



# Mariners Centre Recreational Needs Assessment



## Final Report August 2015

Submitted by:  
**dmA** Planning & Management Services  
Wolfville, Nova Scotia

In Association with  
WSP Canada Inc.



August 14, 2015

Mr. Gil Dares  
Manager  
Mariners Centre  
45 Jody Shelley Dr.  
Yarmouth, NS B5A 4B2

Dear Mr. Dares:

**Re. Mariners Centre - Needs Assessment**

We are pleased to provide our final report for the Mariners Centre Needs Assessment.

This study identified the need for new and replacement indoor recreation facilities at the Mariners Centre to serve residents in the Yarmouth area. The study identifies opportunities to replace aging facilities and significantly enhance programming in the community.

This project represents the first step in the development process. If a decision is made to proceed to the next steps, a feasibility study is required to address conceptual design, capital and operating costs and to determine a preferred management and operating model.

It has been a pleasure working with you on this project. We trust the recommendations will provide a solid foundation for the municipal owners/funders to plan the Mariners Centre's future.

Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Morgenstern', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jim Morgenstern, MCIP  
Principal

cc: Christina Townsend, WSP Canada Inc.

# Mariners Centre Needs Assessment

Final Report

August 14, 2015

## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
THE ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT	2
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>3</b>
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	5
STUDY PROCESS	6
NEEDS ASSESSMENT APPROACH AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS	7
Factors Affecting the Needs Assessment	7
Service Area Population	8
Impact of Location	9
Benefits of Multipurpose Recreation Complexes	9
The YMCA	12
The Operation, Management and Financing of New or Expanded Facilities	16
<b>SECTION TWO: NEEDS ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>18</b>
INTRODUCTION	18
ARENAS	20
AQUATIC CENTRE, GYMNASIUM, MULTIPURPOSE SPACE AND FITNESS	23
Gymnasium Space	27
Multipurpose Space	31
Fitness Center	35
CURLING FACILITY	37
BEST PRACTICE FACILITIES	41
<b>SECTION THREE – NEXT STEPS</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>MUNICIPAL-YMCA PARTNERSHIPS</b>	<b>48</b>

## INTRODUCTION

In March 2015, dmA Planning and Management Services and WSP Canada Inc. were retained by the Mariners Centre Board of Management to prepare a recreational Needs Assessment. The results are documented in this report.

---

### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

Two reports were prepared for the study. A separate Planning Context Report documents all background information including the inventory of existing facilities, demographic data, recreational trends analysis and the results of the community consultation activities. While information from the Planning Context Report is referenced in the needs assessment, the background report should be consulted for details.

The Needs Assessment Report is organized as follows:

Executive Summary

Section One: Background and Approach to the Needs Assessment

Section Two: Needs Assessment – Major Facility Components

Section Three: Conclusion and Next Steps

Appendix A – Discussion – YMCA – Municipal Partnerships

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Recreation Facility Requirements**

Our analysis indicates the need for the following facilities in the Yarmouth area to adequately address the community's recreational needs. These facilities could be developed as an expansion of the Mariners Centre.

- A contemporary aquatic centre (a 25m, six lane pool with training, instructional, recreational and therapeutic components)
- A gymnasium and additional multipurpose space, if located in conjunction with a new aquatic facility and supported by enhanced programming and community development activities
- A replacement for the existing curling facility

### **Operational and Management Considerations**

There is not sufficient demand to support both municipally owned and operated facilities and those currently provided by the YMCA. In recent years, a number of Canadian municipalities have entered into partnerships whereby the YMCA operates municipally owned facilities. If this operating model was adopted in the Yarmouth area, the YMCA would close its existing facility, move to the Mariners Centre and operate a municipally owned pool, gym and fitness centre – essentially replicating their existing facility in a modern, well designed recreation complex. We have recommended that this operating model be explored and if terms acceptable to both parties can be realized that it be implemented in preference to municipally operated facilities.

The existing curling facility is owned and operated by a community association with no municipal financial support. This is customary in most Nova Scotia municipalities. A move to the Mariners Centre would therefore represent a change in policy on the part of municipal owners/funders. The affected Councils must determine if this acceptable. However, even if the Councils agree to financially support curling, a facility could be developed with municipal support at a location other than the Mariners Centre. The pros and cons of this option require further investigation before a decision is made to include curling in a future Mariners Centre expansion.

## Municipal Recreation Service Delivery

Should the Mariners Centre be expanded and redeveloped as a major multipurpose recreation complex, it will represent a major transition to a new model of recreation facility provision in the Yarmouth area. It is therefore an ideal opportunity for the municipal units who own and/or finance the Mariners Centre to review policies and practices associated with programming and community development, facility scheduling, managing and monitoring facility use, fees and other aspects of service delivery. We recommend that this review be undertaken.

## Next Steps

The next step in pursuing a possible expansion of the Mariners Centre is a detailed feasibility study. The purpose of the study is to provide the owners/funders of the Mariners Centre with the information necessary to make a decision on proceeding with the project. The feasibility study deliverables include:

- An initial space program for major facility components and a schematic concept describing anticipated relationships and key design principles
- A preliminary capital cost
- A site plan showing how the expansion can be accommodated on the site and any implications for current or proposed uses
- A proposed management and operating structure clarifying the role, if any, of the YMCA and the implications of the expansion for existing staffing, policies and procedures and the Management Board
- An initial operating budget indicating the annual cost to the municipalities.

## **SECTION ONE – BACKGROUND AND APPROACH TO THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

---

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The Mariners Centre is a major recreation complex serving western Nova Scotia. Opened in 2001, the Centre includes a twin pad arena and associated support facilities (boardroom, lounge, program/meeting room) which is used extensively for both ice sports and entertainment and special events. The Centre is owned by the Town of Yarmouth (Town) and the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth (District) and operated by a Board of Management. While not an owner, since 2014 the Municipality of the District of Argyle (Argyle) has been a party to the operating and management agreement and shares equally with the Town and District in any operating deficits.

The municipal owners' interest in the Mariners Centre's long range development plans gave rise to this study. The Needs Assessment addresses existing capacity and future needs and expectations and recommends a preliminary long-term facility development plan. This is a preliminary plan; further assessment of the feasibility of specific developments will be undertaken in a subsequent study.

Prior to this study, a meeting of community stakeholders was convened in October 2014 where almost 90 ideas for possible additional facilities and developments at the Mariners Centre were identified. A number of possible recreation facility developments (such as an aquatic centre; gymnasium; curling rink; fieldhouse/indoor soccer facility) were identified and are the focus of this study. Other ideas emerging from the workshop included design and operational enhancements (e.g. a larger lobby, more seating, storage space, portable flooring, bio-mass, renewable energy, etc.) and non recreational facilities (restaurant, hotel, commercial daycare; environmental design research centre; office rentals, etc.). While the design and operational enhancements will be explored further if the project proceeds, they are not part of this assessment. The need for non-recreational facilities is not considered in this study.

As with the input at the October 2014 workshop, many of the comments received from stakeholders during this study process are important and relevant considerations affecting the future of the Mariners Centre, but are not pertinent to the needs assessment. For example, the Agricultural Society submitted a brief that raised a number of concerns about future developments that might impact their use of the property for equestrian events. They also had suggestions for improvements to the barn and outdoor riding ring. Other user groups noted issues with design and accessibility; the available seating; and other features of the Mariners Centre. This input is described in the Planning Context background report and we are confident

that the Board of Management will address these issues in future studies dealing with the expansion of the Mariners Centre. However, they are not a part of the needs assessment.

The needs assessment is the first, critical step in planning for the future of the Mariners Centre. We understand a more in-depth feasibility study will be undertaken following this study. The feasibility study will include detailed architectural and building assessments, site planning and the creation of a comprehensive business plan and capital cost projection for any recommended changes to the Mariners Centre.

To serve as a solid foundation for the work that will follow the needs assessment will:

- Narrow the long list of ideas and suggestions that emerged from the October 2014 community meeting to a realistic list of viable projects.
- Establish market demand – the end product of this study is not a list of projects that the community would like to see at the Mariners Centre – it is a short list of facilities where projected community use is sufficient to support their development at the Mariners Centre.
- Establish priorities if not all projects can be pursued in the short term.
- Demonstrate needs in a manner that will satisfy the requirements of local decision-makers and external funders.
- Provide advice on implementation and ensure the momentum developed in this study carries through to the feasibility study and continues to support the successful development of an improved Mariners Centre.

---

## STUDY PROCESS

The needs assessment was undertaken in four phases.

- **Phase One – Planning Context:** documented the current state and established the context for the study.
- **Phase Two – Community Engagement:** included consultation with the general public, stakeholder groups and staff, to identify future needs, priorities, and options for development.
- **Phase Three – Needs Assessment:** identified community needs and options for facility development.
- **Phase Four – Future Development Strategy:** involved drafting the facility development strategy, review with the study team and a final presentation to the public.

The results of Phase One and Two are documented in a separate background report.<sup>1</sup> This report describes the needs assessment and next steps.

The following were key aspects of the study process:

- Background information for the analysis was provided by Mariners Centre staff and staff associated with other community organizations and agencies, such as the YMCA. (See Planning Context Report for details).
- Two surveys were conducted for the study. The general public was invited to complete an on-line survey that was hosted on the web-site of the Mariners Centre and the Town, District and Argyle. The survey was widely advertised and 465 responses<sup>2</sup> were received in the three weeks it was active. Organized sport and recreation groups participated through a separate detailed survey. (See Planning Context Report for details).
- In addition to the surveys, a number of community organizations were asked to submit briefs and personal interviews were conducted with Mariners Centre staff, other municipal officials, agency representatives and community members. (See Planning Context Report for details).
- Two public meetings were held; one at the beginning of the study to identify issues and a second to review study findings.
- The consultants also met with the Mariners Centre Board of Management, which served as the Steering Committee for the study.

---

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT APPROACH AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS

### Factors Affecting the Needs Assessment

The following factors were considered in determining the need for new or expanded recreation facilities:

- *Service Area Population/Population Change:* The current and future population defines the potential market for the new recreation facility development at the Mariners Centre.
- *The Impact of Location on Use:* This assessment is focused on the Mariners Centre. Consequently, the impact of location, if any, on the use of proposed facilities must be considered.
- *Availability and Use of Current Facilities:* The extent to which prime time is scheduled to capacity at existing facilities as well as any indication of unmet demand.
- *Trends in Participation:* Changing patterns of participation in various recreational activities is a major consideration in projecting needs.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mariners Centre Needs Assessment. Planning Context Report. June 2015.

<sup>2</sup> This is a very high response rate for a survey of this type. However, this was not a statistically valid survey and the results cannot be assumed to accurately represent public opinion. See Planning Context Report for further discussion.

- *Community Demand:* The demand for additional facility time among the general public, organized sport and recreation groups and other potential users.
- *Levels of Supply in Similar Sized Communities:* Where possible the facility supply per capita in the service area was compared to other communities. Despite the limitations associated with comparing communities in this manner because of the many intervening variables, these types of population based comparisons do provide a useful benchmark to assist in the assessment. Comparative supply levels were based on data for Ontario communities of 10,000 to 50,000 population. We used Ontario data because it offers a much larger sample of communities (36 for 10,000 to 50,000 population). In addition, because this was a special study<sup>3</sup> that was undertaken by dmA based on a survey of all major Ontario municipalities we were able to control for quality of the data and ensure that comparable facilities were included in each of the major categories used for benchmarking. The data was compiled in 2005 and is therefore somewhat out of date. It likely underestimates levels of supply in most communities.

