

**SUBJECT: Sport Commissioner 2021 Update on Return to Play and Situation of Sport in Ottawa**

**File Number ACS2021-OCC-FED-0014**

**Report to Finance and Economic Development Committee on 5 October 2021  
and Council 13 October 2021**

**Submitted on September 23, 2021 by Councillor Mathieu Fleury**

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**Ward: CITY WIDE**

**OBJET : Mise à jour de 2021 du commissaire aux sports concernant le retour au jeu et l'état du sport à Ottawa**

**Dossier : ACS2021-OCC-FED-0014**

**Rapport au Comité des finances et du développement économique**

**le 5 octobre 2021**

**et au Conseil le 13 octobre 2021**

**Soumis le 23 septembre 2021 par conseiller Mathieu Fleury**

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**Quartier : À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE**

#### **REPORT RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Finance and Economic Development Committee receive and recommend Council receive this report for information.**

#### **RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT**

**Que le Comité des finances et du développement économique reçoive ce rapport et recommande au Conseil de recevoir ce rapport a titre d'information.**

## **BACKGROUND**

This information report is being submitted by Councillor Mathieu Fleury pursuant to Subsection 81(14) of the *Procedure By-law*.

## **DISCUSSION**

I am proud to serve as Ottawa's Sport Commissioner and support our community through the power of sport and physical literacy. I am grateful for the opportunity to work directly with dedicated amateur sports organizations, their staff, members, volunteers, and all those who ensure that sport, recreation, and leisure play a key role in our City.

The Sport Commissioner's role is to promote the local sports community and support Ottawa Tourism by advancing the 'Bid More, Host More' strategy. The team at Ottawa Tourism is well organized; they know the local hosting potential and continue to strive to maximize our local hosting offering. Additionally, the Sport Commissioner is called to work with the sport community to support (growth, needs, governance, advocacy).

This report provides an overview of the current opportunities and threats within Ottawa's community sport sector. We will cover the general impacts and lessons from the last year and options to consider supporting Ottawa's sports community and position Ottawa as a sport-friendly City.

The sport community is so large that this report is not meant to capture every situation, risk, and opportunity, but instead to share with Council and the City a picture of the current situation affecting sport in our community as well as opportunities to help, support, and grow sport in Ottawa.

The sport community has continued to be engaged throughout the COVID pandemic. The Ottawa Sport Council, which is the voice for local sport in Ottawa, has helped support the Roadmap for a safe return to play while respecting various Public Health safety measures. Every sport has had a journey to support athletes depending on their respective field of play. Some sports, such as tennis, can be played outdoors and as an individual, have been more resilient. In contrast, others who are indoors, team-based, and lease their spaces have had real struggles to continue supporting youth practice and gameplay, including basketball.

The sports community in Ottawa starts at a young age with the "learn to" programs and moves through the various levels of play, including competitive and continues well into adulthood with the master's programs. Ottawa is a powerful example of the Long-Term

Athlete Development (LTAD) model, which aligns closely with the objective of Sport Canada and ParticipAction.

The sports community is mostly all organized by non for profits local sports clubs. The engagement of parents and volunteers is critical to help grow and sustain passion and long history of sports in Ottawa- as 73 per cent of all clubs have no staff – they are entirely volunteer-driven.

Ottawa is very fortunate to continue to count on a growing number of professional sports organizations, including the Ottawa Senators, the OSEG partners (Redblacks and 67's), the BlackJack, Aces, Atlético and Titan Baseball, to name a few the key ones.

On the amateur level, many of the local clubs are connected with the USport environment through the UOttawa Geegees, Carleton Ravens, Algonquin Thunder and Les Coyotes du Collège La Cité. The College and University environment is a crucial window to allow amateur levels athletes to continue to learn, compete, and grow in their sport locally.

In 2021, Ottawa will be fortunate to support TEAM CANADA by sending local athletes to the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. In total, 23 participants athletes came from Ottawa, which includes Vanessa Gilles who plays on the National Women's Soccer team who won gold in Tokyo 2020.

### **2020 and 2021 Risks:**

The realities of a world pandemic have significantly impacted the City of Ottawa and its residents. The sports community is no different. Many local sport clubs have had to minimize operations due to restrictions and limited access to the field of play.

As many local clubs are volunteer led, their ability to pivot was remarkable. The sports organizations that have had the most challenges over the period are organizations that own their venues, private leases for the space, and paid employees, specifically coaches and administrators.

The risk for athletes includes staying fit and healthy and the ability to grow in their sport through the many lockdowns. As many would have saw on social media, home gyms and parks transformed training during the COVID pandemic for all who look to stay physically active – this was no different for our local athletes. As Ottawa's vaccination

rollout progressed, many sports returned to regular practice over the summer of 2021. The current limits that remain are related to ensuring safe distancing, use of space and access to the area. As an example, some sports, including swim teams, have not resumed regular activities due to pool capacity. Others have not regained common practice and game calendars due to gymnasiums, specifically in local schools, remaining off-limits.

