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Council-In-Committee Meeting – October 15, 2025

Subject: Ice Allocation Policy Review
Report Number: CDS-25-052
Division: Community and Development Services
Department: Parks, Recreation and Culture
Ward: All Wards
Purpose: For Decision

Recommendation(s):

That Report CDS-25-052 Ice Allocation Policy Review be received as information; and

That Council approves the updated Ice Allocation Policy, GP-37 attached to this report; and

That the policy be implemented effectively for the 2025/2026 Spring Ice Season.

And Further That staff be directed to prepare the 2026 User Fees and Service Charges By-Law to reflect any additional cancellation fees supported by Council, as presented within this report.

Executive Summary:

Purpose of the Report:

The purpose of this report is to present Council with an updated Ice Allocation Policy for consideration and approval. The development and updating of the policy are necessary to ensure that the ice allocation and booking processes remain relevant to current usage and demand and promote fair and equitable access to all user groups. The policy also outlines the decision-making criteria used for determining the weekly base allocation of ice time per group and permit administration processes involved.

Background and Context:

Norfolk County's current Ice Allotment and Conditions of Rental Policy CSD-09 was created and approved on June 22, 2004. Minor revisions to items such as the definition of prime and non-prime hours, references to statutory holidays and user fees were approved on October 30, 2015, and July 31, 2017. However, the guiding principles of the policy have not been subjected to any changes since its original creation date.

To promote equitable and fair ice distribution among user groups and minimize the negative impacts of unused, returned, amended, and cancelled ice on the arena system, an update to the ice allocation process and policy was identified and included in the implementation strategy for the Master Recreation Plan – Recreation Without Borders.

The revisions presented in this policy are part of the strategic approach to ensuring fair and equal access to arena facilities for all residents of Norfolk County.

Discussions:

Over the past decade, numerous changes have significantly impacted on the demand for ice usage within the County, resulting in a clear need to update the existing Ice Allocation Policy. Key factors contributing to this need include:

- Structural changes within local minor sports organizations,
- New mandates from governing bodies, such as the Ontario Minor Hockey Association's (OMHA) "Open Borders" policy, which alters where participants are eligible to play; and Hockey Canada's implementation of Player Pathways, which emphasizes player development including cross-ice and half-ice programming,
- Impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, and,
- A reduction in available ice pads, from six to five.

Recognizing these changes, updating the ice allocation process was identified as a strategic priority for the Recreation Department.

Revising a policy of this nature presents challenges. The County works with a wide variety of organizations, each with unique and sometimes competing needs, priorities, and perspectives. As such, changes to the policy can be complex and occasionally contentious, requiring significant time, dialogue, and collaboration.

Policy Review Process

In 2023, staff initiated the process of developing an updated Ice Allocation Policy. This began with stakeholder engagement and information gathering. On October 9, 2024, an update was provided to Council through Report CD-09-24, which outlined the next steps in research and data collection aligned with the goals of the County's Master Recreation Plan.

Over the past two years, staff have undertaken a thorough and collaborative approach for review, which has included:

- hosting community consultations and user group meetings,
- conducting one-on-one discussions with individual organizational user groups,
- consulting with municipal comparators and reviewing best practices,
- analyzing ice season requests, allocations, and cancellations for the past two fall/winter seasons, and

- working closely with regular user groups to collect accurate team and registration data to support informed decision-making

All user groups were given an opportunity to review and comment on the recommended policy prior to the final draft. Upon receiving feedback, staff carefully reviewed the input and, in many cases, made revisions to the policy to reflect the concerns and suggestions of stakeholders.

Based on feedback received, with a few exceptions, the proposed Ice Allocation Policy has been well received by the various groups and individuals that rent the County ice facilities.

Due to the significant volume and nature of the changes being proposed between the existing Ice Allocation and Conditions of Rental Policy and the new Ice Allocation Policy, it is not practical to provide a detailed, item-by-item comparison.

Instead, to support Council's review and understanding, both the current and proposed policies have been attached to this report. This will allow Council to assess the updates in full context and understand the broader shifts in approach, structure, and intent.

The following highlights some of the more important additions, revisions, and updates included in the new policy:

- implementation of a method for determining base ice allocations and the creation of an ice distribution matrix based on a standard of play formula
- updates to definitions of prime and non-prime ice hours as well as ice seasons
- residency requirements
- changes to priority distribution criteria for ice time & establish priority distribution criteria for open ice generated from returned or vacant ice
- tournaments and special event criteria and process
- updated cancellation policy
- user fees

Method of Distributing Base Ice Allocations per Organization

When determining how to distribute ice hours to different groups (e.g., youth teams, adult leagues, recreational skaters), a fair and equitable method that reflects the needs of each group needs to be established. This distribution method is called a "standard of play formula" and it is utilized in creating the ice distribution matrix that makes up the base allocations for each organization at the start of the season. Staff conducted thorough research and reviewed benchmarks from municipal comparators before presenting findings to the user groups on the various ways of formulating the standard of play formula. User groups were presented with seven different models and methods. The formula contained within the proposed policy was the agreed upon consensus.

