

Operating an Outdoor Rink



Great neighbourhoods start with you.



How to reach us

EMAIL AND PHONE

✉ waterloorinks@waterloo.ca

☎ 519-742-8772

EMERGENCY AFTER HOURS

After 4 p.m. Monday to Friday, weekends and holidays if there's an immediate threat to property or person (e.g. uncontrollable water flow from hydrants)

☎ 519-886-2310

☎ Call 911 for emergency services at any time like fire, police, and EMS

LOCATIONS AND SCHEDULES

Find outdoor rink locations and schedules at waterloo.ca/outdoor-rinks

NEIGHBOURHOODS WEBSITE

Check out the [neighbourhood's website](#) to explore more how-to guides, find your neighbourhood, and subscribe to the e-newsletter.

ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

This material is available in alternative accessible format upon request. Please contact us a minimum of 3-5 business days before it is required.

GUIDE VERSION

This guide was last updated September 2026.

Responsibilities of the rink committee

ESTABLISH A RINK COMMITTEE

Prior to confirming a rink location for the season, a rink committee of a minimum of six adults must be established to oversee and direct volunteer operations of the rink.

APPOINT A CONVENOR

Each rink committee requires a convenor, who will be the City of Waterloo's contact for information distribution regarding the rink. The convenor will oversee the rink operation, ensuring that all tasks are accomplished. They will relay information from the City to the committee and volunteers. They will maintain an updated list of all registered volunteers who assist with the rink operation and maintenance.

UPDATE THE COMMITTEE ANNUALLY

Each rink season, the committee needs to be updated to include current volunteers, new volunteers, and any other committee changes. This includes all members completing volunteer forms and training.

SCHEDULES

New committees will work with staff to determine a schedule for the rink. Where feasible, time should be equally allotted between both ice activities of skating and hockey. Activity schedules will be posted on the City's website and at the rink site. If there are changes to your rink site, such as a location with a new rink light, your schedule should be updated to reflect this. Once established, all ongoing rink locations will maintain the same schedule unless reasons for change arise.

SAFE PLAY

Recreational hockey is permitted during posted times. For the safety of all participants and surrounding neighbours, any pucks, balls, and sticks should remain on the ice surface. Slap shots are not permitted. Pond hockey nets are a great way to encourage this!

RULES AND REGULATIONS

Basic rink rules and a rink status map are communicated on the [outdoor rink webpage](#). The committee should determine how other necessary items will be shared with volunteers and rink participants. Rules should be monitored by the committee to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all. Consider asking your local neighbourhood association to share the rules on social media or posting any additional rink rules on the sign at the park.

INCIDENTS/ACCIDENTS

Report and record all incidents/accidents at the rink, including incidents with participants, volunteers, and property damage through an accident/injury report. Copies are provided. For support contact waterloorinks@waterloo.ca.

RINK EQUIPMENT

The committee should ensure rink equipment is stored in the storage box. Any additions to the list of supplies provided by the City of Waterloo are the responsibility of the rink committee and must be purchased and stored at year-end by committee members.

WATER HYDRANT LOCKS

Hydrants should remain locked at all times when not in use by volunteers flooding the rink. All locks are issued through City of Waterloo parks services. Private locks are not permitted and will be removed.

Outdoor rink layout & equipment

STANDARD LAYOUT

- Each site is allowed one 84' x 48' standard boarded rink (22.2" x 10" x 12' spruce boards).

RINK MODIFICATIONS

- You may inquire about an alternate layout prior to installation by emailing waterloorinks@waterloo.ca to discuss possible approval.
- The alternate layout must not damage or create concerns within the park or its surrounding property; this includes underground utilities and turf.
- Any unapproved modifications may require removal by staff or the volunteer team
- Low boards are always installed to encourage safe play – city staff will not install high boards.
- If you wish to make approved modifications as a rink committee, please let staff know your request including what will be done and supplies to be used.
- Any household tools used during a modification must be supplied by the rink committee. Tool use is at the volunteer's own risk. Use should only be considered for adults over the age of 18 who feel confident in their operating abilities. Tool operating manual guidelines should be always followed when in use. Tools used should always be in proper working order.
- Acceptable tools include simple residential-grade tools such as hand tools (hammers, screwdriver, handsaws), power tools such as drills, power screwdrivers, and hand sanders that are intended for home use. Power saws, circular saws, or commercial grade equipment like nail guns are not permitted.

