

To:
Warden Muise & Councillors
Courthouse Road - Tusket,
Nova Scotia
BoW3Mo

June 8th, 2020

The YMCA of Yarmouth is a cornerstone facility for many families and residents in the region. A safe space for everyone to participate in sport, learning and growth. The YMCA has been a facility that has helped forge many young people into productive adults and helped build lifelong passions for sport. Many of the past patrons of the YMCA have gone on to University varsity programs or become coaches themselves. The Y has produced massive benefits for our community and we can't let it close for lack of funding or misaligned priorities.

As proud parents of a dedicated swimmer who's put just about everything she can into competitive swimming, we're also huge supporters of the swim team. I was a new swim parent eight years ago and it was an awakening for me to see how much training and effort it takes to swim competitively. The hours of work swimmers and coaches put in is monumental and like most competitive sports the volunteer efforts of the coaches and families can't be measured. I believe my daughter's experience with the swim team has been a huge factor not only in her physical and mental health but in her growth, maturity and character as a young adult. The guidance and support she has received from her award-winning coach Ginny Smith and coaches Jen Hood, Bobby Lou Reardon, Cheryl Clayton, Heather Nickerson and Alix d'Entremont have instilled strong traits in my daughter, including, resilience, commitment and perseverance. Traits she is now calling upon as she tries to deal with the potential loss of her athletic identity overnight. We're indebted to the coaches and volunteers and so lucky to have had a facility, albeit way too small, for our daughter to train in. Now to be told that the last eight years of work, sweat, tears and dedication are for nothing is devastating, and it's wrong.

What's the plan here? Are we saying these kids will have to practice in Lake Milo as was done in the distant past? Are we saying they should just accept that the swim team is not as important as hockey, basketball or soccer? These sports all have more than one quality facility in the region and are all represented by parents, volunteers and participants who would never accept what the swim team is being forced to accept. No one is saying our kids should practice in the lake, yet, (give it time, I'm sure someone will) but what are we left to think? What are we left to do? Should I ask why we need indoor soccer, basketball, curling or hockey when all these sports can be played outside too? That sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? Why are swimmers, athletes the same as everyone else, being tossed away then? This is not right. This should not be allowed to happen in a community that can support a facility like this.

The YMCA in Yarmouth is a private organization. Many may ask why local governments are partially funding it. Well, because for over 150 years the Y has delivered services to the community that have supported the public good. Services that local governments weren't providing and didn't want to be responsible to deliver. Its a lot easier to provide some funding for a pool, day camps or community programming and have someone else deliver it than being solely responsible for delivering it yourself. Our local governments have been supporting the YMCA in Yarmouth for many years because of the services it provides to the community and because these services are important. Local governments have also partially funded the Y's operations because the YMCA provides our community with needed assets that municipalities don't have. In my opinion, the biggest asset the Y provides is the pool. There is no other public pool in Yarmouth County and a pool is not an asset our municipalities currently provide. Here's the problem, when government funds private organizations that provide needed services to a community the programming these organizations deliver is dependent on the grants from the local government. If a government decides they can't continue to provide funding (as in the case of the YMCA), local governments can walk away because they are not technically responsible. It seems that local governments are trying to help solve this issue but its also clear that our local municipalities have contrasting priorities. Time will tell how effective their efforts will be. We need to stand up as residents too and ensure our voice is heard and not just once. We need to keep this issue at the forefront of all agendas. Failure to do so ensures the loss will remain.

From my perspective, the Y is not only used by town residents either. Members of the swim team and coaches are residents of all three municipalities in Yarmouth County. The greater membership of the YMCA of Yarmouth certainly doesn't just represent the Town of Yarmouth. There is no debate, the YMCA is a facility used by all residents of Yarmouth County and Yarmouth County residents need to step up and save it. We can't let a facility like this pass away with the distant hope of something to replace it in the future. We must insist that this facility is kept in working order long enough for a new one to be built. If we allow the Y to close while holding onto a distant goal that a new facility will be built in the future, we'll most likely ensure it doesn't happen. Municipal priorities can change and often do. The time it takes to build a new facility is too long for a community to wait with nothing to use in the meantime and especially if we are expected to go without a pool for an indefinite amount of time. I don't remember our community going without an ice surface before the Mariners Centre was built, why is this acceptable now? I cannot see how swim programming will continue without a pool. Even if all parties involved were in full agreement to build a new facility at the Mariners Centre, it will be years until one is finished. Where will children in our community learn to swim in the meantime? Where will lifeguards train? Where will our swim team practice? We can't let this facility become another boarded up facade or memory of how things once were.

Like many families in Yarmouth County, my family and I have been very connected to the YMCA of Yarmouth. Swim lessons, dance, Friday night fun nights, birthday parties, summer camps; our family participated in all of them. It's not the YMCA brand we are connected to, but the people, programming and benefits the Y brings our community. Benefits we can't afford to lose.

Contrasting municipal priorities should not cause the closure of a regional facility that is utilized by the region's residents. An amazing swim program should not be tossed aside because we so often find ourselves siloed. The fantastic programs of the YMCA should not be lost because we can't agree. The provincial and federal governments along with municipalities could fix this if we could only agree and see through a plan that may take longer than 6 months to accomplish.

From my perspective as a swim parent for the last 8 years, it's become clear to me that competitive swim is not seen in the same light as other sports. Literally and figuratively, you can't even SEE the entire pool when you're inside the YMCA. So most people could be forgiven for not realizing the importance of the pool to the YMCA and why our competitive swimmers need to be supported. The swim team and competitive swim in our region are not given the credit or support it deserves. A lot of the positive activities that take place at the Y must also be unseen because we're about to throw away a major pillar of our community with only a hope for a new one. Hope is not a strategy.

The YMCA is more than it seems at first glance and like many in this community, the "Y" holds strong connections to all of us in the region. For many reasons, the Y is an anchor for everyone. A place where children, youth, adults and seniors gathered from the moment it opened to the minute it closed. It's not just a building. Unfortunately, I fear the costs of running the building aren't being considered against the costs of losing it. Our community cannot lose this facility. A community of our size and resources must be able to work together and agree that this facility is crucial for all of us and our greater health and wellness.

I request that the Municipality of the Town of Yarmouth, The Municipality of the District of Yarmouth and the Municipality of the District of Argyle work with the provincial and federal governments, residents and stakeholders to find a solution to keep the YMCA in Yarmouth operational until such time as there is a new facility.

Sincerely

