

Sport Aurora to stay put at Town Hall for now, despite motion to boot them



By Brock Weir

Sport Aurora, an umbrella organization representing many of the diverse sports clubs in Aurora, will stay put at Town Hall.

The organization could have been turfed last week, had a motion from Councillor Evelyn Buck calling on Council to "withdraw immediately" space provided to them at Town Hall passed. The group currently occupies a desk at Town Hall in the department of Parks and Recreation. Their use of Town Hall space has long been a bone of contention for some Councillors arguing it is not fair for other sports groups, and matters came to a head with last week's motion.

"It was my understanding [this space was given to them] on a temporary basis and the reason was it would help Sport Aurora in their work to obtain a Trillium grant," said Councillor Buck. "I believe that was accomplished. The question arises on how it is we have excess space available when we have just gone through a torturous exercise to extend the space at Town Hall. That office space has a cost."

She acknowledged the "high regard" Sport Aurora has with many Council members around the table, but said it was "inappropriate" to have an "outsider" such as that group within the municipal offices.

The motion to give them the boot was defeated, with Councillor Buck, along with Councillors Chris Ballard, Wendy Gaertner, and John Gallo voting in support. For them, it was a question of "fairness" when it comes to other community groups who might not be able to use the Town Hall address and phone number on their communications to give them some clout.

"All I have heard over the last three or four years now is we just don't have enough space at Town Hall to accommodate Town Staff," said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. "One of those has to be right - either we do or we don't. I am not trying to diminish Sport Aurora's efforts, but the main point is, is it really fair to the other community groups? I would like to see a policy in place that all of our groups are being treated as equally as possible."

For Councillor John Gallo, part of the problem is whether or not this space is available. Responding to questions from Councillors via email earlier in the week, Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, highlighted the other groups that enjoy municipal space. Although Sport Aurora is the only such group at Town Hall, others such as the Aurora Minor Hockey Association (AMHA) have space at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, along with groups ranging from the Aurora Lawn Bowling Association to the Society of York Region Artists distributed to other public space as available, whether at the Complex, the Aurora Cultural Centre, or conference rooms at Town Hall.

Councillor Gallo argued everybody should be on the same page to avoid any feelings of "inequity."

?There is no space for them [at Town Hall] because it is being used by somebody else, and I think that is where the animosity is,? he said.

Voting down the motion were Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, along with Councillors John Abel, Sandra Humfryes, Paul Pirri and Michael Thompson. In voicing their support for Sport Aurora maintaining the status quo, they highlighted the benefits they saw Sport Aurora bringing to the community, as well as the number of sports groups using public space elsewhere.

Sport Aurora's service of over 10,000 people should be taken into consideration, argued Councillor Abel.

?If Councillor Gaertner was at the Breakfast of Champions, you would see 300 children parading down sporting excellence of all ages, emceed by Olympians, and people they look up to,? he said. ?The value alone with that is tremendous and that was just the second year.

?The cost/benefit is overwhelming and I think if you went out to the community and said, ?We're going to put this desk here, but look at all the benefits you're going to get, I don't think the community is going to have a problem with that.?

Councillor Thompson, on the other hand, said he saw Councillor Buck's motion as ?micromanaging.? Mr. Downey, he argued, says the space is available, Sport Aurora has ?no qualms? of looking for other facility space if the need arises, and the original reason for giving them space at Town Hall served and continues to serve the purpose.

?If there was any organization that came before us and was able to ask for so little and parlay that into a sizable grant from the Province or the Federal government for all the community, I would be open to finding them more space as well. If that was all it takes to be able to give them a desk and a phone when it is not being used so they can access provincial or federal dollars to improve whatever their objectives are for the community at large. Yeah, that is a great deal for us.

?It seems like every week there is something and some Councillor attacking Sport Aurora and I am sure it is probably disheartening for the members.?

Driving home the point of fairness, Councillor Pirri moved a motion that in addition to Sport Aurora, all other public space provided to groups like the AMHA be withdrawn immediately. That did not get a seconder. Councillor Gaertner argued, on the other hand, that parallels can't be drawn between groups using the Leisure Complex as a base and groups using the Town Hall address and phone number.