

New five year plan charts growth for parks and recreation

By Brock Weir

New sports facilities, arenas and pools could be part of the Aurora of 2021 if the Town's new draft master plan for parks and recreation is approved by Council next month.

The update to the previous five year plan was presented to Council last week calling for significant projects to account for the needs of Aurora's present population and forecasted growth.

Among the recommendations presented last week were carrying out architectural studies and a business plan to add a gymnasium, new multipurpose space, and a fitness centre to the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex on the east side of Aurora and a business plan to look at converting the old home of the Aurora Public Library on Victoria Street to address municipal needs, "recreational or otherwise" in association with the Aurora Promenade, said consultant Todd Brown.

A potential future need is also a new pool facility to provide more opportunities for swimmers across Aurora. This could either be a new pool constructed at an existing leisure complex or a new facility altogether.

"If you decided to go [with a standalone facility], we would recommend that the gymnasium and fitness centre we talked about for the SARC in our first recommendation be located as part of that facility because that would make it a multiuse, multigenerational type of facility, as well as a standalone aquatics centre," said Mr. Brown.

Existing facilities are also worth a re-think, he added.

These public spaces have the potential to "encourage greater socialization opportunities, particularly among young families, youth and older adults, with comfortable seating and greater accessibility, ensuring your community centres act as community hubs," he noted.

"There is a need for three rectangular fields," continued Mr. Brown, turning his focus to outdoor amenities. "We are recommending they be located [on lands recently bought by the Town behind] the Hallmark Building site (near Vandorf Road and Industrial Parkway)."

An artificial turf field located at Stewart Burnett Park or at the proposed new Complex would be something to think about, along with a new ball diamond geared towards older players and hardball use, two minor splash pads "in areas of gap", and a new water feature, such as a fountain, in the Aurora Promenade area.

"Providing tennis courts, basketball courts and playgrounds within neighbourhood parks in developing areas, more specifically the 2C lands, ensuring new and rejuvenated playground areas incorporate barrier-free access opportunities to ensure both children and their caregivers are given the opportunity to participate, and exploring provision of an outdoor artificial ice surface in conjunction with an urban design, economic development or civic improvement initiative, possibly as part of the promenade as well," added Mr. Brown.

In the future, as Aurora reaches build-out, the new draft parks and recreation plan calls in the acreage of parks needed per resident. This target currently stands at 2.5 hectares per Aurora resident but should be brought down to 1 hectare or 1.5. The current standard is a goal that is never going to be achieved in Town with the amount of land currently available, said Mr. Brown.

Although Council won't have a chance to formally address the recommendations in the plan until a meeting currently slated for February 16, Councillors provided a flavour of the discussions to come last week.

Looking over the vision, Councillor Tom Mrakas, for instance, said there should be an increased emphasis on taking a second look at how existing facilities are currently being used. Hockey arenas, for example, have particular down times where they are either not

being used for hockey or skating, or have their ice removed entirely. Repurposing such spaces for basketball and other sports during those times could buy Aurora some time before making a decision on future infrastructure builds, he argued.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner also weighed in on the plan, underscoring a point in the plan which shows the pool at the SARC being overused and in high demand compared to the older pool at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex. This, said Mr. Brown, could be attributed to a number of factors including the age of the facility and the fact the SARC pool provides a greater depth and, therefore, allows for a greater variety of use.