

**COWICHAN LAKE SPORTS ARENA
CURLING FACILITY REVIEW**

FINAL REPORT – FEBRUARY 5, 2005

**PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL RECREATION
CONSULTANTS**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Meetings with the Client	1
1.2 Background Information	2
1.3 Information from other Communities	4
1.4 Recreation Trends	6
2. DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS	7
2.1 Option A – Status Quo	7
2.2 Option B – Weekly Conversion	8
2.3 Option C – Dedicated Skating Ice	9
2.4 Option D – Conversion to Wellness / Fitness / Activity Centre	9
2.5 Option E – Conversion to Town Hall Office Space	10
3. RECOMMENDED OPTIONS	10
4. CONCLUSION / IMPLEMENTATION	12

1. INTRODUCTION

In December 2004, the Cowichan Lake Recreation Commission retained the services of Professional Environmental Recreation Consultants Ltd. (PERC) to conduct a review of the operation and programming of the Cowichan Lake Curling Facility.

PERC was represented on the project by Bill Webster, a Partner in the firm, and Monty Holding, an Associate Consultant, and President of Monty Holding and Associates Consulting.

The proposed methodology, discussed in detail later in the report, included the following tasks:

- Meetings with the client
- A review of background information
- Discussions with other communities and organizations
- A review of current trends related to curling
- Development of several options for the client's consideration
- Preparation and review of a draft report
- Revisions to the draft
- Preparation and presentation of the final report

1.1 MEETINGS WITH THE CLIENT

Most of the meetings involving the consultants and the client were conducted by e-mail or conference call.

The first of these discussions was intended to clarify the proposed methodology, to review a number of potential options that had been raised in the community, and to identify individuals and organizations with which the consultants should meet.

On December 7, 2004, Monty Holding visited John Elzinga at the Cowichan Lake Sports Arena, to tour the curling and arena facilities, to review program brochures and related material and to discuss current programs being offered at the Sports Arena, as well as the actual space being used and the number of participants attending. Various strategies were discussed that had been used in the past to increase attendance in curling as well as in other program areas.

They reviewed material previously compiled relating to possible renovations to the curling rink including the removal of the posts between sheets two and three. They also talked about several ideas to improve the arena/curling rink facility if a renovation approach was to be taken. These ideas included increasing the size of the arena dressing rooms and finishing the curling rink floor with a concrete or similar surface to allow dry floor activity.

Budget documents were reviewed for the past two years, taking into consideration the implementation of the 2004 Lake Area Recreation Consolidation plan. In addition,

Cowichan Lake Curling Facility – Page Two

the cost sharing formula that is now in place involving Lake Cowichan and Electoral areas F and I was discussed, as well as other curling opportunities that exist within a reasonable driving distance from Lake Cowichan.

1.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **Population**

Lake Cowichan is located approximately 25 minutes west of the City of Duncan and as indicated in FIGURE ONE, had a population of 2,827 people, according to information reported by the 2001 census.

Electoral areas F and I have 2,912 people as reported by the 2001 census. The electoral areas include the communities of Youbou, Honeymoon Bay and Mesachie Lake.

In 2001, the total population in the area served by the Cowichan Lake Recreation Commission represented 5,739 residents.

FIGURE ONE
POPULATION – LAKE COWICHAN / AREA “F” / AREA “I”

Community / Area	1986	1991	1996	2001
Lake Cowichan	2170	2240	2858	2827
Area F	1620	1645	1762	1763
Area I	1240	1195	1426	1149
Total Population	5030	5080	6046	5739

The overall population of the area declined by 307 residents between 1996 and 2001.

It should be noted that historically, the main driver behind population growth and decline has been the forest industry. More recently there has been an increasing number of retirees moving to the area, due to the relatively affordable cost of housing. The declining birth rate, however, suggests that overall growth in the area will be modest, at best, over the next decade.

Lake Cowichan Curling Facility – Page Three

- **The Facility**

In 2004, the Lake Area Recreation Consolidation Plan was implemented. Community halls throughout the Lake Area are now administered, operated and maintained by the Cowichan Lake Recreation Department. All residents in the Lake Area contribute equally to the community halls and the Cowichan Lake Sports Arena.

The Cowichan Lake Sports Arena consists of a regulation ice arena and a four sheet curling rink within one building.

The arena has a concrete floor that can be used for dry floor activities during the non-ice season. The curling rink has a sand floor making it unavailable for dry floor activities. Also, the curling rink lacks under-floor heating which would be required if a concrete floor were to be considered along with the continuation of ice activities.

The curling facility has a lounge area attached which includes a concession and kitchen. This area is currently used for some programs such as pilates, quilting and art classes.

- **Curling Club**

At the present time, there is a mixed draw held on Tuesday evenings and a men's draw Wednesday evenings. A women's league runs for six weeks beginning in mid January. A junior program including about twelve youngsters is held on Thursday afternoons. This program is offered in three-five week sessions between October and March.

Curling Club members use the lounge during their league nights as well as during bonspiel events. The lounge facilities are also available for other activities held in the curling rink.

There are three bonspiels held each year. The summer mixed event in mid-August enjoys good attendance, and for the most part, includes out-of-town curlers who take advantage of the camping and outdoor opportunities in the area. The Men's Open is hosted in late January each year, also with good attendance from other clubs in the area. The third bonspiel is the winter mixed event that has struggled with attendance in recent years.

These activities amount to approximately 177 hours of curling ice use per year.

Staff has attempted some non-traditional activities without success and is reverting back to a traditional event this winter which hopefully will generate more interest.

Lake Cowichan Curling Facility – Page Four

The Cowichan Lake Curling Club had 56 members registered with the Pacific Coast Curling Association, the B.C. Ladies Curling Association and Curl B.C. for the 2001/2002 season. That number remained at 56 members registered for the 2003/2004 season.

1.3 INFORMATION FROM OTHER COMMUNITIES

The consultants reviewed data from a number of other communities in order to gather information that could be compared with the Lake Cowichan situation.

This information focuses on curling participation numbers and their relationship to the number of hours of ice used for curling.

The curling facility ice use numbers were provided by the operators of the curling facilities. The participation numbers used in the report were provided by the Pacific Coast Curling Association, the B.C. Ladies Curling Association and Curl B.C.

There is likely some use of these facilities by people who participate in mini-bonspiels occasionally but are not registered members of any Curling Association. We have no means of accurately identifying these numbers.

- **Duncan Curling Club**

The Duncan Curling Club is a stand-alone facility located in the City of Duncan, and has five sheets of ice. The facility is owned and operated by the Duncan Curling Club.

The Club has sixteen draws per week, with ten taking place in the evenings, and the other six scheduled during weekday mornings and afternoons. The Club also hosts three bonspiels each year for three days over a weekend. The facility is also used for about fourteen one-day mini bonspiels each year. This amounts to approximately 964 hours of curling ice use per year.

The Duncan Curling Club had 316 members registered with the Pacific Coast Curling Association, the B.C. Ladies Curling Association and Curl B.C. for the 2001/2002 season. That number dropped to 312 members registered for the 2003/2004 season, a decrease of 1%.

- **Esquimalt Recreation Centre**

The Esquimalt Recreation Centre curling rink is part of a complex that includes a regulation ice rink. The curling rink has six sheets of curling ice.

The rink has regular draws seven days a week throughout the curling season, and hosts a total of twenty-two draws per week with play taking place mornings, afternoons and evenings. The curling rink also hosts four three day bonspiels, and five two day bonspiels per year. In addition to these events, approximately

Lake Cowichan Curling Facility – Page Five

six one night mini-bonspiels are conducted each year. This amounts to 1,218 hours of curling ice use per year.

The Esquimalt Curling Club had 455 members registered with the Pacific Coast Curling Association, the B.C. Ladies Curling Association and Curl B.C. for the 2001/2002 season. That number has increased to 566 members registered for the 2003/2004 season, an increase of 24%. (A part of the growth experienced in Esquimalt is undoubtedly as a result of the closure of the curling facility at the Oak Bay Recreation Centre.)

- **Juan de Fuca Recreation Centre**

The Juan de Fuca Recreation Centre curling rink is included in a large recreation complex and consists of eight sheets of curling ice.

The facility has ten draws per week between Monday and Friday, six of which are in the evenings. The remaining four draws are during the morning or afternoon. The centre typically hosts about four regular three day bonspiels and six one day mini-spiels each year. This amounts to approximately 568 hours of curling ice use per year.

The Juan de Fuca Curling Club had 407 members registered with the Pacific Coast Curling Association, the B.C. Ladies Curling Association and Curl B.C. for the 2001/2002 season. That number remained at 407 members registered for the 2003/2004 season.

- **Mission Recreation Centre**

The Mission Recreation Centre curling rink is part of a large Parks and Recreation Department facility, and has four sheets of curling ice.

After about five years of part-time use, with skating ice being available three days a week, as of September 2004, the rink is once again operating as a full time curling facility.

