



Report to: General Committee

Meeting Date: May 6, 2025

SUBJECT: Little Native Hockey League - 2025 Tournament Report

PREPARED BY: Mary Creighton – Director, Recreation Services
Andrew Baldwin – Acting Executive Director, Destination Markham Board

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report titled Little Native Hockey League – 2025 Tournament Report be received; and
2. That Council recommend to the Destination Markham Board that additional funding in the amount of \$25,000, to support the hiring of a Tournament Coordinator, be added to the Destination Markham contribution increasing their annual budget for 2026 and 2027 to \$240,000; and
3. That Council support staff initiating conversation with the Little Native Hockey League to extend the term of the current Memorandum of Understanding (2025 – 2027) for 2 to 3 additional years; and
4. That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with the highlights of the successful 2025 Little Native Hockey League (LNHL) tournament and to provide data on the Economic Impact of the 5 day event with recommendations for continued support of the event in 2026 and 2027 as per the Memorandum of Understanding.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Markham hosted the 50th Anniversary of the LNHL in March of 2024. The event included 244 teams, using 15 ice pads (Markham 10, Stouffville 3 and Richmond Hill 2). It was estimated that there were over 4,500 athletes with an additional 6,000 family and friends that attended the event.

As a result of the successful 2024 event, in June of 2024 the City of Markham, Destination Markham and the LNHL Executive signed a 3 year agreement with Markham to host the event from 2025 – 2027.

National Award Presented to the City of Markham/Destination Markham for the 2024 LNHL 50th Anniversary and Tournament

On March 20, 2025 Sport Tourism Canada presented the Sport Event Legacy of the

Year award to the City of Markham/Destination Markham for the 2024 - 50th Anniversary Little Native Hockey League Tournament. The STC Sport Event Legacy of the Year Award honours the remarkable achievements or contributions of individuals, companies or organizations in creating sport, economic, and social legacies for a community, while also demonstrating environmental stewardship, within a sport event held in Canada in 2024.

Sport Tourism Canada is (STC) promotes sport tourism as a grassroots economic development initiative at the community level, aiming to establish Canada as a preferred sport tourism destination. The City of Markham and Destination Markham are members of this non-governmental organization helping to support events that bring positive economic and social benefits to the community. The tournament generated almost \$10 million in tourism economic benefit for the City of Markham.

Festivals and Events Ontario (FEO)

The City of Markham received the FEO Impact Award for hosting the Little Native Hockey League Tournament 2024.

The criteria focuses on recognizing events, municipalities, suppliers, volunteers and sponsors that have made significant and positive impact within the festivals and events industry. Specifically, the award considers an organization's dedication, innovation, and ability to adapt to changing industry parameters.

All City of Markham and Destination Markham staff who supported the success of the 2024 LNHL 50th Anniversary Celebration and Tournament, share in this major national tourism award.

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

2025 Tournament Overview

The 2025 event was held from Sunday March 9 – Thursday March 13, 2025. This year's event hosted 277 teams with over 15,000 visitors including 5,500 athletes.

As in the previous year the tournament was hosted at all 10 ice pads in Markham, 4 ice pads located in Stouffville and new this year was the addition of 14 hours at Canlan Ice Sports – Scarborough.

Angus Glen Arena hosted the tournament opening ceremony on Sunday March 9th and served throughout the week as the tournament headquarters hosting a variety of vendors, food truck alley, activities for kids and various information and educational clinics for the Indigenous community.

Beyond the economic benefits which will be discussed, the LNHL Tournament reinforced community engagement, celebrated Indigenous culture and provided young athletes with an opportunity to compete at a high level while strengthening family and

community bonds. This event showcased Markham's capability as a premier sports tourism destination, emphasizing the city's ability to host large-scale sporting events successfully

Economic Impact

The 2025 Little Native Hockey League Tournament was a major economic driver for the city and surrounding areas.

This event brought vibrant activity to the city, generating significant economic benefits for local businesses and the broader community. The figures presented in this summary are best estimates based on assumptions and data provided by event organizers, hosting partners and hotel accommodation partners. These estimates provide a good overview of the event's direct impact on the local economy.

The direct business impact of the event totaled an estimated \$14.38 million, through participant and visitor spending on accommodations, food and beverage, retail and entertainment, transportation and services tied to the event.

Key Highlights:

- Food and beverage spending reached approximately \$4.06 million, reflecting strong restaurant and catering activity during the tournament.
- Lodging contributed \$2.65 million in direct sales, with over 11,357 room nights booked in Markham at an average room rate of \$234.
- Retail and transportation accounted for approximately \$2.6 million and \$2.87 million respectively, driven by attendee shopping and local travel.

