



Staff Report

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Report To:	Council		
Date of Meeting:	October 18, 2021	Report Number:	CSD-007-21
Submitted By:	George Acorn, Director of Community Services		
Reviewed By:	Andrew C. Allison, CAO	Resolution#:	
File Number:	[If applicable, enter File Number]	By-law Number:	
Report Subject:	Community Arena and Hall Boards – Ongoing Challenges due to COVID-19		

Recommendations:

1. That Report CSD-007-21 and any related communication items, be received;
2. That Council direct staff to work with volunteer operated arena and community hall boards to resource the proof of vaccination process for their buildings, as required by recent amendments to the Reopening Ontario Act, 2020 (ROA);
3. That the Director of Financial Services provide funding for proof of vaccination process, utilizing the COVID-19 Recovery Funds and/or Safe Restart Funds received from the Province and Government of Canada subject to availability and eligibility;
4. That this arrangement remain in place until March 31, 2022, or earlier, if future amendments to the ROA eliminate the need for the current proof of vaccination process;
5. That staff report back to Council in Spring 2022 providing a report on the costs incurred by the Municipality to provide financial support to these boards; and
6. That all interested parties listed in Report CSD-007-21 and any delegations be advised of Council's decision.

Report Overview

With the recent amendments to the Reopening Ontario Act, requiring certain businesses to complete proof of vaccination verification of visitors, except as exempted, entering the spaces, the Municipality has had to retain a security service firm for our municipally operated indoor sport and recreation facilities. Additionally, this requirement exists for both board operated arenas. As vaccination verification is also required for the indoor spaces of facilities used for meeting and event spaces, all board operated community halls and the Visual Arts Centre must comply to be in operation.

In addition to the existing challenges that facilities operated by volunteer boards have dealt with since the start of this pandemic, this latest amendment to the ROA has required them to provide an additional level of staff/volunteers to comply with this requirement. If a board is unable to provide this new level of compliance, they are not able to operate and provide access to events, programs, and services for their communities.

Staff are seeking approval from Council to work with these boards to arrange the necessary resources to staff the proof of vaccination process for all activities, as required by the Province, including providing the necessary funds, utilizing COVID-19 Recovery and Safe Restart Relief Funds, as determined by the Director of Financial Services.

1. Background

- 1.1 On March 17, 2020, based on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Ontario Government declared a province-wide emergency. This declaration allowed the Province to implement a variety of health and safety measures to battle COVID-19. This included the immediate closure of most indoor public spaces, including municipal recreation facilities and meeting and event venues.
- 1.2 Since that date, there have been subsequent re-openings and closures. This guidance was provided initially under the Response Framework and now the Roadmap to Reopen. During those opportunities since March 2020, the Municipality did reopen recreation facilities and provide programs and services, as allowed at the time. We adopted a cautious approach that did provide the public access to activities while still maintaining a healthy and safe environment for both the public and staff.
- 1.3 To reopen in those earlier days, the Municipality had to implement strict health and safety protocols including enhanced cleaning and sanitization procedures, and active screening and contact tracing of all visitors. These measures added significant cost to our operations and with limited capacities permitted, revenues were also reduced.
- 1.4 This was also the reality that community halls and arenas were faced with. Community Services staff worked with these volunteer boards to implement the health and safety

protocols necessary for their reopening. Some of the community buildings have been open, when permitted, over the last year and a half. However, some buildings did not have the volunteer-base or the funds needed to provide the necessary measures to reopen and have remained closed since March 2020.

- 1.5 Since the start of this pandemic, Council has provided COVID relief funding through various programs and grants. In April 2020, Council approved the creation of a \$100,000 Community COVID Support Program as recommended in Report [FND-008-20](#) . As stated in the report, “This program would provide funding to non-profit organizations to provide community support programs, including those supporting small-businesses, to those in need as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic”. As reported in Report [CAO-020-20](#), seven community halls and one arena received funding from the Program.
- 1.6 In May 2021, as recommended in Report [FSD-023-21](#), Council further approved the 2021 COVID Support Program for Hall Boards. This \$60,000 application-based fund would only be available to the board operated community halls and arenas. As expected, the program was well received, and following a review of all applications a funding recommendation was approved by the CAO and cheques were recently issued to the successful applicants.
- 1.7 The Newcastle Town Hall also requested, and was approved, additional funding as part of the 2021 External Agencies Budget submission. The funding was requested to offset anticipated reduced revenues for 2021 due to the ongoing restrictions of COVID-19.
- 1.8 At the March 21, 2021 Council meeting, a request from the Newcastle Arena Board for additional funding was approved. The funds requested were needed to cover their 2020 operating loss, due to restrictions from COVID-19.

