

# TORONTO'S OUTDOOR ARTIFICIAL ICE RINKS

A MANUAL FOR RUNNING COMPRESSOR-COOLED  
OUTDOOR RINKS REALLY WELL



CELOS: Centre for local research into public space

# TORONTO'S OUTDOOR ARTIFICIAL ICE RINKS

A MANUAL FOR RUNNING COMPRESSOR-COOLED  
OUTDOOR RINKS REALLY WELL

Contributors:

Lea Ambros, Anna Beckerman, Daniel Cayley, Corey Chivers,  
Sarah Comier, Heidrun Gabel-Koepff, Sandy Gribbin, Jutta  
Mason, Mayssan Shuja-Uddin, Dan Watson, Amy Withers

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CELOS:

242 Havelock Street Toronto M6H 3B9 416 533-0153

[www.celos.ca](http://www.celos.ca)

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# City of Toronto Outdoor Ice Rinks

Toronto has the most outdoor compressor-cooled ice rinks of any city in the world. There are 4 rinks at central locations and 45 in neighbourhoods. Twelve of the rinks are double pads – one pad for playing hockey, the other pad for pleasure-skating. The rest are single pads where hockey and pleasure-skating take turns. A double-pad rink costs over \$1 million to build, not counting the rink change-rooms. A single-pad rink costs around \$700,000. So these rinks are one of Toronto's treasures.



But they need some help. For many years the compressor-cooled outdoor ice rinks were open from mid-November until the end of February when the sun got too strong. Torontonians

could skate outdoors for about 15 weeks each winter. But in 2001 City Council voted to permanently reduce the season of the neighbourhood outdoor rinks to 10 weeks a year, not opening them until late December. The rink season

went down from 106 days to 70. This resolution caused such an outcry by skaters that 2001 was the only year when it was actually carried out.



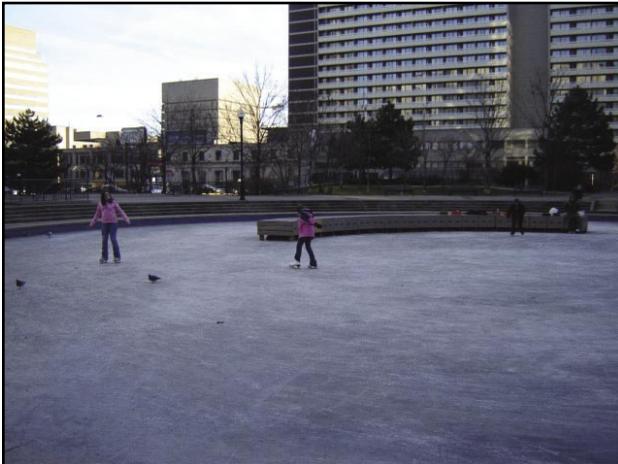
Even so, since 2001 the outdoor rinks have opened between two and four weeks late every year. Finally in 2007 the mayor announced that rinks would not open at all until January 1 2008, to save money. The Mastercard Company came to the rescue with a one-time donation of \$160,000. But it's not

impossible that the rinks could be a pawn for the same announcement again next year.

Beyond that, there seems to be persistent confusion at City Council and among City management about how and when these rinks work best. The confusion is reflected in a recent Parks, Forestry, and Recreation document “SERVICE PLANNING AND PROVISION STRATEGY OPTIONS.” It conflates natural and compressor-cooled outdoor rinks, stating that both kinds of rinks are “*limited to a relatively short operational season that has recently been further reduced as climatic changes result in fewer days when it is possible to have natural ice or maintain outdoor artificial ice.*”

The writers of this internal City report seem to be unaware that outdoor artificial ice rinks are minimally affected by climate change. (see page 11)

Compressor-cooled outdoor rinks do very well in temperatures up to 15 degrees celsius, during the 15 weeks when the sun is lowest in the sky.



There are other ways in which Toronto’s outdoor rinks seem to have got lost on the radar at City Hall. Although most of the compressor plants are in very good condition, too many of the rink change-houses are unpleasant places, windowless, with inadequate sitting areas both inside and out, out-of-date rink information, and rules that drive users away. There is often less-than-ideal ice maintenance. Some of the rinks are inexplicably locked in the mornings and even

during some of the prime skating hours on weekends and in the evenings. Communication between on-site rink staff and ice maintenance staff is often poor. The recent Parks and Recreation Division restructuring means that rink-related responsibilities are now divided between thirteen different staffing sections – an

unwieldy team to run anything!

But all of these problems can be addressed, many of them at little or no added expense or even a saving. That's the point of this report.

How this report came about: In 2004, the Metcalf Foundation funded the *Centre for Local Research into Public Space (CELOS)* to research and write about what makes parks work well. Part of this research has focused on the outdoor compressor-cooled rinks. It was conducted by volunteers, interested citizens and the front-line recreation staff at Dufferin Rink, when they were not working at their own rink.

The researchers visited 23 Toronto central and downtown rinks over three years. Each rink has been visited at least once a season since 2004, 15 were visited twice in 2005/2006, and all were visited at least twice in 2006/2007. Eight of those rinks were visited weekly.

The Outdoor Rink Report is based on these visits, on the stories collected by the Dufferin Rink hotline over three winters, on anecdotal evidence from rink users across the city, and on the researchers' first-hand experience as rink users, volunteers and rink staff. Toronto is a winter city for a third of the year, and the rinks are our joint treasure. Run well, they provide a lively community winter gathering place for all ages, newcomers just trying skates for the first time, kids' hockey leagues, and third-generation shinny hockey players – even for non-skaters who just come for the hot chocolate and the pleasure of watching the fun. Here's the manual for how to make them work.



# Rink usage

## *What needs fixing:*



*Perfect ice, almost empty rink*

Some outdoor rinks are often empty, whereas others are full to bursting (which is not fun either). Rink use needs to be spread out more evenly, by making the less-used rinks gain more friends.

## *How to fix it:*

Neighborhood rinks can play several roles. They are obviously places where people can skate and play shinny hockey for free, or permit organized hockey times for low fees. But they can also be neighborhood social centres for winter, where Torontonians can meet and engage with one another. This potential is far from fully realized at the city’s compressor-cooled outdoor rinks, but there are many good possibilities.

## **FAMILIES**

Families with young children are the secret weapon of rinks. Rinks that make friends with such families will have loyal friends who use them often, and around whom all the rest can be built. Families are attracted to comfortable rink houses and double-pad rinks where they can be sure to get pleasure-skating time.

Families are most likely to keep returning if the ice is consistently well-maintained, the schedule is reliably adhered to, and information about any changes is readily available to them.



*Break for lunch*

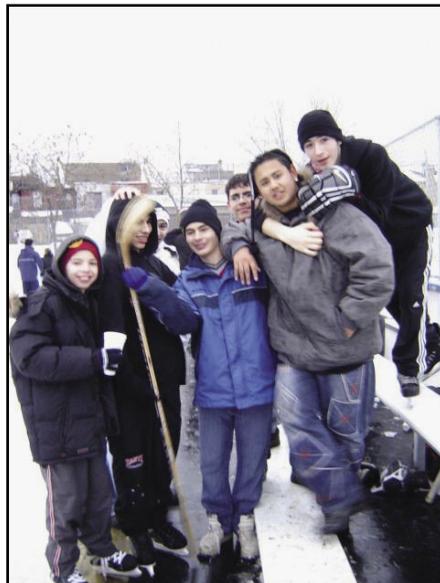
## **BALANCE OF AGES**

Families are the matrix for a sociable rink, but rink change areas are usually a small space. In order to balance all groups, the change area mustn't be turned into a day care. Youth need to feel they're still in a real rink house. Rinks don't do well as ghettos, and they can only be social centres if they include all ages - and some people with problems, too. If any one group begins to treat the rink as their own turf – parents, or the old card players, included – it's important for rink staff to restore balance.

## **YOUTH**

Outdoor rinks are places of physical activity for all ages and stages. For youth in particular they're practice grounds for athletic skill. It's important to give each age group a time when they can play well without too much crowding or peer bullying. This means, clear age rules and hourly, daily follow-up. When rules are fair, and worked out through informal consultation, they get cooperation in the long run.

In addition, rinks are places where youth like to socialize - and also where they like to try out their power. Staff at outdoor rinks are often very young and that makes it almost impossible for them to regulate the social life of a rink. Where there are mature staff with a real interest in and curiosity about the young people who use the rink, working alongside younger staff, youth can find a lasting resource, sometimes even a home away from home in the winter.



## **SKATE LENDING**

City outdoor rinks generally don't offer skate rentals. When the recreation supervisor at Dufferin Rink suggested applying to the NHL Players' Association in 2004 for skates, hockey sticks, helmets, and gloves, rink friends were dubious. It seemed like a lot of extra work and commotion.

But when the fifty sets arrived and were sprayed yellow and \$2 loans were set

up, the number of kids and adults who came to skate doubled. The supply of skates seems to have attracted more skate donations. Zamboni café income paid for even more skates, and now there are close to 80 pairs available to rent for \$2. This is cheap enough that whole families come out, teenage shinny players bring their girlfriends on Fridays, and kids whose families can't afford new skates every year as they grow, can still keep playing shinny. One of the largest group of skate borrowers have been new-comers to Canada, of all ages and from all parts of the world, who are eager to try skating for the first time in their lives. Skate rental could be considered for a few more outdoor rinks in the city, or even a mobile skate-rental truck.



