

August 22, 2019

To: Minnesota Hockey Board of Directors

cc: Rich Rakness, District 8 Director

From: Woodbury Area Hockey Club (Affiliate MH0816)

Re: Request of Variance to MN Hockey Bylaws – Article 5

Dear Minnesota Hockey Board of Directors:

Situation:

Due to the recent and projected growth of the area, WAHC is requesting an exception to the recently enacted rule in MN Hockey Bylaws Article 5 to allow the alignment of teams by the two public high school boundaries. Since East Ridge High School (ERHS) opened in 2009-10, the ERHS Boys Hockey group has been advocating for separate youth hockey programs to serve our ERHS boundary youth and our WHS boundary youth. Both the WAHC Board and the Cottage Grove Hockey Association do not support the formation of a new affiliate agreement at this time (projected player counts by division and level are not sufficient for entirely stand-alone teams), nor is there currently wide-membership support to do so. However, the WAHC Board wants to ensure that all viewpoints are considered as well as ensure the sustainability providing players a community-based experience. The ability to align teams by high school is an early step in assessing the long-term impact of potentially splitting the affiliate boundary in the future, as the community continues to grow.

Background:

The Woodbury Area Hockey Club's (WAHC) current affiliate agreement includes players that live or attend school in South Washington County ISD833 (including the cities/towns of Afton, Newport, and the majority of Woodbury). The boundary encompasses three public high schools with hockey programs: East Ridge High School ('ERHS'), Park High School ('PHS') and Woodbury High School ('WHS'). ERHS and WHS are in the current affiliate boundary; CGHS is an ISD833 school within the Cottage Grove Hockey Association boundary, however WAHC members can open enroll in the CGHS. WAHC players have many options on where to play high school hockey. Many players choose to play at ERHS and WHS however many also play at nearby private schools (Cretin, Hill Murray, St. Paul Academy and St. Thomas Academy).

Assessment:

Over the past several years, the WAHC Board has explored a potential association realignment (a 2-program model in lieu of a split) in order:

1. Ensure the program is sustainable in the future with an emphasis on development
2. Provide sufficient time to educate members regarding all the nuances of this issue
3. Continue to solicit feedback from the membership (in 2016-17 WAHC began to survey its membership annually in this regard to gauge their support and to understand our members' points of view on an association realignment)

To date our member surveys and the WAHC Board do not support a split at this time, however, there is interest in supporting the public high school hockey programs as they are within our community-hockey boundary to help grow and strengthen these programs in an effort to help grow the sport/hockey in Woodbury-our community.

Request:

WAHC is therefore requesting an exception to MINNESOTA HOCKEY BYLAWS ARTICLE 5 to allow the alignment of **Youth** teams by high school service area:

1. Squirt level for the 2020-21 Season as a *pilot season*;
2. Peewees in 2021-22; and
3. Bantams in 2022-23.

This would allow us to continue exploring the feasibility and potential impacts of officially modifying the existing affiliate agreement boundary. Both the East Ridge High School and Woodbury High School Boys Hockey coaches support this recommendation.

We are committed to continue hearing our members' point of view on this and all initiatives that may affect the successful operating of our association and are moving forward with a professional survey to formalize our annual membership survey process in this matter. The ability to best develop our players' skills will continue to be the priority in the decision.

Respectfully submitted,

The WAHC Board of Directors

Attachments:

WAHC Intra-Association Alignment _2-Program Model
WAHC by High School



Background

WAHC Mission Statement:

The Woodbury Area Hockey Club aims to provide the most gratifying and rewarding youth hockey experience **for players, parents and coaches** seeking either the **best competitive or recreational** athletic experience in a positive, **developmental** environment at a **reasonable expense**.

WAHC Boundary

WAHC's boundary and jurisdiction is defined and granted by Minnesota Hockey, the state affiliate of USA Hockey, the authorized representative of the International Ice Hockey Federation with exclusive jurisdiction over the conduct of play of ice hockey in the US.

Pursuant to Minnesota Hockey's *community-based model*, the Woodbury Area Hockey Club welcomes all boys and girls that **either live or attend school in the ISD833 school boundary of Woodbury, Afton and Newport**.

2016-17 Commitment:

In 2009-10 East Ridge High School (ERHS) was built – giving our Woodbury area hockey boundary 2 public high schools with hockey programs. Since that time, the ERHS Boys Hockey Program group has been exploring the possibility of separate youth hockey programs to serve our East Ridge High School boundary and Woodbury High School boundary youths.

