

## Fleury Park to become pickleball hub as Council considers future amenities

Plans are underway to update well-used Fleury Park into a "cornerstone destination" for the community, but while a final decision has not been made on what many of these updates will look like, one thing is certain: its future as a pickleball hub in Aurora.

Council this month will consider a raft of new features for Fleury Park, including an accessible playground and rubber playground surfacing, but continuing apace is the development of an eight-court pickleball "complex."

"Pickleball is a priority, so that will be initiated first, and we have already been dealing with our consultant on that," said Sara Tienkamp, Director of Operations for the Town of Aurora, responding to questions from Ward 3 Councillor Rachel Gilliland on where things stood.

The pickleball complex element has not been tendered as yet as the Operations department is waiting for a final decision on what further amenities might be coming to Fleury so the project can be tendered all at once.

But Councillor Gilliland, an avid pickleball player and advocate for the sport within the community, sought assurances that work on these courts "this 'pickleplex' " would be carried out by those who "understand how to build them properly."

"You start to learn the mistakes that can happen, especially with the amount of room that are around the edges of the pickleball courts," she said of visiting courts outside Aurora. "Some have short fences in between to help the balls rolling, and I just want to make sure that when we are going up to tender, for someone who's going to be installing all these pickleball courts, actually has some experience because it's not just as simple as 'slapping down a square footage of asphalt or whatnot and throwing up some nets. I think there's more to it than that, and I would really hope that we're going to make that part of our tender specialized'. I certainly don't want to put all the eggs in one basket if it's not their specialty."

Tienkamp assured the Councillor that the winning contractor would have specialties in the amenities ultimately decided on.

"We have worked with our landscape firm [and it's] very well-versed in tennis courts and any kind of court, pickleball included [and] have done very comprehensive designs for other municipalities, including Newmarket, so we're closely following some of those guidelines that they've provided and then they will be installed by a court contractor," said Tienkamp. "These are fully functional pickleball courts for competitive play."

Councillor Gilliland said that was "music to my ears" and Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner agreed "there are going to be a lot of happy people to hear this news."

Additional pickleball courts are slated to come online over the course of this year. These include construction at Thomas Coates Park (colloquially known as Mavrinac Park), Edward Coltham Park (located on Roy Harper Avenue, near William Graham Drive), and Trent Park off Thomas Phillips Drive in the northeast quadrant of St. John's Sideroad and Bayview Avenue.

"We've met with the contractor and they will be starting work shortly with the anticipation of those being completed in around the first week of July or so, give or take some weather," said Tienkamp, adding that the courts were initially planned to combine basketball and pickleball, but will now be dedicated with two courts at each location.

**By Brock Weir**