

City of Abbotsford

ARENA SERVICES & FACILITIES STRATEGY 2022



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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The City of Abbotsford's Arena Services & Facilities Strategy will support effective planning and investment in future arena facilities. Arena services include the provision of recreation space for ice, dry-floor and curling activities.

This strategy provides a set of action items to be implemented to ensure sufficient provision of arena facilities into the future. It considers Abbotsford's current arena use patterns, anticipated changes in population, demographics and sport participation trends, as well as the current condition of arena facilities with regards to lifecycle funding requirements.



Photo credit: City of Abbotsford | ARC Facility

BACKGROUND

The City of Abbotsford's arena services and facilities have evolved organically throughout history. The City has adapted to changing needs of the community through shifts in service and facility provision. Today, Abbotsford's arena facilities are operating at capacity which is limiting growth of sport and impacting the ability for the community to access programming. To ensure the City continues providing appropriate arena facilities for the community, the City has completed an Arena Services & Facilities Strategy study. This document summarizes the detailed assessment completed during October 2020 and Fall 2022.

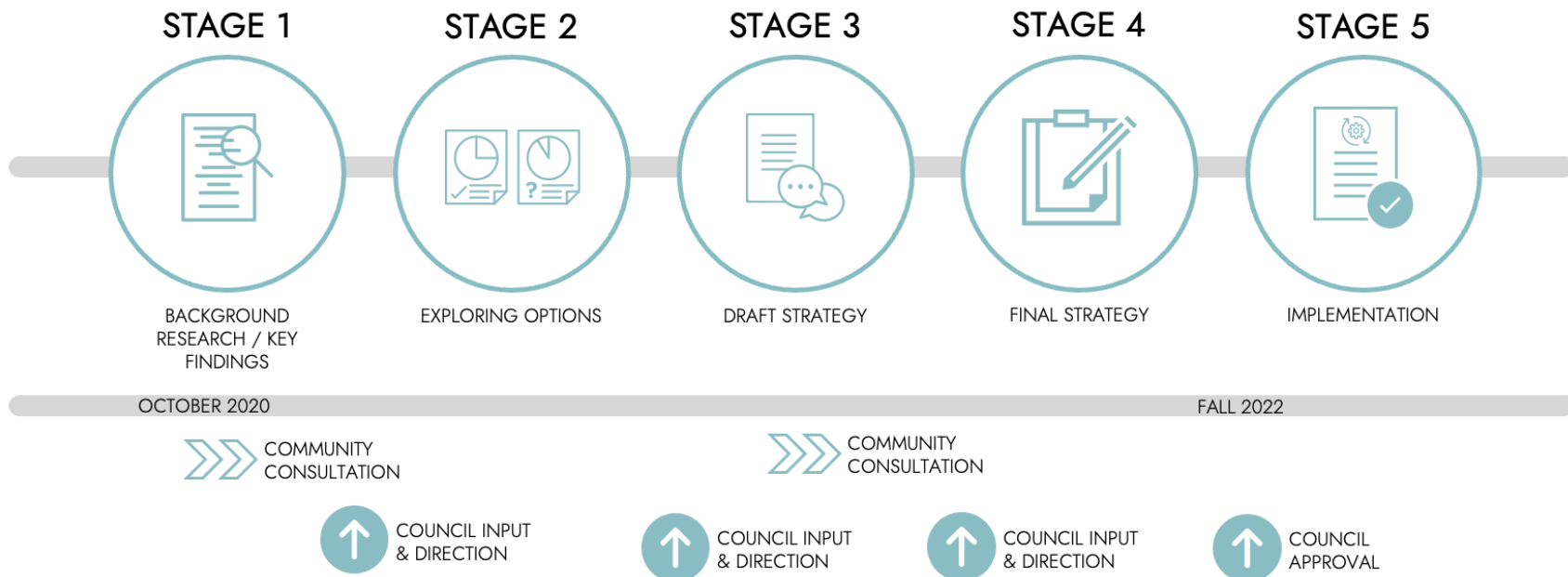


Photo credit: Kelli Mcclintock | Unsplash



STUDY PROCESS

The study has been completed over a 2-year period beginning in October 2020 and finishing in late 2022. The study process followed the City of Abbotsford's 5-stage planning approach.



Stage 1: Background Research / Key Findings: Included a detailed analysis of the current arena inventory and future demand patterns. This stage included comprehensive community consultation.

Stage 3: Draft Study: Included the development of a draft document which summarizes the complete study from beginning to end. *(This Report)*

Stage 5: Implementation: Will include the implementation of the action items identified within this report. City staff will lead the implementation process.

Stage 2: Explore Options: Included the identification and assessment of options to address the anticipated future gap in arena facilities.

Stage 4: Final Study: Included the finalization of the study with the inclusion of the community's and Council feedback/comments. *(This Report)*



CONSULTATION

Various forms of engagement and consultation were completed to inform the study. A combination of interviews with operators, arena users and key stakeholder groups and surveys targeting the general community and key user groups were conducted during the initial stage of the study.