In 2016-17 the WAHC, believing it is in the best interest of our membership, committed to not only join in but to lead these discussions in order to make the right decision for all our players and families. WAHC is a community-based hockey program. Our players who go on to play high school hockey, not only play for ERHS and WHS but many will play at our neighboring private schools (including Cretin, Hill Murray, St. Paul Academy and St. Thomas Academy). A change in the association model will directly impact all our youth.

At that time, key points we communicated to you on this included:

- The **WAHC board will lead**/facilitate this process with Wes Bolin, WHS Boys Hockey Head Coach and Dustin Vogelgesang, ERHS Boys Hockey Associate Coach as part of the working team. We also asked Tom Kulenkamp, ERHS Girls Hockey Head Coach and Chris Lepper, WHS Girls Hockey Head Coach to join the discussion.
- We are **committed to having one association** and this process will help us to determine if we have 1 or 2 programs within the association; we are not considering splitting into separate associations.
- We are in the beginning stages – determining the best method to explore the options. This will take time.
- We are **committed to hearing your opinion** in the process. We will utilize tryout informational sessions or other in-person meetings to educate on the pros and cons regarding a 2-program model in 2016-17 and then surveying our members each subsequent season.
- The ability to best **develop our players' skills will be the priority in the decision**.

Pursuant to this commitment, in 2016-17 we defined our strategic priorities and introduced the idea of a Hockey Director Model.

WAHC Strategic Priorities:

Establish a premier youth hockey club in partnership with our families and community resulting in **greater participation numbers**. We identified two strategic priorities (1) to grow the interest in youth hockey by being able to provide a more accessible and affordable experience to our younger players, and (2) to retain current players by improving player development and the competitiveness of our programs. With more outside alternatives to association hockey, families are looking outside Woodbury and association hockey for the strongest program.

With these goals, WAHC initiatives in the past 3 seasons included:

- Attract new players –
Drivers: affordability and accessibility
Initiatives: Fee Analysis, reduced fees Girls 6U/8U, weeknight ice solution, long term ice strategy, fundraising program, Intro To Hockey & free equipment to use
- Retain current players –
Drivers: player development and competitiveness
Initiatives:
Coaching Support/Resources-Development, Hockey Director Model, In-Season Player Development vendor(s), Goalie Development, Member Engagement

WAHC Hockey Director Model Implemented 2018-19 Season

In 2018-19, we implemented a Hockey Director Model and made the decision to hire Wes Bolin-Coach WHS Boys Hockey and Dustin Vogelgesang-Coach ERHS Boys Hockey as our Co-Hockey Directors as part of our approach to exploring an association-program split and to continue to support the high school hockey programs within our hockey boundary.

Membership Surveys – A Key first step

We understand that there are different viewpoints-pros and cons around all sides of this issue and we continued to explore how to educate around all the nuances of this issue in order to elicit good feedback from our membership. A Membership Survey was a key first step. We surveyed our membership each of the past 3 seasons to get their input and viewpoint on a split and/or realignment of teams by level to understand their demands/expectations. To date the Membership Survey feedback we received does not support a realignment of teams by high school.

April 2019 Minnesota Hockey Youth Rule Change

At its annual meeting in April 2019, Minnesota Hockey reviewed its moratorium on New School Affiliate Agreements which was set to expire August 2019 and voted to continue this moratorium by adopting the following Bylaw change which precludes 'school teams'.

Article 5

Registration

Except for existing teams and programs in place at the end of the 2018-19 season, no Association may form a Team registered by the Association for reasons other than age (Classification), skill (Division) or gender (Youth, Girls). All Players who are otherwise eligible for a Team shall be allowed to register and

tryout for the team(s). This rule shall not apply to mite, U8, or mini-mite teams which may be formed on a geographic or school attendance basis.

Proposal

The recent MN Hockey Bylaw change *forces our hand* – to make a decision for any association realignment being promoted –as the ERHS Boys Hockey program group reaffirmed its intention for a separate youth program and committed to pursuing an appeal to Minnesota Hockey for a separate association.

From general consensus at our Annual Meeting of Members on April 24, members in attendance recommended that we consider an Intra-Association alignment-2 program model (similar to the Lakeville Hockey ‘silo’) to avoid the possibility of a FULL split – should the ERHS Hockey Program group be successful in their petition for its own youth program. At the meeting, the WAHC Board agreed to survey our membership again to gauge their interest/support for this specific proposal in an effort to inform their decision. If the membership is in favor of the intra association hockey boundary alignment as proposed, the WAHC Board will work with the WHS and ERHS coaches and our Minnesota Hockey District Director on a proposal to Minnesota Hockey requesting an exception (to the new rule/Bylaw change) to allow a 2-program model within our association that would be phased in over 4 seasons beginning 2020-21 season (see phase in time frame/details below) as an alternative to a FULL split of our association on appeal.

