? she said. ?This is just smoke and mirrors and I don't appreciate it.?

Councillor John Abel agreed: ?This just befuddles me. I don't think it is a very nice way to be treating something like this.?

His concern, he added, was re-wording the motion to stipulate that all Aurora residents would be able to use the park implied that somehow all Aurora residents wouldn't be able to use the park without that stipulation.

?It is not like we were shutting the doors of the park to anyone who wanted to show up there,? agreed Councillor Tom Mrakas. ?The need to actually state that all residents can go to the park, are we going to do the same for all the other parks in Town? Are we going to state that Summit Park is for all the residents of Aurora? Of course, all the residents of Aurora can go to this park. I don't think we need to state it and put it in as a policy. It doesn't make sense to me.?

When Mayor Dawe's motion failed, semantics were set aside in favour of the firm numbers.

Some Council members expressed disappointment the anticipated budget was on the rise, particularly in light of this spring's heated debates over the final costs of Aurora's Joint Operations Centre.

?I feel like I have been t-boned and given the amount of people who are looking forward to this, and we have had internal emails asking if it is going to be on time, it just seems like there is another hurdle,? said Councillor Harold Kim. ?I think I am fiscally conservative and like to manage my budget, even I find it challenging to approve a project that is going to be 30 ? 35 per cent over budget.?

While Committee members mulled the possibility of taking items out of the budget and later considering them as future capital projects, the recommendation for the budget increase moved forward to this week's Council meeting for final approval.

?I see that this is a benefit to the community as a whole,? said Councillor Mrakas. ?We're adding more green space to our Town, more parks, and I don't see what's wrong with that. We hear so many times that our Parks Master Plan states that we don't need this and that is why we should not be in favour of this. Would you rather have houses in this area, or would you rather have nice, beautiful green space, places for our residents to go and enjoy themselves and be active? There is a definite benefit and, as has been stated, it is not just for certain people in the community. It is for all of Aurora to enjoy.?

Concluded Mayor Dawe: ?I have no problems that we acquired this land. I have no problems with it being green space. I have a problem with putting this much money into what is classified as a small neighbourhood park.?