

Park options should include new baseball diamond, say Councillors

By Brock Weir

The resurging popularity of baseball in Aurora and King has led to a relative shortage of places to play, and the new parkland on Mavrinac Park could help pick up the slack, say Councillors.

While a public meeting is set at Town Hall for Tuesday, May 31, from 5 - 7 p.m. to allow the community at large to weigh in on various amenities to go in the park, a full-scale baseball diamond should be on the table for discussion, according to Councillor Jeff Thom.

‘I had conversations with the Aurora King Baseball Association and they are really having an unprecedented level of registrations and they can't cope with the demand for spots,’ said Councillor Thom. ‘In fact, for some of the rep baseball teams in Aurora, their home field is now in doubt. To me, that is just wrong. They are also reducing their capacity and having to make sacrifices for time. These are things sports teams have to do all the time, but they are turning kids away. Now that we have a parkland coming on board, for me, having that option for Council to discuss and consider would have been nice.’

Various options were presented to Council last month by Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, in a tentative concept plan which will be up for public discussion. Responding to the Councillor's concerns, Mr. Downey said a baseball diamond is a better fit for large-scale 10+ acre ‘community’ parks, rather than the ‘neighbourhood’ park proposed for the Mavrinac site.

‘[These amenities] include lights and we are concerned that if we put a lit facility [there] that would create the need for light poles 60 to 80 feet in the air, and that would certainly have an impact on adjacent residents.’

Although Councillor Thom questioned the difference between the lighting that would be required for a tennis court proposed for the Mavrinac site over what would be needed for a baseball diamond, Mr. Downey added the Town does not currently have adequate parkland available for building a new baseball diamond.

‘However, that doesn't mean we couldn't look at repurposing, or we could look at a rethink of some of the plans we have for some existing lands that could accommodate a ball diamond,’ said Mr. Downey. ‘We understand that in the Master Plan it was a high priority and is something we would need to address within the 2017 capital budget as far as how we are going to proceed.’

The Town purchased several acres of land in the Industrial Parkway and Vandorf Road area last year behind the former home of Hallmark Cards. At Council, Mayor Geoff Dawe suggested that would be an ‘ideal location’ for baseball and lighting would have minimal impact on the area.

Baseball is indeed something that could be accommodated on the Hallmark lands, noted Mr. Downey, and is one of the areas where a ‘rethink’ on how to use the land would be needed.

‘Most of the things with regards to the Hallmark lands centre around soccer fields, so if Council felt that perhaps those lands would be more appropriately dedicated to baseball, we would be more than happy to bring that forward to Council for your consideration,’ said Mr. Downey.

While this option was put on the table, other Councillors called for baseball to be an option for Mavrinac neighbours to consider.

‘I would rather get this done right rather than just get it done,’ said Councillor John Abel. ‘We should have a diamond somewhere east of Bayview and north of Wellington. It is a growing sport and you may see that demand come up.’

Added Councillor Thom: ‘I am absolutely for a parkland in part of that area and I am happy to look at the mix of services offered to residents, but it doesn't make sense that if we have an identified need in the Master Plan, and we have land allocated for parks, that

we [don't] look at all the options and then make a decision. As long as we get some baseball diamonds in the mix moving forward.?