



**Subject:** James Whyte Arena - Interim Operational Plan (2024-2025)

**Report to:** Thorold City Council

---

## Recommendations

1. That the Building Condition Assessment Update Report (November 2024), **BE RECEIVED**; and,
2. That the James Whyte Arena **BE CLOSED** for the purposes of future recreational programming.

## Key Facts

- The James Whyte Arena is no longer in service, and the refrigeration plant has been decommissioned.
- City Council directed staff to initiate a call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) for the interim use of the facility (2024 to 2027).
- Staff identified three potential users through the EOI process. Council directed staff to develop a collaborative Operational Plan that includes any requirements for Capital Improvements and potential funding sources.
- Council requested an updated Building Condition Assessment to ensure the potential uses could be safely conducted in the Whyte Arena.
- The Building Condition Assessment has identified the need for significant Capital expenditures to bring the facility to a state of good repair.
- The purpose of this report is to seek Council's direction regarding the future of recreational programming at this aging facility.

## Budgetary Status

No funding for the use or upgrading of this facility is included in the 2024 Budget.

## Analysis

At its meeting on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Council approved the recommendations in Report PWCS 104-2023, which set out a game plan for the future use of the James Whyte Arena.

At its meeting on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Council approved the recommendations in Report PWCS 38-2024, which directed staff to work with the Thorold Community Activities Group, 128 Thorold Flying Dragons Royal Canadian Air Cadets Squadron, and Thorold Minor Soccer Club to develop a collaborative Operational Plan and report back to Council.

Additionally, staff were directed to identify and estimate the required Capital Improvements and potential funding sources needed to sustain the ongoing operation of the Whyte Arena for the short term Operational Plan.

The EOI process identified that there is an interest in the use of the dry floor space at the James Whyte Arena. Based on the staff's discussion with the selected user groups, the programming schedule would look as follows:

*Royal Canadian Air Cadets (Flying Dragons)*

- Currently using 2 dressing rooms, the Doherty Committee room, & the James Whyte floor on Mondays & Wednesdays 6-9pm
- Also using storage in 2 old dressing rooms and a small closet
- Started in September because they had to be out of Allanburg for renovations

*Thorold Community Activities Group (TCAG)*

- Want to start using the James Whyte floor on Nov 4<sup>th</sup>
  - Tuesdays – Youth Floor Hockey (5:30-6:30pm), Volleyball (6:45-7:45pm)
  - Thursdays – Jr. Hip Hop (5:30-6:30pm), Dance Fusion (6:45-7:45pm)
  - Fridays – Youth Soccer (5:30-6:30pm), Youth Basketball (6:45-7:45pm)
  - Saturdays – Racquet Sports (9am-12:30pm), Gymnastics (10:30am-11:30am)
- Also using storage in 1 old dressing room and potentially a small corner of space for basketball nets and other large equipment.

*Thorold Soccer Club*

- Currently booked for use of the space for the following dates:
  - Saturday Oct 26<sup>th</sup> & Nov 2<sup>nd</sup> - 4-5pm
  - Saturday Nov 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> Dec 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> – 1-2pm
- They are booking more “ad hoc” and as needed around the other 2 groups above (nothing consistent) with dressing room usage.

We have also received requests from other groups (TAAA, ball hockey groups, etc.) looking to rent the floor. In total, staff expects participation of approximately 200 persons per week. Understanding the frequency and type of use is helpful in evaluating what

Capital investments might be necessary and feasible to justify reprogramming this space.

The condition of the building was inspected in 2019 by McIntosh Perry Consultants Ltd. (now Egis Canada Ltd.). At that time, it was determined that an investment of over \$6 million would be required to bring the facility to a “state of good repair”. Since that time, only minimal maintenance has been completed. The James Whyte arena was used as a temporary Operations Centre for the past two years while the current facility at 1543 Beaverdams Road was being renovated.

At Council’s direction, staff have arranged for an update to the Building Condition Assessment (BCA). The full report is included in Appendix 1. The BCA report identifies...

*“Over the next 10 years, it is anticipated that most building equipment and systems will require major repair or replacement to maintain the building in a state-of-good repair under the current operational model.”*

The BCA also breaks down the costs into immediate, short-term, and long-term costs. Of particular interest is the finding that...

*“Based on our visual review of the property, we are of the opinion that total cumulative expenditures will be in the range of \$2,200,000 in the immediate (2024) and short terms (2025 to 2029) for the building and site to maintain the property in a state-of-good repair.”*

It also concludes that the cost of upgrading the facility to a state of good repair has increased to \$7.425 million.

The motivation behind examining the potential use of the Whyte Arena was to establish a cost effective, short-term solution to the growing need for indoor recreational space. The required investment to make the facility safe for use is excessive given the relatively short life span of the building. It is also not likely that the City will be able to recover Capital contributions from the user groups or access external grant funding, given the City’s other infrastructure priorities.

For this reason, staff has not developed a detailed Interim Operational Plan until City Council has provided further direction. Based on the most current information, staff are recommending that the James Whyte Arena be formally closed.

## **Impact on the Environment, Climate Change**

There are no known environmental or climate change related impacts to this Report.

## **Alternatives Reviewed**

User groups selected through the EOI process have indicated that their ability to make contributions to the needed Capital improvements would be very minimal given the short term return on investment. Staff have considered options to make the arena a “*No Spectator*” facility by blocking off perimeter access, installing emergency lighting, removing the bleachers, and restricting use to the interior floor space. This would only allow restricted use over a very short time span (3-6 months).

Consideration for the provision of more indoor recreational space will be given during the planning for the re-development of the site and the next update of the City’s Recreation, Parks and Trails Master Plan.

## **Relationship to Strategic Plan**

The recommendation is consistent with Council’s Strategic Plan:

- Vibrant and Prosperous Community
  - Livable Community
  - Community Wellbeing
- Service Delivery Excellence
  - Service Modernization
  - Community Engagement
- Sustainability
  - Sustainable Infrastructure
  - Financial Sustainability

## **Other Pertinent Reports**

- PWCS 104-2023 James Whyte Arena Future Use Strategy
- PWCS 38-2024 Expression of Interest – Whyte Arena

---

**Prepared by:**  
Geoff Holman  
Director  
Public Works and Community Services

---

**Recommended by:**  
Geoff Holman  
Director  
Public Works and Community Services

---

**Approved and Submitted by:**  
Manoj Dilwaria  
Chief Administrative Officer

*This report was prepared in consultation with Brooke Nicholson, Program Coordinator, Dave Baldoni, Manager of Community Services, and reviewed by Mark Richardson, Associate Director of Community Services.*

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1            Building Condition Assessment – James Whyte Arena