

Youth Centre renos to start Nov. 13, pending approval

By Brock Weir

Builders bidding to renovate the Aurora Family Leisure Complex ahead of the opening of the Town's new Community Space for Youth will be in Town this week to see what they could be in for.

Tenders for the \$7.5 million plan to renovate the Complex (AFLC) to accommodate the youth space, additional fitness areas, a new skateboard park, and an overall facelift to the building were picked up by 48 bidders when Aurora opened up the door last week, according to Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation. This number will be whittled down to 13, and eventually a winning bidder will be chosen by October 30 before Councillors sign off at the Committee level on November 5.

That's when the fun starts for AFLC users.

"I will be writing a report based on the tender results we receive on October 30 and then looking for Council approval on November 12 and commencing construction shortly thereafter," said Mr. Downey. "[Until then] we do not plan on moving any programs from the facility. The reason for that is because if the project goes south on November 5, we don't want to have all the fitness equipment moved some place and then have it all moved back. We're not pulling any trigger until Council has said on the fifth there will be some level of comfort that this seems to be happening. At that point we will start kicking into gear with all the plans we have to do with the anticipation it will get approved on November 12."

Users of the AFLC, including swimming and track users, as well as clients in yoga and other recreational programs, have spoken out about the impending closures to make way for the youth space. They have said they were not adequately consulted on the plans and have particular concerns regarding the closure of the track. While most other AFLC programs will be held at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex near Wellington and Leslie, there are currently no other options available for people who want to keep fit on the track.

"November 13 might be the last day and all programming will be moving to other locations," said Mr. Downey. "We are concerned about [the track]. Many of the track members are concerned and what we can do to accommodate them. It is the one element we have over at the Leisure Complex that we haven't been able to address."

"The track is going to be closed; that is a non-negotiable issue. The concern is where else can members go with regards to the use of the track?"

He went on to note his department is currently investigating options including the Magna Centre in Newmarket, as well as Schomberg's Trisan Centre and walking programs in the early morning at Upper Canada Mall. Further opportunities could be found closer to home, however, with a possible running program under investigation for the upper level of ACC1 at the Aurora Community Centre.

"We can't have that going on while the Juniors are playing, but there might be an opportunity to have walking program there that marries with the permitting that happens at the facility," said Mr. Downey. "We have to have a staff person attached to that, and we have to have it for members only, as opposed to drop-ins, but we're trying hard to address all the concerns."

When it comes to concerns, however, those shared by members of Aurora's Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee came to costs and communication. Member Juergen Dauer cited the "spiralling" costs of the youth centre, which have ballooned from the neighbourhood of \$4.5 million for the youth centre alone, to \$7.5 million for a more complete renovation and upgrade of the AFLC.

"I am looking at the overall cost exceeding \$7 million and back when the two options were presented in November last year, repurposing the fitness centre and relocating it to the SARC was \$4.7 million and the addition to the Aurora Family Leisure Complex was \$4.2 million. We chose the second option. If the cost now ballooned to this amount, why would be not go back to

Option 1 and knock \$2.5 million off the cost??

Mr. Downey countered that that was not the direction of Council.

?In the report, I presented to Council there were options available to them. Council approval was for the additional funding. It is not for me to question whether or not Council should or shouldn't be doing certain things, but rather provide information to them.?

Councillor Chris Ballard, who has not been an advocate of the youth centre plan as approved, agreed.

?Council didn't raise that either,? he said. ?Frankly, I never thought of it and nobody else around the table thought of it. We have sunk a lot of money into this in terms of architects and stuff, but that question wasn't asked by Council.?

If all goes according to plan, the Parks and Recreation department plans on re-opening and having everything back up and running at the AFLC by October 31, 2014.