

Formed in 2007, the Ontario Aquatic Sport Council began in the form of an Infrastructure Steering Committee – Doug Ferguson, Brian Connors, Dan Thompson, Anne Bell, Linda Cuthbert and Pat Murray. This group transitioned the governance to a formal Aquatic Sport Council – originating members Alex Brown, Alex Palilionus, Jane Wright, Sheri Kraus, Pat Murray, Lorraine Wilson-Saliba and Anne Bell. The partnership between each of the five aquatic sports and with Parks and Recreation Ontario undertook the work of the Mission of the Council and entered into a second project funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation; beginning in 2012.

### **Activities and Outcomes during the Funding Period**

- Establishment of a Centre of Expertise providing the following services: business case support, brokering between groups, technical advice, corporate partnerships, and tools and templates as web resources (i.e. models for effective relationships among facility operators, sports clubs, community; costing models for different facilities; etc.) Staff were hired (Lauren Dickler) and partnership with Swim Ontario entered into, creating a point of access through phone and internet.
- Increased collaboration with, and understanding among, stakeholder groups in the sector (i.e. PRO, YMCA, Sport Councils, Pan American Games, etc) around the need for sport friendly facilities.
- Consultations on pools: Orillia, Collingwood, Renfrew, Tecumseh, Bellville, Brampton, Clarington as well as PAAC and Windsor. There were 10 sport friendly pools completed and at least two more being built. The Town of Collingwood, which does not have a population deemed to sustain a regional pool – given the number of pools in the area – refurbished an outdoor pool to create a six lane indoor facility.
- Workshops were delivered at the PRO Conference in 2011 and in 2012 with good discussion and feedback.
- Meetings with City of Toronto, Windsor, University of Toronto, pool operators and pool architects, as well as provincial sport stakeholders contributed to influence and learning. Council members travelled to communities to meet with sport clubs and municipal representatives in several communities. A master planning workshop was conducted. In all cases the participants indicated that the collaboration expanded understanding and interest.
- Engagement that inform decisions at a time when both Windsor and Toronto were building pools enhanced our learning and the illustration of how sports can work together. There are many more opportunities yet to be realized in aquatic collaboration from those legacies.
- At the end of the project the Council continued to work on several initiatives underway: a partnership with the True Sport Foundation to launch the Club Excellence Program in Ontario and pilot projects in growing aquatic sport in communities where it is currently limited to swimming.

### **Products**

- Maintained a robust website with resources for both sport clubs and pool operators.
- Developed a Guide to Master Planning. In the process of completing the Master Planning Guide we engaged stakeholders in validating the content and its uses. As one operator said, “The next time a club approaches me, I am first going to tell them to read this – and then we will talk!
- Produced Fact Sheets related to FAQ and excerpts from both the Business Plan template and the Master Planning Guide.
- Developed case studies related to pool building and refurbishment.

- Partnership and user group template agreements were developed and used in 10 sport facilities/communities within one year after dissemination.

**Lessons Learned:**

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The single most important result of the project was the regular meetings of Executive Directors, and/or Board members of the five sports that created an increased awareness of common issues and needs, and the opportunities that working together might present. The focus of discussions was on growing sport and creating efficiencies.

We believe that whether it was through direct contact, word of mouth or from the increased awareness of pool architects, that there is a better understanding of the limitations of leisure pools – resulting in better informed decisions. The fact that most new pools in the last five years have not been leisure pools may be because those limitations were experienced, or because they were pointed out.

The most difficult result to achieve is a pool deep enough for synchronized swimming and diving – and at anything but the entry level, water polo. There is considerable aversion to the cost of building and/or operations, and resistance from both community programmers and swim clubs to the time that it might take away from current programs. Our efforts might have been spent, earlier, in ensuring that those sports were thriving in the communities where the facilities already existed, and building case studies on those that did. This short fall has led to our focus on both pilot projects to grow aquatic sports and Club Excellence program. Clubs are not well-equipped to nurture and grow their sports or to partner in the expansion to other aquatic sports.

The other challenge is in changing thinking regarding aquatic activity as a life-long endeavour, and not an elite sport for the young. This is a challenge in both programming and facility decisions.

The Council made several attempts and engaged varied sized communities in an effort to determine the formula to determine the adequacy and need for sport-friendly pools – of different sizes. In some communities sport organizations are using every adequate and not-so-adequate body of water available – in others there is space not in use, but barriers to distance, related to cost or related to relationships. Old pools that operate, but do not meet the needs of sport are very difficult to count. It was impossible to determine the existing capacity or need related to these pools.

We were challenged in achieving templates or cases for the economic advantages of sport friendly pools. The element of political will and influence was difficult to measure and only large pools in large centres have an economic impact beyond the soft benefits of health and wellness and life-long sport.

Old pools are the challenge in mid-sized communities where a national level facility could be sustained. There is water to train in, but not good competition space. The inclusion of the depth and towers required for diving and synchronized swimming is not likely to be solved without funding incentives. Both Windsor and Toronto built for these sports based on requirements attached to event funding.

The most challenging points of collaboration have been with sport clubs themselves, who struggle with the realities of economics and do not always accept the advice they are given. One community made three different approaches to us, asking for assistance in building a case for a 50 metre pool – for a population of 50,000. They are finally getting an 8 lane, 25 metre pool. Another has twice stalled their opportunities with a similar argument and do not have a finalized plan yet.