

The City Where Everybody Can Play

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Recreation Facilities & Programming Plan

May 2026

St. Catharines

MONTEITH BROWN
PLANNING CONSULTANTS

City of St. Catharines

Recreation Facilities & Programming Plan

May 25, 2026

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Councillor Matt Harris, Ward 2, St. Andrew's
Councillor Joe Kushner, Ward 2, St. Andrew's
Councillor Mark Stevens, Ward 3, St. George's
Councillor Kevin Townsend, Ward 3, St. George's
Councillor Caleb Ratzlaff, Ward 4, St. Patrick's
Councillor Robin McPherson, Ward 4, St. Patrick's
Councillor Dawn Dodge, Ward 5, Grantham
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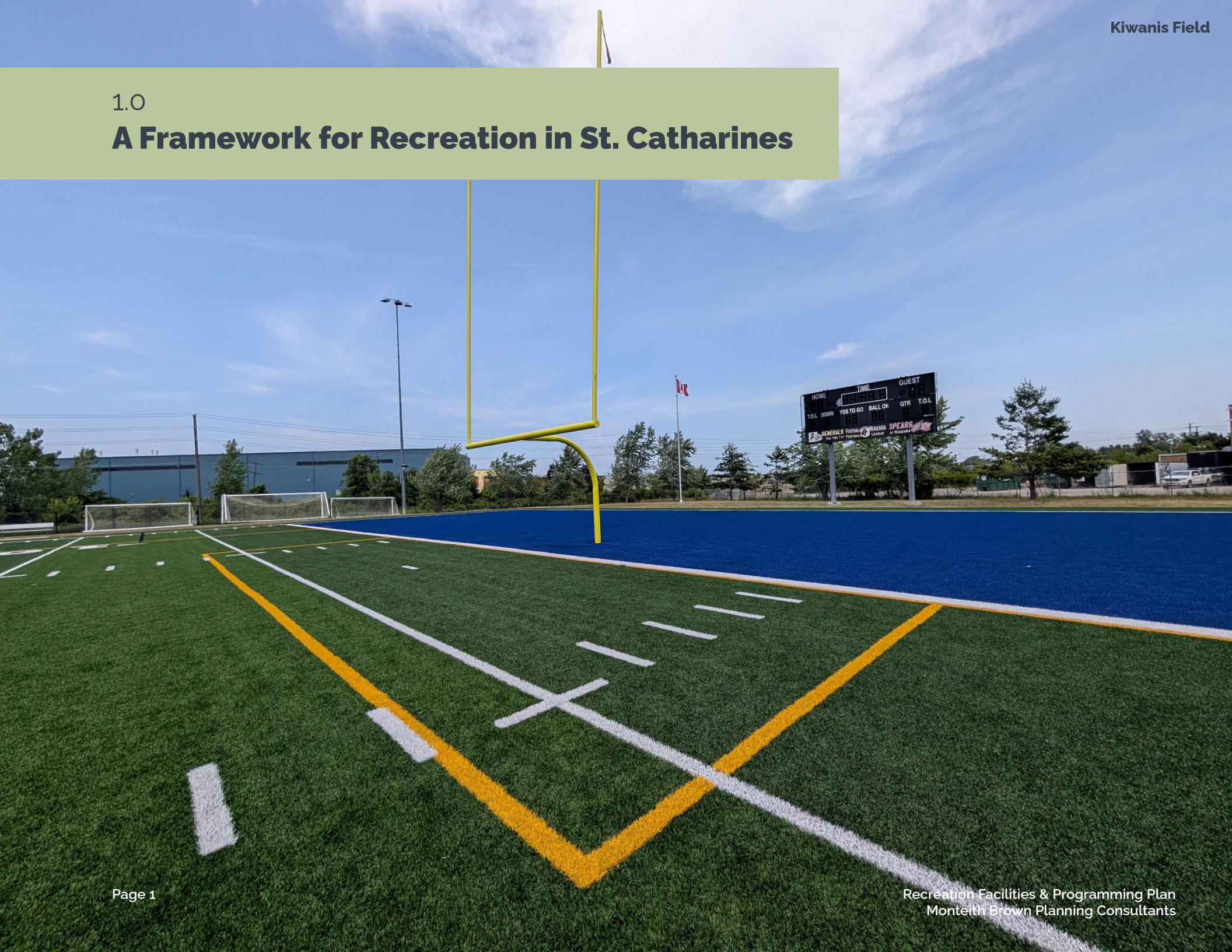
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List of Acronyms

AODA Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
BGCN Boys & Girls Club of Niagara
CRCS Community Recreation & Culture Services Department
FAIR Fee Assistance in Recreation Program
FRC Framework for Recreation in Canada
GTA Greater Toronto Area
IDEA Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility
RFPP Recreation Facilities & Programming Plan
SKAC St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre
WSAC Walker Sports & Abilities Centre

1.0

A Framework for Recreation in St. Catharines





The Recreation Facilities & Programming Plan (“the RFPP”) guides how the City of St. Catharines plans, invests and delivers quality recreation experiences to residents. Looking to the year 2035, the RFPP establishes priorities that reflect interests in recreational activities, considers St. Catharines’ changing urban structure and population, and aligns with the goals set out in the St. Catharines Strategic Plan.

Carrying forward a philosophy historically guiding the City’s Community, Recreation & Culture Services Department, the RFPP re-engaged people living, working and playing in St. Catharines and re-affirmed an aspiration to be:

“The City Where Everybody Can Play”

1.1 Reflecting Everyone in Recreation

The City of St. Catharines has a storied history when it comes to providing recreation and park services. Over the years, municipal recreation services have provided a pathway for local-level sport and athlete development, nurtured community connections, offered access to quality open spaces, and reflected the values people place on sustainability and the environment. Today, St. Catharines' recreation and parks services foster vibrant and connected neighbourhoods, support climate change resiliency, and contribute to the local economy.

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

The City has an interest in every resident being engaged in some form of recreation. Recreation facilities and parks are designed and programmed so that there are choices for residents of every age group, income level, cultural background, gender identity, and people with disabilities. Notable characteristics of St. Catharines residents based on Census data include:

- The 2021 Census recorded 52% of the population as female and 48% as male.
- Populations 55 years of age and above increased by more than 8,000 people between 2011 and 2021 while those 19 years and younger declined.
- 3.5% of the population identify as having Indigenous ancestry.
- St. Catharines median household income was recorded below that of Niagara Region and Ontario, while the prevalence of persons recorded under Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure, After Tax was higher.
- One out of five St. Catharines residents were born outside of Canada.
- The percentage of racialized persons increased from 10% in 2006 to 16.5% in 2021

1.2 Recreation is a Part of the City's Vision

Recreation services are an essential component of the quality of life and services that the City strives to offer. The RFPP helps fulfill the objectives of the St. Catharines Strategic Plan that identifies the City's Vision, Mission, and the following Guiding Principles:

- Safe environments for all
- Accountable and transparent
- Effective operational foundations
- Respect for community affordability
- Proactive communication
- Commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion
- Focus on innovation and partnerships
- Results-oriented
- Conservation and sustainable use of resources

In addition, the Strategic Plan has five Goals that the RFPP and recreation services align with in the following and other ways:

Goal 1: Economic Prosperity – In addition to providing jobs at the City, quality parks and recreation facilities attract economic investment, workers and newcomers, and encourage local youth to remain in St. Catharines. Selected parks and recreation facilities have the capacity to host local, regional, provincial, national and international events.

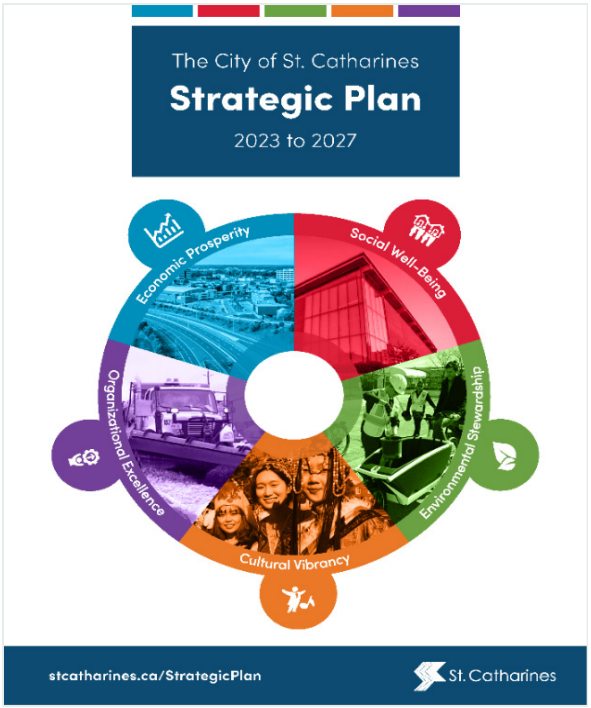
Goal 2: Social Well-being – Recreation facilities and parks are destinations that connect people to each other. Development and renewal of parks and facilities can encourage urban regeneration, and act as catalysts for further investments in communities by others.

Goal 3: Environmental Stewardship – Within the broader greenspace system, parks present opportunities to protect, preserve, and enhance the City's tree canopy. Designing parks and recreation facilities with energy and water conservation in mind can lower emissions and operating costs over time.

Goal 4: Cultural Vibrancy – The City's recreation facilities and parks host gatherings at the neighbourhood and city-wide scale. They are used as places for creative expression, integrate public art, and are supported by programs delivered by the City.

Goal 5: Organizational Excellence – Communications and customer service are integral parts of St. Catharines' recreation and parks system while fiscal decision-making is key in the context of balancing affordable access with costs to repair, renew and construct.

> The City of St. Catharines municipal government leadership will focus on accountability, affordability, innovation, and responsible stewardship of community resources.
>
> ~ City of St. Catharines Mission Statement



1.3 Guiding Principles of the Plan

Guiding Principles serve as a basis for the RFPP to assess needs and make recommendations that are consistent with what was heard during community engagements, being consistent with the City's Strategic Goals and Principles, and ultimately support a vision of being "The City Where Everybody Can Play." The Guiding Principles that underpinned the previous Recreation Facilities & Programming Master Plan remain relevant to this day and are thus incorporated into the CRCS Department's philosophies for the next 10 years.

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.



RFPP Open House at the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre

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 Investments in Recreation

Notable services delivered by the City include:

- 564.5 hectares of parkland across 133 municipal parks;
- The St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre, two outdoor pools, three wading pools and five splash pads;
- 5 arenas including the Meridian Centre and Walker Sport & Abilities Centre (WSAC). The WSAC is owned through a municipal-university consortium and operated by a contracted third party;
- Three Older Adult Centres that accommodated over 55,000 program visits annually from their members;
- 30 rectangular fields and 20 ball diamonds;
- 26 outdoor basketball courts, 34 tennis courts and 15 pickleball courts;
- Playgrounds at 72 parks; and
- Hundreds of recreational programs, lessons and other activities that serve over 225,000 program registrants annually.

The Community, Recreation & Culture Services Department (CRCS) and Facilities and Environmental Services Department (EFES) work collaboratively, along with other City Departments and Divisions, to sustain St. Catharines' recreation, culture and parks system.



Kernahan Park

The City's major accomplishments in recreation services over the past 10 years include:

- **Implementation of the 2015 Recreation Facilities & Programming Master Plan** with 85% of recommendations completed or underway in some form.
- **Opening Canada Games Sports Park / Walker Sports & Abilities Centre** through a four-way partnership that includes dedicated times for use by City of St. Catharines programs and residents. Notable amenities include a twin-pad arena, quadruple gymnasium, indoor running track, and a seniors-focused fitness centre.
- **Modernization & Renewal of Port Weller Community Centre** including façade enhancements, renovations to the lobby and multi-purpose room, addition of an exterior barrier-free washroom, as well as improvements to the adjacent park through a new splash pad, picnic pavilion and rejuvenation of the multi-use court and playground.
- **Making Bill Burgoyne Memorial Arena** more accessible and improving the front of the building, while assuming responsibility of the Merritton Centennial Arena from the Lions Club.
- **Sunset Beach Renovation Project** allocating $6.9 million to modernizing aging facilities, improving accessibility, playground replacement, shoreline protection measures, new boat ramp, and more.
- **Adding Recreational Parkland** to the municipal supply through 2 hectares (5 acres).
- **Parks Renewal Plan** preparation, implementation and subsequent update that provides a long-range replacement strategy for playgrounds and hard surface sport courts in city parks.
- **Kiwanis Field** artificial turf renewal along with lighting upgrades and a new scoreboard.
- **Merritton Community Park** tennis court revitalization and expansion to enable community programs delivered by the Community Tennis Club of St. Catharines through surface, fencing and lighting upgrades.
- **12 Mile Creek Mountain Bike Course** developed in partnership with Ontario Power Generation.
- **Selected Policy reviews and updates** including facility allocation, cost recovery rates and others.
- **Grantham Rail Trail** year-round active transportation route, connecting neighbourhoods to parks, schools, and other locations.