Consultation was focused on collecting an understanding of the current state of arena services and facilities in Abbotsford and how the community's needs are expected to change into the future. There were a number of shared sentiments from the consultation process:

- The City of Abbotsford residents value their arenas and feel that they are inclusive and welcoming facilities.
- There is a strong ice sport community within the City.
- Abbotsford arenas have a high quality of ice.
- Non-traditional ice and dry-floor activities are gaining popularity. Growth of these activities are limited by the current supply of facilities.
- Leisure ice activities are very well subscribed and in high demand.
- The community would benefit from the development of a twin sheet ice arena.
- Regular ice and dry-floor user groups prefer to deliver programming from a single location rather than multiple locations.
- There is a shortage of user group storage space at all arenas.
- 72% of public respondents and 60% of arena users noted they would be willing to financially contribute to improvements to the arena system (either through donations, increased arena and registration fees or increased property taxes).

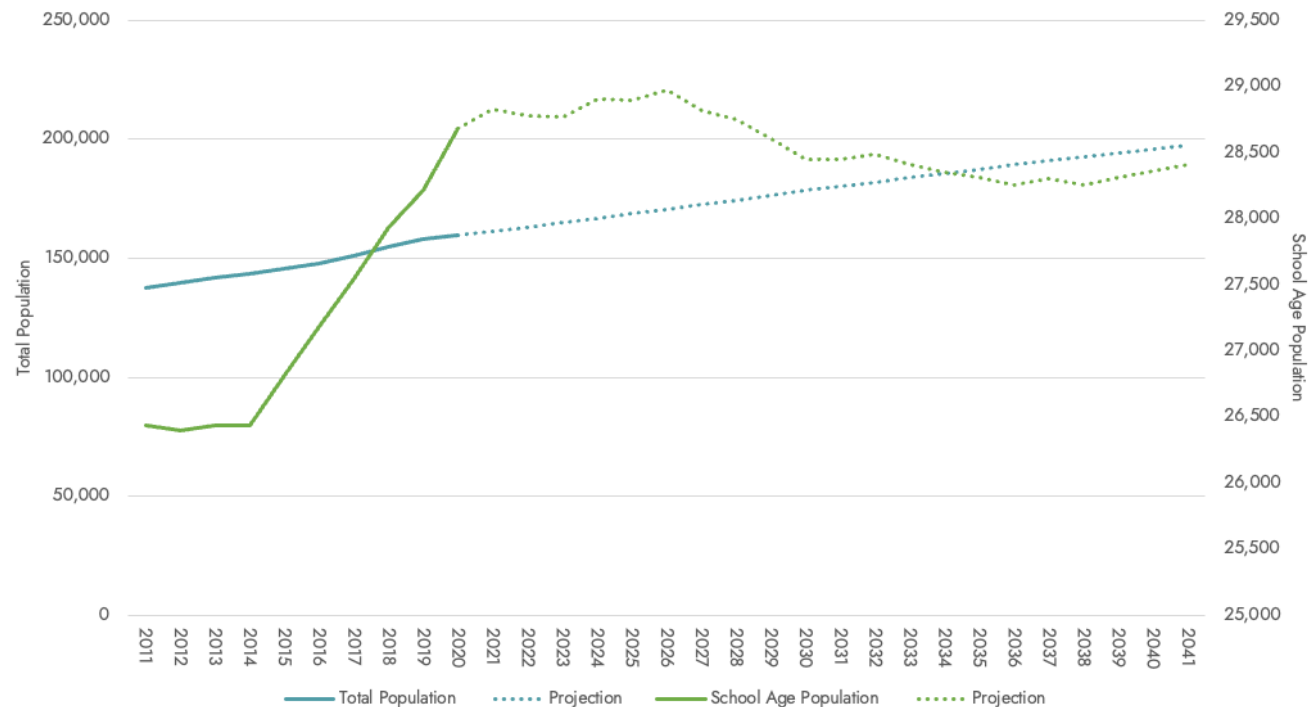


POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Abbotsford's population is projected to grow by 23% over 20 years (2021-2041). At the same time, the population is aging. Abbotsford has seen a significant increase in the school age population (4-18 years old) in recent years, however this trend is likely to start declining within next 10-15 years.

There are some key themes and indicators when considering the impacts of population growth and demographics on arena demand into the 20-year future. They are:

- **Youth arena sports registration is likely to remain stable** – given that this age group (ages 0-19 years) is projected to increase by only 0.5% between 2021 and 2026 and then decrease over the next 10-year period (-1%) and 20-year period (-1%).
- **Population of Abbotsford is aging** – projected growth in population is a result of increasing adult numbers and as such, arena programming and activities will likely shift away from time intensive activities (competitive hockey, figure skating) and towards less structured activities (leisure programming, drop-in hockey, low-commitment team leagues etc.)



Data Source: BCSTAT 2021, Population Projections



RECREATION TRENDS

The nature of arena recreational sports has changed significantly in recent years, along with participation levels in various activities. In general, Canadians are increasingly less active. Commonly cited barriers include: individuals not having enough time, the unaffordability of recreation activities and facilities (e.g., equipment costs), the lack of available facilities, and the lure of an inactive sedentary lifestyle (e.g., social media and video games).

The fact that Canada has an aging population also contributes to a trend of decreasing participation levels in sport. This decline is especially true with respect to higher intensity organized team sports, such as ice hockey.












In contrast, there has been significant growth in spontaneous, unstructured ice and dry-floor activities such as ball hockey, indoor soccer and drop-in skating.

