

Indoor tennis dominates sports plan talks



Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation for the Town of Aurora, speaks to a packed house at a public meeting to discuss the Town's new Parks and Rec plan.

By Jake Courtepatte

Aurora's Council chambers were filled to the brim Thursday with members of the community looking to voice their opinions on the future of sports and recreation within the community.

And the people have spoken: they want an indoor tennis facility.

Timberlane Athletic Club, set to close its doors for good at the end of the year, has been a haven for tennis aficionados in the Aurora area for almost thirty years. Over 2,000 members are left without a facility as the lease comes to a close with the owners of the site, Brookfield Homes, to make way for housing.

Project planning consultant Todd Brown said he and town staff "heard a lot of feedback" with regards to indoor tennis.

"We've had a number of emails from tennis groups, I'm sure there are a few tennis folks here today," he said.

That may have been an understatement.

Kevin Carter, the creator of www.tennisinaurora.com, has been using the web to try to strengthen the voice of tennis in the community. He said he had concerns regarding the collection of data, and what he felt to be an underrepresentation of the tennis community within it.

"Timberlane represented so much for this community, and to see so little done to find a replacement means our future generations won't get the same opportunities we had."

Bill Maron, the owner of Total Tennis in Aurora, has enjoyed a partnership with the Town of Aurora since 1998. His summer program now serves approximately 450 members throughout the season.

But when it comes to the winter months, he says the options have dwindled compared to what they were twenty years ago.

"Aurora players had the option of indoor tennis at either Timberlane or Aurora Highlands Tennis Club," he said. "It was definitely an encouraging landscape for the growing number of tennis players in the community."

He made note of the population growth in the area since that time, from approximately 35,000 to 60,000 currently.

?So twenty years ago, Aurora tennis players had ten indoor courts. On January 1 of next year, they will have no option to play tennis in our town unless they want to wait until April.

Sitting beside Betty Sinclair, co-founder of Timberlane and the wife of recent Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee Ken Sinclair, he said it will be a ?sad day for members? when Timberlane closes its doors.

?We have to accommodate for a growing population, this is an understandable reality. But for what cost to our sports infrastructure??

Brown said that he and his consulting team certainly hear the concerns, but ultimately the decision for more infrastructure boils down to the Town's decision.

?Those facilities are best pursued using a model that the town uses now, which is much similar to the one you see with the Aurora Sports Dome,? said Mr. Brown. ?It's a partnership between the town and organizations that are willing to operate that type of facility.?

Among the other main points of interest was the lack of proper swimming facilities. Members of the Ducks Swimming organization voiced that they were worried they were being pushed out of the plan, and left out to dry ? no pun intended.

Brown, however, noted that four of the last five times he and his consultants at Monteith Brown visited the pool at the AFLC, it was empty.

?It suggested to us that it wasn't fully utilized, but we will have to look at scheduling and we do hear you. Typically though, for a community of this size two pool facilities would be sufficient in not only meeting today's needs, but needs into the future.?

Reg Chappell, the founder of Ducks Swimming, disagreed.

?The provincial regulations you're looking at in terms of the number of pools, they're out of date,? said Mr. Chappell. ?We can't get our programs into competitions because there's not enough facilities to fit them in.?

?Even on a 50-metre pool, we could block out almost all of the prime time based on current growth within our programs and the people we've had to turn away. It needs to be looked at in a lot more detail. We need pool time, and a facility we can use.?

The Sports Plan will be evaluated until January 12, when Council will meet for final approval. The official approval is set for January 19 at Council Chambers.

Both meetings are open to the public.