

Section 3

Indoor Recreation Facility Assessments

The City of St. Catharines has a long history of investing in community centres and indoor recreation facilities. Facilities to be examined through this Section include the City's supply of:

- Arenas;
- Indoor Aquatic Centres;
- Indoor Artificial Turf Fields;
- Gymnasiums;
- Older Adult Centres;
- Youth Space; and
- Multi-Purpose Program Spaces



3.1 Arenas

Supply: 10 Ice Pads under municipal ownership at the following six arenas: Bill Burgoyne Arena (1 ice pad), Garden City Complex (2 ice pads), Haig Bowl (1 decommissioned ice pad as discussed below), Meridian Centre (1 ice pad – which is operated by SMG), Merritton Centennial Arena (1 ice pad – which is operated by the Merritton Lions Club) and the Seymour Hannah Sports and Entertainment Centre (4 ice pads).

The supply includes the Haig Bowl ice pad which was decommissioned in 2014. Haig Bowl is included for the purposes of this assessment on the basis that utilization data contained herein reflects historical ice bookings occurring at that ice pad. City Staff note that Haig Bowl is currently leased to a private operator for dry floor usage, and state that capital investments would be required to accommodate dry floor usage over the long term since this facility was built to function as an arena. However, the supply conservatively discounts the Merritton Arena to be the equivalent of 0.65 ice pads despite it being wholly owned and maintained by the City of St. Catharines and a number of local hockey organizations indicate that they regularly utilize this arena to meet their needs.

Further, the supply counts Meridian Centre as the equivalent of 0.25 ice pads since it is only partially accessible for general public use due to OHL usage and special event programming (just four months after opening, between 15 and 20 hours per week are being rented to community users, a level that is expected to grow as the operation further establishes itself). Both the Merritton Arena and the Meridian Centre have flexibility to allocate ice outside of the parameters of the City's Ice Allocation Policy due to agreements with their third party operators.

For the purposes of the Master Plan's assessments, **the City's 'effective' supply is assumed to be 8.9 ice pads.** This adequately reflects ice pads that the City is responsible for funding to enable community use, recognizing that this falls in between the 'actual' supply of 10 ice pads and the 'City-allocated' supply of 7 ice pads (if excluding Merritton Arena, the Meridian Centre, and the decommissioned Haig Bowl).

The availability of Ridley College arena to the community is also recognized as a contributor to the supply (though not specifically added to the 8.9 effective ice pads), with groups such as GHL Niagara Co-ed and the Players Hockey League reporting usage of that rink. The College's NHL size ice pad is operated year-round, and is very well utilized for community rentals during prime time throughout the winter season.



Service Level:

St. Catharines' level of service is one ice pad per 15,805 population which falls within a tolerable range in the Greater Golden Horseshoe where provision typically ranges between an ice pad per 12,000 to 20,000 population. Population-based standards, however, do not necessarily capture market-based demand considerations (such as changing participation rates, aging and diversity characteristics of the population, geographic inequities, etc.). St. Catharines operates an ice pad for every 560 registered arena users (or one per 630 registrants if excluding Haig Bowl) which is higher than what many other urban communities tend to target (one ice pad per 700 to 800 registrants). Furthermore, looking only at children and youth (ages 5-19) who are the primary drivers of arena demand, St. Catharines' provision rate (one municipal ice pad per 2,450 youth) is greater than any of other communities benchmarked (see Appendix B) at an average of one per 3,205 youth. Based purely on these per capita measures, the City of St. Catharines provides more ice pads per population of children and youth than each of the comparator communities, and the second highest level of service overall per total population.

Distribution:

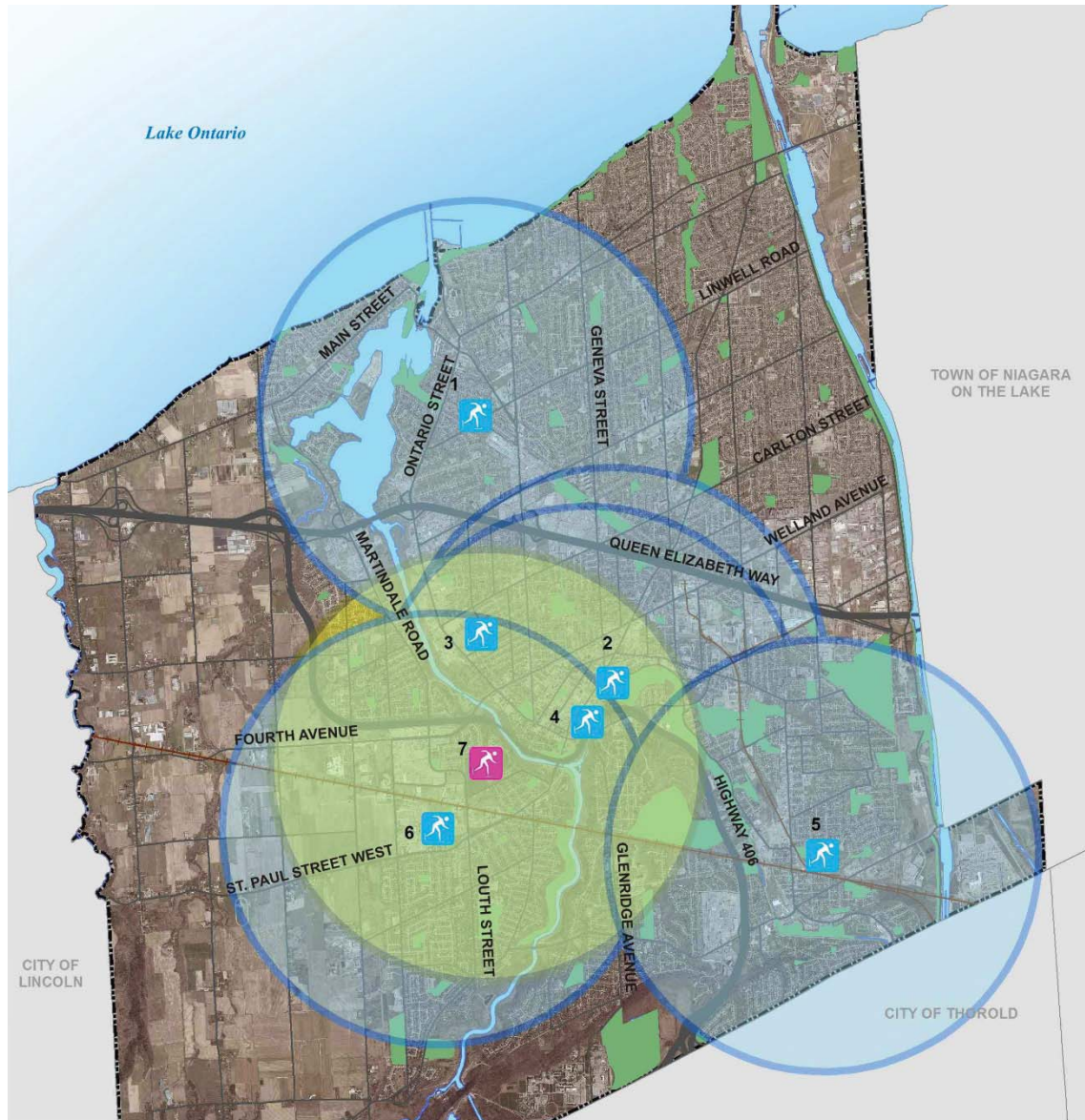
Application of a 2.5 kilometre service radius (generally representing a 10 to 15 minute drive) around each City-owned arena generally encompasses most areas of St. Catharines. Noted gaps include the eastern neighbourhoods within Grantham and St. George's wards, and further that the Bill Burgoyne Arena is the only such facility located north of the Q.E.W. However, arenas are considered drive-to facilities with all of St. Catharines supply considered to be within reasonable distribution to population.

Consultation:

The majority of input regarding arenas was provided by the Arena Partners Committee and through arena users that submitted user group questionnaires. Key themes from these stakeholders included a desire for the sustainable management of local arenas, improving how ice time is allocated and scheduled, and investing in a new multi-pad arena to replace the Garden City Complex.

In terms of general community opinion, the statistically representative survey of St. Catharines' households revealed that nearly half of residents are opposed or strongly opposed to the City spending additional public funds for arenas and curling rinks. This level of support rated the lowest relative to nineteen other recreation facilities. Requests for additional ice pads were not emphasized through other means of consultation.

Map 2: Distribution of Arenas



Arenas

- Arenas with a 2.5 km Service Area
- Non-Municipal Arena with a 2.5 km Service Area

Municipal Arena

1. Bill Burgoyne Arena
2. Garden City Arena Complex
3. Haig Bowl Arena (Decommissioned)
4. Meridian Centre
5. Merritton Arena
6. Seymour-Hannah Sports Centre

Non-Municipal Arena

7. Ridley College



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 Map prepared by Monteith Brown Planning Consultants



Participation: Data provided by user groups records 4,976 players registered with local ice sport organizations (adjusted to reflect prime time users and residents of St. Catharines). 23% of surveyed households participated in hockey or figure skating over the past year (the ninth most popular activity).

Utilization: Usage of prime time hours (5pm to 10pm Monday to Friday, 8am to 9pm Saturday/Sunday) has been relatively steady over the past four ice seasons with an average of approximately 91%. Excluding times when arenas were closed, 837 hours of prime times went unused between October and February while another 933 hours were unbooked in shoulder hours typically identified as prime times in other municipalities (4pm to 5pm and 10pm to 11pm Monday to Friday, plus 6am to 8am and 9pm to 12am on Saturday and Sunday). Collectively, prime and shoulder hour availability amounts to 1,770 unused hours during the 2013/14 season, noting that the previous three winter seasons had unused capacity in excess of this figure. This reaffirms the City's decision to decommission Haig Bowl. Analysis solely of the November and February peak months confirms availability of ice time.

Appendix B contains a comprehensive analysis of ice pad requirements in St. Catharines. Using a variety of metrics and analytics, the assessments conclude that there is available capacity in the existing arena system that is not being utilized by arena organizations, the City or the general population. In fact, the assessment indicates that a supply of 7 ice pads would be adequate for meeting the needs of City of St. Catharines residents for at least the next ten years and likely for some time beyond this period (by comparison, the 2008 Recreation Facility Master Plan also projected that the City would require 7 ice pads by the year 2026). As a result of the Master Plan's assessments, no net additions to the supply of ice pads are recommended during the ten year time frame of the RFPMP based on:

- Analysis revealing that 1,770 unused prime and shoulder operating hours equates to 1.25 ice pads being available over the course of the season (data received from the Merritton Arena suggests that it is well-booked although the facility is not currently required to adhere to the City's Ice Allocation Policy). The amount of available hours reinforces the fact that the City was justified in reducing the supply of one ice pad (i.e. the decommissioning Haig Bowl) for ice use.
- Analysis of total registration and youth registrations in relation to market-driven provision standards yields availability of the equivalent of nearly two ice pads, reinforcing the operating hour assessment.
- The City's high level of service as measured by ice pads per total population, population of children and youth, and registered arena users.
- The statistically valid poll of St. Catharines' households revealing that participation has decreased from 31% to 23% in hockey and figure skating between 2006 and 2014 (and lowering from the sixth to ninth most popular activity during that time). Accurate to

within $\pm 5\%$, the current poll suggests arena investments receive the lowest level of public support for arena investments among all recreation facility types except curling (45% are opposed to additional arena investments)

- The City's annual arena operating budget has averaged approximately \$1.35 million in tax subsidy over the past three years. This does not include the ongoing capital investments required to maintain an aging supply of arenas. It is reasonable to expect operating costs to escalate in a status quo scenario due to capital maintenance requirements, increases in utility and/or staffing costs, and if further declines occur in the number of hours rented.
- The City's ability to finance a new multi-million dollar arena is constrained by its existing debt commitments (e.g. the Meridian Centre, St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre/Dr. Huq Family Library Branch, etc.), infrastructure deficit for municipal assets beyond just recreation.
- Further, the fact that the City no longer collects development charges potentially increases the reliance of the tax base and debentures to fund new facility construction.

The City is presently providing a level of service that allows many groups to access convenient prime times. The City of St. Catharines has chosen to accept the greater financial costs of doing so, and is willing to do so under a low usage operating profile within its shoulder hours. Ultimately, the City must make a decision on how St. Catharines wishes to rationalize its arena supply in relation to its costs and level of utilization. While no net increases are recommended to the supply of ice pads, the City should turn its efforts to maximizing the effectiveness of the existing arenas using a multi-faceted approach aimed at:

- a) building upon the internal operational efficiency of the Department;
- b) encouraging greater usage during both prime and shoulder hour periods;
- c) aligning Merritton Arena with municipal values; and
- d) providing a greater understanding/visibility of cost accounting and providing more transparency in the financial reporting for the arena system.

Upon implementation of strategies associated with the above-noted objectives within the next three years (which Appendix B describes in greater detail), the City should revisit the supply of ice pads. Based on the current assessment, the mid-term target is likely 7 ice pads (plus the Meridian Centre) unless utilization significantly increases or the City chooses to provide an enhanced level of service by which the City accepts the financial costs of doing so in exchange for its desired level of community benefit in providing excess ice in both prime and shoulder hours.



Recommendations

- #1. The ice needs assessment has indicated that the supply of current ice pads exceeds the current demands required to serve user groups and the community beyond the next ten years. However, prior to considering a further reduction in the supply of arena ice pads, however, it is recommended that the City maintain its current supply (with Haig continuing to be decommissioned and includes the independently operated Merritton Arena and the Meridian Centre). A two phased approach is recommended to confirm ice pad demand with the first phase taking place over the next three years while the City undertakes the following actions:
- a) Develop strategies aimed at increasing prime, shoulder and weekend hour utilizations through differentiated pricing strategies, alternative scheduling and allocation approaches, encouraging 'spot' bookings, etc.
 - b) Future assessments of operating and utilization performance should include prime time hours as defined by the Ice Allocation Policy for its tracking and reporting purposes (i.e. the 10pm and 11pm time slots for weekday and 9pm to 11pm for weekend rentals, as well as the 7am to 8am weekend time slots). This is consistent with industry norms and will allow for better comparisons with other arena performance in other municipalities.
 - c) Renegotiate the Merritton Centennial Arena agreement to require that City policies be fully implemented thereby ensuring a consistent and equitable approach across the City-owned arena supply in St. Catharines, including implementation of the Ice Allocation policy. As part of this, the agreement should provide the City full access to utilization, registration information and relevant financial information to allow for the City to integrate into its performance measurement exercises.
 - d) Revise the existing Ice Allocation Policy to: i) differentiate the priority of ice allocation of residents versus non-resident and commercial versus community; ii) differentiate with a higher priority given to the allocation of ice for community use versus commercial use; and iii) utilize the 'actual' amount of ice utilized by groups in the preceding year as a starting point for allocation rather than what was initially allocated (to recognize hours turned back after the allocation process from the previous year).
 - e) Review the arena budgeting practices to ensure alignment with best practices and provide greater understandability to the general public.
 - f) Monitor the planning exercise being undertaken by Ridley College for its campus, to determine potential impacts, if any, on the availability of the existing ice pad on community use.
 - g) Continue to decommission Haig Bowl for ice purposes (noting that dry floor uses would continue as long as sustainable to do so) subject to an arena facility provision strategy based upon the findings of the first phase recommendations.