## Service Area Population

For the purposes of this assessment, we have defined the Mariners Centre service area as the County of Yarmouth. The County includes the Town of Yarmouth, the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth, the Municipality of the District of Argyle, and the First Nations community of Yarmouth (Reserve 33). The three municipal units fund the Mariners Centre and contribute the majority of current users. This is likely a conservative estimate of the service area for some of the facilities that may be provided. For example, if a contemporary aquatic centre was developed, the nearest competing facility would be in Bridgewater and we expect the market area would extend throughout south western Nova Scotia.

The service area 2011 population was 25,275, down from 27,310 in 1996. There are no population projections available for the service area, but based on discussions with municipal and other agency staff, we have assumed a stable population of 25,000. A stable future population would reverse the trend of moderately declining population and as such is likely an optimistic scenario. However, there are a number of community and economic development agencies focused on promoting the area and retaining and attracting investment, so it may be a reasonable assumption for planning purposes. That said, population change in the service area should be monitored and decisions based on stable population should respect the uncertainty inherent in any future population projection for the Yarmouth area.

We have no information on the changing characteristics of the population (age, household structure, employment, income, etc.)<sup>4</sup>. However, the service area currently has an older age profile than the Province (greater than 19% of the population over the age of 65, compared to less than 17% for the Province).

---

<sup>3</sup> Municipal Recreation Facility Inventory Study. dmA Planning & Management Services, 2005

<sup>4</sup> See Planning Context Report for information about the 2011 demographic profile.

Consistent with the current situation and societal trends we have assumed an aging population which suggests lower levels of participation in active, organized sports. We have assumed that any other changes (income, ethnicity etc.) will not be significant and won't affect the demand for recreation services.

## **Impact of Location**

While the study investigates recreational needs in the service area, it is premised on the assumption that any required facilities will be provided at the Mariners Centre. A few key informants felt facilities might not be well used at this location. We disagree. The location will not have an impact on use for the following reasons:

- The Mariners Centre was developed from the outset as a regional recreational facility. It is ideally situated at the intersection of Highways 101 and 103 to serve the larger region. Current users are drawn from the three municipal units that fund the Mariners Centre and constitute the service area for the purposes of this study.
- The community survey clearly indicates support for the Mariners Centre location. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of respondents feel that if new or replacement facilities are required, the Mariners Centre is an appropriate location for these facilities.
- The majority of sport and recreation groups responding to the study survey supported the Mariners Centre location. None of the organizations that are currently using other facilities in the community indicated that they would not transfer their programs to the Mariners Centre if appropriate facilities were provided<sup>5</sup>.
- The situation in the Yarmouth area is being repeated in virtually every major regional market in Canada as municipalities move from the old model of stand-alone facilities to large multipurpose recreation complexes. There is no evidence to suggest this transition is having a major negative impact on participation rates; indeed in most communities multipurpose recreation complexes are experiencing higher levels of community use.

## **Benefits of Multipurpose Recreation Complexes**

If the Mariners Centre is expanded, either with new facilities or with replacements for existing facilities in the community, the development will be consistent with trends in Nova Scotia and throughout Canada. Many communities are decommissioning older recreation infrastructure and moving from stand-alone single purpose facilities to large centralized recreation complexes. In Nova Scotia, recent developments in Pictou County and Bridgewater are examples, but this is happening throughout Canada because of the benefits of multipurpose recreation complexes.

---

<sup>5</sup> This question was not relevant to arena users who are already at the Mariners Centre and some of the respondents, such as the Boys and Girls Club, were already using facilities elsewhere in the community.

Multipurpose complexes will generally increase the use of recreation facilities and, more importantly, frequently attract new users. In addition, because all facilities are under one roof – these complexes can make a significant contribution to a wide range of social objectives including higher levels of community cohesion and social interaction; inter-generational contact; and opportunities for shared program delivery.

Unlike stand-alone facilities, multi-component recreation centres provide many opportunities for cross-programming (e.g. a gym and swim program) or concurrent programming (e.g. a single location where family members can simultaneously participate in programs of interest). Consequently, the municipality is in a position to expand its program base in both different areas of interest and service combinations. In addition, the use of large multi-component recreation centres can support a full range of ancillary facilities and amenities such as food service, child-care, facilities for those with special needs; etc.

Multipurpose complexes create unique opportunities for more cost effective service delivery. Staff can be more efficiently deployed and administrative, security and reception duties frequently can be shared. Equipment can be shared among facilities resulting in lower overall operating costs and economies of scale can be utilized to negotiate better arrangements for service contracts, insurance, etc. Finally, much higher levels of use can be anticipated yielding higher program revenues and attracting more sponsors and advertisers.

It is not within the scope of this study to investigate or quantify these benefits. The financial implications will be explored further if a feasibility study and business plan is prepared following the Needs Assessment. While we have not quantified these benefits for the Yarmouth area, they have been demonstrated elsewhere and should be anticipated with a Mariners Centre expansion.

## **Physical Activity Strategies**

The Town and District of Yarmouth and Argyle have prepared physical activity strategies. We expect improved recreational facilities at the Mariners Centre will support the objectives of these Physical Activity Strategies. However, it should be noted that the research<sup>6</sup> undertaken and the strategies adopted do not suggest that the absence of facilities is a major barrier to physical activity in the region. This is not surprising because facilities are seldom the major constraint to active and health living. Similar to other communities, lack of time, poor awareness and education associated with the benefits of physical activity, cost and other programming constraints were much more significant barriers than the availability of

---

<sup>6</sup> We were provided with surveys associated with these physical activity strategies. These were (1) a 2013 online survey of 150 respondents as part of the Physical Activity Strategic Plan. Town and Municipality of Yarmouth. 2014-19. (2) The Municipality of Argyle. 2010 Recreation and Physical Fitness Syndicated Survey. Ipsos Reid. with 300 respondents, and (3) District of Argyle Physical Activity Community Survey. Dec. 2014. Nova Insights. Both of the Argyle surveys were statistically valid.

facilities. For example, in Argyle lack of time was mentioned as a barrier by 42% of respondents, followed by weather and health restrictions (14% and 12% respectively) with “lack of places to exercise” mentioned by 10%.<sup>7</sup> A second survey in Argyle found that only 11% cited “infrastructure in the local area” as a factor that would cause them to participate more frequently<sup>8</sup>. The strategies adopted for enhancing physical activity and health in the three service area municipalities generally do not focus on facilities. For example, the Town and District Strategy has a very strong focus on awareness and education; programming; active transportation and initiatives aimed at specific target groups such as females.

While facilities do not emerge as the most important barriers to physical activity, we know that high quality, accessible and affordable facilities are a part of the solution to the adverse impacts of sedentary lifestyles. In the Yarmouth area, this may be particularly true for aquatic facilities. While walking and activities such as gardening will have the highest levels of participation in most communities, swimming remains a very popular activity – especially if a full range of competitive, instructional, recreational and therapeutic programs can be accommodated in local aquatic facilities, which is not the case currently in the Yarmouth area. In this regard, it is interesting to note that swimming was second only to walking as an activity in which Argyle residents reported they would like to participate more frequently (mentioned by 23% of respondents).<sup>9</sup>

The Needs Assessment survey was more strongly focused on facilities than the surveys conducted for the physical activity strategies<sup>10</sup>. The results are consistent in so far as “no facilities to accommodate my interests” and “facilities available but unsuitable” were not the major reasons for not participating in recreational activities of interest. These reasons were reported by 22% and 8% of respondents but restrictions associated with insufficient time and cost and inconvenient scheduling were mentioned as often (by 37%, 33% and 20% respectively). However, almost 80% of the survey respondents reported that new recreation facilities or replacements for existing facilities were required in the Yarmouth area to meet the needs of their household. An indoor pool dominated the list of facility requests by a considerable margin. Other replacement facilities, such as multipurpose space, gymnasias, a fitness centre and curling club were also mentioned. Very few facilities that do not currently exist were identified (indoor soccer was the only recreation facility mentioned by a significant proportion of the respondents). These responses suggest that while the Yarmouth area is served by a number of recreation facilities, respondents feel these are not of sufficient quality to meet their needs.

---

<sup>7</sup> The Municipality of Argyle. 2010 Recreation and Physical Fitness Syndicated Survey. Ipsos Reid

<sup>8</sup> District of Argyle Physical Activity Community Survey. Dec. 2014. Nova Insights.

<sup>9</sup> District of Argyle Physical Activity Community Survey. Dec. 2014. Nova Insights.

<sup>10</sup> As noted earlier, this study's survey was also not statistically valid and likely does not accurately represent public opinion in the same manner as the Physical Activity surveys.

## The YMCA

The scope of the Needs Assessment only deals with the requirement for new or improved facilities – not the owner or operator. Consequently, while we are addressing the need for a new and improved aquatic facility to serve residents in the Yarmouth area, we are not specifically charged with commenting on the future of the YMCA. However, it is clearly not possible to discuss the need for a new pool without considering the future of the YMCA.

Operating from its facility in downtown Yarmouth, the YMCA has been serving the community for decades. The facility has experienced a number of renovations and restructuring of program areas over time. The indoor pool is a small (20 yard) traditional design with none of the amenities associated with contemporary aquatic facilities. Other facilities include fitness areas, a gym and multipurpose space. A number of capital conservation items will need to be addressed at the existing building in the coming years and financing these will be a challenge.

The Yarmouth and District YMCA serves a small market from an older facility. It has struggled to build a sustainable membership base and a secure financial basis for continued operations. The Board continues to address these challenges and the YMCA's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan is focused around four strategies: Building the Brand; Expanded Outreach and Partnership; Financial Development and Strengthened Impact. These strategies all speak to consolidating and strengthening the Y's position in the community, its membership base, and its financial viability. Nonetheless, with an older facility ongoing capital conservation costs will be a continuing problem. Membership has been very stable at about 1,000 for the past 5 years, and the prospects for significant growth are questionable.

Our assessment indicates the most significant recreational facility requirement in the Yarmouth area is a contemporary indoor pool to replace the pool at the YMCA. Two aquatic facilities can not be supported by the service area market. Consequently, should a municipally owned and operated pool be developed at the Mariners Centre, we expect the YMCA would close its pool. Without an aquatic facility, the viability of the YMCA would be further jeopardized and while the Y might continue to have a presence in the area, it is unlikely it would continue to operate its existing facility.

An alternative is the re-development of the YMCA at an expanded and enlarged Mariners Centre. In this scenario, the YMCA would become the operator of a municipally owned aquatic centre. This is an increasingly common model in Canada, and was the approach taken at the new Pictou County Wellness Centre. We have discussed municipal – YMCA partnerships in Appendix A of the report. These have been successful, mutually beneficial partnerships in many other Canadian communities. While our scope of work

does not include investigating a YMCA partnership in the Yarmouth Area, we strongly recommend that this be a component of any subsequent studies.

Another issue associated with the YMCA but not within the scope of our study, is the impact of relocating the Y from its current downtown location. A number of key informants were concerned that this would negatively impact the Town's attempts to revitalize the downtown. However, others argued that there is little direct economic impact for downtown businesses in that YMCA members are not combining their trip to the Y with shopping or using downtown services. These individuals also suggested that should the YMCA no longer operate from their current location, other uses might be identified that could support the Town's downtown revitalization objectives. We have not investigated these issues.

From a recreational point of view, the YMCA's relocation to the Mariners Centre would be entirely positive. It would better position the Y as a regional recreational resource and improve access for most residents. At a new, multipurpose recreation facility the Y could provide much superior services and attract a larger, more secure membership. The Y could continue to provide socially focused programs (e.g. for youth) in the community through outreach efforts and partnerships with other agencies.