Community Tennis of Club St. Catharines, Community Park

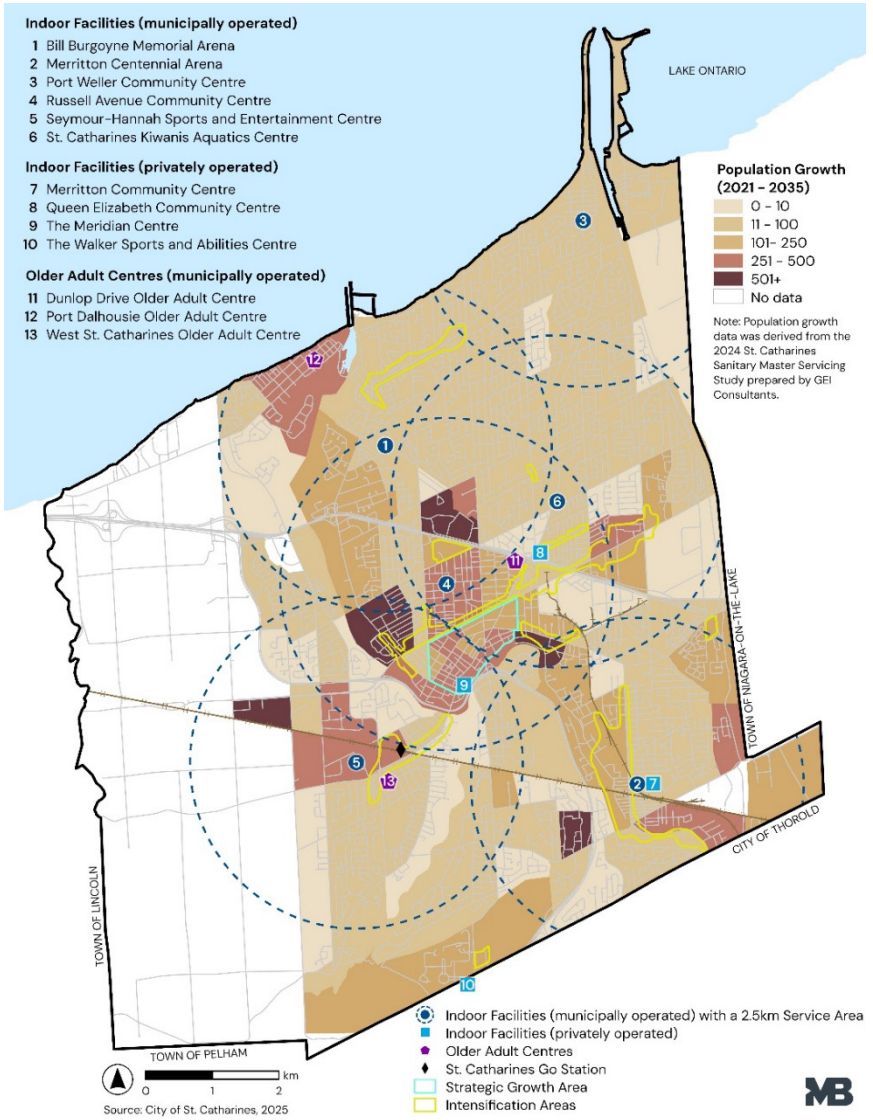
1.5 Recreation is a Part of City Building

St. Catharines has experienced many changes to its population over the past decade. Whereas population growth rates were modest 20 years ago, demand for housing has significantly increased over the last decade, leading to stronger rates of population growth. The City's population was estimated at 145,000 persons in 2025 and is projected to 156,000 persons by the year 2035, ultimately growing to nearly 172,000 people by the year 2051 as identified in the Region of Niagara Official Plan. Due to recent changes in provincial planning policy, the City is currently updating its Official Plan and thus decisions surrounding future provision of recreation and park services should align with the new Official Plan upon its approval.

Historical residential developments in St. Catharines have been characterized by low and medium density forms of housing. With a limited supply of developable 'greenfield' lands remaining, future residential growth is increasingly being planned through infill and intensification. The City's Sanitary Master Servicing Study directs most future population growth to the central part of the city, between the QEW and the railway tracks. More specifically, the area around the St. Catharines GO Station is projected to experience substantial residential growth over the next 10 years.

With limited undeveloped lands available, finding spaces for new recreation and parks facilities will be more challenging than in the past. Strategic approaches will need to be employed through proactive land acquisitions, partnerships with others, and willingness to explore new ideas if the City is to provide its growing resident base with opportunities for health and interaction through recreation. In addition, recreation and park developments should be part of the City's urban design, placemaking, mixed-use and transit-supportive development initiatives.

Figure 1: Distribution of Population Growth, 2021 - 2035



Source: St. Catharines Sanitary Master Servicing Study, 2024

1.6 What We Heard

Over 3,000 people were engaged in some form through the RFPP's development, sharing what they love, what they would change, and their ideas for the future of recreation in St. Catharines. Input was gathered from residents and community groups regarding recreation facilities, parks and programs. Different engagement tactics were employed to provide St. Catharines' diverse community with multiple ways to provide feedback.



EngageSTC
Nearly 2,800 visitors have learned about the RFPP through EngageSTC which provided information about the planning process, feedback opportunities, and posted documents prepared for the plan.



Community Open Houses
Open houses were held throughout the process at the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre and Central Library, attracting nearly 200 people.



Community Survey
Over 800 survey responses were received through EngageSTC and paper copies.



Community Group Workshops
Three workshops were held with community groups, sports organizations and volunteers.



Interest Holders Interviews
Discussions with Bridges Niagara, Niagara Regional Native Centre, Brock University, local school boards, and Ridley College.



Advisory Committee Workshops
All Advisory Committees received the community survey, and three Advisory Committees were engaged to seek out their insights and experiences for recreation.

Participation Profile

The top five activities survey respondents have undertaken in the last 12 months consist of:

72% Enjoyed parks and open spaces

70% Walked or hiked for leisure

68% Visited a beach

42% Swimming

41% Gardening

Frequently Used Facilities

68% **visit indoor recreation facilities** such as arenas, pools, gyms and community centres **at least once a week**. By comparison, between 36% and 38% use parks and outdoor recreation facilities a minimum of once per week.

Top Barriers to Participation

1. Program isn't offered at a convenient time (28%)
2. Facilities or programs are too crowded (18%)
3. Lack of time (15%)
4. Facilities or programs do not reflect interests (15%)
5. Unaware of opportunities (14%)

Priorities for Investment

89% agree that **recreational services** should be a high priority for council.

71% agree that **acquiring parkland** should be a high priority for council.

>80% support investments in **indoor swimming pools** (83%), **parkland** (81%), and **beaches** (80%).

Indoor recreation facilities were **important** to 94% of survey respondents while 71% reported being **satisfied** with the City's indoor facilities.

Community Open Houses

SKAC is a source of community pride: Ample positive feedback was received about the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre (SKAC) and the staff working there. People love the pool and its co-location with St. Catharines Public Library.

Online registration challenges for high-demand programs: There was substantial feedback regarding challenges with the City's online recreation registration system. Most comments emphasized that since program demand is high, online registration fills quickly. Due to the high-demand and competitive nature of online bookings, participants who are not comfortable with electronic technology or cannot access the internet face barriers to program registration.

Priority registration for residents is desired: St. Catharines residents want first priority to enroll in City programming before non-residents, particularly for programs that are in high demand such as aquafit and pickleball.

Desire for an additional pool: The topic of having another indoor pool was frequently mentioned at all open house sessions due to high demand for the City's existing swimming programs, as well as the closure of the local YMCA. Feedback suggests people would like to see a new indoor aquatic facility in other neighbourhoods that is similar to SKAC.

Additional community centres with gymnasium spaces are desired: Programs and activities that received the most interest included those for seniors and youth, particularly gymnasium sports such as pickleball and basketball. A general desire for year-round indoor community spaces and programming was also stated.

Recreation spaces should be welcoming & inclusive: There is a prevailing belief that everybody should feel welcomed and supported in the City's facilities, including people that are new to the community and/or experiencing economic challenges.

Community Representatives Focus Groups



Positive relationships with the City: Representatives of groups mentioned that City staff are helpful and have a great relationship with their groups.



Affordable recreation is important: Several representatives indicated their organizations direct members facing financial hardships to Jumpstart while others hope to add low-income programs in coming years. Most groups try to set their rates based on what people can afford.



Raising awareness about the FAIR program: There is a lack of awareness of the City's FAIR program. Promoting FAIR in community centres and libraries was suggested as a way to inform people of the program.



Creating welcoming spaces for Indigenous Communities: Groups expressed the importance of making facility spaces welcoming to members of Indigenous communities and acknowledging St. Catharines' Indigenous histories.



Improving the comfort and safety of parks: Adding lighting, shade structures, trees, gardens, and washrooms was suggested as a way the City could foster more community involvement and participation in parks, as well as enhance park safety.



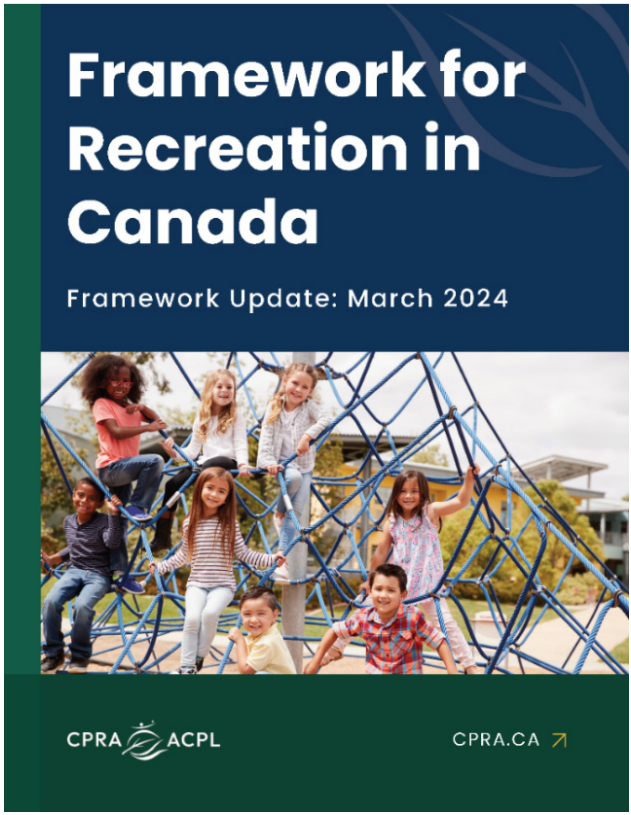
Volunteer recruitment challenges: Several groups are having trouble finding volunteers and think that promoting volunteer opportunities on the City's social media could be helpful. Some groups are able to meet their volunteer needs through high school students' volunteer hours.



Additional facility spaces are needed: The SKAC and school gymnasiums were identified as having limited availability for new programs and users. Competitive groups would like more time to meet competition and training demands.

1.7 Structuring the RFPP within the National Framework

To be "the City where everybody can play", the RFPP is aligned with the Framework for Recreation in Canada (FRC) which stems from collaborative efforts between provincial and territorial governments, the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA), and provincial recreation and parks associations. The City and its CRCS Department actively consider CPRA and Parks & Recreation Ontario (PRO) frameworks, charters, and initiatives; aligning the RFPP with national and provincial bodies supports the broader collective through evidence-based decision-making.



The FRC sets a vision where *"Everyone is engaged in meaningful, accessible recreation experiences that foster individual wellbeing, the wellbeing of natural and built environments, and community wellbeing"* and advances the intent of this RFPP. The FRC's five Goals serve as the basis for how the RFPP is structured:

- **FRC Goal 1.** **Active Living**: Foster active living through physical recreation. Focus on getting the inactive, active, rather than the active, more active.
- **FRC Goal 2.** **Inclusion & Access**: Increase inclusion and access to recreation for populations that face constraints or barriers to participation.
- **FRC Goal 3.** **Connecting People with Nature**: Help people connect to nature through recreation.
- **FRC Goal 4.** **Supportive Environments**: Ensure the provision of supportive physical and social environments that encourage participation in recreation and help to build strong, caring communities.
- **FRC Goal 5.** **Recreation Capacity**: Ensure the continued growth and sustainability of the recreation field.

The FRC identifies a set of Priorities for each Goal, which in turn are considered within the RFPP.

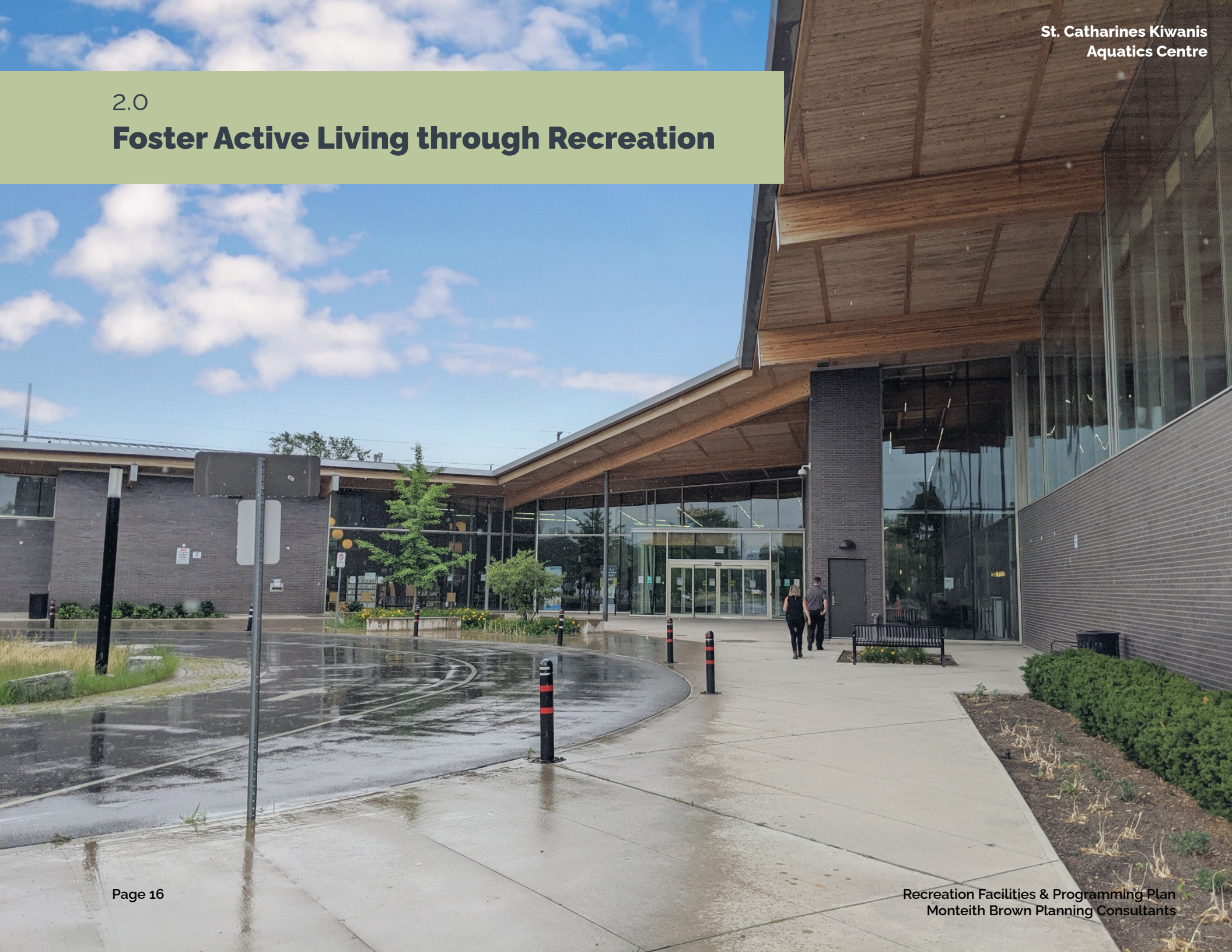
1.8 Recommendations

Rec. #1. Have regard for the Framework for Recreation in Canada, along with its subsequent updates and iterations, to guide the overall planning, management and implementation of recommendations for the City of St. Catharines recreation, culture and parks system.

