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August 27, 2023

Ashley Rowe.
Secretary, Long Lake Flatwater Training Centre Society.
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Dear Ashley,

Thank you for your invitation to provide a letter of support for the Long Lake Rowing and Paddling Centre. I am very pleased to do so.

I am a lifelong advocate for paddling and rowing and for increasing accessibility to water sports for all Canadians. Water Rat says to Mole in Kenneth Grahame's classic the Wind in The Willows "Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing -absolutely nothing- half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. "Those words have never been truer than now in this age of computer games, television and social media and confusing and almost incomprehensible world events, climate change and Covid. They have most certainly been true in my life. Learning to paddle canoes and kayaks teaches important water skills, water safety and water confidence, coordination and balance, camaraderie, teamwork, lifelong friendships, self discipline, strength and fitness and a love for the outdoors. It creates that desire to get out on our rivers, lakes and the ocean, untangles in a way the complexity of life, and cultivates a lifelong appreciation and love of "messing about in boats".

I started paddling on Deer Lake in Burnaby when I was 10 years old because adult paddling enthusiasts wanted to encourage paddling and provide a facility where kayaks and canoes could be kept and shared. Permission from Burnaby Parks and Rec. was given, and the Burnaby Canoe Club was born. We shared our little boat house with a small adaptive kayak program using whitewater kayaks and with a peddle boat rental. Eventually a fantastic world class facility was built on Burnaby Lake for the 1973 Canada Games that to this day churns out national champions in rowing and in canoeing and kayaking. In large part because of benign lower mainland winters, excellent safe water access, excellent equipment and equipment storage, and its central location and proximity to schools and post secondary education, the Burnaby Lake Facility over the decades has attracted many national canoeing and kayaking team members and many world class Canadian rowers and top coaches. Eventually my training with other great paddlers turned into being named to the Canadian national team and after some years Gold and Bronze Olympic medals. After racing Sprint kayaking, I became interested in Outrigger canoeing and in Dragon-boat racing. I was a founding member of CORA, the Canadian Outrigger Racing Association and served as Medical Director for the international Dragon Boat Federation. This taught me how widely shared across cultures worldwide simply putting a paddle in the water and pulling on it is. Almost every indigenous culture with access to water has some form of paddling and canoe racing. For three decades,

I have served as coach of the Laoyam Eagles, a local high school team that has won the prestigious Vancouver Dragonboat Festival more than 23 times leading to what I feel is a high level of water safety and canoeing literacy in Pemberton. I continue to paddle to this day and will head off in September to race the 35-mile crossing between Catalina Island and Newport Beach with a team of sixty-year-olds, some of who I've known since I was 12.

The problem for those of us who want to mess around in little boats is that the initial equipment capital cost is high and the learning curve steep. Long skinny boats are relatively hard to store and can be vandalised and are subject to weather degradation if left outdoors. This is true for canoeing, for rowing, for dragon boating and for outrigger. Consequently, large buildings with long equipment bays or with fenced lockable storage compounds close to water are the established norm for our boats. Boat ramps need to be built taking into account changes in lake level and fairly low-profile floating docks are required for boat loading and unloading. The equipment lasts many years and can be shared with others. Consequently, a facility to store equipment and run paddling and rowing programs is a long-lived community legacy investment and an asset that lasts for decades and decades. I have been instrumental in establishing paddling facilities in Vancouver (False Creek racing Canoe Club), in Pemberton (Pemberton Canoe Association) and have hopefully inspired others to do the same.

Nanaimo has long-established paddling roots. I first visited Nanaimo to race dugout canoes at Shell Beach south of Cedar around 1981. Coast Salish dugout canoe racing is incredible to both watch and participate in. Boys and girls age groups and adult men and women age groups race in finely built boats on the ocean learning and carrying on canoeing traditions and canoeing culture which are millennia old. I befriended Nanaimo paddlers Ruth and Al Matson who competed in marathon Canoe Racing. Their daughters became skillful sprint kayakers making our provincial teams and Canada Games Teams of the day. Later I returned to Nanaimo and was introduced to Long Lake by a medical colleague, Dr. Mike Fleisher and was gob smacked by its beauty and potential. Long Lake has proximity to a large nearby community, accessibility, benign weather, perfect size and length. It was no surprise to me when Nanaimo Canoe Club started to produce national champions. Recently when Nanaimo Canoe Club lost their Voyageur Canoe fleet to fire, Pemberton Canoe club donated three Voyageurs in support of their paddling programs that target accessibility for youth and seniors and encourage indigenous participation.

We must not turn our backs to on water recreation. I believe all Canadian kids should be taught to paddle a canoe safely and effectively. I strongly encourage your support of the Long Lake Flatwater Training Centre. Investing in and building a first-rate venue for paddlers and rowers to start out in boats, to develop skills, to train and to race is money well spent. That investment will pay dividends in terms of water safety, health and fitness, and recreational opportunities for youth and adults and elders in Nanaimo for many decades. I strongly recommend your support of this tremendous initiative.

Kind regards


Hugh Fisher M.D, O.C.