



Norfolk Minor Hockey Members & Norfolk Residents,

Find the document "Serious Ice Shortage Concerns – Discussion Paper" attached.

This document examines the impact of the closure of the Rec Centre Arena. The inescapable conclusion is that the closure of this arena - as directed by Norfolk County's 2020 budget - will result in significant ice availability shortages, threaten Norfolk Minor Hockey's programming, and render the County incapable of meeting the needs of the citizens of Norfolk.

We request that this decision be re-visited.

Norfolk Minor Hockey shared this document with our Mayor and Councillors in an attempt to raise awareness and understanding of this serious problem. It was a problem when the budget was passed, and the gravity of the situation has been amplified significantly through developments which have arisen since their 2020 Budget decision, most notably the formation of a Norfolk 'A' Centre hockey program.

In response, Mayor Chopp called a meeting with Norfolk Minor Hockey representatives, Norfolk County CAO Jason Burgess, and Bill Cridland, General Manager of Community Services.

In this meeting, Mr. Burgess indicated that a Norfolk by-law mandates that youth programming is to be given ice scheduling priority. As such, we should be assured that there will be no threat to our minor hockey activities. While this is positive to Norfolk Minor Hockey, further analysis indicates that **even with this allowance, Norfolk Minor Hockey's programming will be impacted, including the loss of hockey tournaments and limiting player development opportunities.**

It was also recognized by Mr. Burgess that with closing the Rec Centre there will be insufficient ice to accommodate all users. **Adult hockey leagues will be among the casualties.** There will simply not be enough ice for everyone. Many leagues - some of them decades old - will be forced to fold, no longer having a home in Norfolk County.

Mr. Burgess further expressed that if Norfolk County had 100% of its usable ice times booked and had to turn away users as a result, that would be a good thing.

We strongly disagree. It may be good for Norfolk County's budget, but we believe our members, and our community, do not want to have Norfolk residents pitted against one another for access to our recreational facilities. This is not equitable, this is not fair, and it is difficult to argue that it represents a fulfillment of the County's duty to meet the needs of its tax-paying citizens.

We feel this direction is also an offence to the service clubs and community members who worked so hard, and donated so much money, to give us all the facilities we currently enjoy. The construction of the Rec Centre arena itself was funded almost entirely through community fundraising efforts, the fruits of which were then donated to the municipality on the condition that it would use it to serve the community



for generations to come. Mothballing the arena and leaving ourselves in a position of want and need fails to meet this commitment, and to many who raised those dollars, it feels like a betrayal.

Norfolk Minor Hockey, and other arena users, are committed to working with Norfolk County to find solutions to reduce the net cost of running our arenas. We understand it is a dollars-and-cents problem, and we are confident we can find a dollars-and-cents solution. We are simply asking for the opportunity to do this before the Rec Centre lights are turned off and we turn away the very users that helped raise the money to build it. We also believe our community is prepared to pay to operate these facilities for the benefit of our children and active adults while we discover the necessary solutions.

We are also not ignorant to the studies completed on our recreation facilities and programs that were funded by our tax dollars. The **2015 Parks, Facilities and Recreation Master Plan** studied the very use of our arenas and made several recommendations which, as part of accepting the master plan, were endorsed by Council. These recommendations included the recommendation to develop a policy framework that would balance public accessibility and revenue generation goals, focusing on some of these identified key components:

- A policy that **gives preference to minor sports**, youth and other special needs groups within selected timeframes for regularly scheduled and program-based activities;
- **Maximizing opportunities** beyond targeted group allocations **for adult and other activities that generate higher fees**;
- **Developing a tournament**, shows, event and festivals component **that supports service provider goals on program diversification....**;
- **Develop policy using** best practices analyses, **community organization consultation** and technical assessments on utilization, revenue generation and related profiles and inputs.
- **Development of a webpage indicating ice availability** and capacity and be promoted widely for the more active selling of non-reserved available ice one to two weeks ahead of its availability (in an effort to increase utilization).

One other key recommendation – which we assume was tied to re-examining arena use following an honest effort to adopt and implement the above recommendations, was:

- That if an individual arena experiences less than 70% prime time utilization over three years, a strategy review be undertaken of the facility in terms of its need and sustainability

Through our review, we did not find a recommendation that suggested our County or its residents should continue with the status quo and then abruptly close an arena without public consultation. Unfortunately our review did find reason to believe that many of the recommendations of the 2015 Master Plan were not acted upon, and in fact the action taken (closing of the Rec Centre) is counter to the recommendations of the Master Plan. This action will remove opportunities for adult activities, and will be suppressive of the motives for our Minor Hockey Associations.



We understand that you will hear commentary like; “minor hockey has consistently ‘returned ice’ in prior years” and “the County review suggests that their historical trend (actual ice use) would indicate that we have enough ice for minor hockey even with the closure of the REC centre ice pad – albeit with some displacement of other user groups”. We, Norfolk Minor Hockey, have taken a step back in light of these comments and re-assessed our 2020/2021 programming model which is built based on a forward-looking plan which respects the new realities of our association (i.e. not on a historical review which no longer applies) and considers our intent to deliver increased ice access for competitive play, a traditional local play program, and an ever-important development program within each level. Our re-assessment confirms our position on the ice situation for Norfolk County – unacceptable.

To simply say “we need to cut costs, sorry” is also not acceptable. It fails the expectations of Norfolk residents, and fails the obligations of Norfolk County to respect its own approved recommendations. A decision of this nature requires a long-term perspective and strategy review, with user group and community engagement, to ensure the resulting decisions are well-informed and transparently derived. Norfolk residents, including those who helped give us these very assets we enjoy today, deserve this much. We didn’t get it.

Our proposal is to undertake the actions set out in the 2015 Master Plan which, in our opinion, have not been acted upon. Our plan, respectively put:

- Aims to increase ice utilization
- Supports the continuance of adult ice activities
- Aims to reduce arena reliance on our Tax Levy
- Provides for opportunities to develop and host improved Hockey Tournaments in Norfolk
- Is accepting of increased ice rates through a phase-in approach
- Is accepting of modified policies around ice cancellations in partnership with the creation of an active webpage for promoting ice availability with a last-minute rate to improve utilization
- Is accepting of developing ice recovery rates that are scaled to users and programs (e.g. youth sports (50% recovery), adult programs (100% recovery), tournaments/festivals (125% recovery))

Our plan is, however, contingent on ensuring that the original six (6) ice facilities (built and integrated into our rural community) are available. Any removals prior to making an honest effort on this plan simply shows an unwillingness to work to save our assets and serve our community’s recreational needs. We are also open to the reality that in the end perhaps one of our facilities must be closed, however before that happens we stand committed to putting forward our full efforts to ensure our community is being best served by such a decision.

We are therefore reaching out to Norfolk Councillors for help. We don’t believe they understood we would be in this position when they made their budget decisions. We also trust that they know their Norfolk constituents, the culture and spirit of Norfolk, and the importance of our community-built and supported arenas.



We are all in this together, and we know that those who know Norfolk, know we are going down a path we do not wish to take.

Please help us in sharing your concern.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors
Norfolk Minor Hockey Association