

Investors come forward for tennis partnership

By Brock Weir

Investors could soon get the green light on getting their proposals together for a new all-season, multi-use tennis facility in Aurora.

The long-discussed project which was initially floated for Fleury Park, but has since been redirected to Stewart Burnett Park near Leslie Street and Wellington, could take a significant step forward this week.

The project has been in the works for over a year with groups such as the Aurora Community Tennis Club and Terry Redvers, operator of the Aurora Sports Dome on Industrial Parkway, coming forward with various proposals. The most significant proposal started off as a collaboration between the two last year: a multi-use facility floated as a project to mark Aurora's 150th Anniversary.

Those plans included the construction of two additional tennis courts at Fleury Park, just west of Yonge and Wellington Street, which would have then been covered with a roof structure and garage-like doors which could easily change the sheltered, open-air courts into a completely indoor, multipurpose building.

The finished result, they said would not only serve users of the tennis club in the winter season, but be open to everyone in the community for use during the spring and summer. Plans also included an amphitheatre to make the ?Fleury Plough House? a venue for local music festivals. Keeping an eye to the environment, they pitched a building clad in solar panels and other innovative technology to implement a solar power generation cooperative to not only generate energy for its own use, but also turn a profit.

While the two initially came forward together, they eventually went their separate ways and the proposal to add additional tennis courts to what already exists was ultimately nixed by Council due to a number of factors. These included failed grant applications, lack of majority Council support, and disputes with the Lake Simcoe Regional Conservation Authority on building something of that nature in flood areas.

That wasn't the end of the road for an indoor tennis facility. The path soon shifted away from Fleury Park to Stewart Burnett Park, well away from flood areas but, significantly, more room for creativity.

Council approved in early June going out to the community and beyond to look for interested third parties to ?build, operate, and finance? the all-season, multi-purpose building.

?In response to Council direction, staff prepared an [Expression of Interest] and released it on July 16, 2013,? said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, in his report to Councillors this week. ?The EOI was widely publicized and 49 companies picked up the document; however, only three were received at closing on August 6.?

The three respondents were Mr. Redvers, the Aurora Community Tennis Club, and a company called Sportstar. Mr. Downey said his department believes all three would be ?capable? of moving forward and recommended Council go to the next level in getting the details.

In their Expression of Interest, the Aurora Community Tennis Club (ACTC) said they supported multiple possible visions for the project including a tennis bubble, a steel building which could be opened or closed to the elements as weather dictates, or any combination of a structure that would incorporate energy efficient technologies such as solar panels.

Brent MacKinnon, President of the ACTC, told The Auroran that some members of the club expressed interest in going forward with the project as a financial investment, but said the ACTC Board has a ?neutral position? when it comes to vendors. He declined to say which members would be interested in taking on the job.

?We are very supportive in trying to be helpful to prospective vendors by sharing our extensive research on developing a multi-use

year-round facility utilizing energy efficient, green technologies,? said Mr. MacKinnon.

?The ACTC remains committed to having our club run its operations at McMahon Park, our home since 1937 [but] we are interested in having our organized league programs run at the new facility so that we can play in weather protected conditions in the summer time.?

Mr. Redvers did not respond to requests for comment at press time.

?All costs associated with the design, construction and operation are to be borne by the proponent,? noted Mr. Downey of the winning bidder's responsibilities.