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Town of Aurora
Committee of the Whole Report
No. CMS25-004

Subject: Sport Plan Update 2025-2029

Prepared by: Hailey Jones, Specialist, Sport & Community Development

Department: Community Services

Date: February 11, 2025

Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS25-004 be received and;
2. That Council endorse the recommendations contained in the attached Sport Plan update.

Executive Summary

In response to the approval of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (June 2023), Staff received Council support to update the Town's expired Sport Plan in June 2024. Optimus SBR, a Toronto based firm, was awarded the \$40,000 contract after an extensive RFP process with the goal to better serve our community through an updated Sport Plan.

- Sport Plan Update aligns scope with the current sport landscape
- Community Engagement proved to be successful and informative
- The vision for the future of sport in Aurora serves as guidance

Background

The Sport Plan traces back to 2015 when the Town of Aurora, in alignment with the development of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, took a proactive step forward by approving a comprehensive strategy for the development of sports and recreational opportunities within the community.

In June 2023, the Town of Aurora took a further step forward with the approval of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP) Update, signaling a recommitment to enhancing the recreational landscape for residents. Building upon this momentum, it was time to focus on updating the Sport Plan. Recognizing the dynamic nature of our community's sporting landscape, the Town acknowledged that the current Sport Plan, designed to provide guidance from 2015 to 2020, no longer adequately reflects the evolving needs of our local sporting organizations (LSOs), Community Sport Organizations (CSOs), and broader community and that this update was needed. It is important to note that this project was only an update and intended to build upon the existing sport plan. Therefore, the scope and approach of this update was scaled down in comparison to the previous sport plan.

Analysis

Sport Plan Update aligns scope with current sport landscape

The Sport Plan Update confirms the Town will continue to actively invest in sport; encourage greater collaboration with community partners and provides a framework to assist in the delivery of grassroots sport. Aurora boasts a vibrant and thriving sports system, home to over 30 Local Sport Organizations (LSOs) and more than 10 Community Sport Organizations (CSOs), which continue to grow and demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges. The Sport Plan is designed not just for the Town but for the entire Aurora community.

The Sport Plan Update will act as a guide for Staff, LSOs and CSOs for delivering quality sports programs in Aurora over the next five years. The focus is on developing community partnerships, public engagement and investments that will ultimately enhance sport delivery throughout the Town. Additionally, as a result of the limited budget and scope of this project, priority was given to hosting multiple community engagement opportunities, redefining the strategic pillars and overall alignment with previously approved Town plans.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (D.E.I.) was the overarching focus of the Sport Plan Update, and the following four strategic goals have emerged: leadership development & volunteer support, sport participant engagement, community sport sustainability, and sport tourism. The following points outline these strategic pillars:

1. Leadership Development & Volunteer Support:
 - Strong leadership and continuously developing volunteers and future leaders are essential steps to creating a sustainable, inclusive sports

system. Volunteers, coaches, and administrators are the backbone of LSOs and CSOs, and their leadership shapes the success, ethics, and inclusivity of community sports. By fostering leadership, the Town can ensure long-term growth and support for both the sports system and participants.

2. Sport Participant Engagement:

- Increasing sport participation ensures that all residents have the opportunity to engage in physical activity, foster healthier lifestyles and build stronger community connections. By making sports accessible to all demographics, the Town can enhance social cohesion, promote wellness, and increase the overall quality of life for residents.

3. Community Sport Sustainability:

- LSOs and CSOs are the foundation of Aurora's community sports system. Supporting the sustainability of these organizations is critical to ensuring they can continue to offer programs, recruit volunteers, and maintain facilities. Without this support, LSOs and CSOs may struggle with volunteer burnout, administrative challenges, and long-term viability.

4. Sport Tourism:

- Sport tourism has the potential to drive economic growth and enhance Aurora's profile by attracting visitors, athletes, and events to the Town. Hosting regional, provincial, and national sporting events brings direct economic benefits to local businesses and helps promote Aurora as a vibrant, inclusive destination for sports enthusiasts.

In summary, the Sport Plan Update prioritizes Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion while focusing on the four key strategic goals. These priorities aim to create a sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant sports system that enhances community connections, supports LSOs/CSOs, and positions Aurora as a leader in sport and recreation across the country.

Community Engagement proved to be successful and informative

Community engagement emerged as a significant success of the process, demonstrating the value of collaboration and gathering input from stakeholders. Engagement occurred across multiple levels, resulting in increased participation and valuable opportunities for relationship building.

The following consultation lifecycle provided multiple opportunities for public input, while increasing and building rapport, relationships and overall buy-in for the completed Sport Plan Update.

- **Phase 1: July - September 2024:** Set-up and Planning. The Town and Optimus SBR worked together to reaffirm scope, approach, and the desired final product.
- **Phase 2: September - November 2024:** Engagement and Research. Round table engagement with LSOs, CSOs, Community Partners, members of Council, and the broader Aurora community via survey discussions. Research into comparator municipalities to understand how they organize their sports landscapes to identify potential leading practices.
- **Phase 3: November - December 2024:** Findings Synthesis. Identifying core trends across all engagement and research activities and applying the Aurora lens to determine possible Sport Plan recommendations. Validation of results took place with stakeholders.
- **Phase 4: December 2024 – January 2025:** Sport Plan Development. The creation of an updated Sport Plan.
- **Phase 5: February 2025:** Sport Plan Ratification. Presentation of the Sport Plan to Council to formally confirm its content, focus, and activities.

Optimus SBR developed four discussion guides, which included:

- Discovery Interview Guide,
- Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee Guide,
- LSO/CSO Group Discussion Guide,
- Community Organization Discussion Guide

These unique and tailored guides were essential tools designed to gather valuable insights and perspectives for the Sport Plan Update. These guides aim to engage participants at all levels to ensure the updated Sport Plan reflects the community's needs, challenges, and aspirations. The guides also ensured that, while each conversation would follow its own unique path, core questions and content would be discussed. By exploring themes such as leadership development, sport participation, community sport sustainability, sport tourism, and diversity, equity, and inclusion, these discussions provided a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape while identifying opportunities for improvement. These guides can be

found in Attachment 1 of this report. The input collected served as a foundation for creating the strategic, inclusive, and sustainable framework for sport in Aurora.

Of note during consultation was the discussion of the need for a formal Sport Council in Aurora. The following question was posed to LSO's and CSO's:

How do you feel about the concept of a Sport Council? If one were to be enacted, what role/activities would you hope it would conduct?

Most respondents were indifferent to the concept of a formal Sport Council and some groups were actively opposed as they felt a Sport Council might create bureaucracy and red tape that could hinder the resolution of issues or concerns. With the creation of the Sport and Community Development staff position, the Town has been able to build strong relationships with LSO's and CSO's and much of the work that a sport council would traditionally do, is successfully achieved by staff working directly with the community.

The LSO/CSO Group Discussion Guide was used during the hosting of multiple sessions. LSOs include Aurora Men's Slo-Pitch League, Special Olympics Aurora, Aurora Skating Club, Aurora Youth Soccer Club, Aurora Lawn Bowling Club, Pickleball Seniors Association, Aurora Barbarians RFC, Aurora Diggers, Aurora Ducks Swimming, Storm Volleyball Club, Central York Girls Hockey Association, Team Ontario Baseball, York Artistic Swimming Club, Redbirds Lacrosse Club, York Curling Club, the Aurora King Baseball Association, and Sport Aurora.

The Community Organization Discussion Guide was used during the sessions with the following organizations: Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, See What She Can Do, Canadian Tire Jump Start, Aurora Black Community Association, You Can Play, Aurora Chamber of Commerce, and the Centre for Immigrant & Community Services.

Extensive efforts were made to engage all LSO's and CSO's in the community, however some were unable to participate in the consultation and may have completed a community survey.

By adopting a deliberate and focused approach with each unique group, we ensured that feedback was thoughtfully gathered and aligned with the overall scope of the project. Given the constraints of a limited budget for this project, this intentionality was crucial, allowing us to consistently prioritize and revisit the project's scope to stay on track and maximize impact.

In addition to the discovery meetings and discussions that Optimus SBR hosted, the community was also invited to participate in an anonymous survey as it relates to sport in Aurora. The written survey resulted in 268 responses. A copy of the survey questions can be found in Attachment 1.

All of the information gathered from the stakeholder consultations and community survey were combined into a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis, which was a key component of the project to ensure a clear understanding of the current state related to sport in Aurora. The strengths identified include strong community support for sports programs, a commitment to diversity and inclusion, an engaged community, and positive momentum driven by the Town's leadership in sports. However, several weaknesses were highlighted, including barriers to participation, volunteer burnout, limited leadership development opportunities, challenges with administrative support for LSOs and CSOs, and issues surrounding facility availability and access.

