

City of Toronto – Parks Development & Capital Projects

Curling Strategy

Virtual Public Meeting Summary

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Introduction

As part of Toronto's [20-year Facilities Master Plan](#) (FMP), City staff reviewed the existing curling facilities across the city to determine the need for new or improved facilities. At the time the FMP was developed, Toronto's supply of City-owned curling ice was in line with or better than other Greater Toronto Area and large Canadian cities.

Based on the supply of City-owned curling ice and the availability of additional privately-owned curling facilities, no additional facilities were recommended.

In October 2019, as part of the approval of the FMP Implementation Strategy, City Council directed staff to monitor and assess trends and participation in curling. Closures of three private curling facilities, two in Toronto's west end, have altered the context of curling in the city.

City staff are in the process of developing a Curling Strategy to:

- Assess the trends and participation in curling
- Consider the current context of curling ice availability
- Identify opportunities to increase public interest in and access to the sport

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

Meeting Date and Goals

A virtual public meeting was held on July 15, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the Curling Strategy to the public, share work to date, introduce and gather feedback on draft principles for shared-use or arena conversion, answer questions of clarification, and share next steps.

Meeting Promotion and Attendance

Approximately 250 people attended the online meeting.

Promotion for the meeting included:

- Emails to over 130 arena users groups with recent permits for Etobicoke arenas (more than 24 permit hours per year)
- Emails to over 5,000 arena program registrants from 2018 and 2019 and Etobicoke/York arena permit holders (one-time permit holders, less than 25 permit hour per year).
- Paid social media ads (Facebook and Instagram)
- Emails to the project listserve
- Emails to the Curling Reference Group
- Promotion on the project webpage: www.toronto.ca/CurlingStrategy

Feedback Summary

Following the meeting presentation, which is available on the [project webpage](#), the project team answered questions and collected feedback. Participants were able to participate through audio and the chat feature.

Overall, many participants commented that they would prefer new capacity be built (e.g. a new arena, an arena addition, or a bubbled rink) to accommodate the need for more curling ice availability, instead of a shared-use model or arena conversion. Participants felt that building

new capacity would be less disruptive to existing arena users, who stated they are already pressed to find ice time during prime-time hours. Feedback is summarised in more detail below.

Note: The meeting was recorded to aid staff in writing the meeting summary. Due to a technical glitch, the meeting recording contained video but no audio. The summary below is based on the notes of staff present. If you attended the meeting and feel key points are missing, please contact alex.lavasidis@toronto.ca to suggest summary amendments.

Feedback on a Shared-Use Model

- Many participants shared that they do not want a shared-use model.
 - Participants believe this will result in a poor experience for both existing arena users and curlers, with poor ice quality and reduced ice availability.
 - Participants specifically noted that achieving good ice quality is very difficult and doubted that could be accomplished in a shared-use model.
- A participant noted that one of the most important elements of curling is the off-ice social nature of the sport, and that it is important to provide a welcoming space before and after curling activities. They expressed concern that this would not be provided in a shared-use model.
- Some participants noted that curling during daytime hours may be useful for increasing curling availability for older adults.
 - Another participant noted that Humber Seniors had rented curling spaces in the past between 8 am and noon three days a week, and has been required to move several times in the past due to lack of available ice or facility closures. The participant agreed that daytime hours would be useful for some curlers.

Feedback on an Arena Conversion

- Some curlers noted their preference for an arena conversion to ensure there is curling space available during prime time hours (e.g. for curlers who work weekdays and cannot participate during the morning/ weekdays).
 - A participant noted they prefer arena conversion as over 50 sheets of curling ice had been lost in the last 15 years (St Georges and Weston most recently, Lambton and Boulevard Club earlier). They want those sheets replaced to meet consistent demand.
- A participant asked when arena conversion would be considered. Staff explained that arena conversion could potentially be considered once new two-pad arenas come online which is consistent with the recommendations in the Facilities Master Plan. This would result in no reduction in ice time for non-curling uses across the City.
 - A participant followed-up to ask why two-pad arenas would be located in the east end, while curling space was needed in the west end. Staff responded that the two-pad arenas will be located in the east end based on needs identified by the City in the Facilities Master Plan, for non-curling ice uses (e.g. hockey, skating etc.). Etobicoke-York has the most indoor ice pads per capita in the city, but no curling facilities. This is why Etobicoke-York is the focus area for creating space for curling uses in existing arenas.

Alternate Suggestions

- Some participants suggested building a new arena as an alternative to either a shared-use model or an arena conversion.
 - Staff noted that this was considered, but has not been a recommendation due to high costs for building a new arena (not including the cost of land).