Rec. #2. Identify and allocate the appropriate resources to implement the Recreation Facilities & Programming Plan through ongoing monitoring, review and implementation of its Recommendations.

2.0

Foster Active Living through Recreation





Dunlop Drive Older Adult Centre

The health benefits of being physically active are well documented. From early childhood to the senior years, the City's efforts to promote physical literacy and facilitating physical activity help prevent chronic health issues and disease that are related to inactivity.

2.1 24-Hour Movement

The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines replaced Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines and Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines to educate Canadians about what a healthful day looks like in terms of being active, walking, sleeping and being sedentary. The Guidelines depict how much time various age groups should "Sweat, Step, Sleep and Sit" per day which are shown in the table below to maintain good health.

The 24-Hour Movement Guidelines are developed for health, education, and recreation service providers to promote in facilities and use in planning camps, recreation and sport experiences.



	Youth Ages 5 to 17	Adults Ages 18 to 64	Adults 65+
Sweat	60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity	150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous physical activities	150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous physical activities
Step	Several hours of light physical activity	Several hours of light physical activities, including standing	Several hours of light physical activities, including standing
Sleep	9 to 11 hours for 5 – 13-year-olds 8 to 10 hours for 14 – 17-year-olds	7 to 9 hours on a regular basis	7 to 8 hours on a regular basis
Sit	Limit sitting for extended periods. No more than 2 hours of recreational screen time per day	Limit to 8 hours or less. Less than 3 hours of recreational screen time	No more than 3 hours of recreational screen time

Source: Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines

2.2 moveSTC Activity Challenge

St. Catharines launched an initiative in 2024 to encourage regular physical activity in the community. The moveSTC activity challenge features a series of monthly challenges designed to get people moving. Challenges are recommended by the Mayor and vary in difficulty recognizing different levels of abilities, fitness levels and personal schedules. By filling out an activity tracking sheet, residents are entered into a monthly prize draw and can record any physical activities that they carry out.

At the national level, ParticipACTION has taken the lead to encourage Canadian communities to become more active through its own annual initiative. Every June, the ParticipACTION Community Challenge opens to individuals, community organizations, schools and local governments. Participants track minutes spent being active through the ParticipACTION website or app, and the total number of minutes are added up in the community. The top 40 finalist communities, which includes the top two from each province and territory, are then asked to explain why they are "Canada's Most Active Community" of whom is awarded $100,000 to sustain local sport and physical activity infrastructure, equipment and initiatives.

Since the Community Challenge began in 2019, ParticipACTION has awarded $1.5 million to winning communities to support local initiatives along with over $7 million in grants for equity-deserving groups. Beyond the funding, 72% of participating communities said there was increased interest in physical activity or sport during the challenge, 61% increased their ability to engage equity-denied groups in these activities, and 54% increased participation and registration in their programs. Through the 2026 Community Challenge, ParticipACTION will be giving grants of up to $1,000 to promote and provide physical activities and sport to equity-denied groups, including Black and other racialized people, Indigenous peoples and communities, newcomers to Canada, older adults, people experiencing financial barriers, people with disabilities and 2SLGBTQI+ communities.[1] The Community Challenge is but one opportunity that the City can explore in concert with national and provincial initiatives as well as its own programs as was proactively done with moveSTC.

[1] www.ParticipACTION.com/programs/community-challenge

2.3 Canadian Sport for Life, Long-Term Athlete Development & Physical Literacy

In addition to moveSTC, the City's recreation programs help provide residents with basic physical skills to participate in active opportunities. Often referred to as "physical literacy" which encompasses movement, confidence and motivation, the City supports these skills for all age groups through its community centres, parks, and programs. In doing so, the City provides a first step on a pathway of being active for life as once people become comfortable with the skills to be more active, the hope is that some barriers to participation will be alleviated.

The City's facilities and programs are primarily oriented to introductory and community-level forms of sport and recreation. The focus on the grassroots is common in municipal service delivery provision, and conversations held for the RFPP suggest that most people believe this is the appropriate role for the City. The prevailing belief is that municipal facilities and programs provide a stepping stone for athletes to progress to more competitive or higher performance forms of sport delivered by community organizations and the private sector. As people increase their recreational competencies and/or move out of higher performance activities, they may continue to rely on municipal programs and facilities such as in the later stages of adulthood. Together, the City and the community deliver pathways for Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) and Sport For Life.

City staff are versed in physical literacy and are imparting its principles in training and program delivery. For example, physical literacy is part of the summer camp training program and has become part of the program design and content formulation for all directly offered recreation and sport activities. These actions will assist camp aged children in obtaining basic movement skills and gaining confidence in becoming more active.



2.4 St. Catharines Recreation Programs & Services

The City provides many recreation and culture services that follow FRC priorities such as embedding principles of physical literacy and focusing on non-competitive and unstructured play for people of all ages and abilities. Like many municipalities, there is a strong focus on programs for children while St. Catharines has long focused services on its older adult population due to its demographic composition. Most municipalities report youth and teens programs as being an age group to improve services towards, and this sentiment was shared in RFPP consultations. Youth engagement in sport and recreation can lead to greater levels of confidence, less use of harmful substances, higher levels of education and the potential to gain leadership training and employment. With older adults expected to continue to be a major segment of St. Catharines' age pyramid over the next 10 years, continuing to support the 55+ population in maintaining active lifestyles will result in better health outcomes physically and emotionally.

Testing Program Satisfaction

Most municipal recreation departments strive to attain a minimum of an 80% satisfaction rating. The CRCS Department assesses satisfaction levels after most sessions and will oftentimes modify a program or service based on feedback; this is an organizational best practice in the delivery of service.

The RFPP community survey tested satisfaction ratings for how recreation services are meeting needs locally as well as general satisfaction rates by age group. Table 1 summarizes responses for age cohorts and an overall average rating. While satisfaction rates were below 80%, it bears noting that this does not reflect on individual programs but rather perceptions of availability for specific age groups. Other RFPP consultations suggested that people are facing competition for available program spots as the population grows. It was also noted that there are challenges when using the program registration system, particularly for people who do not use the online registration platform. As such, the satisfaction ratings reported in the RFPP survey are but one input and need to be considered with results of other surveys; in addition, further engagements (such as user focus groups) and continually measuring satisfaction will advance continued improvement within the CRCS Department.

Table 1: Program Satisfaction Ratings, RFPP Survey

Age Cohort	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Total
0-4 Years	26%	30%	**56%**
5-12 Years	33%	24%	**57%**
13-17 Years	24%	11%	**34%**
18-54 Years	35%	20%	**55%**
55+ Years	31%	36%	**67%**
Community Programs	36%	32%	**68%**

Note: figures exclude survey respondents that do not participate in specific programs.

2.5 Recommendations

Rec. #3. Promote Canada's 24-Hour Movement Guidelines within City of St. Catharines recreation facilities and communications channels used by the Community, Recreation & Culture Services Department.

Rec. #4. Supplement the moveSTC initiative by joining the annual ParticipACTION Community Challenge. During the Challenge, engage with community partners to raise awareness about physical activity and the various programs offered by the City for people of different age groups, interests and abilities. The ultimate goal is to be awarded "Canada's Most Active Community."

Rec. #5. The City's physical activity initiatives should be measured and reported to City Council and community partners each year. At a minimum, articulate opportunities available to all age groups, trends in participation, noted barriers and interventions, as well as key performance indicators that demonstrate the results of the City's efforts. The initial focus should be on municipal programs and services but could involve contributions from community partners as relationships are formed and strengthened.

Rec. #6. Test satisfaction levels in recreation and culture programs annually to understand where to implement service improvements, as well as determine program priorities that respond specifically to the needs of St. Catharines residents.

3.0
Embed Inclusion & Access





St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre

As the “City where everybody can play”, St. Catharines is committed to ensuring all residents can access its recreation and culture services. The parks and recreation system was designed with a neighbourhood focus to reduce distance as a barrier to play and programs. The City offers programs for toddlers and provides a wide range of activities at its three Older Adult Centres, supporting participation for people of all ages and abilities. Many communication strategies are used to promote these opportunities, and City staff are focused on reaching out to groups representing people experiencing financial barriers and other equity-deserving groups to ensure needs are met, no matter who they are.

3.1 A Local Context for IDEA

The City is committed to serving all members of the community. Council has formally affirmed its commitment to embracing, endorsing and celebrating the city's growing diversity, and to creating an environment where every person feels safe, welcome and valued. This direction informs the work of Council, committees, staff and volunteers across all City services.

In alignment with this commitment, principles of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) guide the City's approach to public spaces, programs and services. The goal is to ensure that facilities are welcoming and that programs reflect the needs of St. Catharines' socio-demographically diverse population. City Council's resolution passed in April 2023 regarding diversity in the city and directs IDEA principles to inform all work, decisions, and recommendations of Council, committees, staff, and volunteers.

CRCS staff make intentional efforts to understand and address barriers to participation. This includes ongoing outreach to people experiencing financial hardship, people with disabilities, and others who may face systemic barriers. Staff maintain working relationships with a range of regional and local organizations, including the Region of Niagara, Niagara Regional Native Centre, and Niagara Prosperity Institute, to better understand emerging needs and gaps in service. While progress has been made in some areas, continued work is needed to identify and engage other underrepresented communities. Meaningful engagement requires involving community members in shaping programs, services and policies that affect them — ensuring decisions are informed by lived experience.

The Niagara Region Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan identifies multiple dimensions of diversity, including Indigenous identity, ethnocultural background, newcomers, 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, people with disabilities, older adults, people experiencing financial challenges and/or housing insecurity, youth, gender, and faith. Recognizing this breadth of diversity has implications for how the City conducts outreach, supports staff development, and adapts service delivery to meet evolving community needs.

> "The City of St. Catharines embraces, endorses and celebrates the continued and growing diversity of the city, and will work to create an environment of equality in the government and in the community for all people regardless of their race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, disability, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, family status, immigrant status, receipt of public assistance, political affiliation, religious affiliation, level of literacy, language and / or socio-economic status; and…
>
> …the City of St. Catharines will continue to foster a community that is safe, supportive and a welcoming place for people who live, work or visit our community; and…
>
> …this motion will inform the work, recommendations and decision making of all Council, Committee, staff and volunteers of the City on all matters within the City's jurisdiction."
>
> ~ City Council Resolution
> Meeting of April 17, 2023, Item 10.3

3.2 Indigenous Communities

The 2021 Census recorded 4,660 St. Catharines residents (3.5% of the population) who identified as having Indigenous ancestry. The 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada identified 94 Calls to Action, many of which can be advanced through the municipal recreation and parks sector.

In 2018, City Council approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Niagara Regional Native Centre (NRNC). Developed in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, the MOU established a framework for collaboration between the NRNC and the City. Its purpose is to reduce barriers to Indigenous-led activities, increase awareness and education around Indigenous histories and cultures, encourage community engagement and gathering, support Indigenous community members, and guide City staff in ensuring respectful and appropriate representation of Indigenous cultures and perspectives. The MOU has provided flexibility to respond to Indigenous initiatives and has served as a foundation for an ongoing professional relationship between the NRNC and the City. In 2022 and again in 2025, City staff met with representatives of the NRNC to review the MOU and identify opportunities to strengthen collaboration and clarify shared priorities. As with any long-term partnership, organizational changes and evolving community needs require periodic reflection and renewal. The City remains committed to working with the NRNC and other Indigenous partners to continue building trust, strengthening relationships, and ensuring that reconciliation is reflected in meaningful action. Other resources for the City and the CRCS Department include:

- **The Aboriginal Sport Circle**: a not-for-profit organization that was founded in 1995 that is designated as Canada's governing body and voice for Aboriginal sport and each Province/Territory is represented. It advocates for the Aboriginal community to engage in healthy and active lifestyles, and is an excellent resource for recreation providers. The Regional Coordinators in Ontario work to engage the community and offer grants to fund programs and activities through the Power to Play Program.
- **The Assembly of First Nations (AFN)**: a national organization representing First Nations in Canada whose IndigenACTION Strategy helps to develop partnerships with community level sport and recreation leaders to ensure that First Nations youth live healthier lifestyles and increase their overall well-being through recreation and sport.
- **The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres**: an organization that has developed an Indigenous Cultural Competency Training (ICCT) program provided by Indigenous organizations and businesses. The ICCT program provides organizations that work with Indigenous peoples and groups to obtain skills and knowledge with respect to the history, terminology, values, and behaviours of Indigenous peoples. It is invaluable as communities begin to develop strong relationships built on respect.

3.3 Equity-Deserving Populations

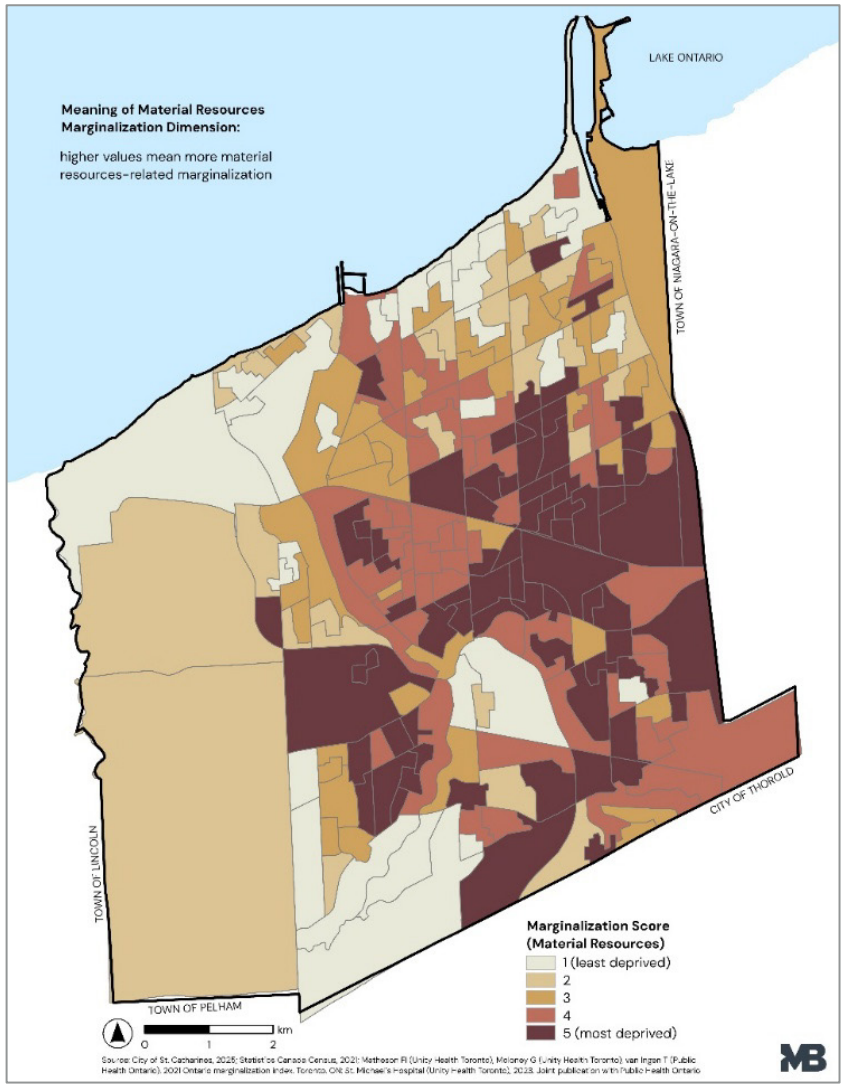
Marginalization & Material Deprivation

Socio-economic status refers to the position of an individual or group in society based on factors such as employment, education, and income. Research indicates that people with higher socio-economic status are more likely to participate in recreation than their lower socio-economic counterparts as they typically have more money, time, and opportunities to participate. Conversely, individuals with lower socio-economic status are less likely to achieve positive health and wellbeing outcomes associated with participation in recreation.

The Ontario Marginalization Index (ON-Marg) is a geospatial data tool 'material resources' dimension data for St. Catharines based on education, lone-parent status, unemployment and low-income rates, and more. The data sheds insights as to areas in which resources related to recreation and park services can increase benefits to equity-deserving populations.

Central and southern areas of St. Catharines have the highest rates of material resource marginalization and as a result, may require additional supports to make recreation services and parks more accessible to the population. The City may address barriers by considering ways to enhance public transportation or sidewalk/trail connections to recreation facilities, and delivering more affordable forms of programming in neighbourhoods through community centres, parks, or in partnership with others.

Figure 2: ON-MARG Material Resources Marginalization, 2021



People with Disabilities

The 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability found that 28% of Ontarians aged 15 and older have one or more disabilities. This is an increase of 4% since 2017. While there is no exact figure for St. Catharines, applying the provincial rate suggests that more than 40,000 residents may be living with a disability. While the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) provides a definition for a disability, it does not provide define accessibility specifically in the context of recreation; however, the AODA defines a barrier as "anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society due to their disability. This includes physical, architectural, information or communication, attitudinal, technological, policy, or practice-based barriers."

Accessibility can be understood as designing and delivering programs, facilities, and spaces so that people with disabilities can meaningfully participate and enjoy them without unnecessary barriers.

Accessibility barriers can prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in recreation and park activities, as well as other parts of daily life. Because play and recreation support physical, social, emotional, and cognitive wellbeing, it is important to ensure people with disabilities can take part in recreation, sport, arts and culture, and parks programs. Inclusive and accessible opportunities help improve overall health and quality of life. To better understand these needs, the City's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) provides important input on accessibility issues. For this RFPP, the AAC shared feedback about challenges with the online registration process, the need to improve financial assistance programs, increased supports for children with disabilities, better public transit access to community centres, and more effective promotion of the City's barrier free features. The Committee also noted that some older parks and recreation facilities still have accessibility challenges due to their age and original design. In the context of recreation, accessibility for people with disabilities can me understood as designing and delivering programs, facilities, and spaces so that people with disabilities can meaningfully participate and enjoy them without unnecessary barriers.

St. Catharines applies the Facility Accessibility Design Standards (FADS) when planning or upgrading recreation facilities and parks. Recent improvements include accessibility upgrades at Bill Burgoyne Memorial Arena, Port Weller Community Centre, and Happy Rolph's Animal Farm, as well as new accessible features at Partridge Park, Glengarry Park, and other locations. The City also continues to explore ways to make programs and communications more accessible for residents with disabilities.

Looking ahead, the City includes accessibility in every park and facility renewal project. These upgrades take place over time, based on funding, project schedules, and long-term capital plans. As future recreation projects move forward, the City will continue to place a strong focus on improving accessibility so that more residents can benefit from updated and inclusive spaces.

Women & Girls

ParticipACTION's 2024 report found that 31% of girls met physical activity recommendations compared to 57% of boys. To increase participation in recreation and parks activities among women and girls, the FRC recommends creating facility allocation policies that ensure women and girls have equitable access to quality facilities and programs at peak times. St. Catharines' women's only swims at the SKAC are a good example of providing safe spaces for women, and supports women who prefer or require women-only spaces for cultural, religious, or personal reasons.

Canadian Women and Sport (CWS) enables girls, women and gender diverse people in pursuing sport and active lifestyles, and keeps women actively engaged in building community capacity. The organization's priority is to develop welcoming environments and sustainable models where women are trained to lead and advance active opportunities in concert with community partners such as municipalities, universities, and not-for-profit groups. CWS has many resources that are readily available to audit policies and practices and help to build capacity within community organizations (e.g. The Temperature Check and Game On). Participation by women, girls, and gender-diverse people in community-driven sport and recreation should be identified as a priority in St. Catharines as it would engage 52% of the population; increasing participation rates in sport and recreation for women, girls and gender diverse people warrants assessment and the development of a multi-year plan.

It is important to recognize that women and girls are not a homogeneous group. Barriers to participation are often compounded for those who experience additional forms of marginalization related to race, disability, income level, age, sexual orientation, or newcomer status. An intersectional approach helps ensure that programs and policies acknowledge these overlapping experiences and are designed to meet the diverse needs of all women and girls.

2SLGBTQIA+ Communities

People who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ (Two-Spirit Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and additional sexual and gender identities) have historically faced societal barriers to inclusion. 2SLGBTQIA+ communities often experience barriers such as discrimination, exclusion, and bullying, which can negatively impact mental health and well-being. These negative health outcomes are further exacerbated when 2SLGBTQIA+ communities cannot attain the benefits of recreation, sport, arts and culture activities if these environments are not perceived to be safe, welcoming, or inclusive.

The City has taken steps to recognize and support 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. For the last twenty years, the City has proudly raised the Pride flag during June, an initiative started and continued by Pride Niagara. The City has also installed a Pride crosswalk as a visible demonstration of allyship and inclusion and recently unveiled a special exhibit 'Pride in Every Step, Love in Every Action' on the steps of City Hall. The City continues to explore ways to support the work of organizations such as Pride Niagara and other community partners.

While these examples of visibility and allyship with 2SLGBTQIA+ communities are important, the City can continue to explore opportunities to ensure recreation facilities, programs, and policies support safe, inclusive, and welcoming environments for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

3.4 Reducing Financial Barriers

There is an ample base of literature that illustrates how income can influence participation in recreation. Research suggests that the higher a person's level of income, the more likely they are to participate in recreation activities and conversely, lower income households may have below-average rates of participation. The 2021 Census reported that St. Catharines' median household income in 2020 was $72,500, which was well below the provincial median ($91,000). More telling is that nearly 17,000 St. Catharines residents live below Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure, After-Tax (LIM-AT), potentially making access to affordable recreation a challenge for 12% of the community.

City Council recognizes the importance of participation and has historically committed to keeping programming affordable by partially offsetting financial costs. Council and staff have done so despite growing pressures such as rising citizen expectations for number and quality of services, continued provincial downloading, global and local talent shortages, and economic uncertainty, all while maintaining a focus on taxpayer affordability. While lower rates of revenue generation have an impact on broad financial objectives, lower user fees in recreation can be rationalized where a desire exists to maximize access to recreation for as many people as possible.

While the Core Service Review raises valid points about fiscal sustainability, St. Catharines has long taken a progressive view that recreation services provide benefits to all residents—benefits that extend beyond dollars and cents. The City's approach, like many other municipalities, is to offer free and low cost program options and to provide subsidies that reduce financial barriers to participation.

St. Catharines FAIR Program

The origins of the City's Fee Assistance in Recreation (FAIR) program dates back to 1997 and provides financial assistance to eligible participants living below the Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut-Offs, before tax. Residents who qualify for the FAIR program can access 50% discounts on recreation programming. Participation peaked in 2023 with 336 participants, who on average received $41.58 towards FAIR programs. Both participation and average spending have changed substantially since 2011 when FAIR had 45 participants who on average received $12.22. Selected feedback received through the RFPP suggests that CRCS staff are knowledgeable, compassionate and discrete when they work with FAIR recipients which is critical since trust is an important part of overcoming barriers.

Customer service staff administer FAIR by ensuring that requirements are met, and individuals are helped (when needed) to gain confidential access to the registration system. Table 2 illustrates the annual number of participants and amount of City spending in the past three years. City staff believe that the decline in 2024 participation may be influenced by the end of the Niagara Kids Benefit program, possibly resulting in less awareness of FAIR. It is important to note that in addition to the City spending figures identified in Table 2, the City carries over unused funding from a previous year in a rolling balance which allows flexibility to offset an unexpected increase in financial needs and growth in program uptake. The funds distributed and average benefit per client values are influenced by the 50% discount values of recreation programming that participants registered for, which is why they have varied each year.

Table 2: FAIR Participation & Funding, 2022-2024

Year	People Served	Funds Distributed	Average Benefit per Client
2022	214	$8,126.47	$37.97
2023	336	$13,969.32	$41.58
2024	127	$3,821.39	$30.09

Source: City of St. Catharines, 2025

FAIR requires residents to demonstrate their economic status through proof of government subsidy or after tax low income cut off documentation. Conversations with the Accessibility Advisory Committee indicate that this requirement can be a barrier. Some municipalities with more progressive fee assistance programs now accept a wider range of documentation, such as tax returns or letters of support from local community organizations. For refugees or newcomers who are experiencing financial challenges and whose first language is not English, the FAIR program would also be more accessible if materials were available in multiple languages and if local translation services were available to assist with specific questions.

Historically, St. Catharines used Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut Offs (LICOs) as the basis for determining eligibility for fee assistance programs. In modern times, use of LICOs as a sole measure of low-income has been called into question with one criticism of the LICOs being that the thresholds are defined using 1992 expenditure data which is over 30 years old and no longer reflects the spending patterns and standards of living today. Some municipalities are looking to Statistics Canada's LIM-AT or Employment and Social Development Canada's Market Based Measure (MBM) as a more accurate way to depict income-based barriers. As noted earlier in this RFPP, material deprivation can also be measured based on a range of socio-demographic factors such as those captured in the Ontario Marginalization Index (ON-MARG). To ensure St. Catharines households experiencing financial challenges can access FAIR, more holistic methods for determining eligibility than LICO will be required.

Combined with study of the City's fees for recreation services, a concurrent review of the FAIR program with a sampling of a willing and diverse set of clients (e.g. through a resident advisory panel, focus groups, etc.) would ensure that there is greater awareness of the program, that it is easily accessed and that it continues to address other barriers residents experience. Promotion of the FAIR program should be refreshed to ensure that all persons experiencing financial barriers can access recreational services with fewer barriers.

3.5 Recommendations

Rec. #7. Continue to schedule regular reviews of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Niagara Regional Native Centre. In addition, identify and meet with Indigenous organizations that can help encourage greater rates of physical activity within Indigenous communities, and continue to move the City towards fulfilling its role in Truth and Reconciliation through the delivery of recreation, culture and sport.

Rec. #8. Continue to work with Indigenous agencies, organizations and communities to integrate public art within parks and public spaces that showcase Indigenous histories applicable to the traditional territory that St. Catharines falls within.

Rec. #9. As the City prepares its next Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, staff should consult the Accessibility Advisory Committee, regional partners, and residents with disabilities to identify ways to add or improve recreation programs and services.

Rec. #10. Consistent with the Sports Field Strategy, construct an inclusive ball diamond containing synthetic surfacing and other barrier-free features at St. Patrick's Park or another suitable location determined by the City.

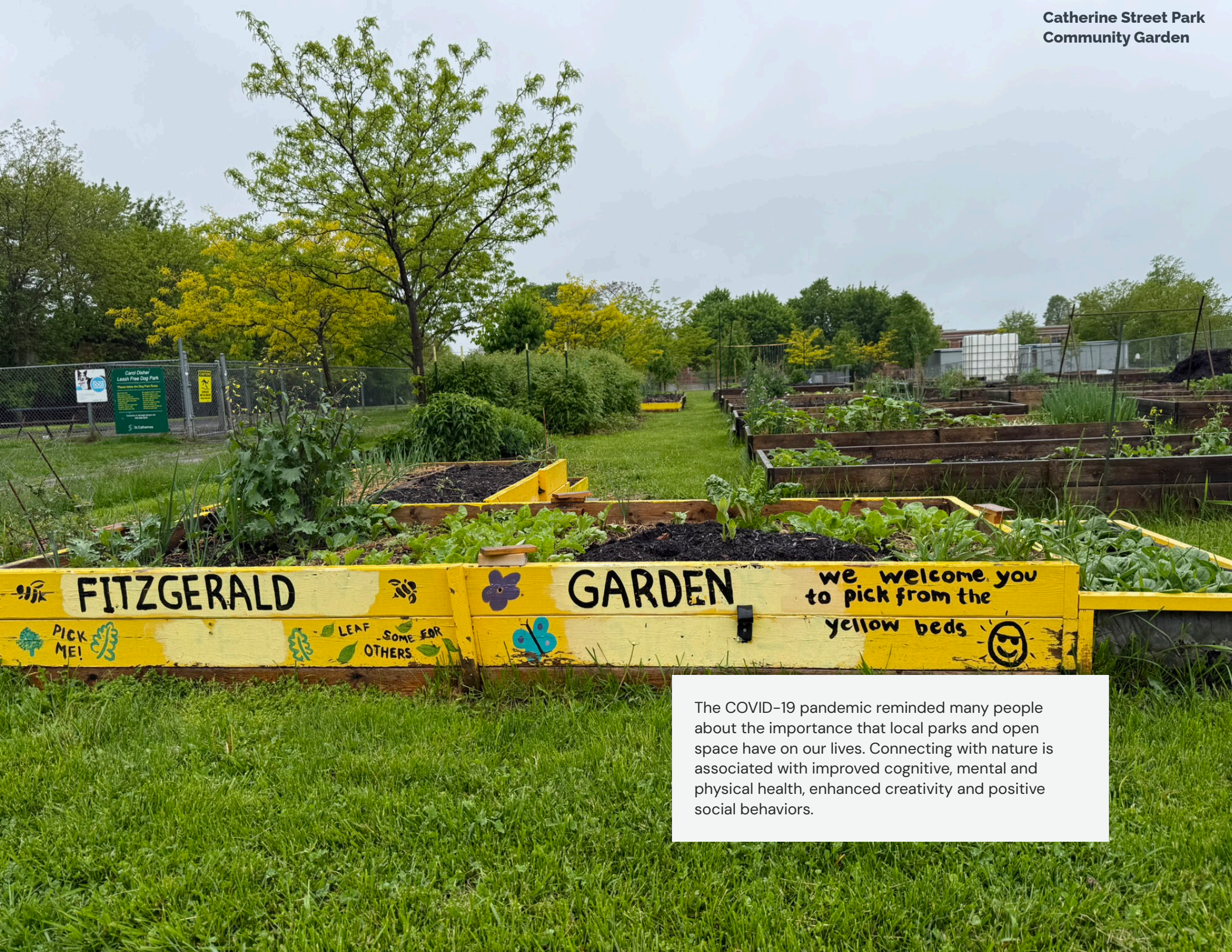
Rec. #11. Engage Niagara Region Transit to explore opportunities to place bus stops closer to selected community centre entrances as well as discussing enhanced weekend and holiday transit service along routes with major recreation facilities such as the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre and event spaces.

Rec. #12. Regularly review and update the FAIR program, potentially to match terms of City Council. Reviews should apply a diversity lens with an emphasis on eligibility criteria, the application process, accepted proof of documentation, promotion, and annual subsidy amount. As part of the update, the City should determine characteristics of the population using the FAIR program, those who are not using it in order to identify unknown barriers, and to inform development of a User Fee Framework (see Recommendation Rec. #38).

Rec. #13. Engage the Canadian Women in Sport to collaboratively assess the City of St. Catharines' policies and practices for ways to encourage more women and girls to become involved in sport and recreation activities taking place in municipal parks and community facilities.

4.0
Connect People with Nature





Catherine Street Park Community Garden

The COVID-19 pandemic reminded many people about the importance that local parks and open space have on our lives. Connecting with nature is associated with improved cognitive, mental and physical health, enhanced creativity and positive social behaviors.

4.1 St. Catharines' Parks System

St. Catharines' high quality and interconnected parks system provides a range of recreation and natural experiences. Guided by the St. Catharines Parks Policy Plan, Active Transportation Master Plan and Waterfront Access Master Plan, the City provides parks, beaches, naturalized areas and trails that connect residents to the outdoors. The Garden City Plan and the Parks Policy Plan establish classifications with the following five types of parks:

- City-Wide & Regional Open Spaces
- District Parks & Playfields
- Neighbourhood Parks & Playgrounds
- Special Urban Parks
- Linear Parks

The City maintains 133 parks that enable access to 564.5 hectares (1,395 acres) of land, and results in a provision rate of 3.9 hectares per 1,000 population which is close to the City's historical provision target. This means that the City has been doing a commendable job in ensuring its parkland supplies are keeping pace with population growth. However, there are gaps in St. Catharines that have historically been underserviced with parkland including the downtown and central core areas, and Ontario Street corridor; a recent review of the City's Parkland Dedication By-law Update reconfirmed these historic gaps, particularly in the Central and West Districts which have the least amount of park space per capita especially for District Parks and Neighbourhood Parks.

Table 3: Parkland Supply & Provision Rate

Parkland Type	Number of Parks	Total Area (Hectares)	Provision Target (Hectares/1,000)	2025 Provision Rate (Hectares/1,000)	2035 Provision Rate (Hectares/1,000)
City-Wide & Regional Open Spaces	23	275.0	**1.5**	1.90	1.76
District Parks & Playfields	13	72.6	**0.5**	0.50	0.47
Neighbourhood Parks & Playgrounds	82	136.0	**1.0**	0.94	0.87
Special Urban Parks	11	1.8	Combined with Neighbourhood Parks	0.01	0.01
Linear Parks	4	79.1	Not Defined	0.55	0.51
Total	**133**	**564.5**	**3.0**	**3.89**	**3.62**

Notes: totals may not add up due to rounding. Provision targets derived from The Garden City Plan and the Parks Policy Plan.
Source: City of St. Catharines, 2025

Provision targets set for each type of parkland as established in the Garden City Official Plan and the St. Catharines Parks Policy Plan classification system are generally being met (Table 3). With the City in the midst of updating its Official Plan, this provides an opportunity to revisit its parkland classification. The existing classification system has served the City well and has many elements that remain relevant today. Optimally, the 2005 Parks Policy Plan should be updated to reflect the many changes to the Planning Act's parkland dedication policies but also define a new Parkland Classification System. Until the Parks Policy Plan is updated, Table 4 contains terminology and uses proposed for consideration in a new plan but also within the new Official Plan. Linear Parks have been removed from the classification system as there are just four parcels designated as such and they are part of the City's trail network; the vast majority of parkland classified as Linear Park is associated with the Welland Canals Parkway Trail which could potentially be reclassified as City-Wide parkland. An update to the Parks Policy Plan should also be undertaken to provide an updated and integrated basis for parks planning in St. Catharines.

Table 4: Proposed Parkland Classification

City-Wide Parks	**Size**: Varies depending on facilities and amenities provided **Catchment Served**: Entire City (i.e. serves needs of all residents in St. Catharines). **Typical Amenities**: Passive spaces, horticultural gardens, golf courses, major sports and cultural facilities. **Target Service Rate**: 1.5 hectares per 1,000 population.
District Parks	**Size**: 4 to 8 hectares **Catchment Served**: 1.5 kilometres **Typical Amenities**: Lit sports fields, walking paths, hard surface courts, major splash pads and playgrounds, allotment and horticultural gardens, shade structures, washroom buildings and parking. **Target Service Rate**: 0.5 hectares per 1,000 population.
Neighbourhood Parks	**Size**: Up to 3 hectares **Catchment Served**: 800 metres / 10-12 minute walk of residential areas. **Typical Amenities**: Junior/senior playgrounds, gardens, junior sports fields, multi-purpose courts, shade amenities and benches. **Target Service Rate**: 1.0 hectares per 1,000 population.
Urban Parks	**Size**: 0.4 to 0.6 hectares **Catchment Served**: 400 to 800 metres from medium and/or high density residential areas. **Typical Amenities**: Variable depending on design but may include hardscaping features, gardens, and public art. **Target Service Rate**: Not applicable to this type of park.

4.2 Parkland Needs

Recognizing the importance of parkland and its historical role in the development of St. Catharines urban structure, the RFPP maintains the City's targeted rate of provision at 3.0 hectares per 1,000 population. Doing so will ensure current and future residents of St. Catharines have access to the outdoor recreational infrastructure required to enable an appropriate mix of recreation, sport, cultural and social activities (e.g. allowing for sports fields, splash pads, hard surface courts, special event areas, off-leash areas, open space for gatherings, general respite, etc.). As previously noted, an updated Parks Policy Plan should confirm whether this provision target needs to be adjusted.

In targeting a rate of 3.0 hectares per 1,000 for the purposes of the RFPP over its 10-year planning period, the strong supply of City-Wide parkland offsets deficits in District and Neighbourhood parkland. Due to the special / unique function of City-Wide parkland, however, these parks cannot always be relied upon for the range of recreational, cultural and social activities needed by the community. Therefore, to meet future needs for District and Neighbourhood Parks, the City would need the following by the year 2035:

- A total of 78 hectares of District Parkland, thereby requiring an additional 5.4 hectares to bolster existing supplies; and
- 156 hectares of Neighbourhood Parkland, thereby requiring an additional 20 hectares to bolster existing supplies.
- City-Wide Parks and Special Urban Parks should continue to be acquired by opportunity, and when needed to sustain system wide provision rates and improve geographic distribution.

The *Ontario Planning Act* and the Garden City Plan contain the primary tools through which the City secures parkland through the land approvals and development process. These frameworks identify minimum requirements for parkland dedication (or cash-in-lieu of parkland) as well as guidelines for municipal parkland provision. Recent changes to provincial legislation will result in declining service levels based on experiences elsewhere in the Greater Golden Horseshoe; therefore, it is in the City's best interests to use all available tools through the *Planning Act* (including the standard and alternative rates) to supplement other parkland acquisition strategies.



Fairhaven Park

4.3 Parkland Renewal

As St. Catharines continues to intensify within its built-up areas, several neighbourhoods are expected to experience substantial population growth driven by infill development, major redevelopment projects, and shifting land-use patterns. The following key park sites are where future planning, reinvestment, or conceptual master plans are warranted to ensure that they continue to serve their neighbourhoods effectively amidst growth and change.

Civic Square

Through downtown rejuvenation and continued implementation of the St. Catharines Downtown Creative Cluster Master Plan, the City is focusing on enhancing public spaces in its core areas. As part of revitalization efforts, the creation of a "Civic Square" is currently being studied along a stretch of James Street, between Church Street and King Street with the goal of creating a community gathering place in the core. This new Civic Square is envisioned to be an inclusive and dynamic outdoor pedestrian space to provide open space to downtown communities as well as hosting special events, markets, festivals and year-round activities.

To date, three options have been developed and are being refined with community input; amenities illustrated include water features, performance space, playground and outdoor fitness equipment, public art, tree plantings, and more. The City is in the process of reviewing and evaluating design approaches, and a final concept will be determined after considering feedback and project costs.



Civic Square Study Area

Cameron Park

The St. Catharines Go Transit Station Secondary Plan (Amendment 19 to the City's Official Plan) states that it is a priority of the Plan to see the use of Cameron Park maintained and improved. The Secondary Plan's Urban Design Guidelines specify that improvements at Cameron Park should improve pedestrian and cyclist connections between St. Paul Street West and the GO Station site, and may include a gateway or plaza component heralding the entrance to the GO Station with amenities such as paths, benches, outdoor passive gathering spaces, floral beds, public art and cultural heritage interpretations. Given proximity to the GO Station site, particular opportunity exists at this park to develop interpretative and/or signage material related to St. Catharines rail history.

Joe Kushner Park

Located in the Glenridge neighbourhood, Joe Kushner Park (formerly Woodgale Park) is a 7 hectare District Park spanning between Glendale Avenue to the south and Radcliffe Court to the north, with a number of public access points to adjacent roads. Land use permissions are supportive of infill development along Glendale Avenue and Glenridge Avenue, with the City's Sanitary Servicing Master Plan anticipating the population to increase by hundreds of people over the next 10 years. The nearby Pen Centre is another noteworthy are of intensification that could add residential units consistent with mixed-use developments occurring at malls and other retail centres across the province.

Joe Kushner Park is one of the only active parks in the area (Burgoyne Woods and Town & Country Park are largely passive). With the forecasted population growth, need for parkland will increase. The RFPP identifies that Glenridge is a gap area for basketball courts and playgrounds, while other studies identify a need to upgrade the rectangular field to a Type A facility and the tennis court condition requires immediate attention. The City should prepare a conceptual master plan to define a vision for Joe Kushner Park and revitalize it in a manner that reflects the evolving character of the neighbourhoods it serves. This may involve the District School Board of Niagara who are planning to re-open the adjacent school and create joint-funding and joint use opportunities.



Joe Kushner Park

Fairview Park

The City's Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan presents an exciting concept to revitalize a large open space (formerly a municipal golf course) close to the downtown core, and in a strategic growth area where significant population growth is projected. To be developed in three phases, the first phase of the rejuvenated park will focus on heritage commemoration and contain a playground, splash pad, pedestrian bridge, community gardens and a washroom. The second phase will introduce active recreational spaces, such as a skate park and pump track, alongside significant naturalization efforts, while the third phase would add hard surface sport courts and gathering areas for community activities. The concept will address a number of facility needs identified in Appendix A of this RFPP.



