

Item No. 3 (i)
Halifax Regional Council
March 29, 2011
Committee of the Whole

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Michael Freill, Chair, Long Term Arena Strategy Committee

DATE: March 13, 2011

SUBJECT: Long Term Arena Strategy – Oval Recommendation

ORIGIN

- Regional Council report entitled Long Term Arena Strategy, including Terms of Reference for the Long Term Arena Strategy Steering Committee, dated January 26, 2010; and
- Public response to the recently opened Canada Games Long Track Speed Skating Oval on the North Commons.

RECOMMENDATION

The Long Term Arena Strategy Steering Committee recommends Halifax Regional Council keep the Canada Games 400 Meter Long Track Speed Skating Oval on the Halifax Commons subject to due diligence on design and budget availability.

BACKGROUND

Council initiated a two-phase strategy to address the Region's arena deficiencies (i.e. arena shortage and their ageing condition). Phase 1, the short term strategy, addressed an immediate critical shortage of ice surfaces and resulted in approval of the BMO Centre. Phase 2 is the development of a Long Term Arena Strategy that would look at the remaining aging infrastructure and come up with long term options to ensure there would remain a stable and adequate number of ice surfaces in the future. Phase 1 was led by the Municipality. Phase 2 is being led by a Council approved Steering Committee. The Terms of Reference for the Long Term Arena Strategy Steering Committee were approved by Regional Council at the January 26, 2010 Council meeting.

The Committee, with a staff technical support team, was assigned to undertake community engagement, data gathering and analysis (e.g. building condition assessments, demographic and user trends, capital and operating costs etc.) and present options and a recommended strategy to Council. The recommendations will address issues such as the target number of ice surfaces in the region; recapitalization of existing arenas; expansions and construction of new arenas; closures; priorities; comparative capital/operating costs of various arena configurations/options; and phasing. In the case of any recommended closures, the Committee will also provide recommendations with respect to whether these buildings and properties should be disposed of or redeployed for other recreational or public purposes.

Included in the Committee's Terms of Reference are the following:

- Take into consideration the 2011 Canada Games Legacy regional destination rink opportunity and recommend siting options/recommendations for the project; and
- Consider a regionally distributed network of neighbourhood outdoor refrigerated rinks for a possible role in the long term arena strategy, including siting options and recommendations.

The Committee's final report and recommendations are not expected to be completed until later in the summer of 2011. However, the Committee was asked to make a recommendation around the legacy regional destination rink opportunity as an early deliverable given the anticipated closure of the speed skating oval to be late March.

DISCUSSION

The Committee has been meeting monthly since September 2010 reviewing information on the existing arena portfolio. The Committee also spent time discussing outdoor refrigerated rinks, what constitutes a regional destination outdoor rink and a community outdoor refrigerated rink, high level siting parameter options, and potential relationships to indoor arenas.

During the course of this exercise, the speed skating oval opened to the public on December 21, 2010. The response from the public was immediate and overwhelmingly positive. It caught people's imagine and dominated media coverage. By the time the Canada Games arrived, staff advised the Committee that over 70,000 people had skated on the oval in the few weeks it was

opened. It attracted seniors, teens, children, novice and experienced skaters, citizens from throughout the Municipality, recent immigrants, individuals, couples, groups, all income ranges, as well as able bodied and disabled skaters. Weather conditions had little impact on user attendance. Unlike lakes, which are very weather dependent, the outdoor refrigerated oval became a reliable place to go meet and skate.

With the arrival of the Canada Games the Committee witnessed the positive response to the quality of the oval from athletes all across Canada and the number of new records being set. It was learned that local interest among kids and adults of all ages wanting to learn to speed skate had skyrocketed. The speed skating clubs of the other Atlantic Provinces took interest in seeing the oval stay as they must go to Quebec or Western Canada to access such a venue.

The Committee has also been aware of all the letters to members of Council and the on line petitions. All of this information has caused the Committee to re-evaluate whether the speed skating oval should become a regional destination facility. It has certainly met all the criteria of what envisioned of a destination rink. It is located in the urban core and center of high pedestrian traffic areas, surrounded on three sides by residential areas and very close to downtown. It does not have a traditional hockey rink shape or boards, making it more appealing to public skating. It has become its' own destination, a place where people are gathering to meet, socialize and get exercise in the winter months when people are generally less active. One cannot help notice it is bringing more people to the North Common than anything else HRM done, especially during the winter when the North Common sees little use.

The Committee is aware that HRM owns 3 of the 6 refrigeration units and has first right of refusal on the other three. Committee members are also aware that no specific commitments were made for the equipment. The Committee acknowledges the original intent for the oval was to be temporary and HRM was considering a concept of a much smaller outdoor destination rink as a legacy. Thus, input on this concept was included as part of the scope of the Committee to help develop a redeployment strategy for the equipment. The Committee is also aware of the time lines required by the 2011 Canada Games Host Society for a decision from HRM on whether it wishes to purchase the remaining three refrigeration units.

Given the overwhelming response to the oval, the Committee was asked to consider the public request that the oval remain and become permanent. The Steering Committee requested from HRM staff additional information on other site options for the oval, as well as more details on the dismantling costs and relocation costs. Staff responded with an overview of the information compiled up to that point. Early analysis indicated other locations would be possible, but the oval shape would likely not be able to be retained. This means it would not be available for use by the speed skating sport as a training and competition venue. Staff advised preliminary estimates of reconstruction cost appeared to be similar between site options unless the size was downgraded.

After consideration of all the known information at this time, the Committee concluded a recommendation should go forward indicating that Regional Council should consider keeping the Canada Games 400 Meter Long Track Speed Skating Oval on the Halifax Commons subject to due diligence on design and budget availability.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The Steering Committee has instructed HRM staff to prepare budget implications as part of further due diligence to be provided to Regional Council in a report accompanying the Committee's Report to Council.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES/BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Project and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Project and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Steering Committee is comprised of members of the community and user groups of arenas. An engagement exercise is being planned for the main mission of the Committee, to develop a long term strategy for the provision of arenas. Time did not permit a specific engagement exercise for the oval recommendation. The Steering Committee utilized the input from the community through media, letters, e-mails, petitions and input provided to HRM staff at the oval site. Should Regional Council decide to keep the 400 meter long track speed skating oval on the Commons, the Steering Committee recommends HRM carry out further community consultation to improve the appearance, landscaping, and summer usage opportunities.

ALTERNATIVES

Council could choose to reject the Steering Committee's recommendation, and instruct HRM staff to investigate further options.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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