

Aurora's outdoor rinks open for all to enjoy



It took a while for true winter weather to get here, but the arrival of seasonal temperatures has a silver lining: it's cold enough for Aurora's outdoor rinks to welcome visitors once again.

Skaters were pleased to hit the ice at several local rinks last week, including Town Park, Ada Johnson Park, Machell Park and Confederation Park, and the long-range forecast looks like favourable conditions will continue next week.

“Prior to the winter season and the construction of the rinks, locations are inspected for holes/surface anomalies where the rink is to be placed, hoses are checked for cracks/breaks, signage installed, lighting systems inspected and timers set, and rink kits inspected to ensure all components are functional [and] viable for the upcoming season,” says Carley Smith, Manager of Corporate Communications for the Town of Aurora, on how locations are chosen each year.

“Construction of one rink, on average, takes four staff eight to twelve hours to construct and fill the rink with water (up to one week before frozen and ready for use). Once rinks are functional, they are inspected daily for safety by staff and flooded regularly to ensure the ice surface remains smooth. In addition, they are cleared after snow events with snow blowers and sweeping equipment.”

At press time this week, Town Park boasted one rink – an EZ-Rink with boards and liners, while Ada Johnson Park on Aurora's east side offered two rinks – one for pleasure skating and the other for stick and puck play. The same two-rink configuration was set up at Machell Park, while Confederation Park prepared one rink strictly for pleasure skating.

“Rinks are located in Community Parks in different areas of Town to provide residents options close to their neighbourhoods,” says Smith.

Outdoor rinks at James Lloyd Park, which had previously been a rolled rink placed over its basketball court, and at Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park, a location that has offered an old-fashioned rolled rink in the past, have traditionally been Town-built and run by volunteers, but these are not yet open.

“The Town historically has had good success with residents managing the maintenance of a couple rinks in Aurora,” says Smith of James Lloyd Park and Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park. “However, the ability to create and keep ice consistently due to weather pattern changes has hampered their efforts in recent years as these rinks are still constructed using traditional means of snow cover, rolled and packed, then flooded to create the rink surface. It also takes a very dedicated and special type of volunteer to go out overnight in -10 or colder conditions to flood. It certainly is not for the faint of heart as it takes many hours of dedication. Currently we have volunteers for these rinks, but the rinks have yet to be established for 2024 in these locations.”

Weather fluctuations will mean the occasional down-time for the rinks that are presently open, but municipal staff will do

?everything possible? to keep ice available to skaters until after March Break.

Next year is set to bring even more skating options to Aurora with the addition of a skate loop at the heart of the Aurora Town Square redevelopment.

?The new skate loop will be a different experience as it's located in the downtown core within a Square, that will aim to be a community hub for cultural events and gathering,? says Smith. ?It will allow people to skate on a loop and take in many of the other experiences that will be offered as part of the complex. The other existing rinks in Town will continue to operate in the park settings, offering pleasure skating and hockey opportunities.?

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