

North Highlands Nordic Ski Club votes unanimously to investigate alternate locations for its ski facility.

Submitted by North Highland Nordic Ski Club

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At the January 13 meeting of the North Highlands Nordic Ski Club, the thirty members present voted unanimously to explore options to relocate the base of operations for the North Highlands Nordic Ski Facility which the club operates in Cape North. The facility has been based since 1986 in the Northern Victoria Community Center, where the club's members and community volunteers hosted the 1987 Jeux Canada Winter Games. Since that time the facility's offerings and resulting needs for additional indoor space have grown considerably.

Historical background and present-day concerns were addressed at the meeting, including the enviable reputation that the facility enjoys in the Nova Scotia cross-country skiing community, and the facility's place as northern Cape Breton's longest continually running winter outdoor recreation and fitness facility. Members emphasized the need to continue operations for the 2020 season at the present location while taking the steps necessary to ensure the continuation of the facility's operation and the improvement of its services to both community residents and the Nova Scotia public.

After unanimous passage of the vote to explore all relocation options committees were formed to investigate land availability, skier access, building design, parking, construction costs and potential financial assistance. The club's intent is to evaluate progress in the early spring. If relocation is shown to be feasible, the hope would be to complete construction/relocation by Christmas 2020, in time for ski season 2021.

The 1989 Canada Games cross-country ski venue, originally planned for the Beulach Ban Falls area of Cape Breton Highlands National Park, was moved to the Community Center site by ski club representatives when they and the Community Center/rink representatives agreed that the infusion of Canada Games funding into the then-incomplete Community Center and Rink would be more beneficial to the Cape North area community than placement of the facility in the national park.

As a result of the move, hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent on the completion of the Community Center and Rink including the ski facility's base of operations attached to the rink, a 7 ½ km trail system, the province's only nordic grooming tractor, and ski event support equipment.

Since that time the ski club's facility has remained open to both the general public and club members from Christmas to late March/early April. The club has expanded the trail system to 12 km and now provides basic trail access, daily trail grooming, ski and snowshoe equipment rentals, children's ski lessons, adult ski lessons, race team coaching and event organization. The 1989 Canadian Junior Ski Championships were held in Cape North and numerous regional and provincial races and fun events continue to the present. All necessary funding for various facility improvements and expansions was raised by the ski club at times working with various government partners such as Victoria County, Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation and the province of Nova Scotia. The facility has operated since the mid-80's almost entirely on a volunteer basis. In 2002 the club, assisted by Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation replaced its original grooming tractor with a new, larger model that has been in use to this day.

As the facility's offerings grew, so did its need for indoor space not only for its own equipment storage but also to service the growing number of skiers visiting from throughout the province and beyond, as well as its own enthusiastic members. For a variety of reasons, the existing space has become increasingly less appropriate for the club's use.

The club anticipates that a move to a more efficient, more skier-friendly location will go a long way towards attracting ever more skiers to the region and help to continue establishing the northern Cape Breton region as a true and dependable winter destination.

