

Sports groups save with Town's purchase of Sports Dome, but work still needed to bring it up-to-date

Aurora residents and groups will see a savings of 10 per cent when they are able to book the Sports Dome on Industrial Parkway North once again, but a further \$600,000-worth of work might need to be carried out to bring the facility up-to-date.

The Town finalized its purchase of the Aurora Sports Dome at the end of March, a \$955,00 deal that was announced April 1.

"By taking the Sports Dome into Town ownership, we will be able to expand access and increase affordability for citizens and sports groups - delivering great value and excellent service at no additional cost to taxpayers," said Mayor Tom Mrakas at the time.

To this end, Council last week approved a 10 per cent fee reduction for regular indoor season rentals of the Dome.

"Under Town ownership and in the absence of a third-party for-profit partner, indoor season rental permit fees can be immediately lowered to provide for more economical access for the community," said John Firman, Manager of Business Support for the Town, in a report to Council. "At the moment, staff are dependent upon the financial information provided by the previous owner to project revenue and expenses. As such, staff recommend a conservative approach to any fee reduction from the current rates charged by the previous owner. This will provide an immediate benefit to all who use the Dome, while enabling staff to monitor and evaluate actual revenue and expenses during the first year of operation."

That first year of operations will be telling as it will be these user fees that will help pay off debt financing to pay off the costs of retrofits for the dome.

\$600,000-worth of work has been identified for the Dome, including \$500,000 for the replacement of artificial turf, \$40,000 for air-conditioning the bubble itself, \$58,000 for HVAC work in the clubhouse and \$2,000 to replace a hot water heater.

"To allow this work to proceed at the most opportune time in the Dome's operation, staff are requesting that Council approve a new capital project for this work now," said Mr. Firman. "This proposed project is to be funded through the issuance of long-term debt financing which will be repaid through future dome operating revenues. Debt financing is required to manage the timing gap between the dome's immediate investment requirements and the generation of its future operating revenue funding source.

"A key financial objective of the Town is to ensure that the Aurora Sports Dome remains self-sustaining and therefore does not require any tax levy support. The sole source of funding for the dome will be its annual operating revenues. As the Dome has not generated sufficient revenues yet to pay for its initial investment requirements, debt financing is required to mitigate the timing gap between when the dome's initial investment is required and when its intended operating revenue source will be collected."

The turf replacement is set to take place next summer, Mr. Firman told Councillors last week, as there would not be sufficient time now to replace it in time for the anticipated opening of the facility.

Lawmakers, however, sought assurances that the uncertainty wrought by COVID-19 was factored into both the timelines and the debt plan.

"Everybody's concerned about COVID. How did COVID fit into this planning and what is the plan for changes, perhaps, in compensation should we not be able to open in the summer?" asked Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

Mr. Firman said COVID was accounted for "insofar as we are heavily projected approximately 40 per cent revenue for this year, knowing that" based on our current Provincial orders [once] we return to the Orange Zone we would be able to open the door on a limited basis and start receiving some revenues.

?It's hard to be specific not knowing exactly what will happen, but if we're not able to open, obviously we would not receive the revenue, of course, and we would have limited operating expenses. Our overall operating expenses would be significantly reduced and could be recovered through future year revenues.?

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