

December 15, 2009

Jutta Mason
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By email: jutta.mason@sympatico.ca

Dear Ms. Mason,

I refer to your recent correspondence requesting a variety of information and setting out a number of concerns with the start-up of this season's outdoor artificial ice rink program. Staff from our affected Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division branches have compiled information to address your enquiries. I trust the following will be helpful in explaining our operations as well as providing a contextual view of the program.

You will recall when I met with you in early April, also attended by senior staff, we focused on achieving mutually desired outcomes, specifically an outdoor rink operation that delivers quality ice surfaces and ancillary facilities (maintenance operations), and an enjoyable user experience (programming). Subsequently, senior level staff, namely my Directors of Recreation and Parks branches met with you periodically this year (although the municipal strike disrupted the schedule) to further pursue ideas and means to refine our operations and continuously improve our service. Our challenge is achieving these objectives in a fiscally responsible manner and within the rules of collective agreements and accountability mandated by the City's processes. We strive to ensure our staff members are well-trained and represent the division in a professional and courteous manner. Each year, Parks, Forestry and Recreation continues to refine and enhance the rink operation, with the aim of improved service.

As you know, City Council, in late February this year, when considering the matter, "Early Opening of Outdoor Artificial Ice Rinks – Supplementary Report" (Item CD22.6) directed that 14 (of the City's 49) outdoor artificial ice surfaces "open at the same time as Nathan Philips Square in 2009". Nathan Philips generally opens 2 weeks before the typical start up of the other rinks. In light of the details identified below, these rinks did open earlier, although not the full two weeks in most cases. Two rinks opened as scheduled and two rinks opened four days after the scheduled opening. The remaining rinks came into operation as quickly as possible as conditions permitted over, by early December. and have provided extended early season skating for many participants. Where there have been concerns, staff has worked to address the specific issues in a timely and responsive manner.

Staffing and Early Opening

When in full operation, there are 80 Parks maintenance staff members and ten Parks forepersons dedicated to the outdoor rink program. To support the early rink openings 30 Parks staff were reassigned to work on the rink program, commencing on November 12. Parks maintenance staff is typically scheduled to work in two shifts, from 7 am to 3 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. It must also be appreciated, as was set out in the staff report to

Council, that pursuant to our obligations under the Collective Agreement, work selection for the year had already been confirmed by the time the decision was made and there limited opportunity to adjust this.

In efforts to contain costs, PFR strives to keep overtime in all work areas to a minimum. However, staff in Parks branch and Recreation facilities put in approximately 123 hours of overtime hours from Nov 12 to early December to get the rinks up and running. This overtime occurred on the afternoon shift, from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. when evening conditions were suited to ice-making and to facilitate attendance at training and to cover shifts due to staff absences. This year, there were some late-night shifts. While it has not been our practice to schedule a midnight shift, we are considering this as an option for future years, subject to discussions with CUPE Local 416.

Capital work delayed the early start-up at two locations. Ideally this work would have been completed earlier, but the labour disruption seriously impacted on much of our work this year, not just rinks. At most others, the plants started-up on schedule and staff began flooding during the afternoons and evenings in an attempt to build ice.

Decisions about the initial opening of the facilities and temporary closures are made by Parks staff in consultation with local Recreation staff. We consider the safety of participants, based on ice conditions when making these decisions.

Making ice this time of year can be difficult and the conditions this season proved exceptionally challenging. We continue to refine our protocols and practices and there will be a number of operational recommendations that come forward, aimed at improved service, should rinks continue to open this early in future years.

Costs – Early Opening

The General Manager advised Council during 2009 budget deliberations and in the staff report considered by Council that while there were funds allocated to support an extended season, there were no funds allocated to support an early opening. The division was required to absorb costs associated with the early opening within the approved operating budget.

Training

The division's ice resurfacers training program is managed through Fleet Services and is conducted in accordance with the Fleet Service Policy. New drivers must take a one day course (includes both in-class and practical components) and 10 hours of on-ice training with an experienced operator. New operators must then pass a test before Fleet Services signs off, providing them with authorization to operate and conduct ice maintenance. Experienced staff members that have already been signed-off, are required to complete a one day refresher course in accordance with the Fleet Services Policy, 4 to 5 hours. In addition to training conducted by Fleet Services, the Parks supervisors provide orientation and training that includes topics such as policies procedures ice maintenance practices, and customer service .

I also note that this year for the first time a pre-season meeting was convened by the Directors of Recreation and Parks, bringing together all members of the management teams involved in the outdoor rink program. This is one important step in a concerted effort to address the concerns about providing a more cohesive operation and improving the skating experience for residents.

Equipment and Service Levels

Generally, rink facilities that have on-site secure and heated storage space for ice cleaning equipment and appropriate space to accommodate staff, have staff whose home base is located at these sites. In this case, from Monday to Friday during the day-shift (7 a.m. to 3 p.m.), one staff person is dedicated to provide maintenance at up to three rinks, situated within close proximity. During the afternoon/evening shift during the week, and all shifts throughout both Saturday and Sunday, these sites each have their own dedicated staff person to provide ice maintenance (one staff person dedicated to one site). During the week, these sites receive a minimum of two floods per day, dependant on weather and usage. Generally, on the weekends these sites receive two to three

floods per 8-hour shift. Again, the schedule can, of course, be affected by weather and ice conditions, usage patterns, permits and programs.

Sites that do not have secure storage space for ice cleaning equipment are serviced by 'fly squads', crews which travel on a rotating basis with ice cleaning equipment to provide maintenance to groups of three to four rinks. Fly crews allows the division to maximize both staffing and equipment resources while providing a good level of service to the public. These locations are serviced twice daily, depending on weather and ice conditions, usage patterns, permits and programs, and traffic disruptions. The one exception to this scenario is Wallace Emerson, a double-pad used for both hockey and pleasure skating with high usage. Due to lack of appropriate facilities for equipment and staff, Emerson is serviced by a fly squad, which is committed to providing service three times daily, conditions permitting.

Oversight

The division recognizes the importance of accountability and oversight to ensure service level standards are adhered to by staff. Parks management is charged with overseeing and reviewing the actual service delivery on a daily basis and accounting for any irregularities. Kevin Bowser, Parks Manager, is the functional lead for the outdoor rink program. The district Parks supervisors have responsibility for day-to-day oversight of staff. Staffing levels are designed to be flexible and responsive to changing local conditions, keeping in mind that constant adjustments are required due to illness, accommodation requirements and any number of other factors. Details around specific labour relations and personnel matters remain confidential.

Communication

There have no doubt been some early season wrinkles in the City's communications channels and conveying timely information to residents. The Rink Hotline is being retired and we are transitioning this function to 311. Making this switch, has necessitated the development of new reporting protocols and procedures for staff. We have now established a system with 311 to provide current information on the status of rinks in a timely fashion, and we continue to refine our protocols. In addition we are looking at technology solutions that may allow for a greater level of service.

Once again, thank you for your interest in the outdoor skating program.

Yours truly,



Brenda Patterson
General Manager
Parks, Forestry and Recreation

- C. Councillor Janet Davis, Chair, Community Development and Recreation Committee
Andy Koropeski, Director, Parks
Malcolm Bromley, Director, Recreation

