



REPORT

TO: Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

FROM: Kevin Okimi, Director of Parks and Open Space

DATE: October 13, 2023

REPORT NO.: RP-2023-015

SUBJECT: Air Supported Dome – Request for Expression of Interest

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. RP-2023-015 dated October 13, 2023, regarding Air Supported Dome – Request for Expression of Interest be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to issue a Request for Expression of Interest for a third party private-public partnership to supply, install, maintain, and operate a seasonal air supported sports dome, as outlined in Report RP-2023-015;

AND FURTHER THAT the Request for Expression of Interest include considerations for air supported structures for court sports (pickleball/tennis/basketball/volleyball), for field sports (soccer/baseball), for indoor training, or for a multi-sport combination of the sports listed.

AND FURTHER THAT staff report back to Council on the results of the Request for Expression of Interest;

AND FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to include considerations for a potential sports dome into the detailed design process for Gellert Community Park expansion and the Trafalgar Sports Park Master Plan Update, pending additional information received through the Expression of Interest process.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- Air supported domes are used in many municipalities to provide indoor recreational opportunities for residents seasonally or permanently. These may be

smaller domes for court type sports (tennis/pickleball) or larger full field size facilities (soccer/baseball), larger multi-sport facilities.

- The Town does not have any air supported domes, however, the Dufferin Rural Heritage Community Centre, an indoor soccer facility situated in Prospect Park, is operated by the Acton Agricultural Society through a land lease agreement.
- Previous Town Recreation and Parks Strategic Plans have not included any specific recommendations or directions for staff to investigate implementation of an air supported structure for recreational use, focusing instead on permanent indoor facilities and the completion of Gellert Community Centre expansion which is planned to include a triple gymnasium.
- The Town has received various requests or inquiries for air supported structures in the past including requests from sports organizations or inquiries from private vendors seeking to construct and operate an air supported structure.
- Numerous sports organizations have emphasized the lack of indoor venues for training or regular play during the winter months as a significant limitation within the Town. These groups are spending significant funds outside of the community when using facilities in other jurisdictions.
- As part of the Gellert Community Park Expansion project, significant consultation feedback requesting an air supported structure for turf and courts was received from sport stakeholder organizations, and the public.
- An air supported dome(s) could provide indoor recreational opportunities in the short term or beyond, for a variety of sports, while plans for the timing of Gellert Community Centre expansion are reviewed based on overall funding considerations.
- Several Ontario municipalities have been working with third party providers to provide air supported structures in a public/private partnership, where there is no or low upfront or ongoing cost or risk to the municipality.
- Town staff held preliminary discussions with 3rd party providers to determine if there was interest in providing this type of service in Halton Hills.
- Based on these preliminary discussions, staff recommend that it is merited to issue a formal expression of interest to 3rd party private sector providers to see if there is interest in a private-public partnership for an air supported dome (of any type) in Halton Hills.
- Staff are recommending that Council direct staff to prepare a Request for Expression of Interest (RFEOI) and issue through the Town's Bids and Tenders platform.
- Staff are also recommending that plans for Gellert Park and Trafalgar Sports Park continue to consider potential dome options, subject to the results of the RFEOI.
- Since Gellert Park's detailed design phase is set to begin pending Council's approval of the final design, Gellert Park may be the most feasible location for an air supported dome in the short term to serve existing and future growth areas.
- There may be opportunities to partner with community sport organizations to construct enhanced facilities in conjunction with a potential dome, with potential for grant funding or fundraising efforts.

- There is no commitment or financial impact to the Town required to issue an RFEOI.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

Air supported structures (domes) are used to support winter or year-round recreational play for a variety of sports across Ontario. In recent years, communities including Whitchurch-Stouffville, Milton, Mississauga, Kingston, and Niagara Falls have all implemented domes to support recreational needs in their communities. Ownership and operation of these structures can be either private or municipal and varies from municipality to municipality. The Town of Milton has multiple domes on school board or municipal property with a mixture of Town, School Board (Catholic or Public) and private operators.

