

Red Deer Advocate

Economic benefits of hosting 2019 Canada Winter Games expected to pack quite a punch

By [Harley Richards - Red Deer Advocate](#)

Published: **September 05, 2014 8:51 PM**

With thousands of the country's top athletes taking part, there's no doubt the 2019 Canada Winter Games will be entertaining.

But the event should also generate an economic boom that will precede competition and continue well beyond the closing ceremonies.

It's estimated that the games, which Red Deer has won the right to host, will have a \$132-million impact on the regional economy. The Canada Games Council calculated that the 2011 winter games in Halifax produced a \$131-million economic windfall for Nova Scotia, and the figure for the 2013 summer games in Sherbrooke, Que. has been placed at \$165.5 million for the province and \$110.7 million for the Sherbrooke region.

"You've got your direct impacts prior to the games through jobs, construction, transport, and you have those indirect benefits prior to the games in terms of attracting new people to actually come and live and work in Red Deer," said Shelley Gagnon, manager of Red Deer's Recreation, Parks and Culture Department.

"You've got your spending during the games and of course you've got your legacies after the games — where you have stronger community in terms of volunteerism and leadership and event-hosting experiences, and you've got the physical legacies of the facilities that are built and those that are improved."

The City of Red Deer has pledged \$26 million in capital funding for the 2019 Winter Games — money Mayor Tara Veer said will be well-spent.

She pointed out that \$6 million of that sum will come from the federal and provincial governments, and \$10 million will be used to develop an ice arena and other recreational amenities at Red Deer College — which is less than half the cost to build similar facilities elsewhere, with the college also assuming responsibility for operating costs. The final \$10 million will be used to perform necessary upgrades to existing recreational assets in the city, said Veer.

The federal and provincial governments will also kick in another \$8.1 million each to help cover the 2019 games' operational costs.

"It actually makes sound economic sense to go after the games," said Veer.

The city's \$10 million investment at the college is for only a small piece of the sports facilities proposed for there, said RDC president Joel Ward.

Red Deer College plans to build a \$66-million Centre For Health, Wellness and Sport. Slated to be called the Canada Games Centre, it will include Olympic-size and NHL-size ice arenas, a performance gymnasium and world-class squash courts.

“For the first time in college history, we’ll be able to host national championships,” said Ward, adding that the arenas will also host Hockey Alberta summer hockey camps.

The new facilities will be available to students and the general public, and will also support educational programming, said Ward.

Although a Centre For Health, Wellness and Sport has long been planned for Red Deer College, the Canada Winter Games allows the project to be fast-tracked and more than doubled in size.

“The original version was \$25 million,” said Ward.

The college has already raised nearly \$50 million from federal, provincial, municipal and private sources, but much of that was contingent on Red Deer’s bid for the Canada Winter Games succeeding.

RDC is also planning a 500-bed residence that will be used to house athletes during the games and for student accommodation thereafter. Without the games, said Ward, the timelines for that project would also have been much longer.

“The construction industry is going to see some considerable business going forward in getting Red Deer ready to be able to handle the games,” said Tim Creedon, executive director of the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce.

Members of that sector are up to the challenge, said Gary Gies, executive director of the Red Deer Construction Association.

“We’ve got some of the best contractors, sub-trade companies, suppliers and manufacturers right here locally,” he said. “We’ll definitely be able to handle it.”

Creedon also expects the local hospitality industry to see a spike in business.

Kevin Ritchie, general manager of the Red Deer Lodge Hotel and chair of Hotels Red Deer, pointed out that Red Deer has about 2,300 guest rooms in 21 hotels. Another major hotel is under construction and two others are pending, and there are plenty of hotels in the surrounding communities, he said.

“I don’t anticipate that we’re going to have a real crunch for rooms.”

Ritchie doesn’t expect local hotels to undergo unscheduled upgrades or expansions as a result of the games, although they will probably gear up for the anticipated jump in bookings.

At the Red Deer Airport, **CEO RJ Steenstra** said the aviation centre will not change its master plan as a result of the games coming to Red Deer. But he acknowledged that funding requests for projects like terminal expansion, increased parking and a runway extension might now receive increased consideration from government.

Steenstra does expect activity at the airport to pick up as the games approach.

“In simple terms, our taxis will be busier, rental car services out of the airport could be busier; obviously the volume within the airport itself will increase substantially, with those people staying overnight and using hotels, eating in restaurants and buying things in our stores.”

The economic impact of the winter games should extend well beyond 2019, suggested Liz Taylor, executive director of Tourism Red Deer.

“The games will bring families, coaches and athletes to the city, many for the first time and hopefully to return to the city and region in the future,” said Taylor. “National exposure will be very valuable. For many, a first exposure to a city is through leisure or sports, and that can lead to return visits, business development and relocation — so any event on this scale is very important.”

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