- #2. That City Staff review ice pad performance within three years, to re-evaluate ice needs following the consideration of the actions associated with the first phase recommendations (Recommendation #1). This will involve an updated assessment of user group registrations, utilization during prime and shoulder periods, program fill rates, capital/operating cost requirements, demographics of the community, etc. to confirm longer-term ice needs. It is expected that this process will determine the City's required supply of ice pads to meet community needs in the long-term.
- a) Should surplus ice be determined at this time resulting in further reductions to the supply of ice pads (i.e. over and above the current number of operational ice pads), it is recommended that the City adjust the arena supply after examining a wide range of options guided by geographic location, level of utilization, building condition, financial performance and partnership opportunities at a minimum.
 - b) Should the City determine an over-supply of ice pad exists but decides to continue to retain 8 ice pads (plus the Meridian Centre), the rationale for doing so would be on the basis that over-supplying arena facilities is a means to further recreational objectives, including:
 - i. provision of surplus rental and programming capacity;
 - ii. maximizing the convenience of playing ice sports by increasing availability of prime times, particularly to adult users;
 - iii. maintaining strong geographic coverage, particularly south of the Q.E.W.;
 - iv. accommodate a portion of regional ice demand;
 - v. the City accepts the ongoing financial costs associated with required capital investments in the aging arena infrastructure, along with annual operating deficit of an over-supply; and
 - vi. winter ice sports are deemed to be a higher community need than other possible activities or facilities that are required, but would be otherwise unfunded or underfunded, given finite budgetary resources in the Parks, Recreation and Culture Services portfolio (e.g. spaces for general purpose activities, youth and/or older adult programming, wellness and active living programs, etc.).
- #3. Regardless of the number of pads the City should choose to retain, initiate potential partnership discussions with an educational institution, area municipality, or other suitable partner to construct a new arena complex to replace aging arena infrastructure in St. Catharines with the number of ice pads determined based upon the three year review noted in Recommendation #2. At a minimum, any such agreement should generally align with partnership principles found in Section 5.5 of this Master Plan, ensure sufficient community access for local residents at a competitive rate, require equitable financial contributions to capital and operating requirements relative to the degree of access obtained, and be strategically located within reasonable access to local residents.



3.2 Indoor Aquatic Centres

- Supply:** The St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre (S.K.A.C.) is the City's premier venue for indoor swimming. The facility contains a 25 metre, eight lane rectangular competition pool plus a separate leisure pool with spray features that is oriented to therapeutic and teaching programs.
- Complementing the S.K.A.C. are quasi-public indoor pools at Brock University (50 metre competition pool), Ridley College (25 yard, four lane pool), and the Walker Family Y.M.C.A. of St. Catharines (25 metre, six lane rectangular pool with spray features). These quasi-public pools are not formally associated with the City, but are publicly-accessible at certain times at rates and/or membership requirements established by the operator.
- Service Level:** The City provides one indoor aquatic centre per 140,660 population. Based solely on a facilities per population metric, this level of service is lower than commonly found among major urban centres in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (G.G.H.) where provision tends to range broadly from one per 40,000 to 80,000 population. The presence of the aforementioned three quasi-public pools has allowed the City of St. Catharines to maintain a lower level of direct service and thereby avoid duplication of community-based aquatic services. In addition, the availability of two programmable pools at the S.K.A.C. including an eight-lane pool represents an elevated level of service in a number of G.G.H. communities where the standard indoor aquatic facility (particularly those constructed over ten years ago) contain only one six lane pool. As such, the City is providing a greater 'bather load' at the S.K.A.C. than is found in a typical indoor aquatic facility.
- Distribution:** The S.K.A.C. is located relatively central within the municipal boundary, and is conveniently located within reasonable proximity to the Q.E.W. That said, neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the City will require a greater amount of time to reach the facility relative to those residing in core neighbourhoods.
- Consultation:** Comments specific to indoor aquatics centres came primarily from the Community Input Event and the Indoor Recreation Facility Users Focus Group, where it was noted that the City provides a lower level of service on a population basis relative to many other municipalities. It is a particular challenge for aquatic clubs who are trying to reconcile their programming demands within prime times which compete with City-run programs for time and space. Certain aquatics clubs are, or are presently exploring, renting time from quasi-public pools including Ridley College. Approximately two-thirds (62%) of residents surveyed through the statistically valid household survey support or strongly support additional public investment in indoor pools, ranking seventh relative to other priorities.

Participation: The Master Plan's household survey recorded swimming as the second most popular activity in St. Catharines, with 53% of households engaging in the activity during the past year (either at an indoor or outdoor location, in a public or personal setting).

Utilization: Since the opening of the S.K.A.C., aquatics participation has been steadily increasing. In 2012, the West Park Pool averaged around 70 swimmers per day in registered and drop-in programs during the winter session. By comparison, the S.K.A.C. averaged 250 swimmers per day in winter 2013 which grew to over 280 swimmers per day in 2014 winter session. Other notable statistics for the 2013 operating year include: nearly 60,000 leisure swims (lane and leisure swimming, and Deep Water Walking); over 30,500 visits to drop-in aquatic fitness classes; nearly 7,500 persons registered in more than 1,500 aquatics classes (noting that there are multiple classes per program) offered by the City.

The Brock University pool functions as the major competitive venue for the City and Niagara Region, and also offers lessons, junior lifeguard camps, competitive swim teams and recreational drop-in swims. The Y.M.C.A. pool also offers lessons, leadership programs and recreational swims to its members. Ridley College makes their pool available for community rental, with the West Park Aquatics Club being a notable renter.

The S.K.A.C. provides a high quality competition pool and leisure pool that allows the City to deliver a multitude of aquatics programs to a wide range of abilities, ages, and interests. While the City's service level of one indoor aquatic facility per 140,000 population is seemingly low compared to other communities, the fact that the S.K.A.C. was designed to a larger than average specification must be considered, as must the fact that many other communities do not have the same number of quasi-public pools available in their communities (particularly a 50 metre varsity pool). Further with just two years of operation under it, the S.K.A.C. appears to still have capacity to grow its programmed and drop-in swim capabilities as evidenced by increasing utilization rates as City Staff learn to adapt and adjust to community demands, and continue to learn about the operating capabilities of this facility. Accommodating prime time rental demands of local aquatic clubs will likely be the largest challenge faced within the City's aquatics portfolio over the next ten years.

With the recent investment in the S.K.A.C. and projected growth of fewer than 1,300 persons in the 4-18 years of age by 2026 (representing the targeted age range of most aquatic club programs), provision of a second indoor aquatic centre would be a significant risk if all capital and operating costs were to be borne by the City as per the S.K.A.C. model. In fact, the S.K.A.C. required an operating subsidy upwards of \$1.4 million in 2013 which grew to \$1.6 million in 2014.

Instead of assuming capital and operating risk associated with enhancing the pool supply for prime time rental opportunities, it is recommended that the City facilitate discussions between local aquatics clubs and the quasi-public pools. It is recognized that these pools



will also have competing prime time demands (particularly the Y.M.C.A.), but there may be potential for greater community use of education sector pools in prime time not used by students. The City could even explore the willingness of the quasi-public pool operators to partner in some capacity with the City and/or user groups. Although this could entail an at- or above-market rate financial commitment by the City, it would still likely be more cost-effective than building and operating a new municipal pool on its own. Should these or other potential pool operators be looking at capital upgrades, the City should investigate the opportunities for partnership to jointly address new pool developments. For example, it has been noted that Ridley College is undertaking a campus planning process and if they are contemplating a replacement or enhancement to their existing pool then there may be an opportunity for a public-private partnership. The same may exist if an area municipality or institution (e.g. a hospital) has capital development plans.

Recommendations

- #4. Identify and engage potential partners that currently provide, or have an interest in providing indoor aquatics opportunities to determine how the City's residents and user groups may gain improved access to meet demands that cannot be met with the City's existing facility.

3.3 Indoor Artificial Turf Fields

Supply: The City of St. Catharines does not own or operate an indoor turf field, though it does provide the Kiwanis Field which is an outdoor artificial turf field that allows for the outdoor season to begin earlier and extend later into the year (e.g., from March to November). An indoor sports field, however, is the only type of facility capable of accommodating year-round field sport activities.

Presently, sports field users looking for indoor space rely upon gymnasiums within the community (through gyms in municipal and educational buildings), albeit each gym may have certain limitations regarding surface, size and ceiling height. Futsal and indoor soccer can also be played in Ridley College's converted former arena building (which is available for community rental) that now houses a multi-use rubberized floor which is a gymnasium-oriented surface (i.e. it also facilitates basketball, volleyball and a number of other activities) that is surrounded by a running track.

Service Level: There is no municipal level of service at present. Service levels across the Greater Golden Horseshoe vary, though it is safe to say that many communities with populations between 50,000 and 100,000 are considering or have already developed indoor turf fields either on their own or in partnership with a third party.