Some key informants suggested that the Y close its aquatic facility and operate a new municipal pool at the Mariners Centre but retain the rest of its operations at the current downtown facility. We expect the YMCA would reject this strategy for the following reasons:

- Continuing to own and operate a YMCA facility in the downtown while assuming responsibility for a municipal pool at the Mariners Centre would create operational and administrative challenges and staffing and management inefficiencies. Operating two facilities in the same service area is not an acceptable practice and likely would not be endorsed by the local Board or the national YMCA organization.
- Membership would suffer if facilities were at two separate locations. While not all members actively use both the pool and the fitness facilities, some do and many purchase a membership based on the complete "package" of available programs and services, even if they seldom use some of what is available to them.
- Opportunities for cross-programming (e.g. a gym and swim program; or a youth drop in where access to the pool is available) are lost.

One final scenario affecting the YMCA was mentioned in our interviews. This involved the redevelopment of the YMCA – including the provision of a contemporary aquatic facility – at the existing downtown Yarmouth location. This possibility was explored a number of years ago but we understand did not proceed because the expected financial contributions from the municipal units were not forthcoming. Without commenting on

the implications for the downtown, from a recreational and financial perspective this is not the best option for the following reasons.

- The significant benefits (discussed above) of a major multipurpose recreation complex are lost.
- The location compromises the Y's ability to serve the larger regional market. This is likely necessary to secure a viable membership and secure the financial support of all of the municipal units in the service area.
- The costs of redevelopment at the existing site will likely exceed new construction at the Mariners Centre location. The YMCA will not bring significant capital to this project. Whether all municipal units would be willing to financially support the project, especially when a cheaper alternative that is better situated to serve the regional market is available, was not investigated but seems unlikely.
- The YMCA would be without a facility for as long as 2 years during the period of demolition and reconstruction. This would likely have a serious impact on membership and the ongoing viability of the YMCA in the Yarmouth area.

The experience of the YMCA of Pictou County is instructive with respect to many of the issues noted above. The former Pictou County YMCA was an older facility in the built-up area of New Glasgow. The aquatic facility was similar to that in Yarmouth; a traditional design, small tank with no recreational amenities. Many of the other program areas of the former Y were also outdated. Approximately 3 years ago, the YMCA closed the New Glasgow facility and relocated to the new Pictou County Wellness Centre. At the Wellness Centre, the Y had the benefit of first class, contemporary facilities in a multiuse complex that includes a twin pad arena. The location is an outlying area at a highway intersection that maximizes access for its regional market. This situation is comparable in many respects to what would occur if the Yarmouth YMCA moved to the Mariners Centre. The following was the impact on the Pictou YMCA:<sup>11</sup>

- In the first 2 years at the new facility membership increased by about 600 and then stabilized at about 2,000. Membership retention is strong.
- Day use and registrations for programs have also increased. Swim instruction registrations, for example, have doubled.
- The YMCA has been able to expand its outreach and partnership programs, in part because a larger more stable membership has provided the financial basis for these community programs. The Pictou County YMCA offers a number of off-site programs, programs in schools, and services in association with other community agencies. These have all expanded.
- New facilities and improved staff resources have allowed the YMCA to offer a number of programs and services that were not possible in the past. Programming for special populations has increased, in part due to features of the indoor pool not previously available. There is additional youth programming.

---

<sup>11</sup> Based on an interview with the YMCA of Pictou County CEO. June 3, 2015.

Improved facilities have also supported additional programming (e.g. a permanent spinning area; ability to use the pool for instruction and lane swimming simultaneously).

- The YMCA's presence and image in the community has benefited from this expanded role and improved facilities.
- One negative feature of the location is the loss of some "walk-to-traffic" that was possible in the New Glasgow facility. However, unlike the Mariners Centre, the Pictou County location is not easily accessible for pedestrians or cyclists. There is also no transit to the Pictou County Wellness Centre.

The Pictou County experience would suggest that a YMCA at the Mariners Centre would provide a higher level of community service and contribute to a stronger, more sustainable YMCA in the Yarmouth area.

In summary, while the needs assessment will not address the future of the YMCA in the Yarmouth area, we have assumed:

- Two aquatic facilities are not feasible and if a municipal pool was developed, the Y would close its pool, quite likely with implications for the future of a YMCA facility in the Yarmouth area.
- A partnership between the YMCA and the municipal units who own the Mariners Centre will be explored if facilities currently operated by the YMCA are relocated.
- The YMCA will not operate from two locations. If the YMCA has operational responsibilities for an aquatic centre at the Mariners Centre, they will relocate any facilities that they operate to this location.
- A YMCA facility at the Mariners Centre will provide a higher level of service, attract more members and be more sustainable than the YMCA at its current location.
- Redeveloping the YMCA at its current location is not a viable option.

## **Volunteer Program Resources and Community Development**

The extent of programming in the community has a direct impact on facility requirements and programming is a function of volunteer resources. With the exception of aquatics, volunteers are responsible for most of the activities that would occur at new or expanded facilities at the Mariners Centre. Sport and recreation organizations in the Yarmouth area noted constraints on programming associated with volunteers and skilled coaches and this undoubtedly affects their needs for facility time. In addition, we understand that some programs that were quite strong in the Yarmouth area in the past, such as basketball, have declined somewhat because of fewer volunteers. Our assessment did not address the health of the volunteer sector or the resources available in the Yarmouth area to support volunteers. In most communities, municipal recreation departments will embrace community development activities that build strong volunteer organizations. We are sure that the Yarmouth and District Recreation Department supports volunteers requiring assistance, however, like most recreation departments, we expect the investment in community

development is restricted by available staff time and resources. As discussed elsewhere in the Needs Assessment, there is some evidence to suggest that volunteer program development is not as strong in the Yarmouth area as in some other communities. While the scope of our work did not include an assessment of this issue, if this is the case it will have a significant impact on community programming and consequently the demand for gymnasias and multipurpose program space.

This is also an issue associated with the overall mandate of the Mariners Centre. The Mariners Centre management team provides excellent, well maintained and safe recreation facilities for community organizations. They maintain high levels of customer service while operating an arena and major event venue in the most cost effective manner possible. In addition, the Mariners Centre management team supports many other community initiatives and events by providing materials, equipment and other resources. Staff are qualified to fulfill this function, they do an excellent job in this respect and this is the mandate authorized by their municipal funders. However, the Mariners Centre is not operated like a community, multi-purpose recreation facility. The mind-set and operating philosophy differs from many recreation complexes where staff, trained as recreation programmers, are strongly focused on offering as many activities as possible to meet the widest range of community needs, with the understanding that these initiatives will be funded by the municipality. These staff provide direct programming and work with individuals in the community to develop volunteer resources that will offer programming. This is not the current role of the Mariners Centre and if new facilities are provided, new programming and community development approaches will be required.

### **The Operation, Management and Financing of New or Expanded Facilities**

The scope of the Needs Assessment does not include an analysis or recommendations concerning the financing, management and operation of future facilities that may be added to the Mariners Centre. This is an extremely important issue and will need to be carefully evaluated to prepare a Business Plan for the proposed facility. This would occur as part of the feasibility study if the project proceeds. We note for example that under the current operating model, there appears to be an expectation that the Mariners Centre's operating deficit will not exceed \$100,000, and we expect that among some decision-makers a break-even scenario is anticipated.<sup>12</sup> There is no possibility that a major aquatic centre will generate sufficient revenues to achieve these expectations. In addition, the Mariners Centre may incur costs associated with other proposed facilities, such as a gymnasium or curling rink, which will require additional municipal financial support. We understand, for example, that recreation groups using gymnasias scheduled

---

<sup>12</sup> The agreement calls for an operating budget to be prepared annually and while projected deficits of \$100,000 or less can be approved by the CAOs of the funding municipalities; if the projection exceeds \$100,000 Council approval is required. In 2014 and 2015, the deficit has been less than \$100,000.

through the Recreation Department are charged \$10/hour. This fee will not cover the cost of operating a gym and consequently higher fees or higher levels of subsidy will be required. These issues are not dealt with in the Needs Assessment but will be in a subsequent feasibility study.

Similarly, it is not within the scope of this study to recommend a management and operating model. Given that new partners such as the YMCA and the Curling Club may be a part of the Mariners Centre's future, this is an important, unresolved issue. While we have not recommended an approach, we have commented on management and operations particularly as they may affect existing facilities such as the YMCA and the Curling Club (see further discussion in the needs assessment section of the report and in Appendix A). However, a preferred management and operational approach will need to be determined in the next stage of the study and this will affect finances and levels of community service.

If the Mariners Centre is expanded and redeveloped as a major multipurpose recreation complex, it will represent a major transition to a new model of recreation facility provision in the Yarmouth area. This is an ideal opportunity for the municipal units who own and/or finance the Mariners Centre to review policies and practices associated with programming and community development, scheduling, managing and monitoring facility use, fees and other aspects of service delivery. We recommend that this review be undertaken.

### **Strategic Decisions Required by the Owners/Operators of the Mariners Centre**

Our needs assessment indicates that an indoor aquatic facility, gymnasium and multipurpose space is required. Currently these facilities are provided by the YMCA, which receives a modest annual grant from area municipalities to support its operation. Our needs assessment also indicates that a curling facility will be supported by the service area population. Currently, this need is addressed through a community based association that owns and operates a curling rink without municipal financial support.

In both cases, should the facilities be relocated to the Mariners Centre they will replace existing non-municipal facilities in the community. If relocated to the Mariners Centre, the municipality would assume some additional responsibility, including financial commitments, for these facilities. Consequently, while these facilities are needed – whether the municipal owners and operators of the Mariners Centre wish to assume additional responsibilities for their provision is a separate question. This is a policy decision that rests with the Councils of the municipal owners/funders. It is a decision that must be made before moving on to the feasibility study stages of the study. Consequently, for the purposes of this discussion, we wish to reiterate the difference between the needs assessment and the financing and operation of future facilities. The facilities are needed – whether the YMCA will be the operator of the aquatic/gym/fitness components and how the municipalities will choose to support curling are policy decisions that must be made by the Councils who own and fund the facilities.

## SECTION TWO: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

---

### INTRODUCTION

We have organized the major facility components identified as possible additions to the Mariners Centre into four groups.

- Arenas
- Aquatic Centre and Gymnasium, Multipurpose Space and Fitness
- Curling Rink
- Best Practice Facilities.

Best practice facilities are recreational spaces with high appeal that are often included in multipurpose recreation complexes but for which traditional market assessment is not possible because these areas are not scheduled and use is generally not organized. An indoor walking track falls into this category. With the exception of the ice surfaces which most residents felt adequately served the community, the core facilities noted above have been the focus of the Needs Assessment since the October 2014 community workshop that gave rise to the study. They are the facilities that dominated the public discussion during the needs assessment consultation. However, there were two other major facilities that were identified by the general public and, to a lesser extent, sports and recreation groups. These were (1) an indoor field house with artificial turf to accommodate indoor soccer and sufficient space and flexibility to accommodate track and field and other sporting events and competitions, and (2) a gymnastics facility. At this time, neither of these facilities have adequate support to justify their provision. Indoor soccer was identified as a close ended option on a list of possible new and replacement facilities and over 30% of respondents felt it was needed. Approximately 25% of respondents reported “playing indoor sports like soccer in a fieldhouse” as a recreational activity they would like to do more often. Because these were close-ended options and the survey was not random, we expect this may over-state the actual demand. More importantly, there is no indication that indoor soccer (the primary user) or other potential artificial turf users such as track and field or Ultimate (which to our knowledge does not exist in Yarmouth) would generate sufficient demand to justify the provision of the facility. Soccer in Yarmouth currently runs a modest winter program using gymnasias and did not request additional gym time to expand this program. The Soccer Club also did not identify a need for indoor artificial turf. Given that these can be very expensive facilities and the turf provides a venue

for as much as 50-60 hours of play weekly on a year-round basis – a very extensive program is required to fully utilize the facility. This is particularly the case when other potential users are not well represented in the community at this time. There is a small but growing Athletic organization who would presumably use indoor track and field facilities but currently would not generate much use and other sports, such as Ultimate which in some centres are major users of indoor artificial turf, are not organized in the Yarmouth area. Finally, unlike most outdoor sports fields, indoor turf is a major expense for municipalities who therefore impose user fees to recover a part of this cost. These can be substantial – in line with those for arena time. We expect that these fees would be an additional deterrent to the development of a strong market for an indoor fieldhouse. We note that of the six groups completing the survey that might use a fieldhouse, only one currently pays for the facilities they use and only three would be willing to pay higher fees for improved facilities. At this time, there is not sufficient evidence that a fieldhouse would be well used or financially sustainable in the Yarmouth area.

