



**STAFF REPORT
ACTION REQUIRED**

**Early Opening of Outdoor Artificial Ice Rinks –
Supplementary Report**

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| Date: | January 21, 2009 |
| To: | Community Development and Recreation Committee |
| From: | Brenda Patterson, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation |
| Wards: | All |
| Reference Number: | |

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to respond to a request by the Community Development and Recreation Committee on the opening of all City outdoor ice rinks at the same time as Nathan Phillips Square commencing fall 2009.

The additional costs associated with opening all 49 city-owned and operated outdoor rinks earlier in the season are substantial and cannot be absorbed in the Parks, Forestry and Recreation operating budget. Currently, there are five outdoor rinks that are opened earlier in the season – Nathan Phillips Square, Mel Lastman Square, Albert Campbell Square, Rennie Park and Dufferin Grove Park. The latter four rinks are scheduled to open on November 28, 2009, a week after Nathan Phillips Square, which will open one week earlier (on November 21, 2009), to coincide with the Cavalcade of Lights event.

As well as the budget constraints, this request would be difficult to administer in 2009, due to the preset work scheduling of fall seasonal clean up and maintenance activities, which are timed to end prior to the current scheduling of the winter outdoor rink seasonal maintenance activities and operations, which includes staff hiring and training, in order to provide outdoor skating opportunities to the public.

For the 2009-2010 outdoor skating season, it is not recommended that all 49 outdoor rinks be opened at the same time as Nathan Phillips Square due to the above-noted cost constraints and operational difficulties. However, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will consider this request in the development of the 2010 operating budget.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that:

1. City-owned and operated outdoor artificial ice rinks not open earlier in the 2009 annual winter skating season due to budgetary constraints; and
2. the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation review this request as part of the Division's 2010 operating budget submission.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of March 3, 4 and 5, 2008, City Council considered the issue of extending the outdoor artificial ice rink operating season until the end of the 2008 March Break for all city-owned and operated outdoor artificial ice rinks. It was requested that the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee prior to the 2008/2009 winter season on costs and opportunities for further extending outdoor artificial rinks throughout the March Break, as well as on a plan that allowed for the operating/closing of outdoor rinks on a year-to-year basis when the weather permitted.

Decision Document - City Council, Item M17.21 (March 3, 4, 5, 2008)

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/cc/decisions/2008-03-03-cc17-dd.pdf>

At its meeting of November 14, 2008, the Community Development and Recreation Committee considered the report, dated October 30, 2008, from the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation describing how the season for artificial ice rinks is determined and that, weather permitting, the 12-week outdoor artificial ice rink skating season be extended to a total of 14 outdoor rinks for an additional two-week period, ending March 15th. This recommendation was adopted by City Council, at its meeting of December 1, 2 and 3, 2008.

Decision Document – City Council, Item CD20.9 (December 1, 2 and 3, 2008)

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/cc/decisions/2008-12-01-cc27-dd.pdf>

At its meeting of January 12, 2009, the Community Development and Recreation Committee requested the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee as soon as possible, and for consideration with the 2009 Operating Budget, on opening all of the City's outdoor ice rinks at the same time as Nathan Phillips Square.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Staff were requested to report on extending the current outdoor skating season of 12 weeks by an additional two weeks at the end of the outdoor skating season, (from March 2nd to March 15th), which would include the March Break when it falls in the first half of March. There are currently 49 outdoor artificial skating rinks that are city-owned and operated. The staff report dated October 30, 2008 recommended that 14 of these outdoor rinks remain open for an extended two-week period in March, (to March 15th), weather permitting. City Council adopted this recommendation at its meeting of December 1, 2 and 3, 2008.

At its meeting of January 12, 2009, the Community Development and Recreation Committee requested that the General Manager of Parks, Recreation and Forestry report back to this Committee, as soon as possible, on the feasibility of a further extension of the annual outdoor ice skating season, by opening all of the City's outdoor ice rinks two weeks earlier in the fall/winter season, that is, at the same time as Nathan Phillips Square (on November 21, 2009). The Committee also requested that this report be forwarded to the Budget Committee so this matter can be considered during the 2009 Operating Budget deliberations.

