

Sport Aurora presses Town to move on Hallmark building

By Brock Weir

Aurora needs to get a move-on in deciding whether or not to collaborate on turning the former Hallmark Building into an expansive multi-use sports facility, according to Sport Aurora.

The local sporting body, which represents a wide variety of teams and organizations, renewed their calls at Council last week, following a pitch made at the podium last summer.

Six months later, the building remains available and the building owner would prefer to enter into a lease arrangement with the Town to create a 215,000 square foot sports and rec centre, according to Sport Aurora's Stephen Kimmerer.

The Town already owns over 11 acres adjacent to this facility for recreational use and the yet-to-be-approved sport plan supports and recommends this land be developed for sports and recreation facility creation, said Mr. Kimmerer, noting the Town's new draft sports plan, which is due to get its first airing at Council next Tuesday.

Retrofitting the building could provide space and venues for sports ranging from volleyball, basketball and baseball, to rugby and gymnastics, and even swimming and sports therapy, he said.

This facility, if developed properly, has the capacity to meet needs as a central community centre for the Town and help the Activate Aurora campaign, said Mr. Kimmerer on the Town's continued goal to make Aurora Canada's most active community. The facility would serve as a competition venue for many sports and, therefore, attract sports tourism opportunities. This facility would meet the requirements for a multipurpose gymnasium and other features within the yet-approved plan.

Sport Aurora believes this facility deserves attention as a possible solution to the many issues identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and could be developed as a centre for excellence, which all Aurorans could be proud of and benefit.

The proposal is still being reviewed by staff, said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, but raised a few questions around the table at last week's General Committee meeting, including the feasibility of retrofitting the building to meet these needs and any structural challenges that might be encountered along the way.

The Year of Sport [in 2015] would have been fitting [to make a decision] but at least we have the ball rolling, said Councillor John Abel. I think it is important we follow up on this.