

Reimagining Weston Lions Arena through a Nominal Lease with MLSE LaunchPad

Date: October 21, 2025

To: Executive Committee

From: Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management and Interim General Manager, Parks and Recreation

Wards: Ward 5 (York South—Weston)

SUMMARY

This report provides an update in response to Council direction ([2025.MM29.9](#)) for staff to engage with Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment (MLSE) Foundation, the Ward Councillor, stakeholders and local residents to explore the feasibility of revitalizing and reimagining the Weston Lions Arena.

The Weston Lions Arena is a City-owned facility managed by the Weston Lions Club under a nominal lease since 1970. As directed, City staff in Parks and Recreation and Corporate Real Estate Management, in consultation with staff in Social Development, worked collaboratively with the local Councillor's office and MLSE Foundation to explore the feasibility of reimagining the Arena. Specifically:

- Staff reviewed the City's current community programming available in the Weston area and how this could be significantly enhanced through free, high-quality youth recreation, mentorship, and employment development opportunities that MLSE LaunchPad's "Sport for Development" program could bring by integrating sport, life skills and academic supports.
- Staff compared the long-term capital and operating financial implications of maintaining the Weston Lions Arena in its current state versus partnering with MLSE LaunchPad. This included consideration of ongoing operational costs, community benefit return, and long-term sustainability through a nominal lease arrangement.
- Staff examined ways to minimize disruption for existing ice users and evaluated the feasibility of relocating current programs to nearby arenas. Parallel analysis explored whether the proposed change, including the potential loss of one ice pad, would negatively impact overall access to ice within the Etobicoke York District. This will be addressed further through the forthcoming Ice Facilities Strategy under the Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan.
- Consistent with Council direction under MM29.9, staff collaborated with the local Councillor and MLSE LaunchPad in development of a comprehensive, iterative community engagement plan to explore feasibility and assess support for the proposal.

- Supported by City staff, the local Councillor and MLSE LaunchPad co-led a first phase of community engagement in August and September 2025. Through online surveys and in-person consultations, local residents and youth consistently expressed support for transforming the arena into a community hub focused on youth development and inclusion.

Revitalization through the MLSE Foundation would result in an estimated \$25 million investment by MLSE, with potential to deliver major repairs and capital improvements to the existing facility. As part of this investment, the facility's seasonal ice pad would be removed and a new, year-round multi-sport facility would be created through MLSE's LaunchPad model.

Through implementation of the LaunchPad service model, the proposal is anticipated to advance positive community outcomes, City-wide funding priorities, and strategic objectives, including enhanced access to free, accessible programming in sport and recreation, life skills development, and academic support for children and youth facing barriers to participation. These will be delivered with no capital financial impact to the City at this location, and operating impacts of relocating existing ice users to other locations will be absorbed in annual operating budgets and off-set by new permit fees being paid to the City for use of ice.

This report provides the findings of the engagement to date, which confirm feasibility of the proposal and indicate broad community interest and support in the potential redevelopment and service model. Based on these findings, staff recommend that City Council authorize staff to negotiate a long-term, nominal lease with MLSE LaunchPad to operate the Weston Lions Arena and direct staff to continue working with MLSE LaunchPad, the local Councillor, and community stakeholders on the arena's redevelopment, including consultation on its future design and programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management, and the Interim General Manager, Parks and Recreation, recommend that:

1. City Council authorize the Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management, in consultation with the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, to negotiate and enter into a nominal lease agreement for 20-years, plus two 10-year extension options, with Youth Centre for Sports Development ("MLSE LaunchPad"), on terms and conditions acceptable to the Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management, in consultation with the General Manager Parks and Recreation, and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
2. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, in consultation with the Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management, to continue engaging MLSE LaunchPad, the Ward Councillor, stakeholders, and local residents on the next phase of the Weston Lions Arena redevelopment, including comprehensive consultation on proposed design and programming for the new facility.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no current financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendations contained in this report. The existing lease agreement with the Lions Club of Weston is a nominal agreement, as is the proposed lease with MLSE LaunchPad. MLSE LaunchPad, as the tenant, will be responsible for all costs, including major capital, maintenance and operating costs, and property taxes, related to the Property. The proposed agreement will also include MLSE LaunchPad's contribution towards interior retrofits, programming space renovations and capital work needed for initial setup estimated at \$25 million.

