July 17, 2020

Dear Huntsville Council Representatives,

Friday July 17th marks a day of hope and promise as areas in the province, including the Town of Huntsville, enter Stage 3 of the Provincial reopening strategy. For many people it has been a mental and physical struggle, overcoming difficulties in day to day life, as we cope with COVID-19. But today there is hope that we, as a community, can regain some of our normalcy; there is restrained relief that our provincial leaders, scientists and medical directors have decided it is time to allow for safe, mindful reopening. As a resident of Huntsville and a member of the local skating community, I am requesting that council reopens the Canada Summit Centre, including installing ice for September use.

Supporting mental health and physical wellbeing for residents of Huntsville is critical. Public Health Ontario identifies “the stay at home order and school closure measures enacted in response to COVID-19 are unprecedented in their breadth and duration and this presents risk to children and families for various physical and mental health problems”. (PHO, June 2020) Youth in our community have been hit the hardest by COVID-19 isolation. Our youth have been locked in since March, 4 months, without being allowed to see friends, attend school, visit parks, engage in any group sports or activities, or even visit a store. As our province has seen an increase in drug use, alcohol consumption and domestic violence during this pandemic, one can’t help but wonder what is happening to children in our community who are isolated behind closed doors. Now, with the start of Stage 3 reopening, it is even more important for our community to safely reopen, which must include safe, planned, structured activities to enrich the lives of all residents including our local youth. As parks and public spaces open it will be very hard for many children to understand and maintain distancing, making organized, supervised activities vital in providing safe activity for youth. Thankfully Provincial Sport Organizations have created guidelines for safe return to sport, and are even being used at several facilities within our own Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit ie. Allendale in Barrie has 2 rinks and the pool open. There are also a few key points in the Ontario Stage 3 Framework for consideration that may affect decision making:

 “-people at their place of work DO NOT count towards gathering limits” pg.12

“-Gathering limits do not apply to pools, rinks, etc.” pg15 –PSOs have different limits

During the past several town council meetings, there has been a clear message that the leaders of Huntsville want to protect the safety of all residents, while protecting town assets and maintaining fiscal responsibility. It can be challenging and even scary to consider reopening especially with a looming second wave. However, as exhibited at many facilities, modified programming can be implemented to allow for community engagement in a safe, controlled environment. A town becomes a community by the way town leaders support and engage their residents. Community services and facilities should be considered for more than just their financial contributions; especially in a time of difficulty, these services and facilities become even more important to support the mental health and physical wellbeing of local residents. I ask that you show Huntsville residents that our mental health and physical wellbeing matter by working with local users to begin a prompt, safe reopening of our Canada Summit Centre.

Thank you for your consideration,