



100 John West Way  
Aurora, Ontario  
L4G 6J1  
(905) 727-3123  
aurora.ca

Town of Aurora

# General Committee Report

No. CMS23-044

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**Subject:** Sports Field Development Strategy – Status Update

**Prepared by:** John Firman, Manager, Business Support

**Department:** Community Services

**Date:** October 17, 2023

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## Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS23-044 be received for information.

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the status of recommendations included in the Sports Field Development Strategy (SFDS) and to summarize new developments and recommendations for next steps.

- The Sports Field Development Strategy was completed and presented to Council in February 2020.
- The updated Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP) along with other new initiatives brought forward by Council have also been considered in this update.
- Staff have been working to assess and implement several of the recommendations from the SFDS, PRMP, and other opportunities.
- Council has also directed staff through Motions passed earlier this year to investigate options for pickleball and a courts dome.
- Staff will continue to review outstanding field development needs and utilization rates and prioritize solutions.
- New park amenities or upgrades will have a direct impact on operating staffing levels.

- The acquisition of land will be key to achieving all our sports field and recreational facility needs.

## **Background**

**The Sports Field Development Strategy was completed and presented to Council in February 2020.**

Monteith Brown Planning Consultants were engaged in 2019 to complete a Sports Field Development Strategy. This was a comprehensive review of the Town's existing outdoor sports field inventory and utilization, and included consultations with staff, Council and user groups. The completed SFDS was presented to Council in February 2020, and identified the following:

- Aurora is an active and growing community. Demand for sports fields is rising.
- We must plan ahead, make the most of our assets, and work with others.
- The Town has made strides, but strategic investment is needed to keep pace with evolving interests.
- Sports groups are seeking more and higher quality fields.
- Fields are being used to capacity.
- More rectangular fields will be required to address growth and the closure of the Stronach Fields.
- Our needs are currently greatest for ball diamonds (as at 2019).
- Land acquisition options are extremely limited.
- The Town should employ a variety of strategies to enhance and expand the supply.

**The update Parks and Recreation Master Plan along with other new initiatives brought forward by Council have also been considered in this update.**

Monteith Brown Planning Consultants were engaged in 2022 to complete an updated Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP). Building upon the previous PRMP from 2016 and the SFDS, this was a comprehensive review of the Town's existing parks and recreation programs and facilities and included community and user group consultations as well as consultation with staff and Council. The completed SFDS was presented to Council in June 2023.

## Analysis

Staff have been working to assess and implement several of the recommendations from the SFDS, PRMP, and other opportunities.

Immediately following approval of the SFDS staff began working on evaluating the various recommendations. As a first step, staff secured a sponsorship agreement to guarantee access to the Stronach Fields (formerly known as the Magna Fields) through the end of 2026.

Some work has already been completed, with other projects in progress and several other to be planned. Table #1 below, provides a summary of the status and staff recommendations related to all the SFDS recommendations:

**Table #1**

Rec.#	SFDS Recommendation	Status	Comments / Next Steps
<b>Rectangular Fields</b>			
1.1a	Replace existing ball diamond at Confederation Park with a 7v7 field.	Under review	To be reviewed as part of planned park redesign.
1.1b	Convert existing field at Craddock Park to a lit, artificial turf field.	Not feasible	Concerns related to LSRCA approval, lighting and insufficient space for washrooms and parking. Do not proceed.
1.1c	Convert two existing ball diamonds at Machell Park to rectangular field(s).	Not suitable	Concerns related to parking and loss of in-demand ball diamonds. Do not proceed.
1.1d	Resume use of previously installed 7v7 field at McMahon Park.	Planned	Proceed when needed, prior to loss of Stronach fields.
1.1e	Convert existing field at Norm Weller Park to an artificial turf field.	Not feasible	Facility fit test confirmed a turf field will not fit. Do not proceed.
1.2a	Add lights to existing field at Machell Park.	Not suitable	Concerns related to lighting impact. Limited additional use does not justify cost of lighting. Do not proceed.

Rec.#	SFDS Recommendation	Status	Comments / Next Steps
1.2b	Add lights to existing field behind the sports dome (Legion Field).	Not suitable	Located on flood plain. Lights would add limited additional usage. Possible future consideration if needed.
1.3a	Add goal uprights to existing field to accommodate rugby and football at Confederation Park.	Not required	Rugby and football needs have been addressed through other projects.
2.1a	Utilize open space for one 3v3 micro field at Chapman Park.	Planned	Proceed if/when required.
2.1b	Construct two 5v5 fields at Edward Coltham Park.	Under review	To be reviewed in overall park plan, in conjunction with court enhancements.
2.1c	Construct two 5v5 fields at the future non-programmed park.	Not available	Park has been designated by Council for natural park construction.
2.1d	Construct two 5v5 fields at Trent Park.	Under review	To be reviewed in overall park plan, in conjunction with court enhancements.
2.2a	Resume use of existing field.	Pending	Includes land owned by YRDSB. Review, pending disposition of George St. Public School property.
3.1a	Enter into shared use agreement for Aurora Montessori School field.	Planned, pending school approval	Short-term option only. Proceed as temporary field during Sheppard's Bush turf construction.
3.1b	Partnership with YCDSB to build an artificial turf field.	Under review	Only known site suitable for potential 2 <sup>nd</sup> soccer dome. YCDSB interested. Proceed when appropriate, pending further review.
3.1c	Enter into shared use agreement for use of 7v7 field at École élémentaire catholique Saint-Jean.	Under review	School fields are very difficult to maintain. Consider as a short-term option during Sheppard's Bush turf construction.

