

Town backs away from big leisure fee increases

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Backpedaling away from hefty leisure services fee hikes gave Town staff and councillors plenty of exercise recently.

Council approved a vastly amended user fee policy than the one that first saw light last November.

That was when a five-year blueprint aimed at making leisure services self-sustaining through skyrocketing user fees sparked public outrage.

"After we received all the public feedback, we went back and refined the user fee model a little more," Jim McQueen, the Town's acting chief administrative officer, told council. "We did come to different conclusions."

The draft policy resulted in a long, impassioned public meeting at which user groups made it clear to councillors they didn't appreciate huge cost leaps for services.

These included the use of pools, arenas, baseball and soccer fields as well as the controversial Town-owned and operated Leisure Centre.

User groups then kept up the pressure by inundating Town staff with written submissions, most with the same basic message — hands off our leisure services.

The result was a thoroughly revamped policy under which leisure services will see only small fee increases, at least in the next few years.

"We've come to the conclusion that there is support for a fair subsidy both for leisure programs and facilities," said Mr. McQueen.

The difference between aggressive full-cost recovery and subsidized programs can be vast.

For example, a basic Leisure Centre annual membership that went for \$400 in 1999 in the draft document (reaching \$800 for 2003) is just \$315 in the new guide.

That's \$15 above the 1998 rate.

A senior's centre games room hourly fee that in the draft document rose from \$4 to \$15 in 1999 remains steady at \$4 in the new report.

The draft policy had that fee rising to \$100 by 2003.

In the new outline, non-recreational services are still subject to a full-cost recovery program.

Under this umbrella are services such as birth registrations, dog tags, and fire and daycare inspections.

The current policy also backs away from an elaborate five-year financial plan. Instead, it nails down new 1999 rates, with a suggested two per cent inflationary increase for 2000-1.

In order not to hamstring any new council, a proviso was added that the inflationary rate be subject to



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approval by any new council that is elected between now and 2001.

A second stipulation allowing staff to come to council with future fee changes aimed at staying competitive was also approved.

While the new policy doesn't provide the stability of a five-year plan, it does give user groups some idea of what's in the store for them over the next few years, said Mr. McQueen.

"Our feeling from the public process was the community which uses the services would like to see what lies ahead for them," he said.

It also gives staff time to step away from an issue that has already cost the Town \$25,000 to study, said Mr. McQueen.

"(The inflationary rate) is not only to provide some stability but also to put leisure services analysis on the back burner for a year or two," he said.

Backing off without a firm policy in place didn't sit well with Councillor John Challinor.

"Without leadership, without direction it ends up costing more money," he said. "I'd really advise that staff get back on the trail of finalizing the policy."

Since saving money is still the name of the game, council agreed to look into Town grants, hardship subsidies and new ways to finance senior's drop-in programs.

Support program

The Canadian Mental Health Association's Halton branch continues to offer assistance through a pilot program which runs until February 16.

The service is available to individuals and family support persons throughout the region who are consumers of the mental health system.

Issues covered include income maintenance, housing and tenancy, employment barriers, legal matters, treatment and consent and human rights. Call 693-4270, ext. 7482 for more information.

Notice of Liquor Licence Application



The following establishment has applied to the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario for a liquor licence under the Liquor Licence Act:

Application for a Sale Licence
Rattlesnake Point Golf Club
5405 Highway # 25
Milton (including outdoor area)

Any resident of the municipality may make written submission as to whether the issuance of the licence is in the public interest having regard to the needs and wishes of the residents. Submissions must be received no later than **March 3, 1999**. Please include your name, address and telephone number. If a petition is submitted to the Commission, please identify the designated contact person.

Note:
The AGCO gives the applicant details of any objections.

Submissions to be sent to:
Licensing and Registration Department
Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario
20 Dundas St. W, 7th Floor,
Toronto ON M5G 2N6
Fax: (416)326-5555
E-mail at licensing@agco.on.ca

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