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Remote car club gets green light

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star

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Remote controlled car track.

The Remote Control Car Club Facility will get a permanent home next spring – at least temporarily. After a lengthy debate Monday, council voted in favour of allowing the club a pilot project that will allow it to lease the Wilcox Park tennis courts early next spring. The short-term agreement, not to exceed two years, will be penned in the coming months with the club taking possession of the unused tennis courts early next spring. The Wilcox Park tennis courts were chosen as the potential site to develop a lease agreement by city staff because it fit criteria needed by the club. Other nearby tennis courts are also in the vicinity, council was told. A usage survey conducted earlier this year on the court showed that only two people used the facility during a half-hour period of more than 8

hours of observation, a staff report states.

The tennis courts are enclosed with a chain link fence that can be locked by the club so the equipment can remain set up at all times.

Marty Charron, president of the Sault Ste. Marie Remote Control Car Club, said the 10-year-old club is looking of a permanent home for the growing hobby.

The sport has been growing over the years and is expected to continue to do so in the future, he said. A permanent facility will go a long way enhance that growth.

The not-for-profit club operated out of the former Alexander Henry school, but can no longer do so because of renovations to transform the building into a new school. While the hard surface was ideal for cars, the weekend rebuilding and tear-down of the 6,000-square-foot tracks – which takes up to four hours – was not, he said.

Charron said the club's plans are to upgrade the surface of the tennis court to better accommodate the sport, with tracks and equipment left there for the entire season, from about mid-April until mid-October.

"It's a simple, fun experience," he told city council.

The remote control cars do not operate with gas and the facility would only be used between dawn and dusk.

The club has teamed up and held events for both Essar and Tenaris family day activities, Rotary Club activities and its own events.

"Our idea is to revitalize part of the community and with a facility that may not be used as much as it once was," he said.

But neighbourhood residents are opposed to converting the public space into a locked facility for the private club.

While Vera Beagan and Wendy Olar admit the tennis court hasn't been well used this past season, it is utilized by neighbourhood families for basketball, catch, teaching bicycle riding and rollerblading, among other things.

A petition with about 160 signatures opposing the Wilcox Park location was presented to city council.

Residents raised concerns about changing a public park into a private club, increased traffic and parking, the needs for washroom facilities and the noise the activity will create.

In addition, neighbours also raised concerns about insurance, liability and additional trash in the area.

"This is a proposal to put a race track in a public space," Olar said. "We don't believe it belongs here. We believe there should be a spot found elsewhere in the city for this club to operate."

A motion to defer the matter until the next week to allow the club time to hold a demonstration for the neighbourhood on the site was defeated. Ward 2 Coun. Sandra Hollingsworth, who voted against the motion, insisted council should adhere to the wishes of the 160 residents who signed the petition.

"I cannot disregard that," she said. "And I'm not comfortable converting a free tennis court used for other neighbourhood activities to a club that has a membership without programming or access to programming to help the less fortunate in this community."

Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker countered that the tennis courts had new usage and they should be repurposed.

The petition received by council was also "misleading," he said, suggesting the entire park, not just the tennis courts, would be closed to the public.

Ward 2 Coun. Susan Myers said she's looking forward to the results of the pilot project.

She said council receives the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee's agenda and minutes of meetings and council knew this was being looked at.

"This is a community facility," she said. "It belongs to the whole community and it's not being utilized," she said of the tennis courts.

Myers was in favour of repurposing the courts by allowing a community group to use it.

"I'm most interested in seeing how this will go. We need to expand our use of our facilities," she said.

Ward 4 Coun. Rick Niro, although he initially wanted to see a demonstration completed for the community, voted in favour of establishing the lease agreement while his wardmate, Lou Turco, did not. Ward 5 Coun. Marchy Bruni also voted against the motion.


Those who supported the motion included Mayor Christian Provenzano and councillors Steve Butland and Paul Christian (Ward 1), Susan Myers (Ward 2), Matthew Shoemaker (Ward 3), Frank Fata (Ward 5), Joe Krmpotich and Ozzie Grandinetti (Ward 6).

Those against includes Hollingsworth, Judy Hupponen (Ward 3), Turco and Bruni.

The recorded vote was passed with a 9-4 vote.



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