



## MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

**FROM:** Kevin Okimi, Director of Parks and Open Space

**DATE:** November 26, 2021

**MEMO NO.:** RP-2021-0008

**SUBJECT:** Outdoor Ice Facilities Update

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### **PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:**

The purpose of this memorandum is to update Members of Council regarding Outdoor Ice Facilities.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Town of Halton Hills maintains natural outdoor ice rinks at 2 primary locations in Town parks each year weather permitting (Georgetown Fairgrounds, Prospect Park). The Town has also provided support to volunteers at Joseph Gibbons Park and Maple Creek Park in the operation of 2 neighbourhood natural ice rinks. Use of Fairy Lake or Storm Water Management Ponds (SWM) for outdoor recreational activities in Winter is prohibited.

The purpose of this Memorandum is to outline the plans for 2022, so that Council is aware of the plans and actions being taken in advance of the 2022 season, in consideration of the COVID-19 impacts to the 2021 season.

### **COMMENTS:**

Due to the ongoing restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and Ontario wide lockdown in early 2021, the Town experienced increased demand for outdoor winter activities including outdoor skating.

To respond to these increased demands from the public, the Town took a number of steps to provide additional outdoor recreational opportunities including:

- Operation/Maintenance of additional Town operated outdoor natural ice rinks (as resources permitted following road and sidewalk snow clearing)
- Support for additional neighbourhood volunteer-operated natural ice rinks

In addition to the Town operated ice rinks, the Town experienced significant challenges in managing the use of bodies of water such as Stormwater Management (SWM) Ponds and Fairy Lake for unauthorized recreational activities (skating, ice fishing) as all indoor facilities were closed for a significant portion of the winter (January – February).

### **Outdoor Ice Rinks (Town Operated):**

The Town typically operates two official outdoor natural ice rinks at Georgetown Fairgrounds and Prospect Park (Acton) funded through the annual Operating Budget. The pads are unsupervised, free to use, and are used for a variety of uses from general public skating to shinny. The rinks are “first come first serve” and no reserved times or permits are available. Staff also construct a smaller secondary pad at Georgetown Fairgrounds if time/weather permits, to provide a location for skating only (no shinny games).

The Multi-purpose court at the 3 Musketeers Skatepark is also designed to accommodate a natural ice rink, however due to limited staff resources, and fluctuating winter weather conditions, this ice surface has not been maintained/operated regularly.

Due to the increased demand from the public, staff undertook the following actions with respect to Town operated natural ice rinks:

- Maintained/operated a second full size natural ice rink at Georgetown Fairgrounds
- Maintained/operated the natural ice rink at the 3 Musketeers Skatepark

The weather in the winter of 2021 was consistently cold for maintaining ice, which provided for an exceptionally long period of maintaining useable ice rinks in comparison to recent years. At the same time, there were less significant snow events over the January/February time period, which permitted staff to focus more on the operation of outdoor rinks (typically the first priority is winter control operations). In addition, due to facilities being closed, Recreation Facility staff were able to redirect staff efforts to assist with the maintenance of ice surfaces at some locations, where in a typical year, they would not be available. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on game play and outdoor gathering limits, there was an increased need to monitor and have facility ambassador and enforcement staff attend outdoor rinks to ensure protocols were being followed, but rinks were not supervised full time, and registration was not required for use.

### **Outdoor Ice Rinks (Volunteer Operated):**

The Town typically supports volunteers in appropriate park locations in the construction of neighbourhood level natural ice rinks. The support generally consists of:

- Approval of a suitable location in the park (no boards/tarps are typically allowed)
- Providing access to a Town water supply (freeze proof yard hydrant)
- Providing a heavy duty hose for flooding/maintaining the rink surface
- Providing a garbage can and regular collection, picnic table and signage

- Providing assistance clearing snow off the surface after a heavy snow (Time permitting after core winter control operations are complete)

Opportunities for Volunteer neighbourhood rinks are published on the Town's website and addressed on a case-by-case basis. There is not a formal volunteer ice rink program or procedure.

In recent years the Town has supported outdoor volunteer rinks at Joseph Gibbons Park and Maple Creek Park, both of which have a Town water source. Sir Donald Mann Park in Acton also has a water source, but no volunteer has stepped forward to maintain a rink at that location.

The Town received multiple inquiries in winter 2021 from residents interested in creating/operating volunteer neighbourhood rinks. Despite various challenges to implement (no Town water supply, need for boards/tarps due to site selection, lack of experienced volunteers), staff worked with volunteers at 3 additional locations (Meadowglen Park, Glen Williams Park, West Branch Drive Park).

