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# Local youth outline needs for the future

By LISA TALLYN  
Staff Writer

Area youth have spoken about what's needed in town for young people and the Town of Halton Hills is listening.

The Town has conducted a Youth Needs Study and recently held two sessions in Acton and Georgetown to share the draft study's findings. In total, approximately 100 people attended.

Draft recommended options in the study include integrated, dedicated youth spaces to be built in the long-term as additions at Acton Arena and Community Centre and Gellert Community Centre in Georgetown.

The estimated cost for the 1,416 sq. ft. addition in Acton, which would include a lounge, computer area, storage and office are projected to be \$658,440. The projected cost for a 2,280 sq. ft. addition at the Gellert Centre containing the same components as Acton's is \$1,060,200.

In the short term, the study recommends the Town explore space at Acton District High School or the adaptation of the Boat House at Prospect Park to be used by youth.

In Georgetown, the short-term recommendation is to consider adapting space at Mold-Masters SportsPlex and/or Halton Hills Cultural Centre to be used by youth.

The Study projects the town's youth population to reach 14,153, from the current 5,514, by 2031. Ninety per cent of the new youth are expected to live in Georgetown.

The final Youth Needs Study is to be presented to council Monday (Dec. 12).

The Town looked at five key areas in the Study: youth engagement, youth-friendly education and training, access, dedicated youth space and connecting services.

As part of the study focus groups were held in both Acton and Georgetown to get feedback from area youth.

Some other recommendations include:

- The Town should move forward with adding a full-size gym to the Gellert Centre (high priority/long term).
- The Town should consider transportation options to move youths from one com-



Among the items listed in the Youth Needs Study was a new skateboard park at the Gellert Centre. *File photo*

munity to the other (medium priority/short term).

- The Town should enter into discussions with Links2Care and other organizations that serve homeless youth to determine the space, staffing and resource requirements for the creation of a homeless shelter geared to youth (medium priority/long term).

- The Town should consider including a full outdoor multi-use court at both the Gellert Centre and Acton Arena (medium priority/long term).

- The Town should consider providing limited programming and/or drop-in services at its rural community halls to ensure rural youth have access to local opportunities (medium priority/long term).

- The Town should consider constructing a skateboard park at Gellert Community Centre Park with input provided by skateboarders, BMX bikers and the youth community (medium priority/long term).

- Town should consider kicking off the

Town of Halton Hills group relating to Youth Services with a training event that is appealing to all agencies and provides foundational support to positive youth development as a community approach (high priority/short term).

- Consider revising the mandate and values of the department and make a clear statement including youth as a valuable asset in the community, and the community's commitment to working with partners, which reinforces the commitment to being a youth-friendly community (high priority/short term).

- Work with community partners to develop a Town of Halton Hills group relating to youth services— geographically focused within the municipal boundaries— and determine the responsibility (high priority/short term)

During focus groups, as part of the Study, the number one service Acton youth said they wish for was public transportation. Those who took part in the Georgetown sessions mentioned the need for movies, job search help, specialized sporting and art facilities, greater student discounts, a larger skate park in Georgetown, and differentiated (eg. field hockey and rugby) and less expensive sports opportunities.

On the dedicated youth space issue, the top three priorities for Georgetown youth were a lounging area, sports facilities, and music studio/area/concert stage. Sports facilities received the second highest number of mentions in Acton with kitchen/food as the top priority. Other spaces and services mentioned by youth in both communities were games (video and billiards), skateboard park, and the desire for creative space (such as art on walls, empty walls to decorate).

At Georgetown District High School participants mentioned more skate parks, drop-in youth-specific sports fields, basketball, sand volleyball and tennis courts, an amphitheatre and a bonfire pit.

In Acton cleanliness, safety and repair of cracks in the skate park were mentioned, as well as a desire to see art in the park and bands outdoors at the bandshell.

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