

Sports field switch offers solution to long-time AYSC issue

By Brock Weir

The Aurora Youth Soccer Club (AYSC) could be on the move to Stewart Burnett Park next year after the Club and the Town brainstormed a solution to a growing problem in the soccer community.

The move is set to come with the Town changing course on new and replacement artificial turf fields.

Council earlier approved a new multipurpose field for Stewart Burnett Park, just behind the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex on Wellington Street East, which was set to be constructed this year. As part of this year's Budget, they also approved new artificial turf for the heavily-used soccer field at Sheppard's Bush, the current home of the AYSC.

But, it has been suggested, switching the fields and moving soccer to Stewart Burnett could be the easiest solution for a problem long-identified by the Town's largest sports club.

The AYSC approached Council last year for new facilities at Sheppard's Bush to allow for showers and some locker facilities, amenities they say have been sorely lacking.

‘That didn't come to fruition so we started to thinking of other ways we can possibly work with the Town [on] what would make it better for the soccer community,’ said AYSC president Jimmy Brennan making his pitch to Councillors last week. ‘There was a proposal for a multiuse field to go at Stewart Burnett and once that field was built, over at Sheppard's Bush, because of wear and tear, that was going to be revamped.

‘Now we looked at it and thought we have a world-class facility here in Aurora that hosts right now a beautiful baseball diamond, tennis courts that are in there now, a swimming pool, hockey rinks, and we thought everything we're looking for is right here.

Wouldn't it be great if we could move the soccer field from Sheppard's Bush to Stewart Burnett and take the multiuse field and move that over to Sheppard's Bush?

‘We're requesting you guys get on board with us and help us out a little bit to facilitate our needs in the soccer community for a soccer-specific field over at Stewart Burnett. This would be great for teams that are coming in from Ottawa, Windsor, London and especially our semi-pro team that we have in Town. This would be an ideal situation for us and the soccer community.’

Councillors, sitting at the Committee level, agreed. Mayor Dawe said Aurora doesn't have a lot of single use facilities ‘with baseball diamonds being one notable exception, and asked for assurances that a new soccer field in northeast Aurora could be used by more groups than just the AYSC.

Mr. Brennan said a field such as this would not have the American Football lines to accommodate the York Region Bucs, but lacrosse and rugby could be accommodated.

‘There are 12 dressing rooms [in the area], showers and everything you need for outdoor sports,’ said Mr. Brennan. ‘I think we have 52 fields in Town and not one dressing room. This would actually accommodate those in need.

‘I think it is a great idea to move things over and I hope we can make this happen at Council and ratify it,’ said Councillor Tom Mrakas looking ahead to this week's Council meeting. ‘I think it is a great addition to the SARC considering we have the Sports Hall of Fame there. I think it is a unique place to have so many people coming in and visiting this Town and seeing what this Town can have for them.’

Building change rooms specifically at Sheppard's Bush would otherwise cost the Town upwards of \$1 million, Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, said.

With that in mind, Council said this option makes financial sense.

‘It also allows the Aurora Youth Soccer to keep their semi-pro team because we understand without those change rooms the league would not allow them to keep the team,’ concluded Councillor Mrakas.

Added Councillor Michael Thompson: ‘This is a great example of working with our community partners to find solutions that not only meet their needs, but ours as well.’

While Council was in favour of the plan, the switch raised questions on what is happening as far as sports fields are concerned in other corners of Town. Councillor John Abel, for instance, cited the 11 acre parcel of land behind the former home of Hallmark Cards near Industrial Parkway and Vandorf for recreational purposes.

He said he wanted to make sure all options were considered.

‘We're not going to be putting money into Sheppard's Bush when we have another plan for the 11 acres of Hallmark and realise we should have considered putting the investment in there for the multipurpose and just done the turf at Sheppard's Bush,’ he said. ‘I am pleased to see something of this magnitude being put into the SARC facility and Stewart Burnett, so I am in support of it.’