

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

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by

SUBMITTED BY:

Mike Labrecque, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: March 25, 2011

SUBJECT: **Canada Games Oval**

ORIGIN

- December 12, 2006: Council approved the 2011 Canada Winter Games budget and bid. The bid included a natural long track speed skating oval. Council expressed interest in purchasing refrigeration equipment for the oval and redeploying it after the Games for a permanent outdoor recreational skating venue.
- July 7, 2009: Regional Council approved development of a refrigerated long track speed skating oval for the 2011 Canada Winter Games. Staff was instructed to develop options for the design and location of a permanent outdoor refrigerated skating rink as a “destination” rink for the Region in the urban core as well as additional community rinks throughout the Region.
- January 11, 2010: Regional Council established the Long Term Arena Strategy Committee and directed the Committee to provide recommendations on both the destination rink and neighbourhood rinks.
- January 6, 2011: Information report in response to overwhelming attendance and interest in the future of the Canada Games Oval.
- Long Term Arena Strategy Steering Committee’s recommendation that the Canada Games Oval be made permanent on the Halifax North Common and serve as the “destination” ice surface for the Region subject to further technical considerations by staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS – PAGE 2

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Make the Canada Games Oval permanent on the Halifax North Common;
2. Direct staff to include the required capital and operating funds for the Canada Games Oval in the proposed 2011/12 Project and Operating Budget as outlined in the budget implications section of this report;
3. Direct staff to immediately engage consulting services as outlined in the discussion and budget implications sections of this report, funded from the advanced project account CBX01268 Consulting – Buildings, until a full funding strategy is approved by Council as part of the 2011/12 budget;
4. Authorize staff to accept donations to put towards the capital costs of making the Canada Games Oval permanent; and
5. Provide direction to staff as to whether or not to entertain proposals for corporate naming rights and other commercial advertising at the Canada Games Oval.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2011 Canada Winter Games brought with it a unique opportunity for residents to skate on a 400m speed skating oval. The public response to the oval as a community recreation facility was overwhelmingly positive and the oval became the talk of the town. Council originally had the vision to create a destination rink after the Games by redeploying equipment from the temporary oval. The oval, however, quickly met and exceeded all of the desired outcomes of what a destination rink was expected to provide. Residents have strongly expressed their desire and asked Regional Council to find a way to keep it a permanent facility. The sport community also expressed a strong interest to see it become permanent and be available as a secondary use for training and competition. This report outlines the results of staff's investigation of the requirements and implications to make the oval a permanent facility. The report covers a discussion on the oval configuration, site options and site design, capital project and operating budget implications, potential donations and contributions, and comparisons to other public spaces.

BACKGROUND

Construction of the Oval

The 2011 Canada Winter Games bid included a natural ice long track speed skating oval. Due to the region's maritime climate there was a significant risk warm weather or rain would occur prior to or during the Games and prevent this event from being held. It was however not financially responsible to construct a large refrigerated ice surface for a one week athletic competition. Council was however interested in constructing such a venue if the refrigeration equipment could be redeployed afterwards for recreational use. On July 7, 2009 Council approved such a strategy. This strategy included two components. These were:

- A regional destination ice surface in the urban core as a first phase; and
- A regionally distributed network of neighbourhood ice surfaces to be developed later.

Money which the 2011 Canada Games Host Society had budgeted for a natural ice oval was put towards the refrigerated oval along with funds from the Municipality. At the time the Municipality did not think that it could immediately use all of the refrigeration units and the Province agreed to deploy any surplus units to other Municipalities as part of their recreation facility grant process.

Rather than have the oval operate exclusively during the Games for athletes, it was agreed that the Municipality and the Host Society would partner on opening the oval to the public prior to and post Games. This allowed the oval to be used primarily for recreational skating and secondarily for training by the Nova Scotia Canada Games speed skating team during off-peak hours.

Recreation Use

Public response to the oval as a recreation facility was overwhelmingly positive and the oval has become the talk of the town. The oval had an attendance of approximately 100,000 for the season despite being closed to recreational skating for several weeks for test events, setting up and breaking down the venue for the Games and the Games-time events themselves. The oval opened shortly before Christmas and caught on with the public during the Christmas/New Years holidays. Its popularity continued throughout January and February with daily attendance on weekdays of 3,500 – 5,000 people. The oval web pages received more hits than any other Municipal pages on HRM's web site, including even the public transit schedule which has traditionally ranked first for hits. A "Save the Oval" web site was established and the administrators submitted a petition with 9,000 names to Council.

A recent Corporate Research Associates (CRA) survey indicated that:

- 84% of respondents either "completely support" or "mostly support" maintaining the oval on the Halifax Common;
- 30% of respondents indicated that they had either used the oval or a member of their household had; and
- "Participation rates were surprisingly similar across the entire municipality, and it is clear that the oval attracted residents from across the whole municipality."

CRA's figures are consistent with the proportion of written submissions to Council supporting continuation of the oval on the Halifax Common. A summary of all submissions can be found in Appendix A.

Community Space

Discussions about social capital and urban placemaking can often seem very abstract and idealistic. The Canada Games Oval however is a perfect example of both of these concepts and the impact on city life which can be achieved when you get it right. All winter long people have been talking about the oval in terms of pride of place as well as a gathering place which animates social life. "Love at first sight". "Electrifying". "Has brought the city to life". "I feel like I live in a cool place". "The city is smiling". "I can't remember the last time I have seen so many people enjoying themselves in the dead of winter, during the NIGHTTIME!" This is not how people usually talk about a municipal service and in a very real sense the oval is more than a municipal service. It's a venue in which citizens themselves bring the city to life.

The level of enthusiasm for the oval is one measure of its success. Another is the diversity of people attending. The oval skating experience has attracted families, seniors, teens, children, novice and experienced skaters, recent immigrants, individuals, couples, groups, all income ranges, citizens from throughout the Municipality, visitors to the Region, as well as able bodied and skaters with disabilities. In addition to skaters, many people, especially grandparents and newcomers, come to the oval simply to enjoy the atmosphere and people watch.