- Distribution:** There are currently no municipal indoor turf field house facilities in St. Catharines. However, an outdoor artificial turf field is located at the Seymour Hannah Sports and Entertainment Centre.
- Consultation:** A number of sports field organizations voiced requests for an indoor artificial turf facility in St. Catharines including the Niagara Varsity Football Club, St. Catharines Club Roma Soccer, St. Catharines Concord Soccer Club, St. Catharines Jets Soccer, and St. Catharines Minor Baseball Association. Generally, sports field users were looking to supplement their outdoor programs with year-round opportunities for indoor training, games, and practices. In the absence of indoor artificial fields in St. Catharines, local user groups reported using indoor facilities in adjacent municipalities such as Niagara Falls and Welland. The household survey undertaken for this Master Plan did not solicit input regarding support for investment specifically in indoor sports fields.
- Participation:** Indoor turf sports, particularly indoor soccer and lacrosse, are growing in popularity in many urbanized areas of the province. With no indoor turf facilities presently in the City, it is unknown how many players affiliated with local organizations are using such indoor facilities in other communities.
- Utilization:** The degree to which local groups are using indoor turf facilities in other municipalities is presently unquantified.

While there are no set service levels for the provision of indoor turf facilities, they are generally common in communities with more than 50,000 residents (although there are examples where communities with lesser population have an indoor turf facility). While some municipalities own and operate their own facilities, the most common approach to provision has been through partnerships between municipalities, non-profit sport associations and/or other public institutions (such as school boards). For a municipality such as St. Catharines that is undergoing a transition in its recreation user profile (notably an aging population) and the financial resources that are associated with maintaining a strong but aging number of facilities, having a negotiated partnership agreement in place would be a likely precursor to any decision to add indoor turf field house to the Parks, Recreation and Culture Services Department portfolio (i.e. it would not be a sustainable decision for the City to solely build and operate a field house).

In the absence of local opportunities, it is difficult to quantify the need for such a facility without first undertaking a comprehensive business planning exercise that involves local stakeholders to fully understand the type/size of field required, the number of hours that might be used each week and how they will be allocated to various users, the capital and operating costs of the facility, potential partners and the respective roles of each, and the ongoing funding strategy. A business plan investigating these noted considerations, at a minimum, should be prepared prior to rationalizing any decision as to whether the City is enter into this new level of service.



At a very high level, demand can be estimated based on the number of outdoor soccer players in St. Catharines. As discussed in the Outdoor Recreation Facility Assessment section, there are an estimated 4,300 players in the City. Applying an assumption that 25% of outdoor players participate in indoor soccer, it can be estimated that there are about 1,075 indoor soccer players residing locally. The average indoor soccer program requires one hour per week on an indoor field for approximately every ten players; this ratio can vary slightly depending on the age of the participant (the field can be divided in two for games involving smaller children) and the level of competition (rep teams require more practice time). Based on this metric, there could be demand of 108 hours per week, noting that the assumption is also predicated on the Ridley College multi-use floor and local school gymnasiums continuing to absorb a degree of these hours.

Accordingly, the City should be open to entertaining discussions should a qualified partner(s) express interest in collaborating on the development and operation of an indoor turf field house. Examples of partners could include, but not necessarily be limited to, school boards and private schools, postsecondary education institutions, area municipalities and/or local sports field organizations (either an individual group or a collective) provided they have demonstrated financial capacity to be involved in operations. The City's role in the relationship should be reviewed through the aforementioned business plan as there are many different examples across Ontario if the City could support such a project. For example, the City could provide the financial backing to secure land and/or the initial cost of construction with a partner possibly repaying the investment back over time, or it could contribute towards all or a portion of capital requirements and have the partner be fully responsible for facility operations (or vice versa) provided suitable community access is permitted.

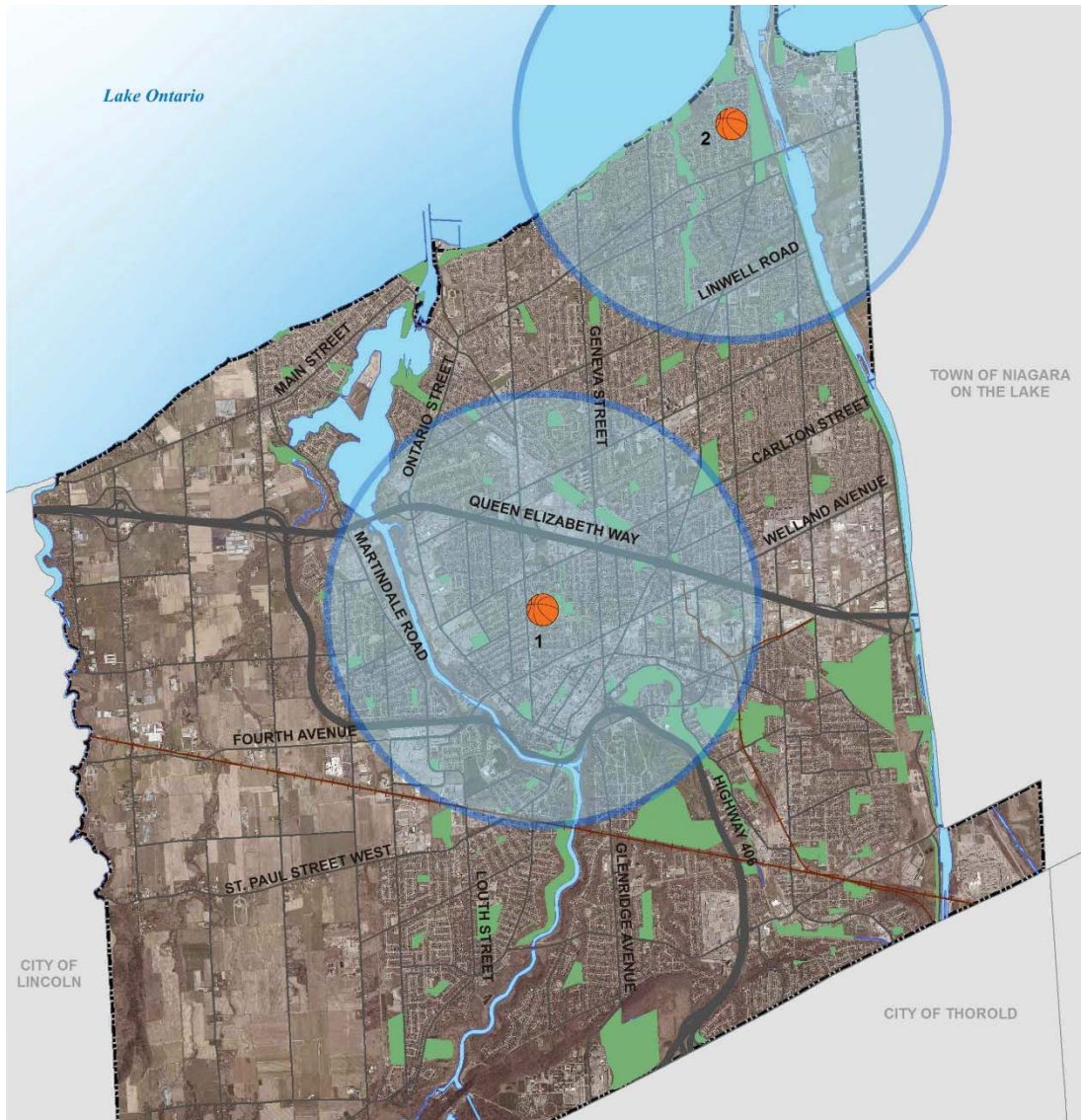
Recommendations

- #5. Municipal entry into the indoor artificial turf market should only be pursued on the basis that a qualified partner(s) can be secured to contribute towards the capital and/or operating commitments and that such investment is first rationalized through a comprehensive business planning exercise.

3.4 Gymnasiums

- Supply:** The City owns two gymnasiums, however, the Port Weller Community Centre gymnasium is the only one that is operated and programmed by the City. The gymnasium (along with all other space) within the Queen Elizabeth Community Centre is leased to the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara and thus no municipally-delivered programming occurs at that facility.
- Of note, the Russell Avenue Community Centre also has a large multi-purpose room that is slightly smaller in area than a gymnasium, however, it has functional limitations consisting of low ceiling height and structural columns embedded within the floor space that prohibit most gymnasium sport activities from taking place and thus is not included in the gym supply.
- Gymnasiums are also available throughout St. Catharines at various institutional locations and places of worship. Access to public and separate school board gymnasiums is negotiated through the provincial Community Use of Schools policy through which community rentals are permitted in accordance with the fee/rental schedule established by the school boards. The City has negotiated a reciprocal agreement with the District School Board of Niagara for exclusive use of the double gymnasium and storage area at Harriet Tubman Public School (opening September 2015) during weekday evenings (the City also has priority access at a fee for additional use during non-school days). Additionally, the Walker Family Y.M.C.A. has a double gymnasium, Ridley College has two gymnasiums while Brock University has three gymnasiums, one of which is a double gymnasium that is encircled by a suspended 200 metre, three lane walking/jogging track.
- Service Level:** Including the Port Weller and Queen Elizabeth Community Centre gyms, the City is providing one gymnasium per 70,330 population. Service levels are generally not directly comparable between municipalities given that some communities may provide fewer gymnasium facilities if they have access to school gymnasiums because of strong relationships, partnerships or joint-use agreements with the local boards of education.
- Distribution:** The service areas of the Port Weller and Queen Elizabeth Community Centre gyms (the latter which is programmed exclusive by the Boys and Girls Club, but addresses a portion of child/youth-focused demand) generally encompass communities residing in the north-east areas of the City. The rest of St. Catharines largely relies upon gyms within the educational facilities mentioned above.

Map 3: Distribution of City Gymnasiums



Gymnasiums

 Gymnasiums with a 2.5 km Service Area

Gymnasiums

1. Harriet Tubman Public School
2. Port Weller Community Centre



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Data provided by the City of St. Catharines.
Map prepared by Monteith Brown Planning Consultants

Note: Harriet Tubman School gym is available to the City through a partnership and reciprocal agreement with the school board

- Consultation:** Discussions at the Community Input Event and through some Focus Groups noted deficiencies in the local gymnasium supply, and that access to school board gyms in particular is cost prohibitive or has too restrictive scheduling policies (e.g. groups being bumped with little notice, certain activities are not permitted to take place at the school's discretion, etc.). Further, these discussions reinforced a trend that became apparent through the household survey whereby participants reported seeing shifts away from traditional organized sports into more flexibly scheduled, self-directed activities that are frequently take place in gyms (pickleball for older adults was a noted example). Another recurring theme heard throughout many of the consultation activities was residents wishing that the City had constructed a gymnasium as part of the S.K.A.C.
- Participation:** A broad range of activities take place for all age groups within the Port Weller Community Centre gym ranging from active living and wellness programs, indoor gym sports (e.g. floor hockey, volleyball, badminton, etc.), to flying model aircrafts. The household survey reported participation in gym activities (some of which may also take place outside of gyms) such as children's programs (21%), seniors and teen programs (14% each), basketball (11%) and volleyball (9%).
- Utilization:** As the only gymnasium under the direct operational control of the City, the Port Weller Community Centre gym is used fairly extensively due to the range of programs offered through the City. Discussions with the Boys and Girls Club indicate that they heavily depend upon the gym within the Queen Elizabeth Community Centre to deliver daytime and after-school programming. Of note, the Brock University and Ridley College gyms permit community rentals during times not otherwise allocated for student classes and programs. In fact, Ridley College indicates that its gymnasiums are rented by community groups for most nights of the week as the facilities are to a higher design/size specification that many gyms operated through the school boards.

Gymnasiums tend to be strategically co-located in multi-use community centre developments as they are flexible spaces through which a range of programs can be delivered. For example, arena and pool users often benefit from the dry-land training space afforded by gyms while cross-programming potential is enhanced if co-locating a gym with a seniors or youth space. Gymnasiums also assist in facilitating the growing demand for drop-in or spontaneous activities (e.g. basketball, volleyball, pickleball, floor hockey, etc.), something that is important in a community such as St. Catharines where the household survey and discussions with community indicates a shift from traditional sports to more flexible or self-directed forms of programming.

Municipalities tend to target gymnasium service levels around 1:35,000 to 1:50,000 population, typically aligning with indoor aquatic centre targets recognizing the economies of scale and cross-programming potential of developing these facilities together. More often, however, an aquatic centre or an arena is considered to be a facility "driver" through which a gymnasium is added for ancillary support and as such a



gymnasium does not usually provide the sole impetus for new community centre construction. In addition, proximity and ability to access school gymnasiums also has a significant impact on supply and demand. While a gymnasium was not included as a complementary facility in the S.K.A.C., the City indicates that the building was designed to allow for expansion to include a gym if needed in the future.

With respect to operational responsibility, community-oriented programming is heavily reliant upon school gyms (including Ridley College) to address needs across St. Catharines, since the Port Weller Community Centre is located in the northern area of the City while the centrally located Queen Elizabeth Community Centre gym is dedicated to child and youth-serving programs offered by the Boys and Girls Club. Use of school gyms is an efficient use of tax-funded infrastructure, however, community access to these facilities can be challenging in the absence of effective shared use or reciprocal agreements. Municipally-operated gymnasiums are much more likely than school gyms to:

- provide a multi-use recreation and/or cultural experience through co-location with complementary facilities, resulting in a 'one-stop shopping' experience for a wide range of ages and interests.
- be accessible during the daytime (when school is in session) and during the summer months (when schools reduce their staffing);
- provide affordable rental rates, particularly on weekends when school janitorial/supervision costs are subject to overtime wages, or due to a school's mandate towards achieving a greater rate of cost recovery; and
- permit a greater range of uses (some school gyms may restrict certain types of activities) while offering a greater degree of scheduling certainty (schools may 'bump' users if a concurrent school use occurs).

The negotiation of favourable reciprocal or shared-use agreements with school boards, as the City has done for the Harriet Tubman Public School, can mitigate some of these challenges (except, in most cases, for access during times when school is session). Other reasons why a municipal gymnasiums are often considered include contingency options where an existing municipal gymnasium or large multi-purpose space can no longer be utilized (e.g. City Staff indicate that certain structural conditions may warrant considerable capital renewal at the Russell Avenue Community Centre) or if a school may no longer be available thereby causing a loss of community-based program opportunities, which in turn may lead to requests for the City to deliver the program in lieu (the school boards have not provided any indication that access will be reduced but nonetheless a contingency plan would be in the City's best interests should community-based programs become restricted by access/affordability issues in the future).

Within the master planning period, it is recommended that the City expand the S.K.A.C. to include a gymnasium provided that expansion of the building footprint is indeed cost-effective and feasible. The provision of a gym at the S.K.A.C. would likely benefit pool users as a whole as aquatic clubs would have onsite access to dry-land training while casual pool users and library patrons have more choices to participate

in an activity while at the facility. The inclusion of a gym with a fitness studio and/or smaller multi-purpose room would provide a more robust community recreation experience at the S.K.A.C. and afford a greater range of multi-generational activities that can take place (e.g. wellness, sport, community rentals, etc.). Another important factor is this development would increase overall foot traffic within the S.K.A.C. (which would also benefit the St. Catharines Public Library branch), and could potentially result in more monthly or annual swim passes being sold as the S.K.A.C. could provide a more 'club-like' experience. It would also reinforce the entire Lester B. Pearson Park site as one of the City's premier hubs of multi-faceted community activities. Any expansion plans for the S.K.A.C. should involve major stakeholders (e.g. the St. Catharines Public Library, potential gymnasium users, youth representatives and older adult associations, etc.) and the public in the design phase.

A new gymnasium is envisioned to provide many benefits to the community, particularly given the range of programs that stakeholders expressed they wish they could provide but did not have a suitable and/or affordable space to do so. A gym will allow the City to expand on highly valuable programs oriented to youth, thereby providing greater opportunities for safe and positive activities to take place, as well as for the growing population of older adult of which there are a number of Baby Boomers that are still looking for active recreational programs (but do not necessarily have sufficient public or quasi-public spaces in which to do so).

