

City of Guelph

Parks and Recreation Master Plan



August 2023



Accessible formats available by calling 519-822-1260 extension 3371 or TTY 519-826-9771

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to our local community, community groups, Indigenous peoples and agency partners for their participation in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP). The PRMP was built collaboratively in a way that is consistent with our values. We acknowledge the work of our staff and community.

City of Guelph Territorial acknowledgement

Guelph is situated on traditional territories of the Attiwonderonk and the Haudenosaunee. We recognize the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation as a treaty partner, through Between the Lakes Treaty No. 3, on whose traditional territory we live and work.

The place we now call Guelph is steeped in rich Indigenous history and is home to many First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Mixed Ancestry people today.

Beyond land acknowledgement

Land acknowledgments are crucial in sustaining awareness and remembrance; however, they require action and participation to fulfill a purpose. We each hold responsibility for participating in this process. By taking time to learn about the truths and histories, through self-reflection and building relationships with Indigenous communities, we can begin the process of reconciliation.

We recognize that strong, mutually beneficial municipal-Indigenous relations is a necessary component of reconciliation, and we are committed to supporting this process in the most effective way possible. We will continue to seek out and foster partnerships with Indigenous governments and community members of First Nation, Inuit, Métis and mixed Indigenous ancestry as we work through the objectives of the PRMP. Our desire to strengthen relationships, engage in meaningful conversations and willingness to learn will inform the implementation of the PRMP and future work plans.



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■ Executive summary

Parks and recreation are vital public services that contribute to the rich culture and vibrancy of Guelph's community. The benefits of parks and recreation are numerous. Not only do they support opportunities for individuals to play, relax or learn new skills, they also contribute greatly to the climate resilience and economic vitality of the city. The City's range of indoor and outdoor recreation spaces and programs contribute to the community's well-being by offering residents opportunities to connect with themselves, with each other, and with nature. As Guelph grows, parks and recreation offerings must also grow and adapt to continue to support community well-being.

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP) sets direction for parkland, recreation facilities and programs in the city over the next 10 years and beyond. It identifies needs for current and future residents, establishes future initiatives, and guides strategic investment. It is a framework that lays the foundation for parks and recreation service delivery, while allowing for flexibility to respond to changing needs.

The PRMP was developed over four phases of work that included an inventory of parks and recreation assets, analysis of strengths and opportunities in the parks and recreation system, development of the Council-approved Park Plan, and development of the final Parks and Recreation Master Plan. An iterative process was followed that included research and benchmarking, validated by extensive community engagement, to understand future needs and gaps in service delivery.

The plan is guided by an overall vision that outlines a desired future for parks and recreation in Guelph:

Parks and recreation are essential to everyday life in Guelph. To be future-ready, Guelph needs parks, facilities and programs that are sustainable, inclusive, adaptable and have a built-in ability to respond to a growing and diverse community. The City needs to connect people to each other, healthy living and the environment.

Six core values of the plan support the vision for parks and recreation. These core values drive the outcomes for this plan and will be embedded in the work of the Parks and Recreation departments. The core values of the plan are:

All people can participate in recreation



Parks and recreation facilities are welcoming and meaningful places for all people



A healthy and vibrant community is supported through parks and recreation



Infrastructure is maintained, sustainable and responsive to community changes



The natural environment is protected, restored and responsibly managed.



The Parks and Recreation departments work together with the community.





The plan provides nearly 100 recommendations relating to park planning, park amenities, indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, aquatics service delivery, community development, recreation programming, and departmental strategy documents. Each of the objectives identified in the Recommendation summary and prioritization section of this plan is intended to guide parks and recreation service delivery over the next 10 years and beyond to achieve the vision of the plan.

The implementation of the plan's recommendations will require a balance of investing in new and existing infrastructure. To meet the needs of the community with limited land resources, careful consideration for intensifying and optimizing existing parks and recreation facilities will be required. Meaningful community engagement for capital projects and processes will be coordinated as appropriate during implementation of recommended objectives. The proposed pace of implementation allows for flexibility and will be based on need, resource capacity, budget approval, and timing of Secondary Plan development, including the Guelph Innovation District and Clair-Maltby.



■ Introduction

Guelph is a city of rivers and green spaces. A city of lush natural areas, abundant tree canopy, a robust trail system, and well over 100 parks. A place where residents value the city's natural resources for its beauty and biodiversity. A place where spontaneous and organized recreation is fostered through thoughtful placemaking and programming. And a place where every year, thousands of residents and visitors enjoy its recreation centres, cultural heritage sites, festivals, sporting events and outdoor activities. Guelph is a place where everyone is welcome and residents are proud to call this city home.

Guelph is also a city that is growing. The population is planned to increase by over 60,000 to a total of 208,000 by 2051. About half of the city's projected population growth is planned in the existing built-up areas of the city, and the other half in greenfield areas.

As the population grows, so too must the community services that support daily living in Guelph. Parks and recreation are vital public services that contribute to the rich culture and vibrancy of Guelph's community. This plan will explore how the City's Parks and Recreation departments' service delivery will respond to the pressures of a growing and changing community over the next 10 years and beyond.

Purpose of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Parks and recreation - a phrase so common that its true significance is often overlooked and reduced to its literal components: open green spaces and the activities people do in their spare time. But parks and recreation are so much more than that. They are the vehicle for well-being among residents, offering opportunities to connect with oneself, with each other, and with nature.

In Guelph, parks and recreation can mean taking a child for their first ride on the carousel in Riverside Park; a newcomer experiencing a taste of Canadian culture by learning to skate at the West End Community Centre; youth learning teamwork through sports participation; or an older adult taking a Tai Chi class in the park. These experiences are more than just a green space or a recreation facility. They are fundamental to quality of life.

Together parks and recreation are something bigger: at their core, they build community. Ultimately that is the driver for this plan. As Guelph continues to grow and change, parks and recreation must adapt to continue to support community well-being.

The PRMP sets direction for parkland, recreation facilities and programs in the city over the next 10 years and beyond. It identifies needs for current and future residents, establishes future initiatives, and guides strategic investment. It is a framework that lays the foundation for parks and recreation service delivery, while allowing for flexibility to respond to changing needs.

Parks and recreation are essential public services

Parks and recreation are vitally important public services—like roads, sewers, stormwater management and waste collection. They are fundamental to quality of life for residents and make Guelph more livable, environmentally resilient, and attractive to businesses and future residents.

Some benefits of parks and recreation are easily quantifiable. In 2017, Guelph's Tourism Economic Impact Visitor Survey found that the 312,700 people who visited Guelph in the previous year for leisure and recreation contributed \$63M to the local economy by spending on accommodation, entertainment, transportation, food and beverage, and shopping.¹ Other benefits of parks and recreation are less quantifiable, yet their impact on environmental and public health is substantial, as shown below.

¹ City of Guelph, Tourism Economic Impact, Visitor Survey 2017 ©IPSOS

Benefits of parks and recreation

Community benefits

- Physical and mental well-being of community members
- Positive outlet for youth at risk
- Contribution to independent living among older adults
- Access to nature
- Opportunities for social interaction
- Opportunities to learn skill through structured and unstructured activities
- Opportunities to play
- Establishment of a sense of place and civic pride
- Aesthetic appeal and relief from urban form
- Opportunities for food production
- Opportunities to highlight and observe cultural heritage
- Opportunities for ancestral connection to nature

Environmental benefits

- Wildlife habitat for plants and animals
- Support of biodiversity
- Reduction of urban heat island effect
- Improved air quality
- Contribution to overall tree canopy cover
- Resilience to climate change
- Opportunities for environmental stewardship

Economic benefits

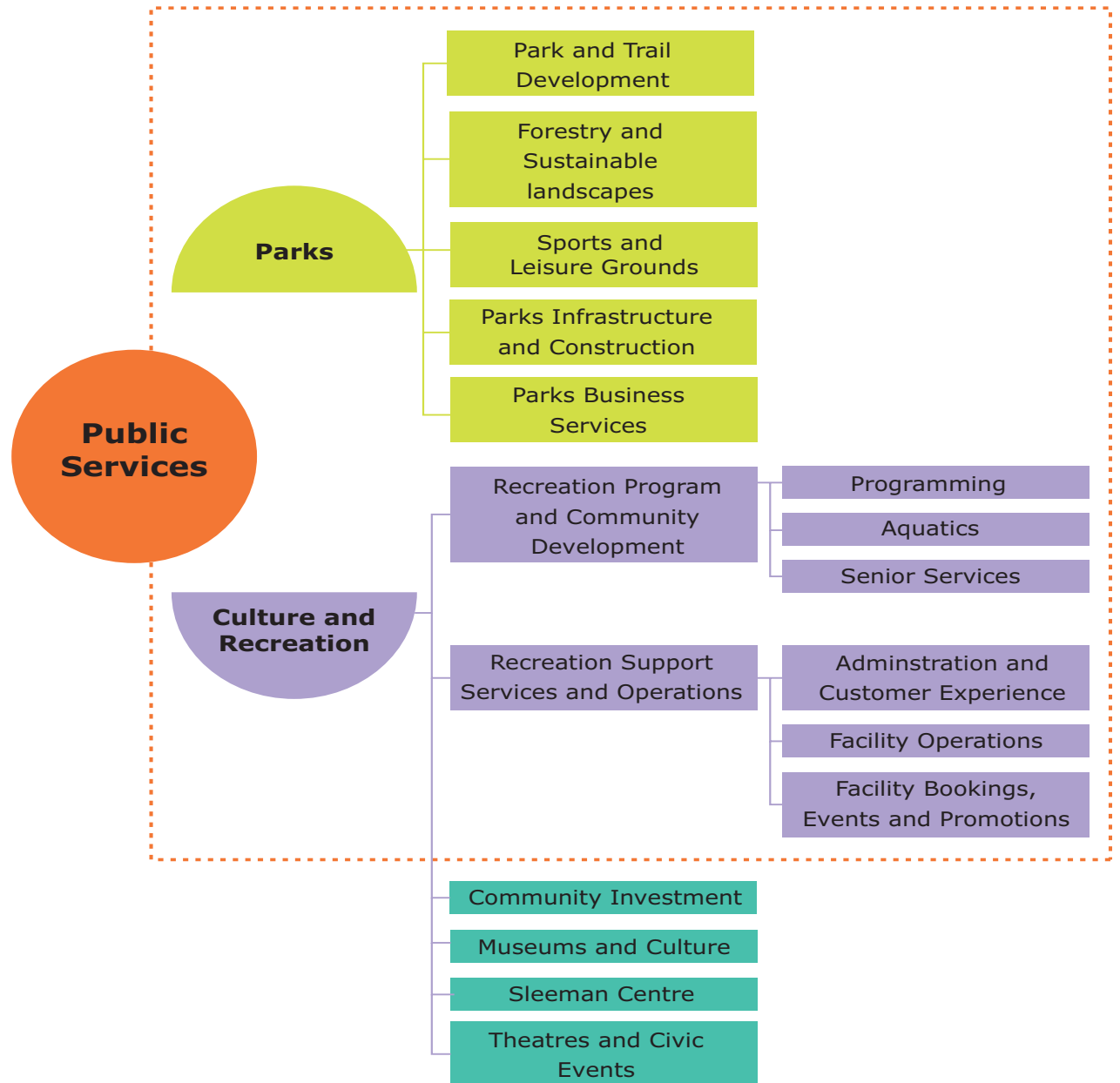
- Reduced healthcare costs associated with improved physical and mental well-being
- Increased property values
- Revenue generation from program and service delivery
- Contribution to local economy through sport tourism
- Contribution to local economy through hosting of festivals and events



■ Department structure

The Parks and Recreation departments work closely together under the City's Public Services unit. Although they are distinct departments, each with their own objectives, they work in partnership to deliver parks and recreation programs, facilities, and services to enhance quality of life in Guelph.

Figure 1: Scope of services included in the PRMP





■ Alignment with other plans and strategies

Through the [Community Plan](#), Guelph residents identified what matters most to them. The PRMP not only champions and further explores the community value of 'We play and explore,' but many other values of the Community Plan, including 'We are home,' 'We protect our environment,' 'We are community,' and 'We feel well.'

The PRMP is not designed to exist in isolation. The vision and core values of this plan are founded on Guelph's [Strategic Plan](#) priorities of 'Sustaining our future,' 'Working together for our future,' and 'Building our future.' To be future ready, the PRMP assesses Guelph's current infrastructure, programming and services to understand and determine what will be needed as the city grows. The plan ultimately recommends policies and actions to support the community's recreational needs.

In 2022, Council approved the City's [Park Plan](#). The Park Plan examined the need for parkland in the city and was a requirement under the [Ontario Planning Act](#) to support the City's continued use of a Parkland Dedication Bylaw. The Park Plan was advanced before the completion of the PRMP to meet provincially mandated timelines. The PRMP builds on the land needs and themes identified in the Park Plan.

Beyond the Parks and Recreation departments, the City has made tremendous progress on being future ready through the completion of many departmental master plans. The PRMP is aligned with many other internal and external guidance documents that support an overall vision for the City. These include but are not limited to:

External plans and legislation

- Provincial Policy Statement
- Ontario Planning Act
- Parks for all (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association and Canadian Parks Council)
- Framework for Recreation in Canada (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association and Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council)
- Healthy Community Design Baseline Project (Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health)

City strategies and plans

- Guelph Trail Master Plan
- Natural Heritage Action Plan
- Urban Forest Management Plan
- Active Transportation Network Study
- Older Adult Strategy
- Think Youth: Youth Strategy
- Facility Accessibility Design Manual
- Transportation Master Plan
- Stormwater Management Master Plan
- Water and Wastewater Servicing Master Plan
- Guelph's Race To Zero Plan
- Guelph's Good Service Standards
- One City. One Voice. Shared Purpose.



■ Master planning process

The PRMP process was led by a City staff working group with assistance from external resources. Evidence-based research, demographics, benchmarking, community feedback, policy analysis and trends in parks and recreation planning were used to understand future community needs and gaps in service delivery. A thorough process was followed that validated research with input from the community and interested parties. In addition to feedback received specific to the PRMP, feedback and data collected as part of the 2019 Parkland Dedication Bylaw update and the 2022 Park Plan was used to arrive at outcomes.

The plan was created over four phases of work.

The first phase of work confirmed parks and recreation assets. A detailed inventory of resources was compiled using data from many different sources.

The second phase of work identified strengths and opportunities within the parks and recreation system. A review of emerging trends, and comparison of services and infrastructure to similar communities was undertaken.

The third phase of work included an in-depth review of parkland needs, which resulted in the development of the Council-approved Park Plan.

The fourth and final phase of work is the development of the PRMP, which identifies future parks and recreation needs and establishes initiatives and priorities to meet those needs.

Figure 2: Master planning process



■ Guelph now and future

To deliver parks and recreation services that are appropriate for the community, it is important to understand who is living in the city and how that might change in the future. New people can bring new life to the parks and recreation system and change the way public spaces are used. Some areas of the city are growing denser, while other areas are being developed for the first time.



Guelph now, as a village of 100 people

Through the Community Plan, the City developed an easy-to-understand profile of the community called Guelph as a Village of 100 People. The community profile shows what the city would look like if Guelph was only 100 people. In this village of 100 people, each person represents 1,318 Guelphites based on the 2016 Census data.

Key considerations

- Guelph's median age is 38.3;
- Guelph has more young adults aged 20-24 than many similar, southern Ontario communities;
- 77 out of 100 people speak English as their mother tongue—the next top five languages spoken at home are Mandarin, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Italian and French;
- People in Guelph have many different ethnic origins. Out of 100 people, three people are First Nations, Inuit and or Métis Peoples, 27 are North American (non-First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples), 72 are European, 16 are Asian, one is Caribbean, two are Latin American, two are African, and one is Oceanian;



- Guelph has a very diverse economy and has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country;
- The median household income is \$67,829, yet 11 out of 100 people live in poverty;
- 69 per cent of people live and work in Guelph (10 per cent work downtown) and 31 per cent live in Guelph but work outside Guelph;
- Guelph is a tourist destination with about 1.7 million visitors yearly; specifically tracked were 163,205 sporting event visitors and 49,757 festival visitors.



Guelph in the future

Guelph is a city that is growing. The population is forecasted to increase by over 60,000 people to a total of 208,000 by 2051. About half of this growth is planned in the existing built-up area through infill development, redevelopment and intensification. More residents will mean increased demand on parks and recreation services. The city will need to use its land and facilities more efficiently, expand the park system, and create new spaces to accommodate sports and recreation.

As part of the Shaping Guelph: Growth Management Strategy, the City prepared a long-term population and housing growth analysis. Population and demographic forecasts suggest that welcoming newcomers and accommodating older adults will be important considerations as the City plans for park and recreation amenities, facilities, and services in the future. The impact of these demographic shifts on the delivery of services presents both opportunities and challenges. For example, recreation activities popularized by immigrant populations may require calibration of City facilities and programming to react to emerging trends. Meanwhile, the increase of older adults who may have more income, time, and health to participate in leisure activities may put pressures on existing facilities.



As the city grows and changes, more people are living in medium or high-density housing types like townhouses and apartments compared to single detached homes. This shift in housing type is an important consideration for the type of park and recreation services offered and where they are located. People living in denser areas may face different barriers and/or seek out parks and recreation in different ways than people living in detached homes with private outdoor spaces.

Key considerations for the future

- The percentage of youth (0-19) is forecast to decline from 23 per cent in 2016 to 20 per cent in 2051;



- The percentage of older seniors (age 75+) is forecast to increase from six per cent in 2016 to 16 per cent in 2051;



- The percentage of young adults (20-34) is forecast to decline from 23 per cent in 2016 to 20 per cent in 2051;



- 69 per cent of population growth is anticipated to be driven by migration;



- The percentage of adults (35-54) is forecast to decline from 28 per cent in 2016 to 25 per cent in 2051;



- The city is forecast to accommodate just over 1,400 new migrants per year, representing an increase of 31 per cent compared to average historical migration.



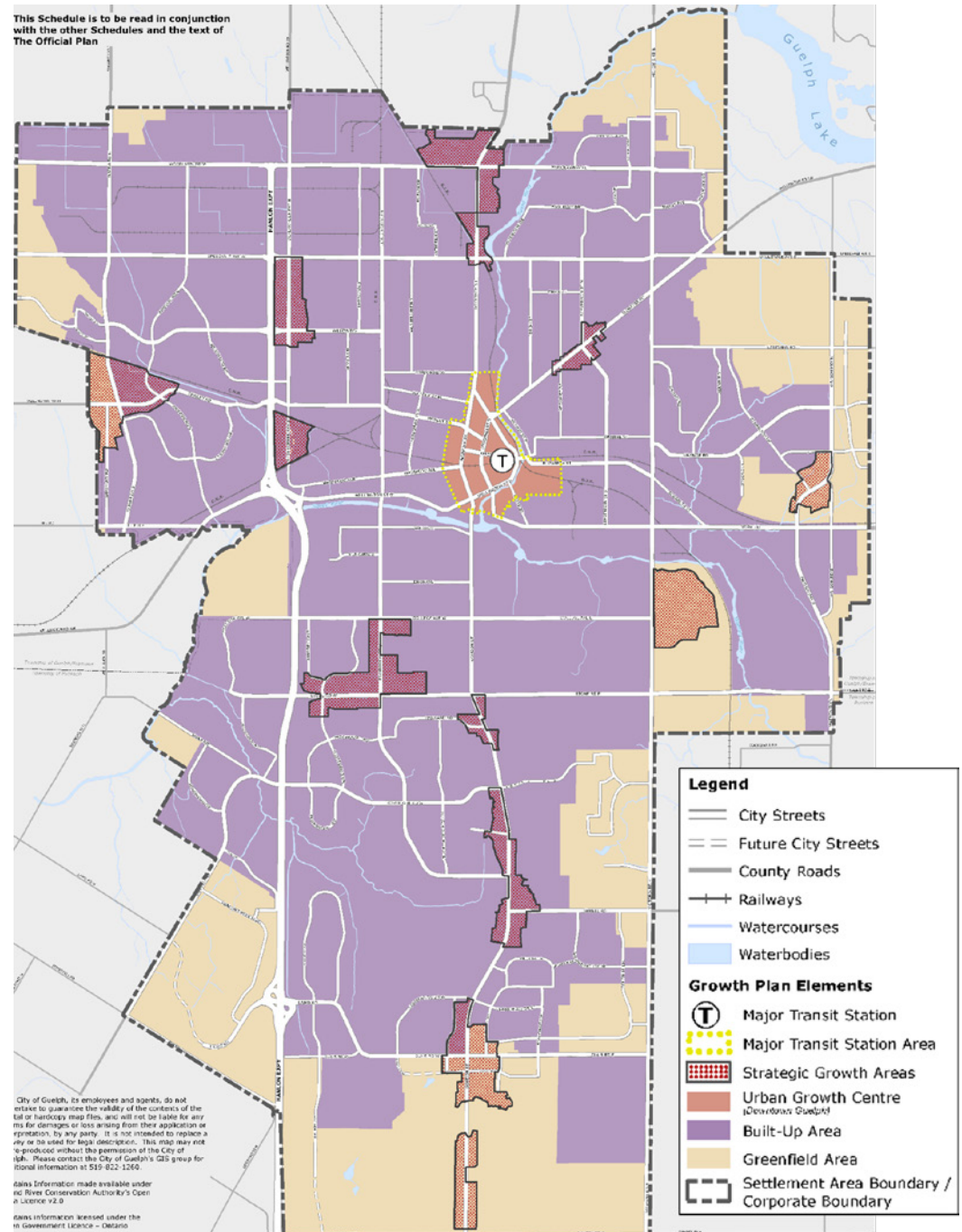
- The percentage of empty-nesters/younger seniors (55-74) is forecast to decline from 20 per cent in 2016 to 19 per cent in 2051;



Guelph's urban structure

Guelph's urban structure prioritizes areas of growth—through an Urban Growth Centre (Downtown) and Strategic Growth Areas (shown in red and peach in the map). These areas are intended to be focal points in neighbourhoods and include a mix of uses, intermodal hubs and medium to high density housing. Managing growth and supporting residents' park and recreation needs requires innovative solutions and strong policy directions. Figure 3 maps the urban structure to understand where we might need to acquire parks in areas of growth.² This growth data will help staff determine how to plan for future parks and recreation opportunities.

Figure 3: Guelph's urban structure



² City of Guelph, 2022, Shaping Guelph: Growth Management Strategy



■ Community engagement

A robust community engagement process was delivered to ensure that the PRMP reflects community opinions and priorities for future parks and recreation needs. Community engagement built on the previous work of the Community Plan and Strategic Plan, and where possible, community feedback from related City projects and initiatives was captured. Specifically, feedback collected as part of the 2022 Park Plan and the 2019 Parkland Dedication Bylaw update was used to help inform the PRMP.

Efforts were taken to consult with a broad range of Guelph residents and organizations across various geographic areas and demographic groups. It is important to note that survey and community feedback data is a source of information that helps paint a picture, but this data is checked against other statistically valid sources like the City's [Citizen Satisfaction Survey](#), public health data and demographic information.

Listening opportunities

A variety of engagement activities were offered over the course of the master plan development, including:



4 Community surveys



2 Public open houses



3 Community workshops



2 Community focus groups



1 Developer focus group



1 Sport user group meeting



15 Parks and recreation facility pop-ups



5 Community pop-ups

5 Presentations to Advisory Committees of Council, including the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Natural Heritage Advisory Committee



1 Brainstorming session with over 300 children in grades 2-5 during the City's Local Government Week visits



10 Internal participant workshops with key municipal departments



10 Individual community group meetings with Youth Council, Youth Providers Committee, Local Immigration Partnership, Upper Grand District School Board, Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition and Indigenous Nations



1 Virtual Sharing Circle as part of an ongoing relationship building initiative with community members of First Nation, Inuit, Métis and mixed Indigenous ancestry. The conversation was themed around parks and outdoor spaces.





Community feedback

Community engagement periods were aligned to the four phases of the master planning process. Below is a compilation of the key highlights from all four phases of community engagement. Engagement summaries for each phase of the project can be found in Appendix A: Community engagement summary.

Accessibility and inclusion

Accessible and inclusive parks and recreation facilities and programs are a priority for Guelph residents. This includes removing physical and financial barriers to participation as well as ensuring equitable access to facilities and information.

Green spaces

Overwhelmingly, Guelph residents value green spaces, including parkland and trails. People want more trees and naturalized areas in parks.

Land supply

Guelph residents have an interest in parkland inventory and ensuring the supply of land for parks and recreation is sufficient for future generations. People want to protect existing parks and continue to grow the park system.

Amenity and program variety

Residents value a highly developed parks and recreation system that offers a wide range of amenities and programming geared towards all ages, abilities, backgrounds and interests.

Investment in aging infrastructure

People want existing parks and recreation facilities to be in good condition and replaced as quality declines. There is particular interest in ensuring each area of the city has the same quality of parks and recreation amenities.



■ Vision for the future

Guelph's vision for the future of parks and recreation services comes from the values and priorities identified by the community through community engagement. The PRMP builds on the strategic directions and goals of the Official Plan, Community Plan and Strategic Plan. The new vision outlines a desired future for parks and recreation in Guelph:

Parks and recreation are essential to everyday life in Guelph. To be future-ready, Guelph needs parks, facilities and programs that are sustainable, inclusive, adaptable and have a built-in ability to respond to a growing and diverse community. The City needs to connect people to each other, healthy living and the environment.

Core values

This plan includes six core values that support the vision for parks and recreation. They provide direction for future action plans and decision-making. These core values drive the outcomes for this plan and will be embedded in the work of the parks and recreation departments. The PRMP core values align with the Strategic Plan priorities of Building our Future, Sustaining our Future, and Working Together for our Future.



A healthy and vibrant community is supported through parks and recreation

Parks and recreation help promote health, both physically and mentally. Parks and recreation programs offer opportunities to participate in physical activity, which can reduce and even prevent health problems. Parks can help people get outside and moving for low or no cost at all.

