

Town's deal with Milton franchise puts local club in jeopardy: President

By **CYNTHIA GAMBLE**
Staff Writer

Halton Hills Gymnastics Centre— still paying back a Town loan to avoid shutting down two years— is frustrated the Town's Recreation and Parks Department has awarded a contract to a Milton company to provide similar recreational services.

In a presentation to Halton Hills council Monday night, Halton Hills Gymnastics Centre's (HHGC) board of directors president Damian Brooks said, "Please don't pull the rug out from under us now."

Brooks said the issuance of a Request for Proposal (RfP) was not the appropriate approach for a new Movement Education program, according to Section 4 within the Town's own Recreation and Parks 2007 Strategic Action Plan.

He said Town staff should have asked HHGC first if they could provide this service, which he says they do.

"By offering a Town program that is substantially identical to our own proposal, will compete directly against HHGC for registration dollars in this demographic," Brooks said. "When a powerful entity like the municipal government enters a competitive marketplace, it fundamentally alters the marketplace dynamics."

Brooks said HHGC's plan to repay the \$324,000 12-year loan it received in 2011 depends on strong recreational gymnastics revenue.

"The proposed Town Movement Education program draws participants away from our own programs, (and) it will jeopardize all the other (HHGC) recreational programming that the Town does not want to provide— programs like girls and boys recreational gym, teen gym and trampoline," said Brooks.

He said this could subvert the non-profit organization's budget just as it is moving to

long-term sustainability and beginning to repay the loan. In a report to Community Affairs committee last month, HHGC reported they were \$40,000 ahead of budget in revenue and did not have to draw on the full amount of the Town loan.

"We ask that the Town re-think its approach to this issue," Brooks said.

Despite the HHGC's plea, Halton Hills council approved a five-year \$60,000 service contract to Monkeynastix, a franchise

based in Milton. Owners Sean and Jennifer Heidstra attended Monday's meeting to introduce themselves. The contract is to provide Movement Education for ages 1-9. The contract is based on full cost recovery.

Movement Education is a non-competitive program designed to get kids involved in physical activity in a fun way at a young age. It teaches early skill and social development so kids can then move on to organized sports. Town staff became

aware of the program in other municipalities and wanted to develop it here.

The Town's Recreation and Parks Department put out a Request for Proposal (RfP) in January and received two submissions: Monkeynastix and HHGC.

"Bids were evaluated by a staff team based on quality of submission, programming and financial factors. Monkeynastix was determined to be the highest ranking proponent," stated a staff report.

Warren Harris, Manager of Open Space and Parks, told council members Monday that the RfP was done in strict compliance with the Town's purchasing bylaw. A key criterion was to have multiple locations throughout the communities of Acton and Georgetown at a range of facilities from schools and churches. Having a High Five accreditation— a national standard for children's recreation and sport— was also a component of the RfP.



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