

Law Amendments Presentation – Oval Facility

Good afternoon Mr. Chair and Honourable committee members. My name is Marion Tyson and I am the Director of Legal Services for the Halifax Regional Municipality.

I'm here today to provide comments on behalf of the Municipality in favour of **Bill 157, An Act to amend the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter** to permit the erection of a permanent building on the North Halifax Common in support of the Oval.

The Oval was first constructed two years ago on the North Common as a temporary facility to host speed skating events for the 2011 Canada Games. To build community spirit and excitement for the Games, the facility was open to the general public before, during, and after the Games closed for competition. Public feedback received for weeks after the Oval opened was loud and clear – HRM should keep it as a permanent facility on the Common.

Last year over 130,000 skaters took advantage of free public skates and equipment during the 11 week winter skating season. In addition to public skates, the facility is also used by speed skating clubs for practice and events, sledge skating, and special events including a family New Year's Eve event with music and fireworks, Valentine's Day skate, arts and culture events, and more. Facility usage remains high during the non-ice season when you can rollerblade, walk or run, play ball hockey or basketball on the track. The infield is a grassy area well used by day camps, ultimate Frisbee teams, and events such as Mawimi and Switch, demonstrating a clear year round interest in this facility by citizens of all ages.

Two public consultation meetings and an online survey were hosted in 2011 to solicit public comments on permanent Oval facility amenities. It was recognized early on by the majority of the public and HRM staff that the successful operation of the Oval as a year round facility would necessitate a permanent structure onsite. For the first two seasons, including during the Winter Games, temporary buildings were placed onsite to accommodate equipment storage and support staff, but the general consensus

during the public consultation was that a permanent structure would reduce the overall footprint of onsite structures and could be designed to be less intrusive than the existing temporary buildings.

Throughout our discussions with the public, practicality has remained a priority. Permanent washrooms were important. The desire for a simple, open, functional building that would reflect the community importance of the Common and fit within the park was often repeated. A considerable number of people asked that the building be multi-purpose and support activities year round rather than just winter skating.

To that end the proposed building will support year round activity at the Oval, and will include: an indoor warming area and outdoor shelter; public washrooms; space for skate and equipment loaning; skate sharpening; rooms for staff and user meetings; and, a maintenance garage for seasonal equipment. The total footprint of the building is anticipated to be 3400 square feet. Should this amendment request be approved, HRM will host additional public consultation on the function, look, feel and design of this new building in January, with construction to begin this time next year.

Overall the Oval facility is supportive of a number of key Regional Council priorities and policies, as it enables low to no cost access and participation in a variety of year round activities for citizens of all ages, promotes physical and mental health, fosters community spirit, and contributes to a vibrant downtown core.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments on behalf of the Halifax Regional Municipality.