Why is the oval so popular? It has caught people's imagination and tapped into some deep seated desire for a Canadian winter experience, unstructured play and being in a festival-like atmosphere. Having said that, there's a certain spark or intangible quality that we'll never really be able to put our finger on.

The following are some commonly cited reasons for the oval's popularity as well as benefits:

- It provides an opportunity for accessible, healthy outdoor physical activity in the winter;
- It provides an opportunity for unstructured and spontaneous recreation, especially for multi-generational families;
- People enjoy the festival-like atmosphere that comes with the large well-behaved crowds;
- A sense of community pride and excitement that a vibrant urban space exists, especially in winter, where diverse people can spontaneously gather and comfortably interact;
- "People watching", laughing, smiling, having fun, talking to strangers;
- It's free and doesn't exclude any one;
- There are too few hours available at indoor rinks for public skating;
- Availability of free skates and helmets for those who don't own this equipment;
- Free skating instruction and skate aids;
- Reliable and safe outdoor ice when the region's lakes and rivers are not safe to skate on;
- The oval's large size and shape (equivalent to 3 NHL rinks) provides a more enjoyable skating experience than a typical indoor rink;
- Nostalgia for a Canadian winter experience which was common when winters were colder;
- New immigrants can participate in a uniquely Canadian pastime with fellow citizens;
- Skating is enjoyable regardless of skill level;
- People feel safe on the Commons at night for the first time;
- People enjoy seeing neighbouring streets animated with pedestrians going to and from the oval with skates over their shoulder; and
- Central location.

Sport Use

As a sport venue, the oval also exceeded expectations. Ninety-seven Canada Games records were broken and Speed Skating Canada officials indicated that the oval was a "world class" venue capable of hosting regional, national and international events up to the level of Junior World Championships. In fact after the Games, the oval was used as the training venue for Canada's Junior World Championship team. When the oval was initially constructed, Speed Skating Canada officials agreed that there were insufficient people participating in speed skating within the Atlantic region to justify maintaining the oval. After seeing the public response to the venue as a recreational facility and community gathering space, Speed Skating Canada offered the opinion that with these activities being the venue's primary use, a case could be made for

keeping the oval, with speed skating training/competition as the secondary use. Officials also indicated an interest in investing in coaching and athlete development in the region, as well as including the oval in their competition schedule.

Performance of Refrigeration Units

This winter was an opportunity to test refrigeration equipment and maintenance requirements for a large outdoor refrigerated ice surface. The oval was subject to extreme weather events which included several heavy rains (50mm), freezing rain, warm temperatures (15C), snow falls, extreme cold and fog. Despite the variety of extreme weather the quality of the oval's ice was usually very good. After extreme warm weather and heavy rain events the oval was reopened within 48 hours. After heavy snowfalls, staff was generally able to reopen within 12-36 hours. Creating and maintaining an outdoor refrigerated ice surface has many basic similarities to an indoor arena, however there were many unique challenges which staff have learned from and can apply in the future.

Long Term Arena Strategy Committee

One aspect of the Long Term Arena Strategy Committee's mandate is to make recommendations on outdoor ice surfaces, including a destination ice surface. The Long Term Arena Strategy Committee is not scheduled to submit its report until early summer. However, due to the overwhelming interest in the fate of the oval, the Committee decided to make a recommendation on the oval's future in advance of the remainder of its work.

The Committee felt that the oval, in its current location on the Halifax North Common, met the qualities being sought of a destination rink. The overwhelming public response to the oval also suggested to the Committee that citizens had already confirmed that this was in fact the Region's outdoor "destination" ice surface in the urban core. The Committee has recommended that the oval be made a permanent feature of the Halifax North Common in its current location. The Committee's recommendation was subject to staff doing some additional due diligence on technical issues.

Recommendations around the concept of a network of outdoor refrigerated rinks are expected to be included in the Committee's final report due later this year.

DISCUSSION

In deciding whether or not to make the Canada Games Oval permanent, there are several related components. These are appropriate size of ice surface, configuration, location, site amenities, recreation and sport program, capital/operating costs, funding and finally the impact upon the Commons.

Size and Configuration

The original concept was that after the Games a smaller ice surface would be built in the urban core. This was to be approximately the size of an NHL rink or slightly smaller. It would also be either rectangular or pond shaped. This was a reasonable plan but the popularity of the oval requires that this plan be set aside. Three things are very clear from the past winter's experience:

- Any ice surface smaller than the long track speed skating oval (equivalent to 3 NHL ice surfaces) will be too small to accommodate the size of crowds which regularly attended the oval throughout the past season. The oval consistently had 750-1000 people on the ice at a time in the evenings and throughout the day on weekends.
- Secondly, people really enjoy the oval configuration because it provides a more enjoyable skating experience and learners are able to separate themselves from the main flow of skaters along the oval's perimeter.
- The oval configuration has the added benefit of meeting the field of play requirements for the sport of long track speed skating. As mentioned earlier, the oval configuration is therefore able to serve the dual function of being a recreational facility and a sport venue for training and competition. The oval provides a new sport participation opportunity for youth and adults. It also provides a winter tourism opportunity through hosting competitions.

The original post Games plan was to build a smaller ice surface which would not require all of the oval's chillers. It should be noted that it was therefore suggested that some refrigeration units could be redeployed at existing indoor arenas as part of the Municipality's recapitalization of these facilities. If all of the refrigeration units are kept at the oval, this will not jeopardize any normal life cycle maintenance at indoor arenas. Any indoor arenas requiring recapitalization such as the Spryfield Arena are being dealt with through the annual Project Budget Planning process.