- Volunteers must not put anything into the ground (such as driving stakes, posts, or ground signs) as these require locates.

SECOND RINK LOCACTIONS OR BOARDLESS RINKS

- Requests for a second rink on the same site will be considered after all rink sites have been accommodated, if adequate conditions allow at the rink site and are suitable for park maintenance.
- Rinks have been successfully installed without boards. Sites granted a second rink are encouraged to pursue this option.
- Approval is required by contacting waterloorinks@waterloo.ca prior to installation.

TARPS / RINK LINERS

Eligibility

- Rink locations on school property, turf sport fields, or areas with high spring water levels are not eligible for tarps/rink liners. All other rink locations can request use of a rink liner at the start of the rink season.
- City staff will notify rink convenors each fall with rink liner requirements and deadlines. Funding requests for rink liner support can be made at this time to the staff liaison. A receipt of purchase is required.

Use and safety

- To assist with and avoid safety risks, rink liners should be no more than one rink board (10 inches) in height. Water should not exceed this height at any time.
- Rink volunteers are responsible for prompt rink liner removal and storage/disposal at the end of the season. Rink liners cannot be disposed of in park garbage.
- Rink committees are encouraged to reuse tarps when possible.

Supplies & services provided by the City

THE CITY WILL SUPPLY EACH SITE WITH:

- a. Rink boards
- b. Pins or sandbags
- c. Two (2) shovels
- d. An appropriate length of 5/8" hose
- e. One (1) storage box
- f. One (1) hydrant lock

- g. Two (2) keys for water hydrant (provided to the rink committee convenor to be shared with committee volunteers)

SET UP AND DISMANTLE OF RINK BOARDS

Board set up occurs seasonally starting in late November at the discretion of City staff. Board dismantle starts when rink committees are finished for the season or when the flooding deadline has passed at the end of the rink season, typically in mid-March.

LIGHTING & WATER SERVICE ASSISTANCE

City staff facilitate maintenance and repairs for rink lighting and water hydrants. Lighting is appropriate for rink use and surrounding resident comfort.

RINK PROMOTION

Printing of flyers or posters to promote the rink or special events is available upon request.

LIABILITY INSURANCE

Liability insurance is in place for all volunteers assisting with the operation of the rink. Volunteers must sign up at waterloo.ca/volunteer or through the appropriate forms prior to rink installation.

REPLACE VANDALIZED OR STOLEN SUPPLIES

Vandalized or stolen supplies will be replaced based on availability of supplies. The original items supplied, plus all replacements remain the property of the City of Waterloo.

Outdoor rink guidelines

PUBLIC ACCESS

- Rink locations depend on volunteer involvement. There are about 30 outdoor rinks across Waterloo. They are accessible to anyone who wishes to participate during the rink's posted hours.
- Access may be denied only if the behavior of the individual(s) is in direct conflict with the City of Waterloo's respectful behavior policy and/or rules of rink use.
- Parks close at 11 p.m. as per the city's parks by-law. Use of outdoor rinks after 11 p.m. is not permitted.

SCHEDULES

- Where feasible, time should be equally allotted between both ice activities of skating and hockey. As noted in the rink committee responsibilities, the staff liaison will contact the convenor prior to the first season to arrange an appropriate schedule.

ELECTRICAL SERVICES

- Access to the electrical service box is not permitted and is not to be used for the storage of tools or other personal items.
- Portable heaters are not permitted in storage boxes.

SNOW REMOVAL

- Rink committee volunteers are responsible for clearing snow from the rink.
- Motorized tractors, vehicles, or all-terrain vehicles with a plow are not permitted as snow removal items as per the city's parks by-laws.
- If a rink committee wishes to use additional snow removal items to those supplied, these must be provided by the rink committee, including any associated costs. Snow blower use is at the volunteer's own risk and should only be considered for adults over the age of 18 that feel confident in their operating abilities. Snow blower operating manual guidelines should be followed at all times when in use. Equipment should always be in proper working order.

LIGHTING

- Lights are operated by a timer and are programmed to turn on at 5 p.m. and turn off at 11 p.m., as per the designated park closing time set out in the city's park by-law.
- Some rink locations also have an on/off button to help further conserve energy, so lights are only used when community members or volunteers are present.
- Questions regarding lighting or timers can be emailed to waterloorinks@waterloo.ca.

