



THE CITY OF WINDSOR

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

DREW DILKENS, DBA
MAYOR

February 25, 2021

Dear Fellow Windsor Resident,

Events in our community over the past 11-months have forced the City of Windsor to take extraordinary measures to deal with the ever-changing landscape related to the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Provincial lockdowns that started in December mandated closure of the Windsor International Aquatic & Training Centre (WIATC) and all other indoor sport facilities for all users. I understand the rhythm an athlete finds when training on a regular schedule. I had that focus and determination myself when I was a swimmer and coached by Windsor's own Lou Pocock. In short, I know this situation is just horrible for many of you.

As we came out of lockdown and moved to 'Red-Control' there was some hope our facilities would reopen and allow for limited use. We were cautioned to move very slowly when reopening our facilities by some of the highest infection control specialists in Canada as a result of concern over variants that exist and are significantly more contagious than the original Covid-19 virus. Candidly, the Prime Minister, Premier, Dr.'s Tam, Williams and Ahmed have all expressed alarming concern over a potential third wave of Covid-19 that could be much worse than anything we have experienced thus far. All indicators point to March-April as the most concerning time for this potential third wave to affect our community. Our concern is also heightened as a result of Covid-19 transmission that occurred in several of our facilities in November-December.

Saying all of this, I understand the disappointment some have expressed upon hearing about the need to transform WIATC into a temporary emergency shelter. This may delay our ability to return the facility to regular service in the short-term should public health conditions allow. Due to the closure of the Downtown Mission by the Health Unit along with a Covid-19 outbreak at the Salvation Army Shelter, the need for our response was immediate and urgent. There were no other reasonable alternatives available and it would have simply been inhumane to pretend this issue could have resolved itself in the middle of the coldest month of the year. We needed to respond with a facility large enough to accommodate 75 beds with proper shower and food serving areas along with an ability to provide other services needed to support a population with complex needs.

I've been both surprised and disappointed with some correspondence my colleagues and I have received related to this decision. I understand the ease with which one can take to electronic means to criticize municipal decisions, but some of the language used is simply unbecoming of my fellow Windsorites. In our position, City Council and I do not have the luxury of prioritizing aqua-fit, diving lessons, and lap swimming over the needs of Windsorites who have nowhere else to turn in winter months. Frankly, I hope you would expect nothing less from us.



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Since the start of this public health crisis, the City of Windsor has converted our recreation centres to serve very different purposes:

- **Adie Knox** has been dedicated for use by the Unemployed Help Centre to store and process the generous donations of food and supplies from last year's June 27th Miracle event.
- Community rinks at the **WFCU Centre** are currently being converted into a mass vaccination clinic, and within days will be hosting the first public Covid-19 vaccinations for those 80 years of age or older.
- We manage two **Isolation & Recovery Centres** in Windsor hotels – one for the temporary foreign worker population and another for homeless individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19.

In each of these instances, City of Windsor staff who would normally administer recreation services and those who process social and employment services have been redeployed to help manage these new front-line needs.

My level of excitement at the thought of being vaccinated and returning to a 'normal' life is equal to yours. Although many will not count the past year among the 'best years of their lives', there is so much to look forward to in 2021. As we move forward over the coming months and see mass vaccinations take place, things will slowly improve as safety protocols allow for more widespread openings to occur. For many that means returning to training and competitive sport. I also look forward to seeing soccer fields active, pools busy, and arenas in action. Until that time, as a community, we must continue to rally around those still suffering the effects of this global pandemic and not rush to selfish and callous commentary. If nothing else, this pandemic has shown us that we truly are 'all in this together'.

Please stay safe, stay well, stay positive, and be kind to one another.

Sincerely,

Drew Dilkens