The City would retain responsibility for exterior operational maintenance, including landscaping, snow removal, and waste collection consistent with current park operations and state of good repair work of the property. Funding is included in Parks and Recreation's Operating Budget and 10 Year Capital Plan. Any financial implications for Parks and Recreation, would be addressed through future budget processes or subsequent reports to Council as needed related to this item.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact section.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on April 23 and 24, 2025, City Council adopted MM29.9 "Working with MLSE Foundation to Explore Feasibility of Reimagining Weston Lions Arena" that directed staff to engage with MLSE Foundation, the Ward Councillor, stakeholders and local residents to explore the feasibility of revitalizing and reimagining the Weston Lions Arena. <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.MM29.9>

COMMENTS

History of the Weston Lions Arena

The Weston Lions Arena is a legacy hockey facility in Toronto. Conceived and built by the Weston Lions Club, the arena officially opened on November 25, 1949, on the former Weston Fairgrounds. The arena is City-owned and has been programmed and managed by the Weston Lions Club under a nominal lease since 1970.

The facility has distinct features including a unique wooden, church-style barrel roof, wooden pew seating, and a sand bed beneath the ice. The arena has hosted local teams such as the Weston Dukes, Weston Dodgers, the Dixie Beehives, Weston Minor Hockey League, and figure skating groups.

The existing lease agreement, as amended in 1983, automatically renews on a year-to-year basis. Either party can notify the other by November 1 of any year, of their intention

to no longer renew, which triggers a lease end date of March 31 the subsequent year (i.e. allows for one final season).

Current State of the Weston Lions Arena

The Weston Lions Arena has a significant and growing backlog of repair needs, totalling over \$15 million. Parks and Recreation's 10-year Capital Budget and Plan currently includes \$2.597 million for state of good repair work on-site: \$131,000 in 2031 and \$2.466 million in 2032 that would include planned upgrades to the refrigeration system. Pending Council authorization to proceed with the MLSE partnership, City staff will explore opportunities to repurpose allocated capital funds as part of a broader capital budget exercise.

The Weston Lions Arena is aging and no longer meets contemporary standards for inclusive, multi-sport, community-based programming. Currently, the City is responsible for major capital repairs, replacements, and upgrades at Weston Lions Recreational Arena while minor repairs, maintenance, operations, and daily cleaning are the responsibility of the Club. Weston Lions Arena is responsible for all programming, promotion, staffing and governance.

Weston Lions Club have provided information on current facility usage. At present, seven user groups are using a combined 40 hours of ice time per week for five months of the year. Should Council approve the next phase of the partnership with MLSE, existing ice user groups can be accommodated in City-operated arenas following the 2025-2026 season. Additional detail on ice provision and allocation is provided below.

MLSE LaunchPad Proposal

MLSE Foundation has proposed reimagining Weston Lions Arena as a second MLSE LaunchPad location, modeled after its existing facility at 249 Jarvis Street, and converting the facility from an ice arena to a youth-focused multi-sport hub. The proposed use would provide free and accessible programming in sport and recreation, life skills development, and academic support for children and youth facing barriers to participation. Parks and Recreation and Corporate Real Estate Management staff have engaged in preliminary discussions with MLSE Foundation to explore this new service delivery model and its potential to enhance youth access and optimize the arena's role as a community resource.

The MLSE LaunchPad proposal includes funding for completion of interior retrofits, programming space renovations, and associated capital work needed for initial setup (estimated cost of \$25 million). MLSE LaunchPad will submit capital plans to the City for consultation prior to construction start. All major operational systems (HVAC, furnace, lighting etc.) would be in line with City standards, including Toronto Green Standards and Toronto Accessibility Design Guidelines. To support capital investments required for modernization, MLSE Foundation has also expressed interest in a long-term lease agreement with the City. This approach is aligned with lease models used at other MLSE LaunchPad sites and would be subject to further negotiation and community consultation.

Based on staff review of the City's current community programming available in the Weston area, the opportunity for a second long-term MLSE LaunchPad could address service gaps in access to local programming by providing access to free, inclusive, and development-focused programming. It would deliver year-round, multi-sport, and wellness opportunities for youth; expand employment and mentorship pathways; provide a safe and culturally inclusive space; and create accessible facilities for community groups to deliver recreation, education, and wellness programs and advance equitable access to sport and community development across the Etobicoke York District.

Building on preliminary discussions, and consistent with stakeholder and resident engagement described below, City staff believe MLSE's LaunchPad proposal satisfies Council direction to better deliver high-quality and accessible sport and recreation opportunities.

Stakeholder and Community Engagement

To assess feasibility following direction from City Council at its April 2025 meeting, staff met with MLSE LaunchPad beginning in May 2025 to better understand the potential for added community benefit that advances the City's financial and strategic priorities.

The existing MLSE LaunchPad location at 249 Jarvis Street operates a "Sport for Development" model that delivers free, high quality, and accessible recreation programming for children and youth experiencing barriers to participation. Weston Lions Arena could be a second MLSE LaunchPad location, to serve as a community hub that would optimize recreation opportunities and community benefits in the next evolution of the facility.

Following MLSE's existing model, these opportunities could include free programming, life-skills development, and inclusive access for local youth and families focusing on physical literacy, mental health, educational attainment, and employment readiness for youth aged 6-18. The existing MLSE LaunchPad location serves approximately 15,000 youth annually, offers programming focused on physical literacy, education, and employment readiness, and provides approximately 40,000 healthy meals and snacks per year. In addition, this site currently provides over one thousand hours of cost-free mental health counselling supports to local youth.

The proposed MLSE LaunchPad model for Weston Lions Arena could include similar programs, alongside its "Sport for Development" programming up year-round, up to six days a week, in nine-week cycles, along a community responsive programming framework developed through broad community consultation.

Staff initiated engagement with the Weston Lions Club in May 2025 to review the organization's operational and financial status. The Weston Lions Club expressed overall support for the MLSE LaunchPad proposal and met with City staff on July 10, 2025. On July 17, 2025, the Acting General Manager of Parks and Recreation issued correspondence to the Weston Lions Club confirming Council's direction to pursue alternative uses for Weston Lions Arena and advising of the City's intent not to renew the existing year-to-year arrangement with the Club beyond March 31, 2026. The letter

committed to continued dialogue, recognizing the Club's longstanding relationship at the site, and outlined that regular arena operations would continue through the 2025-2026 ice season. The letter provided a City contact to assist the Club in identifying alternative arrangements for user groups ahead of the 2026-2027 season. On October 8, 2025, Corporate Real Estate Management provided the Club with formal notice under the existing lease, confirming the City's intention not to renew the current agreement effective March 31, 2026.

Following Council direction under MM29.9, Parks and Recreation staff worked with Corporate Real Estate Management, Social Development, and the local Councillor on a regular basis, beginning in July 2025 to guide MLSE LaunchPad in developing a comprehensive, iterative community engagement plan. The engagement plan involves phased consultations and clear communications to existing user groups, including multiple initiatives to ensure comprehensive consultation with local communities and the Weston Lions Club.

Throughout August and September 2025, Phase 1 of the engagement plan focused on assessing the capacity of the proposed LaunchPad to deliver high-quality and accessible sport and recreation opportunities.

Phase 1 of the engagement commenced with MLSE hosting open houses at its downtown LaunchPad location in August and September 2025, offering tours for Weston residents. MLSE hosted a community BBQ and Sport Day on September 11, 2025, that was attended by over 400 people, and town hall meetings have taken place with nearby Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) and co-operative housing residents.

