

Town Square, Sports Dome naming rights to be sold amid Council concerns

Selling the naming rights to any facility can bring in significant revenue, and components of Aurora Town Square and the Aurora Sports Dome are no exception ? but setting the rules of the game was a challenge faced by Council last week.

Last Tuesday, Council voted in favour of moving forward with negotiating the sale of naming rights to several components of the Aurora Town Square redevelopment including the outdoor gathering space, the Church Street Schoolhouse, and the bridge connecting the expansion to the historic Church Street Building to the nearby Aurora Public Library.

Also up for grabs following Council's approval is a name sale opportunity for the Aurora Sports Dome, the sports facility on Industrial Parkway North which the Town purchased last year.

While Council members agreed that the sale of naming rights would bring funds into Town coffers, the road to get there was far from unanimous.

Although Councillor Wendy Gaertner objected specifically to selling off the naming rights to some components of the Town Square development, Councillors Rachel Gilliland and John Gallo said their decision should be reserved until municipal staff finish drafting a new Town-wide policy on naming rights large and small ? including benches in the Aurora Arboretum.

?I am fine with the Town Square Bridge renaming and I am fine with the naming of the theatre, which I don't see on this list, but with respect to the Church Street School House, to me that has to just remain and I am not in favour of naming the outdoor square,? said Councillor Gaertner. ?It is the Aurora Town Square and I believe that is the name it should hold.?

Councillor Gaertner voted against staff recommendations on the whole, but the three Councillors specifically voted against a clause which would task staff with ?initiating negotiations with potential partners for the purpose of naming the Aurora Town Square Bridge Outdoor Square, and Church Street School House.?

Waiting for a Naming Rights policy to come back was also cited as a reason to vote against similar recommendations on the Aurora Sports Dome.

?An existing recreation facility advertising and sponsorship client has expressed interest in entering into a naming rights sponsorship agreement for the Aurora Sports Dome,? said John Firman, Manager of Business Development for the Town of Aurora, in a report to Council. ?Initial discussions confirmed that this client is very serious about pursuing this and finalizing an agreement as soon as possible.

?Negotiations would include details related to the naming of the facility, financial commitment from the prospective sponsor, terms of sponsorship, sponsorship recognition, and designation of the sponsorship funds.?

?This is a very awkward time because we're still in the middle of developing a naming rights policy and ironing out our sponsorship opportunities,? said Councillor Gilliland. ?While I am in full support of that, at the same time, I think we really need to ensure our policy is in place so we?know those rules of engagement.?

Councillor Gilliland said she wanted to ?keep the lines of communication open? when it came to negotiations, but Councillor Michael Thompson questioned what was meant by that.

?We have expressed ourselves in closed session with regards to what we're looking for,? he said. ?We have tasked staff in trying to achieve that and coming back with something along those lines, if possible. Then Council would make a decision.?

Councillor Gallo, meanwhile, said that while he was ?leaning towards completing a policy before we move forward with any

particular entity? he successfully requested the word ?sponsor? be changed to ?sponsors? so as to ?leave the door open? for options at Council.

?I think, from my perspective, at least it is a direct communication to staff that this is the direction I would like to see it go in,? he said. ?If that takes a little more time, I think it is worth spending that time.?

Added Mayor Tom Mrakas: ?We want to make sure we get the best possible deal for our community and the Town and I think that is what Council is striving for here.?

Ultimately, Councillor Gilliland was the lone vote against moving forward with the Sports Dome opportunity at this time.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter