

Action needed on new sports facility, say advocates

By Brock Weir

Aurora's sports facilities are busting at the seams and it is only going to get worse with population growth, according to sports advocates.

Reg Chappell, Vice President of Sport Aurora, the umbrella group that acts as a voice for the majority of Aurora's sports teams, took their push for a new multiuse sports facility to the next level last week, highlighting the need as a delegate to Council.

Aurora has had a new recreation facility on its 10 year capital plan for well over a decade. Although the timelines are coming closer and closer, now is the time to consider accelerating the process, he said.

"Most of our current sports facilities are at capacity," said Mr. Chappell, who also serves as president of the Master Ducks swim club. "Demand for sport facilities is increasing. A family who is looking for a place to live, school and sports are at the top of their list. Across Canada, activity levels are increasing as we address our health requirements. If we want to promote ourselves as an attractive community then we must address these needs. The 2003 Culture and Recreation Master Plan included a list of additional facilities required for a population of 69,000. It is now predicted that we will reach a population of 75,000. The current master plan and sport plan recommended facilities are needed.

"The Town has on its books from the Master Plan to address the building of a facility in 2019. Tonight, the Parks and Recreation and Cultural Committee will be bringing a motion to move discussion of a new multipurpose sport facility forward. Sport Aurora would like to show support of this motion and suggest we begin discussions immediately as we are currently in arrears with an increasing demand that is growing exponentially."

That is exactly what Council did. With that out of the way, however, there is still a lot to do.

While many people, including Mayor Geoff Dawe, have said Aurora's south end is short-changed when it comes to recreation facilities, with the Aurora Community Centre, Aurora Family Leisure Complex, and Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex all on the north side of Wellington Street, Mr. Chappell said there is no need to hire a consultant at this point to start laying the groundwork.

"There is a pool of knowledgeable and experienced individuals within the membership of 41 organizations that make up Sport Aurora," said Mr. Chappell. "They have direct access and can get immediate input from their members. Their members make up a majority of citizens of this community. We would suggest that the director of Parks and Recreation and Culture, who has had extensive experience, host the meeting of ice, field, gym and pool partners. I use the word 'partners' because we are all in this together to build a multipurpose sport facility that we can all use at a price we can all afford to build a better community.

Recommendations from this group would then be brought back to Council for further discussion and direction.

"The demand is substantial and fields, ice, gyms and pool partners have their backs to the wall fighting for facility time in order to grow and this leaves no room for new programs. Exactly what is needed needs to be discussed as a grow-out of the community is coming quickly. There will have to be a compromise that the partners will also address. We are already in arrears, demand is increasing exponentially as demand grows. Time is of the essence and this will be the last sport facility we have built."

In further discussions following Mr. Chappell's delegation, Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, said there has been no discussion yet on what a new facility might look like or what would go in it. What was important, from Sport Aurora's perspective, was a "commitment from Council that a new facility was on the horizon and we could then commence the work of putting together information that would assist Council in determining" the next steps, from the look, to the facilities, said Mr. Downey.

"This is the first step in looking for a commitment from Council with regards to us reaching out to the community in order to gather information for that next multipurpose facility," he said. "I have to concur with Mr. Chappell's suggestion that we get together, do a roundtable discussion on what the needs are, how we're going to fill any gaps in information and when that might be coming forward. I haven't got a time commitment at this point other than I have direction to go off and meet with the groups, start gathering the information and report back to Council as soon as I possibly can, once I have information I believe is satisfactory for Council to move forward with the next step in this decision."