

St. Andrew's College plans get go-ahead

By Brock Weir

St. Andrew's College will be able to delay development charges on their new theatre and arena, following an about-face from Council last week.

Councillors changed their minds from the previous week's committee resolution which rejected a recommendation to allow the private school to defer the payment \$240,000 of development charges based on a 2002 agreement between them and the Council of the day.

Staff recommended the continuation of the agreement until "a substantial change of use occurs, or a change of ownership occurs on the property." Questions were raised at the committee table, however, on whether the services that could be offered in the new venues would hinder local business and Councillors initially voted down the recommendation. By the time that decision came up for final approval last week, however, Councillors had a change of heart following a plea from SAC headmaster Kevin McHenry.

"We, as a school, are not planning to increase enrolment in our school; instead we are improving facilities in order to keep pace with the top independent schools in Canada," he said, noting the Aurora's long relationship with the educational institution for over eight decades. "For over 87 years we have grown together."

He highlighted the work SAC does within the community from being a host venue for the Special Olympics programs, nearly \$500,000 in donations from the entire SAC community for their Holiday Heroes campaign benefiting the York Region Children's Aid Society, and the extensive use of their facilities by community groups as examples of their community outreach endeavours.

The school, he added, has 255 boarders from both at home and abroad, 355 day students and each year families move to Aurora so their sons can attend, and over \$2 million in financial aid is awarded to over 140 SAC families.

"Our tuition fees cover our operating budget at the school and we have always fundraised our capital expansions," Mr. McHenry explained. "A potential increase of \$2 million for our building project has made our Board of Governors just last Thursday mandate that part of the project be stopped immediately. The proposed facilities will not drain the resources of the Town of Aurora, which is the rationale for development charges. Rather, these new buildings will complement the existing Town infrastructure and may even relieve some of the pressure on the Town to build additional infrastructure, recreational and cultural venues."

"SAC is not in competition with the Town of Aurora. Instead, we view ourselves as being in partnership with the Town. We are committed to strengthening this partnership in the days and the years ahead."

Driving home this point, he said their new arena would house five hockey teams, but they would still need Town of Aurora ice. That being said, there will be primetime hours of ice available at SAC for times in which municipal programming is short. While it won't be a full-on public facility, it will be available "to serve the needs of the community."

One Councillor to change his mind on whether or not to defer the development charges was Councillor John Abel. He said many facets of the community from sport to culture would benefit from the end result of the SAC buildings.

"Growth pays for growth and since there is no impact on our community from our infrastructure, it is a very reasonable decision for me to defer those DCs," he said. "I often look at what are the plusses and paybacks and it goes on and on for SAC."

Continuing his support from the previous week, Councillor Michael Thompson said extending the previous agreement was reasonable but also at the end of the day, one needs to look at who will ultimately pay the final price if development charges are collected from a development such as this.

"Either they pass it on to the students in tuition increases, or it means they have to go back out into the community and fundraise

some more,? said Councillor Thompson. ?It is concerning because up until this time they had a belief that in all likelihood they would be able to proceed and move on a similar agreement and they went out and moved things forward. Now things are in jeopardy. It is unfortunate because they do so much for the community as well as helping Aurora's image. Our willingness to defer is really an investment not just in the community but in education.?

The recommendation to defer the development charges was carried 7 ? 9 with Councillors Chris Ballard and Evelyn Buck voting against. Explaining his vote, Councillor Ballard said he was still on the fence and would have liked Town Staff to take another kick at the can in coming to an agreement ? such as agreeing to waive ? rather than defer ? the payment of fees in exchange for community use of the facilities.