

Town to spend \$1M over four years to keep 86-year-old arena operating

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The Town of Halton Hills will put \$1 million into the 86-year-old Memorial Arena over the next four years in hopes of keeping the aging structure operational.

Photo by Ted Brown

ment: \$85,000.

Lewis said while he's concerned, he did not comment at Monday night's meeting, because he wanted more time to think about the issue.

Lewis said he understands the huge financial crunch this town is facing with regard to infrastructure replacement. Having been a member of both the fire services committee and library board, he accepts the need to spend money on new fire stations and the library. But he pointed out hockey and skating groups have already requested 11.5 hours more in ice time for this coming winter season than the Town can provide.

That's why he decided to support the Memorial Arena report—the ice is needed too much.

However, the Town, he said, can't keep pouring money into an aging arena hoping that it will last for how many more years until there is money in the Town coffers to build a new one.

Wednesday morning, Lewis sent e-mails off to Mayor Rick Bonnette, staff members and others offering solutions to get the ball rolling on planning for future arenas. For example, he said St. Catharines initiated a multi-partnership (city, public and industry/commercial) fundraising drive and within five years, had a four-pad arena complex.

The staff report recommends a council workshop—prior to public consultation—to discuss redevelopment of the Georgetown Memorial Arena and the "over-programmed" Georgetown Fairgrounds.

As well, the council vote directed staff to explore potential sites for a future twin pad arena. The Town is currently in a 1.5 ice pad deficit based on current participation rates. In a recent survey, residents gave new ice rinks the highest priority rating related to recreational facilities.

To read the Memorial Arena report, go to www.haltonhills.ca, August 11 council meeting, Report 8V.

In hopes of squeezing another 10 years out of aging Memorial Arena, the Town will pump at least \$1 million into the 86-year-old Mill Street facility over the next four years.

At Monday night's council meeting, members voted to support—without comment—a staff report recommending minimum building repairs and replacements for the arena to keep it operating over the next decade.

It was staff's preferred option over a second one—spending \$3.3 million over 20 years.

The council vote, in effect, gives Memorial Arena "special status"—or committed financial dollars—in the 2009 capital budget and the 2010-2018 capital forecast.

Next year, \$186,000 will be spent on the building; \$315,000 in 2010; \$482,000 in 2011 and \$22,000 in 2012—assuming no emergency repairs are needed. Expenses include replacements on: roofs, heating system, sanitary line, plumbing fixtures, electrical wiring, and refrigeration system pumps, installation of sprinkler system, parking lot repairs (not replacement) and masonry repairs. The following years, costs will continue to skyrocket with items such as a new skating floor and seating replacement.

Georgetown Memorial Arena was first built as an outdoor ice rink (undersized by today's standards) in 1922, but was later enclosed. According to the staff report it has not undergone "any major revitalization since its original construction," adding it has surpassed the normal life expectancy of an ice rink by 35 years.

"What is the realistic lifespan of Memorial Arena? ...This building is not going to be there forever, but the question is for how much longer," asked Councillor Bryan Lewis, in an *Independent & Free Press* interview Wednesday. The Ward 2 councillor has asked that same question at every budget committee meeting since he was elected.

"I have a real genuine concern, not only in regard to the lifespan of this building but also in the planning for a building to replace it."

Lewis estimated that it would take an average \$300,000 a year to keep the arena going. "Some day it's done, and how much do we want to put into it?"

Lewis called the Memorial Arena Building Condition Assessment report, which listed the potential lifespan of each component of the arena—its structure, interior and exterior elements, as well as electrical and mechanical systems—significant and concerning. But he pointed out the report was dated July 2007—and the Town is already a year behind and playing catch-up on repairs. He pointed out the report states the rink seating has less than three years left in its lifespan (now two), and it's no longer even possible to get replacement parts for the 475 seats installed in 1964. Cost for replace-

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