

Tennis dome proposal raises questions

By Brock Weir

A multi-court tennis 'dome' could take one step closer to becoming a reality on Aurora's east side this week.

Councillors are set to sign off on going out into the community seeking private partnerships to build a six court tennis dome at Stewart Burnett Park, near Leslie and Wellington. The recommendation comes on the heels of previous proposals put forward by the Aurora Community Tennis Club for a similar facility at Fleury Park.

While municipal staff concluded that plan was not feasible, it was markedly different than what will be on the table for final approval on Tuesday.

The Club (ACTC) proposed a multi-purpose facility which, while roofed, would be open to the elements during the summer months and closed in the winter allowing for year-round court play.

The proposal from Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, has undergone a significant makeover.

'The thought was this would be a domed facility, so it would primarily function as a tennis facility year-round,' he said. 'It was not anticipated it would serve as a multi-use venue for other activities.'

Part of the issue, he said, is the proposed dome's proximity to the existing baseball diamond. If this was an open air tennis facility, they would run the risk of foul balls finding their way onto the courts, and other logistical issues.

Should Council give the plan final approval this week, they will be authorising the Town to go out in the community seeking 'expressions of interest' from possible partners in making this a reality. According to Mr. Downey, eligible partners will be required to pay 'all capital costs for the design, supply and construction of six tennis courts, change rooms, dome, lighting and any other ancillary facilities.' They will also be required to get all permits and approvals, pay all taxes and operational costs, and provide the chance for the public to use the facilities as well as the Town for programming.

If Councillors want a multi-purpose facility, one that could also be used for soccer, as a festival venue, or any other potential uses, now would be the time to say so, cautioned Mr. Downey.

'If Council wishes for staff to put in the expression of interest they would rather like a structure as opposed to an air-supported structure, that is something we can ask [for],' he said. 'With the number of people moving into the 2C area and the lack of tennis courts on the east side of Town, we feel the provision for six courts is something we believe is going to satisfy the needs for tennis in that community.'

While Councillors were ultimately supportive of the plan at the Committee level last week, some expressed concerns over costs that would be associated with this 'minimal', said Mr. Downey 'as well as the impact building the courts would have on the possible expansion of the nearby Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex (SARC).

When the building was constructed, there was room deliberately left over on the site in case future growth required the construction of up to two further ice pads. Mr. Downey said this would indeed put an end to the possibility of two new ice pads at the SARC, but that, in the end, was not something likely to be on the cards anyway.

Others questioned where this would fit in with the big picture with several big ticket items coming on quickly in Town.

'We have a number of different projects in the works with regards to the Youth Centre, the possible skateboard park, and this would be another one,' said Councillor Michael Thompson. 'The two would have some degree of impact on our operations in terms of

staff time to various degrees. I am just curious whether this would require any increase in staff having any impact operationally if we were to build it going forward.?

Again, Mr. Downey said staff time spent on the plan would be minimal and it fits into their schedule. After they send out the expression of interest and evaluate responses, then would be the time to present a further report to Council with any concerns stemming from that, he added.

While he was not present for the meeting last Tuesday, Councillor John Gallo, a vocal proponent of the previous plan proposed by the ACTC, told The Auroran he was cautious about the latest development.

?I'm not sure I would like to get into another deal like the soccer dome,? he said.