*\$2 skate rental*

## **CAMPFIRES**

In order for people to talk to each other, they need a story magnet, something beautiful to loosen their tongues. In 1994, Dufferin Rink friends discovered that winter rink-side campfires were one of the easiest, cheapest, and most dramatically successful ways to get rink users talking to each other. (The idea was taken from the winter campfires set up by Parks staff at the side of Grenadier Pond during cold snaps, for many years.)



*Hot chocolate*

The Fire Department gave rink friends single-occasion fire permits at the beginning, and then after two years without problems, the police department gave yearly permits. As collaboration between rink friends and rink staff improved, the permits were given to the recreation supervisor and he made sure that the rink staff were trained to assist and supervise the campfires.

By then the fires were most often cooking fires,

with soup or hot chocolate or people’s own food if they were having a birthday skating-party. (The campfire birthday parties were never closed to outsiders – parks have no walls! – and often strangers who joined the fire circle got to know new people through these parties.)

## FOOD

Skating makes people hungry. At Dufferin Rink there are two very small community kitchens, one of them a snack bar called the “zamboni café.” It offers a variety of foods prepared on site, including soup, English-muffin pizzas, cookies, and hot chocolate, seven days a week. The rink staff prepare and serve the food, often together with volunteers (mostly high school students doing their community hours).



*Rink snack bar*

Although food prices are very cheap, the snack bar is so popular that it makes about \$20,000 a winter for putting back into expanded park programs.

Parents tell the rink staff that they can get their kids away from their computer games and out of the house with the promise of “a skate, a mini-pizza and a cookie.” The hospitality of a rink is enormously increased by the nice smells as well as the taste of good food. Food is also a great way to appeal to all groups and all ages. Many youth get so engrossed in their games that they skate for hours. By the time they realize they’re hungry they’re often bad-tempered. Giving easy access to some cheap food puts them in a much better mood. And the on-site staff who serve the food get to start a conversation in a friendlier way than

always having to say “you’re not allowed to...”

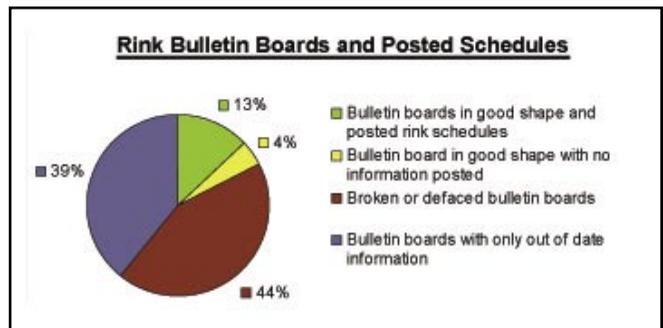
There are two other city outdoor rinks which have their own kitchens. A number of other rinks are attached to a community centre and so have a kitchen nearby.

Not every outdoor rink could or should have food, but some rinks are ideal for such an addition.

## Communication

### ***What needs fixing:***

Presently it is impossible for most rink users to find out up-to-date information about the condition or availability of ice time at their rinks. It’s not helpful to get only a pre-recorded message and find out nothing about the current status of the local rink. Then, if a rink is unexpectedly closed when a family of four has gotten the kids all bundled and packed into the car, or when a youth has lugged his heavy hockey gear all the way to the rink on foot, it takes only a few such experiences for people to give up on outdoor skating altogether.



*Schedule posted is 3 years out-of-date*

Rinks have five main ways to communicate with rink users. When researchers for this report checked how rink information gets to skaters, this is what they found:

### **1. Bulletin boards**

Bulletin boards at many rinks are defaced or damaged, and even those bulletin boards in good condition often do not have up-to-date information.

#100 EXCEPTIONS TO SCHEDULE SORRY! :-)

**MONARCHA.I.R**  
(SCHEDULE IS PERMANENT.)

	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.	SUN.
<b>PUBLIC SKATE</b> (6 under helmets)	1-4pm	4-7pm	1-4pm 8-10pm	5:30 5:30pm	1-4pm 5:30-7pm	3-6:15pm 7:15-10pm	1-6pm
<b>SHINY</b> 13 under (Helmets)	4-6pm		4-6pm	[REDACTED]	4-5:30		12-1
<b>SHINY</b> 14+ (under helmets)	6-8pm	1-4pm 7-10pm	6:30-8 15 a Permit:	1-3:30 [REDACTED]	7-10pm	6:15 7:15pm	10am- 12pm
<b>LEADS TO SKATE</b> [REDACTED]				5:30-7pm (ADULT)		9am- 3pm	

Hand-lettered sign

At some rinks, staff said they had been told that there was no money for the photocopying of rink schedules, so there would be none available.

## 2. Signage for change-rooms and washrooms

66% (15) rink *change rooms* were in need of signs.

At 10 of the 15 rink change rooms in need of signs, staff had written paper signs to help skaters.

29% (9) *staff rooms* were in need of signs.

Staff rooms which are separate, locked-up and without windows or signage, are a major stumbling block between recreation staff and the public working together.

## 3. City Rink Information website:

The city website gives the printed rink schedules, many of which are wrong. The site lacks certain basic details such as rink opening dates or individual rink phone numbers, and it also has no capacity to report on rink closures for mechanical failure, or rink re-opening after a snowstorm.

#### 4. Rink Information “hot line”:

This is only a recorded rink schedule from the beginning of the season.

#### 5. Rink phones:

Individual rink phone numbers are unlisted. Many rink staff feel that it’s not their job to give information to rink users on the telephone.

#### How to fix this:

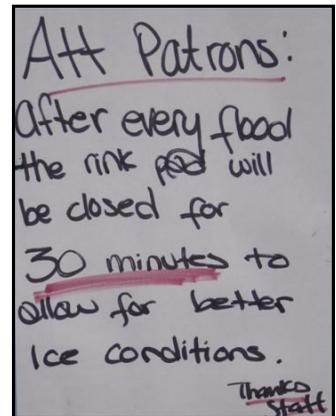
The most frequent interaction that citizens have with city employees is with front-line staff. It is therefore imperative that these staff be given all the necessary tools to communicate in a friendly and informative way with rink users.

**Schedules:** Rink staff should be given a good supply of up-to-date skating schedules to post and hand out to rink users. (Not to print rink schedules is a false economy!) Rink staff should also be given the responsibility of making sure that the schedules are posted on all bulletin boards or taped to the change room walls, inside and out, if no bulletin boards exist.

**Signage:** As soon as possible, the City should order the installation of signs for identification of change rooms.

Temporary signs: As we visited rinks we saw that many workers tried to solve the signage problem on their own by making signs and taping them up, to direct skaters. A hand-written sign saying “rink closed, due to sun, try back at 5pm or call...” is clearly appropriate given the specificity of the information given.

But workers should not have to make and tape up little pieces of paper saying “women’s washroom”. However we applaud the rink staff’s effort given the circumstances. We recommend giving the rink staff pieces of plywood and paint, and encouraging them to make something a little nicer and longer-lasting.



Temporary sign

**“Live” rink hot line:** The “live” rink hot line should continue on, and all rink staff citywide should be instructed to call in their information to hotline staff when the weather forces rinks to close, and again later when they are ready to reopen.

**The recorded rink information line:** The rink information on the city’s rink information line should be updated quickly whenever weather affects the rinks. This can continue to be done by hotline staff (Dufferin Rink staff), but it needs cooperation from other rink staff citywide.

**The city’s rink information web site:** There should be one page accessible to a city worker for quick postings of rinks closings and re-openings. These updates should happen much more frequently than once a season.

**Individual rink telephone numbers:** these numbers should be listed in the phone book, on the city’s rink information web site, on the recorded rink information line, and on the schedules given out at each rink. Rink staff should be encouraged to give up-to-date information and refer callers to nearby rinks, giving the specific phone numbers. Individual rinks’ phone lines should also have outgoing messages that can be easily changed by on-site staff in case of any change to the regular schedule.

