

Sport Aurora disputes Council comments on Sport Plan

(Re: Council looks beyond Sport Aurora for sports initiatives, January 3)

The first line of this story suggests that Council 'could' be looking beyond Sport Aurora for delivery of sports programs, citing that staff have been asked to report on 'alternate delivery models.' Yet, it is reported that staff recommended the Sport Plan delivery agreement be extended. Town staff is diligent in their recommendations and they know what Sport Aurora has done, but are now being asked to consider an alternate delivery model.

From the Town's website, the Sport Plan is introduced; 'The Town of Aurora has prepared a Sport Plan to encourage greater collaboration with community partners and make use of existing facilities over the next five years.' Yet the decision made by Town Council seems to be contrary.

Sport Aurora is an inclusive organization that represents 40 sport organizations and has a democratically-elected Board to guide their directions; one of which has been the Aurora Sports Plan delivery for the past three years.

Sport Aurora's performance has been closely monitored by Town staff through monthly meetings and quarterly reports. Town staff has deemed that all key performance indicators, that they originally set, have been met.

The Year-4 programs reported in the article; women and girls in sport, persons with disabilities, older adults, low-income accessibility, cultural-diversity and sport tourism, are well under way. Recommendations have been made by Sport Aurora after extensive consultations with many stakeholders in the Community. Committees have been formed and directions are already established. But they will stop because the Town 'pressed pause.'

Councillors Gilliland and Humfries recognized the value of Sport Aurora and voted against the pause and against the notion that other delivery models be considered. The loss of momentum is problematic as contractors are let go and numerous Committees with valued volunteers are 'paused' or even abandoned.

Volunteers are an asset that should not be wasted. The other four Councillors and the Mayor disagreed with this logic and voted to 'pause.'

The article reports that 'assurances' were made that Sport Aurora's cornerstone programs such as Breakfast of Champions, Sport Volunteer Recognition Lunch and the All Kids Can Play Program would continue without this 'cash infusion.'

This is not necessarily actually true. Those properties are Sport Aurora's. They will only continue provided that resources are procured as needed. Sponsorships and donors are always welcomed for such important Sport Aurora Programs. They will survive because they matter.

Mayor Mrakas suggested that there has been 'some conversation' regarding moving to a Sport Council or 'Sport Board'.

No conversation has been had with Sport Aurora. And there is no reference in the Sport Plan about a 'Sport Board'. Sport Aurora has reviewed best practices in other municipal jurisdictions regarding the development of a Sport Council and they appear in the Reports. In the Aurora Sport Plan, a Sport Council is described, suggesting that the Town 'reconstitute Sport Aurora into a Sport Council with an expanded mandate'.

On the theme of reports being unread (or not understood) is the comment made by Councillor Gallo that there wasn't a clear message of what was being achieved through Sport Plan delivery by Sport Aurora. The implication was that somehow Sport Aurora had failed to deliver. Staff reported that Sport Aurora had met every deliverable.

Likewise his 'funding lines were blurred' comment about Activate Aurora is curious. The funding lines are crystal clear. Sport Aurora received a \$749,500.00 provincial grant to advance a number of initiatives and it was reported that no Town funding was or has been used for those programs.

In fact, some of those provincial funds have been used to train Town recreation staff and up-skill Town personnel at no cost to the Town. In addition, provincial grant funds have been used to pay for those newly up-skilled staff to deliver some of our Programs; helping youth become more physically literate. We believe it is important that our Council ensure they are diligent and accurate when publicly commenting and during decision-making.

Sport Aurora applauds the Town for wanting to be directly involved with the Sport Plan and take responsibility in laying a strong foundation for sport. Until now, their role has been to build and permit much needed facilities. According to the Sport Plan, the Town charges sport organizations \$2M annually to use those facilities. Implementing the Sport Plan would be a positive step towards sport development and using just a fraction of those permit fees to build a strong foundation for sport seems prudent. Sport Aurora remains ready to collaborate as a community partner.

The Sport Aurora Board of Directors