Guelph residents feel a sense of stewardship for their parks and feel empowered to contribute to positive change. For many community members, leisure, culture and good mental health are tied to green spaces.

All people can participate in recreation

Guelph residents should feel welcome in parks and recreation facilities through opportunities for all ages, abilities, backgrounds and genders.

As a corporation, Guelph values inclusion which makes us “stronger for our differences.” There is new awareness about systemic inequity and an increased desire to create equity of opportunity, safety and inclusion for all in the community. Guelph is committed to improving the safety and inclusiveness of spaces through programming, education, activities, events, and enhanced facility design.



Parks and recreation facilities are welcoming and meaningful places for all people

Parks and recreation facilities are an important part of Guelph’s public realm. Recreational spaces create opportunities for social connection—either through intentional or casual gatherings. It is important that everyone feels welcome and that the City’s spaces help facilitate this.

Activated and interesting spaces provide opportunities for social interaction and help differentiate Guelph from other cities. The City’s parks and facilities need to be designed or reshaped to nurture social well-being, provide landmark beauty and offer a safe place where everyone belongs.



Infrastructure is maintained, sustainable and responsive to community changes

A functioning park and recreation system is made up of different spaces, places, and recreational opportunities. This diversity is versatile and empowering, but also makes it challenging to provide sustainable operations practices in the future. Strong asset management and operational plans, backed by long-term financial and resource strategies, are needed to ensure the stability and sustainability of Guelph’s parks and recreation system.

As the population grows, Guelph will need to reshape its parks and facilities to meet new and emerging needs and service level expectations. Guelph is committed to providing an optimal level of service that meets community needs, is sustainable, affordable and realistic. Meeting current service demands, while updating and expanding the parks and recreation system presents opportunities for the future.



The natural environment is protected, restored and responsibly managed

A healthy community is one where there are intact ecosystems and places for people to enjoy nature. Guelph will develop a park system that helps protect the Natural Heritage System from degradation by offering places for people to connect with nature in parks. The City will also expand the urban forest and look for spaces outside of the Natural Heritage System to plant more trees to help achieve the goal of 40 per cent canopy cover.

The park system also presents an opportunity to build a climate resilient city. Parks can help protect against the effects of climate change including extreme weather events, flooding, intense heat and poor air quality by using green infrastructure and expanding the urban forest.

The Parks and Recreation departments work together with the community

Guelph will work with the community to listen, learn and to help improve service delivery and communication. Developing partnerships with local organizations, private partners, schools and residents is important to the work the City does. Guelph can develop new spaces or programs through new service-delivery models that would otherwise be unavailable due to financial or resource limitations.

The City has an opportunity and responsibility to listen to the community as the parks and recreation system grows. There is also an important opportunity to be more intentional with addressing systemic inequities in parks and recreation.



■ Parks

What makes Guelph, Guelph? The City asked residents through the Community Plan and the answer for many is the city's rivers, parks, natural areas and tree canopy. Guelphites are deeply passionate about the city's green spaces and are stewards of the environment. The Parks department is responsible for planning, developing, operating and maintaining over 400 hectares of parkland. In addition to parks, the department stewards over 850 hectares of Natural Heritage System (NHS) and 130 kilometres of trails.

In 2022, Council approved the City's Park Plan. The plan examined the need for parkland in the city. It is a foundational document to the PRMP and the two documents work together to guide the work of the parks and recreation departments. Land needs are not the focus of the PRMP because the Park Plan established key issues and needs relating to parkland in the city. The PRMP builds on the land needs identified in the Park Plan and presents new challenges that have emerged since the adoption of the Park Plan. The PRMP focuses on trends in park planning and outdoor recreation, departmental opportunities and specific park amenity needs.

To begin the Parks section, it helps to have some context about what a park is, what a good park system has, and how Guelph's park system is structured. These topics were covered in great detail in the Park Plan, so the intent is to provide a brief background on the park system basics.

What is a park?

A park is meant for recreation. For the purpose of this plan, parks are areas of land set aside primarily for human enjoyment, recreation and connection to nature. The terms 'park' and 'parkland' are used interchangeably in this document to refer to these areas of land. NHS lands are excluded from policies and strategies relating to parkland as they typically have limited accessibility or opportunities for recreation. It is important to recognize however, that within Guelph's existing land inventory, there are some areas where NHS features overlap existing parks.

What makes a good park system?

An ideal park system provides the optimal level of service—this is the amount and type of service that meets community needs/desires and is sustainable, affordable and realistic. Guelph's optimal level of service for the park system is based on these key principles:

- Everyone can access a park within a reasonable walk from their home;
- There are a variety of park types with different functions in all areas of the city;
- Parks accommodate a variety of recreation amenities and programming; and
- A similar level of service is provided throughout the city, recognizing that urban form or neighbourhood demographics may require a different approach to parkland (e.g., areas of high-density development may have different park needs than areas of single detached homes).



How Guelph's park system is structured

Guelph's parkland is organized in a classification system that guides park function, programming and size. Official Plan policies outline four types of parks in Guelph: urban squares, neighbourhood parks, community parks and regional parks. Urban squares and neighbourhood parks are intended to meet the local needs of residents by providing walkable amenities. Community Parks and Regional parks are intended to meet both the local needs of residents and the larger community by offering a broader service level that includes cultural and outdoor recreational needs. This often includes parking, intermediate level sports fields, and specialized attractions. The classification system is a forward-looking standard, which means that sometimes an existing park doesn't fit neatly into the park type description. Existing parks are a product of the urban form, principles of planning and standards at the time of development.

Urban squares

Urban squares serve people in intensification areas to help address increased demands for recreation. They are meant to serve both the immediate residents as well as other people visiting the area for shopping dining or appointments. Like neighbourhood parks, they are meant to be walkable and are well-suited to mixed-use areas with high pedestrian traffic. Urban squares are smaller in scale than neighbourhood parks and provide opportunities for social interaction and passive recreation.

Neighbourhood parks

Neighbourhood parks are the building blocks of the park system. Neighbourhood parks are typically smaller, local parks that serve the needs of one neighbourhood. They include play areas, recreation amenities and green spaces that are close to people's homes. They are meant to be easily walked to (500-800 metres) so people can enjoy unorganized, unstructured and spontaneous activities. They typically provide passive areas, low to intermediate sports facilities, informal and formal play areas and may contain natural areas.

Community parks

Community parks provide specialized amenities that draw people from an area that exceeds a typical walking distance. This often includes a broader community of several neighbourhoods within a geographic area. They are meant to serve residents within a long walk (more than 1 kilometre) or a short bike, car or bus ride. Some residents may travel further to participate in organized sports or recreation programming. Since community parks are meant to serve more people, they are often located on arterial or collector roads with access to transit or parking areas. They have amenities to support community celebrations or athletic events that may not be found in smaller neighbourhood parks (e.g., lit sport fields, splash pads or bookable amenities).

Regional parks

Regional parks are some of Guelph's most recognizable parks and are designed to attract residents city-wide and visitors from out of town. These parks are used by residents and visitors for day use, celebration, sports or to commemorate culturally significant places. They are typically large parks but may be smaller if they have a culturally significant feature or a specialized recreation facility. They are intended to be accessed by long walks, public transit or by bike or car ride. They are typically located on arterial roads and have parking areas.

The following sections of this plan are structured to present information on trends and best practises, followed by key issues and opportunities, and finally objectives and recommendations for each of the key topics.

Parkland planning

Parkland planning is complex. It involves using many tools to acquire land and requires thoughtful collaboration with many internal and external interested parties including residents, developers, land-use planners, urban designers, ecologists and engineers. This section focuses on high-level land planning of parks: where they should go, how many are needed, and how big they should be.

Community voice

"We need more parkland and open space."

"Parks are infrastructure. They have a maximum carrying capacity. If they do not grow with the population, they are impacted by too many demands."

"With increasing housing density, it is important to ensure that more parkland is located near to dense areas."

"Connect our parklands so that people can walk/cycle to different green spaces in the city"

Trends and best practices in parkland planning

Connectivity

More than ever, people want to move around freely. Whether by public transit, car, cycling or walking, people value being able to easily get to their destinations. To encourage healthy lifestyles, many municipalities are weaving together the public realm to connect people to their homes, places of work, shopping, community centres, parks, trails, rivers and natural areas.

Guelph has made tremendous strides connecting parks with multi-modal streets and the trail network through the work of the [Guelph Trail Master Plan](#), the [Active Transportation Network Study](#) and the [Transportation Master Plan](#). But digging a little deeper, how can stationary parks contribute to overall connectivity in cities? Many municipalities are now thinking about how parks can be more than just destinations along transportation routes but also network enhancers by contributing to a safe, attractive and animated network. This can be done by including elements in parks like bike repair stations, washrooms, water refill stations, wayfinding, lighting and rest areas.

Co-location of parks with other green spaces

While not a new trend, co-location of parks with other green spaces is becoming more critical as the amount of parkland that municipalities can acquire through development has been significantly reduced by the Province of Ontario. Ultimately through provincial [Bill 23, 'More Homes Built Faster Act,'](#) the City is going to receive less parkland through development applications, which could result in park parcels being smaller. Many cities are now focusing more on locating parks next to other green spaces like stormwater management facilities, the natural heritage system, trails, and school lands to make the park system feel larger, create connectivity and ecological linkages. Although these other green spaces in the open space system are not meant for recreation, they have complementary functions and can help to avoid fragmented green spaces. Strategically locating parks next to other green spaces continues to be a strong trend in parkland planning and is becoming a critical tool in the current development climate.

Multi-functional land

Growing population is putting pressure on land resources. In built-up areas,

land is scarce and yet population growth requires more park and recreation resources. In greenfield areas developers are tasked with providing housing to meet growth targets, multi-modal roads to promote sustainability, parkland to support increased recreation demands, and stormwater management facilities to control runoff from new subdivisions. More than ever, developments need to achieve multiple objectives and functions, while making efficient use of land.

As cities become denser, creative solutions are needed to accommodate all the facilities and infrastructure needed to support healthy communities. One way of achieving this is through multi-functional land. Many cities have started to layer varying land uses over one another. For example, stormwater management ponds can have a certain degree of recreational function layered over the primary stormwater management use, and urban parks can be layered over parking garages.

While a multi-functional land use planning approach can be a good tool to maximize land efficiency, there are disadvantages, including limits on the optimal functioning of each type of use. For example, it would be impossible to layer much needed sports infrastructure over a surface stormwater management

pond, and costly to implement green space and trees over a parking garage. The benefits and challenges of this trend need to be carefully assessed.

As large landholders, Parks departments are often faced with requests to implement important municipal and regional infrastructure into parks. There is a fine balance to ensure recreation function and potential is preserved to accommodate the vast recreational needs in parks, while also recognizing that parkland may be able to accommodate some infrastructure without compromising the primary purpose of parkland.

Facility-fit park sizing and configuration

How do municipalities right-size parks? There is no scientific method, but historically many municipalities have implemented minimum park size and configuration policies to ensure that parkland acquired through development is functional for many recreational options. However, these policies are becoming more difficult to conform to due to parkland dedication rates being significantly reduced by the Province of Ontario and the size of development sites. Park size is highly dependent on the density being proposed in each development, as the province sets

parkland dedication rates based on the number of dwelling units being proposed.

Many municipalities are looking for ways to ensure parkland meets the recreational needs of the community, while being limited by provincial legislation on the amount of land that can be required through development. To address this, many municipalities are moving toward a facility-fit model for sizing and configuring parks. This method requires municipal staff to identify to developers during the development application process what programming is required based on a recreational needs assessment.

The developer is then required to demonstrate how the proposed parkland can accommodate those uses. This helps municipalities get right-sized parks and appropriately configured (square or rectangle) parks so that parkland parcels are conducive to building recreational facilities.

Equity of park distribution as a metric for success

City-wide parkland targets, typically measured in hectares per 1,000 people, has been a key metric in municipal parkland planning for many years. This is an easy metric to track: set a target, and measure parkland inventory against

the target. However, many municipalities are now recognizing that, while it may be easy to track, this may not be the best metric for evaluating the success of a park system. Parkland dedication legislation is subject to frequent change, often making parkland targets further disconnected from what can be achieved through dedication alone. Many municipalities rely on tax-funded land purchases to maintain parkland service levels as parkland dedication is often not enough to meet parkland targets.

There is also new awareness about systemic inequity and an increased desire to create equity for all. Rather than overall parkland quantity, many municipalities are taking a more human approach to parkland planning and measuring success by considering how well the park system serves the community. Numerous cities, including Guelph, have written into their policies that access to parks should be within reasonable walking distance from residential areas. A typical distance metric is 500-800 metres, or a 5-to-10-minute walk. Ultimately, there is a trend of moving beyond simple static targets for the amount of parkland municipalities “should” have, toward a well-connected park system that focuses more on equity of park access and distribution.



Key issues and opportunities for parkland planning

Provincial legislation changes

Since the adoption of the City’s 2022 Park Plan, the Province of Ontario enacted Bill 23, ‘More Homes Built Faster Act.’ Through this legislation, the City of Guelph has been assigned a housing target of 18,000 new dwelling units by 2032 as part of the provincial goal to build 1.5 million homes in 10 years. To meet this target, the legislation includes changes to the Planning Act and Development Charges Act that reduces both land and budgets available to support parks, specifically by:

- Cutting potential land conveyance rates by 50 per cent—the requirement of developers to convey one hectare of land for every 300 units they build is reduced to one hectare for every 600 units;
- Cutting potential cash-in-lieu rates by 50 per cent—the requirement of developers to pay the market value of land at a rate of one hectare of land for every 500 units they build is reduced to one hectare for every 1,000 units;
- Allowing developers to choose which portions of development are suitable for park purposes. Under Bill 23, municipalities no longer get the final say on whether land is suitable for park purposes;
- Reducing and further capping cash-in-lieu rates to 10 per cent for sites smaller than 5 hectares and 15 per cent for sites larger than 5 hectares;
- Allowing land not currently considered parkland, like encumbered land or privately owned public spaces (POPS), to be counted toward parkland dedication requirements; and
- Requiring municipalities to allocate or spend 60 per cent of cash-in-lieu revenue every year, adding complexity to the ability to save up to secure expensive land for large destination parks or strategic acquisitions.

This new legislation significantly impacts City of Guelph Official Plan parkland policies in two ways:

- The city-wide parkland target of 3.3 hectares per 1,000 people identified in the Official Plan will be impossible to meet using parkland dedication alone.
- The minimum park sizes for neighbourhood, community and regional parks prescribed in the Official Plan will be impossible to meet using parkland dedication alone.

The impacts to these policies are further described below.



Official Plan parkland targets

The current Official Plan parkland target is 3.3 hectares of parkland per 1,000 people. This target was identified in the 2009 Recreation, Parks, & Culture Strategic Master Plan and set in the Official Plan through OPA 48. The basis for the target was adoption of the rate of parkland per 1,000 people that the City was meeting at the time.

To understand if and how the City can meet the Official Plan parkland target, it is important to understand how the City grows the park system. The Planning Act establishes the authority for municipalities to require development to contribute to the park system, either through:

- Transfer of land for parks or other public recreation purposes; or
- Payment in lieu of parkland (cash-in-lieu).

Collectively these policies are called 'parkland dedication.' The amount of land or cash required by parkland dedication policies is a percentage of the development area; or calculated by the number of residential units proposed. The province sets the maximum rates of parkland dedication that municipalities can require of developers.

The Park Plan identified that the City's Official Plan target of 3.3 hectares of parkland per 1,000 people set in 2009 is not sustainable using parkland dedication alone. The report identified that the City could expect to acquire on average 1.2 hectares of parkland per 1,000 people using parkland dedication. The gap between the Official Plan targets and the

tools available to municipalities to acquire parkland is now further exacerbated by Bill 23. Using new parkland dedication rates enacted through Bill 23, the City can now expect to acquire on average 0.6 hectares of parkland per 1,000 people using parkland dedication. This would leave the City short of the city-wide target by 2.7 hectares per 1,000 people.

There are a number of options to address the gap between the target and the tools available to acquire parkland. Options include:

- Purchase additional land to meet the Official Plan target;
- Adjust the parkland target to align with what the City can acquire through parkland dedication alone;
- Utilize partnerships and land-use agreements with other public agencies to meet targets;
- Consideration of new metrics, like walkability to parks and quality, rather than overall quantity of land as a target; or
- A combination of the above.

The Official Plan identifies that the above strategies are appropriate to consider, however the City needs to establish how the combination of these tools supports service levels moving forward.



Official Plan minimum park sizes

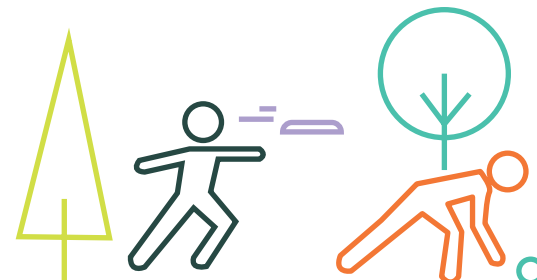
Park size guidelines identified in the Official Plan are used to communicate expectations and vision for parks to residents, businesses and developers. Historically, the size of park has determined the number and type of amenities that can be implemented in each park in the future. However, since the last update to the Official Plan minimum park sizes, Bill 23 has reduced the amount of parkland municipalities can acquire through development.

The 2022 Council-approved Park Plan reported that the City is not meeting the minimum size targets prescribed in the Official Plan. The plan reported that two of the City's 13 regional parks meet minimum size; three of the City's 37 community parks meet minimum size; and 26 of the City's 63 neighbourhood parks meet minimum size. Since the approval of the Park Plan in 2022, the Province of Ontario has further reduced the amount of land municipalities can acquire through development, making the Official Plan minimum size targets even more difficult to achieve.

The current rate that municipalities can acquire parkland from developers is set by the province at one hectare per 600 dwelling units. The Official Plan minimum park size for neighbourhood parks is one hectare. Therefore, in order to achieve the minimum one-hectare park, a subdivision development of 600 dwelling units must be proposed. Although subdivisions range in size and density, a typical subdivision development application Guelph contains 250-350 dwelling units, making it difficult to achieve the minimum size target on most development applications.

Having a minimum park size policy has the effect of discouraging acquisition of smaller infill parks. As described in the Park Plan, a range of parks of all sizes are needed to fill distribution and service level gaps in the city. This is becoming critical to meet recreational needs as the population increases. City staff have heard from Council and the community that acquiring small parks is better than none at all. Results from a community survey in August 2022 also indicate that residents value highly programmed, quality parkland over quantity. In 2021, City staff demonstrated that recreational needs can be met in smaller spaces through the successful implementation of a neighbourhood park that included play equipment, pathways, green space and seating on a 0.08-hectare parcel known as San Giorgio Morgeto Park.

For neighbourhood parks in greenfield areas, the City should continue to seek the maximum parkland dedication allowed by the Planning Act. However, to keep up with pace of growth, type of growth, and legislative constraints on parkland dedication, the City should consider moving toward purpose-driven park sizing and configuration to satisfy community need. This is referred to as a facility-fit model.



Multi-functional land

As described earlier in this plan, multi-functional land is a growing trend, but it is also very challenging to balance priorities and needs. As a large landholder in Guelph, the Parks department is frequently asked to accommodate other municipal and regional infrastructure in parks. This ranges from stormwater management facilities and regional transit infrastructure to buried pipes and cables, and environmental monitoring wells.

Conversely, the Parks department benefits greatly from layering recreational use over other municipal infrastructure. This includes many of the City's parks along the Speed River that have been permitted to develop over buried service trunks, and sports courts that have been developed within water station lands. With land at a premium, population growth driving additional recreational needs, and parkland dedication rates being cut, the City has an opportunity to take a closer look at how and when parks and recreational amenities can be layered or located within lands that are not primarily intended for parks but could support park use.

With the number of requests for use of parkland for other infrastructure, it has become clear that a framework is needed to assess when it is appropriate for parkland to accommodate other uses, and when it is not. A framework would guide decision-making, ensuring that recreational value is not compromised, recognize the intrinsic value of parks to Guelph residents, and provide transparency between the City and the community for when and why some requests are supported by the Parks department and why some are not.





Partnerships

The City also has an opportunity to look beyond its own departments and land holdings to support recreational need in the community. Organizations like the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) and school boards are agencies that greatly contribute to the publicly available recreation land in the city. Having common objectives like facilitating physical and mental well-being, environmental stewardship, and community improvement, partnerships with these agencies make sense. These organizations complement the City's offerings, and often, the City partners with these agencies to build, maintain, or book recreational facilities on their land.

Partnerships between the City and other community organizations have been extremely beneficial for Guelph residents. To further maximize resources, the Parks department has an opportunity to investigate partnerships with the private sector for project funding and sponsorships. These types of partnerships will allow business to give back to the community, while furthering the City's ability to provide parks and recreation services.

Objectives and recommendations for parkland planning

1. Position parks as recreation and trail network enhancers by implementing bike parking, bike repair stations, washrooms, water refill stations, wayfinding, lighting, and rest areas in parks where possible and appropriate.
2. As City infrastructure projects are contemplated, consider opportunities for multi-functional land that may allow a recreational function combined with the primary land-use.
3. Develop a framework for assessing when it is/is not appropriate to accommodate infrastructure or uses other than recreation in parks.
4. Update the City's Parkland Dedication Bylaw to align with recent changes to the Ontario Planning Act.
5. Continue to secure new parks or expand existing parks as part of the development review process.
6. Develop a Parkland Acquisition Strategy and pending outcomes, update the park provision and minimum park size policies in the Official Plan.
 - The Parkland Acquisition Strategy will:
 - Consider how Bill 23 will impact land acquisition in current development applications, secondary plan areas, and development to 2051;
 - Consider the impacts of using encumbered land, POPs or private land in future parkland provision and recommend policies to ensure it meets city-wide needs;
 - Identify potential areas where parkland may not be adequate to support proposed population;
 - Determine if any opportunities exist for strategic parkland acquisition
 - Determine if other tools like partnerships or joint-use agreements can reduce the need to acquire more parkland and count toward park inventory;
 - Assess how Guelph is providing parkland to other comparable communities;
 - Determine how much the City might need to invest in land purchases to meet the parkland targets and minimum park size criteria in the Official Plan;
 - Determine how much the City could invest in purchasing parkland while being fiscally responsible and meeting community development objectives;
 - Estimate how much the City could invest in park renewal or intensification to help meet long-term recreation needs;
 - Determine how to best allocate or spend cash-in-lieu of parkland dedication;
 - Use what was heard from the community through the PRMP and engage the community in evaluating alternatives for parkland acquisition;
 - Determine the need for other key performance indicators for a successful park system;
 - Identify existing underutilized spaces and develop a strategy for how to encourage broader use; and
 - Update and further develop policies for accepting quality parkland.

7. Maintain an up-to-date and comprehensive inventory of all parks and park assets (including parkland, open space, and sites under municipal influence) to improve ability to assess current and future supplies.
8. Explore partnership opportunities with school boards, the GRCA, and other public agencies to allow and/or continue to allow community use of recreational facilities owned by other organizations.
9. Explore partnership opportunities with the private sector for project funding and sponsorships. As part of this work, ensure equitable prioritization of departmental work is maintained.
10. At the 10-year update to the PRMP, include land needs and content covered in the Park Plan in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan as one overall strategic document.



Park amenities

Park amenities are the recreational components of parks. They range from sports fields to playgrounds, and infrastructure that enhances user experience, like washrooms, seating and shade.

A comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment was prepared as a component study of the PRMP to identify gaps and future needs among the City's indoor and outdoor recreation facilities. While the needs assessment focused on the individual needs for each asset type, this section of the PRMP focuses on trends, challenges and opportunities for park amenities. It also incorporates all of the recommended actions from the needs assessment, though some have been combined together in the PRMP recommendations for efficiency and logical work planning.

Community Voice

"Accessibility is key. Universally accessible spaces open things up for everyone."

"Provide more shaded areas for children to play under and for caregivers to sit under."

"I would love to see another skate park as the one we have is pretty fantastic."

"I would love if there were dedicated space for the adults to work out while the kids played."

"More washrooms!"

"More options for teenagers, such as hockey sites, or another sporting areas."



Trends and best practices for park amenities

Climate change and climate resilience

Climate change continues to be a growing concern for people. Concerns about water efficiency, urban heat island effect, species decline, flooding, and drought are at the forefront of peoples' minds. People expect government agencies to be leaders in climate resilience throughout the delivery of public services. Like many cities, Guelph has committed to the United Nation's Race To Zero campaign and has set targets for the whole community to reduce carbon emissions to become a net-zero carbon community by 2050.

Parks contribute significantly to climate resilience by mitigating extreme temperatures, providing opportunities for naturalization, supporting active transportation, and increasing the urban forest canopy. Recent trends in climate resiliency in parks include introduction of solar panels to generate renewable energy, providing end-of-trip amenities like bike parking in parks, and implementation of Low Impact Development (LID) techniques like rain gardens and bioswales.

Wellness in parks

Active and passive recreation and connection with nature have notable impacts on health and well-being. All facets of wellness are becoming more commonly acknowledged and prioritized in people's lives. This growing trend of wellness is being woven into park designs as people seek out parks for their physical, mental, emotional and social well-being.

One of the biggest trends for incorporating wellness into park programming is installation of fitness equipment. There are many ways that municipalities are incorporating fitness equipment into parks but the most effective installations for engaging users are destination style fitness parks, like the popular Muscle Beach in Venice, California, or parkour/ninja courses. Many cities are moving away from individual pieces of fitness equipment with moveable parts in local neighbourhood parks, as they tend to be under-utilized in this setting.

Another growing trend that promotes wellness in parks is the integration of community gardens. As cities grow denser and housing types shift to more compact dwellings like condominiums and apartments, people are seeking out public land for gardening and growing their own food. The expansion of Guelph's own community garden network demonstrates that people are increasingly interested in knowing where their food comes from, as well as the therapeutic benefits of gardening.

Shade

With temperatures rising due to climate change, increased urban heat island effect, and growing awareness of the health effects of UV exposure, shade is becoming a priority for park users. Community feedback through the PRMP revealed that shade is in fact one of the most important elements in the park system to the community. Not only does shade help to mitigate UV exposure but it also enhances user comfort and reduces glare. Trees are almost synonymous with parks, however in their infancy, they provide very little shade. Long-term, trees are the best option for shade coverage, however when immediate shade is desired, many municipalities introduce shade structures. These are often located in larger destination style parks where people tend to visit a little longer. Effective shade should be considered during the initial design stages for parks.

Park stewardship

One of the best ways to increase shade and other environmental benefits in parks is by involving the community. In 2017, the City created a part-time Community Stewardship Coordinator position to promote and facilitate stewardship opportunities between the City and residents. The program has grown significantly and has encouraged members of the community to take ownership of public spaces through participation in tree planting initiatives, garbage clean-up events, invasive species removal, and pollinator garden implementation and maintenance. Supported by the recommendations of the [Natural Heritage Action Plan](#) and the [Urban Forest Management Plan](#), the City should continue to pursue coordination of stewardship activities and build new partnerships with volunteers. By setting an example on its own lands and supporting local stewardship, the City will sustain its urban forest, natural spaces and parks for the long-term.

Spontaneous recreation

People are looking to play differently in parks than they used to. Passive recreation and individual recreation activities are becoming more important to residents as lifestyles become busier. With awareness that physical activity and connection with nature can have notable improvements on health and well-being, more people are participating in informal activities like horseshoes, bocce, slack-lining and picnicking. However, they are also looking for park infrastructure to support this type of recreation. Features like food trucks, natural playgrounds, outdoor kitchens, fire pits, table tennis, dog parks, bocce courts and adventure courses are becoming increasingly popular. Some cities are looking to partner with community organizations to provide these amenities or provide rental opportunities through libraries.



Park use in all seasons and times of day

As lives become busier, people are favouring activities that can be done spontaneously at any time of day. People are participating in organized activities and sports less than before, however, local demand for organized activities is increasing due to population growth. People are looking for activities in all seasons and even extending into the evening. Because of this trend, lighting has become an important consideration for parks as people are choosing to be active in the evening, and during winter and fall when the days are shorter. Many municipalities are striving to implement more opportunities for winter activities and programming parks.

Sports participation

Canadians are very enthusiastic about sports, and demand for sports facilities is a continual trend. However, many studies show that participation in sports is declining as people are choosing informal and spontaneous activities. Although participation in sports overall is trending downward, population increase

is causing local participation numbers to increase. Overall, youth registration rates are decreasing but adult registration rates are increasing. Growing demand for sports infrastructure continues to be a trend in municipal parks and recreation planning.

Memorialization

Culturally in Canada there is a high importance for memorializing loved ones. Connection with nature and opportunities for personal reflection in parks offers people an opportunity to remember their loved ones and the experiences they had with them. Because of this, parks are becoming increasingly recognized as special places to memorialize loved ones. Many cities have implemented bench and tree memorial programs where people can donate toward the purchase of furnishings and trees that are then placed in parks for the public to enjoy.

Key issues and opportunities for park amenities

Park amenity targets

Park amenity targets evaluate the quantity and ratio of amenities to population, and set aspirational service levels for the future. A Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment was completed as a component study of the PRMP to identify gaps and opportunities among the City's outdoor recreation facilities. The following outdoor asset types were included in the needs assessment:

- Baseball and softball diamonds;
- Rectangular fields;
- Cricket grounds;
- Basketball courts;
- Tennis and pickleball courts;
- Sand volleyball courts;
- Running tracks;
- Skateboard parks and bike parks;
- Disc golf courses;
- Outdoor rinks;
- Lawn bowling greens;
- Fitness stations;
- Playgrounds;
- Splash pads and wading pools;
- Community gardens;
- Dog parks and leash-free areas;
- Picnic shelters and shade;
- Permanent restrooms; and
- Water bottle refill stations.

Specific targets and recommendations for new amenities in parks were determined through a comprehensive methodology that included spatial analysis, equity analysis, growth analysis, benchmarking against comparator municipalities, community engagement analysis, and booking data analysis. Quality assessments of individual assets were not a part of the scope of the needs assessment. The full analysis for each amenity type can be found in the needs assessment.

The recommendations of the needs assessment have been embedded in the recommendations of this plan. Meeting some of these targets could be challenging due to land resource availability and timing of secondary plan development.



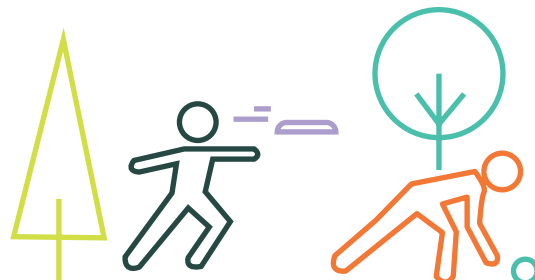
Park optimization

As the population grows, parks will be under more pressure than ever to accommodate more users and uses in smaller spaces. The City will need to make every bit of parkland count by maximizing efficiency. There is a strong need for more sports fields, but there is also an opportunity to go beyond just adding more. The City will need to focus on optimizing existing sports fields to ensure needs are being met. This means considering improving existing sports fields with better turf, adding additional amenities like irrigation and lighting, converting fields to uses that are more in need, like cricket, and finally constructing new fields.

With optimization and a focus on multi-functional and flexible parkland, there will be impacts on maintenance needs. Increased use may lead to different operating practices to keep facilities in good condition. Planning these changes won't be immediate, but it is important to define a strategy and implementation plan for optimization.

Infrastructure equity

While Guelph strives for equitable distribution of quality park amenities, it is important to recognize that the current state of parks facilities across the city is not entirely equitable. For example, new growth areas receive funding and attention through the development process and benefit from development charges as a funding source. It is a common narrative that parks in older parts of the city receive less attention and investment. Renewal of existing parks is not eligible for funding by development charges so there is a fine balance to be struck between investing in existing infrastructure without putting too much pressure on the tax base. Through the development of a sustainable parks asset management plan, it is important to keep having conversations and taking action to fill infrastructure equity gaps.



Pairing growth projects with renewal projects

One strategy to ease the tax burden when investing in existing infrastructure is to strategically pair growth projects with renewal projects when possible. For example, if the City is implementing a new tennis court in an existing park that is needed to support population growth, timing of nearby renewal projects, such as a playground or pathway replacement, should be considered to understand if the projects can move forward together. While only the growth portion of paired projects is development charge eligible, there may be cost efficiencies and reduced burden on tax funding by avoiding duplication of mobilization and construction costs. Pairing of growth and renewal projects will require careful capital budget planning and ongoing discussion between the City's Parks and Finance departments.



Accessibility and Inclusion

Guelph is 'stronger for our differences.' Guelph residents should be able to access and use parks comfortably anywhere in the city, with opportunities for recreation, health and mobility for everyone. Geographically, some parks in older built-up neighbourhoods are less accessible or do not have features for all people in our community. The City must focus on prioritizing inclusion and accessibility from the very start of each park project for greatest success. Starting too late will make inclusion and accessibility much harder to implement.

The City adopted the Facility Accessibility Design Manual (FADM) in 2015 with specific information for outdoor recreational spaces. The FADM not only meets the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), but in many ways exceeds it to offer more universal design. The design manual adheres to the principles of universal design and recognizes the need to accommodate the broad diversity of people who use facilities. The FADM is a guiding document that is used in the design of all park and recreation facilities in the city.

The Parks department regularly works with the Accessibility Advisory Committee

(AAC) to identify and address barriers faced by people with disabilities. The AAC has provided input into the PRMP, and it is important that City staff continue to engage with the AAC throughout the life of the PRMP on site specific park designs to ensure parks are universally accessible. It is a recommendation of this plan that City staff continue to consult the AAC on park development projects.

Accommodating all ages in parks

There is a growing demand for parks to have something for everyone, rather than being designed for singular uses or user groups. Parks that provide opportunities for a range of ages tend to be more well-used and appreciated. Historically parks have been very good at accommodating young children with a variety of playgrounds, and youth/young adults with sports fields and specialized amenities like skateboard parks. However, with an aging population, cities are tasked with ensuring older adults are meaningfully engaged and represented in parks too. This means facilitating and providing infrastructure for activities that attract older adults, like pickleball and walking paths. It also means that parks must be accessible and provide seating, shade and washrooms wherever possible.

Park design and construction standardization

The Parks department undertakes numerous capital projects each year ranging from building playgrounds and splash pads to sports fields and courts. Occasionally, developers build parks for the City as part of their developments. The variety of internal staff, external consultants, developers and contractors involved in park design and construction projects drives a need for standardization for all aspects of park development. The City has an opportunity to develop a park manual as a resource for internal staff, consultants and the development community that provides clear direction on the park design and construction process, standardized materials, specifications, construction details and the expectations for developer-built parks, should this option be chosen by developers. By standardizing park development, the Parks department will align itself with other internal departments, and improve efficiency with project costs, timing, and maintenance practises.

Objectives and recommendations for park amenities

11. Continue to improve climate change resiliency through the incorporation of sustainable and Low Impact Development (LID) features into the design of new or renewed parks.
12. Continue to consult the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) on park development projects.
13. If fitness equipment is requested during community engagement for neighbourhood parks, consider utilizing signage to encourage fitness rather than dedicated outdoor equipment.
14. Explore creative solutions to providing a dynamic youth/ adult fitness park as a specialized destination facility within the park system. Engage the community on what type of facility is preferred.
15. Continue to promote awareness of the fitness classes the City offers in park settings.
16. During the design process for individual parks, assess demand and available space for community gardens.
17. Seek to align new community garden locations with other park facilities that use water, for water and capital cost efficiency.
18. During the construction of new parks or renovation of existing parks, every effort should be made to include new trees for shade. Proactively seek opportunities to increase tree canopy in parks.
19. Install shade structures in the following circumstances when possible: at water play facilities; at playgrounds with rubber surfacing; and at specialized facilities like skateboard parks, bike parks, amusement rides, and dog parks.
20. Continue to pursue coordination of park stewardship activities and build new partnerships with volunteers.
21. Develop a memorial program that provides opportunities for residents to donate furnishings or trees in memorial to enhance public parks.
22. Develop a Sports Field Strategy that will optimize sports field service levels.
 - The strategy will:
 - Define service-level targets for ball diamonds, rectangular fields, and cricket grounds based on the number of registered participants in sports organizations that use City fields and diamonds;
 - Identify gaps in sports facilities inventory;
 - Consider how to increase use of recreation facilities during non-prime time hours;
 - Undertake a size and quality assessment of all diamonds and rectangular fields to identify opportunities for optimization of facilities, which may include adding lighting or irrigation, converting groups of smaller facilities or re-purposing existing facilities to other park uses that are more in demand;
 - Explore partnerships and strategies to incorporate sports facilities owned by other public agencies into its overall community service level; and
 - Consult with sports groups to gather feedback regarding actual participation rates, field quality, maintenance issues and projected usage.

23. Monitor use and demand of the new cricket ground at Riverside Park, disc golf facilities, and lawn bowling facilities.
24. Rebuild the driveway entrance to the Guelph Lake Sports Fields to address ongoing stormwater management and flooding issues.
25. Renovate Drew Park basketball court.
26. Construct 11 new outdoor tennis and pickleball courts. Consider constructing dedicated tennis and pickleball facilities.
27. Evaluate the impacts of climate change on the Outdoor Ice Rink Program and identify strategies to fulfill community ice rink needs in other ways, including but not limited to synthetic ice and refrigerated rinks in key locations. Consideration should be given to capital cost, as well as maintenance and operational requirements.
28. Investigate the implementation of a multi-use outdoor sport facility with boards to accommodate ice hockey, ball hockey and lacrosse.
29. Construct one major skateboard park in an area south of the Speed River.
30. Construct four skateboard nodes. The skateboard nodes may be implemented in smaller parks to fill distribution gaps or areas of need.
31. Evaluate the ability to add lighting at Silvercreek Skateboard Park.
32. When the lawn bowling green is nearing the end of its service life, the City should undertake a master plan exercise for the portion of Royal City Park east of Gordon Street. In consultation with the Lawn Bowling Club consider whether the facility should be re-located. Consideration should be given to the settling period required for new bowling greens to ensure minimal disruption to the Club's operations and opportunities for play.
33. Construct two new rubber surfaced playgrounds: one at University Village Park and one in the northwest portion of the city.
34. Continue to monitor capital investment against operational and maintenance costs to ensure optimal life cycle of playground assets.
35. Convert wading pools at Exhibition Park and Sunny Acres Park to splash pads. Engage the community about replacement of these assets when they are nearing the end of their service life.
36. Implement two new permanent restrooms in the southeast portion of the city. Water bottle refill stations should be included in the building designs. As park restrooms are built or renovated, consideration for all-season access should be evaluated.
37. Identify locations throughout the park system to add more public benches and seating. Consult with the AAC on location of seating and rest areas along pathways in parks. Consider creative ways of financing these benches including naming rights, sponsorships, and donations.

38. Ensure that adequate signage with park names and addresses exists at all City parks. These signs should be restored or replaced when they deteriorate.
39. Develop a parks asset management plan that identifies inventory, condition, anticipated service life and replacement costs of park amenities that can be forecasted in the corporate budget. The asset management plan should continually monitor community need and identify opportunities for re-locating and re-purposing facilities to serve changing demands.
40. Develop a framework and resources to secure adequate and ongoing funding for the repair, renewal and replacement of aging parks, amenities and infrastructure.

Parks prioritized for improvement should be:

 - In areas of high need or areas of intensification;
 - Underused or in poor quality;
 - Highly-used spaces that make a large impact on a wide range of users;
 - In need of accessibility improvements or do not have walking paths;
 - Identified as opportunities through Urban Forest Master Plan and Natural Heritage Action Plan;
 - Declining in service level; and/or
 - Responding to changing standards and new community needs.
41. Continue to look for opportunities to strategically pair growth projects with maintenance and replacement projects for cost savings. Identify opportunities to integrate service level improvements and expansion into maintenance and renewal projects.
42. Develop a Park Manual as a resource for City of Guelph staff, consultants, and the development community.

The Park Manual will:

 - Provide standards for design and construction of parks and park amenities;
 - Define the development approval process for facility-fit park parcel sizing, location, configuration, and road frontage to support community and recreational need; and
 - Outline an option and process for developer-built parks.
43. Develop a new standard condition for Development Agreements that outlines developer responsibilities should they build parks for the City.

Data and technology in parks service delivery

It is easy to assume where investment and attention is needed within the parks system, however it is important to recognize biases and that the loudest voices don't necessarily align with greatest need. Data collection through the use of technology can help identify problem areas and determine where investment is needed the most.

Community Voice

"Provide more accessible maps and easier to read maps for access to parks."

"Being able to book online a tennis court would be nice. Even if it was only one court that's pre-booked and others are drop in."

"Consider multiple ways of booking amenities. Online, through an app, by telephone, in person."

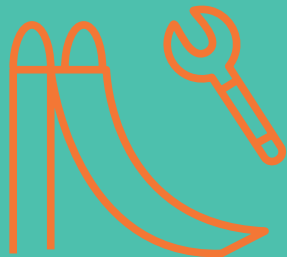
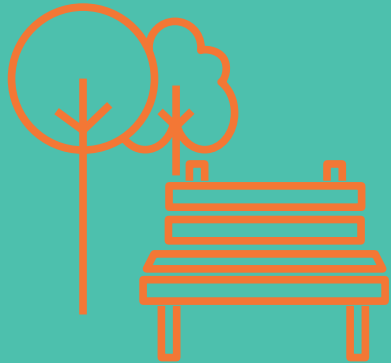


Trends and best practices for data and technology in parks service delivery

Use of technology for customer service requests

People want simplicity when reporting issues or concerns. This is especially true when people are engaged in activities in parks, and do not want to spend time making a phone call or reaching the right City department. Making this process easy is critical to encourage reporting of problems and to improve parks service delivery.

Guelph has recently centralized customer service requests and concerns through an easy-to-use platform called the '[Report a Problem Map](#).' Park users can easily log concerns with the City in moments using mobile phones, tablets or web browsers. Residents are encouraged to report problems such as graffiti, playground and washroom maintenance issues. The technology directs requests and the specific location on a map to the appropriate department to manage issues efficiently.



Key issues and opportunities for data and technology in parks service delivery

Information equity

Throughout all the City's services, there is a push to ensure all of the corporation's public information is available to people of all abilities. People require information to help them assess if a park's amenities and characteristics match their abilities or desired experience. This information should be available at parks, as well as on a platform that is accessible before people commit to visiting parks. In parks, QR codes on signage are a simple accommodation to ensure people who cannot read physical signs can get access to the same information through their mobile devices. Improving communication about parks will help residents use the park network better or in new ways. There is an opportunity to better provide people with the right information, at the right time, using the right media. The City should regularly update its website with detailed information on amenities, type of experience, pathway surface material, and playground surface material in each park. By providing up-front information about parks, people will be able to make informed choices about using specific parks.

GIS and technical support for park planning

Park planning requires a significant amount of background research, particularly during development review, such as Zoning Bylaw Amendments, Official Plan Amendments, Plans of Subdivision, Site Plan applications, and Building Permit applications. In order to collect parkland dedication (either land conveyance or cash-in-lieu), park planning staff must check historical records on each property where development is being proposed to confirm if previous conveyances or payments have been made. Currently there are several databases that staff must check to confirm this information. Provincial Bill 109, 'More Homes for Everyone Act' has shortened the timelines that municipalities have to complete development reviews. Therefore, the City must find efficiencies in the development review process. The Parks department would benefit greatly from a centralized database that tracks previous parkland conveyances and cash-in-lieu payments in one location.

In addition to parkland conveyances, park planning staff often need to reference previously approved Draft Plans of Subdivision to determine the rate at which parkland dedication was applied

in the past. These approvals often go back decades and the plans that contain the necessary information are large-scale hard copy files that are not easy to sift through. To improve efficiency of development review, the City should digitize all previously approved Draft Plans of Subdivision so that staff have this information at their fingertips. Further, the boundaries of the Draft Plans should be mapped in GIS as an internal resource for park planning staff.

The City also has an opportunity to improve park amenity planning through a GIS exercise to locate and map all underground services in parks. When considering appropriate locations for park amenities that require water or wastewater service, like washrooms, splash pads and community gardens, parks staff would benefit from being able to quickly check which services are readily available at each park site. While digital information for services in newer parks is typically available, in older parks that were developed and re-developed several times over before the digital age, this information is not available. To improve efficiency, the City should develop a GIS database for existing services in parks.





Outdoor sports court booking system

Through community engagement the City received several requests to make outdoor sports courts available for booking, and to make the booking system available online. Residents noted frustration with showing up to sports courts only to find they are in use. An online booking option for courts could potentially identify for users when courts are and are not available, and ensure that everyone gets a turn to play their sport. There are also challenges with developing an online booking system including:

- Displacing and/or discouraging spontaneous pick-up play;
- Equity imbalance for park users that do not have access or ability to use an online booking system;
- Users potentially booking too much time and not sharing courts;
- Users potentially booking time and not showing up or cancelling their bookings;
- Communicating to users which courts are booked and which are not; and
- Enforcement of booking timeframes.

There are potential benefits and challenges to implementing an outdoor court booking system. The City should investigate this in more detail and consider the practicality.

Objectives and recommendations for data and technology in parks service delivery

44. Regularly update the City's website with detailed information on amenities, type of experience, pathway surface material, and playground surface material in each park.
45. Improve services through more effective use of technology and available data. Continue to improve data collection through the use of digital benchmarking tools, data management and reporting standards.
46. Develop digital tools and strategies that help people find and explore Guelph's parks and open spaces.
47. Establish Service Guelph as the first point of contact for parks inquiries.
48. Develop a centralized database that tracks previous parkland conveyances and cash-in-lieu payments in one location as an internal resource for park planning staff. Continue to update the database as parkland conveyances and cash-in-lieu payments are made.
49. Digitize all previously approved Draft Plans of Subdivision. Map the boundaries of all previously approved Draft Plans as an internal resource for park planning staff. Continue to update the database as Draft Plans are approved.
50. Develop a GIS database of existing underground services in parks as an internal resource for parks staff. Continue to update the database as new services are installed in parks.
51. Investigate the need and practicality of a booking system for drop-in rentals of court sports. Consider an online option for booking and viewing court availability and tools to communicate this at the facilities.





■ And: How parks and recreation work together

And. Such an important word here. Not as a transition between sections, but rather as a link that binds community services together. Parks and recreation interconnect in so many ways that are vitally important to the delivery of services and the well-being the Guelph community. Parks and recreation are dependent on one another to make sure that play is a part of everyday life at every age and every ability.

Community voice

"Rec classes can be a powerful tool in building relationships with neighbours."

"We live in a condo, with the rising cost of housing we will most likely for a while and we depend on the parks and recreation programs to provide our children with physical activity and stimulation."

"Please add more activities to our parks, having greenery only doesn't cut it anymore. Many other cities and towns have festivals, interactive games, and permanent park games/amenities."

"It would be fun to see more teens, adult and senior interests considered in park design."

Trends and best practices in parks and recreation

Park animation

Park and Recreation trends are forever changing. They're constantly shifting to meet the world around them. As local demographics change, so do recreational interests and needs. Cricket and pickleball are quickly establishing themselves as popular activities in need of attention in recreational planning. Sporting success also changes the way people choose to recreate. Skateboarding is adopted as an Olympic sport and pressures on Silvercreek skatepark have never been greater. The Raptors win the NBA championship and courts overflow.

With a growing population, limited park land available, and growing costs associated with construction and development, the City needs to look at creative approaches beyond just adding more. Community expectations and municipal planning, especially in fast growing cities like Guelph, are moving away from single use approaches and towards multi-purpose facility and field design. This versatile approach is more flexible to changes and trends, serves a broader portion of the population, and exposes people to new activities.

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, opportunities for recreation were pushed exclusively outdoors, leaving lasting changes on the community's recreation preferences^{3 4} and asking our local parks system to do even more. Community engagement feedback for this plan identified amenity focused parks – parks that contain highly programmed spaces with lots of features – as a top priority.

Participants in the City's Park Activation program echo this thought, with 98 per cent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the in-park recreational programming improved their overall park experience.

Providing opportunities for spontaneous, unstructured recreation and outdoor programming in future park planning provides a cost-effective way to enhance the quality and capacity of existing parks. This could include facilitated programs, like Learn to Skate on community rinks, to equipment lending in parks to unique landscape features and built forms, like stages and amphitheatres, that encourage animation. Providing opportunities for animation in parks also allows the City to distribute programs and resources more equitably throughout the community, improving geographical reach and reducing barriers to access. Without the need for large infrastructure investments, a park animation approach can help make parks more accessible and enjoyable for all ages and abilities, and better serve the whole community.

³ Approximately 57 per cent of phase 3 community engagement respondents stated a preference for outdoor recreation programming following the pandemic; 64.7 per cent of people believe the City should develop more outdoor, satellite location programs for all ages

⁴ "Shift toward more unstructured physical activities could be pandemic legacy, researchers find." CBC, April 19, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/shift-toward-more-unstructured-physical-activities-could-be-pandemic-legacy-researchers-find-1.642015>

City of Pembroke lending hub

In partnership with the County of Renfrew and the Renfrew County District Health Unit, the City of Pembroke provides an equipment lending hub at Riverside Park, making sports equipment and outdoor adventure materials available to park-goers free of charge. The program provides everything from adventure packs (bird and tree identification booklets, magnifying glasses, binoculars, first aid kits, etc.) to baseball bats and gloves to walking poles, bicycles and kayaks.

Figure 4: Lending Hub



Active Town of Ajax program

The Town of Ajax promotes the benefits of safe outdoor activities to support the physical and mental health of its community through their popular Active TOA program. Through free outdoor recreation opportunities, like snowshoe lending, the Town of Ajax helps residents stay active, especially in winter months.

Figure 5: Snowshoe lending



Seniors' outdoor activation toolkit

A partnership between Wood Green Community Services, 8 80 Cities and over 100 seniors delivered fun and interactive programs in several parks and public spaces in Toronto's east side. This included repurposing covered ice rinks, dormant in the summer, into shaded oases for seniors' Zumba® classes, and transforming an old shuffleboard slab into an accessible space for a drum circle. These adaptive reuses of space helped show that programming for seniors can and should take place outdoors to maximize health benefits and underlined the need for investment in parks and public spaces to meet their needs.

Figure 6: Seniors activation



Special events

Guelph has long been home to many unique and diverse special events. From charity walks to food festivals and cultural celebrations, these events bring countless benefits to the community. They provide opportunities to gather, connect and celebrate; they encourage inclusion and cultural exchange; they help forge community identity and a sense of civic pride; and they contribute to Guelph's economic prosperity. In 2022, the City of Guelph hosted 1,051 indoor and outdoor permitted events, bringing vibrancy to the city and driving economic growth through the tourism sector.

Sport tourism

Sport tourism can positively impact both the local community and the wider economy. It brings in visitors who spend money on accommodations, food, and services, supporting local businesses and driving economic growth; it brings people from different regions together to share meaningful experiences; and it creates a sense of local pride and unity, with organizers and residents alike getting an opportunity to promote their city. Perhaps most importantly in the context of the PRMP, sport tourism promotes physical activity, inspiring people to be active and adopt healthy lifestyles. Building on these benefits and Guelph's collaborative spirit, the City's [2022-2026 Economic Development and Tourism Strategic Plan](#) aims to leverage Guelph's recreation assets to make Guelph a must-see visitor destination in Ontario and establish a sport, group, and conference plan to support organizers in their work. Providing the resources to support these activities while balancing other

important community recreation needs, would help strengthen community well-being, grow Guelph's reputation on a provincial level, and contribute to the success of Guelph's local economy.

