

# The Victoria Curling Club

A Cornerstone of Athletics and Community in Victoria

## Introduction

The Victoria Curling Club (VCC) has been the home of curling in BC's capital city since 1949. Victoria's vibrant curling community depends on the VCC's facility, which not only provides the best curling ice in BC, but also facilitates the camaraderie that is so integral to "the roaring game." This short paper is intended to outline the current state of operations at the VCC, as well as key opportunities and challenges, that we face so the City of Victoria can make an informed decision with respect to the renewal of the VCC's property lease and potential support going forward.

## Who We Are

The VCC features 8 sheets of ice, a lounge, a small café, and a multipurpose room in addition to the ice surface and administration areas. We currently operate 7 days a week:

- Hosting 20 weekly leagues including men's, ladies, mixed, seniors and youth.
- Employing a youth strategy that provide both high performance and recreational curling opportunities to elementary, high school and University students. In (2022-23) we have revitalized our youth program and now serve almost 100 youth in its first-year post COVID.
- Hosting a significant number of school groups visits. In a typical year over 1200 individual students visit the Club which includes a free curling program that is extended to Central Middle School to create recreational opportunities for kids within Victoria's "inner city".
- Offering ice rental opportunities for competitive and non-competitive tournaments, corporate and team-building events.
- Offering an Adult Learn to Curl Program that has taught almost 200 new curlers and spawned a "Rookie League" to help for the students' seamless integration into the Club.

The Club takes all its instructional programs very seriously using certified coaches, national program standards and supported by a suite of safe sport policies. Pre-COVID, the Special Olympics curling program ran (and will again) at the Club.

In the 2021-22 season, the Club had 804 registered curlers and through our recruitment drive we have raised that number to 907 in 2022-23. In 2021-22 we also responded to fellow curlers when Esquimalt Curling Club closed to host a COVID-19 vaccination clinic and provided curling opportunities for 179 of them.

The average age of a curler at the VCC has been trending downward indicating our success in reaching a demographic that is interested in a downtown lifestyle and in need of the kind of downtown social and athletic opportunities that the VCC specializes in providing.

During the Club's nearly 70 years of operation, VCC members have earned an impressive record of athletic achievement. Provincial curling champions, national champions, world champions, and coaches with Olympic experience have called the VCC home. The VCC remains a hotbed of competitive curling in BC.

In summary, we have shown our resiliency through the COVID pandemic and are growing the sport in the region. Discussions are ongoing about bringing provincial and national events to the region.

## Community Benefits - Economic

The VCC has hosted numerous major curling events. As far back as 1958, the building played host to the Brier, and more recently, Club members spearheaded the 2005 and 2013 World Men's Curling Championships at the Save On Foods Memorial Arena and the 2009 BC Ladies Scott Tournament of Hearts. Over the past 5 years, we have played host to:

- Western Canadian Dental Association Bonspiel
- BC Provincial Firefighters Curling Championship
- BC Provincial Ladies Championship (Scotties)
- BC Provincial Junior Championship
- Pacific Coast Masters Curling Association Provincial Championships
- CanMidWest (Retired Military) Bonspiel
- World Junior Hockey Tournament – "the Barn"
- The Friars' Brier (a tournament for clergy that runs concurrent with the Brier)
- Canada West University Championship

There is significant economic value to Victoria generated with these events that cater primarily to out-of-town teams and fans. Hotels, restaurants, travel companies, and local area tourism operators all benefit from these events. As an example, the Western Canadian Dental Association Bonspiel alone, with 24 teams from outside of Victoria, infused approximately \$250,000 in direct spending into the community. A small World Curling Federation Mixed Championship in Kelowna provided a \$1.2 m benefit to the city and the larger World and Canadian Men, and Women's championships have been documented to provide between \$6 to 17 million financial benefits to the communities in which they have been held.

In addition to events, the annual operating budget of over \$500,000 provides livelihood to employees and benefits from the locally sourced supplies and contracts.

## Community Benefits - Social

The VCC also provides many non-curling benefits to members and the community of Greater Victoria. The facility boasts:

- An upstairs bar (with a current “Club” designation for Liquor Licensing) with a capacity of 175 patrons.
- An independently run Café, providing healthy and popular dining options to curlers and local community members.
- A downstairs multi-purpose room for meetings, classroom space, yoga, and training.
- A 15,000 square foot space for events on the main floor, where the ice is housed in the winter.

In recent summers, the Club has hosted the Times Colonist Book Sale (with over 14,000 visitors over the course of the weekend), the FIBA Olympic Qualifying Basketball Tournament (as a volunteer operations centre), the City of Victoria’s summer day camps for youth; the City of Victoria’s pickleball courts; a prayer centre for the Muslim Association; and a training centre for the Victoria Police Department.

Approximately ten years ago, the VCC regularly served as a venue for major concerts and trade shows. It is a strategic priority for the Club to provide valuable concert and conference space once again in downtown Victoria, both on the main floor of the facility in the summer, and upstairs in the Club lounge on a year-round basis.

Finally, the Club plans to forge relationships with the Songhees and WSANEC First Nations, which we hope will contribute to reconciliation and manifest in curling programs for Indigenous youth.

In a typical year (using pre-COVID figures) the VCC has approximately 40,000 individual site visits – an indication of the facility’s service to multiple communities.

## Vision for the future

### **Strategy.**

The VCC has a vision that is based on expanding its reach in both the local community and in the curling community locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally. We see ourselves as continuing to provide high quality services to members and the broader community through curling opportunities to all ages and in partnership with educational institutions and community groups as well as with provincial and national curling organizations. In addition to curling, we plan on expanding our current engagement with the public (described above) through year-round ancillary events and activities using the facility as a community hub. We envision the VCC as a music hub for up-and-coming local musicians as well as established local festivals. The recent application for the expansion of our liquor license and our embracing of the City’s live music program are tangible indicators of this intent and has been strongly supported by the local community.

### **Financials**

The VCC operations are on a sound financial footing, relying on membership fees and grants from gaming and other sources for its revenue. It has recently diversified revenue source through ice rentals in the winter and building use during the summer. Capital assets on the other hand, are a critical issue with most of the ice-making equipment well past its replacement date. In particular, the refrigerated floor upon which curling is dependent has brine leaks and requires replacement.

In 2016-17, the VCC operated at a financial loss. Since that time, we have posted a \$20,000 profit in 2019-20 (the last financial year pre-COVID). The COVID year (2020-21) resulted in break-even finances due to the impacts of the pandemic. Each of the last two years have had or have a planned \$50,000 surplus.

In 2020-21 we initiated a program to modernize the facility starting on the lounge area and in 2021-22 invested \$50,000 on a dehumidifier, essential for the maintenance of curling ice. It has become evident that we need to accelerate our modernization pace. Curling fees have been increased and our current budget plans for the surplus of \$50,000 to be aimed at building and equipment upgrades. A contingency fund of about \$150,000 is also available to help us partner with potential funding organizations.

Operationally, the VCC is a viable and stable economic entity positioned for growth in the post-COVID environment. For the asset replacement, it is anticipated that a major fund-raising program will be initiated early in 2023 to generate the funds to modernize the equipment and parts of the building.

### **Risk Assessment**

The principal risks to the VCC come from its history and are:

1. The long-term relationship with the City of Victoria.
2. The age and condition of the building and the ice-making equipment

### **City relationship:**

The VCC was incorporated as a non-profit society of BC on November 20, 1949. A lease on the land upon which the VCC facility was built was obtained through the City of Victoria in June 1950. Through considerable club efforts, funds were raised through the sale of debentures and a building was constructed and opened in February of 1953. Since that time, it has been in continuous operation in the same location and facility, located in the North Park neighbourhood of Victoria. The building and contents of the VCC are owned by the membership. The land upon which the facility is built is held by the City of Victoria and leased to the VCC.

Historically, the VCC and the City of Victoria have had roughly decade-long leases at irregular intervals. For the past seven years, however, the VCC has been operating without a long-term lease and no signed document is in place. In addition to leaving the conditions of our occupancy of the land undefined, it precludes investment in facility upgrades required over the coming years by either granting organizations or the club itself

By renewing a long-term lease with the VCC, the City of Victoria will enable the VCC to justify its major capital investments over the next decade. With those investments, the VCC can continue to serve curlers and Victorians for decades to come as a vibrant place for athletics, arts and culture, and community-building. Not only will securing a lease with the City position the Club to decide to pursue major investments in facility upgrades, but a renewed lease will also enhance the Club's ability to generate funds for those upgrades by way of government grants. Many of the available grants for these types of projects can only be secured if an application includes evidence of the applicant's long-term viability and security, including long-term leases.

The VCC is proposing that we update and renew the lease agreement of 2004. A five-year renewable lease is proposed. It is understood that the city requires the ability to reclaim its land and the VCC is prepared to negotiate clauses that would permit the city the flexibility in land management that is needed with suitable timelines.

Finally, for several years we have heard of possible plans for a new multisport facility in the area and if that becomes a reality, the VCC would love to see curling included and will be more than a willing partner.

### Capital Assets

As with all facilities of this age there is a need for renewal. While there has been ongoing maintenance and improvements over the years, the modernization agenda for our facility needs to be advanced. This is particularly evident in the equipment needed for **the continuance of curling**. In particular, the renewal of the refrigerated floor is critical as the number of leaks of brine are increasing and their location becoming problematic to curling ice production. A second priority is a ventilation system to provide air quality **attractive for public events** in both summer and winter.

### Recent Upgrades:

Over the past 5 years, the VCC has undertaken facility upgrades, with the help of volunteer labour and strategic grant funding. The upgrades have been focused on the two key objectives:

1. The continuance of the sport of curling
  - a. Brine pump replacement
  - b. 180 pairs of rental shoes and 50 brooms for drop-in curling, rentals, and youth programs, and
  - c. Rebuild of Dehumidifier.
2. Enhancing the attractiveness of the facility for public events:
  - a. Bar renovations
  - b. South facing roof re-shingling
  - c. LED lighting in the main floor and lobby area
  - d. Multi-purpose room upgrades (floor/paint/lighting), and
  - e. New café operator, and renovations to the space in and around the kitchen (lobby)

### Future priorities

1. The continuance of the sport of curling
  - a. Refrigerated Floor replacement (immediate) and
  - b. Replacement of Condenser and chiller (2-5 years)
2. Enhancing the attractiveness of the facility for social activities
  - a. Air conditioning (immediate)
  - b. Installation of further security features (1-2 years), including:
    - i. video cameras, auto-locks, etc. on front doors and exits, and
    - ii. Replacement or reinforcement of outside doors

- c. Installation of music/event infrastructure: PA system upgrades, HVAC, stage, and lighting, etc. (1-2 years)
- d. Completion of lobby and entryway upgrades – new flooring/tiles (3-5 years)
- e. Renovation or remodel of the entryway overhang (3-5 years)
- f. Installation of video streaming (through Curl BC grant funds) for provincial events in winter, also available to be used in summer for other events – either for streaming or closed-circuit viewing (funding based)

The VCC expects progress to be made toward the above upgrades in the near term. As funding opportunities arise and we reap the benefits of our diversification, more substantive upgrades to the facility will be undertaken including:

1. **Repair of the roof and perimeter** of the building within the next 5-10 years.
2. **Improving accessibility.** We want to be as accessible for people with mobility issues as possible. The Club has installed stair lifts to almost every area within the Club making the lobby, main floor, ice surface, and bar accessible. Access to the lower level remains to be completed.
3. **Fire panel upgrades.** The Club is currently on a legacy “3 wire” system, and as such does not have the capability to run a proper fire panel.

## Conclusion

The Victoria Curling Club has decades of history in Victoria and is a community fixture at 1952 Quadra Street. The future of our revitalization and modernization relies on the City of Victoria acknowledging the value we provide to citizens and working in partnership with VCC through an extended lease so that we can continue to be the home of curling and support local economic development by hosting both curling and social events. In addition, we will provide healthy opportunities for young and old alike to engage in physical and social activities, building community and relationships across all income brackets and backgrounds.