

## House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance Pre-budget consultation

### Submission from the BC Recreation and Parks Association

13 August 2010

## **Recreation Infrastructure Renewal – a priority for our federal budget**

In the first detailed study of its kind in BC, the BC Recreation and Parks Association has clearly established that a substantial majority of BC's recreation facilities are at or near the end of their life-cycle stage and exhibit physical conditions consistent with age. Typically, as a facility's life-cycle stage increases, operational costs and the need for capital upgrades escalate dramatically, while energy efficiency and functionality decline. The problem of rapidly-aging and declining facilities is compounded by the rapid increase in our population. This is creating functional obsolescence whereby changes to recreation programming, to sport regulations and technical standards, to health and safety standards, in demographics and recreation trends combine to impair the utility of a facility and diminish its asset value.

Community recreation and sport facilities require sustainable maintenance and funding for renewal if they are to remain one of the most cost-effective prescriptions for good health.

Inactivity and its related health and socioeconomic consequences are costing BC and the country money and quality of life. It is a leading contributor to obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke, certain types of cancers, and fall-related injuries and chronic conditions in older adults.

Recreation is a key factor in combating this trend, supporting physical activity at the community level and leading to healthier lifestyles, stronger community connections, increased productivity and economic growth. Promoting healthy lifestyles and the need for recreation and sports facility renewal comes at a time when citizens and communities are deeply concerned about the devastating social impacts of drug-related gang activity on our streets and about the need to provide suitable havens where young people can access and enjoy healthy lifestyle alternatives. Within communities, recreation builds stronger individuals and families, reducing negative, self-destructive behaviours such as smoking, substance abuse and juvenile delinquency.

**Investment in recreation infrastructure is a preventative approach for individual and community health that offsets spending on reactive investments in health care and social justice infrastructure.**

#### **What's at stake?**

Physical inactivity costs BC as much as \$573million/year. \$211 million/year is attributable to direct costs such as hospitals, physicians, drugs, and institutions, and \$362 million/year to the real indirect costs of lost productivity due to premature death and disability<sup>1</sup>. We are putting the communities and population of BC at risk. The cost of inactivity impacts us all:

Epidemiological studies estimate that physical inactivity results in 36 per cent of heart disease, 27 per cent of osteoporosis, 20 per cent of strokes, hypertension, type 2 diabetes and colon cancer and 11 per cent of breast cancer;

To make matters worse, we are in the midst of an epidemic of childhood obesity that is going to translate into rocketing health care costs at a time when many fear the system is not sustainable.

### **Health care costs can be reduced**

There is mounting evidence that the provision of modern, accessible, activity-friendly recreation infrastructure represents a vital cost-saving investment in good health. The bottom line is simple: Investing in recreational and parks infrastructure can significantly reduce health care system costs directly associated with inactivity.

### **Youth: Obesity and Juvenile Diabetes is on the rise**

Child and youth participation in physical activity improves health and reduces risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some forms of cancer, osteoporosis, and hypertension.

### **The Costs of Aging Population**

Senior activity reduces health risks/costs and the incidence of fall related injuries and chronic health conditions.

### **The Cost to Communities: Inequity, Barriers, Access & Discrimination**

First Nations and immigrant populations are at risk due to gaps in accessibility and culturally appropriate programs. The delivery of culturally appropriate health services provides an opportunity to address inequity of access in aboriginal health, to increase activity of the aging population, and to facilitate the development of a multi-year sustainable plan to address the needs of BC's growing and changing population.

### **Community Development and Viability**

Parks, trails and recreation facilities increase property values and tax revenue. Recreation facilities generate construction and operations job opportunities and support tourism, providing venues for everything from high-performance sporting events to recreational attractions.

### **What are the Issues?**

According to the BC Recreation and Parks Association's (BCRPA) report "A Time for Renewal", upwards of 50% of BC's recreation, parks and sports facilities are 35 years of age and older\* and in urgent need of renewal or replacement. This abundance of aging infrastructure is undermining the ability of communities to attract, accommodate and sustain the range of healthy activities that are being trumpeted as integral to the fulfilment of BC's fitness and health goals. More than replacement, it is imperative that we ensure a sufficient and appropriate stock of recreation facilities exist to support healthy living, adapting our facilities so that the demographic, cultural, heritage and health needs of the population are met.

BC's recreation infrastructure is aging. A large number of recreational facilities are nearing end of useful life.

42% of BC indoor recreation facilities are 35 years or older.

68% of BC's indoor recreation facilities are 25 years or older.

Our older buildings are becoming obsolete - not matching the changing demands of our growing population and being environmentally wasteful and polluting. Their functionality fails to reflect the changing needs of the population and the strong environmental leadership shown by British Columbia. In recent years less funding has been available for recreation infrastructure and today we are experiencing a rapidly accumulating backlog deficit.

Society today is not the same as it was 50 years ago. Our interests, leisure time and activity choices have changed. We cannot expect facilities built 50 years ago to support our new lifestyles and so we must think clearly about our recreation needs today and for the future.

### **What trends must we consider?**

#### **Our Activity Choices**

In today's hectic society, people tend to choose less structured activities that fit easily into varied schedules and changing routines. We are pursuing a greater diversity of activities and are looking for ways to incorporate lifestyle and wellness into our daily routines. These shifts impact the size and layout of facilities, facility operating schedules and demand for outdoor recreation.

#### **Our Shifting Demographics & Diversity**

As we age, our preference and capacity to participate in recreation changes, affecting the services we require. Additionally, cultural diversity presents a need to ensure that all residents of a community have access to relevant recreational experiences. Finally, due to changing economics, commercial enterprise and personal preference, some communities grow while others decline. By anticipating these population shifts we can invest in our recreation facilities where our dollars will have the greatest benefit.

#### **Our Approach to Recreation**

Today we recognize the value of integrating multiple recreation levels and services in one facility. This integrated approach combines overall building costs while extensively increasing the utility, accessibility and operational benefits of a single facility. These multi-use facilities quickly become community hubs, but also require extensive planning and often large capital investments.

#### **Our Desire to be Inclusive**

Recreation is an essential right for all British Columbians, however many facilities are not yet capable of providing full access to everyone. Over a quarter of our indoor and almost half of our outdoor recreation facilities in BC rate as poor in terms of physical accessibility. While accessibility varies by activity type and site conditions, a significant number of facilities in BC require upgrades in order to provide barrier-free access to all.

#### **Our Environmental Awareness**

As concern for the environment grows, people are supporting protection of green space through parks, open spaces and trails. Public stewardship is gaining momentum and new technologies allow development of public infrastructure with a much smaller carbon footprint, increasing the viability of and need for green decision-making.

#### **Our older buildings don't match our new lifestyles**

Wear and tear is not the only problem a building faces as it ages. Functional obsolescence, which is a loss in utility due to changing demand from its users, affects older buildings that can't be retrofitted to accommodate new uses. Functional obsolescence can impair the utility of a facility and diminish public support of existing recreation assets.

#### **Our investments have been inconsistent**

Inconsistent funding has led to uneven investment periods for recreation infrastructure. The late 1960s and the 1970s saw a surge in recreation infrastructure funding and the result was the development of an essential base of facilities that have been serving our communities for over 30 years. The investment surge was followed by a decline in spending on recreation. This scenario has generated a deficit in which a large number of our recreation buildings are now nearing the end of their useful life spans and require extensive renovation or complete replacement.

### Investment in Recreation Infrastructure by Decade

| Year     | Investment     | Population | \$/Person |
|----------|----------------|------------|-----------|
| Pre 1960 | \$1.05 billion | 1,602,000  | \$655     |
| 1960s    | \$1.18 billion | 2,128,000  | \$552     |
| 1970s    | \$3.61 billion | 2,745,861  | \$1,313   |
| 1980s    | \$1.22 billion | 3,292,111  | \$369     |
| 1990s    | \$1.96 billion | 4,039,230  | \$484     |
| 2000s    | \$0.82 billion | 4,381,603  | \$186     |

#### Our recent investment hasn't kept up

By looking at capital investment in indoor recreation infrastructure over time, we can see that our recent investment has not kept up. In the 1970s, our per person investment in recreation infrastructure was almost three times the per person investment of the 1990s. Our lack of recent investment in recreation facilities is contrary to our rising awareness that recreation and physical activity are vital to our everyday lives.

#### What to do?

It is time for long-term renewal that ensures a sustainable, ongoing future for our recreation facilities. Maintaining the status quo is not an option.

#### Recreation infrastructure renewal is an investment

The large number of citizens utilizing indoor and outdoor recreation facilities and the potential of facilities renewal to attract inactive British Columbians justifies infrastructure funding. As well, infrastructure renewal will create much needed employment in communities and stimulate economic activity amongst suppliers of goods and services.

Particularly during hard economic times, parks, recreation and culture services and programs are critical to maintaining healthy quality of life. Replacing poor sidewalks and walking paths, adding bicycle lanes, and upgrading aging facilities like pools and community centres are projects that positively impact the health of children and adults.

Renewing our recreation and parks infrastructure on an ongoing basis will ensure that we meet changing community needs, that we become more energy efficient and that our facilities remain important and sustainable assets in our communities.

We urge the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance to support the provision of infrastructure funding for recreation, parks and sport.

Respectfully submitted

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\*The average functional life of a building is 50 years<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hls.gov.bc.ca/prevention/activitycost.html>

<sup>2</sup> Vander Ploeg, Casey. (2006) "New Tools for New Times: A Sourcebook for the Financing, Funding and Delivery of Urban Infrastructure." Prepared for CanadaWest Foundation. Retrieved from: [www.cwf.ca/V2/files/NewTools.pdf](http://www.cwf.ca/V2/files/NewTools.pdf)

#### **About the BC Recreation and Parks Association**

*For 52 years, BCRPA has been a central resource for its 5000+ members, providing leadership, training and support. BCRPA's diverse network includes parks, recreation and culture professionals, volunteers, students, fitness leaders, local governments, business interests and other valuable community partners. Those members manage more than \$11B worth of recreation infrastructure assets that attract more than 50 million visits by adults and children annually. BCRPA CEO is the Founding Chair of the BC Healthy Living Alliance, the largest health promotion team in the Province. The BC Recreation and Parks Association is a member of the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association.*