

Costs to replace skate park continue to rise, with Councillors balking at new price tag

As the skateboard park at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex continues to deteriorate due to poor construction, the cost for a suitable replacement is ballooning.

Last week, Council considered three possible new locations for a reconstructed skate park after approving \$600,000 for its replacement in 2019. As of last week, however, the price tag now hovers at \$1.195 million, leading to tough decisions by Councillors.

The present skate park was constructed at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex (AFLC) in 2014 as part of an expansive renovation of the facility spurred by the development of a youth centre within its walls. Problems with the finished product were evident soon after completion with cited causes including improper drainage and insufficient rebar used in the concrete.

Following the approval [of the reconstruction costs in 2019], staff developed a survey to engage the users regarding the skate park facility to explore the use of amenities and potential improvements to enhance the overall experience, said Parks Manager Sara Tienkamp in a report to Council. Improvements included lighting for safety in evenings, shade structure and water bottle refilling station.

Preliminary cost estimates from the consultant for the reconstruction exceeded the allotted budget funding significantly. Replacement of concrete surface was estimated at \$550,000, not including the removal of original concrete, drainage works, and additional amenities required by users.

Although staff presented the Aurora Community Centre, Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex and Stewart Burnett Park as possible new locations, discussions last week focused mainly on the rising costs.

My feeling is to take the [original] \$600,000 and to figure out how to fix it and not a penny more, said Councillor John Gallo. I struggled with the \$600,000 after we already spent what we budgeted at \$800,000 and now know how that ended. There is no way I would accept anything more than that. I want it fixed. I want it for the community. I am not interested in improvements like lights. Maybe they can come at a second time, but my view is not a penny more than \$600,000 and staff figure out how to do it.

Councillor Michael Thompson agreed there is more work to be done on this, stating it is disappointing that figures continue to rise.

There needs to be further explanation on why the costs have ballooned, he said. We hired a consultant, they did bore holes, extensive testing if you go back and read that report, they seem to infer when they identified the costs that it was for demolition and reconstruction and all of that, and that is where that \$600,000 figure came to. Yet, when we went out and got a further consultant there was a big variation.

Staff, he said, should be tasked with going back to the drawing board to make amendments to the plan to make sure it fits with what was previously budgeted for.

I don't want to just fence off the skate park and not have it be used, he concluded. I think it is a good asset to have, I think it is well-used, and I certainly would like to find a way to make this work. Similar to Councillor Gallo, I have an issue with the price tag at this point and I would like to have some options or discussions, or some creative thoughts around how we can get this price down and get it to re-open again, or at least get it safe again, so the issues are fixed and it can be used for generations to come.

Councillor Sandra Humfries said she agreed that it was now getting concerning but said that young adults need this area. Similarly, Councillor Wendy Gaertner said the question is whether or not Aurora wants to provide a skateboard park for youth.

?We said we wanted to and we did,? she said. ?It is not the [youth's] fault it didn't work out. It is really well-used and it is certainly important that the kids have it this year, and we're treating them a bit like second-class citizens. I would like this to operate at least for the summer. We have kids who have had a tough time with a lot of excess energy. It is not even for the kids who use this skateboard park, their friends come, they sit, they don't behave badly from what I have seen. It is just a very wide-open, easy to monitor, safe place for kids to hang out.

?I am okay with opening it for the summer and seeing what we can do to just keep it going. If it costs more than \$10,000, it costs more than \$10,000. If that is our choice, we have to make sure it is in somewhat good repair for the kids. I want the kids to have a skateboard park and, frankly, I'm always a penny-pincher, but if it costs us much money, it costs us much money. I think to take it away from them would be a really bad idea.?

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