

New gymnasium put on the backburner at SARC

By Brock Weir

A new full-size gymnasium, which was floated earlier this year as an extension to the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex to meet the demands of a growing community, has been put on the backburner until 2019.

Although proponents on the new gymnasium – particularly Councillors Michael Thompson and Tom Mrakas – were hoping the Town would break ground on the extension earlier this year, Council has now approved the multipurpose space in principle and referred it to the newly-inaugurated Council of 2018-2022 to consider as part of the 2019 Capital Budget.

“It was certainly my hope that it could have been dealt with in 2018,” said Councillor Thompson. “The Parks & Recreation Committee (PRAC) looked at it back in November and personally I had conversations with staff in regards to funding in January and confirmed it was DC (development charges) eligible and it could be tackled as a mid-year addition to the 2018 Budget.

“Unfortunately, it wasn't able to materialize and [wasn't brought] forward for Council's consideration at this meeting. What we have seen, from the information provided to PRAC, that at one time [a gym at the SARC] was contemplated. The price tag was significantly lower than it is today, and I would rather see Council deal with it sooner rather than later so that no further increases come into the cost to build this gymnasium because I do believe it is necessary and needed.

“It is not a question of if we need it, it's a question of when are we going to build it? I would certainly hope that a future Council takes that into consideration and moves forward really quickly.”

The report, presented to PRAC on June 21 by Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services, estimates the cost of the new gym to be in the neighbourhood of \$2.16 million dollars, or \$300 per square foot. This estimate, she noted, does not include any additional upgrades to the building that might be necessary to make it happen, such as electrical or HVAC.

“At the time of the original

construction, the facility was built with the HVAC and electrical necessary for an addition, however this was approximately 12 years ago,” said Ms. McDougall. “Therefore, prior to proceeding, further evaluation is needed to confirm if existing HVAC and electrical still meet the needs of an addition. If they do, then no further costs will be incurred. But, if they do not, the cost of upgrading the systems would need to be accounted for.”

Space available on the site would allow for a 6,000 square foot addition, the report continues, which is adequate for a single gymnasium. Once constructed, the main hallway of the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex (SARC) would serve all facilities and the existing change rooms would service both the gym and the pool.

Staff predict that the eventually-built gym would prove to be well-used, providing additional opportunities for pre-school programs, summer camps, group fitness classes, a walking club, local volleyball, badminton and basketball programs, indoor golf lessons and more.

“The gymnasium at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex is well-utilized, particularly during prime time (early morning, late afternoon and weekends),” said Ms. McDougall. “Additionally, registered programs currently taking place in school gymnasiums at a rental cost to the Town, could be relocated and programming could be expanded to a new gymnasium at the SARC.”

Council previously tackled the issue of a new gym at the SARC while sitting at the Committee level on July 17. There, Council members questioned both the timing and funding sources for the project.

“The genesis of this came from a Sport Aurora meeting,” explained Councillor Thompson. “The conversation came up because the SARC was always intended to have a gymnasium and, at the last minute, it was taken off the plan. That's why there are still plans today that show an existing gym as part of the SARC. We moved forward with the premise [that this would] address the immediate need.

“One of the reasons we had a special PRAC meeting in June was in order to get the minutes before this Council, at this meeting, before we became a lame duck. I am not sure where that has come from, but that was never the intention, nor was it part of the conversation [to go to the 2019 Budget] from the get go. The conversation was we need it now, let's move forward and let's develop it. That is why the cost and feasibility are before Council. I completely understand if Council is not willing to move forward, but it was never to go to budget. I am not sure where that disconnect came from.”

According to CAO Doug Nadorozny, the project can't move forward without an identified funding source and that would come to budget.

“Council would have to move a motion to go ahead and do an in-year capital transfer to make it happen,” the CAO expanded.

“Through the normal course of the process, staff would do a report, they would recommend it go to Capital Budget, and you would

consider it in the 2019 Capital Budget. We are at the will of whatever Council wants to do. If Council decides to move it forward [earlier than next year] we would need a motion.?

From the perspective of Councillor Wendy Gaertner, additional factors to cost need to be considered before moving forward with a new gymnasium.

?The reason there was going to be a new gymnasium [at the SARC] was because it was going to be part of a youth centre,? she said. ?That was going to be the whole focal point [and] a youth centre probably wouldn't require that much parking. It was intended for a specific use and that was mostly for youth. If we're going to revisit this now, I think we need to look at the parking issue?because it is tight as it is.?