The graphic shown to the right identifies the anticipated participation trends for ice, dry-floor and curling activities into the future.



Photo credit: Logan Weaver | Unsplash

General Participation Trend

General Participation Trend		
TYPICAL ICE ARENA SPORTS	 Women's Hockey	Increase
	 Leisure Programming	
	 Figure Skating	Stable / Slight Increase
	 Curling	
	 Speed Skating	Stable
	 Adult Hockey	Stable / Slight Decrease
 Youth Hockey		
DRY-FLOOR ARENA SPORTS	 Lacrosse	Increase
	 Indoor Soccer	
	 Pickleball	
	 Ball Hockey	Stable / Slight Increase





Scoreboard and digital displays showing game statistics and advertisements.

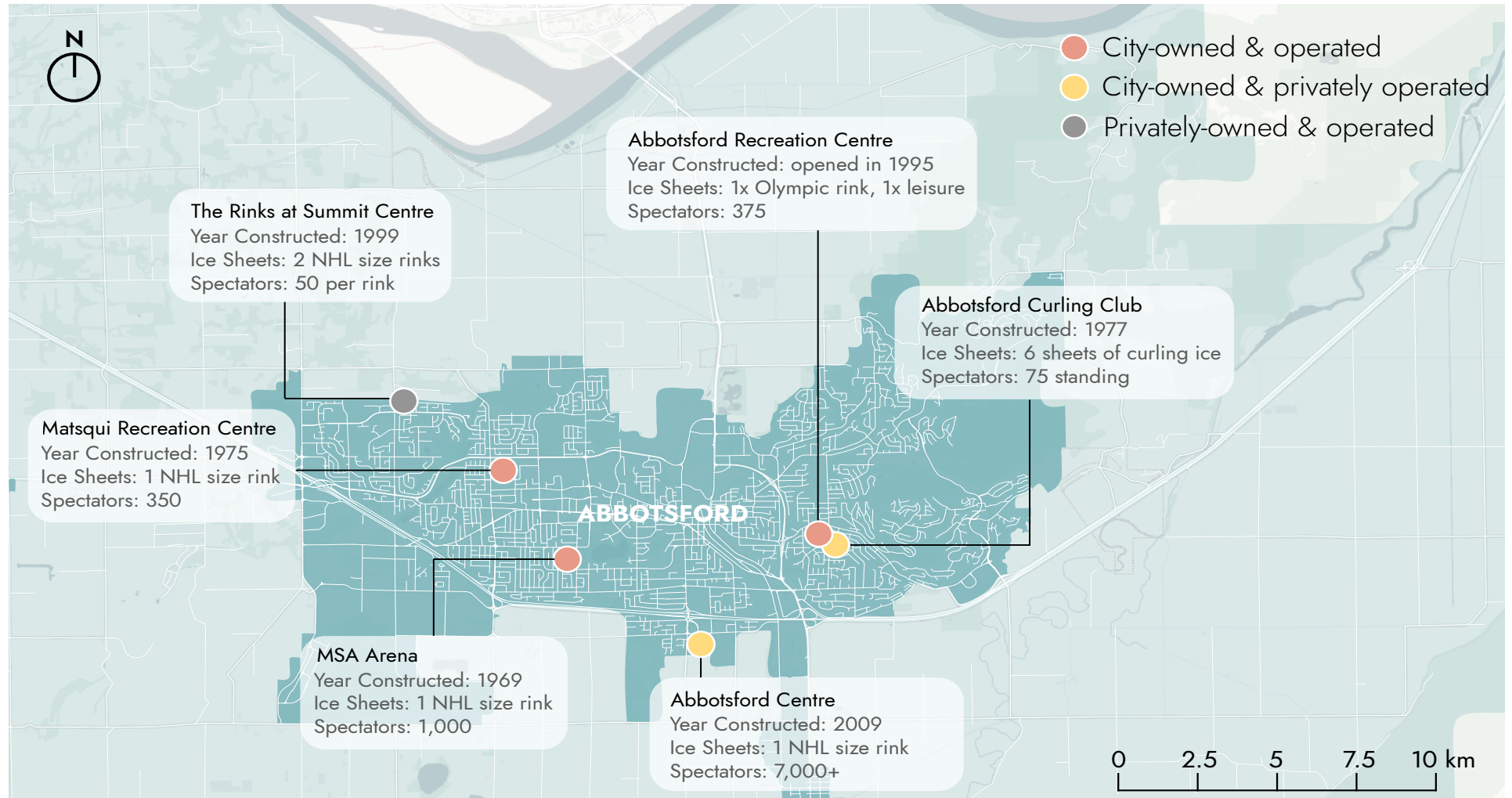
Blue banners with white text, likely advertising local businesses or community events.

Sandman
HOTELS & RESORTS

Complete
EYECARE

CURRENT ARENA SUPPLY

Within the City of Abbotsford there are 6 facilities that currently support recreational and organized arena activities. Of the 6 arena facilities, 5 are owned by the City of Abbotsford and 2 are privately owned.



The Abbotsford Ice Rink, a privately operated facility, featured a reduced size ice sheet and provided the community with access to ice year-round. This facility was excluded from the assessment due to its relatively limited service in comparison to the other arenas and as of 2022, has closed.



Abbotsford Recreation Centre (ARC)

- Arena is very well utilized, with peak utilization nearing 100% during the Fall and Winter seasons. Over the course of 1 year, the arena is 75% utilized.
- The arena currently operates with an approximate cost recovery rate of 45% which is within the acceptable range for a municipally run arena.
- The arena is in good physical condition and with ongoing capital maintenance should continue to support the needs of the community.

Matsqui Recreation Centre (MRC)

- Arena is very well utilized, with peak utilization of ~85% during the Fall and Winter seasons. Over the course of 1 year, the arena is 72% utilized.
- The arena currently operates with an approximate cost recovery rate of 47% which is within the acceptable range for a municipally run arena.
- The arena's infrastructure is aging and will require significant capital investment over the next 10-years to remain operational.

Matsqui Sumas Abbotsford Arena (MSA)

- Arena is well utilized, with peak utilization of ~85% during the Fall and Winter seasons. Over the course of 1 year, the arena is 74% utilized.
- The arena currently operates with an approximate cost recovery rate of 53% which is within the acceptable range for a municipally run arena.
- The arena's infrastructure is aging and will require significant capital investment over the next 10-years to remain operational.

Abbotsford Curling Club

- Curling rink is ~60% utilized in peak season and ~42% utilized over the course of one year.
- The rink is managed and operated by Abbotsford Curling Club, a not-for-profit organization. The Club remains financially viable as the site and facility are provided by the City at no cost.
- The rink infrastructure is aging and will require significant capital investment over the next 10-years to remain operational.



Photo credit: Pixabay





Photo credit: Tsuguliev | Adobe Stock

Abbotsford Centre (AC)

- Historically the AC provided ~500 annual hours of community ice and dry-floor bookings. The community was able to access the facility during periods when there are no event or performance bookings.
- The facility operating model relies on income generating events to remain financially viable and therefore there is little incentive to use this facility for community ice and dry-floor activities. Additionally, in 2022, the City finalized an agreement with Canucks Sports and Entertainment for management and use of the facility, which further justifies excluding this arena for future community use.
- The AC is in good physical condition and will continue to be a place for major events and performances.

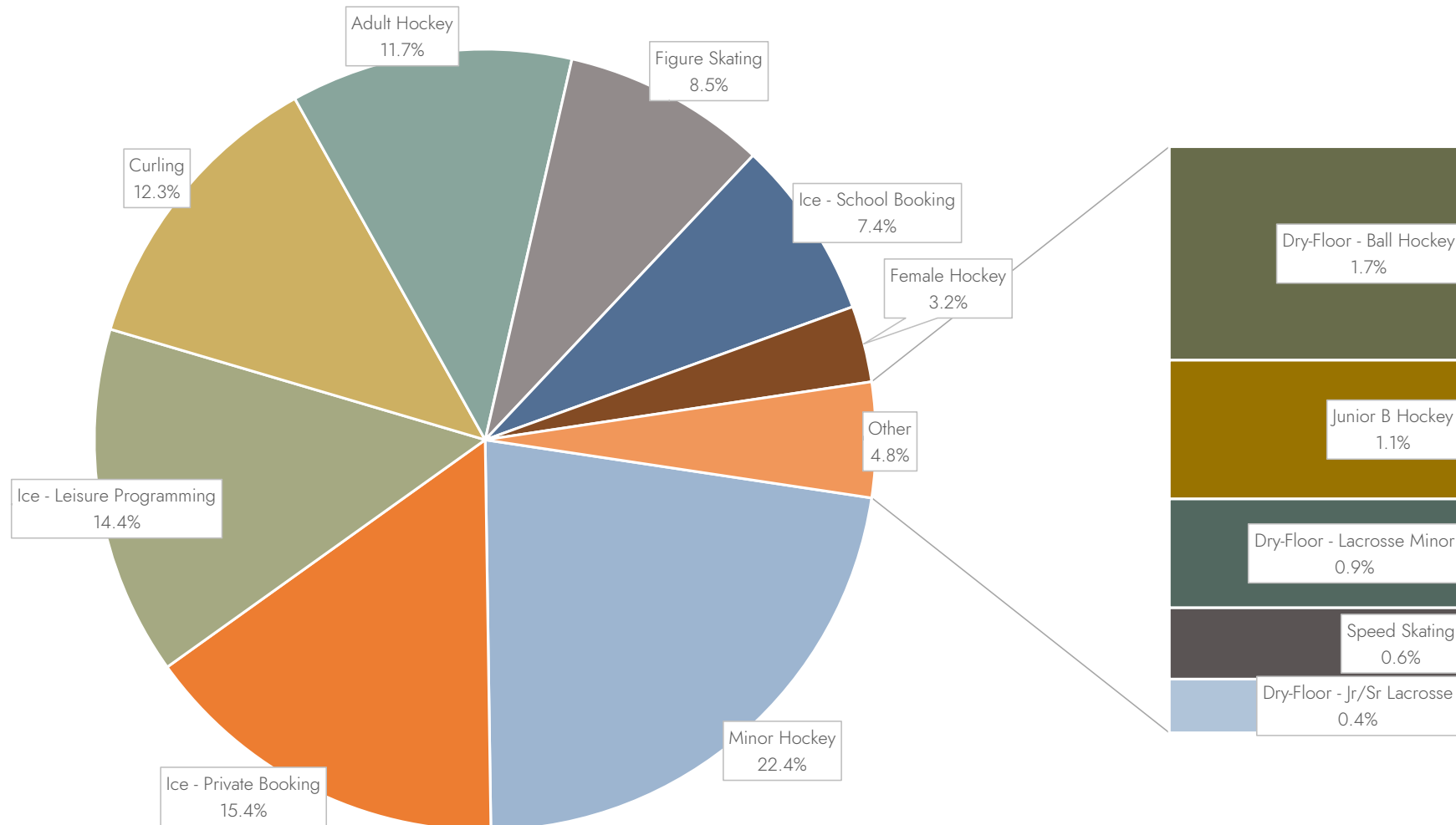
The Rinks at Summit Centre

- Summit Centre is the only twin ice sheet arena within the City of Abbotsford. Ice is maintained for use all year long.
- Summit Centre is well utilized with an annual utilization of ~58% and peak utilization in the Fall and Winter seasons.
- The City has an agreement with the Rinks at Summit Centre to provide the community with 1,264 annual hours.



In total, the community currently uses ~18,000 annual hours of ice and dry-floor booking time across six facilities (excluding Abbotsford Ice Rink). The following graphic illustrates how the community uses the facilities.

Total Annual Abbotsford Arena Activity



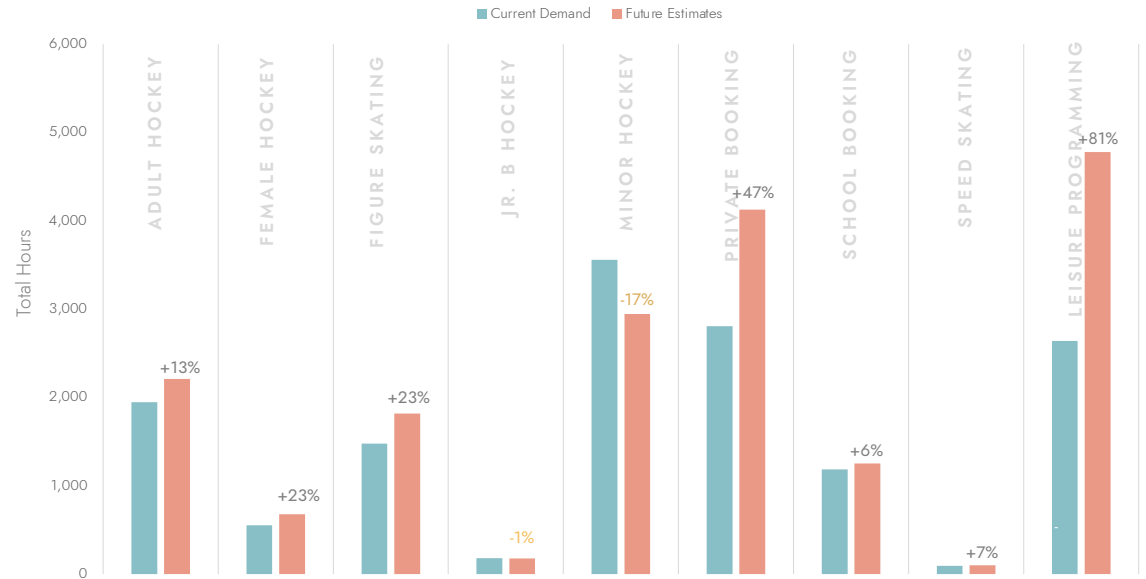
FUTURE DEMAND

There are many factors that impact the future demand for ice, dry-floor and curling facilities. This study has considered the impacts of growth related to:

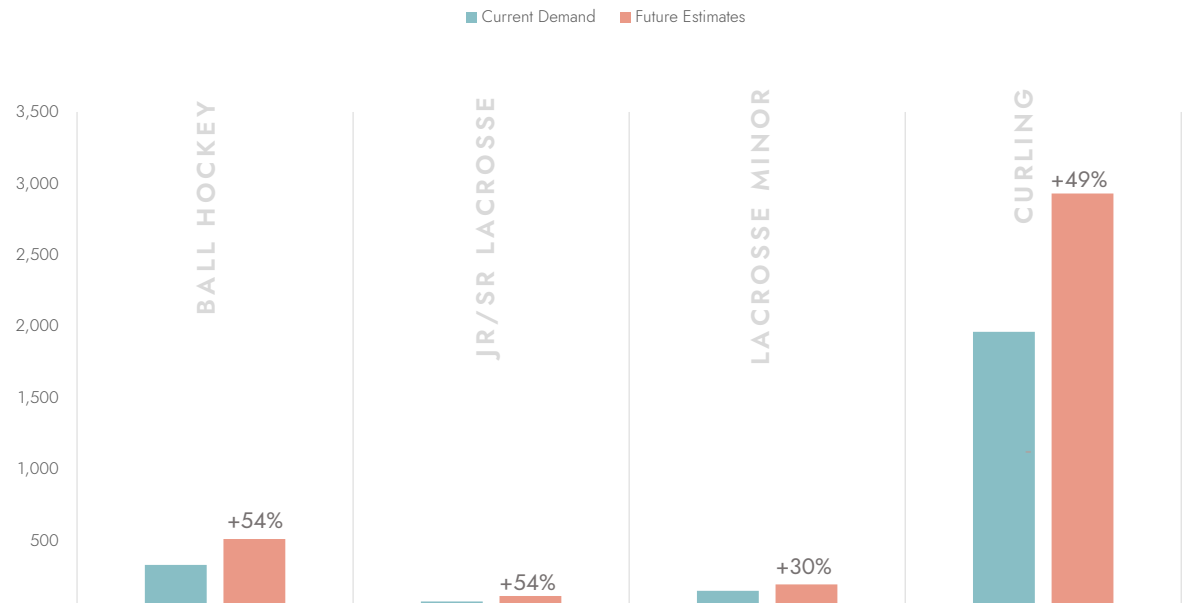
- Unmet community demand which is not currently accommodated from the existing supply of arenas.
- City population and demographic changes.
- Shifting activity trends.
- Alignment with City initiatives. For example, the City would like to increase arena inclusivity by offering activities that are attractive to a wider and more diverse audience.

