

Section 1

Introduction

Across Ontario, municipalities are involved in providing some form of recreational services to their residents ranging from simple parks to large multi-use community centres. Through its infrastructure of recreation facilities, recreation programs and supporting services, the City of St. Catharines recognizes the importance of encouraging physical activity and healthy lifestyles. The City's recreation system facilitates a number of community benefits that culminate into a sustainable community such as healthy living, economic development, community vibrancy and environmental stewardship. According to the National Framework for Recreation:

"Recreation is the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing."



The City Where Everybody Can Play



1.1 The Importance of Recreation Facilities and Programs

St. Catharines' recreation system is essential to the health and well-being of the City as a whole and each resident living in the community. The vision contained within the National Framework for Recreation emphasizes the interconnected nature of the recreation system in enhancing the well-being of individuals, communities, and places and spaces. Recreation facilities and programs provide St. Catharines' residents with numerous physical, health, psychological, economic and environmental benefits. Not only does participation in recreation offer opportunities for a healthy lifestyle, it also facilitates greater cognitive development and self-esteem among individuals, social interaction, economic spending, conservation of natural lands, and community vibrancy.

This Recreation Facility and Programming Master Plan (RFPMP) is guided by the following vision statement, which was developed based upon themes arising from the various community engagement activities that were undertaken through this process. The Master Plan's vision embodies the City's philosophy that recreation opportunities are inclusive and available to the community at large. St. Catharines affords a recreational experience that is different from others due to the presence of its high quality parks, waterfront areas, and recreation facilities. Collectively, the City's recreational infrastructure draws usage from residents, visitors and post-secondary students. Facilities and programs are developed in response to different ages, cultural or social backgrounds, income levels and abilities that make up St. Catharines' diverse community.

The City Where Everybody Can Play

By being "The City Where Everybody Can Play", this Master Plan recognizes the contributions of recreation in becoming a healthy community and building upon the City's historical investments in its recreation and sport system. The vision also places considerable value on the facilities and services provided by the City's partners, volunteers, and other non-municipal recreation providers. Collectively, the City and local recreation providers offer a range of services that result in a comprehensive, balanced recreation system where residents have a broad choice of activities to pursue in their free time.

St. Catharines has taken steps towards promoting healthy lifestyles and locally available opportunities to participate in physical activities by investing in its recreation infrastructure in terms of facilities, program delivery, parks and trails. By focusing efforts on facilitating healthy lifestyles, the City recognizes that it has a role to play in providing venues for physical activity, social interaction and wellness. The City of



St. Catharines embodies the spirit of the National Recreation Statement which states: “The basic role of the municipality is to ensure the availability of the broadest range of recreation opportunities for every individual and group consistent with available community resources.”

The City’s Parks, Recreation and Culture Services Department is a sophisticated provider of recreation services whose portfolio also encompasses parks and culture. The Department is a key contributor to achieving a desirable quality of life in St. Catharines. The City and its Parks, Recreation and Culture Services Department embody a progressive philosophy through which strategic and long-range planning is regularly undertaken to ensure that the needed mix of parks, recreation facilities and programs are delivered to the community in a financially responsible manner.

The RFPMP is a framework to guide decision-making for the City of St. Catharines to the year 2026. It is intended to update and build upon the City’s 2008 Recreation Facility Master Plan based on St. Catharines’ present and anticipated community profile, the City’s current supply of recreation facilities and programs, and updated recreation participation profiles. The Master Plan is primarily intended for implementation by the Parks, Recreation and Culture Services Department though its recommendations sometimes span other municipal departments, and may also influence the way in which community-based recreation providers and partners deliver their own services.

The importance of recreation is also recognized in St. Catharines’ Sustainability Strategy. The Sustainability Strategy provides an overarching framework that aligns major municipal policy and guiding documents, including the RFPMP, to ensure municipal initiatives are aligned toward achieving common, community-identified sustainability objectives. For example, the Sustainability Plan identifies that recreation can further overarching goals of achieving compact, livable neighbourhoods by encouraging ‘enterprise, culture and recreation clusters for integrated business and lifestyle opportunities’ and using public spaces, including recreational facilities, ‘to increase prosperity and civic interaction in neighbourhoods’. In addition to the Sustainability Strategy and the RFPMP, elements of the recreation system span topic areas contained in other City policy documents such as the Garden City Plan, Urban Forestry Management Plan, Parks Policy Plan, Culture Plan, Museum Strategic Plan, etc.

1.2 Accomplishments Since the 2008 Master Plan

In order to effectively manage these municipal and community-based assets to deliver sustainable and high quality services to local residents into the future, a framework is needed to guide decision-making and make sound investments (in terms of human, social and financial capital) through long-range strategic planning. The RFPMP is a tool to assist decision-makers, stakeholders and the general public in determining needs and priorities related to services and facilities encompassing the parks and recreation needs of the City of St. Catharines. City Staff have historically utilized master plans as an overarching guiding framework through which annual prioritizing and project planning take place, including subsequent reporting to City Council for budget and other requisite approvals.

St. Catharines previous master plans guiding the City's long range priorities for the parks and recreation services have culminated in a number of accomplishments that have provided many benefits to local residents. Since the completion of the 2008 Recreation Facility Master Plan and the 2005 Parks Policy Plan, the City has embarked upon a number of initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life in St. Catharines, including the following initiatives that are relevant to the recreation system:

- awarded the 'Age-Friendly' designation as formalized through the World Health Organization;
- creation of an Ice Allocation Policy;
- construction of the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre/Dr. Huq Family Library Branch (S.K.A.C.), the Meridian Centre and the Downtown Performing Arts Centre (scheduled completion for Fall 2015);
- partnership and reciprocal use agreement with the District School Board of Niagara for Harriet Tubman Public School;
- development of the Kiwanis Field and Berkley Park soccer field;
- enhancements to Municipal Beach;
- addition of kayak/canoe launch site at Henley Island;
- development of a leash-free area for dogs at Catharine Street Park;
- Centennial Gardens improvements;
- trail construction (e.g. East Port Weller Spit, bridge connecting Jaycee Park to Rennie Park, etc.); and
- launch of ePlay and the online Leisure Guide.



1.3 Guiding Principles of the Master Plan

As defined by the National Framework for Recreation, "Recreation is the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing." In supporting the vision of being "**The City Where Everybody Can Play**", ten Guiding Principles have been largely carried forward from the previous Master Plan. These Guiding Principles are consistent with the themes derived through the research and consultation inputs.

Guiding Principle #1 - Building a Healthy Community

By recognizing the role that recreation plays in promoting healthy lifestyles and social interaction, the City will provide community and political support to ensure that services are properly delivered, maintained and enhanced.

Guiding Principle #2 - Making Recreation Accessible for All

Recreation services will provide accessible and affordable opportunities to all residents, recognizing that different individuals or groups may have different needs and expectations based upon their age, ability, income and background.

Guiding Principle #3 - Investing in Opportunities for Youth

The City will invest in organized and unorganized activities for youth by providing opportunities that engage youth in meaningful physical activity and recreation experiences.

Guiding Principle #4 - Enhancing Opportunities for Older Adults

As the older adult and senior population grows, the City will broaden its complement of active and social recreation programs and services to this age group.

Guiding Principle #5 - Embracing the Natural Environment

The City will continue to embrace its natural surroundings and build upon the opportunities provided by these assets through the exploration of programming options and the promotion of recreation activities associated with these assets.

Guiding Principle #6 - Providing the Necessary Infrastructure

The City will provide and maintain integrated and accessible recreation infrastructure that meets community needs by reflecting a diversity of interests, incomes, ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds.

Guiding Principle #7 - Supporting Our Volunteers

The City will support, recruit, develop, recognize, enable and involve volunteers, as they are an important and integral component of recreation service delivery in St. Catharines.

Guiding Principle #8 - Encouraging Positive Partnerships and Alliances

Where appropriate, the City will pursue partnerships with other public, community and private sector providers in order to facilitate the provision of a diverse range of recreation services.

Guiding Principle #9 - Efficient and Effective Service Delivery

The City, through its role as the primary coordinator of the local recreation system, will ensure that the required tools, resources and supports are available so that recreation opportunities are provided in an efficient and effective manner.

Guiding Principle #10 – Sustainable Investments in Recreation Infrastructure

The City will provide effective asset management to ensure the long term availability and sustainability of its recreation infrastructure, and the achievement of best value from available capital funding resources.



