

Sport Aurora set to begin implementation of Sports Plan

By Brock Weir

Sport Aurora is set to get to work this week implementing the short term goals of Aurora's new Sports Plan.

The Sports Plan, which is a planning document commissioned by this Council to chart the current and future needs of sports users and groups in the community was recently approved by Council and the first stage of its implementation plan received approval at Council last week.

Following Council's green light, the Town will contract Sport Aurora, an umbrella group representing the bulk of the Town's sports teams and clubs, to carry out the first stages of the vision at a cost of \$56,000.

Short-term goals include the development of an 'Aurora Sport Policy' that clearly defines the role of sport within Aurora and the roles of stakeholders such as the municipality, clubs, and businesses, seek partners to go in on long-term sporting visions, and initiatives that focus on physical literacy and making sport fully accessible.

'Sport Aurora has played an integral role in the creation and development of the Sport Plan and has now provided a proposal for the execution of tasks within the Sport Plan,' said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, in a report to Council. 'Sport Aurora has been a key driver in the development and delivery of many initiatives related to sports and recreation over the past several years. [They] have approached the Town with a proposal to deliver the tasks in the Sport Plan and continue with their efforts to elevate sport and recreation in the community. They would be a contracted service to the Parks and Recreation Services Department eliminating the requirement of a Sport Development Officer at this time.'

Following a lengthy delegation to General Committee from Sport Aurora president Stephen Kimmerer, and several questions from the other side of the table, the plan ultimately won the approval of Councillors who said they were impressed with Sport Aurora's track record so far.

'You are a proven and trusted partner that we have worked with for years and years, and the value your entire board, committee and volunteers lends has been really invaluable to our Town,' said Councillor Sandra Humfries. 'For me, this is a really fantastic resolution that staff have brought forward and I am looking forward to that first successful year and reporting out how we're going to continue this success.'

Added Councillor Michael Thompson, an advocate of a Sport Development Officer during the last Municipal Election Campaign: 'When we began this process with the sports plan, we saw it as a strategic document to help guide our way with regards to sports delivery in Aurora and certainly I am supportive of us doing something so we continue on. We identified 2015 as the Year of Sport and we were certainly hopeful we would have kick-started it a little bit early, but we're here now and I am glad to see that.'

Something Councillor Thompson said he would like to see come forward is clarity on the goals and 'measurable' outcomes on these goals, something Mr. Downey said was part of the initial discussion with Sport Aurora. A full report would be coming back to Council outlining successes coming out of the deal, said Mr. Downey.

One sticking point in moving forward, however, could come from the composition of Sport Aurora itself. While it represents the majority of sports groups in Aurora in terms of the number of clubs under its umbrella, it does not represent the majority in terms of athletes.

The Aurora Youth Soccer Club and Aurora Minor Hockey are two of the biggest sports clubs in Aurora and remain independent of each other and Sport Aurora.

Within the Sport Plan is a recommendation to reconstitute Sport Aurora into a 'Sport Council' with a new mandate and

representation from the sports community as a whole, a goal some Councillors said was easier said than done.

When these concerns were raised by Councillors Wendy Gaertner and Tom Mrakas, Mr. Kimmerer said there has been dialogue with the Aurora Youth Soccer Club and conversations so far have been "very positive." Although Councillor Mrakas said that was "encouraging", Councillor Gaertner still had reservations.

"That is a very, very big issue," said Councillor Gaertner of forming a Sport Council. "I know Sport Aurora is well aware of that and is working on that, but if we as a Council are endorsing a Sport Council, that Sport Council must have buy-in from hockey and soccer because they have a huge membership and they would need to be represented. That is certainly something that needs to have further work by Sport Aurora, this Council, [and] by Mr. Downey. It is a very important issue in Town."

Others around the table, however, were less concerned.

"I do not believe Sport Aurora should be held hostage because a couple of other large organizations have chosen not to be a part of it," said Councillor Harold Kim.

Added Mayor Dawe: "Sport Aurora has stepped up extremely well to provide us with the services they need. I would suggest they are doing this as a benefit for the Town because they believe it is the right thing to do. For that reason alone, I am very inclined to support them.

"Quite frankly, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. If the other parties wish to join, I believe Sport Aurora will welcome them with open arms. If they don't, I don't think we should be penalizing Sport Aurora for something someone else doesn't want to do."