

DATE: September 30, 2020

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Adam Davey, Director of Community Services and Public Safety

SUBJECT: 2020/21 Arenas Winter Ice Season and Indoor Walking Program (CN Centre)

ATTACHMENT(S): None

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council:

1. CONSIDERS reopening the CN Centre for:
 - a. the indoor walking program for the 2020/21 winter season from mid-October to mid-April, as detailed in the Report dated September 30, 2020, from the Director of Community Services and Public Safety;
 - b. ice use in late October for the 2020/21 winter season, as detailed in the Report dated September 30, 2020, from the Director of Community Services and Public Safety;
2. CONSIDERS reopening the Rolling Mix Concrete Arena for ice use in mid-October for the 2020/21 winter season, as detailed in the Report dated September 30, 2020, from the Director of Community Services and Public Safety.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to seek council direction on the reopening of the ice surfaces at CN Centre and Rolling Mix Concrete Arena (RMCA). Many Provincial COVID-related changes related to recreation have occurred over the previous few months, referred to as the “Progressive Loosening” stage of the Provincial Return to Play Plan (Phase 3 of 4). This includes actual gameplay, and as a result, numerous user groups and leagues are planning for modified seasons. The user group community and Arenas staff are seeking a decision on arenas in order to plan for the 2020/21 season. This decision is needed for the purposes of user groups’ programming requirements and planning for registration and scheduling. Administration is of the view that the recreational need within the community is strong enough to warrant consideration of reopening of additional arenas.

Additionally, this report seeks Council direction on reopening the CN Centre concourse to the public during the 2020/21 winter season. At the Council meeting on August 31, Council directed Administration to report back on a plan for resuming public access for walking at the CN Centre. This report provides an overview of how that could be achieved by October 19.

While these measures to increase availability of ice surfaces and provide the opportunity for walking at CN Centre will certainly enhance local opportunities for recreation during the winter season, they will come at a financial cost. Presently, Administration is anticipating a 2021 budget shortfall of approximately 6.4 million. Reopening these facilities is expected to increase this shortfall as described in this report.

DISCUSSION:

This report covers three topics. First, the Walking Program at CN Centre. Second, ice use at Exhibition Park (three Kin Arenas and CN Centre). Third, ice use at RMCA. Ice use demand is consistent with previous years clearly indicating the recreational need within the community. At present, three sheets of ice are not sufficient to meet a baseline demand from our numerous user groups, as there is insufficient time available to conduct many programs. Although five sheets would provide the opportunity for modified programs under COVID-restrictions, triaging of ice times will still likely be a requirement (through the City's *Ice Allocation Administrative Procedure*).

Similar to previous reports, the information contained within this report is accurate as of September 29, 2020. Significant changes regarding the loosening of restrictions in the "Field of Play" have resulted in substantial adjustments to budget projections. It is anticipated that numerous other changes shall occur throughout 2021, resulting in further adjustments to budget estimates and the operational model.

WALKING PROGRAM:

In previous years, the City has provided two indoor locations for the winter walking program, located at the concourses of CN Centre and the RMCA. Indoor walking ran from approximately late October to mid-April (weather dependent, timeline coincided with the closing and opening of Masich Place). Both locations were open during operating hours and treated as open public spaces. Staff and cleaning costs were included in existing Arena budgets and scheduling. Additionally, two other locations are available for indoor walking in Prince George, at the Northern Sport Centre, and Pine Centre Mall.

Because of COVID-19 restrictions, what had previously been a very simple and relatively inexpensive process now requires dedicated staffing, IT support, and cleaning resources that were not budgeted for. Incremental costs of reopening for seven months of operations in 2021 are approximately \$150,000. These numbers assume the current status quo remains in effect. Based upon the numerous changes over the previous several months, it is highly probable that operational modifications will continue to occur, and may continue to be loosened next year. This may result in fewer (or greater) control measures, accordingly adjusting costs. The walking program staffing requirements for Monday – Friday business hours are approximately 2.0 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions, with the intent of filling with staff currently on layoff.

PROGRAM DETAILS:

WHEN: Opening day is tentatively scheduled for Monday, October 19, 2020. Operating hours are Monday to Friday, from approximately 8:30 AM – 4:00 PM. There will be four (4) daily walking blocks of 90 minutes, with a 30 minute clean between each session. Participants may enter and exit anytime throughout their booked block. Exact timings and operating hours shall be confirmed and publicly communicated in mid-October.

8:30-10:00 – walking
10:00-10:30 – cleaning
10:30-12:00 – walking
12:00-12:30 – cleaning

12:30-14:00 – walking
14:00-14:30 – cleaning
14:30-16:00 – walking
16:00 -16:30 - cleaning

HOW: Participants must register in order to comply with Provincial COVID restrictions that include facility owner/operators maintaining contact-tracing lists. There are two (2) methods to register:

1. Online at the City's Recreation page (a link will be added in mid-October with full details and registration information); or
2. Over the phone, by calling 311.

There is no drop-in registration available. The reason for this is because the CN Centre atrium is a small space and in order to keep staffing as lean as possible, online and phone registration shall be used. Registration opens 48 hours in advance, and closes 30 minutes prior to each block. This ensures an equitable allocation of bookings, and provides adequate planning time for staff to print off registration lists. Each walking block is limited to 40 participants, to ensure compliance with a maximum of 50 people in the concourse area (including City staff, contractors, and tenants).

Participants who have registered online for Aquatics may already be familiar with the registration system. Signage, floor arrows, and hand sanitizer stations in accordance with Public Health Orders are located throughout the facility.

ARENAS:

As stated above, the current supply of three sheets of ice (Kin Arenas) is insufficient to accommodate the City's numerous user groups. The current 2020/21 season ice use forecast is assessed at a level similar to previous years. Further, because of COVID-restrictions related to the time delay between groups due to cleaning and maximum capacity limits, actual ice demand will probably exceed previous years. It is also worth noting that the August summer camps saw an approximate 18% higher user rate during the week compared to last year.

Every major user group – Spruce Kings, PGMHA, SD57, ringette, figure skating clubs and our various recreation leagues – have made numerous requests for additional ice time. To date we have opened three of the City's six sheets of ice to balance community needs with budget constraints. A further compromise position that balances our community's recreational needs over the winter months with the City's budget constraints – in accordance with the COVID-related Public Health Order restrictions – may be to reopen the RMCA and CN Centre, providing five sheets of ice for the 2020/21 season.

CN CENTRE:

Due to the CN Centre being co-located with the Kin Arenas – to include shared utilities – there are economies of scale that can be achieved. Existing staffing levels can serve all four sheets of ice at Exhibition Park. Provided the Walking Program remain Monday to Friday, there is no requirement for increased staffing levels (other than the 2.0 FTEs associated with the walking program). Administration supports giving consideration to the reopening of CN Centre for both the Walking Program and for use as a fourth sheet of ice for the 2020/21 winter season in order to provide winter recreational services to the community.

RCMA:

The RMCA is the least cost-efficient arena within the City, with the lowest cost-recovery rate. It is also home to the City's BCHL team, the Spruce Kings. Although the costs associated with reopening the RMCA marginally exceed the Elksentre, the Elksentre does not have the support infrastructure required for BCHL games. Further, because of proximity, the RMCA can be managed within an expanded staffing model from Exhibition Park. The Elksentre, because of location and other factors, cannot achieve the same staffing efficiencies as can be found between Exhibition Park and the RMCA.

Arena budgeting is normally based upon a three year rolling average. Under COVID, this does not exist. Therefore, the estimated budget projections are current based off existing restrictions. Given the fluidity of the situation, budget and operations are expected to considerably change throughout 2021.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The Director of Finance advises that the current 2021 City budget shortfall to date is an estimated \$6.4M.

Reopening the CN Centre for indoor walking and ice use in 2021 will increase the shortfall by approximately \$150,000. Reopening the RMCA ice surface for the 2020/21 winter season would further increase the shortfall by approximately \$250,000. This assumes the current Provincial Restart Plan status quo (Phase 3). It is highly probable that the current situation will continue to evolve, resulting in financial adjustments. Because of this, any budget number should be considered accordingly.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

Walking Program:

The indoor Walking Program at CN Centre is ready to begin on October 19. In order to keep costs as low as possible, operating hours are proposed as Monday to Friday business hours and online/phone registration is required. If approved by Council, full details of the program will be communicated publicly the week prior to opening day.

Arenas:

Ice user groups wish to plan and provide programming for the community. Although the COVID situation continues to remain highly dynamic, Administration is of the view that ice use demand is sufficient for five sheets of ice. With Council's approval, ice at the RMCA and CN Centre may be ready for use in two to three weeks' time. From a community service perspective, opening additional arenas for recreational use serves our purpose of providing subsidized recreational facilities to better community quality of life. However, reopening additional arenas will increase the City's estimated budget shortfall.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Adam Davey, Director of Community Services and Public Safety

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, Acting City Manager

Meeting Date: 2020/10/05