

WOAA Minor Hockey Committee Report on Amalgamation of Centers

Purpose of this Report

WOAA Minor Hockey Chair Paul Sebastian assigned a number of Minor Hockey Committee members to review the growing trend of minor hockey centers amalgamating with neighboring centers to form a new center within the WOAA. Those members included Bob Hill, Dale Burnett, Rick Vivian, Kayla Nichol, and Steve Howson. The committee was tasked with discussing various options available to the WOAA and to what role the WOAA Minor Hockey Committee might take on this matter to shape the future landscape of minor hockey in the WOAA.

Introduction

A list of past WOAA minor hockey centers was compiled that shows some 40 plus associations in the last 30 to 40 years. Due to many various factors that number has been declining to the present day list of 22 "rep" centers. There are currently two cases of potential amalgamation of centres in various stages of progress that would reduce that number even further. This trend is not only found in our area but is prevalent through the whole of the OMHA. In response to the decline of the number of team entries in each base classification in recent years, we have seen the number of OMHA small town classifications fall from seven to just three, namely "B", "C", and "D". Additional Entries also had their own distinctive classification but that too has been eliminated in the past year.

Past amalgamations in the WOAA area are listed below with their former minor hockey centers:

Arran Elderslie – Tara, Paisley, and Chesley

Blyth Brussels – Blyth and Brussels

Bruce Peninsula – Lion's Head and Wiarton

Central Perth – Elma Logan and Milverton

Huron Bruce – Ripley and Lucknow

Mid Huron – Seaforth joined with BCH which included Bayfield, Clinton, and Hensall

Minto – Palmerston, Harriston, and Clifford

Saugeen Shores – Port Elgin and Southampton

South Bruce – Mildmay and Teeswater

TCDMHA – Chatsworth, Keady, and Desboro

West Grey – Durham, Normanby (Ayton)

Three other associations have been designated as Local League centers – Howick, Wallace, and Zurich. The centers of Belgrave, Belmore, and Tiverton had minor hockey programs at one time but have since dissolved and players were given the right to choose a neighboring minor hockey association to join.

Reasoning behind Amalgamation of centers

The WOAA is in a bit of a unique situation since it is made up of a number of small towns and villages which worked just fine in the past years. The problem now is that players and parents are more interested than ever to play at a higher level or skill set where they all play with others of like skill. The decreasing participation levels are also a major driving factor here with Centres across the OMHA now unable to support competitive Representative teams.

Various points have been expressed for the reasons why centers have amalgamated to form a larger association. The number of smaller centers (formally classified as E or D) had continued to diminish over the years to the point that these classifications have been dropped. In many cases those centers were experiencing a dramatic drop in the number of registrations at each age level and could

not support entering a team. In some areas those players would simply go to the next closest center for that season and return to their "home" center the following year. However it became more common that the center could not support a rep team in a consecutive number of years and either dropped the "rep" center status or combined / amalgamated with a neighboring center to form a new association.

Other associations have combined to make a full minor hockey program available to all players. In many cases the smaller centers did not have enough registrations to be able to run both a rep team and a local league team in each age group that would accommodate the skill levels of their players. In these cases the association had to make a choice to enter one or the other. If they chose to go with a Local League team they would lose their better players to the next closest center. This in turn lessened the number of available players to the center to the point of not even icing a local league team. In most cases of amalgamations the centers have expressed the desire to give their players the chance to play at their proper skill level and in order to do that the association must do whatever possible to provide choices to their players.

Some associations cited the loss of players to neighboring "A" or "AA" centres through the NRP system as one of the reasons to look at a bigger amalgamation to a possible "A" status. This in turn would allow players to stay in the home area and play at a higher level. The loss of "hometown" players to the "AAA" zone team also affects the centers available numbers.

Options for the WOAA

The committee members were given the opportunity to list various opinions that might be used to shape the future of minor hockey in the WOAA area. The following options are meant for discussion purposes only and are not intended to be taken as an end goal. They are listed in no particular order.