COMMENTS

The yearly schedule for operating outdoor artificial ice rinks is established annually based on the Division's annual operating budget submission. This schedule is a planning tool that is used by the Division to hire and train seasonal staff, develop instructional skating programs and to advertise these services in the City's "Fun Guide". For the 2009 fall/winter skating season, the yearly schedule was developed in the spring of 2008, in time for the development of the 2009 annual operating budget in the latter half of the year. The current budget submission for 2009 does not anticipate any additional costs for early openings at all of our 49 outdoor rinks.

It should be noted that apart from Nathan Phillips Square, which opens on November 21st this year, there are four other outdoor rinks that also open earlier in the season - on November 28th. They include: Mel Lastman Square, Albert Campbell Square, Rennie Park and Dufferin Grove. Therefore, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division does provide early leisure skating opportunities to the public at some of its rinks.

For the 2009 fall/winter outdoor skating season, if all 49 artificial ice rinks were to be opened two weeks earlier (on November 21st), an incremental operating impact of \$645,600 would be incurred. This increased service provision is not included in either the Parks, Forestry and Recreation's annual base budget or the 2009 Operating Budget submission, so is not recommended for implementation this year. However, Parks,

Forestry and Recreation Division will consider this request in the development of its 2010 operating budget submission.

Aside from the budget constraints, there are seasonal workforce scheduling issues that would need to be addressed in order to accommodate the earlier opening of all of our outdoor rinks, including:

- the early opening would coincide with the annual parks autumn closing operations, which includes cleanup of parks, turf and horticultural maintenance activities, park building closures, winterization of automatic irrigations systems, sports field maintenance activities and the layoff of seasonal staff.
- there are insufficient full-time Parks staff to cover off both the above-noted fall seasonal close up duties, and rink opening and maintenance duties, if they're both scheduled during the same time period in mid-November.
- an additional week is needed prior to the opening of the outdoor skating rinks to hire and train seasonal staff and to prepare and flood the rinks so they are ready in time for the public skating season; so for a November 21st opening, seasonal staff would have to be hired by November 16th.
- the early opening of all 49 rinks would be difficult to administer during this time of fall seasonal maintenance activities, which coincide with the gradual layoff of summer parks casual staff. Full-time staff cannot assume the additional rink preparation and flooding duties due to their heavy workload commitments, so additional seasonal staff would be needed to backfill them, in order to open the outdoor rinks earlier in the season.

The transition to opening rinks early in the fall of 2009 is especially problematic, as there are no additional funds included in the Parks, Forestry and Recreation operating budget submission to either extend the contracts of summer seasonal workers or hire new seasonal staff earlier than December 1st, which is the current hiring date for the outdoor skating season for most of the outdoor rinks.

Additionally, there are weather-related problems in extending the outdoor skating season two weeks earlier in the season. Due to the warmer climatic conditions in November, it takes longer to cool the outdoor rinks, as the underground temperatures are warmer. Therefore, our energy consumption levels and associated costs will be higher. Also, warmer temperatures in November could hamper our ability to provide safe outdoor skating conditions, so it may not be possible to provide a full two weeks of leisure skating to the public during that time of year at all of our outdoor facilities.

Due to the late timing of this request for the 2009 budget cycle and our preset work scheduling for the hiring of seasonal staff, we are not recommending that any additional outdoor ice rinks be opened earlier than their current schedule this year (beyond the five that are currently opened earlier in the 2009 fall season).

Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will review this request for a further extension of the outdoor skating season in the development of their 2010 Operating Budget submission.

CONTACT

Paul Ronan, Director, Parks, Tel: 416-396-4490, Fax: 416-396-4957, Email:
pronan@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Brenda Patterson
General Manager, Parks, Forestry & Recreation