

Council approves increased subsidy for curling club

By Angela Gismondi

King Township council has granted the King Curling Club a one-year extension on their phased-in user fee subsidy, but if the club runs a revenue surplus, they will have to pay it back.

Ward 2 Councillor David Boyd presented the idea to his council colleagues at a meeting on Jan. 12. The extended phase-in represents a savings of about \$3,845 in ice rental fees for the curling club.

In 2012 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. Approving the continued phase-in means the curling club will retain a higher subsidy for the 2015-2016 season than was originally adopted. For the 2015-2016 season, the subsidy rate will be 27.5 per cent for adults and 32.5 per cent for seniors and youth. No further extension of increased subsidy will be granted and the subsidy level of 25 per cent for adults and 30 per cent for youth/seniors will be applied to the rentals for the 2016-2017 season.

"We would allow one more year of the subsidy and if there is a surplus, they have to pay that \$3,800 back," explained Boyd. "This will give them the opportunity to take advantage of the subsidy for another year if needed. If they truly need it, it's available to them."

Mayor Steve Pellegrini agreed.

"This will help them through one more year and then we're reducing the subsidy," he said, adding groups often run a surplus.

Although the majority of councillors agreed Boyd's idea was a good compromise, some councillors were concerned it is unfair for the Township's other clubs and user groups.

"I feel if we're going to give a \$3,800 subsidy to one group, we need to consider giving something to the other groups," said Councillor Cleve Mortelliti. He added the rates are reasonable for a sport which uses a lot of ice.

He pointed out that the club used \$6,000 from their reserves to purchase new furniture for the lounge.

"If the curling club needs funds and they have a reserve, why not use that for a potential shortfall in fees?" asked Mortelliti. "Maybe that shouldn't have been spent on frills for the lounge but should have gone to subsidizing the league itself."

Councillor Debbie Schaefer agreed.

"I very much echo what Councillor Mortelliti is saying," said Schaefer. "I don't see how I could justify this to other user groups. I'm not debating there is a challenge for the curling group, but I don't see how I can justify giving preferential treatment at this point."

She added that the club has been given due notice and has had three years to prepare for the subsidy reduction, just like other groups across the Township.

"I will not be able to support it," Schaefer concluded.

Councillor Linda Pabst defended the curling club's position.

"It is a new club and they're asking for a favour," said Pabst. "If it helps them sustain a good group of curlers as a new club, I would like to see them succeed."

Councillor Bill Cober was concerned about the financial impact on other user groups.

"You know how I feel about a tax increase," said Cober. "If we're providing subsidies the money is coming from somewhere."

Boyd tabled a motion to extend the phase-in for the King Curling Club for the 2015-2016 season with a condition that the Township be provided with the King Curling Club's 2015-2016 financial statements and should there be a revenue surplus, the club will reimburse the Township the difference. The motion passed 4-3.