The model chosen is one that is based on number of teams and level of play. This is a common approach because it considers the overall demand from different leagues and categories. This formula will drive the base allocation that each user group receives before allocations are made to the next scheduling priority group. This does not mean that an organization cannot request additional ice to offer further skill development opportunities after the balance of priority allocations are completed. The creation of the ice distribution matrix will take into consideration the base allocation, the number of prime hours and non-prime hours each group gets as well as distribution between weekday and weekend ice.

To ensure the formula achieves the desired result of fairness and equitable ice allocation, staff conducted an analysis of the past two fall/winter ice season allocations to determine the effect on each user group. Some user groups would see limited changes while others would have bigger impacts.

The following chart shows the overall impact on the minor hockey organizations based on the 2025/2026 season only (please note this is only as accurate as the information provided by user groups at time of allocation request submissions):

Team	Number of Teams	2025/2026 Actual Hours Allocated	Hours Allocated based on Formula	Difference*	Ave. Ice Allocated per team (Actual)	Ave Ice. allocated per team (Formula)
Delhi/Norwich 59ers	30	46.5	55	8.5	1.55	1.83
Norfolk MH (combined)	59	127.0	95	(32)	2.15	1.61
Norfolk Knights	16	56	40	(16.0)	3.5	2.5
Port Dover MH	13	23	16.5	(6.5)	1.77	1.27
Simcoe MH	14	19	18	(1.0)	1.36	1.29
Waterford MH	16	29	20.5	(8.5)	1.81	1.28
Langton MH	6	12.0	8.5	(3.5)	2.0	1.42
Norfolk Hericanes	10	19.5	19	(0.5)	1.95	1.9

*Note – numbers in brackets depict a reduction in allocated ice

The above chart shows that the current system allows for inequitable distribution and overallocations and if the proposed formula was utilized a more fair and equitable distribution of ice time would result.

Definition of Prime, Non-Prime and Seasons

Staff are recommending changes to the definition of prime and non-prime hours as well as ice seasons.

Currently prime hours are defined as weekdays from 5pm to 10pm and weekends from open to close; and non-prime hours are weekdays from open to 5pm and after 10pm. Proposed recommendations for prime hours is weekdays from 5pm to 11pm and Saturday and Sunday 8:30am to 11pm; and non-prime hours of weekdays from open to 5pm and after 11pm and weekends from 6:30am to 8:30am.

The purpose of this change is to ensure that the high demand ice times are identified as prime time hours and the less desirable ice times are identified as non-prime hours. User fees are charged based on the definition of prime and non-prime, therefore offering more of an incentive for organizations or individuals to request ice in times of lesser demand.

Staff have also proposed changes to the definition of ice seasons to ensure clear timelines and turnover when the seasonal facilities close and the year-round facility continues. This will assist in establishing clear guidelines for the ice request process per season, more timely response on allocation and the ability to allow for a separate spring allocation priority for ice distribution to ensure that the adult user groups are given the opportunity to acquire more desirable ice time if they desire.

Residency Requirements

The operation of recreation facilities requires a large tax-based contribution provided by its residents and therefore residents should always receive priority over non-residents in the allocation of ice time. As such, included in the new policy is a residency component, that gives the County the ability to reduce time allocated to an organization that does not meet a 95% resident factor.

The new policy will accommodate the regular use of ice by non-residents after resident demand is satisfied. Non-residents will not achieve historical status in regard to permit allocation on a year-to-year basis and will only be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

It also acknowledges and accepts the residency requirements established by each individual organization and those identified by the sport's governing body (i.e., OMHA, OWSHA, Hockey Canada, Skate Ontario, Skate Canada). However, it does identify that Norfolk County reserves the right to impose a more stringent residency on user groups or organizations that do not reflect a Norfolk resident majority of 95%, if available ice time is limited. Implications could include reduced base allocations and ice user fees imposed at general prime or non-prime rates instead of the minor sport/youth rate.

Proof of residency can become a complicated process with concerns of privacy on how data is collected, shared and stored. As such, staff are recommending that it is the

responsibility of the user groups to uphold the policy and if necessary, provide Norfolk County with proof of player residency.

Priority Distribution for Ice

Ice is allocated in a methodical format governed by priority allocations. Each level receives their allocation before the next group is offered ice.

The current policy allocation distribution priorities for fall/winter are identified as follows:

- Norfolk County Minor User Groups/Organizations
- Other organized children, seniors and organizations representing people with disabilities
- Regular yearly tournaments and special events
- Municipal programs
- Adult groups
- School use
- New adult requests and any other request

The priority distribution for summer ice had a different allocation priority putting private sector community organization schools and training programs (or commercial users) ahead of all others. This was followed by municipal programs, off-season youth and adult users and new ice requests.

The proposed policy provides the following priority allocation for all ice seasons other than the special provision for adult use identified below:

- Norfolk County Programs (minimum 5% reserved)
- Tournaments and Special Events
- Norfolk County User Groups
- Seasonal User Groups
- Board of Education User Groups
- Occasional or Commercial Users

These changes ensure that Norfolk County residents are the number one priority to ensure community access to ice. By moving Norfolk County programs (i.e., public skates, parent and tot skates, and general shinny) to the first priority, all Norfolk County residents have access to general ice programs at reasonable times without having to be a member of a regular user group.

A new addition to the policy is the creation of a seasonal priority distribution for ice during the Spring/Summer ice seasons; specifically, April 1 to June 30, to ensure adult programs also have fair and equitable access to ice. Adult participants are a vital segment of our hockey community. Over time, prime ice has become increasingly limited for adults, impacting their ability to participate fully. This addition is designed to

recognize the importance of adult programs, support lifelong recreation, and foster a welcoming environment for all ages.

The proposed policy has a priority allocation given to Adult Programs (i.e., adult hockey leagues, adult learn to skate, or other adult programs approved by staff) Monday to Friday 8:00 PM to 11:30 PM during this time. Ice will be allocated on a first come first serve basis or lottery, if conflicts arise and can't be worked out between groups. Equal consideration will be given to both men's and women's groups. There is a caveat that the County reserves the right to interrupt this time to ensure minor hockey tryouts can be completed with the time frames required as mandated by their governing bodies.

When ice becomes available due to cancellations or other changes in the schedule, a priority system is proposed to allocate the ice time. The purpose of this is to create a fair and transparent process for distributing available ice time in a manner that supports designated priority groups (i.e., women and girls' hockey, special interest groups) while also maintaining alignment with Norfolk County's Master Recreation Plan service levels.

The recommended priority sequence would be Women/Girls' Hockey Programs and Special Interest Groups, Youth and Development Programs, Adult Leagues and Programs, New Tournaments and Special Events.

Tournaments and Special Events

A provision has been added to the proposed policy to ensure that existing historical tournaments and special events are recognized. Tournaments or Special Events that are not held for two consecutive years will lose their historical status. A requirement to confirm tournaments and special events 30 days prior to the start of the event and a clause stating that the first 60 hours requested will not impact on the user group's seasonal allocation of ice has been added.

Cancellation Policy

Cancellation of ice time by user groups, as well as unused ice (defined as ice that is contracted to a user group, but no one shows up to use it), continues to be a problem. There were approximately 380 hours of ice time that was cancelled by regular user groups during the 2024/2025 Fall/Winter Ice Season.

In October 2024 Council approved a change in policy from 72 hours cancellation notice to 7 days cancellation notice. However, there was no noted reduction to the cancellation of ice hours. When user groups cancel ice, it impacts the workload and administrative pressures placed on staff to amend contracts and try to resell or redistribute the ice so that it does not sit vacant.

To ensure the fair distribution and effective utilization of ice time, while minimizing the negative impact of unused or canceled ice hours, clear cancellation policies are required. By implementing controls that are stricter in nature, it promotes fairness, transparency, and accountability in the allocation and use of ice time across various sports and activities.

The proposed policy includes provisions for standard cancellations of 7 days' notice with no penalty (which is the same as that approved by Council in October 2024). However, it also incorporates policies around unused ice, cancellation limits, administration fees, and added requirements for tournament/special event cancellations.

Stricter policies around cancellations encourage proper planning by user groups who have contracted the ice and aim to reduce last minute changes and unused ice. A major component of the proposed change is not only the addition of administrative fees charged, but also a reduction to next year's base allocation for those user groups who cancel ice.

Ice Rental Fees

The proposed policy does not recommend changes to user fees charged, other than those that are newly added fees related to cancellation parameters. The policy does, however, clarify and recommend changes to past practice. In the current process, Special Events, specifically ice carnivals are not treated the same from organization to organization. The charges applied to contracts for ice used for Skating Carnivals have continued status quo as it had in the pre-amalgamation days. As such, there is no consistency between skating clubs and the fees charged for use of ice. Some clubs pay for all ice used, some pay only for the actual carnival show and not practice time and other clubs pay no fees at all. It should be noted that all ice used for Hockey Tournaments is charged at the applicable user fee.

The proposed policy includes a provision that all bookings, including ice utilized for tournaments, carnivals and special events will be charged based on the applicable prime or non-prime user fee. Carnival set up time (meaning time that is used for ice preparation or time that is unable to be sold due to carnival prep) will be exempt. All times in which skaters are on the ice will be charged. This is general practice across municipal comparators.

Staff are currently conducting a thorough review of ice user fees and will bring forward a subsequent report on recommended changes to applicable ice fees.

Conclusions:

While not all user groups are going to be fully satisfied with the implementation of a new ice allocation policy and process, staff believe that the criteria and processes presented in this new policy achieve the goals outlined in the Master Recreation Plan to provide a policy that:

- **Ensures Fair Service Delivery** – by providing a transparent and equitable means for service delivery,
- **Promotes Community Engagement** – by encouraging participation in ice sports for the overall benefit of the community,

- **Prioritizes Local Needs** – by considering the needs of Norfolk residents before those from other communities,
- **Guarantees Fair Access** – by striving to provide fair access to arenas and recreational amenities,
- **Allows Flexibility for Users** – by adapting to meet the needs of sports associations and other users,
- **Establishes Consistent Procedures** – by creating uniform criteria and procedures for the reservation and use of arenas,
- **Supports Maintenance and Repair** - facilitating schedules that support proper and sufficient maintenance of ice surfaces,
- **Encourages Special Events** – by allowing for the planning and implementation of special sports events and programs that expect high participation,
- **Benefits the Entire Community** – by ensuring that the County's arenas serve the interests of the entire community, and
- **Balances Diverse Needs** – by achieving a balance between the needs of permit holders, casual participants, and the community.

Finance Comments:

The stated goals of the proposed Ice Allocation Policy Update are to ensure that the ice allocation and booking processes remain relevant to current usage and demand and promote fair and equitable access to all user groups. Potential benefits to the County associated with a more robust policy include higher ice utilization at arena facilities, higher user satisfaction, and a more streamlined process resulting in potential administrative efficiencies. The financial impact of these benefits is difficult to quantify at this stage, but staff will continue to monitor utilization statistics and recommend changes accordingly. This policy update does not have a direct impact on short-term ice rental rate recommendations.

Updates to the cancellation policy are intended to minimize the financial impact on the County associated with unused ice as there is an opportunity cost associated with contracted ice that is cancelled inside the allowable timeframe if it cannot be resold. Based on the 380 hours of cancelled ice incurred in the fall/winter 2024-25 season, of which approximately 277 hours could not be resold, this equates to \$41,500 in lost revenue to the County, assuming an average rental rate of \$150/hour across all categories. The proposed Cancellation Administration Fee and Tournament/Special Event Cancellation Fee in addition to imposing cancellation limits and sanctions on future allocations could help mitigate these losses and deter future contraventions. Again, it is difficult to quantify the actual impacts at this stage, however, outcomes will continue to be monitored by staff. Staff feel that the percentage-based approach for the proposed cancellation fees is most appropriate as it reflects the relative staff time required to process the requests, amend contracts, and try to resell the ice.

The Proposed 2026 User Fees and Service Charges By-Law Update is being presented to Council at the October 16th, 2025, Budget Committee meeting and does not include the proposed cancellation fees proposed within this report due to the timing of this

review. As such, if approved, staff will prepare the resulting User Fee By-Law based on Council's recommendations for the Council Meeting scheduled for October 28th, 2025, and any budget adjustments will be incorporated into the Proposed 2026 Levy Operating Budget for the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department.

Interdepartmental Implications:

Interdepartmental implications of this policy are minimal. Slight financial impacts as a result of changes to the cancellation requirements may result.

Consultation(s):

The Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee, Supervisor, Parks East Operations and West Operations, Supervisor, Recreation Services, Facility Booking Clerk and representatives from ice user groups including minor hockey, junior hockey, girls' hockey, skating clubs, special interest groups, adult hockey teams/leagues and municipal comparators were consulted on the development of this policy.

Strategic Plan Linkage:

Building Norfolk - Develop the infrastructure and supports needed to ensure complete communities

Ensuring the health, safety and well-being of the community by facilitating the necessary support to ensure affordable, accessible and equitable service options.

Attachment(s):

- Attachment A – Current Ice Allocation and Conditions of Use Policy - 2004
- Attachment B – Proposed Ice Allocation Policy - 2025

Approval:

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