

Pro promises 'exceptional' tennis, but vision goes beyond rules

By Brock Weir

Rules should be broadened to allow for wider ranging proposals for new tennis facilities, according to the Aurora Community Tennis Club.

The group is backing a proposal to finance and build a series of indoor and outdoor tennis courts at Stewart Burnett Park, the outdoor recreation facility near Leslie and Wellington Streets. They were responding to an expression of interest put out by the Town of Aurora this summer for a new tennis facility on that location. The only problem is, however, the call was simply for a covered or indoor facility and that's the plan on which other groups have based their proposals.

The 'exceptional' project in question was brought to Council last week by Aurora resident Andres Marco, a former professional tennis player with an extensive résumé as a player and trainer. His project was backed at the meeting by Brent MacKinnon, president of the Aurora Community Tennis Club.

'My partner and I, on the weekend, concluded a verbal agreement with some other investors to offer a proposal to the Town of Aurora for an exceptional tennis facility,' said Mr. Marco in a statement, which Mr. MacKinnon read to Council.

'Our proposal is exceptional because we envision a mixed use facility: We will have recreational, community-based programs as well as high-level professional training programs. It's exceptional because we envision both indoor and outdoor courts. Exceptional because we would be promoting the sport of pickle ball, the fastest growing sport in North America, especially for a booming senior population.

'Exceptional because our complex will enable hosting of significant local, regional, Provincial, and international events that would bring many players and visitors to Aurora. Exceptional because our vision will stimulate local economic development.'

According to Councillor John Gallo, if Mr. Marco and the Aurora Community Tennis Club are planning to pay for it, their plan should be given due consideration. AL Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, on the other hand, said that could be difficult because the expression of interest put out the call for an indoor facility, something which other groups have complied with.

'It makes it difficult to compare apples to apples,' said Mr. Downey. 'If a proponent comes forward and wants to build 20 tennis courts and our expression of interest identified six, how do we evaluate whether or not the proposal for six courts is better or worse than the proposal for 20 courts?'

'We need to define what we're looking for and I thought we did that very well in the expression of interest. If the proponent wishes to go outside of that, they're welcome to, however, it won't be evaluated as part of the RFP because it is not what was directed by Council to be sent out as an RFP.

'Some of the proponents have called and said, can we put in a proposal for a bubbled facility and can we put in a proposal for a building? Absolutely. You can compare apples to apples with that, but not the number of courts in the footprint that we have established.'

Councillors approved going forward with the expression of interest on consent this past summer.

Nevertheless, Councillor Gallo said the Town should not be concerned if a group comes forward with a 'larger scope' if Aurora is not going to be on the hook to pay for it. While Aurora would be supplying the land, it should accommodate all proposals.

'If someone is out there that wants to build something that is grand, and with their money, I think we should be open to at least looking at it,' said Councillor Gallo. 'It is there money; why would we close the door?'

Councillors received word from three groups responding to the expression of interest, including Terry Redvers, the owner and

operator of the Aurora Sports Dome on Industrial Parkway North.