TIDINESS

- Please keep the park and outdoor rink clean by picking up debris.
- If a sharp is found on park property, email sharpscleanup@waterloo.ca or call the City of Waterloo Service Centre at 519-886-2310. Do not touch needles or sharps.
- Identify and remove hazards quickly to reduce the chance of injury. Contact waterloorinks@waterloo.ca for support where needed.
- Store all rink equipment in the storage box.

INSPECTIONS

- City staff conduct inspections to proactively service hydrants, identify deficiencies, hazards, and damages, as well as ensuring site cleanliness and security.
- Questions or concerns that arise from these inspections will be discussed with the outdoor rink convenor.

HOSES AND HYDRANTS

- Drain the hose away from park pathways, play equipment, or seating areas to avoid ice buildup and potential injury.

- Disconnect the hose from the hydrant after each flood to avoid freezing the equipment.

Prepare for rink building

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS

Volunteer convenors will reach out to team members before the season starts with any important details such as new volunteer requirements, rink liner/tarp rules, or other start of season reminders. All outdoor rink volunteers need to be registered with the City of Waterloo and complete necessary training before starting at the rink.

SCHEDULING VOLUNTEERS AND USE OF MESSAGING PLATFORMS

Scheduling volunteers is a key task of outdoor rink convenors. Securing volunteers to assist once equipment is onsite, weather conditions are cold enough (below -4°C multiple days in a row), and the team is ready to flood is what starts the rink off well! If you and/or your team choose to use a messaging or chat application, such as WhatsApp, group text, or Facebook Messenger, please ensure you/your convenor are following guidelines below:

- **Get permission:** Ensure each volunteer has given their permission to be added to the group before doing this and that they understand their phone number will be shared with the full volunteer group. Offer alternatives if a volunteer is not comfortable with this approach, such as individual messages, an email group where contacts remain blind carbon copied (BCC'ed), or platforms that allow contact information to remain confidential (for example, they show a username instead).
- **Identify youth participation:** City staff will communicate with the convenor when a new youth volunteer registers. Please identify if you are using a group chat at that time so permission from a parent/guardian can be obtained. Like above, alternatives may be requested that keep contact information confidential.
- **Adjust chat access:** Where possible, have any admin members put group settings to private to limit access to outside users or contact details. Remove volunteers that are no longer on the team. Check-in on a one-on-one basis if you are not hearing from individual members for an extended period to ensure it's not a technical difficulty or other concern.
- **Focus on volunteer discussion:** Keep chat topics focused to volunteer tasks and schedule needs. Neighbourly conversation is a great part of community building and will naturally happen around things like rink weather and use. Ask members to take individual messages outside of the chat that are beyond the scope of outdoor rink volunteering. For example, if a few of the volunteers have children on the same hockey team and want to make carpool arrangements for the weekend. No conversations with youth volunteers, beyond convenor requirements, should happen outside of group messages.

- **Message history:** Messages pertaining to outdoor rink volunteering are part of the program communication. Understand that you or your rink convenor may be asked to share screenshots if issues or concerns arise.
- **Be inclusive and welcoming:** Whether someone is new to volunteering or a long-time member, it is everyone's role to support a group conversation that is inclusive and welcoming to all team members. Things to think about to support this include the language being used, being mindful of the time folks are messaging to allow everyone an opportunity for discussion, keeping the chat simple to follow, using respectful language only, and maintaining a positive volunteer environment. Remind yourself that everyone can interpret messages differently when only text is involved and consider this in your choice of words.
- **Connect with your staff supervisor:** If issues or concerns arise amongst the team in a group discussion or at any time throughout volunteering, please contact your staff supervisor for support. We are here to help you navigate challenges and support outdoor rink team needs.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY

Dress in warm layers each time you visit the rink. Your base layer, the clothes closest to your body, should be moisture wicking to help keep you dry and comfortable. For safety when flooding, boots with good traction or ice cleats are recommended. Helmets are encouraged any time you are on the ice surface. Consider waterproof items where needed, like gloves or boots.

PLAN YOUR ROUTE AND SURVEY THE SITE

Winter conditions can be cold, snowy, and dark. Plan your route to the park understanding these conditions and be prepared if conditions change. If you are walking or biking to the park, ensure you have adequate lighting and plan for snowy routes. If driving, drive according to the road conditions. Tell a friend or family member your plans, including when you expect to arrive home.