Site Options

Several sites were considered for the temporary Canada Games long track speed skating oval. The North Common site was chosen for specific reasons which are also relevant for selecting a permanent destination ice facility. These criteria are:

- A high profile site;
- Centrally located;
- Surrounded by several large relatively dense neighbourhoods;
- Easily accessible by foot, transit or vehicle;
- Able to accommodate crowds; and
- A reasonably flat site requiring a minimum of site alteration.

Alternative locations for a permanent oval have been suggested by the public. A great deal of the oval's success is due to its central location on the Commons. Staff therefore examined nearby alternative sites such as the Central Common, Wanderers Grounds and Garrison Grounds. Each of these sites has advantages and disadvantages. Capital costs across each site are similar, with the exception of site servicing, which has already been installed at the North Common for temporary oval. Each location can accommodate some form of large skating path in various shapes, but not necessarily a 400m oval plus sufficient room for large crowds of several thousand people and maintenance facilities/office space for staff and first aid. Furthermore these locations cannot accommodate an oval without significant disruption to the existing primary use.

The Central Common, across the street, scored high on many levels as an alternative location for a permanent oval. However, it works only by reconfiguring or eliminating key recreation

features such as the tennis courts, Canada Games Diamond, soccer field, swimming pool or skateboard park. The Central Common is in great need of repair and needs to be totally rethought. The added time and cost of redesigning and reconstructing the Central Common would unduly complicate and delay decision making on the future of the oval.

At the Wanderers Grounds the rugby, football and lawn bowling infrastructure would be eliminated. Additionally, the Wanderers Grounds does not have the visibility that is thought to be key to making the oval part of everyday life in HRM. The Garrison Grounds does not have sufficient space for an oval, accessory facilities and crowds.

The North Common scored highest as the most suitable site and the only one that can serve a dual purpose as a recreational skating facility and competitive speed skating facility

Impact on Existing North Common Uses

Placing a permanent oval on the North Common is not without its impact. The oval would eliminate a ball diamond used by recreational bantam baseball and softball. A sport field used by soccer and ultimate Frisbee would also be displaced. The ultimate frisbee field could be relocated to the centre of the oval if it were turfed. (Placing turf in the center of the oval offers the best combination of multi-season and multipurpose use and is the most cost effective solution). Replacement of the ball field and sport field is important and needs to be addressed. However, while there is a cost to replacing a ball field, this cost is less than the cost of replacing facilities which would be displaced on the Central Common or Wanderers Grounds.

The original plan called for the Oval to be dismantled and the Common restored over the summer of 2011. The displaced ball fields cannot be reinstated in time for use this summer. Therefore the issue of reinstatement should not be an immediate driver with respect to making a decision on the future of the oval/destination rink. Staff will take advantage of the coming year to assess ball diamond needs and options.

Site and Enhancement Design

If the oval is permanently located on the North Common, in addition to replacing the sand subsurface with a concrete base for ice making, other improvements to the site and its associated structures are required. Some of these are functional and others are aesthetic. From an *aesthetic* point of view, the original site design for the oval was only intended to be temporary for the season of the Games and was not designed or constructed with durability or attractiveness in mind. From a *functional* point of view the design of crowd gathering areas, control points, and site amenities also needs to be improved. If the oval venue is made permanent both its landscape design and its associated structures need to blend more harmoniously with the rest of the North Common.

Structures: Exemplary quality of design, materials, and construction is necessary for this project to succeed as a true community space. Structures such as washrooms, warming huts and equipment shelters must be durable and attractive and, if intended to be permanent, they must impart a sense of permanence. This means design by professional architects and construction with materials befitting the prominent public profile, and heavy use, to which this venue will be exposed. The right design treatment will result in a sense of pride and ownership by the

community, and will go a very long way toward addressing the concerns of those who may not initially support a permanent oval at this location.

Landscape: Plans to enhance the pathways, lighting and landscaping of the North Common are already underway. These plans can be modified to encompass the oval and make it an attractive permanent year round feature as opposed to its current temporary appearance with incomplete groundcover finish and visually discordant appearance. An initial design exploration confirms that there is an opportunity to better integrate the oval into the landscape and character of the North Common. This includes improvements with respect to accommodating special events at all times of the year in addition to winter skating activity. With respect to the oval itself, once it has been converted to a concrete pad it can be used for roller blading and cycling by children in the spring/summer/fall. As mentioned above the infield can be a turf area used for Frisbee and other informal activities which currently occur on the North Common.

With proper attention and budgets dedicated towards the oval's site design, its associated structures, and the overall renewal of the North Common, the skating facility can be well integrated into the character and multipurpose program of the North Common in a way that leaves a lasting public space legacy.

The design and construction process for the site improvements and associated structures will be undertaken in two stages.

- In the first stage, the oval will be converted from a sand base to a concrete base and the infield will be turfed. The existing building housing the ice resurfer will also be relocated on the site. Stockpiled earth material stored on the site from the original site re-grading will also be dealt with and site grading along the perimeter of the oval will be improved to better integrate with the remainder of the North Common. This work will be completed in time for the oval to reopen for the 2011/12 winter season.
- The second phase involves consultation regarding the look and feel of the site as well as the character and function of any accessory structures (e.g. shelter for the ice resurfer, washrooms, enclosures for the refrigeration units) and whether or not these structures will be year-round permanent or temporary seasonal to be stored off-site.

Capital Costs: Phase 1

A long track speed skating oval with an intended life of at least 25 years requires:

- Significant civil engineering work to stabilize and level the site to strict specifications;
- Structural concrete slab to contain the refrigerant piping;
- Underground electrical system to serve the chillers and exterior lighting;
- Exterior lighting system;
- Improved drainage and landscaping;
- Purchase of the remaining 3 chillers at \$100,000/unit from the Halifax 2011 Canada Games Host Society; and
- Some control system enhancements to make the refrigeration units more energy efficient.

