

There are economic opportunities to be had in this week's DOCS on Ice tourney: Council



(Dr. Chris Gannage, an emergency room doctor at Southlake Regional Health Centre, is a driving force behind bringing the DOCS On Ice Tournament to Aurora and Newmarket this weekend. Auroran photo by Brock Weir)

By Brock Weir

Aurora Councillors threw their support behind the upcoming DOCS on Ice tournament, a weekend event which will bring over 900 doctors to Aurora and Newmarket this week.

Although organizers did not get a full waiver of fees for the use of the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex (SARC) of \$7,000, they scored a sponsorship of \$2,000 in addition to a \$1,000 grant already allocated to them by the Town's Parks and Recreation Department.

Councillors rejected a motion from Councillor Sandra Humfryes asking for the full waiver because some believed it would set a bad precedent for groups such as the Aurora Skating Club, which is paying full fees for the use of the Aurora Community Centre this week for their biennial skating showcase.

Similarly, the Aurora Chamber of Commerce is also paying full freight for their use of the same facility next week for the annual Aurora Home Show.

?There are a number of groups that could benefit from the waiving of fees, which is the reason I am asking Council for direction,? said Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation, last month. ?It is somewhat unique.?

Councillor Humfryes initially suggested waiving the fees out of funds in Council's Contingency Fund, which is nominally \$50,000 set aside for special projects, fundraisers, grants, and community events which may come up over the course of the year.

Councillor Paul Pirri, however, expressed alarm that this fund has already been whittled away to \$20,000 by the end of March. Explaining the shortfall, Town Treasurer Dan Elliott explained \$10,000 of the fund went to the Aurora Historical Society for their funding grant of \$70,000 which was formally approved in March, with a further \$20,000 being taken out of the account to address increasing costs of insurance rates.

With 2014 being an election year, Mr. Elliott said this is likely to be a ?shorter year? in terms of money flow, so that reduction was warranted.

At the end of the day, however, Councillors voted to purchase a sponsorship agreement in the view 900 incoming doctors could provide an economic opportunity for the Town.

‘There is no doubt there is going to be an economic impact,’ said Councillor John Abel, noting local restaurants and other businesses need to be properly notified there could be hundreds of extra mouths to feed.

Councillor Chris Ballard said he also agreed with his concept, noting that Aurora needs to attract more doctors.

‘There may or may not be significant economic development because of it, the players may or may not have time for a local dinner, but one of the key things which was alluded to [by event organizer Dr. Chris Gannage] is introducing a significant number of young doctors to our neighbourhood,’ said Councillor Ballard. ‘Competition for quality doctors is critical to maintaining a sustainable community. When you have an excellent health facility like Southlake, excellent schools like we have here in Aurora, anything you can do to introduce doctors to Aurora is a good thing.’

Aurora CAO Neil Garbe agreed, and noted this area was a ‘good market segment’ for Aurora to examine. For future impacts, Councillor Michael Thompson cited talks earlier in March by Sport Aurora in potential future impacts. Sport Aurora, he said, drove home the importance of ‘sport tourism’ to a Town such as Aurora and to make that a reality, there needs to be more accommodation than the lone hotel Aurora currently has.

Having Aurora on the radar of more people and more teams would go a long way in convincing hotel chains that there is ‘a good business case here.’

The lone vote against sponsoring the event was Councillor Paul Pirri. Although he said it was a great cause for DOCS on Ice to focus on raising a significant amount of money for the Canadian Mental Health Association, which is based in Aurora, economic benefits to the Town would be slim to nil.

‘If you ask me where the benefit is to Aurora residents, I don't see any,’ he said. ‘They are coming here for an event, but the games they are going to play are a shot drive to the highway. When you think about where people are going to be coming and going, it is going to be coming up the 404, coming across Wellington and going to play their hockey games. I just don't see the value in this.’