

Toronto Sports Council Summit Series
THE FUTURE OF AQUATICS IN TORONTO

Canadian Tire Conference Centre, 2200 Yonge St, 3rd floor
May 15, 2008

DRAFT MEETING REPORT

On May 15, 2008, the Toronto Sports Council (TSC) hosted a working session to discuss the Future of Aquatics in Toronto. The session was hosted by Canadian Tire JumpStart, and triggered by the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) announcement that it would decommission 39 of its pools over the next two years. The purpose of the meeting was two-fold: to protect access to pools in the immediate term; and to begin developing strategies for sustaining and strengthening Toronto's pool infrastructure as key community asset over the long term.

59 people participated, including members of several aquatic organizations, government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, foundations, sports bodies, local media, the City of Toronto, the Toronto Sports Council (TSC), the Canadian Tire Foundation, community organizations, the TDSB, the University of Toronto, local schools, and parents (please see Appendix A for a full list of participants).

Dan Thompson, President of the Canadian Tire Foundation for Families and Swimming Canada opened the session and expressed the Foundation's commitment to supporting the effort to keep pools open. David Crombie, appointed by the TDSB to take a leadership role in exploring opportunities to keep pools open, explained his role in the process and his belief in the opportunities for the meeting participants to influence positively the future of pools. Finally, Karen Pitre, Chair of the TSC, explained the advocacy mandate of her organization, which aims to bring together the broader sports community, unify its voice and find solutions to challenges that face sport.

This Draft Meeting Report was written by Nicole Swerhun and Daniel Bernal, third-party process facilitators, who also conducted the meeting. It's intended to reflect the key messages from the discussion and is intentionally not a verbatim transcript. It is being delivered in draft to all participants, who are encouraged to provide their feedback. Please forward comments or suggested edits to daniel@swerhun.com by Friday, June 6, 2008, after which the report will be finalized.

SUMMARY OF KEY MESSAGES FROM THE MEETING

1. There's a strong case to be made for keeping the TDSB pools open.
2. There's a lot of information available regarding the current and future demand for pools that has not yet been compiled and it's critical this information be considered before any decisions are made about the future of pools.
3. There are many potential solutions to the challenges within the existing pool system that have not yet been explored (e.g. pressure on current infrastructure and programming, the costs of running programs, and the lack of a central body to manage all aspects of aquatic operations in Toronto).
4. There needs to be time for a collaborative effort between the aquatic sector, Canadian Tire, TDSB, the City, the TSC, and others to explore solutions. There's an opportunity for the approach to pools to be a model of how public assets are managed, paid for and governed.

I. APPROACH TO THE MEETING

The discussion at the meeting was focused around the following questions:

1. What compelling arguments exist that the decision to close pools needs to be revisited?
2. Review the information the Toronto Sport Council is considering collecting from organizations in Toronto's aquatic sector to help "make the case" to keep pools open. Is there any other information that TSC should be collecting?
3. What challenges does your organization face when delivering aquatic programs? What solutions could help address those challenged?
4. What collaborative partnerships can we undertake as a community to protect pools as key community assets?

Participants worked both in small groups and together in plenary to respond to these questions. The remainder of this Draft Report reflects the feedback and advice shared.

II. MAKING THE CASE FOR KEEPING POOLS OPEN

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What compelling arguments exist that the decision to close pools needs to be revisited?

1. There are significant questions about the accuracy of the estimates regarding the number of pool users and pool costs.
2. There's a need to demonstrate that the longer term consequences of closing pools have been considered (e.g. need time to complete a risk analysis to assess the process engineering steps that would need to be taken to reverse a decision, or even if you can reverse the decision once the pools are decommissioned).
3. Policy implications haven't been explored. The decision to decommission the pools is based on economics, but not on policy. The decision needs to include consideration of the contribution that swimming and sport make to a number of human values, for example the leadership and employment opportunities they create for youth, and the cost of the consequences (including increases in the number of child deaths by drowning, especially 10 years down the road). The return on investment that pools bring to the community need to be described and understood.
4. Before closing pools, work should be done to see whether TDSB pools have a role to play in filling the aquatic plans for the City of Toronto, and whether – for example - TDSB pools could accommodate users currently turned away from City pools because of limited capacity
5. No effort has been made by an intergovernmental group to find a way to avoid decommissioning of pools, and that should happen before a final decision is made.