The project cost for the first phase of work in 2011/12 is estimated at \$4.297M. The project cost estimate has been prepared by staff to provide an order of magnitude indication of the cost. Until design consultants are engaged, detailed drawings are prepared and cost estimates prepared to a higher degree of accuracy, this estimate is a project risk.

Time is of the essence if the oval is to reopen in mid December 2011 as a permanent venue. It is estimated that the design, tender and construction process will take 8 months to complete. This includes 2 months to award design contract and prepare tender documents, 1 month for tender/award and 5 months for construction. **Thus, it will be necessary to initiate the process of engaging consultants in April, at a cost of \$125,000, to begin the design work which is required. This design work must be undertaken prior to approval of the 2011/12 project budget in order for the oval to be operational in mid December 2011.**

Capital Costs: Phase 2

Phase 2 construction will be included in the 2012/13 project budget. This phase will include community consultation to refine the size and location of onsite amenities and additional surrounding landscaping to blend it into overall improvements to the Commons. The estimate for Phase 2 is an additional \$1.4M, but will be subject to input during the public consultation.

What is the “Oval”?

The proposed operating costs for the oval are presented below. These costs have to be understood in the context of what activities and services are offered at the oval. The “oval” is generally referred to as a thing or place. In fact the “oval” is both a venue/facility as well as a program/collection of services. Both components are relevant when discussing the future of the oval and have capital and operating budget implications. The “oval” consists of the following elements. Many of the operating and capital costs are proportional to the venue’s popularity and frequency of use.

Oval Infrastructure and Site Maintenance

- Refrigeration system (chillers, pipes, generator, back up power, water)
- Sub surface for ice (currently sand)
- Ice making, cleaning and resurfacing
- Garage for ice resurfacer
- Staff and equipment for snow removal from ice and surrounding public assembly areas
- Public seating
- Solid waste removal and portable washrooms
- Power
- Lighting
- Security

Oval Program

- Skate monitors for crowd control and first aid
- Recreational skating
- School skating trips
- Speed skating training

of upgrading the oval. It may also be possible to provide some small form of recognition for these donations on site in the form of a plaque for example. The Municipality has accepted financial donations in the past (e.g. restoration of the Halifax Public Gardens) and provided some recognition.

It is advised that donations not be put towards the annual operating cost of the oval. Relying upon donations for annual in perpetuity costs is not sustainable and will only lead to a funding crisis in future budget years and uncertainty over service levels at the oval.

Corporate Naming Rights & Advertising

Some commercial organizations have expressed an interest in making financial contributions to the oval. It is not clear however whether these offers are charitable donations or are intended to be commercial transactions with the Municipality in exchange for corporate naming rights or advertising opportunities. There has been some limited informal public debate as to whether or not such transactions would be in the spirit of the use of “common” land. During short duration civic events (e.g. Canada Day, Canada Winter Games etc) corporate sponsors have been permitted to have commercial branding on the Commons. There is however no guiding policy. Recently corporate naming rights for the BMO Centre were sold, but the site and building did not have any public associations or sensitivities.

This issue is a discretionary decision based upon community values which Council must decide. Staff does not have any professional advice to offer. If however Council does decide to entertain corporate naming rights or commercial advertising, staff would take some time to determine the value of these commercial transactions before entertaining any offers and they would be brought back to Council for consideration.

Comparisons to other Outdoor Spaces

There has been much debate among the public on whether a permanent oval should have free access to public skating, or whether some sort of admission fee should be charged. In order to incorporate a fee approach, fencing would be required as well as a good means of entry, fee collection and crowd control. This would require additional staff, security and infrastructure. It is felt the extra costs would outweigh the benefit. In addition, with thousands of people entering the venue each evening, admission fees, change making and checking for season passes will cause delays, congestion and alter the experience of attending the oval.

In general the Municipality provides free access to outdoor venues such as parks, trails, beaches, trails and playing fields for general use. In the case of playing fields, fees are charged to groups who want to reserve them for their exclusive at specific times such as for league play. Any individual however can use playing fields for free if they filed is not reserved. Maintaining free access to the oval for public skating would be consistent with this practice. Charging a rental fee to the speed skating club for reserved access times would also be consistent with this practice.

The following bullets compare the Municipal beach program with the oval.

- The Municipality maintains and staffs 25 beaches for 61 days in the summer with an annual attendance of approximately 132,000 and an annual operating cost of \$467,000 with no access fees.

- The oval season in a full year of operation will be approximately 90 days long. This year's attendance was 100,000 and could be higher next year since it will be open to the public more days. These figures are only taking into consideration winter use. Potential use by citizen for summer activities would be in addition to these numbers. The projected annual operating cost is \$410,000 with some nominal recoveries from concessions and speed skating club rentals and no proposed access fees.

Staff therefore recommend public access remain free for public skating.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

2010/11 – Phase 1

It will be necessary to initiate the process of engaging consultants in April, at a cost of \$125,000, to begin the design work which is required for Phase 1 of the oval upgrades. This design work must be undertaken prior to approval of the 2011/12 project budget in order for the oval to be operational in mid December 2011. It is therefore necessary to immediately engage consulting services funded from the advanced project account CBX01268 Consulting – Buildings, until a full funding strategy is approved by Council as part of the 2011/12 budget.

The budget availability has been confirmed by Financial Services.

Budget Summary:	Project Account No. CBX01268 – Consulting – Buildings	
	Res. 1910.3 - Commons Skating Oval Consulting	
	Cumulative Unspent Budget	\$125,000.00
	Less: RFP No. 11-027 Phase 1	<u>\$125,000.00</u>
	Balance:	\$ 0.00

2011/12

There is a gross operating budget implication of \$410,000 (TPW and CD cost centres), beginning in 2011/12, associated with the recommendations of this report. There will be some revenues, but these cannot be estimated at this time. Phase 1 upgrades to the oval have 2011/12 estimated project budget cost of \$4.297M. There may also be financial contributions which can offset some of this cost; however this amount cannot be estimated at this time.

