

Mavrinac land should be sold, says parks consultant

By Brock Weir

A six acre parcel of land on Mavrinac Boulevard which the Town purchased last year following a contentious fight with Minto Developments should be sold to secure parkland in other areas of Town, according to consultants developing a new master plan for parks and recreation in Aurora.

Council is to debate the plan, first at the Committee level, on February 16 before the plan is potentially adopted by Council the following Tuesday.

According to consultant Todd Brown, who presented the proposed new Parks and Recreation Plan to Council last week, local lawmakers must decide whether or not to maintain the land in question, but their master plan recommends against transforming the property into a park.

"The parcel really is a parcel that has a more passive or naturalization opportunity [rather than soccer fields] because of its location encircled on three sides by residential uses," said Mr. Brown. "Therefore, there would be some conflict with the types of uses and intensity of uses that could occur at that site."

Sports fields on the land could have a negative impact on surrounding properties, he added.

Compounding the issue, he added, is the proximity of two large neighbourhood parks - Ada Johnson Park and Hickson Park - both located within an estimated eight minute walking distance from the Mavrinac lands which already offer a variety of amenities.

"If [Mavrinac] were to be retained and created as parkland, that area would be over-serviced in comparison to the rest of your community," Mr. Brown told Council. "We do believe that divesture of that parcel creates an opportunity for the municipality by enabling you to re-invest those funds through the divesture of the lands to find a better suited parcel that reconciles deficits in the community and perhaps provides an opportunity for land banking for a future community centre or a multiuse sports field park."

Also factoring into the recommendation were plans for the Aurora Wildlife Park, now called the Ivy Jay Nature Reserve, which begins on Wellington Street East, just east of Mavrinac, running north between the 2B and 2C developments.

"We have two local parks within an eight minute walk and there is also the wildlife area," said Mr. Brown. "That area is very well-served with opportunities to meet the local residents' needs. [Recreation amenities on the Mavrinac land] would essentially be duplicating what you already have within eight minutes."

"A goal of the plan is to eliminate duplication and look at areas of gap. We felt that was not an area of gap. We do recognize the Town purchased that land from Cash in Lieu of Parkland [reserves] and, therefore, if it was not pursued as a parkland there would have to be reimbursements to that fund to make that happen."

Aurora purchased the land in question last fall, after nearly two years of contention, for \$2.47 million, the value of the land at 2007 prices, as per the condition of the municipality's original subdivision agreement that year.

Originally earmarked for a new Catholic school, the subdivision agreement included the clause that if the land was no longer needed by the York Catholic School Board the Town of Aurora would have first right of refusal to secure the land at these original prices, a provision which landowners Minto Communities disputed and legal proceedings commenced.

The land was eventually secured just short of the matter appearing before the courts.

Area residents urged Aurora to fight for the land to prevent further homes being built in the area, arguing they purchased their homes at a premium in the belief they would back onto a school or, at the very least, open space.

The eventual purchase, at the time, was heralded by Mayor Geoff Dawe as a victory in ensuring Aurora enforces its agreements.