



REPORT

TO: Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

FROM: Kevin Okimi, Director of Parks and Open Space

DATE: September 22, 2023

REPORT NO.: RP-2023-013

SUBJECT: Outdoor Ice Strategy Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION:

That Report No. RP-2023-013 dated September 22, 2023 regarding the Outdoor Ice Strategy Recommendations be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council approve the Vision & Goals for Outdoor Ice Programs as outlined in Report RP-2023-013;

AND FURTHER THAT staff be directed to undertake a detailed feasibility and financial review for an outdoor refrigerated ice facility as part of the Gellert Community Park expansion;

AND FURTHER THAT staff be directed to include future provisions for an outdoor refrigerated ice rink at Gellert Community Park expansion in the 10 year capital forecast as part of the Town's 2025 Budget Review, subject to the Town's Long Range Financial Plan and results of the feasibility and financial review;

AND FURTHER THAT staff implement the servicing upgrades for natural ice rinks as outlined in Report RP-2023-013 through existing approved capital 8500-11-2208 Outdoor Ice Rinks - Servicing Requirements;

AND FURTHER THAT staff include additional operating budget considerations for improvements to the natural ice rink program as outlined in Report RP-2023-013 in the 2025 Budget Review;

AND FURTHER THAT staff report back on implementing a formalized Neighbourhood Skating Rink Program as outlined in Report RP-2023-013;

AND FURTHER THAT staff report back on implementing an outdoor skating program on Fairy Lake as outlined in Report RP-2023-013 for consideration in the 2025 Budget Review;

AND FURTHER THAT staff provide up to \$500 reimbursement to neighbourhood groups that currently construct and operate neighbourhood rinks on Town property until a formal program can be finalized, to be funded from existing outdoor rink operating budgets, up to a maximum of \$2,000 total;

AND FURTHER THAT staff continue to monitor winter climate trends and best practices for implementation of outdoor ice facilities in order to adapt the Town's provision of outdoor ice facilities accordingly.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- Town staff have prepared an Outdoor Ice Strategy, including community consultation.
- The Outdoor Ice Strategy sets out the Vision and Goals for outdoor ice facilities in Halton Hills.
- Results of the study show that residents have a strong desire for outdoor ice facilities, both refrigerated or natural, as well as formalizing the neighbourhood rink program, and a program to permit outdoor skating on Fairy Lake.
- Staff are recommending a balanced program of improvements to provide alternative types of outdoor ice skating facilities at various locations in Town.
- There are significant capital and ongoing operating costs depending on the recommended options, and staff recommend additional detailed study be undertaken to refine capital and operating costs of some features (i.e. refrigerated skating trail at Gellert Community Park). Some more expensive facilities (i.e. refrigerated premium rink) will not be financially feasible in the near future.
- It is possible to continue to provide an improved basic level of service for natural ice rinks by increasing the number of locations and amenities, until more expensive facilities are financially viable.
- It is necessary to monitor winter climate trends and adjust the outdoor ice strategy accordingly based on new climate information and best practices.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with the results of the Outdoor Ice Strategy and seek direction on next steps arising from the completion of the study.

The Outdoor Ice Strategy has been underway since January of 2022, to conduct a comprehensive review of the Town's existing outdoor ice programs as well as include a review of the feasibility for additional ice facilities (natural, artificial, synthetic, natural

water bodies). The intended outcome of the Outdoor Ice Strategy is to ensure a clear understanding of demand, support of user groups, understanding the public perception, and to bring forward clear options for Council to review and consider.

The Outdoor Ice Strategy supports the Recreation and Parks Strategic Plan (2020-2025) recommendations to provide for year-round recreational activities in parks and open spaces.

Major elements of the Outdoor Ice Strategy include:

- Identify preferred options to improve outdoor ice recreational opportunities in Halton Hills.
- Review the need for additional outdoor ice facilities/experiences, while integrating with other recreational facilities and recreational programs.
- Advance the objectives of the Recreation and Parks Strategic Action Plan, regarding winter recreational opportunities.
- Identify capital and operating costs for proposed facilities.
- Consider recommendations to improve the existing outdoor rinks and existing community volunteer rink program.
- Engaging local community groups and residents to define the Outdoor Ice Strategy.

