

SARC gymnasium project set to move forward with \$11.1 million price tag

The addition of a single gymnasium at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex is set to move forward this week with a price tag of \$11.125 million.

The project, with this most recent budget increase of \$2.295 million, was given the tentative approval by Council at last week's General Committee meeting.

The new gym space, once completed, will help meet the needs of the current population as well as future growth, but some Councillors were left questioning whether it will really make a big enough dent in the current deficit of recreation space.

'This particular journey to build a gymnasium at the SARC began almost five years ago and came out of the Parks & Recreation [Committee, and] through the process we have looked at various iterations and here we are tonight hoping to move forward,' said Councillor Michael Thompson last week, summarizing the process, which began with a look on whether the SARC could accommodate one or two gymnasium spaces. 'As we look at the revenue model going forward, we're fairly confident it will be well-utilized and will address a service gap.'

'In hindsight, it would have been good if we had the gym built in 2006. We know the costs would have been considerably less. We have seen year over year the cost increase and why the issue was brought forward five years ago. My preference would have been to build it then. It is what it is. We're here tonight, I think the need is there, it has been demonstrated over and over that we need to move forward with this gym.'

Similar views were expressed by Councillor Harold Kim that the new gym, once approved, will be greatly used.

'Our population is going to be increasing [to] 85,000 by 2051,' he said. 'The inflationary environment we have found ourselves in the last six months, costs are always rising and it is not a matter of whether we should build it; we should build it and I am in full support.'

But not all members were in support of the proposal.

Councillor John Gallo said while he was 'not debating the need' for the facility, he said he would not support it as the 'costs are outrageous.' He also questioned some of the tweaks that have been made along the way following consultation with sport user groups, which resulted in bleachers and showers being taken out of the equation.

Councillor Gallo said these features would be an 'asset' if part of the rationale moving forward with the gym was to provide further opportunities for the Town to host tournaments.

'What they told us was that on a regular daily use they would not use them,' said Recreation Manager Lisa Warth on the feedback she received on bleachers. 'They come into the gym and they have their bags, they put them on the floor and they go and do their activity. For as special event, there may be a need for seating and we would bring in temporary seating. We would just set up rows of chairs that are already available in the facility and they told us that would suffice.'

Sports groups said that rather than needing showers, the users would 'come dressed, do their activity and leave,' she added.

'We're putting a lot of emphasis on our user groups and I appreciate their input, don't get me wrong, but they may also have it wrong,' said Councillor Gallo. 'I don't think it is the right approach to simply take what they want or don't want. We're building for a community here and personally I would have [explored that] a lot more. We have to take a more global approach when we build these things.'

The Councillor added if the gym was going forward, Council and the Town needs to work to 'make it the best it can be' and not remove things from the budget 'that may have value just for the sake of that.'

Councillor Wendy Gaertner also opposed the gym plan, but for a different reason.

'I think we need two gyms for our population growth,' she said. 'To me, one gym is not going to solve the problem. We need to figure out where to put two gyms, even if it is one gym on top of another. One gym is not going to get us to where we want to go. We want to have sport tourism. We want to be able to service our current and future populations, and the price tag is really high for one gym.'

Adding two gyms to the SARC was previously ruled out by Council as doing so to the recreation centre's current footprint would result in encroachment onto environmentally sensitive areas and could disrupt the adjacent David Tomlinson Nature Reserve.

Should this additional gym be approved by Council this week, it will stand at 8,000 square feet, include two changerooms at 620 total square feet, a storage area, a renovation to existing administrative and customer service areas at the SARC, and provide flexible space.

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