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Town of Aurora

General Committee Report

No. CMS20-025

Subject: Aquatic Feasibility Study - Update

Prepared by: Lisa Warth, Manager, Recreation

Department: Community Services

Date: November 3, 2020

Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS20-025 be received.

Executive Summary

The Aquatic Feasibility Study (“the study”) developed by Isaac Sports Group LLC (“ISG”), is now complete. This report provides findings on the community survey along with next steps in determining what type of aquatic facility could be considered.

- A summary of the results from an online aquatic feasibility survey and the community presentations reveals strong support for a new aquatic facility
- Next Steps include further discussion on Sport Tourism in the Town of Aurora

Background

The Aquatic Feasibility Study was awarded to and has been completed by Isaac Sports Group.

Stuart Isaac presented an overview of the feasibility study to Council on July 7, 2020 and reviewed several options and high level costing (both capital and operating) to build a new aquatic facility in the Town of Aurora, either as an addition to the SARC or a standalone facility. At that time it was noted that additional community consultation (presentation and survey) would be completed before staff return to Council with an update.

Analysis

A summary of the results from an online aquatic feasibility survey and the community presentations reveals strong support for a new aquatic facility

An online survey was posted from September 14 to October 2 at engageaurora.ca, the Town's online community engagement site. There were 109 responses to the survey and highlights include:

- 88% of survey respondents were Aurora residents
- In response to “how many times per month do you or member of household use a Town of Aurora pool”, responses ranged from 0-20.
- 43% of respondents indicated they use aquatic facilities outside of Aurora. When asked which pools they use, 30% of respondents indicated they use pools in the Town of Newmarket. When asked where and why other pools are used, responses included:
 - Private pools (for lessons and leisure)
 - Other municipal outdoor pools
 - Other municipal indoor pools
 - Hotel swimming pools
 - Training facilities such as the Markham Pan Am Centre and the Toronto Pan Am pool
- When asked, on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being most important, how important are aquatic facilities to your household, 80% responded that aquatic facilities are very important.
- When asked about the current level of satisfaction with current Town of Aurora aquatic facilities, the answers were as follows:
 - 11% indicated they were very satisfied
 - 24% indicated they were satisfied
 - 52% indicated they were somewhat satisfied
 - 13% indicated they were unsatisfied
- When asked to what degree do you oppose or support the Town of Aurora developing new aquatics facilities, respondents answered as follows:
 - 66% said they strongly support new aquatic facilities
 - 25% responded they support new aquatic facilities
 - 6% responded they oppose new aquatic facilities
 - 3% indicated they were strongly opposed.

- When asked to what degree respondents supported or opposed an increase in user fees to support the operation a new aquatic facility, the answers were as follows:
 - 31% strongly support an increase in user fees
 - 46% support an increase in user fees
 - 15% oppose an increase in user fees
 - 8% strongly oppose an increase in user fees
- When asked what type of facility respondents feel would best serve the community, the answers were as follows:
 - 56% answered a 50 metre competition pool
 - 18% answered a 50 metre training pool
 - 20% answered a 25 metre pool
 - 6% answered no new facility
- When asked about the importance of the economic spinoff that a 50 metre event pool could bring to the Town, answers were as follows:
 - 58% responded very important
 - 24% responded somewhat important
 - 10% responded not very important
 - 4% responded unimportant
 - 3% responded very unimportant
 - 1% had no opinion

In addition to the survey, two community presentations were held on August 20, 2020. These sessions were held virtually via Zoom and 48 people attended between the 2 sessions. The presentation was lead by the consultant, Stuart Isaac and included an overview of the Feasibility study, including the various options of aquatic facilities, programming and operation, and capital and operating costs.

Feedback from these presentations were positive, with several participants indicating support for a new aquatic facility. Comments included questions about the location of a new facility and suggestions for specific design elements (such as washrooms on deck).

Previous to this, several other consultations took place as outlined in the July 7, 2020 General Committee report.

Next Steps include further discussion on Sport Tourism in the Town of Aurora

In order to determine the size and type of aquatic facility to build and operate, the Town needs to have further discussion on Sport Tourism in general. With other sport and

recreation facilities currently under consideration including a gymnasium addition to the SARC and sports field development, the Town needs to determine which facilities to invest in, to drive sport tourism.

Investment in sport facilities will also require Council to make a decision on service levels and affordability. The size and type of future facilities will depend on the Town's desire to further Sport Tourism. A 50 metre pool is not required, nor sustainable for only community use (ie: learn to swim, leisure swims, water sports, aquatic exercise, training etc.). A 50 metre pool would only be built if Council wanted to provide a facility for elite athlete training, and hosting high level competitions along with some community use.

The Town will not be successful in the sport tourism realm without suitable facilities. Additionally, the Town may want to explore potential partnerships for the construction and operation of any facility capable of hosting high level sporting events as there will be a Regional benefit to having these facilities.

14 letters of support have been received with respect to a 50 metre competition pool. These letters have been received from national and provincial aquatic organizations, several regional and local aquatic user groups and high school swim teams.

The location of any new facility will also need to be considered, as the Town's land inventory is dwindling, and options to purchase new land are also limited. The Aquatic Feasibility Study states that as an addition to the SARC, 2.25 acres of land are needed for 25 metre pool and 4.25 acres are needed for a 50 metre event pool and as a standalone facility, 4 acres are needed for a 25 metre pool and 6.5 acres are needed for a 50 metre facility.

Both the Sport Plan and the Economic Development Strategy address the development of a Sport Tourism strategy. This will have to include the proper facilities and other amenities to host large scale national and international events. It may be useful for Council to participate in a workshop where the benefits and risks of Sport Tourism and investments in facilities can be further explored.

Advisory Committee Review

Staff attended both the June 20 and October 10, 2019 meetings of the Community Advisory Committee along with the consultant at the June 20, 2019 meeting. Discussion and feedback was received on various topics including potential locations for a new facility, green technologies and efficiencies for any new operating plants.

Legal Considerations

None

Financial Implications

This report does not result in any financial implications for the Town.

Another important next step in the Town's exploration of a new aquatics facility will be its development of a funding strategy for this project.

This project may be eligible for grants such as the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, however projects need to be at a "shovel ready" stage.

Communications Considerations

As discussions on Sports Tourism and about a potential new aquatic facility take shape, the community will be informed through various means as appropriate to the situation. Where engagement is required, Communications will organize for appropriate engagement solutions, and will share information as the process unfolds.

Link to Strategic Plan

This project supports Objectives #4 – Encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle under the Community pillar of the strategic plan.

Alternative(s) to the Recommendation

Not applicable

Conclusions

The survey results indicate that respondents are in favour of building and operating a new aquatic facility, even if it results in small tax levy increase. Survey results also indicate that only 35% of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the current facilities, indicating a desire for a new facility.

The Aquatic Feasibility Study and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan indicates that at minimum, an additional 25 metre pool is needed for the Town of Aurora to meet the current and future demands of the Aurora community.

Council will need to make a decision on the level of service and investment they are willing to make with respect to a new aquatic facility. A 25 metre pool will serve the needs of the immediate community but limits the economic impacts and benefits a larger, competition pool would provide.

A Council workshop on Sport Tourism would be a useful exercise to assist Council in making these decisions and could be scheduled in early 2021.

Attachments

None

Previous Reports

CMS20-016 – Aquatics Feasibility Study – July 7, 2020

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on October 15, 2020

Approvals

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer