



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Outdoor Artificial Ice Rink Season

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| Date: | October 30, 2008 |
| To: | Community Development and Recreation Committee |
| From: | Brenda Patterson, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation |
| Wards: | All |
| Reference Number: | |

SUMMARY

This report describes how the season for Artificial Outdoor Rinks is determined.

Prior to the 2005 ice season, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff reviewed the outdoor artificial ice rink schedule and implemented a consistent approach at all forty-nine rinks that are owned and operated by our division. This practice allows for a minimum 12-week outdoor skating schedule, with a few exceptions for earlier openings - i.e., Nathan Phillips Square (for the Cavalcade of Lights), Mel Lastman Square, Albert Campbell Square and two other rink locations to provide for a training site for permanent staff.

Due to weather conditions, the City's outdoor ice rink season has traditionally ended at the beginning of March each year. Last year, City Council requested staff to review this practice to identify opportunities for extending the season in March, including the March Break, if feasible. Commencing in the 2008-2009 winter season, staff are recommending that fourteen artificial outdoor ice rinks that meet our criteria for an extended season, remain open for a further two-week period in March - from March 2nd to March 15th - (weather permitting). Due to the warm climatic conditions in the latter half of March however, staff are not recommending that these rinks remain open beyond March 15th, as safe skating conditions for the public cannot be assured.

Therefore, whenever March Break falls in the first half of March, staff are recommending that these 14 rinks remain open during the Break, (weather permitting). However, due to warmer weather conditions and our inability to ensure safe skating conditions to the public, we are not recommending that any outdoor rinks remain open when the March Break occurs in the latter half of March. This would include the 2009 March Break, as it falls between March 16th and March 20th. The public will continue to have access to

public skating at our indoor ice facilities and this information will be posted on our website.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that weather permitting, the Outdoor Artificial Ice skating season of twelve weeks be extended at a total of 14 outdoor artificial ice rinks, as indicated in Attachment 1, for an additional two week period to March 15th.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications arising from this report. The total operating cost of keeping 14 city-owned and operated outdoor artificial ice rinks open for an additional two week period in early March is \$172,000. Parks, Forestry and Recreation operates 13 of these rinks and the remaining rink, Albert Campbell, is operated by Facilities and Real Estate. Parks, Forestry and Recreation has consulted with Facilities and Real Estate Division and both divisions are currently able to absorb these additional costs in their operating budgets.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of March 3, 4 and 5, 2008, City Council considered the issue of extending the outdoor artificial ice rink operating season until the end of the 2008 March Break for all city owned and operated outdoor artificial ice rink. Council requested that the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation report back on this issue, as follows:

- The General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation be requested to report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee prior to the 2008/2009 winter season on costs and opportunities for further extending outdoor artificial rinks throughout the March Break.
- The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation be requested to report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee outlining a plan that allows for the operating/closing of outdoor rinks on a year-to-year basis when the weather permits.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/cc/decisions/2008-03-03-cc17-dd.pdf>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The City of Toronto has 49 outdoor artificial ice rinks. There are 21 outdoor artificial ice rinks in the South District, 19 in the West District, 8 in the North District and 1 in the East District, at Albert Campbell Square.

In the spring of each year, the operating schedule for outdoor rinks is established based on the division's approved operating budget. The schedule allows for the Division to plan staff schedules, leisure and instructional skating opportunities and advertisements in the Fun Guide.

During its meeting of March 3, 4 and 5, 2008, Council considered the operating season for outdoor rinks. This report outlines how the operating season is set and recommends a plan to extend the skating season in certain outdoor ice rinks across the City.

COMMENTS

In 2005, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff evaluated the operating season of the 49 outdoor rinks across the City of Toronto. It was determined at that time that the Division should offer a consistent schedule to City residents that would allow for a minimum 12 week skating program at a majority of the outdoor ice rinks throughout the City. There were some exceptions to this schedule. The rink at Nathan Phillips Square traditionally opened earlier to coincide with the "Cavalcade of Lights" event, which is a special event that is planned in late November of each year. Two other Civic Centre rinks, Albert Campbell Square and Mel Lastman Square, are opened earlier in the season, due to their focal locations and popularity. In addition, two rinks that are used as training facilities for Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff are opened earlier to allow them to be trained in time for the winter season. Last winter, because of colder temperatures, the Division was able to keep eight additional rinks open for an extended 2 week period.

The 2008/2009 outdoor skating season begins with the opening of Nathan Phillips Square outdoor rink on November 22, 2008. Mel Lastman Square, Albert Campbell Square, Rennie Outdoor and Dufferin Grove rinks will open on November 29, 2008. All remaining rinks will open on December 6, 2008. The 12 week outdoor skating season ends on March 1, 2009.

Each year the division monitors the weather and shuts down its outdoor rinks if the ice conditions deteriorate to the point where safe skating conditions cannot be provided to the public. In early March 2008, the City was still experiencing winter conditions with significant snow on the ground and colder weather conditions. During the two week extension, March 3-16, 2008, staff had an opportunity to collect data and review the findings at the eight extended locations, at the end of the artificial ice rink season.

Although there were 25 to 40 skaters on each rink per day participating in various activities (from leisure skating and shinny hockey), rink conditions were more difficult to maintain, creating soft and/or wet ice which required staff to close portions of the rinks by coning off areas. During most days in March, the sunlight and warmer temperatures deteriorated ice conditions at all locations. During the evening shifts, when staff were able to improve ice conditions (as temperatures dropped), the rinks were reopened the following morning. The conditions in March were variable, however, due to weather conditions.

In order to provide a longer outdoor skating season, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff are recommending that the annual outdoor skating season be extended by two weeks in March – from March 2nd to March 15th – annually at 14 outdoor artificial ice rinks across the city (as outlined in Attachment 1). It must be noted however, that extending the outdoor skating season by two weeks into early March will be weather dependent. Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will have to monitor the ice conditions at each of these 14 locations to ensure that the skating conditions are safe for public use.

For the 2008- 2009 winter season, the School Board's March Break period has been scheduled for the latter half of the month, from March 16th to 20th. Due to weather constraints of warmer temperatures and stronger sunlight during this time period and our inability to provide safe outdoor ice conditions to the public, our outdoor rinks will not be kept open during the 2009 March Break. The public will continue to have access to public skating at our indoor ice facilities and this information will be posted on our website.

From this year onwards, staff will be recommending that 14 outdoor ice artificial rinks across the city be kept open for an extended two weeks period in early March (from March 2nd to March 15th), weather permitting. The additional costs of keeping these rinks open can be absorbed within the Division's current operating budget. These rinks were selected using the following criteria:

- geographical coverage across the city
- strong patterns of usage for both leisure skating and shinny hockey
- capacity for good quality ice-making / retention during the extended season
- availability of on-site permanent storage facilities for ice resurfacing equipment
- ability to accommodate Parks maintenance staff on-site

All of the outdoor ice rinks were evaluated using the criteria outlined above to ensure coverage across all districts; to ensure that they are well-used by the public during the winter season; to ensure that they can provide good quality ice conditions in early March (weather permitting) and that they can accommodate permanent Parks staff on-site, so that maintenance can be provided throughout each day during the extended two-week March period. Out of a total of 49 outdoor rinks that are owned and operated by Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, it was determined that 13 of them met all of these criteria. An additional rink, Albert Campbell Rink, which is owned and operated by Facilities and Real Estate Division, was also chosen, as it met all of the above noted criteria and is the only existing outdoor artificial ice rink that serves Scarborough District. From a cost analysis perspective, staff have determined that these rinks can be kept open for a further two-week period without the need for additional funds to offset the incremental operating costs.

In recommending the current outdoor ice rink schedule the Division considered three options for extending the season. The first option is to keep 14 outdoor rinks open for an extended two week period in early March (to March 15th), weather permitting) which is being recommended.

The second option of keeping all 49 rinks open would cost approximately \$700,000 but would not be feasible because most of the outdoor rinks would not be able to maintain ice during warmer weather conditions and do not have on-site facilities to accommodate staff and equipment that would need to be housed on-site to closely monitor and maintain the ice surfaces during the warmer season in early March. Due to the age and size of refrigeration plants, some are not capable of maintaining good ice conditions in the month of March. Usage patterns at some rinks also declines that time of year.

Staff investigated a third option involving a two-week extension of the outdoor skating season at five additional outdoor artificial ice rink locations that met the above noted criteria. However, the additional annual operating cost of keeping these additional rinks open was \$71,000, which exceeds our current budget capability to absorb. In addition, the process for work scheduling would have required a decision to be made on this option well in advance of the artificial ice rink season commencing. For these reasons, this option would not be considered for the 2008 – 2009 season.

The provision of outdoor skating opportunities for the public must be planned well in advance of the winter skating season, in order to allow for the appropriate budgeting, scheduling, site preparation and deployment of staff to manage these facilities and to maximize weather conditions. The current schedule allows for a minimum 12 week season for most of the city owned and operated outdoor rinks. Commencing the 2008 and 2009 winter skating season, staff are recommending that 14 of these outdoor rinks be kept open for an extended two week period in early March – from March 2 to March 15, as weather permits.

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SIGNATURE

Brenda Patterson
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Recommended List of Outdoor Artificial Ice Rinks for Extension of
Outdoor Ice Skating Season

**Recommended List of Outdoor Artificial Ice Rinks
for Extension of Outdoor Ice Skating Season**

West District

Rennie Park Rink
Sir Adam Beck Rink
Sunnydale Rink
West Mall Rink

South District

Nathan Phillips Square
Dufferin Grove
Hodgson Rink
Kew Gardens Rink
Regent Park South Rink

North District

Mel Lastman Square
Broadlands CC
Glen Long CC
Irving W. Chapley CC

East District

Albert Campbell Square
(owned / operated by Facilities &
Real Estate Div.)