



**The Corporation of the
City of Sault Ste. Marie**

C O U N C I L R E P O R T

March 23, 2026

TO: Mayor Matthew Shoemaker and Members of City Council
AUTHOR: Nicole Maione, Director of Community Services
DEPARTMENT: Community Development and Enterprise Services
RE: Soo Greyhounds Inc. Agreement

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to request Council approval to enter into an agreement with Soo Greyhounds Inc. (Soo Greyhound Hockey Club) for use of the GFL Memorial Gardens as the main tenant of the facility for ten years, with two five-year options to extend.

Background

At the May 29, 2006 Council meeting, By-law 2006-124 was passed authorizing the execution of an agreement with the Soo Greyhounds, which set out the terms for the rental of the facilities at the Steelback Centre (formerly the Sault Ste. Marie Sports and Entertainment Centre) by the Soo Greyhound Hockey Club. The term of this agreement was twenty hockey seasons from 2006-07 to 2025-26.

Analysis

The Soo Greyhound Hockey Club has been a distinguished member of the Ontario Hockey League (OHL) since 1972, with a rich history in Sault Ste. Marie dating back to 1919. As the primary tenant of the municipal event centre, the Soo Greyhounds have played a central role in establishing the facility as a consistent anchor for year-round activity within the downtown core.

Over the course of the current agreement, the City and the Soo Greyhounds have developed a collaborative and professional partnership that has strengthened both facility operations and community engagement. This partnership has enabled the City to sustain elite-level hockey locally while also leveraging the facility to attract concerts, special events, and non-sport programming that benefit residents and visitors alike.

Through the life of this agreement, the City expanded box office services to include online sales, increased marketing and advertising opportunities throughout the venue, expanded suite rental opportunities and broadened food and beverage options and services to accommodate increased patron demand. In addition, the City and the Soo Greyhounds partnered to add an additional 113 seats to the arena capacity to include infill seating and further partnered to replace the original video

scoreboard in 2020 with a state-of-the-art video display system for the facility (Schedule C).

To date, a total of 773 games, including 72 playoff games, have taken place since the inception of the current agreement, and a total of 3,003,939 tickets have been issued.

The presence of the Soo Greyhounds as a long-term anchor tenant provides predictable scheduling, operational stability, and guaranteed annual facility usage. This stability strengthens the City's ability to market the facility, attract external promoters, and negotiate favourable service and supplier contracts. Game nights consistently drive increased pedestrian traffic and spending in the downtown core, supporting local restaurants, hotels, retail businesses, and parking services, while contributing to overall downtown vibrancy.

Beyond direct economic impacts, the Soo Greyhounds actively participate in community and charity initiatives, offering fundraising opportunities for local charities and non-profit organizations, thereby fostering a strong sense of civic pride within our community.

Financial Implications

Over the term of the current contract, to date the City has received a total of \$3,146,064 in ticket sale revenue alone representing 8.87% of total ticket revenue. This revenue was calculated based on a sliding scale that increased annually by the average ticket price and the City relied heavily on the team making the playoffs to realize a benefit to the City.

This revised structure represents an average increase of approximately 1.13% and significantly improves revenue predictability, allowing staff to prepare more accurate annual operating budgets. Year one ticket revenue is estimated at approximately \$210,000 and is expected to increase annually.

In addition, the proposed agreement formalizes current ticketing practices ensuring modern and convenient purchasing options remain available for patrons while generating as estimated \$35,000 in facility revenue to support operating costs.

All other financial aspects of the agreement remain unchanged including:

- City retention of 90% of food and beverage revenue
- City receipt of 10% of all gross in-facility advertising revenue
- City retention 100% of facility naming rights
- City retention of 80% of suite lease revenues.

Maintaining the Soo Greyhounds as the primary tenant reduces financial risk to the City by ensuring baseline utilization of the facility, supporting staffing stability, and spreading fixed operating costs across a greater number of event days.

Collectively, these factors contribute directly to the long-term financial sustainability of the facility.

In addition to direct facility revenues, Soo Greyhounds events generate indirect economic benefits through increased hotel occupancy, restaurant and bar activity, transportation usage, and visitor spending associated with both regular-season and playoff games.

Overall, the City can anticipate a breakeven, or modest operating surplus from game operations, with annual results fluctuating based on attendance and playoff performance.

Strategic Plan / Policy Impact / Climate Impact

This agreement supports the Corporate Strategic Plan in a number of ways:

Though the Community Development Focus area this partnership supports the growth of a diversified economy through increase tourism spending and occupancy rates.

The agreement also contributes to a vibrant downtown with the GFL Memorial Gardens being located in the downtown core which supports the Quality of Life focus area of the plan by playing a critical role in sustaining year-round activity and enhancing downtown vibrancy.

Finally, this agreement provides the opportunity for the City to develop and sustain a long-standing community partnership with the Soo Greyhounds and provides accessible entertainment opportunities for residents while providing exceptional customer service as per the Service Delivery focus areas of the Corporate Strategic Plan.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that Council take the following action:

The relevant By-law 2026-36 is listed under Agenda Item 12 and will be read with all by-laws under that item.

Respectfully submitted,
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