1.4 Methodology

Departmental decision-making and service delivery is influenced by a number of plans, policies and procedures. The City's previous Recreation Facility Master Plan has provided guidance over the past several years and culminated in many of the previously noted accomplishments including the development of the S.K.A.C., the Kiwanis Field, and delivery of a focused range of programs and services that respond to community needs.

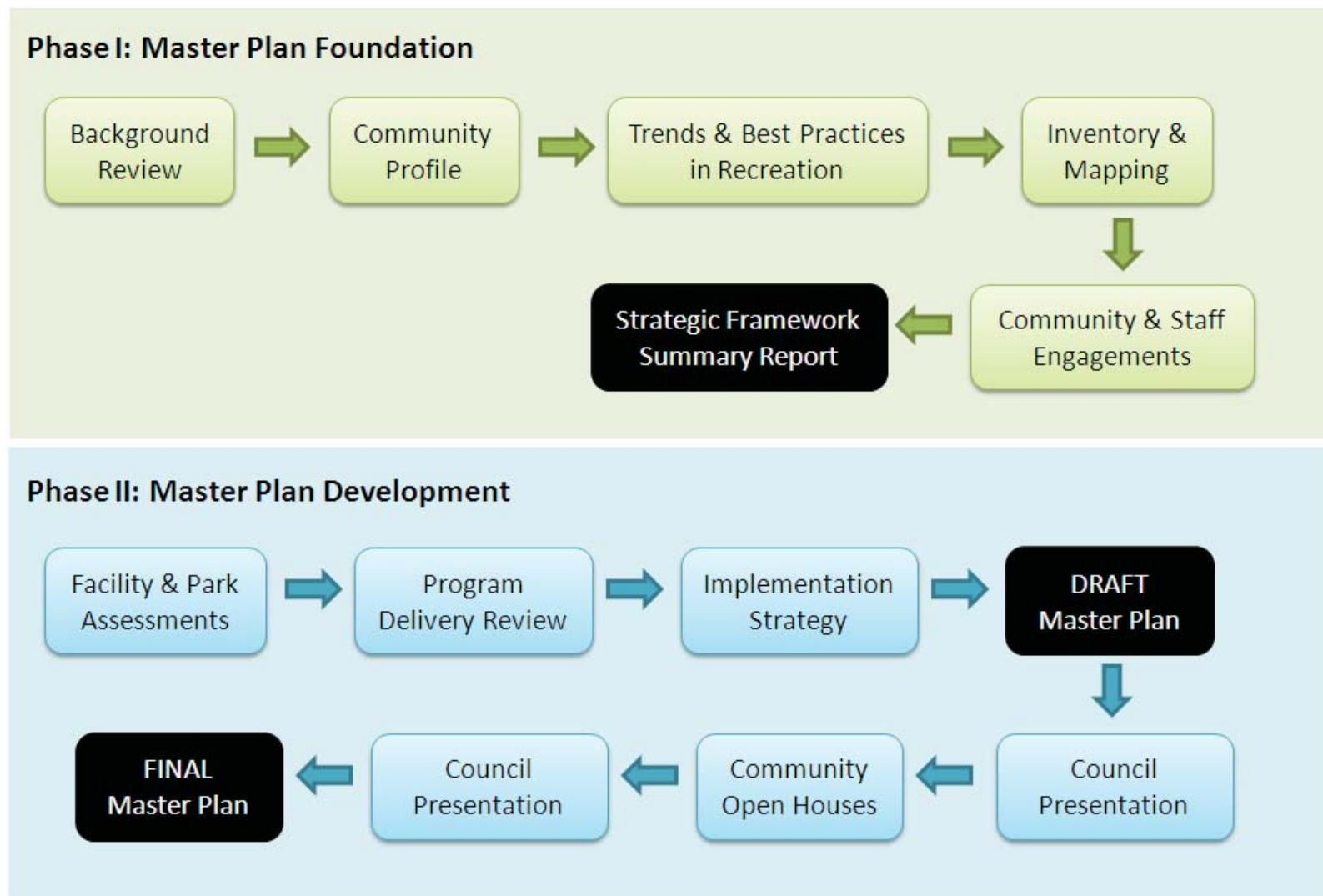
Recognizing that community demographics, recreation user preferences, facility and program utilization profiles, and other important indicators have been continually evolving since the previous Master Plan was approved, the City of St. Catharines released a Request For Proposal in April 2014 to undertake the RFPMP. This new Master Plan will continue to guide the delivery of these services with a sustainable strategy reflective of present circumstances. The Consulting Team of Monteith Brown Planning Consultants and Tucker-Reid and Associates was retained to prepare the Master Plan, with oversight provided by a Technical Committee and a Senior Steering Committee consisting of City Staff and appointed Council representatives.

