

Indoor tennis dome approved for SARC

By Brock Weir

It's a decision that has long been on the bubble, but after over three years of debate, Aurora tennis players will be able to play year-round.

Council formally approved a lease agreement with Canada Winter Tennis last week, which will see a tennis bubble erected just behind the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex (SARC) under a 20-year deal with the operator.

While some Councillors reiterated their misgivings over tying up the land for a full two decades for local tennis enthusiasts, this was the best option ? and a long time coming.

?It is imperative to the tennis community that we see something done this year,? said Kevin Carter, co-founder of the website [tennisinaurora.com](#). ?There has been a lot of work done by the ACTC (Aurora Community Tennis Club) and many people in the community to show what tennis means [to Aurora]. I think it would be an absolute setback for the tennis community not to see something in 2016.?

Since the closure of Timberlane Athletic Club last year, former members have had to go elsewhere to play year-round, including Thornhill. If that is the situation much longer, they will get settled in other communities, argued Mr. Carter.

?I think it is really important because this is a community that tries to support fitness and people being active all year round, not just in the summer months when the courts happen to be open, but all year,? he concluded.

Cautious support was also offered by Stephen Kimmerer, President of Sport Aurora, who said the ACTC has represented the interests of local tennis players in Town for over seven decades and their needs should be in the forefront of any agreements going forward.

Any public-private partnership between the Town and Terry Redvers' Canada Winter Tennis should include provisions giving ACTC members and local tennis players in general preferred rates and other benefits as taxpayers.

This was a concern shared by Councillors John Abel and Wendy Gaertner, the only two Councillors voting against the deal, both of whom said they wanted to see more details on the lease agreement, with the latter proposing a two week delay before moving ahead.

While the two supported the construction of an indoor tennis facility, they agreed it should be in a different location.

?I feel it is not the right thing for the Town to give out this valuable piece of land for a 20 year lease for a bubble that can't be taken down in the summer,? said Councillor Gaertner. ?I do think perhaps we could find another piece of land where we could put the bubble [and] take it down in the summer.?

A prime location in Councillor Abel's view is a seven acre parcel of land recently acquired by the Town for sports fields just behind the former Hallmark building at Vandorf Road and Industrial Parkway South. Here, a bubble with six courts could be built which could be deflated to provide outdoor play in the summer ?and we would become one of the best-known tennis communities in York Region.?

?20 years is not a good business plan for a municipality,? said Councillor Abel, noting the Town needs to be looking at revenue opportunities, despite the deal bringing \$9,000 per year at a yearly inflation rate of three per cent for the term of the deal flowing into Town coffers. ?Here we are giving away one of our best examples of a revenue opportunity, and we're going to give it away for 20 years? I would really like to know if there is an opportunity to negotiate and I am being told there isn't. It has all been covered in

the lease that we haven't seen.

?We have let down our tennis community because this has been before us for about four years and we have nothing to show. I will pledge to our community that we will get a bubble up by the end of this year, but let us pause for two weeks while we get?.things in order.?

The Councillor's opposition to the deal also spread to the fact the proposal doesn't allow for the bubble to be taken down in the summer when less than 10 per cent of respondents to a Tennis in Aurora survey indicated they prefer to play tennis in a bubble.

This, however, all works out in the end, according to Parks and Recreation Director Al Downey who told Council a bubble such as this would allow the Town to move tennis camps and instruction into the bubble, freeing up space on municipal outdoor courts for those wanting to serve.

?I would guess if you don't want to play tennis inside the bubble during the summer, you can play tennis outside of the bubble in one of our many tennis parks,? said Councillor Paul Pirri, eliciting a chuckle from some of the tennis supporters in the audience.

His support of the deal was echoed by the majority around the table.

?I really haven't heard anything to make me change my mind,? said Mayor Geoff Dawe. ?I don't believe a two week delay will do anything for us and I don't think we will get anything back that will make me change my mind. I will support moving forward with this now. It is an opportunity for us to provide additional services to residents without costing the residents and I suspect the proponent is very interested in ensuring he sets his rates such that he is going to have the dome full all the time.?