A youth focus group engaged in discussions the week of September 21, 2025, and feedback from this focus group envisioned the proposed MLSE LaunchPad at Weston Lions Arena as a safe, inclusive community hub that supports well-being, mentorship, and local pride. Two key priorities emerged:

- Youth Employment and Development: strong interest in paid jobs, mentorship, and career development linked to both construction and ongoing operations, including opportunities in coaching and skilled trades.
- Community Safety: desire for a safe "third space" offering positive, accessible activities, and affordable space for local organizations to run wellness and prevention programs.

A comprehensive online survey specifically aimed at engaging ice user groups at the Weston Lions Arena and other local arenas launched in August 2025 and closed on September 30, 2025, receiving 873 responses. The survey included ability to share anonymous feedback and was accessible in six languages (English, Vietnamese, Spanish, Italian, Somali, and Arabic), and revealed broad and diverse participation, with 84 per cent of respondents living within five kilometres of Weston Lions Arena. Overall, 61 per cent of respondents support or strongly support the proposed MLSE LaunchPad expansion, including 81 per cent of youth under age 29. When asked what design features and community priorities reimagined facility should include to best serve local

needs, participants emphasized priorities such as free access to sport and recreation (78 per cent), youth employment and volunteer training (55 per cent), space for community gatherings (54 per cent), mental health and wellness supports (51 per cent), and food and education-related programming (over 40 per cent each). This data indicates strong desire for a multi-sport, inclusive, and community-rooted facility that preserves local heritage, strengthens belonging, and advances equitable access to recreation and opportunity. In summary, data from the survey found:

- Support for free or low-cost access (affordability)
- Preference for multi-sport spaces over single-sport (ice-only) models
- Interest in inclusive design (wheelchair access, prayer/sensory rooms)
- Strong demand for youth-specific and culturally reflective programs

Among the 23 per cent of respondents not in support of an MLSE LaunchPad in Weston at this time, the main concerns were around loss of ice facilities and questions about whether the future space could include an ice component. Pending Council approval, future consultation would seek resident input on design features, such as play space types, programming, and accessibility, and on broader community priorities that a reimagined facility could help to address and advance.

More than 100 participants attended a public consultation meeting held on September 24, 2025, to discuss priorities for the reimagined facility. Three consistent themes emerged:

- **Community Needs and Opportunities:** participants emphasized the need for a youth-friendly, inclusive, and accessible recreation space. Local youth shared that they are not currently using the existing facility and are seeking a space that reflects their interests and identity. Residents expressed strong support for additional year-round indoor recreation opportunities and identified a gap in positive, local activities for youth. The proposed MLSE LaunchPad model received support from young people who noted that travel to other centres often requires long commutes. Local educators and service providers expressed interest in program partnerships across school levels and community agencies to enhance opportunities for children, youth, and families.
- **Building Community Connection:** residents highlighted the importance of honouring the site's history, particularly the legacy of Weston Lions Club, to foster neighbourhood pride and a sense of place. Youth, parents, and community organizations noted that a welcoming, well-programmed facility could play a preventative role in addressing local violence by providing safe, engaging spaces during critical after-school hours. Participants also highlighted the strength of Weston's civic networks and recommended that early collaboration opportunities be established with local groups for meetings, events, and grassroots programming.
- **Key Concerns:** some participants raised concerns about the potential loss of ice access for current arena users, including local hockey schools. Others sought clarity on program eligibility, emphasizing that services should be open to all youth regardless of background or income. Parents asked whether programming could extend to children under six years of age. Several participants also highlighted the

need for further consultation on multi-sport interests to ensure that the design reflects the community's evolving demographics and recreation needs.

To promote these engagement opportunities, a project webpage, paid social media advertisements, email campaigns and e-flyers have been leveraged to reach various stakeholder groups, along with signage and posters to promote the survey at local schools, residential buildings, libraries, parks, and other community spaces. Postcards were also circulated to all residents within a two-kilometer walkshed of the Weston Lions Arena.

Staff review and analysis of engagement findings in October 2025 support that reimagining Weston Lions Arena through the proposed MLSE LaunchPad model provides a feasible, community responsive path forward toward Council's direction to reimagine and explore how to deliver high-quality, inclusive, and accessible sport and recreation opportunities for the Weston community.

