

HIGH ICE FEES HARD ON HALTON HILLS HOCKEY PLAYERS

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Hockey in Halton Hills comes at a price.

Though Halton Hills staff recently recommended the elimination of a \$25 surcharge for prime-time ice rentals, some residents would like to see the fee reduced further.

"There is a \$300 hidden tax on hockey players in Halton Hills," Grant Kelly, vice president of Halton Hills Minor Hockey, said, "because the user fee is higher than everywhere else."

At the Nov. 11 Halton Hills town council meeting, Kelly pushed for councillors to review rates for prime-time ice rental fees.

"We knew the rate was high," Kelly said. "We had no idea that everyone else was so much cheaper."

In Halton Hills, rental of ice for one hour costs \$269.34, the highest fee compared to rates paid by 17 other minor hockey associations in the tri-county area.

Of the 17 other associations, when buying ice time from 14 different municipalities, 10 cost 40 per cent less per hour than in Halton Hills. The lowest rate charged was more than \$100 lower, with rates at \$154.87 per hour.

"We buy between 4,700 and 4,900 hours of ice each year," Kelly said, time, he added, that accounts for \$1.3 million in fees. Compared to the average of fees in other communities, Halton Hills players pay \$400,000 more per season to play.

"By far, our No. 1 cost, 70 to 75 cents per dollar we collect from parents goes

to the Town of Halton Hills," Kelly said, adding that other large expenses go to hiring referees and membership into the Ontario Minor Hockey Association.

The cost to register to play in the Halton Hills association, Kelly said, is \$600, with \$400 going toward ice time.

Halton Hills Minor Hockey has only two part-time employees and operates with over 100 volunteers.

With more than 1,300 players registered for the 2019/2020 season, Kelly said the number has dropped by 22 per cent compared to the previous season.

"Minor hockey is one of the first places where kids make a connection to their community," Kelly said, "And being a Thunder or a



Graeme Frisque

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Twister player matters. Being a part of their hometown hockey association is important."

While the fees were high, Brent Marshall, chief administrative officer for the town, reminded council and residents that the

high fees were part of a deal made by user groups in previous years.

"There's a cost to operate these facilities," Marshall said. "If the funding isn't coming from the users, it's coming from the entire community."

In 2011, at a four-and-a-half hour meeting, council and 16 delegations made the decision to construct three additional ice surfaces in Halton Hills. The costs of which would, in part, be funded by a three-year arena levy, paid between 2013, 2014, and 2015, as well as \$5.86 million to be paid by user fees. A \$2 million fundraising campaign combined with user fee surcharges and one-time registration charges made up the remainder over the coming decade.

"We've achieved the target, that's what tells us it's the right thing to do to remove the service charge, but we're not there yet," Marshall said about reducing the fees.

"We're talking about a loss of revenue well beyond a quarter of a million dollars."

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