

Pricetag for arenas prompts council's 'sober second thought'

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with alternative arena financing scenarios. The deferral applies to the three planned arenas and the relocation of the soccer field and tennis courts.

Fogal said the costs shocked her, and she did not realize that many items would be left out of the capital budget and forecast such as her favourites: cycling master plan projects, trails development and park creation. She suggested delaying the Acton twinning by three to four years.

"I'm just looking a month," said Fogal. "I didn't know until I got this (budget) package how many things would fall off the table— I don't think anybody knew. But now we do know ... and frankly I don't think the residents of this town have a clue what else is not going to happen because we're going to do all these arenas. I fully expect we're going to be getting two arenas. It's not nothing... but we have to have a balanced approach as well."

Ward 3 Councillor Moya Johnson agreed, saying, "We need a sober second thought on this."

Budget committee carried on with approval of other items—mainly public works and fire services costs—on the \$15.5 million capital budget.

Voting for the arena deferral were Fogal, Mayor Rick Bonnette, and Councillors Clark Somerville, Joan Robson, Ann Lawlor, Jon Hurst and Moya Johnson. Voting against were Councillors Bryan Lewis, Michael O'Leary, Dave Kentner and Bob Inglis.

The decision was made after a delegation of arena ice users from Acton Minor Hockey, Georgetown Minor Hockey and Georgetown Figure Skating Club pleaded their case for more arenas and left the council chambers. The groups say the 4,260 children in their organizations are not getting enough ice time now and the registration demand is growing. All three planned arenas are needed sooner, rather than later, they said.

The deferral blindsided Lewis, chair of the Georgetown Arenas Task Force.

"When does the buck stop?," he said, explaining proposals for new arenas have been going on for years. "I don't know what

else can be talked about. I don't know what else, short of removing something.

"I have listened tonight about parks, trails, bike paths and I simply say we want all those things to happen. We are building two libraries, we have built two fire halls and retrofitted a third, and an indoor soccer field. And we sit here with one arena—the second oldest arena in Canada—that we won't have tear down, it's going to fall down... We all knew this one was going to be difficult, we all knew the financial action... We were all forewarned," he said.

He pointed out that Acton arena users agreed to support the hourly use surcharge, and to amalgamate their organizations with Georgetown as long as the Acton twinning was included.

Piqued about comments of lack of budget items for non-arena users in the community he pointed to all the money being spent on the libraries. He called for a vote on a three-year deferral on costs related to the library expansion project. It lost.

"I'm a little nervous on the debt—it's probably the most we've ever done," said Inglis. "But in the end we need to go ahead with these two arenas."

Director of Recreation and Parks Terry Alyman said the arena-building program is precipitated by the imminent closure of the aging Memorial Arena after the 2012-2013 hockey season. If the building is kept open after that date, the Town will have to spend millions of dollars on upgrades such as the roof. As it is, Manager of Facilities Paul Stover said "we're living on borrowed time with a lot of things, including the refrigeration system."

The plan is to build a \$16.5 million twin pad arena onto the Mold-Masters Sports-Plex. The displacement of the lit seniors soccer field to Trafalgar Sports Park and the four tennis courts to the Gellert Centre would add \$1.8 million to the cost. Those arenas would be constructed in 2012-13, ready for the 2013-2014 hockey season. Construction then would begin on the twinning of the \$10.3 million Acton Arena, ready for the 2014-2015 ice season.

Total price tag: \$29,137,000.

According to the financial strategy unveiled Tuesday night the Town could pay for that by arena hourly user surcharge, development charges, sale of Town assets, developer contributions of \$1,000 per unit of each new home built, a \$1-2 million fundraising campaign, dedicated tax levy and property tax debt.

Total debt: \$25.2 million for the proposed arenas.

Add onto that \$6.3 million debt for the Cultural Centre & Georgetown Library expansion and \$5 million of existing debt.

Total potential Town debt: \$36.5 million. Town Treasurer Ed DeSousa said the strategy would require taxpayers to support

annual Town tax increases of between 6 and 7 per cent in the years of 2013-15.

Noting that a component of the campaign requires funding, O'Leary said, "Everybody's (seniors, tennis club, ice user groups, library, hospital) talking about fundraising ... I'm just at a loss to explain where all this money is going to come from?"

DeSousa agreed that if the fundraising component failed to meet its target then taxpayers would have to pick up the remainder.

Deliberation on the capital budget continued last night (Wednesday) with discussion on the 2011 operating budget beginning Tuesday with a public delegation night.



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