

To the attention of:  
Councillor Barb Willard, and  
Councillor Aaron Neeb,

I write to you in hopes of sharing input on your recent discussions and the discussions of those elected before you regarding the state of the recreation facilities in our community. While I do volunteer as a Director on the Board of South Huron Minor Hockey and coach athletics in this community, I am writing to you as a voting constituent of yours. I would like to share with you some ideas about the opportunity that exists for this council to consider a renewed commitment to long range planning and to highlight some concerns in the due process that has lead this council to stumble to their current position of endorsing the recommendation from Neustadia of building a recreation facility with some adjusted amenities and a single ice pad. At Council's Committee of the Whole meeting on September 23, 2019 council was faced with a legacy deciding opportunity that would reshape and revitalize this community.

The opportunity that was before you as Council was to reflect on the numerous consultancy reports that live on in the archives of the municipality that provide a stark contrast to what was endorsed by Council this go around. Those commissioned studies, plans, scans, and recommendations also presented an opportunity for you as Council to consider the intersection of the Neustadia report with that of the Municipality's Age Friendly Plan, Recreation Master Plan, as well as the linkage to Economic Development, Job Creation, Planning, and other upper tier government partnerships.

The opportunity before you that still exists, is that as elected officials you can reflect on your due diligence on this file. You can question if this report by Neustadia constitutes as an official Recreation Master Plan, or as a facilities plan. As elected officials you will know that any Master Plan worth its weight includes community engagement sessions, consultations, and a due process. The opportunity exists for you to question the expediency of this process and the lack of transparency in getting to this point. As members of Council you can critically analyze, as is your responsibility, if the methodology and forecasting is accurate given the work conducted by Neustadia lacks nearly any outside input. Perhaps the opportunity before you as Council is to question if suggesting a Fundraising Consultant be secured is wise given you as Council quite literally just paid \$10,000 to break a contract with *Campaign Coaches*.

It is an understatement to say the hardworking members of our community that volunteered their time to assist in a recreational plan and community hub working group were completely and unceremoniously dismissed along with their hard work so early in your elected tenure on Council. Perhaps it is worth considering as elected officials, if it is worth your time to actually have the courage to question Municipal staff about their public engagement strategy on this so-called Recreation Master Plan. For example, one could question why staff missed the opportunity to set up a table during minor hockey spring and fall evaluations to share information about this work and collect feedback from users of the facility, something that would have exposed the municipality to more than one thousand (1000) users in one place. What about having a staff presence at events like the rodeo, adult baseball tournaments, children's baseball wrap-ups, or by coordinating with non-profit organizations to leverage engagement strategies?

The good news is, you have the opportunity to reflect on your confidence that, should a Municipal Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection (MFIPPA) request be made regarding how Council ended up at this point with Neustadia that you could confidently and publicly defend the process and explain

the narrow vision and focus. The current endorsement lacks real long term planning and vision. This is not simply about a single ice pad versus two. It is more than an opportunity to find operational and logistical efficiencies with two ice pads, it is more than recognizing that Neustadia excluded operationalization recommendations such as the inclusion of non-profit institutions like the YMCA. This of course is something you, as elected members of Council already have in your many previous studies and commissions. So I ask you, as members of Council, why have you ignored this and why have you been so reluctant to seize the opportunity before you to really consider **Community Building, Public Engagement, Transparency, Due Process, Long Range Planning, Economic Development, and Municipal Place Making?**

This brings me to clear concerns in your support for a single pad arena. Some of them such low-hanging fruit that I wonder how as part of fulfilling your elected duty you failed to consider them. For example, did you know that recommending users of your recreational facilities go elsewhere for service is a poor and frankly lazy approach to customer service and business continuity? Have you considered how concerning it is that one single ice pad in our community would push lower rental users to the absolute margins? Is it not concerning that free public skating may be pushed out of prime weekend time to accommodate better revenue drivers? How will this impact casual users of the facility, the unorganized enthusiast or hobby participants of this type of recreation? What about the no-to-low cost “shinny” that is available for those that want to be active, feel some social inclusion, but have neither the means nor the ability to participate in more formal-organized sports? I am concerned as a tax payer that this Council is viewing this initiative as a divisive topic with significant short term (one could argue inaccurate and inflated costs) and not through the lens of growth and to view this as an opportunity to create an anchor in our community, something that galvanizes the community.

Did you know that earlier in 2019, the Exeter Hawks had an exceptional and successful season, something their executive expects to be a trend, and their start to this season would support. But as a result of this, several logistical issues came to immediate light, and your endorsement of the proposed plan does absolutely nothing to address this, but rather compound it. Or what about Women’s Ball Hockey that was pushed back and delayed because the only available facility was being used for hockey. Or take for example the need to turn down the potential for spring hockey leagues because of Rummage Sales and Galas. In a world with two ice pads, the Municipality could remove the ice from one and operate dual purpose usages at the same time, something that took place in Stratford this year in April with 3 on 3 hockey on one pad for kids and a youth ball hockey league on the other. Staggering ice times by half an hour would result in the need for only one Olympia and reduced staffing costs.

Are you as concerned as I am that the proposal by Neustadia fails to project growth in user rentals over the next five to ten years (or beyond), and that their projections are based on previous year’s usage? Take for example that had the municipality or Neustadia collected and presented on the growth in minor hockey registrations and facility usage in the last 4 years you, as Council would have realized that there have been growth by, or by more than 25% in those categories. Figures that you as Council should seek to confirm with Minor Hockey-one of your largest recreational stakeholders. Did you also know that every time a tournament is held in South Huron currently, outside municipalities receive revenue because there is not capacity to accommodate the business need as it is? This will be exacerbated as more tournaments will be added to the roster of tournaments as a result of changes by Hockey Canada and the Ontario Women’s Hockey Association.

I am concerned that when this municipality so desperately needs to build more housing and wants to attract more families and retain the 25-34 year old demographic that you would endorse a “plan” that builds for yesterday and not for the future. You too should be very concerned about this! Your endorsement of this Neustadia plan contradicts Council’s own interests! It feels as a constituent that you are counting on voter apathy and disinterest from the community.

I ask you to be a voice for our community, and to fulfill your legislated responsibility to question the process, the accuracy, and the transparency of the work you commission. Please embrace your responsibility to put into practice the many reports that have come to this council and previous ones before you that point to the need for an operational and cost effective body like the YMCA, and reports that you paid for that speak to having a second ice pad. You can advocate for better performance from your Municipal staff, and hold people accountable for work that is far from inclusive or thorough, including work that produces engagement metrics that fail to justify such a hastily supported recommendation. Lastly, I ask of you, as one of your voting constituents to have a vision for South Huron, to think beyond what is right in front of you, and retain young families, attract people to this community, and build the type of facility that encompasses capacity to serve your market. Because up to this point, you have been unable to do so, and I am concerned that doing the same or less, does not logically make any sense.

Kindest Regards,

Kevin Dickins  
Ward #2 (Exeter)

c.c.  
Mayor, George Finch  
Clerk, Municipality of South Huron  
Darren Kints, President- South Huron Minor Hockey Association