

HALIFAX

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

Item No. 15.1.2
Halifax Regional Council
May 31, 2022

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by 
Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: April 5, 2022

SUBJECT: **Potential Indoor Skatepark Space**

ORIGIN

February 9, 2021 Regional Council meeting motion:

MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Cleary

Halifax Regional Council request a staff report to identify options for considering an indoor skatepark space as a standalone project or as part of a future recreation construction.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter

Section 79A(1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if

(a) the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality;

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to continue to support scheduling of wheeled sports and other dry floor recreation programs within the Gerald B. Gray Memorial Arena (located at 10 Monique Avenue, Dartmouth) including the promotion and booking of the facility for these uses for the timeframe described in this report.

BACKGROUND

Skateparks are recreational facilities that may include ramps, rails, steps, bowls, and other similar features that are used for maneuvers, typically on skateboards, BMX bicycles, scooters, and inline skates. While skateparks are typically purpose-built permanent facilities, skatepark activities can also occur with moveable equipment fabricated by individuals or groups and placed in municipal sports courts or other hard surface areas. The municipality has 15 skateparks, all of which are outdoor. They are available to the public at no cost. Their use is weather dependant and therefore typically seasonal.

In winter 2021, an on-line petition calling for the municipality to establish an indoor skatepark was initiated by a member of the public. The petition resulted in Regional Council requesting a staff report to identify options for an indoor skatepark as a standalone facility or as part of a future recreation centre. The petition has remained open to the public and currently has over 5,000 signatories.

Following Regional Council's motion, municipal staff engaged with indoor skatepark advocates (the "working group") to understand their needs for an indoor facility. This working group also represented roller skating/roller derby interests, whose groups would also benefit from an indoor facility. The working group has identified a common need for a flexible indoor floor space that could accommodate a variety of wheeled sports and activities.

DISCUSSION

This report provides an overview of wheeled sports and activities, considers existing facilities in the municipality, outlines examples of skatepark facilities for other areas, and presents options for Regional Council to consider in supporting an indoor facility.

Organization and Existing Facilities

Skatepark Activities

Based on feedback from the working group, observation of skateparks and information provided from park operations staff, municipal skateparks are popular facilities. However, even with the popularity of the activity and with an active local Skateboard Association advocating for facilities and representing skateboarding, the participants involved in it are not as formally organized as other sports. Typically, in more formally organized sports, all participants are members of a club and part of an overall governing body. The lack of a formal organizing body related to skateboarding may be due to the nature of skateparks being open and available to the public, much like a playground. Therefore, skatepark users may not have the same representation as other organized sports when it comes to the development of facilities.

There are a variety of outdoor municipal skateparks and skatepark equipment found in municipal parks, however, there are limited indoor public or private facilities. The working group cited two examples - a floor space at the Estabrooks Community Hall (managed by an association) in Hubley that has been regularly booked for both instruction and drop in programming as well as a private warehouse space in Timberlea. Both of these indoor spaces are set up on a temporary basis with portable equipment.

Roller Skating/Roller Derby

Roller derby is an organized sport which occurs on an indoor track that is normally set-up within gymnasiums or arenas and curling rinks when their ice is removed. Roller derby is represented locally by the Anchor City Rollers (formerly the Halifax Roller Derby Association) which is the governing body overseeing the roller derby league in HRM. The league frequently offers programming at the Spryfield Lions Club and the Mayflower Curling Club. These spaces can also be used for general roller skating.

Based on requests for facility booking and increased sales reported by the working group, roller skating and roller derby is a fast-growing sport in HRM. It is promoted as inclusive and accessible to a range of community members. Roller derby has been regularly challenged to find indoor spaces and the organization has been working collaboratively with the Halifax Skateboard Association, outlining its needs for a flat, smooth, large indoor floor space to accommodate a track.

Facility Examples

Regional Council's motion requests information about the options available to accommodate an indoor skatepark within an existing building or a new recreation centre construction project. The establishment of indoor skateparks has been an ongoing topic within many other maritime municipalities, however there are limited actual facilities. Examples include:

- Generation XX in Summerside, PEI, is a youth centre operated by a non-profit organization. The centre is a former curling rink and includes a skatepark with ramps and related equipment for drop in and programming uses. The skatepark is part of an overall facility that supports local youth. It has been supported through government funding, including 2019 federal infrastructure funding and the City of Summerside contributed over \$250,000.
- Undercurrent Youth Centre is a non-profit organization that focusses on youth outreach and has facilities in Glace Bay and Sydney, NS with skatepark ramps and related equipment for wheeled sports and activities.
- Riverview NB has a municipal Indoor Skatepark and Youth Centre which includes a skatepark and a youth centre with pool, foosball, air hockey, table tennis, and an entertainment unit with movies, and gaming consoles.

