



October 3, 2020

To all members of the Halton Outdoor Club from your Interim President, Don Logan, on behalf of the Board:

The Halton Outdoor Club (HOC) is a unique and vibrant 4-season 4-sport club energized and driven by its members with their love of the outdoors and their desire to develop new skills and new friendships. Never, in its 47 years, has the HOC faced such a monumental challenge as COVID-19. ***We need your support now***, more than ever, to ensure that the Club stays strong and can continue to offer – and even expand – the diverse and high-quality programs that we've all become accustomed to.

And so, I'm writing this letter to all our members to:

1. Tell you what your Board has been doing since COVID began to ensure that Club activities could be offered to members within Government guidelines while ensuring participant and leader safety;
2. Describe the Club's financial situation, the use of membership fees and the financial impact of COVID this year and into the next year;
3. Share with you the exciting work being done to plan for the Club's future;
4. Update you about plans for the upcoming season, including how we propose to mitigate the financial impact of COVID for members wanting to join activities;
5. Inform you of the important upcoming Club events – the AGM and Fall Info Fair;
6. Ask for your support...

1. *What the Board has done to ensure safe return to sport events*

After COVID struck, the HOC Board, Club Manager and supporting members assessed what changes would be needed to our sport activity offerings. Initially, scheduled events in every sport both locally and overseas had to be cancelled under government orders, much to the disappointment of Sport Directors, trip leaders and members. Fortunately, deposits for all cancelled extended trips were recovered or transferred to 2021.

Later, once health authorities provided guidance for safe return to some activities, the Board developed COVID personal safety guidelines for offering Club events in compliance with government advice. The Sport Directors, with Board support, then developed programming that enabled a 'soft opening' of some hiking and cycling events in June to test the COVID guidelines and to gauge trip leader and member support.

Since these events were successful, more trips were offered, and in July members gradually returned to Club cycling and hiking activities. HOC has managed to offer 63 events since COVID struck, while ensuring adherence to the government's changing group-size advice. Between October and December, 26 trips across sports are currently listed, another 24 (including 4 overnights) are planned for the winter months, and several additional activities are in the planning stages.

Paddling was the sport most affected by COVID restrictions. Trip leaders' concerns around physical distancing, group size and safety on the water – including the ability to train and test members' competencies in order to keep them safe – greatly impacted HOC's ability to offer a robust program this summer. Despite this, the paddling community managed to hold 5 events on the water and our Paddling Director, Sandy Nay, made the most of the 'down time'

by hosting 8 virtual sessions focused on kayaking and safety offered by experts from both inside and outside of the Club. These virtual sessions were well attended. The Club also hosted a virtual event about Lyme disease organized by Bonnie Quinn, our Club Manager.

2. HOC's financial situation and the impact of COVID

Membership fee

The HOC membership fee remains unchanged from last year at only \$75.00 per person. This covers the operating costs of running our robust and active outdoor club. While the Board, along with many members, provides volunteer manpower, there are several expenses that must be covered by the membership fee, e.g., insurance; banking and payment processor fees; charges for Wild Apricot, the system that supports automated event registration, the Club website, global emails, etc.; Club-wide events such as Info Fairs; and the stipend paid to our Club Manager, who spends many hours helping to manage HOC on a day-to-day basis.

Club reserves

Fortunately, HOC has a reserve of funds that has accumulated and been set aside over the years from higher membership numbers in some years, better-than-expected participation in some events, successful extended trips, etc. The reserve represents about 2 years of operating expenses (currently about \$40,000 per year). It is generally considered prudent for not-for-profit organizations like ours to maintain a reserve of this size (i.e. 2 years of operating expenses) to help manage the impact of poor sport years, unusual declines in membership and unexpected events such as COVID-19.

The financial impact of COVID

We anticipate that COVID will result in a shortfall of revenue compared with operating costs in 2020-21. In part this is because of the additional costs of running sport programs in ways that are compliant with government restrictions around physical distancing, maximum group size, etc., and in part because we realize that some members may not feel totally comfortable in group settings.

3. Planning for the Club's future

Investments in future offerings

Based on the responses members provided to the 2017 survey, some initiatives for retaining and increasing membership were identified and the Board decided to invest a portion of our financial resources in these projects. For example, we developed a policy for using reserves generated from successful trips to support enhancements to Club programming (the 'Sport Profit Policy'). Early in 2019-20, in accordance with this new policy, your Board decided to invest \$9000 in leader training, instructor certification, first aid training and supplies, and initiatives to attract new members. Unfortunately, COVID has put all of this on hold.

Strategic planning

To ensure Club sustainability in the longer term, over the summer the Board set about developing a strategic plan for HOC for 2021-2024. We were fortunate to secure, *pro bono*, the services of Linda Martin, a very accomplished strategic planning consultant. Linda guided the Board and a few newer member volunteers in exploring HOC's purpose and values and identifying the type of future we'd like to see (vision) for the Club.

We have been energized by the experience and excited by the opportunities for HOC that were identified. We look forward to sharing some preliminary thoughts with you at the **AGM scheduled for November 25th, 2020** (see details later).

4. The 2020-21 season

Your Sports Directors, Board and member volunteers are committed to providing a rich program of sport activities this year, probably mostly here at home in Ontario.

Ski/snowshoe program for 2020-21

Planning for the upcoming season is well underway. The Ski Director, Club Manager and volunteer instructors, in consultation with Coach Canada and our resorts, have looked at the possible challenges presented by COVID-19 and ways we can address them.

Thank you to the 175 members who responded to the Winter Sport Survey. Survey results show strong support for the winter day trips and good support for the extended trips. With your votes, we are confident moving forward. You will find that ski/snowshoe specific COVID protocols are now posted on the Club website. Four extended trips are also posted on the website in anticipation of an October 15 registration opening date. A tentative ski/snowshoe schedule will be posted during the first week of October to give you a clearer picture of how the winter will look and Jim Blair, our Ski Director, will be sending out a communication to all members to share results of the Winter Sport Survey and to provide more information regarding winter plans.

This work is being done with our eyes wide open. We are only too aware that, given the current circumstances, conditions could change at any moment and our plans must change with them. However, by taking a positive, flexible approach to our planning, we will do everything that we possibly can to run a safe and successful winter program.

Mitigating the impact of COVID

In order to ensure a full program of activities with maximum opportunities for members to participate, the Club has decided to:

- Maintain the membership fee at its present level of \$75 for 2020-21.
- Use Club reserves to fund shortfalls that may occur between 2020-21 revenues and operating costs so we can maintain a strong base for planning and delivering programs.
- Use Club reserves where necessary to subsidize additional COVID-related costs of 2020-21 events, so that as many members as possible can participate if they wish.
- Take whatever steps are necessary to operate in full compliance with government guidelines to keep our members and trip leaders safe.

HOC will keep the membership fee at \$75 and subsidize additional COVID-related costs of events

5. Upcoming Club Events – Please mark your calendars

Annual General Meeting (AGM) – November 25, 2020 at 7 pm.

While we had hoped to hold our AGM in person, that is not possible. We will therefore conduct it virtually through your computer. We will provide instructions on the use of the virtual technology and make it as easy as possible for everyone to attend. **We urge you to**

participate as this will be your opportunity to vote for Board positions and learn about the results of our strategic planning to date. You will receive more information by email at a later date but for now please **mark the date on your calendar**.

Fall Info Fair – Saturday October 24, 2020 between 12 and 2 pm

We were unable to hold our annual Spring Info Fair due to COVID restrictions. We are therefore very keen to hold our “Outdoor” Fall Info Fair to promote our Club and its excellent programs to potential new members.

For the safety of all attendees, the Fall Info Fair will be held outdoors at the Burlington LaSalle Park pavilion, a lovely venue. Procedures will be in place to ensure compliance with COVID-related restrictions. **We encourage you to join us** and **bring a friend** who may want to join the Club! Watch for more details coming your way.

6. The Club needs your support!

The past 6-7 months have been a very challenging time for all of our members and families and for your Halton Outdoor Club, and we expect this to continue well into 2020-21. Challenged yes! – but we hope not only to offer a full program of events this year but also to enhance and strengthen the Club and its offerings into the future. We have many ideas resulting from our recent strategic planning exercise.

In order to survive and grow, we need the support of all our valued members. You can support the Club by:

- Renewing your Club membership – which remains at only \$75
- Continuing to participate in activities where you feel comfortable doing so.
- Volunteering to assist your Board with several of the initiatives we will launch during 2020-21
- Attending the AGM on November 25, 2020
- Bringing a non-member friend to our Fall Info Fair.

Summary

Your Board has spent considerable time over the past 3 years figuring out how HOC can grow, remain sustainable and enhance its programs for current and future members. **We need your support now more than ever.** We strongly believe that HOC is more than just a Club – it is *our* Club, a community of people who support each other. So even if you aren't sure you will feel comfortable in some group settings that are part of your sport, please join for 2020-21 to allow our Club to build for the future.

Hope to see you on the trails,
Don