

Sports plan to be implemented by new staff person at Town Hall

**By
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Council's efforts to bring the implementation of Aurora's Sports Plan in-house were approved by local lawmakers last week.

On a vote of 6 ? 0 (with Councillor Michael Thompson absent from the meeting) Council signed off on a new 24-month contract position to implement the Town's Sport Plan.

This 24-month contract position, however, fell short of what municipal staff were looking for.

Going into last week's Council meeting, elected officials were poised to ratify a decision made at the Committee level calling for the hiring of a new permanent position to bring the Sport Plan to fruition. They changed their mind, however, bowing to calls from Councillor Harold Kim to convert this proposed full-time position to a contract.

Initially proposing an 18-month contract position, Councillor Kim said his initial preference was to bring on an external consultant to do the work because of their industry expertise. But he said he sensed his Council colleagues, and indeed staff, were looking at the possibility of an internal hire for the role and a contract position was the compromise he offered.

?This gives us the opportunity to see if it works out with this individual because not every hire is the best hire,? he said. ?Some of us have been in a situation where we have hired staff and people on our team and thought, you know what? Maybe we could have done something different or hired someone else. This gives the flexibility that after the Sport Plan is constructed, maybe we go in a different direction.?

At the outset, staff offered some concerns that an 18-month contract was not enough time to fully evaluate the performance of the individual hired ahead of the 2021 Budget Cycle. Councillor Kim's motion, as a result, was amended to 24-months to allow some additional time to examine the impacts.

Taking the position from a full-time hire to a full-time contract position received support from many Council members, including Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said it is ?common practice? to do a temporary hire and let the individual prove

themselves.

?Getting stuck with

someone who is permanent?puts us in a hard position,? she agreed. ?I think, unfortunately, the way the job market is now?I think it is very hard for people to get jobs and having a 24-month contract?with the Town of Aurora with the hope of becoming permanent, I think is actually a good idea.?

Councillor John Gallo

agreed, noting he would have been fine with the original amendment for an 18-month contract.

?The Sport Plan

actually has a five-year window from 2015 to the end of 2020 and the plan is basically spelling out it should be implemented within those five years,? he said. ?Eighteen months, by the time you select someone, is more or less the end of 2020. Even if during the Budget process, there's enough money there to have that position up until the end of 2020. So, the discussion would be at Budget, in my view, after the end of December 2020. Do we hire that person again starting in January 2021??

Offering a different

perspective was Councillor Sandra Humfryes who spoke in favour of a permanent hire. Advertising for a full-time position, she argued, might yield better candidates than a job posting for a contract position, regardless of how many months the contract is for.

?We're taking a big

chance here, changes in direction, and I want to make sure we have someone who feels they can have a big career here and not just coming in for 18 or 24 months,? she said, referring to Council's shift on bringing the Sport Plan in-house from Sport Aurora, which has laid much of the plan's groundwork.

?I would normally

agree [with Councillor Kim's rationale], but I believe you are looking for an experienced individual, someone who understands sport and all types of different programming and actual different types of sports. Also, this isn't going anywhere. This is a long-term plan that is going to continue to grow and evolve. It is not going to disappear. We're making a big change here. We're replacing an organization that used to deliver this and we're now taking it on in-house. I want someone who is out there, perhaps in a current job in a different town, who thinks, ?this is a great opportunity for me.' It is going to be hard for someone like that to leave a permanent position to take a chance on a [the contract position] here.?

Councillor Rachel

Gilliland noted that her only concern with a permanent position was there were a lot of ?unknowns? on the table.

?Maybe there is room

to define what the role would look like, she said. Maybe 36 months would be something more appropriate to give [staff] a little bit more evaluation. I would feel comfortable with a 24 or 36 month contract position just because we are entering the unknown. I personally feel just being in the workforce, consultants and contract work is not unusual and I think it does foster some individual who would vie to do this job, probably better, above and beyond, bring new and different ideas, and it gives us an opportunity to refine that position if we so find and need to do that.

While Mayor Tom

Mrakas said he wanted to see this position be a permanent one, he saw the value in bringing in some flexibility by voting in favour of the amendment.

When we first

ventured down the Sport Plan and we hired Sport Aurora as a vendor to implement that Sport Plan, the specifics around that was that we would re-evaluate them after a couple of years and that's what we did, said the Mayor. I think we should allow us the same flexibility with this as well, to be able to re-evaluate after a couple of years. I do want to make sure that our staff have the proper amount of time to give us a proper evaluation, so that is why I think I am okay with the 24 months.

I wouldn't mind seeing the contract position

[because]

we can re-evaluate and make adjustments. We're going to [keep looking at how we can promote sport tourism] within our community, so I see this as a long-term position, but I would just like to make sure we have had an opportunity to re-evaluate it.