

Mavrinac Park plan promises something for everyone

By Brock Weir

A tentative vision for six acres of parkland on Mavrinac Boulevard promises to have something for Aurorans of every age, ability and mobility.

Councillors tentatively approved a concept plan for the park at last Tuesday's General Committee meeting. Coming forward for ratification this week, it proposes extensive tree planting, tennis courts, courts accommodating both basketball and pickleball, benches, a play zone, and community gardens.

While community consultation is set to begin following approval of the concept this week, the approval is expected to set a budget with a \$1.3 million ceiling.

‘We looked at some of the other facilities that are within the area to make sure we were not necessarily duplicating but addressing any of the needs that were identified within the community,’ said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation. ‘We certainly took some of the comments we received during Council deliberations [on] some of the elements in the park. We felt that from some of the comments we received, the community was looking for a park that addressed a wide variety of demographics from an age perspective.

‘We were looking for something for children, something for adults, something for older adults, and also an area where there could be some open space. There is a grassed area, some free play area, and we didn't want to overly program the park but we did want to put some elements into the park that were also identified as a shortfall as part of our master plan.’

Going forward, however, public consultation is key but just how wide that consultation should be is a matter that took up considerable time when Councillors first debated the concept plan. While they agreed there should be additional input from the Town's Accessibility Advisory Committee, as this park will include trails and other accessible features, they differed on whether the Town's advisory committees on Parks & Recreation as well as the environment should also have a kick at the can.

‘I think it is necessary that we get clear instructions and I also think it is a good idea to put it through the committees,’ said Councillor John Abel, responding to a motion from Councillor Sandra Humfries to send the concept to all three groups. ‘The more engagement we get will probably have the best presentation for Council's consideration. For a project of this scope, I am in favour of the amendment.’

Others, however, weren't so sure. Councillor Michael Thompson, for instance, questioned how sending the matter to the three committees would impact the timing of breaking ground on the park.

‘I think many of us around the table, as well as residents of the neighbourhood, would like to see something sooner rather than later,’ he said. ‘Granted, it has to be the right concept, but I want to get a sense of whether or not going through the various committee structures will add any undue delay to the process.’

Going to the committees was not something originally anticipated, responded Mr. Downey, conceding it will delay the process.

‘We understood Council wanted to see this come back sooner rather than later and that is why we moved the schedule ahead,’ said Mr. Downey. ‘It was always our anticipation that we would hold a public meeting as quickly as we could, get that information, come back to Council, get some approvals and go through some of the tendering process with some hope that we would then get an approval tender from Council this year and at least commence construction.’

That construction, he added, could be simple servicing of the land or actually getting started on the park itself.

Councillor Thompson, however, said he wanted more of a ‘one step at a time’ approach in going to the public for their ideas, then

looking at timelines and the impact of going to the committee level.

?For myself, I would like to see us move on it this year,? he said. ?I would hate to see it delayed until 2017. If there is an opportunity to do the open house and have that conversation [on going to a committee] I would be more comfortable with that.?

In the end, Councillors dropped the Environmental Committee from the mix but voted to send this to Accessibility as well as Parks and Recreation.

?It is very important that we absolutely listen to the public because that is what they want and that is what is important to the community, but it is also important that we do this right,? said Councillor Humfryes, suggesting, along with Mayor Geoff Dawe, special meetings of the committees be held directly after the public open house. ?It is a huge investment and we need to incorporate accessibility. It is so critical. The worst thing that could happen is we put a beautiful park in there and it is not inclusive for everyone to enjoy. It would be a real shame and it is way too important to risk that.?

Councillor Abel agreed, adding: ?I would prevail on our CAO to streamline the process. It may appear daunting to some, but I like the simplistic approach Mayor Dawe and Councillor Humfryes [have offered]. Sure, we can delay it. I have seen reports delayed for two years, but if you want something brought forward I have seen them moved forward in 60 days.

?We are cognizant of the fact we have 10 weeks before the summer break. We can have an open house, get this information to the committees, get it back knowing that we have had full engagement and opinions from our committees that can play a role.?