Using these growth factors, and assuming the current level of service is maintained into the future, it is estimated that the City of Abbotsford will see a 34% increase in demand for arena facilities. The following graph presents the anticipated increase in activities over the next 20-years.

Projected Growth in Demand - Ice Activities



Projected Growth in Demand – Dry-Floor Activities & Curling



ARENA GAP ANALYSIS

Given that the City of Abbotsford will see an increase in demand for arena activities over the next 20-years, there will be an impact to the number of ice sheets, dry-floors and curling rinks required to support the community. The following figure presents the projected ice, dry-floor and curling estimates.

Note: The assessment considers peak activity times and seasons. For example, the majority of ice activities take place during the Fall and Winter season and there is strong user group preference for afternoon and evening bookings, therefore the total annual demand for ice will not be spread evenly over each day and month – there will be peaks in usage by season and time of day.

If the trends continue, in 20-years, the City of Abbotsford community will have demand for 5.4 ice sheets, 1.2 dry-floors and 0.6 curling rinks. **This demand exceeds the current supply of facilities by 1.6 ice sheets and 0.8 dry-floors. The demand for curling is not anticipated to exceed the current facility**

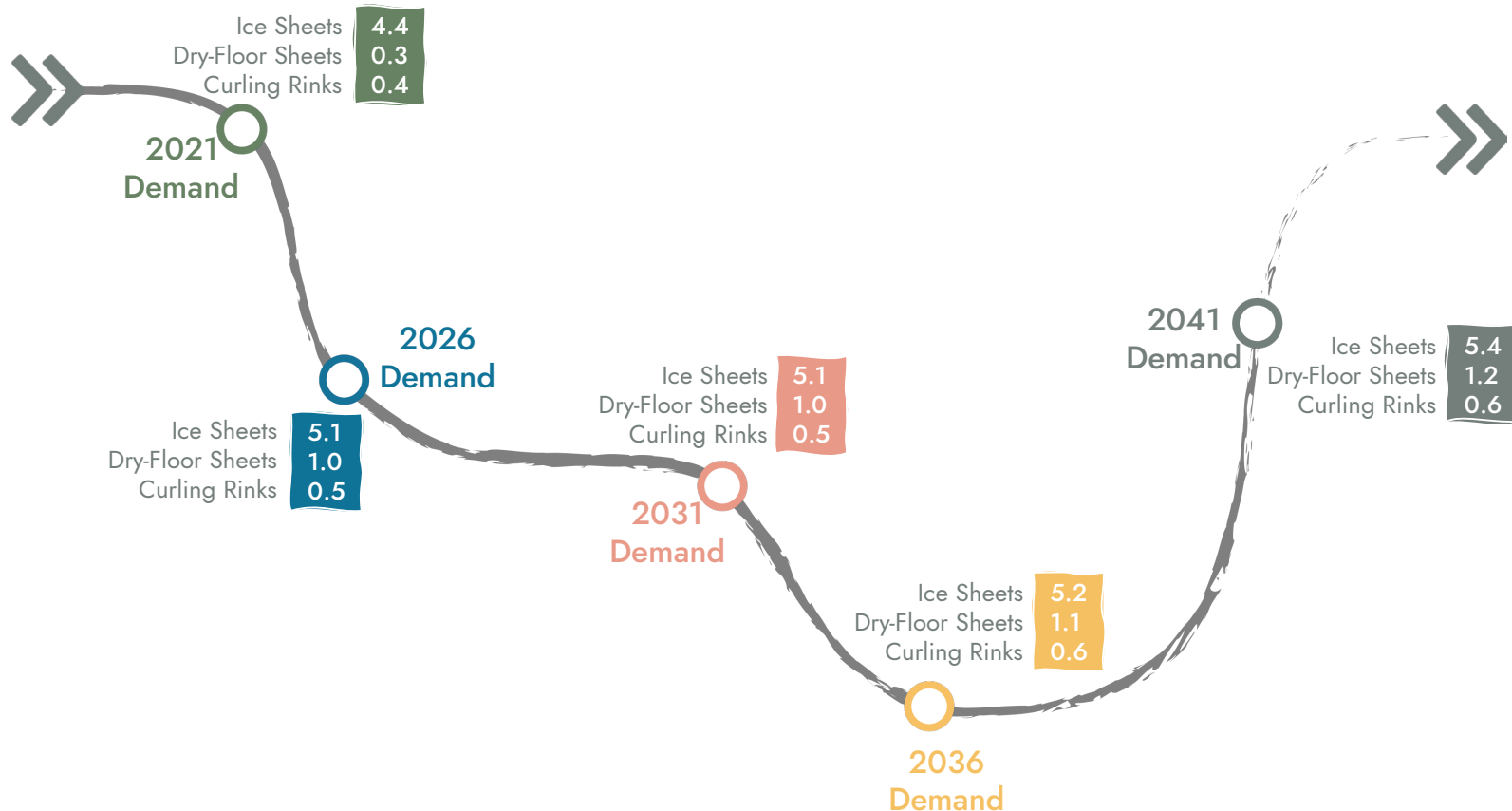




Photo credit: Shvets Production

KEY FINDINGS

STRENGTHS