6. It's not clear that TDSB has the legal right to limit access to a public asset that was built with City tax dollars.
7. Closing the pools would be a disservice to the communities that use them. These facilities are a source recreation and employment for a broad spectrum of the population, and youth in particular. If pools are closed, upper grade students would have fewer opportunities to participate in physical education classes.
8. Finding a strategy to keep the pools open offers a great opportunity for different stakeholders, such as the TDSB, the municipal, provincial and federal governments, and aquatic organizations, to figure out innovative ways of solving the issues through co-operation.

III. DATA COLLECTION

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Review the information the Toronto Sports Council is considering collecting from organizations in Toronto's aquatic sector to help "make the case" to keep pools open. Is there any other information that TSC should be collecting?

Participants agreed that collecting the data from Toronto's aquatic sector is a vital part of "making the case" to keep the pools open. Overall, they feel strongly that there are three types of data that should be collected as they are critical to informing any decisions regarding the future of pools. They include:

1. Data from users other than the city and the TDSB
2. Re-collect data from TDSB
3. A market survey

An early draft of a pool user survey (targeted toward organizations that run programs in pools) was shared with participants (see Appendix C). Suggested edits and additions to the survey are included below in *italics*.

- **Edit: Q2. What type of aquatic activities does your organization provide?**
Competitive events | Competitive Training | Leadership Training (Life Saving) | Skill Development | Recreation | Fitness | Rehab/Therapy
"Special Needs" should be added as one of the possible answers.
- **Edit: Q8A. What factors do you consider most important in the selection of an aquatic facility for your organization?** Rate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all important and 5 is extremely important.
 - A. Physical characteristics of the pool (size | depth | # of lanes | water temperature | viewing areas | change room | deck area | handicap accessible | state of repair | cleanliness | other (INSERT))
 - B. Other (price | location | caretakers | hours available | cleanliness | other (INSERT))

Part B should include the process of obtaining the permit to operate program at venues as one of the possible answers.

- **Edit: Q9. How would you rate the quality/state of repair of the pool(s) your organization is currently using?** Poor | Fair | Good | Very good | Excellent
At least one participant thought that this question is irrelevant and expressed concern about the way answers to this question would be used. Instead, it was suggested that a neutral, knowledgeable party to judge the state of repair of each of the facilities.
- **Edit: Q12. What is the impact of the proposed pool closures on your organization?**
It was suggested that this question should include the impact the pool closures would have on the community.
- **Add:** *Ask survey respondents what percentage of market demand is not currently met with the available programs and facilities. In addition, the survey should attempt to find out whether organizations meet the demand for their program with the existing facilities.*
- **Add:** *Ask survey respondents to estimate the amount of youth who take part in free programs at these pools and also find out how many kids use these pools during regular day/school hours. This question should attempt to estimate how many users would otherwise not get a chance to learn how to swim.*
- **Add:** *Question organizations that operate programs at schools whether they think that the facilities they use are professionally maintained/utilized.*
- **Add:** *Question that estimates the number of employees at each facility and determine the loss of employment that the pool closures would generate.*
- **Add:** *Determine whether improving management of the pools would raise the demand for aquatic programs.*

IV. LONG TERM CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What challenges does your organization face when delivering aquatic programs? What solutions could help address those challenges?

Challenges are listed in **bold** and solutions in *italics*.

→ **The existing pool infrastructure is already stressed with existing programs.** Aquatic organizations already can't deliver on the demand for their programs due to lack of pool availability. The City of Toronto's aquatic programs also have long waiting lists. *It was recommended that low cost, low technology solutions be found to continue operating the existing pool infrastructure, which should be part of a larger strategy to move forward to avoid the pool closures.*

→ **Pools are an important local asset for changing demographic.** Seniors demand for local pools will increase over time. *Pools should not be closed before plans for replacement are in place and a better understanding of the needs of future users—especially seniors—has been achieved.*

→ **The discussion about pools typically focuses on facilities. It's also about the programs.** A discussion needs to take place that evaluates the value of programs that teach basic skills and others like Swim to Survive. There is a segment of the population that learns to swim thanks to the availability of programs held at TDSB pools, including those who learn during school hours in physical education lessons. Potentially, these groups would otherwise not learn how to swim.