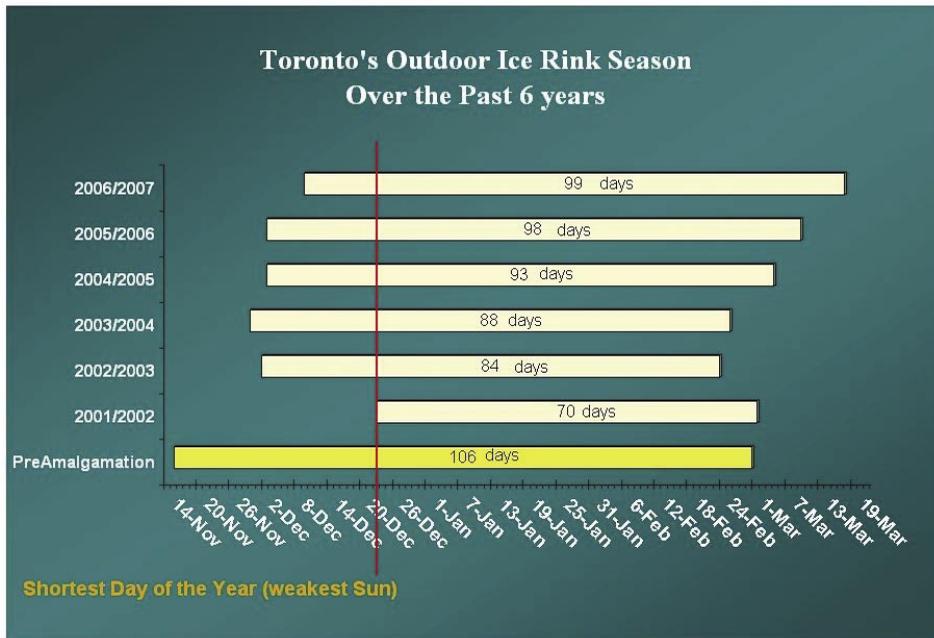


*Up-to-date information missing*

## Rink season

### **What needs fixing: Working against the sun**

Artificial outdoor ice rinks work best (and most energy-efficiently) when the **sun is at its weakest** during the year. The sun is at its lowest angle (and hence weakest) in the northern hemisphere on **December 21st**. It follows that the best and most efficient time to run outdoor artificial ice rinks is in the 15 weeks centered around that day. After an attempt in 2001 to just squeeze the rink season down to 10 weeks, chopping it off at BOTH ends, 2-3 weeks were added back on. But the chart below illustrates how, in the last four years, the Parks department has slid away from this ideal season.



In recent years city staff and councillors have felt pressure from many parents to keep the rinks open throughout March break. While it is a lovely idea to keep kids skating as long as possible, rink census sheets show that attendance at outdoor rinks during March break is very low, even on cold overcast days when the ice is in good condition. As soon as the sun comes out, the census goes to zero, as rink staff are forced to close the slushy and dangerous ice during daylight hours. Keeping the rinks open in March is a losing battle against the spring sun. (see Appendix 5) The city would be better served by informing parents that outdoor rinks are hardly more feasible in March than they are in May, and offering alternative March Break programming.

Opening earlier is much more likely to attract skaters eager for winter to arrive. Shiny players especially are often eager to skate as soon as the NHL season gets going. And the ice is consistently better in the early months of winter. In the most recent (2006/07) rink season, December 2006 was unseasonably warm and served as an instructive experiment on the effects of October/November-like temperatures on compressor-run outdoor ice rinks. *Taking Dufferin Rink as a sample rink:* Toronto's December temperatures ranged from 0°C to plus 13°C. **Throughout December there were no days when the rink had to be closed.**

In **January** the temperatures ranged between minus 12°C and plus 11°C. The sun was still low enough that **there were no days when the rink had to be closed**, even when it was sunny.

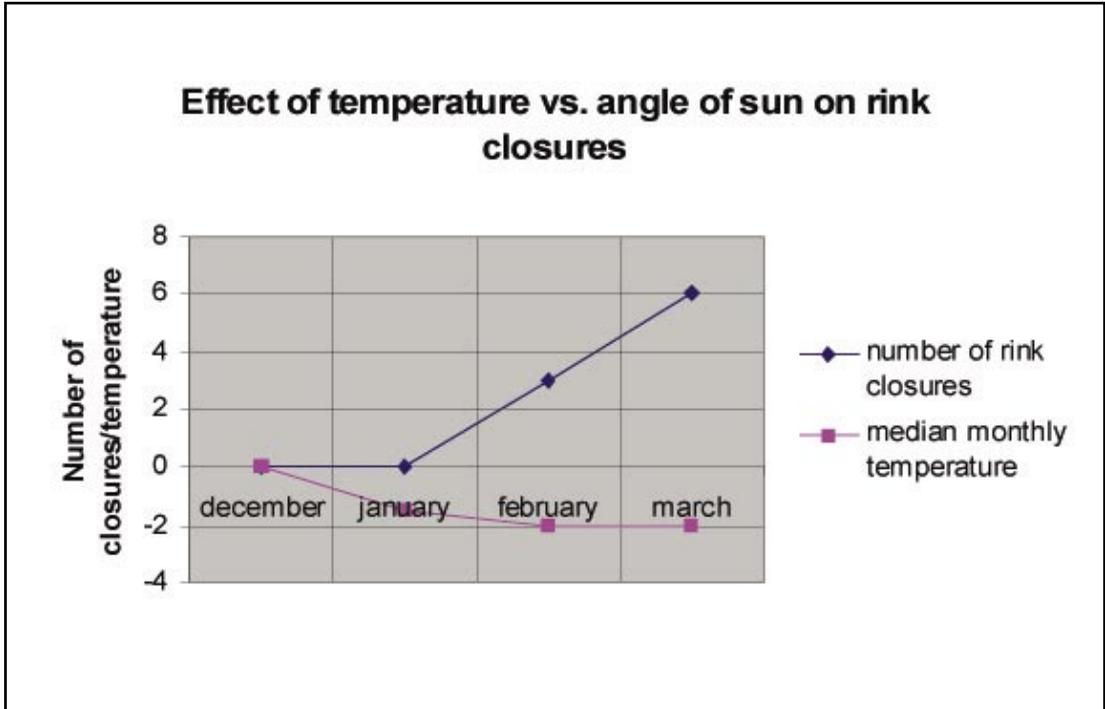
In **February** the temperatures were, for the most part lower (ranging from minus 13°C to 0°C). Yet **staff had to close Dufferin Rink by 1 pm on 3 days due to soft and slushy ice**.



*Slushy ice*

In **March** this became even more pronounced with temperatures ranging from minus 20°C to plus 15°C. There were 6 days of afternoon rink closures (often on cold days if the sun was out). Since the rink closing date was March 18, **six closures actually represent 33% of the month closed during peak hours**.

The **angle of the sun** in the late fall and early winter makes for dreary days that



could happily be spent skating regardless of temperature (anywhere under 18°C) or clear skies (low sun). The compressors are designed to keep the ice frozen and are very well suited to countering the force of higher temperatures. But they are unable to counteract the effects of higher sun.

### ***How to fix this:***

Work around the sun. The rinks should be opened in mid-November and closed at the end of February to best take advantage of the low sun and the related **savings in energy costs**. At least half the rinks should be open for fifteen weeks, to allow Torontonians maximum use during the winter season.

### **Hours of operation:**

#### ***What needs fixing: Ice good, but rinks locked***

Many rinks keep the ice surface locked **all morning on weekdays, and often into the afternoon**. This means no school classes nor shift workers nor unemployed people nor families with very young children can use these rinks at those less-busy times.



*Ice good but rink locked*

In addition, some rinks are locked a great deal during what would normally be considered prime time, including part of the evening. In 2006/07 season,

17 of 24 rinks closed at 5 or 6 pm on Sunday, despite the presence of many skaters

5 rinks of 24 didn't open until 11 or even 12:30pm on Sunday

3 rinks didn't open until 12:30 or 1:00pm on weekdays.

Giovanni Caboto (also known as JJP or Earls court Rink), a once-popular double-pad rink, rebuilt new about 1997, was kept locked during most of the weekend. According to its schedule, the rink was only open three and a half hours on Saturdays, and three hours on Sundays.

Besides poor scheduling, rink visitors too often found rinks closed unexpectedly without apparent reason (this does not include closures due to bad weather).

While some outdoor rinks close early on weekend evenings, or even on weekday evenings, other rinks remain open and very busy with shinny hockey until 11 pm. The compressor plants are running and using energy at all of the rinks, even when they're closed.

### ***How to fix this:***

Use the rinks to the very maximum during skating season. **No rink should be locked and empty during the hours when a park would normally be open for the public.**

Keep rinks unlocked during normal operating hours even when there are no staff on site. **(Post “rink unsupervised” signs)**

As long as the proper signs are posted to clarify that people are skating at their own risk, it is no more dangerous to leave gates open at unattended rinks than it is for the city to run rinks such as Nathan Phillips Square, Rennie, Wallace, Ryerson, College Park, or Harry Gairey rinks, none of which are lockable.

## **Ice maintenance**

### ***What needs fixing: Unreliable season-opening dates.***

Although Toronto announces opening days for rinks, the actual openings are often a few days late. This is because, in order to save wages, ice-making too often begins only a day or two before the rink is scheduled to open.

### ***How to fix this:***

Starting floods only two days before rinks are scheduled to open is a false economy. Extra crews should **start flooding the rinks four days before the**

**scheduled opening.** These crews should work at night (to make use of the no-sun hours). That's what the ice-making crews used to do when these outdoor rinks were first introduced. To make the most of staffing, the crews can travel between four rinks, to put layers of water on all of them in rotating sequence.



Zamboni

**Groups of rinks should open in a planned sequence,** not all at once. All that's needed is half a week between each group of rinks opening. Rink supervisors already try to do this, to open the rinks in an orderly way. But every year recently, City management and city councillors have directed the rinks to open all on the same day. Decision-makers need to know that the principle of "harmonization" -- in this case each rink opening at the identical time of each other rink -- does not work well in practice.

