

Complex users angry at upcoming closure

By Brock Weir

Upcoming renovations for Aurora's new youth centre have left regular users of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex (AFLC) seeing red.

Residents using the facility's pool and gym to keep fit aired their concerns last week saying they were not adequately consulted on pending construction at the complex and programs that will be affected.

Extensive renovations are expected to start next month and continue through the fall of 2014. The objective is to make room for a Community Space for Youth and give the overall complex a facelift.

The entire bill for the project is expected to clock in near \$7.5 million.

When the renos get underway, the popular running track will be closed, most pool and fitness programs will be transferred to the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex (SARC) on Wellington Street near Leslie Street, and squash will be limited.

"I want to congratulate you on the time you have taken in the last decade to research and consult for youth needs [in Aurora]," said AFLC user Anne Raney last week, noting she appreciated the work to address youth needs.

What she criticised, however, was Council's ultimate decision on picking an option that would cause service disruptions.

"The architect's proposed design change radically changes quite a few things," she said. "The first option was to permanently locate the fitness area to a new area constructed at the Stronach and repurpose the area to a gymnasium at the Leisure Complex. Council endorsed the design of the new and renovated works at the AFLC as proposed by the architect. Now it is a renovated work of the entire building with youth elements within the building and also a one-storey addition for the fitness."

Above all, Ms. Raney said it was the "process" that concerned her in that young stakeholders were consulted, but not users as a whole. While she applauded efforts made for younger people, she added seniors were "vulnerable" as well and disruptions to them should be taken into account.

Also speaking out against the renovations was Claire Venna. A 15-year member of the AFLC, she said she was never consulted or told about the changes that would be taking place. She welcomed the "facelift" coming to the building, particularly those serving youth, but was "offended" others weren't consulted to see what they would like to see in a revamped complex.

"There will be a lot of people that would just be out of luck," she said of limited program space at the SARC. "We were never consulted and it was just a done deal. We were told this is just the way it is and we just find it very unfair. I just think maybe we should rethink, if it is not too late, and come up with a better solution that would fit the whole community and not just the youth."

Representing this "senior" group was Rob Jessop. Mr. Jessop highlighted the importance of cardiovascular exercise to the senior population, particularly for people with histories of strokes and heart attacks. The track at the Leisure Complex is an integral benefit to local health-conscious people of a certain age.

"They can't get out and walk during the winter months and it is very difficult for them," said Mr. Jessop. "The sidewalks are slippery, they're afraid of falling, and they depend on that track to maintain their health. Let's face it: if the Centre is closed down for one year, it is quite conceivable it could be a heck of a lot longer than that. That is a large fraction of the life expectancy that is left for some of these people."

"It is very important to build a youth centre. Young people are important, but I think old people are important as well."

According to Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, a communication to all members of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex is due this week outlining many of the changes in store to AFLC programming. It includes a schedule of extra lane swims to be held at the SARC to accommodate some of the lost pool time, options to place memberships on hold until the Complex is fully back up and running, as well as refund options for memberships.

Loyalty Rewards will also be introduced to members of the Club Aurora fitness program entailing a free one-month extension to memberships once the building reopens next fall, as well as other bonus options beginning November 13.

The track is the only element within the Leisure Complex that is actually closing, all other [programs] are being moved or transferred to other locations and we're continuing those operations," Mr. Downey told The Auroran. "We want the people who are actively engaged to continue to be actively engaged, but unfortunately the track was the only casualty. We feel we have fulfilled the majority of the needs within the recreation community, but we weren't successful in being able to address every one."

His department, he added, is looking at alternatives to the track including the tracks at Newmarket's Magna Centre, at the Trisan Centre in Schomberg, and possible walking programs at Upper Canada Mall.