



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

Town of Aurora

# General Committee Report

No. CMS21-038

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**Subject:** Disc Golf Opportunities in Aurora

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

**Department:** Community Services

**Date:** November 16, 2021

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## Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS21-038 be received; and
2. That Highland Gate property be identified as the preferred location for a future nine-hole disc golf course following additional consultation with the community and Highland Gate Ratepayers Association; and
3. That a preferred operating model for a future nine-hole disc golf course be municipally operated; and
4. That a new capital project for the design and construction of a nine-hole disc golf course be included in the 2023 capital budget for consideration.

## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of research conducted on disc golf courses and operating models around Ontario as well as considerations for land space to build a disc golf course in Aurora.

- There are several factors that contribute to building a successful disc golf course in the community.
- Operating models for disc golf courses around Ontario vary and can be dependent on the presence of a disc golf club or group in the community.
- Highland Gate is the location of choice after various land options were reviewed.
- Financial and human resources will be required to build and maintain a disc golf course

## Background

On January 26, 2021, a delegation was made to Council requesting an opportunity to discuss how the addition of disc golf could contribute to the community and provide a COVID-19 safe sport option for 2021 and beyond.

A motion was put forward on June 22, 2021, for staff to investigate feasibility, operating models and locations to build a disc golf course in Aurora.

## Analysis

**There are several factors that contribute to building a successful disc golf course in the community.**

The investment into a disc golf course goes beyond finding a piece of land and building the course as there are several other factors that will contribute to whether a course is used frequently by the community. Town staff met with five municipalities to learn about their disc golf courses. Municipalities included Bracebridge, Huntsville, Peterborough, Midland and Orillia. Furthermore, Town staff met with Tilt Bridge Consulting and community member Todd Billo for insight into factors that should be considered when building a disc golf course.

To support the development of a disc golf course on a piece of land, adequate and properly placed signage and parking can impact the experience of potential users. Taking a similar approach to a golf course can create a welcoming space, ensure safe use of the space and enhance the user experience. This would include sufficient parking, welcome and entrance signage, directional signage and signs at each hole to identify the hole number, hole length and a visual image of the hole. Without proper signage, users can get disoriented, throw discs in the wrong direction creating a safety issue and frustration among users. Those communities that were consulted through research, identified lack of signage and building a course that does not meet the skill level of the target market and general community as key factors in lack of community use of their disc golf course.

Identifying the primarily target market and building a course that aligns with that market is critical to success. Disc golf courses vary greatly in size and complexity and without an understanding of the market, a disc golf course could sit empty year-round. Effectively reaching the primary market and their experience will be critical to the success of a course.

Building community awareness and sufficient education about the sport and course, can positively impact usage rates. Some communities engaged through research have not invested in any promotion of the disc golf course which has resulted in low usage rates. Knowledge of the disc golf course has been based on word of mouth. A well planned and executed communications campaign through Town channels can increase awareness and interest to reach more of the community. Furthermore, opportunities to educate the community through try-it sessions where they are provided information about disc golf and taught some of the basic skills can encourage usage.

**Operating models for disc golf courses around Ontario vary and can be dependent on the presence of a disc golf club or group in the community.**

There are three main models for operating disc golf courses in Ontario. Research has shown that disc golf courses built on municipal property are typically offered free of charge for usage as it operates like a playground model. However, a fee may be applied if permitted for a tournament.

1. Municipal Property, Municipally Operated / Maintained - Disc golf course on municipal property and operated/maintained by the municipality
  - Municipality takes full responsibility for building, maintaining and operating the course
2. Municipal Property, Community Group Operated / Maintained Disc golf course on municipal property and operated/maintained by a community group (i.e. – disc golf club), except grass cutting which is done by the municipality
  - Municipality identifies and provides the land for the disc golf course
  - Local group / disc golf club builds the course
  - Local group / disc golf club fixes any broken cages
  - Local disc golf clubs use course and run leagues at their own discretion on courses without a permit or fee
  - Municipality conducts all course inspections
3. Private property/Private Operated - Disc golf course on private property and operated by the private business
  - Privately run, generally with a fee to use

The following is a summary of pros and cons to each model:

Model	Pros	Cons
1. Municipal Property, Municipally Operated / Maintained	Ensure all safety measures are in place  Oversee all maintenance to ensure it is done within a timely manner  Build and maintain focus on a identified target user	Additional cost to maintain course  Responsible for all communication and promotion for usage
2. Municipal Property, Community Group Operated / Maintained	Disc golf club brings existing clientele  Remove cost and responsibility of maintaining	Potential issues with local group and club to meet municipal standards
3. Private Property, Privately Operated	No cost to the municipality to build and maintain the course	Fee structure for participation which could be a barrier for some community members  Course design may not meet the needs of the community as a whole to encourage and support life long physical activity.

**Highland Gate is the location of choice after various land options were reviewed.**

At this time, only two suitable locations have been identified:

- Highland Gate
- Aurora Community Arboretum

Highland Gate Parklands is the preferred location for a new nine-hole disc golf course. Previously a golf course, the setting is conducive to disc golf. It is not a loud, active sport and use would be less than typical golf.

The addition of disc golf as an amenity would need to be presented to the Highland Gate Rate Payers as they played an active role in the Memorandum of Understanding and park design in which the lands are to be developed. There is no parking with some potential for limited spots near Highland Gate and Bathurst, otherwise on the street.

The Aurora Community Arboretum lands were also considered as an opportunity to construct a disc golf course as they flow through and around Lambert Willson Park/Aurora Family Leisure Complex. However, to facilitate the layout of the course it would require mowing of large tracks of land that are currently in a natural state. The Arboretum Master Plan outlines all future naturalization/trail initiatives on the parkland and the inclusion of disc golf would not allow for important planting and habitat creation projects to be completed.

**Financial and human resources will be required to build and maintain a disc golf course.**

Building a disc golf course will include an initial cost to build as well as ongoing maintenance cost and promotional initiatives.

The initial cost to build would be up to \$ 26,000, which includes design costs, tee pad, disc golf cages and signage throughout the course. In addition, there would be potential engineering and traffic analyst costs to address parking in the area.

Once the course is built, this will result in an increase to the level of service for maintenance of the course, mowing etc.

**Advisory Committee Review**

N/A

**Legal Considerations**

None.

**Financial Implications**

The estimated initial cost for the construction of a nine-hole disc golf course is \$26,000. As this proposal is new, it currently is not included in the Town's budget. Should Council be supportive of this proposal, staff will include a new capital project for the construction of a 9-hole disc golf course in the 2023 capital budget for its consideration. In addition, all future replacement costs for the disc golf course will be included in the rehabilitation & replacement capital plan.

Furthermore, all incremental operating and maintenance costs for the proposed golf course will be included in the upcoming year's multi-year operating budget for Council's consideration.

## **Communications Considerations**

The Town will use "engage" as the level of engagement for this project. Should Council approve this, the Town will implement an engagement process through its engagement portal Engage Aurora to gather community and stakeholder input.

## **Link to Strategic Plan**

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

- Encourage an active and healthy lifestyle

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

1. Receive report, further discussion by staff will no longer take place.
2. Direct staff to revisit alternative lands to build a disc golf course.
3. Direct staff to review the demand for disc golf in the community as part of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan review.

## **Conclusions**

The addition of a disc golf course in Aurora can contribute and support the priorities of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Furthermore, it is a safe activity that encourages physical activity for all ages. As a free activity, it is accessible to many community members and can be used year-round.

## **Attachments**

None

## **Previous Reports**

None

## **Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on October 28, 2021

## **Approvals**

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer