

# Mayoral candidates push for more sports space ? but differ on the road to get there

**By Brock Weir**

It was the last chance for all of Aurora's municipal candidates to make their respective pitches to Aurora voters as a collective, but at the final all-candidates meeting hosted by Sport Aurora last week, talks naturally turned to what each candidate would do to give local teams and athletes a boost.

Evening the score from the September 17 debate hosted by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, Geoff Dawe's rock broke John Gallo's scissors and it was up to the incumbent to get the crowd warmed up with his sports resume.

Touting his record of improving and adding to sports and recreation projects such as the Nokiidaa Trail, the upcoming Aurora Youth Centre, skateboard park, the eco park planned by Frank Stronach, and revenues from the Mayor's Charity Golf Tournament, Mr. Dawe also touted Aurora's support of efforts to make the Town a Canadian Sport For Life (CS4L) community, and the PLAY ? Physical Literacy for All Aurora Youth ? program.

?The Parks and Recreation master plan drew two significant conclusions about the state of our community's needs,? said Mr. Dawe. ?The first is that we need more parkland for sports fields and leisure activities. Capacity is a key issue as we go forward over the next four years. Under my leadership, Council has directed staff to aggressively pursue all fiscally prudent avenues to achieve that, whether it is through lease or partnership opportunities. We are making progress on that and staff is diligently pursuing those.

?The second is that we need more multiuse community and sports program space. I advocated for a public-private tennis facility that would have been located beside the Stewart Burnett baseball diamond, a win-win situation that would have generated revenue for the Town. Unfortunately, a couple of short-sighted Council members prevented residents from gaining what I think would have been a great facility. I am committed with Council to working [to re-introduce] that tennis facility and to introduce a new multi-use sport and community facility very early in the next term.?

Challenger John Gallo was one of those councillors who voted against the proposed tennis dome, but he too said he was committed to a new multi-use facility ? one of a rigid structure rather than a dome as presented.

?How many people would like additional soccer pitches?? Mr. Gallo asked the crowd. ?A swimming facility? An indoor tennis facility? How many taxpayers would want to pay for this? Planning for and meeting future recreational needs for the community will cost \$10- , \$15-, \$20-million. That money has to come from taxpayers, development charges and reserve funds. That is why it is so important to engage the public, together with staff, and experts to ensure we make the right decisions.

?One of the priorities of our new Council should be to update the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and that is why we need effective public consultation. For example, I think we need a new multiuse indoor tennis facility. Our inventory of outdoor courts follows the Master Plan but we have no indoor public courts. As one of the fastest growing sports, this facility would be used for youth, adults, and seniors, basketball, pickleball, badminton etc. With the right public-private partnerships it is doable.?