

City proceeding 'at potential peril' on KED

Minnow Lake group expecting case for judicial review to be heard

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The Minnow Lake Restoration Group is eagerly awaiting direction from the city on how to proceed with a court action they launched in August.

The group issued a press release earlier this week in which they indicated they are "waiting for the earliest date (from) the court to have the case heard."

The MLRG is seeking a judicial review of the July 14 council decision to proceed with the Kingsway Entertainment District. The group wants the resolution to be considered null and void.

"A favourable decision would stop the arena expenditure immediately," the Restoration Group said in its release.

Ian Wood, executive director of strategic initiatives, community and citizen services, told council in July the city has resumed meetings with its partners "and they are going well." He said there were a number of tasks the city needed to begin or resume, including finalizing the site plan; completing some infrastructure work; reviewing site

preparation with BOT Construction; and launching the search for an operator for the events centre.

The city also needs to finalize the design of the events centre, which will confirm the final budget, Wood said.

"We have restarted the process to select a venue operator for the events centre," Wood told councillors in late September. "Staff believe this is an important step at this point in the process so we can have the venue operator in place to participate with the design/build RFP process."

At the end of the July meeting, council voted 8-3 to proceed with plans for the KED. The only councillors to vote against moving forward were Ward 1 Coun. Mark Signoretti, Ward 2 Coun. Michael Vagnini and Ward 4 Coun. Geoff McCausland. Ward 3 Coun. Gerry Montpellier and Ward 10 Coun. Fern Cormier were absent.

Site preparation could begin as early as next month, a staff report noted

"Following council's direction to restart and accelerate the events centre development, staff re-established contracts for site development; restarted the process for securing a venue manager/operator; finalized details for site drainage; and are preparing for the design/build RFP process," the report indicated. "All project partners are working together on the plans for shared site works in

order to have grading and blasting begin by Nov. 29."

As part of the September decision, council voted 7-6 to finalize negotiations with BOT for site prep work. That will mean an expenditure of nearly \$6 million from city coffers.

A staff report indicated site preparation will cost a total of about \$9.7 million. The city will be responsible for \$5.9 million, while Gateway will pay \$2.2 million. The hotel, as yet unnamed, will cover \$1.1 million, while Dario Zulich, the developer, will pay \$530,000.

The MLRG is seeking an end to all expenditures.

"The latest council meeting authorized the site prep — nearly \$10 million — via city-administered contract; a single-source contract for architectural services for a firm not accredited in Ontario — \$850,000; and another \$300,000 for engineering services," the group said. "This voted on by six councillors, with the tie broken by Mayor Brian Bigger. Despite four years elapsing, Zulich has not indicated publicly or by contract that he has secured a four-star hotel, waterpark, motorsports park, soccer bubble, twin pad rink and other add-ons promised in 2017."

Eric Gillespie, the lawyer representing the citizen group, said the city could be putting itself in jeopardy by pursuing the events centre.

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