

COUNTY OF RENFREW

DEVELOPMENT AND PROPERTY DEPARTMENT

TO: County Council
FROM: Craig Kelley, Director of Development and Property
DATE: January 7, 2022
SUBJECT: Department Report

RESOLUTIONS

1. **2022 Ontario Winter Games**

Recommendation: THAT County Council approves that the 2022 Ontario Winter Games be postponed until the Winter of 2023.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe economic and social disruptions across the globe, and the recent restrictions that have been announced as a result of an especially virulent Omicron variant of the virus has meant further cause for concern of large gatherings and events. Originally planned for February 24 through to March 6, 2022, the Ontario Winter Games was meant to be a sign of the County's reemergence from the pandemic, and a signal that the Province is back open for business. The gathering of more than 3,500 participants and spectators was going to help drive a boost to the local economy and showcase large social events where we could celebrate being together after such a long struggle.

Unfortunately, now is not the time to celebrate.

Since direction was provided to staff from County Council in October, the Games Organizing Committee and its host of volunteers worked diligently to overcome the logistical challenges with the hopes of hosting the Games in 2022, but unfortunately, the pandemic and the rising concerns of an impending variant were already beginning to impede our efforts.

As it became increasingly clear that this new Omicron variant was overwhelming our Province and forcing new restrictions, Warden Debbie Robinson, Chair Peter Emon and County/Winter Games staff held several conversations with Provincial Games staff about the implications of the Games happening amidst an increasingly difficult to control pandemic. There is uncertainty around the availability of the sporting venues, the availability of secondary accommodations (short-term rental accommodations), the lack of emergency/health personnel and the unease of hosting a Games in the midst of a circulating variant that knows no boundary. Furthermore, we do not have the infrastructure or sufficient experienced staff to manage testing, screening, tracing and isolation protocols that would be required to ensure the safety of all participants. To that end Warden Robinson and Chair Emon convened conversations and meetings with MPP John Yakabuski, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and the Honourable Lisa McLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries to determine what, if any, steps would need to be taken to postpone these Games to another time.

On Tuesday, January 4, 2022, MPP Yakabuski and Minister McLeod, along with Province of Ontario staff, confirmed that postponing the Games until 2023 was a viable scenario and gave their full support to this action, given the current health crisis in the Province. Upon the passing of this recommendation, Minister McLeod will begin the necessary work to reallocate the Winter Games funding to the following year, while her staff will work with their Provincial counterparts to determine appropriate dates in 2023 that align with the Provincial Sporting Organizations and other major tournaments that are scheduled in Winter 2023.

We remain confident that we can host the best Ontario Winter Games ever and feel that this is the right decision to make at this time.