



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

Town of Aurora

# General Committee Report

No. CMS21-035

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**Subject:** Sport Tourism Strategy Update 1

**Prepared by:** Erin Hamilton, Sport & Community Development Specialist

**Department:** Community Services

**Date:** November 2, 2021

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## Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS21-035 be received; and
2. That a Sport Tourism Strategy be developed to engage the local business and hotel industry, create a visitor experience package to support existing events and explore potential new events to bring into the community with the current assets and resources available to the Town; and
3. That staff further investigate opportunities to enhance current facilities that would expand the event hosting potential and opportunities to bring new events into the community; and
4. That staff report back to Council in Winter 2022.

## Executive Summary

The development of a Sport Tourism Strategy is a priority in both the Sport Plan and Economic Development Strategic Plan. This report provides information from the research and community engagement undertaken as well as resulting recommendation for the future direction of sport tourism in Aurora. Considerations include:

- Local Sport Organizations are currently hosting a series of sport events annually within the community without the lens of sport tourism when planning
- The capacity for event hosting a variety of sports is limited due to the current assets available

- The impact of sport tourism on the community assists in achieving the recommendations and priorities of multiple strategic plans within the Town of Aurora
- The vision, goals and capacity of community stakeholders is critical to the success of implementing a Sport Tourism Strategy
- Additional resources would be required to successfully implement and sustain a Sport Tourism Strategy

## **Background**

### **Sport Tourism Strategy**

The Sport Plan and Economic Development Strategic Plan identify the development of a Sport Tourism Strategy as a priority. In March 2021, Council participated in a Sport Tourism workshop facilitated by Sport Tourism Canada. An information report was submitted to Council on June 15, 2021, providing a summary of the information collected through the workshop in March. Based on the information outlined in the summary report, staff have been conducting research, engaging with stakeholders and reviewing options for the future direction of the sport tourism in the community.

## **Analysis**

**Local Sport Organizations are currently hosting a series of sporting events annually within the community without the lens of sport tourism when planning**

A number of Local Sport Organizations are currently hosting events that would fall within the definition of sport tourism (refer to Appendix A). These events are delivered independently with the use of Local Sport Organization volunteers and resources. The majority of these events take place in municipal facilities. The events are not delivered from the lens of sport tourism in terms of engaging local businesses, marketing and communication efforts and community wide recruitment and training of volunteers. Historically, attendees have used hotels in neighbouring municipalities due to a lack of options in Aurora.

With the majority of Local Sport Organizations being volunteer driven, there is a lack of capacity to implement additional initiatives that would allow the community to benefit from the impacts of hosting sporting events. As part of the consultation process with Local Sport Organizations (Refer to Appendix B), they were asked for input on the role

the Town could play to contribute to support sport tourism in the community. The local sport organizations had many common recommendations to work collaboratively on future events hosted in Aurora.

Through a formalized Sport Tourism Strategy, the Town can lead efforts in the following areas to enhance the customer experience and create a collaborative approach to delivering events:

- Partnership with local hotels to provide a reduced rate for overnight stays. If the attendees stay in Aurora, they are more likely to spend money at local businesses for food, sporting goods and take in community events and attractions.
- Notification to the local restaurants who can prepare to welcome an influx of visitors to the communities and offer discounts to attendees which will increase their experience and encourage them to return to future events.
- Collaborative marketing and communication efforts can increase awareness among the community which would result in an increase in spectators, enhanced awareness of opportunities to participate in sport and profiling hometown athletes.
- Providing attendees with an Aurora experience and awareness of the many events and experiences the community has to offer. Furthermore, the opening of Aurora Town Square will be a key attraction to draw visitors into the downtown core.

#### **The capacity for event hosting a variety of events is limited due to the current assets available**

Due to the location of Aurora within the GTA, the majority of event participants would need to travel from over 80 kilometers one way to consider staying overnight. As a result, provincial, national and international events would need to be the focus of a sport tourism strategy. The current assets available in Aurora (refer to Appendix C) limits the level of events that can be hosted in the following sports / facilities:

- Aquatics – swimming, diving and artistic swimming (25 metre pool too small and insufficient spectator seating)
- Gymnasium – volleyball, basketball (gymnasium is not sufficient in size and quantity, insufficient spectator seating capacity)
- Fields – rugby (insufficient quantity of fields in close proximity), lacrosse (no field with lacrosse lines and sufficient fields in close proximity), football (insufficient supporting amenities)

- Arenas – figure skating (arena size and insufficient spectator seating capacity), hockey (ACC, suitable up to Junior level)

Some facilities require significant capital investments to bring events into the community. This includes a larger, enhanced aquatics facility, triple gymnasium with specific supporting specifications and larger rink with more seating capacity. Other sports require smaller capital investments to support event hosting in the community. Examples of this include lines on a lacrosse field, additional amenities for outdoor facilities such as washroom and changeroom facilities on site.

