

City of Toronto – Parks Development & Capital Projects

Curling Strategy

Public and Stakeholder Engagement Summary

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Introduction

Developing the Curling Strategy

As part of Toronto's [20-year Facilities Master Plan](#) (FMP), City staff reviewed 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.

Reflecting the alterations to curling facility provisions in the City since the creation of the FMP, City staff are 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

A draft curling strategy, in the form of a staff report, will be presented to Council in the late Fall of 2021.

A Phased Approach

There are two phases of work included in the development of the Curling Strategy, followed by a staff report to Council.

Phase 1: Supply and Demand for Curling (Winter to Summer 2020)

In this phase, City staff assessed the supply of and demand for curling ice in the City, identifying gaps and opportunities. During this phase of work, a Curling Stakeholder Reference Group was established to provide a forum for staff to learn about and confirm the needs of the curling community related to programming, sport development and facilities, from curling experts and community representatives.

Three key findings from phase 1 include:

1. There is unmet demand for curling ice in Toronto, especially in the west end.
2. Curling serves a wide range of ages and abilities.
3. The delivery model for curling in Toronto presents a barrier to broader participation.

Phase 2: Facility Options Analysis (Fall 2020 to Fall 2021)

Part A. In this phase, City staff analysed possible facility options by conducting a jurisdictional scan, reviewing existing City ice facilities, provision models for curling ice, and sport development opportunities.

As there is no curling ice in Etobicoke York, demonstrated demand for the sport, and little or no capacity at nearby facilities to meet this demand, Etobicoke was identified as the target community for increase provision of curling facilities. The following facility options for were identified:

- **Potentially feasible:**
 - Conversion (full-time arena conversion): Convert an existing arena to curling ice (full-time conversion)
 - Shared Use (part-time arena conversion): Shared use of existing arena ice (hockey/skating + curling) that would require part-time conversion between curling ice and hockey or skating ice.
- **Not recommended based on the Capital Budget:**
 - New stand-alone curling facility
 - New co-located curling facility (part of a Community Recreation Centre)
 - Adding a curling facility onto an existing arena building (three-wall addition)

Part B. To further investigate potential benefits and challenges of each facility option (full-time arena conversion or a shared use model), staff held multiple public and stakeholder engagement events (identified in Table 1, below). The Curling Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) existing Etobicoke arena users, and members of the public were asked to provide feedback on preferences between the two potentially feasible facility options (full-time arena conversion or a shared use model), and to inform the development and refinement of Principles for Potential Conversion or Shared Use (see later section on Principles). Councillors were kept updated through this process.

Engagement Process Overview

Stakeholders from the curling community, existing arena users, and members of the public were invited to provide feedback to inform the development of the Curling Strategy. The chart below provides an overview of the engagement events held by City staff. Brief overviews of each engagement event, including an overview of promotion for each even are available in **Appendix A**. Full summaries of each engagement event can be found on the [project webpage](#).

Engagement Event	Date	Target Participants	Number of Participants
Curling Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) Meeting 1	June 18, 2020	Curling Community Representatives (see Appendix C)	9
Curling SRG Meeting 2	September 29, 2020	Curling Community Representatives	8
Curling SRG Meeting 3	March 8, 2021	Curling Community Representatives	7
Etobicoke Arena Users Online Survey	May 18 to 31, 2021	Existing Etobicoke Arena Users	53
Etobicoke Arena Users Virtual Stakeholder Meeting	June 17, 2021	Existing Etobicoke Arena Users	40
Curling SRG Meeting 4	June 24, 2021	Curling Community Representatives	9
Virtual Public Meeting	July 15, 2021	Public	250
Public Online Survey	July 9 to 25, 2021	Public	1,333 ¹

¹ Approximately 49% of survey respondents identified as part of a curling arena-user group.

Summary of Feedback

The following provides a high level summary of key points of feedback collected throughout the engagement process. Detailed summaries of each engagement event are available on the [project webpage](#).

Option Preferences

The following provides a high-level summary of the feedback received through the engagement process regarding preferences for introducing curling into an existing City-owned arena. The options presented were:

- I. **Full-time conversion** of an existing arena to a curling facility
- II. **Shared use** model where ice use is shared between curling and hockey/skating (ice conversion required between uses)

More information on each option is available in Appendix B.

