

What do you want in a skateboard park?



By Brock Weir

What will \$500,000 buy you when it comes to a new skateboard park? That could soon be up to you.

Aurora Council approved a \$500,000 spending limit for a new skateboard park set to be built close to the south end of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex in front of the upcoming Community Space for Youth.

The new skateboard park will be constructed by the Canadian Ramp Company, a company that prides itself on the importance of tailoring the finished products to the needs and wants of the community, as well as ensuring this very community has a fair crack at having their voices heard.

“Proper promotion to the local community is an integral part of the development of skate park projects,” says the Canadian Ramp Company (CRC). “The success of every skate park is dependent on feedback from the local skate culture and support from the community. Through a series of community meetings and webinars, we can create a skate park design to meet the needs of area residents. We would also offer to create a social media site dedicated to the skateboard project. This would become a hub for the local skaters to comment on the design progress allowing all opinions to be heard.

“Our design team specializes in the integration of local identity into all our skate park projects. Incorporating local materials, history or symbolism has resulted in collaborative projects that are unique to the project location.”

Although some Councillors said setting the upset limit at \$500,000 before public consultation was truly underway was the wrong way forward, they believed that public consultation services was a valuable starting point.

“It seems to me, especially when we have site reviews and community engagement that would be well worth funding,” said Councillor Chris Ballard. “I am hearing concerns from people in the community, especially people who use the arboretum near the proposed location of the skate park. It seems to me that before we move ahead we should take a step back and move forward with [CRC's] eight steps.”

Others said they believed the best way forward would be to take both steps in conjunction of each other. Councillor John Abel said he appreciated the concerns of the arboretum, but said plans should go ahead and these concerns be addressed during the consultation process.

“We're doing a great thing for our community by bringing forward, as part of our youth centre needs, a good skate park that has

community involvement," he said. "The youth are going to help us design it and they are going to use it."

In his comments, Councillor Abel highlighted the number of years it has taken to get to a point where a youth space is finally on the horizon. From the perspective of Councillor Evelyn Buck, it is important to go out to the community to find out what skaters really want because they do not have the benefit of being organized and having advocates within the community for their own interests.

"I see this as something that would be very useful in preparing specification and making the decisions," she said. "I would appreciate getting expert advice on how best to serve that community with a facility that doesn't cost more than it has to cost."

For Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation, had Council not decided to set the \$500,000 limit, it would put his department in a bind because one can't design something unless you know the limitations of what one can spend. The company in question also proposed a bike park, something which, he added, might be a good idea to consider as conflicts have come up between skateboarders at the Town's skateboard area at Hickson Park near Bayview and Wellington and bikers who also try to use the same space.

Having a bike path as part of the skateboard park plans for the Leisure Centre could help alleviate some of that congestion and conflict, but that could come with an additional price tag.

"Bikers drop gravel and rip into the skateboard ramps," said Mr. Downey. "It creates a bit of a safety hazard, so we're looking for an opportunity to expand our bike ramps. [CRC] had mentioned they have designs and they had built many tracks and they saw an opportunity [at Lambert Willson Park]. I would certainly entertain exploring a bike park."

When all is said and done, Mr. Downey said building the skateboard park in conjunction with the youth space would tie together "seamlessly" when it comes to executing design plans. Once those are ready to go, he added he expected construction of the skateboard park to move quicker than the completed youth space.