More significant purpose-built facilities with substantial ramps and other permanent equipment are found in larger cities. Examples include:

- The Yard, in Ottawa, ON, which is a dedicated BMX track and skatepark that was initiated through a Kickstart campaign that raised over \$100,000 and led to the conversion of former industrial space, with approximately 1,068 square metres (11,500 square feet) of active area. It is supported through fees and memberships.
- Le Taz, in Montreal, PQ, was established after a site that was being used for a skatepark facility was expropriated for the development of a library. As a community response to the expropriation, a non-profit group was formed and supported by business and three orders of government resulting in the development of a \$12 million, 3,252 square metre (35,000 square foot) skatepark. Le Taz is a non-profit facility, which is also supported by fees and memberships.

Roller skating and roller derby are not normally accommodated within the same indoor facility floor space as skateparks and would be impractical unless ramps and other equipment were modular and movable. This approach would be more typical in situations where an indoor program might just be starting, and flexibility is important, which is representative of the current situation in HRM, as outlined by the working group.

HRM Options

There are different governance models for municipal involvement in the development and operation of skatepark facilities, noting that these are a step above a simple flexible floor area space.

Municipally Owned and Operated

The municipality could develop and operate an indoor skatepark facility as either a standalone facility or as part of a recreation centre. This approach would be comparable to the Riverview Indoor Skatepark and Youth Centre. The programming and operation would be the responsibility of the municipality. This option is not necessarily favoured by the working group as it requires substantial start-up costs and its ultimate development and operation may complicate a predominantly grassroots approach to participation and programming.

Municipally Owned / Board Operated

The municipality could enter into an agreement with a local organization to assume responsibilities of a municipal indoor facility, and under a lease agreement establish an indoor skatepark. This option could be for an arena or other community facility. These types of agreements ensure the clarification of the municipality's responsibilities as the building owner, and those of a community association or board, as an operator. This option could be developed through an adaptive reuse of an existing facility that is no longer needed for other municipal uses. Consultation with the working group indicates they favour this option, as it aligns with their grassroots approach to participation and programming. However, there is no organizational capacity at this time for a community group to fully assume responsibilities of a facility, if one could be identified.

Municipally Supported

The municipality could identify that it would be supportive of an organization's initiative to establish its own facility. Municipally supported facilities are typically owned and operated by non-profit organizations and supported through municipal financial contributions in recognition of the recreation service they provide. The Atlantic Tennis Centre, which was supported by three orders of Government along with other partners, is an example of such a facility. This model may be a future opportunity, but not an immediate one as it may be a considerable undertaking and it has not been identified as a possible initiative by the working group.

Facility Promotion and Scheduling

With few indoor spaces for wheeled sports and activities, it is challenging for either a community group or the municipality to recommend supporting any of the above-noted models. However, there is sufficient interest and merit for the municipality to facilitate the use of an existing indoor venue for wheeled sports and activities. Through discussions with the working group, the best approach could be enabling the use of a municipal facility that could accommodate modular and moveable equipment for skateboarding, BMX, and scooters that would be stored on site. Moveable equipment, when not in use, would also permit other wheeled sports and activities such as roller skating and roller derby, as well as other dry floor sports and activities such as lacrosse and ball hockey. Flexible floor space would be fundamental to the viability of this type of facility scheduling.

Based on engagement with the working group, the benefit to providing a year-round dry floor facility for scheduled use is that it would provide an opportunity to gather user data and understand the appropriate scale and function of a potential future dedicated facility, either public, non-profit, or private. In the immediate term, a municipal facility would be the best way in which to provide support for skatepark activities.