### **2020 and 2021 Opportunities:**

Over the last 10 years the sports community's engagement has grown and thrived. The pandemic created a cry for local sports organizations to work together to strengthen the sector. The engagement and dedication of leaders from each sport allowed the development of many resources. The focus was on safe return to play. Focus was placed on support for administrators, coaches, parents, and athletes. Under the stewardship of the Ottawa Sport Council, the Ottawa Return to Play Roadmap was developed by 70 local sports organizations and the City of Ottawa to promote and enable the resumption of sport in our community. Based on guidelines from public health officials at the community, provincial and federal levels, the Roadmap provides a selection of practical tools and resources to ensure that sport rolls out consistently and carefully, based on the best available information.

One of the highlights of the summer of 2021 was the return to play for many sports, including for athletes who run, cycle, play pickleball, tennis, golf, and soccer. The recent hosting of the 2021 Canoe Kayak Canada Sprint National Championships at the Rideau Canoe Club is a successful example of a safe and competitive hosting environment for the City, Ottawa Tourism and local clubs.

Additionally, this fall's return to a varsity sports season is a glimpse into the new normal of living with COVID. Universities took on a leadership role to ensure all student-athletes and sports teams are fully vaccinated to train and compete. As College and University sport is generally integrated with local sports clubs, their kick starts to a season, specifically the soccer teams, rugby - to name a few, show hope for everyone.

The City will be making significant legislative decisions in the fall of 2021, including the Official Plan. Aligned with the Official Plan review, the Recreation, Cultural Facilities and Services (RCFS) team conducts a Parks and Recreation Masterplan Review. For many in the sports sector, this is an opportunity to expand the sports spaces in Ottawa or, in many instances, rebalance the investments to ensure a modern field of play is available in all communities in Ottawa.

As part of the City's Recreation Masterplan review, the sports community, individuals, athletes, and coaches from various sports have been engaged throughout the process to advocate for their needs and identify/recognize gaps in facilities in Ottawa. Each sport has its perspective, and as sports is constantly evolving to reflect Ottawa's demographics, we see new emerging marks locally, like cricket, pickleball and others. We are delighted to see the RA Centre offer facilities for this newer and popular sports. As a City, all facility needs must be captured, understood and planned for. Equity of access is essential. To allow for most sports to grow, we must prioritize investments in four fields of play that will enable most sports to thrive: fields, gymnasium, pools, and arenas.

### **Hosting update**

The Major Events Office at Ottawa Tourism is responsible for proactively targeting and attracting a diverse set of significant events, investing in new and existing events with high growth potential, and providing support services for hosting groups.

Canada's Capital Region has demonstrated the ability to stage major national and international sporting events. It has built a reputation for delivering a supreme experience for all rights holders, participants, sponsors, spectators, and volunteers. In recent years Ottawa has hosted several national and international sporting events, including:

- 2021 Trillium Championship Show
- 2021 Canoe Kayak Canada Sprint National Championships
- 2020 Pan-American Wrestling Championships and Olympic Qualifier
- 2020 U Sports Men's and Women's Final 8 Basketball Championships
- 2019 Volleyball Canada 14U National Championships
- 2019 FIVB Volleyball Nations League
- 2019 Ontario Basketball Championships U16 Girls and U14 Boys
- 2019 Super League Triathlon
- 2019 OFSAA Wrestling Championships
- 2019 Water Polo Canada 16U & 19U Eastern Nationals

- 2019 Canadian Championships in Artistic Gymnastics
- 2019 U Sports Women's Rugby Championship
- 2018 FIVB Volleyball Nations League
- 2018 National Taekwondo Championships
- FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 Americas Qualifier
- 2018 Canadian Track and Field Championships
- 2018 World Junior Girls Golf Championship
- 2018 Ontario Basketball Championships U16 Girls and U14 Boys
- 2018 U Sports Women's Soccer Championship
- NHL 100 Classic
- 2017 Tim Hortons Roar of the Rings
- 2017 Grey Cup
- 2017 CP Women's Open
- 2017 Canadian Track and Field Championships
- 2017 Global Relay Road Cycling Championships
- 2017 Davis Cup, Canada vs. Great Britain
- 2017 Red Bull Crashed Ice
- 2017 Canadian Tire National Skating Championships
- 2016 Tim Hortons Brier
- 2016 Canadian Triathlon Championships
- 2016 Global Relay Road Cycling Championships
- 2016 Volleyball Canada 14U Championships
- 2016 World Junior Girls Golf Championship
- 2016 Canadian Men's Amateur Golf Championships

- 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup Canada
- 2015 Canadian Sprint Canoe Kayak National Championship

Days before the beginning of the pandemic, Ottawa hosted the 2020 Pan-American Wrestling Olympic Qualification Tournament and Senior Pan-American Wrestling Championships and the 2020 U Sports Men's and Women's Final 8 Basketball Championships. Since then, Ottawa has hosted two major events: the 2021 Canadian Sprint Canoe Kayak Championships and the 2021 Trillium Championships – the largest equestrian event in Ontario. Before year-end, Ottawa expects to host the Canadian Cross Country Championships, U Sports Men's Soccer Championship and Canadian Curling Club Championships.

Although Ottawa has seen numerous cancelled or postponed events in the last 18 months, Ottawa Tourism and partners have secured the following events that will contribute to Ottawa's economic recovery, the list is continuing to grow:

- 2021 & 2022 Canadian Cross Country Championships
- 2021 Canadian Curling Club Championships
- 2021 U Sports Men's Soccer Championship
- 2022 Canadian Tire Skating Championships
- 2022 Volleyball Canada 14U National Championships
- 2022 Ontario Indigenous Summer Games
- 2022 Canadian Elite Basketball League Championships Weekend
- 2022 CP Women's Open
- 2022 Bingham Cup
- 2023 International Association of Gay Square Dancers Annual Conventions
- 2023 Masters Indigenous Games
- 2024 Canadian Wrestling Trials
- 2025 ScotDance Canada Championship Series
- 2026 World Wheelchair Basketball Championships

Attracting new sporting events to Ottawa is the top priority of the Major Events Office at Ottawa Tourism. Sporting events have already contributed to and will fuel Ottawa's recovery, offering significant economic and social benefits to the local community.

**Hosting limitation; facility gaps:**

The Canada Summer Games 2021 bid for Ottawa (2017) In 2017, our City came together to put together a comprehensive bid for the 2021 Canada Summer Games. Over 30 people from sport, business and different sectors of the economy collaborated to present a unified vision of our City as a sports host and a community ready to welcome athletes, coaches, volunteers, and fans. Ottawa was unsuccessful, but the bid created an awareness that several facilities have hosting gaps and critical investment opportunities to improve facilities and support performance in Ottawa. Ageing facilities, on University Campuses as well as City facilities, did pose the main challenge.

Key investments in significantly upgrading the Terry Fox Athletic Facility (land owned by the NCC) and space led by the Ottawa Lions remain unique. In 2017 and 2018, the Ottawa Lions hosted the Athletics Canada National Championships, which again showed the limitation of the current facility. The location is ideal, but the overall facility, field of play, hydro, scoreboard, and stands need an overview of planning/investment. Another example of the lessons learned from the lost bid is the need for a modern aquatic facility that can host swim meets, diving, artistic swimming, and water polo. The current City hosting facility, the Nepean Sportsplex, does not meet minimum requirements to host, even for younger athletes.

This City can aspire to host Canada Summer Games and other multi-sport games but it needs targeted investment to meet modern sports facilities to make it attractive for hosting.

Following the Canada Summer Games 2021 bid, I brought together key stakeholders in Ottawa to review our bid and see how we can work together to ensure a prosperous bid in the future. At the table, we have the City of Ottawa, the University of Ottawa, Carleton University, Algonquin College, the Ottawa Sport Council, Ottawa Tourism and several well-respected sports leaders and residents who have made their mark at the National Sport level.



In the City of Ottawa, our universities colleges have ageing facilities that need to be renewed in the coming years to accommodate successful bids, allow athletes to perform in modern facilities (accessible and safe), and meet the growth.

-The LRT and its expansion offer a renewed and unique opportunity for locals to connect to facilities that were more challenging to access. It also provides an edge, from competitors landing at the Ottawa Airport, taking the LRT to local hotels, connecting to vital commercial districts, and potentially accessing centrally new modern facilities, likely at the University of Ottawa or at Carleton University, or at both.

-Local schools have had a very complex response to supporting learning throughout the pandemic. The period has created understandable limitations for local sports clubs and school sports teams to practice and play. The restart to in-person school this fall is the top priority. The current risk factors, including schools remaining safe and open with young unvaccinated students aged 12 and under, must be the focus. The sports community relies on access to fields and gyms in schools, mainly high schools. The current situation has raised significant shortfalls, where all four boards have different allocation approaches for fields and gymnasiums. Now is the time to renew a coordinated approach to provide adequate and reliable access to school sports spaces and local community sports outside of school hours. This will require engagement and leadership from each of the school boards and support from the province of Ontario to pilot an approach for coordinated use of Ottawa schools.

Ottawa has ageing city facilities: most of Ottawa's recreation facilities date from the centennial era. They have been improved and have allowed the sports communities to thrive for well over 50 years. Still, these facilities no longer meet the modern needs for sports play, practice, and growth, for example, 50 metre pool, single pad arenas, grass fields, and growing demands for gymnasiums. In the last decade, the newer communities have had multi-sport facilities that have improved access for clubs within those growth areas. Still, those facilities aren't centrally accessible, and were planned and built for recreation uses. Although the most attractive option for hosting, Ottawa's centrally located facilities are the least modern and oldest.

Targeted investments and developing a recreation and sports facility plan will help shape the future of Ottawa as a sport-friendly City. We need to work together to ensure our current and future facilities meet the City's residents, local athletes, and clubs' needs and aspirations.

**Local considerations/discussion:**

- The University of Ottawa and Carleton University facilities are significantly ageing while both Universities continue to grow. The sports teams at both Universities recognize the importance of investing in sport and recreation facilities to modernize the offering for students and student-athletes. As they plan to reinvest into extensive multi-sport facilities, many opportunities exist to support performance for student-athletes and the broader sport community in Ottawa.

- Hockey is less and less popular. Hockey Canada's registration declined from 721 504 in 2014/2015 to 607 951 r in 2019/2020. Rinks in Ottawa are ageing, specifically the single pad arenas. Adults are looking for more mainstream hours, and the rise of girl's hockey is the main reason that overall youth participation in hockey isn't more alarming.

- Tennis: the closure of the Ottawa Athletic Club (OAC) (privately owned) has left a gap in indoor tennis courts in Ottawa. The loss of 14 courts is of concern for Ottawa's ability to host and the sport to continue to develop. Organizations like Noble Tennis School and Rideau Sports Centre are looking to advance projects to support Ottawa's tennis community

Figure Skating: the closure of the Minto skating rink will directly impact the Minto Skating Club, which has been called the private facilities home for over 30 years. The club is strong and is looking for a new permanent home in the core of the City.

- Soccer Clubs: soccer clubs are expanding. The level of play continues to improve. The Soccer community has improved its fields with provincial and federal funding programs and strong financial position for many of Ottawa's clubs. Investments in new areas that allow for an extensive range of sport uses on the same fields remain important as our City grows and field use continues to expand.

- Pickleball: a popular sport in Western USA, is now mainstream in Ottawa. The local clubs are organized, and registration continues to grow. There are more and more outdoor courts, and recently, the new courts at the RA centre demonstrate the growth and popularity of pickleball in Ottawa. Once a popular sport among seniors, now has grown in all age groups.

- Basketball: the basketball community in Ottawa is represented by five clubs. In discussion with their leadership, they recognize the importance of a renewed governance to advocate for the sport and growth properly. The current structures for allocation have demonstrated inequities and barriers to accessing this sport. Having one

organization for basketball in Ottawa would enable the organization to advance investment at the City and all four school boards.

### **Conclusion:**

The sports community in Ottawa is diverse and continues to diversify. Most clubs are led by volunteers and offer programs for all age groups. With its four seasons and large geographic landscape, the City of Ottawa provides a unique play area for sports. However, Ottawa's sports community is looking for investments in sports facilities to modernize, meet growth and improve access. The sports community has demonstrated resiliency throughout the pandemic, and it is ready to support athletes and teams as we navigate through the end of the pandemic and a new normal is established.

Sport is a community asset in Ottawa, and there are stories of character, strength and people who make a difference through the power of sport. It can elevate our growth, creating a stronger mindset and encourages healthy, vibrant and engaged residents.

The Ottawa Sports Council advocates for the sector and amplifies sports identity as a centralized voice to collaborate and partner to strengthen our communities with better health and productivity, greater inclusion and participation, increase sport facilities and infrastructure and position Ottawa to compete for regional, national and international sporting events while locals benefit from modern training and playing facilities.

Targeted investments and developing a recreation and sports facility plan can help shape the future of Ottawa as a sport-friendly City. We need to work together to ensure facilities in Ottawa meet residents, local athletes, and clubs' needs and aspirations.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications connected to this report for information purposes.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal impediments to receiving the information in this report.

### **COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR(S)**

This is a City-wide information report

### **ADVISORY COMMITTEE(S) COMMENTS**

No Advisory Committee feedback was sought on this information report.

### **CONSULTATION**

No public consultation was undertaken on this information report

This information report was submitted nine calendar days in advance of the meeting pursuant to Subsection 81(14) of the Procedure By-law. As such, a formal comment was not available prior to agenda publication.

### **ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

This report is for information. No specific Accessibility Impacts have been identified.

### **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

This is an information report. No specific implications have been identified.

### **RURAL IMPLICATIONS**

This is an information report. No specific implications have been identified.

### **TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

This is an information report. No specific implications have been identified.

### **DISPOSITION**

If the report recommendation is approved by the Finance and Economic Development Committee, this report will be forwarded to Council for information.