



# Let's Go Skating

NO FEE ICE TIME IS A SOURCE OF PRIDE IN AMHERST, NS

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THE FRAMEWORK FOR RECREATION IN CANADA GOALS AND PRIORITIES:



ACTIVE LIVING



INCLUSION AND ACCESS



SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

## CHALLENGES ADDRESSED

There had been a steady decline in both use and minor sport participation numbers at the Amherst Stadium over the past several years, due in part to financial barriers to accessing programs and services (e.g. hockey and figure skating). There was a need to provide affordable opportunities for children and youth to improve their skills and physical literacy, and to be part of active programs that enhance well-being. Amherst (and virtually all other communities) had always charged for ice time. Changing that policy would not be easy. There were concerns about the costs and cost recovery.



*Ice time use at the Stadium increased by 225 hours compared to the previous year.*



## IMPLEMENTATION

The Recreation team gathered data and evidence from numerous studies to make the case for a no-fee ice policy. They consulted with users and ensured that the policy aligned with goals set out in other already-approved plans including the Master Recreation Plan, the Municipal Physical Activity Strategy, the National Framework for Recreation, and the Council's identification of poverty reduction as a strategic priority.

After hearing the evidence of need and benefits to residents and the community, the Town Council voted in August 2016 to implement the Ice Allocation Policy Pilot Project, which eliminated ice time fees at the Amherst Stadium for youth and youth-serving organizations. They also approved spending up to \$60,000 to cover any revenue loss.

“From both an economic activity and a health promotion point of view we've seen the benefits first hand.”

The youth organizations that qualify for waived ice rental fees must pass the ice cost savings directly to their individual members. Savings for families range between \$75 and \$350, depending on the number of children participating and the types of activities they do. In addition, they cannot charge admission for events at the Stadium, such as tournaments and competitions. This meant more families could afford to come, both from Amherst and from out-of-town.

The Town engaged Dalhousie University to conduct evaluations to provide a better understanding of the impact that the policy had on participation at the Amherst Stadium, and the attitudes of residents toward the new program. Key partners were brought in to support the pilot and the evaluation, including the Community Health Board, Sport Organizations (skating and hockey), other users, the Chamber of Commerce and the NS Department of Community, Culture and Heritage (who funded the evaluation).

## OUTCOMES

Key findings from the evaluation included the following:

- The Amherst Skating Club and the Cumberland County Minor Hockey both reported increased registrations for their programs. Both received significant ice time savings, which enabled these organizations to reduce registration fees for their participants.
- Ice time use at the Stadium increased by 225 hours compared to the previous year; the Stadium staff saw a 50-60% increase in public skating.

- The amount of money generated by hockey tournaments in Amherst (e.g. lodging and meals) was estimated to be approximately \$98,580.00. This excludes potential economic advantages for other businesses or local shops.
- Among residents who participated in the online survey, 82% agreed that the cost of \$60,000 to provide no fee ice time to youth was a worthwhile investment; 92% of participants agreed that the Town of Amherst should continue to invest financial support to increase and maintain physical activity among youth.

“From both an economic activity and a health promotion point of view we’ve seen the benefits first hand,” says Mayor David Kogan. “The attention that this project has garnered at the provincial and regional levels and beyond also allows us to emphasize our message that Amherst is a great place to live, work and play.”

The policy and program has moved beyond the pilot stage and is now ongoing. It has become a source of pride for community leaders and residents. Town officials have been asked to present at regional and provincial gatherings. Residents speak about it with pride. One man in his 80s told a visitor at a hockey game, “You know, we don’t charge our young people to use the ice. I am so proud of that.”

The initiative has also garnered attention from organizations like Sport Nova Scotia, Hockey Nova Scotia, Hockey Canada and Skate Canada, which have expressed interest in introducing the project in other jurisdictions.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Use research and evaluation to make your case and document the outcomes of the implementation. Collect testimonials and stories as well as data.
- Align your initiative with existing plans that are familiar to municipal politicians and community leaders.
- Frame the conversation about costs around the goal of investing in the community. Bill Schurman says, “Removing systemic financial barriers to physical activity is an investment in the wellbeing of our citizens and the health of our community. Aim to make this the philosophy of the Department, elected officials and the community”.
- Seek out diverse partners (e.g. health, business, sport, university) but recognize that it sometimes takes time for some of those partners to come to fully buy in.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- Bill Schurman, Director Recreation: [bschurman@amherst.ca](mailto:bschurman@amherst.ca)
- Amherst Recreation Department: includes links to Master Plans, and all documents related to No Fee Ice Allocation Policy: Evaluation, Pilot, Guidelines, Key Messages — <https://www.amherst.ca/recreation.html>

<b>Framework Goal and Priority</b>	Goal # 2 Inclusion and access (reducing financial barriers). Also addresses Goals 1 (Active Living) and 4 (Supportive Environments)
<b>Population Addressed</b>	Children and youth, but all ages benefit
<b>Community</b>	The Town of Amherst is largest population centre in Cumberland County, Nova Scotia (population 9,413 in 2016). It is close to Halifax NS, and Moncton, New Brunswick. Residents report poorer health and lower economic status than most other towns in NS (e.g. 34.7% of all Amherst youth 17 and under live in poverty).
<b>Setting</b>	Semi-urban, small town
<b>Lead Implementer and Organization</b>	Bill Schurman, Director Recreation, Town of Amherst
<b>Key Partners</b>	Town Council, Arena users including Cumberland County Minor Hockey, Amherst Skating Club and the School Board, Board of Health, NS Department of Community, Culture and Heritage
<b>Activity Focus</b>	No Fee Ice Policy
<b>Stage of Development</b>	Pilot completed and evaluated, Policy continuing