

Hallmark sports fields designs called into question

By Brock Weir

At could be back to the drawing board this week on plans for a multipurpose sports field and softball diamond on Aurora's Hallmark Lands.

Council, sitting at the Committee level last Tuesday, threw cold water on proposed designs, which would have seen the proposed multipurpose sports field downgraded to an artificial turf soccer pitch to accommodate limited space on the land.

The one sports field-one diamond (one and one) compromise was reached by Council last month after local sports teams made their respective pitches on why the 13-acre parcel of land would be best allocated to their respective sports.

The designs presented at Council last week, however, also presented a problem: there was not land enough to accommodate a full softball diamond as well as a north-south oriented sports field.

It is generally recommended that the orientation for a rectangular field is a north-south direction to minimize the effect of the setting sun on players, providing fair play, said Sarah Tienkamp, Manager of Parks and Fleet, in her report to Council. The multi-use field in its ideal orientation on the Hallmark Lands does not meet the minimum setback of 15 metres from property lines, as it is only 5.4 metres away on either end of the field. The multiuse field will fit if it is orientated east-west and if it is placed northeast southwest. These are certainly not the ideal layouts for competitive sports play.

Based on the facility fit drawings, a senior artificial turf soccer field is the best layout for the space. It would allow for the field to be oriented in the optimal direction and well set back from property lines, permitting free flow of pathway circulation to all the amenities for park users.

For some Council members, this finding was less than what they anticipated when they made their decision for one and one earlier this summer.

I have had the experience of placing a tennis court in an east west orientation and it doesn't work. If we're going to spend all of this money on an artificial turf field, it has to be north south, said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. I can't imagine as a Council we would spend all this money to put a field in a placement that is not supported by the groups for tournament.

This was a view shared largely by Mayor Geoff Dawe, who said I cannot support this as it turned out.

He suggested the matter be referred back to staff for further information, a motion seconded by Councillor Wendy Gaertner. This motion, however, was not approved by Council.

Another sticking point contained within the recommendation was a request that Council remove field lighting at natural turf Norm Weller Park, part of an ongoing renovation project in the south Aurora field, and reallocate money earmarked for this project back to the Hallmark lands.

With the addition of artificial turf at Hallmark, staff would recommend that the lighting component for the project be eliminated and only the drainage scope of the work continue, said Ms. Tienkamp. Rationale for this decision is based on the artificial turf available booking time of approximately 1,500 hours per season compared to the 400 hours per season available on a natural turf field. Additionally, Hallmark being situated within an industrial block, there would be no impact [of lighting] to surrounding properties versus with a residential setting. Not installing the sports field lighting at Norm Weller Park would save approximately \$200,000 which could be applied to the Hallmark Land Parkland Development project.

But, in the eyes of some Council members, this would merely solve a problem by creating another.

I was not in favour of the one and one option and it is starting to become apparent to me more and more that my decision in that regard was correct, said Councillor Jeff Thom. I am not in favour of allocating more money to an option I didn't agree with and I am certainly not in favor of the work at Norm Weller park being altered to accommodate the one and one option I was opposed to. I think decreasing the light at Norm Weller park means we're shifting the usage as opposed to adding usage. I think one of the things that people talked about when the one and one was talked about was we were going to be adding usage, but if there is going to be no lighting at Norm Weller it definitely shifts the numbers a bit and I am not in favour of it.

Referring it back to staff might give some Councillors more time to look at numbers, but I am just not in favour of what is on the floor so I will be voting against it.

Also maintaining his opposition to building sports fields on Hallmark was Councillor John Abel, who reiterated his position.

Unfortunately, it is on employment lands and I can't support that, he said.