

Tennis players wait for next volley from the Town of Aurora

By Brock Weir

The ball will soon be in Aurora's court to determine the future of indoor tennis in the area.

Councillors last week voted in favour of a motion from Mayor Geoff Dawe calling for a report to come back to Council mid-January providing further information on providing an indoor tennis facility to address community needs and a game plan on how to move forward.

The move comes as demands for an indoor facility grow with the closure of Timberlane Athletic Club, which is set to be razed for a residential development. These concerns came to a head earlier this month at a public session on both the Town's new Parks and Recreation Master Plan as well as its Sports Plan with a long line of community members speaking out on the matter.

In his motion, Mayor Dawe underscored a decision made in the last term of Council that saw a proposal for a tennis bubble at Stewart Burnett Park that would have been cost-neutral to taxpayers in favour of looking further into a rigid multi-purpose tennis facility, a move which inspired considerable scorn from some members of the tennis community.

‘This has gone around a couple of times and there is confusion and I think we need to resolve this one way or another,’ said Mayor Dawe. ‘That is why I am asking staff to come back with specifics on how we can best address the situation.’

Councillor Paul Pirri characterised the vote to look further into a rigid structure instead of the proposed partnership on the tennis bubble as one of the ‘big mistakes’ of the last term.

‘We had the opportunity to provide the facility for free and actually make a little money right off the bat and we deferred it to look at an option that was going to cost us millions of dollars,’ said Councillor Pirri. ‘It was a mistake then and I would like to rectify this as quickly as possible. It is too bad, in my opinion, that Aurora tennis players are missing out on an opportunity to be playing tennis [indoors] but we have the opportunity to provide something at this point in time.’

‘It was an election year, it got deferred, it got put off the plate, and I think we missed the boat on this one. Hopefully by next winter we have a facility we can utilize as cost-effectively as possible as opposed to spending millions of dollars doing exactly the same thing.’

While the report, set to come back for the next General Committee meeting, currently scheduled for January 19, will have information on the current status of the various balls in the air, Councillors were heartened it will also make recommendations on how to get out of limbo and move forward.

‘My intention is that the report will be comprehensive, explaining the RFP in the background and provide options to Council to move the matter forward,’ said Town Solicitor Warren Mar.

Councillor Abel, however, said he wanted comments made on indoor tennis at the recent public information session to be considered within the report. Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, told Council the report will outline the history, issues related to the RFP process, actions to date, and then options on how to proceed.

‘I am glad this is not just an informational report coming back to us because I feel that would take a long period of time,’ said Councillor Tom Mrakas. ‘I am glad that we will have something in front of us to make a decision. It is too bad it didn't happen already, but hopefully we can make a decision and get it done.’