→ **Booking facilities is hard because a city-wide schedule isn't available.** Participants noted the lack of a central place where pools availability information can be found. This makes it very difficult for program providers to grow their operation and engage in long-term planning exercises with the aim of growing the aquatic community. *A website needs to be created where all information about aquatic facilities and programs can be stored and easily retrieved by any interested party.*

→ **Facilities are too expensive.** Permit fees are too high and if a fee closer to market rate was charged, there would be significant increase in users. Lower fees would also increase access to lower income users. *It was recommended that an independent party re-evaluate the costs of operating these facilities. Participants were confident that ways to reduce operational costs can be found.*

→ **Running pools needs expertise, resources and time.** Participants feel there are opportunities to significantly strengthen the governance and funding mechanisms that support pools. *Some suggested that opportunities for 3rd party management agreements with not-for-profits and for-profits should be explored to operate the facilities at schools. An umbrella organization could also aid smaller volunteer-driven aquatic organizations provide support. This organization could also be a central place for all aspects of aquatic programs in*

Toronto and take a leadership role in contributing to implementing strategic policies (e.g. Toronto Pools Strategy).

→ **Specially designed facilities are needed.** At least one participant mentioned that facilities are inadequate to host large competitive events, such as Pan-American Games. Current facilities do not offer enough space for dry-land training necessary for many aquatic activities.

→ **The aquatic community needs to find better ways to highlight health and social benefits to aquatic activities to the wider community.**

V. KEY PARTNERSHIPS & FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What collaborative partnerships can we undertake as a community to protect pools as key community assets?

1. Keep aquatic organizations working together, as they represent an invaluable resource and source of motivation.
2. Find ways to ensure all levels of government work together and assume their share of responsibility for keeping the pools open.
3. Seek corporate sponsors for funding opportunities. Corporations could be interested in buying naming rights of pools, which could generate significant revenue. Another option would be selling wall space to advertisers.
4. Seek the assistance of the provincial Ministry of Health Promotion, as involvement in aquatic programs would have a positive effect on health improvement.
5. Seek federal grants for public infrastructure.
6. Create a mechanism whereby developers are mandated to give a certain percentage of their investment back to the community as resources for the improvement of aquatic facilities or programs in the Toronto area.
7. Work together with health foundations (e.g. Heart and Stroke Foundation) or social development agencies to direct resources towards aquatic programs that go in line with the mission statement of these organizations.
8. As the TDSB sells some of its surplus lands or facilities, encourage the board to allocate the revenue of these transactions for the benefit of aquatic facilities.
9. Seek advice from other municipalities (or other institutions) that have implemented successful aquatic strategies.
10. Create an awareness campaign to ensure political representatives and citizens see value of keeping pools open.

VI. MOVING FORWARD

David Crombie wrapped up the meeting by sharing his perspectives on the next steps in this process:

1. The TDSB, the municipal and provincial governments each have a critical role in finding solutions for pools, as do key community organizations like those represented here at this meeting.
2. All stakeholders involved in this process have the hard, but rewarding, task of creating a set of policies that informs how municipal, provincial, and other institutions (the TDSB in this case) can collaborate. The success of this process could not only provide a solution to the closure of the pools, but also create a benchmark for policy frameworks for the twenty-first century.
3. The most effective way that aquatic organizations can influence the process is by expanding the base of constituents that advocate for the value of pools. A wider constituency will only strengthen our case and our ability to attract the attention of other institutions, including government, to work with us on this important issue.

APPENDIX A - Participants

The following individuals and organizations participated in the meeting (listed alphabetically by affiliation):

Company/Organization	First Name	Last Name
Allenby Daycare	Helen	Bucknell
Aquatic Federation of Canada	Linda	Cuthbert
Aquatic Infrastructure Council	Alex	Brown
Campaign for Public Education	Stephen	Seaborn
City of Toronto	Phyllis	Berck
CIUT Radio	Ted	Fairhurst
Danforth School Council	Annette	Wilde
David Crombie and Assoc.	Robin	Crombie
Dive Ontario	Mark	Rourke
Eunice's Swim School	Marguerite	Layne
Frank's Swim School	Mike	Liebmann
Healthcare Management Consultant	Livia	Hunter
Keele Pool Campaign	Peter	LaMantia
Lakeshore Swim Club and York Mavericks Waterpolo	Jane	Wright
Let's Make Waves	Heidi	Wilson
Let's Make Waves	Linda	Phillips-Smith
Let's Make Waves	Nancy	Abbey
Lifesaving Society Ontario	Barbara	Byers
Lifesaving Society Ontario	Doug	Ferguson
Masters Swimming	Lois	Adams
Masters Swimming Ontario	Chris	Smith
Media	Kris	Scheur
National Dragonboat Club	Konrad	Doenbecker
North Toronto Aquatic Club	Glenna	de Haan
North York Aquatic Club	Dave	Douglas
Ontario Aquatic Sport Council	Brian	Connors
Riverdale Pool	Debbie	Gordon
Scarborough Swim Club	Chris	Smelt
Speical Olympics Toronto	James	Noronha
Synchro Ontario	Cynthia	Caskey
TDSB	Howard	Goodman
TDSB/4400	Giselle	Burton
TDSB/4400	Sarah	Rier
Toronto City Councillor	Janet	Davis
Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation	Jeff	Carmichael
Toronto Sports Council	John	Wilkinson
toronto sports council	Mike	Pitre
Toronto Sports Council (TSC)	Karen	Pitre
Toronto Star	Emilie	Mathieu
Toronto Swim Club	John	Grootveld
Toronto Swim Club	Laura	Pratt
Toronto Swim Club	Leslie	Carter
Toronto Synchronized Swimming Club	Valerie	McDonald
Tourism Toronto	Robert	Kawamoto
Tourism Toronto	Sonja	Turek
University of Toronto	Cathy	Hughes
University of Toronto	Robin	Campbell
YMCA	Carolyn	Tyner
YMCA	Scott	Haldane
	Anne	Bell
	Sharon	Brodovsky
	David	Crombie
	Janet	Dabrus
	Rob	Milligan
	Laura	Pereverzoff
	Brenda	Shillington
	Bev	Swerling
Facilitation	Nicole	Swerhun
Note taking	Daniel	Bernal

APPENDIX B – Proposed Agenda

Meeting Purpose

To seek feedback from organizations representing Toronto’s aquatic community on opportunities to:

- Protect access to pools in the immediate term; and
- Begin developing strategies for sustaining and strengthening Toronto’s pool infrastructure as a key community asset over the long term.

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5:00 pm	Welcome Dan Thompson, Canadian Tire Foundation for Families + Swimming Canada
5:05	Introductions & Agenda Review Nicole Swerhun, Facilitator
5:10	Opening Remarks David Crombie Karen Pitre, Toronto Sport Council <i>Questions of Clarification</i>
5:45	Discussion <u>Key Questions:</u> SHORT TERM 1. What compelling arguments exist that the decision to close pools needs to be revisited? 2. Review the information the Toronto Sport Council is considering collecting from organizations in Toronto’s aquatic sector to help “make the case” to keep pools open. Is there any other information that TSC should be collecting? LONG TERM 1. What challenges does your organization face when delivering aquatic programs? What solutions could help address those challenges? 2. What collaborative partnerships can we undertake as a community to protect pools as key community assets?
8:25	Wrap-Up and Next Steps David Crombie
9:00	Adjourn

APPENDIX C – Draft Survey

MAKING THE CASE TO KEEP POOLS OPEN Draft Survey Questions to Aquatic Organizations

1. **What type of aquatic services does your organization provide?** Swimming | Diving | Synchro | Water Polo | Scuba | Other (INSERT)
2. **What type of aquatic activities does your organization provide?** Competitive Events | Competitive Training | Leadership Training (Life Saving) | Skill Development | Recreation | Fitness | Rehab/Therapy
3. **Describe the pool(s) currently being used by your organization?** Pool | Type (City, TDSB, private, etc.) | Location (N, S, W, E) | Major Intersection | Rental rate/hour
4. **What are the hours of operation of the pool(s) you use?**
5. **What time of year do you use the pools?** Spring | Summer | Fall | Winter
6. **How many users do you bring to the pool(s)?**
7. **What is the age of participants?** % over 18 | % under 18
8. **What factors do you consider most important in the selection of an aquatic facility for your organization?** Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all important and 5 is extremely important.
 - A. Physical characteristics of the pool (size | depth | # of lanes | water temperature | viewing areas | change room | deck area | handicap accessible | state of repair | cleanliness | other (INSERT))
 - B. Other (price | location | caretakers | hours available | other (INSERT))
9. **How would you rate the quality/state of repair of the pool(s) your organization is currently using?** Poor | Fair | Good | Very Good | Excellent
10. **What do you like or dislike about the pool(s) your organization is currently using?**
11. **What are the significant barriers and/or challenges that your organization currently faces, and how could they be addressed?** A. With reference to your aquatic facility? B. Other?
12. **What is the impact of the proposed pool closures on your organization?**
13. **Do you have any additional comments?**

PROPOSED NEXT STEPS WITH THIS SURVEY

Based on feedback from this meeting, the Toronto Sport Council will refine the survey questions (as necessary) and distribute within the next week to everyone who signed in at the meeting, and encourage people to pass it on to other organizations as well. The survey will also be available for downloading from the TSC website (www.torontosportscouncil.com). We're hoping people will reply by May 31st so that the information can be compiled and shared in early June.