



Recreation Facility
Association
of Nova Scotia

Supporting you – from the ground up

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August 24th, 2020

To the Honourable Stephen McNeil and Dr. Robert Strang,

Re: Concern surrounding the potential loss of recreation and sport facilities in Nova Scotia

On behalf of the membership of the Recreation Facility Association of Nova Scotia (RFANS) we would like to thank you for the strong leadership and willingness to work with associations like ours to move Nova Scotia safely through this pandemic.

Recreation and sport facilities throughout Nova Scotia have worked diligently to create reopening plans that follow the Return to Recreation (Program and Facility) Guidelines and to establish safety protocols for their members and communities. The loosening of restrictions to allow recreation and sport facilities to start reopening was strongly embraced and facilities were eager and prepared to welcome their communities back.

RFANS has been in constant communication with our members throughout this pandemic. As we approach the fall recreation and sport season some concerns have been expressed by the arena sector. One of the biggest obstacle's arenas will face this fall is the anticipated loss of revenue due to Public Health directives, specifically around gathering limits of 10 without social distancing. **RFANS is strongly recommending that these limits be reconsidered and increased to 50, as soon as possible.** As part of our consultation process to move toward smoothly and safely reopening further this fall, we have met regularly and discussed these issues with our members, Hockey Nova Scotia, Ringette Nova Scotia, Skate Canada Nova Scotia and Speed Skating Nova Scotia who all have expressed support for this change to gathering limits.

Time is of the essence in deciding to increase the gathering limits. RFANS recommends the increase to 50 happen before September 1st, 2020; or at least an announcement by September 1st noting an October 1st, 2020 increase, dependent on epidemiology. Recreation and sport facilities need to know now what they can expect for this fall when creating their plans. It will make a world of difference in influencing whether a facility remains closed or is able to reopen and it would help dictate a timeline as to when reopening can happen. Holding off on this announcement will adversely affect many facilities who are deciding in the next week or so whether they open or not. An early announcement will inform decision making by creating awareness of the increased parameters they could work within.

Dealing with COVID-19 has already put increased economic pressure on recreation and sport facility operators. The added costs to implement safety precautions, sanitization, new equipment, additional staff, and public health directives has taken a toll. There are few alternative revenue streams for arenas outside of ice rentals and the gathering limit of 10 without social distancing further limits who can or will want to rent under these conditions.



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With limiting gatherings to 10 or less without social distancing, arenas expect to experience a drastic reduction in participation in adult recreation which means additional revenue losses. Many arenas rely heavily on these adult recreation leagues to survive. Some arenas may choose to close or not even open this fall due to the significant drop in revenue.

These gathering limits also affect ice sports being able to play at more normal levels. Less participants on the ice drives up the cost of participation, creating additional barriers to play. We anticipate less ice sport participants, so we can confidently say we expect minor sport rentals to be reduced, adding once again to a loss of revenue. With the restriction to games not being played, sports will be booking far less ice time. Creating these smaller groups of 10 also increases the need for more volunteers. Additional coaches and volunteers will be required to ensure each group has the proper supervision and guidance. Finding sufficient volunteers may delay associations start ups, cancel seasons, or limit how many registrations they accept.

Antigonish Arena is a great example of how these numbers will affect arena operations. Minor Hockey accounts for 67% of the ice time rented at the Antigonish Arena and is 45% of their ice revenue (discounted rate). Adult recreational leagues account for the other 33% of ice rentals, equaling 55% of their ice revenue. Without the option to play games Junior and Rural Hockey Leagues will not need as much ice time but also lose on average 200 spectators per regular season games and up to 2000 spectators during playoffs which is money needed to operate their associations.

Recreation and sport facilities generate millions of dollars in the Nova Scotia economy each year through recreation and sport rentals, concessions, tournaments, sectionals, regionals, provincials, and large events such as World Women's Hockey and the 2019 Scotties Tournament of Hearts. Competitive sport contributes greatly to the economic well-being of communities our recreation and sport facilities serve. Each of these events bring revenue not only to the recreation and sport facility but the community directly benefits. Visitors spend nights at hotels, eat in restaurants, spend at gas stations, shop at local retailers, purchase signs and swag at local printers for the events, etc. RFANS COVID-19 Impact on Nova Scotia's Recreation Facilities survey supports this by revealing facility closures will affect tourism in the community (46%), restaurant patronage (54%) and hotels (36%). This survey also indicated if facilities do not open 71% responded the economic well-being of their community would be affected while 64% suggested it would affect their region of the province.

Recreation and sport facilities also create many jobs within their communities. Closures will in turn have a negative affect on jobs and on many suppliers. Recreation and sport facilities spend large sums of money yearly on power, facility maintenance, concessions, etc. creating loss of work for those that supply facilities with regular operational needs.

All these issues cumulate to potentially crippling losses and unsustainable futures for some arenas in Nova Scotia. Regardless of whether recreation and sport facilities are board run, community owned, private, or managed under a municipality they



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are all still responsible to meet some, if not all, expenses through their revenue. Smaller community owned facilities will be more challenged in this respect.

The health and wellness of communities' hinge on having access to their recreation and sport facilities. Nova Scotian's expressed their need to recreate early on in this pandemic. RFANS appreciates the governments safe and cautious approach to increasing gathering limits, but this increase needs to come sooner than later for our sector. Recreation and sport facilities are now deciding the feasibility of opening and this increase from 10 to 50 could be the deciding factor. Once these facilities decide to close or not reopen communities physical and mental wellbeing will suffer. RFANS COVID-19 survey found 96% of respondents indicated that if they stay closed the greatest impact on the community would be on both the mental and physical health of the residents.

Increasing the gathering limit to 50 without social distancing will have a significant positive impact not just on arenas, but curling clubs, gymnasiums, pools, community centres and cultural facilities. We believe this is a reasonable ask as it is not a dramatic change but just enough of an increase to provide reassurance for facilities to reopen with projected revenue sources. The plans our recreation and sport facilities have created have proven successful over the past three months as they began moving towards reopening. Plans were created to be flexible so they can be easily and quickly adjusted as restrictions unexpectedly change, for better or for worse. Our facilities are prepared to take the next step in moving into the new normal.

In closing, RFANS would like to highlight recreation and sport facilities have been in the business of managing many people and creating safe environments for our communities to participate long before COVID-19. Recreation and sport facilities want to open but some are struggling to weigh the positives of reopening knowing the potential revenue losses they anticipate. If the gathering limit without social distancing was to increase to 50 we expect that many facilities would see enough participation to make reopening sustainable.

RFANS genuinely appreciates you taking the time to consider our request. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Brittany Hunter
Executive Director