Objectives

Enhance each high school hockey program within our hockey boundary while continuing the mission/purpose and priorities of youth hockey – built on the fundamentals of MN Hockey’s community-based hockey model, player skill development and hockey for everyone and our commitment to *Grow the Game* in Woodbury.

We do this by staying as one association and aligning our players to and forming our teams by the ERHS and WHS boundaries beginning with our 8&Under-Mite/MiniMite teams in 2020-21 and followed by Squirts in 2021-22, Peewees in 2022-23 and Bantams and JrGold/16U in 2023-24. **Note:** The Girls levels will be reviewed and decided on annually and only considered for splitting when the numbers could support it.

This proposal allows us to ‘effectively split’ in support of the high school programs, and at the same time continue as one association - advancing Minnesota Hockey’s community-based model, and maximizing the efficiencies, advantages and strengths of a single-association. This Intra-association 2-program alignment, in lieu of a full split, better supports recruitment and retention efforts by allowing us

- (1) to keep our Girls program intact; with teams co-oped at all levels,
- (2) to trial a ‘split’ and to respond to changes in school boundaries, in boundary demographics, and single-program challenges / opportunities minimizing the impact these changes have on our individual player-family experience.
- (3) to avoid/delay the disruptions/problems for our WHS boundary (and our neighboring association – Cottage Grove Hockey Association/CGHA) that are accelerated by a full split thereby minimizing the negative impact on our player-families’ hockey experience and our recruitment & retention efforts within these boundaries.

- (4) the flexibility to co-op programs if needed at each Youth level when the player numbers are lacking

Benefits Offered In Support of a 'Silo/2-program Intra-Association Alignment

- Creates branding for each high school hockey program – a greater identity and promotion of the two high school hockey programs that are within our hockey boundary.
- More dedicated focus and support from the high school hockey programs with our boundary resulting in a single development approach within each program - more aligned with high school objectives
- Developing all players at all levels
- Stronger Coach buy-in / support-resources
- Allows more kids to play at a higher level - at all levels of play.
- Advances team success / core chemistry as players in each program grow/develop together from youth through high school programs
- Promotes/Strengthens member engagement – building parallel infrastructure within both programs
- Having 2 programs under the one-association umbrella (versus a FULL SPLIT of the association), promotes consistent/unified ice and administrative operations – maximizing long term ice strategy, hosted tournament opportunities, lawful gambling, sponsorship-fundraising – directly benefiting / impacting affordability of hockey
- This 'silo' approach versus a FULL SPLIT, highlights the challenges & opportunities of our closed WHS boundary and allows us to grow through and respond to declining player counts and anticipated demographic changes minimizing any negative impact to our families
- No disruption to CGHA East Ridge High School boundary.
- Follows majority of other sports in Woodbury area which are aligned by the high school boundaries

Some of the Challenges & Considerations Expressed with Change in the Association Model

- Lack of goalies at each level per HS boundary.
- Lack of numbers to form teams at every level.
- Kids being forced to play down due to lack of numbers/teams at each level.
- Always and forever changing HS boundaries impacting kids/teams until ER area is landlocked like WHS.
- Need to Co-op teams means we're not in a position of strength and able to split.
- Need to Co-op entire girls program means we're not in a position of strength and able to split.
- Changing socioeconomic landscape within our hockey boundary and what impact that would have on the future of the WHS side of the silo.
- What has happened to other youth associations that have either "split" or been impacted by a split with a similar socioeconomic makeup of Woodbury/ER?
- What has a split done to the community aspect/feel of each association and how do they interact with each other? Has it created unity/division in the community? Is it a healthy relationship?
- Additional costs with duplication of infrastructure required with a 2-program or Full split.