### ***What needs fixing: Ice thickness in rainy winters***

In years when there's lots winter rain and it's not removed before it freezes, the ice on outdoor rinks can get as thick as 7 inches by the end of January, at which point ice maintenance becomes very problematic. It has been the practice of many zamboni staff to stay off rinks when it rains. Some seasonally employed zamboni drivers say thicker ice is better ice, and they insist on leaving rainwater on the ice to freeze.

The only argument we have heard to prove that thicker ice is better was that, *"anyone would prefer to skate on a pond with 7 inches of ice than on one with 3 inches."* Obviously this is true for a pond but untrue for a mechanism which is dependent on a cooling system that functions beneath the surface of the ice. The pipes that cool the ice are only effective if the ice is thin enough for their cooling effect to reach the top layer of ice.

### ***How to fix this:***

Train all rink maintenance staff in the importance of keeping the ice at **less** than 4

inches thickness. When ice is kept between 1 ½ and 3 inches, compressors work well at keeping it frozen. In years when there is lots of rain, zamboni drivers must remove water as it accumulates during a rainfall, so that it doesn't freeze onto the existing ice. Also the zamboni drivers need to cut down the ice more often when there's been lots of rain.

### ***What needs fixing: Availability of ice resurfacing equipment.***

Sometimes there's a zamboni operator at a rink but no equipment for him to use. Having a zamboni operator sit in the rink office with no equipment is expensive. (The cost per operator for a 12-week season is at least \$15,000 per rink.)

The shortage of ice resurfacing equipment is increased by frequent equipment breakdowns. Having "flying squads" pull zambonis from rink to rink on trailers without any shock absorbers, doesn't help. Some city rinks have no convenient parking for zamboni trailers. In other rinks the zamboni has to be driven over curbs and other obstacles, to reach the rink it's supposed to plough, or it has to drive a far distance over rough paths. This slows down the crews in poor weather and jolts the machines, causing them to need repair sooner.

### ***How to fix this:***

Continue to ***acquire more ice resurfacers*** (Zambonis or Olympias). The goal should be to put a Zamboni/Olympia ice resurfacer at each double pad and a Zamboni/Olympia or even a tractor with an ice-resurfacing attachment at each single pad. Zamboni drivers can go from rink to rink, but ice resurfacers should stay put. The drivers who service rinks located near public transport should take the TTC or ride bikes (if there's no snow on the roads – which is often) instead of using city trucks. That way the City can save money instead of buying more trucks, and also reduce its greenhouse gas emissions.



*Zamboni at Nathan Phillips Square*

**Maintain the equipment well, on a priority schedule:** This has already improved from four years ago when it could take five days or more to repair a machine. Broken machines need to be repaired fast because when the travelling zambonis (“flying squads”) break down, or the zamboni trailer gives trouble, outdoor ice can get too thin from lack of resurfacing. Then the rink has to be closed for emergency ice flooding.

### **What needs fixing: Programming interrupted by ice maintenance**

Single pad rinks are maintained by “flying squads” – two drivers go from rink to rink with a zamboni on a trailer and maintain them in series. The on-site rink staff don’t always know the schedule of ice maintenance at their rinks. Schedule changes without notifying on-site rink staff are frequent. Rink users and on-site staff need to know when the zamboni is coming so they can plan around it. Frequent unscheduled ice maintenance discourages skaters from coming to the outdoor rinks. Nobody wants to spend half their skating time sitting on the sidelines waiting for the zamboni to finish resurfacing the ice. On the other hand, some children are so mesmerized by the sight of a zamboni cleaning the ice that parents are eager to know when the ice will be cleaned so that their child will not miss out on this momentous event.

### **How to fix this:**

Work in the direction of having ice resurfacing equipment at every rink. That way, only one zamboni driver is needed to run the equipment. The second driver is freed up to run ice-resurfacing equipment at other rinks, multiplying the labour power and giving much greater flexibility. Most rinks that were surveyed last year only got roughly half the optimal maintenance due to over-stretched staff and equipment. This proposal would enable the same number of staff to accomplish much more. Drivers can then work around program schedules.

It’s also very important that zamboni drivers are in frequent contact with on-site rink staff, so that the rink staff can give users the right information about the day’s ice cleaning schedules.

### **What needs fixing: Delays in reopening rinks after snowfalls**

Ice maintenance approaches vary widely. There are too many times when all

the neighbourhood rinks are closed even though City Hall and Harbourfront are open. This is not because those two rinks have better compressors but because they have better snow maintenance provisions. Up until a few years ago, zamboni drivers were not allowed to push snow off the rink after a snowstorm, even if there was a tractor on site. That was someone else's job. So after a snowstorm, even when the weather was fine again, many outdoor rinks stayed shut for days until the plough got to them, and meantime the operators sat on their hands.

### ***How to fix this:***

Some of the rink operator trucks are fitted out with shovels on the front in winter. All zamboni drivers should be trained to use them, when it's snowing. No need to wait until the snow stops falling completely to begin clearing. In a blizzard, zamboni drivers need to take shelter, but when the snowfall begins to let up, all the drivers can resume their clearing schedules (not only the brave ones).

### ***What needs fixing: Preventing rink users from shoveling light snow off the ice***

Rink guards often don't allow skaters to shovel snow off the ice, even when rink shovels are available.

### ***How to fix this:***

Have a good supply of rink shovels on site and let them be used. The City still owns many of the long metal green rink shovels from the days when the ice was maintained manually. When no zamboni or no zamboni driver is available, rinks where staff work alongside the skaters to shovel the snow off, can have many extra hours of good playing time.



*Staff shoveling snow*

Rink shoveling is a fine art and must be done correctly in order to not make life harder for the rink operators when they are available to come back and clean the ice next. Please see Appendix 3 for the rink shovelling rules that were developed at Dufferin Rink and have been successfully used for the last eight years.

## Design: Quick and cheap improvements

An outdoor rink should be one of the public spaces in Toronto where the widest variety of Torontonians can be seen together. We envision a rink with young parents and toddlers trying to balance on skates for the first time, a rink with grandparents keeping fit, a rink with teens playing casual shinny. Staff on site should be easy to locate, friendly, and should be given support to create such a neighbourly rink.

There are many problems with the design of some outdoor rinks and buildings. However, small changes can make a big difference. If we don't make some of these changes, many outdoor compressor-cooled ice rinks will remain underused, unsafe at times, and a far cry from what they can be.

### ***What needs fixing: Windows***

#### **No windows in change**

**rooms:** Of the 23 rinks visited, 10 had change rooms with no windows, and 5 had windows that were either very small, or too high up to see out, or not facing the rink. The absence of windows, together with harsh lighting and drab interiors, often give rink change areas a slummy look.

#### **No windows in staff rooms:**

13 of the 23 rinks had no windows in the staff room, and often the staff at the rinks were inside and cut off from rink users. One staff room had windows not facing toward the rink, and one had windows blocked with black plastic garbage bags. That leaves only 8 staff rooms with windows allowing staff to see out or rink users to find staff.



*No windows in staff room, Kew Rink*

**East End skating father:** *“My wife hates skating. I don’t mind skating with our daughter but I can’t go all the time. So when my wife goes to Kew or Jimmie Simpson rinks and can’t sit inside and see Andrea skating around -- because there are no windows -- she just doesn’t let her skate for more than 20 minutes before she is frozen and mad from sitting in hockey boxes.”*

### ***How to fix this:***

Windows are very important for making a rink safer and comfortable for skaters and staff. Ideally rink change rooms should have large, eye-level windows onto the ice.

The rinks with adequate windows had many different kinds, from glass panels in doors, to the wide walls of windows at Regent South, and the well placed window inserted into the wall only last year at Wallace Emerson. There are many solutions to the problem of visual access.

**Staff rooms should have visual access to the rink and the change room.**

Using eight outdoor rink change rooms with adequate windows as guides for the variety of the windows available, the following rinks could have a window easily added to the change rooms in time for the 2008/2009 rink season: Jimmie Simpson, Kew Gardens, Hodgson, JJP, and Withrow. The cost for an external window is around \$2000 each. Internal openings (between staff rooms and change rooms) are cheaper.

It is very undesirable to have staff lock themselves up in windowless rooms where they cannot interact with skaters, or even see them. When staff rooms are far from the change rooms or windowless, like at Rosedale Rink, Ramsden or Jimmie Simpson, it’s better if rink staff leave their closed-up, windowless offices and work out of the change rooms instead – as they do at Regent South and Harry Gairey Rinks. At Regent South Rink, staff have a table and work equipment in the general change room. They have a good view of the ice, and sunlight pours in all day. Staff can talk to people in the rink house and keep an eye on the ice at the same time.

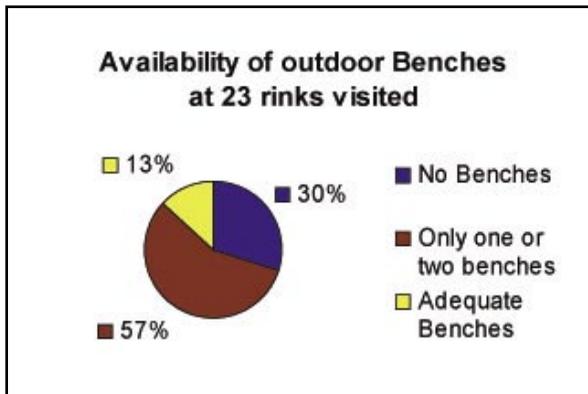
There are a few rinks with offices where the windows face in the wrong direction,

away from the rink and from rink users. These offices are almost as non-functional as windowless offices. And if rink staff install television sets or personal computers in the rink office to play games or do schoolwork during their “work” hours, the benefit of a window is effectively cancelled.

