

EDMONTON SOCCER ASSOCIATION

Facility Access, Maintenance and Performance

Recommendation

That the November 1, 2023, Community Services report CS01660, be received for information.

Requested Action	Information only		
Connect Edmonton's Guiding Principle	Connect Edmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	BELONG		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	N/A	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	N/A
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy C187A - Enhancing Community Facility Services Through Partnerships 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January 18, 2023, Community Services report CS01468, Edmonton Soccer Association - Community Benefits and Access August 24, 2022, Financial and Corporate Services report FCS01195, Edmonton Soccer Association - Edmonton Soccer Centre South Lease Expansion 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the January 18, 2023, Executive Committee meeting, the following motion passed:

That Administration work with the Edmonton Soccer Association to provide a report to Committee outlining performance measures and utilization data, options to increase community accessibility and participation in unbooked times, and details on the allocation of costs for

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maintenance including turf maintenance; and reach out to stakeholders to understand their experience in accessing their facilities and their governance structure.

Executive Summary

- Edmonton Soccer Association (ESA) conducted an engagement with its long-term rental groups and all groups reported back that they are satisfied with the status quo and have no desire to be part of the governing structure of ESA.
- Upon Administrative review, ESA continues to meet the performance criteria within their current lease agreements.
- ESA's allocation process is a similar process to which the City uses for arenas, sport fields and gymnasiums. This process renders satisfactory facility usage of prime hours, while maintaining community access to prime hours outside of historical users.
- ESA had a utilization rate of 75 per cent for all prime hours available in the 2022-2023 season, allowing many casual users the opportunity to book prime hours.
- ESA has begun to research other sports and organizations that may be able to program the indoor turf or concrete surfaces in the indoor soccer centres. This includes pickleball, basketball and school programs.
- ESA is responsible for all maintenance and upkeep of the three indoor soccer facilities, with the exception of structural components as outlined in the lease agreements, and replaces the turf on the fields when funds are available, typically with the help of provincial grants.

REPORT

The Edmonton Soccer Association (ESA) is a non-profit association formed in 1985 as a partnership between the Edmonton Minor Soccer Association (EMSA) and the Edmonton and District Soccer Association (EDSA). ESA's mandate is to develop, operate and maintain indoor and outdoor soccer facilities, while the EMSA's objectives are to promote, develop and govern minor soccer in the City of Edmonton and the EDSA's mandate is to provide soccer programs in the Edmonton district for adults at all levels.

With the development of the first indoor soccer centre (West) in 1995, City Council passed a motion recognizing the ESA as its partner in developing, operating and maintaining future indoor soccer facilities. The second indoor facility (East), opened in 1999 and the third facility (South), opened in 2004. City Council's Executive Committee approved the amendment of the lease agreement for the South Soccer Centre to include the expansion completed in 2022 (August 24, 2022, Executive Committee, Financial and Corporate Services report FCS01195, Edmonton Soccer Association - Edmonton Soccer Centre South Lease Expansion.)

ESA contributed over \$20 million to the capital costs of developing the three City-owned indoor soccer centres (West, East and South Centres) as well as the Bill Gilhespy Soccer Complex at Henry Singer Sports Park. Together, these facilities contain 14 indoor sport surfaces (12 turf fields and two concrete surfaces), 12 outdoor grass fields and two outdoor turf fields. ESA operates and

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maintains each of these facilities in accordance with long-term lease and operating agreements. The City does not incur any operating costs for these recreation amenities.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected ESA in many ways, including financially. The South Soccer Centre expansion construction and the need to pay operating expenses during the pandemic when the facilities were not being used resulted in the ESA depleting their capital reserve fund without prior consent from the City of Edmonton. With registration numbers across all leagues dropping, field usage declined dramatically and is now slowly returning back to where it was pre-pandemic. Post-pandemic, there have been other financial pressures including increased wages, custodial costs and utility rates. ESA is working closely with Administration on recovery and building these reserves back up in a way that does not put financial strain on the organization.

Performance Measures and Utilization

Performance Measures

Administration currently works with 70 sport partner groups, which encompasses 92 agreements within the Sport Partnerships section of Community Recreation and Culture. These partnerships are currently evaluated in their ability to provide access to sport amenities to the community above and beyond typical City service levels. These partnerships are an integral part of the sport and recreation ecosystem within Edmonton. Administration evaluates the compliance of their agreements, while the partner groups focus on providing services and programming to the sporting community and adjusting to trends in each respective sport.

The current long-term lease agreements require that ESA report its financial position annually. Performance is assessed by ESA's ability to operate within the terms of the lease. They operate publicly accessible spaces at reasonable rates and times, by maintaining the facilities in a manner that prevents long-term closures or general disrepair and by following the permitted use clauses of their lease agreements.