The tournament supported an estimated 2,690 direct jobs, including temporary, part-time, and full-time roles across hospitality, tourism, food services, and event operations. These positions translated into the equivalent of 101 full-time annual jobs, offering a measurable boost to local employment.

From a taxation perspective, the LNHL generated approximately \$106,300 in Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) revenue. The return on investment (ROI) was \$29,446, based on a hosting investment of \$525,000 comprising \$215,000 in cash from Destination Markham and \$310,000 in-kind contributions from the City of Markham. This represents a 6% positive ROI at the local level, emphasizing the event's value as both a cultural celebration and a strategic economic investment.

The success of the LNHL reaffirms the powerful role of Indigenous sport tourism in advancing community economic development, social inclusion and cultural exchange. The strong visitor turnout, hotel demand and local spending emphasize the importance of continuing to attract and support events that align with Markham's broader tourism development and reconciliation goals.

Moving Forward – LNHL 2026 and 2027 Tournaments

Staff from Recreation Services and Destination Markham were to attend a debrief meeting on Saturday April 5th at Rama First Nation. Unfortunately, due to the ice storm the previous week this meeting had to be rescheduled. The staff team will be meeting with the LNHL executive on Saturday June 14th.

We anticipate that one of the topics of discussion with the LNHL Executive is looking at growing the capacity of this event to host 300 teams, which would be an additional 23 teams which equates to an additional 48 hours of ice over the 4 days. There are a number of options available which could include the tournament starting at most locations on the Sunday afternoon/evening. This would have an impact on our community groups and recreational skating, however this is the first weekend of March break which does not tend to be a busy time in our community centres.

Staffing Resources – City of Markham Coordinator

Currently the City supports the LNHL through in-kind contribution of \$310k which includes \$25K for the staff coordinator support position that is provided from Recreation Services. Due to the growth of the tournament and changing business needs, Recreation Services is no longer able to support this “secondment” position without having the ability to back fill or to hire someone externally on contract to coordinate the event.

Staff are recommending that the \$25K allocated as in-kind services be funded through Destination Markham which would increase their cash contribution to \$240K annually. This would then allow a dedicated individual to coordination of the logistical requirements to host the event among the 12+ facilities being used to host the event and to work directly with the LNHL planning group.

Future Consideration

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Markham, Destination Markham and the Little Native Hockey League Executive outlines the commitment for Markham to host the tournament for a 3 year period, 2025 – 2027. Given the success of the 2025 tournament and the extremely positive economic impact, \$13.65 million, staff are recommending that consideration be given to extend the MOU.

This event currently is the largest sport tourism event that the City of Markham supports. Given the success and positive economic impact staff are seeking Council’s support to have an initial conversation with the LNHL Executive to understand if they would be interested in extending the term of the MOU.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following represents a summary of the 2025 Financial Contribution from Destination Markham which was approved June 2024. The total approved was \$215K to support various activities of the tournament.

Below is the summary of costs which totals \$197,529 resulting in a surplus of \$17,500.

Destination Markham Financial Contribution Approved \$215,00	
Categories	2025 Actuals
Opening Day	\$19,746
Signage	\$ 6,563
Security	\$26,707
Referee/Scheduler support	\$34,546
Stouffville Ice	\$33,726
Site Support staff	\$14,617
Medical	\$18,000
LNHL Exect. Mtg/Accommodation	\$25,594
Parking Shuttle	\$6,610
Contingency/Miscellaneous	\$11,420 (ice logos, storage pod, volunteer support)
Total Spent	\$197,529

Proposed 2026 Destination Markham Financial Commitment

Staff are recommending that Destination Markham continue to make this financial commitment of \$215K to support increased costs that will be incurred as result of additional teams attending requiring additional security, medical, referee and site support staff. The impact of additional teams does have a positive impact on the economic impact to the City of Markham.

Staff are recommending that the \$25K allocated as In-Kind services be funded through the Destination Markham Board which would increase their total cash contribution to \$240K annually.

Staff are requesting that Council recommend to the Destination Markham Board that additional funding in the amount of \$25,000, to support the hiring of a Tournament Coordinator, be added to the Destination Markham contribution increasing their annual budget for 2026 and 2027 to \$240,000

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

Not applicable

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Although the LNHL is a sport-based tournament, it is essential that the host community ensure that celebration of the First's Nation's culture is included and respected in every aspect of the plan which aligns to our Diversity Strategy and Action Plan.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Destination Markham Corporation and Recreation Services.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Morgan Jones
Commissioner
Community Services

Arvin Prasad
Commissioner
Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

N/A