WAHC By The Numbers

Player Counts – By Level of Play 2009-10 through 2018-19

ALL PROGRAMS										
LEVEL of PLAY	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Jr Gold/16U	35	36	45	36	35	34	20	0	37	33
Bantam	117	111	104	101	86	93	104	100	95	92
Peewee	131	119	106	115	128	118	96	105	128	119
Squirt	108	132	141	128	110	102	113	110	110	116
Mite	116	121	117	115	119	101	106	117	125	124
MiniMite	106	109	87	92	84	93	104	101	109	109
15U (14U pre2016-17)	17	20	22	24	17	0	0	0	15	17
12U	41	42	38	45	41	25	31	38	48	41
10U	41	45	46	29	30	41	45	35	47	51
Girls8U	27	20	24	29	32	36	25	19	45	50
Girls6U			13	25	23	26	17	29	29	28
TOTAL	739	755	743	739	705	669	661	654	788	780

Player and Team Counts – Youth and Girls

YOUTH & GIRLS PROGRAMS - PLAYERS						
	2016-17		2017-18		2018-19	
<i>LEVEL of PLAY</i>	GIRLS	YOUTH	GIRLS	YOUTH	GIRLS	YOUTH
Jr Gold/16U		0		37		33
Bantam		100		95		92
Peewee		105		128		119
Squirt		110		110		116
Mite		117		125		124
MiniMite		101		109		109
Girls 15U			15		17	
Girls 12U	38		48		41	
Girls 10U	35		47		51	
Girls 8U	19		45		50	
Girls 6U	29		29		28	
TOTAL	121	533	184	604	187	593
Total Registered Players		654		788		780

YOUTH & GIRLS PROGRAMS TEAMS						
	2016-17		2017-18		2018-19	
<i>LEVEL of PLAY</i>	GIRLS	YOUTH	GIRLS	YOUTH	GIRLS	YOUTH
Jr Gold/16U		1		2		2
Bantam		6		6		6
Peewee		7		8		8
Squirt		8		8		8
Mite		9		9		9
MiniMite		9		9		8
Girls 15U			1		1	
Girls 12U	3		3		3	
Girls 10U	3		4		4	
Girls 8U	2		4		4	
Girls 6U	3		2		2	
TOTAL	11	40	14	42	14	41
Total Rostered Teams		51		56		55

ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

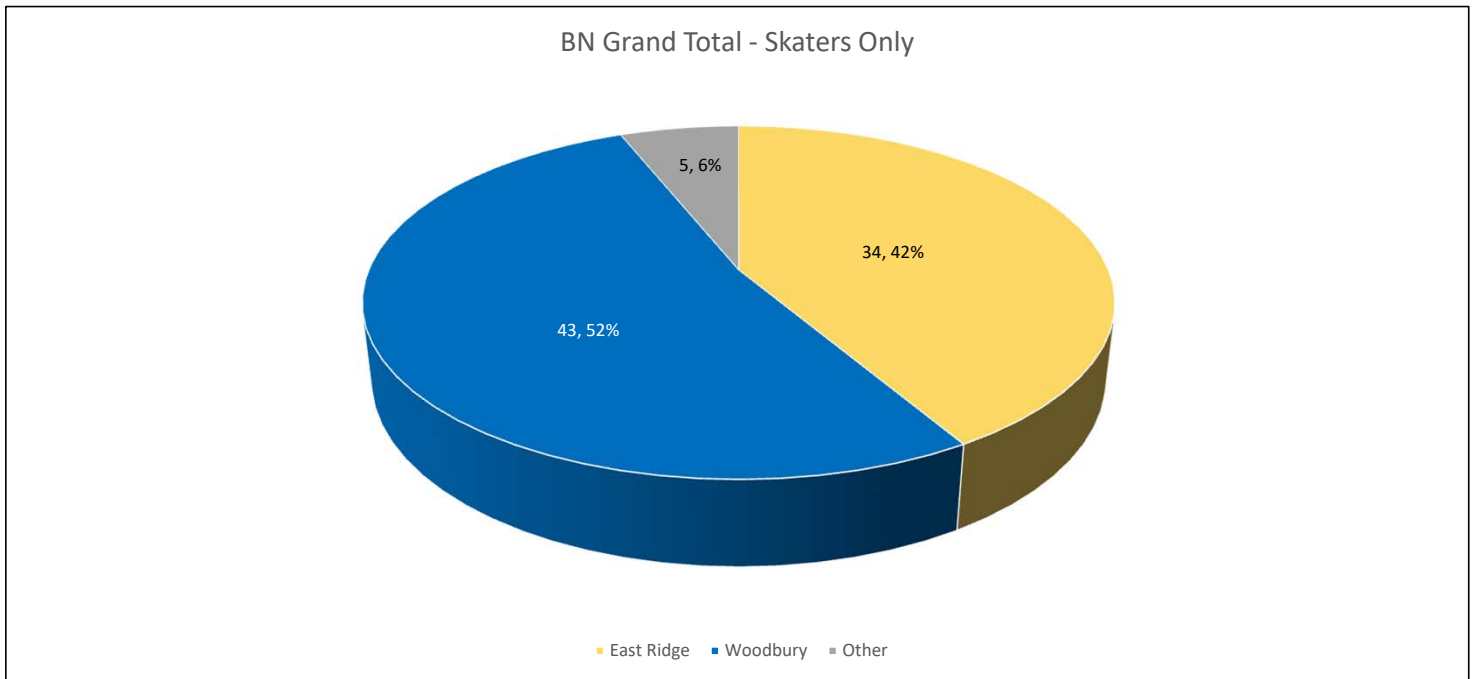
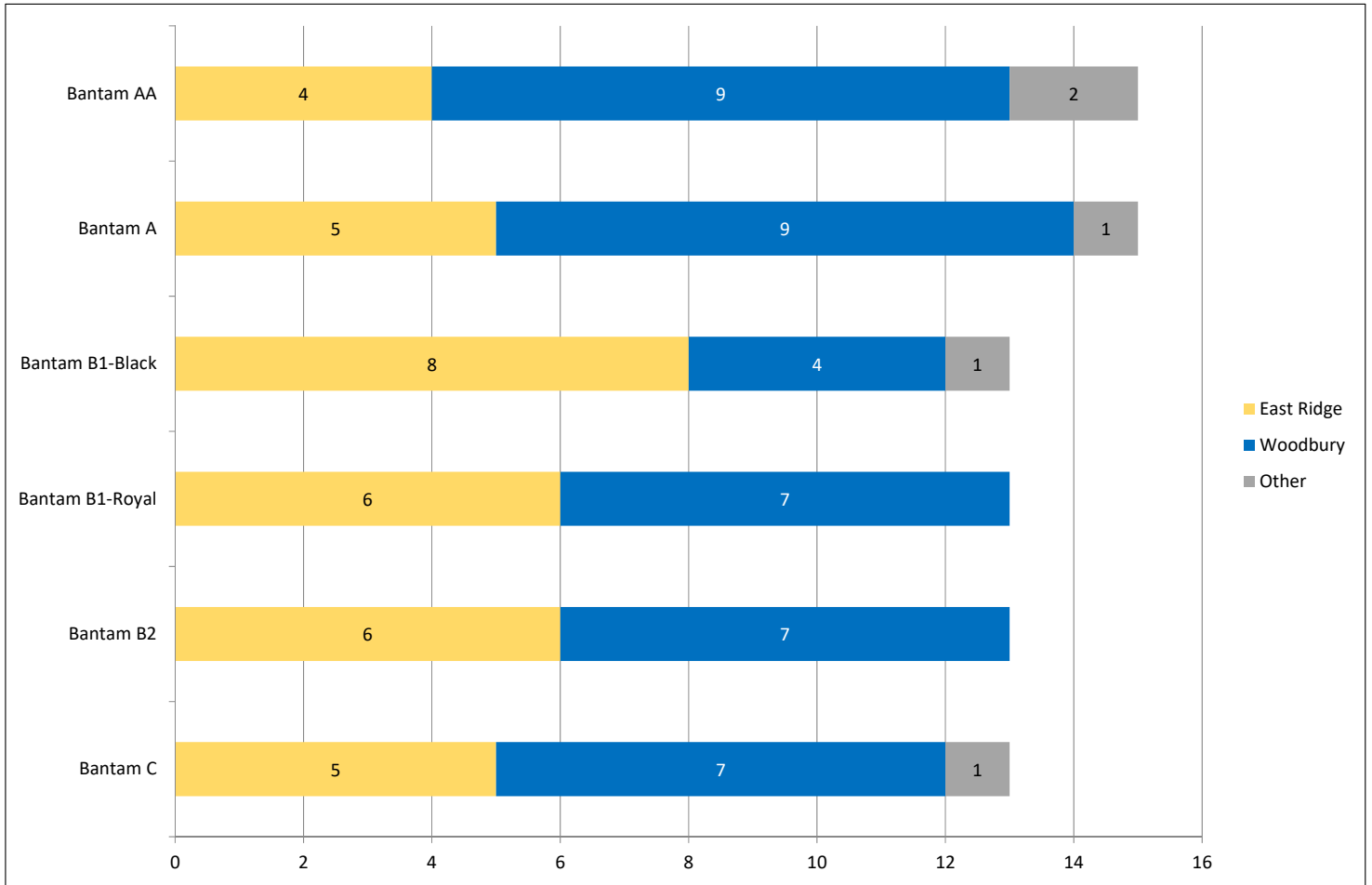
Association	2015-16		2018-19	
	Population	Association Membership	Population (a)	Association Membership (b)
Woodbury	68000	650	69800	778
Eagan	67000	515	66600	467
Osseo/Maple Grove	65000	1099	73800	1155
Eden Prairie	62000	526	64400	462
Burnsville	60000	336	61400	124
Lakeville	60000	818	63700	771
Minnetonka	51000	965	53100	1029
Apple Valley	50000	249	52400	301
St. Louis Park	45000	336	49000	380
Stillwater	20000	920	19400	868

