



Council Report

DATE: Tuesday, January 26, 2021

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: ENHANCED SAFETY MEASURES FOR OUTDOOR WINTER AMENITIES

FROM:

Jim Harnum, City Manager

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

This report outlines a series of additional, more comprehensive and effective safety measures that allow for the reasonable and responsible approach to reopening and management of the City of Vaughan's outdoor skating rinks, toboggan hill and off-leash dog park. These further measures are in full compliance with the Province of Ontario's recent stay-at-home order and declaration of a second provincial emergency under s 7.0.1 (1) of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* (EMPCA).

Report Highlights

- As part of the City's disciplined, responsible and measured approach to COVID-19, staff have developed a plan to reopen City outdoor ice rinks, the toboggan hill and the off-leash dog park with additional and enhanced control measures to support a positive citizen experience and safe use of the amenities.
- This enhanced approach includes increased staffing to support citizen experience and well-being, additional security coverage, additional physical distancing measures and additional enforcement attention to ensure continued safe operation of the amenities and deter unlawful uses.
- Corporate and Strategic Communications will publicize and promote the re-opening and applicable control measure through all appropriate channels.

Recommendations

1. THAT following the implementation of the proposed enhanced safety measures outlined in this report, the toboggan hill at North Maple Regional Park, the dog park at 299 Racco Parkway and the City's five outdoor rinks be re-opened as soon as possible; subject to regulations issued by the Ontario government.
2. THAT City staff continue exploring other potential outdoor activities that safeguard the public's health and well-being.

Background

As part of the disciplined, responsible and measured approach to COVID-19, the City of Vaughan temporarily closed its outdoor skating rinks, toboggan hill, and dog park effective Friday, Jan. 15, 2021, in response to rising cases of the virus. City staff's decision was made in response to the Province of Ontario's recent stay-at-home order and declaration of a second provincial emergency under s 7.0.1 (1) of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMPCA), accompanied with the findings of staff during the operation of these outdoor amenities, that included but was not limited to over-crowding, gathering of people off-the ice, trespassing and unlawful use after hours and behaviours that were not in keeping with public safety guidelines.

The closure decision was further informed by repeated public statements by provincial officials to stay home and by ongoing COVID-19 case counts. All decisions about closing and opening facilities continue to be informed by Vaughan-specific data and reflect guidance issued by York Region Public Health and the provincial government – with public safety being the priority. Since the beginning of December 2020, Vaughan accounts for approximately 41 per cent of the cases followed by Markham (28 per cent) and Richmond Hill (13 per cent) in York Region.

During the Jan. 19, 2021 meeting of the Committee of the Whole (1), Council directed staff to bring forward a plan that would ensure maximum safety possible at outdoor amenities. The directive requested the plan be presented at the Jan. 26 meeting of City Council for further discussion about whether to adopt the enhanced measures and to reopen amenities at the earliest possibility.

Previous Reports/Authority

[CW \(1\), Tuesday, January 19, 2021 – Member's Resolution – Reopening of Public Skating Rinks.](#)

Analysis and Options

By-law enforcement, City staff experiences, public feedback, and media reports

demonstrate the real challenges and threats to public safety to maintain physical distancing and limit crowd sizes at our outdoor rinks and tobogganing sites. Other issues include inconsistent use of face coverings, people allowing others to cut lines, overcrowding around the ice surface and the surrounding areas, and unauthorized use outside of operational hours. Staff have experienced many of these same problems at the City's dog park. Despite extensive communications and public awareness, some people refuse to follow the rules.

Recognizing the repeated challenges all communities face due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, City staff completed a review of existing safety measures. These findings have resulted in a series of proposed enhanced measures to ensure maximum safety in compliance with the Province of Ontario's stay-at-home order.

Toboggan Hill – North Maple Regional Park

In addition to existing safety signage and regular inspections by Parks staff, new safety measures include:

- Mandatory mask zone for all participants and observers
- On-site security guards on weekends and holidays from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Additional signage
- Increased enforcement presence and patrols by enforcement officers

Off-leash Dog Park

In addition to existing safety signage, new safety measures include:

- Mandatory mask zone for all users
- Security guard rotations on weekends and holidays, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Increased enforcement presence and patrols by enforcement officers

Outdoor Rinks

In addition to existing perimeter fencing, prominent signage, on-site staff and security guards, a limit of 25 skaters with no shinny or hockey, new safety measures include:

- Return to regular operating hours
- Mandatory mask zone for all participants and observers
- Additional mats and benches will be purchased and spaced using a revised site plan to ensure adequate social distancing for each participant/family and ability to put on skates (25 per location)
- On-site staff to support the check-in, line management and skate patrol functions at each rink
- Additional on-site security guards to provide 24-hour coverage.