Once you arrive at the park, do a survey of the scene to assess safety. Make sure there are no hazards around, like fallen trees or people using the park inappropriately. Stop if anything feels out of place. Remove or avoid hazards and report them appropriately. Leave immediately if you feel a situation is unsafe. Report concerns to suitable emergency services or City of Waterloo staff.



Reminder: always volunteer in groups of two or more. This supports safety at the rink for all volunteers.

Building an outdoor rink

WHEN THE TEMPERATURE IS BELOW ZERO:

With snow

- When there is about 2" of snow, pack the area with shovels or scrapers.
- Make it as level as possible to make flooding easier and quicker.
- During the coldest time period (late evening), apply an even, thin coat of water with a fine spray (known as pebbling).
- The first coat should only dampen the surface.
- When the surface is completely frozen, continue to sprinkle fine coats of water until a bond is created between the boards and the frozen water.
- Add snow and water where areas look uneven or channels have formed.
- When a solid crust has formed and the bonding with the boards is firm, it's time to flood.
- Flood only when the temperature is below freezing.
- Set a flooding pattern to apply water to the complete surface of the rink without overlapping.
- When the first layer is frozen, continue flooding until the rink is level and roughness has disappeared.

Without snow

- Without snow to absorb the water, moisten some sawdust and pack it in place of all existing holes between the boards and the ground. The sawdust will hold the moisture until it freezes and will create an excellent bond with the boards to keep the water within the rink when flooding.
- Apply water only to the area where the boards meet the ground.
- Apply several coats or primary sprinkling until there is a solid base between the boards, the ground and the layers of sawdust.
- During the coldest time period (late evening), apply an even, thin coat of water with a fine spray.
- The first coat should only dampen the surface.
- When the surface is completely frozen, continue to sprinkle fine coats of water until a bond is created between the boards and the frozen water.
- When a solid crust has formed and the bonding with the boards is firm, it's time to flood.
- Flood only when the temperature is below freezing.
- Set a flooding pattern to apply water to the complete surface of the rink without overlapping.
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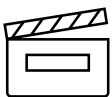
Anytime you are adding water, bubbles may form creating shell ice. If this happens:

1. Break the above layer of ice
 2. Remove excess ice
 3. Pack the hole with snow and water
 4. Level with a shovel
 5. Complete a normal rink flood
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Operating the hydrant

Rink hydrants are designed and installed to be self-draining, allowing them to operate in colder temperatures without freezing.

- Always operate the hydrant with the handle in a full upright ON position.
 - Always perform a drainage palm-test after each use:
 - Place the bare palm of your hand lightly over the hydrant discharge.
 - You should feel some degree of suction.
 - Pull your hand away – you should hear a pop.
 - The degree of suction and pop depends on the hydrant's effectiveness at self-draining – the better the suction, the better the drainage.
 - If there is no suction, wait a few minutes, turn the hydrant on again, firmly close it, and redo the palm test.
 - The effectiveness of drainage is reduced each time you operate the hydrant and close it within a short period of time, so avoid more than two consecutive attempts – the drainage reservoir needs time to drain before it can accept more water.
 - If the results are unchanged, the hydrant is at high risk of freezing – monitor it closely and report your concerns as soon as possible.
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Watch the [operating an outdoor rink training video](#) for a summary of important rink details and to see helpful visuals, like a video of the palm test.

- Lock the hydrant securely through the handle linkage when not in use.
- It's important to stop water trickling from the hydrant once closed to avoid unnecessary freezing.
- Trickling water is hard on the hydrant and leads to icy conditions in the park.

- The hydrant must be firmly in the OFF position when not in use.
 - A successful palm test indicates a fully closed hydrant.
- Hydrants should always be run under the supervision of rink committee volunteers. Do not leave running water unattended at any time. Any time you leave the park, the hydrant should be fully closed and locked.
- Lock operation
 - Avoid getting water into an open lock and keep it in your pocket for warmth during flooding.
 - Reduce the chances of breaking a key in the lock by not forcing a frozen lock to unlock with the key alone.
 - Use lock de-icer when necessary.