Gray Arena

There are no centrally located municipal facilities that are readily available for dry-floor usage during winter months, with the exception of the Gerald B. Gray Memorial Arena (Gray Arena). While Gray Arena has been identified for disposal by the municipality, it has also been the subject of a community engagement process. The results of that process are being presented to Regional Council alongside this report, with a recommendation to prepare a redevelopment plan for the site (see separate report). Should Regional Council decide to proceed with the redevelopment plan recommendation, Gray Arena could continue to be available for dry floor bookings and promoted for skate activities, along with other dry floor sports while that redevelopment plan is completed.

Since Gray Arena was decommissioned for ice usage, it has been regularly used as a year-round dry floor facility, largely by lacrosse and ball hockey. This past year, it was booked for lacrosse for 20 to 25 hours/week and ball hockey for 3 hours/week. It is also readily accessible by public transit and has an immediate concentration of surrounding schools and residences. Consultation with the working group

indicates support for booking the Gray Area for its programming and as a means to further determine the most viable solution for developing indoor dry floor facilities in HRM. With an active promotion of year-round indoor dry floor use at the Gray arena, other possible sports might be attracted to the facility including pickleball and futsal.

Since Gray Arena has been exclusively operated as a dry floor facility, the average annual operating cost is approximately \$160,000. It is anticipated that operating any comparable sized facility would be in this range. Gray Arena rentals for lacrosse and ball hockey currently generate approximately \$41,000 annually in rental revenue, which would be increased with the inclusion of wheeled sports. Scheduling of the facility is coordinated through Parks and Recreation and would continue for wheel sports and activities. While the facility has been available for bookings, this opportunity was not fully explored by wheeled sport users to-date. Further, through fall and early winter of 2021/22 the Gray Arena was used as a temporary shelter site and unavailable for recreation bookings. Active promotion and advertising of this facility for varied uses will be undertaken going forward with its return for recreational uses.

Community Facility Master Plan

In February 2017, Regional Council approved the Community Facility Master Plan 2 (CFMP2) as a framework for municipal decision-making regarding recreation facilities. Indoor dry floor facilities are supported by the CFMP2 which has an ongoing recommendation to consider the viability of providing the adaptive reuse of arenas for sports including and not limited to lacrosse, skateboarding, and roller derby. Using Gray Arena to accommodate such wheeled activities, as well as other activities, would align with the recommendation of the CMFP2.

Timeframe

Should use of the Gray be demanded beyond the short term, the facility would require significant maintenance and recapitalization for extended use. Costs for the recapitalization of the facility would include site work, roof, interior architecture, mechanical and electrical. The order of magnitude cost could be approximately \$1,100,000. As noted above, a separate report is being presented to Regional Council with a recommendation to prepare a redevelopment plan for the site. Staff recommend the Gray continue to be booked until the significant capital recapitalization is required or until the site becomes unavailable pursuant to a redevelopment.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The review and research indicate there is a need for indoor dry floor space. This can be accommodated on an exploratory basis in order to better define the scale and scope of that need and is supported by the CFMP2. Should Regional Council support the continued scheduling of Gray Arena for dry floor use, staff would work with stakeholders to organize the storage of equipment and coordinate the use of Gray Arena by all groups, which would occur through bookings. With Regional Council's support for the continued facility use, there would be increased promotion of the facility as an indoor dry floor rental location and HRM staff would engage with the working group on timing for use. The duration of the continued dry floor use of Gray Arena would be tied to the time that would be required for the preparation of a redevelopment plan as noted within the separate report, should Regional Council approve that approach.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The average annual operating costs of the Gray Arena have been \$160,000, based on limited dry floor use. Any incidental increase to operating costs would be accommodated within existing budgets and be further offset with additional revenue from bookings.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There is a risk that the Gray Arena may not be used in a substantive way for wheeled sports and activities or serve as a catalyst in the development of a dedicated facility. The working group suggests that it would be well used, and the continued recreation use of the building could be viable while a separate project is underway to consider the future of the site. There is a risk that future redevelopment of the site would not accommodate the recreation uses discussed in this report resulting in the municipality being unable to continue to meet this recreation demand. Overall, however there is low risk to the municipality in proceeding in the manner as recommended in this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Municipal staff have been engaged with a working group of skateboard, BMX, roller skating/roller derby representatives.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVES

Regional Council could direct the Chief Administrative Officer to:

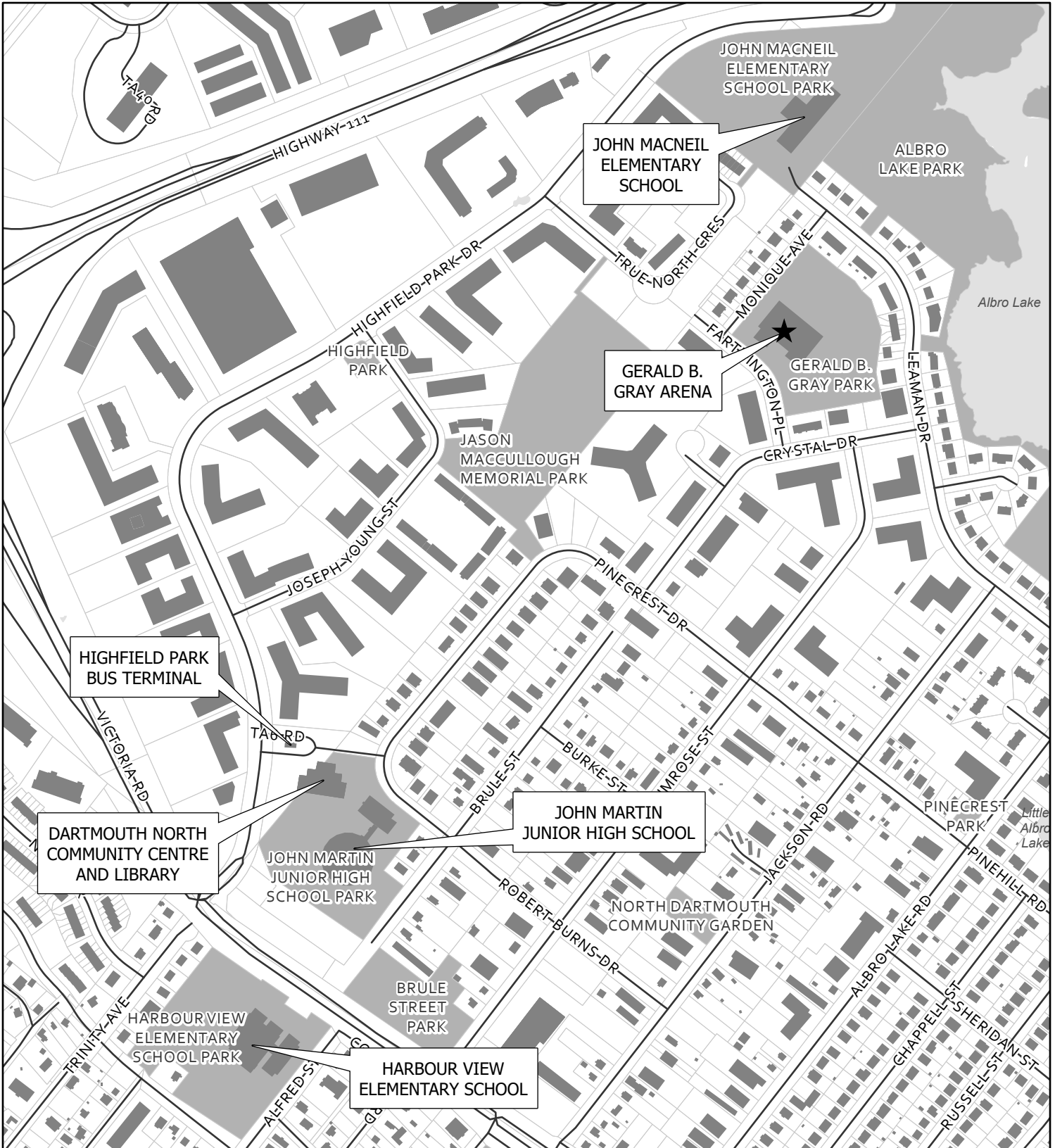
1. Consider an indoor dry-floor facility during a future facility review or redevelopment, rather than at the Gray Arena.
2. Take no further action to consider an indoor skatepark and facility for wheeled sport/activities.

ATTACHMENT

Attachment A Gray Arena Map

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
Richard Harvey, Manager, Policy and Planning, 902.476.5822

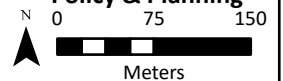


GRAY ARENA AND SURROUNDING AREA MAP

- ★ Gerald B. Gray Arena
- HRM Park
- Building Polygon

HALIFAX

**Parks & Recreation
Policy & Planning**



Date: 7/22/2021