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Item No.
Community Planning & Economic Development
December 11, 2014

TO: Chair and Members of Community Planning & Economic Development
Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Brad Anguish, Director, Parks & Recreation

DATE: December 1, 2014

SUBJECT: Centennial Pool

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

October 9, 2014 Motion of Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee:

Moved by Councillor Mason and seconded by Councillor Watts that Community Planning and Economic Standing Committee request a staff report regarding the provision of youth, senior and other community swimming lessons at Centennial Pool, which shall include specific response from the Centennial Board on the reduction in youth swimming lessons at Centennial Pool, including the reasons for the change, timing of the change in relation to the YMCA closure, impact on the users and discussion on the need for the reinstatement of the program.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Section 79 (1) including (k) recreational programs; and (x) lands and buildings required for a municipal purpose.

BACKGROUND

Centennial Pool is centrally located on the corner of Cogswell and Gottingen Streets. The pool was constructed for the Canada Summer Games in 1967, and was recently refurbished through a multi-phased capital project totaling approximately \$3.9M. This facility is one of two 50 metre pools in HRM and is used for recreational swimming, swimming lessons as well as training for competitive swimming and diving.

The authority and requirements for the management of regional facilities are outlined in specific management agreements between HRM and the respective community boards. The community board (Centennial Pool Association) has been responsible for the management of the Centennial Pool since April 1999. To help offset the operating costs for the facility; HRM provides \$145 K in annual subsidy to the community board in addition to the \$118K in net annual revenue realized from the parking lot. In November 2011, Regional Council directed staff to undertake a review of financial, reporting and community alignment aspects of the regional facilities. Centennial Pool is one of eight facilities included in the review as directed by Regional Council. Further, upon completion of the recapitalization of pool and upgrading of the mechanical systems, HRM assumed responsibility for the maintenance of the pool to ensure the systems are operated in a manner consistent with the warranty requirements.

In May 2014, the YMCA on South Park Street was closed in preparation for its reconstruction which will contain a pool once re-established. With the closure, programming including swimming lessons was no longer available at that location. As a result of the YMCA closure and concerns raised regarding the availability of swimming lessons at Centennial Pool, the Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee (CPED) requested a staff report on the provision of programming and lessons at Centennial Pool.

DISCUSSION

With the closure of the Halifax YMCA pool, citizens had to find alternative locations for swimming opportunities, specifically children's swimming lessons. During the preparation of the YMCA relocation plan, there were no specific discussions between YMCA and Centennial Pool staff. While the closure was widely known, there were very few inquiries to Centennial Pool from parents related to lessons. There did seem to be conflicting information throughout the community related to swimming lessons at Centennial Pool which lead to a sense that it was not currently a provider of swimming lessons for children and youth. As a result, it was likely deemed to not be an option for citizens attempting to find alternatives as a result of the YMCA closure.

As requested by CPED, staff requested that the Centennial Pool Association provide some clarity regarding their provision of swimming lessons at the facility to better understand why programming for children and youth is not a key aspect of service delivery at this facility. While a formal letter was not received from the Board Chair, HRM staff had verbal and email discussions with the Board Chair. The Board Chair indicated the following aspects associated with Centennial Pool:

- The facility is one of two 50 metre pools and dive training facilities in HRM.
- Water temperature and depth of the water are specific to competitive sport training – specifically swim team and 3 metre, 5 metre, and 10 metre dive training. The water temperature is kept colder which is not conducive for those learning to swim.
- Unlike the more recently constructed pool (Canada Games Centre), there is not a movable floor in place at the facility in order to effectively accommodate children and youth aquatic lessons.
- In terms of lessons, the facility is primarily providing adult swim lessons which are booked to capacity.
- There are some child and youth swimming lessons but they are not popular partially due to scheduling time and limited offerings

The Centennial Pool Board Chair further indicated that swimming lessons for children and youth were not recently cancelled, but are not a popular choice for facility users as a result of the above information and

therefore are not being offered for the upcoming season. The child and youth swimming lessons were offered on weekday afternoons from 3-3:30 pm and included various levels from beginner to advanced. For the upcoming season (2015), Centennial Pool will not offer these lessons. The Chair further indicated that it is important to note that, as one of two 50 metre pools in the region, it is heavily utilized and relied on by citizens and athletes for the provision of swim meets through the provincial sport organization, schools, and Universities. As a result, the facility will often cancel scheduled lessons to accommodate swim meets. This factor also limits children's swimming lesson opportunities at the facility and community access.

The response from the Board did indicate that the facility increased its offering of adult swim lessons as they are regularly booked to capacity with a wait list. With only limited feedback and inquiries from YMCA users, specific information on the impact to users was not clear. As a result of the various conditions noted above, the Centennial Pool Board does not anticipate offering youth and child swim lessons. The Board Chair indicated "In lieu of lessons, we offer the all children's/youth groups (ranging from the St. George's YouthNet to Daycares to the YouthProject) discounted rental space."

Pool Infrastructure

Municipal facilities are generally expected to allow for access and usage by multiple types of users and swimming pools are not different. However, there is a degree of recognition that the Centennial Pool is a sport-specific facility. As a result, while programming such as lessons for children and youth are expected to be made available, they are typically less popular at this facility because of the water temperature, the depth of the pool, and the frequent cancellations due to swim meets. This, coupled with limited program offerings and the time of day for programming, is not conducive to children's lessons.

Residents do have options for provision of recreation programming at other pools in the area. The following pools are accessible by transit and/or are within a maximum 25 minute drive-time of the Centennial Pool:

- Needham Centre Pool 5 minutes (2.5km)
- Dalplex University Pool 6 minutes (3.6km)
- Stadplex at CFB Halifax 3 minutes (1.4km)
- Halifax Commons Pool 3 minutes (1.4km)
- Dartmouth Sportsplex 4 minutes (3.4km)
- Captain William Spry Centre Pool 12 minutes (7.4km)
- Canada Games Centre 14 minutes (10km)
- Bedford Outdoor Pool 21 minutes (14.2km)
- Sackville Sports Stadium 24 minutes (17.9km)

In addition, the Nova Scotia Rehabilitation Centre pool is expected to reopen in 2015. While that pool is regularly used by the facility during the day, it does provide opportunities for community recreation programming in the evenings and is under 5 minutes and 2 km away from Centennial Pool.

Aquatic needs and provision of aquatic facilities and services will be a topic of review in the upcoming Community Facility Master Plan update. Citizens, user groups, facility managers and key stakeholders will have opportunity for commentary and discussion related to the review and verification of service provision in aquatic facilities in general as well specific facilities including Centennial Pool.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community members make up the Centennial Pool Association Board.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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