Consistent with HRM's approach to adding new services and programs, the additional costs (not currently accommodated within the existing budget envelopes) would be funded through an increase to the general tax rate when preparing the 2011/12 Proposed Project and Operating Budgets.

Tax rate Impact (Operating):

Total Operating budget required	\$410,000
CD budget realignment	<u>(\$ 50,000)</u>
New Budget requirements	\$360,000

Tax rate Impact (Capital):

Estimated Project budget	\$4,297,000
Project Account #CPX01190- Park Upgrades (10/11 approved)	<u>(\$ 247,000)</u>

Project Account #CPX01190- Park Upgrades (11/12 proposed)	<u>(\$ 300,000)</u>
New Budget requirements	\$3,750,000

If approved, the total additional budget requirements in 2011/12 would result in an increase of 0.8 cents to the general tax rate.

Council should approve sufficient funds for Phase 1 in 2011/12. Proceeding with the project should not be dependent upon receiving donations. Delaying the project while funds are raised will jeopardize reopening next season's reopening.

2012/13 – Phase 2

There will be some additional capital project costs required for Phase 2 landscaping and amenities in 2012/13. This work will be blended into previously planned upgrades to the North Common. Phase 2 is estimated to cost \$1.4M, however, it will be influenced by public consultation on the size and location of amenities and landscaping. If approved, the additional budget requirement in 2012/13 would result in an increase of 0.3 cents to the general tax rate.

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 public has weighed in on their opinion in a number of ways through letters, e-mails, on line petitions, the media, public surveys, as well as speaking to councilors and staff. The 1994 Halifax Common Plan was developed with a great deal of public consultation. The concept of a skating oval is congruent with the principles of that plan, however, the requirement to create a paved hard surface track on the North Common is not congruent with specifics of the plan (nor was it ever imagined).

Developing the design for Phase 2 will involve public engagement. This will focus on refining the site plan, design, amenities, landscaping and blending the venue into the North Common to acceptable standards.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Council could decide not to move ahead at this time and request staff to explore further site options beyond those considered. After careful consideration of all the factors that made the oval as successful as it was this past winter, staff believes the best options were brought forward and reviewed and the recommended location is the best and most cost effective option. Delaying a decision could also begin to impact the ability to have a permanent option ready in time for winter 2011. The oval could operate as a temporary venue for a further year if necessary;

2. Council could decide to select one of the other site location options considered in the site evaluation. Staff does not recommend this option because of the more significant impact on other existing infrastructure and the higher cost to relocate impacted infrastructure along with other reasons previously presented. It would likely require having to spend some funds to redeploy the oval on the North Common again for a period of time while developing options for new locations of numerous impacted infrastructure on at least two of the other sites considered;
3. Council could decide not to go with a speed skating oval at all, and instead go back to a much smaller destination rink. Based on the public response, staff feels this option would not provide a satisfactory sized facility, nor be able to capture many of the advantages the oval provided. It would also eliminate the secondary function of providing a new sport training, competition and sport tourism facility in the Municipality.

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A – Summary of E-mails and letters from Public to Regional Council

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.

Report Prepared by: Doug Rafuse, Manager Facility Planning, Community Development, 490-6205
Peter Bigelow, Manager, Real Property Planning, IAM, 490-6047
Terry Gallagher, Manager, Infrastructure and Asset Management, IAM, 476-4067

Report Approved by: _____
Paul Dunphy, Director, Community Development

Financial Approval by: _____
Cathie O'Toole, CGA, Director of Finance, 490-6308

Appendix A - Summary of E-mails and letters from Public to Regional Council

	Contact	Community	Oval Position	Reasons for/against
1	Citizen	Cole Harbour	For	Health & happiness worth more than costs
2	Citizen	Dartmouth	Against	Waste of money - have plenty of lakes for free with ample parking, access where beaches exist. Lakes being cleared by volunteers at no cost.
3	Health Association	NS	For	Growing obesity rates - Oval provides healthy physical outdoor activity
4	Health Association	Halifax	For	Free and publically accessible, provides physical activity, reducing health inequities, sense of belonging improve health of communities & Individuals. Availability of free equipment rentals and convenient location reduces barriers for low income individuals and others. Newcomers able to experience Canadian activity.
5	Citizen	Dartmouth	Against	Too expensive to maintain for limited benefit. People can skate in existing rinks or use lakes for free. I am retired person with fixed income. Will divert money from essential services and reduce my standard of living.
6	Health Association		For	Physical activity, community activity - against using alcohol industry as potential sponsor
7	Health Association		For	Fun, family oriented winter physical activity - against using alcohol industry as potential sponsor
8	Citizen		For	Best thing to ever happen - skating with neighbours, sense of pride, winter sport activity when lakes not frozen
9	Citizen		For	Great outdoor exercise, great location, accessible, used by all ages, great instructors and can be used by all skill levels, new Canadians trying to participate in Canadian pastime, enthusiasm and smiles on everyone's faces, meeting strangers on sidewalk with skates over shoulder, spinoff to local businesses
10	Citizen	Sheet Harbour	For	People are speaking and willing to help find ways to pay
11	Citizen	Halifax	For	Great difference to atmosphere & livability in winter, great location, accessible. Turned Commons into vibrant place that in winter is frozen wasteland by day, dangerous place by night. Suggests small fee.
12	Citizen	Windsor	For	People want to keep it for all the right reasons. Try using a monthly lottery to raise funds.
13	Citizen	Hammonds Plains	For	Should be free, just like Public Gardens. Public Gardens has a cost, yet nobody complains. Some things are worth the cost, wonderful and healthy.
14	Citizen	Halifax	For	First class, great ice surface, enjoying company of citizens of all ages, smiles, healthy outdoor activity, feeling of true comradeship among skaters, great location can be used for sporting events, will attract visitors
15	Citizen	Halifax	Uncertain	Expresses both views - biggest issue is appearance -temporary appearance, too industrial, and say it will cost millions to make attractive. Thinks small winter skating pond would be bonus but oval too expensive to make permanent, operate based on media information.

