

HALIFAX

P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 14.1.5
Halifax Regional Council
March 20, 2018

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by 

SUBMITTED BY: Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: March 7, 2018

SUBJECT: Box Lacrosse Facilities

ORIGIN

September 5, 2017 Regional Council motion:

Moved by Deputy Mayor Craig, seconded by Councillor Mancini
THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report assessing the need and feasibility of establishing both indoor and outdoor box lacrosse facilities. **MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

HRM Charter, Section 79 (1) The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for(k) recreational programs and... (x) lands and buildings required for a municipal purpose ...

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct staff to continue to monitor the usage of both indoor and outdoor facilities for Box Lacrosse usage and other dry-floor users, and review the needs with the future assessment of the LeBrun Arena.

BACKGROUND

Box lacrosse originated in Canada and is typically played in the off-season of hockey, in arenas with the ice removed. It is also played on outdoor courts, with boards added to the sides to create the box. Box Lacrosse gained popularity through the 1960's in HRM, in arenas once the ice was removed in the spring. Lacrosse in HRM is organized into six clubs; St. Margaret's, Halifax, Bedford, Sackville, Dartmouth, and Eastern Shore. Each club hosts a range of boys/men's and girls/women's programs, starting from skill development and physical literacy through to competitive play. Box Lacrosse is played by children as young as four years old, through adulthood, often drawing hockey and ringette players as an off-season activity to keep active and continuing hand-eye development.

On September 5, 2017, Regional Council put forward a motion for staff to assess the need and feasibility of both indoor and outdoor box lacrosse facilities. This came from Councillor Craig as he has been involved previously with lacrosse in Sackville, where the Sackville Wolves have cited that they have inconsistent access to dry-floor times during their season, a common barrier to other clubs in the municipality.

DISCUSSION

Box Lacrosse in HRM

Lacrosse Nova Scotia indicated that there are over 1,100 box lacrosse players in HRM. Recently, competitive players have been scouted to play collegiate level lacrosse at universities in Quebec and Ontario, as well as American universities. While the number of participants has fluctuated over the last ten years in the HRM, numbers are generally consistent between 1,100 and 1,500 participants.

While box lacrosse has not always had strong numbers through its history in HRM, through the support of active volunteers to coach and manage leagues, the sport has had a relatively stable number of participants. In meeting with members of the lacrosse community, they identified some subjective factors which have caused the fluctuation of player enrollment, predominantly related to inconsistent access to dry-floor facilities for indoor box lacrosse.

Current HRM State

Indoor Facilities

Box lacrosse is played in a variety of arenas across the municipality. Arenas have dry-floor hours available for Box Lacrosse, though groups contend it is challenging to find the adequate amount of time for their practices and games, especially within proximity to their home community. Demonstrated in the chart below, municipal arenas have historically been well used by Box Lacrosse teams for practices and league play. With some of the municipal arenas being replaced by the Dartmouth 4-Pad Arena, ice will be removed on two sheets in that arena and the BMO Centre during the spring/summer season which will accommodate lacrosse bookings. LeBrun Arena will continue to be used for lacrosse during the off season. Table 1 demonstrates the overall usage of dry-floor time for box lacrosse, which in 2018 and onward, will be accommodated at other arenas.

Table 1: Hours booked for Box Lacrosse at Indoor Municipal Facilities

	LeBrun	Gray	Bowles	Devonshire	Total
2013	93	0	354	112	559
2014	92	0	332	131	555
2015	99	0	315	104	518
2016	241	57	430	128	858
2017	283	90	428	140	941

The current provision of dry-floor time tends to vary from season to season and across arenas to accommodate the various demands, with box lacrosse beginning in April and finishing mid-way through

August. When arenas remove their ice, as noted, it also provides an opportunity to complete maintenance which is critical for the ongoing health of the facility. Because of the demand for ice time, it is not in the interest of HRM or community operated facilities to defer the maintenance to any time other than the spring/summer. At times, some extensive maintenance may disrupt lacrosse bookings, but this is not a regular circumstance.