Option A – Form five to six "A" centers

The WOAA could monitor all potential amalgamations with an end goal of forming 5 – 6 "A" sized centers within the WOAA area. There would be potential for any member centers to maintain their own Local League, Houseleague, and beginner programs or they could run these within the whole of the amalgamated center. Once a new "A" league is formed, there could be potential for additional OMHA neighboring "A" centers to participate providing all approvals from both the OMHA and WOAA are gathered. We must keep in mind that "A" centers must provide a minor and major team in each age group. This would provide the WOAA with at least 10-12 teams with the possibility of a third team in each age division.

Option B – Form eight to twelve "B" centers

The WOAA could monitor all potential amalgamations with an end goal of forming 8 – 12 "B" sized centers within the WOAA area. Any applications for an "A" base classification would be reviewed by the WOAA but the emphasis would be on limiting the size of centers to "B". There would be potential for all existing member centers to maintain their own Local League, Houseleague, and beginner programs or they could run these within the whole of the amalgamated center.

Comments on Option A and B

(it is worth mentioning that there may be an option of a mix of "A" and "B" centers playing in the same league however the logistics of that could have some tough hurdles to work around)

In both options A and B it is the opinion of the committee that the WOAA would not force amalgamations but instead steer those centers contemplating a form of amalgamation to seriously look at these options. It is generally agreed that in order to have an "A" league within this area an ideal

number of 6 "A" centers would have to be formed. There are examples of this already in the OMHA both in the Southern Counties/ Niagara area and in the Windsor area. More recently the Shamrock league has announced that an "A" league is planned to operate in the 2023-2024 season. The recent amalgamations in all of the OMHA continue to lessen the number of "D" and "C" rep centers. It is still unknown what the effects and consequences will be on the recent decision to phase out NRP's. It will be important that these new amalgamations review their ideals and goals in making a strong rep organization while still maintaining an even stronger local league system. It is important to note that in past amalgamation it was essential to take the first years to build up the organization instead of "shooting for the moon" right off the start. Most opinions point us in the direction of having more "hometown" style local leagues with a more "regional" approach to rep teams. It would be recommended that any hockey at U9 and below should in most, if not all cases, be based out of each individual center regardless of the amalgamation process. This would allow those younger age players to participate in their hometown arena instead of driving to a regional arena.

Option C- Continue present format

The WOAA could continue with the present process in place and let amalgamations happen as they come along and continue to recommend the proper classifications.

Although this method is still the easiest in the short term for the WOAA it is probably inevitable that it will allow the creation of some very strong teams though uncontrolled amalgamations. In contrast, those centers that wish to go it alone (especially current C and D centers) will be of much fewer numbers and may eventually be forced to a non rep status. The biggest complication will involve the task of the formation of competitive leagues for these teams with a suitable amount of travel.

Option D- Another suggestion

The WOAA could review any other suggestions to move forward on this topic.

What this all means for the WOAA

The many changes in the minor hockey setup over the past years has presented challenges to the Minor Hockey Committee in forming competitive leagues for both rep and local league divisions. This is followed by the placing of teams for playoffs and keeping in line with the new format put out by the OMHA following the Hockey Canada Pathway.

Amalgamation of current minor hockey centers continues to be a hot topic both to centers that wish to combine and those that wish to run as status quo. We must find that workable balance and be ready to adapt with the ever changing landscape of minor hockey, not only as the WOAA proper, but also as a member of the OMHA, OHF, and Hockey Canada.

