

Committee looks for community 'buy in' for Jubilee playground

By Brock Weir

Plans march on for a \$100,000+ accessible playground at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park, but some want to make sure that if you build it, you better build it right.

Aurora is currently securing a consulting firm specializing in accessible playgrounds to design and steer the project, including community input, for the proposed playground at the John West Way park.

Council put the wheels in motion for a playground estimated between \$100,000 and \$180,000 last month. If brought to fruition, it will be the second park fully accessible to Aurorans of all physical ability.

'We have identified \$150,000 in a capital budget request,' said Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation. 'Whether or not it costs that, we're not sure yet, but at least it is a bookmark. There needs to be capital funds expended in 2014, so we hope to have all of this culminating in March or April.'

At last week's Parks and Recreation Committee (PRAC) meeting, however, members wanted to ensure there was a community 'buy-in', not only to ensure that it is tailored to the needs of the community, but to also investigate buffering some of those costs with sponsorship.

The accessible playground at Norm Weller Park undertaken by the local school board secured sponsorships, according to Mr. Downey, but that is not the Town's normal course of action.

'We could do that, but we don't intend to,' said Mr. Downey of sponsors. 'These playgrounds are funded through our development charges, so the development community is involved in providing parkland services so we don't have to rely on sponsorship to make it happen.'

'If there is a recommendation coming from this or any other committee or Council that says we would like you to go off and obtain sponsorship, we can do that, but the success of that playground would not be dependent on whether or not we do or don't get those sponsorships.'

Committee member Greg Smith said, however, it is one thing to raise the money and get the park built, but keeping it up to snuff in the decades ahead is another matter altogether.

'The challenge with a playground like this is it requires a lot of upkeep and expenditure is ongoing,' said Mr. Smith. '[The School] raised a lot of money to have it built, but as specifications changed, all of a sudden the flooring had to be upgraded to something else and that was a big challenge.'

Mr. Downey kept the door open to the possibility. Going on that route wouldn't be unlike what Aurora did when planning the current Aurora Seniors' Centre, just a stone's throw away from the proposed playground, he said. There, fundraising targets were established, but it was not contingent on the building's future.

'If we got the money, great,' said Mr. Downey. 'If we got no money, we still have all the finances in place in order to pay for the construction. If we got \$50,000 for this, great, but if we don't, it doesn't mean the project is in jeopardy.'

Keeping an eye on sport, Ron Weese, President of Sport Aurora, has suggested planning the playground to keep in mind the principle of having Aurora as a 'Canadian Sport for Life' community, a program promoting physical activity as well as improving the quality of sports to people of all ages. It focuses on building 'physical literacy', building the foundations for ongoing physical and sport activities, and linking sport and athletics to education, health, and other community programming.

?We now know there are a number of physical literacy playgrounds that have been developed in Canada and the United States to try and develop the ability for speed, balance, coordination, running and jumping,? said Mr. Weese. ?I think this is a great opportunity for us to have one of the first physically literate playgrounds in the Region because there are none. If we want to put this kind of money into it, we might as well do it right.?