Outdoor Facilities

There are two outdoor courts available for programming box lacrosse which are owned and operated by HRM (Highfield Park, Dartmouth and Gorsebrook Park, Halifax). Highfield Park was well used and frequently scheduled over ten years ago. Then the status of the facility was changed, leaving it open for community use and unscheduled to ensure it was available for anyone to enjoy. However, it has received minimal maintenance over that time and, as a result, the Highfield Park facility has become derelict and needs to be brought into a state of good repair. Gorsebrook Park is well used and frequently scheduled for ball hockey and lacrosse. While both facilities can accommodate lacrosse, neither is suitable for league games. For outdoor box lacrosse games to be played at either site, modifications would need to be made to the court, including lights, player benches, penalty boxes and timing equipment/scoring equipment. In speaking with those involved with administrating teams and coaching the sport, an outdoor facility is not ideal for anything besides practices, as there is too much inconsistency in weather.

Table 2 shows the limited use of the Gorsebrook Park site by box lacrosse groups as compared with ball hockey. In speaking with stakeholders, staff noted the condensed season and the need for a consistent play surface as primary reasons for limited outdoor usage. The natural elements involved with an outdoor facility can be detrimental to a scheduled game or practice, which is not ideal.

Table 2: Hours booked at Gorsebrook Park

	Lacrosse	Ball Hockey
2013	25	178
2014	46	161
2015	15	112
2016	10	143
2017	52	368

Staff met with the President of Sackville Wolves Lacrosse to discuss the club’s concerns related to indoor dry floor access and interest in an outdoor box lacrosse facility. The Sackville Wolves Lacrosse had put forth a suggestion regarding a property between the Metropolitan Field and Leslie Thomas Jr. High for a potential open lacrosse box. Due to the steep slope between the Metropolitan Field and the upper soccer field, it was deemed to not be a feasible site. The adjacent sport field was also considered; however, it is a scheduled field used for soccer and therefore not a good option for conversion. Based on the discussion, it is understood that the club’s primary focus is indoor dry floor access. While an outdoor facility would be of interest, such a facility would not be part of its core programming.

Facility Usage

Both the Community Facility Master Plan and Community Facility Master Plan 2 speak to multipurpose use of recreation assets, rather than individual usage. Multipurpose usage of recreation assets enables a more efficient operation and provides broader options for user groups. In addition, it allows HRM to maximum the use of its recreation assets and mitigate the need for and construction of numerous single-use assets.

Those documents also outlined the potential of re-purposing older arenas for other uses. Sports such as soccer, ball hockey, lacrosse and roller derby would all be potential users of a facility of this nature. Furthermore, community recreational sports organizations such as Halifax Plays and Halifax Sports and Social Club would benefit from the flexibility of a dry-floor space. Therefore, when arenas are being closed and potentially disposed of, it is part of the process to determine whether there is merit to maintaining these facilities for other purposes or community use, which might not be accommodated in the newer replacement

facility.

With the construction of the new Dartmouth 4-pad arena, it replaced four stand-alone, single pad arenas, namely Devonshire, Bowles, Gray and LeBrun arenas. The assessment of the Devonshire, Bowles and Gray arenas determined there was not sufficient need to maintain any of the facilities for alternative use. As a result, Regional Council declared those facilities as surplus to municipal requirements and they are being processed through the relevant disposal processes. Regarding LeBrun arena, due to significant arena recapitalization work, staff noted the need to explore on a pilot basis whether the demand was significant enough to necessitate continued use of the facility for ice usage in the winter and dry-floor use in the off season. As a result, LeBrun Arena was retained for the 2018/19 season, after which staff have been directed to report back to Regional Council on its future. However, that timeline will likely change, as there is a need to maintain the LeBrun Arena for an additional year with its current status of a seasonal ice arena, in order to offset the loss of Spryfield Lions Rink while necessary capital work is completed on the roof. Therefore, it is expected that the assessment of the future of the LeBrun Arena will occur after the 2019/20 season.

2018 Scheduling of Indoor Facilities

The 2018 season is more complex than normal with respect to the scheduling of dry-floor usage as there are a number of factors which come into play. With the Dartmouth 4 Pad replacing the Bowles, Gray, Devonshire and LeBrun Arenas, the provision of space for dry-floor activities will change. With Cole Harbour Place utilizing the Gray while Scotia 1 undergoes capital improvements, the Gray will not be available for dry-floor bookings until June, which is much later than normal. In addition, with the capital repairs required at the Spryfield Lions Rink, it will not be available for the full spring/summer season. As well, with the ongoing refurbishment of the Dartmouth Sportsplex, the Halifax Forum/Civic will be absorbing some usage that would normally be accommodated at that location. Therefore, the Halifax Forum/Civic will not be available for lacrosse bookings this year.

Regional Council opted to keep LeBrun Arena open on a pilot basis to determine future usage requirements, therefore, the dry-floor usage of that facility will remain as status quo. The dry-floor usage hours previously scheduled at the Devonshire, Bowles and Gray Arenas, along with the usage impacted by the work at both Spryfield Lions Rink and Dartmouth Sportsplex, will be accommodated at the BMO Centre and Dartmouth 4 Pad arenas, through the removal of ice on two sheets within each facility. That will enable the current dry-floor demand to be met within the overall network of arenas.

Based on the research through the Long-Term Arena Strategy update from 2017, the dry-floor demand can typically be accommodated with only one pad from both multi-surface arenas in the off season, along with the other arena facilities. However, with the other impacting factors during the 2018 season, the additional dry-floor allocation is required. The demand for ice usage in the off season is significantly lower than during the winter season. Therefore, ice demand during the spring/summer can be accommodated across the network in other arenas which maintain ice.

Conclusion

Indoor Facilities

Based on the current demand, the evidence does not support the need to develop a stand-alone indoor box lacrosse facility. Furthermore, sport specific facilities are not recommended, as HRM provides multipurpose recreation assets to enable a more efficient use of its overall inventory of recreation assets. Part of the challenge facing Box Lacrosse clubs has been the travel time to facilities, which would only be exacerbated by having one dedicated facility.

With the changing landscape during the 2018/19 season, staff will continue to assess the overall status of dry-floor activity scheduling, and respond accordingly to ensure the scheduling needs can be met as efficiently as possible. After the upcoming season, once the major capital projects are completed, the

assessment of the future of the LeBrun Arena can be completed, including whether there is sufficient demand to warrant a conversion of that facility to an alternate use.

Outdoor Facilities

The current usage of outdoor box lacrosse facilities does not support the need for additional outdoor Box Lacrosse. Currently, the Gorsebrook Park site can facilitate practices and on average over the last five years there has been less than 30 hours scheduled for lacrosse. Highfield Park has been dedicated as an open facility for community uses, and should continue to be used as such. However, additional maintenance is required and has been included in the 2018/19 parks maintenance plan. Staff will continue to assess usage of outdoor facilities through 2018/19 for any change in demand that would warrant further review of the outdoor requirements.

Also, it should be noted, that while the stakeholders expressed an interest in the development of additional outdoor box lacrosse facilities, the emphasis was more on access to indoor facilities, and the outdoor facilities would be more complimentary. The fluctuation of participants, adequate provision of indoor time, and unpredictable weather during the box lacrosse season does not support the need to expand on the current provision of outdoor facilities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with the recommendation. The required maintenance for the Highfield Park site is estimated at \$15,000 and has been allocated in the 2018/19 parks maintenance plan. Should Regional Council direct staff to explore the establishment of a permanent dry-floor facility, financial implications would be outlined in a that future report.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations in this Report. The risks considered rate Low. To reach this conclusion, consideration was given to operational, financial and strategic risks.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Staff met with stakeholders from the lacrosse community in preparation of this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are not any environmental implications.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1: Regional Council may choose to direct staff to initiate the process to consider the establishment of a permanent dry-floor facility specifically for box lacrosse in a future capital budget.

Alternative 2: Regional Council may choose to direct staff to initiate the process to consider the establishment of a permanent multipurpose dry-floor facility in a future capital budget.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Gareth Evans, Recreation Planning Specialist, 902.292.1264