Recommendations

- #6. Subject to confirmation of site conditions and constraints, construct a gymnasium at the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre/Dr. Huq Family Library Branch along with any supporting spaces rationalized through the supporting business plan such as a wellness studio and/or additional multi-purpose program rooms. The design phase should engage stakeholders such as, but not limited to, the St. Catharines Public Library, older adult associations and other potential gymnasium users.
- #7. Continue to maximize programming opportunities at the Port Weller Community Centre.
- #8. Engage in additional shared-use or reciprocal agreements to access existing and new gymnasiums operated by the District School Board of Niagara, Niagara Catholic District School Board and/or any other appropriate partnering agency in order to meet future gymnasium demands.



3.5 Fitness Space

Supply: The City of St. Catharines delivers active living and wellness programming out of multi-purpose rooms oriented to floor-based fitness, largely at the community centres and the S.K.A.C. The City does not directly operate equipment-based fitness clubs.

There is a sizeable private sector fitness industry in St. Catharines and area municipalities. Within St. Catharines are clubs such as Goodlife, Anytime Fitness, Fulton Fitness, Downtown Health Club, Energy Fitness Studio and Reflexions. The local private clubs provide a wide range of fitness opportunities including traditional weights and personal training, cardio equipment, classes and programs, and squash. The Walker Family Y.M.C.A. also provides a high quality 10,000 square foot fitness centre with cycling studio and three-lane indoor track, while Brock University contains a 5,100 square foot facility.

Service Level: While many larger municipalities directly deliver floor-based active living and wellness programming, the provision of equipment-based fitness opportunities is not consistently viewed as part of the core service mandate across municipalities in Ontario. Even among those municipalities providing equipment-based clubs, the operating model differs widely from direct competition with the private sector, indirect competition by focusing on smaller and/or introductory-level spaces, leasing municipal space to third party providers, or partnering with other service providers such as educational institutions or non-profits (e.g. the Y.M.C.A.) to provide fitness centres through negotiated agreements specifically detailing the capital and operating responsibilities of each party.

Due to this variability in municipal fitness facilities or facility provision models, direct comparison between municipal service levels is not a consistent method of gauging how the City is delivering upon its fitness objectives – provision tends to be based upon corporate philosophy more so than a population-based market threshold.

Distribution: With municipal fitness programs delivered at the various community centres and older adult centres, distribution of these services occurs across the City.

Consultation: Public support for spending on fitness centres was recorded at 47% through the household survey, while 29% were opposed. Focus group discussions generally centred upon the need to provide dry-land training space for athletes, preferably within the facilities that they use for their core activities.

Participation: The emphasis being placed on personal health is resulting in growing participation across Ontario for physical fitness activities. This is translating into increasing use of private and public sector fitness services oriented to health and wellness, including active living programming centred on cardiovascular and stretching activities (e.g., aerobics, yoga, pilates, etc.). Such active living programs and classes appear to be the fastest growing segment of fitness, more so than traditional weight-training, given that they are designed to be fun, social activities (e.g., Zumba). Participation in aerobics, fitness and weight-training was the third most popular activity recorded through the Master Plan’s household survey, pursued by 42% of the sample.

Utilization: Municipal fitness programs, including aquafit, are observed to contribute significantly to the usage of various facilities in which they take place.

As described above, there are several equipment-based fitness facilities located throughout the City. As the City of St. Catharines has not traditionally provided equipment-based fitness centres as a part of the core service mandate, it is recommended that the City continue to focus on its core strengths of providing floor-based fitness programming (e.g., zumba, yoga, spin, etc.) to encourage holistic health opportunities within its existing community centres. In support of this continued focus, it is recommended that the City construct an active living studio in tandem with the proposed gymnasium at the S.K.A.C., noting that any proposed services offered within this fitness space should be complimentary to, rather than competing with, private sector services. While the S.K.A.C. already has a multi-purpose room that is presently used for some wellness programs (e.g. yoga), the room’s size, aesthetics and configuration appear to be optimally suited for meeting, gathering and instructional types of programs. A new active living studio at the S.K.A.C. should be flexibly designed to accommodate a range of activities, programs and interests, contain mirrored walls, have a wood-sprung floor and ceilings of sufficient height, and provide adequate storage.

Recommendations

- #9. Integrate an active living studio as part of the City’s recreation portfolio. This space should be flexibly designed to accommodate a range of activities, programs and interests, contain mirrored walls, have a wood-sprung floor and ceilings of sufficient height, and provide adequate storage.



3.6 Community Centres

Supply: The City of St. Catharines owns four community centres that generally provide large multi-program spaces as their core function. Port Weller Community Centre contains a gymnasium while the Russell Avenue Community Centre has a large multi-purpose hall. Both of these facilities also have ancillary spaces such as meeting rooms, kitchens, offices, storage rooms, etc. The City leases its Queen Elizabeth Community Centre to the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara who deliver their own community-based programming out of the facility's gymnasium and various multi-purpose rooms. Similarly, the Merritton Community Centre is leased to the Merritton Lions Club who are responsible for managing the facility. The St. Catharines Museum also provides multi-use opportunity space that is utilized for a diverse range of uses but is not included for the purposes of the RFPMP.

Although the S.K.A.C. contains a multi-purpose room and is intended as a community gathering place, it functions as a community centre with a different focus (i.e. aquatics and library services) than those described above. On this basis, the S.K.A.C. is not reflected in this supply but is assessed primarily in the aquatics and gymnasium section of the Master Plan.

Service Level: The four community centres result in a service level of one per 46,887 population. Municipalities no longer tend to construct singular-focused facilities (though many have inherited these assets through a legacy of infrastructure) with the recent prevalence of multi-use, multi-generational designs and thus direct service level comparisons with others is not applicable.

Distribution: As shown in Map 1, the community centres are generally located in a manner that provides a degree of service to each quadrant of the City, though Port Dalhousie is noted as a gap in this respect (it does benefit from the older adult centre and a library branch that can be used as meeting space). The Russell Avenue Community Centre and the Queen Elizabeth Community Centre are located within 1.5 kilometres of each other and would duplicate each other's' program catchment area if it were not for the specific program-focus of the Boys and Girls Club.

Consultation: Input provided through the consultations suggested an appreciation for the four community centres, but the message was expressed that they are 'not truly multi-use.' Apart from this, limited requests were received regarding community centres, although residents expressed the need for a broader range of programs, building upon the sentiments expressed for a desire for true multi-purpose program spaces. Such programs may include those focused around youth and older adults, active living and fitness, arts and culture, education, and more. The household survey also revealed

that 41% of residents supported additional public investment in community halls or banquet rooms (27% opposed), ranking eighteenth among facility types and suggesting that these types of facilities are not a high community priority at this time.

Utilization: The City runs a number of its recreation and cultural programs at these locations, and also makes these facilities available for the community to rent for special events.

These community centres provides opportunities for facility users to access the space within well-established neighbourhoods of St. Catharines for meetings and a number of programs offered by the City. On one hand, the community benefits from having well distributed multi-purpose program space as it provides residents with conveniently located, competitively priced facilities (as compared to private facilities such as hotels, social clubs, etc.) for a variety of gatherings, celebrations and meetings. This space is equally essential to community organizations delivering community programs including local senior's groups, minor sports, cultural groups, etc. These halls can often be focal points of community activity, offering abilities to deliver programs and services to smaller catchment areas in the City (e.g. a neighbourhood or group of neighbourhoods). On the other hand, community halls tend to be used for a homogenous range of uses such as social gatherings, buck and does, etc. and can be costly to operate from a municipal perspective (particularly when looking at them together) due to low rents, and high capital maintenance (the facilities are between 30 and 60 years of age) and utility costs.

Maximizing existing community spaces to accommodate a wider variety of uses is a preferred approach to providing the public with access to new multi-purpose program space. The City should continue to make use of its existing assets and invest in appropriate upgrades in order to ensure that a sufficient distribution of rental and program delivery spaces exist. Prior to any investment in existing facilities, the City will need to assess the costs of carrying out any improvements and rationalize this expense through a cost-benefit evaluation. For example, such spaces could be used for a greater degree of outreach programming delivered by the community or the City (e.g. youth and older adults programs, arts and cultural services, studio-based fitness opportunities, etc.). Ensuring that these spaces are multi-purpose yet actively programmable is an important part of evaluating whether or not to upgrade.

With a new gymnasium being recommended through an expansion of the S.K.A.C. (refer to Section 0), economies of scale in construction should allow for the fairly priced inclusion of smaller multi-purpose space. As will be discussed in subsequent pages, the S.K.A.C. expansion should include a multi-purpose room(s) that assigns program-priority to youth and older adult activities as it would be a relatively low cost capital item and its ongoing operating cost would be nominal due to the manageable square footage. Including this space would allow the City and the St. Catharines Public Library to leverage additional programming opportunities and facilitate a broader and more multi-generational range of activities to take place at the S.K.A.C..



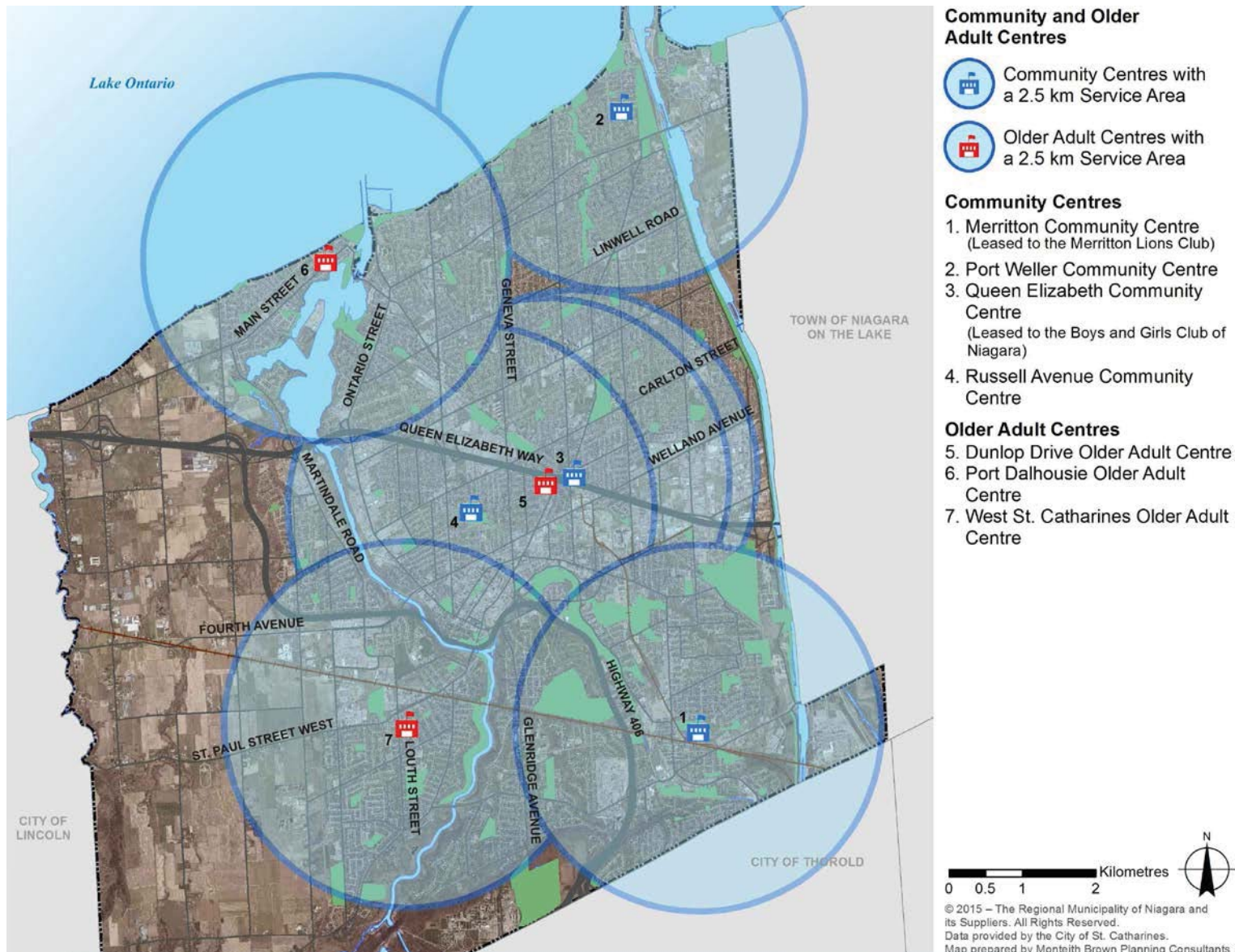
The 2008 Master Plan recommended that the City evaluate the long-term need as to whether it should retain ownership of both the Russell Avenue Community Centre and the Queen Elizabeth Community Centre since both of these facilities contain similar elements. For the Queen Elizabeth Community Centre, a potential sale to the current tenant should be explored and provide them with the right-of-first refusal in the event that municipal divestiture of that facility is rationalized. The 2008 Master Plan also recommended a city-wide review of all its community centre operations in light of their potential to accommodate a broader range of uses as discussed in the preceding paragraphs. City Staff, through their internal implementation schedule of the previous plan, indicated that funds were not available to complete the study nor were funds available to fix the existing building stock.

Through the current master planning process, demand for general programming, older adult and youth programming, cultural programming (as expressed in the Culture Plan and further supported through consultation with organizations), and additional self-directed activities has been significant. The unavailability of financial resources is certainly understood, though a loud message has come from the community that these spaces are as important, if not more than facilities oriented solely to sport (particularly with historically strong financial investments in indoor/outdoor aquatics and the arena supply) and that financial resources need to be better distributed. This RFPMP reinforces the need to undertake a comprehensive review of community centre operations and options, as does the City's internal implementation plan, and it is on the above noted basis that the 2008 recommendation is carried forward for the current master planning period. In particular, the study should also examine the ability of the S.K.A.C. to accommodate a greater share of the program load if one of these facilities is decommissioned, leased or sold through the aforementioned expansion to include additional multi-use program space, particularly since both community centres are located within a ten minute drive of the S.K.A.C.

Recommendations

- #10. Include at least one multi-purpose program room, preferably assigning program priority to youth and older adults, as part of the proposal to add a gymnasium to the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre/Dr. Huq Family Library Branch.
- #11. Undertake a comprehensive review of community centre operations and options. Notable focus should be placed upon the Russell Avenue Community Centre and the Port Weller Community Centre.

Map 4: Distribution of Community Centres and Older Adult Centres





3.7 Older Adult Centres

- Supply:** A total of three Older Adult Centres are owned by the City and operated in partnership with local Seniors' Associations. Facilities include the Port Dalhousie, Dunlop Drive and West St. Catharines Older Adult Centres. The facilities generally contain multi-purpose activity spaces, offices, kitchens and storage areas.
- Service Level:** The City provides one older adult centre per 46,890 population or 15,025 persons ages 55 and over.
- Distribution:** The distribution of seniors centres generally results in a strong north to south coverage, though the closure of the Merritton Seniors' Centre leaves a gap in the south-east.
- Consultation:** A strong message was communicated that there is a growing need for older adult spaces and programs in St. Catharines, and that aging trends will place an even greater pressure on existing facilities due to a rapidly increasing 55+ population and diverse program pursuits between 'younger' and 'more elderly' older adults. Considerable discussion in one focus group centred around the fact that the City has not been able to devote resources to keeping its Older Adult Centres open enough during evenings throughout the week, which limits the ability of the Seniors' Associations to attract older adults who are still working during the day. Discussions were also held regarding the need to devote funding to older adult programs so that persons living on small fixed incomes do not become isolated due to an inability to pay for programs or transportation to reach a program, but unfortunately there have been instances where program funding has in fact been cut and thus the Seniors' Associations are no longer able to provide a valued service.

The household survey found that while 64% of residents were satisfied with the recreational opportunities for older adults, residents felt that there were gaps in older adult programming such as those centred on healthy living and fitness, education, arts and culture and travel. The household survey also reported that 70% of residents supported additional public spending on dedicated seniors' spaces (11% opposed). Support for additional investment in this facility type ranked third among 21 recreation facility types, suggesting that older adult spaces are a high priority (it is noted that the survey had a slight overrepresentation of older adults between the ages of 55 and 69). Consultation with various general interest groups also revealed the need to provide accessible services to older adults, particularly with fixed incomes.

Participation: The household survey reported that 14% of residents participated in organized seniors programs within the past twelve months. Participation trends have identified the emergence of active older adults who are generally more physically active and healthier than previous generations of seniors. This growing market segment seeks the more rigorous programs and activities typically provided at multi-use community facilities, although at a less intensive pace. Such opportunities include swimming, pickleball, badminton, fitness and wellness, and dancing. Further, there has been an increase in social and cultural programs such as linguistics, cooking, and computer workshops, which have been captured in the growing spectrum of local older adult programming. This trend is not to say that all older adults and seniors are active and seek non-traditional activities, as communities across the GTA have been observed to provide an assortment of recreational opportunities that respond to an array of senior interests and abilities.

Utilization: The degree to which Older Adult Associations and other local groups are using the older adult centres is presently unquantified, however, a review of their program offerings suggests a robust range of uses are taking place within (and outside of) the facilities.

Older adult spaces provide venues for residents ages 55 and over to gather, share common interests, hold events and programs, and organize games. These spaces have increasingly become more important as St. Catharines' population continues to age, those among those commonly utilize older adult spaces as a means of social support. Given that local demographic trends expect St. Catharines population to continue to age, it is anticipated that participation in drop-in and registered older adult programs will continue to increase over the planning period, increasing pressures for high quality older adult programming and spaces. The City's existing older adult centres, however, appear geared to most optimally service those in the 70+ age group, reinforcing the concerns heard through the master plan consultations that identified the most pressing concern of local Seniors' Associations to attract younger members.

The 2011 Census identified that the population of residents age 55 and over makes up 30% of the City's population and that by 2026, the 55+ population will have increased by 4,000 persons with one out of every three residents being an older adult. As a result, the increasing proportion of older adults is expected to drive demand for high quality space to support local older adult programming, which has experienced increasing demands based on rising participation rates over the past few years.

The Seniors' Associations correctly identify the concern that operating hours and the types of facilities provided at older adult centres and the community centres is unlikely to appeal to working older adults and younger Baby Boomers. Enhancing the amount of interesting and convenient program opportunities for the current generation of seniors is a proactive way for the Seniors' Associations to maintain their longevity, as it is critical to engage the 55-65 age group as early as possible so that they sustain membership levels and thus also the sustainability of the Associations themselves (and their programs).



The three older adult centres provide the City with a solid foundation upon which to provide services oriented to current and future generations of older adults. The facilities and their volunteers have expertise in delivering programs suited to the membership and can be used to guide the City's future programming efforts recognizing the need to integrate the Baby Boom generation into the older adult centres, community centres and other facilities. The City should look to outreach existing services to the S.K.A.C. in order to leverage cross-programming synergies with the pool (e.g. aquafit and recreational swims are popular among many older adults maintaining their active lifestyles), the St. Catharines Public Library and the onsite kitchen. The programming synergies would be further accentuated with the proposed addition of a new gymnasium, wellness studio and a multi-purpose room(s) that assigns program-priority to older adult and/or youth activities. Using the S.K.A.C. will appeal to the 'new' generation of older adults who are looking for more active living type programs in a multi-generational environment (the fact that the S.K.A.C. is not be branded as a 'seniors centre' will also encourage Baby Boomers to participate, even if programs are delivered in concert with an Older Adult Association). It is emphasized that such a space should only be provided if proceeding with the gymnasium expansion.

Recommendations

- #12. Through feasibility study and business planning process, evaluate the merits of integrating a multi-purpose room that assigns programming priority, in whole or in part, to older adult activities through the proposed expansion of the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre/Dr. Huq Family Library Branch or alternatively examine other municipal properties.

3.8 Youth Space

Supply: St. Catharines does not provide any dedicated youth space; however, a range of youth-oriented programs are available are available at the Port Weller and Russell Avenue Community Centres, the S.K.A.C. and certain parks throughout the City. Municipal programs are oriented to 'youth' whose ages span 11 to 13 and 'teens' between the ages of 14 and 17 though the definition of these cohorts can encompass ages as low as 9 and as high as 24 based on evidence in other municipalities and the intended function of their facilities and services.

Supplementing municipal program opportunities are youth programs provided by local community partners such as the Y.M.C.A. of Niagara and Brock University. There also non-profit youth agencies operating within the City. The Deck is a faith-based organization whose facility promotes a safe, positive environment for youth to access drop-in leisure activities and some social services. The Raft is a youth hostel and resource shelter focusing on preventative and reactive services largely for older youth. Both of these facilities are oriented to at-risk youth and teens. Also in the community

are the Grantham Optimist Youth Centre (Linwell Road) and the Optimist Club of St. Catharines Youth Centre (Napier Street) through which those service clubs deliver recreation and educational program opportunities.

- Service Level:** In the absence of a municipal youth centre, a service level is not applicable. Most municipalities do not provide these spaces on a per population basis as such facilities are developed by opportunity, such as including them in a facility designed to promote multi-generational interests, or where community-based youth centres are not available.
- Distribution:** The distribution of the above noted community providers serves a number of pockets throughout the City, which when considered in tandem with the City's programs that are offered through municipal facilities and parks encompasses many areas of the City (recognizing that the type of programs and facilities for youth will vary depending upon the programs offered at each location).
- Consultation:** The need for more programming geared specifically towards local youth was expressed through the Community Launch Event and the household survey. While nearly three-quarters (72%) of residents were satisfied with the recreational opportunities for children under the age of 12, a lower number (43%) of residents were satisfied with the recreational opportunities for teens between the ages of 13 and 18. Research suggests that youth often do not participate, leading to community perceptions that there are not enough opportunities for this age segment. Nevertheless, there is a need to further investigate opportunities for this age group. The household survey found that 68% of residents supported spending additional public funds on improving or developing new dedicated youth spaces. Support for this facility type ranked fifth out of 21 recreation facility types, suggesting that the provision of dedicated youth spaces is relatively a high priority among residents.
- Participation:** The household survey identified that approximately one-fifth (21%) of residents participated in children's programs and 14% of residents participated in organized teen programs. Trends across Ontario reveal a growing preference among youth for unstructured pursuits compared to organized sports, prompting the emergence of drop-in youth centres or community rooms that support a variety of recreational youth opportunities.

Data provided by the Region of Niagara anticipates that in 2016, there will be over 2,300 fewer youth (-14%) in the 9 to 18 age cohort compared to ten years prior. The Region does project, however, a slight recovery with growth of 1,100 persons in the cohort by 2026 but this still represents a net loss in the number of youth since 2006 after which their share as a percentage of the total population would decrease from 13% to 11%. Although the population of youth is not expected to experience the same level of growth compared to older adults, the youth population will continue to be an important segment of the population to serve. The provision of engaging programs



beyond simply organized sports can offer youth much needed access to activities geared to health and self-esteem to combat common concerns surrounding physical and mental health.

The proposed expansion of the S.K.A.C. to include a gymnasium lends a significant opportunity to bolster youth-focused programming that will occur out of that facility. Gymnasiums are one of the most important youth facilities due to the flexibility of the space to be programmed for the great multitude of interests that youth and teens have including drop-in sports and other recreation activities, games, cultural activities, etc. For this reason, it is recommended that a multi-purpose room that assigns priority to youth-focused programs be constructed at the S.K.A.C. as part of the gymnasium program. In addition to broadly serving youth across the City through this initiative, it positions the S.K.A.C. to host a greater range of after-school activities particularly for students at the nearby Laura Secord high school and/or Prince of Wales elementary school. A greater youth presence at the S.K.A.C. may also be congruent with the educational and programming objectives of the St. Catharines Public Library whose branch could lend itself well to youth usage through homework areas, computer access, etc. It is emphasized that a youth-priority space should only be provided if proceeding with the gymnasium expansion.

Recommendations

- #13. Through a feasibility study and business planning process, evaluate the merits of integrating a multi-purpose room that assigns programming priority, in whole or in part, to youth and activities through the proposed expansion of the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre/Dr. Huq Family Library Branch or alternatively examine other municipal properties.