

Skaters sound off on their new skateboard park



By Brock Weir

Facebook groups, webinars and other online discussions will help drive Aurora's new skate park.

Local skaters came to the Aurora Family Leisure Complex on Thursday to have their say on what they would like to see in the new skate park, which will be a key focal point of the Town's new Youth Centre.

Council has allocated \$500,000 for the construction of a skateboard park, near the south entrance of the Complex, which could be home to the youth space as early as the end of 2014.

The brainstorming session brought out a handful of students, representing skaters from Aurora High School, Dr. G.W. Williams, Cardinal Carter and St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High Schools, as well as Steven Pink, owner of Spuds Skateshop, a popular hangout adjacent to St. Max.

Presented with three possible designs by Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, and Brandon Robinson of the Canadian Ramp Company, skaters wanted something that would continue to provide new challenges and last the test of time.

"You guys are super lucky to have a community that stands behind you and wants to do this," said Mr. Robinson. "I work with communities all across the nation and it is very difficult to have both parties working together like this. I personally believe, as a skater, no community is the same. There are different styles of skaters, different ages of skaters, intermediate and expert. We want to build a design that is going to meet your needs and your desires."

Although Mr. Robinson provided three distinct designs, of varying shapes – round, rectangular and oval – with a variety of challenges and obstacles, one thing the designs had in common is they're slated to be prefabricated rather than poured into place.

The benefits of a pre-fab skate park are "huge", said Mr. Robinson, as they provide a "stronger" option, and they provide a better warranty, he said. Mr. Downey added that having a pre-fab park would also make it easier to switch up the challenges, make repairs, and add new additions without tearing out huge swaths of poured concrete.

Others, however, were not as sure this was the right way forward.

"I have skated at a couple of pre-cast parks and they get separated after a time," said Mr. Pink. "I have skateboarded for 12 years now and when you're going up a set and there is a crack, they get bigger and bigger. It throws off the skate park."

Mr. Robinson contended, that poured parks get cracks as well, but in Mr. Pink's view skating on a prefab surface just doesn't feel the

same.

As the people in attendance felt out the different designs, they didn't hold back in making their suggestions, writing their comments directly on the plans, circling the elements they liked, as well as the components which weren't, in their view, up to snuff.

Making their rounds, it appeared a circular shape was favoured over the rectangle and oval for flow, allowing users to easily skate around the park and better accommodate ramps, stairs, and other challenges which could also be used by kids on bikes.

They wanted jumps, more things to hit, with lots of room to move around. Planting trees, they said, would also be a good move not only to provide shade, but further obstacles.

Regardless of whether the final product is poured or pre-fab, whatever the outcome, it is going to be better than Aurora's current skate area at Hickson Park in the east side of Town.

"This is worlds apart," said Mr. Pink. "We were waiting, waiting, and waiting for a skate park and then we got word we got a skate park at Hickson," said Mr. Pink. "It is poured in place and I still skate Hickson. I like it because it is in my neighbourhood.

"This is great. It will boost a lot of kids skateboarding in my area, and hopefully it will drive kids to the youth centre. I would like to see more kids skating not only for my business, but for the sports itself. I feel it is starting to phase out."

While Mr. Robinson plans on reconvening the group " and potentially some new recruits " for further online discussion, he has taken the suggestions back to their designers to take a look and see what they can incorporate.

Mr. Downey said he hopes to have the final park designs ready in six to eight weeks.

"I want to go back to Council and say this is what we can do for \$500,000," he said, noting the construction of the youth centre will come first, followed by the less time consuming build of the skate park. "I'm hoping to cut the ribbon on the Youth Centre in October of 2014.

"These kids [here this afternoon] come from various areas in Town and they have also skated in a lot of skate parks. We did our very best to get it to everyone and every age level at every school. A lot of the kids are bringing other kids' thoughts to the table and I think it is great they're taking the opportunity to have a say."