

Aurora could take roller skating drop-ins for a spin this year

Roller skating drop-ins could be a new addition to the Town of Aurora's recreation programs, if Council signs off on a new initiative next week.

Council gave the tentative thumbs-up to a new drop-in program earlier this month at the Committee level. Should this decision be ratified on March 31, opportunities for drop-in roller skating and inline skating could be developed pending the availability of local arenas when the ice is out.

As The Auroran reported earlier this month, municipal staff have been exploring the idea of formal roller skating activities following a motion made last year by Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland.

While staff found that hiring an outside company to operate roller skating activities locally was cost prohibitive, they said drop-in programs where users bring their own skates and protective equipment could be a quick win for skating enthusiasts and the Town.

“If Council is comfortable with us proceeding with the drop-in concept, our staff, firstly, will just look at our schedule and availability of the dry ice pads once the ice comes out,” said Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services. “Similar to what we did a couple of years ago regarding the introduction of pickleball on our dry pads, we'd do the same for this matter and do have a promotion around that as a program drop-in.”

Stouffville, noted McDougall, is one municipality that has a formal weekly program with a private provider, but this was secured with grant funding.

“As far as the drop-in model, not too many do it yet, but we're learning, and certainly any experience [other municipalities] have we'll make ours as strong as we can to get it going,” she continued. “I think promotion is a big thing. I know that there obviously is already existing popular roller skating rinks, not just in York Region, but beyond, but we could even in a try-it model, bring in a guest, not a performer per se, but somebody with that skillset just to draw attention to how this could actually be. I'm careful not to tip the scale of a new event because we're in-year and I've got to be sensitive to the budget aspect, but it's certainly a try-it kind of initiative and we can look at what we can achieve this year.”

While the drop-in initiative was ultimately supported by Council, some members expressed disappointment at the cost building a more substantive program.

“I was really hoping it would be a little more affordable than what was being presented. I was excited about it, I think the community was excited, however I do remain optimistic that there's something we can do,” said Councillor Gilliland, underscoring the importance of a “try-it” day to build both awareness and excitement over the activity. “Hopefully that is something we can look towards to gain excitement and momentum about coming and doing that.”

Similarly, Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he had “greater expectations” when it came to the available options, but said he understood the reasoning behind staff's recommendations.

“We used to be a roller skating town and we've lost that momentum,” he said. “I agree with Councillor Gilliland about just offering a pop-up. I'm wondering if you do the same kinds of things that we do with all other sport activities by providing a learn-to-skate, doing it with youth, and building the momentum based on the development of that skill and, of course, do all the other types of social things that are being done.”

“When you're looking at what the next steps are, if we can think about offering programming for this, so that five years down the road we're going to have a large number of people, I see this as a sport tourism opportunity, too, because if we do it first, other people will come to a place that really rocks and I think it's important for that social element, because that's a very important part of

the roller skating crowd.?

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