ISSUE NOTE: reopening of 41 outdoor artificial ice rinks considerations

Issue

A motion was put forward at City Council on March 3, 2008, for Parks, Forestry and Recreation to reopen the 41 Outdoor Artificial Ice Rinks (AIRs) that closed for the season on March 2. The Division recommends that the rinks not be reopened (with the exception of the eight pre-determined locations) for the following reasons:

- All compressors were shut down by contractors or permanent staff on Monday, March 3.
- All 55 seasonal Local 416 staff will be laid off on Tuesday, March 4. Some staff have selected alternative employment opportunities while other staff have scheduled vacations.
- Some equipment has been returned to yard storage facilities.
- Allowing the outdoor rinks to remain open for two weeks is weather dependent. Weather conditions at this time of year may result in unstable ice conditions.
- There is no advertising or promotion scheduled to advise Toronto residents of the rinks reopening.
- There is limited revenue opportunity to reopen the AIR program.

2007/08 AIR Season:

- 2007/08 AIR season: 41 rinks operate for a 12-week period; 8 rinks operate for a 15-week period.

- This is the regularly-scheduled season that Parks, Forestry and Recreation has operated on since 2006. There was no cost containment measures implemented in 2008.

- This season, most rinks opened on December 8, 2007, and closed on March 2, 2008.

- Eight locations are identified throughout the city to stay open until the end of March Break (Sunday, March 16, 2008), weather permitting. These eight locations are the same rinks that remained open during the 06/07 AIR season. These rinks are:

  - Albert Campbell Square
  - Dufferin Grove
  - Hodgson
  - Kew Gardens
  - Mel Lastman Square
  - Nathan Philips Square
  - Rennie Park
  - West Mall

- The rinks scheduled to remain open through the March Break have equipment located on site so that ice maintenance is more efficient and timely.
• 40 City-owned/operated indoor arenas across the city will be open until the end of March with some arenas staying open until May to accommodate ice permits. Public and leisure skate programs end for the season end on March 16, 2008.

**Current Situation**

• To reopen the 41 AIRs that closed on March 2 would take 3-4 days at additional costs, not currently in the budget.

• Seasonal staff is currently in the process of removing ice and cleaning up the AIRs that closed on March 2. All compressors have been shut down. Equipment has been removed from some of the sites.

• In addition to full-time staff allocated to the AIR program, 55 seasonal Local 416 staff is hired for the outdoor ice operating season. The term of employment for the staff who support AIRs operations ends on Tuesday, March 4, 2008, with the exception of staff at the eight rinks.

• All 55 seasonal staff would require extensions on their work selection period which may lead to issues with staffing all 49 rinks. Seasonal employees may have selected other employment opportunities through the bumping process or employees may have scheduled vacations.

• Maintaining ice into the month of March poses a number of challenges. Unpredictable and rising temperatures, sunshine, and spring-like weather conditions such as rain, make it difficult to maintain outdoor ice, causing potential safety concerns.

• The forecast for Monday, March 3 included sunshine, rain and a high of 12 degrees, which had an effect on ice maintenance on the eight rinks recommended to stay open until March 16. If these weather conditions continue, these eight outdoor ice rinks may close earlier than expected.

• There are additional costs to maintain ice into the month of March. As a result of the warmer weather, plants need to work harder to create skate-able conditions on AIRs, increasing hydro and operating costs.

• Additional costs per week would be between $40,000 and $60,000, depending on the facilities. This does not include start up or closing costs.

**Background:**

• Parks, Forestry and Recreation operates 49 outdoor artificial ice rinks across Toronto.

• The Outdoor Artificial Ice Rinks’ season is a pre-determined schedule that is set out in the fall of each year. Prior to the commencement of the season, the start and end date for each location is advertised.

• Parks, Forestry and Recreation has been expanding the AIR season through internal efficiencies in order to provide Toronto residents with increased winter recreational opportunities as a result
of requests from Mayor Miller. Prior to 2005, the AIR season was 10 weeks. Currently, the AIR season is a minimum of 12 weeks, and 15 weeks for eight rinks extending to March Break.

- Funding a 12-week AIRs season provides the ability for some rinks to open earlier to accommodate the City’s Cavalcade of Lights event and staff training requirements, and for selected rinks to stay open longer to accommodate March Break, depending on the weather.

Options for the future:

- Extending the AIR operating season will need to be discussed prior to the start of the season for budgeting and planning purposes.

- City Council should direct Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report back on options and opportunities to extend the AIR season for 2008/09.

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