Rec.#	SFDS Recommendation	Status	Comments / Next Steps
3.1d	Enter into shared use agreement for use of 7v7 field at Northern Lights PS.	Not suitable	Field is heavily used by school and in poor condition. Do not proceed.
3.1e	Enter into shared use agreement for use of 7v7 field at Our Lady of Grace CES.	Under review	Agreement already in place, however, this location may require fencing to maintain quality. Proceed, pending further review.
3.2a	Partner with YRDSB to access fields at the existing Dr. G.W. Williams SS.	Pending	Ideal location for various options. Awaiting the opportunity to discuss with YRDSB.
3.2b	Partner with school boards for future elementary and high schools.	Complete	Partnership approved for artificial turf field at new Dr. G.W. Williams SS. Construction underway. Other new elementary schools to do not have sufficient land for fields.
3.2c	Enter into shared use agreement for use of 11v11 and 9v9 fields at Aurora High School.	Under review	Field quality difficult to maintain. Proceed, pending further review and consultation with Board.
3.2d	Partner with YRDSB to build two 7v7 or 5v5 fields at Devins Drive PS.	Under review	Field quality difficult to maintain. May require fencing. Proceed, pending further review.
3.2e	Enter into shared use agreement for use of 7v7 field at St. Joseph's CES.	Not suitable	Field quality very poor. Unable to maintain for safe play. Do not proceed.
3.2f	Add uprights to existing field at École secondaire catholique Renaissance to allow for rugby.	Not required	Rugby needs have been addressed through other projects.

Rec.#	SFDS Recommendation	Status	Comments / Next Steps
<b>Ball Diamonds</b>			
1.1a	Re-orient and enlarge existing ball diamond at Confederation Park to a senior diamond.	Under review	To be reviewed as part of planned park redesign.
1.1b	Enlarge existing diamond at Fleury Park to allow adult/older youth play.	Not suitable	Requires major construction (grades, existing bush line, etc.).
1.1c	Convert two existing smaller diamonds to a senior diamond.	Under review	Concerns regarding parking and lighting. Further review required.
1.1d	Enlarge existing ball diamond at Summit Park to a senior diamond.	Not suitable	Concerns with lighting and parking. Confirmed site for outdoor fitness park. Do not proceed.
1.1e	Convert existing ball diamond to a stadium venue to support Intercounty Baseball League.	Under review	Requires further review, including: funding requirements, possible partnerships, impact on existing permits, and parking considerations.
2.1a	Construct two lit ball diamonds on the Hallmark Lands.	Complete	Project completed. Both diamonds are heavily used.
2.1b	Identify location for future lit hardball diamond.	Not available	Facility fit tests confirm no existing town-owned or town-accessible land exists to support this. New land acquisition is required.
3.1	Enter into shared use agreement to allow for community access to St. Andrew's College ball diamond.	Not available	SAC already provides access through their own facility rental program.

A total of 16 projects from the SFDS recommendations have been completed, are planned, or currently under review for possible future implementation.

The PRMP included several recommendations regarding other outdoor recreational amenities, which may directly or indirectly impact sport field development. These recommendations and their current status are included in Table #2:

**Table #2**

<b>Rec.#</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Priority Level</b>	<b>Status</b>
#1	Secure land in S/W Aurora for the development of a recreation centre and sports fields.	High	This item is addressed later in this report.
#8	Consider low-risk involvement in a community partnership should the demand arise for a second indoor turf facility.	Low	Existing needs do not support further action at this time but should be considered in any future turf field development.
#12	Need for an additional two-court tennis facility in the S/W quadrant.	Medium	Potential to include at Confederation Park as part of park redesign in capital budget for 2025/26.
#14	Review existing outdoor pickleball locations and consider upgrades.	High	Court upgrades included in 2024 capital budget.
#15	Establish a dedicated outdoor pickleball complex with six or more courts.	High	Proposed for Fleury Park as part of park redesign/improvements in 2024/45 capital budget.
#17	Expanding the supply of outdoor basketball/multi-use courts where geographic gaps exist.	Medium	Basketball included as part of Shining Hill Park development (2024). Staff will continue to look at potential locations as part of future park redesigns.
#18	Installing lights on one existing basketball court as a pilot.	Medium	Proposed to be included in the Summit Park redesign in 2024.
#19	Work with sport organizations to pursue expansion of beach volleyball courts and programming.	Medium	Limited data to support need for additional courts. One group approached the Town early this year but has since disengaged.

