

City of Toronto – Parks Development & Capital Projects

Curling Strategy

Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting 3 Summary

March 8, 2021

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Introduction

This document provides a summary of the Curling Strategy Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting 3 that was held on March 8, 2021.

[More information about the project can be found on the project webpage at www.toronto.ca/curlingstrategy](http://www.toronto.ca/curlingstrategy)

Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting #3

The purpose of this workshop was to provide a project update, including a recap of Council direction and work to date, a discussion of facility options identified for further investigation, considerations for further analysis, and next steps. The meeting presentation will be available on [the project webpage](#).

Attendees

Staff

- Suzanne Coultres, Project Manager
- Matt Bentley, Project Manager
- Alex Lavasidis, Senior Consultation Coordinator

Reference Group Members Present

- Toronto Curling Association: Tom Worth, *Club Manager Liaison*
- CurlON: Steve Chenier, *Executive Director*
- Rocks and Rings (sport development): Chad McMullan, *President, Rock Solid Productions*
- West End Curling Committee: John Rudd, Susan Lawrence, and Greg King
- York Urbanist Curling Design: Mark Inglis
- Special Olympics: Michael Chung, *Program Developer - GTA*
- Toronto Sport and Social Club: Graham Welsh, *Venues Coordinator*

Regrets

- Curling Canada
- High school curling
- Ontario Rental Facilities Association (ORFA)
- Parasport Ontario

Feedback Summary

Participants provided questions of clarification and comment throughout the meeting. These questions (Q), comments (C) and responses from staff (R) presented below.

Q. What is the staff report timeline?

A. The timeline for the staff report will depend on the stakeholder engagement, which will start shortly. The goal is to provide a staff report this year, ideally later in the spring. The phase 1 report is complete and can be linked into recommendations for growing the sport.

Q. Availability of single pads for conversion are based on the building of the new twin pads, scheduled over the next 5 years. Would any conversions be able to begin before twin pad conversions?

A. The main consideration is that the capital budget is built on the available funding over 10 years. So conversion is contingent on finding room in the capital budget, which is not currently allocated. This funding would need to be provided through future plan updates. The 10-year plan includes the intent to link any conversion to when a new twin pad is brought online. The difference is, at that time, there was an adequate provision of curling facilities across the city.

Q. Typically, costs are \$4.5 million for 2 arenas, and \$800,000 for design, is that correct?

A. Generally there is funding for planning and construction with the two budgets sometimes overlapping. It is still unclear what a conversion could look like and cost will depend on future uses.

Q. Are the 10-year master plan funds Council approved?

A. The plan is approved, and Council approves the spending each year, in year. As part of their yearly approvals, an update to the 10-year forecast is presented. If funding levels continue on pace, you would expect to see those funds approved. This is a waterfall approach to funding the plan over the 10 year period.

Q. When identifying an arena for conversion, would cost of conversion be a major consideration?

A. One of the more impactful issues is who the conversion is providing service for and impacts to other services. There will be some degree of analysis on the economic impact but will generally focus on who will be impacted by the change. Cost recovery within PFR is not 100%, with pools and arenas being the most costly. Even with a large amount of permit revenue there are a net losses. While conversion cost and operation cost is a consideration there are other more critical considerations including the facility condition, whether arena users want more accessible spaces, impacts to a broad range of users, etc.

Q. Are budgetary limits the rationale for not providing a new facility as an option?

A. Yes, the budget, especially for a piece of land is expensive. It is very difficult to find land that the city owns that could be used for this type of purpose, as city lands are already being used for other recreation purposes. Staff can't recommend a new facility because of cost considerations.

Q. Would it make a difference if budget could be found outside the City, for example through partnerships with private entities or with higher levels of government?

A. If third party funding is available, there is an opportunity for out of the box approaches (e.g. securing private land, or funding). The challenge is that there are no major provincial or federal programs that provide funding, beyond keeping existing facilities running/improving existing facilities. If funding became available we would investigate that option, but we are not aware of any such programs at this time.

Q. A new arena would help fill the gap for those who have been displaced by the recent closures, but do not address the untapped demand for curling across the city. Would there be possibility in the future to tap into that untapped market?

A. That is a good point for long term planning horizons (e.g. 25 year or more). The best way to demonstrate the additional need is by current participation. So, if we convert a rink or create a shared use model, and can show it is used to capacity, that helps build that case long term.

Q. You've presented and shared great data. There was one statement that was concerning, "there are more hockey players than there are curlers". While that is a fact, we should look at the reason for that. There are 15 - 20 hockey arenas in Etobicoke. I think you need to divide the number of participants in a jurisdiction by the number of facilities to get a more accurate comparator. That is what should be presented in the report.

A. The data we have shows a magnitude of difference between curling and hockey demand, and even with the absence of facilities in Etobicoke, still shows demand for curling in Etobicoke. However, the point is taken.

Q. If profitability is not a high criteria but the budget for a new facility is, it seems like a contradiction. What if curling was seen as cost neutral or profitable? Given the demand of displaced curlers and an untapped demand in the market, you could fill 8-9 arenas. The estimate of 5-6 arenas of unmet demand seems low.

