Council Direction:

At its meeting of May 13, 2010, Council approved Item 11 of the Audit & Administration Committee Report 09-008 (Grants Sub-Committee Report 09-002, Item (n)), which read as follows:

That staff be directed to investigate the feasibility of establishing a hockey equipment program for disadvantaged children and report back to the Emergency and Community Services Committee.

Information:

The Hamilton Minor Hockey Council (HMHC) provides a registration fee subsidy as do individual minor hockey associations. However, the funds available do not meet the overall community need and, as a result of this, the minor hockey associations do not provide any equipment subsidy to players playing minor hockey.

HMHC, in partnership with the City of Hamilton, Nustadia Recreation and Hamilton Arena Partners (HAP), currently hosts an annual golf tournament at Kings Forest Golf Course that generates approximately $15,000.00 annually for disadvantaged youth to participate in minor hockey city wide. Likewise, the Dave Andreychuk Foundation provides financial support to the HMHC of approximately $10,000.00 to offset player registration for those less fortunate and facing financial barriers. In addition, Youth Serving Agencies Network
of Hamilton (YSAN) provides an additional 50% subsidy to approximately 60% of those players requesting subsidy for minor hockey registration.

Between 2008 and 2009, ninety nine players requested subsidy. HMHC provided a total of $25,000.00 in funding, requiring the associations and YSAN to cover the difference of approximately $15,000.00 to offset the full cost of player registration subsidy. Hockey associations in Ancaster, Dundas, Flamborough, Glanbrook and Stoney Creek provided subsidy internally and did not request HMHC funding. These communities support their players as part of their overall budgeting and generally received fewer requests than minor hockey associations in Wards 3, 4 and 5, who are facing financial challenges and declining registration.

It should be noted that no minor hockey association in Hamilton provides subsidy for equipment. An association may occasionally facilitate the disbursement of used and donated equipment. In 2009/2010, HMHC has estimated that requests for funding will increase by 25%, as has been the trend of requests since the program began in 2005.

Recreation staff met with HMHC on January 14, 2010, to explore additional opportunities and affordable alternatives to reduce the cost for children to participation in minor hockey and ice skating. The City of Hamilton and HMHC have identified a decrease in minor hockey registration, particularly in the younger age category. Affordability and access are the two main issues affecting participation in the sport.

Sport Development staff in the Recreation Division, will work with HMHC to facilitate meetings in 2010 with the Ministry of Health Promotion, the Hamilton Community Foundation, the Trillium Foundation and other community partners to secure financial support to address needs in the lower city. Funding through grants and other sources are needed to implement additional hockey equipment subsidies and different program delivery approaches.

In addition to alternative funding options for the hockey equipment subsidy, the City will seek to establish a “Got Skates” program with the community and minor hockey. The goal of the program is to remove financial barriers in the hope that children will participate and develop further interests in minor hockey and skating and encourage physical activity. Based on the ability to secure additional funds, a pilot program will be launched in the fall of 2010. The program will be based on the successful “Got Skates” program that was first introduced in the City of Mississauga four years ago after City officials saw a decline in minor hockey and skating memberships. A Mississauga survey found that many new immigrants could not afford the cost of skates or lessons. Consequently, they distributed drop off bins to all arenas and organized a marketed skate drive. Since then the City of Mississauga has seen over 1,200 children participate in their program. The program’s success has been dependent on public, non-profit and private partnerships, which have covered the majority of costs for instruction, skates, and equipment.
Similarly, Hamilton has seen a decline in youth participation, particularly in areas of the city where new immigrants are not familiar with skating and/or face financial barriers.

The City of Hamilton will work with the Minor Hockey Alliance of Ontario, HMHC and its affiliate members to provide a comparable program, which introduces the basic skills; while promoting the sport at the grass roots entry level to children who otherwise would not be exposed to ice hockey. Hockey Canada has also identified this need and may also provide some resources to assist with this pilot program.

In addition, staff will be proposing a recommendation to the Grants Sub-committee that the current criteria for sport funding, under the Community Partnership Program, include the need for equipment subsidy. This recommendation aligns with the City’s intent to make recreational sport programming accessible to all children. The criteria to receive funding through the Community Partnership Program will include player registration and equipment subsidy for associations applying and demonstrated financial need.

Staff will be recommending that volunteer training no longer be eligible for funding and that accessibility and equipment subsidy be the priority to ensure programs remain affordable. Associations are encouraged to apply and assist participants where need is demonstrated in their respective communities.