



## **GTA Sports and Entertainment plans on applying for NHL expansion franchise**

### **'We're going to proceed with the process,' says CEO**

By Mike Zeisberger | Wednesday, June 24, 2015

LAS VEGAS - At least one Toronto-area group plans to contact the National Hockey League in the near future regarding the efforts to land a second team to the self-proclaimed Centre of the Hockey Universe.

GTA Sports and Entertainment CEO Graeme Rouston, who has been attempting to construct an 18,000-plus seat arena in the Markham area for several years, confirmed Wednesday night that his organization definitely will pursue the opportunity .

"I'd say that in the coming days we intend to reach out to the league about bringing another NHL franchise to southern Ontario," Rouston said in a phone interview with Postmedia Network.

Rouston's comments came less than an hour after commissioner Gary Bettman announced that the league will open a formal process in which expansion applications will be accepted. The deadline to submit the paperwork for the interested parties will be Aug. 10.

"(The league's announcement) means different things to different people," Rouston said. "We're now seeing an opportunity for a process to apply for an NHL franchise which we've privately been hoping for.

"We're going to proceed with the process. Hopefully we're successful with it."

Plans for the proposed Markham arena, known as the GTA Centre, were hatched in the spring of 2012 with Rouston spearheading the project.

In the end, Markham council voted to keep public money out of the equation and to use private backers only.

The issue has polarized Markham politicians and residents, with the anti-arena faction showing no fear in slugging Rouston and his plans. As recently as February, some of them referred to the project as "dead."

In any event, Rouston would not identify Markham specifically as a potential site on Wednesday, saying only that "all opportunities around the GTA will be explored.

“At this time, there is no specific agreement (with any community),” Roustan said. “We do plan on speaking with politicians in the province about moving this process forward.”

As for his detractors who have questioned his motivation for wanting to build an arena with no NHL tenant and have criticized some of his past business dealings, Wednesday’s news certainly put a new spin on the situation for Roustan.

“Being involved in any franchise in the NHL is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that drowns out any noise that comes from the cheap seats,” Roustan said.

Don’t be surprised if there are other Toronto-area parties who contact the league as well.

There is a belief that, behind closed doors, the league would be open to the concept of a second team playing at the Air Canada Centre, although there would be a lot of bureaucratic red tape to cut through for that to happen.