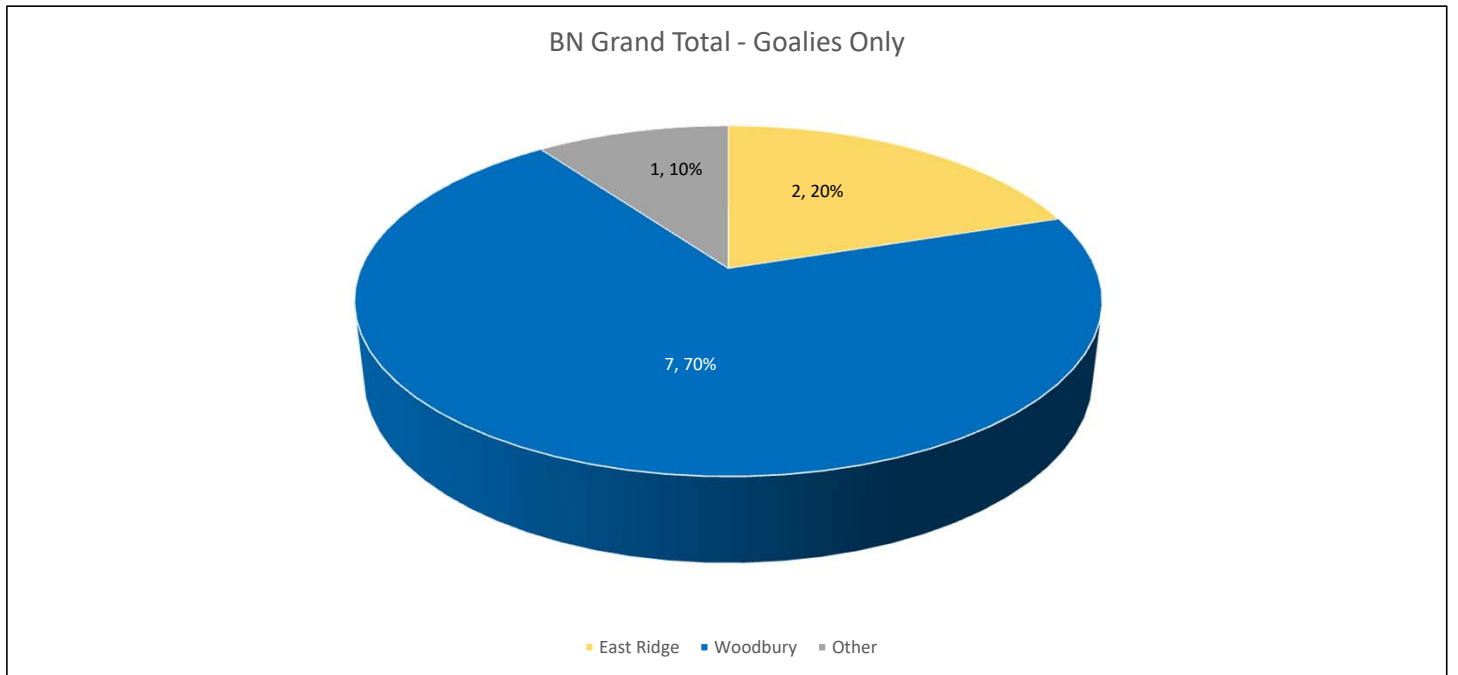
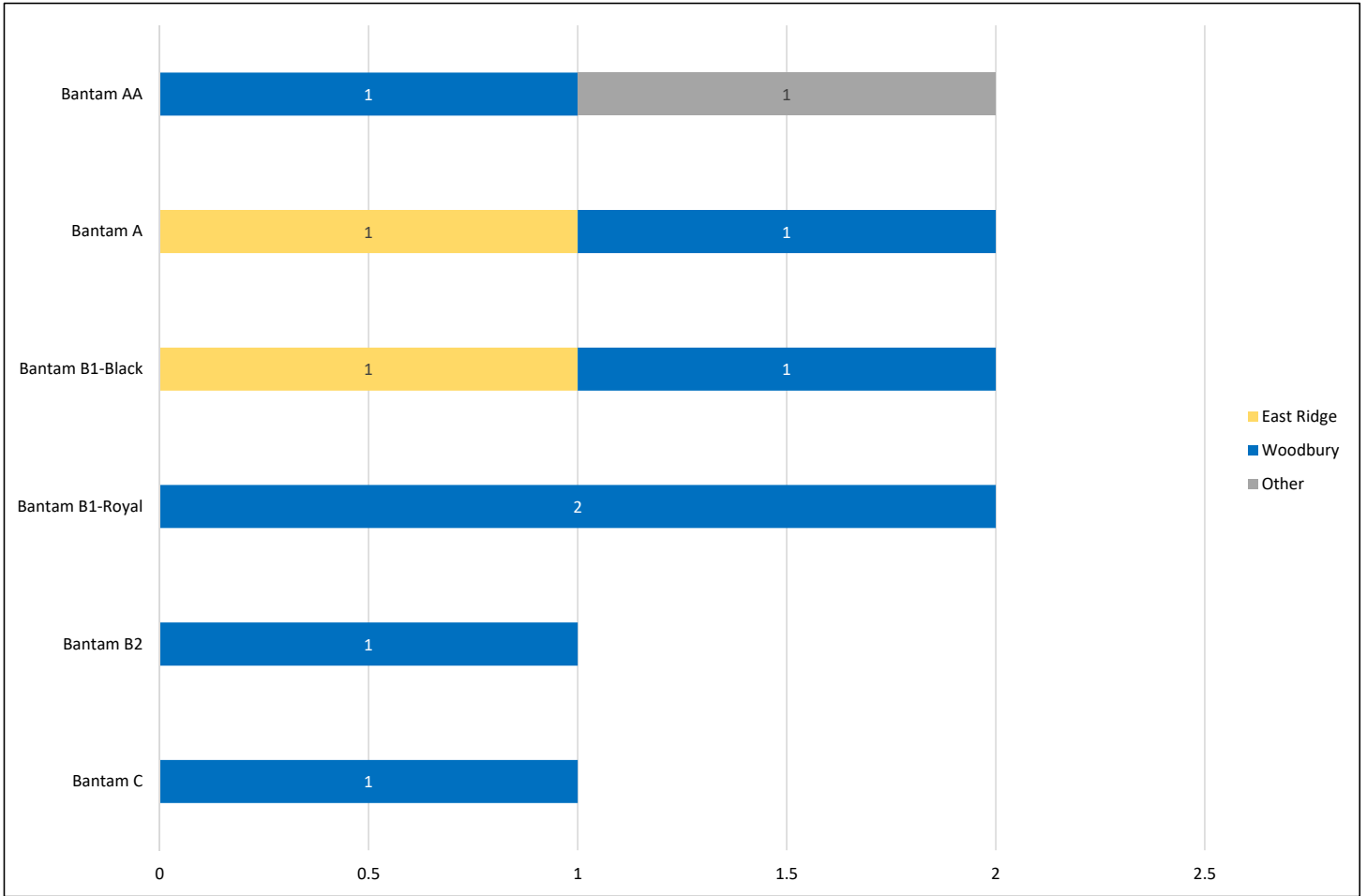
(a) source: '2017' population per <http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities>

