



# Staff Report

## Community Services

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**Report To:** COW- Admin, Corp and Finance, SI, Comm. Services  
**Meeting Date:** May 26, 2025  
**Report Number:** CS.25.024  
**Title:** Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative  
**Prepared by:** Ryan Gibbons, Director of Community Services

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### A. Recommendations

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THAT Council receive Staff Report CS.25.024, entitled “Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative”;

AND THAT Council directs staff to continue to work with Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative to consider the use of part of the municipally owned land of the former Tees Please property;

AND THAT Council direct staff to provide an update by the September 29<sup>th</sup> Council meeting;

AND THAT Council direct staff to formally meet with Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative up to 4 times prior to the September 29<sup>th</sup> Council meeting.

### B. Overview

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This staff report is being provided at the direction of Council in response to a deputation from the Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative (GBRI).

GBRI has requested the Town to consider a partnership to develop opportunities for tennis. The request is to identify an appropriate piece of land that will allow for between 4 and 6 courts that could be constructed with the ability to place a cover over the courts that would allow for year-round play.

This report provides Council with the necessary information to identify a tentative preferred location for the proposed Georgian Bay Community Racquet Centre, allowing staff to proceed with further exploratory work, including obtaining cost estimates and site designs.

This report also presents a preliminary assessment of possible delivery models for a Town-provisioned indoor tennis facility, outlining options for ownership, and operational management. This background information will be important in shaping a facility that is sustainable, accessible, and aligned with community needs.

## **C. Background**

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The 2021 Leisure Activities Plan identified the development of reliable indoor tennis infrastructure as a priority for the Town, recognizing the growing demand for year-round racquet facilities among residents.

In response, the Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative (GBRI) (a not-for-profit volunteer group) began advocating for municipal action to fulfill this priority. Their objective has been to support the Town in identifying viable locations and delivery models, ensuring that indoor racquet facilities are accessible and financially sustainable.

### **Public Engagement & Demand Assessment**

Beyond the Town's assessment in the Leisure Activities Plan 2021, the Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative (GBRI) conducted a public racquet sports survey between September and December 2024, with findings presented to the Town regarding community interest in indoor tennis facilities.

Additionally, in April–May 2025, the Town gathered further data through the 130 King St W Survey, which included a question specifically addressing indoor tennis demand (question 16 of the survey).

These engagement efforts have provided multiple opportunities to assess community interest, offering the Town relevant data to support further consideration of indoor tennis infrastructure.

### **Previous Council Direction**

On December 9, 2024, GBRI presented a deputation to Committee of the Whole, formally outlining a four-court indoor tennis proposal leveraging Town-owned assets at 130 King Street West. Following this, on December 16, 2024, Council passed the following motion:

*"THAT Council receive for information the deputation of Georgian Bay Community Racquet Centre regarding Four-Court Tennis Development Leveraging Existing Town Assets at 130 King Street West;*

*AND THAT Council direct staff to provide a staff report in response to the requests contained in the deputation, by the end of March 2025."*

To advance this direction, staff engaged in a collaborative review process with GBRI, holding meetings on April 23 and May 14, 2025, to assess site feasibility, financial considerations, and delivery models.

Staff Report CS.25.013, entitled "Response to The Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative";

THAT Council receive Staff Report CS.25.013, entitled "Response to The Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative;"

AND THAT Council direct staff to actively collaborate with The Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative to identify viable Town owned properties (including but not limited to 130 King St W) for an indoor racquets facility, conduct a preliminary feasibility assessment of potential locations and operating models, and provide a comprehensive staff report to Council by June 2, 2025;

AND THAT Council direct staff to formally meet with The Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative every three weeks to share progress and ensure continued collaboration in the process of bringing forward a staff report to Council by June 2, 2025.

Two collaborative meetings took place with the group on April 23 and May 14, following which this staff report has been prepared for Council's consideration.

## **D. Analysis**

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### **Serviced Location Required**

A serviced location is deemed by GBRI to be essential for a sustainable indoor racquet facility. This is because a facility of this scale (4–6 courts) would require appropriate and reliable electricity, heating, water supply, and waste management, all of which are significantly more cost-effective on an existing serviced site.

GBRI has worked with an independent dome consultant, undertaken on a pro-bono basis. The dome consultant confirms that heating a facility without the appropriate services would cost approximately three times more if propane tank-based, compared to a natural gas connection. Higher operational costs would lead to higher user fees, potentially limiting community access and affordability.

