

User fees at revamped Leisure Complex changed ahead of 2015 opening

By Brock Weir

Ahead of this winter's anticipated full opening of the newly revamped Aurora Family Leisure Complex, Council is set this week to hammer out exactly how much it will cost residents, and returning members of the Complex, to use the facility.

Councillors gave tentative approval to the revised user fees at last week's General Committee meeting, a recommendation which is expected to get the formal green light this Tuesday.

Among the fee changes for the AFLC include adjustments for squash fees associated with new membership structures at the Club Aurora fitness centre, which allows a bit more flexibility in the facilities and services each member might want to access.

According to Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, new wellness membership levels are a response to 'concerns and requests' from several members.

'We believe the combo memberships better reflect what the needs of our membership are,' said Mr. Downey. 'With the Gold Wellness Membership we were charging individuals for services they were not necessarily interested in, so we are now trying to focus more on what your needs are and then, if you wish to add on to that particular program, you will see you can add on the pool, aquafit and squash, as opposed to it being charged for that in your overall fee.'

Squash memberships, he notes, were discounted this year in a reflection of reduced service levels stemming from the facility renovations. What was once a seven day window to use the squash courts was reduced to three possible days of access due to the renovations and the fees were adjusted accordingly, said Mr. Downey. With everything set to get started once again next year, those fees will be back up to their 2013 levels.

In addition, fees associated with the use of the track have been eliminated and that element of the new facility will be open to each resident free of charge.

'We don't think that is going to be a huge [financial impact], but we believe it is now going to give additional opportunities for folks to exercise without incurring any additional costs,' Mr. Downey told Councillors.

One change which raised concerns for one Councillor, however, was a perceived hit for seniors.

For several programs and classes at the AFLC, the previous 50 per cent discounts seniors have been enjoying in 2014 are proposed to be reduced to 20 per cent. From the perspective of Councillor Wendy Gaertner, this 30 per cent jump might be too much for seniors all at once.

'Seniors are not happy with the big increase,' she said, noting classes now \$3.50 could go up to \$5. 'It doesn't seem like a lot of money, but it is a huge percentage. We have given them two months' notice, but it is coming out of the blue for some people.'

But the change will bring the cost of programs for seniors at the AFLC in line with other seniors' discounts and subsidies across Town, according to Mr. Downey.

'Town programs offer a standard discount for seniors' members at 20 per cent,' he said. 'For some unexplained reason, we offered a 50 per cent discount for aquafit programs. There didn't seem to be a justification why we had gone beyond the 20 per cent to 50 per cent [and] there still doesn't seem to be a justification with regards to that. We are also trying to standardize that level of subsidy throughout all of our costing.'

As seniors programs in Aurora are accessible as early as the age of 55, Mr. Downey said Aurora remains at the 'forefront' of

offering programming to seniors from as early an age as possible, but consistency across the board is important.

In response, Councillor Gaertner said it makes sense to her as a Councillor, but as a senior it is an issue.