

Oakville Arena scores reprieve from decommissioning

By David Lea
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

The Oakville Arena has been granted yet another reprieve as Town council opts to give residents more time to weigh in on the facility's fate.

Council decided to withdraw a report, which was initially scheduled to come before the Town's Community Services Committee Tuesday night. It recommended the arena be taken out of service effective Sept. 1, 2012 and referred to the 2012 budget process for consideration.

The report also recommended savings from the arena's closure be used to offset operating costs at the Queen Elizabeth Park Community and Cultural Centre. It also said the arena, while out of service, could be left as it is until council finalized the site's future.

The recommendations did not sit well with many area residents.

"There was considerable outcry and concern regarding the fact the community did not have an opportunity to comment and be engaged in the decision-making process, i.e. whether we close the Oakville Arena," said Ward 2 Town and Regional Councillor Cathy Duddeck.

"Instead, there will be a recommendation it be included in the larger picture, (such as) the Parks, Library and Culture Master Plan, where it will go through a full public consultation period. People are very supportive of that, they want to be able to participate in the process."

The report said the Oakville Arena, which opened in 1950, was the subject of a building condition audit in 2004.

After receiving the audit, Town staff concluded the arena had exceeded the functional lifespan of a typical municipal arena and that it did not meet current code or modern standards.

Bringing the arena up to code will cost an estimated \$13.4 million, without which Town staff say the arena is at risk of being closed as a result of the yearly engineering inspection.

They also said that based on past studies, the age of the arena and its "significant shortcomings," investing capital dollars in the facility is not an option.

Considering this, Town staff recommended the arena be taken out of service.

Area residents have a somewhat different opinion. In a previous interview, area resident Phil Simeon argued the arena should receive a heritage designation because of its unique design and its significance to Oakville's local and national sports history.

Under such a designation, the structure and the facility's appearance would remain intact.

Simeon also said the arena could still be utilized to help ease the town's incredible demand for ice time.

"The outside of the Oakville Arena may not be the most appealing structure, however, I believe the right designer or architect could give it a facelift. Overall, it blends in well with the neighbourhood and surrounding parks, giving that corner a real community feel," said Simeon.

"Arenas are community hubs where people socialize, cheer, and come together for a variety of reasons. I believe operating this facility is costly and renovations would be expensive, but even in its current condition, it effectively serves local community and recreation needs."

Dates for the coming public consultations for the Oakville Arena have yet to be set.

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FUTURE UNCERTAIN: The Town of Oakville is considering the future of Oakville Arena and its surrounding lands.

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