Technology and data collection

Municipal parks and recreation departments are quickly moving toward greater use of technology and data collection to learn more about how, how often, and when facilities and outdoor spaces are used. With this data in hand, municipalities can start to understand which facilities are most heavily used and why. They can compare data with similar communities for benchmarking exercises, evaluate cost-benefit ratios of certain facility-types, test demand during pilot projects, and more. Data collection can help parks and recreation departments make evidenced-based decisions. As the customer service hub for formal indoor and outdoor facility users, City Recreation fosters relationships with users and providers – from individuals and small groups to local and provincial sports organizations – and is uniquely positioned to collect timely, local data based on bookings, inquiries and requested patterns of use.



Key issues and opportunities for parks and recreation

Special events

Special events play an important role in shaping local recreation and community identity and providing residents and visitors with fun and meaningful experiences. These events however also place additional demands on amenities that are already highly used and often displace community use of public spaces. The City receives a wide range of special event requests each year, both from returning users and new applicants. To effectively balance community needs and manage special events, many municipalities are developing special event frameworks or policies that consider the following.

Event classification

Classifying special events is difficult because they are all unique, come with varying levels of risk-management, and require different layers of attention, regardless of size or anticipated attendance. A framework to improve processes and provide greater clarity and transparency to event organizers would be beneficial to the City. These frameworks often establish pre-approved versus untested event locations, identify appropriate resting periods and usage limits, and categorize risk management factors and resource requirements.

Balancing community benefits

Recreation facilities and public spaces are already in high demand. Hosting a special event often means displacing other community users. A minor sports game might give way to a tournament, the field where residents normally play with their dogs might become a midway, a residential street suddenly becomes overflow parking, or the road taken to and from work might be closed and re-routed. Prioritization criteria should be established to measure, manage and balance these unique challenges.

Data management and analytics

Data collection can be hugely beneficial to Parks and Recreation departments, improving services, planning and asset management. But only if the right data is collected and resources are in place to effectively analyze the information. Currently, several gaps exist in the data and information the City collects from community users that would provide a better understanding of facility use, distribution and demand:

Non-bookable spaces

With minor exceptions for City-delivered programs, several City recreation amenities are non-bookable spaces (e.g., tennis and pickleball courts, disc golf courses, skateboard parks, etc.), meaning that they are designated for spontaneous use and not available for scheduled or league play. As such, it is hard to quantify patterns of use and establish evidence-based levels of service.

City recreation currently lacks a clear and well-resourced evaluation plan and dedicated staff to collect and analyze data, identify gaps in available data, and determine whether services and initiatives are meeting intended goals or community expectations. As noted in the City's 2021 Service Rationalization Review, building Recreation's departmental capacity in these areas would improve service delivery, operational efficiency and targeted investments in underserved areas, and support future parks and recreation planning.

Only formal booking inquiries and application are captured

Community feedback and local research⁵ highlights that many residents find recreation booking and registration policies and processes complicated and costly – especially newcomers and grassroots organizers who do not have the time, historical knowledge or resources to navigate the system. As such, many individuals and groups do not access City recreation services or formally book City facilities, leaving a gap in available data.

Facility usership

Outside of City recreation programs, facility usership data is currently only captured at the organization level. Collecting registration or usership data from facility users, as well as tracking unaccommodated requests, would provide a better understanding of local use, demand and trends in participation.



⁵ Shrestha, Niva. Understanding Barriers of Recent Immigrants to Access Recreational Activities in Guelph. 2022. www.guelphwellingtonlip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Best-Practices-for-Inclusion-in-Parks-and-Recreation-A-Review-of-Existing-Literature-FINAL.pdf

Elite level sport

The trend towards multi-purposing indoor and outdoor facilities helps ensure wide and diverse access to recreational activities. This approach to facility design and operation however impacts elite level sports due to governing body requirements (e.g., specialized playing surface sizes, lining requirements, etc.) and infrastructure needs (e.g., seating, storage, and event space), potentially limiting levels of play and sport tournament opportunities. The core values of this plan emphasize inclusive introductory and intermediate level activities and amenities to support community access and life-long participation in recreation. Establishing clear priorities in facility allocation policies will help to improve transparency and communication in how recreation facilities are distributed, planned and developed.

Facility allocation

Guelph is a proud and vibrant sport and recreation city. Pick a recreational pursuit and there is likely a local organization, community champion or grassroots organizer driving its growth and participation. This passion is founded in fun and a huge part of what makes Guelph such a great place to live and play. As the city continues to grow, and these passions along with it, the City needs to examine not only what new facilities and outdoor spaces should be developed, but also, how they are distributed, scheduled, and operationalized to provide balanced, easy, and equitable access for all residents. The City's current allocation policy and processes prioritize historical allocations, providing existing users with continued use of the previous year's allocated time and space. While this helps establish historical patterns of use, it also limits opportunities for new and emerging users and uses, especially during high-demand prime time, making balanced and equitable distribution challenging.

Community requests

The City receives numerous requests for additional parks and recreation amenities, facilities and programs daily. These requests often come through informal emails or phone calls, or through community engagement activities that are unrelated to parks and recreation. When requests go unacknowledged or do not get implemented, residents can feel frustrated that they are not being heard. In reality, City staff do not have a framework for assessing and addressing unsolicited requests for parks and recreation amenities and programs. It can be difficult to accommodate budget requests and prioritize new initiatives in already established capital and operating budget forecasts, without de-prioritizing other important work. However, many ideas received from the community have a lot of merit and potential benefit for the community. A sustainably resourced framework or program outlining how unsolicited requests are received and evaluated would provide a transparent mechanism to properly investigate the value and feasibility of these community-led ideas.



Objectives and recommendations for how parks and recreation work together

52. Develop a special event framework to establish criteria to equitably balance community needs and priorities.
53. Evaluate the City's Facility Allocation Policy and distribution processes to optimize use and ensure balanced and equitable distribution of recreation facilities.
54. Using priority initiative zone mapping, install four Activation Stations in identified priority parks to increase community participation and year-round park animation for all ages and abilities.
55. Increase City provision of park-based recreation programming, including equipment lending, to support community participation and year-round animation for all ages and abilities.
56. Develop a data collection and evaluation plan for City indoor and outdoor facility bookings to improve performance management and facility optimization, balance distribution of use, identify areas for priority initiatives and investment, and inform future facility development and provisioning.
57. Develop a decision-making framework that outlines the process for evaluating and responding to special requests received from the community.





■ Recreation

City of Guelph Recreation operates over 322,000 square feet of indoor recreation facilities that provided almost 69,000 hours of recreation for the community from April 2022 to March 2023. Recreation Services also coordinated over 23,000 hours of community use on outdoor fields and spaces during the 2022 season. Registration and booking numbers consistently show that residents want to be in City facilities and playing on City fields, they want to participate in City programs and that demand for these services continues to grow. The City's 2021 [Service Rationalization Review](#) also shows that Guelph's operating expenses for recreation programs and facilities per household are significantly below municipal comparators, suggesting that greater investment is needed in City recreation to meet growing community needs and improve cost recovery potential.

As a trusted provider of quality, community-focused recreation, the City wants its buildings and spaces to be so much more than just places people go for a program and then leave. We want our centres to be destinations that invite people to visit, stay and play. We want our services to be diverse and dynamic, creating experiences that encourage people to explore and try something new. We want to showcase what a happy, healthy, and inclusive community looks and feels like. And we want to make it possible for every resident to participate and have their say in what we deliver to the community.

We know that if we want to make these values and vision a reality, we have a responsibility to role model healthy and inclusive behaviours and nurture community-wide access and participation. While we are proud of the registrations and booking numbers shared above, our waitlists and the bookings we cannot accommodate also show us that we still have a lot of work to do. We invite you to read this section, and the ideas, actions and recommendations throughout this whole plan, in the spirit of Recreation's aim to be a role model – to build on our successes, to work together to create opportunities for underserved people and emerging activities, to find efficiencies and provide more with what we already have, and to develop new spaces and opportunities for residents to play and thrive and grow.

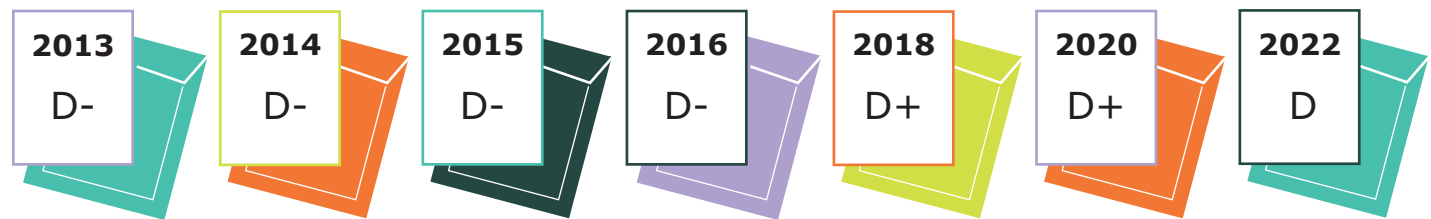
Recreation as a role model

Community voice

"Online websites are impossible and the paper guides are not providing intros to the program and drop-in descriptions necessary to draw customers. You need many of the open houses that you provided the seniors to in May to the regular public in order to introduce them to all of the activities offered or provide a power week in which you provide cards to the public that allows them to try out whatever - say five activities without charge."

"Re-brand recreation and outdoor trails and parks as health facilities. It's how they're seen in Asia and many countries in Europe. The connection between mental and physical health and recreation, especially outdoor recreation, has been proven in the research. Now it's time to connect the dots for people."

Figure 7: ParticipACTION physical activity report card grades (2013-2022)



Trends and best practices

Physical activity rates

ParticipAction’s 2022 Report Card on Physical Activity gave Canadian children and youth a D grade for overall physical activity, with only 28 per cent of children and youth meeting 24-hour movement recommendations.⁶ This declining grade (D+ in 2020) was largely tied to the pandemic, when in-person activities, both at school and extra-curricular, were cancelled or severely limited due to Public Health-related closures and restrictions. The impacts of these closures and restrictions were even more pronounced for at-risk communities – including BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+, women and girls, individuals living with disabilities, and individuals living in low-income circumstances – who already face barriers to recreation and experienced disproportionate declines in participation. The pandemic also brought about a sharp rise in screen time and sedentary behaviours. Going from a grade of D+ to an F over the course of the pandemic, only 18 per cent of children and youth met screen time recommendations in 2022.

While pandemic-driven declines are concerning and need to be addressed, overall physical activity and sedentary behaviour targets have received a failing grade for the past 10 years. Screens and technology are also becoming more and more a part of everyday life, contributing to greater daily use for children, youth and adults. As a role model for the community, City Recreation needs to develop new approaches and evidence-based strategies that encourage balanced lifestyles and improve participation in recreation, especially for equity deserving groups, to help reverse these community health trends.

and evidence-based strategies that encourage balanced lifestyles and improve participation in recreation, especially for equity deserving groups, to help reverse these community health trends.

⁶ ParticipACTION. Lost & Found: Pandemic-related challenges and opportunities for physical activity. The 2022 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Toronto: 2022.

Water does wonders

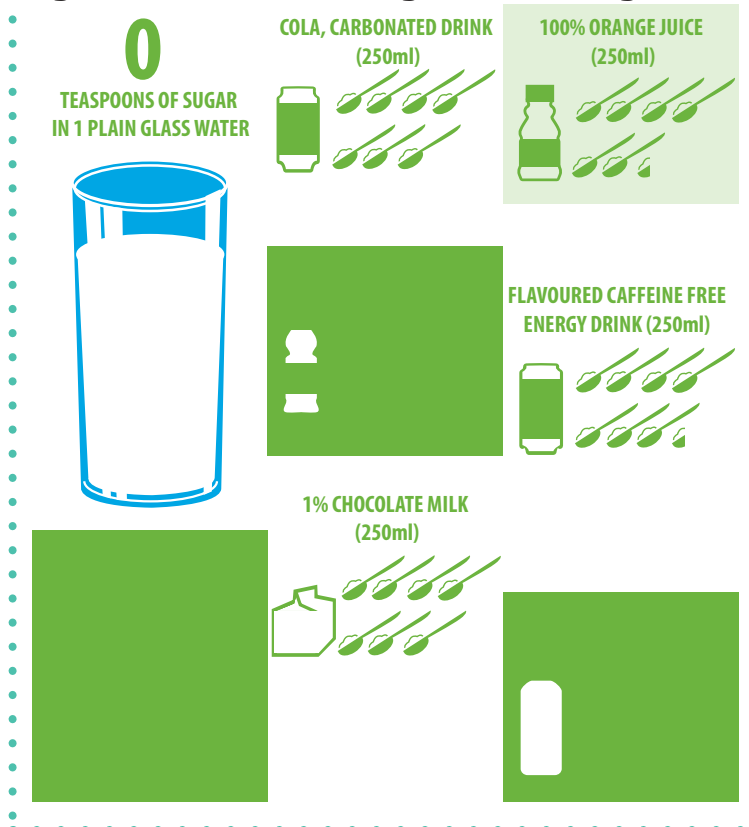
From 2015-2018, the City of Guelph participated in the Healthy Kids Community Challenge, known locally as Energize Guelph, a Provincially funded initiative aimed at promoting healthy behaviours for children in communities across Ontario. Under the Energize Guelph banner, City Recreation continues to operate several of these health initiatives, including low-cost “Give it a Try” programs, Park Activation, and reusable water bottle vending machines in three City recreation facilities.

Encouraging people to drink water instead of sugary drinks, the reusable bottle vending machines have sold over 4,100 bottles since 2017, and received local, provincial and national media attention for their role in reducing waste and promoting healthy, sustainable behaviours. Since inception, bottle supply has been entirely funded through grants and sponsorships, leaving sustainability of the initiative in question. Making these machines a permanent fixture in the City’s recreation facilities and continuing to subsidize the costs of bottles so that residents can make healthy decisions without financial pressures would underline the City’s commitment to healthy environments and behaviours. Building on this success story and commitment, the City could also follow municipal trends, exploring healthy food options and policies to further role model healthy choices and lifestyles for residents.

Figure 8: Reusable bottle vending machine



Figure 9: Amount of sugar in beverages



Energize Guelph floor decal

What started as a fun and creative way to get people to drink more water transformed into one of the City's most used and enjoyed recreational assets. The twisting "EG" skipping rope on the floor of West End Community Centre is now a staple of spontaneous recreation, with everyone from toddlers to seniors walking the tight rope forwards, backwards, sideways, as they travel the hallway.

Figure 10: Energize Guelph decal

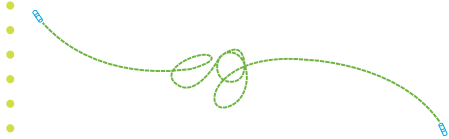


Figure 11: User feedback on reusable water bottles



Redefining recreation

Recreation and physical activity are often seen as one in the same, which is fair, since recreation plays a huge role in getting people moving and living more active lives. But Recreation is so much more than just physical activity. It is gardening, it is art, it is meditation, it is learning. It can be almost anything. Learning new skills, having fun, and building self-confidence can do as much for personal health as going for a run.⁷ So it is crucial that the definition of recreation not get reduced to physical activities alone. As new activities and ideas enter the recreational sphere, municipal recreation needs to be flexible and dynamic, so that programs are responsive and designed in line with diverse community interests.

⁷ CivicRec. Seven Ways Your Parks and Recreation Efforts are Strengthening Your Community. 2022.

Key issues and opportunities

Leadership development and continuous learning

Building leadership capacity at all levels is essential to delivering high-quality service and creating a vibrant, connected community. Through consistent, identified trainings and team building, all City Recreation staff, from front-line to management, should be seen and empowered as recreation leaders and experts. Extending beyond municipal recreation, trainings could be offered jointly with community partners to improve resource and information sharing and strengthen the capacity of the local recreation sector.

Marketing and promotion

In 2020, the City transitioned from a printed Community Guide (a listing of all City recreation programs) to an exclusively online catalogue. This process centralized information, improving the consistency and accuracy of information, and provided valuable flexibility – especially during ever changing pandemic cancellations and schedule adjustments. It also reduced printing costs and production needs, resulting in financial and environmental efficiencies. This online-only approach however also created gaps in community access to information. With many residents lacking access to consistent technology and internet and/or digital literacy, the move online created a digital divide, reducing equitable access to information. Many people also intake and process information differently, relying on different mediums depending on personal preferences or learning styles. Recreation staff are regularly asked to print online materials for customers who struggle with the online format or miss the ability to casually flip through printed material and discover new programs.

Objectives and recommendations for recreation as a role model

58. Incorporate reusable bottle vending machines into Recreation budget to ensure sustainability of the initiative and continued role modeling of healthy behaviours in recreation facilities.
59. Investigate healthy food and beverage options and policies for City recreation facilities.
60. Continue to monitor and respond to trends and the ever-changing definition of recreation to ensure programming for diverse audiences in Guelph.
61. Develop a Recreation Promotions strategy, incorporating multiple formats, translation of materials, and community outreach, to complement the department's current online catalogue.
62. Adopt the proposed Service Delivery Model ([page 97](#)) to increase access to and supportive opportunities for community recreation and health-focused programming.



Community voice

"I know there is a cost to building indoor court space but there is a lack of this kind of space generally available in the city, we presently rent space from the school boards but they have limited space for the demand which is why we have had to limit our membership for the past 15 years or so."

Indoor recreation facilities

Understanding emerging trends and the current context of Guelph's recreation assets and infrastructure helps establish a foundation for future planning and ensures that recreation facilities and services are future ready and responsive to change. Trends in recreation facility design are driven by changing interests and activities, existing and emerging sports, financial responsibility and sustainability, inclusion and accessibility, and holistic health and well-being. This integrative approach transforms recreation facilities into much more than just spaces for sports, it creates social hubs for community life and connection.

"Invest more in city-building/built-environment changes that encourage daily exercise/recreation, such as on and off-road cycling infrastructure, trails, safer streets, and in general higher quality public space that is senior and kid friendly. Reduce investments in expensive indoor facilities such as ice pads, especially if they only serve a small but higher income population."

"Build facilities for the future and that are the proper size for competitions and assuming we will have them for 20 plus years. Full size gyms, wooden floors, full size pools with the number of lanes and length that host competitions. Full size change rooms, upkeep the facilities throughout the years. Build quality new facilities."

Trends and best practices for indoor recreation facilities

Welcoming and inclusive spaces

Recreation centres are not just homes for sports and programs. They are hubs for gathering, personal growth, and pro-social activity. For many, they are an extension of home and provide access to critical resources like heat, air conditioning and Wi-Fi. For others, they are places to gather, share stories and build relationships. Recreation facilities need to be intentionally designed to ensure spaces are welcoming, accessible and inclusive. Above and beyond legislated accessibility requirements, they should include spaces for passive cultural and recreational opportunities like study, rest, conversation and games, and provide signage and wayfinding that greets guests in a wide variety of languages. They should also honour and acknowledge the land on which they are built and on which the community recreates. Identified through engagement with Indigenous nations, communities and Councils, collaborating with Urban Indigenous peoples to install art, signage, and medicinal plantings in and around recreation facilities would provide greater education and understanding of Guelph's pre-settler history and help create a welcoming space for the many First Peoples, Métis and Indigenous people of mixed ancestry who live here today.



Creating space through art

The City of Surrey commissioned a number of Indigenous artworks, with installations in Community Centres, Parks and Public Spaces. The works invite connection with the land, examine local histories, amplify the voices of Indigenous artists, aim to help Indigenous peoples see themselves reflected in the space, and prompt personal reflection towards understanding Indigenous presence at the centre of community. The art also offers a holistic understanding of health, focusing on spirituality, relationality, and the environment – aspects of wellness often overlooked in Western cultures.

Figure 12: Creating space through art. City of Surrey Indigenous art in community centres (Anthony Gabriel, Clayton Community Centre)



Figure 13: Rain Pierre's design on the North Surrey Ice & Sport Complex windows symbolize reconciliation



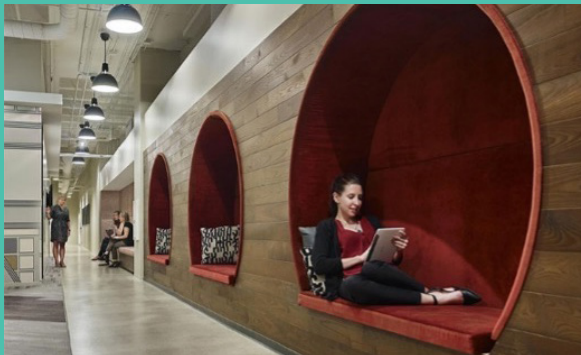
Placemaking

Placemaking inspires residents to think of and use public spaces creatively, bringing people together around shared experiences and building playful spaces that can be used in many different ways. Given the available space in and around City recreation facilities, there is opportunity to promote organic and unstructured recreational activities through placemaking enhancements. Placemaking features both inside and outside of recreation centres encourage residents to come and spend time in recreation centres and engage in self-directed activities, rather than just visit for a program and leave. It invites them into the space and welcomes them to stay. This creative use also brings character to public spaces and supports their ongoing evolution.

Rolling Meadows, Illinois

Circular seating nooks were embedded into the walls of this office design, creating cozy and comfortable spaces for people to work, rest, read or relax.⁸

Figure 14: Seating nooks



Off the ground: Danish Architecture Centre, Copenhagen^{9 10}

The Off the Ground Installation offers a new take on seating and play in public spaces. Made from recycled firehoses, the elements can be easily moved into a low seat, hammock or swing, providing different experiences based on each users needs and interests.

Figure 15: Interactive seating



Figure 16: Interactive seating



Paint the ice: Westerner Park, Red Deer, Alberta

Following a Family Day hockey game, Westerner Park invited Red Deer residents to “unleash their inner artists” and turn the rink into a “vibrant canvas of colours.” Imagining ice use in a new way, the event brought hundreds of community members together to express themselves creatively and gather around shared experience.

Figure 17: Paint the ice activity



⁸ “This office design has built in nooks for relaxing.” *Contemporist*, May 3, 2017. www.contemporist.com/office-built-in-nooks-for-relaxing/

⁹ Straschnow, Jair & Nygaard, Gitte. “Off the Ground: adults at play.” *Installation Mag*, Aug 16, 2013. <https://installationmag.com/adults-at-play/>

¹⁰ “Off the Ground.” *Archilovers.com*, 2013. www.archilovers.com/projects/96673/off-ground.html

Barcelona, Spain

The unique shapes of these outdoor benches not only provide places for people to sit and relax, but also act as ramps and ledges for skateboarding and scootering, as well as architectural art in public spaces.

Figure 18: Multi-purpose seating



Multi-purpose facility design

As recreational interests and activities grow and become more diverse, there are growing expectations that recreation facilities will accommodate numerous activities and support participation through all ages, stages and abilities. In other words, facilities need to be more versatile and provide something for everyone. Facilities also need to be flexible in their design and operation so that programs and services can quickly adapt and respond to emerging trends. Reconfiguring playing surfaces using moveable barriers, shifting playing surface orientations, and using multi- or modifiable lines provides opportunities to accommodate many types of activities and maximizes the use of existing assets. This multi-purposing approach also creates operational efficiencies, serves a larger portion of the population, accommodates new uses and revenue sources, and improves inclusive experiences.

Figure 19: Rendering of Guelph's South End Community Centre



Gym smart floor

Developed in Germany, the glass flooring system uses programmable LED lighting to create lines directly underneath the surface. The lighting can display a variety of boundary lines, including basketball, tennis, badminton and other activities played in a typical gymnasium. The level of elasticity and friction are similar to a typical wooden floor and a basketball will bounce at the same height. Pairing technology with infrastructure, this flooring offers a dedicated sport experience in a multi-purpose facility.

Figure 20: LED line painting on gymnasium floor



Facility provision and utilization

Table 1 summarizes the City's existing and planned indoor recreation facilities. Pools, gyms, and ice continue to experience the highest levels of use and demand among City recreation facilities, especially as multi-purposing efforts and approaches increase options and opportunities in these spaces, leading to consistent prime time pressures. Construction of the South End Community Centre (SECC) will add to the City's supply of these amenities, bringing Guelph in-line with or above facility supply targets identified in Appendix B, Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment. With most of Guelph's recent growth happening in the south-end of Guelph, and most of the City's program registrations coming from this area of the city, the SECC will also help address geographic distribution of recreation facilities and activities.

Table 1: Existing and planned City of Guelph recreation facilities¹¹¹²

Facility Type	Supply	Incl SECC	City Wide Provision (1 per XXX residents)	City Wide Provision with SECC	Location
Indoor Aquatics	2	3	1:71,870	1:47,913	WECC, VRRRC, SECC
Outdoor Aquatics	1	1	1:143,740	1:143,740	Lyon Pool
Ice Pads	5	7	1:28,748	1:20,534	VRRRC, WECC, SECC, Exhibition Arena, Centennial Arena
Gymnasiums & Auditorium	1.5	3.5	1:95,827	1:41,069	WECC, SECC, Evergreen
Fitness Facility	1	2	1:143,740	1:71,870	WECC, SECC
Artificial Turf Facility	1	1	1:143,740	1:143,740	Sportsdome
Indoor Walking Track	0	1	0:143,740	1:143,740	SECC
Multi-Purpose Rooms	18	21	1:7,986	1:6,885	VRRRC, WECC, SECC, ESCC, Sportsdome
Seniors Active Living Centres	2	3	1:71,870	1:47,913	Evergreen, WECC, SECC

11 The Sleeman Centre also houses a municipal ice pad that provides some recreational use for the community. It is not included in this assessment, as the facility's primary function is entertainment. Still, it provides opportunity to increase municipal programming, and as a modern, well-equipped 5,000 seat venue, plays a significant role in Guelph's sport tourism market.

