

Riverside South community space at a premium

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by Nevil Hunt

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Rec centre's expanded space will be 'very well used': councillor

A planned expansion to the Rideauview Community Centre will provide welcome space for programs which as "bursting at the seams," according to Gloucester-South Nepean Coun. Steve Desroches.

"This is to deal with the current need in the community," Desroches said recently while walking the hallways of the community centre.

The \$800,000 expansion project will add about 100 square metres of new space; a new meeting room similar to the existing conference room that can be divided into two smaller spaces.

"I'm confident the additional space will be very well used," Desroches said, adding the community has been fortunate school space has been available to take up the demand for meeting and gym space.

He said the big issue locally is child care.

"Before and after-school care: lots of parents need that, including myself," he said.

Riverside South is home to more than 10,000 residents today, with as many as 50,000 projected in roughly 20 years.

That means the Rideauview Community Centre won't meet the needs of the entire community as new residents move in.

Already land has been set aside near St. Francis Xavier High School for a much larger rec centre. Currently that land isn't served by roads or city water.

"The next phase will have to be a much larger complex with a full range of recreational services," Desroches said.

The plans for the Rideauview Community Centre expansion will be on display on March 20 at Moncion's Your Independent grocery store. Desroches will also be on hand to discuss the project.

SKATEPARK

One recreational opportunity that may be addressed in the coming years is space for skateboarders. Desroches said a skatepark is a good idea, although there's no suitable site within the existing layout of Riverside South. Noise would likely be an issue for residents near a skatepark, so the proximity of homes to skateboarders will be taken into account as the community expands.

"We have to find space," he said. "In the current configuration I'm not sure there is a logical space. I don't see fit right now."

No matter what news comes along about new homes, new businesses or new recreation space, Desroches said the people of Riverside South want to learn what's going on.

"People have a great interest in how the community is evolving," the councillor said, adding further retail development is on the way soon. "Developers say there is a keen interest from retailers to build now and in the future (in Riverside South)."

The opening of the future Strandherd-Armstrong bridge — planned for 2012 — will also spur retail growth, he said.

SIDEBAR

Demand for new rec centre space already exists

Just minutes before Coun. Steve Desroches arrives at the Rideauview Community Centre to chat with a reporter, Kristina Brady posts a sign on the centre's doors. The drop-in for children up to age six is full for the day.

Brady, who works for Global Child Care Services, runs the drop-in twice a week, as well as a baby drop-in. It's an opportunity for free play, activities and a healthy snack time.

"We have to turn people away," Brady said, adding the gym can serve a maximum of 40 children.

"We could use more storage space too," she said, adding the existing storage spaces are used by all manner of recreational groups. "Things are awfully tight."

Amy Spears and her 16-month-old son D'Arcy dropped in to the rec centre on Feb. 26, and she was thankful there was space available.

"We've come before and it's been full before," Amy said. "We need a larger area, and maybe more activities like a storyteller."

Shannon Kelly and two-year-old daughter Erin also made it in before the full sign went up. Shannon said more rooms would be a bonus, and a pool would be a great idea too.

"Erin will be in school soon so before- and after-school care is going to be really important," she said. "It's a hot commodity to get one of those spaces."

"Take a look around here," she added, waving at the busy gymnasium. "This is only about one per cent of kids in the neighbourhood."

Looking a decade or so ahead, Shannon said she'd like a teenage Erin to have more things to do near home.

"Any expansion of activities … would be wonderful," she said.

PHOTO CREDIT: Nevil Hunt, Barrhaven Ottawa South This Week

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