Beyond financial considerations, a lack of water and sewer infrastructure could result in reliance on portable washrooms, which may not be ideal for a facility intended to support regular community use and long-term sustainability. To ensure a high-quality experience for users, a serviced location is sought for permanent washroom access, maintenance efficiency, and long-term viability.

Therefore, GBRI advocates that Council's tentative site selection should prioritize serviced locations to minimize future infrastructure challenges.

### **Four Court Facility vs Six Court Facility**

Facility size will directly impact both community programming capacity and potential regional influence.

A four-court facility is sufficient for local programming, training, and intra-club tournaments, providing accessible year-round play for juniors, seniors, and recreational athletes.

A six-court facility expands possibilities to regional tournaments and structured high-performance development, increasing economic and tourism value. The feasibility of a larger facility depends on available land, space requirements, and infrastructure capacity.

These are factors to consider alongside community priorities when determining whether to pursue a four-court or six-court design.

### Site Selection Criteria & Location Comparison

On the back of a review of Town-owned sites, as directed by Council, staff believe the following sites represent the most viable serviced Town-owned locations for an indoor racquet facility. Based on servicing availability, zoning compatibility, and future expansion potential, Council should tentatively select the site that best meets project feasibility criteria.

Location	Property Size	Possible Courts	Zoning	Servicing	Neighbourhood Compatibility
125 Peel St.	Approx. 30 acres	Up to 6	Agriculture	Hydro (limited)	Moderate – limited residential surroundings
130 King St. W	Approx. 2.9 acres	Up to 4	Development D	Hydro, Water, Wastewater	Low/Moderate – residential surroundings
171 King St.	Approx. 2.8 acres	Up to 6	Commercial	Hydro, Water, Wastewater	High – non-residential surroundings
Tees Please	Approx. 18 acres	Up to 6	OP – FSP D with some Hazard	Hydro, Water and Wastewater	High – limited residential surroundings
Tomahawk Property	Approx. 50 acres	Up to 6	Specialty Agriculture	Hydro (limited)	Moderate – limited residential surroundings

The Tomahawk property and 125 Peel St. have been included in this list due to resident feedback suggesting the potential suitability. However, it is listed for clarity to demonstrate why it must be excluded. Zoning regulations and servicing must be carefully considered. The Tomahawk property is designated as Special Agriculture zoning, which prohibits the development of some indoor structures, making it unsuitable for this project. Additionally, the lands are not appropriately serviced including a lack of available power for any additional use, further limiting feasibility.

## **Facility Structure Options – Seasonal vs. Year-Round**

The decision between a seasonal or year-round structure will significantly impact operating costs and summer operations. A brief analysis is provided below.

### **Seasonal Indoor Structure (Bubble)**

A seasonal dome would be installed in fall and dismantled in spring, allowing outdoor play during warmer months. However, this approach has several operational challenges:

- **Annual installation and removal costs**—each cycle adds wear and tear, reducing the structure’s lifespan.
- **Exposure to the elements**—court surfaces degrade faster due to seasonal weather.
- **Weather-dependent play**—rain, wind, and extreme heat still impact outdoor tennis availability in summer.
- **Limited cost savings**—while a seasonal structure avoids air conditioning costs, the annual assembly and storage expenses offset much of the savings.

### **Year-Round Indoor Structure (Bubble or Fabric Tension Building)**

A permanent indoor facility ensures uninterrupted access to tennis, mitigating issues related to seasonal weather disruptions. GBRI has highlighted that the greatest gap in community access is indoor courts, not outdoor tennis. Even in summer, high temperatures, wind, and unexpected rain frequently disrupt outdoor play, making year-round indoor access beneficial for all users.

- **Consistent play, regardless of weather** - this is particularly valuable for junior development, seniors, and competitive training, ensuring reliable practice schedules.
- **Protection from the elements** - keeping courts indoors extends their lifespan, preventing surface degradation caused by seasonal exposure.
- **More stable revenue streams** - year-round programming provides predictable income, supporting long-term sustainability. A year-round facility opens additional revenue and accessibility options, including junior tennis camps, ensuring structured training while keeping children protected from excessive sun exposure. Adult clinics and training camps, offering guaranteed sessions regardless of weather conditions. Competitive play & tournaments, attracting regional players who require stable indoor conditions for skill development.
- **Air conditioning requirements** - while summer climate control incurs additional costs, it improves user comfort, making the facility attractive for broader programming.

