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ABBOTSFORD CENTRE POSTS BEST YEAR EVER AS SUBSIDY DIPS BELOW \$1 MILLION MARK

Arena's subsidy at lowest level ever as attendance numbers spike

It may still be lacking a major tenant, but Abbotsford Centre posted its best financial year ever in 2016.

Record attendance last year drove revenue dramatically higher than projected and resulted in a city subsidy of \$931,000 in 2016.

That is the lowest annual cost to taxpayers since the arena opened eight years ago and the first time the number has dipped below \$1 million.

A total of 151,818 people attended ticketed events in 2016, more than double the figure from 2015, when Abbotsford Centre had required a \$1.2 million subsidy. That subsidy figure was itself significantly down from previous years – both before and after the Abbotsford Heat left in 2014.

Seven different events were sold out, with the highest grossing concert Blink 182's appearance in September, according to the facility's annual report, which was presented Monday to council. Another 63,790 people attended non-ticketed events like university convocations, film shoots and the BC Summer Games

On top of the operating subsidy, Abbotsford continues to pay off the costs of building the facility to the tune of about \$2.3 million each year.

The decreasing subsidy has brought Abbotsford Centre's annual operating costs below that of some other prominent city-run facilities, including the Abbotsford Recreation Centre and Matsqui Recreation Centre, which also each receive more than \$1 million in subsidies.

Years ago, Mayor Henry Braun suggested it might be impossible to reduce the subsidy below the million-dollar mark.

"I didn't think we'd get to under a million dollars and yet here we are," Braun said. "We are very pleased that our taxpayers don't have to fund [Abbotsford Centre] to levels they have in the past."

Coun. Dave Loewen also credited Spectra, the company that operates the centre, for its management, noting that every act that no money was lost on any of the acts that performed last year.

Abbotsford Centre general manager Andrew Nash said that promoters are realizing that a variety of genres can draw well in the arena. While the arena still hosts plenty of Christian pop and country shows, Nash said that recent successes have shown the ability for hard rock, metal and even Broadway shows to do well.

The annual report suggests that most of those who attend performances in the facility come away pleased. But around 11 per cent of those who took a survey gave the centre low marks. Nash attributed many of those issues to high expectations regarding traffic and parking.