Town of Huntsville Staff Report

Meeting Date: September 30, 2026 **To:** Council

Report Number: CORP-2026-53 **Confidential:** No

Author(s): Reva Frame, Director of Corporate Strategy/Treasurer

Subject: Update on Town Docks Sauna Request No. 2

Report Highlights

The report summarizes the results of the community engagement activities related to the request to operate a sauna and cold plunge at River Mill Park/Town Docks.

Recommendation

For Information Only.

Background

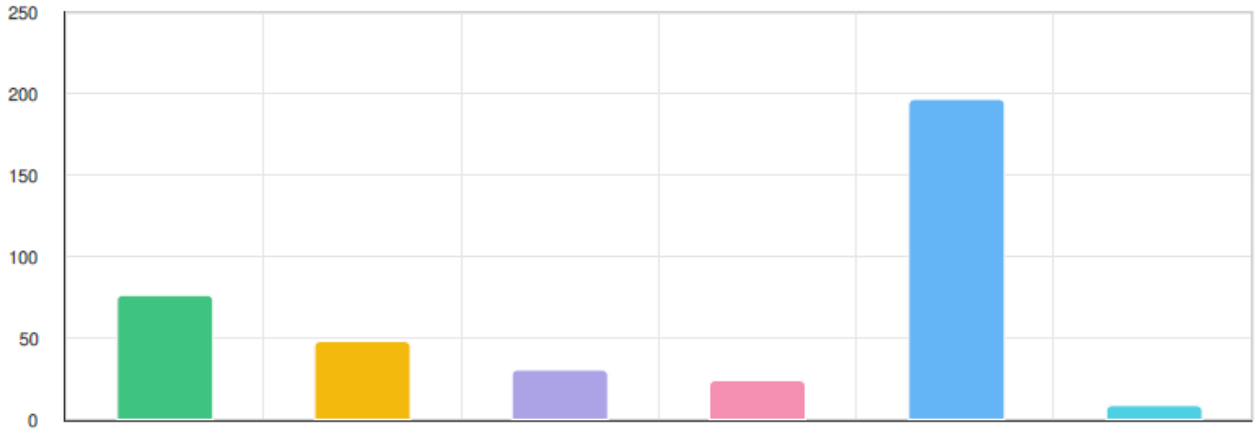
On April 29, 2026, General Committee received a deputation from Mike Prince requesting to operate a sauna and cold plunge at River Mill Park/Town Docks and staff were directed to review the request, investigate key considerations, and report back on recommendations should Council decide to allow the commercial venture on municipally owned property. Key considerations included a review of potential locations, and what may need to be included in a lease agreement between the requestor and the Town.

On June 24, 2026, staff reported back to General Committee (Report CORP-2026-37) with the key considerations noted above. At that time, via resolution GC59-26, General Committee deferred the report for public input from the community to help inform their decision regarding the lease and proposed operating location(s).

Discussion

Public consultation was undertaken in the form of an online survey through MyHuntsville.ca which was promoted through social media, a media release and advertising on LCD screens in Town facilities and on the Town's website. The results of the online survey consultation were as follows:

Q1. If Council decides to proceed with the lease of a sauna and cold plunge operation on Town-owned land in Huntsville, what is your preferred location?



Question options	responses	%
River Mill Park - Year Round (I support a sauna and cold plunge operation situated on the Muskoka River at River Mill Park, west of the public docks near the community garden) :	76	23.1
River Mill Park - Winter Only (I support a sauna and cold plunge operation situated on the Muskoka River at River Mill Park, west of the public docks near the community garden)	48	14.6
Town Docks - Year Round (I support a sauna and cold plunge operation at Town Dock municipal property by the finger docks directly in front of On The Docks Pub):	31	9.4
Town Docks - Winter Only (I support a sauna and cold plunge operation at Town Dock municipal property by the finger docks directly in front of On The Docks Pub)	24	7.3
Private Property Only (I believe businesses should operate from privately owned or privately leased property)	196	59.6
Unsure	9	2.7

In addition to the 384 responses to the question above, 271 of the respondents also provided additional comments, concerns and recommendations for Council's consideration. The general themes of this feedback included:

- This is a good tourism initiative.
- There is already too much happening at the docks and limited parking downtown, especially in the summer.
- While this may be a good tourism draw, there are concerns that this will come at a cost to local residents through either increased financial cost and/or loss of public space.
- Our lakes do not need to be polluted more than they already are.
- Public lands should not be used for private gain, unless it can be demonstrated that the general public will benefit.

Also, Town staff and Council members received a number of direct emails from concerned residents that are consistent with the results noted above and echoed the general comment themes identified above.

Based on the public consultation, the majority of respondents (59.6%) felt that the business should operate on privately owned or leased property. The next highest location chosen (23.1%) was at River Mill Park (west of the public docks near the community garden).

Options

Options are as noted in Report CORP-2026-37:

1. Approve the operation of a sauna and cold plunge on municipally owned property and direct staff to develop a lease agreement, at fair market value plus any cost recoveries, with Mike Prince for the operation of the sauna and cold plunge at _____ (location) for _____ (term), in accordance with the Town's Lease Policy (Development-12).
2. Do not approve the operation of a sauna and cold plunge on municipally owned property and authorize Economic Development staff to continue to work with Mike Prince to establish connections with private commercial property owners, funders, and local tourism organizations.

Respectfully Submitted: Reva Frame, Director of Corporate Strategy/Treasurer

Manager Approval (if required): _____

Director Approval: _____

CAO Approval: Denise Corry, Chief Administrative Officer