

New SARC gym takes step forward following Council approval

A new single gymnasium for the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex took a significant step forward last week after Council gave the green light to finalize designs.

The decision takes a proposed double gym, something that local sports groups have been advocating for both to increase capacity and position Aurora as a sports tourism and tournament destination, out of the running.

Council previously voted down the double gym option earlier this winter citing both cost and its footprint, which would encroach on environmentally sensitive lands.

If brought to fruition, the single gym, standing at 8,500 square feet, is estimated to cost \$11.3 million dollars, which is planned to be paid for through future development charges. (DCs)

Going forward with the designs for a single gym was approved on a vote of 5 ? 2 with Councillors Wendy Gaertner and John Gallo voting against it.

Both cited the costs, particularly debt financing the project until the DCs roll in, as a significant stumbling block.

?As far as construction costs, it should be pretty clear to everyone that the rise in construction costs is not normal and has everything to do with the craziness that we have been living with for the past two years and just like other things it will come back to normality,? said Councillor Gallo. ?To build something like this right now, in my opinion, is not the right time and to debt finance it is also not the right strategy.

?I am sure this will move forward, and I hope I am wrong, but the history books show that the timing of this is not right, the cost to build this right now is not necessary, and I continue to believe we're putting the Town of Aurora in further debt that is not necessary.?

Although she opposed the motion, Councillor Gaertner said the reality is the Town of Aurora needs two gyms to meet capacity, but it is not possible at the SARC due to environmental concerns.

?We're trying to grow sport tourism and have been talking about that a lot,? she said. ?I think we need to find a place in the future where we can put two gyms ? and I also agree with Councillor Gallo: we have a lot of debt. I have never been comfortable with that, so I will also have to vote against this.?

While Councillor Michael Thompson stressed that the motion on the floor was to finalize designs and the ?debate around debt financing and whether or not that is appropriate? could come at a more ?appropriate time,? Councillor Gallo argued that that ?appropriate time? was now.

?In my experience, once you have gotten to that stage and you have spent that kind of money, the chances of going back are absolutely zero,? Councillor Gallo contended. ?Not only that, I would add that once the cost estimate comes back, you can rest assured that there will be far greater costs than what is presented, as we have already seen. Yes, on the surface, you can say we haven't made a final decision, but that is absolutely not true because it never pans out that way.

?I have never seen it in the 10 years I have been on Council. We nudge forward, spend a little bit more money, get a little bit more of this and that and then you get to a point [of], ?We spent all this money, how can we possibly turn around now?' That is exactly what is happening. If you want to stop it, now is the time to stop it. You know roughly what the costs are. You either go for it or not? Now is the time.?

But meeting capacity needs of the community ultimately won the day.

?People may question the timing, but with cost-to-cost pressures, those are constant year after year,? argued Councillor Harold Kim. ?We, as members of Council, our priority is to provide servicing to residents and certainly the need for [this service with the gym] with 500 ? 1,000 Aurora residents coming in annually, the demand is certainly not abating. In terms of the cost pressures, the biggest costs of the project [are] labour and wages. Once that has gone up, and in the last couple of years that has risen substantially, [they aren't] going to go down.?

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