Air supported structures can range significantly in size depending on the intended use. Soccer field domes are very large (accommodate full size soccer field up to 64mx100m) while court sport domes (tennis, pickleball, basketball) are much smaller depending on the number of courts.

There are currently no air supported domes in Halton Hills, either municipally owned, or privately operated. The Town's 2007 Recreation and Parks Strategic Action Plan included recommendations for an indoor soccer facility to be reviewed at the former Acton Arena location. This indoor facility was constructed in 2007 in partnership with the Acton Agricultural Society and is owned/operated by the group through a lease arrangement with the Town. The facility continues to provide indoor turf field use and is consistently at capacity through the winter months. It is used for other programming during the outdoor sport season and is a successful indoor sport operation.

Through the Town's recent (2020) Recreation & Parks Strategic Plan, the need for indoor facility space was focused on the development of the Gellert Community Centre expansion, which was based on the 2019 Feasibility Study and included three full size gymnasiums, an indoor walking track, seniors centre, youth centre, and multi-purpose meeting rooms and fitness studios. An air supported dome was not recommended or considered due to the focus on the expansion of the Gellert Facility as the primary method to provide for indoor sport needs. The implementation of the Gellert facility expansion remains subject to more detailed financial review and financing considerations and may be delayed beyond current budget forecast timing.

Despite not being identified in past studies, multiple community sport organizations have expressed a continued desire for additional indoor sports facilities to meet their pressures to secure adequate space. Since the Town does not manage any indoor sports facilities, these sports organizations must rely on school facilities for community use or private facilities outside of Halton Hills. For the 2023/2024 season, the schools are already operating at maximum capacity.

An air supported dome(s) would allow for increased use of premium facilities all year. Sports organizations have currently maximized local indoor space such as schools and the Dufferin Rural Heritage Community Centre (Acton) which primarily have availability in the evening and weekends. There is minimal time available in indoor facilities for

daytime use. By having an air supported dome, sports organizations can use it for a longer duration and accommodate the indoor training or year-round play desired for their sport. Many of the community sports organizations or individuals go outside of the Halton Hills boundary to continue playing their sport in the winter season, which results in significant funds being spent outside of the community. As of 2023, at least six Halton Hills sports organizations currently leave the Halton Hills boundaries to access indoor facilities in the winter for further training/play. It is anticipated that training facilities will be needed regardless of whether the Gellert building expansion occurs. Other sports (i.e. Tennis and Pickleball) also use indoor facilities outside of Halton Hills to accommodate their play through the winter months.

The initial survey for the Gellert Park expansion project included a question regarding air supported domes to obtain preliminary public feedback on the idea of a dome at Gellert Park. Through the consultation, numerous sport community group stakeholders (Pickleball, Tennis, Soccer), and members of the public expressed support for potential domes to be included in the park area. While the park expansion concepts do not include a dome as additional review and detailed assessment is required, the final park design could physically accommodate a court sport dome, should one be identified in the future.

The Town is undertaking an Outdoor Sports Strategy and will be reviewing the Master Plan for Trafalgar Sports Park as part of an overall review of the future plans proposed for existing Town owned but undeveloped parkland. Previous discussions have included Trafalgar Sports Park as a potential location for sports domes (turf/soccer and/or courts, multi-sport potential) given it is a Town wide multi-sport park and includes multiple sport fields.

At this time, staff have no direction from Council or previous master plans, or any forecasted plans in future budgets for the Town to consider financing, constructing, and operating an indoor domed facility, and staff do not recommend that the Town should consider constructing and operating a dome. However, the possibility of an external operator to finance, construct, and operate a dome through a lease arrangement which benefits the community with no/low financial investment or risk to the Town may be a viable alternative. As noted above, the Town of Milton, the Halton Catholic District School Board, and the Halton District School Board have partnered with private sector operators to implement domes in this way, as have several other Ontario municipalities. Some sports organizations have also had discussions with private sector providers to determine preliminary interest for a facility in Halton Hills.

