

King adopts Parks, Recreation & Culture Master Plan

By Mark Pavilons

King's newly adopted Parks, Recreation & Culture Master Plan will allow the Township to keep pace with population growth and meet recreational needs for its residents.

Staff worked tirelessly on the new plans (separated into Parks & Forestry, and Facilities), reaching out to the public for their input. Online surveys, meetings, interviews with council and staff and public consultations all took place prior to this summer.

The posting on the website speaking.king.ca generated many participants. Feedback related to parks identified that 50% of people were generally satisfied with current services, while the remainder felt improvements were needed in both service levels and amenities.

Respondents felt the current amenities were below average.

A meeting was held in May at the municipal centre to gather more input. From that meeting, those in attendance generally supported current parks services, but identified areas where levels could increase, relating to certain demographics, especially youth and seniors. Respondents wanted to see more money invested in existing facilities and new construction.

Staff will continue to use the plans as a guiding document over the next five years.

It will become the framework that will guide the Parks, Recreation & Culture Department's future strategic direction for the delivery of parks, forestry and facility services and the allocation of financial resources, according to the report prepared by director Chris Fasciano. He stressed that it may not be possible to implement all of the recommendations over that period, which are dependent on economic conditions and funding.

The new plans emphasize building on existing partnerships in the community. The recreation facility strategy is based on an understanding of community need, in relation to being fiscally responsible.

Financing the direction in the plans are dependent on a number of factors, not the least of which is developing a fiscally sustainable implementation strategy that aligns with council's defined priorities. The department has to leverage all sources of funding, including taxes, cash-in-lieu of parking contributions, development charges, debentures, etc.

Fasciano stressed the Master Plan will play a key role in identifying annual and long-term priorities. It's a resource document to help inform council and staff decisions, not a cast-in-stone strategy.

It will be a valuable tool for staff in preparing annual business plans, grant applications, general program planning and a vehicle for the integration of the ICSP priorities into day-to-day department operations, Fasciano wrote. The plan will also serve as a resource document for developers and community partners interested in creating new opportunities in the Township.

The Plan needs to be viewed as a guide, one which may evolve as needs in the community change and as financial resources fluctuate.