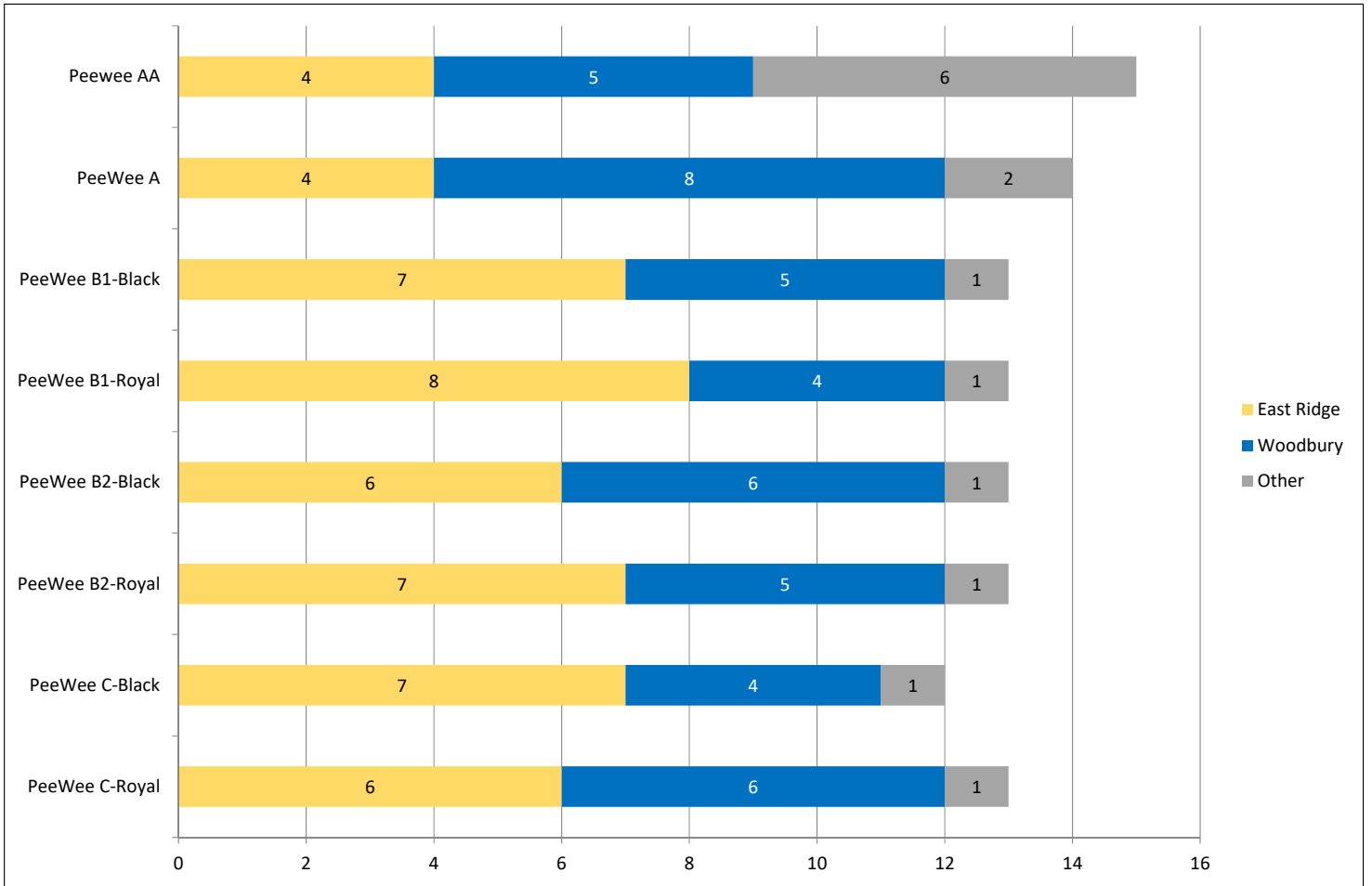
(b) source: Todd Elmer-USA Hockey MN District Registrar

WAHC Player Counts – By WHS & ERHS Boundary

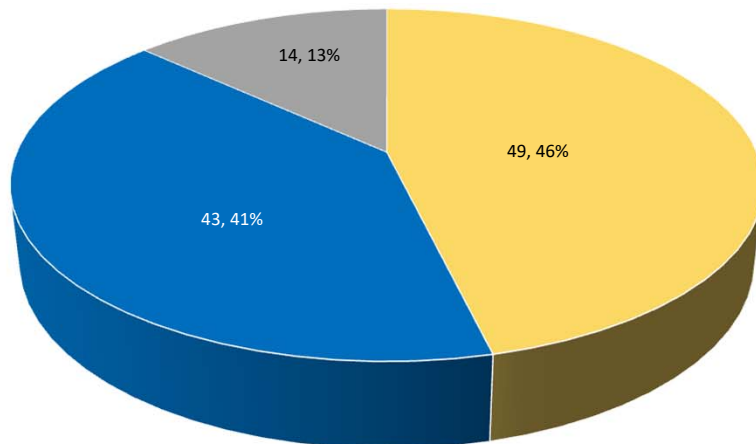
[INSERT – D. Krafts By High School Drafts]







PW Grand Total - Skaters Only



East Ridge Woodbury Other

