

## Sport Aurora addresses 'misconceptions' in future of Sports Plan

**By Brock Weir**

Sport Aurora was commissioned nearly four years ago to bring Aurora's Sports Plan to fruition, but now that the Town is mulling a change in direction, the body representing more than 40 local sports teams, is stating its case.

Sandra Manherz, Vice President of Sport Aurora, appeared at Council last week to 'correct some misconceptions and some inaccuracies' she said have come out of the ongoing debate at Town Hall on whether the direction of the Sport Plan should change course.

Since shortly after the current Council was sworn in last December, local lawmakers have been weighing options on how to deliver on some of the key planks of the Sport Plan, including the establishment of a Sport Council and how to use sport as a draw for tourism.

Some lawmakers have questioned the progress made thus far, arguing that the Town should take more of a 'leadership role' in its development.

But Ms. Manherz argued the Town has always been at the wheel of the Sport Plan.

'It is important to note that the Town has always had a strong leadership role in the Sport Plan,' she said. 'The Sport Plan was deemed a priority by Council in 2015 and the Sport Plan, along with its 22 deliverables, were formulated by the Town and were approved by Council in 2016. Sport Aurora's service agreement to execute the Sport Plan was monitored and directed by the Town each step. The Town identified the areas of interest and priority each year, created the deliverables for each of the areas of interest, monitored progress and approved the results. The Town of Aurora has always been in charge of the Sport Plan and has always provided leadership.'

Ms. Manherz went on to address comments questioning the 'value' Sport Aurora provides to the taxpayer in carrying out their Sport Plan contract. In addition to completing the measurables of the Sport Plan on budget, she said Sport Aurora has brought in \$1.2 million in grants to Aurora, up to six times the Town's original investment.

'Each dollar was spent here in the Town of Aurora, creating jobs, creating valuable programs, and giving advanced training not only to our coaches, but also to Town Staff to provide the highest level of programming to our residents,' she said. 'The cost of hiring one individual as a sport development officer to execute the sport plan would not come close to the value Sport Aurora has provided, utilizing the knowledge of over 60 qualified individuals, experts in their field, who have volunteered their time collaborating on the Sport Plan.'

Another criticism levelled at Sport Aurora not only in the recent debate on the Sport Plan, but other initiatives Sport Aurora has undertaken with support of public dollars is the view that Sport Aurora does not provide a united voice for Aurora athletes and sports groups.

Two of the biggest groups in local sports, the Aurora Minor Hockey League and Aurora Youth Soccer, remain separate entities. Nevertheless, Ms. Manherz argued that everything Sport Aurora has done so far has been carried out with an eye to benefitting Aurora's entire sporting community.

'I will reiterate that Sport Aurora's position on facilities, sport policy or programming do not change based on who is in our membership, as we have a global and inclusive view of sport in this community,' she said. 'We represent anyone. Any organization, any sport that has a footprint in Aurora, regardless of membership. All that we ask is they care about the common good of sport in which to contribute.'

'Further, I have continually advocated for field space, whether through shared use agreements or new facility acquisitions such as Bloomington with most of you. I have met with the YRDSB (York Region District School Board), I have had multiple meetings with both of our MPPs, and in each situation, our advocacy efforts would have primarily benefited the one sports group, soccer, that is not a member of Sport Aurora. Why? Because we do what is in the best interests of the community. Always.'

Underscoring this point, she added the Sport Aurora Board includes founding members of the Aurora Soccer Club, an adult club, representing over 25 years of soccer club management.

'The engagement of Sport Aurora by the Town has been revenue positive, resulting in building a strong foundation of sport in this community like no other,' she said. 'We are leaders and we are proud of that. While I respect Councillors' need to re-evaluate how it's spending its dollars responsibly, as the VP of Sport Aurora, I do take exception to the notion that Sport Aurora doesn't have the best interests of this community in mind when setting budgets and that we haven't provided value to the community we live in. Our actions suggest otherwise. I respectfully ask that you consider these points when you deliberate on the future of the sport plan and

specifically deliverable number three as it pertains to the Sport Council.?