

Sport Tourism plan aims to make Aurora a destination for athletes, supporters

Aurora is one step closer towards its goal of becoming a sport tourism destination.

Council last week approved the Town's Sport Tourism Plan, which will serve as a blueprint through 2026 on "making Aurora a destination for new and repeat sport participants and their families" and enhancing their experience along the way.

The strategy has several goals set for the next four years including celebrating hometown athletes, working to bring new sporting events to Town, and promoting active, healthy lifestyles.

"Aurora has an incredible, active sports community and I am very proud to see the progress being made with Aurora's Sport Tourism Strategy," said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement. "I look forward to seeing this strategy in action in our community and to the positive opportunities for our local sporting organizations, athletes and businesses."

Council has kept a close eye on the Plan's development over the last two years and in this latest round of approvals, more money was kicked in to achieve the Strategy's maximum goals.

Additional funding will go to staff support with a specific focus on partnership development with the business community, including hotels and restaurants, to provide a complete package for players, their families, tournament organizers, and fans alike.

While Erin Hamilton, Sport Development Officer for the Town of Aurora, said immediate funding needs could be met within its current budget, a further infusion of a staff position could be used for assessing the economic impacts of specific sport events, training volunteers for multiple roles and multiple events, build further communications and marketing materials, and enhance "visitor experience initiatives."

Now that Council has approved recommendations, one of the quickest wins in the plan will be the development of a Sport Visitor Experience Package in conjunction with the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and the Explore Aurora website.

"This platform will be a one-stop shop for everything outside of the field of play and be available to all visitors well in advance of arriving in Town," said Ms. Hamilton. "The Sport Visitor Experience Package will provide visitors with a reason to stay in and experience Aurora when not on the field of play."

The package will include information about hotels and accommodation in Town, a list of restaurants that can provide discounts and special menus for large groups, a roster of local experience and attractions visitors can take in while in the community, including trails, local sporting goods stores should the need arise and municipal facilities "which can provide additional opportunities to fill their time when available."

A temporary Sport Visitor Experience Package will be ready to roll out later this year, she noted, with a full launch expected in 2023.

New hosting opportunities will also be evaluated against what she describes as "Triple Bottom Line Impacts" in economic, social/cultural, and sustainability.

"A Sport Tourism Strategy will allow Aurora to identify new sport event hosting opportunities within the current assets of the community," said Ms. Hamilton. "It is critical that the Town understands why new events would be supported in the community. Each sporting event brings different value under the Triple Bottom Line impact areas. In evaluating future hosting opportunities, the 'why' in each of these categories must be considered.

"Determining whether an event will contribute to the goals of the Sport Tourism Strategy should streamline and guide decisions

about proceeding with a bid, communication initiatives, and collaboration opportunities.

“Currently, several events are hosted annually on the ice, fields and diamonds. The Sport Visitor Experience Package will support these events and the participants. Through initial discussions, some of the private facilities are interested in exploring event hosting opportunities where the Town can provide support as outlined in the strategy.”

Overall, the recommendations in the Sport Tourism Strategy are designed to provide an “optimal experience for each visitor” that comes into the community.

“Through a coordinated and collaborative approach, visitors can experience what Aurora has to offer through the annual sporting events that take place while the local business community can benefit from the economic impact,” said Ms. Hamilton.

Existing sporting events identified in the plan that already bring in visitors from beyond Aurora include the International Silver Stick Tournament hosted by the Central York Girls Hockey Association, the Aurora 9U Father's Day Baseball Tournament hosted by the Aurora King Baseball Association, the Aurora Youth Soccer Club/Aurora Football Club's Ontario Cup Soccer Tournament, and the annual U14 and U15 Rep Hockey tourneys hosted by the Aurora Minor Hockey Association.

Upon approval, Councillor Rachel Gilliland noted the Plan could soon see results with some of its sport tourism goals.

“I wanted to give some mention to the fact that Aurora is doing a Provincial Softball Tournament, which I think is absolutely amazing,” she said. “I am happy to spread the word because that is a big deal.”

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