There was interest expressed in gymnastics (almost 20% of survey respondents identified it as a sport they would like to participate in but are not now doing). A cheerleading/gymnastics program is operated in the Yarmouth area. This is a small group (approximately 50 participants) however they expect to grow in the future. The group did not specifically request a dedicated gymnastics facility and their membership is far short of what would be required to support a facility. At this time, this group would be a user of gymnasium space which they would share with other sports groups. While we believe that there is a market in the Yarmouth area for types of programs provided by gymnastic clubs in other communities, and this may develop to the point that dedicated facilities are viable, we expect that the club would be self supporting and would not operate from a municipally owned and operated dedicated gymnastic facility at the Mariners Centre. For many of the same reasons curling rinks are not supported by municipalities (see further discussion elsewhere in the report) dedicated gymnastics facilities are seldom provided by municipal recreation departments and we expect this would be the case in the Yarmouth area.

## ARENAS

### Conclusion

- The existing ice surfaces at the Mariners Centre will meet needs for the foreseeable future. A third ice surface is not recommended.
- There was considerable interest in having both ice surfaces at the Mariners Centre as NHL dimensions. This should be investigated if a feasibility study involving an architectural assessment of the building is undertaken.

### Background

SUPPLY/DEMAND	LOCAL INDICATORS
Existing Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1:12,500 (based on assumed service area population of 25,000)</li> </ul>
Comparative Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1:9,179</li> </ul>
Use Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The arenas are used to near capacity in prime time.</li> </ul>
User Group Survey Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Five of six arena user groups report stable participation; minor hockey reports decreasing participation</li> <li>▪ Five of six arena user groups expected their membership to increase in the future; minor hockey – the largest organization by a significant margin, expect decreasing participation</li> <li>▪ Arena user groups requested a total of 5 hours/week of additional ice time.</li> <li>▪ Most arena users report their members are under the age of 19; indicating a shrinking market in an aging community.</li> </ul>
Community Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Close to 60% of responding households had used an arena in the past year; by far the largest proportion of respondents reporting use of an existing facility</li> <li>▪ Between 4-9% of respondents reported they would like to participate more often in arena ice related activities (hockey, figure skating, recreational skating). However, the reasons for not participating were much more likely to be associated with personal constraints (such as available time) than the availability of facilities.</li> <li>▪ Fewer respondents (less than 20%) reported a need for new or replacement arenas than for any other facility.</li> </ul>
Participation Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Overall moderately declining use of arenas should be anticipated; particularly in organized team sports and activities directed primarily to younger age groups. The potential for more significant declines in arena sport participation exist if health and safety concerns (e.g. concussions) continue to be raised.</li> <li>▪ Unorganized, recreational uses (shinny hockey, recreational skating etc.) may experience some growth.</li> <li>▪ Use of the arena floor for activities when the ice is removed (sports including ball hockey, soccer, box lacrosse, etc.) may represent opportunities for expanded programming.</li> </ul>
Other Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ None identified</li> </ul>

## Discussion

Two ice surfaces for the current population compares favourably with other municipalities.

While the most desirable times are fully booked, the existing ice surfaces are not used to capacity in prime time. Early morning bookings are rare and the last scheduled use on weeknights is generally before 11PM. In markets where ice demand is high, it would not be unusual to see arenas booked from 6AM until midnight. This booking schedule would result in as many as 65 prime time hours each week. The Mariners Centre ice surfaces are booked 53 and 58 hours per week (which includes both prime and non-prime time).

Like most arenas in Canada, we understand that use has declined moderately in recent years and that less desirable prime time (early morning and late evening), which would have been scheduled in the past, are no longer needed. These changes in use are reflected in the Mariners Centre's revenue streams. Prior to 2009, about 60% of the Centre's revenue was generated from ice rentals; this was estimated to have fallen to about 40% by 2015.<sup>13</sup> It is for this reason that the Mariners Centre management wisely views its arenas as multipurpose recreational spaces rather than ice surfaces. The Mariners Centre is quite progressive in this regard; this perspective will be increasingly common amongst arena operators in Canada.

Compared to many other arenas, the Mariners Centre enjoys relatively high levels of use in the non-ice season. In the most recent off-season, the arenas were booked on 24 and 21 occasions. This is greater use than would be customary in many other community arenas, but is consistent with the Mariner Centre's role as a major event and entertainment facility and its mandate to generate revenue to offset costs. As noted above, non-ice arena use has become an increasingly important source of revenue and the Board has made a number of investments in equipment, facility improvements and partnerships to enhance off-season events.

The majority of the arena users reported stable to declining participation in recent years<sup>14</sup>. Minor Hockey – which accommodates the most arena participants by a significant margin – have seen their membership decline from 554 to 451 between 2012 and 2015. Minor Hockey anticipates further decreases in membership in the future. While a number of arena groups reporting stable participation expect increases in membership in the future, they generally attributed this to increased interest and/or improved marketing. There is little evidence to support the assumption of increased participation and this is undoubtedly an optimistic assessment. One of the current ice users requested 5 additional hours/week for their programs. These hours could be accommodated with existing ice time.

---

<sup>13</sup> Mariners Centre. Return on Investment Report. February 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Note – all information from the user group survey and community survey is documented in the Planning Context Report.

The experience at the Mariners Centre is consistent with the experience of other municipalities and trends (see Planning Context Report). Trends suggest that ice related activities will remain stable at best and are much more likely to decline, particularly if energy costs significantly increase user fees with an adverse impact on membership. While cost is a significant consideration, other factors including the continued aging of the population, safety concerns, and increasing winter alternatives to hockey all point to lower levels of future participation. The most probable future scenario is a steady, gradual decrease in demand for ice time.

If arena sport participation continues to decline at a gradual pace and assuming stable population, two ice surfaces will still be required in the Yarmouth region, but will likely not be used to full capacity in prime time within 10-15 years. There is no need for a third ice surface in the Yarmouth area and it will likely be an increasing challenge to fully utilize two surfaces.

One of the ice pads at the Mariners Centre was downsized during detailed design and construction, apparently due to budget constraints. This has been a continuing concern for some arena users and during this study an interest in expanding this ice surface to NHL dimensions was noted. This may be possible if additional facilities are being added to the Mariners Centre and the building is being restructured during redevelopment. Given that other aspects of the building – such as the size of the lobby have been a continuing concern – it may be possible to address all of these issues in a redevelopment. Whether this is possible given the current design and construction or desirable given the cost, is not known. An engineering and architectural assessment would be required to identify options and costs. This should be undertaken as part of a future feasibility study. (See Section Three of the report for a discussion of next steps).

---

## AQUATIC CENTRE, GYMNASIUM, MULTIPURPOSE SPACE AND FITNESS

### Introduction

We have discussed these facilities as a group for two reasons.

First, they represent the facilities currently provided by the YMCA. We discussed the issues surrounding the YMCA in the previous section of the report. If the municipality elects to provide a new aquatic facility with a gym and multipurpose space, the YMCA could not compete and would likely close its existing facility. An option is for the YMCA to be the operator of a municipally owned complex that replaces the existing YMCA. In either case, the future of these facilities in the Yarmouth area are inter-related.

Second, these facilities can be seen as a “package” from an operational and programming perspective. The skills required to operate a complex of this type are complementary as are the types of programs offered. Opportunities for cross-programming are also maximized when these facilities are co-located. A recreation facility centred around a pool, gym and fitness is very common in municipal recreation departments, and the standard model for most YMCAs.

### Aquatic Centre

#### Conclusions

- The existing YMCA pool cannot meet the aquatic needs of the region and should be replaced with a contemporary aquatic centre comprised of a 25 m, six lane pool with recreational components and a separate therapeutic tank.
- A partnership between the municipal owners/operators of the Mariners Centre and the YMCA for the provision of a new aquatic centre should be explored.

## Background

SUPPLY/DEMAND	LOCAL INDICATORS
Existing Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The YMCA 20-yard pool is the major indoor aquatic facility in the service area.</li> <li>▪ Residents also have access to the indoor pool at the Rodd Hotel. Memberships and day passes are available. The Recreation Department also offers a program for seniors at this pool.</li> <li>▪ Assuming one indoor pool, the service areas level of supply is 1:25,000</li> </ul>
Comparative Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Indoor pools 1:17,463.</li> </ul>
Use Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Approximately 590 individuals, mostly children, took swim lessons at the Y in 2014</li> <li>▪ Approximately 17 lane swims are offered per week</li> <li>▪ Close to 1,000 occasions of recreational swimming (day passes) were recorded in 2014. The Y also offers a number of free swims and children under 6 are not charged for recreational swimming. These are not included in the above count.</li> <li>▪ Close to 300 parents and tots participated in swim programs in 2014.</li> <li>▪ Despite the limitations of the pool; program registrations are not at capacity and additional users could be accommodated at most recreational sessions.</li> </ul>
User Group Survey Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The swim team has had a stable membership of about 50 and expects this to continue in the future.</li> <li>▪ The swim team requested 14 additional hours of pool time per week for new and improved programs.</li> </ul>
Community Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 78% of respondents reported that new or replacement facilities were required in the Yarmouth area; over 70% of the households identified an indoor pool as a required facility. This was the most often requested facility by a considerable margin.</li> <li>▪ Recreational and fitness swimming were identified by 36% of respondents as activities in which they would like to participate more often; second only to running or walking on an indoor track.</li> </ul>
Participation Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aquatics are amongst the most popular recreational activities for Canadians.</li> <li>▪ Aquatic programs appeal to a wide range of age groups and, assuming proper facilities are available, deliver a number of health and wellness benefits. Therapeutic and wellness programming is particularly well suited for older age groups and as such participation will continue to rise.</li> </ul>
Other Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The design and amenities of the existing pool significantly restrict program offerings to adults; individuals with special needs; and recreational users.</li> </ul>

## Discussion

While the Yarmouth service area's level of supply (one pool for 17,500 people) compares favourably with other municipalities, this is misleading because of the nature of the aquatic facility. Primarily due to design limitations, the YMCA pool offers a very restricted range of aquatic programs and services to the community. The pool is especially limited in serving the needs of those with disabilities and in attracting recreational and therapeutic users. Given that recreational swimming continues to be one of the most popular leisure activities for all ages and a growing numbers of older adults will drive demand for therapeutic aquatic opportunities, this is a significant unmet need.

This need was well reflected in the community consultation. A new aquatic facility was without question the most significant need reported by those responding to the community survey (mentioned by over 70% of the respondents). Without exception, key informants identified an aquatic facility as the highest priority for improved recreation facilities.

