

Public critical of Town's new arena plan: meeting

By RICHARD VIVIAN
The Champion

Milton's planned new arena came under fire Wednesday, as members of the public criticized its proposed seating capacity and potential uses.

"If you get groups that want to have a tournament in there, you can't with seats for only 200 people. The various tournaments out there attract a lot more than 200 people," said Dave Burrell, whose comments were repeatedly echoed throughout the public meeting held at the Lion's Hall.

As the plan currently sits — it has yet to be finalized — each of the four pads would contain seating for 200. Additional seating for about 50 per pad would also be available in the centre gallery, which will house a concession stand. Standing room would add a further 100 observers per pad.

Those seating levels were chosen as the preferred option because they offer the most efficient use of resources, responded Ken McAlpine, Milton's manager of parks and facilities.

"You can't build a facility to fill it once a year. This was the most effective way of accommodating all the user group input and making sure that we can program the space effectively throughout the year," he told the crowd of about 45 people.

"We haven't closed the door on any of this, but as it stands now,

"If you get groups that want to have a tournament in there, you can't with seats for only 200 people."

DAVE BURRELL

this is the recommended way to go based on input from the user groups and the cost benefit analysis."

In addition to the \$20 million arena — which will be situated on the southeast corner of the Derry Road and Commercial Street intersection — the Town is also looking at renovations to Memorial and Tonelli arenas as well, the manager continued. Large events would continue to be held at Memorial, which has seating for 900, with standing room for another 300 individuals.

Several demands were also made to make at least one of the new arena's four pads Olympic-sized, so as to benefit uses outside of minor hockey. Current plans would see all four ice surfaces meet NHL size regulations.

"We need one of the four pads to be figure skating, recreation skating, something that can be roller-skating in the summer. We're hockey, hockey, hockey. I think we're wrong, wrong, wrong," said local

resident Paul Scherer. "You're making users put the round peg in the square hole."

Making one pad Olympic-sized would both add to the cost of construction/operation and remove potential profits, Mr. McAlpine commented.

"If we do that, we're eliminating the facility for tournaments that would need all four ice surfaces," he said.

Further requests from the public were put forward to consider indoor soccer uses either at the new arena or making space available at one of the existing facilities.

While taking much criticism from those in attendance, the Town was credited for the timeline of the arena's construction.

At least two of the four pads are expected to be operational by September 2003. Phased plans would see the second twin pad built by 2009, but town council will consider building all four pads for next year, depending on the results of tendering.

Town council is expected to debate the concept design Monday, before sending the project out to tender in September. Construction is scheduled to begin in October.

"This is not the end of the door for facility development in Milton," said Jennifer Reynolds, Milton's director of community services.

"The needs of the community and demands on facilities will continue to be evaluated."

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