

Jan 7/2022

Mayor Finch and Council,

By now I am sure that council is familiar with recent recreational needs assessments and the opportunity for community consultations, taking place in Goderich, and proposed for Bluewater.

The Goderich approach was to have a Recreational Review Ad Hoc Committee appointed to support council and the ongoing Recreational Advisory Committee, in a two month process of research, data collection, and community engagement. This two month process, started July 2021, and in October they received 700 survey responses. The community was then invited to provide further feedback from Dec 17, to Jan 7/2022, as posted on website and social media.

From the report, “ the Community Recreational Needs Assessment identifies recommendations on the types of recreational facilities that could be implemented by the year 2030 along with ways that the town can provide them in a financially responsible manner.”

<https://www.goderich.ca/en/stay-and-play/community-recreational-needs-assessment.aspx#>

Yesterday, the County of Huron posted the draft County 2022 budget on their website and social media asking for community input. I encourage council to review this process as well.

<https://www.huroncounty.ca/news/huron-residents-invited-to-engage-in-county-of-hurons-2022-budget-process/>

In 2019, SH through an RFP process, engaged a consultant to complete a Recreational Master Plan and Facility Assessment. This assessment was to include public input. That was a missed opportunity for council to not only have public commitment and engagement, but also for council to assess how the RFP contract did not deliver the Recreational Master plan.

At the same time, Nov 2019, council was presented with the budget report for 2020 capital investments required for 2020-2024, which included upgrades to arenas, pools, ball diamonds, fire halls, playgrounds etc. There was a similar presentation for the 2021 budget.

However,

February 2021, the Stephen arena was suggested for closure, even for sale based on inefficiencies and the facility assessment review. A fire hall closes because of asbestos?

Centralia hall demolished instead of being sold, because it had lead pipes?

Summer of 2021, an architect presented to council, a plan for SHRC, for 12-15 million, again no public input, now called phase 1 and 2. It will be interesting to see who is involved in the design moving forward.

October and November 2021, were busy months preparing for the 2022 budget, that contains 6.5 million debt for 30 years for Upgrades to Recreational Facilities SHRC and Stephen Arena.

Discussions have taken place with Kirkton Woodham Committee, and Bluewater, for input on infrastructure and programming, but not SH taxpayers.

Budget 2022 includes “\$50,000 facilities audit that will provide expertise for a baseline and will be deeper than the facility review completed by Nustadia which was visual, and based on lifecycle.” and “that staff be authorized to proceed with the procurement process for the SH Rec Centre Phase 1.” There is no request for community input. Again, Huron County is asking residents for engagement in the budget process.

Meeting notes from October indicated 2 staff and 2 councillors were meeting to discuss the SHRC project. I have heard there have been different clubs being promised upgrades to their space/service in 2023.

Are they part of the 2009 Recreational plan, the 2014-2018 strategic plan, or the capital project forecast? One would think the “group” or “staff” that are meeting would be keeping public informed via council meetings?

In October 2021, a service club asked to provide an outdoor rink..This was referred to the Community Recovery Task Force to “investigate and explore community park use Policy development and bring back to council.” So some groups are promised some things and others not, or some have to go through another process?

This seems very similar to the Recreation Community Hub Committee being dissolved and funding assistance turned down.

I overheard a conversation regarding the Stephen arena, “getting a cement floor, it is in the hands of staff, and public will be notified when the time comes, to provide input.”

As Council has approved the facilities audit, and an updated survey / Geo- tech review, one would expect 2 months or more to do the RFP/ research to determine if drawings for upgrades can take place.

Based on the history of rollover of projects from 2021, such as Port Blake is it reasonable to think that the 4.5 million dollar project of phase 1, could be completed by August of 2022?

When do you expect to tell the public there is no responsible debt recovery plan for other critical infrastructure projects?

Could the time in the next 2-3 months, be used to review what others such as County, Goderich, Bluewater, do to engage, and collect input from taxpayers, and service users.

Could the time be taken to develop the paid for but not delivered Recreational Master Plan, so that we all know what the financial implications are for the next 10 years?

It is not about being right, but rather about doing the right thing!

Thanks for your consideration, Maureen Cole