

High priorities dominate new Parks & Rec plans

By Brock Weir

If Aurora's Master Ducks Swim Club is hoping to have a new pool in Town soon, they might have to tread water a little bit longer.

Council is set to move forward with devising an implementation strategy for the Town's new draft Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Councillors took their first detailed look at the plan at the Committee level, which identifies a number of high priority needs for Aurora when it comes to providing recreational space and programs to meet the requirements of a growing community.

Among them are taking a look at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex with an eye towards a possible expansion to include a new gymnasium, multipurpose space, a fitness centre, and other amenities. Working in tandem with this is a recommendation for a feasibility study on adding a six lane 25 metre pool to the Aurora Family Leisure Complex or, if that is not workable, an aquatics space in another area of Town.

'The input we are getting from the user groups, primarily aquatics user groups, is there was quite a push to come forward with a new facility,' said Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation. 'Quite frankly, the consultant wasn't convinced we needed a new aquatic facility immediately and perhaps we should be looking at other opportunities to provide that service.'

'[The consultant] believes the level of risk right now is very low with regards to our need for a new facility. I think the Ducks might disagree, but we're not going to get agreement [from everybody]. The position is if you can build a case for the need for an additional aquatic facility that case needs to be built.'

On dry land, additional high priorities identified in the draft plan include a possible reconfiguration of the Magna and Lebovic rooms at the Aurora Public Library, currently rented out by the Town of Aurora, to become library space and finally making a plan for Library Square.

'I am hoping we will have an opportunity to start moving forward as we're entering the second half of the second year of our term and we don't have a lot of time,' said Councillor John Abel.

Outdoors, a sports field complex of three fully-lit rectangular fields is a high priority, as is the construction of an artificial turf field at Stewart Burnett Park near Leslie Street and Wellington Street East, and looking for further partnerships within the community to provide sport and recreation space.

'This is a big chunk of activity for Council to digest,' said Mayor Geoff Dawe, asking for the high priorities to be prioritised one step further. 'One of the issues we're going to have to look at is [where we talked] about tennis courts and one of the elements here is in the 'northeast quadrant.' We're going to have to be very clear when we decide what is the northeast quadrant and we have to be very clear when we come up with that criteria.'

While Councillor Harold Kim expressed some misgivings about a possible new fitness club at the SARC, similar to Club Aurora currently in operation at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex as it 'competes' with private business, Councillor Wendy Gaertner put in a word for Aurora's seniors.

She called for a rethink on how parks allocation is determined because, as the population ages, what's considered walking distance to a park might be an evolving concept.