

Home Show moves to SARC after ice battle with Tigers



By Brock Weir

After 28 years at the Aurora Community Centre, the Aurora Chamber of Commerce will be moving their annual Home Show to the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex.

The Chamber's concession to move the show to the recreation centre on the east side of the Town came after a contentious debate around the Council table on whether to side with the Aurora Tigers or the Aurora Chamber for use of the Community Centre arena at the end of April.

For decades, both the team and the Chamber have worked in harmony over the use of the facility. This came to an abrupt end this spring, however, when the Ontario Junior Hockey League extended their season, putting use of home ice into jeopardy.

They were unable to come up with a compromise this year and the Aurora Chamber won out, leading the Tigers to make alternate arrangements with York University. Matters, however, came to a head at Town Hall this week when Barry Quinn, General Manager for the Tigers and Paul Smith, President of the Chamber, came to ask for Council's intervention in settling the dispute.

It was a situation Councillors said they were loath to find themselves in but, at the end of the day, they sided with the Tigers over use of the arena.

"I understand it is not an ideal situation for the Chamber of Commerce, but if the option is between losing the Tigers or requesting a move for a few years? I don't want to lose our Tigers," said Councillor Paul Pirri, making a motion to allow the Tigers to have ice time while working with the Chamber to find an alternate solution.

According to Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation for the Town of Aurora, alternatives for satisfying both parties would be costly and complicated. Boards to put over the ice to allow for the Home Show would cost over \$100,000 to accommodate heavy equipment required to set up the Home Show, he said, let alone costs for installation and storage.

While the Chamber initially said the SARC was not ideal due to location and less parking than what is currently enjoyed by the ACC, there are additional options as well, he added. These include getting creative by providing a shuttle from other parking locations.

This was also a problem which some could say the Town anticipated when the SARC was planned two Councils ago. At that time, Mr. Downey said the Chamber was originally approached to move operations there, and the original tender included an ice deck to accommodate the home show, but both the Chamber and the Council of the Day, said they were not interested in pursuing that to the tune of \$100,000 per arena.

Responding to questions from Councillor Michael Thompson on whether spending the money on an ice deck would be offset by the economic benefits both the Home Show and the Tigers bring to the Town, Mr. Downey said one of the main financial impacts to the

Town would be if the Tigers weren't here at all.

"The issue is they need it all or nothing," said Mr. Downey. "If we are looking at a cost-benefit analysis, the most cost-effective measure for the Town is to move the Home Show to a later date, have it at a later date at the ACC."

From Councillor Thompson's perspective, the community as a whole wants to see both groups succeed and their respective successes will bring many benefits to the community, but it was an "unfortunate situation" to be in.

Like Councillor Pirri, however, when push came to shove, Councillor Evelyn Buck said she too also supported the Tigers.

"The Aurora Community Centre #1 was built for the Aurora Tigers," she said. "We opened it early because that year they made the playoffs and they had also gone from a Junior C team to a Junior A team. We will never build another facility like that one with the number of seats that one has because there is never going to be a need for it. You had to have been there to know why we built that facility with all of those seats, and how proud we were of it, and how proud we were of the Aurora Tigers.

"I also acknowledge that this is the perfect location for the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. We can't replicate that. There is no place else better and they have been doing it for 28 years, and doing it better as the years have gone by. It is the facility that lends itself to the success of the Chamber of Commerce. We have a Solomon-like decision to make."

Other solutions mused by Council could be quite far off. Councillor John Abel, for instance, said if there was just a convention centre in Aurora, there would be no question on where the Home Show would thrive. But, at the end of the day, with new rules from Hockey Canada and an extension of the season, it is all out of their hands.

"Council and the Town have demonstrated how much they support the Chamber and that goes without question," he said. "We have sponsored events and partnered with other events, and it is a great relationship. [Delaying this decision] is not doing our job. It is not right to the Tigers, it is not right to the Chamber. Are we going to allow the Tigers to stay in this Town, or are we going to say you can't play here anymore?"

From Mayor Dawe's perspective, this was a situation which came to a head fairly quickly and was somewhat exacerbated by the Tigers success in this year's playoffs.

"No good deed should go unpunished," he said. "We have been trying to figure out how to come to an agreement and it is a difficult thing to do. We have to respect [the Tigers' history] and we have to respect the Chamber for what they do for small business."

At the end of the day, although she said it was a "Solomon-like decision" to make, when you really got down to it, making a decision wasn't part of the struggle for Councillor Buck.

"You think politics should always throw you the right solution and save you from making decisions, and we don't very often get a decision to make like this one," she told Councillors. "Councillors have to remember we're not social convenors here and the Chamber of Commerce, better than any other organization in Town should understand we're running a business here. We need them both."