The Swim Team indicated a need for additional facility time and a facility that was better equipped for training and could accommodate meets. While the team expects their membership to be relatively stable in the future, an improved facility would greatly enhance their programming and they would use additional time in a new pool. The length (25m) and width (6 lanes) would be appropriate for training and hosting competitions. (The team currently uses the pool at Universite Sainte-Anne for meets). A new facility would also meet the Swim Team's requests for a viewing area, full accessibility and better locker rooms and amenities for users.

Synchro Nova Scotia also provided input indicating the need for improved facilities. They noted there was a synchro team in Yarmouth in the past, but the team folded due to issues associated with the YMCA pool (it was too small to allow simultaneous programming or dedicate pool time exclusively to synchro and is expensive to rent). Currently competitive clubs are largely confined to HRM, but Sychro Nova Scotia is promoting the sport with training sessions and camps in some of the newer pools (such as Bridgewater) outside of Halifax. They would use a new pool in Yarmouth for this purpose in the hope that this would lead to the creation of a local club.

This level of community demand combined with the inadequacies of the existing facility and trends that indicate growing interest in aquatics all suggest that there is a very strong need for a new aquatic facility in the Yarmouth area.

There is considerable flexibility associated with the design of new aquatic centres. During detailed design, programming and activity requirements and preferences will need to be more closely aligned with design options and available construction budgets. While the details will be determined during detailed design, a new aquatic facility should have three main functional areas. (1) training/instructional, (2) therapeutic, and (3) recreational.

The training and instructional component requires a 25 metre, 6 lane rectangular tank. The therapeutic pool is envisioned as a separate tank with warmer water, but this need not be a large pool. At minimum, it must be large enough to accommodate typical class sizes with instructors (perhaps 15 people) with specialized design features to accommodate the programming focus. The training/instructional and therapeutic components are the highest priority and the basic requirements noted here should not be compromised, but certainly could be enhanced if resources allow.

The recreational components should be developed to the greatest extent possible within the construction budget. Ideally recreational components would be part of a separate third tank rather than integrated with the training/instructional pool. This is preferred because it accommodates cooler water temperature in the rectangular tank preferred for competition and training. The recreational pool might involve teaching steps and a free form swimming/play area as well as recreational play features (slides, on deck spray pads, etc.) The extent of these installations will be governed by budget.

Experience elsewhere in Canada suggests that YMCA-municipal partnerships can be mutually advantageous approaches to providing aquatic facilities, especially in small markets. This option should be explored. (See Section One and Appendix A of the report for additional discussion).

## Gymnasium Space

### Conclusion

- A regulation size gymnasium should only be provided as part of an expansion to the Mariners Centre in conjunction with an indoor aquatic facility.

### Background

SUPPLY/DEMAND	LOCAL INDICATORS
Existing Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community residents currently have access to gymnasia at the YMCA and at area schools. The municipal Recreation Department controls the scheduling in non-school hours at 4 schools.</li> </ul>
Comparative Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information not available</li> </ul>
Use Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information is not available for all school gymnasia, but those scheduled by the Recreation Department are not used to capacity.</li> </ul>
User Group Survey Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Two existing users of gymnasia requested additional time.</li> </ul>
Community Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A gymnasium was requested by about 32% of respondents who felt additional facilities were required.</li> <li>▪ Many of the activities that respondents reported a desire to participate in more frequently would occur in gymnasia.</li> </ul>
Participation Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There will be sustained demand for facilities such as gymnasia, which can be programmed for a variety of active indoor sports or available for drop-in activities.</li> <li>▪ General trends indicate increases in a range of gym-based activities (e.g., basketball, badminton, volleyball, wellness activities).</li> </ul>
Other Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ None identified</li> </ul>

### Discussion

In the Yarmouth area, residents are primarily served by school gymnasia, augmented to a limited extent by the YMCA gym. Through an agreement with the school district, a number of school gymnasia are booked by the Recreation Department on weeknights and weekends. This arrangement is in place for the following schools: Carleton; Maple Grove; Port Maitland and Meadowfield. The agreement provides the Department with scheduling privileges on weekdays after school hours and weekends at no cost. There are some restrictions on community use given that school activities take precedence and in some cases custodial staff must be on duty. Maple Grove Junior High accommodates some school use on weeknights and weekends, but generally these gymnasia are not used to capacity. We understand that this is in part

because Town of Yarmouth residents are reluctant to travel the 15 or 20 minutes necessary to access these facilities.

The Recreation Department also recently gained access to the former Yarmouth Junior High School gym. This is a special arrangement<sup>15</sup> whereby the Department can schedule community use on weeknights and weekends for a cost of \$10/hr. This has significantly expanded the supply of gym time available to the Department and a schedule is currently being determined. To the greatest extent possible the Department will attempt to book new users into this gym, however, current users of the Yarmouth High School Gym (which is not booked by the Department) may wish to transfer to this facility because they are less likely to be displaced by school uses. Some groups using gyms in the District may also wish to transfer use to Town, but this will be discouraged to ensure all available gyms are used to the greatest extent possible. It is not anticipated that the gym will be fully booked; and some of the users will likely vacate time in other gyms now booked by the Department. As noted the Yarmouth High School gym is available for community use but not booked by the Department (this facility is scheduled by the Principal and is used by the community; the extent of use is not known).

A gym was requested by about 30% of the community survey respondents, but fewer respondents requested a gym than many other core facilities including the pool, multipurpose space and fitness facilities. When asked if there were recreational activities that they would like to participate in more frequently, only about 15% identified “indoor sports like basketball”; however larger proportions reported restrictions on ball hockey (21%); and indoor soccer (26%).

The only two current users of gymnasias who requested additional time were the Volleyball Association and Special Olympics. A total of 44 hours/week were requested, but volleyball requested 40 of these hours. Given that the group is currently using 40 hours/week, doubling their facility time is undoubtedly an optimistic projection (and in fact exceeds the group’s estimate of its likely growth in the next five years). We note that a number of sports that would make use of a gym were not included in our survey. An individual associated with basketball was contacted but did not respond. Sports such as badminton, Ultimate and ball hockey that we would often encounter in other communities, are not well represented by organized recreational leagues. The absence of these leagues and the limited demand for additional gymnasium time amongst those responding to our survey, supports the notion that school gyms are currently adequately serving the community, but may also indicate an unmet demand for programming..

---

<sup>15</sup> This gym may eventually be incorporated into a new school that is planned to replace the three elementary schools that are closing. If this occurs, the Principal of the new school will determine if the Department can continue booking the facility weeknights and weekends. However, in any case, it will still be available for community use.

We expect that there are opportunities to expand programming that are not being fully realized. Experience in most communities indicates increasing popularity of basketball, badminton, floor hockey, and indoor soccer (among other sports) for both league and unstructured participation. In larger centres with a young adult population, Ultimate is one of the fastest growing sports. The reported decline of recreational basketball in Yarmouth is surprising and we expect this has more to do with lack of volunteers and organizational support than interest. Similarly, there are new programs recently developed in Yarmouth that will likely grow. We understand a lacrosse group is currently forming. Among those responding to our survey, both Southwest Nova Athletics and Cheerleading/Gymnastics have enjoyed significant growth in a short period of time and this is expected to continue. The Soccer Association currently runs a 17 week winter program using 9 hours of gym time and while they did not request additional gym time, this is likely a program that could grow<sup>16</sup>.

Relying exclusively on school gymnasias is not an ideal strategy and increasingly municipal recreation departments are operating gymnasias. A municipal gym can accommodate unstructured access to gymnasias. Many communities are placing considerable emphasis on “open gym” programs for children and youth and parents and tots because these successfully reach the physically inactive and are a major strategy for combating obesity and other impacts of sedentary lifestyles.

There is also growing demand for daytime access to major recreation facilities in a society where leisure time is more flexible and daily schedules are less likely to be oriented around child responsibilities. The potential for day time use plus the opportunities for cross programming when gyms are co-located with other major recreation facilities such as pools is another reason municipalities are providing gyms.

While in all communities the majority of gymnasias for community use are provided by educational authorities; school gymnasias cannot adequately meet community needs. Due to no day time access and frequent interruptions in community programming due to school priorities, most municipalities will attempt to augment school facilities with at least one municipal gymnasium.

This is a reasonable strategy in Yarmouth, a gymnasium could be a future component of the Mariners Centre, but only if a concerted effort is made to expand programming that would occur in gymnasias. This involves both supporting community recreation associations that provide these programs and expanding unstructured recreational activities and programs. This won't occur by simply providing a gym at the Mariners Centre. Recreation programming and community development staff must be in place.

---

<sup>16</sup> As discussed earlier, athletics, gymnastics and indoor soccer would likely all prefer special purpose dedicated facilities (indoor track and field; a gymnastic centre and indoor artificial turf). There is no indication that dedicated, specialized facilities of this type could be supported in the Yarmouth market at this time and consequently a gym is the alternative.

Furthermore, the gym will only be well used if it is a community recreation hub - part of a larger centre with complementary facilities such as a pool and multipurpose programming space. Finally, the programming must be affordable. Rental rates for the organized groups and program fees must not be barriers to participation. Key informants report this can be an issue for the Mariners Centre because the facility is expected to operate at a very minimal deficit and this affects rental rates for multipurpose space that could be used for community programming.

We would only support the development of a gym if it was part of the relocation of the YMCA or was part of a larger municipal recreation complex programmed by the municipality either through the Recreation Department or by qualified recreation staff retained by the Mariners Centre Board.

## Multipurpose Space

### Conclusion

- The existing multi-purpose space at the Mariners Centre can accommodate additional community use and efforts to expand programming and enhance community access, especially for the meeting/program area, should be explored.
- Additional multipurpose programming space should only be provided if an aquatic complex and gymnasium are developed at the Mariners Centre.

### Background

SUPPLY/DEMAND	LOCAL INDICATORS
Existing Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Multipurpose programming space specifically designed for recreation programming is not available to the Mariners Centre. The Mariners Centre accommodates community use in the Boardroom, Lounge and Meeting Room.</li> <li>▪ The YMCA has a variety of spaces that can be used for multipurpose programming.</li> <li>▪ The Yarmouth and District Recreation Department offers programs from a number of community centres, including the Rotary Centre and Lake Milo Boat Club.</li> </ul>
Comparative Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information not available</li> </ul>
Use Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ None of the multipurpose spaces at the Mariners Centre are used to capacity (the Lounge, Meeting Room and Boardroom were used on 100, 62 and 99 occasions respectively last year). The levels of community use for the Boardroom and the Lounge are very reasonable and these facilities are well used for meetings, training sessions and similar activities. The large meeting room has relatively limited use but the flooring, wall and ceiling finishes, would not fully accommodate a wide range of recreational programming.</li> <li>▪ The YMCA's multipurpose programming space is not used to capacity.</li> </ul>
User Group Survey Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ None of the user groups requested additional time in multipurpose programming space..</li> </ul>
Community Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Multipurpose programming space was mentioned by 50% of the respondents who felt additional facilities were required to serve the Yarmouth area. This was second only to an indoor pool.</li> <li>▪ Many of the activities that respondents reported a desire to participate in more frequently would occur in multipurpose space</li> </ul>
Participation Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Trends support the provision of appropriate multi-purpose rooms within larger recreation complexes. Cross-programming and intergenerational programming opportunities, and the convenience and benefits of combining these types of components under one roof are all justifications of this type of facility model.</li> <li>▪ General trends indicate increases in a range of activities utilizing multi-purpose space (e.g. fitness programs, dance programs, martial arts, etc.).</li> </ul>
Other Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Multi-purpose/meeting space is flexible program space that can accommodate a wide range of indoor, organized, or drop-in sports and recreation and can also be used for dry-land/cross training and non-sport activities.</li> </ul>

## Discussion

The three existing multipurpose spaces at the Mariners Centre are not fully utilized but do accommodate community use. The Boardroom hosts a wide range of community meetings and the lounge area is frequently booked for social events, larger meetings and training sessions. These two areas are not designed for most programs that would be of interest to the community, but they serve a useful purpose and this should continue, and if possible be expanded.

