

One diamond would have been 'putting a band-aid on a broken leg': baseball club

By Brock Weir

Over the last few years, the Aurora King Baseball Association has been turning players away due to the sheer demand on diamond space in Aurora and King, according to Association president Jamie Cole.

Now, relief is coming in the form of two baseball diamonds set to be built on Aurora's Hallmark Lands.

Mr. Cole was on hand to reiterate his position at last week's Council meeting that two diamonds on the land on Industrial Parkway South at Vandorf Sideroad was the only solution, and that anything less than two would be like 'putting a band-aid on a broken leg.'

Local baseball groups 'softball, slo-pitch, and baseball proper' have maxed out the existing diamonds, he said. Aurora, he continued, has more rectangular fields than ball diamonds than either Richmond Hill or Newmarket, and claimed that Aurora has 'the worst rectangular field to diamond ratio' compared to surrounding communities, or nearly four to one, over two to one elsewhere.

'The desire for baseball in this community is high,' said Mr. Cole, speaking on behalf of the Association (AKBA), the Aurora Diggers, and other baseball groups in the area. 'All diamond users are turning groups away. Just this week, we had a meeting with 25 potential coaches who are pleading with us to increase the number of competitive teams, something we would love to be able to do, but struggle to. All diamond users have done everything they can to maximize what is available, including renting private diamonds, some of which are outside of Town.'

'Recently we learned that repurposing the fields at Machell Park and Fleury Park is far too expensive an option. We know that building parks on the Oak Ridges Moraine would not allow for building bathrooms or other facilities required for hosting tournaments. There are no diamonds at the school boards that we can share. The Hallmark lands make so much sense for two diamonds. They can be built with the right amenities. These diamonds could be used by baseball, softball and slo-pitch, and free up time on existing diamonds as well. They would be used every day of the week, could be used for both games and practice times.' In asking Council to reconsider its previous decision for one baseball diamond and one rectangular field on Hallmark, Mr. Cole said two diamonds would lay the foundation of a facility that will become a 'hub' of baseball activity for 'years to come.'

'The Hallmark lands, at this time, really are our best option,' he said.

The position of the AKBA was backed by Sport Aurora, who drove home the 'importance of a single sport solution on Hallmark' and the positive impact such a move would have on sport tourism in this community.

Javed Kahn, Director of Community Relations for Sport Aurora, told Council that data presented to them has shown baseball has a greater need for space over soccer.

'If the data is truly in question, Sport Aurora, along with its members, commit to providing verified metrics to assist Council in coming to a just and confident decision,' said Mr. Kahn, who said since Sport Aurora last delegated to Council, it has been determined by the Town's Parks, Recreation & Culture Advisory Committee (PRAC) that repurposing the fields at Machell and Fleury Parks from rectangular fields to baseball diamonds would be costly, requiring trees to be removed and hills to be excavated. 'There are no other options for diamonds,' he continued. 'We have also delegated on other community partners that can provide full-sized rectangular fields oriented in the ideal north-south direction at a fraction of the cost. I will therefore respectfully ask again that Council re-examine its options in light of the new data, that a reconsideration be put forward and a motion to move forward with two ball diamonds on Hallmark, as was originally proposed and recommended. This motion provides much-needed ball diamonds, services multiple user groups, and is fiscally responsible, doesn't impact other capital projects, supports sports tourism, and has the potential to generate income for our Aurora businesses.'

But soccer had its moment at the podium too.

Martin Ambrose of the Aurora Soccer Club underscored soccer as a continued draw not only in Aurora but around the world, emphasising the recent success of the World Cup in Russia, which brought an estimated 1.2 million attendees and generated 220,000 and a \$30 billion bump in GDP.

'The World Cup is coming to North America in 2026. Canada, US and Mexico are hosting a 48 team roster,' said Mr. Ambrose. 'It would certainly be a shame if Aurora was not in a position to take advantage of some of the economic tourism surrounding this. In 1996 when the US hosted the world cup, the German national team set up their base camp in Alliston where they took advantage of the Nottawasaga fields.'

Like Councillors Tom Mrakas and Sandra Humfries, Mr. Ambrose too questioned information going against the proposed multipurpose field coming to Council at a late stage in the game.

?As one of the primary representative sporting bodies in this community, why does it appear that irrespective of the June 12 one and one decision that this is now being suppressed by a manoeuvre?? he asked. ?Even if Council decided favourably of a one and one option, we continue to make ourselves available for dialogue with Council, staff, and our fellow recreational users. This is a very large capital project. They are clearly divided on the best course for the community and this topic has divided?this community. We do request again that Council direct staff to include at least one grass soccer field, with floodlights and the project design and approval, in addition to our continued request that soccer be provided its own representation at PRAC.?