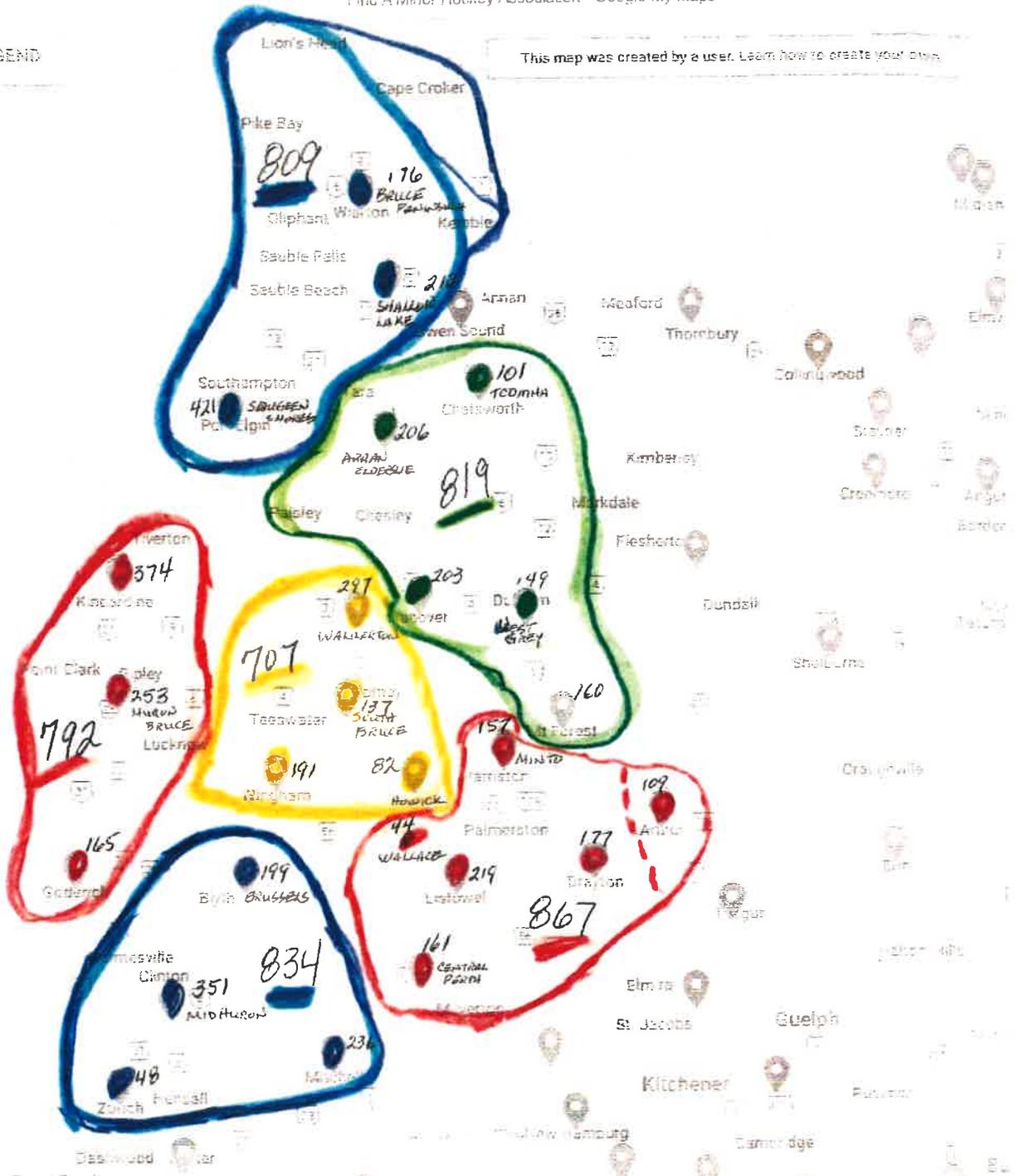
The WOAA Minor Hockey Committee and WOAA Board of Directors will also have to be mindful of the financial implications to the operation of the WOAA that any of these changes will make.

Future Steps

1. The whole of the Minor Hockey Committee to review this report and add any comments, suggestions, and ideas and add to the report.
2. Present the report to the WOAA minor hockey contacts for their input.
3. Finalize the report and present to the Minor Hockey Committee (and possibly to the WOAA Board of Directors) for approval and then use as a base guideline for the upcoming years.
4. Continue to update the report as new factors come into play.

