

Agricultural Society urges saving the old arena

Over the past few weeks, there have been a number of write-ups referring to announcements with respect to the future of the old Schomberg Arena, including the fact that the King Township council had voted to proceed with an Request for Proposal (RFP) process with consideration of only a brewery/commercialized retail site and that of an aging centre development on the existing site. In one newspaper it said 'End of an Arena' but it's not yet. At that point of time, the Schomberg Agricultural Society's 'Expression of Interest' (EOI) proposal was not being considered as an option going forward.

The future of the Schomberg Community and Agricultural Arena is still up in the air.

Recently, due to a revised vote at council, it is with great excitement that the Schomberg Agricultural Society has been now included in the formal RFP process that allows us to submit a proposal for the 'repurposed usage of the Schomberg Arena.'

As for a bit of history on this arena it starts with the land being donated by the Wray family. A committee was selected and the fund raising began. The Agricultural Society had an agreement that they would be able to use the arena for the Fair and other agricultural events. This led to the Agricultural Society applying for a grant to aid in the construction of the arena in the amount of \$12,500. There were four massive car draws held by the Schomberg Lions Club which helped raise \$37,000, almost half the cost of the construction of the arena. Canvassing brought in \$37,000 more, activities large and small raised another \$6,000. Surplus from 1962-63 operation booth and ice was \$8,000.

The arena was built on the policy of 'pay as you go' because the committee had no borrowing power. Construction could only be done when money was available. So fundraising was ongoing. Many, many volunteers helped with the construction of this arena and helped keep costs down.

In 1960, the grading of the property, the front or cement block portion was built. In 1961, there was enough money to purchase and erect the steel or skating part of the building. In 1962 the task of getting the ice area ready and raising funds to purchase a freezing plant and accessories was done. There was about seven miles of pipe laid over the 75 by 175 foot ice area.

The first skating took place on Nov. 1, 1962 at the open house. Seats had to be built and cement laid over the freezing pipes but this had to wait another year until money was raised for it. On Nov. 15, 1963 the arena was ready for the official opening. The original figure for building the arena was about \$75,000, but building costs had exceeded \$100,000 and yet it stood debt free.

Many will not know why the word 'Agricultural' is in the name of the arena.

It is because the Schomberg Agricultural Society donated a one-time grant that they received towards the costs to build the arena. The arena was the centre of the community for 48 years for hockey, figure skating, curling, the Schomberg Spring Fair Homecraft Centre, Lions Car draws, weddings, receptions, church meetings and almost all other events in Schomberg for all those years.

With the opening of the Trisan Centre, focus was placed there. However, it soon became apparent to many of the community based groups that the old arena that had served so well for 48 years was still needed. There has been much discussion with respect to the funding needs of the Township to offset the cost of the Trisan Centre.

Should this come at the expense of losing an important fixture in the Schomberg and surrounding community?

The Schomberg Agricultural Society, with the support of many volunteer groups in Schomberg, is making a proposal to the Township that the arena should be re-purposed for a wide range of community uses focused around, but not limited to, the continued use by the Agricultural Society for the annual Spring Fair and the possibility for many other agricultural and community uses with the full synergy of the arena and fair grounds together.

Of note, the Schomberg Agricultural Society, now in its 163rd year, has more than 150 current members and volunteers. The board is comprised of the executive plus 12 directors. The secretary-manager and treasurer are appointed positions. Together with approximately 50 committees, we orchestrate one of the province's best agricultural fairs. We also participate in many other community events throughout the year.

This reflects a unique strength of the Schomberg Agricultural Society.

We are very proud of our society and the people who represent it, especially our junior members who are our future and our senior members who are there to mentor and guide us in the right direction.

Specifically, the proposal represents a Schomberg Agricultural Society Fair and Agriplex plan.

The vision is to be a society with a broad base of agricultural support with a first class facility, well operated and maintained.

With a mandate to continue to serve the membership through the energy, dedication and expertise of the past and present membership by developing and expanding from the longstanding Schomberg Agricultural Fair over the many years, to become a high quality, year-round facility combining the Agricultural Fair and the new Agriplex. It will become a focal point in King Township, upholding our agricultural heritage and traditions and serving the needs of the community in a responsible and safe

environment through education, programs and the use of the facilities.

The development of the Schomberg Agricultural Society Fair and Agriplex plan would provide:

? Expand to 365 days/year business model incorporating arena and fair grounds.

? Strong community provider: long term community ?hub? that facilitates King Township agricultural/sporting/equine events.

??It provides a business partnership with King Township and commercial partners (on-site retail partners).

The benefits are that it would keep it local, fill the need for an agricultural ?community? facility. Would offer year-round usage rental revenue opportunities.

It would also provide a member riding arena, space for community/seniors' groups.

It could be used for the farmers' market, a cattle penning/sorting/working facility. It could be home to auctions, tractor pulls, youth crafts, 4-H events, indoor sports such as soccer or volleyball.

The Schomberg Agricultural Society Fair and Agriplex business plan and strategic long-term business plan provides sustainability of sufficient economic viability to support the needs of members of the community and revenue generation to support the King Township financial requirements over an extended period.

The proposal makes full usage of the combined fair grounds and the inclusion of the Agriplex (old arena) to fulfill its mandate to the community.

There is still a lot of work to be done and no decisions on the future of the arena have been made. It is clearly in the hands of the community to show support for the Schomberg Agricultural Society /Agriplex proposal by speaking directly with your area council representative to let your views of support be heard.

With the support of the community and the Township, our proposal will save the arena and bring first class agricultural based activity to King Township.

The Board of Directors

Schomberg Agricultural Society