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"ALL THE NEWS YOU NEED"

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1993

Elliott relieved as arena gets preliminary nod

BY FRANCES NIBLOCK

The exact location must still be decided, but plans to build a new \$4.1 million arena in Acton east have been approved, in principle, by Town politicians.

During budget talks Saturday councillors agreed to call tenders on the project late this year, a move that relieved Acton councillor Norm Elliott.

"I'm happy. I didn't know what to expect from Council. I won't say I'm ecstatic but I'm happy that councillors took this step because if they hadn't, it would have been a major step backward. I think we're 95 per cent of the way to getting this thing approved for construction next year," Elliott said in an interview Saturday.

The approval in principle gives

Town staff the go-ahead to apply for \$760,000 in subsidies from the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation. Just over \$1 million of the arena's cost will come from development levies and the balance of \$2.3 million will be borrowed.

Council was told negotiations for an arena site are continuing with land owners north and south of Highway 7, east of Churchill Road, and that by June or July the Town should be able to pick a site from the three now proposed.

The approval in principle will have no impact on this year's tax increase, but the arena could add up to four per cent to next year's tax bill.

Treasurer Ray King said Council will have the option of spreading the borrowing costs over several years to offset the impact.

"We don't know the final aspects of financing yet. We will

have to make a decision in 1994 whether we debenture the whole of the cost or whether we can stretch it over 1994 and '95," King explained.

"We had planned to debenture about \$1.2 million this year, but we took it out of the budget because of the timing delay in getting this project started. We won't know about the financing until it's determined if we have to buy land and how much Provincial money we may get."

Arena user group spokesperson Gord Chapman said he was gratified that the money for the new arena was included in the capital budget for this year.

"I'm happy that everyone on Council still seems enthusiastic about the proposal but I'm a little disappointed about the timetable," Chapman said in an interview Saturday.

"The big issue, given all the uncertainties, is whether we should still be considering Acton north, which would be a quicker alternative."

Although no site has been selected, Council indicated several months ago that there is no political will to rebuild in Prospect Park, the location of the existing arena. Also, an industrial site on Wallace Street, north of McDonald Boulevard, has not officially been eliminated from the running.

The existing 65-year-old arena in Prospect Park would require \$375,000 in repairs over the next five years to keep it structurally safe and there are problems with the rink's refrigeration equipment.

The approval in principle for the arena project is expected to be affirmed by Council when the capital and operating budgets are approved in early March.

Budget cuts may still affect Seniors' Centre

BY FRANCES NIBLOCK

The proposed \$18.2 million Town operating budget for this year was reduced by \$19,593 during an all-day special budget meeting on Saturday.

For a home in Acton assessed at \$5,700, that would result in a Town tax bill of \$621, which is \$15 dollars, or 2.4 per cent more, than last year.

Although Council made a cut of \$78,855 to the budget, it added \$59,262 for new programs and additional staff. Another \$68,000 could be saved if Council delays conversion of the Bower Avenue fire hall into a Seniors' Centre, and uses unallocated capital reserve funds to help pay for some capital projects.

Those cuts, and one made Saturday, would bring the general Town purpose tax rate down to a zero per cent increase.

Council will decide whether to delay the Acton Seniors' Centre and the Georgetown Seniors' Centre at the Monday, Feb. 23 Council meeting, after receiving final plans from the Georgetown group.

Council agreed with a third staff suggestion to save \$37,505 by eliminating all conferences for staff and councillors.

Another \$5,100 was cut by re-

ducing an engineering employee's training period overlap and delays in implementing the new overnight parking ban in Acton and Georgetown means the Town will not have to spend \$15,000 for a new vehicle for the bylaw enforcement officers to use. But delaying the program also means Council must increase the budget by almost the same amount it cut to make up for lost ticket revenue.

The final two recommended cuts include a \$25,000 reduction in the \$100,000 budgeted to fight proposed landfills on Georgetown's eastern boundary and deletion of \$10,000 to improve the Fire Department's communications system.

Council added \$20,000 to the proposed operating budget to provide a sophisticated mapping system for the planning department and \$21,721 to extend the contract of a building inspector.

Council also added \$4,300 to more than double the amount of money it will give out in grants this year. Eight local groups and organizations will share the recommended \$8,500 grant allocations.

Council is expected to approve both the current and capital budgets in early March.



WON'T BE LONG: Lacrosse workouts for Acton Peewee, Novice and Tyke teams were held Saturday at McKenzie-Smith Middle School. Players practised their passing and stickhandling skills. Shown working on ball control are, left to right, Shawn Weatherall, Thomas Wolfer, Jeff Newman, Kyle Artem and coaches Kevin Weatherall and George Artem. (Mike Albano photo)

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