The following work was completed as part of the study:

Phase 1: Background Review

- Background review and analysis of best practices
- Local and regional scan of outdoor ice facility offerings and operations
- Outdoor Ice Climate Trends Review
- Fairy Lake Outdoor Ice Feasibility Study
- Public Consultation #1 (survey)

Phase 2: Vision, Goals and Recommendations:

- Draft Vision & Goals
- Identify and Evaluate Options
- Public Consultation #2 (survey)
- Confirm preferred options and final recommendations

[Memorandum RP-2022-0006](#) (included as Appendix A) summarizes the key works undertaken as part of Phase 1: Background Review, including the initial public consultation. This report will outline the works undertaken as part of Phase 2 of the study. Key information from Phase 1 is also included as follows:

- Review of local and regional facilities and background information (Appendix B)
- Outdoor Ice Climate Trends Review (Appendix C)
- Fairy Lake Outdoor Ice Feasibility Study (Appendix D)
- Public Consultation #1 (Appendix E)

Draft Vision and Goals:

Town staff drafted a preliminary Vision and Goals for Outdoor Ice in Halton Hills based on the Phase 1: Background Review and public input received through the initial survey.

The draft Vision and Goals are as follows:

- 1) **Vision:** The Town of Halton Hills operates a variety of ice surfaces, at convenient locations, that provide unique outdoor winter experiences for all residents, and accommodate a wide range of different outdoor ice activities.
- 2) **Goals:**
 - a. **Facility and Operations Goals:**
 - Provide safe and accessible surfaces and facilities
 - Create inviting and unique environments at each ice surface
 - Critically assess operations to support high quality surfaces and associated amenities
 - Ensure that the implementation of the Outdoor Ice Strategy is fiscally responsible
 - Establish community partnerships for the development and maintenance of ice surfaces, including volunteers
 - b. **Public Information / Promotion Goals:**
 - Increase community awareness by ensuring easy access to information and providing education
 - Ensure new ice surface opportunities are promoted to create awareness
 - Develop processes to receive and analyze public input to assist in the creation of innovative ice surfaces, services, and programming ideas
 - c. **Services and Program Goals:**
 - Develop and deliver a range of programs, services and events that align with user interests
 - Establish community partnerships to increase and enhance programs and services at ice surfaces
 - Explore vendor relationships to increase and enhance programs, amenities, and services at ice surfaces
 - d. **Climate Change Goals:**
 - Monitor weather patterns and climate trends to maximize the season and mitigate impacts to surfaces
 - Review, evaluate and adjust the Outdoor Ice strategy as needed based on changing climate information while considering fiscal impacts.

Review of Options:

Based on Phase 1: Background Information and the draft vision and goals noted above, staff identified preliminary options for improvements to the outdoor ice programs. Due to the many options and methods for creating outdoor ice facilities, staff separated the potential improvements into five general themes. The most suitable sites for facilities (as determined by a site suitability review) were included in the options that were presented to the public (Appendix F) and are summarized below:

1) Option A: Improvements to the Natural Ice Rink Program

- Enhancements to existing outdoor rink program (servicing, staffing levels)
- new locations or facility upgrades to support the creation of natural outdoor skating rinks (non-refrigerated)
- Designated specific locations or times for leisure skating only
- Add core amenities to existing and new ice surfaces (seating, mats, spectator seating)
- Consider enhanced amenities at key locations (warming stations, concessions, etc.)
- Potential Focus Areas:
 - o New natural ice surface at Gellert Community Park
 - o New natural ice surface at Glen Williams Park
 - o Expansion of natural ice rinks at Fairgrounds Park (2 total rinks)
 - o New natural ice surface at Acton Sports Park
 - o Expansion of natural ice rinks at Prospect Park (2 total rinks)

2) Option B: Refrigerated Ice Pad at Gellert Park expansion

- Proposed refrigerated ice pad facility to be part of Gellert Park expansion
- Multi-use ice pad recommended due to multi-season flexible use
- Could include roof to assist with weather/operations management
- Could consider a skating trail as an alternative

3) Option C: Fairy Lake Ice Program:

- Develop and implement a program for ice testing and monitoring by Town staff
- Town staff or volunteers to construct/maintain ice facilities
- Potential for skating rinks and trails.

4) Option D: Synthetic Ice Surface for Special Events

- Town to purchase a synthetic ice surface for use at public events, or installation in a park seasonally or year round
- Partnership with event organizers and community organizations
- Recommended location at Dominion Gardens due to winter events. Dominion Gardens has servicing and space constraints for a larger more complex outdoor ice facility options, but a medium sized synthetic ice surface could be accommodated.

5) Option E: Formalize the Volunteer Ice Rink Program

- The current neighbourhood rink program is informal and unstructured.
- Create a formal neighbourhood rink program (volunteer based) including:
 - o Level of support by the Town of Halton Hills
 - o Site selection criteria
 - o Basic training and operating guidelines for community members
- A more formal program would supplement the outdoor ice facilities provided at Town operated locations.

Public Consultation Phase 2 and Survey #2:

In February and March 2023, a second public consultation survey was posted on the Town's Let's Talk Halton Hills website on the [Outdoor Ice Strategy](#) Project page. The focus of the second survey was to obtain feedback on the various options discussed above, and identify priorities of residents, as well as obtain feedback on the draft Vision & Goals. Upon completion of the survey, staff reviewed public comments, detailed opinions and results, regarding the ice facilities in the Town. The survey was completed by 169 residents, and the complete survey results (personal information redacted) are included as Appendix G.

Key survey results included:

- 94% of respondents agreed with the draft vision and goals
- The options were ranked as follows:
 - 1) A refrigerated ice facility as part of the Gellert Park expansion
 - 2) Improving the natural ice rink program (slightly lower)
 - 3) Fairy Lake Ice program
 - 4) Formalizing the volunteer program
 - 5) Synthetic ice surface
- The options for natural rink improvements were ranked as follows:
 - 1) New natural ice surface at Gellert Community Park
 - 2) Second natural ice surface at Fairgrounds Park
 - 3) Town operated natural ice surface at Glen Williams Park
 - 4) Town operated natural ice surface at Acton Sports Park
 - 5) Second natural ice surface at Prospect Park
- Refrigerated ice trail slightly preferred over a refrigerated ice multi-use pad at Gellert Park expansion. As part of the Gellert Park expansion consultation, a stronger preference by the general public was noted for an ice skating trail.

The majority of respondents also:

- support a Fairy Lake Ice Program as a partnership with Town and community members.
- do not support a pilot project to demonstrate/test synthetic ice options.
- believe that refrigerated ice is required due to changing climate conditions and uncertainty of natural ice facilities due to weather.
- believe refrigerated outdoor facilities should be considered in future major parks and public spaces.
- are willing to pay increased fees and levies to fund construct and operate premium outdoor ice facilities and also support investigating private/public partnerships.

Financial Information:

Before considering options for implementation, it is important to understand the financial implications of the various options. Facilities for outdoor ice vary significantly in the order of magnitude for cost depending on which type of facility is considered. See Appendix H for summary information.

Refrigerated Rinks Cost Analysis:

Based on the background information review, initial estimates for the order of magnitude capital costs for a complete refrigerated rink were between \$3-5 million or more, depending on size, level of amenities and servicing requirements, and would include concrete ice surface, amenities, a service building, ice resurfacers, and any major utility/infrastructure upgrades. Ice resurfacers capital costs could range from \$90,000 (natural gas) to \$150,000 (electric including charging station).

As part of the Phase 2 work, staff obtained more recent costing and facility design reference information from Whitchurch-Stouffville and Aurora who have recently implemented outdoor ice facilities.

Recent projects by these municipalities (which included ice skating trails), have been even higher than initial estimates as costs have escalated in the construction sector significantly (\$6-10 million total costs).

Operating costs, including staffing, energy and maintenance costs have not yet been determined in detail, but are expected to be in the range of \$50,000-\$150,000 or more per season depending on several variables. Without a specific design, manufacturers are not able to provide more specific costing information.

As noted in the Phase 1 review, staff reviewed the potential to incorporate outdoor ice facilities into other capital projects already identified (i.e. Gellert Park Expansion, Vision Georgetown Parks) to maximize construction and cost efficiencies, however, there was not a significant cost saving.

Natural Ice Rink Improvements:

Natural rinks (similar to existing) can cost from \$1,500-\$2,500 to construct, and an additional \$100-\$150 per day for flooding. The total cost to operate natural rinks is approximately \$15,000 per location depending on the length of season. Improvements to existing systems would largely be focused on upgrades to and construction of new water services (\$15-25,000 per site), upgraded lighting (\$5-10,000 per site) and increased levels of dedicated staffing for the construction and maintenance of additional natural rink locations. Additional equipment (ice making attachments) and minor amenities (seating/mats) could also be added to make operations of the outdoor ice facilities more efficient and comfortable for users.

Fairy Lake Program:

Outdoor ice programs on natural bodies of water like Fairy Lake, are primarily reliant on staff and equipment time, and can often be implemented for significantly less as noted in the Phase 1 Background Review. A basic operating cost of \$10,000-\$15,000 is estimated at Fairy Lake depending on the length of season and staff availability as outlined in the Fairy Lake Outdoor Ice Feasibility Study. Some costs may be able to be offset if a volunteer program was implemented to assist with some of the regular maintenance of the rink.

Neighbourhood Ice Rinks (volunteer):

Neighbourhood Ice Rinks do not require significant investment from the Town. Currently the Town provides a garbage can, rink signage, and a picnic table. Community members do all the work to construct and maintain the rink. If time permits, Town staff may clear off snow after a significant snow event once priority snow clearing has been completed. Other municipalities offer small community grants to neighbourhoods to create and maintain outdoor rinks. During COVID-19, the Town offered \$500 grants for supplies and other operating materials to support neighbourhood rink volunteers.

Financial Summary and next steps:

To further explore the budget implications of the more complex options (refrigerated ice facilities) staff will be required to spend considerable time and effort, including retaining consultants as required to prepare fully informed budget estimates and more refined preliminary designs. Staff have outlined the proposed recommendations of the Outdoor Ice Strategy in the section below, which are reflected in the Council report recommendations, to ensure that Council supports staff exploring these more complex options, which may ultimately not be financially viable in the short term.

Outdoor Ice Strategy Recommendations:

Based on the survey results, and further technical team review, the following recommendations are provided to advance the provision and development of outdoor ice facilities in Halton Hills. The final recommendations of the Outdoor Ice Strategy include aspects from several of the options, which would be implemented over time to achieve the Vision and Goals for outdoor ice. This report seeks to confirm that Council supports additional investigation of the key recommendations and outcomes based on community consultation.

Recommendation #1: Outdoor Ice Facility at Gellert Park Expansion

The results of the public consultation for both the Outdoor Ice Strategy and the Gellert Park Expansion highlight strong community demand for a refrigerated outdoor ice facility as part of the Gellert Park expansion. Preliminary costing, as noted above, indicates that the current capital budget forecast (\$3 million) **is not** sufficient to implement a meaningful and significant facility. Increased budgets (**\$3-\$6 million increase**) are required to construct such a facility, which is currently not accounted for in long range financial plans. Due to the financial order of magnitude, staff are recommending that a more detailed feasibility and cost analysis be completed for an outdoor ice skating trail as part of the Gellert Park expansion, to coincide with the detailed design process for the park. This will allow staff to provide Council with a more detailed financial analysis and estimate of cost to determine the long term viability and affordability of this type of feature, and to inform the long range capital forecast. Now that the preferred options have been narrowed down to this location, a more detailed analysis can occur. Staff also recommend continuing to consider future servicing and requirements for an outdoor facility as part of the detailed design process for the Gellert Park expansion. A refrigerated outdoor facility **would not be part of the initial park construction phase** currently being considered, and would be planned in the future subject to the results of the detailed financial review and long term financial review.

Financial Impacts: \$6-9 million in capital costs, \$100,000-\$150,000 in annual operating costs (approximately 0.16-0.24% levy increase). Funding for the detailed feasibility review by a consultant (if necessary) is available through existing project 8500-22-2201 for the Outdoor Ice Facility Feasibility Study (\$80,000).

Recommendation #2: Improve Existing Natural Rinks

Given that the priority for a refrigerated outdoor facility and improving the existing natural rink program were very close in ranking, and given the current financial constraints which preclude the implementation of a refrigerated facility in the short term, Staff recommend that the outdoor ice strategy include improvements to the natural ice rink program, based on the public feedback and input received. Implementing these improvements will assist in providing a basic level of improved service until the financial viability/feasibility of more premium facilities is determined. Specifically, the key recommendations are:

- Construct and maintain a Town operated natural ice rink at Gellert Community Park (Diamond #2). A water service already exists at this location, so only additional staff time is required. Creating a natural ice rink costs approximately \$15,000 per season.
- Construct and maintain a second Town operated rink at Georgetown Fairgrounds. As servicing already exists at this location, it would only require additional staff time. Given this location is already the site of a rink it is estimated that an additional rink would cost \$10,000 per season.
- Construct and maintain a Town operated natural ice rink at Glen Williams Park. The Glen Williams Park location has been constructed by neighbourhood volunteers since COVID-19, however Glen Williams Park is a larger community park, and is a suitable location for a Town operated rink given it serves the entire Glen Williams area, as well as nearby areas in the Georgetown Urban Area. A water service is required for the Town to operate this rink. There is an existing capital budget project for outdoor ice rink service improvements that can be used to fund these capital improvements. An operating budget of \$15,000 would be required for Town staff to operate this rink.
- No natural rink improvements are recommended for Acton, as they were lower scoring in the priority review, and based on the Fairy Lake Outdoor Ice Program recommendations (below). The focus in Acton would be to implement an outdoor ice program on Fairy Lake, in addition to the existing ice rink at Prospect Park.
- Designate specific times/locations for leisure skating or drop in-shinny play to ensure shared use of the facilities.
- All natural outdoor ice rinks will be reviewed for basic amenity improvements (mats, seating, spectator seating and lighting) which will be implemented through existing budgets (capital or operating). If existing budgets are insufficient, additional budget requests will be requested through future budget processes.
- Any increase of operating budgets would be considered as part of the 2025 Budget Review.

Financial Impacts: \$0 additional capital (already approved), \$40,000 in annual operating costs (approximately 0.06% levy increase)

Recommendation #3: Fairy Lake Outdoor Ice Program

- Based on the Fairy Lake Outdoor Ice Feasibility Study, the ability to use Fairy Lake for skating is similarly dependent on climate and weather conditions. There is little difference in maintaining ice rinks on the lake or on land, other than the lake has the potential to form thicker ice formations, which may resist thawing to a greater extent than those constructed on land and could extend the skating season. Use of the lake also requires a testing protocol to be implemented to monitor ice conditions.
- Based on the public feedback, it is recommended that the Town implement a program of ice testing and public notification for certain areas of Fairy Lake.
- The Town would work with community members to identify areas where the skating trails or rinks could be built to supplement the ice rink at Prospect Park.
- If Council approves this recommendation, Staff will investigate and report back in more detail on the safety requirements and protocols, as well as policies for a lake ice testing program, including how community volunteers would be engaged to construct and operate ice features.
- Any capital or operating budget funding would be considered as part of the 2025 Budget Review.

Financial Impacts: estimated \$5-\$10,000 additional capital for safety equipment, \$10-\$15,000 in annual operating costs (approximately 0.02% levy increase) for implementing the testing program. To be confirmed as part of detailed program review.

Recommendation #4: Formalize the Neighbourhood Rink Program (volunteer lead)

- In the public survey, respondents noted that regardless of which priority options were selected, it would be beneficial to formalize the neighbourhood rink program, to supplement whatever Town facilities were being operated.
- This represents a low risk to the Town and builds community spirit and connections among neighbours.
- It is recommended that the Town formalize a Neighbourhood Rink Program to include:
 - o Policies and procedures for neighborhood groups to construct and operate natural rinks
 - o Town level of support (provision of amenities, options to increase support, site selection, servicing upgrades etc.)
- If Council approves this recommendation, Staff will report back with a proposal for a formal Neighbourhood Rink Program with additional details.
- It may be possible to include the Neighbourhood Rink Program as part of existing Town volunteer or grant programs (i.e. Community Partnership Program).
- Some community groups have continued to request the \$500 in support for neighbourhood rinks which was offered during COVID-19. Staff are recommending that the Town provide funding for up to \$500 for materials and supplies to existing neighbourhood ice rink groups until a formal program has been considered by Council. There are only a few groups who access this

funding, and staff recommend it be funded from existing operating budgets for outdoor rinks. It is recommended that the amount provided to groups be capped at \$2,000.

Financial Impact: No new increase to budget required (cost would be funded from current Operating Budget). Future impacts TBD.

Recommendation #5: Monitor Winter Climate Trends

As noted in the Outdoor Ice Climate Trends Review, outdoor ice facilities (refrigerated or natural) are all affected by changing climate, and can be impacted by higher temperatures, sun, and precipitation. The Outdoor Ice Strategy recommendations above need to be regularly reviewed along with climate change trends, to determine if any changes to the approaches, facilities or operations are recommended.

It is recommended that Council direct staff to regularly monitor winter climate trends and best practices for outdoor ice facility operations to ensure the Outdoor Ice Strategy is responding to the changing situations and technology, as well as climate trends. Key climate trends that would be monitored are highlighted in Appendix I.

Next Steps:

If Council approves the recommendations of this report, Staff will continue to investigate the recommended options and approaches. Projects that are already approved under existing budgets will proceed, and projects requiring additional studies or review will be advanced and incorporated into future capital/operating budgets or will have additional reporting to Council for approval of any policies or programs. Recommendations that require capital or operating budget funding will be referred to the budget committee review process for consideration.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report aligns to the Town's Strategic plan recognizing the value to provide responsive, effective municipal government and strong leadership in the effective and efficient delivery of municipal services.

This report also identifies climate change and the environment as one of the Town's Strategic priorities.

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report impacts and/or helps address climate change and the Town's resiliency through climate adaptation. Providing outdoor ice facilities that respond to changing climate trends adapts the provision of this service to the current climate situation.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public Engagement has been conducted as follows: Online Survey, Let's Talk Halton Hills Project Page. Two significant surveys were undertaken as part of the Outdoor Ice Strategy. A total of 569 responses were received for the two surveys. The option of an outdoor ice facility at Gellert Park expansion was also considered as part of the Gellert Park expansion public consultation process which also had a significant response.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

A cross functional team from multiple departments participated in the Outdoor Ice Strategy. Staff from Recreation and Parks Department (Parks and Open Space, Community Development, Facilities), Transportation and Public Works (Public Works and Park Operations) and Business, Environment and Culture (Climate Change Division) provided input into the strategy and this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report has the potential to require funding in a future budget year and therefore needs to be referred to budget committee for tracking purposes.

Any capital or operating costs (not already approved) associated with outdoor ice facilities as noted above will be subject to future approval by Council and based on a review of affordability and sustainability in conjunction with the Town's Long Range Financial Plan and the Capital Budget and Forecast for future years. The affordability of some more expensive features is not viable financially in the near term.

The Town's 2024-2032 Capital Forecast includes \$3 million for an outdoor ice facility, which is not sufficient based on the current information and preliminary pricing. The 2022 Capital Budget approved projects 8500-22-2201 for the Outdoor Ice Facility Feasibility Study (\$80,000) and 8500-11-2208 Outdoor Ice Rinks - Servicing Requirements (\$95,000).

Operating budget requirements for the various recommendations would impact the annual levy by an estimated 0.02% to 0.32% if all the recommendations were advanced. Staff are recommending that operating budget considerations be considered as part of the 2025 Budget process, to allow time for construction of the capital improvements to rink locations outlined in this report, and to allow staff to fully review the operating impacts and approach for each of the services.

The 2024 capital budget will continue to include capital projects in the 2025-2033 Capital Forecast based on the preliminary recommendations of the strategy. Additionally, more detailed reviews will be completed to update requests in future budget forecasts.

Reviewed and approved by,

Paul Damaso, Commissioner of Recreation & Parks

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer