

City of Toronto – Parks Development & Capital Projects

Curling Strategy

Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting Summary

June 24, 2021

Suzanne Coultes, Project Manager
Alex Lavasidis, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator



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Introduction

This document provides a summary of the Curling Strategy Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting that was held on June 24, 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 #4

The purpose of this workshop was to provide a project update, including a review of the survey and meeting results of the consultation with Etobicoke Arena Users, an introduction of the draft principles for shared use or conversion, and next steps. The meeting presentation is 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*, and Michele Gower
- Rocks and Rings (sport development): Chad McMullan, *President, Rock Solid Productions*
- West End Curling Committee: John Rudd and Susan Lawrence
- York Urbanist Curling Design: Mark Inglis
- Special Olympics: Michael Chung, *Program Developer - GTA*
- Toronto Sport and Social Club: Graham Welsh, *Venues Coordinator*
- High school curling: Baruch Zohar
- Special Olympics Ontario: Kirsten Bobbie
- Ontario Recreation Facilities Association (ORFA): Mark Reinert, *ORFA Board member and Town of Petawawa*

Regrets

- Curling Canada
- Parasport Ontario
- CurlION

Feedback Summary

A non-verbatim summary of questions (Q), comments (C) and answers from staff (A) presented below.

Q: What are the chances of full arena conversion?

A: Both options are being explored through our report. There's concern from current arena users around the reduction of ice time, which is fair. Full conversion will have more impact on the total number of hours going forward. So, from that perspective, I would say that the full conversion will have more impact directly on people that are currently using the ice. However,

it's an option that we're exploring through this work. We do know that we have current direction in the Facilities Master Plan (FMP) to look at the conversion of arenas down the road. I don't think we're at a point where we're saying that one or the other is more of an option. We are just reporting back what we heard from the stakeholders that are using these rinks and have a direct connection to the various arenas.

C: The main concern with shared use is finding an effective way to share rinks with the current users of the arena. For instance, how to maintain slots, use priority, demand, storage, etc.

A: I want to add that some of the groups we consult with use arenas all over the city too. Some of the rinks are being used more for practice and some more for games. We certainly talked through that and there are certain permit groups that we spoke to which have representation all across the city.

C: One additional principle might be to consider transition time requirements between sports.

C: One of the things that I noticed was the suggested time to set aside for curling. Giving curling mid-day slots during the week is not necessarily going to help introduce curling to the Etobicoke and west end area. I think that leagues within curling are just as popular in the evenings as they would be for hockey and skating. So I think that's something that needs to be kept in mind as well.

A: We're very well aware of that, which was also captured in our early phase one work. We did want to be transparent, and I don't think it's a surprise that the current users of arenas predominantly use the arena in prime time, which is what our data shows. They're going to say sure curling is great but just come in after 11 at night or in the daytime before noon and that's not going to work for curling either. So part of this, this process is to capture that and I think we're certainly going to be able to reflect that there is competing demand in prime time. So that'll be a big part of this work.

Q: So there were seven arenas identified as being underutilized and most of those were in the Etobicoke-York, but have you looked at this from a utilization perspective from people on the ice, to see if facilities are being used to their maximum potential? And I guess having said that as well, I can imagine if the shoe were on the other foot.

A: We do look at that. It's something that we look at with all facility types and part of the reason for having the next consultation, to broaden the conversation to some of those other types of utilization, such as program participants in skating programs or it could be even groups that may have used these arenas for special events. The conversation that came up within the consultation with the arena users is that demand for arenas overall is not increasing over time. It's something that was in the FMP. That's what supported the premise of conversion over time as we build new arenas. I think that essentially what a lot of this comes down to is core prime time hours of use. Something that I found even before the curling issue came up was when we looked at arenas daytime use across the city and not just in Etobicoke-York its very, very low and that makes a lot of sense. I mean, kids are in school and a lot of the traditional hockey leagues that happen with groups, like employees are not happening the same way they used to. So, when we factor daytime utilization into the mix, they do have open hours. The challenge is when you get into the prime time (5 p.m. to 10 p.m.) during the weekdays and the weekends where even rinks that may have less use are still well used during those prime time hours. I think that's what we're hearing reflected in the feedback from the existing user groups. So, the

whole idea of what we're talking about around conversion is contemplating how do you reallocate your programs and your permits within arenas to free up the space to do that kind of conversion. That's the real purpose of bringing that information forward with the stakeholders. No matter what happens through this work, if we identify an arena, there still is going to be a reallocation of permits and ice, which would affect users, which is what we heard.

C: There was the mention of bubbles and that's kind of an interesting idea. That's more of a "net new sheets of ice" approach and that may still have some issues associated with it. But if we're having conflict, and we are bound to have conflict in terms of trying to share existing facilities, a bubble might be of some use.

A: It was an interesting point that came up in that last meeting and yes, and something we will investigate. This suggestion came in relation to the fact that a bubbled outdoor rink could provide additional practice time for skating, which could free up or create additional capacity. So, I don't think it's fair to say that we've gone any further than what that looks like but the hockey users, they're very well aware of Park Lawn Bubble Arena in Etobicoke which is highly effective in providing practice space to a lot of these leagues. So, while we have talked a lot about the fact that we don't want to disrupt the leagues as much as possible, they still do have practice sites as well. If that can be done some other way that could free up time as well. I think it's very much been sort of flagged through that process. We'll flag it sort of again today and likely will come up in future consultation as well.