MAP LEGEND

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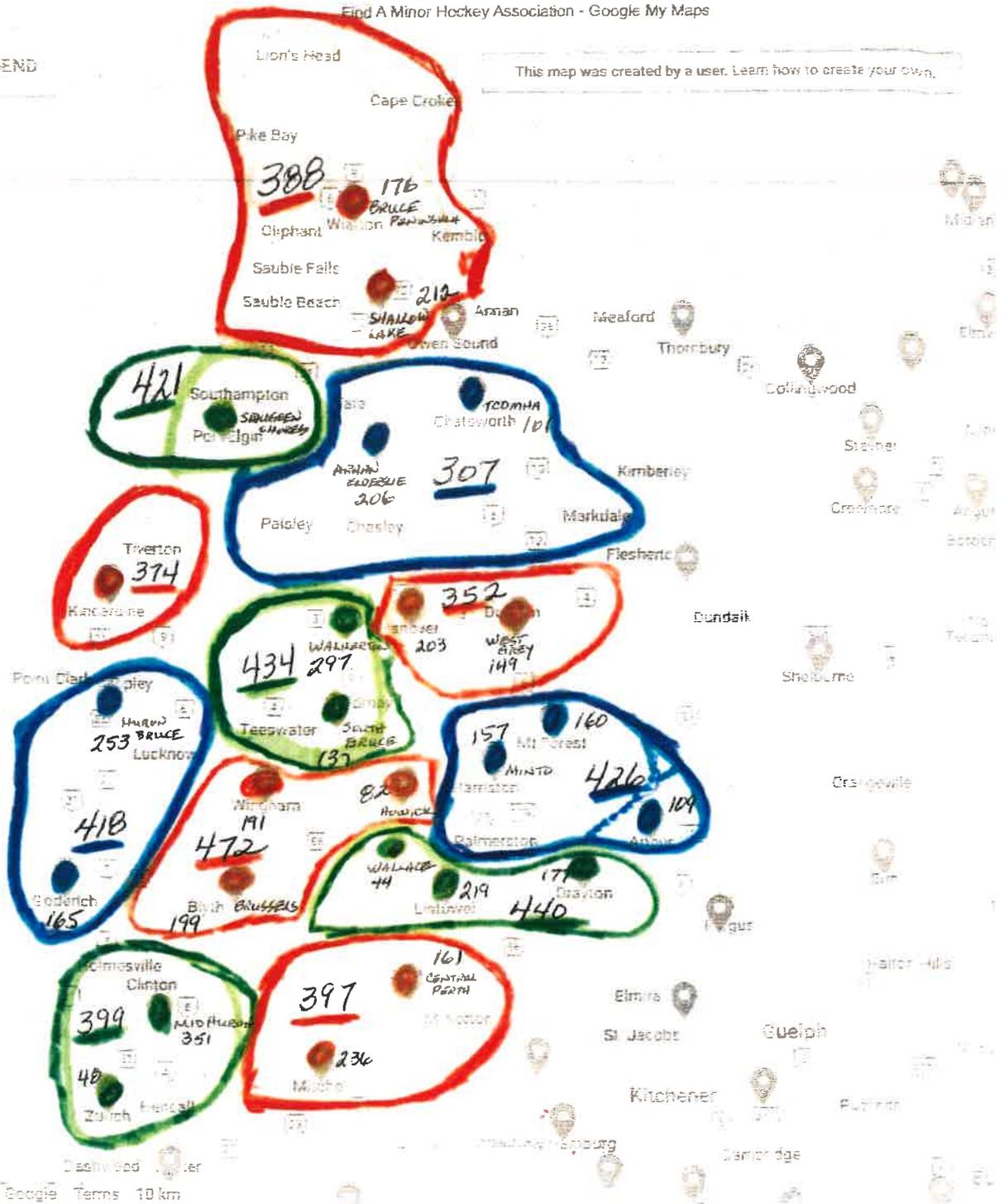


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OPTION MAKING 6 'A' sized centers with registration of combined present centers of 650 to 900 registrations.

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OPTION MAKING 12 'B' sized centers with registrations of combined present centers of 300 to 500 registrations.