12 Pending Provincial approval of SALC designation

Key issues and opportunities for indoor recreation facilities

Aging facilities

The Canadian Infrastructure Report Card highlights that about 30-35 per cent of recreation facilities in Canada are in fair condition or worse, with many more than 50 years old.¹³ According to recent facility condition assessments, most of the City's recreation facilities are in good condition, but several align with Canadian trends, now at or nearing the end of their service life and requiring infrastructure improvements, renewal or repurposing to maintain appropriate service levels and accommodate future growth. Accessibility updates are also required in some older facilities to ensure equitable and consistent service delivery for all residents of the community. Outdated facility designs – especially in relation to changing demographics and recreation trends – also limit the potential and types of use some facilities can accommodate. The City will need to investigate replacement and/or repurposing of aging recreation infrastructure in the coming years, especially with regards to the two single pad arenas (Exhibition Arena and Centennial Arena) and Lyon Pool.

Transforming aging and underperforming assets

A key challenge for Guelph is ensuring that recreation assets keep up with population growth, changing demographics, and shifting recreational needs and activities. As mentioned above, multi-purpose designs and features will help the City do more with what it already has, maintaining existing programming while responding to new needs. As recreation evolves and patterns of participation shift, the City should also consider how existing infrastructure – especially aging infrastructure already in need of investment and renewal – can be renovated and repurposed to better serve Guelph's future recreation landscape. For example, with many ice sports on the decline, and court and turf sports on the rise, the feasibility of converting aging sole-purpose arenas to court- or field-houses could be examined as a way to meet future provision needs and renew aging assets into hubs for broader community recreation.

¹³ Canada Infrastructure. 2019. Canadian Infrastructure Report Card 2019: monitoring the state of Canada's core public infrastructure. <http://canadianinfrastructure.ca/downloads/canadian-infrastructure-report-card-2019.pdf>



Facility optimization

Land scarcity, rising costs of construction, and changes to the way people recreate are driving recreation providers away from reliance on new infrastructure. Instead, municipalities need to explore creative solutions beyond just adding more. Facility utilization data shows that City recreation facilities are highly used, however, the balance of use is uneven. Amenities like ice, gym, turf and pools face significant pressures during prime time,¹⁴ but are notably underused during shoulder seasons and non-prime time. Construction of the SECC will increase provision levels and address prime time pressures on existing amenities, however, it will also increase patterns of availability during non-prime hours.

A Recreation Facility Optimization Strategy targeting increases to available times and spaces would:

- Offer a more diverse recreation portfolio;
- Bring new users and services into City facilities;
- Optimize use of existing resources and reduce burnt time;
- Generate new revenue streams without the need for significant capital investments; and
- Increase access to City spaces and services.

The strategy should consider partnership opportunities, community engagement, evaluation of the City's allocation and distribution processes, assessment of City program schedules and fill rates, opportunities for placemaking and/or intentional space designs (e.g., preschool-specific space), and a user fee assessment to determine feasible and effective ways to maximize use of existing recreation spaces. The data and analysis generated through this strategy would also support greater alignment with municipal trends that are moving away from facility provision targets based on total population and instead leaning on user registrations, demand and patterns of use to more accurately determine future facility needs and planning.

14 Mon-Fri, 6-8am & 4-11pm and Weekends (all day)

Kitchener free space bookings

The City of Kitchener *Book a Gym Program* allows residents to book a gym or community room for free at one of ten local community centres to use for physical activity or to host a hobby group or neighbourhood meeting. The program provides 45 minutes of gym space or up to two hours of multi-purpose room use for groups up to 10 people. Spaces are available on a first-come, first-served basis, and each group can book once every seven days. The program increases community access, reduces barriers to participation, and improves utilization of non-prime facility space.

Sensory Rooms: Loafer's Lake, City of Brampton

Sensory rooms combine a range of stimuli to help individuals with cognitive or behavioural conditions develop and engage their senses, providing a safe, positive space to self-regulate and take breaks. Sensory rooms reduce the risk of serious incidents, improve program experiences and staff rapport with participants, and create new program opportunities and potential revenue streams for Recreation.

Figure 22: Sensory room



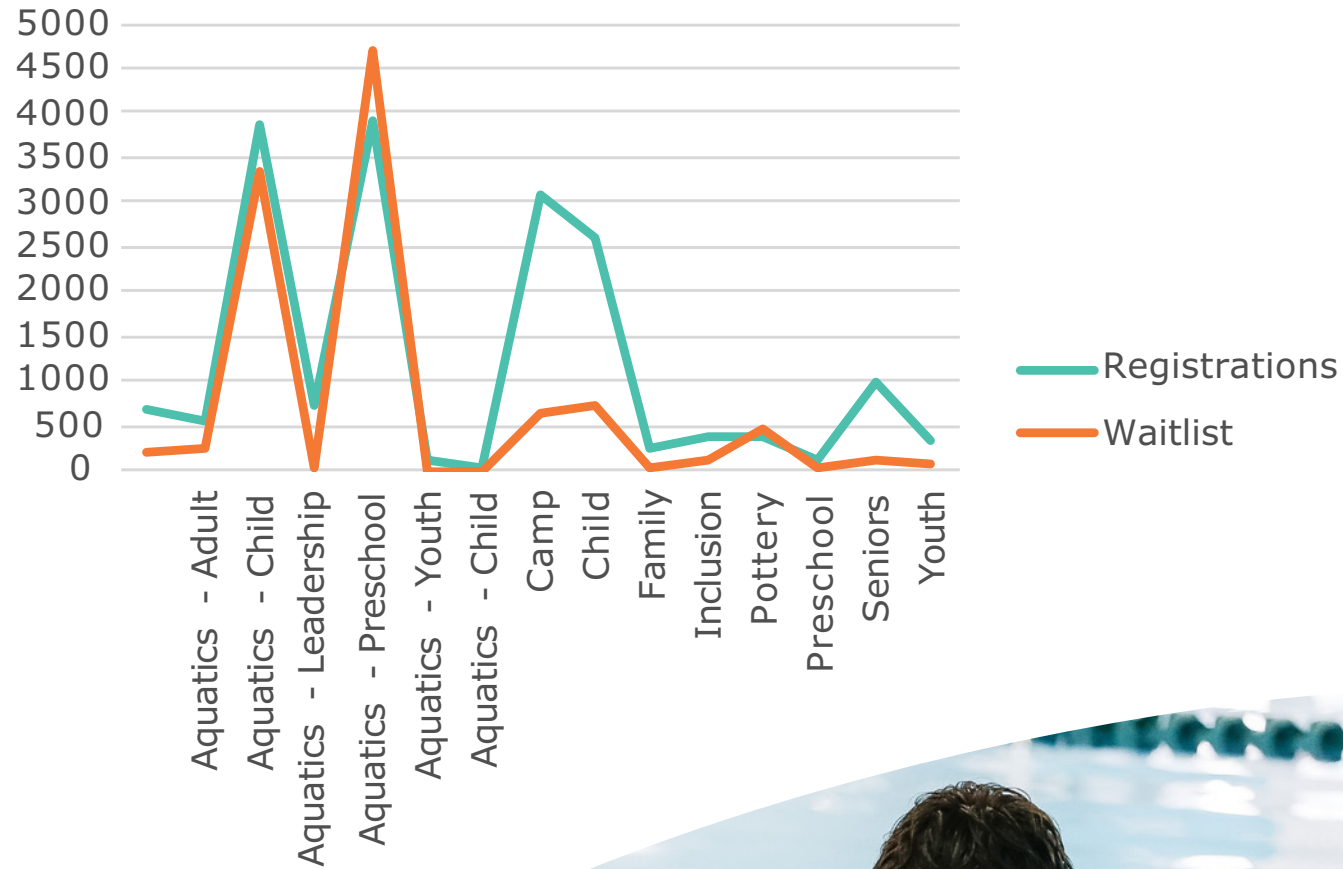
Objectives and recommendations for indoor recreation facilities

63. Install Indigenous and cultural art, signage and plantings in recreation facilities.
64. Collaborate with the City's Culture Department and local Indigenous and BIPOC artists to establish inclusive art installations in Recreation facilities.
65. Through strategic investment or renovation, add new amenities or features inside and outside recreation facilities that promote unstructured play and placemaking in order to create welcoming, safe, playful spaces that can be used in many different ways.
66. Permanently install Sensory Rooms in Victoria Road Recreation Centre and West End Community Centre to improve inclusive services and participation in Recreation facilities.
67. Conduct feasibility study of aging Recreation facilities to evaluate improved service level potential with renovations, renewals or repurposing.
68. Investigate options to increase municipal indoor pool inventory based on projected service level deficits beyond 2033.
69. Conduct a site feasibility study to investigate expansion and/or repurposing of Lyon Pool to improve service level potential through renovations, renewal or repurposing.
70. Develop and implement a Recreation Facility Optimization Strategy to maximize use and potential of existing City Recreation facilities.
71. Collect registration data from user groups to better understand community use and demand for indoor recreation facilities.
72. Adopt provision targets for indoor recreation facilities that are based on the number of registered participants in City and community organization programs rather than total population to plan in line with community demand and facility utilization.

Aquatics

Swimming and aquatic related activities remain some of the most popular recreational pursuits in Canada. The City of Guelph is no exception and continues to experience high demand for both drop-in and registered aquatics programming. From Spring 2022 through Winter 2023, the City of Guelph provided over 23,000 hours of aquatics programming for the community. Learn to Swim programs continue to be the most sought-after activity, with 7,194 people registered in Learn to Swim programming and another 7,330 people on the waitlist – numbers that clearly highlight that people want to be in City pools and participating in City programs.

Figure 23: City of Guelph aquatics registrations and waitlist



Community voice

"Add more pools like Lyons park - its wondering to have an outdoor public pool."

"Guelph needs more pool availability."

"I enjoy the pool programs that I participate in regularly ... generally aquafit and therapy sessions ... and think that the city has done a great job navigating the pandemic period and the social distancing protocols. The staff that I've come into contact with have all been great and they work hard to create a fun, safe and educational space, as well as developing a sense of community."



Trends and best practices in aquatics

Swimming as a critical life skill

The stats at the beginning of this section highlight just how important pools are to the Guelph community. They are a source of fun for residents and visitors, and perhaps more importantly, provide valuable life skills that contribute to the safety and resiliency of the community. Every year about 160 people drown in Ontario. Drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death for children under five, and statistics show that children under 12, young men and seniors 65+ are at the greatest risk.¹⁵ All of these risks and drowning deaths are preventable through water safety knowledge and learn to swim programs. As such, it is vitally important that cities increase access to these programs – especially for at-risk and underserved communities¹⁶ – as they quite literally save lives.

¹⁵ Lifesaving Society. Water Safety, Lifesaving Society: The Lifeguarding Experts. <https://www.lifesavingsociety.com/water-safety.aspx>

¹⁶ LifeSaving Society 2023 Outreach Program Infographic. Retrieved from [lifesavingsociety.com](https://www.lifesavingsociety.com)

Partnerships

Community partnerships play an important role in growing aquatics services and addressing staffing shortages in the recreation sector. In Fall 2022, the City of Guelph and the Upper Grand District School Board re-launched the Leadership Aquatic Program (LAP), a partnership program that provides 40 students per semester with high school credits for completing Instructor-Lifeguard trainings and certifications. Once complete, these leadership certifications can lead to employment with the City of Guelph and other aquatics serving organizations.

Innovative programming

Looking beyond Learn to Swim, the City has developed many unique activities to bring people together in new and exciting ways, improve equity in services, and introduce the joys of water to more people in the community.

Paddleboarding in pools

Guelph was one of the first communities in Ontario to introduce Stand-Up Paddleboarding (SUP) as an in-pool program. Since that time, the City's SUP programming has expanded to include yoga and fitness options for youth and adults.

Women's only swims

Staffed by and open to individuals who identify as women, these swims offer a space of belonging to focus on recreational enjoyment and personal well-being.

Sensory friendly swims

Sensory swims provide an adapted swimming environment for children, youth and adults of all abilities. No music, a smaller group of swimmers, no whistles (unless necessary) and quiet changing rooms create a safe, positive space for participants to self-regulate and better manage stimuli while enjoying the pool.

The "doggie dip"

This program allows pet owners to take their dogs for a swim and a day of play in Lyon Pool.



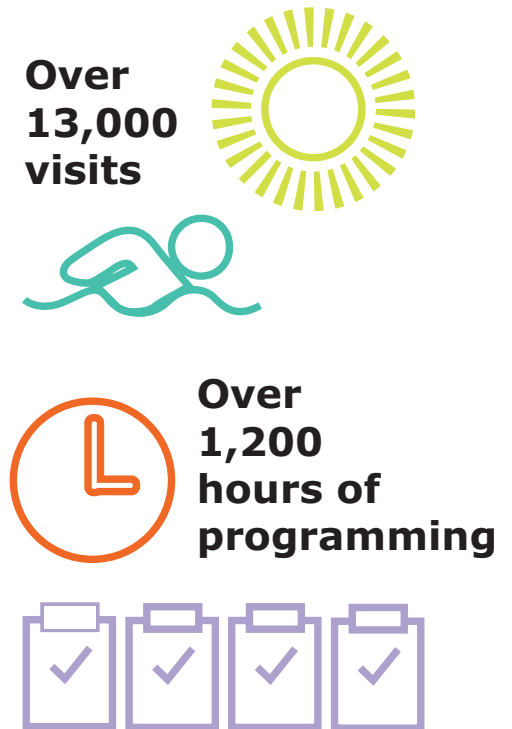
Key issues and opportunities for aquatics

Indoor facilities

With the addition of the SECC, Guelph will have three indoor aquatics facilities in its municipal supply, including the 50m pool at Victoria Road Recreation Centre, which can be divided into two 25m sections to serve larger tournaments and teaching-recreational opportunities. With the SECC, this inventory provides a strong supply and distribution of aquatics facilities throughout Guelph and meets the needs of the community. Based on projected population growth though, the City will start to fall back into undersupply of aquatics facilities by the end of this plan's lifecycle (2033) and will require an additional facility before 2051 to maintain service levels for the community.

Outdoor facilities

Guelph has one outdoor pool (Lyon Pool) that operates during the summer months. In 2022, the pool saw over 13,000 visits and provided over 1,200 hours of programming. Community feedback for the PRMP consistently highlighted demand for outdoor pools and water features. Outdoor pools are also becoming key components of urban climate and heat relief responses,¹⁷ further fueling the value of these amenities to the community. Built in the 1950s, Lyon Pool was designed to serve a population of around 33,000. As Guelph's only outdoor pool, it currently operates at a service level more than four times original intention – a pressure that will reach over five times by 2033. Given the age and condition of the current facility, it is also nearing the end of its service life, and as such, expansion or repurposing should be considered to continue meet service level needs and targets.



17 City of Toronto. City of Toronto Heat Relief Strategy, April 2022, www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/8f66-Heat-Relief-Strategy-2022.pdf

18 Raza, Ali. "Toronto is designed for a climate that doesn't exist anymore and it needs to 'face reality' experts say." CBC, August 13, 2021, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/climate-change-toronto-adaptation-1.6138067

Youth participation and leadership development

Like most communities across North America,¹⁹ Guelph sees a notable drop-off in recreation participation around the age of 10-12. Currently, youth (ages 12-17) only make up about 6 per cent of aquatic program participation – a downward trend that generally continues until about the age of 30 – leaving a significant gap in service provision and the well-being of local youth. The gap in youth participation also impacts leadership development and staffing levels. The City’s aquatic staffing cohort is made up almost entirely of youth and young adults, meaning the decline in participation has a ripple effect into the potential talent pool. Over the past five plus years, the North American aquatics industry experienced a dramatic decline in Lifeguard and Swim Instructor Training participation – a decline further exacerbated by pandemic restrictions and course cancellations. Given that only about one out of every four aquatics Leadership Course participants use their skills and qualifications to work as a lifeguard and/or swim instructor, new and creative approaches to (re)engage young people in aquatics programming are needed to meet growing aquatics service levels.

¹⁹ ParticipACTION. Lost & Found: Pandemic-related challenges and opportunities for physical activity. The 2022 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Toronto: 2022





Ninjacross

Appealing to youth and young adult audiences, Ninjacross is a pool-based gymnastics and obstacle course that provides both fitness and unstructured programming. The system retracts up to the ceiling, allowing facilities to expand their audiences and activities without impeding or impacting existing users or uses.

Figure 24: Ninjacross activity



Movies at the Dive In

Movie theatre meets pool, this unique placemaking activity invites people to enjoy community pools in a completely unconventional way. It also helps showcase that recreation centres are so much more than places to be active, they are places for the community to gather and enjoy a show.

Figure 25: Movie viewing at pool

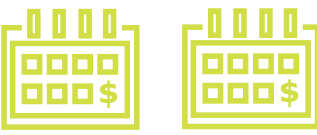




\$1,500 in course fees



Over 170 hours of training



Updated every 2 years for about \$250 and 13 hours of training

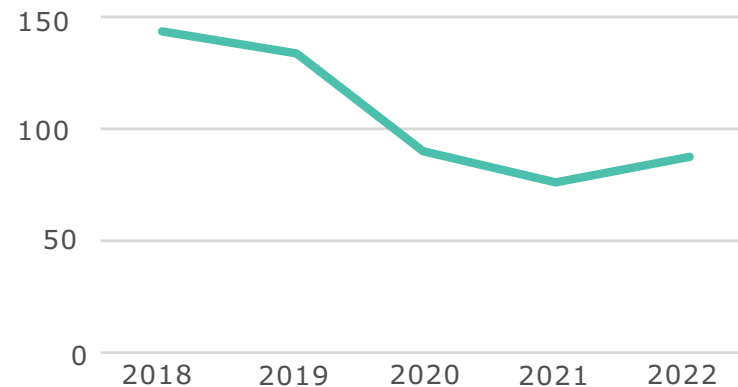
Staffing

Since 2018, the North American aquatics sector has experienced a significant decline in qualified staff, with financial investments and time required to become a certified lifeguard or swim instructor pushing people away from the field.^{20 21} Becoming a certified instructor-lifeguard costs over \$1,500 in course fees and requires over 170 hours of training. These certifications also need to be updated every two years at an additional cost of about \$250 and 13 hours of training. This investment versus reward dilemma has resulted in staffing shortages that led to temporary or intermittent closures and program reductions at City pools.

Pandemic-related closures and training cancellations made this shortage even worse. Many existing recreation staff left the industry for more stable sectors, while the next generation of young swimmers lost the opportunity to develop their skills or be trained and certified, leaving a two-year gap in the already scarce staffing cycle. By Fall 2022, municipalities across the country were canceling programs and adjusting schedules

due to staffing shortages. While the development of the SECC will address the aquatic infrastructure needed to meet service level targets over the next ten years, staffing levels also play a critical role in the City’s ability to maximize the potential of its aquatics assets and meet community demand. Following the lead of other municipalities, the City should consider a staffing model assessment and employee training and incentive programs to address current deficiencies and incentivize long-term staff development and retention.

Figure 26: Aquatics staffing levels



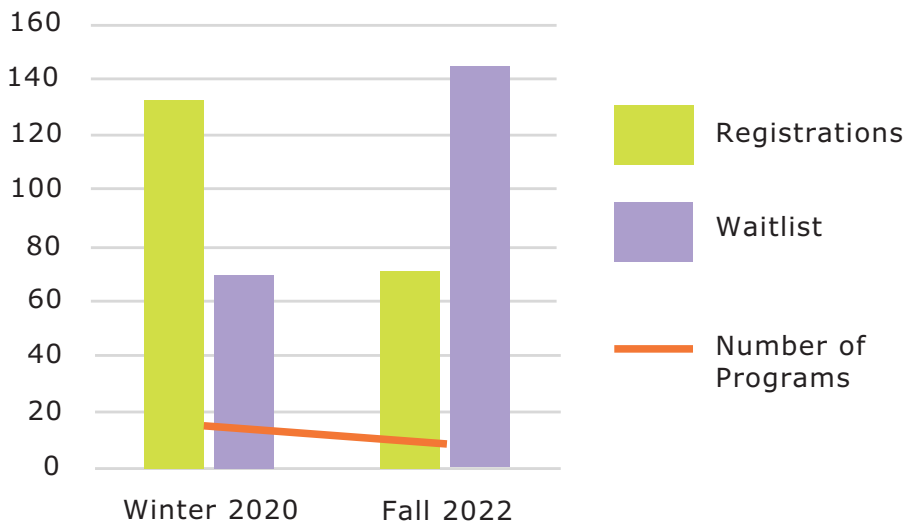
²⁰ Farooqui, Salmaan. "Cities across Canada dealing with lifeguard shortages, struggling to keep pools, beaches open." Globe and Mail, June 25, 2022, www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-lifeguard-shortages-canada/

²¹ Shingler, Benjamin. "Across Canada, a shortage of lifeguards raises concern about next generation of swimmer." CBC, July 18, 2022, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/lifeguards-swimming-lessons-shortage-1.6519453

The aquatics dilemma comes ashore

The recreation staffing dilemma that began in aquatics is now working its way into other areas of recreation. In 2022, City pottery programs had to be scaled back due to staff shortages, providing less than half the number of available spots and more than doubling program waitlists compared to 2019. City fitness programs also had to change or adapt program plans, as staff with specific certifications, like Spin© or Zumba©, could not be secured. City summer camps managed to maintain overall camp spots, but seasonal recruitment ran until June, where historically staff were confirmed in February. These growing staffing challenges suggest that staffing model assessments and employee training and incentives should look beyond aquatics and consider gaps in recreation as a whole.

Figure 27: City of Guelph aquatics registrations and waitlists (2020-2022)



Inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility

The growing demand for aquatics programs and the current decline in certified staff means that many in the community are missing out on opportunities to enjoy City pools and build essential life saving skills. These missed opportunities impact future staffing potential and have lasting consequences for residents – particularly newcomers and people in low-income households.²² The Lifesaving Society of Ontario reports that newcomers are four times less likely to be able to swim than people born in Canada, and that almost 80 per cent of newcomers will be on or around water in the summer-time,²³ placing them at a much higher risk for drowning. Financial costs and registration process barriers also make access to swim lessons unattainable for many low-income individuals and households,²⁴ positioning aquatics as a privileged activity. Strategies are needed to address inequities in aquatics participation, increase representation of underserved communities in aquatics leadership and programming, and improve access to critical lifesaving skills.

22 Musset, Ben. "If we cared, we could do better": Why the scramble for City swim lessons is worse than ever." The Star, October 14, 2022, www.thestar.com/news/gta/2022/10/14/if-we-cared-we-could-do-better-why-the-scramble-for-city-swimming-lessons-is-worse-than-ever.html

23 LifeSaving Society 2023 Outreach Program Infographic. Retrieved from lifesavingsociety.com

24 Pagliaro, Jennifer. "It's like the Hunger Games': Wait-lists for city toddler swim programs double after pandemic pauses." The Star, March 26, 2022, www.thestar.com/news/gta/2022/03/26/its-like-the-hunger-games-wait-lists-for-city-toddler-swim-programs-double-after-pandemic-pauses.html

Objectives and recommendations for aquatics

73. Continue to explore and evaluate emerging trends in aquatic infrastructure and programming – especially those targeting youth and young adults – to address identified demographic gaps in service.
74. Through strategic investment, add new aquatics amenities or features that encourage participation – especially for youth and young adults.
75. Initiate a Recreation staffing model assessment and employee training and incentive programs to identify efficiencies and strategic opportunities to address program and service level vulnerabilities.
76. Continue to explore creative partnerships to increase qualified staffing levels and support the professional and/or academic development of Recreation staff
77. Develop an IDEA strategy ([page 107](#)) in collaboration with local service providers and equity deserving communities to better understand and address barriers to aquatic participation and increase aquatics opportunities for equity deserving individuals and communities.





Community programming

We're all sat in the attic of the recreation centre watching a pot of chilli simmer. An odd mix of social workers, varsity athletes, rec centre staff and folks living in shelters. "Smells good" someone says, hoping to break the awkward silence. A chorus of "yeps" before the room goes quiet again and we all turn our eyes back to the table or the wall. A window here would be helpful, give us all something to stare out of.

Come game time we wander into the gym, leave our stuff against the wall, and snag a ball from the pile dumped in the middle of the floor. A few people start to jog around the gym, a few fire shots at the net, the rest just kind of poke at a ball with their toe. Slowly though, we start to catch each others' eyes, balls get passed back and forth, and eventually a game takes shape.

Afterwards, the chilli room is rowdy, filled with laughter and banter, voices piling on top of voices, claiming rights to the biggest highlights and blunders of the game. A group of awkward strangers only an hour ago, strangers from all different kinds of places, paths and experiences, now bonding over a ball.

This story is not unique. It has been told a thousand different times in a thousand different ways and speaks to recreation's special ability to reach across differences and bring people together around shared experiences. It builds relationships and it builds community.

That is really what this plan aims to do: build community. To do that though, we need to acknowledge that recreation looks different to different people. It is experienced and accessed in different ways. And for many, it is not accessible at all. They are not invited to play, so they are not invited to be part of the community. The actions in this plan need to address that.

From Spring 2022 to Spring 2023, the City delivered over 106,000 drop-in opportunities and provided 3,195 children with camp experiences. Over 17,600 unique residents registered in City programs and almost 24,000 engaged with Recreation Services in some capacity. More than 50 City programs were offered in community spaces to improve geographic reach and over 100 were offered as shared caregiver-child or tandem-timing activities to make it

easier for everyone in the household to participate. While these numbers and efforts highlight the City's commitment to remove barriers and provide quality recreation experiences, registration mapping for this plan highlights that certain areas of Guelph are better served than others and that only about 12 per cent of the local population participates in City programs. Understanding local barriers to participation and aligning with trends in recreation will build engagement with equity-deserving communities and increase opportunities for all Guelph residents.