- Abbotsford has a **high quality of ice** surfaces.
- **Ice is well-utilized**. City arenas have average utilization rate of ~92% during the winter season, and ~73% over the full year.
- Many participants benefit from **subsidized costs** for arena use.

CHALLENGES

- There is **unmet community demand** for both ice and dry-floor activities.
- There is growing **demand for leisure and unstructured arena sports**.
- The City's **Curling Rink is underutilized**.
- There are some **functional issues with arena support spaces**, including spectator seating, changing rooms, warm-up spaces, and storage areas.
- The City's **arenas have both significant capital and operating costs** and are aging. City-owned arena infrastructure, particularly the MRC and MSA arenas, require significant investment to maintain current service levels and operations.

OPPORTUNITIES

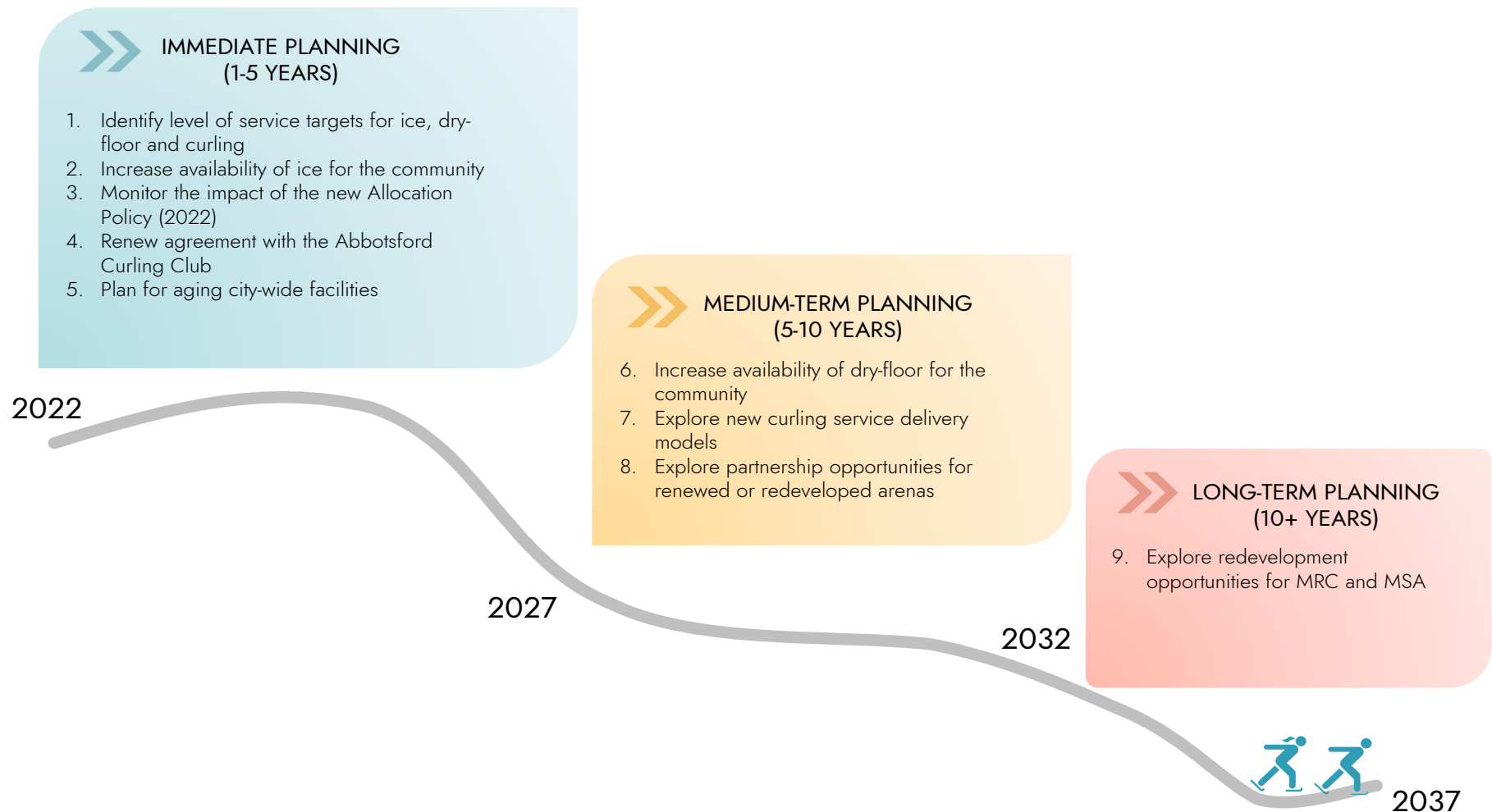
- The level of service provided by the City could be redefined to prioritize community needs given known constraints (ice sheet deficit, lack of a twin-sheet facility, aging facilities etc.), associated with current facilities.
- Capital Investment in the existing facilities could reduce the demand deficits and extend the life of existing facilities. Examples could include: major renovation or twinning of an existing arena, pouring a new slab at MRC or renovating the Ag. Rec. facility.
- Development of a twin-ice sheet facility could increase capacity for ice and dry-floor activities and sport hosting opportunities.