After any agreement between the City and MLSE LaunchPad is executed for redevelopment of the Weston Lions Arena, additional engagement will consult local user groups about facility design and future programming. Specifically, pending Council approval, Phase 2 public consultation would be focused on design features including sport surface mix, cultural expression, and universal accessibility.

Indoor Ice Provision

Weston Lions Arena currently contains a single ice pad, and proposed designs for the new LaunchPad do not include ice. Staff have been directed ([2025.EY24.24](#)) to report back on replacement ice opportunities, such as the creation of a new ice pad or the expansion of an existing arena, within the Etobicoke York District. This work will be addressed through an Ice Facilities Strategy as part of the forthcoming Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan.

The Ice Facilities Strategy will identify current and future demands, gaps where ice facilities are located, opportunities to maximize use, and ways to improve ice facilities for local communities. Draft facility-based directions from the Ice Strategy (which has been the subject of [public engagement](#) over 2024 and 2025) include considerations for increasing investment in arenas to maintain them in good repair, opportunities for improvements and modernizations, co-location with other community spaces and services, potential consolidation of single pad arenas into new double pad locations, and leveraging partnerships, donations and sponsorships to enhance arena condition and year-round availability for community use.

Ice Allocation

Weston Lions Arena is a City-owned facility operated by the Weston Lions under lease. Under the current lease arrangement, the single ice pad at Weston Lions Arena has not been a part of city-wide ice allocation, meaning that current user groups that include Toronto residents would be considered as part of the existing allocation of ice in the City rinks.

Staff have engaged with Weston Lions Club to understand the landscape and allocation requirements of current user groups and begin working alongside existing ice users to include them in the City's ice allocation at other City-owned arenas. Ice allocation in Toronto is a network, with ice users often travelling to multiple facilities to access ice. City staff will continue to engage existing arena user groups ahead of the 2026-2027 season.

The City's Ice Allocation Policy was approved by Council in 2005 and defines how indoor ice time is allocated; each year, Parks and Recreation develops an annual Ice Allocation Work Plan. The upcoming 2026-2027 Ice Allocation Work Plan would outline the milestones and dates for that seasonal permit process. The City's Ice Allocation Policy describes a formula, using available hours and registration numbers, to determine the number of hours per week that each applicant will receive at a City-operated arena.

Every applicant, including new and emerging groups, receives ice time. Ice scheduling (when and where the ice time is provided) is determined by assessing the available hours and the requests by the groups. The total time allocated to a group in a single season and the method by which the time is calculated can be found in the Ice Allocation Entitlements document which is shared publicly ahead of each season.

Ice time is first allocated for City programming (September to April). Once City programs are booked in, the order of priority is non-profit groups (children or youth, competitive youth programs, adults, or older adults), then private companies (all ages).

The number of hours each group receives is based on the number of people in the group and how many of them live in Toronto. Applications must be submitted by set deadlines that are posted online; seasonal permit applications for the 2026-2027 season would be due in November with permits for that season issued in April 2026.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Based on results from Phase 1 of the community engagement plan, City staff believe the proposal from MLSE LaunchPad represents a unique opportunity to reimagine the Weston Lions Arena as a vibrant community hub that better meets the needs of local youth and families through enhanced opportunities for high-quality and accessible sport and recreation.

By transforming the facility into a MLSE LaunchPad location, the City can expand local access to free, high-quality sport, recreation, and life-skills programming for children and youth facing barriers to participation.

This initiative aligns with the City's strategic goals of equity, inclusion, and youth development, while also addressing the aging condition and underutilization of the current arena. Through broad and meaningful community engagement, careful transition planning, and a strong operational partnership, this project has the potential to deliver substantial and lasting benefits to the Weston community and residents across the city.

Staff will continue working collaboratively with MLSE LaunchPad, the local Councillor, stakeholders, and residents to advance this initiative with detailed updates made available on the project website as the project progresses.

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