Over 106,000 drop-in opportunities 

Provided 3,195 children with camp experiences 

Over 17,600 registered in City programs 

Almost 24,000 engaged with Recreation Services 

100+ were shared caregiver-child or tandem-timing activities 

Community voice

"I think that regardless, a high priority and degree of consideration in use should be given to children as well as newcomers and those for whom English is not a first language... There are many things in Guelph that are hard to access if you don't have a car or know where to go."

"Something in the core... There are only small private gyms downtown."

"Cost of living and taxes are skyrocketing and those of us on fixed incomes are being hit hard. Something to bear in mind."

"More recreation programs in the community. Love those free programs in the parks."

"I loved the offerings a while back where you could pay a small fee and select several types of classes to try in one day. it was fun to meet new people, the instructors, tour the facility, and TRY new activities. You know, "Try it! You might like it."

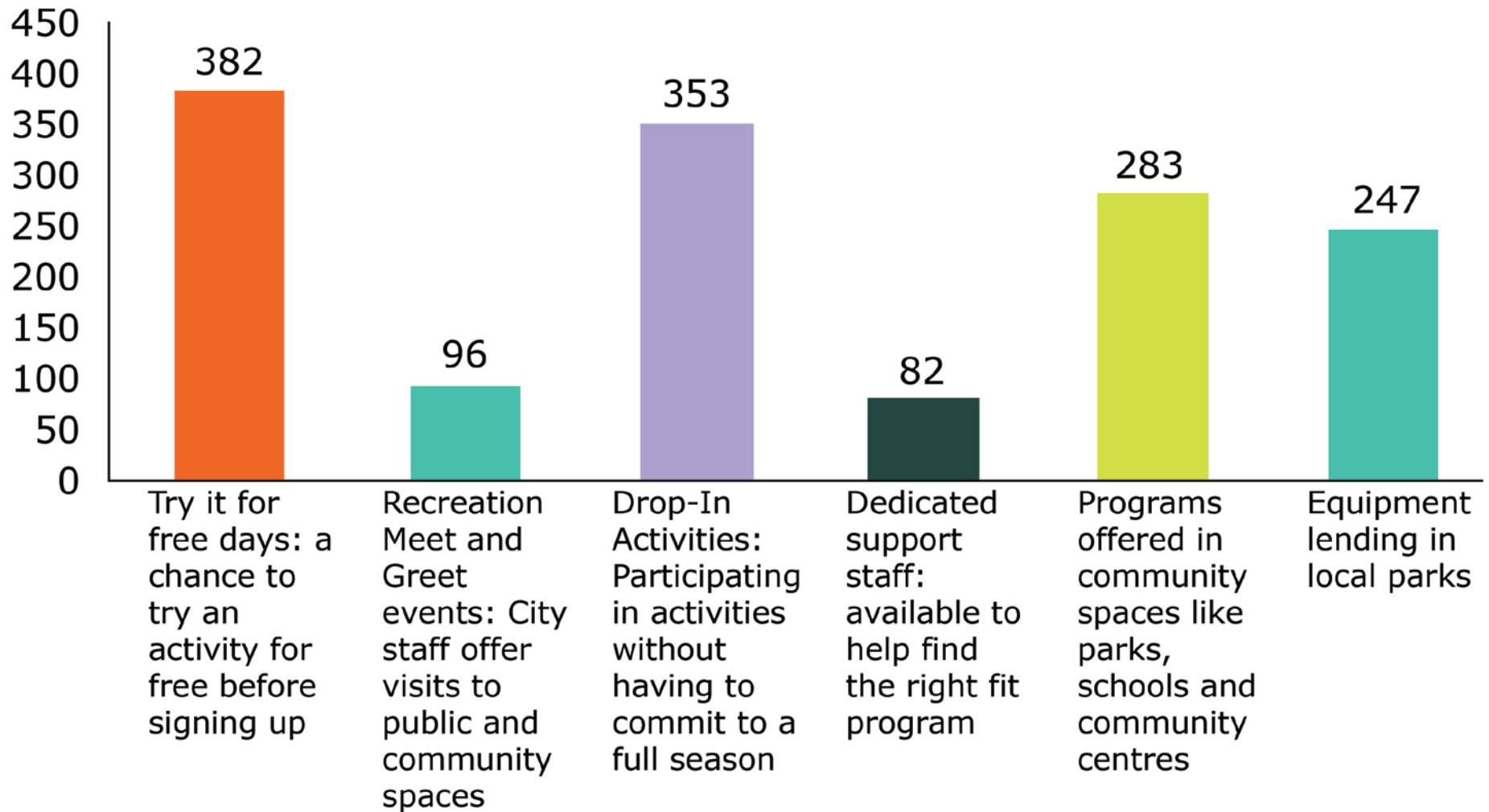
Trends and best practices in community programming

Recreation sampling

Recreation Sampling or "try it" programming is an evidenced and effective strategy to engage new audiences in recreation and physical activity. Offered as single sessions, at no or low cost and no long-term commitment, try-it programs give people the opportunity to experience new activities, discover new interests, and build a wider range of skills. Patterns in recreation suggest that people are moving away from specialized or single sport participation. In response, recreation sampling ignites peoples' interest through a variety of options and fosters lifelong participation in physical activity.²⁵ This approach also allows recreation providers to trial new activities and use ongoing community feedback to shape program offerings. If strategically delivered during shoulder seasons – the time period before or following a scheduled season – a series of try-it activities can also improve facility optimization by making use of space and time that normally goes unused.

²⁵ BG, Mulcahey MK. The concept of sport sampling versus sport specialization: Preventing youth athlete injury: A systematic review and meta-analysis. The American Journal of Sports Medicine. 2020;48(11):2850-7.

Figure 28: What kinds of initiatives might make it easier or more welcoming for you to enjoy new activities?²⁶



Spontaneous recreation

Pandemic-related closures and restrictions forced people to think differently about how they recreate. Without access to facilities and organized activities, people engaged in more unstructured activities that took place on their own schedules. Although the recreation sector experienced a surge in program registrations when pandemic restrictions lifted, participation in spontaneous recreation remains a lasting trend. Time is now proving one of the biggest barriers to participation, with people unable or unwilling to commit consistent and dedicated time to an activity.^{27 28} As a result, recreation providers need think differently about how they design and deliver programs, offering more flexibility in activities, scheduling, location, and approach to meet the growing demand for less structured activities.



Outdoor recreation

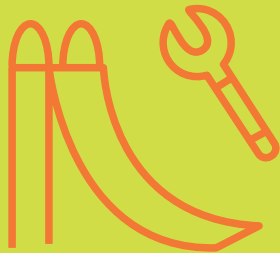
There are so many benefits to being outdoors. Simply going for a walk in green space reduces anxiety, depression, asthma and high-blood pressure. The benefits of being outdoors are so great in fact that doctors are now prescribing nature as a treatment for physical and mental health conditions.²⁹ Add in elements of play, which improve cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being for people of all ages – especially young children – and the outcome is a happier and healthier community.

Demand for outdoor programs and activities ballooned during the pandemic and remains on the rise. This shifting trend requires recreation providers to think outside facility walls and reduce reliance on built features and amenities. Instead, providers need to consider creative ways of animating open spaces and incorporate natural environments into program design. Growing connections with the natural environment also helps foster stewardship and creates opportunities to embed nature education and participatory practices into recreational programs. This provides an opportunity to support synergies with other City strategies, like the [Guelph Trail Master Plan](#) and [Natural Heritage Action Plan](#), that will improve local environmental outcomes and enhance residents' quality of life.

27 "Shift toward more unstructured physical activities could be pandemic legacy, researchers find." CBC, April 19, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/shift-toward-more-unstructured-physical-activities-could-be-pandemic-legacy-researchers-find-1.6420153>

28 Goodwein, Tiffany. "City Recreation trend looks towards more spontaneous activities." Chat News Today, October 6, 2021, <https://chatnewstoday.ca/2021/10/06/city-recreation-trend-looks-towards-more-spontaneous-activities/>

29 Turunen AW, Halonen J, Korpela K, et al. "Cross-sectional associations of different types of nature exposure with psychotropic, antihypertensive and asthma medication." *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 2023;80:111-118.



Park Activation program

Launched as a grant-funded pilot program in 2017, the Park Activation program has become one of the City’s most popular programs, engaging over 1000 children and caregivers each year. Using the principles of outdoor, unstructured play, the low-barrier program introduces children and caregivers to new activities and ways to use park spaces, improving physical and mental well-being, and strengthening social connections. The program also increases engagement with local parks and green spaces, with 77 per cent of participants stating that they now visit parks more often as a result of participating in Park Activation.

Figure 29: Activation Station



Partnerships and collaboration

The strategic actions and service delivery model outlined in this plan will go a long way to increasing the City’s reach in the community and creating valuable recreation opportunities for the growing population. That said, the City cannot be all things to all people and cannot hope to meet the needs of all residents alone. Guelph is incredibly fortunate to have many passionate residents, service providers and recreation organizations capable of contributing to community health and well-being. The City currently has many formal and informal partnerships with community stakeholders, leaning on the expertise of others to build rapport and strengthen relationships with underrepresented groups and enable recreational opportunities beyond the capacity of the municipality.

The Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition (GNSC)

The GNSC is a network of neighbourhood groups, sponsoring agencies and program partners. Each neighbourhood group operates in an autonomous way at the grass roots level to meet the needs of children, youth and families in the neighbourhood. As a neighbourhood-level service provider, the GNSC supports all kinds of different recreation activities, from cooking programs to after school activities to cultural gatherings and conversation circles in many mother tongues. They also provide a voice for residents, sharing the unique strengths, challenges and opportunities of each neighbourhood, and developing and advocating for responsive, community-led programs and initiatives.

With a shared focus on improving inclusive recreation experiences, the partnership between the GNSC and the City enables direct engagement and learning opportunities with equity-deserving groups and individuals, shared trainings to improve staff and community development, collaborative programming, and most recently, a pilot project aimed at removing barriers and increasing participation in recreation for local newcomers.

Key issues and opportunities for community programming

Barriers to participation

Despite the foundational understanding that City recreation facilities, programs and services are open to everyone, there are many different barriers that keep people from participating in City recreation. Some are tangible, like financial ability or geographic location, while others are systemic, but all contribute to the disparities in participation, health and well-being, and sense of social belonging for at-risk communities.^{30 31} To support the City's [Community Plan](#) commitments to inclusive prosperity, equitable access, and enabling play everywhere, City recreation has a responsibility to move beyond an "open to everyone" mentality, and develop strategic actions aimed at building trust and relationships in the community, understanding and removing local barriers to participation, and developing specific programs and initiatives to increase recreational opportunities for underserved people and groups.

30 ParticipACTION. Lost & Found: Pandemic-related challenges and opportunities for physical activity. The 2022 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Toronto: ParticipACTION; 2022

31 Canadian Parks and Recreation Association/Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (February 2015). A Framework for Recreation in Canada - 2015 - Pathways to Wellbeing. Ottawa: Canadian Recreation and Parks Association. 40 pages.

Inclusion services

City of Guelph Recreation provides a range of supports to ensure individuals living with disabilities can meaningfully participate in recreation activities. Over the past 10 years, Inclusion Services has experienced a significant increase in participants with sensory, communication, medical, mental health and behavioural needs, placing pressures on available resources and current service levels. The complexity of many individuals accessing Inclusion Services has also increased in recent years, requiring additional staff trainings and specialized third-party services to accommodate participation, maintain staff and participant safety, and provide positive recreation experiences.

Aligning Inclusion staffing and service levels with broader community demographics helps establish a baseline for service and mitigates risks associated with behavioural challenges and the City's duty to accommodate under the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#). As demand is most keenly felt during summer months, when camps take on the daytime caregiver role of schools, local school board data provides a valuable benchmark

for service needs. During the 2020-2021 enrollment year, almost 14 per cent of Guelph students (Junior Kindergarten-Grade 8) received special education services,³² while only about 4 per cent of total camp spots were allocated to Inclusion, suggesting that the City's seasonal provision levels need to more than triple to meet community needs. Incorporating specialized behavioural and/or therapeutic recreation staff into Inclusion Services would also help address growing complexities in service and create long-term pathways for participants (e.g., transitional-aged programming and employment opportunities in recreation). As noted in the Strategy Section ([page 101](#)) of this plan, alternative Inclusion service delivery models should also be investigated to ensure appropriate long-term supports and service levels for Inclusion participants.

32 Data Source: <https://www.app.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sift/elementary.asp>

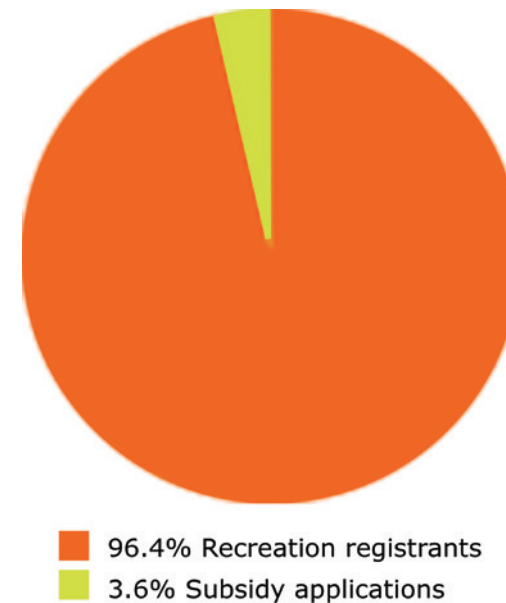


Program navigation

As Guelph’s population grows and becomes more diverse, it is important to consider the role City Recreation can play in supporting and accommodating the varying needs of equity deserving individuals and communities. For example, many local newcomers reported that finding and accessing information about recreation programs can be difficult and time-consuming – especially if materials are only available in English. The process of registering for programs, much of which needs to be done in advance of registration dates to ensure timely access to high demand activities, can be a new concept and vary depending on service provider, preventing people from participating.^{33 34} For many, not fully understanding the requirements of specific programs – for example choosing the appropriate swim level based on ability not age or the need for sharpened skates and a CSA approved helmet for learn to skate programs – can impact positive recreation experiences and contribute to stigma and confidence barriers that have lasting negative consequences. More than half of the people participating in the Phase 4 community survey for the PRMP were also unaware that subsidy programs were available for recreation programs. Improving registration process and subsidy application awareness, and including orientation sessions for City activities, would increase registrations and subsidy uptake and provide more supportive entry into City recreation.

Subsidy applicants make up 3.6 per cent of Recreation’s current customer base. Currently, only 20 per cent of approved subsidies are actually used to register in recreation programs, dropping the customer base to 1 per cent, while about 11 per cent of Guelph residents live below the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO).

Figure 30: Amount of City recreation participants using subsidy programs



33 Shrestha, Niva. Understanding Barriers of Recent Immigrants to Access Recreational Activities in Guelph (2022). guelphwellingtonlip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Understanding-Barriers-of-Recent-Immigrants-to-Access-Recreational-Activities-in-Guelph-FINAL.pdf

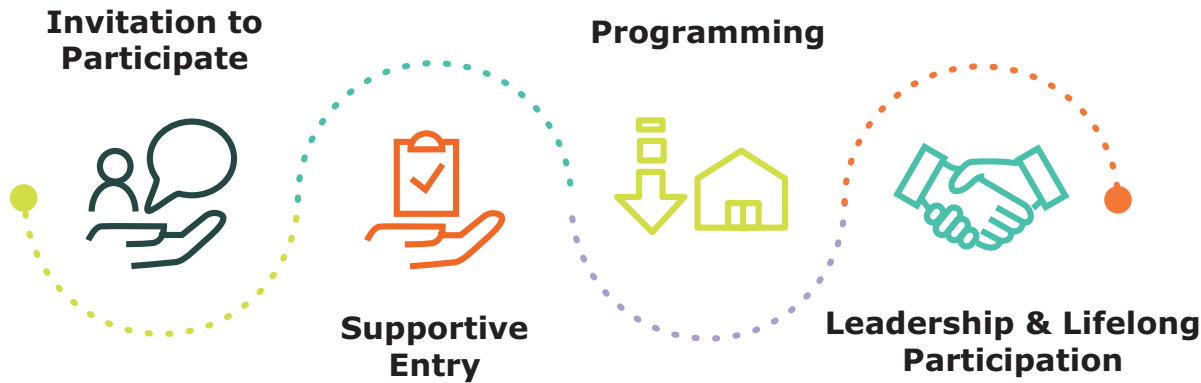
34 Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership. "Best Practices for Inclusion in Parks and Recreation" (2022). www.guelphwellingtonlip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Best-Practices-for-Inclusion-in-Parks-and-Recreation-A-Review-of-Existing-Literature-FINAL.pdf

Program delivery model

Combining all the trends and opportunities above into a multi-phased Program Delivery Model would allow City Recreation to better distribute resources throughout the community, serve more residents, build relationships with equity-deserving communities, and strengthen partnerships with local organizations. It would also create multiple entry points into City Recreation, meet residents where they are at, provide a more supportive experience, and improve quality of services and programs.



Figure 31: Proposed City recreation program continuum



Invitation to Participate

Deliver community-based programs and activities to:

- Introduce residents to City Recreation through “try-it” activities
- Reduce barriers to participation through no and low cost, community-based activities
- In-person information sharing and feedback opportunities
- Connections to subsidy and inclusion support programs
- Connections to community recreation providers depending on activities of interest



Supportive Entry

Modify current program delivery approach to include pre-program orientation sessions to better support entry into formal or registered recreation.

- Build “program readiness”: teaching participants what they need to know to be successful and have a meaningful experience in recreation programs

Registered and Drop-In Programming

Enhancing current state.

- Indoor and Outdoor program options in City facilities and community spaces
- Traditional programs and diversified activities based on feedback from Invitation to Participate
- Tiered programming, from “come as you are” to advanced skill options

Leadership and Lifelong Participation

Build a lifelong pathway for recreation.

- Support transitions through phases of City Recreation
 - Pre-school > child > youth/ leadership > adult > seniors
 - Sustain participation through vulnerable timepoints
 - Introduce volunteer opportunities beginning in youth lasting through lifetime
- Support graduated transitions to community organizations
 - e.g., Learn to Skate > Minor Hockey
- Support transitions from recreation participant to recreation leader
 - Develop future leaders and staff cohorts through early engagement in recreation and skill development, early introduction to qualification pathways, identifying areas of interest and supporting recreational goal planning

Objectives and recommendations for community programming

78. Incorporate recreation sampling into Recreation service delivery and develop a series of low-cost, low-commitment “try-it” activities to introduce community members to City recreation programs.
79. Investigate including free “try-it” activities as part of Welcome to Guelph Program.
80. Increase provision of drop-in recreation programs to accommodate growing demand for spontaneous recreation options and activities.
81. Continue to provide recreation programming in schools and other community spaces to increase the reach and geographic distribution of City recreation services.
82. Collaborate with Parks, Planning and Environmental Planning to align actions and improve outcomes in the Guelph Trails Master Plan and Natural Heritage Action Plan.
83. Continue to explore partnerships and collaborations focused on expanding and enhancing recreation opportunities for the community.
84. Explore collaborations with the City Culture Department to leverage existing facilities to increase community recreation opportunities and address service deficits.
85. Increase Inclusion service levels to reflect broader community demographics.
86. Undertake a comprehensive equity mapping process to establish priority initiative areas for recreation investment and engagement, including the development of low-barrier recreation programming.
87. Adopt and implement the proposed four-phase Program Delivery Model to improve Recreation’s service continuum, more equitably distribute recreation resources across the city, and increase access to supported recreation for community members.
88. Develop a comprehensive program evaluation plan to establish meaningful performance measures and ensure the updated Program Delivery Model meets service expectations and community needs.



Recreation Strategies

Youth Strategy

Creating a youth friendly city benefits everyone. Youth are our future leaders and the builders of tomorrow. When youth are engaged and involved in their community – and the decisions that shape it – cities are more connected, creative and culturally vibrant. A successful city must welcome its youth and invest in actions that allow them to thrive now and into the future.

In 2012, the City made a commitment to local young people through the 2013-2018 [Think Youth Strategy](#). The strategy included 40 recommendations, designed and driven by youth, to shape Guelph in a youth-friendly way and ensure that local youth are celebrated and supported by a caring network of elected officials, community members, local organizations, and municipal staff.

Community voice

“You have great programs for wee ones, kids and seniors. We have tweens / teens in our home and this seems like a bit of a missing group - in terms of programming for those kids that may not be on sports teams (for various reasons) – but families may value opportunities to expose them to different types of activities that they could build confidence in.”

Trends and best practices in youth recreation

Youth-friendly city designation

In 2015, the City was awarded a Gold Designation as a Youth Friendly City for its “outstanding commitment to providing youth with opportunities to play, and to participate in and contribute to their community.”³⁵ This award and the actions behind it were driven by the commitments and recommendations outlined in the Think Youth Strategy.

Guelph Youth Council

A City-led initiative, Guelph Youth Council is a group of passionate young people, ages 13-18, that strive to preserve and enhance youth culture in Guelph. The Council works to ensure that all meetings are safe, inclusive spaces where young people can gather to have a say in the solutions that shape their community. As local experts and advocates, Guelph Youth Council played an advisory role on several high-profile municipal and community-led projects, including the Transportation Master Plan, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and local Youth Wellness Hubs.

Think Youth Strategy

As of December 2018, 36 of 40 goals outlined in the Think Youth Strategy were successfully implemented. Ranging from active transportation initiatives to inclusive recreation opportunities to youth engagement trainings and policies for City staff, the strategy made numerous and notable impacts on the Guelph Community.

Key issues and opportunities for youth recreation

Youth participation rates

As noted throughout this plan, youth participation in organized recreation declines significantly around ages 10-12 and continues until early adulthood. Youth (ages 12-17) account for less than 1 per cent of City recreation registrations. The COVID-19 pandemic further impacted youth engagement in City programs, with Guelph Youth Council dropping from an average of 30 members in 2019 to just three in Fall 2022. Resources and youth-driven strategies are needed to effectively re-engage local youth in recreation, civic participation and community development.

The loneliest generation

The current generation of youth have never known a time without the internet or immediate access to information on a phone that can travel with them everywhere they go. This instant access to information and the online world makes youth incredibly self-driven and socially conscious. It also means they spend a lot of time independently consuming online content and without direct human connection. In a world more connected than ever, youth feel more isolated, lonely, and alone than any other generation. City Recreation needs to create affordable, accessible, and authentic opportunities for youth to build meaningful human connections and participate in civic development. Recreation also needs to engage youth in completely different ways than it did in 2012 or 2018. New insights and youth-driven strategies are needed to help Guelph maintain its “outstanding commitment to providing youth with opportunities to play, and to participate in and contribute to their community.”

³⁵ City of Guelph. Ontario Youth Friendly Communities Recognized at Blue Mountain Resort, City of Guelph, Is Play in Your Community, 2015, <https://guelph.ca/wp-content/uploads/YFC-Media-Release-2015.pdf>

Older Adult Strategy

Older adults aged 55 and up currently make up about 28 per cent of Guelph's population – a figure that is projected to rise locally and nationally over the next 10 years. By 2036, the number of Older Adults in Canada is estimated to reach between 9.9-10.9 million people.³⁶

In 2012, City of Guelph Council approved the City's Older Adult Strategy. The Strategy was developed based on extensive consultations, using a framework consistent with the World Health Organization's (WHO) Dimensions of Age-Friendliness. Through six foundational and 58 WHO domain related recommendations, Guelph was designated as an Age Friendly City in 2014.

Community voice

"Many of the programs for people 55 and up are during the weekday assuming that these folks are retired but some of us still work fulltime."

"The parks need to provide spaces for seniors: gathering areas with suitable seating, chess tables, coffee bars and seating areas with shade, gentle walking areas, enabling gardens, story telling areas."

"I would like see programming that is available for aging adults that are still active and community focused in the south end of Guelph. This seems to be a bit of a wasteland for seniors if not involved in the arboretum community. The Evergreen Senior's Centre is very far away when taking public transportation from the south end of Guelph."



³⁶ ParticipACTION. April 3, 2019, 60 is the new 30: Six ways being active keeps you young. www.participaction.com/blog/60-is-the-new-30-six-ways-being-active-keeps-you-young/

Trends and best practices in older adult recreation

Physical health and wellness

As people move into older adulthood, the risk for many chronic health conditions increases, as does the risk of falling, which is the leading cause of injury-related hospitalizations among older adults in Canada.³⁷ Engagement in recreation is a key way to stop or slow health conditions, injury and disease that disproportionately affect older adults. Regular physical activity can lower rates of heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, Type 2 diabetes and reduce the rates of certain cancers. It also improves strength, balance and mobility, all of which lower the risk of falling.

Cognitive and mental health

By 2030, nearly 1 million Canadians are expected to be living with dementia – a figure forecasted to almost double by 2050.³⁸ Regular participation in recreation and physical activity improves cognitive function, protects against the onset of dementia, and slow its progression, making people more mentally fit and reducing burdens on caregivers and the health care system.³⁹ Regular engagement in recreation and physical activity also improves self-esteem, mood, and the ability to handle stress, building happiness and resiliency.

Social connection and participation

Older adults are more at-risk of social isolation due to declining health, risk of fall-related injuries – especially during inclement weather – and shrinking social networks. This isolation was even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Public Health measures, such as lockdowns and stay at home orders, had harmful social consequences for older populations.⁴⁰ City Recreation played an important role during this time, re-designing programs and services to keep older adults food secure, socially connected, and physically active. More generally, recreation is a great way to meet new people and connect with friends, both through activities and volunteer opportunities. Developing and delivering intergenerational programming also creates social benefits for older adults and young people and is an effective tool in reducing ageism.

