

INSIDE AURORA: A Sporting Opportunity

By Scott Johnston

"Aurora's going for the 2024 Olympics."

"What?!" I gasped, my coffee going down the wrong way.

"Toronto's dropped out, so Aurora's applied," confirmed my friend Dave, with a nod. "Oh, they haven't announced it, but the signs are all there."

"What sort of signs?" I asked, settling back in my chair.

"The mayor proclaimed 2015 as 'The Year of Sport' in Aurora. What better signal that the Town wants to fully embrace this than through an Olympic bid?"

Before I could interject on how weak that argument was on its own, he continued, "Then there's all the talk about the Parks and Rec Plan and infrastructure development in Town. That's all necessary for a bid.

"And hotels. Why all of a sudden the big push to get hotels in Town, if not because they were needed before long because of the expected sudden influx of visitors, who would need to be accommodated somewhere close by?"

His reasoning was way too general. I needed to trip him up on specifics.

"So, where would they hold the swimming events?"

"The Leisure Complex," he replied.

"That pool's not Olympic sized."

"That's the beauty of the Leisure Complex. They have to shovel millions of dollars into it every few years anyway for some repair or other. Next time around they could just lengthen the pool and dig out a diving area while they're at it. With the Olympics several years away, they'd have tons of time."

"And the main stadium for the opening and closing ceremonies, and all the track events?" I asked.

"Why do you think the Town purchased the Mavrinac property?"

"They could never fit a stadium on a piece of land that small!"

"Well, a velodrome, perhaps. They bought it for some reason, and you don't see Council announcing right away that it's going to be a park like everyone thought. No, they're 'exploring all of the options.'"

"Okay, so even if they could fit the bicycling venue there, you still haven't said where the stadium could go, or the athletes' village, and other venues. You'd need a huge parcel of unused land."

"There is one in Aurora. It's not available now, but it will be soon."

"You mean?"

"That's right, the Stronach Complex. They're moving to King in a few years. All that land south of Wellington will be sitting unused. The main building itself is almost a ready built athletes' village. I even think the property has a small lake. They could use that for rowing or sailing."

Before I could say anything, he clarified, perhaps realizing that even his vivid imagination had limits. "Well maybe it's a bit small for sailing, but they could do that in Lake Wilcox just south of Town."

"But the Magna property does have a golf course," he continued, "and isn't golf going to be an Olympic event by then?"

"Yes, but ...?" my mind reeled with all these somehow slightly plausible arguments. "You haven't addressed the real issue; how would they pay for it all?"

Oh, I expect they've been squirreling the money away for years. After all, the school and regional portion of our tax bills are always really low. But when has the Town portion ever been less than at least a few times the rate of inflation?"

"And what are they spending all that money on?" he laughed, "Library Square? Yonge Street Development? The Hillary heritage area?"

"No," he tapped his nose conspiratorially, "it's the same as that \$30 million plus Hydro Fund nest egg that's never been spent. They're saving it for something else. Something big."

As Dave returned his attention to his coffee, I thought over what he said. The idea of Aurora hosting an Olympics seemed crazy. But his arguments did have an oddly connected bit of logic, and after all, stranger things have happened in this Town.

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