

New advertising strategy could bring tens of thousands into municipal coffers: Thom

By Brock Weir

Last year, arenas on both sides of Yonge Street were re-branded following sponsorship agreements with Aurora's McAlpine Ford Lincoln and Newmarket's Pfaff Automotive, but more should be done in forging these sponsorship deals both on and off the ice, according to Councillor Jeff Thom.

Following a trip to Edmonton and a meeting with the Mayor of Ottawa at a recent conference for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Councillor is calling on Aurora to follow the lead of the Nation's Capital in doing a complete inventory of municipal assets with an eye of seeking out sponsorship opportunities and advertising revenue.

Such a move, he says, will help generate municipal revenue independent of the taxpayer while offsetting operating costs in the process.

While touring the Alberta Legislature with the Mayor of Ottawa, Councillor Thom says he learned more about their recent inventory where they looked at everything in their arsenal that was sellable, while developing a range of pricing for each opportunity and unrolling a strategy to get the money rolling in.

“There is an opportunity to raise revenue that doesn't hit the taxpayer,” says Councillor Thom. “There are companies, local and national, and I think local is what Aurora can thrive on. If there was a strategy in place, and there was somebody willing to advertise, it is a huge opportunity. I look at it as clawing back some of the operating costs of these facilities.”

In his day job, Councillor Thom works for a sports marketing company that facilitates such sponsorships on a wider scale, working with municipalities such as Ottawa and Oshawa in brokering these deals with sports-related and other interested companies.

“Some municipalities do it better than others and some municipalities don't do it at all,” he says. “There is quite a range and Aurora fits in the middle of that range, in my opinion, but there are some municipalities that just hit it out of the park.”

“On a rink that can handle about 50 rink boards, there are maybe only four or five that are actually sold. I am not saying we do a poor job at it now, but I think we could do better. There is no dedicated person [to work on this]. If there are only five boards sold at the Leisure Complex and there are 45 open spaces, and they go for \$1,000 a year, that is \$45,000 we are potentially leaving on the table. Multiply that by five ice pads?”

Opportunities can also be found beyond the ice pads, he says, but notes a balance needs to be struck.

“I am not suggesting we advertise on everything and I think there can be too much, a bit of white noise, and I wouldn't advocate for having the Mayor and I walk around with advertisements on our foreheads!” he says. “Having said that, I think facility sponsorship gives the Town some revenue on an asset that is just sitting there all funded by tax dollars, and it also helps local businesses get their names out there and we're all about that at the Town, trying to increase economic activity with local businesses. It is a win-win, in my opinion.”

“Maybe the Town has some things we haven't even thought about that someone would like to sponsor. I leave it wide open. I am anxious to see what they come back with. We should be using these assets to their full potential.”