



Legislation Text

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Re-opening of Cultural and Recreational Facilities

Presented by: Percy Janke - Director of Emergency Management, Diane Enger - Director of Recreation and Parks, and Kelly Jerrott - Director of Community Services

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the following recreational facilities/programs/services are approved for re-opening to the public, during the indicated time periods:
 - Servus Place remaining facilities, programs and services that had not previously been re-opened, as early as August 29 - September 5, 2020
 - Community Clubhouses as early as August 29 - September 5, 2020
2. That the following cultural facilities/programs/services are approved for re-opening to the public, during the indicated time periods:
 - Arden Theatre professional programming (including family programming) as early as October 1, 2020
 - Arden Theatre rental events as early as October 15, 2020
3. That the CAO is directed to take into account at a minimum the following factors that Council considers to be important policy and governance considerations, when instructing Administration on preparation of plans for re-opening the full range of municipal facilities, programs and services that were closed during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic:
 - Public desire for a return to service levels as close as possible to pre-pandemic, as soon as can reasonably be achieved
 - Public desire to avoid increasing property taxes in 2021 and following years while the economic impact of the pandemic continues to put the livelihoods of many of our residents, and the viability of many of our businesses, at risk
 - The City's current financial situation, including the probability that the City will face a significant budget deficit in 2020 due to unanticipated costs and diminished revenues associated with pandemic response, and the need to ensure that the amount of that deficit carried forward to 2021 is minimized

- The need to ensure that both the public and City staff are kept reasonably safe from the risk of COVID-19 transmission, when accessing re-opened City facilities, programs and services
- The need to ensure that reasonable steps are taken to inform all persons who access or are considering accessing re-opened City facilities, programs and services of the risks of contracting the COVID-19 virus and of steps each person individually can take to minimize that risk
- Applying a reasonable and achievable standard of “high levels of sanitation and personal hygiene” in complying with section 4(c) of Chief Medical Officer of Health Order 25/2020, when formulating and implementing plans for re-opening City facilities, programs and services
- Making optimum use of available human and financial resources when determining “the extent possible” in complying with section 4(d) of Order 25/2020
- Building in alternatives and contingencies to allow for flexible and rapid response to changes in circumstances, including without limitation any material changes to reported rates of COVID-19 infections, particularly in Alberta and in the Edmonton area specifically.
- Respecting the guiding principles for re-opening recreational and cultural facilities, presented to the Emergency Advisory Committee at its meeting on June 11, 2020

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Council with additional information on recreational and cultural facility re-openings, and recommended policy direction to enable Administration to formulate detailed plans for re-opening of recreational, cultural and other facilities, programs and service on a timetable and in a manner that meets Council’s expectations.

ALIGNMENT TO PRIORITIES IN COUNCIL’S STRATEGIC PLAN

N/A

ALIGNMENT TO LEVELS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

Application of the policy guidelines set out in Recommended Motion #3 may result in modification of service levels in order to facilitate re-opening of City facilities.

ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL DIRECTION OR MANDATORY STATUTORY PROVISION

N/A

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Recreational and cultural facilities were closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 13, 2020. A comprehensive list of what is currently open is identified in the draft public facility re-entry plans attached to this report. [Note that the situation is still fluid and the re-entry plans have not yet been put through the filter of Council's over-arching policy directions as set out in the "Recommended Motions" section of this report; therefore the plans should not be considered final at this time and Council is not being asked to approve them but rather to approve policy guidance to inform their content.]

On June 9, 2020 the Province of Alberta announced an earlier than anticipated start (June 12) to Stage 2 of the provincial re-launch strategy, and part of that announcement was that re-opening of elements of recreational and cultural facilities and programming which had been expected to be delayed to Stage 3, would instead become part of Stage 2. In support of the accelerated timetable for Stage 2, on June 12 the Chief Medical Officer of Health issued Order 25/2020 (copy attached) that repealed many previous CMOH Orders and allowed most activities and facilities in the Province to re-open to the public subject to conditions that include complying with relevant guidelines "to the extent possible".

On June 11, 2020 the Emergency Advisory Committee was briefed on the following guiding principles to plan for the re-opening of recreational and cultural facilities:

- Outdoor facilities will be prioritized over indoor, to extent feasible.
- Facilities will be brought back when they are ready and using cost-recovery to the extent possible.
- Identify what regional partners are doing and consider the impacts of our decisions.
- Where possible, prioritize re-openings to meet the demand of user-groups.
- Impacts to service levels and resource capacity will be considered.
- Organizational risk and responsibilities.

Administration is recommending a phased re-opening of recreation and cultural facilities to meet user and community needs and to re-introduce service delivery to St. Albertans in a safe and fiscally responsible manner.

In addition to adhering to the guiding principles set out above, each specific facility plan has been or will be developed in alignment with CMOH Order 25/2020. The terms of that Order allow for considerable latitude in implementation, and are consistent in that respect with well established law that allows governmental authorities (such as municipal councils) to weigh and balance many relevant factors in arriving at policy decisions, or in giving policy guidance to their administration. Accordingly, if Recommended Motion #3 above is passed, when finalizing re-opening plans Administration will consider all of the factors that Council directs to be taken into account in addition to: modified service delivery expectations, staffing impacts, facility utilization rates, proposed revenues and expenditures, and legal considerations that will be provided confidentially.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS OR ENGAGEMENT

Administration continues to work with local user groups and community partner organizations to understand their needs as the City re-opens facilities to the public while complying “to the extent possible” with relevant Provincial Guidelines. Administration also continues to communicate with regional partners to understand their facility re-openings and public demand.

IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

Financial:

Financial scenarios and forecasts presented to Council on April 20, 2020 and May 19, 2020 represented “possible” scenarios of facility and program openings along with the financial implications of these timelines. Upon Council approval of facility re-opening plans, administration will prepare a comprehensive financial forecast for 2020 for all City operations for presentation to Council not later than the regularly scheduled meeting on August 17, 2020.

The financial impacts provided for each facility component/program are based on the estimated direct costs of operating that service and do not include fixed costs of running the facility itself. These costs will be considered and included in the comprehensive forecast to be provided later.

It is important to realize that while the cost implications of re-opening the facilities are quantifiable with reasonable accuracy, there is significant risk on the revenue side most specifically linked to spontaneous use and individual program participation such as swimming lessons, ticket sales, and reduced rental revenue depending on the level to which theatre capacity will be reduced as a COVID mitigation measure.

We understand what our maximum revenue generating capability would be based on facility capacity restrictions but what we do not clearly understand is what the actual uptake on our offerings will be. Only time and public response will provide that answer. Some things that may impact participation include potential rising numbers of active COVID infections, people’s general comfort with public gatherings and residents’ personal financial situations. With no historical events of this nature, there is no real data upon which to base our assumptions. Participation, rental and booking levels, and revenue generated will need to be monitored closely through the remainder of this year and likely 2021.

All financial estimates at this point assume that we are not significantly impacted by one or more resurgences of the virus and that current restrictions on gatherings are lifted over time and not restricted further.

Legal / Risk:

The Legal Department will continue to provide confidential legal advice to Council on this, and related topics associated with facility and program re-openings.

Program or Service:

Although Administration will strive hard for a return to as much “normalcy” as possible, the COVID-modified facilities, programs and services may look very different to community members than previous operations. Modifications could potentially include maximum gathering sizes, physical distancing, enhanced or mandatory sanitation and hygiene measures. Ultimately, these things will impact the user experience and, in some cases, may limit flexibility of facility operations.

It is also important to note that program and facility offerings may have to evolve if the Province of Alberta modifies its guidelines in the coming weeks and months, or if the legal obligation to follow those guidelines ceases to be qualified by the words “to the extent possible” as is currently the case under Order 25/2020. The final result is anticipated to be a return at some point to previous service levels and user experience with high levels of user satisfaction - however, at this stage it is not possible to offer a timeline to reach that goal.

Organizational:

Adoption of the recommended motions may result in recall of some laid off employees or return of some employees on redeployment. With the return of staff to their home departments, existing service levels within Public Works should be maintained through the hiring of seasonal casuals.

However, there may be some risk of negative public image from residents in terms of value for money of the services if staff are recalled and if revenue or use of the facilities is lower than expected.

ALTERNATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS CONSIDERED

Council could delay passing any or all of the recommended motions until the modelling of the whole corporate financial situation is ready for presentation to Council, not later than the August 17, 2020 regular Council meeting.

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