Master Planning Process

The Master Plan has been created using qualitative and quantitative research methods. The first phase focused on research and community engagement, the latter of which has been a major point of emphasis in this process. City staff and the Consulting Team devoted significant resources to creating a comprehensive community consultation program. City Staff made a concerted effort to inform, invite, follow-up and engage hundreds of residents, stakeholders, City representatives, institutions and agencies, etc. in the master planning process. Specific details from the research and consultation activities were presented through a Strategic Framework Summary Report, which is a background document to the Master Plan.

The subsequent phase involved assessments using the foundational data that were used to create the RFPMP. The master planning process is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Planning Process for the Recreation Facility and Programming Master Plan





Alignment with Corporate Frameworks

A number of background documents have been reviewed to understand the planning context surrounding the Master Plan, on the basis that this RFPMP forms part of a broader policy context for the City as a whole. There are a number of documents and provincial policies that affect St. Catharines' growth and land uses; this information must be taken into account during the preparation of the Master Plan. In addition, to meet the demands of its population, the City has proactively undertaken numerous studies and carried out the creation of new facilities and programs. The Master Plan will be utilized, in conjunction with other documents, to guide local planning and decision-making.

For the RFPMP to be effective, it must align with corporate objectives and land use planning policies, as well as other plans specifically guiding the Parks, Recreation and Culture Services Department (e.g. the Culture Plan and Museum Strategic Plan). These documents have provided baseline content for the Master Plan, while integrating and/or reinforcing appropriate findings that support the provision of services falling under the purview of the Plans. Pertinent provincial legislation and a number of documents that have been reviewed as part of the planning process are listed below.

Provincial Legislation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ontario Planning Act • Provincial Policy Statement • Greenbelt Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe • Niagara Escarpment Plan
Strategic Policy Documents	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garden City Plan • Niagara Region Official Plan • Parks Policy Plan, 2005 • Recreation Facility Master Plan, 2008 • Facility Accessibility Design Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown Creative Cluster Master Plan • Tending Our Garden City: City of St. Catharines Sustainability Strategy • Inspire St. Catharines: Culture Plan 2020 • Museum Strategic Plan

Other Documents

- 2011 Census Community Profile
- 2011 National Household Survey
- St. Catharines Leisure Guides
- Ice Allocation Policy
- Region of Niagara Development Phasing Strategy (2013) and Development Charges Background Study (2012)
- Morningstar Mill Feasibility and End Use Study (2010)
- Black History Interpretive Centre Interpretive Framework and Feasibility Study (2014)

Study Focus

This Master Plan builds upon the City's 2008 Recreation Facility Master Plan though the previous plan's cultural assessments have recently been updated by the City's Culture Plan and the Museum Strategic Plan, and are thus not a major point of focus this time around. Also of note, this Master Plan is not intended to duplicate or update work conducted for the City's 2005 Parks Policy Plan but rather will ascertain progress made to date in implementing that Plan and provide input with respect to what priorities should continue to be advanced in relation to the outcomes of this RFPMP.

The inclusion of capital and operating cost estimates associated with individual recommendations do not form part of the RFPMP. This is due largely to the significant degree of cost variability that occurs over a long range plan of this nature (e.g. escalations/deviations in the price of materials, cost of labour, utility rates, etc.). Instead, more accurate pricing can be determined shortly before the implementation of a specific recommendation, which City Staff will articulate through an annual implementation plan that provides the City with a better representation of cost according to prevailing market rates and conditions. Doing so will better attain Guiding Principle #10 (Sustainable Investments in Recreation Infrastructure) and provide the City with the best available information to guide its capital and operating budget planning processes.