

Report to the Accessible Advisory Committee Subject – Canada Games Venues Date April 18, 2011

I am pleased to provide an overview of the venues used by the 2011 Halifax Canada Winter Games. A Committee was in place for the Games that looked at the venues in terms of universal access and customer service to athletes, officials, volunteers and spectators.

The Committee had seventeen sites to work with for the games. Of these sites eight of the sites were owned or administered by Halifax Regional Municipality. As the Accessible Advisory Committee is an HRM Committee and its' interest is in HRM owned or leased spaces this report focuses on eight facilities that fall within those parameters.

These facilities were used for a specific purpose for the Games and this purpose dictated the examination of the site. The everyday purpose of the facilities outside the Games was not examined. Therefore, there may be universal access features that were not considered. An example of this was the Halifax Forum that was not being used for hockey but for boxing for the Games. Care has been taken in this report to attempt to identify some of the shortfalls remaining in these facilities that were not originally considered or that the Canada Games administration opted not to implement. Still other items at each venue were not looked at that part was not being used or, had no athletes with disabilities using them such as locker rooms.

The Canada Games Centre

This new facility was built specifically for the Games. It was only used for a few minor test events for the Canada Games up to the Games themselves. It was built to plans that included universal access in the planning phase. There were two items of concern recognized during the Games with the facility and these are being corrected.

Items of Concern – (1) An open face staircase remains in the facility which is a hazard for persons with visual impairments when using their cane. (2) Signage was incomplete for universal access.

The Commons Oval Site

This temporary facility was built specifically for the Games. It has recently been approved to be rebuilt as a permanent facility. The site was extremely well done for the Games and the lessons learned from operating the oval for local citizens and not athletes in competition will require some adjustments for a permanent site. However, the plans for functioning as a Games site were extremely well done.

For the Future – (1) The centralizing of services for persons with disabilities around the principle entrance was an excellent idea. The site is vast and it is very useful to have the entrance, washrooms and other services all in the same area as it is an outside site. (2) Permanent accessible parking should be created on the street near the main entrance. (3) Skating sledges for persons with disabilities as loaners should be on site for the public if skates are on site as loaners for the general public, if this is offered in a permanent oval facility.

Cole Harbour Place

This older HRM facility had some minor upgrades to host the sport of ringette. Therefore, the examination was of Scotia 1 and Scotia 2 ice surfaces and supporting infrastructure. This facility served the purpose well and as a legacy from the games a new accessible viewing area was constructed in Scotia 1.

Items of Concern – (1) Signage problems need to be corrected in the future especially for persons with visual impairments. Some were corrected for the Games.

Dartmouth Sportsplex

This older HRM facility was used for Hockey during the Games. There was no sledge hockey in the Games so universal access needs of persons with disabilities as athletes was not considered as the rest of the facility such as the pool area. The dressing rooms at the rink were not evaluated as sledge hockey is not a Canada Games Sport.

Items of Concern – (1) Signage problems need to be corrected in the future especially for persons with visual impairments. Some were corrected for the Games. (2) One problem was noted as a result of the Transit terminal at the site as persons with disabilities attending hockey could not get off a transit bus at this location. This will be corrected with the building of the new Transit terminal.

Grand Parade (Festival Square)

This site was used for free concerts and activities for the games including athlete recognition. No work was done to the site due to no budget for this site in the original Games funding allocations. Therefore no universal access work took place but areas of concern were noted for possible future undertakings.

Items of Concern – (1) There is no useful accessible entrance to the Grand Parade. The best entrance for meeting a standard is the main entrance from Barrington Street. This entrance has its' limitations and is nowhere near any accessible parking or even a drop off point as there is no parking on Barrington Street. It is also the furthest point from the accessible entrance of City Hall which is sometimes used in conjunction with activities on the Grand Parade. It is the furthest point from the closest parking complex which is the Scotia Square Parkade and furthest of the accessible on street parking sites on Argyle Street. (2) The closest entrance to the Grand Parade from City Hall is through the former driveway off Argyle Street. This entrance is a safety hazard as it is beyond safe grade standards. (3) There is no safe way to get to the Scotia Square complex from the Grand Parade. The old driveway entrance to the street is not safe because of the grade from the sidewalk to the street and previous conversations have been held regarding a crosswalk in this area. The corner of Duke and Argyle at the lower or harbour side is a treacherous ramp, not because of the ramp, but the grade of the terrain at the location. (4) There exists no permanent area to view events in the Parade for persons in wheelchairs. Such items are at the mercy of event managers who run events at the Grand Parade.

Halifax Forum

Just the forum was used during the games and it was not used for hockey. It was the boxing venue for the games. There were numerous upgrades for the Games including accessible washrooms and power door operators. The bingo hall, multipurpose room and other arena were not used for the games and were not evaluated.

In the Future – (1) There is no accessible viewing area at the Forum ice surface. As it was a boxing venue for the Games all seating was on the floor that is normally the ice surface. (2) To get to the ice surface area, for floor seating events, the best way is the ramp near the main entrance. This is beyond accessible grade standards.

St. Margaret Centre

This site was used for short track speed skating and figure skating. This site was a pleasant surprize for universal access. The limitations are the smaller arena. The multipurpose area or gym was not used for the games but the washrooms in this area were used. Of surprize was the existence of roll in showers for the gym. The dressing rooms of the rinks were not evaluated as there were no athletes with universal access needs participating in the events located there.

Item of Concern – (1) There is no accessible viewing area for the smaller arena.

Halifax Metro Centre and World Trade Centre

Both these venues (this complex) were used extensively for the games and for many purposes. The design of the complex has its' limitations for joint events from the standpoint of persons with disabilities that are not present for those without. The general aspects such as seating in Metro Centre, washrooms in the complex and elevators are well done. A big plus is that the complex is part of the downtown pedway system.

Items of Concern – (1) Persons in wheelchairs cannot get to the NS Sports Hall of fame. They must go through Metro Centre and therefore have limited access if the Metro Centre is in use such as the Tattoo. At all other times a person in a wheelchair must make arrangements in advance so staff can meet them at the box office and escort them through the Metro Centre to the concourse level by way of a Metro Centre elevator. (2) Signage is poor for person with visual impairments. (3) The ramp to the World Trade Centre main entrance empties at the corner of Carmichael Street. The curb cuts at this corner need to be upgraded. (4) The athlete areas at Metro Centre are not accessible. There are no accessible washrooms in the area. This came to light when planning was being done for the athlete participation in the opening and closing ceremonies.

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