

# New gymnasium being explored for the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex

**By Brock Weir**

A new gymnasium added onto the Stronach Aurora Recreation Centre would be a 'quick fix' to address a growing community need. This is the view shared by Councillors Tom Mrakas and Michael Thompson, which received the support of the Town's Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee at the close of 2017 and is a recommendation Council will consider this week.

Council is set to begin the process of exploring the feasibility and costs of building a gym onto the SARC to meet current and growing demand. The recommendation to set a feasibility study was approved at the Committee level last Tuesday.

While Councillors agreed to start the process, however, Mayor Geoff Dawe said focus should continue to be on the new multiuse facility that is being designed for southeast Aurora.

Last year, Councillors Mrakas and Thompson, who were absent from last week's Committee meeting, pitched the addition to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee amid continued design work for the new facility.

With the expectation it could take a considerable amount of time to secure the land for the facility from the Provincial government, adding a new gym to the already bustling SARC was seen as a quick fix.

'Personally, I think it is a good fit and something which should have been built when the SARC was built,' said Councillor Tom Mrakas, making his motion to the Committee. 'There is a need for a gymnasium and I think it is something that can be put to good use.'

Citing community needs and wants suggested for the new recreation centre, Councillor Mrakas said a gym for the SARC would not only go a long way in addressing those items, but transform the building into a 'true multiuse facility.'

'We have soccer, there's tennis and hockey, if you have a gym you can make it that true multiuse facility. It is in a good location, the hotel is moving in and I think the gymnasium, if you build it right, can house some tournaments,' he said. 'My understanding from talking with representatives from the YNBA (York North Basketball Association) and the Ontario Basketball Association, we would be able to host a tournament if we had the facility. This, I think, would help with that and could help in the short term as well.'

A similar view was offered by Councillor Thompson, who highlighted what he saw was the timeliness of pressing ahead with a new gym.

'If you look at the SARC and what we have done with it and added to it over the last couple of years, the missing component to me is to have a multipurpose gym there,' he said. 'There is actually a spot designated for that multipurpose gym in the southwest corner and there was a conversation about having it or not having it, it didn't make it into the final design, but if you look at that facility, I think when we look at all the components around there, it strikes me that there is one thing missing and I think it would complement the facility significantly.'

'I have had some residents come to me and talk to me about the fact there appears to be no warm-up spots for some of the hockey teams and so forth, so they are doing it in the common areas? To some degree, it is not a good mix with people who are trying to watch their kids or do whatever because you've got other groups. If you had a gymnasium there would be a perfect spot for them when it is not being used, but it is opening up programming opportunities. There is an immediate need for another gym in Town and it is a bit of a quick fix.'

The idea won the support of many members of the Committee, with citizen member Eric McCartney stating he would like to see a gymnasium go one step further and follow the route of public schools in incorporating a stage space to maximize its value to the community.

Fellow member Juergen Daurer, however, said while it 'wasn't a bad idea' he wanted to see how it would fit into a full study of all of Aurora's facilities and within the context of the new multipurpose facility.

For Councillor Thompson, however, there isn't enough time to sit around and wait.

'I appreciate having that Master Plan, but we have been waiting on that piece of land [from the Province behind Cardinal Carter Catholic High School] for six years now and I would love to be able to say that we control our own destiny here,' he said. 'But we don't with this one. Part of our struggle with having that Master Plan and having that other facility is we're at the mercy of another level of government and, as much as I am sure [Director Al Downey] is pushing them, I am not sure. There is a need for a multipurpose gym no matter what the Master Study is and I think it is a quick win to address one of the deficiencies we have.'