16	Citizen	Falmouth	For	Came from valley to meet family and skate on Oval - great experience. Not impressed with getting parking ticket Sunday afternoon. Many other visits parking not enforced in this area around Commons.
17	Business Association	Halifax	For	Place for community to gather, puts feet on the street and helps businesses, great tourism potential, limited outdoor recreation in metro limited, feels that money well spent, already showing numbers unlike other proposed projects.
18	Business Association	Halifax	For	Place for community to gather, puts feet on the street and helps businesses, great tourism potential, limited outdoor recreation in metro limited, feels that money well spent, already showing numbers unlike other proposed projects.
19	Business Association	Dartmouth	For	Place for community to gather, puts feet on the street and helps businesses, great tourism potential, limited outdoor recreation in metro limited, feels that money well spent, already showing numbers unlike other proposed projects.
20	Business Association	Dartmouth	For	Place for community to gather, puts feet on the street and helps businesses, great tourism potential, limited outdoor recreation in metro limited, feels that money well spent, already showing numbers unlike other proposed projects.
21	Business Association	Sackville	For	Place for community to gather, puts feet on the street and helps businesses, great tourism potential, limited outdoor recreation in metro limited, feels that money well spent, already showing numbers unlike other proposed projects.
22	Business Association	Spryfield	For	Place for community to gather, puts feet on the street and helps businesses, great tourism potential, limited outdoor recreation in metro limited, feels that money well spent, already showing numbers unlike other proposed projects.
23	Citizen	Dartmouth	For	Outdoor refrigerated surface available to public provides more ice time, gives residents/visitors a viable option to stay healthy over winter months. Getting on rink with family.
24	Citizen		For	Great thing for all ages
25	Citizen		For	As a senior, really enjoyed the outdoor exercise. Would pay small fee.
26	Citizen		For	Everyone can enjoy - children, adults, seniors. Enjoy driving by and seeing people happy and enjoying themselves - common land given to people - make it possible for them to enjoy it. Listen to the people, it unites community.
27	Citizen		For	So many people getting enjoyment of using it. Helps promote fitness and good health. Canadian winter outdoor activity.
28	Citizen	Dartmouth	For	Uses a public space where people can meet for some fun and fresh air in the winter months. Using the Commons like this helps reduce crime and makes the whole area a better uses space.
29	Citizen		For	Does so much good physically to get people to go out and skate in winter months. Helps reduce obesity. Gets family together and having fun.
30	Citizen		For	Pride and community spirit it has brought. Sport opportunities not available in Atlantic Provinces, tourism, accessible to low income, promotes physical activity, generates business, family can use together, could find ways to generate revenues & sponsors to offset costs, parts of Commons is "dead zone" in winter.

31	Citizen	Halifax	Against	Supports outdoor skating and for free but would like to see more temporary smaller rinks like Rockefeller Centre. Likes HRM's approach to spend a bit extra and open Games venue to public before/after Games.
32	Citizen	Halifax	Uncertain	Better solution would be to use fake ice oval. With Halifax's iffy winter weather, fake ice oval would be better, no refrigeration equipment required, would allow other site options.
33	Citizen	Halifax	For	Healthy both socially and fitness-wise. Does not support selling naming rights. This is a public space.
34	Citizen		Against	Says it is a novelty. Wants Commons left alone as urban space. Does not support concerts there either.
35	Citizen	Halifax	Against	Encroachment on Common. Should be no permanent fixtures on the Commons.
36	Citizen		Against	Cannot afford it with deficit. City staff should identify financial risks and how this could possibly be afforded. Says people can go skate at lunchtime at existing indoor rinks or use lakes. User pay for a fee. City could assist groups clearing lakes.
37	Citizen	Halifax	Against	No new Convention Centre and no Skating Oval. Both projects are bad. Pay down debt and lower taxes instead.
38	Citizen	Clayton Park	For	Healthy exercise and activity out in fresh air. Says every heart attack costs taxpayers \$30,000.
39	Citizen		For	Best thing to ever happen. See families walking with skates in tow, smiling, talking to each other. The atmosphere, feeling is exciting. Would pay small fee.
40	Citizen	Halifax	For	Brought hold new atmosphere to Commons. Wonderful opportunity to get exercise in fresh air, people of all ages and backgrounds can interact in a friendly safe manner. Getting to know one and another from communities. Feeling of revival in spirits of city. Says willing to pay and doesn't even skate. Loves seeing people, lights on Commons at night enjoying. Says they remember a time when people swam, skated on "Egg Pond" on Commons.
41	Citizen		For	Improvement to city. Place to gather, exercise outdoors in fresh air. Family activity. Great use of public lands that is underutilized in winter. Says access should be free to use at no direct cost to skaters, willing to pay a little more in taxes to support.
42	Citizen		For	
43	Citizen		For	Keep it permanent. Had not been on skates in over 25 years and am over 60. Been there several times and had exciting experience. Bringing community together. Best thing to happen in city in long time.
44	Citizen	North End Halifax	For	Progressive for city. Citizens have longed for an outdoor skating venue. Great recreational activity, gets people moving in winter. Costs far outweigh benefits to citizens. Magical. Better investment than Convention Centre. Listen to electorate.
45	Citizen	Halifax	For	Apartment faces Common and can see activity. Has become a special place for citizens of all ages. Need to find solution to keep this unexpected gem in our city centre. Great location for access by inner city kids who do not have transportation.
46	Citizen	Halifax	For	Wonderful addition to life in HRM. Make it permanent facility.