The rink has eight draws per week on a regular basis through the curling season. These are mainly held in the evenings, with three being held either in the morning or afternoon. The Mission Curling Club hosts about two bonspiels per year each using three days over a weekend. This amounts to approximately 428 hours of curling ice use per year. This figure is about 100 hours more than it was when the club used the facility three days a week while skating activities used the other three days.

The City's "ice conversion system" is discussed in the recommendation section of this report.

The Mission Curling Club had 64 members registered with the Pacific Coast Curling Association, the B.C. Ladies Curling Association and Curl B.C. for the 2001/2002 season. That number has increased to 104 members registered for the 2003/2004 season, an increase of 63%. It should be noted however that there were no ladies registered with any association prior to the 2003/2004 season. Of the 104 members registered for the 2003/2004 season 46 were ladies.

- **Victoria Curling Club**

The Victoria Curling Club building is owned and operated by the Victoria Curling Club. The land is owned by the City of Victoria and leased for a minimal annual fee. The facility is a stand-alone building in downtown Victoria and includes eight sheets of curling ice.

The Club has twenty-three draws per week. On Monday through Friday evenings there are two draws per night, while the remaining draws take place during the mornings and afternoons seven days per week. The Club hosts six three day bonspiels per year and six one day mini-bonspiels per year. This amounts to 1,420 hours of ice use per year. In addition to these hours, the Club also rents ice time to two National Curling Teams.

The Club had 928 members registered with the Pacific Coast Curling Association, the B.C. Ladies Curling Association and Curl B.C. for the 2001/2002 season. That number has increased to 1048 registered members for the 2003/2004 season, an increase of 13%. (Like Esquimalt, some of the increased membership at the Victoria Club can likely be attributed to the closure of the curling facility at Oak Bay.)

- **Other Communities**

The consultants also contacted Parks and Recreation Departments in Tumbler Ridge, Powell River, Fernie and Lake Country.

In Tumbler Ridge, participation in curling has increased somewhat in the past few years. This has occurred, in all likelihood, because of increased population growth, as coal mining activity has increased in this part of the province. In Powell River and Lake Country, participation has remained steady; and in Fernie the numbers have declined, along with a decrease in the City's population.

1.4 RECREATION TRENDS

Over the past decade, as the demographics of our communities have changed, there have also been a number of changes in the public's activity choices. While these changes are not universal, they have, nonetheless had an impact on the delivery of leisure services.

Lake Cowichan Curling Facility – Page Seven

Certainly, participation in curling has decreased in many communities in British Columbia, and in some cases, this has resulted in decisions to convert existing rinks to accommodate different activities. As discussed later, a significant renovation to the Lake Cowichan facility is an option that should be considered.

Other trends include a shift from structured to unstructured activities, particularly among youth. This movement has resulted in a significant increase in individual activities such as skateboarding, and other pursuits that people can engage in at the time of their choice, as opposed to participating in activities with regularly scheduled practice and game times.

In terms of youth participation, there is a trend of diversity of values into distinct segments of youth culture. One leisure program or facility, such as a skatepark or an ice rink, does not meet everyone's needs.

Increased emphasis has also been placed on the value of participation in leisure and physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle, and as a way to prevent disease and reduce health care costs. While the fitness and activity levels of adults in British Columbia is improving (as measured by time spent in active recreation, BC has the highest level in Canada), the level of physically active leisure by our children and youth, is decreasing dramatically. In 1998, one-third of Canadian children did not have the minimum amount of activity required to sustain basic health. In 2000, this figure had risen to two-thirds.

Generally, interest in certain types of parks and recreation facilities is in decline, while others are becoming more popular. Curling rinks are experiencing reduced use in many communities in British Columbia, while those that are increasing in popularity include multi-purpose facilities, fitness centres, youth facilities, indoor pools (with leisure components) and arts / cultural centres.

2. DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

Based on a review of the information collected during the research phase of the project, the consultants have developed a number of options for the consideration of the Cowichan Lake Recreation Commission. These options are outlined below.

2.1.1 OPTION A – STATUS QUO

In this option the Commission would decide that it does not want to disrupt the Curling Club and the service it provides the Lake Area. It may do this if it decides that the continuation of the Club is more important to the community than the other options presented.

While this option provides continued curling at the Cowichan Lake facility it does not address the concern of tax subsidy to the curling participants.

Lake Cowichan Curling Facility – Page Eight

The advantages to the Commission include:

- Continued convenient curling opportunities for area residents
- No capital costs for improvements

The disadvantages to the Commission include:

- Continued concern with the tax subsidy for curling
- Continued concern with the number of hours of curling rink use, with limited opportunities for other activities to be scheduled

Consideration could be given to the development of strategies to increase curling participation at the Cowichan Lake Curling Rink. Recent statistics indicate that substantial increased numbers would be necessary to make this possibility realistic, and trends continue to indicate a decreasing amount of interest in the activity.

2.2 OPTION B – WEEKLY CONVERSION

In this option the curling rink would be prepared for curling on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and converted to skating ice for Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Some of the basic facility changes required for this conversion have been implemented, with the exception of the removal of the support posts down the centre of the facility.

The City of Mission used this option for about five years until the facility was re-dedicated to curling in October 2004. This was as a result of the addition of a second arena to their complex in September 2004.

In this case, the Commission would have to make a decision whether or not to spend the required funds to remove the support posts from the centre of the rink. If the decision was made to leave the posts as they are, the skating activity opportunities would be greatly reduced.

Advantages to the Commission include:

- Continued curling opportunities for the area residents
- Added skating opportunities for the area residents

Disadvantages to the Commission include:

- Capital cost to remove centre support posts (In June, 2003 Dominion Construction provided an estimate of \$211,300 to remove the posts)
- Cost for about 36 man-hours per week to convert to curling ice
- Cost for about 5 man-hours per week to convert to skating ice

Lake Cowichan Curling Facility – Page Nine

- Unhappy curling participants due to poor ice conditions because of constant conversion to skating ice
- Unhappy skaters due to smaller ice surface than normal and concerns regarding the ice surface

It should be noted that the Mission curling rink has four sheets of ice. The City built hockey boards including glass in the curling rink which stayed in during the days the facility was used for curling. (The man-hours for conversion were provided by Mission as were the comments regarding user satisfaction.)

2.3 OPTION C – DEDICATED SKATING ICE

In this option the Commission would have to remove the centre posts to provide a dedicated (seasonal) skating area.

The Commission may consider additional renovations to establish a facility that could accommodate figure skating, minor hockey, skating lessons and some form of leisure ice opportunity. The leisure ice idea may be novel in the region and generate attendance from outside the Lake Area for those public sessions. The combination of leisure ice and other skating activities, however, does not provide for compatible use.

It should be noted that the Cowichan Valley Minor Hockey Association has expressed interest in a smaller ice sheet for “at least” 25 hours per week. While this is an interesting possibility, it would not address local needs, and does not address current proposals for increased ice at the Cowichan Community Centre.

Advantages to the Commission include:

- Opportunity for increased participation in the facility
- Increased satisfaction from skating and hockey participants
- Improved tax subsidy position for the curling facility

Disadvantages to the Commission include:

- Capital cost of renovations
- Displeasure of the curling participants
- Risk of continued low participation numbers

2.4 OPTION D – CONVERSION TO WELLNESS/FITNESS/ACTIVITY CENTRE

This option would involve a significant renovation to the facility including a permanent floor. It would not necessarily require the removal of the centre support posts. A design for the space could include weight training facilities, fitness/exercise areas and activity space for a variety of community programs. The fitness exercise areas would offer programs such as Pilates, Yoga, Dance and Tai Chi.

Lake Cowichan Curling Facility – Page Ten

Programs in this kind of space would attract both male and female participants of all ages and abilities.

Advantages to the Commission include:

- Inclusion of new recreational opportunities for area residents
- Opportunity for reduced facility operating costs
- Opportunity for increased revenue
- Increased number of facility participants and seasonal activity
- Increase in general recreation service satisfaction

Disadvantage to the Commission include:

- Capital cost of renovations
- Unhappy Curling Club members

Wellness/Fitness facilities are very popular in community recreation centres, contribute to a wide variety of “benefits” associated with the delivery of community recreation, and make significant contributions to the financial health of public recreation organizations.

2.5 OPTION E – CONVERSION TO TOWN HALL OFFICE SPACE

This option is included because the consultants are aware that the Town is looking for a new space to locate the Town Hall operation and other services.

The curling rink facility provides approximately 9,000 square feet of space that could be developed into office and meeting spaces.

Advantages to the Commission include:

- Possible revenue opportunity
- Possible release of facility responsibility
- One stop shopping for all municipal services

Disadvantages to the Commission include:

- Loss of a recreation facility
- Unhappy recreation users
- Capital costs

3. RECOMMENDED OPTIONS

FIGURE TWO, on page 12, provides a summary of the options considered by the consultants, along with the list of perceived advantages and disadvantages.