Partnerships: Guelph Wellington Seniors Association

With approximately 2,100 members, The Guelph-Wellington Seniors Association (GWSA) is one of the largest seniors' organizations of its kind in Canada, providing diverse programs, activities and services to Guelph and Wellington County. Through a Community Benefit Agreement, the GWSA and the City of Guelph share a strategic partnership that improves access to recreation and social opportunities for older adults. This partnership expands the reach of both the City and GWSA, enabling greater engagement with local seniors to improve service delivery, information sharing and policy development.

37 ParticipACTION. April 3, 2019, 60 is the new 30: Six ways being active keeps you young. www.participaction.com/blog/60-is-the-new-30-six-ways-being-active-keeps-you-young/

38 Alzheimer Society of Canada. "The Landmark Study: Navigating the path forward for dementia in Canada." 2022. https://alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/documents/Landmark-Study-Report-1-Path_Alzheimer-Society-Canada.pdf

39 Alzheimer Society of Canada. "The Landmark Study: Navigating the path forward for dementia in Canada." 2022. https://alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/documents/Landmark-Study-Report-1-Path_Alzheimer-Society-Canada.pdf

40 Government of Canada. "Social Isolation Among Older Adults During the Pandemic." 2021. Prepared by: Andrew V. Wister, Ph. D. and Laura Kadowaki, Ph. D. Gerontology Research Centre Simon Fraser University for the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Forum of Ministers Responsible for Seniors. <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors/forum/covid-19-social-isolation/covid-19-social-isolation-en.pdf>

Key issues and opportunities for older adult recreation

Digital divide

For a variety of reasons, including affordability, digital literacy and attitudes towards technology, many older adults do not prioritize and/or have access to digital tools and communication, often leaving them disconnected from their families and their community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this digital divide became even more problematic as community gatherings and social connections moved almost exclusively online, isolating those without access to technology or the skills to use it. That said, as baby boomers and generation X move into older adulthood, a second seniors' cohort, one that is digitally literate, is emerging, requiring balance in recreation and civic planning to ensure services and cities are designed with these diverse needs and abilities in mind.

Changing demographics

As noted above, a large number of younger, digitally literate people who are still in the workforce are moving into older adulthood. Guelph's new Canadian population is also growing at a faster rate than provincial and national averages,⁴¹ with many newcomer seniors providing childcare roles within multigenerational households.⁴² Activities of interest are also changing rapidly both in Guelph and across North America. Spreading to younger demographics, but founded on a base of older adults, Pickleball is growing at a rapid pace. Culturally meaningful programs, like Qi Gong and Tai Chi, are also core programs for City of Guelph Recreation. As the Guelph community continues to grow and become more diverse, the design and delivery of programs, services and supports needs to be reflective of the community's changing needs, interests and demographics.

Barriers to participation

Rising costs and affordability were highlighted as barriers to recreation throughout all phases of community feedback for the PRMP. This feedback was most pronounced in comments from older adults, many of whom live on limited or fixed incomes. Annual recreation fee increases have remained at or below 2 per cent for the past 5 years,⁴³ but given consistent community feedback and evidenced financial barriers to participation, further assessment and strategic approaches specifically supporting older adult participation in recreation are needed. Registration mapping of City of Guelph Seniors programming also show geographic areas of under- and over-representation throughout the city, suggesting imbalances in access to recreation. These imbalances need to be assessed further to fully understand neighbourhood-level barriers and opportunities and improve the distribution of recreation resources throughout the city.

41 Statistics Canada. Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population, Guelph.

42 Government of Canada. Social isolation of seniors: A Focus on New Immigrant and Refugee Seniors in Canada. Employment and Social Development Canada, 2022. www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors/forum/social-isolation-immigrant-refugee.html

43 Barring a few program-specific increases based on inflationary costs of consumable supplies

Lessons Learned: Think Youth and Older Adult Strategy

The Think Youth Guelph Strategy and the Older Adult Strategy were both ambitious documents aimed at improving life and culture for underserved Guelph residents. Both strategies included large numbers of recommendations, spanning across many areas of municipal service, and further, into autonomous realms of the community. Despite the evidence-informed and well-intentioned nature of these strategies, both were approved for implementation without any dedicated or sustainable funding and stretched into service areas and community domains where City Recreation had no influence or direct means to promote change. For example, while 90 per cent of the recommendations outlined in the Youth Strategy were achieved, this was accomplished largely through extensive staff time and the good will of many local businesses and organizations. The remaining 10 per cent were also complex, high-profile objectives that could not be realistically achieved or sustained without dedicated funding. They were also the objectives perceived to have the greatest direct impact on civic engagement, inclusion, and wellbeing for Guelph Youth (e.g., a recreation portfolio specifically for youth experiencing homelessness, addiction and/or mental health challenges; Youth Advisor to City Council). This lack of resourcing and issue of scope made prioritizing and actioning strategy recommendations challenging, if not, unrealistic in many cases.

Both strategies also did not include timelines for review or key performance indicators against which to measure impact and success. As such, it was challenging to assess whether community needs and strategy goals remained relevant

throughout the respective strategy timeframes or whether the work and resources invested had any measurable impact on their intended audiences.

The population and built form of Guelph has grown and changed over the past 10 years, with even larger growth and change forecasted for the next 10. Future strategies, like those recommended in this section, should be structured as living documents, allowing for continuous input from the community and the flexibility to consistently reflect the community they aim to improve. Future strategies should also include dedicated project management to steward the implementation of objectives, as well as pursue funding and partnerships to support identified goals. Both the Youth Strategy and the Older Adult Strategy contained recommendations beyond the purview of Recreation's service area. Dedicated project management would have helped facilitate the development of shared objectives across City departments and community organizations, leading to more impactful and sustainable strategy outcomes.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Strategy

Driven by global social, political and economic events, the City's Community Plan was updated in 2022, making a formal commitment to identify Guelph's most vulnerable populations, to listen closely to their stories, struggles, and pain, and to work toward equity and the permanent elimination of exclusion and systemic racism in all forms.

Parks and Recreation have a role to play in this work and commitment. A recent local study showed that about 9 out of 10 Indigenous Peoples and 7 out of 10 Immigrants and Visible Minorities experienced discrimination in Guelph in the last three years, with 50.5 per cent and 24.1 per cent of these incidents, respectively, taking place in a library, community/recreation centre or arena.⁴⁴ 2021 Census data also shows that almost 23 per cent of the local population have an identified disability, yet City Inclusion services and programs only account for about 1 per cent of Recreation registrations. Improving these experiences and opportunities means acknowledging and addressing the fact that underserved communities – like women, Indigenous peoples, people living with disabilities, members of visible minorities, newcomers to Canada, and residents living in low-income – face numerous barriers and have less access to municipally funded recreation.^{45 46}

To move forward as a united community, as envisioned in the City's Community Plan, a Recreation specific Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Strategy is needed to improve practices and processes, ensure trusting relationships are built with vulnerable communities, and sustained efforts are made to eliminate the exclusion in Recreation environments and systems.

Community voice

"The City is a trusted provider of Inclusion Services."

"Offer more diverse and cultural programs."

"Reduce costs to programs by making it available to all social economic Families."

"Ensure access to facilities for all children and people with disabilities, despite income."

44 Lapshina, Natalia and Esses, Victoria. Discrimination Experienced by Immigrants, Visible Minorities, and Indigenous Peoples in Guelph: an empirical study by the Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership. March 2022. guelphwellingtonlip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GWLIP-Discrimination-Report-Guelph-final-web.pdf

45 Shrestha, Niva. Understanding Barriers of Recent Immigrants to Access Recreational Activities in Guelph (2022). www.guelphwellingtonlip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Best-Practices-for-Inclusion-in-Parks-and-Recreation-A-Review-of-Existing-Literature-FINAL.pdf

46 Ariba, Mark, Sam Laban, Chris Schuck, and Lindsey Thompson. Equity and Recreation Policy. Community Engaged Scholarship Institute, University of Guelph (2022; currently in review).

Trends and best practices for inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible recreation

Recreation subsidies and Community Investment Strategy

The City's Community Investment Strategy focuses on building partnerships and providing funding and in-kind support to local not-for-profit organizations to achieve community and social goals and improve the well-being of Guelph residents. The strategy supports the delivery of sport and recreation activities for the community and provides subsidies for participation in recreation activities. The City of Guelph currently manages and distributes Adult (18+) recreation subsidies through the Fee Assistance in Recreation (FAIR) Program and maintains a Community Benefit Agreement with the Children's Foundation of Guelph and Wellington to distribute recreation subsidies for children and youth through the Free to Grow Program. In 2023, the City's Community Investment department also launched a micro-granting program to support community building through creative ideas that activate neighbourhoods and arts-based initiatives.

Inclusion Services

City Inclusion Services provides one-to-one support, adapted programming and

specialized summer camps to ensure individuals living with disabilities can meaningfully participate in recreation activities. In 2019, Inclusion Services received the Parks and Recreation Ontario Access and Equity Award for the Limitless Guelph initiative, a provincially funded pilot program that provided education and barrier-free adaptive sport programming to over 1,800 local children and youth.

Inclusion staffing models

Given recent growth in and demand for inclusive recreation, many municipalities are updating staffing models to ensure qualified and appropriate supports for people with disabilities participating in recreation. These models vary across municipalities, but generally involve three core approaches: recruitment of specialized staff, contracted services, and partnerships with health and developmental services. For example, many municipalities have incorporated behaviour specialists and recreation therapists into their recreation teams to act as resources to both staff and participants requiring enhanced supports. Other municipalities are contracting or partnering with professional, specialized services with experience in lifts and transfers, mobility

supports, communication barriers (e.g., sign language or picture exchange communication systems), behaviour management, and medically intensive participants (medication administration, feeding tubes, high-choking risks, etc.) to appropriately support inclusive participation. Moving towards equitable access for all community members requires municipalities investigate and invest in alternative staffing model to address local needs and support inclusive opportunities for residents facing barriers to participation.

Ottawa spirit program

A joint venture between the City of Ottawa and the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, the Spirit program provides respite day services and summer programs for children and youth with complex medical, behavioural, emotional and/or other mental health needs. Funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and facilitated in City recreation facilities, the program offers access to municipal recreation staff, as well as on-site Registered Nurses, Recreation Therapists, and one to one attendant care to support participation in a full range of individual and group recreation experiences.

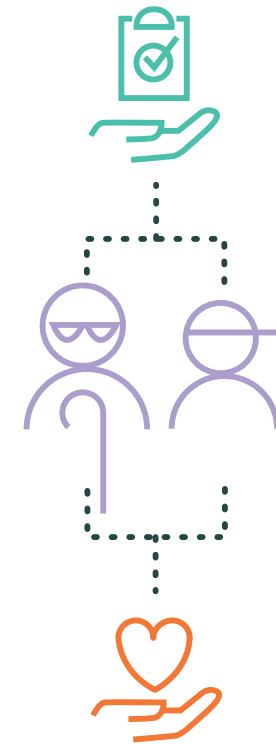
Key issues and opportunities for inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible recreation

Health and well-being outcomes

Participating in recreation benefits individual and community health and well-being.⁴⁷ It improves physical and mental health, increases social well-being and feelings of belonging, creates community connections and cohesion, builds stronger families, reduces the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences, and promotes community safety and vitality. Engaging equity deserving individuals and communities in the development of programs and processes that reduce barriers to participation and increase equitable access to community and municipal recreation would help reduce disparities in health and well-being outcomes in Guelph.

Distribution of recreation resources

Just over 17,600 residents or about 12 per cent of the local population accessed City of Guelph recreation programs in 2022. While a significant number, this means that most residents do not directly benefit from municipal recreation programming. Registration mapping shows that participation in City programs is geographically disproportionate, with those living close a City recreation centre boasting higher participation in City programming. There are also areas of Guelph that are significantly under-represented in program registrations and over-represented in recreation subsidy applications, underlining the inequitable distribution of recreation resources throughout the city. Developing programs and initiatives in collaboration with residents from under-represented areas of the city would reduce barriers to participation and provide more equitable distribution of municipal recreation resources.



⁴⁷ Canadian Parks and Recreation Association/Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (February 2015). A Framework for Recreation in Canada - 2015 - Pathways to Wellbeing. Ottawa: Canadian Recreation and Parks Association.



542 of 766 approved subsidies went unused over the past year; this means that only 29% of approved applicants participated in recreation programming

Barriers to participation in recreation

As noted throughout this plan, there are numerous barriers that limit or inhibit access to recreation. The City of Toronto’s Recreation registration process – a process similar to Guelph’s – was recently described as “class warfare” and “like the Hunger Games,” with demand for programming far outweighing supply and the process favouring those with flexible schedules, consistent internet access and available credit.⁴⁸ City of Guelph subsidy data further highlights that there are barriers beyond financial that need to be addressed to improve equity and participation. About 11 per cent of Guelph’s population live below the low-income cut-off (LICO), but only 677⁴⁹ residents or 0.04 per cent of the population applied for recreation subsidies in 2022. Of these approved applications, only 135 were used, meaning the majority did not participate despite available financial support.

Many individuals and households living above LICO still report struggling to make ends meet, do not qualify for available subsidies, and often have to prioritize other needs above recreation.⁵⁰ Thus, while Guelph has several mechanisms in place to reduce barriers to participation (subsidies, community investment programs, Inclusion services, etc.), and the service delivery model proposed in the previous section will help improve distribution and access, a more comprehensive, data-driven and resident-informed strategy is needed to fully understand local experiences, identify policy and process gaps, and address inequities in recreation.

48 Pagliaro, Jennifer. “It’s like the Hunger Games’: Wait-lists for city toddler swim programs double after pandemic pauses.” The Star, March 26, 2022, www.thestar.com/news/gta/2022/03/26/its-like-the-hunger-games-wait-lists-for-city-toddler-swim-programs-double-after-pandemic-pauses.html

49 766 approved applications from 677 unique residents

50 Shrestha, Niva. Understanding Barriers of Recent Immigrants to Access Recreational Activities in Guelph (2022). www.guelphwellingtonip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Best-Practices-for-Inclusion-in-Parks-and-Recreation-A-Review-of-Existing-Literature-FINAL.pdf



Duty to accommodate and service delivery model

The Ontario Human Rights Code states that service providers have a legal duty to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities in a way that promotes dignity, integration and full participation to ensure they have equal opportunities, access and benefits, if doing so does not cause “undue hardship.”⁵¹ As a municipality, undue hardship is based on the entire corporation, not just the department or service area, meaning there are very few limitations to accommodations. If a participant’s needs are beyond the abilities and expertise of Recreation staff, the municipality is required to provide additional training for staff and/or contract professional support (PSW, Behavioural Therapy, Nursing care, etc.) to ensure dignity, integration and full participation.

In 2019, One2One Inclusion supports for City of Guelph Camps were oversubscribed, with a fill rate of 126 per cent, which declined over the course of the pandemic, but returned beyond budgeted service levels in 2022. From 2021 to 2022, City Recreation also spent over \$13,000 on additional trainings and third-party specialized services to support inclusive participation in recreation programs. Given this growing trend and service level requirement, staffing and service models should be investigated and evaluated to determine the most effective and appropriate way to accommodate the safe, meaningful, and dignified participation of all program participants going forward.

⁵¹ Ontario Human Rights Commission. Policy on Ableism and Discrimination based on Disability, June 27, 2016. www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/8-duty-accommodate

Objectives and recommendations for recreation strategies

89. Continue work outlined in the Think Youth Strategy and implement youth-driven initiatives to maintain Guelph's designation as a youth-friendly city.
90. Re-initiate the Support Through Engagement in Programs and Sport (STEPS) program, as directed in the 2013-2018 Think Youth Strategy, to deliver recreation programs for at-risk youth and youth experiencing homelessness.
91. Update the City's Youth Strategy to understand and support the evolving needs and interests of local youth, and developing initiatives to improve sustained engagement in recreation, healthy behaviours and civic participation.
92. Continue work outlined in the Older Adult Strategy and implement seniors-driven initiatives to maintain Guelph's designation as an Age Friendly City.
93. Improve geographic distribution of older adult programs to ensure programs are offered throughout the whole city.
94. Investigate designating the South End Community Centre as a Seniors Active Living Centre.
95. Update the City's Older Adult Strategy – reframing as an Age Friendly Strategy to better align with current industry language and terminology – to understand and support the evolving needs of older adults and ensure the City remains a great place to live and age well.
96. Promote and support the City's Micro-granting program, to increase grassroots and community-led arts and recreation opportunities.
97. Initiate the Development of a Recreation-focused Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility Strategy.





■ Plan implementation

Recommendation summary and prioritization

The following is a consolidated list of all the recommendations of the PRMP. All recommendations of the Needs Assessment have been embedded into the PRMP recommendations, though some have been combined for efficiency and logical work planning.

The implementation timeline is meant to demonstrate prioritization of each of the recommendations of the PRMP and is not a finalized work plan. The proposed pace of implementation allows for flexibility and will be based on need, resource capacity, budget approval, and in some cases, timing of Secondary Plan development, including the Guelph Innovation District and Clair-Maltby. Meaningful community engagement for capital projects and processes will be coordinated as appropriate to successfully implement the recommended objectives.

Table 2: Implementation timeline

	Recommendation	Short (1-4 years)	Medium (5-9 years)	Long (10+ years)
	Parks			
1	Position parks as recreation and trail network enhancers by implementing bike parking, bike repair stations, washrooms, water refill stations, wayfinding, lighting, and rest areas in parks where possible and appropriate.	✓	✓	✓
2	As City infrastructure projects are contemplated, consider opportunities for multi-functional land that may allow a recreational function combined with the primary land-use.	✓	✓	✓
3	Develop a framework for assessing when it is/is not appropriate to accommodate infrastructure or uses other than recreation in parks.	✓		
4	Update the City’s Parkland Dedication Bylaw to align with recent changes to the Ontario Planning Act.	✓		
5	Continue to secure new parks or expand existing parks as part of the development review process.	✓	✓	✓
6	Develop a Parkland Acquisition Strategy and pending outcomes, update the park provision and minimum park size policies in the Official Plan.	✓		
7	Maintain an up-to-date and comprehensive inventory of all parks and park assets (including parkland, open space, and sites under municipal influence) to improve ability to assess current and future supplies.	✓	✓	✓
8	Explore partnership opportunities with school boards, the GRCA, and other public agencies to allow and/or continue to allow community use of recreational facilities owned by other organizations.	✓	✓	✓
9	Explore partnership opportunities with the private sector for project funding and sponsorships. As part of this work, ensure equitable prioritization of departmental work is maintained.		✓	
10	At the 10-year update to the PRMP, include land needs and content covered in the Park Plan in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan as one overall strategic document.			✓
11	Continue to improve climate change resiliency through the incorporation of sustainable and Low Impact Development (LID) features into the design of new or renewed parks.	✓	✓	✓

	Recommendation	Short (1-4 years)	Medium (5-9 years)	Long (10+ years)
12	Continue to consult the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) on park development projects.	✓	✓	✓
13	If fitness equipment is requested during community engagement for neighbourhood parks, consider utilizing signage to encourage fitness rather than dedicated outdoor equipment.	✓	✓	✓
14	Explore creative solutions to providing a dynamic youth/adult fitness park as a specialized destination facility within the park system. Engage the community on what type of facility is preferred.		✓	
15	Continue to promote awareness of the fitness classes the City offers in park settings.	✓	✓	✓
16	During the design process for individual parks, assess demand and available space for community gardens.	✓	✓	✓
17	Seek to align new community garden locations with other park facilities that use water, for water and capital cost efficiency.	✓	✓	✓
18	During the construction of new parks or renovation of existing parks, every effort should be made to include new trees for shade. Proactively seek opportunities to increase tree canopy in parks.	✓	✓	✓
19	Install shade structures in the following circumstances when possible: at water play facilities; at playgrounds with rubber surfacing; and at specialized facilities like skateboard parks, bike parks, amusement rides, and dog parks.	✓	✓	✓
20	Continue to pursue coordination of park stewardship activities and build new partnerships with volunteers.	✓	✓	✓
21	Develop a memorial program that provides opportunities for residents to donate furnishings or trees in memorial to enhance public parks.	✓		
22	Develop a Sports Field Strategy that will optimize sports field service levels.	✓		
23	Monitor use and demand of the new cricket ground at Riverside Park, disc golf facilities, and lawn bowling facilities.	✓	✓	✓

	Recommendation	Short (1-4 years)	Medium (5-9 years)	Long (10+ years)
24	Rebuild the driveway entrance to the Guelph Lake Sports Fields to address ongoing stormwater management and flooding issues.			✓
25	Renovate Drew Park basketball court.	✓		
26	Construct 11 new outdoor tennis and pickleball courts. Consider constructing dedicated tennis and pickleball facilities.	✓	✓	✓
27	Evaluate the impacts of climate change on the Outdoor Ice Rink Program and identify strategies to fulfill community ice rink needs in other ways, including but not limited to synthetic ice and refrigerated rinks in key locations. Consideration should be given to capital cost, as well as maintenance and operational requirements.	✓		
28	Investigate the implementation of a multi-use outdoor sport facility with boards to accommodate ice hockey, ball hockey and lacrosse.		✓	
29	Construct one major skateboard park in an area south of the Speed River.		✓	
30	Construct four skateboard nodes. The skateboard nodes may be implemented in smaller parks to fill distribution gaps or areas of need.	✓	✓	✓
31	Evaluate the ability to add lighting at Silvercreek Skateboard Park.	✓		
32	When the lawn bowling green is nearing the end of its service life, the City should undertake a master plan exercise for the portion of Royal City Park east of Gordon Street. In consultation with the Lawn Bowling Club consider whether facility should be re-located. Consideration should be given to the settling period required for new bowling greens to ensure minimal disruption to the Club's operations and opportunities for play.			✓
33	Construct two new rubber surfaced playgrounds: one at University Village Park and one in the northwest portion of the city.	✓	✓	
34	Continue to monitor capital investment against operational and maintenance costs to ensure optimal life cycle of playground assets.	✓	✓	✓

	Recommendation	Short (1-4 years)	Medium (5-9 years)	Long (10+ years)
35	Convert wading pools at Exhibition Park and Sunny Acres Park to splash pads. Engage the community about replacement of these assets when they are nearing the end of their service life.	✓	✓	
36	Implement two new permanent restrooms in the southeast portion of the city. Water bottle refill stations should be included in the building designs. As park restrooms are built or renovated, consideration for all-season access should be evaluated.			✓
37	Identify locations throughout the park system to add more public benches and seating. Consult with the AAC on location of seating and rest areas along pathways in parks. Consider creative ways of financing these benches including naming rights, sponsorships, and donations.	✓	✓	✓
38	Ensure that adequate signage with park names and addresses exists at all City parks. These signs should be restored or replaced when they deteriorate.	✓	✓	✓
39	Develop a parks asset management plan that identifies inventory, condition, anticipated service life and replacement costs of park amenities that can be forecasted in the corporate budget. The asset management plan should continually monitor community need and identify opportunities for re-locating and re-purposing facilities to serve changing demands.	✓		
40	Develop a framework and resources to secure adequate and ongoing funding for the repair, renewal and replacement of aging parks, amenities and infrastructure.	✓		
41	Continue to look for opportunities to strategically pair growth projects with maintenance and replacement projects for cost savings. Identify opportunities to integrate service level improvements and expansion into maintenance and renewal projects.	✓	✓	✓
42	Develop a Park Manual as a resource for City of Guelph staff, consultants, and the development community.	✓		
43	Develop a new standard condition for Development Agreements that outlines developer responsibilities should they build parks for the City.	✓		
44	Regularly update the City's website with detailed information on amenities, type of experience, pathway surface material, and playground surface material in each park.	✓	✓	✓

	Recommendation	Short (1-4 years)	Medium (5-9 years)	Long (10+ years)
45	Improve services through more effective use of technology and available data. Continue to improve data collection through the use of digital benchmarking tools, data management and reporting standards.	✓	✓	✓
46	Develop digital tools and strategies that help people find and explore Guelph's parks and open spaces.	✓		
47	Establish Service Guelph as the first point of contact for parks inquiries.	✓	✓	✓
48	Develop a centralized database that tracks previous parkland conveyances and cash-in-lieu payments in one location as an internal resource for park planning staff. Continue to update the database as parkland conveyances and cash-in-lieu payments are made.	✓		
49	Digitize all previously approved Draft Plans of Subdivision. Map the boundaries of all previously approved Draft Plans as an internal resource for park planning staff. Continue to update the database as Draft Plans are approved.	✓		
50	Develop a GIS database of existing underground services in parks as an internal resource for parks staff. Continue to update the database as new services are installed in parks.		✓	
51	Investigate the need and practicality of a booking system for drop-in rentals of court sports. Consider an online option for booking and viewing court availability and tools to communicate this at the facilities.		✓	
	Parks and Recreation			
52	Develop a special event framework to establish criteria to equitably balance community needs and priorities.		✓	
53	Evaluate the City's Facility Allocation Policy and distribution processes to optimize use and ensure balanced and equitable distribution of recreation facilities.	✓		
54	Using priority initiative zone mapping, install four Activation Stations in identified priority parks to increase community participation and year-round park animation for all ages and abilities.	✓	✓	✓
55	Increase City provision of park-based recreation programming, including equipment lending, to support community participation and year-round animation for all ages and abilities.	✓	✓	✓