- **Regional Gap in Indoor Summer Tennis** - while outdoor courts are plentiful across the region, there is limited access to indoor courts during the summer months. This creates a unique opportunity for the Town to establish a facility that serves both local and regional demand—ensuring uninterrupted play even when outdoor conditions are unpredictable due to rain, extreme heat, or wind.

### **Space Needed**

The spatial requirements for an indoor tennis facility depend on regulation court dimensions and necessary surrounding space for movement, safety, and amenities.

- A standard regulation tennis court measures 60 ft x 120 ft, including playing areas and perimeter zones for player movement.
- For indoor use, a regulation height of at least 33 ft (approximately three storeys) is required to accommodate safe ball trajectory and lighting configurations.
- A single indoor court requires approximately 7,200 square feet, including essential buffer space.

When accounting for passageways, storage, and additional facility components, the estimated space needed is: Four-court facility: Approximately 30,000–35,000 sq ft.

Six-court facility: Approximately 44,000+ sq ft.

These spatial estimates provide a baseline for site selection considerations, ensuring a location that can accommodate the proposed facility size while maintaining operational efficiency.

### **Potential Funding Sources:**

The funding strategy for this facility will likely require a multi-source approach, balancing Town contributions and external grants.

### **Town Funding Allocation**

The Town has identified \$365,000 designated for tennis facilities, which could be leveraged as part of the municipal contribution. Given the cost of a 4–6 court facility (which needs to be determined once a location is selected), additional funding will be necessary to meet the remaining balance.

### **Loan Arrangement with the Town**

Council may consider financing options that allow initial capital investment to be repaid through operating revenue. This approach has been successfully used in other municipalities to fund recreational infrastructure without excessive upfront municipal spending.

## **Community Fundraising & Sponsorship**

GBRI and local stakeholders could help secure corporate sponsorships, naming rights, and direct fundraising to cover a portion of project costs. Community engagement in financing fosters local investment in the facility and strengthens long-term operational viability.

## **Manufacturer Financing Options**

Some manufacturers of domes provide specialized financing programs, enabling phased payments (i.e. monthly lease payments) rather than requiring full upfront costs. This could serve as an option if needed. The monthly lease payments would be covered by the facility's monthly operating revenue.

## **Operating Model for the Facility:**

The facility's ownership and management structure will significantly impact its financial sustainability, accessibility, and operational success. Below are the three primary models that could be considered:

### **Fully Town-Owned and Operated**

The Town would own and manage the facility entirely, funding operations through municipal budgets and user fees.

#### ***Pros:***

- Full municipal control over pricing, scheduling, and access policies.
- Ensures long-term public access without commercial influence.
- Can integrate with other town recreational programs.

#### ***Cons:***

- Requires significant municipal staffing and operational management.
- Ongoing financial liability falls on the Town, increasing operational costs.
- Limited external investment opportunities, making funding more reliant on municipal finances.

### **Public-Private Partnership (Commercial Operator)**

A private entity would lease, operate, or manage the facility, with the Town maintaining ownership but delegating day-to-day operations.

***Pros:***

- Reduces direct municipal costs, as a private partner covers staffing and management.
- Potential for revenue-sharing agreements to act as a revenue stream for the Town.
- Allows for competitive programming and high-performance training without burdening Town resources.

***Cons:***

- Public access could be influenced by commercial priorities (e.g., higher fees for private lessons).
- The Town has less control over programming and accessibility.
- Private operator may prioritize profit over affordability, which conflicts with community goals.

### **Not-for-Profit or Community Group Operation**

Ownership remains with the Town, but a dedicated not-for-profit organization (e.g., GBRI or a similar entity) would operate the facility on behalf of the Town.

***Pros:***

- Aligns with community-driven values, ensuring affordability and accessibility.
- Reduces the Town's operational burden, leveraging volunteer or non-profit management.
- Allows for grant eligibility and fundraising efforts, bringing in external support.

***Cons:***

- Requires long-term governance oversight by the Town to ensure financial sustainability.
- Would require structured agreements to define financial responsibilities.