The ESA has over 30 years of operating indoor soccer facilities. In this time, ESA has proven their ability to provide a safe and accessible space for indoor soccer while performing annual maintenance and improvements without impacting programming. They continue to maintain sufficient access to space rentals by all groups at reasonable rates that reflect the cost to operate. This is evident in their ability to operate these spaces since their inception in 1995. In this time, Administration has heard minimal concerns from members or the public on the rates ESA charges for their spaces or the hours available with the exception being concerns about the facility spectator fee that is charged.

Utilization

In the 2022-2023 season, ESA had a 75 per cent utilization rate of all prime time and an increase in total available prime hours due to the south expansion. This was an eight per cent increase from the previous two seasons. 2022-2023 had an overall utilization rate of 64 per cent for the winter season. These utilization rates show equitable opportunities for community usage of prime hours, as well as opportunity for growth from all leagues or groups wishing to operate their programs in the indoor soccer centres. The casual prime hours booked in the Winter Usage

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Summary table in Attachment 1 shows that not all prime hours are allocated to historical users and that there is available time for casual users to book time. Between the 2021-2022 and the 2022-2023 season there was an increase of over 350 prime hours by casual users.

Weekday daytime hours historically have been the hardest to fill, especially in the summer season when the public engages in more outdoor-based activities. ESA is looking into alternative options on how to fill these times as described in the following section.

Community Access and Filling Unbooked Time Slots

Community Access

Annually, there are over 750,000 individual visits to the indoor soccer centres from players, coaches, referees, and includes 138,000 spectators.

Bookable indoor sport surfaces go through an allocation process determined by the ESA. This process is very similar to the City's allocation process. When comparing rental rates with other facilities within the province, ESA's rates are similar to those in other municipalities. This process starts with the groups who historically book the most amount of time (EMSA and EDSA). They submit block booking requests for their programs. All hours booked by these groups are considered prime hours, even if they extend past the 9:45 p.m. timeframe. Additional prime hours can be booked by other users if these leagues do not fill all the prime hours available.

Following these historical bookings, allocation then goes to EMSA Zones to book on behalf of their communities for practice times and then allocation is given to ESA's long term rental partners for their programs (ball hockey, Volt hockey, lacrosse, and inline hockey). Once the members and long term renters have booked their times, space is then made available for first come, first served bookings. These bookings are defined as casual bookings.

Anyone is able to book the remaining available timeslots. The use of the space does not need to be for soccer; any activity that can safely be played in the boarded areas on the existing surface can be accommodated. Bookings can currently be made by email or over the phone. ESA anticipates transitioning to an online system in the fall of 2024. Midweek daytime (any time before 3:00 p.m.) is the most widely available time for bookings. This is the time slot that ESA is working on several strategies to fill with alternative uses of the space.

Operationally, ESA is a non-profit organization that needs to balance the changing needs of the facility and facility users. ESA ensures that the operational hours fit the current demand of rentals. Staffing allocation is determined by the facility usage. Typically, rentals can be booked a few days in advance to allow ESA administration to schedule personnel appropriately. In the winter season, bookings can be made with just a day's notice; however, in the summer season two days' notice is required. The facility is not open when there are no bookings.

To help offset operating costs of the facilities, ESA has an admission fee for spectators and other facility visitors. The rates for the 2023-2024 season are \$7.00 per day or \$50.00 for a season pass. ESA issues season passes for players and coaches as part of their team's registration cost through their respective leagues. Passes for the 2023-2024 season will include access to the Victoria Centre and the Scottish Dome. A promotional 'buy one get one 50 per cent off' is now available to attract additional pass holders for the 2023-2024 season.

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Filling Unbooked Timeslots

ESA is focusing on filling non-prime and daytime hours with rentals from a wide variety of sporting programs, both at the organized and recreation levels. EMSA has committed that starting in 2023-24 all their under-11 age groups (five to 11 years) league play will be moving to ESA's indoor soccer centres from the Scottish and Victoria soccer venues. This alone will commit approximately 900 additional hours of prime time use at the facilities over the course of the winter indoor soccer season.

ESA has committed to increasing its efforts in connecting with the Edmonton school boards for use of their facilities during the unused daytime hours. As well, ESA is currently exploring options to animate basketball in their facilities during the winter daytime hours, and potentially the spring/summer timeslots.

ESA is also currently researching the use of their facilities for pickleball. Pickleball is one of the fastest growing sports in Canada, and space allocation for this sport is also in need. One field can accommodate six pickleball courts. Volt hockey, inline hockey, and lacrosse programs are all expected to grow in the coming years and futsal is another sport with opportunities to create a league to be played in the indoor boarded facilities. ESA continues to actively work with its partners to explore sport event hosting opportunities in recognition of how sport tourism contributes to Edmonton's economy while also creating opportunities for sport growth. Some examples of events hosted or scheduled to be hosted include:

- Alberta Soccer hosts boarded provincial championships in ESA centres annually;
- EMSA/EMSA Zones run tournaments such as the Slush Cup, FC memorial, Polar Cup;
- Lacrosse offers tournaments every summer; and
- Ball hockey expects to host provincial youth and adult championships and National B championships at the South Centre next July building on their success in hosting the Western Challenge Cup in July.

Maintenance Costs

City Maintenance

All maintenance costs for the three indoor soccer centres are the responsibility of ESA with the exception of structural components as defined in the lease agreement, which are the responsibility of the City. The City's maintenance costs over the last three years has been quite minimal. A total of \$7,839 in facility maintenance costs by the Facility Maintenance Services department between January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2022. This is an average cost of \$2,613 a year, or \$871 annually for each facility. These are associated with either on-demand, or preventative maintenance scheduled work for structural items as defined in the lease.

	East Soccer Centre	South Soccer Centre	West Soccer Centre	Total
2020-2022	\$2,107	\$2,405	\$3,327	\$7,839

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ESA Maintenance

ESA has performed adequate maintenance of the facilities, including the playing surfaces, mechanical systems, electrical systems, boilers, and other amenities. This is best shown by their ability to remain open to the public without closures of facilities to perform maintenance or repairs that would prevent usage of the facilities. This long standing track record shows their dedication to maintaining the facilities at a high level.

Turf Maintenance and Replacement

The turf surfaces and their underlay are currently on a replacement schedule of one field surface every year, pending funding availability. The cost to replace one turf surface is approximately \$200,000. ESA has been accessing the provincial Community Facility Enhancement Program (CFEP) grant to subsidize 50 per cent of the replacement costs. Historically, they have been successful in receiving grant funding. There is some concern from ESA that with reductions in grant program budgets, they may not continue to receive this funding and not be able to hold to this current schedule.

Stakeholders Experiences and Governance Feedback

ESA completed a stakeholder check-in with its members and long-term rental partners in July 2023. Administration worked closely with ESA in developing the topics of discussion for the engagement that was administered via email. ESA sought feedback on the stakeholder experience with allocation, facility usage, governance, summary of participation numbers and future usage of their spaces. The results of this engagement were widely positive and receptive that the current allocation process and governance of the ESA was acceptable. None of the groups expressed a desire, or need, to be part of the board of directors, or governance model of ESA. Attachment 2 includes letters of support from key stakeholders including EMSA, EDSA, Ball Hockey Edmonton, Edmonton Sport and Social Club, Greater Edmonton Lacrosse Council and Edmonton Indoor Lawn Bowls Club.

Budget/Financial Implications

The reduction in revenue at the soccer centers during the pandemic has had a substantially negative impact on ESA's financial position. Currently, Administration is working with ESA on a recovery plan to return the organization to their prepandemic financial position. ESA has submitted a business plan that includes revenue and cost control strategies to generate positive net income and build up the Capital Reserve over the next five years.

Community Insight

ESA has heard from casual users of the facility that finding available space to book earlier in the year is needed as other leagues and programs need to secure time to ensure they can start their own registration process. ESA recognizes that this is an area that requires improvement. ESA is addressing this by adding more staff to the allocation process to speed the process up, thus allowing casual bookers to access bookable times sooner. Historically, ESA would only open the doors if they had at least three hours of bookable time. This created some challenges with users being able to secure time outside of prime hours. ESA responded to these concerns by opening

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the facilities to bookings if they have at least two hours of bookings. This change has seen positive results in bringing more users to the facility.

GBA+

The City leases the three indoor Edmonton Soccer Centres to ESA. Facility users are Edmontonians of diverse age, race, religion, gender, ability and socio-economic status. EMSA registers the largest number of soccer participants through its zones and the city's community leagues. Through relationships with groups like Kidsport and Jumpstart and through other support methods (e.g. payment plans), EMSA mitigates financial barriers to participation.

ESA also supports Free Play for Kids through a sub-lease of space and a special booking agreement for after school programs and a summer camp. Free Play for Kids provides kids from diverse economic circumstances with no cost play opportunities.

The City's Accessibility Advisory Committee reviewed the design for the south soccer centre expansion. The space provides for persons with disabilities to participate in sports and includes access to gender neutral washrooms, ramps for field access for persons using mobility aids, an elevator to the spectator area with safe and designated accessible seating with sight lines for viewing the fields.

Attachments

1. Hours of Operation & Historical Usage Statistics
2. Letters of Support