Staff would seek out opportunities to bid on additional sporting events that could be hosted within the current assets of the Town. This would include efforts in the area of some field and arena sports (i.e. soccer, baseball and softball). In addition, opportunities for events that could use our extensive trail system (i.e. – cross country running). Identified opportunities to bid on events would require a formal approach including the engagement of specific community stakeholders and partners that would play a role in hosting. A formal approach could include steps such as the formation of a committee, seeking letters of support or partnership agreements.

### **The impact of sport tourism on the community assists in achieving recommendations and priorities in multiple strategic plans within the Town of Aurora**

Sport Tourism Canada identifies the “triple bottom line” approach which evaluates the economic, social/cultural and sustainability outcomes gained when hosting an event. Identifying how the outcomes of events align with the vision and priorities of the Town can assist in determining why sport tourism and why host specific events.

In review of the Sport Plan, Economic Development Strategic Plan and Town of Aurora Strategic Plan, a focus on sport tourism can contribute to achieving the over all recommendations and priorities within each. Appendix D provides an overview of potential opportunities for sport tourism to contribute to the municipal plans. In order to align a Sport Tourism Strategy with municipal plans, a review of internal policies and procedures would take place.

The Economic Impact of sport tourism includes ‘*heads in beds*’ and an opportunity to look at vacancies at local hotels to secure events that can bring business into the community. As well, focus on building awareness of small businesses in the community through promotions and engagement in sporting events.

The social / cultural impact of sport tourism includes the development of youth through volunteerism, an opportunity to collaborate with cultural performers to enhance the

experience of participants and secure female only events to educate, support and promote females in sport.

A formal Sport Tourism Strategy can support the transfer of knowledge between events, training volunteers that can support multiple events, to host sports that are not currently offered in the community and potentially lead to the long-term offering of a program that will meet the needs of an underserved group.

**The vision, goals and capacity of community stakeholders is critical to the success of implementing a Sport Tourism Strategy**

Economic Development and Community Services town staff identified key community stakeholders in sport tourism and identified an avenue to seek input on their vision, perspectives, and role. To establish a foundation in sport tourism, the following stakeholder categories were consulted:

- Local Sport Organizations
- Neighbouring municipalities
- Non-municipal facility providers
- Neighbourhood Network
- Tourism and Business Support Organizations

The following key themes were identified during consultations with key stakeholders:

Stakeholder Group	Key Themes
Local Sport Organizations (full report in Appendix B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exposure of sport opportunities, competing in home town, profiling local athletes, community pride</li><li>• Lack of competition caliber facilities in the community, lose athletes that can never compete in Aurora</li><li>• Volunteers primarily drawn from local sport community, opportunity for collective approach</li><li>• Opportunity for community collaboration, business engagement, celebrate what Aurora has to offer</li><li>• Town can be the link to the community and businesses, enhance the visitor experience, create policy to identify roles, expertise to support bidding</li><li>• Local sport organizations can lead field of play event execution, creating and securing events into the community</li></ul>

Neighbouring municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not have or have outdated sport tourism strategies</li> <li>• Interested in furthering discussions to identify opportunities to collaborate in sport tourism initiatives</li> </ul>
Non-municipal facility providers	<p>St. Andrew's College</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support use of facilities when not in use by College and user groups. Primarily outdoor fields would be available during summers and weekends</li> <li>• Willing to negotiate permit rates for sport tourism events.</li> <li>• Would further discussions about students volunteering for sport tourism events</li> <li>• Would further discussions about supporting the organization of sport tourism events if hosted at the College</li> <li>• Would like to collaborate with the Town on sport tourism events they bring to the College</li> </ul> <p>School Boards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would support sport tourism if the current user groups agree to cancelling permits during specified time. The school boards would not make that decision for user groups and would require the Town to engage in those discussion with user groups. (NOTE: school board permits are at full capacity between September and June)</li> <li>• Encourage the municipality to consider future gymnasium infrastructure that would meet the training and competition needs of the sport user groups</li> <li>• Current gymnasium assets through the school boards have minimal capacity to host provincial or above competitions. If events were to be hosted, there will be no spectator seating to support the visitors that come with the participants</li> <li>• Any fees for permits would be as outlined in the school board permit policy for municipalities and local non-profit organizations</li> <li>• Permits are not currently issued during Winter Break, March Break and summer holidays after 6:00 p.m. Any requests for permits during this time would require a special request</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Would engage further with colleagues at the board to engage students as volunteers for sport tourism related events in the community</li></ul>
Neighbourhood Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Would collaborate and partner with the Town and sport community on a Sport Tourism Strategy</li><li>• Would promote sport tourism related volunteer opportunities through regular monthly school visits</li><li>• Actively profile sport through website</li><li>• Sport is one of the top three choices for majority of high school students when seeking volunteer opportunities</li></ul>
Tourism and Business Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Due to the timelines of hotels opening in relation to the pandemic, insufficient information is available to understand the ideal times to bring new events into the community and capacity to accommodate existing events. Further discussion will take place in the next phase of the strategy development</li><li>• Further discussion and potential collaboration will be explored with various groups including the Aurora Economic Development Corporation, the Aurora Business Improvement Association, the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and Central Counties Tourism</li></ul>