Lake Cowichan Curling Facility – Page Eleven

It should be noted that there may well be other options, or other combinations that could be considered. Those addressed by the project team, however, should give the Commission significant “food for thought”, and hopefully, sufficient information with which to identify local preferences.

The consultants believe that **Option A** is not appropriate. While leaving it as a curling rink would eliminate the need for significant capital improvements, the facility is not being used enough to justify the subsidy it receives. With all home owners in the Lake Area contributing to its operation and the low number of participants, curling does not support its continuation in its present form. With the opportunity for curling at the Duncan Curling Club, only a short drive from the community, there is the opportunity for Lake Cowichan residents to continue to curl.

The consultants also believe that **Option B** is not appropriate based on the information provided by the City of Mission on their experience over the past five years using this format. This option provides a compromise to both skaters and curlers, with neither being well served. The cost of improving the space (i.e. removing the posts, and accommodating both skating activities and curling) would be significant, and the cost of converting the ice from curling to skating on a weekly basis would be expensive and would not allow for consistent ice quality, especially for curling.

The consultants believe that **Option C** may be worth consideration. It would provide additional skating ice which has a demonstrated higher demand than curling, and would allow the ice staff to provide consistency in ice maintenance. It would, however, provide a smaller surface than the regular arena ice that hockey and skating are accustomed to. There is a risk that the smaller surface will become an issue, and after a period of time, result in less frequent use.

The creation of a leisure ice facility would compromise the use of the area for hockey or skating. The regional attraction to leisure ice would be a family special occasion opportunity which would work best on weekends. While this might attract skaters from other parts of the Regional District, as well as Lake Cowichan, the consultants envisage many hours throughout the week that the facility would be idle.

Option D is an excellent option, and is worth serious consideration. It would provide a broad range of recreational opportunities that would be new to the residents of the Lake Cowichan area.

While there is a new Curves for Women centre in the community, it is unlikely that a new facility of this type would have a negative impact on its operations. In all likelihood, the facility would attract a broad cross-section of adults and teens, and the activities included would appeal to residents of all ages and abilities, and equally to both males and females.

Compared to the other options, capital costs would be relatively low, and operating costs would be significantly less than with an ice facility, and the revenue opportunities would be year-round.

Option E is also worthy of consideration when viewed from the total Town perspective. It would take a recreation facility out of the Commission's inventory along with the program opportunities the residents now enjoy. However, the facility space may provide valuable services to all residents of the Town to use in an efficient manner.

**FIGURE TWO
DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS – LAKE COWICHAN CURLING FACILITY**

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Status Quo	Convenient curling No capital costs	Tax subsidy Continued low curling participation
Weekly Conversion	Convenient curling Additional skating	Capital cost Conversion costs Poor ice conditions Small ice surface
Dedicated Skating Ice	Increased participation Skaters' satisfaction Improved tax subsidies	Capital cost Curlers' dissatisfaction
Conversion to Wellness / Fitness / Activity Centre	New / increased recreation opportunities Reduced operating costs Additional participants Increased satisfaction	Capital cost Curlers' dissatisfaction
Conversion to Town Hall space	Revenue opportunities Release of facility responsibility	Loss of recreation facility User dissatisfaction Capital costs

4. CONCLUSION / IMPLEMENTATION

At this point, the consultants suggest that the Recreation Commission and staff give consideration to the following options:

- Conversion to wellness/fitness space
- Conversion to Town Hall office space

Lake Cowichan Curling Facility – Page Thirteen

Each of these options would provide something different to Lake Cowichan residents, and at the same time, eliminate the availability of a curling facility in the community. As mentioned earlier, however, it is extremely difficult to justify a dedicated space for curling, particularly with the small number of participants, the limited use that the facility receives, and the proximity of the Duncan Curling Club.

It is the consultants' opinion that the options should be discussed by the Commission, and following that, with the public.

It should also be noted that overall benefits to the community should be considered in making decisions regarding the future use of the space.

In the consultants' opinion, there is sufficient ice in Lake Cowichan to meet the short and long term needs of the community. On the other hand, there are other amenities, such as those described in Option D, that would (1) result in a more comprehensive multi-use facility, (2) be attractive to a wide range of age and interest groups, and (3) provide activities that complement the arena and adjacent Centennial Hall.

In making the suggestion above, it should be noted that the study did not include sufficient financial resources to provide an indication of capital costs related to each of the options. It would be wise to retain design and cost consultants to develop that information, prior to proceeding to an information meeting involving the public. During the discussion of the report, however, the consultants will present information that offers a general comparison of the costs associated with each option.