





MEDIA RELEASE

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RE: Amherst Ice Allocation Project

Amherst, Nova Scotia – A pilot project that cut ice-time fees at the Amherst Stadium for youth and youth organizations has had a positive impact on the health and well-being of the community's young people, says a report that was prepared for the town by a Dalhousie University research team and released on Monday.

"This project was an overall success and is an example to other municipalities about how an investment in physical activity and youth is also an investment in both the health and economy of the community," the report, conducted by Applied Research Collaborations for Health, says.

Dr. Ryan Sommers, medical officer for Public Health Service's northern zone, agreed. Noting that Nova Scotia has some of the poorest health statistics in the country, he said the project helped "reduce the barriers to physical activity facing youth."

The project, he added, is an example of a public health that makes "healthy choices possible and easier for community members."

Launched in August 2016, the Amherst Ice Allocation Pilot Project saw Amherst town council unanimously approve the elimination of ice fees for youth organizations, like the Cumberland County Minor Hockey Association and Amherst skating club, and other activities aimed at youth, like public skating. The town approved the spending of \$80,000 to cover any loss in revenue.

Believed to be the first initiative of its kind in Nova Scotia, the council hoped the project would halt a steady decline in stadium usage while helping improve the health and well-being of the community's young people through increased physical activities.

The goals have been met, the report says.

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As examples, the report points to the impact the project had on the skating Club and minor hockey association. The skating club saved \$19,000 in ice fees, while minor hockey saved \$45,000, enabling both organizations to cut registration fees and experience an increase in registration. The skating club's numbers increased to 144 participants in the 2016-2017 season, up from 99 the previous year. The hockey association's numbers saw 277 youth participate during the same time period, an increase of 17 participants.

Minor hockey also saved an additional \$2,400 in tournament fees, which enabled it to host an additional tournament last season. It is estimated the money generated by hockey tournaments in Amherst for lodging and meals was about \$98,580, the report said.

Recreation staff reported that ice-time use increased by 225 hours compared to the previous year, with staff seeing a 50 to 60 per cent increase in public skating during the 2016-2017 season, the report said.

Staff weren't the only ones to see increased usage of the stadium. Seventy-two per cent of respondents to an online survey conducted by the research team indicated they used the stadium more during the 2016-17 season than they had during the previous year, while 76 per cent perceived that physical activity among youth had increased during the last season, the report said.

People who attended focus groups conducted by the survey team also indicated there seemed to be increased activity at the stadium compared to past years, and those attending the focus groups also said the reduction of registration fees helped youth to be active and "increased equitable access" to physical activities in the community, the report added.

The majority of those participating in the online survey and focus groups indicated they felt the money council spent during the project was a worthwhile investment, and 92 per cent of the respondents agreed the town should continue to provide financial support in order to maintain and increase physical activity among youth, the report said.

Mayor David Kogon was pleased with the positive evaluation of the pilot project.

"From both an economic activity and a health promotion point of view we've seen the benefits first hand," Kogon said. "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."

During the summer, town council agreed to continue the program during the 2017-2018 season.

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