

Sportsplex

Broad public engagement is needed to discuss and move forward on a great opportunity for Cambridge - building a new multi-purpose sports facility. That discussion should ensure everyone feels totally engaged and energized as they have their voices heard, including all sports groups.

In order to build a healthy community we must provide excellent, friendly and welcoming facilities that people want to use, and facilities that are affordable and appealing to our multi-generational community. Along with these considerations “green” technologies should be part of an enticing design along with a sustainable component that will insure financial viability.

The City of Cambridge has over a dozen recreational facilities. These include six arenas with a total of 7 ice pads. Also, there are other sports venues such as the Cambridge Ice Park and Cambridge Centre ice pad. The old age of our facilities is well known to the community and the life of a number of these facilities was extended 4 years ago with over 16 million dollars being infused into them. We invested in everything from new chillers to repaved parking lots in order to ensure more productive facilities for a longer time.

Many of our facilities are entering their final years, and now is the time to continue with the planning of a multi-purpose Sportsplex to serve the recreational needs of citizens and support sport tourism.

In the summer of 2014 a number of concerned citizens spoke to the Master Plan Steering committee of Cambridge City council. Their constructive suggestions and willingness to be part of the public process certainly demonstrated to the committee that it was in fact following a parallel course towards a multi-purpose sports complex.

As a result of its lengthy deliberations, the final report from The Master Plan Steering Committee to council contained the following motion that not only dealt with a recreational complex in south-east Galt, but laid the groundwork for the building of a new Sportsplex facility. (Please see the last paragraph of the motion below.)

“that the city confirms its commitment to establish a recreational centre comprising a Swimming pool, gymnasium and gymnastics centre in South East Cambridge and that a Function and space requirement for such a facility be completed in 2014 in conjunction with Cambridge Libraries and galleries and the Public and Catholic School Boards;

And that a land study to identify potential sites for future facilities be included in the 2014-2015 Capital Budget forecast;

And further that, on the recommendation of the Master Plan Steering Committee, Council, as part of the 2015 budget process, consider the establishment of an additional capital project for a city wide multi-use sports and recreational complex to be included in the 2015-2024 Capital Budget forecast.”

Out of this motion, referring specifically to the last paragraph, here are the brief steps that I believe are necessary for moving ahead:

1. Council has endorsed the staff recommendation to include a land study and the creation of a capital project to construct a multi-purpose sport and recreation complex with its ten year capital budget.
2. Consideration is being given to including the following elements within a multi-purposed complex:
 - ice pads to support community use and special events
 - aquatics
 - field House (indoor soccer, field hockey, lacrosse etc)
 - gymnasiums
 - community meeting spaces
 - retail/service opportunities (therapy services, sporting goods, concessions)

It should be noted the number and size of the various elements is not finalized and would be determined through a public process and review of community needs. Also, there is a potential to de-commission less efficient single pad arena facilities and repurpose them to meet other community needs.

As we look to the future, land acquisition would need to take place and a community and design process would need to follow. The Master Plan Steering Committee would have to review the results of the public consultation sessions, the survey results already undertaken, the submission from the Sportsplex4cambridge group and the committee's facility tours.

This review will help to develop a draft vision for the facility that will inform the 2015 capital budget process. After council approves the budget, The Committee would then get back to work seeking community input (public meetings, focus group meetings and targeted questionnaires) on a draft vision document in order to refine the building elements.

Once the refined vision is in place, then council could proceed to move forward with the design and construction of the complex knowing full well that it would also have to seek either federal or provincial grants to help offset the costs. However, regardless of the financial challenges of this project, the long term beneficial impacts for present and future generations far outweigh the costs. It's a project that will not only meet the needs of sports groups in Cambridge, but will build a facility that we can use for a generation, something that links our community together and something that stands for the future of our city.