- Some participants suggested placing a bubble on an outdoor rink, or building a bubbled outdoor rink to provide additional ice time.
- Further suggestions for a new facility include:
 - Using lawn bowling fields for curling in the winter, or selling existing lawn bowling lands to raise funds for a joint, indoor lawn bowling and curling facility.
 - Staff noted that curling cannot take place over top of lawn bowling facilities as the correct conditions for curling could not be met without removing the lawn bowling infrastructure. Staff noted the city does not sell park lands.
 - Asking the private golf courses that once had curling facilities if their arenas could be used again.
 - Staff noted that these are private facilities and the spaces are being used for other purposes.
 - Add a new arena at the Six Points interchange
 - Staff noted that this community centre (Etobicoke Civic Centre Community Centre) is too far advanced and construction is about to begin.
 - Add a new addition at Central Arena.
 - Add outdoor curling ice at City Hall and the Bentway under the Gardiner.
- Some participants suggested the City pursue corporate or provide sponsorship or donations in order to raise funds for a new arena.
 - Staff noted that if a major strategic opportunity arises, the City would investigate. If participants are aware of an opportunity they should contact staff.
- Some participants suggested adding an extra ice pad to existing facilities. This could prevent a reduction in available ice for existing arena users (compared to conversion or a shared-use model) while reducing overall costs compared to building a completely new arena.
 - Staff noted this would still be prohibitively expensive as there is no budget for a new curling arena, even as an addition.
- A participant suggested changing taxation, land use, or zoning policies to encourage private development of a curling centre.
 - Staff noted that this is outside the scope of this project.
- A participant suggested tax breaks for golf courses be removed to pay for a new facility.
 - Staff noted that this is outside the scope of this project and referred the participant to provide their feedback through the Golf Course Operational review currently underway.
- A participant suggested providing curling space on the Outer Harbour or other frozen spaces on Lake Ontario.
- Some participants want the City to consider a do-nothing approach in order to not impact existing arena users, suggesting there should have been this option available in the online survey.

Additional Feedback

Project Considerations

- A participant asked why the closure of private curling facilities should impact the provision of public facilities. Staff explained that the Facilities Master Plan, which sets out a 20-year plan for recreation facilities in the City of Toronto, was made with the calculation that those private facilities would provide recreational curling capacity to residents. Across the City, curling spaces are provided through a mix of public and

private facilities, and there are now no facilities, either public or private in Etobicoke-York. This lack of facilities and Council's direction to look at trends in participation and demand is what has led to the development of the Curling Strategy, with a focus on Etobicoke-York.

- A participant questioned if a curling club would be a permit holder or a facility operator in either a in a shared-use model or conversion. Staff replied operating models would be determined at a later date.

Concerns about Reduced Ice Time and Existing Arenas

- Some participants noted that ice time is already scarce and many hockey programs augment city ice availability by renting private facilities. Reducing hockey arena availability at City rinks would further increase the cost of hockey for families. Moving hockey programming could make it more difficult for parents who work to make it to practices and games that are further outside of their neighbourhoods.
- A participant noted that they moved into their area for access to the arena and would not want to see current programming displaced for curling.
- A participant asked when Etobicoke arenas were last updated. Staff responded that across the City, investment in arenas is guided by a state of good repair program that ensures arenas continue to operate safely and effectively.

Curling Demand and Demographics

- A participant noted that some players have had to look well beyond the borders of Toronto for curling space and report that those club as are also at or near capacity.
- Some participants claimed that curling is a sport that caters to older adults instead of children, and therefore should not be provided with additional ice time if this leads to a reduction in ice time for other ice-based kids programming.
 - Other participants and staff noted that there are many youth curling programs, and that a large segment of curlers who were displaced by the curling rink closures were high school curling clubs. More information on demand for curling is available on [the project webpage in past meeting presentations](#).
 - Other participants spoke to their experience curling as an older adult as an invaluable way to stay active and social.

Arena Selection

- Some participants questioned if specific arenas were being considered for conversion or a shared-use model. Staff clarified that no specific arenas are being considered as it is still early in the research process. Any next steps are subject to direction by Council and if any changes are proposed or considered for specific arenas then additional communication will take place.
- A participant suggested reconsidering conversion or a shared-use model at a multi-pad facility, noting that it is better to compromise tournament play (occasional) than day to day usage.
- A participant asked if membership, permit, and other revenue streams are considered when determining how to use an arena. Some participants shared their concern that curling would bring in less revenue per hour of use for the city compared to arena uses like hockey. Staff clarified that both arenas and curling facilities have similar revenue models, with a combination of rental and league revenues. Overall, revenue streams between uses are similar.

Other

- A participant asked for detail about how community needs are considered in this process and whether subsidized programming will remain given capital budget pressures. Staff explained that the City considers the demographic needs of communities in facility planning and that it is a City goal to increase access for those that cannot afford programming.

Next Steps

- Refine the draft principles based on feedback collected today and through the public survey (survey live until July 25)
- A summary of this meeting and feedback collected through the survey will be posted to the project webpage.
- Apply the principles to develop staff recommendations (September)
- Report back to Council (October -TBC)

Any further steps are to be determined by Council.

Contact Us

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

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