

Partnerships on new high school could lead to more community space

By Brock Weir

There is a "renewed level of enthusiasm and energy" between the Town and the York Region District School Board on possible partnerships on a new building when they move Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School to Bayview Avenue, according to Mayor Geoff Dawe.

Following a motion from Mayor Dawe last week, Aurora will begin talks with the School Board (YRDSB) on possible partnership opportunities on community facilities as they begin the consultation and design process for a new Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School on Bayview at Borealis, which is expected to be completed in roughly five years.

Mayor Dawe's motion was one of two on last week's Council agenda related to the Williams move, with the other from Councillor Tom Mrakas focusing on what should be done with the old school once the move is complete.

Speaking to his motion on the new build, Mayor Dawe said he is encouraged by the enthusiasm so far.

"Mr. Downey (Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Operations) has had multiple discussions with the Board, so we have never taken an official stand to talk to the Boards," he said. "[Partnerships] worked out very well with St. Maximilian Kolbe in terms of that shared field, so I think there are some great synergies."

Councillor Michael Thompson was similarly enthused over the possibilities.

"I am hopeful because I know it has been a conversation since I have been at this table coming to these sorts of arrangements with the school boards, and using the facilities has been a challenge, so Mr. Downey has related to us on numerous occasions," he said.

"Hopefully when we work with them from the conception of the proposed high school we are able to overcome those and take advantage of it. It always made sense to utilize it to some degree, both for our own needs as well as theirs, so I will be in full support."

Speaking in favour of the motion, Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she already saw schools as "shared spaces" within the community.

"I would like to see all schools as shared spaces for the community, but here we have an opportunity to get in at the very beginning of the process," she said. "If it could be a community space for families that live in this area, it would be very convenient for them to use the space and I would be all in favour of that."

Earlier in the evening, Sport Aurora expressed its support on collaboration, urging both motions to go forward.

"Population growth in Aurora is ahead of past planning expectations. Demand for sport and recreation facilities is ever-increasing," said Sport Aurora president Stephen Kimmerer. "When a family is looking for a place to live, schooling, sport and recreational opportunities are at the top of their deciding list. Across Canada, activity levels are increasing as we address our health requirements. If we want to promote ourselves as an attractive community then we must address these issues. If Aurora is to become the most active community in Canada we need facilities."

"Sport Aurora supports community partnership opportunities and will aid in securing additional sports facilities, gymnasiums, fields, ice pads, pools and ball diamonds. Partnerships with those such as the York Region District School Board have the ability to drive efficiencies and produce cost savings. It only makes sense that they should be investigated and considered."

"We are reminding you once again of that. Sport Aurora will continue to support all initiatives to improve our recreational infrastructure. We encourage this Council and any future Council to continue to participate in positive dialogue and work with us to develop sport and recreational spaces and programs for all residents of Aurora."