

January 31, 2022

Report To: Mayor and Council

From: Travis Rob, Manager of Operations and Facilities

**RE: 2022 Budget Request from MAT Committee**

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In December 2021, the MAT Committee forwarded a letter to the Treasurer for consideration in the 2022 Budget for the creation of a skating trail on Rainy Lake. This matter has yet to be considered by Council and no funds are currently included in the 2022 budget for this initiative.

The letter requests that the Town construct a trail on Rainy Lake for the purposes of skating through the winter. This request is extremely complicated and before Administration could look into the cost of such a request Council has to consider a number of issues related to this potential project.

1. Where would the trail be located? The Town of Fort Frances is bound on its east and south boundaries by water however much of this water is moving year-round which results in poor to no ice conditions for most, if not all the winter. The closest place that a trail could possibly start would be at the end of School Road and head northeast. Rusty Meyers Flying Service does have their docks and ramp in this area, and this is a primary lake access point from the OFSC trails in town. Further there is no maintained area for parking along this section of the roadway.
2. Should the Town consult with Couchiching First Nation? Given the limited ability to access safe ice, the trail would be located entirely along the portion of the lake along that community. There is an opportunity to partner with them to share access and both benefit from any tourism activities spurred from the trail, however at the very least we should discuss the project with them.
3. Would the Town insurance cover workers operating equipment on ice? We would have to confirm with our insurance provider that we would be covered to take our equipment on the ice. Would Council be open to an increase in premiums to cover this type of work?
4. Typically, these types of trails have benches to tie skates at the entrance to the trail as well as benches or warming shelters along their length. Are these amenities something that Council wants to include as part of this initiative?

In addition to these questions, there are several other considerations that Council needs to be aware of before a decision is made to proceed or not.

1. Working on ice is extremely dangerous at the best of times and would require the establishment of very strict ice safety policies and procedures including a rigorous thickness monitoring program to ensure that the ice was as safe as possible for both our workers as well as patrons utilizing the trails through the winter.
2. Plowing the ice is extremely tough on equipment. The lake is a punishing environment, plowing the hard packed, drifted snow is very difficult. Add in snowmobile tracks, slush, cracks and heaved ice and the task becomes even more difficult. Additional expenses incurred for equipment breakage and downtime are a guarantee.
3. The Town would need to acquire some type of equipment to flood the trail once ice thickness was adequate to access the trail. Lake ice is very rough even in the best of years. The trail would have to be flooded regularly to maintain a smooth surface for comfortable skating.

There are so many factors to consider with this request, determining a cost is near impossible. We do know that the plowing and maintenance that this would require would be an almost daily task and

would be time consuming. To make this a feasible project, we would need to keep one additional staff on in Parks and Cemeteries for the winter dedicated to looking after the maintenance of this trail. In addition, going forward we would need to look to purchasing lighter equipment better suited to working on ice. The best piece of equipment we have to work on the ice is our John Deere 3046 tractor with blower. This unit is perfectly suited to this work; however it is heavy for its size (3670lb/1665kg) and given its small cab would sink very quickly trapping the operator inside in the event that the unit broke through the ice. Alternatively, we do have a ¾ ton truck with a plow (10,195lb/4624kg) which would not be feasible to put on the ice until later into the season. Parks does have a side by side for work in the cemeteries which would be a good unit to open the trail early in the season but currently we do not have a plow or cab for this unit as it is not intended for winter use.

The letter from the MAT Committee references several other trails in other communities and, in researching this report, it was found that all of these trails are either volunteer initiatives or done by private entities. In addition, all of these trails are along low or no flow rivers or small lakes where the ice conditions would be less variable and there is protection from wind blown snow, pack ice, heaves and large cracks. Given the current ice conditions, the ability to get a trail constructed this late in the season may not be possible this year, however at this time the ice in the area of the potential trail has not been checked for condition or thickness.

Before pricing could be determined, a location needs to be determined, ice conditions need to be checked in this area, and consultation should be undertaken with stakeholders. At this point Administration is looking for direction from Council on this initiative. Does Council wish to have Administration undertake the work to determine the cost for a trail of this type on Rainy Lake in 2022 or defer this to the 2023 budget process?

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Travis Rob', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Travis Rob, P.Eng  
Manager of Operations and Facilities