Source: Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan (Draft), 2024

Ontario Street Corridor Secondary Plan & Alex McKenzie Park

The City has retained an outside planning consultant to lead a secondary planning process to establish a vision and land use planning policies along the Ontario Street corridor generally falling between the QEW and Welland Avenue, and includes the former General Motors lands. Staff anticipate that the secondary plan would be completed by the end of 2026. Based on past work that included development of a terms of reference and a public open house, the study area is envisioned to contain a significant mixed-use neighbourhood and promoting the evolution of the Ontario Street commercial corridor into a more compact, mixed-use urban environment.

The former GM lands (also known by their address: 282 and 285 Ontario Street) represent 20 hectares, and are the second and third largest vacant developable properties in the City's urban area. The lands are currently designated Mixed Use in the Garden City Plan which target a minimum population density of 100 people and jobs per hectare, but City staff are anticipating higher densities based on development applications received to date. The addition of thousands of new people living and working in the area will place pressures on existing parkland and create a need for new parks.

While population forecasts will not be available until the secondary planning process begins, the anticipated level of growth in the range of thousands of people will require new recreation facilities. Most notably may be a need for sports fields, including a Type A rectangular field along with playgrounds and hard surface sport courts. A District Park should be sought for the secondary plan area along with potentially Neighbourhood and Special Urban Parks to ensure walkability through geographic distribution.

Alex McKenzie Park is located within the Ontario Street Corridor Secondary Plan boundary as it is adjacent to Haig Street. The majority of the 2 hectare site is occupied by the ball diamond which can only be programmed for youth programs due to the short setbacks from adjacent homes. While Alex McKenzie Park already serves the existing residential population living in the neighbourhood, there will undoubtedly be growth-related demands placed upon it through the redevelopment of the former GM lands. The ball diamond should be relocated to Pic Leeson Park / John Dempsey Park and the space should be reimagined as a high quality park with a broader range of recreational amenities intended to serve the expanding catchment area population. As discussed in Section 5.2, the Haig Bowl Arena may also need to be repurposed to meet indoor recreation programs of the secondary plan area and beyond.

Pic Leeson Park / John Dempsey Park

Pic Leeson Park and John Dempsey Park are adjacent but separated by a sizeable grade differential. They collectively have three diamonds and their own parking lots, however, there is no formal pedestrian or vehicular access internally between them. With a recommendation to relocate the Alex McKenzie ball diamond to these parks, that fourth diamond presents an opportunity to strengthen programming and operational efficiencies as well as reconcile the need for an adult-sized hardball diamond in St. Catharines. The fourth diamond could be added to the northwest portion of Pic Leeson Park in place of the rectangular field; the potential to acquire lands east of the park should be explored which may allow greater flexibility in meeting an adult sized hardball diamond (Figure 3).

A park-specific master plan should examine the ability to re-orient existing diamonds, convert all or some of them to Type A facilities, create internal pedestrian and/or vehicular circulation routes, and address the slope. A plan should also explore potential for washroom, storage and/or shade structures which could possibly require relocation of the other rectangular field.

Figure 3: Aerial Image of Pic Leeson Park & John Dempsey Park



Source: City of St. Catharines Sports Field Strategy, 2024

4.4 Climate Change Adaptation & Resilience

St. Catharines is an environmentally progressive municipality. Environmental stewardship is a core pillar of its Strategic Plan while the Climate Adaptation Plan outlines a variety of goals to address the local impacts of climate change on municipal operations and services. The City's recreation and parks system is a valuable resource to help meet municipal climate change objectives and address Climate Adaptation Plan goals through services such as:

- Providing splash pads and pools, along with shaded areas in parkland, to help people prepare for hotter summers.
- Increasing plantings in parks and around community facilities to reduce impacts known as the urban heat island effect, while protecting shorelines and other areas from erosion.
- Providing parks and other greenspaces helps with flood mitigation through surface water absorption and retaining more stormwater onsite.
- Designing and retrofitting community centres and arenas with energy efficiency and water conservation in mind.

St. Catharines is working naturalized areas into existing and new park designs to reflect sustainable practices aimed at increasing climate change resiliency, promoting native plant biodiversity and pollinator species, and increasing habitat while pesticide use in parks has been reduced or eliminated. Unfortunately, the rationale and benefits of naturalization efforts are not always understood by the public who may view areas such as no-mow zones as being unsightly compared to "manicured" areas within a park. Continued education is required through promotional efforts and even programming so that public is aware of the importance of having well distributed naturalized areas across the community. Partnerships with conservation authorities and environmentally-focused organizations is an effective way of spreading the message and delivering content.

Ensuring the community is aware of standards of new development that reflect sustainable design (low impact design choices, naturalized open space areas) is an area for improvement. Residents may not understand the importance of planned natural areas and in comparison, to previously "well groomed" green spaces, can cause concern about lack of maintenance when in reality, these are planned by design for long-term sustainability.

4.5 Recommendations

Rec. #14. Update the City of St. Catharines Parks Policy Plan to provide a renewed basis for planning, acquiring and designing municipal parkland. At a minimum, the Parks Policy Plan should establish a parkland classification system that is integrated into the new City of St. Catharines Official Plan.

Rec. #15. Acquire at least 5.5 hectares of District Parks, including one that is located in the Ontario Street Corridor Secondary Plan.

Rec. #16. Target the acquisition of 20 hectares of Neighbourhood Parkland and Special Urban Parks across St. Catharines, with a focus on communities that are underserviced by parkland on a per capita basis including, but not limited, the downtown and central areas of the City.

Rec. #17. Revitalize Joe Kushner Park in a manner that responds to needs resulting from nearby infill developments and redevelopment of the Pen Centre. At a minimum, the City should upgrade the rectangular field to a Type A facility while integrating a basketball court, playground, paved pathway, and additional seating.

Rec. #18. Prepare a conceptual plan for Pic Leeson Park and the adjoining John Dempsey Park that illustrates its ability to integrate the ball diamond relocated from Alex McKenzie Park, thereby creating a four-diamond complex designed for competitive play and tournaments.

Rec. #19. Prepare a conceptual plan for Alex McKenzie Park that defines a new vision to address the recreational needs of the existing neighbourhood along with new populations being added through the development of the former General Motors lands located immediately to its north and west. Relocation of the ball diamond (per Rec. #19) provides the potential to offer a much broader range of park amenities than found there today.

Rec. #20. Implement the Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan to address selected recreational needs identified in this Recreation Facilities & Programming Plan.

Rec. #21. Continue to allocate sufficient annual funding towards the renewal of outdoor recreational assets found within parks, targeting $1.5 million per year (and adjusted for inflation). Annual priority projects should be informed by the City of St. Catharines Parks Renewal Plan, asset management plans, potential to align with other approved park repair and redevelopment projects, and ability to use the City's Parks Legacy Fund. A review of the additional resources required, including staffing, to implement the increased asset renewals should be a consideration.

Rec. #22. Prepare a Trails Renewal Plan (or similar) to guide the City's recreational trails system.

Rec. #23. Enhance public education related to environmental stewardship and importance of naturalization to better inform the objectives of associated municipal policies, programs and service levels encompassing use of no-mow zones, green infrastructure and climate change resiliency initiatives, encroachment, illegal dumping and other topics. Collaboration with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and other environmental partners is encouraged in the implementation of environmental policies and programs.



Port Dalhousie Older Adult Centre

5.0 Provide Supportive Environments



Russell Avenue Community Centre

St. Catharines' community centres, arenas, older adult centres and parks are physical spaces that support residents in their pursuit of recreational activities. In turn, these make the City's facilities an important part of building strong and caring communities.

5.1 Recreation Facility Assessments

Facility needs assessments contained in Appendix A have yielded a number of recommendations, some of which are concentrated at a few key community centres and parks.

Identify a Site for a New Indoor Aquatic Centre

Pressures placed on the SKAC have been compounded with the closure of indoor pools at the Walker Family YMCA and Ridley College. The City has experienced a post-pandemic resurgence in aquatics participation at the SKAC, and pressures are mounting given the number of people displaced from the YMCA's local aquatic programs.

The RFPP needs assessments project the need for an indoor aquatic centre containing 25 metre lane and leisure/warm water tanks. A new aquatic centre should consider the ability to co-locate with other municipal services through an existing or future multi-use community centre.

Land availability and geographic distribution are two important elements to consider in terms of where to locate a new indoor aquatic centre. The SKAC's central location affords access to areas between Lakeshore Road and Eastchester Avenue, to the east of Twelve Mile Creek. Areas west of the creek and south of the downtown are considered to be gaps but there is limited land that is either owned by the City or in the form of large vacant parcels in the size required for a facility of this scale.

A new indoor aquatic centre is preferably located where geographic access to St. Catharines can be maximized in conjunction with the SKAC. The adjacent criteria and other considerations can be used to evaluate sites. The City should begin by screening its own inventory of municipally-owned properties as well as lands designated in Secondary Plans for institutional or recreational use.

Site Selection Criteria for an Indoor Aquatics Centre (not in order, nor intended to be exhaustive)

The site:

- Is within reasonable proximity to a large residential area.
- Contributes to a reasonable distribution of aquatic services.
- Can be co-located with complementary recreation, cultural, parks, or other municipal services.
- Is compatible with adjacent land uses.
- Is located along or near a major road and transit route, and preferably a trail route.
- Is within walking distance to at least one secondary school.
- Has the potential to be a community focal point.
- Does not have major environmental or topographical constraints.
- Possesses long-term expansion potential.
- Is owned or can be cost-effectively acquired by the City, or provided in partnership with another landowner.
- Can provide enough onsite parking.

Identify a Site for a New Gymnasium & Group Fitness Studio

The Port Weller Community Centre is the only gymnasium that the City can directly schedule and program. The only other gymnasium owned by the City is at the Queen Elizabeth Community Centre which is leased exclusively to the Boys & Girls Club of Niagara; however, this property was recently declared surplus with the intent of being redeveloped for affordable housing and a BGCN childcare centre, and it is not known at this time if the gym will be replaced. The Walker Sports and Abilities Centre's four gymnasiums are available, but while public access can be gained through its third party operator, the City does not directly program those gymnasiums.

The City has made efforts to increase access to school gymnasiums and has been successful in being able to offer selected programming at the Harriet Tubman Public School and Jeanne Sauvé French Immersion Public School. As is common throughout Ontario, however, securing broad access to schools can be challenging for municipalities and community providers since school gyms are often unavailable during the daytime hours, may be too small for competitive sports, or may impose restrictions regarding the type of activities being allowed, and rental rates can be cost-prohibitive for certain users. Higher quality school gyms, such as those in secondary schools, tend to be in higher demand and thus have limited capacity, particularly when there are fewer options through a municipality; feedback provided by the District School Board of Niagara indicated that demand for their gymnasium space is exceeding their supply.

While City staff have done an admirable job of leveraging large multi-purpose rooms in facilities such as Russell Avenue Community Centre and the Dunlop Drive Older Adult Centre for selected floor sports, such rooms often have limitations that preclude the full range of gym programs from being delivered. While a multi-purpose room negotiated by the City in the Lock Street residential development will also enable some programming, it would not be able to address gym sports. As such, a new municipally-operated gymnasium in St. Catharines would significantly enhance the ability of the City to deliver modern and high quality programs that meet expectations of today's populace. It should be designed to secondary school size specifications to maximize program and event delivery potential.

The City's focus should remain on fitness programming through classes focused on movement, stretching and aerobics. A group fitness studio would be a strong complement to the new aquatics centre and/or gymnasium, providing synergies through cross-programming and a holistic wellness experience. A group fitness studio would be characterized by a room containing a sprung-wood floor, mirrored walls, and storage for group fitness equipment.

Prepare for Arena Expansion in the Longer-Term

The City has increased available arena capacity in the last five years with the addition of the Walker Sports and Abilities Centre and by assuming operational responsibility of Merritton Centennial Arena that was historically operated by the Merritton Lions Club. Ice sport registrations in St. Catharines have been on an upward trajectory following the disruptions that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, although registrations remain 15% below pre-pandemic rates. In the last full ice sport season, St. Catharines' arenas were used to 84% of their available prime time capacity.

As such, the outlook is optimistic but needs for additional ice pads are not pressing. Assuming local ice sport participation rates hold steady, the existing arena supply should be able to meet population growth-related needs until the year 2035 at which time a new ice pad could be required. Adding one ice pad to the municipal supply in the long-term should be implemented by either:

- twinning Bill Burgoyne Memorial Arena or constructing a new twin pad arena at an alternative site to replace Bill Burgoyne Memorial Arena, in order to expand service to residential areas north of the QEW; or
- twinning the Merritton Centennial Arena, or reconstructing it on the site as a twin pad arena that is co-located with the RFPP's recommended indoor aquatic centre and/or gymnasium.

A future update to this RFPP or the St. Catharines Arena Strategy should confirm the need to expand the arena supply.



Seymour-Hannah Sports & Entertainment Centre



Bill Burgoyne Arena

Enhance Opportunities for Year Round Field Sports

There are no full-size indoor turf fields in St. Catharines that are operated by public or private providers, although Club Roma's Wolf Den contains smaller sized rectangular fields. All other winter indoor soccer activities are offered out of school gyms which are often too small for field sport activities and not conducive for training for certain sports. As a result, local organizations are travelling to other communities to rent time at indoor turf facilities to support their increasing off-season training requirements.

Indoor turf facilities have become prevalent in communities that have reached population thresholds between 50,000 to 100,000, and those with robust soccer programs. With a current population estimated at 145,000, St. Catharines has exceeded the above noted threshold while local soccer organizations reported 1,500 participants in their indoor field programs, a level that could generate demand for between 150 and 160 hours per week for their programs alone. Utilization rates are likely to be higher and could be in the range of 85% of prime time capacity when factoring other field sports such as football, baseball, etc. The estimated number of local indoor participants combined with a regional market participant base living within 30 minutes of St. Catharines – particularly in western Niagara Region – also rationalizes entry into indoor field turf provision based on an estimated projection of rental hour usage.

