



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Calgary's brand should highlight sport, active living, and inclusivity

CALGARY, Alta. – Canada's inspiring winter Olympians and Paralympians have reminded us again of the power of sport in society, from the community to the international level. Calgary is a uniquely active, sporty city. A Calgary branding exercise is currently underway. WinSport and its partners are calling on civic leaders to recognize sport and active living as central to our city's brand.

Sport encompasses so much more than high-performance competition. Medal performances inspire people to get outside and get active individually, with friends, and with their kids. Governments recognize the critical contribution of sport and recreation to our mental and physical health, a connection thrown into sharp relief by the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Comprehensive research](#) completed by Calgary's ActiveCITY Collective shows that Calgary is a very active city by Canadian standards; Calgary spends two times the national average on sport and recreation. This sector makes a far bigger economic contribution to the city than is generally recognized. WinSport alone generates \$120 million in economic activity and 1,200 jobs in Calgary in a typical year and welcomes over 1.2 million guests. In the bigger picture, non-professional sport contributes an estimated \$1.2 billion to the local economy and supports 16,000 jobs.

Active living is a differentiator in Calgary. Where else can you ski or snowboard, figure skate or speed skate, paddle, fly fish or surf (really), cycle 1,000 km of pathways or mountain bike off a chairlift, all within city limits? Calgarians love these urban recreation opportunities, along with the alpine mountain experiences available an hour's drive away. It's time to reflect that unique competitive advantage in the city's brand. Young people are drawn to cities with active sport, recreation, and cultural scenes. Recent research by the Canada West Foundation about young people leaving Calgary shows the urgency of telling this story more effectively.

Calgary's active city is under threat. Its world-class sporting facilities are aging. The Government of Alberta's announced investment into the Canmore Nordic Centre is fantastic news for Calgary. Reinvestment in urban sport facilities is required as well. Core venues including WinSport's Canada Olympic Park (COP) are in urgent need of refurbishment. Remarkably, COP is still an internationally renowned competition and training hub for high-performance winter athletes 34 years after hosting the 1988 Winter Olympics, while also providing essential facilities for grassroots community sport. The original infrastructure is end-of-life, yet it continues to shape the city's identity and skyline, enabling generations of Calgarians to live healthy, active lives.

The Calgary sport community must think seriously about accessibility and inclusivity as part of this reinvestment. WinSport facilities are not accessible to all. And the barriers are not only to those with disabilities. WinSport seeks to encourage participation from people of more diverse backgrounds.

"We call on the experts who are reconsidering Calgary's brand to focus on Calgary's natural competitive advantage – our culture of year-round active, outdoor living," said Barry Heck, President and CEO of WinSport. "At WinSport, which is already the hub of Calgary's active economy, we are resolved to lead the way on strengthening accessibility, diversity and inclusivity in Calgary's sport community."

“The correlation between competitive sport involvement in childhood and professional success in adulthood has been demonstrated in many studies, and that correlation is particularly strong for women,” said Jennifer Konopaki, Executive Director, Sport at WinSport. “We attract athletes of all ages to Calgary because of our world-class sport facilities. We cannot let this competitive advantage slip.”

“At Vivo, we are excited to be part of a growing spirit of collaboration that is adding new vibrancy to Calgary’s sport and recreation sector,” said Cynthia Watson, CEO of Vivo for Healthier Generations. “Getting everyone playing leads to active kids, healthy families, and strong communities. We can use play to create a more inclusive Calgary.”

“The benefits of sport and recreation are at least as high, if not arguably greater, for people with disabilities,” said Karen Dommett, Director of Calgary Adapted Hub Powered by Jumpstart. “Sport can be a powerful vehicle for inclusion and can reflect the type of society we want as a community, but we need to be intentional in ensuring that our city’s facilities and programming are acknowledging and breaking down barriers.”

“ActiveCITY itself was built by volunteers passionate about sport, recreation, and active living who recognize the contribution this sector makes to Alberta’s economy,” said Heather Chapple, Chief Collaboration Officer of the ActiveCITY Collective. “Having lived in other major Canadian cities, I can say Calgarians are fortunate to have such beautiful natural settings and built facilities at our fingertips. With these assets, Calgary is well-positioned to lead the country in its active economy.”

– 30 –

About WinSport

WinSport inspires human potential through the spirit of sport. The Calgary Olympic Development Association, operating as WinSport, is a community-based, not-for-profit organization that owns and operates Canada Olympic Park and the Bill Warren Training Centre in Canmore. WinSport also administers legacy funds that support the Olympic Oval. WinSport’s mission has three pillars: to help people discover the joy and health benefits of sport; to encourage talented athletes to develop their skills; and to enable Canada’s high-performance athletes to excel on the world stage. Financial commitments from Canadian governments and business have allowed WinSport to expand its sport and community offering over time; significant investment will be required in the coming years to renew the legacy facilities that have welcomed the world to the Calgary region for more than a generation.

For more information, please contact:

Dale Oviatt
Senior Manager, Communications
WinSport
T: 403-247-5601; C: 403-461-9074
E-mail: doviatt@winsport.ca