47	Citizen	Halifax	For	Not a skater but have gone several times to watch. Got me off the couch and out into fresh air. Everyone having good time, relaxing, enjoyable. Gets kids away from TV and computers and exercising. People who grumble about use of Commons land - well this is every common person is using it. Lakes don't freeze long enough anymore so this is great solution. Could allow charities to set up hot chocolate spots. Keep talking about obesity, lack of exercise issue - this can help change that. Should be no fee to use it.
48	Citizen		For	However, says configuration should be changed to hockey rink shape or have a hockey rink attached because thinks half of skaters are hockey players. That way, could also use in summer for street hockey and Oval for roller blade path. Currently takes too long to clean ice.
49	Health Association		For	Bringing people - and life - to downtown. Huge, happy crowds. Make it permanent.
50	Citizen		For	Lake use too weather dependent. Equates Oval on Commons to European cities. Ideal use of public land that for most of year is underutilized by most. Sport rinks are fine for competitive recreation, but for those who just like to enjoy pure fun, exercise and fresh air. city could use outdoor surface that could be converted to walking, jogging, rollerblade surface in warmer months. Doesn't mind paying extra taxes if knew money was being spent wisely to get people off sofas and onto safe, outdoor arena in heart of growing city. Well used by all ages regardless of skating abilities.
51	Citizen	Fall River	For	Enjoyed the Oval. Son's skating has improved. So difficult to find family skating time as rink are taken up by hockey players. Even if must move to another location, keep outdoor rink.
52	Citizen	Halifax	For	Have used many times and lot's of fun. Wrote a history of the Commons. Was originally used to graze cows, horses and sheep of common people, we've moved on from then. This is 21st century activity for the "common" people. Saw more people they knew on News Years Eve than did in the whole summer. Just what was needed for city centre, and for winter activity.
53	Citizen	North End Halifax	For	Live in Halifax, work in Burnside. Because of work hours, location, many public skating venues inaccessible. Cannot get to "noon" skates. Recreational skating is pasttime favorite, can now go 3 to 4 times per week, instead of maybe 1 hour, once per week. Loves seeing so many people. Have friends who had not skated in 10 years now addicted to it because of location, shape, availability of Oval.
54	Culture Association	Halifax	For	Great gift to Halifax because it is creating events. Beneficial to make city a place where people want to be out enjoying themselves.
55	Citizen	Clayton Park	For	Fabulous facility for public skating. Senior citizen who regularly uses it. Very popular.
56	Citizen		For	Energizing for city to have this on Commons and open to public. Used by huge segment of people, happy, enjoying, patiently waiting when crowded, gathering place. Bringing people to downtown.
57	Citizen	Annapolis Valley	For	Keeping it permanent would be huge boost for tourism within Province. Does a lot of travelling and always researches activities, places to see. This gives Nova Scotia something to highlight for winter activity. Rockefeller Centre but with Nova Scotia Prices and hospitality.
58	Citizen	Halifax	For	Moved here from Ontario. Loves the region but misses opportunity for open air skating in a common area in heart of city like in Nathan Philips Square in Toronto, or by City Hall in Kitchener. Oval has brought out best in people, city. Use it for running track in summer, would be great use.
59	Citizen	North End Halifax	For	Has increased use of Commons 100 fold. Huge attraction. Suggest small user fee or using local high school volunteers if cost is issue.

60	Citizen	Halifax	For	Used it many times. Gets people out of house in winter and exercising. Positive atmosphere. People courteous, really happy. All demographics using it. Family activity. Urban core. Suggest summer roller skating with interesting landscape design in center. Sees it becoming a very popular winter destination from all over the Province.
61	Citizen	Dartmouth	For	Used it many times. No matter what the age, people smiling, taking pictures, enjoying company and great outdoors. One of best ideas in decades in HRM for recreation and community spirit.
62	Citizen		For	Serve as a useful recreational function for many in community. Familiar with such facilities such as in Roseville, Minnesota.
63	Citizen		For	Best thing that has happened to Halifax since 2001. Must remain permanent.
64	Citizen		For	Most exciting sporting and entertaining event in many years.
65	Citizen		Uncertain	Keep it for rest of winter, but after Games charge a nominal fee and see how it goes and let cooler heads prevail.
66	Citizen	Halifax	For	Doing more to get people to use the Commons for good healthy activity than anything else they can remember. Better use than summer concerts. Would like to see it used in summer for track, etc.
67	Citizen	Purcell's Cove	For	Have used it and all ages were having a blast. Family activity. Felt like were in a different city. So citizen friendly attraction. Increased fitness. Family, fun, quality activity. Can improve social health. Commons now feels much safer and accessible to citizenry.
68	Citizen	Purcell's Cove	For	Took family and met up with friends who drove from Bedford with their family for fun skate. Love the "hub" location. Location, location, location. Husband hasn't skated in 20 years, son hates to skate, never played hockey - both bought new skates and love it. Have been to Vancouver couple of times, seen their tremendous access to outdoor winter recreation in heart of bustling city and was envious- says the Oval puts Halifax on par and they will be envious. Look at in-line skating for summer use.
69	Citizen	Fairmount	For	Have used it, best thing that happened to Halifax. Offers opportunity for individuals or families who cannot afford skates or get to public skates at local arenas a change to go out and skate. Great physical activity. Happy, smiling faces. All ages. Very difficult to find public skating times at local arenas at times that work for families. Lakes often not safe except for few weeks. Outdoor natural rinks very dependent on weather and volunteers. The Oval gets people interested in speed skating as well as public skating. Son now interested in new sport. Great social activity, ran into old friends from another community. Healthy and productive activity for youth who are not into organized sport.
70	Citizen		For	Went skating and brought tear to my eye seeing so many families and people of all ages just clamoring to get on Oval. In this age of video games and 3D everything - amazing to see people so excited by simple outdoor activity.
71	Citizen	Dartmouth	For	Non-user but seen it well used and popular. Tearing it up would be such a waste. Find summer usage. For cost of maintaining, try set user fee.
72	Citizen	Halifax	For	
73	Citizen		For	Brother has been training/skating at Calgary Oval. Delighted to hear Council support for possibility of this venue becoming permanent to the community and next generation of skaters.
74	Citizen		For	True legacy of Games
75	Citizen	Halifax	For	Would also suggest it become roller skating oval in summer.

