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The Chilliwack Curling Club, which opened in 2018, features the most efficient ice-making equipment, LED lighting bright enough for television broadcasting, a full professional kitchen attached to a 120-seat restaurant and a banquet lounge capable of 300-person events. (Photo submitted by Chilliwack Curling Club)

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PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CITY OF CHILLIWACK AND CURLING COMMUNITY PAYS OFF FOR BOTH SIDES

**BY
BRIAN**

CHICK

Most curlers have fantasized about building their own curling club. Usually inspired by the deficiencies of their current club, dreamers might imagine bigger locker rooms, a more comfortable lounge, or the latest in ice-making equipment.



In 2012, as part of its 10-year strategic fiscal plan, the City of Chilliwack committed to building a new curling facility, originally with a budget of roughly \$6.5 million. (Photo submitted by Chilliwack Curling Club)

For Bruce Renwick, manager of the Chilliwack Curling Club in British Columbia's Fraser Valley, this exercise in fantasy became a necessary planning stage for the reality of building a new club. Thanks to a major investment from the City of Chilliwack, Renwick and his committee got to design their dream facility from scratch.

"We shot for the moon, fully expecting that they'd say 'No' to a few things. This or that would have to come out," said Renwick. "We threw everything we wanted into our plan, and they actually built the building we wanted."

The eight-sheet club, which opened in 2018, features the most efficient ice-making equipment, LED lighting bright enough for television broadcasting, a full professional kitchen attached to a 120-seat restaurant and a banquet lounge capable of 300-person events.

"It's actually now called the Chilliwack Curling Club and Community Centre," said Renwick. "It's a year-round facility."

Since 1952, the Chilliwack Curling community had run its own club, which was technically leased to the city for \$1 per year. After rebuilding the club in 1960, the six-sheet club ran successfully under this model for more than 50 years before the city decided to offer an upgrade.

"Our council looks at things a little differently than most," said Ryan Mulligan, Chilliwack's Director of Recreation & Culture, "We don't offer programs; we let the communities develop the programs they want, and we try to provide the facilities."

In 2012, as part of its 10-year strategic fiscal plan, the City of Chilliwack committed to building a new curling facility, originally with a budget of roughly \$6.5 million. As plans evolved, two sheets were added, the Canadian dollar struggled, the price of steel skyrocketed, and the final price tag ended up being more than double the original estimate.

“Historically, the city had put no money into the curling facility at all,” said Mulligan. “We thought it was time to build a new facility, but we wanted them to run the programming, manage the building, and make it profitable.”

“The city was great,” said Renwick. “They involved us with every decision from the beginning. They let us design it, deal with the planners, the contractors, pick the colours.”

The payoff was a centre that was not only going to be a curling club. In its first year, the club hosted 180 non-curling events. Prior to the COVID lockdown, there were wedding banquets booked every weekend over the summer, and Christmas parties booked every weekend through December. Renwick plans to make the 23,000-square-foot ice shed available for trade shows, concerts and car-meets in the off season.



Bruce Renwick, Chilliwack Curling Club manager.

“We ran extra power, and extra data (capability) out to the ice shed for things like trade shows,” said Renwick. “We’ve got 16-foot garage doors, so you could drive your truck right out onto the ice-shed floor to unload.”

“Bruce has some really interesting plans on how to use the facility over the summer,” said Mulligan. “Unfortunately this year, most of that was cancelled, but it still presents an opportunity to bring people in, and see some revenue there in the future.”

And of course, there is the curling. Almost immediately, the facility was put on display when it hosted the 2019 Canadian Senior Curling Championships. The new building also brought about 700 curlers with it from the old club (just across the parking lot), but has had a bit of trouble growing the membership, largely due to COVID.

“This is now our third season in this building,” said Renwick. “And we have yet to complete a full curling season. Other than getting started late the first year because of the construction, COVID shut us down early last year, and we were late getting going this season... It’s so hard with COVID to build anything right now.”

Still, even in the fall of 2020, the club’s novice league has more than 50 new curlers, and the numbers are steadily increasing, along with Chilliwack’s population as people move away from Vancouver’s pricey real estate. Renwick believes the membership will be over 1,000 before too long.

“It’s a win-win arrangement. We get a brand new building, but the city lets us run it. We’ve been running a successful club for 68 years, so we know how to run the facility,” said Renwick. “Meanwhile, they don’t have to worry about staffing the building, and it costs them nothing to operate.”

“They ran the last club since the ’50s,” said Mulligan. “The intent is that we provide a new building, and they can make it run for another 50 years.”

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