All 5 volunteer locations were able to provide outdoor skating opportunities for the local neighbourhoods, increasing the opportunities for outdoor ice skating for Town residents with nominal impacts to existing operating budgets. Favourable weather made this possible in both allowing for an extended period of natural ice, and for the availability of Town assistance.

There was also significant public interest in the provision of a natural ice rink at Gellert Community Centre. A volunteer outdoor rink at Gellert Community Park is currently not feasible due to lack of a permanent water service available through the winter (the irrigation service is winterized and building connections are not suitable in size/location for use by volunteers for the creation of an outdoor rink).

### **Outdoor Ice Natural Bodies of Water (SWM Ponds and Fairy Lake)**

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions/Province wide shutdown, all indoor Town recreational facilities were closed in early 2021, as well as private recreation/entertainment venues. Across Ontario this led to an increased use of Storm Water Management Ponds (SWM) as well as natural bodies of water such as Fairy Lake for outdoor skating.

SWM Ponds are not a safe/viable option for winter recreational use due to fluctuating water levels, flowing water, inconsistent ice thickness, etc. and are not tested or monitored by the Town.

In response to the increase in use, Public Works staff installed signage and barriers at Storm Water management ponds across Town, and inspected them regularly to ensure they remained in place. Town enforcement staff monitored and enforced COVID regulations and Trespassing at these locations 7 days a week.

Outdoor winter activities (skating, ice fishing) are prohibited on Fairy Lake in the Parks Bylaw 2013-0062, but historically have only been enforced on a complaint basis, with few complaints ever received. The Town does not monitor ice conditions of the lake, and cannot ensure safety. Due to the enforcement of COVID-19 regulations (no game

play, gathering limits) at the beginning of the Province wide shutdown in January 2021, the provisions of the Parks Bylaw were being enforced on Fairy Lake.

### **2022 Program and Projects:**

For 2022, the Town will operate the standard outdoor natural ice rinks at Prospect Park and Fairgrounds, as well as supporting volunteer rinks which are requested (Maple Creek Park, Joseph Gibbons Park, Sir Donald Mann Park, Meadowglen Park, West Branch Drive Park, Glen Williams Park, Gellert Community Park). The increased demand due to COVID-19 impacts may not be sustained now that Town indoor recreation facilities (as well as other private recreational/entertainment venues) are opened. Furthermore, staff support for additional natural ice rinks (including volunteer rinks) will be weather-dependent.

As part of the 2022 Capital Budget, there are two projects related to the outdoor ice program. The budget includes funding for upgrades to improve the servicing required to facilitate volunteer rink locations at Gellert Community Park, and Glen Williams Park, as well as additional equipment and upgrades to improve the operations of existing Town or volunteer ice rinks. Staff have advanced the upgrades at Gellert under existing contracts, with the intent to have the water service at Gellert available for January of 2022 should a volunteer group be interested in operating a rink at this location. Construction is underway and tentatively expected to be completed by the end of the year.

The 2022 Capital Budget also includes funding for an Outdoor Ice Feasibility Study and Strategy. This study will begin in January of 2022 (subject to budget approval) and will include a comprehensive review of the Town's existing outdoor ice programs (Town and Volunteer) as well as include a review of the feasibility for additional ice facilities (natural/artificial/synthetic/natural water bodies) including a detailed analysis of the business case for each type, including consideration for climate change impacts. A multi-disciplinary consultant team (including architects, landscape architects, recreation planners, outdoor and synthetic ice specialists (including recreational use of natural bodies of water), engineers and climate change specialists will undertake the study working with a Technical Staff Committee including Parks & Open Space, Recreation Facilities, Community Development & Park Operations/Public Works.

No Operating budget increases (to increase the number of Town operated rinks) have been included for 2022, but the Outdoor Ice Feasibility Study & Strategy will inform future capital and operating budgets and recommendations.

For Fairy Lake in 2022, there will be no changes to existing bylaws and policies. Skating will remain prohibited, but only enforced on a complaint basis. Staff have confirmed with the Town's insurance provider that the current approach (posted prohibitive signage and complaint based enforcement) is considered reasonable.

The review of the potential for a formal program on Fairy Lake will be reviewed as part of the Outdoor Ice Feasibility Study and Strategy as well as the Fairy Lake Water Quality Study.

For SWM Ponds, there will be no changes to existing bylaws and policies. Additional signage and barriers will be erected and policies enforced, as needed.

**CONCLUSION:**

This Memorandum is intended to provide information to Council on the 2022 Outdoor Ice program and upcoming projects, with respect to the impacts of COVID-19 on the 2021 season.

Reviewed and approved by,

Warren Harris, Commissioner of Recreation and Parks

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer