

Orillia Packet & Times
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Progress in action
Steve Clarke, Mayor



If you haven't been by the recreation facility project site on West St. S. in the last few weeks, I encourage you to take a moment to walk, drive or cycle by. Behind the large mounds of soil at the front of the site, construction crews have been hard at work. The phoenix is rising, and finally, it can be seen from West St.

Over the next coming months, more of the building will start to appear as the foundations are completed and walls continue to be built. It's a very exciting time, certainly worthy of an update to residents and future users of the facility.

At the end of June, I had the privilege to attend a site tour with members of the volunteer-led Recreation Centre Campaign Team. Although I am provided with progress updates and visit the site regularly, this time was different. There was electricity in the air. There was such a sense of excitement from those in attendance to witness the development of such a long-awaited project.

Things are really taking shape and as the architect walked us through his vision for the project, it was clear that everyone could see it too. The highlight of the tour was certainly the pool. For the first time, we were able to stand in the area where the 25-metre, 8-lane pool will soon be and see foundation walls and easily identify the deep end. I'm not sure how long we stood there. We were amazed at the sheer size of the pool and the walls surrounding it and amazed at the reality that in about a year, Orillia will finally have the community pool that has been visualized for decades.

Currently, the building foundations and pads are nearing completion. Acapulco Pools, the pool sub-contractor completing the aquatic installation, is on site and has started construction of the pool basin floor. Preparation for the sanitary sewer and water main is taking place and underground electrical work is also underway. Looking forward to the next few months, the structural steel work will begin, the north parking area will be graded and site services will be completed. The project team anticipates the building will be fully enclosed by January 2018.

With the building taking shape, City staff continue to prepare for the opening in 2018. At the Budget Committee meeting on July 17, Council had a first look at the proposed operating budget and user rates for the new recreation facility.

Our goal is to provide Orillians with affordable access to recreation and leisure facilities. Proposed rates were developed based on anticipated programming of the new building and an average of current fees at facilities throughout the region. Families, seniors and individuals will have a variety of options from various levels of Fun Passes

(memberships), direct programming and pay as you go programming. User groups will have access to a world class facility for very competitive rates.

The budget presented was a high-level overview and values were based on current operating budgets and extensive research conducted by staff into the operation of other facilities. With that said, it is very important to understand that the facility we are building is not a cookie-cutter type building and there is no facility that operates similarly with the exact amenities.

Currently, staff are proposing a net operating subsidy of \$856,000 for the facility and \$100,000 for the 36 acre site. While staff provided a slightly lower estimate back in 2015, the proposed budget now includes considerations for factors that were not known at that time such as site selection, inflation, the rise in utility rates within municipal facilities, and the recent announcement of the proposed increase to minimum wage.

This project is the most anticipated and largest in the City's history and staff have been hard at work to prepare for its opening in 2018. Orillia has been waiting for a very long time for a recreation facility and when it's complete, the facility will not just be a building for users to swim or workout, I truly believe it will become the social heart of our community.

I encourage you to watch our website and social media channels for updates on this exciting project which includes an aquatic centre (lap pool, leisure pool, and therapy pool), gymnasiums, multi-purpose rooms, a walking/jogging track, preschool room, office space and fitness centre.

For more information on the recreation facility project, including pictures from the June 28 site tour, visit orillia.ca/recreationfacility.