ACTION PLAN

Understanding that arenas are costly to construct, maintain and operate, adequate planning and due diligence is required before embarking on infrastructure development. To ensure the City of Abbotsford continues to make informed planning decisions, there are a number of actions to be completed over the next 10-years. 9 actions have been identified and categorized as immediate, medium-term and long-term actions. These actions will be implemented by City staff in the years to come.



IMMEDIATE ACTIONS (1 - 5 Years)

1. Identify level of service targets for ice, dry-floor and curling: The City needs to consider what level of service they desire to provide the community related to ice, dry-floor and curling. Any changes to level of service (either enhanced or decreased) will impact the demand on arena facilities.

2. Increase availability of ice for the community: There is an immediate community need for additional ice time. The City should continue to work with the ownership of the Rinks at Summit Centre to purchase additional ice time. It is recommended that the City purchase as much is available to help offset the demand.



Photo credit: Auremar | Adobe Stock

3. Monitor the impact of the new Allocation Policy (2022): A new Allocation Policy was adopted in early 2022. This framework and its impact should be reviewed annually to ensure it provides inclusive access to arena services and facilities.

4. Renew the agreement with the Abbotsford Curling Club: The Curling Club facility is currently underutilized. The City's most recent agreement with the Curling Club for operation of the facility expired in 2019 and a new short-term agreement (1-5 years) should be considered. As part of this agreement, the City should seek use of the facility for non-traditional dry-floor sports such as pickleball or other community uses to increase its utilization rate, especially in the off-season.

5. Plan for aging city-wide facilities: The City should devise an immediate strategy to ensure the current inventory of arenas can be maintained for at least 10 years. The City should begin to assess what needs to be maintained and upgraded at ARC, MRC, MSA and the curling rink to continue providing the same level of ice, dry-floor and curling activities until at least 2032. This should provide sufficient time to devise a city-wide long-term facility plan with supporting asset management and long-term financial plans. Detailed building condition reports should inform this planning. A 5-year arena funding plan should also be developed to ensure the work can be completed as soon as possible.



MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (5 - 10 Years)

6. Increase availability of dry-floor for the community: Increasing the availability of covered dry-floor arena space with year-round access can help to meet the needs of emerging and growing dry-floor sports. Understanding that the long-term requirement for dry-floor space is possibly a dedicated, indoor dry-floor arena, other low-cost options can be explored to increase the availability of space sooner. One cost-effective option to consider investigating is a permanent cover of the Yale Court Lacrosse Box with upgrades to the flooring, scoreboards and dasher boards to ensure the facility can support practice and game play.

7. Explore new curling service delivery models: The curling rink will also require significant investments in the coming years. The City could consider options for the delivery of curling services in Abbotsford. Much of this may depend on the outcome of negotiations for a short-term agreement, as well as the state of the club post-COVID-19 restrictions. As previously noted, the City could explore a number of options for curling, including a regional model that would see local neighbouring clubs combined into one facility, which would maximize the use of the facility.

8. Explore partnership opportunities for renewed or redeveloped arenas: The City should explore partnership opportunities as it relates to purchasing additional arena hours from private rink operators, replacing, and building new arena/recreation facilities. The Rinks at Summit Centre should be considered a strategic partner for the City. As noted above, the City should seek to purchase additional time where available at Summit Centre and secure this through a longer-term agreement.

In addition to the Rinks at Summit Centre, there may be other partnership opportunities for the City to consider as it relates to its own land holdings. The City has a number of land holdings that could be considered attractive from a development perspective. Given the high costs associated with arena and recreation infrastructure, it is imperative the City explore opportunities with private industry and senior levels of government to share these costs.



Photo credit: Ron Alvey | Adobe Stock



LONG-TERM ACTIONS (10+ Years)

9. Explore redevelopment opportunities for MRC and MSA: To simply maintain the level of service currently provided through Arena Services, both MRC and MSA Arenas will require major renovations, or more likely, replacement. Without these two arenas, the City will be facing a major deficit in approximately 10-years, therefore a plan for replacing these two arenas before they reach end of life is imperative. From a building and operating efficiency standpoint, the City should not consider replacing the arenas with a new facility dedicated to only ice and dry-floor activities – it is much more efficient to develop a multipurpose recreation facility. In addition, multi-sheet facilities are more economical to operate than single-sheet arenas. Seasonal or non-traditional facility designs should also be considered as effective ways of meeting community demand for leisure ice specifically.



Photo credit: Shvets Production



City of Abbotsford

Parks, Recreation and Culture Services

<https://www.abbotsford.ca>

<https://letstalkabbotsford.ca/arenastrategy>

