



REPORT FOR ACTION

Updates on Artificial Ice Rink Standards, Cross-Ice Hockey Impacts and the Feasibility of Skate Rental Programs at City-operated Rinks

Date: June 21, 2018

To: Community Development and Recreation Committee

From: General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report responds to directions to report back to the Community Development and Recreation (CDR) Committee on the implementation of operating standards for outdoor artificial ice rinks, the impact of cross-ice hockey at City arenas and the feasibility of skate rental programs at artificial ice rinks.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) operates 52 outdoor artificial ice rinks for 12 to 16 weeks each year. Programming includes supervised leisure skate and Shinny hockey as well as permit opportunities. In the 2017 to 2018 skate season, there were over 580,000 visits to the City's outdoor rinks. PFR operates 65 indoor ice surfaces at 51 arenas. Hockey organizations are the largest users of permitted times with over 58,000 hours permitted this past winter season. Established operating standards, responsive programming and ensuring a quality user experience are divisional service priorities. Since 2016, PFR has advanced a number of service standards and operational changes to improve the customer experience and access to quality ice facilities. The division also works closely with its ice user groups and community stakeholders when responding to issues, opportunities and changes in their program standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The Community Development and Recreation Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts from adoption of the recommendation in this report.

The report provides an update on signage implementation and use which are part of the Council approved service levels within the 2018 Council Approved Operating and the Council Approved 2018-2027 Capital Budget and Plan.

The Interim Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of November 8 and 9, 2016, through item CD15.4 "Outdoor Ice Rink Program Standards and Improvements", City Council requested the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to develop a standard template to communicate flooding and maintenance at each artificial ice rink and direct staff to post these; post 311 as the customer service contact number for program or facility issues; and report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee on implementation and use by end of the third quarter, 2017.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.CD15.4>

At its meeting of October 2, 2017, through item MM32.26 "Request for Report on the Impacts of Mandatory Cross Ice/Half-Ice Hockey", City Council requested the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to consult with Hockey Canada, the Ontario Hockey Federation, the Greater Toronto Hockey League, North York Hockey League and local minor hockey leagues in the City of Toronto, and to report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee on the impacts of mandatory cross-ice/half-ice hockey on Parks, Forestry and Recreation operations, including the ownership, safety and storage of equipment, ice allocation, scheduling, change room space, and fees and revenue.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.MM32.26>

At its meeting of January 17, 2018, through item CD25.4 "Supporting Skate Rentals at City-Operated Outdoor Rinks", the Community Development and Recreation Committee directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee by July 2018 on possible approaches to starting skate rental programs at City-operated outdoor rinks.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.CD25.4>

COMMENTS

Update on Artificial Ice Rink Standards

Over the last two outdoor ice seasons (2016-2017 and 2017-2018) staff have successfully implemented the Artificial Ice Rink Program and Operating Standards. As directed by CDR, the purpose of these standards was to improve the overall users' experience at any of the City's outdoor rinks through improved communication, maintenance and customer service information. Specific examples of PFR's standards include, but are not limited to, the development of consistent facility maintenance schedules, real-time information on rink schedule changes and/or closures, information on flooding schedules and providing 311 as a contact number for facility related issues.

As part of PFR's commitment to continuous improvement, a survey was conducted from January to March 2017 to solicit feedback from the public on program delivery and user experience. The survey had 600 respondents who indicated high levels of satisfaction ranging from 78 to 96 percent in the following areas: ice quality, building maintenance, instructional programming and customer service. 60 percent of respondents indicated the website is the channel they access most often for schedules and program information. The survey confirmed that the enhancements made to www.toronto.ca/skate with respect to real-time information on closures, ice conditions and schedule changes were effective.

Staff will continue to monitor feedback and ensure the artificial ice rinks provide a quality user experience.

Cross-Ice Hockey

In 2017, Hockey Canada mandated cross-ice hockey, also known as half-ice or modified-ice hockey, for participants under the age of seven. Cross-ice hockey is played widthwise on a rink, which represents approximately one-third of the length of the full ice. This method allows up to three games to be played concurrently. This approach essentially scales the playing area to the age and size of the participants. PFR consulted with ice users on the impacts that mandatory cross-ice hockey has had on arena operations and their programs.

A reference group was established with representation from City staff, Hockey Canada, the Ontario Hockey Federation, the Greater Toronto Hockey League, North York Hockey League and Scarborough Hockey Association. Impacts, including ownership of ice dividing equipment, safety and storage of equipment, ice allocation, scheduling, fees and revenue were discussed. Minor hockey associations will be responsible for the purchase of any ice-dividing equipment necessary. PFR will work with associations to provide storage solutions, where possible.

It has been determined that there will be no impacts on ice allocation, fees or revenue as a result of mandatory cross-ice hockey. Ice time will continue to be allocated to youth hockey associations in accordance with the Council-approved Ice Allocation Policy.

Feasibility of Skate Rental Programs at City-operated Rinks

Four skate rental operations exist at City rinks. Of these, Nathan Philip Square is operated by a third party vendor "City Skate Rentals" and Dufferin Grove, Wallace Emerson and Campbell are operated directly by PFR.

Establishing additional skate rental locations would require a number of site conditions to be present and enhancements to PFR's current service level at any candidate location(s). These include and are not limited to:

- Investments in skates and protective equipment (i.e. helmets)
- Skate sharpening equipment
- Secured storage space
- Rental kiosk space
- Technology to support point of sale and cash handling
- Staff resources

Most of the City's outdoor rinks cater to neighbourhood residents and most lack the necessary infrastructure and participant volumes to support a third party operator contracted through a Request for Proposal process. Expanding directly-operated, City subsidized skate rental operations would be resource intensive and in many locations, require additional capital and IT investments.

PFR continues to deliver and enhance accessible, affordable outdoor skate opportunities for skaters and non-skaters. Partnership programs as an example, have advanced programs such as Hockey in the Neighbourhood, equipment donations and helped with capital improvements to outdoor ice facilities. PFR will continue to explore innovative approaches to engage residents in outdoor skating activities in the city.

Conclusion

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is committed to continuous improvement. Staff will work with the city's ice user community to monitor the impacts of cross-ice hockey; implement programs and services that ensure outdoor skating programs are accessible for both skaters and non-skaters; and will review and improve service standards to ensure optimal service delivery and customer experience.

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SIGNATURE

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