Q: Is there any precedents or any examples previously of how that has worked or hasn't worked whether it's for curling or any other sports, to see how the transition went and how it affected all parties involved?

A: We did quite a bit of research on the model, and we found that it does work for providing more of a recreational but not necessarily a competitive ice surface for curling. There are drawbacks with having to clear the ice for hockey and it's not always as level as a dedicated curling facility would be. You can't necessarily maintain the temperature consistently to get the quality of pebble and things of that nature. The regular back and forth conversion does not result in a competitive ice surface for curling and I think there's agreement around that. The other piece is time for conversion. I think from the input we've received, it's probably around 4 hours to go back and forth and needs a high amount of staff time on it. So, these are things we talked through with the user group as well. With that said, it can serve a niche for beginners and recreational curlers. And there may be opportunities to look at, for example, a few days on a few days off, rather than doing it every day, which creates more downtime. The suggestion around potentially incorporating transition time as one of the principles makes sense in that regard in terms of trying to minimize the downtime generally. With respect to conversion, there have been a few examples. The one we highlighted in the phase two presentation was around conversion that we saw in Cobourg. It was a volunteer group that had taken an existing arena and converted it over for a relatively low cost and added curling. You can achieve 5 sheets of ice with that because you're not having to leave space around the edges for the ice equipment. For regular conversion back and forth, it's a 4-sheet proposition for curling because of the ice clearing. That's like a really high-level snapshot but we do have examples of success on it.

C: It starts with shared use to gain interest in curling and figuring out how many curlers we have and whether we're able to make a viable club, and then the next step is to go to conversion. We're looking at the west end in Toronto, and we already have enough curlers. We can always make a viable club so, I don't see shared use as something that would be successful and

enough ice time for all the curlers that we have. Plus, it would make it very difficult for us to provide ice availability to school leagues and bring more people into the game from smaller organizations, which I think is really important. I really think conversion should be focused on.

C: I think we've been pretty clear on the options on the table, a conversion of an arena would be the best of those options. And I don't know how we might be going forward. I'm hoping that there's a way that we're going to be able to work through this, but I'm getting a bit of a sense that we might be approaching an impasse and I'm hoping I'm wrong.

C: From a school perspective, the shared use sounds really challenging because it's only valuable to us if it's available between 3:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. Shared use sounds terrible, but if it's going to be days of the week, would definitely work much better than hours of the day for shared use.

C: We're past the point of having no people that want to come to curl in the West end and we have hundreds that are just ready to sign up and get going. And I also want to bring up the point of safety on the ice for curlers. I've curled and a lot of shared-use facilities throughout the world and a couple of times I've been very nervous about my safety with the ice, the hacks, and things like that. I don't know if other people have experienced it, but a couple of times I've been reluctant to curl because of the condition of the ice and the condition of setting up the hacks into the ice. So, I just wanted to bring that up to me, it's not safe.

C: Curling ice is a lot harder than hockey ice or skating ice because the skaters need some grip in order to make their turns and do their jumps up to figure skating or make their turns in hockey. So, 4 hours is cutting it pretty tight to get the top part of the ice nice and cold so it's safe for curling. Everyone who has curled here has probably been on ice that's felt really slippery or has been out on a warm day or very humid day and the ice gets a little softer. And it feels very, very unsafe. So I think 4 hours is very much at the low end. And when you have a hockey rink carrying a lot more ice, it takes a lot longer to get that ice nice and cold for curling. So, that would be another challenge shared use.

Q (Staff): If we approach shared use in terms of a few days on a few days off and had longer conversion times, perhaps overnight, could that adjust some of the issues that you've raised?

C: To me, no, because the one time I was most afraid was we had the ice for the week.

C: Potentially, it could be colder, which I think would be good, but it would be on a case-by-case basis.

C: I was wondering if you considered how curling would use the ice during the day, and those nonpeak times. Several clubs I know of and work at have daytime leagues some before noon where there doesn't seem too much hockey usage. So I was wondering how curling uses the ice during the day compared to hockey.

A: That analysis is quite easy. Not including Saturday and Sunday, where you get into a little bit more prime time. If we didn't have to worry about the time it takes to convert the ice, if it was just a matter of use of the facility, they're almost interchangeable. Outside of some city programs, the daytime use of the arenas is really quite low. So there definitely is a complementary opportunity during the daytime hours especially Monday to Friday. The challenge would be around conversion time.

C: With the clubs that have already closed and the lack of access in these private clubs, there is already the demand for people to be able to access curling facilities. We're being removed, or we're being told, we can't rent any more time at clubs simply because they're already full and they have waitlists just to become members. So I think it's really important to remember that while yes shared use might be a great opportunity to create some more curling facilities, it really isn't going to address the problem that's being brought up right now.

C: There is a lot of untapped demand. There are new, more diverse markets and people that we can reach to hopefully changed this game as well.

Next Steps

- Refine principles based on your feedback and feedback from Arena User stakeholders (June)
- Host a public meeting and an online survey to gather additional feedback on the principles (Summer)
- Apply the principles to develop staff recommendations (September)
- Report back to Council (October -TBC)
- Any further steps to be determined by Council

Contact Us

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

Suzanne Coultres
Senior Project Coordinator
City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation
suzanne.coultres@toronto.ca