

Council okays funds for outdoor rinks in King

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Outdoor skating rinks are as Canadian as hockey and Tim Hortons. King councillors and staff hope to get more ice rinks open this winter and in the future. But staff shortages and budget constraints may impact their sustainability. Councillors okayed funding, but stopped short of making it permanent. Funds will be taken from the proceeds of the annual Mayor's Golf Tournament for this year. Staff recommended three new locations for outdoor rinks this year in King City: Rafferty's Corners Park, Salamander Park and Kettle Lake Park. All three locations have "high community engagement and volunteerism," and the needed space to build the rinks. In the report by staff, it was noted that these, or any future locations, can only be operated if there are sufficient volunteers to help maintain them. Staff is confident the Rafferty's Corners Park can be completed for the coming season and will make best efforts for the other two. Staff estimated the cost to prepare and build all three rinks at \$18,000 each, or a total of \$54,000. This is a one-time capital cost. Staff have been able to obtain \$10,000 through a developer contribution and \$18,000 can be funded by the Kettle Lake Park project, leaving a shortfall of \$26,000. This balance will be funded by the golf tournament reserve fund, which has a current balance of just over \$100,000. Staff also estimated it will cost roughly \$7,500 total to maintain all three in the future as ongoing operating costs. Council has authorized the \$54,000 in capital, from a variety of sources including pre-approved capital, developer contributions and the mayor's golf tournament. The \$7,500 for operating will be drawn from the Mayor's Golf Tournament fund as well. Chris Fasciano, director of community services, said work will commence on all sites, even if they can't be open this year. Staff are always willing to listen and work with community groups who want to use them. Councillor David Boyd said the desire for outdoor rinks is "Canadian," and he asked if space at Cold Creek Conservation Area can be used this year. Fasciano said limited staff are the main hurdle. Boyd also said he wants a rink at Tasca Park built as soon as possible. He did say that additional outdoor ice availability also helps to discourage residents from using storm water management ponds for outdoor skating, something that's prohibited due to numerous safety concerns. Councillor Bill Cober, admittedly the frugal one, said council needs to be aware of the costs of enhanced service levels within a tight budget. He asked whether savings can be found elsewhere. Fasciano noted that staff is always looking for efficiencies, and are fully cognizant that council wants a zero increase in the annual budget. However, these new rinks will come with ongoing costs. Mayor Steve Pellegrini said the desire for outdoor activity and the use of rinks peaked due to the pandemic. He said council should look at the need "with eyes wide open" next year. He pointed out everyone wants a rink in their community but pressures on the budget are very real. Councillor Avia Eek noted collaboration with community members is the key, noting "we can do things differently." Years ago, residents came together to clear off ice from the Holland Marsh canals.