The large meeting/programming room provides the greatest opportunities for programming and is not well used for this purpose. This is perhaps understandable because it was not built to respond to community demands for programming. The Mariners Centre was adding heated storage space as a ground level expansion and this area was developed as a second floor addition. Currently the space is used about 60 times a year, primarily for training programs with some private rentals. Many of these activities happen in non-prime time (during the day) and consequently the space could be available on weekends and weeknights for community recreation programs. However, there are no regularly scheduled community recreation programs in this space. It is a large (capacity for 175 seated) rectangular room with windows along one wall. The wall and flooring finishes are not appropriate for all types of programming, but the room could be used for more activities than is currently the case. The lack of use may in part be attributed to other options in the community; however the area is not actively promoted and marketed as community space. As discussed earlier, this is in part because of the Mariners Centre's mandate and operating philosophy. While Mariner's Centre staff are actively engaged in the community and provide resources and staff support for many community events and functions, their facility role is largely focused on providing well maintained safe spaces for community use. They are not programmers. Furthermore, the municipal owners/funders expect the facility to be operated with minimal subsidy. This is reflected in the use of the multipurpose space. While currently about 50% of the users of this space are not paying rent because they are charitable groups or volunteer associations such as minor hockey, many users are renting the space at market rates for training sessions and private rentals. Many of the types of community programs that could be offered in this space will not generate sufficient revenue from registrations to pay market rental rates. If this area was actively promoted for community programming, there would be additional staff costs for maintenance, set-up, wear and tear, etc. and these costs would likely not be fully recovered with fees. The willingness of the municipal funders to subsidize programming in this space is not known and would determine the potential for greater community use.

Much of the demand for multipurpose space will originate with new programs. There has been a significant increase in wellness programming in response to concerns surrounding physical inactivity and obesity. These programs focus on movement and social interaction and generally do not require a full gymnasium. Art and cultural programming (art appreciation, dance, painting, children's arts and crafts) is growing in most communities as are a wide range of physical fitness and activity programs such as yoga and tai chi. Programs for mothers/care givers and pre-school children are also extremely popular in most communities, and especially where climate or other factors contribute to the isolation of parents caring for young children. Finally, special event programming is often well suited to this type of space. Virtually all of the examples noted above were mentioned by community survey respondents as recreational activities in which they would like to participate more frequently. We are confident that there is unmet demand for this type of programming in the community. However, as noted in our discussion concerning gymnasia, these programs will not materialize simply because the space is provided. They require program staff supported by marketing and appropriate fee structures. These programs are also most successful if co-located with other major program areas (such as an aquatic complex) and used in conjunction with these areas (e.g. as a social space for a youth drop in on an evening when the youth also have access to the pool or gym). This space is also best used when located at a facility that is a major recreational destination point for the community and seen as the logical venue for a diverse range of recreational programming. Consequently, if major new facility components such as a pool and a gym are not developed at the Mariners Centre, we would not recommend additional multipurpose space. In the absence of these other major facilities, the Mariners Centre's best strategy would be to encourage greater use of the existing multipurpose components.

Assuming an indoor pool and gym are added to the Mariners Centre, additional multipurpose space should also be provided. As noted above, the Mariners Centre currently provides a large meeting room which is not fully utilized. Unfortunately, it is also not ideally designed for multipurpose programming. Appropriately designed and equipped multipurpose space can accommodate a broader range of community activities than virtually any other component of a multipurpose recreation complex. Athletic activities that do not require a full size gym (fitness classes, martial arts, youth groups, cross/dry-land training, etc.) other recreational programming (cultural events, mom-tots programs, etc.) and instructional activities (first aid, child care, etc.) can be accommodated in this space. Designed for flexibility and multipurpose programming, the area would typically have moveable walls so that it can be partitioned for simultaneous programming. Flooring, wall finishes and fixtures would be selected to accommodate a wide range of programs. Natural light and amenities required to facilitate programming (storage; sinks; presentation equipment; moveable tables and chairs, etc.) would be available. The space would also be located within the larger recreation complex to take advantage of other support services (kitchen; change rooms) and to

be available for cross-programming. The existing Mariners Centre meeting room does not fulfill all of these design requirements. It may be possible to make some improvements to this area to enhance programming potential. Nonetheless, we expect some additional multipurpose space would also be required. The amount of space and specific design requirements requires further research.

## Fitness Center

### Conclusion

- The existing YMCA and private fitness facilities currently meet the needs of the community and a competing fitness facility should not be established at the Mariners Centre as long as the YMCA's current facilities are available.

### Background

SUPPLY/DEMAND	LOCAL INDICATORS
Existing Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1:3,076</li> <li>▪ In addition to the YMCA, there are at least 3 private fitness centres in Yarmouth.</li> </ul>
Comparative Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1:5,290 (under 10,000 pop); 1:14,907 (10,000-50,000 pop)</li> </ul>
Use Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ .No available information</li> </ul>
User Group Survey Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No expressed demand for additional fitness facilities.</li> </ul>
Community Survey Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ About 20% of respondents indicated they would like to use a fitness centre more often, but their inability to do so had less to do with available facilities than other constraints.</li> <li>▪ About 37% of respondents ranked a 'fitness center' as a needed new or replacement facility.</li> </ul>
Participation Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ General trends indicate increasing focus on health and active living, and interest by sport user groups to cross train for sport development.</li> <li>▪ Fitness participation has changed significantly in recent years and while there is still a strong market for equipment-based fitness facilities, the growing trend is toward unstructured lifestyle based fitness (e.g., fitness walking, rollerblading, biking etc.)</li> <li>▪ Typical fitness center members are between the ages of 20-49 with above average income and education.</li> </ul>
Other Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ None identified.</li> </ul>

### Discussion

Fitness centres in most communities cater to a number of distinct markets. Some target a distinct user group (e.g. women only; serious weight trainers, etc.) while others tend to cater to a broader cross section of the population with a greater range of facilities and programs that attract individuals of all ages, genders, interests and skill levels. In the Yarmouth area, the YMCA falls into the latter category and is the primary provider of fitness programs. The Y's target market is comparable to most municipally owned and operated fitness centres.

We have no information on the private fitness operators but assume they are serving a unique sector of the market. The YMCA, which is focused on the general municipal market, is not used to capacity so there is no need for a municipally owned and operated fitness centre.

While the current circumstances suggest that the private sector and the YMCA will continue to meet the need for fitness facilities for the foreseeable future, there is no guarantee private business will continue to invest in these facilities and the long term future of the YMCA may depend on how the municipalities deal with the expansion of the Mariners Centre. A major fitness centre could be provided at the Mariners Centre in the future if other providers no longer meet this need.

## CURLING FACILITY

### Conclusion

- Assuming ongoing, active membership recruitment and program development, curling is a viable recreational activity and a curling club should continue to be supported in the Yarmouth area.
- While a curling facility at the Mariners Centre would be a compatible use, it would require a change in current practices/policies because the Councils of the area municipalities do not own curling facilities and do not provide financial support for operations.
- Should the Municipal Councils decide to financially support curling, additional research is required to determine if the curling facility should be a part of the Mariners Centre, or developed at another location.

### Background

SUPPLY/DEMAND	LOCAL INDICATORS
Existing Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1:25,000</li> </ul>
Comparative Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1:19,351</li> </ul>
Use Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Currently there about 137 members use the Yarmouth Curling Facility</li> <li>▪ The membership represents all age groups</li> </ul>
User Group Survey Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In the 2012-15 period, membership has increased from 120 to 135. The Club expects membership to increase about 5% in the next 5 years, due to marketing and increased interest in the sport.</li> </ul>
Community Survey Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Compared to other recreational activities, very few respondents report a desire to participate in curling more often. Only 5.5% of respondents indicated they are not participating as often as they would like. On a list of 24 possible activities, this was second only to figure skating as the lowest reported desire to increase participation.</li> <li>▪ A new or replacement curling facility was identified by about 25% of the survey respondents as a required facility to serve the Yarmouth area.</li> </ul>
Participation Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ General trends indicate stable to declining membership in curling.</li> <li>▪ Nova Scotia data indicates declining membership.</li> </ul>

### Discussion

The Yarmouth Curling Club is a 4 sheet curling rink sharing club house facilities with the golf course. At present, the Club has about 137 members, down from a high of about 180 in the past. The Club executive has recently changed and new strategies for membership growth and retention have been put in place. The Club conservatively reported an expected 5% increase in membership over the next 5 years, but ideally would like to secure the membership of about 180 that it enjoyed in the past. At 180 members, a four sheet

curling rink would have a strong membership base that would compare favourably with other facilities in the Province. However, this growth in membership would be at odds with trends in Nova Scotia where the number of adult, junior and little rock members has declined by about 12% between 2003/04 and 2014/15 (from 6,877 to 6,053)<sup>17</sup>

Given the existence of an established curling club in Yarmouth, we are confident that an improved facility would increase programming and stabilize and likely increase membership. The survey results and trends do not indicate a significant market for expanded use, and we expect the Club's target of 180 members may be optimistic, but curling is a viable activity in the community.

The existing curling facility is in poor shape and major expenditures are anticipated in the future. A building audit in 2011 concluded that the structure was serviceable as is, but needed significant expenditure in the near term including replacement of the ice plant and reinforcement of the roof.<sup>18</sup> The Club's preference is to relocate to the Mariners Centre in a new facility. The Club's needs could be met with a typical community curling facility, similar to their current space with 4 sheets of ice and some dedicated lounge and viewing space.

The need for a replacement curling facility is clear. The critical questions are (1) will the affected Councils accept curling as a municipal recreation facility, and (2) if the municipal units are prepared to own and assume some responsibility for operating a curling rink, should it be located at the Mariners Centre.

Curling facilities, like golf courses and gymnastics facilities, are often not supported as municipal recreation facilities. In Nova Scotia, the vast majority of curling facilities are not owned by the municipality. Furthermore, while these facilities may receive occasional project specific grants (e.g to fix a structural problem or cost share on an energy upgrade), very few receive annual ongoing grants to cover operating expenses. This is the case in Yarmouth where the Curling Club receives no on-going municipal financial support. There are a variety of reasons why these facilities are treated differently from arenas or indoor pools. These include dedicated use (the club is usually the exclusive user of the facility); ability to operate on a self-sufficient basis; and (for golf courses and gymnastics facilities) an unwillingness to provide public support (and often subsidy) to facilities that might compete with the private sector. It is not our purpose to discuss the merits of these arguments in the Yarmouth area, but if a curling facility is to be added to the Mariners Centre, the municipal owners and funders must change current practices and policies. This is a

---

<sup>17</sup> Information from Curl Nova Scotia. It should be noted these figures are for members and not all curlers are club members. There is some indication that curling participants – which includes occasional curlers – may be area for growth in the sport.

<sup>18</sup> Aging Building Audit Final Report. C.J. MacLellan Assoc. July 2011.

fundamental first decision that must be made by the Councils. If they choose to continue the current practice of not funding curling, a new curling facility will not be added to the Mariners Centre.

If the Councils change their policies a curling facility could be provided at the Mariners Centre. However, this is not the only option. If the municipalities wish to support curling in the Yarmouth area, they could assist the Club to secure and operate its own facility at a location other than the Mariners Centre. Whether this was a new facility or the renovation and redevelopment of the existing facility would presumably be decided based on relative costs and other benefits. The nature of the support would be determined by the municipal units but might include a contribution to capital costs, in kind services or an ongoing operating grant. Given that this option is available to the municipalities should they elect to support curling in the service area, the rationale for locating a new facility at the Mariners Centre is the key consideration for this study. We have noted a number of important considerations below; however, additional research is required to quantify the relative costs and document other pros and cons.

**Capital Costs.** According to staff, an additional compressor would be required to support curling at the Mariners Centre. However, other components of the existing ice plant could support the curling rink, and there would therefore be some capital cost savings at the Mariners Centre relative to a separate stand-alone facility. Much more significant capital cost savings would be realized at the Mariners Centre if land acquisition and site development costs were minimized. Not having to purchase a site would be a major cost saving. In addition, the Mariner Centre site is fully serviced, ready for development and provides parking and other site services. It is unlikely another site would offer these cost advantages.

These cost saving could be partially offset by higher building costs at the Mariners Centre. The Mariners Centre is a major event and entertainment centre. The quality of construction reflects this role. While innovative design may minimize these costs, we expect a higher standard of construction for exterior and interior finishes would be necessary, at a higher construction cost.

On balance, we expect capital costs for a new curling facility would be lower at the Mariners Centre than at alternate locations.

**Operational Considerations and Costs.** If the municipal units own the curling rink, they would likely want to be the operators to ensure they protect the asset and limit their liabilities. At the Curling Club a number of maintenance and operational costs are undertaken by volunteers or paid staff reimbursed at a very conservative rate. Total wages attributed to the Curling Club in 2014<sup>19</sup> were about \$9,000; roughly evenly split between manager/bar staff and ice makers. The Golf Club is a larger part of the overall operation

---

<sup>19</sup> Financial information from 2014 Financial Statement.

(revenues of about \$263,000 compared to \$67,000 for curling) and consequently covers a larger share of costs such as insurance. If operations become the responsibility of the Mariners Centre, we should expect higher costs both for staff and operational items such as insurance where municipal policies may dictate higher standards of service. Given that any additional revenue would come from membership growth alone, we expect a substantial municipal subsidy would be required to cover the additional costs associated with a Mariners Centre location. Of course, an alternative is that the Curling Club would continue to operate the facility and therefore avoid these additional costs. This may not be acceptable to the owners for the reasons noted above and would certainly complicate the day-to-day operations, particularly if the ice plant was shared.

**Program Development and Membership Growth.** Locating at the Mariners Centre would significantly enhance the visibility and exposure of curling and provide much better access to the regional market. This would undoubtedly support membership growth and retention and increase participation in curling. This arrangement would also yield the benefits associated with multipurpose complexes (discussed in Section One of the report), including the potential for energy recovery. Some, but not all, of these benefits might be achieved if the Club simply located on the Mariners Centre site but continued to be owned and operated by the community association.

**Multiple Use.** The curling club could be used for other community programs, but the need is questionable. The Club requires the lounge/viewing area on weeknights and weekends when most community programs occur, so there would be limited availability and during the day community programs could be accommodated in other multipurpose space at an expanded Mariners Centre. During the off-season the curling rink floor could be set up for youth drop in programs, basketball, etc., but this largely duplicates space available in the arenas when ice is out or gymnasium and multipurpose areas available in an expanded Mariners Centre. Of course, the options for multiple uses are available regardless of the location of the Curling Club. The Club currently accommodates very few non-curling programs and events – but this is in large part because they share their building with the golf course.

**Tournaments and Events.** For many major bonspiels, a typical arrangement is to use ice in the curling rink (with temporary bleachers) as well as in the community arena where fixed seating and other amenities are available. (In Yarmouth, presumably both ice surfaces could be made available for curling but this arrangement is often not ideal for other arena users). If both the curling club and the arena were used to host an event, being under the same roof would be an obvious advantage. However, many communities use this arrangement when the curling club and arena are not co-located.

These issues, and more importantly the relative costs, require further investigation.

---

## BEST PRACTICE FACILITIES

Supply and demand data was not available to assess the following facilities in the same manner as those discussed in the previous section. With the exception of the walking track which was strongly supported, these facilities were generally not discussed by community representatives. This is not surprising because they would be unfamiliar to many residents. However, they are often included in multi-purpose recreation facilities as innovative spaces that offer unique programming opportunities. We have referred to these as “best practice” facilities and these could be considered as components of an expanded Marines Centre, although many are currently available in some form. With the exception of the walking track, these are small spaces that could significantly expand both programming opportunities and the appeal of the Mariners Centre for a broad range of users, including those who may not be interested in sport facilities.

However, these facilities only make sense if the expansion is significant and creates a major multipurpose centre. With the exception of the walking track, the facilities are not warranted unless an aquatic centre, gymnasium and multipurpose space is added to the Mariners Centre.

### Indoor Walking Track

Walking is one of the most popular recreational activities and its appeal extends to a wide range of individuals, including those who are less likely to participate in active sports. Walking is an activity that residents can take part in at their own convenience and with a minimum amount of equipment and training; therefore participation will continue to rise. Indoor walking/running tracks also provide year-round opportunities to be active, benefiting communities that experience cold and lengthy winter seasons. Walking tracks are also well suited to multi-purpose recreation facilities because they complement other programs and can often be accommodated within the larger building design.

An indoor walking track could support participation by those who are currently inactive due to obesity, medical conditions, or age related challenges.

There was strong support for an indoor walking track amongst those interviewed for the study and close to 75% of survey respondents indicated “running or walking on an indoor track” was something that they would like to do but cannot at this time. .

## **Community Board Room/Classroom/Skills Development Space**

These types of spaces are increasingly popular for structured, educational and skills development programs. Ideally, they would accommodate computers, audio-visual equipment, etc. This space could be programmed throughout the day for at-home parents and older adult classes, after school for homework help/tutoring, and in the evening for classes catering to those who work during the day. If rented for meetings and training sessions, the space provides another revenue stream for the facility.

The Mariners Centre boardroom, lounge and meeting room are already being used for these purposes. Opportunities to upgrade and improve the boardroom and the meeting room (additional equipment; improved audio visual, etc.) could be explored if warranted, but there is no need to duplicate these facilities.

## **Community Kitchen**

In some multipurpose recreation centres, rather than simply providing a kitchen to support occasional rentals and social events, additional space is added so the kitchen can be used for cooking classes, food safety instruction and nutritional classes. The Mariners Centre has full kitchen facilities that support its event and entertainment role. The possibility of redesigning these areas to also allow programming could be investigated if it is easily accommodated with other renovations to the Centre. We acknowledge that similar program areas are provided elsewhere in the community (e.g. at Sobeys and in many community centres). If a community kitchen was provided at the Mariners Centre, it would primarily be to complement other programming. If the Mariners Centre becomes a major multipurpose recreation centre and serves as a hub of community activities, it will be a program and destination point for all residents. The programs that could be offered in a community kitchen would complement those available for youth, new parents, older adults and others elsewhere in the facility.

## **Rock Climbing Wall**

A climbing wall, ideally located in a highly visible area such as off the lobby, could be a desirable feature if an aquatic centre and gymnasium are added to the Mariners Centre. Participation in indoor climbing has grown dramatically in recent years and is recognized as having a variety of health and fitness benefits. It is an activity that can be enjoyed year-round and can be undertaken by adults and children as well as by those with physical disabilities. This type of feature is often a major attraction for youth, including those who may not participate in traditional sports. These facilities are programmed and must be supervised when used. Consequently, in addition to the capital cost, there are staff costs. The community's interest in this

type of facility might be explored further before making a decision to include it in an expanded Mariners Centre. The experience of other multipurpose recreation complexes that have incorporated climbing walls would be worth investigating.

### **Child Minding Space**

A small child minding/babysitting component should be incorporated if an aquatic centre and additional programming space is added to the Mariners Centre. Appropriate and affordable childcare can be difficult to arrange and can often make participating in recreation and leisure activities a challenge. This could be considered as a fee-for-service option during peak periods of use at an expanded Mariners Centre.

### **Food Service and Community Social Space**

It would be customary to provide an area for food service and informal socialization in major multipurpose recreation complexes. This is both a customer service and a recreational space where residents can socialize. Ideally this would be located in the lobby area and would have views to activity spaces in the complex (e.g. over-looking the pool). At the Mariners Centre, the small size of the lobby has been a continuing concern. If a major renovation and expansion occurs, a redeveloped reception/lobby area should be a priority and could include some of the components noted here (food service; occasional childcare; climbing wall, etc.)

## SECTION THREE – NEXT STEPS

Having completed the Needs Assessment, the next step in the planning process is to prepare an in-depth feasibility study for the proposed facility components at the Mariners Centre. However, prior to undertaking the feasibility study the municipal owners/funders must make some key decisions.

Step One: Councils<sup>20</sup> Review and Endorsement of the Needs Assessment

After reviewing the results of the Needs Assessment, Councils must decide whether they will proceed to the feasibility study stage.

Step Two: Councils Policy Decisions Concerning the YMCA and the Curling Club

It is not necessary for Councils to make a final commitment at this time to a partnership with the YMCA or to including the Curling Club in future development plans for the Mariners Centre. Additional information on financial and other impacts on both of these issues will be available from the Feasibility Study and these should inform Councils' decision. However, if Councils, as a matter of policy, feels that either of these arrangements are unacceptable regardless of the financial implications, this should be decided immediately as it will affect the scope (and cost) of the feasibility study.

Step Three: Prepare Terms of Reference and Request Proposals for the Feasibility Study

The terms of reference for the feasibility study should represent the scope and complexity of the issues being investigated. This will be affected by Councils' decision in Step Two concerning the possible involvement of the YMCA and the Curling Club. The following is a suggested scope (based on the assumption both the YMCA and Curling Club are part of the study).

---

<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, we have assumed that the Councils of the Town of Yarmouth and the District Municipality of Yarmouth – the owners of the Mariners Centre – will make decisions concerning future studies. Presumably, the District Municipality of Argyle, as a funder, may also have input to these decisions. We have collectively referred to these municipal governments as "Councils".

### *Space Program and Conceptual Design*

A further spatial breakdown of the recommended facility components is required. While the Needs Assessment has provided a high level perspective on the space program (e.g. a 25 m/6 lane pool; regulation size gymnasium, etc.) the areas which will complement the core recreation facilities (such as the viewing area for the pool; reception/social/food service areas; requirements for additional multipurpose space) require further investigation. In addition, this is an opportunity to explore opportunities for correcting limitations of the existing facility (such as the small lobby).

The conceptual design will also explore the relationships between facility components. This is a greater challenge when adding to an existing facility than building new. The opportunities to tie existing spaces, such as the meeting room, into new program areas while maximizing access to complementary facilities (kitchen; storage; main entrance) and efficiently minimizing non-assigned space (connecting corridors, etc.) will be a challenge.

The deliverable is an initial space program and architectural concept. This is required to prepare a capital cost estimate.

### *Capital Cost Estimate*

Based on the space program and conceptual design, an initial cost projection can be provided. The cost would include preliminary estimates for construction; site development; furnishings and fitments; design and contingencies.

### *Site Plan*

With the space program defining the overall size (footprint) of the proposed expansion and the design concept indicating preferred relationships, it will be possible to prepare a site plan. The outdoor areas at the Mariners Centre are used by the Agricultural Society for their annual Fall Fair and equestrian activities and the Board has plans for making greater use of outdoor areas for community recreation (e.g. multipurpose court, etc.). These uses need to be accommodated in any expansion to the Mariners Centre. The activities of the Agricultural Society are particularly important in this regard. The Mariners Centre Board is fully committed to continuing to accommodate the Agricultural Society and this will be a key consideration in any future development plan.

The site plan will determine how these various outdoor uses can be accommodated with the proposed building expansion as well as dealing with issues such as parking and site access. Requirements for additional parking; upgrades or improvements for access and other site developments will also be reflected in the cost estimate.

#### *YMCA Partnership Framework*

An initial framework for the partnership with the YMCA can be negotiated at this stage in the study. As noted earlier, there is no standard template for these types of agreements and there are many issues to be addressed in a comprehensive agreement. (See Appendix A for additional details). While it is not necessary to finalize all issues and reach a binding agreement at the feasibility study stage, a framework of sufficient detail should be put in place to allow both parties to broadly understand their financial and other commitments to the project and consequently make a firm decision on the desirability of the partnership. The framework should represent a negotiated agreement outlining positions on each of the issues identified in Appendix A.

#### *Operational and Management Structure*

In addition to determining the role of the YMCA, other operational and management issues would typically be investigated at the feasibility study stage. The assumption during the Needs Assessment was that the existing Board of Management would continue to be the operator of an expanded Mariners Centre. This should be confirmed and any necessary changes to operating assumptions (such as cost recovery expectations) and the existing agreement between the municipal units should be identified. The operational relationship with the Curling Club would be clarified. Finally, a staffing model and organizational chart for the expanded Mariners Centre would be created along with recommendations for any new policies or procedures that would need to be put in place before opening (e.g. fees and pricing; facility allocation policies; marketing and communications, etc.)

#### *Business Plan*

A preliminary operating budget would be prepared for the expanded Mariners Centre based on the results of the previous tasks and current operations. The budget would identify all existing and new sources of revenue and operating expenditures. Projected annual requirements for municipal funding would be determined.

The purpose of the feasibility study is to address all issues in sufficient detail to provide Councils with the information necessary to make a decision on proceeding with the project. At the conclusion of the feasibility study the following information will be in place.

- An initial space program for major facility components and a schematic concept describing anticipated relationships and key design principles
- A preliminary capital cost
- A site plan showing how the expansion can be accommodated on the site and any implications for current or proposed uses
- A proposed management and operating structure clarifying the role, if any, of the YMCA and the implications of the expansion for existing staffing, policies and procedures and the Management Board.
- An initial operating budget indicating the annual cost to the municipalities.

#### Step Four: Conduct the Feasibility Study

The proposed scope of work requires a consulting team lead by a recreation planner, ideally with experience with municipal-YMCA partnerships, and an architect with expertise in the design of multi-purpose recreation complexes which include major aquatic centres. This is a major study with a number of special issues. It must provide sufficient detail to allow the affected municipalities and other funders to make an informed decision on what will be a very significant financial investment. A timeline of not less than six months and a budget in the order of \$75,000 is indicated, however, the resources required to do the work will depend on the terms of reference and will be affected by the number of meetings and presentations requested and the requirements for community consultation.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **MUNICIPAL-YMCA PARTNERSHIPS**

---

## MUNICIPAL-YMCA PARTNERSHIPS

### Introduction

This following discussion provides an overview of partnerships between YMCAs and municipalities for the development and operation of indoor pools, gymnasias and fitness centres.

YMCA - municipal partnerships for major recreation facilities are quite common. Arrangements between municipalities and YMCAs might broadly be placed in two categories. In the first category, the YMCA owns and operates the facility but receives some municipal support. It has been customary in many (but not all) municipalities that hosted a YMCA for the municipality to provide some support. This might include annual on-going operating grants; exemptions from taxes or other municipal service fees; municipal services at no or low cost (e.g. snow clearance); support with marketing and publicity, etc. The municipality also might make a one-time contribution to a building fund, and in some cases this might be done to secure a community benefit that would not otherwise be offered (e.g. lower cost access for non-members for free swim periods). This is an older model defined by the fact that the Y is the owner and operator of the facility with full responsibility for all major, ongoing costs.

Today a more customary model, and one that is increasingly popular among YMCAs, involves the municipality as the owner of the facility and the YMCA as the operator. This is a much more involved partnership with both parties assuming significant and ongoing responsibilities for the facility. We expect this is the only model that the YMCA would consider if it were to replace its current facility with a new Y at the Mariners Centre. Today this would be the preferred model for YMCA's in small markets such as Yarmouth. The following comments are based on this model.

### Possible Benefits of a YMCA Partnership

The possible benefits of the YMCA's involvement, relative to municipally owned and operated facilities include the following:

- The YMCA is fully qualified and has a good deal of experience locally and nationally with the operation of aquatic, fitness and multipurpose programming space. Particularly in situations where the municipality is not currently operating indoor pools, this is often seen as an advantage.
- In addition to its experience as a facility operator and programmer, the YMCA has been actively involved in many initiatives locally and nationally that contribute to wellness and healthy and active lifestyles. These initiatives can complement those of the municipality.

- The YMCA also brings to the community expertise and involvement in a broad range of non-recreational, socially focused programs (e.g., employment assistance, youth-at-risk, new Canadians, etc.). While not directly connected to the core facilities and programs at the recreation centre, these are complementary services. In communities where other providers may not be offering these services, or may be limited in the scope of their programming, having the Y as a new partner can be a significant advantage.
- The YMCA may support capital costs (generally, this would only involve equipment and fund-raising efforts).

It should also be noted that YMCA-municipal partnerships, and specifically formal agreements whereby the YMCA operates municipally owned facilities, are increasingly common in Canada and have proven to be very successful arrangements for many communities. This is, therefore, a proven model with a number of established precedents.

Our comment above concerning non-recreational, socially focused programming is extremely important. This is a major strength of the YMCA and a significant attraction, particularly for smaller communities where agencies offering these services may not be available. A number of key informants interviewed for this study noted that the YMCA does not play this role to any major extent in the Yarmouth area. They also felt the YMCA was less involved in these socially focused programs today than was the case in the past. To the extent that this is true, it might be attributed to the membership and financial challenges the Y is facing. Nonetheless, in our view, this should be a significant part of the partnership. If the municipality is prepared to provide a home for the YMCA by assuming facility costs, they should expect the YMCA to do more than simply operate the facility. The partnership agreement should ensure that the YMCA's non-recreational programs are also available to the community.

In addition to the service and operating advantages that the YMCA can bring to a management agreement, this model is preferred by some municipalities because it generally results in lower costs than would be the case if the municipality was the operator. The factors that contribute to lower net operating costs vary somewhat among communities. In some cases, lower staff costs, greater reliance on volunteers and access to non-traditional revenue sources, such as donations, ongoing fund-raising, or revenue streams from associated activities, such as child care, can be factors that explain lower net operating costs.

However, a significant consideration is membership revenues. Very few municipal operations charge membership fees for access to aquatic programs or multipurpose programming. The YMCA model puts greater emphasis on membership revenues, which essentially assign a higher cost to the user than would typically be the case in a municipally operated facility. The YMCA has policies in place that ensure

residents are not turned away because of financial hardship. However, YMCAs generally have no access to tax revenue and consequently operating costs that might be subsidized by the general tax payer in a municipal facility must be generated by users at the YMCA. Lower annual municipal costs, primarily for aquatic facilities, have been a major attraction of YMCA-municipal partnerships in many communities.

### **YMCA - Municipal Operating Agreements**

When YMCAs and municipalities develop facilities together, formal agreements need to be in place establishing each partner's responsibilities, financial obligations, and rights to receive services. The purpose of an operating agreement is to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, every operating eventuality is anticipated and a course of action is agreed to in advance so as not to jeopardize the success of the facility once it is operating. A good agreement covers a wide range of topics including many that will not be relevant until many years in the future (e.g., responsibilities for capital conservation). These formal agreements are significant to the ongoing success of the project because they provide direction on issues that are likely to emerge in the future and, therefore, avoid unanticipated demands that can threaten the viability of the partnership.

In Nova Scotia, the YMCA of Pictou County recently entered into a partnership with the municipal owners of the new Wellness Centre in a situation that is similar to that Yarmouth. In Pictou County, the YMCA closed an older, existing facility and relocated to a large multipurpose recreation complex where they are the operators of municipally owned aquatic and fitness facilities. In this agreement all capital cost for the facility were the responsibility of the municipalities. The municipalities provided upfront funding for pool and fitness equipment, but these capital costs are being recouped in a 25 year lease arrangement. The YMCA contributes to operating costs based on its share of the total square footage of the complex. The revenues to offset these costs are secured through membership fees and other sources, typical for YMCAs.

It should be emphasized that there is no standard model for these types of agreements. The agreement, therefore, must carefully reflect the specific needs and characteristics of the community, the proposed facility and the partners. The details emerge through negotiation and ultimately must be acceptable to both parties. Obligations specified in the partnership agreements are negotiated on a case by case basis and vary. The nature of the facilities, services, and market vary and this results in very different financial scenarios. The likely financial scenario associated with a municipal -YMCA partnership in Yarmouth can only be determined with a detailed feasibility study and cost-sharing negotiations between the Y and the affected municipal units.

The following issues would be relevant to a partnership agreement with the YMCA for operation of a municipally owned indoor aquatic facility.

- Each party's contribution to capital and operating costs; limits to contributions; availability of ongoing municipal subsidy, access to reserves and grants from senior levels of government, ownership of surpluses, if any, etc.
- The ownership of the facility and long term responsibilities for capital conservation and facility and equipment renewal.
- The establishment of a governance board and the associated terms of reference, the reporting relationship to the owners and funders, etc.
- Programming model, including the types of programs offered and service priorities.
- Agreement on key policy positions that will affect the operation of the facility and its financial performance (e.g., facility allocation priorities, including the relative priority assigned to community recreational uses, sport tourism, other community economic development activities, user fee and pricing policies, etc.). There may also be a need to reconcile conflicting positions in the existing policies of the partners.
- Marketing protocols concerning the name of the facility, signage, representation in ads, etc.
- Procedures for performance measurement and ongoing service evaluation.
- The financial and other arrangements that would govern a party when abandoning the partnership.
- Arrangements governing community access both for YMCA members and non-members.
- Market exclusions and restrictions – some agreements specify that one party cannot compete with another in a manner that would restrict revenues (e.g., the local municipality would not provide programs comparable to those offered by the YMCA if this jeopardized revenue streams necessary for the operation of the facility without municipal subsidy).
- The role of the YMCA and the other partners in fund-raising and the ownership of fund-raising revenues, both prior to construction and on an on-going basis.

While presumably everything is open to negotiation, the YMCA will generally not participate in a significant way to financing capital in these arrangements. The YMCA will participate in fund-raising and may make a sizeable capital contribution to the purchase of equipment for the pool and a fitness facility. However, all capital costs, after fund-raising and grants from senior levels of government, would typically be a municipal responsibility. In addition, as the building's owner, the municipality would likely be expected to assume full responsibility for capital conservation costs, including the repair and replacement of all equipment and the maintenance of built infrastructure and major building components. In partnership agreements between municipalities and the YMCA, where the municipality is the owner, the YMCA generally does not contribute

fully to capital conservation costs. However, the YMCA might contribute to some portion of capital conservation costs, reflecting the fact that YMCA members are contributing to the “wear and tear” of building components and the YMCA would typically represent these costs in their membership fee structures. However, as noted, these items vary significantly from one agreement to the next and are subject to negotiation between the owner and the YMCA.