Rec.#	Recommendation	Priority Level	Status
#22	Addressing gaps (West of Yonge) in splash pad distribution.	Medium	Proposed to be included in the redesign for Fleury and Confederation Parks. Shining Hill Park construction to include a splash pad.
#25	Additional barrier free playgrounds, with one in each quadrant.	High	Planned for Town Park in 2024. To be further reviewed by the Accessibility Advisor in 2024.
#26	Undertake site evaluation process to establish a third outdoor fitness park.	Medium	A third fitness park is to be included in the Summit Park capital upgrades in 2024.
#27	Preparation of a business plan to consider an artificial outdoor ice rink.	High	To be presented to Council in 2024.
#28	Exploring the possibility for a Disc Golf course.	Medium	No suitable Town-owned land exists. New Disc Golf courses opened in 2023 in King, Stouffville and East Gwillimbury will likely meet the demand.

Nine of the PRMP recommendations listed above are currently in progress, planned, or under review for future presentation to Council.

**Council has also directed staff through Motions passed earlier this year to investigate options for pickleball and a courts dome.**

Given the scope of the review for pickleball opportunities, this has been addressed in a separate report.

Our previous and existing partnerships with the Lind Realty Team Sports Dome, the Marilyn Redvers Tennis Centre and the St. Maximilian Kolbe artificial turf field, and other developing partnerships have shown that various combinations of public/private/non-profit partnerships present viable opportunities for the development and operation of a courts dome.

Staff have conducted a review of existing parks and have not been able to identify a suitable location for a courts dome. The majority of existing parkland lies within LSRCA



flood plain and would not be approved for the development of structures such as a dome or the required clubhouse to support it. In addition to the dome itself, additional land is also required for a clubhouse and parking to support the facility. Alternatively, the addition of a courts dome where construction would be approved, would come at the sacrifice of other amenities. In order to proceed any further with this project, land acquisition or the identification of a partnership on lands not owned by the Town will be required. As schools would not be a suitable option, privately owned land would be the only option other than the acquisition of new land at this time.

**Staff will continue to review outstanding field development needs and utilization rates and prioritize solutions.**

As indicated in Tables #1 and #2, numerous options have either been implemented, are planned for implementation, or currently under review. Staff are also in the process of evaluating 2023 sports field utilization rates to confirm the number of new facilities that will be required going forward.

Other new projects such as the partnership with St. Anne's School (shared use artificial turf field) and the Aurora Barbarian's Rugby Football Club (2<sup>nd</sup> multi-sport artificial turf field at Sheppard's Bush), will have a positive impact on meeting our sports field needs.

The recommendations provided in the SFDS have a range of costs associated with them. Some projects can be completed at minimal or no cost; some will require minimal costs that can be included in the appropriate annual operating budget; and some will require significant capital expenditures.

All of these factors will be considered as staff continue to evaluate the needs and options for future sport field development. Future sports field development recommendations will be included in the appropriate budget approval process, or by separate Council Report where required.

**New park amenities or upgrades will have a direct impact on operating staffing levels.**

Additional new amenities or significant upgrades within parks or at schools (involving maintenance by Town staff) will have a direct effect on operating staffing levels. Currently staff are stretched and, in some cases, not able to fully meet current service level standards. Staffing has not kept pace with growth and expansion of services.

This has a direct impact on service levels and operating budget funding for materials and supplies to maintain amenities/facilities. Consideration of new/upgraded amenities

should include a fulsome review of the affect on Parks ability to deliver and meet the Council endorsed service level standards.

**The acquisition of land will be key to achieving all our sports field and recreational facility needs.**

Considering the amount and variety of existing and anticipated needs, not only for sports fields but for other facility needs it is evident that the Town does not have adequate land to support all of our needs. The Town has placed a strong focus on developing community partnerships and has achieved a great deal of success in this area. While all potential partnership opportunities have not been exhausted, our success in this area leaves limited opportunities available.

With limited opportunities for new land acquisition available, it is recommended that Council pursue land acquisition opportunities that may arise.

### **Advisory Committee Review**

None.

### **Legal Considerations**

None.

### **Financial Implications**

All staff supported SFDS recommendations will be included in the appropriate operating or capital budget for Council's review and approval subject to funding availability.

### **Communications Considerations**

None.

### **Climate Change Considerations**

The recommendations from this report do not impact greenhouse gas emissions or impact climate change adaptation.

## Link to Strategic Plan

The recommendations in this report support the Strategic Plan goal of *Supporting an exceptional quality of life for all* in its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the following key objective within this goal statement: *Encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle.*

## Alternative(s) to the Recommendation

N/A

## Conclusions

That Council receive this report for information.

## Attachments

None.

## Previous Reports

N/A

## Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on September 28, 2023

## Approvals

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer