



GODERICH LIONS CLUB
BOX 65
GODERICH, ONTARIO
CANADA
N7A 3Y5

Friday March 7th, 2025

Goderich Town Council and Memorial Arena Task Force
57 West St,
Goderich, ON N7A 2K5

Subject: The Future of the Goderich Memorial Arena — A Call for Thoughtful Action and Genuine Community Engagement

Dear Members of Goderich Town Council and the Memorial Arena Task Force,

The Goderich Memorial Arena, built in 1949 to honour the brave veterans of our town who served in World War II, has long stood as a gathering place at the heart of our community. A space that embodies the spirit of connection, celebration, and service. For the Goderich Lions Club, this building represents far more than bricks and mortar; it has provided a home for events that directly fund and fuel our community service, bringing neighbours together for causes that strengthen our town.

We recognize the difficult position Council faces in balancing aging infrastructure, financial constraints, and evolving community needs. We recognize and understand many councils before have 'kicked the can' with regard to what to do with the Memorial Arena. After years of neglect and inaction, the public consultation window has been abruptly compressed to a mere 3 day period, occurring *sometime in the next few weeks*, leaving minimal time for thoughtful input from our community. This rushed approach, after years of inaction, does a disservice to both the process and the people who care deeply about this facility's future.

The Memorial Arena is one of the few remaining central, accessible, and flexible spaces where the people of Goderich can gather, celebrate, fundraise, and connect. For decades, the Goderich Lions have relied on the Memorial Arena to host community-building events such as our annual Garage Sale, which has raised funds that directly benefit local projects, charities, and residents. Other community groups have similarly depended on the arena for dances, garden shows, shuffleboard, indoor soccer, floor hockey, fundraisers, and more. Its proximity to Bannister Park further enhances its importance, providing change rooms and washroom facilities for outdoor sports leagues. In short, Memorial Arena has served — and should continue to serve — as Goderich's Community Centre.

We cannot support the extremely compressed timeline for community consultation. As one of our members stated, just weeks ago we had a facility that hosted the children of Goderich Public School for a Christmas dinner, and now we suddenly face the very real prospect of losing it entirely. This type of decision, with long-term consequences for community life, must not be made in haste. It must involve thorough input from the public, including groups like ours, who have a direct stake in its future. We maintain that a 3 day public consultation carried out by a third party such as GSP is insufficient.

Opinions within our Club vary on the preferred outcome. Some favour a complete rebuild to modern standards, while others see merit in renovation if it proves cost-effective and revenue-generating, some have even expressed that if the town is facing financial issues the best course may be to privatize or lease the building to a revenue-generating for-profit company. Regardless of the final approach, one thing is clear: Goderich needs a community gathering space, and Memorial Arena — or what replaces it — must fill that role.

It is concerning that Goderich, a town of nearly 8,000, currently has zero dedicated community hall capacity with the old arena being closed. Meanwhile, our smaller neighbouring community, Central Huron, has 7 community halls with a combined capacity of over 2,500 people. This disparity is glaring. The Memorial Arena's importance goes beyond nostalgia; it represents access to affordable, accessible space for local groups, families, and service organizations to come together. If we lose this space without a clear community-driven replacement plan, we will have failed our residents.

The Lions urge Council and the Task Force to step back, slow down, and engage the public meaningfully over a longer period than 3 days. We urge to not see this as a box-checking exercise, but as consulting with our community to envision what our town needs. There are important questions that have not been adequately explored:

- What creative revenue options exist for the facility, such as renting unused spaces or partnering with private operators?
- What low-cost improvements could address safety concerns, allow the doors to open, without triggering unnecessary full-scale upgrades?
- Could Memorial Arena's upper floor serve as meeting space for community groups like ours, reducing the need for expensive new facilities elsewhere?
- Have we fully considered flexible design options, e.g., moveable walls, multi-purpose flooring, that would increase year-round utility and potentially generate revenue?

The answers to these questions, and many others, cannot be determined in the space of a few rushed meetings. We feel the future of Memorial Arena should reflect a collective vision, not a reactive response.

The Goderich Lions Club stands ready to engage with the public Charrett and voice our concerns and ideas. We believe in a solution that balances financial responsibility with the need for a vibrant community space. We also urge Council to consider this process as a reflection of the town's values; a demonstration that in Goderich community comes first.

We thank all of you for your service to our town. We trust you will recognize that a decision of this magnitude deserves more time, more care, and more respect for the voices of those who live, work, raise their families, and volunteer here.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John J. Maaskant". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

John J. Maaskant
Goderich Lion's President
On Behalf of the Goderich Lions Club