



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 02

Halifax Regional Council
February 23, 2016

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by Director

Brad Anguish, Director of Parks & Recreation

DATE: January 26, 2016

SUBJECT: Arena Web Based Booking and Payment System

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

- January 10, 2012: Motion of Halifax Regional Council:

"MOVED by Councillor Fisher, seconded by Councillor Hendsbee that Halifax Regional Council request that staff deliver a report on the feasibility and effectiveness of a web based booking and payment system for arena users with the ultimate goal of including all indoor and outdoor sports facilities (ie: ball diamonds, sports fields, courts, etc.) with Phase 1 to include HRM owned and operated arenas; Phase 2 include Multi District facilities and also facilities operating under management agreement and Phase 3 would include all other arenas in HRM should the owners or operators wish to participate. MOTION PUT AND PASSED."
- August 14, 2012: Halifax Regional Council Motion
MOVED by Councillor Hendsbee, seconded by Councillor Uteck that Halifax Regional Council:
..."3. Direct staff to implement the Centralized Scheduling Process as outlined in the Long Term Arena Strategy (Attachment 1 of the July 26, 2012 revised staff report); MOTION PUT AND PASSED."

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter; Section 79 1 (k), Council may expend money required by the Municipality for recreational programs.

BACKGROUND

In January 2012, Council directed staff to undertake work on options related to web based booking of arenas and include the capability to expand to other recreation facilities, fields and courts. In order to consider a web based booking system, a centralized approach to scheduling is required. Currently, HRM does not have a centralized scheduling for all recreation facilities, however, Regional Council approved implementation of centralized scheduling for arenas as part of the Long Term Arena Strategy (LTAS). As part of this work, staff completed an external scan of nine cities that use similar recreation software as HRM (CLASS from Active Network) plus the Internet Facility Booking module. This additional software allows for the following functions:

- 1) view-only availability, where citizens can view the availability of facilities, but must book and pay for the rental in person or over the phone; and
- 2) booking & payment, where citizens can check availability and then complete the transaction by booking and paying for the rental online.

All of the benchmark cities use, and have had success with the view-only availability component, but none have fully engaged the booking & payment portion for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons that cities have not expanded to web based booking from online viewing include:

- Online public viewing of the ice calendar may need to be disabled for periods of time while league bookings are finalized – this could cause public confusion or dissatisfaction.
- The current practice of clients subletting ice time from one group to another is problematic for online booking - affects ice allocation policies, wait lists, liability, and fair and equitable access.
- Customer service – personal interaction is still required to ensure all contracts are signed, keys picked up, and proof of insurance provided.

Even though there are challenges with a booking and payment system, a few cities are now, or will soon be, piloting a booking and payment functionality on a limited number of minor venues.

Subsequent to Regional Council's 2012 motion, staff has completed a Technology Roadmap for Parks & Recreation of which centralized scheduling and consistent technology in all HRM owned facilities are key components. These components have been further confirmed through Regional Council's direction on the Multi-District Facilities. At its October 6, 2015 meeting, Regional Council directed that consistent technology and "one – client" models be initiated at those facilities which would further support centralized scheduling.

DISCUSSION

Implementation of centralized scheduling and web based booking options for all user groups and facilities is complex. A multi-phase approach is needed to implement the various components. The first part of the centralized scheduling component was the assessment of the feasibility and implementation of a web based booking and payment system for the 4 HRM owned and operated arenas.

Phase 1: Implementing View-Only Availability for Municipally Operated Arenas

The process for scheduling the bulk of the ice time is still a largely manual process. Staff work with the various associations to match their requests for availability. The associations are allocated blocks of time and then manage their allocation of time for games and practices. The remainder of the ice time is available for rental by individuals or groups.

Following the success of the view only component of the Internet Facility Booking Module in other large cities, HRM purchased the Active network (CLASS) - Internet Facility Booking module in June 2012.

This established view-only availability within the CLASS system allowing HRM citizens to view facility availability online.

The view-only availability piece of the module was activated on November 1, 2012 for the four HRM owned and operated arenas. Citizens continue to express their appreciation in being able to see same time availability for ice rentals at the arenas. There have been other benefits of the online availability. For example, on the first day after going live, the Facility Scheduling office sold thirteen (13) additional hours of ice.

The initial cost to expand and implement the required software module via Active Network (CLASS) was covered by Parks & Recreation's operating budget (\$7500, with an annual maintenance fee of \$1500).

In addition to the HRM owned and operated arenas, several HRM owned arenas are located in multi-district facilities and operated by community boards. Most of those facilities have also implemented view-only availability, using a variety of technology solutions. However, there is no centralized online availability at this time.

Phase 2: Centralized Scheduling Process and Community Access Plan

As part of the LTAS, Regional Council approved implementation of two policy priorities:

- a) Community Access Plan (CAP)
- b) Centralized Scheduling Process

The Community Access Plan and the Centralized Scheduling Process are an integrated approach to ensuring fair, equitable, and efficient utilization of ice in HRM owned facilities.

Community Access Plan Implementation Update

The Community Access Plan outlines requirements to ensure fair and equitable distribution of ice time throughout sports, genders and age groups. In order to achieve success and meet the direction from Regional Council, it was imperative that each facility implement the CAP within their facility and apply the principles consistently to all user groups. The CAP was implemented in all HRM owned facilities on April 1, 2013.

Staff from both the HRM operated and community operated facilities has been meeting since its implementation to ensure that the CAP principles are implemented effectively. Many of the historical gender, sport, ability, and age inequities have been resolved as a result of the CAP implementation.

There were no incremental costs to implement the CAP.

Centralized Scheduling Process Update

The implementation of centralized scheduling will allow for a more strategic and efficient approach to utilization of ice and ensure all users will be treated consistently. Data presented in the LTAS report (pages 20-22) illustrates complexities in the current system of multiple scheduling groups. Centralized scheduling will provide a single portal for user groups to access ice and will allow for efficient and fair access.

To meet the objectives of a Centralized Arena Scheduling Process, there are several requirements:

- The existing manual processes of ice allocation must be incorporated into the new solution
- All arenas must be using a common solution rather than the variety that is being used today
- There needs to be a means to record ice utilization, not just at the Association level, but at the age/gender/sport level in order to report on alignment with the CAP
- There needs to be a means for performing the ice booking online that is secure and meets all conditions to complete the transaction

Similar challenges and requirements exist for other recreation facilities and programs.

To assist with meeting those requirements, the Parks & Recreation Technology Road Map has been developed to meet Regional Council's objectives regarding centralized facility booking, scheduling, and program registration activities in the Municipality's recreation facilities. Centralized scheduling is being considered as part of an overall coordinated system for recreation facilities, with the requirements listed above forming key components to ensure the overall system is able to offer a coordinated and efficient service to all users. Initial work has begun to consolidate the requirements of Regional Council's direction related to the Long Term Arena Strategy and the Multi-District Facility initiative, as well as requirements for the inclusion of other recreation programs and facilities.

The current CLASS system will be at end of life in December 2017. Therefore, a planning and investigation process to determine a replacement system has been initiated with a centralized scheduling system and coordinated technology across all facilities being critical requirements. Potential technology systems have been identified and evaluated through a Request for Information (RFI). Funding has been allocated in the proposed 2016/17 capital budget for the system and tenders will be issued once funding is approved.

The cost of developing the Centralized Scheduling component will be the subject of a future report.

Proposed Phase 3: Other Sport Facilities & Programs

Upon completion of implementation of centralized scheduling processes and technology for arenas and recreation facilities, HRM will explore options for other recreation assets. Ball fields, sport fields and sport court facilities may follow a similar approach with view-only availability as the initial phase. This will be dependent on the overall success of the initial implementation phases and the analysis of results from other cities. This phase is a larger undertaking, as the number of recreation assets is significant. For example, HRM currently schedules one hundred and four (104) ball diamonds, one hundred and thirteen (113) sport fields, and twenty-four (24) sport courts.

There are significant costs associated with the implementation of a coordinated recreation system that would include centralized arena scheduling and the ability to expand to other recreation facilities. The initial cost which has been estimated and submitted as part of the capital budget process for 2016/2017 is \$900,000.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement was completed as part of the LTAS process through the support of the steering committee.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Denise Schofield, Manager, Program Support Services, 902-490-6262