### ***What needs fixing: Outdoor benches and mats***

If there are benches outdoors, parents may choose to watch their kids skate or play shinny hockey. Outdoor benches also offer another place to change to skates if the change rooms are locked, or unpleasant or sex-segregated.

Of 23 outdoor rinks visited, in 7 rinks there are no outdoor benches for resting or skate-changing. The rest have some outdoor benches, although often not more than one or two. In 8 rinks the mats don’t reach benches or washrooms.



At Jimmie Simpson Rink, on an otherwise wonderful afternoon when City Councillor Paula Fletcher had her annual Neighbourhood Skating Party with hot dogs, popcorn, hot chocolate, ice dancing and a DJ, the small change rooms were crowded by people warming up and changing into their skates. There were no benches outside, so people putting on their skates out there had to hop on one foot trying to change into skates while standing up. Others hobbled over the extremely icy, bumpy pathway to find a bit of fence to sit on to change their skates.

### ***How to fix this:***

Outdoor benches (or picnic tables) should be delivered to those rinks with no existing outdoor benches. Mats should lead to outdoor benches as well as to change rooms and washrooms.

While benches and picnic tables are perpetually in short supply in the summer, all over the city there are picnic benches chained together during the winter. If these picnic benches were distributed at the rinks during winter, there could be outdoor places to sit at every rink with no extra cost.



*No outdoor benches, Jimmie Simpson Rink*

## Food in rinks

### ***What needs fixing: Broken vending machines (or poor food choices):***

In the 23 outdoor rinks visited, there was a total of 25 vending machines, of which 13 were out of order. The ones that worked sold only pop, gatorade, water, chips, and candy bars.



*Out of order*

Vending machines are a cheap, but ineffective, solution to the challenge of food at a rink. Vending machines break, run out of items and present staff with irate and hungry skaters who lost their quarters and have no recourse other than arguing with staff. Of a total of 25 vending machines in the change rooms at Toronto's rinks, less than 50% of them actually work. They sit taking up space in small change rooms.

The foods and drinks offered by vending machines are by definition limited. Vending machines offer chips, candy

bars, Gatorade, pop and water. Vending machines should be phased out where possible, or maintained to a much higher standard, and only where a healthier alternative food provider is impossible to establish.

### ***How to fix this:***

**Food: community kitchens, snack bars.** Food available in rinks around the city varies a great deal and provides a spectrum of models to use when thinking about offering healthier, more diverse, and tastier foods.

Dufferin, Wallace, Rennie, Campbell and North Toronto Outdoor Rinks should be used as potential models for snack bars.

Wallace Rink is attached to a community centre. In the winter of 2007, Wallace Rink staff collaborated with Dufferin Rink staff and volunteers to create a "Sunday Family Day" snack bar and campfire program. From 2 to 4.30 pm every Sunday in January and February, rink staff worked with young teens to make cookies, little pizzas, and pasta with sauce in one of the two community centre kitchens, plus hot chocolate and hot dogs over a campfire. The teens were easily engaged in helping out with the cooking and preparing but also in creating and posting menus and practising counting out change under the staff's supervision. What were the benefits? For the teens: a little casual kitchen training, a little design and drawing practice, honing some math skills. For the Recreation staff: they came out of their staff offices and made friends. For rink users: some tasty food when all that fresh air made them hungry, and a sociable gathering place around the campfire. Public service at its best!

A number of rinks have the potential for innovative food programs. Some are attached to community centres with public health certified kitchens, some have a snack bar already installed. Some rinks that have minor food programs could increase the regularity of the snack bar hours. Some rinks with accessible kitchens nearby are Rennie, Wallace, North Toronto, Christie, Jimmie Simpson, and Harry Gairey.

In some rinks a kitchen could be added easily. When outdoor rinks and swimming pools share facilities (Greenwood, High Park, Christie, Monarch) there are large buildings with plenty of extra space. A new kitchen would have year round possibilities. Other rink change room areas that are large enough to accommodate a simple snack bar are Campbell, Trinity, Regent South, Riverdale, Hodgson, Dieppe, Harry Gairey, Wallace, and Ramsden.



Fund-raiser at Rennie, closed snack bar behind

## Rink permits

### ***What needs fixing: Low permit numbers:***

The permit office has a policy of no refunds if the rinks are closed for bad weather. There are also no refunds for poorly maintained ice. Charging people for rink time even when they can't use the ice discourages permit applications.

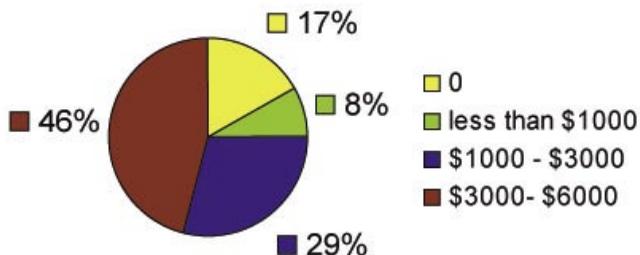
### ***How to fix this:***

Ask permit holders to pay for only half the season up front and allow front-line staff (or local supervisors) to collect for any additional weeks in which the ice was in serviceable condition

Post clear information about available permit times at rinks where there are no permits at the moment as well as at neighbouring rinks which are all booked up.

Ensure that staff at the more popular rinks are aware of which rinks have permits available so that they can direct potential permit holders to those rinks.

**Income from Permits 2006/2007**  
(data taken from 24 rinks)



# Helmet Policy

## ***What needs fixing: Un-enforcable helmet policy:***

Rink staff are told to enforce a shinny-hockey helmet policy for adults. This policy is so unpopular that its low compliance rate actually increases the legal risk for the city. From a legal point of view, the courts will readily award claims for an explicit policy that is not enforced, even if the policy can be shown to go counter to generally accepted forms of a sport – as is the case with shinny hockey and protective equipment.



*No helmets*

Of the 99 rink visits when helmet counts were included for this report, only on 19 occasions were there any skaters wearing helmets. The four rinks where the helmet policy was strictly enforced for adults had much lower rink use.

Enforcing the helmet policy is often impossible and sometimes even dangerous for one youth staff to do. This is especially true when the shinny players are older than the staff.

There is little or no documentation about the background of the mandatory-helmets-for-shinny policy. City management could produce no information about shinny-related injuries, nor about claims against the city, nor data from other cities. Nor was there any record of which working group might have discussed this policy before it was endorsed by the directors.

A freedom of information request turned up the information that there have been only three claims against the City for injuries at outdoor ice rinks since amalgamation. All rink-related claims (indoor and outdoor rinks together) during those seven years added up to a total of \$36,000. None of the claims were related to the absence of helmet use.

### ***How to fix this:***

Continue to enforce the helmet policy for children under the age of six, whether they are playing shinny or pleasure-skating

Return to posting signs that strongly recommend the use of helmets for all shinny players

Strictly enforce rules against “slap-shots” during shinny hockey times, and remove non-cooperating players from the ice.



*Kids need helmets*

## **Staff structure**

An organization that has frequent restructuring is obviously casting around a bit, trying to address some problems. During the last twenty-five years, there have been four major and three medium restructurings (often referred to as “re-orgs”) at Parks and Recreation (more recently called the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division). The most recent restructuring was probably the most drastic to date.

### ***What needs fixing: Too many sections***

In the months since the latest restructuring, each city rink has been in the purview of thirteen different administrative sections:

1. building maintenance,
2. electrical/ plumbing/compressor room (tech services),
3. rink manager and supervisor,
4. parks manager and supervisor,
5. skating programs supervisor,
6. youth issues manager,
7. neighbourhood teams/ community engagement manager,
8. planning and development project manager,
9. health and safety (corporate services),
10. permits,
11. fire service,
12. business services,
13. recreation manager and supervisor.

Outdoor compressor-cooled rinks seem to be administrative orphans – not exactly at home in any part of the new park structure, certainly not “owned” by anyone who sees them as a vitally important resource for neighborhoods and community engagement. *And it shows.*

### ***How to fix this:***

When there are this many different staff carving up responsibility for one place – one rink, or one park, or one community centre – that’s a tricky experiment. The only way to see if it can work is if everyone talks to each other. That takes a lot of time. But *not* doing it causes problems that take even more time. Management should direct front-line staff to signal their concerns to one another, and to work them out with as much care as necessary. Supervisors will have to take extra care to make sure that their staff feel sufficiently connected with staff from other sections, to run the rinks well. If front-line staff are experiencing blocks in communication with other sections of rinks workers, supervisors should help them find the reason for the difficulty and work at removing it. **The test for success should always be: is the rink running better than it was?**

### ***What needs fixing: Insufficient channels of communication between on-site staff***

With so many departments each structured as separate hierarchies it is very difficult for front-line staff in ‘tech services’ to know what their counterparts in ‘parks’ or ‘recreation’ are doing. This can make it quite frustrating for rink users trying to find out basic information about their rinks. The fact that the on-site recreation staff are unaware of this basic information is often baffling to the people who simply want to know why the rink has been shut-down for a few days or when to next expect the zamboni.



*Staff shinny hockey referees*

**From teacher Sally Bliss, about Monarch Park Rink, December 2006:** *"I'm a teacher at Greenwood Secondary School at Greenwood and Danforth. All our students are new Canadians. Last year, I started an after school skating program to introduce them to the joys of skating and get them "Active on Ice", during what can otherwise be quite a miserable season for many. With donations of used hockey skates and helmets, we'd walk 5 minutes over to Monarch Park's rink to use during public skating hours. The program was hugely popular! In September when school resumed, the first question a student from Iraq asked was, "When does skating start again, Ms?" We'll, it was supposed to start today, but the rink at Monarch is a mess. I phoned Matty Eckler Community Centre at noon and they said that it would most likely stay closed. but nobody had told them for sure I stopped by the rink at 4 pm and the rink attendant didn't know if the zamboni would be coming or not. I can't help but be frustrated at the lack of information across the city."*

### ***How to fix this:***

#### ***Use the on-site recreation staff as the central 'conduit'***

Front-line recreation staff (building attendants and rink guards) are most consistently at each rink, and each rink office has a log book whose partial purpose is to allow front-line rink staff to communicate with one another. The easiest way to make sure that problems (eg. compressor failure, rink operators stuck in traffic, etc) are communicated to rink users clearly and promptly is for front-line staff from all other departments to let the on-site recreation staff know exactly what is going wrong as soon as it happens. Obviously this kind of simple interaction happens often across the city, but it is neglected often enough that it is necessary for supervisors and managers to remind all rink workers to be clear and respectful with their colleagues.



# **APPENDICES**

**1-5**

# A Map of Toronto's Artificial Outdoor Ice Rinks



- |    |   |    |   |
|----|---|----|---|
| 1  | Barbara Ann Scott/<br>College Park          | 33 | Rivercrest Rink                                     |
| 2  | Broadlands                                  | 34 | Riverdale   |
| 3  | Buttonwood Rink                             | 35 | Rosedale  |
| 4  | Campbell                                    | 36 | Royalcrest Rink                                     |
| 5  | Christie Pits                               | 37 | Ryerson   |
| 6  | City Hall/Nathan<br>Phillips Square         | 38 | Scarborough Civic Centre,<br>Albert Campbell Square |
| 7  | Dieppe                                      | 39 | Sir Adam Beck Rink                                  |
| 8  | Dufferin                                    | 40 | Summerlea Rink                                      |
| 9  | Giovanni Caboto/<br>Earlscourt/ J.J.P.      | 41 | Sunnydale Acres Rink                                |
| 10 | Glen Long Rink                              | 42 | Trinity   |
| 11 | Greenwood                                   | 43 | Valleyfield Rink                                    |
| 12 | Harry Gairey/ Alexandra/<br>Scadding        | 44 | Wallace Emerson                                     |
| 13 | High Park                                   | 45 | Wedgewood Rink                                      |
| 14 | Hodgson                                     | 46 | Westgrove Rink                                      |
| 15 | Humber Valley Rink                          | 47 | West Mall Rink                                      |
| 16 | Irving W. Chapley Rink                      | 48 | Westway Rink  |
| 17 | Jimmie Simpson                              | 49 | Withrow   |
| 18 | Kew Gardens                                 |    |   |
| 19 | Lambton-Kingsway Rink                       |    |   |
| 20 | Ledbury Rink                                |    |   |
| 21 | Martingrove Rink                            |    |   |
| 22 | Mel Lastman Square Rink                     |    |   |
| 23 | Monarch Park                                |    |   |
| 24 | North Toronto Memorial CC/<br>Eglinton Park |    |   |
| 25 | Otter Creek                                 |    |   |
| 26 | Pleasantview                                |    |   |
| 27 | Prince of Wales Rink                        |    |   |
| 28 | Queensway Rink                              |    |   |
| 29 | Ramsden                                     |    |   |
| 30 | Regent Park North                           |    |   |
| 31 | Regent Park South                           |    |   |
| 32 | Rennie                                      |    |   |



*Stroller skating*

# Appendix 2

## History of ice time reductions and shifts

2001

**City of Toronto staff report, March 29, 2001**

To: Budget Advisory Committee

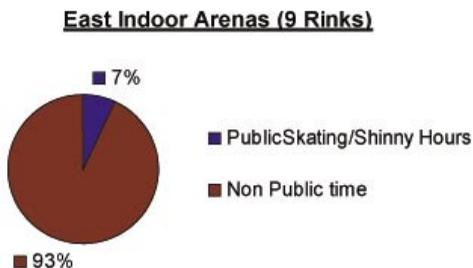
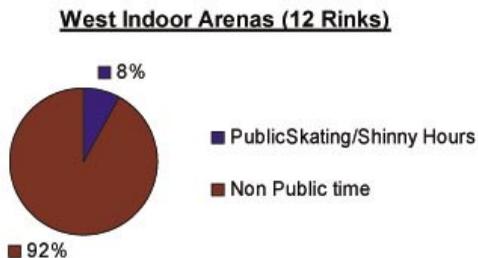
Page 3: Reduction in operating season for Outdoor Artificial Ice Rinks (AIR's):  
*The proposed adjustment to Outdoor AIRs is to reduce the operating season by 2 weeks to harmonize at a 10 week season from mid December to the end of February. This will be a reduction uniform across the City of Toronto. Outdoor skating would still be available at Nathan Phillips Square, Mel Lastman Square and Albert Campbell Square for the full season. Indoor public skating will provide an alternative and will be available at 60 indoor locations throughout the City. This is a reduction of 3.4 FTEs and \$0.096 M. Approved by Council.*

In actual fact, the “alternative” proposed for skaters – to skate at indoor arenas –was far from equivalent. During the period when the outdoor rinks would be closed, there were 750 hours of pleasure-skating time and 185 hours of shinny hockey time available at indoor arenas. Meantime, lost time at outdoor rinks: 120,000 hours of pleasure-skating and 100,000 hours of shinny hockey.

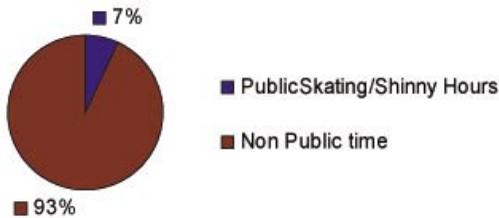
### **Arena (indoor) public skating times:**

In 2007, rink researchers called every arena to find out their total drop-in public skating and shinny times:

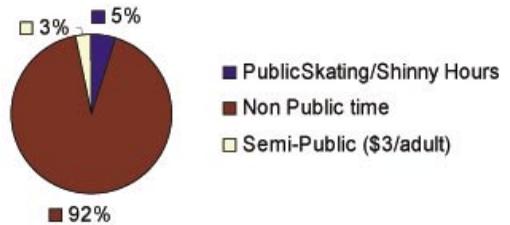
North York (north district) is the highest with 10% of the total time; Scarborough (east district) is lowest with 7%.



### North Indoor Arenas (17 Rinks)



### South Indoor Arenas (7 Rinks)

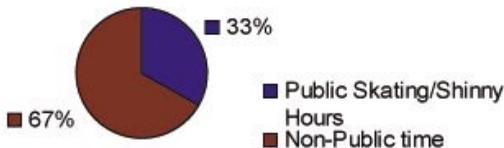


Data from **Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation Drop-in Skate 2006-2007**.  
Prime-time hours are defined as Mon-Fri 15:00-22:00, Sat-Sun 9:00-22:00

### **Outdoor rink public skating time:**

There are also big differences between different parts of the city, in the amount of drop-in public skating and shinny hockey offered in outdoor rinks, ranging from 33% of rink time in the west to 68% in central and downtown Toronto. If Wayne Gretzky was right and shinny is the foundation of hockey, then kids who live in the downtown area are lucky.

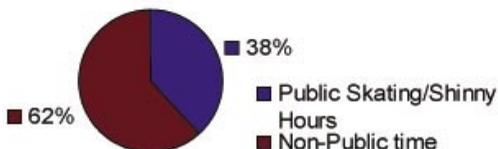
### West Outdoor Rinks (14 Rinks)



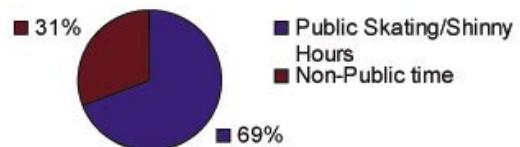
### East Outdoor Rinks (1 Rink)

No neighbourhood rinks in East District

### North Outdoor Rinks (9 Rinks)



### South Outdoor Rinks (30 Rinks)



Data from **Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation Drop-in Skate 2006-2007**.  
Prime-time hours are defined as Mon-Fri 15:00-22:00, Sat-Sun 9:00-22:00.

From Barclay Hope, protesting against the 2001 cuts: *"I am a parent of a seven year old girl, a nine year old girl, and a four year old hockey fanatic. I am forty-three years old and still play hockey. I am finding it increasingly difficult to explain to my son why he can't skate on the outdoor hockey rinks when there is ice on the streets. He was on the News one year when the weather had turned warm, but not warm enough to turn the artificial ice to mush. The cameraman had other people to shoot, but he chose Charlie, with his crossover turns and his sliding stops at the age of two and a half. When he has trouble going to sleep I lie beside him and whisper, recounting each step of the trip to the rink, the tying of the skates, the conditions of the ice, the hot chocolate afterwards. He sleeps. He wants to sleep with his skates on. Trite but true.*

*Now we are told the rinks will live shorter lives. Cutbacks. I understand cutbacks, and when you think about it, they're just hockey rinks. I guess we can go and play video hockey...."*

## **2002**

In 2002 the City of Toronto hired *Leisure Plan International* to do an **"Outdoor Ice Facilities Harmonization Study,"** at a cost of \$27,800. Word got around that the study was intended to make an argument for greatly reducing the number of outdoor rinks. However, on the basis of the information collected, the study did not make that recommendation. It was shelved.

## **2003-2006**

Mayor David Miller asked Parks, Forestry and Recreation to keep outdoor rinks open to the end of March break. The rinks still opened 2 – 4 weeks late, but some rinks stayed open another two-three weeks in March. However, the ice quality was poor every March and the census of rink users was very low. (see Appendix 5)

## 2006

2006 Budget Committee “*service level adjustments*”: Staff suggested at City Council’s Budget Committee meeting that the City could close all A.I.R.s except Nathan Philips Square and Mel Lastman Square. They’d be kept open 14 weeks. That would save \$569,400 in 2006 and \$1,117,500 in 2007. (This proposal didn’t pass up to the next stage).

## 2007

March: An internal staff report, “***Service Planning and Provision Strategy Options***” showed an alarming misunderstanding of the difference between compressor-cooled artificial ice rinks and natural ice rinks. It stated that both kinds of rinks are “*limited to a relatively short operational season that has recently been further reduced as climatic changes result in fewer days when it is possible to have natural ice or maintain outdoor artificial ice.*”

May: All Councillors received a big, colourful binder from Parks, Forestry and Recreation, called “***Councillor Resource Kit.***” Under “*Overview of Programs and Services*”, Artificial Ice Rinks (A.I.R.s) are omitted. Under “*Parks, Forestry, and Recreation by the Numbers*” indoor arenas are listed, but no A.I.R.s are on the list. Moreover, in the Sports listing, there is no reference to hockey at all.

August: Mayor Miller announced that outdoor rinks will not open until January 1, 2008, because of budgetary cost containment.

October 2: Councillor Karen Stintz made a motion at Executive Committee, asking that the rinks open in December and close at the end of February, saving money at the other end. Her motion did not pass. After the meeting broke up, Mayor Miller told a rink researcher: “*the rinks have to stay open into March Break because parents demand that, and the weather in December is too warm for the rinks.*” (see page 11)

October 12: MasterCard donated \$160,000 so that the city could open its rinks on Dec.8 (three weeks after the ideal opening date of mid-November).

## Appendix 3

### Ice cleaning by rink users with shovels: from the CELOS OUTDOOR RINK STAFF HANDBOOK

When snow is falling, some extra actions need to be taken in order to keep the rink a fun and safe place to skate.

Important: If there is any snow on the ice at all, ask the shinny players to play with only one puck. Keep a very close eye on them and if it becomes difficult to see the puck make them stop playing. It is imperative that they don't lose a puck in the snow. Pucks get stuck in Zamboni's and damage them, and we need to protect those machines! Explaining this to the shinny players is a good idea.

If there is a light/medium snowfall and no zamboni or snow-plough driver is able to come and clear the ice just then, supervised skaters can clear the snow themselves. It is very important to do this right because there are many possibilities for snow shoveling to be a disaster.

First, ask everyone to stop playing and see if there might be enough skaters around to clear the ice. If there are about five or six guys/gals and they are game, gather them together and explain the snow shovelling rules.

Do not hand out shovels until you have explained the whole process. Otherwise people will skate away with the shovels and you will have to yell.

#### **The shovelling rules:**

1. A staff person has to be around for the shovelling from start to finish.
2. No one may play on the ice until everyone is done working.
3. No snow may be piled anywhere on the ice, especially against the boards.
4. All snow that is cleared must be brought out of the rink through the gate and cleared to the side so that a Zamboni or a plough can still get through the gate.
5. At least one of the players has to change from skates to shoes and help the staff person shovel the snow out of the rink and over to the side.
6. If there are more helpers than shovels a couple of people should continually

skate around the rink and move the snow out from the boards with hockey sticks.

7. If there are not enough people around to clear the entire rink, staff can organize them to clear half of the rink (the half closer to the gate).

8. Everyone who helps to clear the rink gets a reward, e.g. free pizza or cookie and a free drink. (Not every rink has these on hand, but it is a good idea to think of some kind of a reward for such hard work. Maybe you can just explain to people that they are being good hardy Canadians and living out our heritage!)

**IMPORTANT:** Shovels have to be locked up at all times unless skaters are committed to clearing the whole ice.

Make sure the green metal shovels are locked up and that the other shovels are put back in the garage.

All of this will only be useful if everyone is vigilant about two things:

1. No pucks hidden under snow on the ice surface
2. No piles of snow on the ice surface especially against boards or blocking the entrance to the rink



## Appendix 4:

### Outdoor rinks, and the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division “by the numbers”

#### Operating budget, outdoor rinks:

In mid-August 2007, **Mayor David Miller** announced that the city’s 49 outdoor compressor-cooled ice rinks wouldn’t open until January 1, to save money that the city doesn’t have. The story had some unexpected plot twists. Although requests by various councillors to discuss the rink cuts were repeatedly ruled out of order at City Hall, MasterCard suddenly changed the bad news – by offering to pay the \$160,000 that the City said they would save by keeping the rinks closed during the busiest month of the rink season.

Mayor Miller accepted the offer a few hours later. But as he said, you can’t run a city on corporate donations. Cities are run on taxes and user fees.

And the outdoor rinks are not run on \$160,000. How much does it really cost to run these rinks? That’s still unknown, according to City Outdoor Rinks manager **Kevin Bowser**. At an October 17 outdoor-rinks meeting called by CELOS, Mr. Bowser acknowledged that city staff are still working on the project begun by ex-Parks and Recreation director **Don Boyle** in **2002**. The project is *identifying the specific costs for each operation run by Parks and Recreation*. Mr. Bowser said that although staff have worked for the last seven months on trying to determine the costs of running the outdoor rinks, that information will not be available until January 2008 at the earliest.

In the press, it was reported that cancelling the December rink season would save either **\$800,000** (*John Barber, Globe and Mail, August 29, 2007*), or **\$569,400** (*2006 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget Overview, Appendix A*), or **\$160,000** (*John Barber, Globe and Mail, September 1, 2007*). The *Toronto Sun* reported on September 21 that the whole outdoor rink season costs **\$2.9 million**, which isn’t a sum of any of those numbers.

The *2006 Operating Budget Overview* prepared by Parks management for the Budget Committee says the whole outdoor artificial ice rink season costs **\$1.7 million**. But this seems to have been an estimate.

### **Staffing:**

At the October 17 CELOS rink meeting, outdoor rinks manager Kevin Bowser said that the City uses about 50 seasonal zamboni drivers and 30 permanent staff zamboni drivers. If a zamboni driver costs the city about **\$30** an hour counting benefits (that number may be too low), that means each driver would cost **\$14,400** per twelve-week season, i.e. **\$1.15 million** for all the zamboni drivers, for a 12-week season.

By that calculation, a full complement of zamboni drivers would cost about **\$300,000** for the 24 days most rinks will be open in December.

Mr. Bowser said that he was not counting rink mechanical staff, since they are outside contractors. [Note: however, the rinks in the former City of Toronto are all serviced by City employees, except if something serious breaks.]

Staffing the individual rinks with rink guards and building attendants must cost less, since their wages are a fraction of the ice maintenance staff. But at this point we have no numbers for this cost.

### **Utilities:**

At the October 17 CELOS rink meeting, outdoor rinks supervisor Brian Green estimated that the outdoor rinks utilities cost is between **\$3000** and **\$5000** a week. For a twelve-week season it costs between **\$1.7 million** and **\$3 million** in utilities. Put another way, each rink has a utilities costs of between **\$36,000** and **\$60,000** a season.

That means that running all the rinks for three weeks in December costs between **\$441,000** and **\$735,000** in utilities.

For comparison: Ted Reeves (indoor) Arena reported **\$110,000** utilities cost for a year. If they were open for 40 weeks that would be **\$2500** a week.

### **Vehicles:**

There is no information yet about the cost of maintaining or replacing zambonis or other trucks used at outdoor rinks, nor about vehicle fuel costs.

### **Energy Retrofit:**

In 2004, City Council took out a loan for a **\$10.3 million** energy retrofit project for arenas and outdoor rinks. The retrofit was intended to save so much money that the utilities savings would entirely cover the debt repayment. However, the total utilities costs have actually gone up as energy prices rose.