A cursory analysis confirms the suitability of Kiwanis Field to be used across the entire year either using a seasonal dome (i.e. taken down in the spring and reinstalled in the fall) if the City wishes to retain the spectator capacity presently provided or alternatively build a structure around the field. In addition to an indoor field, the City should continue to strengthen its supply of rectangular fields and ball diamonds through implementation of the Sports Field Strategy. Doing so would include building 3 lit fields, adding lights to existing fields at Joe Kushner Park and Trapper Leo Park, initiating a boxed soccer court pilot program, and relocating the Alex McKenzie ball diamond to the Pic Leeson Park / John Dempsey Park to enhance its tournament and league programming potential. In addition, the City should seek out a parcel of land that is of sufficient size for a cricket grounds should the need arise in the future (anticipated after this planning period).

5.2 Revitalizing Recreational Infrastructure

Many of the City's recreation, culture and park-based facilities have served multiple generations of St. Catharines residents. Some of these spaces are now at a point where they are showing signs of their age or no longer meet the needs of the community as effectively as they did in the past. Rejuvenation through reinvestments in City-owned parks and facilities breathe new life into public spaces, act as catalysts for neighbourhood revitalization for lands that surround them, and positions the City's infrastructure to meet needs for future generations.

The City's ongoing asset management planning efforts highlight that recreation, culture and park infrastructure is aging. While the City has completed a number of repair and renewal projects, there is more to be done given the breadth of recreational and parks infrastructure spread across the city. The Port Weller Community Centre and Park improvements are an excellent example of revitalizing an existing asset and rejuvenating activity choices for people living in the neighbourhoods around it. From façade and other aesthetic improvements to functional enhancements, the community centre has a renewed look. Just as importantly, an expanded range of programming is taking place and facility users express pride in participating in that modernized environment. Accessibility upgrades have made it more inclusive to a wider range of while multi-generational additions through the splash pad and multi-use court (allowing tennis, pickleball, basketball and ball hockey) truly makes Port Weller Community Centre an anchor for everyone living near it.

The City should look at revitalizing other community centres and older adult centres in a similar way as was done in Port Weller. While complete rebuilds can be needed (and sometimes are more cost-effective than retrofitting), functional improvements can also extend life and provide modern amenities being sought today. It is recommended that the City look at modernization potential for Russell Avenue Community Centre, particularly since growth-related pressures will intensify with greater levels of infill growth being directed to the core; the ability to expand the community centre towards Catherine Street Park should be investigated.



Russell Avenue Community Centre



Port Weller Community Centre

The Dunlop Drive and West St. Catharines Older Adult Centres are advanced in their lifecycles having been in service for more than 55 years while the Port Dalhousie Older Centre was opened in 2002. The changing needs of local older adults and seniors combined with the antiquated experience offered through the existing older adult centres building makes it clear that the time has come to modernize them and bring them in line with best practices. The City should explore ways to revitalize the three older adult centres in a manner that modernizes interior spaces and enables a greater range of physical activity and community programs to be delivered. At a minimum, consider lighting, flooring and furniture upgrades as repurposing underutilized areas to more functional spaces (e.g. group fitness studios) that are conducive to the promotion of healthy aging objectives. Doing so may attract younger generations of older adults into the Older Adult Centres and sustain memberships. The temporary shift of older adult activities from Port Dalhousie to Port Weller exemplifies the potential that active programming can have when combined with traditional older adult activities.

As a longer-term project, potentially beyond the 10-year planning period, the City should begin to contemplate the future of the Haig Bowl in anticipation of the residential developments in the Ontario Street Corridor Secondary Plan area where thousands of new residents could arrive upon redevelopment of the former General Motors lands. These future populations will likely gravitate toward recreational programming offerings at Russell Avenue Community Centre and the SKAC, both of which are already under space-related pressures.



Dunlop Drive Older Adult Centre

5.3 Sport Tourism

St. Catharines has certain recreation facilities and parks that are conducive to sport tourism. The Walker Sports and Abilities Centre and Canada Games Park are legacy projects from the Canada Games, and are already attracting events from across the province and beyond. The Meridian Centre draws from a regional base for OHL games, concerts and other special events. The Seymour-Hannah Sports & Entertainment Centre four-pad arena and the Joseph McCaffery Park ball diamonds are well suited for tournaments, the SKAC's eight-lane pool can host provincial swim meets, and George Taylor Field is a charming stadium that offers a unique amenity in the region.

Sport tourism is not typically the primary focus for municipal recreation departments whose mandate typically centres on delivering programs and services to their own resident base. However, municipalities recognize that their recreation infrastructure can be leveraged for sport tourism and thus encourage coordination between Recreation and Economic Development staff to this end. Municipalities in Niagara Region have demonstrated a willingness to work together in the past (including initiatives beyond recreation) and as evidenced by the recent Canada Games, a regional perspective on sport tourism can be the best approach in attracting and bidding on major events. The benefits of having sport-friendly facilities and legacy projects are two-fold. First is that all people can participate in a sport of their choice but also at a level of their choice. The other advantage is the economic impact of sport tournaments and tourism to the local economy. A number of municipalities have prepared Sport Tourism Plans and have their Economic Development teams actively monitor opportunities; coordination with Recreation staff is critical to ensure local community groups are not unduly displaced from their regular programming when facilities are in use for tournaments and events.





Walker Sports and Abilities Centre

5.4 Recommendations

Rec. #24. Identify a site and construct a new indoor aquatic centre within the short-term that contains a 25 metre rectangular pool with a minimum of six lanes, a separate leisure pool, and potentially a therapeutic tank.

Rec. #25. Identify a site and construct a gymnasium, group fitness studio and indoor walking track with consideration given to co-locating all or some of these facilities with a new indoor aquatic centre, an arena, or alternatively at the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre.

Rec. #26. Carry out an architectural analyses and concepts that examine the feasibility with reconfiguring and/or expanding Russell Avenue Community Centre and the Haig Bowl in order to meet growth-related needs resulting from intensification along the Geneva Street corridor and the City's core.

Rec. #27. Explore the ability to revitalize St. Catharines' older adult centres in a manner that modernizes interior spaces and enables a greater range of physical activity and community programs to be delivered. At a minimum, consider lighting, flooring and furniture upgrades as repurposing underutilized areas to more functional spaces (e.g. group fitness) that are conducive to the promotion of healthy aging objectives.

Rec. #28. Enclose Kiwanis Field, with either a seasonal dome or a permanent structure, in order to enable rental and programming for indoor field sports.

Rec. #29. Construct 3 lit rectangular fields, install field lighting at Joe Kushner Park and Trapper Leo Park, and initiate a boxed soccer court pilot program consistent with the Sports Field Strategy.

Rec. #30. Identify a site to add a new ice pad in the longer-term with consideration given to twinning either the Bill Burgoyne Memorial Arena or Merritton Centennial Arena, subject to confirmation by future study.

Rec. #31. Identify a location in the Port Dalhousie Ward at which to construct a splash pad.

Rec. #32. Establish pickleball hubs in the north, central and south parts of the city including one such hub at Burgoyne Woods. Each pickleball hub should contain a minimum of 6 dedicated courts, ensure sufficient setback distances from residential areas, and ideally provide onsite parking.

Rec. #33. Explore opportunities to bolster sport tourism in St. Catharines by facilitating regular touchpoints between staff working in the Economic Development and CRCS Departments. Engage area municipalities to discuss a regional approach to sport tourism and consider the development of a Sport Tourism Plan.

6.0
Reinforce the Capacity of the Recreation System





For recreation services in St. Catharines to grow in step with the needs of the population, and do so in a way that ensures services are available for both current and future generations, there is a need to be efficient and intentional in the way services are delivered to the public through the various City Departments involved.

6.1 Financial Considerations

The RFPP requires financial investment in St. Catharines recreation, culture, and parks system and it outlines a series of priorities for new infrastructure to meet growth related needs, as well as to upgrade, modernize, or renew aging assets to better respond to community expectations. St. Catharines has limited resources and cannot afford to do everything that the community desires, underscoring the importance of undertaking this RFPP and previous Master Plans to prioritize needs.

Although the City may experience various challenges in meeting the required financial and human resources to achieve the recommendations in the RFPP, it is expected that it will make every effort to implement these strategies through appropriate means. Full implementation of this RFPP requires a funding strategy that includes the consideration of the following tools to fund capital and operating costs for new construction or redevelopment of existing facilities:

- Development charges;
- Parkland cash-in-lieu reserves;
- Community benefits charges;
- Fundraising, donations, and sponsorships;
- User fees and surcharges;
- Leasing space from other property and/or facility owners;
- Debenture financing; and
- Grants and other funding programs.

Preliminary Capital Implications

The recommendation to construct an indoor aquatic centre and gymnasium will carry the most substantial capital and operating cost arising out of the RFPP. Recent experiences in municipalities that are either considering or have constructed community centres anchored by an indoor aquatic centre and gymnasium suggest that costs to construct range between $50 million and $70 million depending upon other amenities included (e.g. meeting rooms, fitness space, library space, storage and support areas, etc.), site and environmental conditions, availability of materials and labour, quality of architectural finishes, and other variables.

In addition, a new ice pad may be required within the next 10 years and twinning an existing arena could incur capital costs of construction in the range of $21 million to $30 million while a recent analysis estimates that it could cost $7 million to enclose Kiwanis Field with a dome. Combined with the aquatic centre and gym, the City could therefore expect capital costs associated with implementing the RFPP's indoor facility recommendations to

range between a minimum of $78 million to $107 million before factoring any renewals or redevelopments to Russell Avenue Community Centre and the three Older Adult Centres. The RFPP's outdoor recreation facility recommendations can be expected to require another $18 million to $20 million largely attributable to renewal of outdoor pools, development of six sports fields, and hard surface sport courts.

As a result, preliminary capital cost estimates of implementing the RFPP recommendations could be a minimum of $127 million over the 10-year planning period; this estimate excludes land acquisition, design and inflationary cost escalations. A sizeable portion of the capital projects identified in the RFPP have previously been presented to the City through the Arena Strategy (2019, Aquatic Facilities Strategy (2021), Sports Field Strategy (2024), and Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan (2025). The City should engage architects, engineers, landscape architects, cost consultants and/or other qualified sources to refine the preliminary estimates identified in this RFPP as part of ongoing implementation of specific recommendations.

Operating Implications

Prior to implementing RFPP recommendations, the City should articulate anticipated operating implications of new or enhanced facilities, programs and services. Recommendations for facility development will necessitate budgeting for additional staffing, utilities, equipment, materials, maintenance, etc. Operating costs are an important part of decision-making given assets remain in service for years and carry annual expenditures over their lifecycle. In addition, service delivery enhancements may necessitate resources for staff time associated with policy development, community engagement, community development, seeking out fundraising and sponsorship opportunities, and more. It is recommended that both capital and operating implications are explored at the time new or enhanced recreation services or capital projects are considered, in order to provide City Council with details on the full scope of resource requirements. Information supplied by City Staff for selected community centres in Niagara Region – including those with gymnasium, arena and aquatic components - illustrate that net operating costs of these facilities can be in the range of $1 million to $1.5 million per year depending on the types of facilities co-located together, revenue generation, staffing costs, and other factors.

Table 5 identifies capital and operating considerations associated with new facility developments proposed in the RFPP. Costs are based on examples of recent recreation facility construction projects in Ontario and derived from City of St. Catharines recreation plans and strategies. Figures should be used as a preliminary guide for the purposes of the RFPP and the City of St. Catharines should obtain quotes from qualified architectural and/or engineering service providers prior to informing capital budgets. The unit cost of an indoor aquatics centre can differ depending on the segment of facility; for example, unit costs will differ between pool area, lobbies, administrative space, etc. Prior to moving forward with any capital project, a full costing review should be completed by a professional consultant.

Table 5: Preliminary Capital & Operating Considerations for New Facility Development

Facility Type	Provision Target	Projected Needs	Unit Capital Cost Range (2026 $)	Operating Implications	Notes
Indoor Aquatic Centre	1 : 45,000 population	+1	$1,000 to $1,400 per sq. ft.	New staff resources, facility overhead costs	Reflects Council Resolution for Modified-Balanced direction (Aug. 9, 2021, Meeting Item 3.3)
Indoor Ice Pad	1 : 700 registered participants	+1	$800 to $1,000 per sq. ft.	New staff resources, facility overheads	Consistent with 2019 Arena Strategy and RFPP Rec. #31
Gymnasium	1 : 45,000 population	+1	$800 to $1,000 per sq. ft.	New staff resources, facility overhead costs	See RFPP Rec. #26
Group Fitness Studio	Co-locate with complementary facilities	+3	$900 to $1,100 per sq. ft.	New staff resources, facility overhead costs	See RFPP Rec. #26
Indoor Walking Track	Co-locate with complementary facilities	+1	To be determined	To be determined	See RFPP Rec. #26
Russell Ave. Community Centre, Haig Bowl & Older Adult Centre Modernization	Not Applicable	+4	To be determined	To be determined	See RFPP Rec. #27 and Rec. #28
Indoor Turf Field Dome	1 : 100,000 population	+1	$7,000,000	New staff resources, facility overhead costs	See RFPP Rec. #29
Rectangular Fields	1 : 90 soccer players	+4	$600,000 (lit) $275,000 (unlit)	New staff resources, field maintenance costs	See RFPP Rec. #30
Ball Diamonds	1 : 100 registered ball players	+2	$900,000 (lit) $300,000 (unlit)	New staff resources, field maintenance costs	See RFPP Rec. #10 and Rec. #19

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Facility Type	Provision Target	Projected Needs	Unit Capital Cost Range (2026 $)	Operating Implications	Notes
Outdoor Pool Reconstruction	Not Applicable	+2	$6,000,000 to $9,000,000	To be determined	Reflects Council Resolution for Modified-Balanced direction (Aug. 9, 2021, Meeting Item 3.3)
Splash Pad	1 per Ward	+2	$550,000	Staff time, operating costs	See RFPP Rec. #32 along with the splash pad included in the Fairview Park MP
Tennis Courts	1 : 5,000 population	--	$100,000	Staff time	See RFPP Appendix A
Pickleball Courts	1 : 5,000 population	+18	$112,500	Staff time	See RFPP Rec. #33
Basketball Courts	1 : 800 youth and teens	+3	$90,000	Staff time	See RFPP Rec. #18 along with the court included in the Fairview Park MP
Skateboard Park	1 : 7,500 youth and teens	+1	$5,600,000	Staff time	From Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan
Playgrounds	Within 800 metres of residential areas	+2	$300,000	Staff time	See RFPP Rec. #18 and Appendix A

Notes: Unit costs stated in 2026 dollars, assume optimal site development conditions and exclude land acquisition, soft costs, contingencies, and inflation/escalation.