### **Additional resources would be required to successfully implement and sustain a Sport Tourism Strategy**

To be successful in the implementation of a Sport Tourism Strategy additional funding and human resource support would be required. Human resources support would focus on partnership development with the business community including restaurants and hotels, communication efforts to build awareness among Town staff, Council and the general community of the sport events taking place on an annual basis and a coordinate approach to volunteer recruitment and training. Furthermore, the position to support and lead efforts to bid on events to bring into the community and support the development of a transfer of knowledge program where a coordinated effort to share resources can take place.

Future financial resources would be used for:

- Event bidding
- Economic impact assessments of events hosted in the community
- Sport Tourism Canada membership and annual conference

- Volunteer training to support sporting events in the community
- Marketing and communication materials to build awareness of sport events in the community
- Visitor experience initiatives that would contribute to making Aurora a sought after destination

## **Advisory Committee Review**

A Sport Plan update was provided to the Community Advisory Committee on February 18, 2021 including information about the status of a Sport Tourism Strategy.

A brief Sport Tourism Strategy update was provided at the September 27, 2021 Aurora Economic Development Corporation meeting. A more detailed presentation is scheduled for the October 26, 2021.

## **Legal Considerations**

None.

## **Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Should Council approve the creation of a Sport Tourism Strategy for the Town of Aurora, this strategy will include a comprehensive financial plan outlining the financial implications of its delivery, as well as any impacts to the Town's existing levels of services.

## **Communications Considerations**

Should Council approve the creation of a Sport Tourism Strategy for the Town of Aurora, the strategy would include a comprehensive communications plan to ensure that appropriate engagement, and subsequent marketing and promotion, occurred. The Town would use "engage" and "inform" as the levels of engagement associated with this process.

## **Link to Strategic Plan**

The development of a Sport Tourism Strategy supports the following Strategic Plan goals and objectives:



*Supporting an exceptional quality of life for all* in its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the following key objectives within these goal statements:

- Celebrating and promoting our culture
- Encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle
- Promoting service accountability, excellence and innovation

*Enabling a diverse, creative, and resilient community* in its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the following key objectives within these goal statements:

- Promote economic opportunities that facilitate the growth of Aurora as a desirable place to do business
- Supporting small business and encouraging a more sustainable business environment

## **Alternative(s) to the Recommendation**

1. The community continue to host sport events with no formal Sport Tourism Strategy developed.
2. A formal strategy is developed to support the current sporting events in the community on volunteers, business engagement and marketing and communication efforts.
3. A formal strategy is developed to invest in capital infrastructure that would allow the Town of Aurora to bid and host larger national and international events.

## **Conclusions**

The development of a Sport Tourism Strategy will address the priorities contained within the Sport Plan and Economic Development Strategic Plan. Significant consultation has taken place to understand the vision of community stakeholders and how to move forward in a collaborative approach. A formal Sport Tourism Strategy will enhance the visitor experience, encourage repeat visits and ongoing participation in local sporting events. Sport tourism can be a catalyst to showing the rest of Ontario what Aurora has to offer in terms of restaurants, special events and the new Aurora Town Square.

## **Attachments**

Appendix A – Sport Event Resume

Appendix B – Local Sport Organization Workshop Summary Report

Appendix C – Assets to Host Sport Tourism Events

Appendix D – Triple Bottom Line Impact Review

## **Previous Reports**

CMS21-023, Sport Tourism Summary Report, June 15, 2021

## **Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on October 14, 2021

## **Approvals**

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer