

Syl Apps centre has athletic future

Posted By Cate Breough

Parisians may finally learn the fate of the Syl Apps arena once the ice surface disappears for good this spring. The revitalization of the downtown arena as an indoor year round facility could soon be underway.

A county committee has been struggling to find life for the downtown Paris facility, a mainstay of the community, after its ice surfaces disappear next year when the new twin pad opens. The committee, that includes all four Paris councillors, decided Monday night to ask county council to proceed with an RFP process to convert the arena so that it could be used all year round as a multi purpose venue. Preliminary estimates peg the conversion costs at about \$250,000.

"The need is there. Let's get on with it," said Roy Haggart who stated that there's huge indoor potential for the Syl Apps.

Mayor Ron Eddy also urged the committee to be proactive and get working on the rebirth of the Paris arena. "We have a golden opportunity and it's come at the right time. There's grant opportunities available and our members are onside to support us...we have the opportunity for the edifice that's served this community for decades to go into the future," said Eddy. The mayor said that while the county has gotten a good share of infrastructure funding from the federal and provincial governments other municipalities have had more, so he feels that Brant deserves a cut of any moneys still available.

Haggart said that both Brant MP Phil McColeman and MPP Dave Levac are willing to take proposals and financial requests for Syl Apps forward to their respective governments.

The committee heard from two organizations at the meeting that say they could work together to share the arena space.

Anthony Punturiero of the Brantford City Soccer Club said that his club that includes about 2,500 area children has been looking for a home for some time. They want to explore the possibilities of converting the arena floor at Syl Apps to a turfed floor. "We can guarantee quite a few hours of rental time for our club itself. We hope to have an indoor Brant County soccer league," he said. Punturiero said that his club has about \$400,000 to invest in a space and if land in the area weren't so expensive they would probably be looking to build their own facility. If they were to invest their own funds in the Syl Apps facility, then they would want to control who uses the building. If they were to lease the space, then they need the county to install the special Ontario Soccer Association approved floor and estimate that the installation and related costs would run to about \$150,000. Punturiero also told committee members that he was confident that if the appropriate flooring were to be installed, other groups would want to use Syl Apps and the county could make a profit on the facility.

Four Seasons Sports would be one of those groups interested in using Syl Apps for its roller hockey leagues. Brock and Sara Murray told the committee that they want to make Syl Apps a winter home for their club. The group already uses the arena in the spring and summer once the ice is gone. They want the county to allow them to install, at their own cost, Mateflex sport court flooring for the upcoming season. But they also see the opportunity for Syl Apps to be used by other groups for a variety of indoor sports like ball hockey, lacrosse, basketball and volleyball. "The ultimate goal is to keep the facility open," Brock Murray said.

The two groups have had a preliminary conversation about sharing the space and exploring ways that the different kinds of flooring needed for their individual sports could be compatible in the same space.

Syl Apps arena is not air conditioned, nor does it have a heating (except for space heating in the bleacher areas). Both groups that spoke to the committee Monday night said that they did not need either to use the facility.

But the committee sees a wider use for the arena if it is upgraded. They want council to agree to fully convert the arena by installing a structurally engineered roof, extending the walls and putting in heating and cooling systems. Haggart said that the county should be looking 10-15 years down the road not just considering installing flooring. "Fixing the temperature (in the building) would allow multi-uses beyond the two suggested users tonight," he said. He said the county should first fix the building and then figure out who and how it will be used considering that the two delegations demonstrated there's great potential for income at Syl Apps. Haggart also endorsed that the arena remain under the county's control.

The committee's request will go to council next week.