

Public consultations set to begin on Mavrinac Park design

By Brock Weir

Public consultation on what Mavrinac Park might look like is set to kick off next month, after Council approved a concept plan for the six acre parcel of land last week.

Council approved a budget amount of \$1.3 million to make the park a reality on an 8 ? 1 vote while referring the concept design to the Town's Accessibility Advisory Committee and Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee for further comment.

The lone vote against the plan was Councillor Paul Pirri.

Councillor Pirri, who has been consistent in his disagreement with area residents that the land in question should be retained as open space and parkland, said he was opposed to the aggressive timeline set by Town Hall to get shovels in the ground.

While municipal staff have said the chances are remote, they said they would ideally like to get construction started following public consultation by the end of the year.

?What is the rush?? asked Councillor Pirri responding to timelines outlined by Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation. ?I still don't understand why we are rushing this. It was established [in the Town's new Parks and Recreation Master Plan] that this park was not needed and now I see Council trying to make Mr. Downey move as quickly as possible to get something done, and I am not sure that is appropriate for us to be doing.

?There have been a lot of meetings and opportunities where we have spoken about the need to get good, strong public information and we have all acknowledged at one point or another that that just doesn't happen during the summer. People go on vacation, people aren't around, so I am not sure why we wouldn't take our time to do things properly. Granted, residents of this area would very much like to see this park go through, but if we're going to have a public open house, I think it should be something that everybody in the Town of Aurora has the opportunity to weigh in on.?

Previously approved parks, he noted, are still waiting for shovels to hit the ground.

Other Councillors, however, said they did not believe they were rushing to bring the park to fruition having gone out with residents to get a lay of the land in question the previous weekend. The excitement, they said, was in the air and it is momentum they would like to see continue.

?They are looking forward to the public planning process, but they are just ecstatic with the work done by staff and have all the confidence that there will be a great park there that everyone can use,? said Councillor Sandra Humfries. ?It is full steam ahead. We're not really rushing this. In terms of how we treat other park developments, it may seem so, but this is one particular case where there is a lot of focus and lots of want, so why delay? I think we have a great basis in front of us on how we can move forward. We have a good conceptual plan.?

Added Councillor Tom Mrakas: ?I am looking forward to the community open house where the public will get a chance to get their input in and, at the end of the day, we will all get together and make a decision on how to move forward with this park.

?[This park] wasn't recommended by a consultant. My understanding is the majority of this Council recommended that this be a park and as far as the pace we are going, going slower doesn't mean you're going to do it better or you're going to do it right. All it means is you're going to go slow when we have clear, decisive thought on how to move forward. That is efficient decision-making and that is what we're doing.?

For others, it was important to note this is not the end of the journey. Councillor Michael Thompson, for instance, said the decision

on the table simply gave staff the go-ahead to move forward with the open house, work with the community, Council and committees to come up with a revised plan.

Staff are going to report back and say, 'Here is the plan, here is the proposed construction date, and if Council is not happy with either the plan or with what the proposed dates are, they can delay it and send it back out and we'll deal with it then,' said Councillor Thompson.

Nevertheless, Councillor Pirri was firm in his opposition.

'I don't believe political will should discount views of professionals who have studied this, our plans that have been recommended to us should be completely disregarded because some residents in the community want something,' he said. 'It was mentioned again early tonight that there is a want in the community and we should be moving forward on this now. I don't believe that should suspend us from doing all the due diligence and all the work we could do to make sure we do something right. We are missing that at this point in time.'