

## Pandemic closures expose damage to SARC pools

Swimming pools at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex are in need of repairs following pandemic shut-downs.

Pools at the SARC were drained while the facility was shut down due to public health restrictions and although being without water allowed staff the opportunity to see previously unnoticed damage to the pools' linings, prolonged exposure to the air exacerbated other problems.

Making the pools fully operational again will cost \$354,600 split between reserve accounts: the Community Building Fund and Safe Recovery funds.

As part of the pandemic response, the Town chose to drain the pools, said Facilities Manager Doug Bertrand in a report to Council. All three SARC pools were first drained in March/April 2020 and were refilled in September 2020. The amount of water lost when they were refilled was within an acceptable range except for the lane pool which took longer than normal to stabilize.

The therapy and leisure pools were drained for a second time in December 2020 because of facility closures. The lane pool was not drained because of the length of time it took to stabilize during the first shut down. The therapy and leisure pools were refilled again in late February 2021. This is when greater-than-normal water loss was observed in the therapy pool. The therapy pool was losing half of its water over a 24-hour period.

Several holes were found in the pool lining, including punctures and cracking. Cracking was due to the membrane drying out and then separating.

It was suggested that exposure to the air allowed the membrane to dry out and caused failure due to the age and brittleness of the liner material, said Bertrand. The membrane was beyond its useful life and at the point of being too brittle for repair. Repairs and patching would have caused further damage and was not recommended as a solution.

The repairs funded by reserves was given the green light with little discussion at last Tuesday's General Committee meeting, but Council members questioned consultants' fees and, in the case of Councillor Wendy Gaertner, why the green light to drain the pools was given in the first place.

It was our choice, said Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services for the Town. We were not directed to drain a pool during a closure. We have done that in the past for some maintenance, but we have held water in the tank because obviously we don't want to waste water and empty it if we don't have to.

In this case, during the COVID closure, we didn't know how long it would be. We anticipated it would be a significant period of time. It was our choice, but it was COVID-driven for our decision to do so.

**By Brock Weir** Editor/Local Journalism Initiative Reporter