

Sports Dome generating ?higher-than-expected? revenue for Town

The Town's partnership with the Aurora Youth Soccer Club (AYSC) on running the Lind Realty Sports Dome on Industrial Parkway North is bringing ?higher-than-expected? revenue to municipal coffers, according to a report before Council.

Earlier this month, Council considered a report recommending some changes to the current structure of the Club's agreement with the Town. These included nixing the requirement of the Club to provide audited financial statements in favour of a less costly annual financial review, and a 10 per cent reduction in permit fees currently paid by AYSC.

When the Town first acquired the Sports Dome in 2021, the Town provided a ?conservative? forecast of \$475,000 in annual gross revenue, according to the report prepared by John Firman, Aurora's Manager of Business Support.

?Dome permitting has rebounded quickly, returning to pre-pandemic volumes resulting in higher-than-expected revenue,? he said. ?Gross revenue for 2023 is currently forecast to be approximately \$700,000. It is also anticipated that with the addition of air conditioning, currently anticipated for Spring of 2024, we will experience an increase in summer rentals which will further increase revenue.

?Being operational for the majority of 2022 and now having completed the third quarter of 2023, staff have obtained a good understanding of this facility's ongoing operating costs for utilities, maintenance and daily operations. The AYSC has also operated within budget since the beginning of the partnership and have demonstrated a commitment to ongoing responsible financial management.?

Even with the revenue, the report also found that rental rates in Aurora are below average, which provide a ?good value to the community? and surplus could fund other capital projects and operational programs. Such surpluses could amount to \$6 million over 20 years.

A reduction, however, could be coming if Council approves for the AYSC a 10 per cent reduction in the fees they pay to rent the space to compensate for the work they do to manage the facility.

?The initial agreement with the AYSC, their rental rates were set at 10 per cent below the regular rate for other community groups,? said Firman in his report. ?In the initial discussions with the AYSC a larger discount had initially been requested to adequately compensate the club for the operational management responsibilities they had assumed responsibility for. It was agreed that the discount would remain at the previously-established 10 per cent and that any additional discount would be considered at the time of this operational review so that we could have a better understanding of their financial outlook.?

If the Town took on the operational work provided by the AYSC, Firman's report estimates it would cost the municipality between \$24,000 and \$26,000 annually.

?I realize that we as a community need to have facilities, they need to be paid for, looked after, but here we've crafted a model where everybody benefits ? all the users, the municipality and the Aurora Youth Soccer Club that, in 2024, in a few short months will be celebrating its 60th anniversary of providing high-level sports in Aurora,? said AYSC President Roy Cohen at the recent General Committee meeting.

Council members were supportive of the work being provided by the AYSC in managing the Dome, citing it as an ?extremely good news story? but some wanted further information on the financials before making a decision over the fee reduction. That decision is due by the end of this month.

?We have a lot of expectations with our other community partners as well and I would feel more comfortable being able to justify that because I look at this like we're giving a 20 per cent reduction if we're already giving them a 10 per cent reduction. How much

of a break are we giving?? asked Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland. ?I want to see that comparator and what we're actually giving, compared to what their actual ask is. What I am seeing is they want a 10 per cent reduction and I want to see that breakdown.?

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner was on a similar wavelength, stating she wanted further information on the monetary value provided by the AYSC.

?The primary expense is staffing,? said Firman. ?The Soccer Club provides the staffing much more efficiently than the Town could at a more economical rate. They staff the desk within the dome and act as a convenor for all permit holders. Additionally, they are responsible for the day-to-day cleaning, making sure the field is tidy and organized, making sure the clubhouse is clean, washrooms presentable??

Additional responsibilities include minor procurement, such as a replacement net, and addressing concerns and complaints from the public.

?This is an extremely good news story,? said Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, noting that there is probably no other municipal facility generating the revenue that is being turned here. ?I am looking for more information on the total operation of the Dome and I think we're clear on that. In terms of the decisions we're making tonight, I have no issues with moving them forward but I hope we can remember and underline one of the reasons why I would like more information and data is we should be yelling it from the rooftops how successful it is??

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter