

Mayor Provenzano and Mr. Vair,

If there is anything I have learned since moving home to the Sault almost three years ago, it's that there are a lot of Monday morning quarterbacks...decisions are made (often after input is requested but never received) and then everybody comes out of the woodwork to criticize the decision and decision-makers. That's just not productive, and it's not a positive way to make our City better.

So, now that the news has come out with the recommendations on ice usage in the City, and your team will hopefully go to the drawing board, I'd like to offer some feedback for consideration during the process.

I'm a firm believer that I don't ever have the right to complain if I don't first at least make an attempt to help with a solution. So, I write to you not only as president of Sault Female Hockey Association, a role in which I hear A LOT of feedback from parents/coaches about ice time, but also in my role of mom to three kids. All of my kids are involved in hockey (two with SFHA and the youngest with Soo Pee Wee Hockey League) and they have all participated in additional programs with user groups of ice time such as Lake Superior Figure Skating Club, KBX Hockey, Ian Shannon Power Skating and others. They have also participated in recreational activities at rinks such as birthday parties, private family skates etc.

Sault Female Hockey Association was an active participant in the usage survey that was conducted, and our need for additional ice is mentioned in *The Sault Star's* article, along with that of ringette. News articles also primarily focus on the city's other minor hockey organizations. I am hopeful that in addition to hockey/ringette, the obvious user groups, that feedback from other user groups was solicited to ensure all needs are considered. These additional user groups would include figure skating clubs; hockey skills programs such as KBX and Northern Elite Female Hockey Academy; Soo Thunderbirds; Sault College hockey; the school boards for their Hockey Canada Skills Academies and their high school hockey teams; the women's hockey league; the various men's hockey leagues, and the list goes on. Additionally, we'd need to consider the needs of the general public for birthday parties, open public skates, etc. If not all of these users were considered/pollled then we can only assume the survey isn't completely accurate about the needs of our City.

But, for the sake of this letter, let's assume everyone had their say. According to the survey, in addition to the rinks at the Soo Pee Wee and Rankin Arena, it recommends that the City operate five municipal rinks.

There's a problem. That recommendation gives us the bare minimum to meet the needs of the current user groups who participate in the study and their assumed growth, but doesn't take into consideration any potential new user groups or additional opportunities that we should seriously consider.

With this amount of ice, we can still only host one hockey tournament in the City on any one weekend. And when that happens, user groups outside of the one hosting the tournament, are forced to give up their ice so their participants lose training and development time that is needed.

Having the capacity to host multiple tournaments of varying sports would directly benefit local businesses such as hotel and restaurants but it would also indirectly benefit other businesses such as gas stations, retailers, and all of the vendors who supply to the hotels/restaurants. Then of course you have twice the amount of business for skate sharpening, pro shops and sporting retailers aligned with the tournament's sport.

The recommendation is to replace the McMeeken with a twin pad arena, giving us one additional ice surface. But, what if the City actually replaced it with a four-pad arena??? Yes, initially it would cost more to build. BUT in the long-term, the additional tournaments and spend from user groups could potentially drive enough revenue to make up for the added cost. Plus, doing it as part of the original construction build will be cheaper than adding on additional pads in the future...or building another whole new arena when the need is determined.

Greater Sudbury has 14 municipal arenas with a total of 16 ice pads. Any weekend in the winter, hotels are filled...and restaurants are filled...with tourists who are in town for various tournaments. It's not uncommon to be at a Sudbury hotel and run into another team/group from the Sault.

Building a four-pad arena would bring our municipal arena count to 7, still a far cry from Sudbury, but still a significant increase for our City and definitely a step in the right direction. A true recreational complex, it could include office space for some user groups (paying rent of course), an expanded pro shop, dryland training business, meeting rooms, restaurant, and help put our City on the map as a destination for sport in the North. It could even include dance rooms, weight room, basketball courts and other facilities that could be used for City recreational classes and drive additional revenue.

There's been talk that the Essar Centre should just go back to being the Memorial Gardens. It's what everyone calls it, anyway. Just like the Air Canada Centre will always be the ACC in Toronto, even when a new sponsor takes over soon, and the Rogers Centre will always be the Skydome. If a corporate sponsor could be sought with sponsorship funds used to build the new arena, their name could go on the building. Finding a sponsor to provide that much money will be tough, however it's a much easier sell from a branding perspective to put their name on a new building with no history for which they will be known for, rather than putting their name on a building that will forever be called something else.

I've been told that the John Rhodes pool is just a little too short to host certain swim meets, and that the indoor soccer field is just a little too short to host certain tournaments/games.

Let's not make these same mistakes when investing the money into new hockey arenas. Make at least one of the pads regulation NHL and/or IIHF and Olympic size so we have the capacity to attract various events such as pre-season games, training camps, etc. Off-season the multiple pads could be used for lacrosse, roller hockey, arena football...consider all the possibilities!

As it's said in the Field of Dreams, if you build it, they will come. And if you build it right, you won't need to rebuild it again at a higher cost further down the road.

I urge your team to do their due diligence to not just build a bare bones twin-pad that meets minimum requirements, but look into the future and the opportunities available to give us a facility to be proud of and that truly benefits Sault Ste. Marie residents.

As I have mentioned in previous communication, I would be open to participating as a user group in any discussion as plans progress around this topic. Please feel free to contact me as needed.

Sincerely,

Elissa Plastino

President

Sault Female Hockey Association