

Curling Club asks Township to reconsider fee hike for 2015

By Angela Gismondi

Fees and charges are going up in the Township and the King Curling Club is concerned about how the increase will affect their membership.

Mike Sidon, president of the King Curling Club, was at the committee of the whole meeting Dec. 15 to ask council not to approve the proposed 2015 rate for curling ice.

“The rate increase is excessive, unfair when compared to other Township organizations, and may damage the future viability of curling in our community,” said Sidon. “Although our club has been extremely successful in recruiting members in the first three years, our membership rate has started to drop off. It is a demographic experienced by other rural clubs in our area where a decrease of 20 per cent is being experienced. If we pass on the proposed increase to our members we would certainly have a greater loss in membership and the Township in return would have a concurrent loss in revenue.”

The proposed fee changes are designed to ensure that the cost of providing a specific service is fully or partially recovered from the user of that service while minimizing the cost and effect to all tax and user rate payers. A number of the proposed rates have been increased to reflect the fact that the cost of providing these programs and services is increasing.

“One of the major drivers is the utility cost is increasing,” explained Chris Fasciano, director of parks, recreation and culture for the Township of King. “The cost of hydro is going up.”

For most fees, staff recommended that the current fee be increased by the annual CPI Index, which was determined to be an increase of 1.6 per cent over last year. Once approved, the new fees and charges bylaw and the new user fees would be effective January 1, 2015.

The net effective rate increase to the curling club would be 13.82 per cent for the 2015-16 season, Sidon explained. The proposed retail rate increase, which is intended to represent the operating cost, is to be increased by 6.23 per cent. The rate for the club is to be subsidized by the Township by 25 per cent, however, that subsidy for most groups has been dropped from 30 per cent from the previous year to 25 per cent this year. The proposed net effective rate increase to the curling club would be 13.82 per cent.

“We are seeking rates that will allow us to stay competitive as compared to other curling clubs and can accept the rate increase offered to the other programs using the Trisan Centre such as hockey, where the retail rate hike will be four per cent, which is half that for curling, and for fitness and other classes where the rates have not been increased at all or by the by 1.6 per cent which is the CPI rate increase the finance department has applied to other services,” said Sidon, adding 10 years ago, there were 245 curling clubs in Ontario and today there are 198. “I am looking for council's support to either keep the subsidy at 30 per cent or work with staff to arrive at some other meaningful reduction to the proposed rate increase.”

What caught Mayor Steve Pellegrini's attention was the fact that the rate increases were different across the board. He asked that the rates be more consistent.

He added that rates for Cold Creek Conservation Area should be increased.

“I think we're missing a golden opportunity for rates to go up at Cold Creek,” said Pellegrini. “I see the potential there for more revenue. It's very well rented.”

Fasciano said that before increasing the rates at Cold Creek, the usage needs to be maximized. Although it is well rented, it is not full yet.

Councillor Bill Cober asked why the subsidy for local groups has been decreased.

Fasciano explained council approved a model which sees the subsidies phased in over three years, starting at 35 per cent and decreasing by five per cent each year.

Councillor Linda Pabst asked her fellow councillors to consider phasing in the subsidy a little more and supporting a 27.5 per cent subsidy for the King Curling Club for 2015.

“I don't want our curling fees to exceed to such a level that we're going to lose more curlers,” said Pabst. “They are new to King and I think we should help make them successful. Every new facility goes through growing pains and this is a way we can help them get through their growing pains. It's a minor thing that would help them and I'm hoping I can get some support from council.”

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti said he would need more information before he could support that.

“I'm a little concerned about changing staff's recommendations without knowing how it will affect other groups,” said Mortelliti, adding it may open up a can of worms. “If baseball or soccer hears we were considering a reduction, they might want to get in on it too? if we do this for one, don't we have to do it for all?”

Councillor Debbie Schaefer pointed out that Councillor Pabst's request to increase the subsidy for the curling club means the club

would be at a higher level of subsidy than other groups in the Township. She doesn't want the taxpayer to have to pay for the curling club's increased subsidy.

Township CAO Susan Plamondon reminded council that a lot of time and effort went into developing the policy and it was subject to considerable discussion and debate. She asked that council approve the user fees and charges bylaw for 2015 as soon as possible and said that staff will look into the issue of ice rates for curling.

?At least in the meantime, there is some basis for going forward,? she noted.

The bylaw and a report on the curling fees will be brought back to the Jan. 12 council meeting.