Based on feedback from curlers, existing Etobicoke arena users, and members of the public, **there is no consensus on a preferred model to introduce curling to an existing City-owned arena.**

- **Curlers much prefer full-time conversion of an arena** over a shared use model. This is based on the following perceived benefits of full-time conversion:
 - Ensures safe, consistent, high-quality ice that will serve both recreational and competitive curlers.
 - Provides greater availability of curling time (including prime time), less down time from conversion, and improved access for all levels and types of play (including schools & bonspiels).
 - Allows for off-ice (warm) spaces to support social elements of curling, better fosters community, and reduces conflict between user groups.
- **Existing Etobicoke arena users prefer a do-nothing approach (neither option).**
 - Key concerns include:
 - Either option would reduce ice time for existing programs (particular concern around youth, low-income and/or other equity-deserving group programming) when ice is already in high demand, particularly in prime time. This could push existing users onto more expensive private arenas, or force existing users to travel longer distances for programs.
 - Questioning whether there is sufficient demand for curling ice compared to other arena uses to justify any action that reduces ice time for existing arena user groups.
 - Questioning if provision of curling ice is financially viable for the City or private facilities
 - Concern that full-time conversion or a shared use model will negatively impact local arena's sense of community.
 - **When asked to choose between full-time conversion to curling or a shared use model, existing Etobicoke arena users prefer shared use**, citing the following perceived benefits of shared use over full-time conversion:
 - Allows for maximized, flexible, multi-sport use of an existing arena rather than a single use
 - Is more easily reversible, cheaper, and can be piloted to test demand.

- Reduced impact on existing arena users, including community members, schools and youth, while still providing more ice time for curlers ((provides a compromise solution between multiple user groups).
 - Some respondents suggested alternative approaches to either full-time conversion or shared use:
 - Building new facilities:
 - A new curling arena
 - A curling addition to an existing arena
 - An outdoor rink
 - A bubble over an outdoor rink
 - More ice pads overall (for curling and other ice sports/activities)
 - Converting existing spaces:
 - A single pad at a double pad arena for curling use
 - An industrial building for curling use
 - Suggestions for accessing funding for a new facility, addition or conversion include:
 - Reworking or adding to the existing City of Toronto capital budget
 - Development charges and Section 37 funding
 - Appealing to higher levels of government
 - Removing existing municipal tax breaks for golf courses
 - Private sector solutions:
 - Incentivising private curling rink development
 - Fundraising or Private Sponsorship for a new privately owned facility
 - Public-private-partnership
 - Using an existing private curling club for public programming
 - Maximizing existing curling clubs (public or private), including extending hours and adding more ice pads

Principles for Potential Conversion or Shared Use

The Principles for Conversion or Shared Use were developed and refined through stakeholder and public engagement from May to July 2021. They are intended to guide decision making surrounding the curling strategy, in addition to the Criterial to Identify Potential Arenas for Curling (Appendix D), and research completed by City Staff including [Phase 1: Taking Stock](#) and [Phase 2: Identifying Opportunities](#).

Developing Draft Principles

The May 2021 Etobicoke Arena Users Online Survey collected feedback on opportunities and concerns related to both a full-time conversion and a shared use model for introducing curling into an existing City-owned arena. The feedback collected through the survey led to the development of **draft** Principles for Potential Conversion or Shared Use:

1. Maintain open dialogue and transparent communications between existing Etobicoke arena users, curlers, and the City
2. Allocate ice time based on the demand for each activity (adjusted over time)
3. Maintain safe and good quality of ice for all users
4. Minimize impacts on existing user groups by:

- Filling unused ice time slots (e.g. off-peak times) before other actions are taken
 - Minimizing any reductions to existing ice permit hours
 - Maintain existing permit time slots and permit locations whenever possible
 - Minimize ice down-time from ice conversion
 - If required, work with permit holders to select the least disruptive time slots changes and/or relocations
5. Ensure off-ice amenities are not overcrowded and are safe for all users
 6. Do not create gaps in programming provision for existing user groups (e.g. skating, ice hockey, etc.)
 7. Support sport development for all ages and abilities

Refining the Principles

Feedback to refine the draft principles was collected through the Etobicoke Arena Users Virtual Stakeholder Meeting (June 17, 2021), Curling SRG Meeting 4 (June 24, 2021), Virtual Public Meeting (July 15, 2021) and the Public Online Survey (July 9 to 25, 2021). Based on the stakeholder and public feedback collected, the **revised** Principles for Potential Conversion or Shared Use are:

- A. Maintain open dialogue and transparent communication between Etobicoke arena users, curlers, and the City.
- B. Allocate ice time based on the demand for each activity (potential to adjust over time) and ensure all users have access to ice at various times of the day including prime time (evenings, weekends).
- C. Provide safe, accessible, and high quality ice for all users.
- D. Minimize impacts on existing user groups:
 - i. Fill unused ice time slots (e.g. off-peak times).
 - ii. Minimize reductions to existing ice permit hours.
 - iii. Maintain existing permit time slots and permit locations whenever possible.
 - iv. Minimize ice down time from ice conversion.
 - v. Avoid programming changes to arenas that are home to "anchor programs" such as house leagues or figure skating clubs.
 - vi. If required, work with permit holders to select the least disruptive time slot changes and/or relocations.
- E. Ensure off-ice amenities are not overcrowded, are safe, and reflect the needs of different user groups.
- F. Do not create gaps in programming provision for existing user groups (e.g. skating, ice hockey, etc.).
- G. Prioritize programming and ice access for youth and other equity-deserving groups while supporting sport development for all ages and abilities.

Appendix A – Overview of Engagement Events by Date

Detailed summaries for each engagement event are available on the [project webpage](#).

1. Curling Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) Meeting 1

Date: June 18, 2020

Participants: The Curling Stakeholder Reference Group was established to provide a forum for curling community representatives to provide their expertise related to programming, sport development, and facility needs, informing the development of the City's Curling Strategy. A full terms of reference, including a list of invitees, is available in Appendix C. In total, 9 SRG members attended the first meeting.

Purpose: To review and confirm the results and findings of Phase 1: Taking Stock, research completed by the City to inform the future Curling Strategy. Members were asked to review the findings prior to the meeting and bring their questions of clarification and comments to the SRG meeting.

2. Curling Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting 2

Date: September 29, 2020

Participants: 8 SRG members

Purpose: To review and confirm the analysis of Phase 2: Identifying Opportunities, research completed by the City to inform the future Curling Strategy. Members were asked to review the analysis prior to the meeting and bring their questions of clarification and comments to the SRG meeting.

3. Curling Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting 3

Date: March 8, 2021

Participants: 7 SRG members

Purpose: To provide a project update, including a recap of Council direction and work to date, a discuss facility options identified for further investigation, considerations for further analysis, and next steps.

4. Etobicoke Arena Users Online Survey

Date: May 18 to 31, 2021

Promotion: Over 130 arena users groups with recent permits for Etobicoke arenas were invited to participate in the survey.

Participants: The survey received 53 responses.

Purpose: The feedback collected from this survey was used to develop a set of draft Principles for Potential Conversion or Shared Use (presented to arena users, curlers, and the public for further refinement). Survey goals included:

- Identifying potential opportunities and challenges related to a shared-use model or arena conversion to accommodate curling activities in Etobicoke
- Identifying how the existing supply of ice in Etobicoke arenas could support curling activities while ensuring existing user groups remain accommodated

5. Etobicoke Arena Users Stakeholder Meeting

Date: June 17, 2021

Promotion: Over 130 arena users groups with recent permits for Etobicoke arenas (more than 24 permit hours per year) were invited to participate.

Participants: Approximately 40 permit holder representatives attended the meeting.

Purpose: To provide stakeholders with an introduction and overview of the Curling Strategy, review the May survey results, introduce and gather feedback on draft principles for shared use or arena conversion, answer questions of clarification, and share next steps.

6. Curling Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting 4

Date: June 24, 2021

Participants: 9 SRG members

Purpose: To review the results of consultations with Etobicoke Arena Users, introduce and gather feedback on draft principles for shared use or conversion, answer questions of clarification and share next steps.

7. Virtual Public Meeting

Date: July 15, 2021

Promotion:

- 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 listserv
- Emails to the Curling Reference Group
- Promotion on the project webpage: www.toronto.ca/CurlingStrategy

Participants: Approximately 250 people attended the online meeting.

Purpose: 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.

8. Public Online Survey

Date: July 9 to 25, 2021

Promotion:

- 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 listserv
- Emails to the Curling Reference Group
- Promotion on the project webpage: www.toronto.ca/CurlingStrategy

Participants: The survey received a total of 1,333 responses (including 308 partial responses). Approximately 49% of survey respondents identified as someone who participates in curling.

Purpose: The survey introduced the Curling Strategy and ongoing work to the public and

gathered feedback on the draft principles for potential conversion or shared use (developed through stakeholder engagement), and preferences between the two options.

Appendix B: Background – Curling in Toronto

Curling in Toronto

In recent years, multiple private curling facilities have closed in the city, including two in Toronto's west end. The principal reason for these closures was not lack of demand or revenue related to curling. Each closure related to prioritizing golf activities. Due to these closures, there is currently a deficit of curling ice available and a demand for curling programming.

In October 2019 City Council directed staff to assess trends and participation in curling. As part of this assessment, staff will present a report to City Council in the fall, who will decide on next steps related to curling ice provision.

As part of staff research to inform the recommendations report, the following facility options for curling were identified. Some were determined to not be feasible based on their high costs and other factors:

Not recommended based on the Capital Budget:

- New stand-alone curling facility
- New co-located curling facility (part of a Community Recreation Centre)
- Add curling facility onto an existing arena building (three-wall addition)

Potentially feasible:

- **Conversion (full-time arena conversion):** Convert an existing arena to curling ice (full-time conversion)
- **Shared Use (part-time arena conversion):** Shared use of existing arena ice (hockey/skating + curling) that would require part-time conversion between curling ice and hockey or skating ice.

Based on stakeholder engagement with curling groups and current Etobicoke arena permit holders, principles for **potential conversion or shared use** of an arena were developed. The draft principles below, once finalized based on public feedback, will help guide the recommendations report that will be presented to Council in the fall.

Draft Principles for Potential Conversion or Shared Use

1. Maintain open dialogue and transparent communications between existing Etobicoke arena users, curlers, and the City
2. Allocate ice time based on the demand for each activity (potential to adjust over time)
3. Maintain safe and good quality of ice for all users\
4. Minimize impacts on existing user groups by:
 - Filling unused ice time slots (e.g. off-peak times) before other actions are taken
 - Minimizing any reductions to existing ice permit hours
 - Maintain existing permit time slots and permit locations whenever possible

- Minimize ice down-time from ice conversion
 - If required, work with permit holders to select the least disruptive time slots changes and/or relocations
5. Ensure off-ice amenities are not overcrowded and are safe for all users
 6. Do not create gaps in programming provision for existing user groups (e.g. skating, ice hockey, etc.)
 7. Support sport development for all ages and abilities

Curling Ice

Curling ice is different than standard arena ice. A description of curling ice is provided below:

- A sheet of curling ice is roughly 45m (150') long by 4.75m (15'7") wide
- Ice surface must be level and clean
- Ice temperature is -4.5° to -5 °C (roughly 1° to 3°C warmer than hockey ice)
- Ice surface is “pebbled” by spraying with clean water (no minerals or impurities) at a consistent temperature
- Curling-specific markings and “hacks” for rock delivery are installed at correct dimensions
- Ice quality depends on consistent ambient air temperature and humidity

Conversion of arena ice to curling ice requires at least 8 hours managed by staff who have the right technical expertise to achieve safe ice conditions.

Shared Use (part-time arena conversion)

In a shared-use model, an existing ice pad would be converted into curling ice for a set period of time. Conversion of arena ice to curling ice requires:

- Staff who have the right technical expertise to achieve safe ice conditions.
- Time to flood the ice (ideally overnight)
- Painting a set of lines for curling onto the ice (these would be permanent)

The amount of time an ice pad would be used for curling shared use model could vary from only a few hours of curling a week to multiple full days a week, depending on the needs of all arena user groups.

Curling ice in a shared use model would only be suitable for recreational rather than competitive curling. Ice quality is not as high as a curling-only facility but would be safe for all users.

Example of a Shared Use Model: Petawawa Civic Centre Arena

At the Petawawa Civic Centre Arena, curling takes place two mornings per week. The ice is flooded overnight. In the morning the ice is prepared for curling. As part of the conversion, portable curling scoreboards are set up. Curling stones are stored in a shed and cooled on ice prior to use.

Arena Conversion (full-time arena conversion)

An arena conversion would involve converting an existing arena to full-time curling use. Consideration would be given to minimize impacts on existing user groups. At this stage, the

City is exploring the opportunities and challenges of a potential arena conversion. If an arena conversion is identified as a favourable option to support curling activities while balancing the needs of existing user groups, further consultation will occur.

With an arena conversion, there is flexibility to convert ice back to a different use if demand changes.

Appendix C: Curling Reference Group - Invited Members

Representatives from the following organizations were invited to participate in the Curling Reference Group:

- Toronto Curling Association
- CurlION
- Ontario Recreation Facilities Association (ORFA)
- ParaSport Ontario
- Toronto Sport and Social Club
- Curling Canada
- West End Curling Committee
- Rocks and Rings
- A curling facility and business consultant
- Special Olympics (GTA)
- Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations (OFSAA)

Appendix D: Criteria to Identify Potential Arenas for Curling

- **Arena Location & Type:** Focus on locations that will address geographic gap in supply of curling ice (in Etobicoke York).
- **Arena Use:** Identify which arenas would result in the least impact to existing permits/programs.
- **Suitability of Arenas for Curling:** Review facility condition, physical accessibility, and transit and car access to ensure the arena would be suitable for curling.
- **Neighbourhood Indicators:** Compile information about the communities where arenas are located including:
 - Participation in hockey, skating and curling.
 - Community use.
 - Proportion of equity-deserving groups: Recent immigrants, Aboriginal Identity, Visible Minority, Low Income.*
 - Whether arena is located or serves a Neighbourhood Improvement Area.

*Data source: Statistics Canada (Census 2016). Terminology of “Visible Minority”, “Immigrant” and “Aboriginal” are used for consistency with corresponding data source (Statistics Canada Census 2016)