

SMHA Presentation to District of Squamish Council

October 21 2025

Leah Hodges, President, Squamish Minor Hockey Association

Thank you, Mayor and Council.

As President of the Squamish Minor Hockey Association, I'm here on behalf of more than 300 youth athletes and their families — families deeply affected by the ongoing closure of Brennan Park.

In front of you is a package of previous work and information related to recreation expansion in Squamish, along with impact statements from SMHA players received as of yesterday. These reflect the very real effect of the recent closure of Brennan Park — caused first by mechanical failure, then by job action, and compounded by the decision to remove the ice surface. Also included is a snapshot of what community looks like when our arena is open: the one and only home game our U18 A1 team played this year. The stands were absolutely full.

The arena isn't just a building. It's where our kids grow up, where friendships are built, and where community comes together. It's one of the few places left where people still gather — to cheer, to talk, to feel part of something bigger than themselves. That is what's been lost.

When part of the union was locked out, the entire union was locked out. That decision closed the only recreation facility serving our community. This isn't about taking sides — it's about recognizing that only you, the Mayor and Council, have the power to end this. If the job action isn't resolved within the next seven days, hundreds of children are at risk of losing their entire hockey season. For our graduating U18 players, this is their final year — and once that time is gone, it's gone for good.

For years, SMHA volunteers — all of them parents — have poured countless hours into researching, fundraising, and advocating for recreation expansion. Yet with each new Council, we find ourselves starting over — rebuilding the same case, and restating the same needs. With respect, you have the opportunity to change that cycle.

Following the Skate Club's communication to Council on October 7, which highlighted the parallel struggles minor hockey faces with a severe lack of ice — and the inability to add equitable programming or even accommodate all who wish to play — I am seeking clarification. It sounded as though there are currently no municipal funds allocated or available for the expansion of recreation infrastructure in Squamish, and that for any new facilities to move forward, the burden would fall on community volunteers and user groups to source the necessary funding.

If financial capacity is the barrier, we urge Council to look to the tools already available. The Community Works Fund directed to us by BC Hockey, a letter from which included in your package, is provided annually to all local governments in B.C. through a per capita allocation to support local priorities, delivered twice each year. Local governments decide how those funds are spent. We are asking that Council formally direct a portion of the Community Works Fund toward the expansion of Brennan Park — adding new ice, aquatics, and multi-sport spaces that benefit the entire community.

We also ask that Council commission an independent, third-party root-cause analysis of the mechanical failure that triggered the September arena closure during the renovation, so the cause is clearly understood and the same issue cannot happen again before that work is complete. Separately, we are seeking an explanation for why the rented dehumidifier equipment — which we understood was required to keep the arena operational — was removed on Sunday.

This Council's term concludes at the end of 2026. You still have time to make recreation part of your legacy — not the closure that ended a generation's season.

Looking ahead, as Woodfibre LNG begins contributing new tax revenues in 2027, you have a rare opportunity to direct a portion of those funds specifically to expanding recreation — turning industrial growth into a lasting legacy of wellness, inclusion, and youth opportunity.

Because at its heart, this is about more than facilities — it's about community. The packed stands at our few home games this season showed what happens when Squamish comes together: pride, energy, belonging. That spirit is what keeps this town connected.

As Kari-Ann said on October 7, every child in Canada should have the right to learn to swim for safety and the opportunity to skate because it's part of our national culture. Yet in Squamish, our youth don't have consistent access to either. Our facilities have been stretched beyond their limits for over a decade, and now — with our only recreation centre closed — even those who managed to secure a coveted spot have lost that opportunity.

So tonight, I'm asking Council to:

- Intervene to end the lockout and prioritize the immediate reopening of Brennan Park so our kids can get back where they belong; and
- Commit to long-term recreation investment, beginning with the Community Works Fund and, in future, a defined portion of industrial revenues to expand Brennan Park's facilities.

Ultimately, this is about our youth — the young people who have grown up in this community, proudly wearing "Squamish" on their jerseys, and who simply want the opportunity to play the games they love close to home.

When the rink does reopen, I invite each of you to come watch a Friday night game — to see firsthand the pride and connection that fill those stands. There truly is nothing else like it.

I'd now like to invite Ben, Zac, Cruz and Nolan, U18 players in their final years of minor hockey, to share the impact this is having on them.