The analysis also revealed significant opportunities, such as increasing sport tourism, expanding inclusive programs, providing leadership and volunteer training, promoting multilingual and culturally sensitive programming, and upgrading facilities to better meet community needs. Finally, potential threats were identified, including volunteer fatigue and attrition, economic barriers to participation, competition from other municipalities seeking to host sporting events, and a lack of sustained investment in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

The Sport Plan Update highlights the findings, insights, and recommendations gathered through comprehensive community engagement efforts (as described above) aimed at shaping the future of sports and recreation in the Town of Aurora. With a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, the Sport Plan Update reflects the voices and experiences of residents, LSOs, CSOs and community organizations. By identifying key priorities, challenges, and opportunities, the report serves as a foundation for developing strategies that will strengthen Aurora's sports and recreation landscape.

Through collaboration and intentional engagement, this report provides actionable insights to ensure the Town remains a leader in delivering accessible, inclusive, and high-quality sports and recreation opportunities for all.

The vision for the future of sport in Aurora serves as guidance

At the core of the Framework is our vision for the future. The vision serves as a guiding beacon, ensuring all actions align with our long-term goals and aspirations.

Aurora is a leader for inclusive, accessible sports, where all residences of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can engage in lifelong participation, supported by a resilient sports system and strong community partnerships.

This vision is important because it reflects Aurora's commitment to fostering an inclusive and accessible environment that ensures all residents, regardless of age, ability, or background, have the opportunity to participate in sports. By emphasizing lifelong participation, it supports physical and mental well-being while strengthening community bonds.

This vision is viable because Aurora already has a strong foundation of community engagement, recognized leadership in sports, and a commitment to diversity and inclusion. With strategic investments in partnerships, and capacity-building, the Town will continue to support a resilient sports system that enhances this vision, making it both achievable and impactful.

Advisory Committee Review

Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

September 19, 2024 – consultation with Optimus SBR

At this meeting, consultants from Optimus attended and gathered feedback from the committee on the distinction between sport and recreation, current support for local sport organizations, the pillars of the sport plan update and ensuring the plan is updated with a lens on diversity, equity and inclusion.

November 21, 2024 – Sport Plan Refresh – Status Update

At this meeting, staff presented the preliminary findings of the community consultation. The committee and staff discussed the management strategies, themes and implementation of the recommendations.

Legal Considerations

None.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report at this time. Future financial needs will be presented to Council through the regular budget approval process for Council's consideration.

Communications Considerations

Communications updated the sport page on Engage Aurora and helped to promote the survey referenced above. The Sport Plan Update will also be posted online. As the Sport Plan Update is implemented, communications will continue to support staff on its initiatives.

Climate Change Considerations

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

Link to Strategic Plan

The Sport Plan Update supports the following Strategic Plan goals and key objectives: Supporting an exceptional quality of life for all in its accomplishments in satisfying requirements in the following key objectives

- Invest in sustainable infrastructure
- Celebrating and promoting our culture
- Encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle
- Strengthening the fabric of our community

Alternative(s) to the Recommendation

1. Council may provide other direction.

Conclusions

The Community Services Department provides essential public services which are necessary for ensuring a high quality of both the natural and urban environments that provide a healthy, satisfying lifestyle for all Aurora citizens. Recreational and cultural/arts facilities, sports, fitness, creative and social programs should all be facilitated with the aim of providing the greatest possible participation. The goal of the Town is to enhance and improve the Aurora citizens quality of life through participation in activities of their choosing.

The Sport Plan Update sets the stage for Aurora to continue investing in sport as a vital component of community life, fostering collaboration with partners and supporting the

delivery of grassroots programs. By providing a clear framework, this plan will guide Staff, LSOs and CSOs in delivering high-quality, inclusive sports programs over the next five years. Anchored by a commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the Sport Plan Update focuses on four strategic goals: Leadership Development & Volunteer Support, Sport Participant Engagement, Community Sport Sustainability, and Sport Tourism. Together, these priorities aim to build a sustainable and inclusive sports system, promote healthier lifestyles, strengthen community connections, and position Aurora as a leader in sport delivery and tourism. With this comprehensive vision, the Town is well-prepared to enhance the sports experience for all residents while driving long-term growth and development in the community.

Aurora is a leader for inclusive, accessible sports, where all residences of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can engage in lifelong participation, supported by a resilient sports system and strong community partnerships.

Attachments

Attachment 1 - Stakeholder Discussion Guides and Community Survey Questions

Attachment 2 - Sport Plan Update – 2025-2029

Previous Reports

CMS24-023, Sport Plan Update No.5, (June 4, 2024)

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on January 23, 2025

Approvals

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer