

Open Letter to our Membership, local media the Mayor and Council:

On or around March 12, 2020 most sports organizations suspended operations. This has turned out to be a sound decision and has in small part helped turn the tide and flatten the curve for Covid 19 infections in our province.

The financial toll this pandemic has taken on our citizens, municipalities, province, and country has been unprecedented and continues to increase. I think we all understand that the cost of recovery at every level will take years to if not decades.

Beyond the financial toll there is a psychological toll this pandemic has taken on our population specifically our **children and youth**. We recognize that the pandemic is still ongoing and still a very real threat. We watch and wait to see what the consequences of the gradual lifting of restrictions will be.

As sports organizations begin to offer opportunities for their membership to safely return to participate in sport, we feel it is incumbent on our leaders at every level to provide support and opportunity for these organizations. The province with the assistance Via Sport has set up guidelines for developing safe return to play plans that are required before any organization can offer opportunities for their membership.

We were disappointed last week when the Prince George City Council announced the city arenas would remain closed until further notice. In their media release and subsequent interviews with local media representatives from city council stated: "Since the start of the pandemic, the city says it's been losing roughly \$1 million per month and, according to a report that will be on July 27's public council meeting agenda initial, estimates also indicate a potential 2021 budget shortfall of \$9 million." This was followed up with the announcement that arenas would remain closed and statements about the amount the city subsidizes the arenas leaving the **impression** that this was a major part of the solution to budget shortfalls.

On July 27, 2020 council will be reviewing a report regarding the budget shortfalls for the current fiscal year and projected shortfalls for 2021. We would like to encourage Prince George city council to revisit the decision to close arenas indefinitely. We feel that with the safe return to play plans that are required that it will be as safe as possible for organizations to begin offering limited opportunities to youth and other groups to begin using the arenas while following the provincial health guidelines.

We are **adamant** that the correct course of action would be to plan to open arenas as soon as demand makes it financially responsible to open at least one or two arenas. then as the circumstances warrant begin opening all other arenas to meet demand. We are confident that the demand at the youth level is already there. We are aware that adult recreation 5 on 5 hockey may not be possible until the provincial health guidelines are amended or more important we are allowed to proceed with plans that reflect the infection rates in the northern health region rather than the entire province. Once arenas begin operations this fall, we plan to work with the adult hockey organizations to see if there are alternative opportunities to normal 5 on 5 play that would be allowed under the safe return to play guidelines. This would help fill ice later in the evening after youth is done and increase revenue to help alleviate the overall costs of operations.

We believe that through consultation with all user groups we can find some solutions to the additional cost associated with cleaning, sterilization, and maintenance of the buildings. To Date there has been no consultation with any of the user groups regarding any of the issues that needs to change. The P.G. Rec. Hockey League in partnership with city staff are willing to help facilitate these discussions.

In summary we feel that the benefits of opening these facilities to the user groups and specifically our youth is extremely important. We understand the challenges that we as a city face but are confident that as elected leaders in our community you will make decisions that will help with the safe return to somewhat normal activities and opportunities for the youth and general population of our great city.

We will be advising our members and the membership for all other user groups to tune into the web cast of the July 27, 2020 council meeting. I hope you see the value to our community that the opportunity for a return to some measure of normalcy is beneficial both for both physical and mental well being. We hope that you can show the leadership we need at this time to get our youth back on the ice and from there as it is safe to do so the adult users will be able to return as well.

This letter was prepared By Allen Hines league administrator for the Prince George Recreation Hockey League and approved for release to the media and city council by the following sports organizations (user groups)

Executive Prince George Recreation Hockey League

Executive Prince George Gentlemen's League

President of PG Draft Hockey

Executive of Prince George Ringette

Executive of Spruce City Old Timers Hockey

President of The Northern BC Centre for Skating

President of the Prince George Figure Skating Club

Owner Cariboo Hockey LTD.

Prince George Minor Hockey