HOSES AND WATER DELIVERY

Using the hose and equipment supplied by the City of Waterloo keeps the hydrant functioning the way it should and maintains an effective water pressure.

Outdoor rink hydrants are not designed to accept a larger diameter hose. A larger hose will require an adapter, which can prevent the hydrant from draining properly and can freeze the hose and the hydrant.

- Use the rubber hose and connectors provided by city staff.
- Do not use nozzles, hose end valves or quick connects. They can prevent the hydrant from draining properly and can freeze the hose and the hydrant.
- If you must cut off any of the connectors, please do so with as little damage to the hose as possible.
- Drain the hose and disconnect it from the hydrant after each flood.
- City staff do not provide any additional items for flooding (nozzles, scrapers, etc.).

FROZEN HYDRANTS

Hydrants freeze when they cannot drain effectively. The most frequent causes of frozen hydrants include:

1. Hose left connected to hydrant after flooding

- The hydrant is designed to back-drain only the water left in the standpipe.
- It is not designed and installed to accommodate the water being back drained from the hose.
- Once the drain reservoir is full, any remaining water in the hydrant standpipe will freeze.
- Disconnect the hose from the hydrant after each flooding to avoid freezing.

2. Hydrant is used incorrectly

- Hydrants must be operated full open, in the ON position, and then fully closed.
- To prevent leaking, the hydrant lever must be fully closed, in the OFF position.

- Lock the hydrant through the handle linkage and conduct a palm test to ensure the hydrant is closed and not leaking.

3. Hydrant is damaged

- There may be internal or external damage preventing the hydrant from sealing and draining properly.
- Look for leaking when the hydrant is closed and always do a palm test.
- If the palm test fails, the hydrant is not draining properly and will most likely freeze.

4. Hydrant is over-used

- The effectiveness of drainage is reduced each time you operate the hydrant and close it within a short period of time.
- The reservoir has a limited capacity before it fills and drainage becomes ineffective.
- Without adequate drainage time, the hydrant will freeze.
- Avoid more than two consecutive attempts – the drainage reservoir needs time to drain before it can accept more water.

5. Hydrant repairs

If you suspect the hydrant is frozen, damaged, or inoperable:

- Do not attempt to dismantle or repair it.
- Do not use a torch or heat source to thaw the hydrant.
- Do not strike the hydrant with a hammer or other object at any time.
- Please report leaks, deficiencies, or operational concerns as soon as possible to avoid extended rink closures.

Contact waterloorinks@waterloo.ca for concerns. Hydrant repairs and thawing may be delayed due to citywide snow clearing priorities. Please be patient as priorities are managed as best as possible. Please note that city staff will not respond to requests for hydrant repairs or thawing, or other outdoor rink problems after hours, weekends, or holidays unless the concern is deemed an immediate hazard to person or property.



A fire hydrant is not an approved alternative to outdoor rink hydrants for water delivery. Unauthorized use of any fire hydrant is not permitted as outlined in the Water Use Bylaw.

Reporting

ACCIDENT/INCIDENT REPORTS

When should you complete a report?

- Anytime there is bleeding, pain from an injury, or any kind of injury to the head.
- In any situation where there is property damage.

If you're ever in doubt, complete the form. Incidents such as these can turn into a concern if the proper process is not followed.

How do you submit the completed report?

- Give the completed form to the rink convenor. The rink convenor will submit the form to city program staff at waterloorinks@waterloo.ca.

After-hours accident reporting

If a serious incident takes place after hours (after 4 p.m., Monday to Friday, weekends and holidays) contact 519-886-2301 and email waterloorinks@waterloo.ca. Be sure to call 911 if the situation warrants emergency services or use non-emergency lines if applicable for police, fire, or bylaw.

A serious incident is defined as significant property damage, serious bodily injury or death.

ENCAMPMENTS

The City of Waterloo takes a balanced approach that prioritizes safety for everyone using park space while also working to connect unsheltered individuals with outreach supports and housing resources using a human rights-based approach. These connections can take time, but we encourage people to continue sharing any concerns they may have. Use the [online tool to report encampments](#).

If you or community members have other concerns, connect with City of Waterloo:

- Email: encampments@waterloo.ca
- Bylaw Phone Number: 519-747-8785
- Additional supports and resources:
 - [Region of Waterloo Food and Housing Help Pocket Card](#)
 - [City of Waterloo encampments webpage](#)