

Town of Whitby

Staff Report

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Report Title: Community Engagement for the Proposed Future Use of Luther Vipond Memorial Arena

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: April 7, 2025

Report Number: CMS 04-25

Department(s) Responsible:

Community Services Department

Submitted by:

John Romano, Commissioner,
Community Services

**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell,
Chief Administrative Officer**

For additional information, contact:

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1. Recommendation:

1. That Community Services Report, CMS 04-25, be received as information.
2. That Staff be directed to begin the Luther Vipond Memorial Arena (LVMA) Community Engagement Process;
3. That a 2025 Capital Project 71251016 LVMA – Repurpose Conversion / Development Project be approved in the amount of \$25,000, funded \$19,072.50 from the Growth Reserve and \$5,927.50 from the Development Charges Parks and Recreation Reserve Fund; and,
4. That Staff be directed to report back to Council with the recommended program options considering the feedback received through engagement on the project.

2. Highlights:

- LVMA is reaching the end of its useful lifecycle for arena operations. The arena is mainly used for ice programs, which will be relocated to other ice pads when the Whitby Sports Complex (WSC) opens with a new twin-pad arena.

- In alignment with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, staff are seeking support to retain a consultant who will facilitate a community engagement process for the future use of LVMA to assist staff in determining options to bring back to Council in late-2025.

3. Background:

The LVMA was reconstructed in 1972/73, with an addition added in 1986. LVMA was originally named The Brooklin Memorial Arena and renamed on Remembrance Day in 1982 to the Luther Vipond Memorial Arena after lifelong Brooklin resident and long-time Arena Manager (1953-1979) Luther Vipond. LVMA is also dedicated to the veterans of the First and Second World Wars.

Currently, LVMA is mainly used during ice season, providing approximately 80 hours of ice time for the community per week for skating, hockey, and ringette. These activities will be relocated to other locations when the Whitby Sports Complex opens with new twin pad arenas, offering more modern and accessible amenities. The LVMA floor is also occasionally used for lacrosse and rented for events (approximately ten days per year) such as Durham Farm Connections, the Brooklin Spring Fair, and an annual cricket event.

In 2019, a consultant was retained to conduct a comprehensive Building Condition Audit (BCA) of the LVMA to evaluate the state of the building infrastructure. The audit showed that capital investments will be required to support the facility's continued use; however, the size and scope of that investment can't be determined until its future use is determined.

As the construction of the Whitby Sports Complex progresses, numerous community partners and interested parties are seeking information regarding the facility's future use. In 2024, Council approved the [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) which provides guidance on community priorities and sets a general course of action to meet the needs of the residents over the next ten years and beyond. Item number 20 of the recommended actions speaks to the need for the Town to "undertake a facility renewal strategy to investigate the feasibility of updating and modernizing LVMA for indoor programming and rentals, including supporting the Brooklin Spring Fair. This should involve input from community partners and the public and may be undertaken as part of a broader vision exercise for Brooklin Memorial Park."

4. Discussion:

Luther Vipond Memorial Arena has undoubtedly played a significant role in supporting recreational opportunities for Whitby residents, particularly in the Brooklin area. Over the years, it has become more than just an arena; it is a place where people gather, connect, and create memories.

As the Town looks to change the current use of LVMA, it is crucial to meaningfully engage past, current, and potential users of the facility to ensure it continues to meet community needs. This engagement is anticipated to be achieved through community engagement sessions, surveys, and focus group meetings that make it easy to learn more, participate, and share feedback. Staff are recommending the retention of a consultant to facilitate this engagement, ensuring the consultation process is thorough and inclusive.

Retaining a consultant to lead this engagement can offer several benefits including:

Expertise and Experience: Consultants that specialize in public engagement bring valuable knowledge, skills, and experience to the process. They can design and implement effective strategies to engage community partners and residents, ensuring that people feel heard.

Objectivity: As external parties, consultants provide an unbiased perspective, which can help build trust and credibility among the public. They can facilitate open and transparent discussions without any preconceived notions.

Innovative Approaches: Consultants often bring fresh ideas and innovative approaches to public engagement. They can introduce new tools, techniques, and technologies to enhance participation and feedback.

Conflict Resolution: Consultants can mediate conflicts and facilitate consensus building among diverse stakeholders. Their neutral position allows them to address disagreements and find common ground.

The LVMA has been a cherished part of the community for over 50 years. It is therefore crucial to manage the public process for repurposing this facility with utmost care and consideration. Ensuring that the process is handled appropriately will help preserve the facility’s legacy and ensure it continues to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Proposed Engagement Timeline:

Deliverable	Estimated Timeframe
Retain Consultant and Plan Engagement	April – May 2025
Community Engagement - Community Meetings, Surveys, & Focus Group Meetings	June 2025
Engagement Analysis	July – September 2025
Present Options to Council	Fall 2025

This community engagement opportunity will be promoted through the Town’s various owned, earned, and paid channels to ensure all audiences can participate.

Note: The community engagement for the repurposing of LVMA is being advanced ahead of Brooklin Memorial Park to ensure its redevelopment aligns with the opening of the WSC and the decommissioning of the arena's current use. Community engagement for Brooklin Memorial Park is scheduled for 2028, with construction expected to begin in 2029 or 2030.

5. Financial Considerations:

Staff recommend proceeding with retaining an experienced consultant to support the community engagement process. This would require an in-year 2025 capital project to be approved, in the amount of \$25,000, funded \$19,072.50 (or 76.29%) from the Growth Reserve and \$5,927.50 (or 23.71%) from the Development Charges (“DC”) Parks and Recreation Reserve Fund. The repurpose and conversion of LVMA was included in the Town’s Development Charges Background Study with a 76% benefit to existing.

Currently, the Luther Vipond Project is included in the Town's 10-year capital forecast for 2027 and may require debt funding to complete.

The Growth Reserve Fund is projected to have a 2025 beginning balance of \$44,360,000 whereas the DC Parks and Recreation Reserve Fund is estimated to have a 2025 beginning **deficit balance of (\$5,731,631)**. The DC Parks and Recreation Reserve has been fully committed to funding the construction of the Whitby Sports Complex. Further, an overall slowdown in Whitby development activity over the past couple of years has resulted in lower Development Charge revenues across all service areas, including Parks and Recreation. Accordingly, Development Charge reserve funds have low uncommitted balances and major capital projects for Parks and Recreation, planned to be funded from DC's, may continue to be deferred or the Town will need to borrow for priority projects until the DC Parks and Recreation reserve is replenished through collections from developers/development activity.

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

Over the next few months, the Project Team will begin the engagement process that may include the following:

Public Meetings:

- Host virtual and in-person community meetings to discuss the project's goals and gather initial feedback from community members. In-person meetings could be held at the Brooklin Community Centre and Library as well as at LVMA to allow residents an opportunity to view the facility.

Survey:

- Offer the opportunity for broad community feedback using a survey to be hosted on Connect Whitby.

Focus Group Meetings:

- Organize meetings with specific partner groups, including Council, Committees of Council, Brooklin Spring Fair Board, local sports organizations, cultural organizations, and youth groups, to gather detailed insights.

Together these various forms of engagement will help ensure a comprehensive and inclusive engagement process that captures diverse perspectives and needs, ensuring LVMA remains a vibrant part of the community for years to come.

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

Staff from Communications, Recreation, Parks Planning and Financial Services have been consulted to ensure the community engagement process for LVMA aligns with the goals/actions within the Community Strategic Plan and Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

8. Strategic Priorities:

The repurposing of Luther Vipond Memorial Arena is a key recommendation of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. This project also supports the Council-approved Vision and actions of the Community Strategic Plan under Strategic Pillar #2 Whitby's Natural & Built Environment; Objective 2.3.5 Implement recreational infrastructure enhancements as identified in the Sports Facility Strategy and Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

9. Attachments:

N/A