### **MURF Considerations:**

The discussion around a year-round indoor racquet facility inevitably raises questions regarding how this project fits within the broader Multi-Use Recreation Facility (MURF). However, it is important to distinguish between the two:

- The proposed indoor racquet facility addresses immediate community need, fulfilling the 2021 Leisure Activities Plan's recommendation for indoor tennis infrastructure.
- MURF is a long-term, multi-sport project, which is still in the early planning stages, with no confirmed budget, timeline, or location.
- A standalone indoor tennis facility can be developed with - in contrast to a MURF - minimal capital investment from the Town, ensuring access to indoor courts without requiring MURF integration. Also creating additional opportunities for grant funding.

GBRI has emphasized that indoor tennis requires specialized court surfaces and configurations, which do not align with typical multi-use gym designs found in MURFs. Communities across Ontario consistently find that purpose-built, standalone indoor tennis venues deliver better outcomes than attempting to fit courts into broader recreation complexes.

Additionally, following a review by GBRI, there is:

- No successful examples of substantial indoor tennis integration exist within MURFs in Ontario.
- A multi-use facility would likely require compromises in court size, surface type, and availability, reducing the quality of play.

### **Preliminary Financial Risk Analysis:**

In a worst-case scenario where a bubble operator failed:

1. **Asset Retention:** The Town would retain the physical courts (the majority of the capital investment). The courts themselves remain viable Town assets regardless of third-party bubble status.
2. **Infrastructure Preservation:** Seasonal bubbles are removable – outdoor courts remain usable in summer.
3. **Transition Options:**

The Town could:

- Rebid operations to alternative providers (both commercial and not-for-profit options exist). Multiple successful operators exist in Ontario, allowing for rapid operator replacement with minimal service disruption.

- Temporarily operate directly until a new partner is found.
  - Revert to outdoor-only operations with no bubble.
4. **Dome Manufacturer Incentive to Find New Operator:** Bubble operators typically lease bubbles from manufacturers, who in turn have strong incentives to assist in quickly finding replacement operators rather than removing equipment. Also, it is worth noting that bubble manufacturers apply their own rigorous financial and operational criteria before leasing equipment, providing an additional layer of due diligence beyond the Town's own selection process to project viability.
5. **Barrier of Separation:** Because bubble equipment is typically leased directly from manufacturers, equipment obligations will always remain separate from court infrastructure.

It is noted that multiple operational models exist because municipalities have developed risk mitigation strategies.

### **Facility Viability**

It is important to mention that successful indoor tennis facilities are built on demonstrated demand, not just on population size analysis. While The Blue Mountains has a smaller population than some municipalities with indoor tennis facilities, high recreational engagement per capita suggests direct population-based comparisons may not fully reflect local demand.

Additionally, the nearest dedicated year-round facility is more than 70km away, reinforcing the apparent need for a local option to serve both the Town of The Blue Mountains and neighbouring communities. Knowing that non-residents would be making use of this facility, it is suggested that Town of The Blue Mountains residents be prioritized in terms of facility access, user fees, over non-residents, and this aspect could be a fundamental component of the business model.

The Town's and GBRI's various public engagement processes to date has shown strong public interest in year-round tennis access, with notable support from players, schools, and community organizations.

To ensure responsible development, a pre-build validation process to assess demand levels, such as offering registrations of interest pre-build, or waitlist sign-ups, could, if needed, provide further reassurance that the necessary demand levels exist for this type of facility and confirm the project's viability before final decisions are made. This approach ensures the Town has done the necessary due diligence to ensure that the facility meets both community needs while also clearly demonstrating financial sustainability.

## **E. Strategic Priorities**

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### **1. Communication and Engagement**

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

### **2. Organizational Excellence**

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

### **3. Community**

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

### **4. Quality of Life**

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

## **F. Environmental Impacts**

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To be determined if a site is selected and the project proceeds.

## **G. Financial Impacts**

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To be determined if a site is selected and the project proceeds. If direction to move forward with a site is provided, staff can offer Council proposed operating models that project long-term financial impacts.

## **H. In Consultation With**

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Kev Rostami, Georgian Bay Racquets Initiative

## **I. Public Engagement**

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The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Ryan Gibbons, Director of Community Services [directorcs@thebluemountains.ca](mailto:directorcs@thebluemountains.ca).

## **J. Attached**

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1. None

Respectfully submitted,

Ryan Gibbons  
Director of Community Services

For more information, please contact:  
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### Report Approval Details

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This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

**Ryan Gibbons - May 16, 2025 - 2:54 PM**