

Aurora tennis dome project could take one step forward this week

By Brock Weir and Jeff Doner

Aurora could come one step closer this week to having a year-round tennis facility, this time in the form of a tennis dome.

Council is slated to consider a bid from Canada Winter Tennis, a company operated by Terry Redvers, the current operator of the Aurora Sports Dome, to construct a six-court winter tennis facility at Stewart Burnett Park, near Leslie and Wellington, just behind the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex.

Canada Winter Tennis was one of three bids received following Council's decision to go out last fall and see if third party operators wanted to take on the challenge of a new tennis facility on the east side of Aurora.

Among the bidders scoring behind than Canada Winter Tennis, were Total Tennis Club and Sportstar Capital, the latter of which was backed by tennis pro Andres Marco, in a proposal which caught the interest of the Aurora Community Tennis Club.

"The proponent is proposing a six court air-supported dome with a request for an initial 20-year lease and 15-year renewal," said Al Downey of Canada Winter Tennis in his report to Council this week. "The proponent has identified partnership program opportunities within the Town to maintain our existing programs. The proponent is financing the entire project and has indicated a lease payment in the amount of \$9,000 per year with an annual inflation rate of three per cent."

Total Tennis also proposed a dome for six courts, six being the number requested by Aurora in its bidding process, proposing a 20-year term with two 10-year lease renewals. This bid, however, presented "limited partnership opportunities" with the Town and a lease payment of \$1 per year.

Taking a different route, Sportstar Capital proposed enclosing the six tennis courts within a rigid structure that would also provide for indoor soccer, a running track, and other amenities under a 25 year lease. No partnership opportunities for the Town were outlined in the proposal, rather they proposed a "number of programs for Town review."

"The proponent has indicated a construction cost of approximately \$16m with the Town as the guarantor to the lending body, and the waiving of development charges," noted Mr. Downey of the Sportstar proposal. "No lease payment has been identified."

"Canada Winter Tennis has identified an annual payment of \$9,000 plus a three per cent yearly inflation for the term of 20 years, resulting in a total payment of \$241,833."

The deadline for expressions of interest in an indoor tennis facility expired in January. At the time, the Aurora Community Tennis Club, which originally came forward to build a multi-purpose rigid structure at Fleury Park in the form of the "Fleury Ploughhouse" said they were "excited" about having a new facility in Town.

"We're just looking to see the expansion of courts in the area. Our mission is to promote Canada's affordable community tennis in Aurora and the surrounding area," said Brent MacKinnon, President of the Aurora Community Tennis Club.

The club currently has about 200 members and MacKinnon said the hope will be to utilize their current facility at McMahon Park in conjunction with the new facility to grow the sport in the community.

"We spoke with the three groups that were interested in the proposal and that was our role," he said. "We gave them our advice, research, because we've been promoting an all-season multi-use tennis facility for the last 10 years and we have accumulated lots of information and lots of research about the different types of structures, technologies, how it can be done, these types of things."

The vision for the new facility at Stewart Burnett Park is seen as beneficial by the club for a variety of reasons, including: an easy

access location close to the 404; close to plazas, shopping centres and lodgings; close for the ACTC to relocate events due to inclement weather; a potential venue for events; and commercial benefits.

MacKinnon also said the ACTC is supportive of many designs, but pointed out that a traditional bubble is not ideal.