

Aurora boasts 'strong sports system' but enhancements are welcome: consultants

By Brock Weir

Aurora has been focusing on ensuring more residents are more active more often and helping the Town reach this goal is a 'strong sports system.' But even the strongest systems can use a bit of enhancement once in a while, according to consultant Claire Tucker Reid.

Ms. Tucker Reid of Monteith Brown Consulting resented a draft Sports Plan for the Town of Aurora at Council last week, ahead of a public information session to gather input from the public at large. While the Town has made its commitment to become the 'most active community in Canada' more needs to be done to achieve this lofty ambition.

'Over 15,000 athletes generate over \$2 million in revenue and if we were to cost the value of volunteerism, it would be that much greater,' she said. 'We wanted to celebrate successes and ensure our athletes are paramount in the sports system and ensure we include marginalized residents.'

The key features of the Sports Plan, which will formally come before Council in the New Year, include four key focus areas: leadership, sustainability, the athlete, and a focus on sports promotion, celebration and sport tourism.

In consultation with stakeholders, Ms. Tucker Reid said a key finding was sports groups were 'concerned' with a lack of a 'strong voice' for sport around the Council table. A proposed solution is to reconstitute the existing Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee to a 'Parks, Recreation and Sport Coordinating Committee' to help address this need.

Issues coming through this committee would look at issues from a sports standpoint and ensure it meets the four objectives described above.

It also proposes the addition of a sports development officer, an issue that was floated several times on the campaign trail over the course of last year's Municipal Election. Such a person, she said, would help provide a significant amount of work to deliver on the plan.

'Aurora, from the demographics we looked at, is increasingly attracting a diverse population,' said Ms. Tucker Reid, addressing a question from Councillor Wendy Gaertner on how the plan would encourage participation from diverse and marginalized groups. 'Often you need to take different approaches to serve residents well by either introducing new sports or teaching newer Canadians traditional Canadian sports. That is one approach.'

With marginalized residents, we would look at persons from low-income backgrounds, persons with disabilities, and look at differing ways to be more inclusive of those populations.'

But, Aurora needs to toot its own horn on the resources it already has at hand, including the Aurora Sport Hall of Fame, she added. A greater emphasis needs to be placed on celebrating sports excellence and heritage within the community, according to their findings, and this in turn touches on another key point which has been the subject of significant discussions: sport tourism.

'Many sports groups would like to attract tourists to their events,' said Ms. Tucker Reid. 'There is an economic spinoff to the community in terms of spending within the community, so we're requesting Council consider the development of a sports tourism strategy that does an analysis of the types of sports and the enhancements that are needed to be a strong sports tourism community. I don't need to say the lack of a hotel is a slight barrier and needs to be addressed.'

Following last week's public information session, the consultants will now analyse the comments and work with Council to address any 'gaps' that have been identified. They hope to have a final master plan at the table by January.

In doing so, Councillor Michael Thompson said it is his hope that the 900-odd people who participated in the development of the plan to this point are kept engaged and provide further feedback on the draft plan.