

King growth puts pressure on parks department staff

By Mark Pavilons

As King continues to grow, so do the demands on the municipality's parks, recreation and culture department.

The coming year will be a critical one for the department, according to a report received by King council recently.

Chris Fasciano, director of parks, recreation and culture, said his department and staff can meet the current demands by stretching their resources to the limit. But, as new subdivisions come on stream, new parks are created and more community events are added to the annual roster, they'll need more money and staff. To lessen the impact on taxes, costs will need to be recouped from user fees. "Staffing, be it full-time or part-time, or contractual service companies, will have a financial implication," he wrote. "It is the opinion of staff at this time that the desired level of service expressed by council and the community can most likely be attained in the next couple of years with contract and student staff increases, thus limiting the overall impact on residents, while maximizing the value for dollar provided.

"As the needs of the municipality grow and evolve the department faces more and more pressure to deliver services at a significantly higher standard within the constraints of existing resources."

Department staff handle everything from grass cutting, street scaping, sports field maintenance, tree and trail maintenance and setting up and taking down of structures for community events.

That involves some 29 soccer fields and eight baseball diamonds; 190 acres of parks; inspecting 14 playground structures; 22 kilometres of trails and providing winter maintenance to municipal buildings.

In the coming year, Fasciano noted King will add some 20 acres of parkland in King City, Nobleton and Schomberg. As well, there will be a new full size soccer field at Holy Name Catholic school.

New development in King has caused a need for more street scaping, plantings, etc. Roundabouts within the Metrus (Nobleton) development has increased his department's garden maintenance duties.

Council has been reluctant to add staff due to the costs, so the department has had to look at other ways to meet the demand. To demonstrate the costs, staff evaluated their services and came up with a cost, should the Township hire an outside contractor. Staff estimated that grass cutting, soccer field maintenance, sidewalk plowing and gardening would cost the Township roughly \$80,000 annually just to accommodate growth.

The parks division needs roughly \$12,600 more to meet current service levels.

"Staff resources have been pushed to a tipping point and future additions of infrastructure and responsibilities without the corresponding level of resources to maintain the current level of service will have a negative impact on our operations, our local user groups and the community as a whole," Fasciano reported. "That being said, our staff are also cognizant that now may not be the time to consider full time staff to accomplish our short-term goals, and must consider ways to phase in service increases as the municipality grows and changes."