It is unclear how much the computerization of the rink plants, and the weather stripping, have saved in rink energy costs, since there were no reliable baseline rink energy cost numbers for comparison at the beginning of the project.

The energy retrofit plan puzzled CELOS researchers and also many of the front-line City park staff when they first heard about it. But the City's *Access to Information* office said they couldn't share any details about what the cost-saving measures would be – “commercial information” is private. CELOS appealed that decision to Ontario's *Information and Privacy Commissioner*, and after a delay of almost a year, the decision went in favour of CELOS. The list of energy retrofit methods will therefore be available for CELOS researchers to study and take notes by the end of October.

Meanwhile, it's now time for the City to begin paying back the energy retrofit loan, in the amount of **\$1.3 million** a year for ten years (all of it payable from the Parks, Forestry and Recreation *operating* budget).

## Capital budget, outdoor rinks

**2006:** (*State of Good Repair* category) **\$1,839,000** (100% debt, none from Reserves) plus **\$2,250,000** (100% debt, none from Reserves). This includes two brand new rinks (Wallace-Emerson and Harry Gairey, **\$1.1 million** each), and repairs like the header trench work at Dufferin Rink (**\$200,000?**).

Note: putting a new window into an existing windowless rink changeroom or staffroom does not count as “state of good repair.” That **\$2000** cost is classified as a “service improvement,” and therefore low priority, far down the list behind the categories “*health and safety*,” “*mandated by legislation*,” and “*state of good repair*.”

Detailed figures for other Parks, Forestry and Recreation capital costs are unavailable to us.

## Overall Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget:

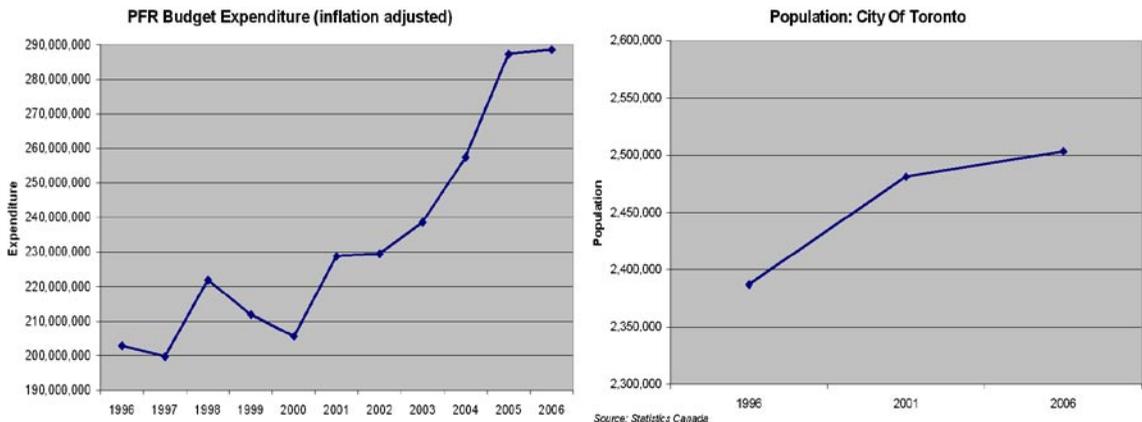
The 2007 payroll together with other costs means that the Parks, Forestry and Recreation budget is around **\$303.4 million gross** (we couldn't find the exact number in the documents). Revenue from permits, user fees and various

provincial and federal grants reduces the budget size to **\$226.146 million net**. But that's still quite a lot.

Ten year recap:

- 2001 Parks and Rec budgeted operating expenditures (*note: figures have been adjusted for inflation*): **\$228,707,453**
- population of the new City of Toronto (potential parks and rec users): **2,481,494** people
- 2006 Parks and Rec budgeted operating expenditures (*note: figures have been adjusted for inflation*): **\$288,551,619**
- population of the City of Toronto (potential parks and rec users): **2,503,281** people.
- **0.9%** increase in population in 2001 to 2006: only **21,787** more people
- **26.2%** increase, i.e. increase of nearly **\$60 million** (*note: figures have been adjusted for inflation*) in Parks, Forestry, and Recreation budgeted operating expenditures in the last ten years.

In that same period there's been less of many things in Parks and Recreation – including rink season length. The number of full-time-equivalent (FTE's) staff positions, however, increased by **743.4** in Parks and Recreation, from 2001 to 2006.



Source: Population figures from Statistics Canada for census years. Toronto Budget numbers from official budget documents.

## Rink-related Freedom of Information requests:

In 2002, CELOS researcher Jutta Mason got in touch with Parks and Recreation Director Don Boyle, asking him to help her find out how much it cost to run Dufferin Grove Park, including the outdoor rink. Boyle's financial assistant (a recreation worker) tried to work it out. It seemed that maybe running an outdoor rink cost between **\$40,000** and **\$50,000** a winter (at that time, the law still required a full-time rink operator on site for 8 hours a day). But the numbers never stayed the same, and after three months, Mason's follow-up questions no longer got answers. It's not likely that city staff were trying to hide the numbers – probably, they just didn't know them.

Eventually it became obvious that no more questions would be answered unless they were backed up by the *Freedom of Information Act*. Even when requests came by that route, responses were often so narrowly applied that they answered very little. That's why most people seeking answers from City Hall eventually give up trying, at least for a time. Now with the outdoor rinks threatened, it seems worth trying again, to track down the numbers – even if the search is difficult.

### **1. Background to 2006 rink closure proposal**

Date submitted: Sept.27 2007

Content: *Please let us examine all city staff correspondence, meeting notes, and other documentation relating to Item 4 of the 2006 Operating Budget Service Level Adjustments (copy attached), including all documentation of how the expenditure reductions in that item were calculated.*

### **2. Arena retrofit project costs**

Date submitted: Sept.27 2007

Content: *Please let us examine all correspondence, meeting minutes, and interim or final reports on the arena energy retrofit program/project. Please include current and recent-year comparative utility-use numbers and costs for arenas/rinks. (This follows up on Freedom of Information request #05-1379)*

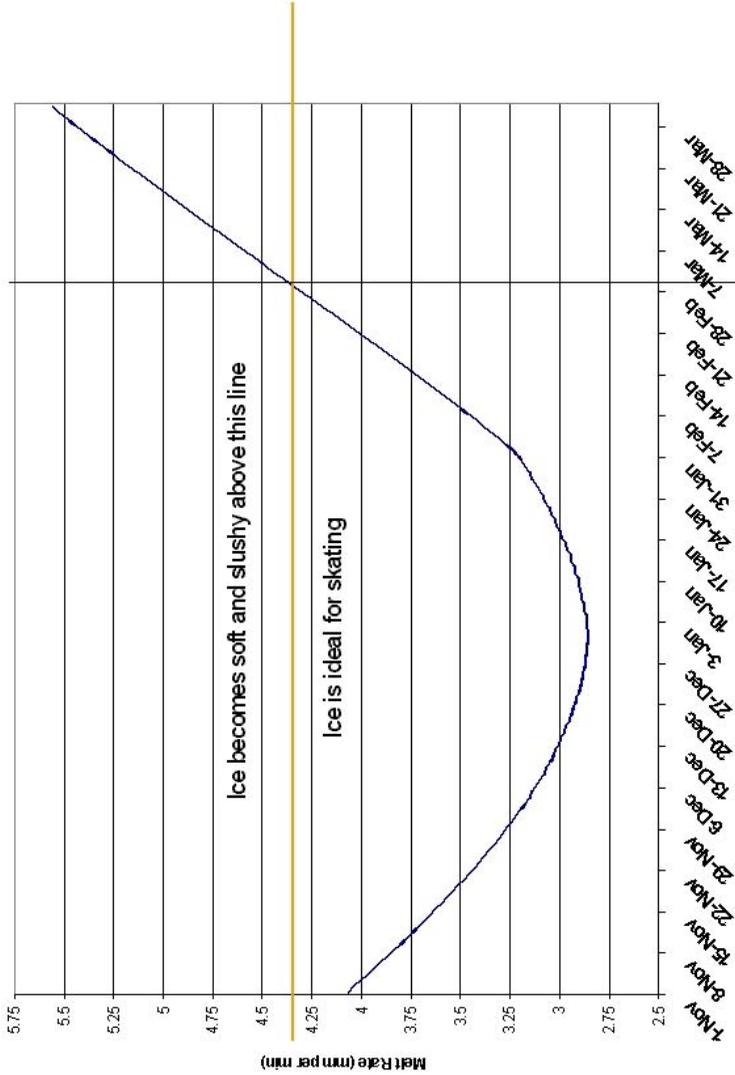
### **3. Cost of running outdoor rinks**

Date submitted: Sept.27 2007

Content: *Please send us the line-by-line cost to run each of the city's outdoor artificial ice rinks (list attached) in the winter 2005/2006 rink season and the winter 2006/2007 rink season. Please break down the energy costs by the month.*

# Appendix 5

Artificial Ice Rinks: Surface Ice Melt Rate at Noon (November - March)



\*Based on average daily temperatures (source: Environment Canada), elevation angle of the sun at noon, ideal ice thickness of 1.5 inches, and full compressor operation.