

INSIDE AURORA: Field of Dreams

By Scott Johnston

Now that the election's over (insert collective sigh of relief here) one of the big topics of conversation in Town is what to do with the Hallmark lands.

This property became available to the Town not too long ago as the greeting card industry continued its trend of shifting from cards being made from ink printed on wood fibre, to ones being more often composed of pixels on our electronic devices.

Located near Vandorf and Industrial Parkway South, this good sized chunk of land covers around 13 acres. To put that into perspective, you could fit the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park, Canine Commons and Town Park into it, with enough space left over to add most of the Aurora War Memorial Park, as well.

It will be one of the bigger parks in Town.

What makes it a topic of controversy these days is that our local sports teams, specifically the baseball and soccer crowd, are currently in a heated battle over its use.

According to a recent delegation at Council there are about 7,500 registered soccer and baseball players in Town.

It sounds hard to believe, but apparently even being accessible 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, the 18 baseball diamonds and 69 soccer pitches currently in Aurora aren't even close to meeting this local demand for these sports, and both groups are lobbying for more.

Town staff advise that there's enough room on the Hallmark property for two playing fields, either two baseball, two soccer, or one of each. Building these could cost as much as \$3,000,000.

Price tag aside, I found that interesting, as two similarly sized parks into Town, Confederation and Machell, have two soccer and baseball fields each, as well as other features, such as basketball and tennis courts, playgrounds and outdoor ice rinks.

So it seems strange that more sports fields won't fit on the Hallmark property, or that other features have not been suggested.

Perhaps it has an odd shape, like an hourglass, or a big patch of poison ivy in the middle of it, or some other thing that reduces the usable area.

Or maybe there is room for other things, but Council can only handle dealing with one set of special interest groups at a time.

In any case, the experts say we can have two fields, so which two?

The Town's Parks and Recreation Master Plan says both types of sports fields are needed, although it doesn't clearly prioritize one over the other. With no immediate other level source of available land on the immediate horizon, and arguments being made for each option, it's a big decision.

Just to add some spice to the debate, one councillor suggested turning the property into employment lands, but that was quickly shot down. I guess we have too many employers and jobs in Town already, for this to warrant any further discussion.

Unlike the decision around Library Square, Council plans to spend less than 15 years determining the future of the Hallmark lands. Maybe the pending election has something to do with it, but a decision is supposed to be made by the time you read this.

So, it will be interesting to see how this goes.

But even if all 7,500 baseball and soccer players are positively impacted by the outcome, that still leaves almost 90 per cent of Aurora's population who don't participate in either of these sports.

Hopefully, Council will set aside a bit of space on the Hallmark lands, and some funding, to include some features for them to enjoy, as well.

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