

Sports plan aims to create 'lasting, positive legacy' in Aurora

By Brock Weir

When Aurora declared 2015 the Year of Sport, Council didn't want to simply leave it at that.

They made good on the vision this week by laying the foundations for a Community Sports Plan.

Brought to the table by Councillor Michael Thompson, the plan aims, in part, to develop Aurora as 'one of Canada's healthiest communities' by providing a framework for sports and recreation development in the years ahead.

'I saw [the Year of Sport] as a catalyst to bring in some of the issues we talked about during the election,' said Councillor Thompson. 'We all spoke to the value of sport at that time and we all recognize the value of sport, not just from a health perspective, but from all different manner of means. We all have different ideas and different thoughts on how to elevate sports within the community. Ultimately, we are a governing body and as a governing body we look at strategic direction, and we look at policy.'

In developing his motion, he said he looked to sports plans in other communities, particularly Mississauga to provide a framework for sports funding, sports direction, and a cohesive vision.

'I would really like to see us elevate sport, whether it is [as] Canada's healthiest community, or just creating that vision whereby we're that destination for tournaments or those kinds of economic events, and hopefully also bringing in a hotel to support it, and other amenities as well. The plan speaks to sports infrastructure, it speaks to promotion and celebration, it speaks to tourism. It brings it all under one roof.'

The potential plan got an early endorsement last week from Ron Weese, outgoing president of Sport Aurora. A sports plan is neither bold, nor unique, but if done correctly it has the potential to leave a 'lasting legacy' in Aurora, he said.

'It will show a demonstrated interest in this Council to build a healthy community from the youngest to the oldest citizens,' said Mr. Weese. 'It will show an interest in developing a relationship between sport and business through a sport tourism strategy, showing the economic value of sport, particularly amateur sport in this Town. Probably most importantly, it will show your interest in collaborating not only with sport, but with public health, with education, recreation, seniors groups, and this is important because we would like to make Aurora Canada's healthiest community.'

A sports plan for Aurora wasted no time gaining traction around the table, passing handily. For Councillor Jeff Thom, developing the plan now 'meshes perfectly' in the year of sport and underscores the importance of sports in the community.

'They not only provide an avenue for healthy living, but also for skills development and self-esteem development in our kids and right up to seniors as well,' he said.

Bringing everything together into one plan would also allow Aurora to move away from a 'piecemeal' approach to sports funding and support across Town, according to Councillor Tom Mrakas.

'I think instead of sitting back and just saying it is the Year of Sport, we are actually doing something about it and we're getting things done,' he said. 'I think this is a good first step in getting things done.'

The next step will be a further report back to Council on the development of a plan. This task will be left with Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation. He said Aurora is 'certainly interested' in the efforts put in by Mississauga on a 'number of different levels.' His report could be back to Council as early as the end of this month.

'It will assist us in focusing our attention on what the gaps are within our community and how we might address those gaps,' said

Mr. Downey. ?I think it is a great opportunity, particularly in the Year of Sport, to start this initiative and I look forward to presenting a report to Council that will identify directed staff resources to this project, as well as any funding we may require to ensure we have a sports plan before Council that will help not only this year, but in future years, and future budget considerations in 2016 and beyond.