2. Reopening Ontario Act, 2020 – Proof of Vaccination

- 2.1 On June 11, 2021 Ontario entered Step 1 of the Roadmap to Reopen, expanding existing outdoor gatherings and activities and introducing the return to some limited indoor activities such as wedding and funeral services and other rites and ceremonies. The Province then moved to Step 2 on June 30, which saw an expansion of outdoor activities and capacities and increased capacities for those limited indoor events.
- 2.2 With the entry into Step 3 on July 16, there was another expansion of outdoor activities and capacities as well as a major reopening of indoor facilities, with capacity restrictions in place. The level of indoor and outdoor activities permitted in Step 3 represented the closest thing to a return to non-COVID operations since March 2020.
- 2.3 With the expansion of permitted activities for our indoor recreation facilities and community halls, in Step 3, remained the strict health and safety protocols including

active screening and contact tracing as well as elevated cleaning and sanitization procedures. The Regulations did provide the person operating a building to offload the responsibility for active screening and contact tracing onto a particular facility permit holder. In many cases this was done by the Municipality and some of the Board operating buildings.

- 2.4 On September 14, 2021 the Regulations were further amended to include proof of vaccination, with specific exemptions, for indoor sport and recreation facilities and indoor meeting and event spaces. This required the person responsible for a business, covered under this amendment, to confirm that each patron entering the facility provide both proof of identification and proof of being fully vaccinated, before entering the building.
- 2.5 The amended Regulation did not allow those responsible for the operation of the building to pass along the proof of vaccination onto permit holders or event organizers. This would require staff, volunteers or a third party to be present during all operating hours to perform this task.
- 2.6 To comply with the Regulation, and faced with a part-time staffing shortage, the Municipality secured the services of a security company to staff the main entrances of our indoor recreation facilities. An external job posting was also issued by Human Resources for part-time staff to perform these duties and, pending a good response, the Municipality plans to transition from use of the security company. To date, the quality of the service received has been excellent and the minimal number of incidents have been handled professionally.
- 2.7 Community Services staff held a meeting with all community hall and arena boards on September 21 to discuss the upcoming proof of vaccination requirement and to discuss the challenges many were facing to comply with the amended Regulation. Staff were able to provide an overview of the changes and to answer as best as possible many of the questions. It was clear during the meeting that many of these operations, that rely heavily on volunteers and in some cases minimal levels of staffing, would be unlikely to find the resources to perform the duties and the funds necessary to pay them.

3. Financial Considerations

- 3.1 In August 2020, it was announced that the Municipality of Clarington received \$2,135,500 from Phase 1 of the Safe Restart Agreement (SRA) with the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada for the 2020 financial operating pressures related to COVID-19. This amount was fully allocated by December 31, 2020, savings from mitigation steps were transferred to the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund to be used in future years.

- 3.2 In December 2020, the Province announced, under Phase 2 of the SRA, that the Municipality would receive \$903,000 towards its 2021 financial operating pressures. Like the Phase 1 funding, anything that could not be allocated to COVID-19 related revenue losses or expenditures could be carried forward to the next year to address ongoing concerns. This funding was included in the 2021 Budget and was anticipated to be used to cover the Community Services Department to offset anticipated revenue shortfalls (before the additional two lockdowns that occurred).
- 3.3 In March 2021, the Province of Ontario announced the 2021 Provincial COVID-19 Recover Funding for Municipalities. The Municipality's allocation under this funding was \$1,733,716, again to be used for operating pressures of recovering from the pandemic. This funding was based on the proportion of COVID-19 cases in the Public Health Unit for our area from January 1, 2021 to February 18, 2021. This funding is for the purpose of addressing priority COVID-19 operating costs and pressures. Excess funds must be placed in a reserve fund for future operating costs and pressures.
- 3.4 For the above funding grants, the Municipal Treasurer is required to certify that the funds were to address COVID-19 related expenditures and financial pressures (e.g. revenue losses). It is the Director of Financial Services/Treasurers' opinion that providing funding to the local community hall and arena boards to implement screening/vaccine verification regulations imposed by the Provincial Government would qualify as an expense under this funding.
- 3.5 The Financial Services Department is still determining the available funding from the above mentioned \$2.6 million; however, it is anticipated that there would be sufficient funding to cover until March 2022. Alternatively, the mitigating savings that the Municipality has recognized could also be used to offset this cost, this would be drawn from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund in 2022.

4. Concurrence

- 4.1 This report has been reviewed by the Director of Financial Services/Treasurer who concurs with the recommendations.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 It is respectfully recommended that Council approve the recommendations in this report to allow staff to work with each board to develop a plan to staff their buildings to permit them to reopen and/or remain open for community meetings, events, and other activities. Without the financial support many of our community halls will remain closed or be forced to close. The valuable work done by these volunteer boards and the activities that occur in their buildings is important to the local community, especially in many of our rural areas.

5.2 Since the beginning of this pandemic the Municipality has been faced with many operational challenges especially during those periods of time when permitted by the Province to be open to offer indoor sport and recreation activities. This has been the same for the community hall and arena boards. However, the recent requirement to provide proof of vaccination has been one of the biggest hurdles we have had to overcome.

Staff Contact: George Acorn, Director, Community Services, 905-623-3379 ext. 2502 or gacorn@clarington.net.

Attachments:

Not Applicable

Interested Parties:

There are no interested parties to be notified of Council's decision.