Based on the level of interest, Town staff have also had preliminary discussions with several private sector organizations, to understand the basic approach to this type of project, and to see if there is any general interest.

Based on these discussions, staff are recommending that Council direct staff to issue a Request for Expression of Interest (RFEOI) for private sector companies to design, build and operate an indoor dome facility(ies) at suitable Town parks, associated with either existing or future amenity developments. The RFEOI would be open to proposals for a multi-sport court dome, a larger turf dome, training facilities, or a combination of these, if appropriate. It would primarily consider Town, Community or Townwide Park sites with

existing or proposed sport amenities, including Gellert Park, Trafalgar Sports Park, and Prospect Park. With the pending commencement of the detailed design for the Gellert Park expansion, Gellert Park may be of more interest to vendors than other projects that are currently further out in the 10-year capital forecast (i.e. Trafalgar Sports Park). The anticipated timing and funding timeframe for projects will be outlined as part of the RFEOI document.

As part of the RFEOI process, staff will also discuss with Halton District School Board and Halton Catholic District School Board staff, whether there is any merit to include non-Town owned sites such as Christ the King Secondary School or Georgetown District High School, where existing artificial turf facilities may be suitable for a larger soccer dome facility, as potential sites subject to a multi-party partnership. Any multi-party partnership would be subject to further negotiation, agreements, and approval by the respective school boards.

Staff believe that an expression of interest is the best way to confirm legitimate interest from the private sector, without incurring significant time or cost to undertake more detailed investigations.

A multi-sports dome in Halton Hills could also bridge the service level gap that exists until the Gellert Community Centre Phase 2 project is able to be implemented when the financial and development situation allows and offers the potential to offer increased recreational activities to residents, provides the ability to host sporting events and tournaments at any point in the calendar year and may also provide the opportunity for increased Town programming. A dome located at Gellert Park would be located centrally within the existing Georgetown South community and the Vision Georgetown expansion lands and may continue to be needed beyond the construction of the Gellert Community Centre expansion as population continues to grow.

Following the expression of interest process, staff would report back to Council with the results of the expression of interest, and identify any next steps including preferred locations, financial considerations, and any updates to other Town planning initiatives as well as potential partnerships with interested sports organizations.

Any expression of interest proposal would also be subject to a more detailed feasibility and site compatibility assessment to review zoning, servicing and neighbourhood context depending on which sites are preferred by proponents.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report aligns to the Town's Strategic plan recognizing the value to provide responsive, effective municipal government and strong leadership in the effective and efficient delivery of municipal services.

This report also identifies fiscal and corporate management as one of the Town's Strategic priorities.

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report is administrative in nature and does not directly impact or address climate change and the Town's Net Zero target.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public Engagement has been conducted as follows: Online Survey, Open House/PIC/Workshop, Stakeholder Meetings. The potential for a dome has been raised by several community sports organizations and residents through the Gellert Park Expansion consultation process including at public meetings and through the online surveys. Other sports organizations have also recently expressed interest in a dome/indoor facility for winter play, training, and sport programming. If an expression of interest for an air supported dome is received, additional public consultation and communications would be a part of the more detailed review and design process which would be subject to future Council approval.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Staff from Recreation & Parks (Community Development) were consulted in the preparation of this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report is administrative in nature and does not have any financial implications. There will be no costs incurred for the Town to conduct a Request for Expression of Interest process, other than existing staff time. Any specific proposals or Town funding requirements would be subject to a future staff report and future capital budget review and approval. Community sports organizations may be willing to partner with the Town to fund raise or apply for grants to provide enhanced facilities in conjunction with a potential dome project. The RFEOI will primarily be based on existing park locations or planned capital works that are included in the Town's 10-year Capital Forecast.

Reviewed and approved by,

Paul Damaso, Commissioner of Recreation & Parks

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer