

Use of former arena by staff clarified

By Mark Pavilons

Concerns raised over the use of the former Schomberg arena for King's Parks, Recreation and Culture department has led staff to clarify some of the facts for the public.

Director Chris Fasciano noted the decision to relocate staff to the building generated discussion and concerns by local residents and he wanted to alleviate some of the misconceptions.

Council gave their stamp of approval to the move earlier this fall and staff began to evaluate the Western Avenue facility to see what was needed to move in.

Councillor David Boyd said the information report received at Monday night's council meeting "paints a very clear picture of what the Township wants to do" and "addresses public concerns."

Fasciano explained the site will be used to locate parks staff and parks maintenance equipment, with no changes to the overall appearance. In the off-season (fall, winter) there will be roughly eight parks staff in the building, growing to 18 in the busy months. The fleet for parks includes 10 pickup trucks and an assortment of trailers, mowers and tractors. They hope to store the majority inside the building. Very little traffic is expected to be generated from this operation.

Fasciano stressed there will not be any salt, sand, soil or wood chips stored on the property. "They will continue to be located at the yard on the 8th Concession and Aurora-Lloydtown Road.

The Schomberg Agricultural Society and the Lions Club will continue to have access to the building. Fasciano said the Township can extend the invitation to other community organizations as well, should they need the space.

This plan allows the continuation of the nearby tennis courts.

There is no desire to make a large financial investment into the facility at this time. The only thing planned is the addition of bay doors. Improvements being carried out deal with functionality and not an overhaul of the building.

Fencing will be installed and the water systems will be restored. The former bleachers in the arena will be removed and heating equipment will be installed.

Staff, Fasciano stressed, will continue to use many of the areas of the facility as they are in the short term.

The facility has been used historically for municipal purposes and while the new use requires a formal change of use under the building code, a rezoning is not needed.

While this change is short-term, there is a long-term potential, but Fasciano said it's difficult to pinpoint an exact timeline.

Projections are that this is a 3- to 5-year term.

Community consultation took place through 2012 and 2013 to find a new use for the property. There is no real opportunity at this time to move forward with any of the major plans.

But, Fasciano pointed out, "there was broad support to maintain the property in public ownership and to support multi-purpose recreational uses.

"Staff believes that ... relocating the parks division that could operate in a manner that would be compatible with other forms of community use and nearby residential uses, is worthy of exploration. It is believed that the parks division will be able to operate with significantly less impact on the area than its previous use as an arena and community centre."

Staff will keep local residents informed and have a planned a public information centre for nearby homeowners. Input gathered from public sessions will come back to council for discussion.