76	Citizen	Dartmouth	For	Used it many times with whole family. Love it. Does not compare to public skating indoors in arena. Being with fellow Haligonians of all ages, races, socia-economic backgrounds. All communities. Positive way for family and friends to be together in winter. Goes skiing - does not compare to this fun. Sledding, lakes cannot rely on conditions. Great exercise to combat inactive/obesity problems. Love location but parking is an issue - why can't area on Commons be used for parking.
77	Citizen	Halifax	For	Have skated on it, and once went with nine other middle aged friends. Have been struck with how many people of wide age span are skating at once enjoying themselves. Strangers stopping to talk to each other. Smiles and laughter being generated, wonderful for city spirit. Nothing has ever enhanced the Commons and promoted family and community enjoyment than this one venue. Has social benefits. Being free of charge is drawing card for family and seniors. location. Getting off the couch and get some exercise and converse with fellow residents. Spirit of our community.
78	Citizen	Halifax	Uncertain	Remembers seeing skating on Commons when they were little. Unless oval can provide free recreational skating to all, it should be dismantled. Against seeing commons being commercialized. Thinks this has trappings of being P3 project. High maintenance facility geared for elite athletes. Commons must remain free to use by everyone. Don't be swayed by seeing Commons as a venue to raise money.
79	Citizen	Head Jerddore	For	For keeping it there, however, will never use and it and therefore doesn't think all HRM should pay for operating it.
80	Citizen	Mineville	For	For keeping it there for reasons of getting people out and enjoy fresh air and exercise, good for local economy. However, not all HRM will benefit and would like to know how operating will be paid for. Says amalgamation was bad for rural areas. Local businesses should pick up some of cost. Some equipment was promised to other parts of municipality/Province.
81	Citizen	Halifax	For	With qualifier. Grade 7 student. Thinks it should be moved to South Common. Will interfere with Baseball on main Common. Main Comon is bigger, darker and Oval will get vandalized.
82	Citizen		For	All for it but thinks there should be a small charge to help cost recovery. Also, what is the impact on usage in other arenas and any negative financial impact .
83	Citizen	Halifax	Against	Lives near Commons. Has concerns about traffic control & parking, hours of operation - noise bylaw violation, aesthetics, privatization of public space if corporate sponsorship used, lack of public consultation.
84	Citizen	Halifax	For	Lives near Commons and does have some concerns that need to be addressed if permanent. Traffic control and parking, hours of operation - noise of music and radio ads and lights on, privatization of public space - should be no advertisements, lack of public consultation. Concerned about impact on baseball diamonds.
85	Citizen	Halifax	For	Lives near the Commons and therefore, have concerns and would like to see other locations explored. Agrees with points of resident listed above (references the letter and that resident's points). Concerned about practices of using Common for concerts, fenced off areas is neglecting how neighbouring residents use Commons.
86	Architect Business	Halifax	Uncertain	Submitted a proposal for skating on Griffin's Pond in the Public Gardens. Was originally used for skating, and claims the first covered rink in Canada was in Public Gardens. Feels with proper study, is doable.

87	Citizen		For	Perfect where it is. Moved to Halifax, never saw our community get together so passionately about a common project. Make it permanent for these reasons.
88	Citizen		For	kind of place that brings people out to get some exercise, have fun, meeting new families
89	Citizen	Clayton Park	For	Fun, pleasure
90	Citizen	Don't think it is HRM	Against	Commons is being destroyed, needs to be protected. It is peoples land, taxpayers land. Supports green space. Ok with existing baseball/picnics/small wading pool/beautiful fountain. Should be as natural as possible, no huge concrete and collateral damages. Skaters can go to other facilities/arenas. Perhaps SMU could build an oval, or HRM build another new arena.
91	Citizen	Fall River	For	Great asset, provides recreation for all
92	Citizen	Halifax Central	Against	Lives near Commons. Have skated on oval but against being permanent on Common without appropriate considerations of the issues important to residents and general public - what becomes of park space, long term values and needs, placement - would it be better somewhere else on the Common?, summer use, other amenities and parking.
93	Citizen		Against	Keep Halifax Commons for the "common" people. Ice skating should have it's own space - these are not 'commons' areas. Halifax needs more green space.
94	Citizen	Fairview	For	Keep it and make it a large celebrational venue. Makes Halifax vibrant and active in winter. Healthy and positive.
95	Citizen	Bedford	for	Have used it with family and loves it. Atmosphere, fun. Should look at Wanderers Ground as permanent location since it is underutilized, has lighting and electrical services.
96	Citizen	Halifax Central	Uncertain	Lives near Commons. Does not indicate for or against, but wrote to complain about noise level of commercial radio music and commercial advertisements on radio.
97	Citizen		Against	This is turning urban park into a commercial venture, doesn't support naming rights or sponsorship. Not environmentally friendly. 100,000 skaters only represents 3% (sic) of population. HRM has many natural lakes for skaters. Doesn't support fences in urban parks. Will impact other users. Oval has to close when weather bad, winter climate in Halifax not suitable for large artificial ice skating surface like oval. Walk around/through Commons more beneficial than gliding on oval.
98	Citizen		For	Skated on oval, really enjoyed it. Enjoyed seeing families participating actively together, day and evening. Would like to see it become a roller skating or running/walking track in summer. Good for wellness of people.
99	Citizen	Rockingham	For	Suggests making it a 365 day attraction if it had a concrete base - skating, roller skating, jogging, go-cart racing and other special events.