



The Corporation of the Town of Milton

Report To: Council

From: Joy Anderson, Director - Recreation & Culture

Date: July 19, 2021

Report No: COMS-007-21

Subject: Outdoor Rinks

Recommendation: THAT staff be directed to proceed with operating two outdoor rinks at Rotary Park and Campbellville Old Park for the 2021/22 winter season only at an estimated cost of \$16,504 in 2021 and \$33,013 in 2022, including a temporary increase of two seasonal operations staff for the period December 2021 to March 2022;

AND THAT staff consider a neighbourhood volunteer program as part of the 2022 budget process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Covid-19 pandemic created a unique level of demand for outdoor skating rinks in January and February of 2021, while the province was under extensive public health measures including the closure of all indoor recreation facilities. The provision of outdoor rinks was discussed at Council on February 8, 2021, and staff were directed to report back on potential options for the 2021/22 winter season.
- The Town previously operated two non-refrigerated outdoor rinks at Rotary Park and Campbellville Old Park. Due to weather conditions, the rinks were open no more than seven (7) days within the 2016/17 and 2017/18 seasons. The decision was made to discontinue offering the service during the 2019 budget process.
- There are four common options used by surrounding municipalities to deliver outdoor skating including: (a) Municipally Operated Non-Refrigerated, (b) Community Volunteer Program, (c) Municipally Operated Synthetic and (d) Municipally Operated Refrigerated.
- Municipalities that operate formal outdoor rinks indicated that the provision of the service does not remove the issue of residents using storm water management ponds for outdoor skating.
- Staff assessed all four options and recommend that the best one for delivering an outdoor rink program for the 2021/22 winter season is to reinstate the program delivered by Town staff at Rotary Park and Campbellville Old Park at an estimated cost of \$16,504 in 2021 and \$33,013 in 2022 (materials and labour).
- Staff also recommend that the town-delivered outdoor rink program conclude at the end of the 2021/22 winter season and that a Community Volunteer Program using



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

best practices from surrounding municipalities be considered to deliver the outdoor rink program for the 2022/23 season and beyond.

- The provision of a municipally operated refrigerated outdoor rink requires significant capital and operating funding and could be explored during future planning studies.

REPORT

Background

At the February 8, 2021, meeting of Council, concerns were raised by Council members around residents utilizing the Town's storm water management ponds for skating/hockey during the pandemic as town indoor facilities remained closed and no other outdoor options were available.

The Town previously maintained two seasonal non-refrigerated outdoor rinks at Rotary Park and Campbellville Old Park. During the 2019 budget process, staff presented data showing that a maximum of seven (7) days were usable in the two previous winter seasons due to a lack of consistent below zero temperatures. When factoring in staff and material costs to maintain the rinks, Council approved the staff recommendation to discontinue the service. From that time up until the Covid-19 pandemic, staff received requests for outdoor rinks but at a minimal frequency. The lack of community interest in outdoor rinks prior to this year, may be attributed to the significant number of daily public-access skating and hockey opportunities at Town recreation facilities. Utilization rates of these affordable daily access programs were high and experienced consistent year over year growth.

The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding outdoor rink options and to make recommendations for the future of the service in Milton.



Discussion

A benchmarking exercise was completed to illustrate the service levels that the other Halton municipalities currently offer for outdoor rinks. Table 1 provides a summary:

Table 1 Municipal Outdoor Rink Comparators in Halton Region

Table with 5 columns: Municipality, Municipally Operated Non-Refrigerated, Neighbourhood Volunteer Program, Municipally Operated Synthetic, Municipally Operated Refrigerated. Rows include Burlington, Halton Hills, and Oakville.

*Was enacted during the 2020/21 winter season (Covid-19)

All three municipalities have indicated that despite having formal outdoor rink options, it did not prevent significant usage of their storm water management ponds for skating and hockey.

There are four different options traditionally utilized to deliver outdoor rinks to communities in Southern Ontario each with unique variables to consider. The chart in Schedule A provides details on the options including financial estimates to provide the service. Staff analyzed the options in the context of a Milton application and offer the following observations and recommendations:

Option 1 - Municipally Operated Non-Refrigerated

To deliver an outdoor rink(s) to the community in time for the 2021/22 winter season, staff recommend a resumption of the municipally operated non-refrigerated option at both Rotary Park and Campbellville Old Park. Staff recommend that these two rinks operate for the 2021/22 winter season only and be used to bridge the gap until a Community Volunteer Rink Program can be initiated for the 2022/23 winter season. This option will require a temporary increase to the staffing complement of two seasonal operations staff for the period December 1, 2021, through March 31, 2022. The cost of this initiative for each of 2021 and 2022 is as follows:

Table with 3 columns: Expenses, 2021, 2022. Rows include Staffing, Materials/Supplies, and Total.

It should be noted that the primary intention is to concentrate the efforts of the additional staff towards maintaining the outdoor rinks. During weather events or other extreme



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conditions, staff will be reassigned within the Operations Division as ice maintenance is not possible during these times.

Option 2 - Community Volunteer Program

A community volunteer led outdoor rink program is one that many municipalities offer including those within Halton Region. Staff recommend that during the 2022 budget process, a service level increase be considered to allow for the implementation of a Neighbourhood Volunteer Program for the 2022/23 winter season. This will provide staff

the opportunity to develop the program using best practices from other communities including the volunteer intake and screening process, risk management practices and park identification. Funds will be required to winterize water sources in the park locations ultimately selected.

Option 3 - Municipally Operated Synthetic

Another option available would be to provide a municipally operated synthetic outdoor rink but it is not recommended at this time. While the newer products for this application are an improvement from previous iterations, they are still relatively new and staff feel as though the long-term evidence to support the significant investment (capital and operational) that would be required is not there currently.

Option 4 - Municipally Operated Refrigerated

A more permanent and long-term option for providing outdoor rink opportunities would be through a municipally operated refrigerated application. Research from surrounding municipalities indicates that the minimum capital investment for one rink would be two to three million dollars and the operational impact in the range of three to four hundred thousand dollars annually. This type of rink does provide a more consistent skating surface and a longer season (typically December to March) but it should be noted that mild weather patterns can still render the ice unusable. The outdoor rink option could be explored further through future planning exercises including the Downtown Civic Square Study and updates to the Community Services Master Plan.

Financial Impact

The cost of resuming the two outdoor rinks for the 2021/22 season would result in estimated costs of \$16,504 in 2021. As staff are currently projecting a surplus to budget for 2021 (see staff report CORS-039-21 on tonight's agenda) it is expected that this variance can be managed within the forecast budget. If required, a one-time transfer from the Tax Stabilization Reserve will be utilized to fund the 2021 cost should the favourable variance not materialize as anticipated for any unforeseen reason. A further \$33,013 in costs will be applicable in 2022 and incorporated into the 2022 budget.



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Financial Impact

The Neighbourhood Volunteer program and associated financial impact will be considered as part of the 2022 Operating Budget process.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristene Scott
Commissioner, Community Services

For questions, please contact: Steve Palmer

Phone: Ext. 2581

Attachments

Schedule A: Outdoor Rink Options

CAO Approval
Glen Cowan
Acting Chief Administrative Officer

COMS-007-21 Schedule A – Outdoor Rink Options

Outdoor Rink Option	Initial Capital Costs	Annual Operating Costs	Additional Comments and Considerations
Municipally Operated Non-Refrigerated	\$0	\$33,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant weekly staff time is required to maintain the surface. • The average season would run from mid-December to early March. • This option is very dependent on sustained below freezing temperatures and therefore frequent service interruptions occur due to mild weather patterns.
Neighbourhood Volunteer Program	\$10,000 - \$20,000 per location for winterization of the water source and installation of a hose bib near the preferred rink location within a park	\$1,000 - \$2,000 per location plus an additional \$1,250 in estimated water costs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs in many surrounding municipalities including in Halton. • Municipal staff requirements include identifying a location within a park, installing a plywood board system and offering a training session for local residents/volunteers on installing and maintaining the ice. • A winterized water source in the park equates to better success with the installation and maintenance of the rink. • Town staff have identified 17 parks with water sources but all would require an investment in order to winterize the water source and install hose bibs at the identified rink locations. • New park construction could include a winterized water source for future community rinks. • A few municipalities use water trucks where there are no water sources but the results of this quick application method are mixed. • Mixed results (more fail than succeed) are seen in surrounding municipalities with new volunteer groups as the commitment level of the volunteers must be very strong for success and some may not realize the hours of work involved throughout the season. • Varying degrees of accountability are seen across municipalities for the volunteers. Some have limited responsibility or oversight and others have very robust requirements with agreements and daily inspection reports etc. • The average season would run from mid-December to early March with frequent service interruptions due to mild weather patterns.

COMS-007-21 Schedule A – Outdoor Rink Options

Outdoor Rink Option	Initial Capital Costs	Annual Operating Costs	Additional Comments and Considerations
Municipally Operated Synthetic	Approximately \$50,000 for 25% of a traditional rink	Staffing costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly staff time is required for a level of maintenance (e.g. removal of shavings, dirt and debris, regular mopping). Allows for year-round outdoor skating. • The product is still relatively new as it relates to large outdoor applications. • Burlington and Brampton have recently installed synthetic outdoor surfaces and continue to evaluate the investment and customer satisfaction.
Municipally Operated Refrigerated	Minimum 2 to 3 million dollars	\$300,000 - \$400,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples include Gage Park in Brampton and The Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness. • In addition to the rink and associated mechanical equipment, an indoor change room, washroom structure and staff area are often provided where these rink operations exist. • The average season runs from December to March. • Extended service interruptions are possible throughout the operating season if mild weather patterns persist.

Note: Estimates on capital and operating costs were derived in consultation with surrounding municipalities based on their experiences in addition to town actuals from previously operating two non-refrigerated rinks.