

Sports sponsorships could be found without consultants? help: Council

By Brock Weir

Aurora's arenas and pools now boast the names of Highland Automotive, Aurora Toyota, Canadian Tire, and Pfaff, to name but a few companies that have recently purchased the naming rights to municipal facilities ? but further sponsorship opportunities must be found by in-house staff, according to Council.

Council last week rejected an item from the 2017 Capital Budget which would have earmarked \$90,000 to hire a consultant to look at ways of identifying facility opportunities and sponsorships around the Town of Aurora.

Last year, Councillor Jeff Thom, who works in the sports advertising business, put forward a suggestion that sponsorship opportunities and facility advertising should be the subject of a review. But Councillors ? including Councillor Thom ? balked at the price tag floated around the table.

?It has to do with available manpower in order to look at additional sponsorship opportunities and explore those more fully,? said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, responding to Councillor Thom's request that he put more ?meat on the bones? of that \$90k. ?Presently we have a part time person who deals with sponsorship and their main goal is to go out and obtain as much sponsorship as possible. To redeploy them and staff to look at a new strategy and explore other opportunities, compare ourselves with best practices of other municipalities, we feel that we are going to need some additional manpower to do that. We felt that was best done on a short term basis through a consultant as opposed to bringing on additional staff to address that.?

Although Councillor Thom conceded there might be some ?manpower issues? in the Parks and Rec department, he said all a consultant is going to come back and say is ?you just need to sell more? ? a conclusion that shouldn't cost nearly \$100,000.

?I think we can handle this in-house,? he said. ?It doesn't have to happen overnight. I think putting a strategy together takes time. It doesn't have to take all of your department's time or all that part time staff's time, but we have a lot of smart people in staff, we have a lot of smart people around the Council table. We can come up with a strategy for advertising in-house that uses current resources and we don't need to spend \$90,000 to do that.

?I brought this forward and would like to see us have a renewed strategy, so I am not trying to stop the idea from moving forward. I just think we have the smarts and the abilities within staff without spending \$90,000 on a consultant.?

This was the general feeling expressed by Councillors, who said a strategy was moving in the right direction but there are other paths, including bringing together community volunteers, to identify further opportunities.

?Sponsorship is a topic we should be delving into, but I am a little hesitant to go to a consultant at this point in time and spend the \$90,000 because I am not convinced that they are going to point us in any direction that we can't find on our own,? said Councillor Michael Thompson. ?If it is a question of staff resources and redeployment, then I think we have to look at if we're doing the right things and if it is better to utilize some of our staff to pursue this as opposed to some other things. I would like to understand more of the challenges of why we don't think we can achieve it internally.?

Responding to Council concerns, Mr. Downey said he and staff felt there was a degree of ?urgency? to bring a sponsorship strategy forward, but now that urgency did not seem to be there. Replying to a question from Mayor Geoff Dawe on how a \$90,000 spend would compare to revenue brought in, Mr. Downey said he expected there would be a profit, but time is an issue.

If done in-house, it could be 2018 before a strategy is presented, he concluded.

?I would prefer to get someone in a position and have them sell,? offered Councillor Tom Mrakas as an alternative to a consultant. ?When it comes to this, I don't think a consultant is going to tell us anything we don't know. We couldn't put someone in a position to sell that wouldn't do on their own. Go out and sell it. What we need is a couple of good sales people to get the advertisements?and for me I would prefer to spend that \$90,000 in a staff position and have them do the work instead of getting a consultant [who will end up telling us] we need to hire someone.?