

FIVE MINUTE MAJOR: Sport Plans are crucial in driving local sports forward

By Jake Courtepatte

Every good execution begins with the same step: a well laid-out plan.

Community sport is supported primarily by the community itself, relying heavily on volunteers to grind out the daily tasks of a local organization. The foundation of community sport, however, relies on a common, overarching set of goals, something for each member to strive for.

Enter the Town of Aurora's Sports Plan, recently approved by Council to begin the first stages of its implementation.

When the wheels starting turning on the plan in early 2015, the Town of Aurora began by looking to the much larger Mississauga for guidance in creating and implementing the plan, having created a plan of their own in 2013. The 33-page plan outlines the current state of sports in the city, what failed and worked in past years, and what must be done in the future to maintain a forward momentum in community sports.

The idea is by no means revolutionary. Canadian Sport for Life, a federal not-for-profit that has grown considerably in the last few years, has praised cities like Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Abbotsford, B.C. for their creation and interpretation of a sports plan. Aurora is just one of the latest communities to take the reins.

But while all may share many of the same goals, each one has to make their plan work with the ebb and flow of their sporting community.

Community-based sport is woven into the fabric of every community in Canada and Aurora is no exception. Sport helps to strengthen a community by building social capital, strengthening family bonds, helping newcomers to integrate more quickly, fostering greater inclusion of people with disabilities, and so many other benefits.

Of a survey administered by the town in September of last year, 85-percent of respondents reported that they participated in some sort of organized sport. The number is not the most indicative of the population however: the average age of the survey respondents was 52.

In our youth, sport enhances academic achievement, teaches positive values and life skills, prevents crime and gang involvement and can provide a sense of empowerment. In adulthood, involvement in sport can enhance workplace productivity and promote healthy aging. At all ages, physical activity helps to tackle obesity, prevents and manages chronic disease, enhances mental health and well-being, and can lead to reductions in overall health care costs.

The traditional sport delivery model calls for program offerings from municipal government, with little outside interference or coaxing from the community to get involved. Aurora has recently adopted a program called Sportability, offered through Canadian Sport for Life, aimed at teaching age-appropriate skills to youth to help them better incorporate what they learn into the town's available clubs and organizations. Part of the plan is also to continue to investigate why girls and youth in general drop out of organized sport.

This level of interest by the Town is what will help reach Aurora's ultimate goal of becoming one of Canada's most active communities.

The numbers pay dividends: the Town estimates that the sports groups in Aurora include at least 15,000 participants combined, generating approximately \$2-million in facility permit payments for the Town.

Aurora has a rich history in the provision of sport and recreation opportunities available to its residents. Sport Aurora, the umbrella organization for most clubs within the town, boasts over thirty members alone, while Aurora Minor Hockey and Aurora Youth Soccer remain independent and boast memberships in the thousands. A primary output of the sport system is a healthy, active, and physically-literate community, and one that can only be strengthened as the Sports Plan comes to fruition.