

Seniors looking to keep fit get reprieve in small price hike

By Brock Weir

Now is the time that many of us are making ? or even breaking ? New Year's resolutions to stay fit, but Aurora seniors looking to do so at the soon-to-be-re-opened Aurora Family Leisure Complex will have an extra incentive going forward.

Seniors taking part in many fitness programs at the Complex (AFLC) will receive a bit of a reprieve on their fitness programming when the facility re-opens this month, following a Council decision to ease a slight jump in program costs, which would have seen subsidies for residents 55-years-of age and older slashed from 50 per cent to 20 per cent, in line with other senior discounts on programming Town-wide.

The impact of the move immediately from 50 per cent down to 20 per cent was minimal on paper ? a \$2 increase on \$3.50 for aquafit classes ? but it was too much too soon for Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

In her motion, which was seconded by Councillor Tom Mrakas, she called for a phased-in approach over two years to ease the burden. Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, however, said the proposed changes would be minimal and make subsidies uniform across the board.

?What we were doing was applying, in my opinion, an inconsistent level of subsidy for our seniors throughout our programs,? said Mr. Downey. ?What we are attempting to do here is provide a consistent 20 per cent discount for seniors for our programs, and for an extended period of time we have been providing up to 50 per cent subsidy on some of our programs. I didn't see a justification for doing that.

?We don't believe it is that large a jump. We don't believe it is going to have that much of a major financial impact, certainly from the numbers we have.?

Taking a look at the number of tickets sold for aquafit over the course of 2013, Mr. Downey said the total impact to the Town would be \$508.20.

Councillor Gaertner, on the other hand, said she was all in favour of the Town taking in as much money as they could, and doing so equally, but in her view there wasn't enough notice to those seniors who would be immediately impacted by the change.

?I know it seems like a small matter, and I don't disagree in some respects, but to any senior who has been using the fitness facility for \$3.50 and now it is going up to \$5.60, that is [an increase] I don't feel is fair. I don't know about the optics, but I don't believe it is fair. It is not going to make that much of a difference to us, but I think it is gesture of respect for whatever senior who loses that. [This increase] is going to hurt someone.?

While the motion ultimately gained support around the Council table, the enthusiasm to it was lukewarm in some quarters, including Councillor Paul Pirri who questioned why this one group of seniors would continue to enjoy an additional subsidy while seniors participating in other municipal programming would not.

?If we're talking about fairness to our seniors, shouldn't they all be receiving that 50 per cent discount?? he asked. ?Why is one group being eliminated out of the equation? I think it makes sense to set up a policy that is fair across the board to everybody, not just an individual class.?

Councillor John Abel also questioned whether it was the right way forward, noting that in the considerable time he spends at the Aurora Seniors' Centre, not one member had raised these concerns to him.

?Optically, it looks good and if that is the sole purpose I am in support of the amendment, but I have not received any feedback from any of the seniors,? said Councillor Abel.

Given that municipal programs allow for seniors' discounts beginning at the age of 55, rather than other jurisdictions that apply the discount at 60 or 65, Aurora seniors still have things pretty good whether at a 50 per cent subsidy or at 20 per cent, according to Councillor Harold Kim.

?I understand the sensitivity to seniors in Aurora, and I am very sensitive to this as well, but?I think our seniors are doing well right now in how we treat them relative to other municipalities,? he said.

The Club Aurora Fitness Centre is expected to re-open at the AFLC next Friday, January 16.