- Online reservation system, available one week in advance with no waitlists or walk-ons to avoid standby line-ups and crowding
- No make-up times or scheduling adjustments for service disruptions resulting from inclement weather or maintenance delays/closures/cancellations
- Skate times will be limited to 45 minutes with a 30-minute break between sessions to avoid any crossover of groups
- All skaters required to provide proof of reservation confirmation and arrive no more than 10 minutes before reserved skate time
- Only registered skaters will be permitted within the skate enclosure
- Increased enforcement presence and patrols by enforcement officers

Natural Rinks

Due to increased popularity of outdoor skating, staff will endeavour to provide two additional natural ice rinks on the tennis courts at Maple Community Centre and North Thornhill Community Centre. The creation of these rinks is contingent on the weather needed to make and maintain ice. Consistent temperatures in the -6C to -10C range are needed to support ice. These sites will be part of the online reservation system and comply with the same safety measures noted for outdoor rinks.

Outdoor Portable Washrooms

Given the increase use of public spaces and the lack of access to washroom facilities that are typically available at community centres, 32 outdoor portable washrooms will be added at 16 select high-use locations including skate areas and parks/walking trails. To support COVID-19 precautions, enhanced cleaning services will be provided.

Snowshoeing

To further enhance individual/family outdoor recreation opportunities, a snowshoe loaner program will be launched for residents to explore snowshoeing this winter season once weather permits. Similar to the launch of the fitness equipment loaner program in October 2020, snowshoes will be available for loan free of charge (all that is required at the time of booking is a security deposit). Snowshoes will be available for contactless curbside pickup at select community centres, and they will be pre-packaged, individually inspected, cleaned and disinfected. Further details will be communicated to the public as they become available.

By-law Enforcement

In the fight to stop the spread of COVID-19 transmissions, enforcement and education efforts continue to be increased across the City. In support of re-opening outdoor amenities, greater attention and a more assertive, proactive approach to enforcement

will be taken to further ensure compliant behaviour in support of the safer use of outdoor winter park amenities.

By-law and Compliance, Licensing and Permit Services will increase proactive patrols throughout the day as time and resources permit with a focus on times that have been identified as more likely to attract a congregation of residents and crowds. BCLPS will continue to work closely with Facilities Management, contract security and Recreation Services to enhance monitoring of these facilities during after-hours to deter trespassing, any unlawful use and any violations of the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020* and any applicable City by-laws. An escalated enforcement approach will continue to be employed that includes issuing of charges where warranted, and continued coordination with York Regional Police and Public Health, as necessary. All reported concerns will continue to be treated as priority.

Communications

The Corporate and Strategic Communications department continues to utilize all communications outlets to reach the maximum number of individuals and inform citizens about outdoor and virtual activities. The public information campaign continues daily, in real-time and reflects the operational decisions made by City staff.

Financial Impact

Understanding that duration of operation for each amenity varies throughout the season, costing has been provided on a per week or one-time basis.

Toboggan Hill

On-site security guards: \$1,120 per weekend and \$3,920 for the March Break

Off-Leash Dog Park

On-site security guards: \$256 per week

Outdoor Portable Washrooms

32 portable washrooms across 16 locations including daily cleaning: \$4,900 per week

Outdoor Ice Rink

Mats, benches, and additional fencing: one-time expense of \$11,200.

On-site security guards: \$24,500 per week (increasing to \$32,500 per week with addition of two natural ice rinks)

On-site staff to support the check-in, line management and skate patrol functions at each rink: \$22,460 per week (increasing to \$31,440 per week with the addition of two natural rinks).

Total projected operating costs on a per week basis equates to **\$57,156.00**, or **incrementally \$74,136.00** with the addition of the two natural outdoor ice rinks. In addition, the purchase of additional materials as described above, provides for an additional startup cost of **\$11,200.00**.

Projected unplanned overages are being drawn from within the approved 2021 budget envelop.

By-law Enforcement

This increased enforcement attention and enhanced monitoring is expected to result in the incursion of unplanned operating expenditures including overtime beyond BCLPS 2021 operating budget; however, in order to support a safer environment and resident experience, the expected additional expenses are necessary. Any significant overages will be addressed and managed through the appropriate budget processes within the 2021 budget year.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

N/A

Conclusion

The City continues to monitor evolving COVID-19 developments and implement precautionary measures to protect the community further. The enhanced safety measures outlined in this report are consistent with the City's response efforts from the very beginning when Vaughan became the first city in Ontario to declare a state of emergency in March 2020.

Should Council adopt staff's recommendations, Corporate and Strategic Communications will communicate reopening of the identified amenities including the additional enhanced control measures through all available communication channels, accordingly.

The City continues to demonstrate its ability to be ready, resilient and resourceful in the face of COVID-19. Many virtual offerings have been introduced or enhanced to offer a new, efficient and streamlined experience for residents and businesses. Essential services continue uninterrupted, traditional services have been reinvigorated, digital platforms have been enhanced, and in-person programs and services have been

modified or are now offered virtually – either through online, teleconference or over the phone.

Again, the health, safety and well-being of the public remains central to the City of Vaughan's emergency response efforts.

Attachments

N/A

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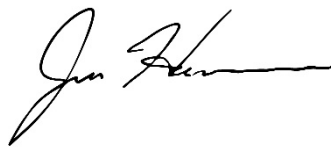
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Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Harnum". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jim Harnum, City Manager