
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report CDS-10-2023 Blue Line Club Expansion – Dunnville Aeros For Consideration by Council in Committee on November 21, 2023



OBJECTIVE:

To allow for the temporary relocation and expansion of the Blue Line Club at the Dunnville arena for all home games—regular season and playoffs—during the 2023/24 season of the Dunnville Sr. A Aeros.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report CDS-10-2023 Blue Line Club Expansion – Dunnville Aeros be received;
2. AND THAT the location parameters and event conditions set out in Report CDS-10-2023 be approved and incorporated into all permits associated with game events.

Prepared and Respectfully submitted: Mike Evers, MCIP, RPP, BES, General Manager of Community & Development Services

Approved: Cathy Case, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The subject report is in response to a Council motion to present options to allow for an expanded Blue Line Club (licensed area) at the Dunnville arena for all home games during the 2023/24 season of the Dunnville Sr. A Aeros (regular season and playoffs). Staff have examined options available at the arena and are recommending a defined space within the north-end stands where this licensed gathering space can take place. Staff are recommending a series of conditions that the organizer(s) will need to comply with and which are intended to ensure control of the crowd, protection of facility features (e.g. walking track) and maintenance of unimpeded access to emergency exits.

BACKGROUND:

At the October 31st Council in Committee meeting, a motion was passed as follows:

“THAT staff be directed to report back to an upcoming Council in Committee meeting on options to allow arena users to extend the Blue Line Club area at the Dunnville arena.”

The Councillor that introduced the motion (Councillor Shirton) provided further details relating to the request noting that it was specific to the Dunnville Sr. A Aeros and for the balance of the 2023/24 season. The existing Blue Line Club (Club) is a separate, licensed area located in the upper lobby at the south end of the Dunnville arena. It currently operates during the home games of both the Junior C Mudcats and—since the introduction of the team in Dunnville in 2023/24—the Sr. A Aeros. The County’s other arenas have similar Clubs that run for specific events (e.g. HCCC – Corvairs home games; Hagersville – Hawks home games; and, Cayuga – Curling Club). The Clubs have operated for decades and function as both a social enhancement for events and as revenue generators for the organizers/clubs.

The location and design of the current Club space at the Dunnville arena was informed by the community as part of the construction design in 2009. It has a maximum capacity of 25 persons. The organizers of the Aeros game events have indicated that up to 3 times that number of patrons could be looking to access the Club. This has been 'tested' through an exception that was permitted on October 7th for the home opener of the Aeros. As part of the exception, a temporary location and facility set-up was developed at the north-east end of the upper section of the arena. It was laid out to accommodate 80 persons and indications are it was near capacity at different junctures of the game. There were no issues with this event.

Based on anticipated demand and the previous positive experience of October 7th, staff are recommending a temporary Club similar to what was established for the home opener event. Given the number and size of events expected to follow (7 regular season games and potential for playoffs with up to 80 persons), additional parameters are being recommended by staff to ensure proper controls, safety and patron conduct occur. The details around this proposal are included in the Analysis section below.

ANALYSIS:

As part of the October 7th home-opener exception, staff examined potential locations and layouts for an expanded Blue Line Club (Club) throughout the Dunnville arena. Staff have reviewed the previous assessment and confirmed that there is only one area that is suited to a relocated and expanded Club, which is the northeast corner of the upper section of the arena. While this area is not designed for a designated Club or physically separated from the main spectator area (e.g. wall, door), there is an ability to create suitable separations and visible space definition through the use of personnel (security), messaging (signage), and temporary barriers (stanchions). The area is shown in Attachment 1.

In addition to space definition, staff have identified the following parameters/conditions for the area and activity:

- Capacity limits: the licensed area would be capped at a maximum of 80 persons. This total covers the entire area, including the section of stands (main area where drinking is to occur) and standing area (bar queue along the side of the walking track and the fixed drink rail). This capacity is derived from calculating the maximum permissible occupant load under the Fire Code and has been confirmed through on-site measurements and calculations completed by County Fire Department staff;
- Professional security: hired security is required for each game event and is to be paid for by the organizer(s). Given the size of the licensed area (80 persons) and its location adjacent to an emergency exit lane and doors, it is critical to have trained personnel present to address crowd control. A minimum of 2 security guards are required for each game event. This is consistent with the ratio set out in the Municipal Alcohol Policies of other area municipalities, as well as the advice of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO);
- Service cut-off: a service cut-off (last call) is recommended at the 10-minute mark of the 3rd period. This cut-off is required to ensure that the serving area (bar) is closed by the end of the game and the patrons exit the Club area and arena facility as soon as possible after the final horn. From time-to-time, Facilities staff have experienced difficulties in moving patrons out of the existing Club in a timely fashion at the end of the game. This has led to delays in staff being able to conduct close-out of the arena facility. Part of the challenge in this regard has been continued service at/after the final horn of the 3rd period which leads to patrons still drinking past the end of game. Given the expectation of much larger crowds in the relocated/expanded Club, it is imperative that a firm and earlier service cut-off be in place to ensure that patrons exit the building and Facilities staff can proceed with their work of take-down and clean-up;

- Directive signage: signage that messages ‘No Standing/No Blocking’ for the walking track, emergency exit doors area, and the stairs in the stands must be produced by the organizer(s), posted in clearly visible fashion, and maintained at all times for the duration of the event.

The above requirements will be laid out as the organizer’s obligations as part of the Special Occasion Permit (SOP) that the County would issue for each game. All other standard requirements (e.g. insurance) would also apply.

Of note, additional County staff would not be required for the game events based on the conditions set out above. At present, the standard staff complement for Junior and Senior A games is 1 permanent staff and 2 students. The Aeros home opener event on October 7th did not produce any additional workload that would suggest the need to increase this complement. Staff will continue to monitor this over the course of the season to determine if needs change. Should staff requirements change, the organizer would be responsible for the additional staff costs incurred by the County.

The AGCO has been consulted on the proposal. The AGCO does not play a role in the actual approval of the licensed location within the facility – the agency has clarified that is up to the County to determine, in particular given that the County does not have a Municipal Alcohol Policy. However, the AGCO has provided some advice to the County relative to this proposal. As follows:

- the approach is not typical – in the AGCO’s experience, Blue Line Clubs are either in a defined space away from the main spectator area (e.g. a viewing room) or the entire arena bowl is licensed (note: licensing of an entire arena bowl is typically for private, larger arenas and not community arenas that are owned/operated by the municipality);
- as noted above, given the size of the licensed area (capacity for 80), professionally-trained security personnel should be employed to address crowd control, emergency situations (including exiting facility), etc.

Based on the above, staff are recommending the relocated and expanded Blue Line Club be approved, subject to the noted parameters and conditions, for the remainder of the Dunnville Sr. A Aeros regular season and playoff games.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

The primary concern is public and staff safety and maintaining a clear path to the emergency exit at the north end of the arena. As the facility owner, the County is responsible to ensure that access to the exit is not impeded in any way. Staff are of the opinion that the organizer’s adherence to the conditions described above is critical in this regard. Facilities staff will monitor game events to ensure that a clear path remains at all times and physical barriers are not created at/near the exit. Should any issues arise, staff will address them with the event security and organizer at the time of the occurrence, with follow up as required. Fire Department staff will also be conducting random inspections of the site during games to ensure compliance with the Fire Code for occupancy and egress requirements for fire exits.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

Staff in Facilities, Parks, Cemeteries & Forestry Operations, Emergency Services and Community Development & Partnerships have collectively developed the parameters for the relocated and expanded Blue Line Club. The Alcohol & Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) has also been consulted on best practices and suitability of the proposed option. All of the requirements of the noted stakeholders have been incorporated into the parameters and conditions described in the Analysis section.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

REFERENCES:

None.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Blue Line Club Location.