

Hallmark lands meeting set for Monday

By Brock Weir

A special meeting to get public input on the use of Aurora's Hallmark lands is set for Monday.

Members of the Parks, Recreation & Culture Advisory Committee will convene at Town Hall on Monday, May 7, at 7 p.m. to gather information from various local sports groups, and members of the public alike, on how the Vandorf Road lands will be designed and configured to address shortfalls when it comes to sports fields.

The results of the input received, along with the comments of Committee members, will be compiled by staff with a report presented at Council for a potentially final decision in early June.

A decision on how the acreage would be used was supposed to be made in April.

At that time, staff presented two design concepts to Council. One suggested two baseball diamonds to address a field time crunch faced by area baseball and softball groups, including the Aurora King Baseball Association (AKBA) and the Aurora Diggers softball league. The second concept kept one baseball diamond, but also incorporated a soccer field, another amenity that is in short supply in Aurora.

The recommendations brought various stakeholders, including the AKBA, Aurora Youth Soccer Club, and Aurora Soccer Club, to state their cases on how the lands could be designed to suit the needs of baseball, softball, soccer and football.

With such varying visions presented, Council voted to send the matter back to the Parks, Recreation & Culture Advisory Committee (PRAC) to cast a wider net on input.

Timelines on the special meeting, as well as the turnaround time, were outlined at Council last week.

With a decision not on the horizon until next month at the earliest, Councillor Harold Kim questioned how this might impact timelines previously presented which pegged full use of the Hallmark lands, whatever configuration they ultimately take, at 2020.

'We would hopefully be able to get some play in sometime in 2019,' said Al Downey, Director of Operations. 'That would be my hope, but it would more than likely still be in 2020, even if the fields were ready; the reason being simply permitting that facility. There wouldn't be any teams available to play on that facility until we moved them from one permitted facility [to the new one].

'It is the growth of the club [that] is going to generate those additional permits. If they anticipate they are coming on in 2019, then they will register more participants in 2019. If they are not coming on in 2019, then they won't register those participants and I can't guarantee that those fields will be up and operational first thing in 2019. We can try, but I suspect they won't be available.'

A more detailed timeline, he added, could be put together once public opinion is received and a Council decision made, he added.

'I certainly understand the urgency on the part of the ball association to get those fields up and operational as quickly as possible,' said Mr. Downey. 'Once I put the schedule together, we will certainly have a better idea once we get close to the end of this year how much work we have done, depending on what that work is. We would then be able to communicate that to the ball association and say, 'We feel pretty confident, go ahead and open up your registration.' Conversely, we could say, 'We are not that confident. We don't suggest you open up that registration because those fields might not be available to you.' It is not unlike what we did with Stuart Burnett and the Soccer Club. We gave them a clear indication of when that would be available and now they can start permitting and using that field knowing it is available at the beginning of this year.'