A. The City looks at hours of use, we don't have a member based model. It has been difficult to measure good utilization of curling ice so we try to use 100-125 people per sheet as a standard.

Q. Donalda has four sheets and approximately 200 members. That's a 50% reduction from the standard you use, but they are planning to carry on providing that space. Across Canada there's lots of curling hubs at 50% of what is considered a profitable club (about 100 people per sheet). If we don't need the pad to be profitable, 50 people per pad could be a sustainable use, which is likely the average size in Canada.

A. We have focused on identifying good utilization. For example, in High Park, provision is about 180 people per sheet, and in Leaside, about 120 per sheet. Based on current use in Toronto, Donalda has lower membership per sheet.

A. Regarding utilization, it may be useful to have more discussion about how we talk about additional use, and how we quantify that. We have to stick to rationalizing the number of sheets based on displaced members, and we could also discuss time of use.

A. Regarding operating budgets, this is a yearly stress, but I want to indicate that operating costs are not the policy rationale for advancing one sport over another. We are more focused on the utilization, especially if disrupting existing users (e.g. moving a team or recreational program).

Q. Does the definition of utilization change depending on the sport? For example, for curling the target is 100 people per sheet with a general time of 9 am to midnight. Are there arena utilization goals to be run all day and night? Is hockey use measured differently?

A. Hockey has gone through a lot of change - the daytime utilization is very low across the City now, whereas there used to be hockey use during daytime hours. Now, core hockey use is generally 5-11 pm weekdays and all day on the weekend. So, when we look at the arenas, we look at the amount of available hours and how they are allocated. The idea was even as the population grows, we could accommodate demand in existing rinks. But to your point, if we look at overall utilization it could bring in more solid daytime use and that could be a story we tell about how we can better use arenas moving forward .

Considerations for a Shared Use Model

C. Shared use models could be a great way to expose and get people into curling in underutilized facilities. The potential challenge is that the ice quality will likely be low for competitive curlers. In terms of ice conversions, a curling use might fit in better with figure skating as compared to hockey, as it is a less intensive use of the ice.

C. When new curlers progress they need better ice and we need those new curlers because they become instructors. A shared use model could work for a few years but better quality ice is needed to maintain the sport.

C. Curlers are more into creature comforts. The hockey arena environment is different than what curlers expect. Typically arenas don't have space where people can meet after the game and sit around, losing a lot of the social element of curling.

C. In Europe the change rooms are shared by the men and the women which is a consideration.

C. You need to ensure space for storage, including cold storage.

Q. (from Staff) Is there a threshold for the number of hours that a club should have access to ice? (e.g. number of days per week or number of evenings?)

C. There would be a range of needs from daytime curling to evening.

C. Transitioning will take time, which could happen in the night or early morning. Scottish high performance programs regularly convert ice for their use. It wouldn't be good to convert hourly but you could convert some weekdays or weekends. The other consideration is budgetary. If you don't have hockey use, you might not need a Zamboni and that changes your budgetary costs.

C. There's a lot of information on conversion and shared use south of the border. USA Curling is getting away from the shared ice model and turning towards more dedicated facilities. Beyond what they do at a macro level, the life cycle of the clubs the same: a group that rents Sunday nights grow their membership, and then they try to find dedicated facility ice.

C. There is a cumbersome nature of preparing the ice, and it is usually volunteer based. People need to be in 2.5 hours before their ice use to prepare, so it becomes a day-long affair. That won't cut it when you have over 550 people who want to curl. I have no doubts it would be full.

Q. Is availability of ice time something considered?

A. We know it is important to maintain access to ice for a range of communities and community uses.

C. I am representing a group that the shared use model will benefit. The people who participate in our programming are often beginners, so shared use to me would be very beneficial. However, it is a disservice to say the shared use model is the best one to go ahead with as the purpose behind this group was to fill in the gap created from the closure of private facilities. It is a little disappointing to hear that the private facilities are closing, and that we can't get a new facility.

C. Other participants echoed that it is disappointing there will not be a new facility.

C. You will need to include a walk in freezer for the rocks for a shared use model. Another issue is that a lot of 1-3 time a year curlers will need weekend availability for bonspiels and without this, growth in the sport is limited.

Next Steps

- All SRG members will have until March 17 to provide additional feedback to the City through email. The outcomes of this meeting will be shared back with participants to confirm accuracy. [The meeting summary and presentation will be posted on the City's Curling Strategy Website at www.toronto.ca/curlingstrategy](http://www.toronto.ca/curlingstrategy) .
- Staff will seek input from current arena users on the possibility of introducing curling ice at an existing City-owned single pad arena in Etobicoke York. Consultation will not focus on recommending a specific arena.
- Potential topics for the consultation include:
 - Key needs of hockey and skating users.
 - Pros and cons of a shared use model between hockey/skating and curling.
 - Potential opportunities to consolidate current use.
 - Any other considerations that may inform this work.
- Staff will report back to Council on work to date and outcomes of this consultation to seek direction on next steps.

Contact Us

For questions or comments related to this project, please contact:

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