

Mavrinac ?Park? future heats up final mayoral debate



By Brock Weir

The future of a six acre parcel of land on Mavrinac Boulevard is currently in the hands of the courts, but that hasn't stopped Aurora's mayoral and council candidates, as well as the public at large, to provide and demand answers on just what should be done with the property.

The Marvinac ?Park? debate is one which has been simmering on the backburner for nearly two years after Aurora voted to take Minto Developments to court in order to exercise what was, according to a subdivision agreement, Aurora's first right of refusal to purchase the land originally earmarked for a future school.

When the local school board decided to look elsewhere, members of the Mavrinac community, many of whom say they paid a premium to own homes backing onto open space, mobilized to make sure the land was secured.

In this final debate hosted by Sport Aurora, a member of the public quizzed each candidate if they were in favour of Aurora using all six acres for sports fields and leisure areas. This question, however, sparked a war of words between the two men vying to be Aurora's mayor in the 2014 ? 2018 term of Council.

?I was the one who brought forward the notice of motion for the Town to exercise its right to acquire that piece of land,? said incumbent Geoff Dawe. ?Yes, I am in favour of acquiring that piece of land. Am I in favour of turning that into a total park? I think that depends on what the land is going to cost us. I think it depends on what the community in that area is looking for. I am certainly in favour of some green space there. How much green space? I don't know, but I am certainly in favour of a certain amount.?

John Gallo, who was active in mobilizing the Mavrinac community, however, said he wasn't buying it.

?I find it incredibly ironic that Mr. Dawe keeps saying he was the one who led the charge for Mavrinac Park,? said Mr. Gallo, noting he was in favour of purchasing the land. ?It blows my mind continuously when he says these kinds of things. The good people of Aurora, Mr. Dawe, know the truth. They know exactly what happened. If you say it long enough and hard enough, people will believe it.?

Mr. Gallo offered a similar argument in the second all-candidates' debate hosted by the Aurora Public Library earlier this month, noting arguments made in closed session would be enlightening but has, thus far, shied away from elaborating.

Also supporting the purchase is council candidate Linda Stephens, who said while it is important to secure the land for green space, she is also concerned over what home purchasers in the area were promised.

“What really troubles me is many of the residents in the area paid lot premiums for their homes to back onto the green space and now it is suggested there might be something alternate to that,” said Ms. Stephens, a realtor. “I would support usage for a combination of leisure green space in a parkette-type format, with leisure recreation space on that land, but I do believe we should pursue to protect what is green space because those homeowner paid premiums.”

The Mavrinac ball kept rolling into a wider ranging discussion on how to address potential future shortfalls in terms of soccer pitches and other recreational space currently offered for use by companies such as Magna. One resident came to the podium, arguing a Town such as Aurora can't always rely on these private companies to provide that extra support. If these companies eventually move, that could create a crunch, he said.

“There is not an easy answer in terms of buying land in Aurora, particularly at market value,” replied Mr. Gallo. “We have done a pretty good job leveraging the development community whenever they have come into Town. I am in full support of purchasing [Mavrinac] that is not market value, six acres to have sport facilities on that property.”

An additional option, he added, was working to secure provincially-owned lands on Bloomington Road for a future sports facility.

“It is interesting we're now painting Mavrinac Park to be soccer fields when a lot of the residents in the area say they don't want anything like soccer fields,” responded Mr. Dawe, to a mixed reaction from the crowd. “It is an interesting comment. Councillor Abel and I met with Premier Wynne this summer to move [the Bloomington option] along and that whole process has been stepped up dramatically.”

From the perspective of council candidate Greg Cook, however, discussions over the future of the Mavrinac lands were premature. As a resident nearby the land in question, he said there are concerns on both sides of the debate.

“If you don't own the land, you don't control its future ? it's plain and simple,” said Mr. Cook. “Should [the land] be owned and purposed for use by our community? Yes. Should it be a case where we go to court if we have to enforce our rights? Yes, we should, and that is the right thing to do. We, as Aurorans, should be proud of a Council that does it for us. It is important we recognize we are all in this together and we all serve interests by working together, sometimes by sacrificing the short term for the long term.”