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BRUNCH BUNCH: The fruit salad was as popular as the homemade desserts at Sunday's Acton Community Brunch as members of T.O.P.S. (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) helped the Acton Kinette Club stage the monthly brunch at the arena in exchange for a share of the profits. — Frances Niblock photo

Now loan policy for local groups

By **FRANCES NIBLOCK**
The New Tanner

Community groups such as the Acton Agricultural Society may be able to build projects like a new fall fair building in Prospect Park with the help of a new Town loan policy.

Councillors voted to amend its Municipal Assistance Program – Joint Capital Management Policy to include provisions so the Town can loan money to community groups, that meet stringent criteria, that want to build facilities on Town-owned land.

A request from the Acton

Agricultural Society for third party capital financing – a loan – led to the new policy framework.

At a recent Council meeting, Society spokesman Dave Dautovich explained that because their building will be constructed on Town-owned land, financial institutions won't grant them a mortgage and they need a Town loan to proceed.

A staff report said the loan program must assess the overall merit of a capital project and limit financial risk to the Town. The existing joint capital project-management policy includes evaluation criteria,

but new more extensive financial criteria will be added to the policy to reduce the risk to the Town, that may borrow large sums of money over a long period of time on behalf of a group.

During debate on the loan policy, Regional Ward 3/4 Councillor Jane Fogal drew attention to concerns raised by the Rotary Club of Acton that Town money means the Town takes over control of the project.

"What I didn't see here was anything that says that the community was still involved in the project in the construction phase...the

Town is not only going to be financially involved, we're going to run the show," Fogal said, asking staff for some "comfort" concerning community involvement.

Terry Alyman, the director of recreation and parks said they would encourage a community group to be as active as possible that is "in essence, the whole nature of the joint capital management policies."

"Because of the financial risk, if you will, to the Town, it is written in more stricter terms to make sure there's certainty in terms of who is ultimately responsible – we want to ensure projects are built to Town standards," Alyman said.

Mayor Rick Bonnette, who called the Society's plans to replace the old arena in Prospect Park "visionary" said the loan policy is necessary so taxpayers and the Town don't face the extra costs of new facilities.

Questioned by Acton Councillor Mike O'Leary about the ownership of a new facility built on Town-owned land, Alyman said the Town would not have a lot of "control" over a building, but the operational risks would rest with the community group that built it.

Acton Councillor Jon Hurst said the loan policy is a "unique opportunity" to address the requirements that the Agricultural Society has, and also to provide additional recreational facilities...it's a win-win situation for us," Hurst said.

Since 1992, The Town has collaborated with the community on various joint ventures in Acton including the Acton Rotary Park; the leash-free zone park in Acton and the soon-to-be built skateboard park.

The financing of the projects has included subsidies, fee waivers, donations and sponsorships.

Council is expected to formally approve the new policy at its February 6 meeting.



THE THREE MUSKETEARS SKATEPARK IS COMING!!!



An interactive presentation and design workshop on the modern world of skateparks and action sports

Designers for the Three Musketeers Skatepark will be present to answer questions on the new skatepark located at the Acton Arena and Community Centre.

Hosted by the Town of Halton Hills and Acton Sports Action Park (ASAP).

Location: Acton High School (21 Cedar Rd.)

Date: Thursday February 9th, 2006

Time: 6:00 to 9:00pm

