

Edmonton Combative Sports Commission

Annual Report – 2021 Accomplishments

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Section 1: Message from the Chair

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to present challenges in 2021 for both the Edmonton Combative Sports Commission (Commission) and especially the professional combative sports community. Further, many people in the combative sports community faced professional, business and/or personal disruptions and challenges as a result of the pandemic. This included gym closures, increased costs to host an event, and less opportunities for athletes to train for and participate in professional combative sports events at either a local, national or international level. Combative sports events were not permitted or possible within Edmonton in 2021 due to either (a) public health restrictions or (b) local promoters not submitting event permit applications.

Despite the pandemic, 2021 was a productive year for the Commission. The year saw the Commission complete its review of existing fighter safety policies and take steps to plan stakeholder engagement sessions on proposed policy changes. We anticipate that stakeholder engagement with key members of the Edmonton combative sports community will be completed by the end of 2022. Furthermore, the Commission heard an appeal of the Executive Director's decision to deny a promoter license application. Following this appeal, all Commission members received administrative decision making training from a reputable service provider and issued a report outlining the Commission's readiness and ability to hear future appeals. Finally, Commission members continue to formally and informally educate themselves on emerging issues in professional combative sports.

The Commission welcomed two new members in 2021 and will welcome one new member in May 2022. At present, the Commission has a full complement of members. More importantly, the knowledge and skills represented on the Commission positions it well to achieve its mandate.

The Commission is currently in a state of transition. The Commission's longstanding Chief Medical Officer (CMO) resigned after serving in this capacity for three decades and has been replaced. Furthermore, the current Executive Director will be re-assigned by the City of Edmonton and replaced over the coming months. The Commission welcomes the opportunity to forge strong working relationships with the new CMO and Executive Director.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of all Commission members who volunteer their time and expertise to support the Commission's mandate of regulating professional combative sports. I would also like to thank the City of Edmonton staff who support the Commission and the wider combative sports community.

Daniela O'Callaghan
Edmonton Combative Sports Commission, Chair

Section 2: Mandate and Role of the Commission

The Edmonton Combative Sports Commission (the “ECSC” or the “Commission”) is a council committee created by City of Edmonton Bylaw 15638 (the Edmonton Combative Sports Commission Bylaw). The Commission is one of three parties working together to regulate combative sports in Edmonton. The other two are City Council and City administration (through the Designated Officer position of Executive Director).

Pursuant to section 83(1) of the Criminal Code of Canada, engaging in, promoting or even attending a ‘prize-fight’ is a criminal offence. However, section 83(2) exempts “a boxing contest or mixed martial arts contest held in a province with the permission or under the authority of an athletic board, commission or similar body established by or under the authority of the province’s legislature.” Pursuant to section 5 of Bylaw 15638, the mandate of the Commission is twofold: to control and regulate Combative Sports and Events in the City by approving regulations governing matters including licensing, conduct, credentials, events, discipline, and by hearing appeals from the Executive Director’s licensing and permitting decisions.

The role of the Commission in controlling and regulating Combative Sports in Edmonton is limited to matters of governance and the Commission’s mandate does not include operational decisions or operational responsibilities. The Designated Officer position of Executive Director is responsible for all operational matters (section 28 of Bylaw 15638 sets out the extensive powers, duties and functions of the Executive Director).

Section 3: Commission Members

The Commission includes up to seven volunteer citizen members. A member may serve a maximum of three consecutive two-year terms. At present, there are no vacant positions. One member has resigned and will be replaced by a new member this year.

Sandy Bugeja	Past Chair	Appointed 05 2017
Daniela O'Callaghan	Chair	Appointed 05 2018
Trevor Kelly	Vice-Chair	Appointed 05 2019
Tye Babb	Member	Appointed 05 2019
Manav Deol	Member	Appointed 05 2020
Kevin Malahy	Member	Appointed 05 2021
Graham Smith	Member	Appointed 05 2021

Section 4: 2021 Key Priorities and Activities

Policy Review and Stakeholder Engagement

In 2021, the Commission approved a number of policies for stakeholder engagement, including Regulation 1 (Licensing – Contestants and Seconds), Regulation 3 (Licensing- Event Officials) and Regulation 8 (Medical). This initiative will focus on key fighter safety policies. The intent is to seek feedback from the combative sports community on proposed amendments, fighter safety and to provide an opportunity for dialogue on emerging issues in combative sports. Engagement will involve conversations with licensed officials (ringside physicians, room inspectors, and referees), other combative sports commissions in Alberta and comparable jurisdictions, fighters, promoters and trainers. In late 2021, the Commission hired an engagement consultant to support this work.

Appeals

The Commission finalized and approved its first Appeals Regulation. Shortly thereafter, the Commission received an appeal regarding the Executive Director's denial of a promoter license application. The Commission secured independent legal counsel, approved an appeal procedure and held a de-novo appeal hearing. The appeal was heard on May 10, 2021 and the appeal panel consisted of three Commission members with a legal background. The appeal panel issued a written decision dated May 22, 2021, which overturned the Executive Director's licensing decision.

Shortly after the appeal was decided, the Commission formed an Appeals Working Group to present a recommendation and rationale on whether or not the Commission should maintain its jurisdiction to hear appeals or to request that the City of Edmonton transition this decision-making process to the Community Standards and Licensing Appeals Committee. The Commission accepted the Appeal Working Group's recommendation for the Commission to retain its appeals mandate.

Appeals Training

In August 2021, the Commission hired the Foundation of Administrative Justice to provide a one-day course on effective and fair administrative decision-making to all members. The training was well attended and very well received.

Annual Planning (2022)

The Commission continues to take a more deliberate focus on its annual planning and has decided to hold a one-day retreat in May/June 2022, after our new member is on-boarded. The focus of the retreat will be to complete an annual work plan and to explore longer term priorities.

In-Progress (2022)

The Commission has passed a motion that it will not accept applications for bare-knuckle boxing events until it has fully researched these events and consulted with key stakeholders (including City of Edmonton law branch, risk management, etc.). The Commission is also developing an Edmonton Combative Sports Fighter Award policy to annually recognize the achievements or contributions of officials and members of the combative sports community.