

Festival Hydro lead sponsor of planned Packham Road fitness park in Stratford



By [Mike Beitz](#), The Beacon Herald
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The ball is rolling and momentum is building for the new fitness park being developed by the Stratford Soccer Association (SSA) off Packham Road.

And the planned multi-use facility, which will include a premier artificial turf soccer field, now has a name – the Festival Hydro Community Park.

The local utility has signed on as the lead sponsor for the south end park, in a 15-year agreement worth a total of \$225,000.

That sponsorship is in keeping with the utility's strategic priorities, which include building partnerships and supporting the community, said Festival Hydro CEO Ysni Semsedini.

"To me, that's one of the important things about locally-owned distribution companies, that we give back to the communities in which we operate," he said. "So I just thought it was a natural fit to be involved in the soccer park."

The park may be the most high profile of Festival Hydro's sponsorships, but it's not the only one, noted Semsedini.

The utility makes regular contributions to the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance, collects employee donations for the United Way, offers student and sports team sponsorships, and will support a solar-powered charging station at Stratford's new skatepark.

"For us, it's all about giving back to the community," said Semsedini.

And the chance to get behind the new fitness park represents "a great opportunity, great timing, and a great way to give back to the community at large," he added.

SSA president Mike Vancea called that sponsorship "fantastic news" for the project, which he first pitched to city council last fall.

"Having Festival Hydro as the main sponsor is extremely valuable to us," he said, "because it allows us to have that conversation with other corporate sponsors to say, this is who's stepping up to the plate so far."

The SSA has committed to fundraising \$700,000 of the estimated \$1.2 million for the first phase, with the remainder to come from the city through a combination of development charges, the parkland trust fund and other sources.

"We're getting a lot of support from the community," said Vancea of the ongoing fundraising campaign. "There's been a really positive response."

In addition to Festival Hydro's naming rights for the park itself, and the continued support of the Rotary Club of Stratford, other sponsors (Bentley's, NA Engineering, Straight Forward Sales and Vancea Financial) have been secured for the four grass fields.

The artificial turf field is the only one left, "and we have some irons in the fire for that," said Vancea.

Construction could begin as early as this fall on the first phase of the project, which will include the artificial turf field, fencing and lighting.

"The intention is for the dig to start in September, and if everything goes well with the weather, we're hoping the field is completed by the end of this year," he said.

Even if it's pushed back to next spring, "it will be a playable surface in 2017," added Vancea.

Work on the second phase will begin as soon as possible after the first, he noted, and will include things like a new covered pavilion and clubhouse with changerooms and washrooms, as well as a scoreboard, fitness trails, a playground and picnic area.

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