	Recommendation	Short (1-4 years)	Medium (5-9 years)	Long (10+ years)
56	Develop a data collection and evaluation plan for City indoor and outdoor facility bookings to improve performance management and facility optimization, balance distribution of use, identify areas for priority initiatives and investment, and inform future facility development and provisioning.		✓	
57	Develop a decision-making framework that outlines the process for evaluating and responding to special requests received from the community.		✓	
	Recreation			
58	Incorporate reusable bottle vending machines into Recreation budget to ensure sustainability of the initiative and continued role modeling of healthy behaviours in recreation facilities.	✓		
59	Investigate healthy food and beverage options and policies for City recreation facilities.	✓		
60	Continue to monitor and respond to trends and the ever-changing definition of recreation to ensure programming for diverse audiences in Guelph.	✓	✓	✓
61	Develop a Recreation Promotions strategy, incorporating multiple formats, translation of materials, and community outreach, to complement the department's current online catalogue.	✓		
62	Adopt the proposed Service Delivery Model to increase access to and supportive opportunities for community recreation and health-focused programming.	✓		
63	Install Indigenous and cultural art, signage and plantings in recreation facilities.	✓	✓	
64	Collaborate with the City's Culture Department and local Indigenous and BIPOC artists to establish inclusive art installations in Recreation facilities.	✓	✓	
65	Through strategic investment or renovation, add new amenities or features inside and outside recreation facilities that promote unstructured play and placemaking in order to create welcoming, safe, playful spaces that can be used in many different ways.	✓	✓	✓
66	Permanently install Sensory Rooms in Victoria Road Recreation Centre and West End Community Centre to improve inclusive services and participation in Recreation facilities.	✓		

	Recommendation	Short (1-4 years)	Medium (5-9 years)	Long (10+ years)
67	Conduct feasibility study of aging Recreation facilities to evaluate improved service level potential with renovations, renewals or repurposing.		✓	
68	Investigate options to increase municipal indoor pool inventory based on projected service level deficits beyond 2033.		✓	
69	Conduct a site feasibility study to investigate expansion and/or repurposing of Lyon Pool to improve service level potential through renovations, renewal or repurposing.	✓		
70	Develop and implement a Recreation Facility Optimization Strategy to maximize use and potential of existing City Recreation facilities.		✓	
71	Collect registration data from user groups to better understand community use and demand for indoor recreation facilities.	✓		
72	Adopt provision targets for indoor recreation facilities that are based on the number of registered participants in City and community organization programs rather than total population to plan in line with community demand and facility utilization.		✓	
73	Continue to explore and evaluate emerging trends in aquatic infrastructure and programming – especially those targeting youth and young adults – to address identified demographic gaps in service.	✓	✓	✓
74	Through strategic investment, add new aquatics amenities or features that encourage participation – especially for youth and young adults.	✓	✓	✓
75	Initiate a Recreation staffing model assessment and employee training and incentive programs to identify efficiencies and strategic opportunities to address program and service level vulnerabilities.	✓		
76	Continue to explore creative partnerships to increase qualified staffing levels and support the professional and/or academic development of Recreation staff.	✓	✓	✓
77	Develop an IDEA strategy in collaboration with local service providers and equity deserving communities to better understand and address barriers to aquatic participation and increase aquatics opportunities for equity deserving individuals and communities.	✓		
78	Incorporate recreation sampling into Recreation service delivery and develop a series of low-cost, low-commitment “try-it” activities to introduce community members to City recreation programs.	✓		

	Recommendation	Short (1-4 years)	Medium (5-9 years)	Long (10+ years)
79	Investigate including free “try-it” activities as part of Welcome to Guelph Program.	✓		
80	Increase provision of drop-in recreation programs to accommodate growing demand for spontaneous recreation options and activities.	✓	✓	
81	Continue to provide recreation programming in schools and other community spaces to increase the reach and geographic distribution of City recreation services.	✓	✓	✓
82	Collaborate with Parks, Planning and Environmental Planning to align actions and improve outcomes in the Guelph Trails Master Plan and Natural Heritage Action Plan.	✓	✓	✓
83	Continue to explore partnerships and collaborations focused on expanding and enhancing recreation opportunities for the community.	✓	✓	✓
84	Explore collaborations with the City Culture Department to leverage existing facilities to increase community recreation opportunities and address service deficits.	✓	✓	
85	Increase Inclusion service levels to reflect broader community demographics.	✓		
86	Undertake a comprehensive equity mapping process to establish priority initiative areas for recreation investment and engagement, including the development of low-barrier recreation programming.	✓		
87	Adopt and implement the proposed four-phase Program Delivery Model to improve Recreation’s service continuum, more equitably distribute recreation resources across the city, and increase access to supported recreation for community members.	✓	✓	
88	Develop a comprehensive program evaluation plan to establish meaningful performance measures and ensure the updated Program Delivery Model meets service expectations and community needs.		✓	
89	Continue work outlined in the Think Youth Strategy and implement youth-driven initiatives to maintain Guelph’s designation as a youth-friendly city.	✓		
90	Re-initiate the Support Through Engagement in Programs and Sport (STEPS) program, as directed in the 2013-2018 Think Youth Strategy, to deliver recreation programs for at-risk youth and youth experiencing homelessness.	✓		

	Recommendation	Short (1-4 years)	Medium (5-9 years)	Long (10+ years)
91	Update the City’s Youth Strategy to understand and support the evolving needs and interests of local youth, and developing initiatives to improve sustained engagement in recreation, healthy behaviours and civic participation.	✓		
92	Continue work outlined in the Older Adult Strategy and implement seniors-driven initiatives to maintain Guelph’s designation as an Age Friendly City.	✓		
93	Improve geographic distribution of older adult programs to ensure programs are offered throughout the whole city.	✓		
94	Investigate designating the South End Community Centre as a Seniors Active Living Centre.	✓		
95	Update the City’s Older Adult Strategy – reframing as an Age Friendly Strategy to better align with current industry language and terminology – to understand and support the evolving needs of older adults and ensure the City remains a great place to live and age well.	✓		
96	Promote and support the City’s Micro-granting program, to increase grassroots and community-led arts and recreation opportunities.	✓		
97	Initiate the Development of a Recreation-focused Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility Strategy.	✓		



■ Monitoring success

An important part of the PRMP is understanding what success looks like and what specific measures can be used to determine success. Some key performance indicators will be measured in larger corporate initiatives identified in the [Strategic Plan's Action Plan and Performance Measure Framework](#), including, percent of current assets that provide satisfactory levels of service, percent of residents who perceive themselves to be safe in the city and percent citizens expressing a sense of belonging to Guelph.

It is also important to measure how objectives of the PRMP are being met. Collecting and managing data about parks and recreation will help monitor and evaluate the plan's success. The PRMP recommends improving data collection and evaluation for indoor and outdoor facilities to inform facility performance, opportunities for optimization, and benchmarking. The Parks and Recreation departments will continue to assess, maintain and use collected data to support capital and operating practices. Measuring and regularly monitoring how the city is providing services to the community will be an important part of this plan moving forward. As part of a data management program, performance measures should be developed and tracked regularly. Potential performance measures can include:



Per cent of people within a ten-minute walk of a park (500-800 metres);



Per cent of parks with walking paths;



Amount of parkland or cash-in-lieu of parkland acquired per year;



Per cent of facilities in fair or good condition;



Per cent of residents accessing recreation programs and services; and



Total hours parks and recreation facilities are booked and used

The success of the PRMP will be reported as the plan is monitored and evaluated. A review and update of the master plan is planned for 2028 at the five-year mark. A five-year review may include revisiting goals, priorities and aligning work plans with a future Strategic Plan or new opportunities. A full master plan update is recommended in 2033.





■ Financial implications

Investment will be required to support the vision, core values and recommendations of the PRMP over the next ten years and beyond. Some of the recommendations of the PRMP will have little financial impact as they can easily be incorporated into existing workplans or processes, however, other recommendations will need investment from the City's capital and operating budgets or other funding strategies.

The capital and operating budgets are the tools for Council to set and manage the pace and extent to which the plan is implemented. The PRMP will be aligned with the existing capital and operating plans, providing consideration to current fiscal constraints and the City's capacity to deliver. The financial information included in this section is intended to be a high-level estimate that will be refined as it is incorporated into the overall corporate plan and multi-year budget process. For capital investments, costs have been identified over the next 10 years instead of showing 'peaks' and 'valleys' that might be expected. The annual capital and operating budgets will be approved through the City's multi-year budget program.

Adjustments to the priorities and sequencing of projects over the lifespan of the plan is inevitable. The PRMP needs to be flexible and able to respond to new opportunities and changes as they arise.

Capital budget

Park and Recreation capital projects are paid for through a combination of municipal tax revenues, development charges (DCs) and third-party sources. The funding strategies in the City’s capital budget are Growth, Service Enhancement, and Infrastructure Renewal. Many times, a project is a combination of many funding strategies including portions funded from Growth, Infrastructure Renewal and Service Enhancement funds.

To simplify, many new parks and recreation amenities in growing areas are made possible through the Growth Funding Strategy. Parks and recreation amenities in existing areas are typically funded through Service Enhancement if it expands existing service delivery. Replacement of existing facilities is funded through Infrastructure Renewal.

Impact of provincial legislative changes

To increase housing supply in Ontario, the Province enacted Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act in November 2022. Bill 23 has reduced municipal revenues from development charges, parkland dedication fees and community benefit charges which are important revenue sources to support growth related infrastructure. This increases the portion of growth-related costs funded through taxes and significantly impacts existing property taxpayers. It also significantly reduces the amount of land municipalities can acquire through development for parks and recreation. Understanding the ongoing changes and impacts of Bill 23 will be an important part of future budget planning.

As future capital budgets are prepared it is important that Growth Funding Strategies are maximized. For park and recreation capital projects outside growth areas, it will be important to use a variety of tools and strategies and to

optimize facilities through renovation and renewal. Funding decisions should be responsible by exploring new funding options, service delivery models and partnerships to ease the tax burden for residents and businesses.

Land acquisition

There may be times that the City needs to strategically purchase land for parks or recreation facilities—for example the future park identified in the Downtown Secondary Plan. Strategic land acquisitions can be financed from funds collected through Parkland Dedication or using other funding strategies. As part of a future Parkland Acquisition Strategy, funding strategic land purchases, land acquisition tools and policies will be examined.

Parks and Recreation capital costs

The Parks and recreation capital costs shown in Table 3 will support the addition of new parks and recreation amenities and intensification of parks to maintain service levels as the population grows. Table 3 represents costs for the recommendations of the PRMP and is not representative of the entire Parks and Recreation budgets. It does not include initiatives or priorities included in other Council approved master plans, such as the Guelph Trail Master Plan, or outcomes from future plans such as the Sports Field Strategy or Parkland Acquisition Strategy. The costs include policy creation, planning, design and construction.

Table 3: Capital costs for PRMP initiatives

	Capital cost over life of the plan
Growth	\$1,300,000
Service Enhancement	\$11,150,000
Infrastructure Renewal	\$4,800,000
Total	\$17,250,000

Operating budget

As new parks and recreation facilities are constructed, there are additional costs needed to operate and maintain facilities. Operating costs are based on many factors including the facility type, level of use, access, equipment needs and staffing. For these reasons, projections of future operating costs are necessarily imprecise and general. Investment is focused on maintaining service delivery as the community grows.

Operations resources

As park and recreation facilities, services and programs expand, so will the resources needed to maintain service levels. The City expects that over the next 10 years the current complement of part-time staff, full-time staff and resources will need to increase proportionally with expansion of the park and recreation system. Along with this expansion, the community development and equity-focused initiatives and recreation service level deficits identified in the PRMP will need operational investments to be successfully implemented. An informed review of these projections will be performed annually based on specific operational needs as part of the budget review process.

Investment in the community

One of the goals of the PRMP is 'working together with the community.' This is also reflected in the City's Strategic Plan. There may be times that funding is needed to help develop partnerships or to explore new service-delivery models with local organizations, private partners, schools or resident groups. Exploring new funding options, service-delivery models and partnerships can help ease the burden on taxpayers and provide community ownership of the plan. Partnership can also provide needed services that would otherwise be unavailable due to financial or resource limitations. No funding has been identified for this in the plan, but funding may be needed in the future.

Appendix A: Community engagement summary

A robust community engagement process was delivered to ensure that the Parks and Recreation Master Plan reflects community opinions and priorities for future parks and recreation needs. Community engagement built on the previous work of the Community Plan and Strategic Plans, and where possible, community feedback from related City projects and initiatives was captured. Specifically, feedback collected as part of the 2022 Park Plan and the 2019 Parkland Dedication Bylaw update was used to help inform the PRMP.

Efforts were taken to consult with a broad range of Guelph residents and organizations across various geographic areas and demographic groups. It is important to note that survey and community feedback data is one source of information that helps paint one picture, but this data is checked against other statistically valid sources like the City's Citizen Satisfaction Survey, public health data and demographic information.

Listening opportunities

A variety of engagement activities were offered over the course of the master plan development, including:

- 4 Community surveys;
- 2 Public open houses;
- 3 Community workshops;
- 2 Community focus groups;
- 1 Developer focus group;
- 1 Sport user group meeting;
- 15 Parks and recreation facility pop-ups;
- 5 Community pop-ups;

- 5 Presentations to Advisory Committees of Council, including the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Natural Heritage Advisory Committee;
- 1 Brainstorming session with over 300 children in grades 2-5 during the City's Local Government Week visits;
- 10 Internal participant workshops with key municipal departments;
- 10 Individual community group meetings with Youth Council, Youth Providers Committee, Local Immigration Partnership, Upper Grand District School Board, Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition, and Indigenous nations; and
- 1 Virtual Sharing Circle as part of an ongoing relationship building initiative with community members of First Nations, Inuit, Métis and mixed Indigenous ancestry. The conversation was themed around parks and outdoor spaces.

Community feedback

Community engagement periods were aligned to the four phases of the master planning process. The following are key highlights from each of the four phases of community engagement.

Phase 1: Project kick-off (summer 2019)

The purpose for the first phase of engagement was to learn how the community uses parks and recreation facilities and to understand the community perception of the system's strengths and weaknesses. The City hosted several events including open houses and meetings with internal and external interested parties. Community members were also invited to participate in an online survey and complete a poll with City staff in key locations throughout the city. Sport user groups were invited to participate in a sports-specific user group survey.

In total during this phase, feedback from 677 individuals or groups was received. Below are a few key themes that were brought up during this phase of engagement.

- Overwhelmingly, Guelph residents value green spaces including parkland and trails;
- Ensure accessibility of spaces and facilities (specifically people with mobility issues and autism);
- Provide transit access to parks and recreation facilities;
- Provide a variety of outdoor recreation amenities including basketball courts, disc golf, tennis courts, pickleball courts, outdoor fitness equipment, outdoor rinks, dog parks and splash pads;
- Provide washrooms and water fountains in parks;
- Provide games in parks (table tennis, chess, horseshoe pits, bocce);
- Interest in parkland inventory and achieving parkland targets;
- Invest in aging infrastructure;
- Interest in different models for recreation programming

(drop-in versus scheduled classes, parent and child classes);

- Provide naturalized areas and shade in parks;
- Build the South End Community Centre; and
- Provide easy access to relevant information including mapping and advertising of programs and facilities.

Key findings from the survey included:

- 83 per cent of respondents stated that they used parks for walking or exercise, with the next highest use of parks being: to meet with friends (47.2 per cent); to use the playground facilities (46.5 per cent); to cycle (45.7 per cent); and to walk their dog (44.2 per cent).
- 32.7 per cent of respondents use indoor recreation facilities once or twice a week. 23.6 per cent of respondents use these facilities seasonally.
- 59 per cent of respondents use outdoor recreation facilities either daily or once/twice a week, with the remaining respondents only using the facilities monthly, seasonally, or for special events.
- 70 per cent of respondents stated that they used indoor recreation facilities for aquatics, with the next highest use being: camps (18 per cent); children/youth programs (18 per cent); and adult programs (17 per cent). 35 per cent of respondents also stated that they use these facilities as part of other, non-City run programs like basketball.
- Program scheduling (37 per cent), lack of interest in services offered (22.5 per cent) and high program fees (22.5 per cent) are some of the most common barriers that prevent respondents from using the City's indoor recreation facilities.

Phase 2: Identifying priorities (fall 2019-winter 2020)

The intent for the second phase of engagement was to dig a little deeper on key themes that emerged in Phase 1 to understand community priorities. For this phase, PRMP engagement was merged with Guelph Trail Master Plan engagement to make it easier for residents to provide feedback on trails, parks and recreation together. The City hosted several events including internal workshops, presentations to the Accessibility Advisory Committee, a sport user group meeting, and a brainstorming session with children in grades 2-5. Community members were also invited to participate in an online survey and complete a poll with City staff in key locations throughout the city.

In total during this phase, feedback from 1,051 individuals or groups was received. Below are a few key themes that were brought up during this phase of engagement.

- Focus efforts on creating a healthy community that serves all ages, backgrounds, income levels and abilities;
- Invest in City infrastructure to encourage daily exercise;
- Make recreation affordable to for all to provide better access to all income levels;
- Install more low-cost/free park amenities for informal play like disc golf, cross country ski trails, bocce ball, pick-up sports or other similar features;
- Make facilities multi-purpose and provide half-ice rinks/ice dividers to increase ice time;
- Build the South End Community Centre;
- Encourage all-season use of parks and provide relevant amenities year-round;

- Provide more washrooms and water fountains in key locations and parks; and
- Plant more trees in parks to provide shade for users and contribute to other environmental benefits

Key findings from the survey included:

- 86 per cent of respondents find it easy to get information about City programs, services and facilities. People prefer to use online sources to get information like the City's website, the Guelph Community Guide online and/or the City's Facebook or Twitter. 35 per cent of respondents prefer a print form of the Guelph Community Guide, and 21 per cent of respondents people prefer learning about programs in-person at recreation centres.
- 45 per cent of respondents prefer a drop-in (pay-as-you-go) style of programming and 16.9 per cent prefer membership based programming to fit a more flexible lifestyle or to make participating in recreation programs more affordable.
- About 67 per cent of respondents believe that the price they pay for recreation is a good value for their money. 75 per cent of respondents either agree or strongly agree that registered aquatic programs are a good value, and 61 per cent believe that ice programs, fitness programs and general interest programs are good value. Less than 1 per cent of people don't believe that Guelph's programs and services provide good value for money.
- 59 per cent of respondents believe that free satellite-based programming like Activation Stations is important and 64.7 per cent of respondents believe the City should develop more of these programs for all ages. Only 22.5 per cent of respondents would be interested in paying a small fee for this service.

- 88.2 per cent of respondents feel that they live close enough to a park and 72.9 per cent of respondents use the park that is closest to them most often. For 27.1 per cent of respondents that don't use the park closest to them, the popular reasons include: preference for destination parks; preference for larger parks; preference for parks with specific amenities/features; preference for a specific type of park (natural or sports fields); and preference for parks with more shade.
- According to respondents the top three priorities for the future of our park and open spaces are: 1) connecting parks with trails, sidewalk or greenways, 2) obtaining more land for parks in the form of small pocket parks in existing areas, and 3) adding more trails in existing parks and natural areas.
- 92.4 per cent of respondents believe naturalization in parks and open spaces is important. Many people believe we should be improving our existing natural areas (NHS) and including unmown areas or more tree canopy in our parks.
- Similar to the results in phase one, almost half of people believe that adding or improving trails is the best way to provide recreation in our community for adults, youth and seniors. The other top popular amenities include: dog parks, an all season rink with boards and a ninja obstacle course or outdoor fitness equipment.

Phase 3: Park Plan development (fall 2021-winter 2022)

The third phase of engagement focused specifically on land needs and parkland planning. The City hosted several events including two community focus groups, one developer focus group, meetings with school boards and the GRCA, internal meetings, meetings with Indigenous Nations, and a virtual sharing circle for Urban Indigenous residents in Guelph. Community members were also invited to participate in an online survey.

In total during this phase, feedback from 426 individuals or groups were received. Below are a few key themes that were brought up during this phase of engagement.

- Protecting parks and creating new parks were the top ranked park development goals by survey and focus group participants;
- Upgrading parks was the third highest ranking goal from survey respondents; focus group participants chose adding new park features in existing parks;
- "Plan activities in parks" was the lowest ranking goal by survey and focus group participants;
- Areas with high population density, areas of high socioeconomic need and areas with few parks were the top three ranked priorities for locating new parks by participants at both focus group sessions;
- Parkland dedication (land or cash-in-lieu to buy parks) from developers and home builders was the preferred way for the City to acquire more parks, with an emphasis on acquiring land. Repurposing existing City land was the second preferred option. Leasing land and purchasing land with tax dollars were the two lowest ranking methods;

- People want parks to be accessible for all members of the community. This includes having parks accessible via bus routes, as well as appropriate surfaces and equipment, particularly for those using mobility devices or strollers;
- Attract people and visitors to parks by hosting events — markets, craft fairs, concerts, movies etc.;
- People want to see trails and parks linked throughout the city; and
- Creative financing tools and legacy contributions were identified as possible ways to acquire more parkland.

Developers also had a range of creative suggestions for Guelph parks:

- Urban squares are a unique way to provide recreational opportunities;
- Parks could be built on top of stormwater management tanks, allowing the land to be used for dual purposes;
- Incorporate trails and vistas around stormwater ponds;
- Use utility corridors for trail connections and recreation opportunities;
- Incorporate heritage of the site to tell the history of the city (buildings, signage and trail markers, sculptures); and
- Use technology to enhance the experience (e.g., guided tours, connecting trails).

Phase 4: Parks and Recreation Master Plan development (summer 2022)

The intent of the fourth and final phase of engagement was to verify feedback received from engagement that was done prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, recognizing that community opinions might have changed. This phase of engagement further explored community priorities for parks and recreation facilities, layering in land constraints identified through the Park Plan. The City hosted several events including open houses and meetings with internal and external interested parties. Community members were also invited to participate in an online survey and complete a poll with City staff in key locations throughout the city.

In total during this phase, feedback from 538 individuals or groups was received. Below are a few key themes that were brought up during this phase of engagement.

- Upgrades to existing fields so they can be used by more groups or later in the day/season was the preferred option to address demand for sports fields and facilities. Adding sports fields to smaller neighbourhood parks was the least preferred option.
- Recognizing that some bookable park amenities like sports fields and shade structures draw people from beyond local neighbourhoods, the community preferred to make use of street parking near parks, rather than building parking lots in parks.
- Recognizing land constraints, 68 per cent of survey respondents stated that it is appropriate to introduce bookable sports fields or courts into smaller neighbourhood parks, where they are not typically located, to increase the provision of amenities city-wide.
- Reducing fees during quieter times was ranked as the

best (36 per cent) policy consideration to encourage use of bookable parks and recreation facilities during non-primetime hours; followed by fee adjustments and/or subsidies to support low-cost; grassroots and community-driven recreation activities (30 per cent); designating time and space for new, emerging and underserved groups (19 per cent); and increasing prime time fees (12 per cent).

- Residents prefer a highly developed park system with lots of amenities over a vast park system that includes unmaintained and natural parks, and a system of well-distributed parks.
- Inconvenient schedules, lack of programs of interest, access to facilities, and affordability were identified as the biggest barriers to participation in recreation activities.
- 'Try-it' for free days was the highest ranking (26 per cent) initiative to encourage people to participate in recreation activities; followed by drop-in activities (24 per cent); programs offered in community spaces (20 per cent); equipment lending (17 per cent); meet-and-greet events with recreation staff (7 per cent); and dedicated support staff to provide orientation before programs begin (6 per cent).

Indigenous engagement

As part of Phase 3 engagement and the development of the Park Plan, correspondence was sent to Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Grand River Métis Council. Following this correspondence engagement meetings with representatives of the Six Nations of the Grand River and the Grand River Métis Council were held virtually in January and February 2022. City staff also participated in a virtual Sharing Circle as part of an ongoing relationship building initiative with community members of First Nation, Inuit, Métis and mixed Indigenous ancestry. The conversation was themed around parks and outdoor spaces.

Themes that were shared by representatives of Indigenous Nations and people of Indigenous ancestry were:

- Importance of preservation, enhancement and conservation of ecosystems and rivers;
- Importance of Indigenous plantings in the landscape;
- Creating indoor and outdoor spaces for Indigenous celebration and gathering; and
- Recognizing or reinterpreting cultural landmarks and inclusion of art by Indigenous artists in public spaces.

Accessibility Advisory Committee engagement

City staff met with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) on four occasions through the development of the PRMP. Below is a summary of feedback received from the AAC:

What is working well in City of Guelph Parks and Recreation?

- Riverside Park enabling gardens
- Water therapy programming
- Royal Recreation and Trans-Canada Trails are in good condition
- Riverside Park playground

What is not working well in City of Guelph Parks and Recreation?

- Need an indoor walking track
- Wood chips on playgrounds can be difficult to navigate
- Need more adult recreation programming and swimming opportunities
- Need more accessible activities at the Evergreen Seniors Community Centre
- Some parks do not have accessible paths to amenities
- Some park pathways are deteriorating and becoming difficult to navigate
- Better signage is needed about accessibility of trail segments before starting the trail
- More rest areas along pathways are needed

City staff received three motions from the AAC for the PRMP

project, including:

- That Parks Planning meet with the AAC Site Plan Sub-Committee regarding recommendations for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. These recommendations shall be made back to the AAC in June 2020.
- That the AAC supports the adoption of a geographic distribution of playgrounds with rubber surface within 2.5 km of residential areas. Further, the AAC supports the implementation of two new rubber surface playgrounds to fill distribution gaps in the central and north-west areas of the City.
- That the AAC receive the draft Parks and Recreation Master Plan when it is posted for public review and provide feedback during the public review period. That the liaison follow-up with the AAC via email on the public review period. And that Parks Planning return to the AAC as the Parks and Recreation Master Plan is implemented.

Natural Heritage Advisory Committee engagement

City staff met virtually with the Natural Heritage Advisory Committee on May 13, 2021, during the development of the Park Plan. The following discussion questions were asked of participants:

- Do you agree that the Natural Heritage System has recreational value?
- How should the city connect people to nature?

The following formal comments were provided as part of the meeting minutes:

- Consider including 'biodiversity' in the operational definition of the Guelph Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
- We want to ensure that increased impacts to natural areas do not result from natural areas being considered 'parks' and/or part of a 'park continuum'.
- We want to have more naturalized spaces and pollinator gardens in the Open Space System to provide 'transition zones' between parks and natural areas.
- We want to build the appreciation and protection of natural areas through education, including the use of signage, technology, community programs, trail ambassadors, Park Rangers and knowledgeable Staff at parks.



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