6.2 Cost Recovery in Setting Fees for Recreation

St. Catharines partially offsets the financial costs to provide recreation services through several revenue streams, most notably user fees, entrance fees, taxation and, to a lesser extent, sponsorships, grants, and partnerships. There are non-financial and intangible benefits that offset fiscal expenditures by way of increased physical and social health among residents, contributions to community vibrancy and cohesion, etc. Therefore, the degree to which quantifiable costs are "recovered" is dictated by the City's philosophy surrounding the "value" of the service that it provides to the community. The first step in setting fees and cost recovery levels is understanding the cost to provide the service and will provide transparency in the setting of fees.

Once costs are known (e.g. to produce an hour of ice), the current cost recovery levels can be ascertained by understanding the percentage of the costs that are recovered through the current fee structures. A comparison to the market rate (surrounding municipalities or service providers) is usually undertaken to determine if fees can be modified. Setting of fees can be developed by determining which age groups or types of programs should receive greater subsidies; for example, municipalities typically charge lower rental rates to not-for-profits, volunteers or community groups deemed to be 'affiliates' whereas higher rates may be charged to commercial operators or organizations focused on training for higher-performance athletes.

As discussed in Section 3.4 of the RFPP, the Core Service Review Update found that the City collected lower user fee revenue for recreation services in comparison to a peer group. With an overall cost recovery rate of 39% for recreation programming, the Core Service Review stated the rate is on the lower end. It is important to recognize that St. Catharines had the lowest Census median household income in that peer group of seven municipalities, and 28% below that recorded for the peer group. With a number of recreation facility overhead costs being relatively standard across the province (e.g. utilities, fleet, supplies, etc.), it might be challenging for the City to impose higher user fees given local economic conditions and earnings of the community relative to other parts of the province.

The Core Service Review Update found that the City collects the lowest revenue per resident for recreation services in comparison to a peer group. However, St. Catharines median Census income was the lowest in the peer group.

This being said, the RFPP concurs with the Core Service Review Update that the City should develop a user fee and cost recovery framework through which municipal recreation and culture services are considered. It bears noting that most municipalities do not target 100% cost recovery rates as the majority of their programs and facilities are provided as community services. For example, the City has demonstrated a willingness to subsidize services that benefit the maximum number of people (e.g. parks, aquatics) to a greater extent than services oriented to a select few. The prevailing

philosophy is that financial subsidies offset non-financial benefits provided to the community such as reduced risk of drowning, increasing the chance of children and youth engaging in positive behaviours through recreation, etc. The Core Services Review Update acknowledges this by stating "partial" cost recovery on recreation, culture and special events in order to support the premise of providing inclusive, affordable and accessible services while providing a series of six steps to setting fees and cost recover targets. Findings and considerations arising from future reviews of the Financial Assistance in Recreation program should be considered as part of any framework guiding recreation user fees.

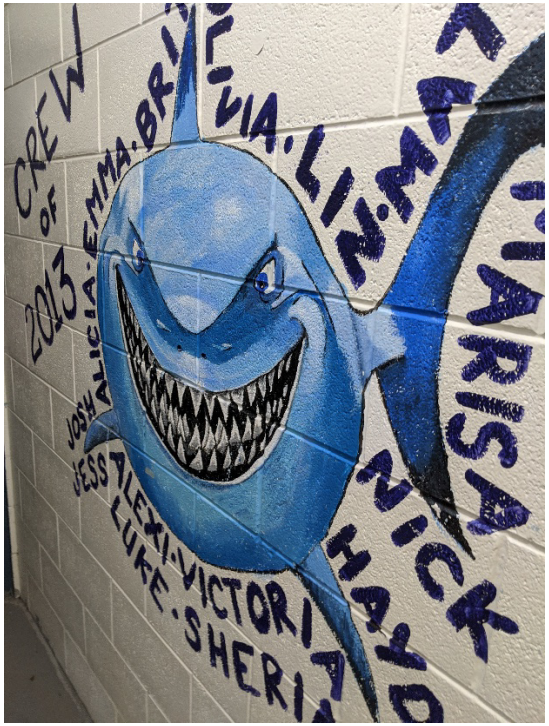
6.3 Building Internal Capacity to Implement the RFPP

Building internal capacity prompts staff to focus on key activities that will allow them to understand the services they provide in greater detail and strengthen the staff team to be more efficient and effective. The development of the RFPP provides an opportunity to review the organization's effectiveness in meeting public needs, plan for future growth, and strengthen service delivery based on public input and other measures.

Staff Capacity

Being prepared for the current and future challenges surrounding service delivery requires a thoughtful approach to staff development and training. There are current training programs available to staff to aid in their development and these are effective to address individual needs for professional development. As well, staff attend training sessions and forums made available through professional organizations respective to their field of expertise (culture, recreation, parks, libraries, leadership etc.).

In terms of future impacts and development as a result of the RFPP, St. Catharines brings with it unique challenges within the community and training will address these common needs for staff from the various disciplines at all levels. The RFPP will influence areas where further capacity is needed in either policy or practice and include at a minimum including diverse populations, conflict resolution and de-escalation, building community capacity, strengthening neighbourhoods, creating efficiencies through the use of technology, partnerships, volunteerism, etc. Developing a multi-year training and development program to address common service delivery challenges will address common areas identified to better serve the public.



Port Dalhousie Outdoor Pool

Retaining talented staff and encouraging all staff to continuously improve their skills and competencies is best completed in a formalized program(s). This ensures that the option is available to all staff and that staff have the capacity to compete for future positions created either through retirements or an increase in the number of facilities. Succession strategies can take many forms including staff being offered expanded roles, special projects, job shadowing, and further training and development.

Setting Levels for Council Approval

The CRCS Department has a large number of services and sub-services; for example, the aquatics division offers lessons, public swims, lane swims, aquafit classes, and facility rentals. Each service type brings with it a different process in providing the service. Identifying levels of service is important in an expanding community as services grow, so will the demands for additional resources both capital and operating. Clarifying what and how services are provided sets the stage for the allocation of resources as the population expands creating the need for more programs and services.

The following process will assist staff in identifying the fulsome range of services provided, the current process, potential efficiencies and prompt an annual review for improvements.

a) Categorize and quantify all services and sub-services;
b) Identify the ideal conditions (e.g., turf cut a certain height and frequency);
c) State the process as to how the service is provided and identify more efficient equipment and the use of technology to enhance service provision;
d) Gather public input on the current service level and test satisfaction levels;
e) Identify intersections with other departments and potential efficiencies; and
f) Review level of service annually to determine efficiencies, gaps, or pressures.

Setting service levels is consistent with the City's Core Service Review Update undertaken in 2025 which recommends that the City *"Implement a service prioritization framework to help inform investment decisions and establish service levels for specific areas that do not have them today*."

Performance Measurement

CRCS staff collect participation, utilization, and service satisfaction data to analyze service delivery levels and to measure performance against the previous years results. This is completed to demonstrate that there has been movement in addressing key goals and initiatives and that residents are well satisfied with service and program provision. Annual attendance and registration statistics are captured and shared with staff, to allow improved planning for the next session and accommodate any pent-up demands.

Articulating specific targets and measures provides clarity and focus on key deliverables for both staff and community partners. Setting targets provides clear expectations so that everyone is working toward the same goals. This approach provides focus on the right things and creates greater accountability. This exercise to measure against targets is to simplify expectations in a complex delivery system.

Performance measures and targets should be considered, and baseline data collected in year one. A review of the information will ensure that appropriate targets are set based on the results. Not all areas will start at the same point, and municipal-wide targets will take some time to achieve consistently. Staff will want to make appropriate and timely modifications and interventions to program, scheduling customer service, facility cleanliness and community outreach to maximize their performance.

No one person is accountable for delivering a service - that responsibility is shared. A sense of teamwork should be created to ensure that everyone has the tools to play their part in service excellence. Measures and targets must reflect what is important to the public and should identify operational priorities for staff undertaking.

Examples of Performance Measures for Recreation Services

Current priorities within CRCS are focused on continuing to recover services to pre-pandemic levels and respond to staffing needs as the City's population continues to grow. Normalizing services and measuring performance to this degree will take time to implement by agreeing to the targets/measures, setting up data collection methodologies, determining baseline data, and refining subsequent service improvement approaches.

Table 6: Sample Performance Measures & Targets

Measure	Suggested Performance Measure	Suggested Target
Inputs	Budget Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) Square feet of facility space	These are baseline inputs and will be compared year to year. Increasing outputs, efficiencies and effectiveness with similar resources becomes the focus for staff.
Outputs	Facility utilization against capacity	80-90% of prime-time hours and 50-70% of non-prime hours
	Direct program utilization against capacity	80-90% of capacity based on facility time available and budget parameters
	Drop-in and casual use opportunities	50-75% of capacity pending on the activity
	Permit utilization	75% use of available hours
Efficiencies	Efficiencies as a result of better equipment, technology, streamlined processes, grants, partnerships, sponsorships etc.	An indication of cost avoidance, increased funding through alternate sources, greater participation through partnerships etc.
Effectiveness	Facility cleanliness rating	80-90% rating
	Satisfaction levels with programs and services	80-90% rating
	Satisfaction levels with community development and sport development services	80-90% rating
	Staff engagement levels	50-75% rating

Note: table is intended for illustrative purposes; performance measures and targets specific to the municipality will need to be developed by the Department.

6.4 Organizational Capacity

The organizational design of recreation, culture and parks units all reflect a functional model with the required staff skills and competencies to deliver a particular type of service. Each unit has a central core of staff to deliver common organizational needs to all of the staff teams within the department. Staff expertise centres on particular knowledge on the delivery of recreation, culture and parks with support staff in customer service, facility maintenance, and administration. This service and community-centred organizational design is common in most Ontario municipalities. Larger municipalities add an element based on geography by dividing the community into service areas or districts.

Organizational design principles are reflected with respect to workflow, the customer, spans of control and the levels within the organization. The organizational structure of the CRCS Department allows for growth in the number of parks, facilities and amenities that will be required in the future. It will be important over the course of the next few years to review service standards in each of the work units and respective staffing standards in the delivery of service. This would include:

- Defining the work and the scope of the work performed. For example, Parks Operations would assess the size of a park (or a group of parks), define the work involved in maintaining it, the service standard as to how often the system is maintained and to what extent. The most effective maintenance approach would be identified along with the human, fiscal and physical assets needed to maintain the system.

- The staffing standards would be identified to address the number of staff hours needed annually to maintain the parks system (continuing with the Parks Operations example) to the predetermined standard.

- The work to address future staffing as result of growth would be defensible in that the most effective approach to development and maintenance would have been identified.

This work will ensure that resources are equitably distributed and the scope of the positions and the number of direct reports is manageable. This work will be required in all divisions that will experience an increase in facilities and the number of amenities.

6.5 Partnerships

The City has a strong history of assessing and delivering programs to enhance residents' experiences, create a sense of accomplishment and encourage skill development. Examples of effective partnerships in St. Catharines include the Parks Legacy Fund, maintenance of selected gardens, the microgrant program, community rink program, and those pertaining to facility and park stewardship. There are opportunities to work with other program providers to broaden the range of programs being offered. Discussions are ongoing around when the City should provide a program directly and when staff should turn to a third party to help in providing programs and services. The information below will help in making this determination.

A general rule employed by municipalities is that core services continue to be provided directly by them and that specialized programs are offered where greater expertise and equipment is available. As the City works to increase participation among equity deserving groups, it should explore opportunities to promote greater equity, including assessing whether some program types may be more appropriately delivered by community partners.

Further, analysis should be undertaken to assess whether the benefits of a third-party provided service is greater than a program directly supplied by the City without compromising quality. Financial benefits could be measured as the City avoiding costs of delivering the service itself or conversely adding new revenue streams if providing the service in-house. The balance of the criteria should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, as a social-minded approach to increasing participation may or may not make the greatest financial sense.

The City believes that investing in recreation is a sound investment in building strong individuals, families, and communities; seeking out other providers of programs reduces duplication and shares resources. RFPP consultations spoke to the fact that there are many non-municipal recreation facilities found at educational institutions and private facility operators, as well as many non-municipal service providers through agencies and community organizations. Working to complement instead of compete is often in the interests of the municipality.

Considerations for Third-party Program and Service Providers

Conditions whereby the City May Continue to Deliver Programs and Services Directly

a) The program is considered core to the CRCS Department's work such as learn to swim lessons in order to prevent water incidents.

b) The program meets a sustainable resourcing need such as developing youth leaders to enable skilled staffing in program and service delivery.

c) The program development and delivery meets strong priorities and requires City-centric coordination.

Conditions Whereby the City May Seek a Third-party Provider

a) The program is culturally specific to an Indigenous, diverse and/or equity-deserving group where program content is most appropriately developed and delivered by the third party.

b) The program requires specialized knowledge and/or equipment that is not considered part of the City's introductory and developmental approach to program offerings.

c) The program meets a required need of the residents and cost-sharing of space and instruction provides more cost efficiency to both parties.

Conditions in Seeking Out Third Parties to Develop and Deliver Programs and Services

a) There is an identified program need or a perceived program need that should be considered.

b) Procurement policies are followed in terms of identifying the program development and delivery terms that is put out to the market for proposals.

c) A contract is developed with the successful third-party provider complete with performance expectations, legislative compliance, quality assurance, and performance measures, etc.

d) An evaluation of the third-party arrangement complete with satisfaction levels of the participants is undertaken as part of the contract deliverables.

The City is proactive about seeking out partnerships to meet certain service delivery needs where cost avoidance is possible, quality can be maintained, and the service may or may not be core to the full breadth of services offered. The City has demonstrated a willingness to enter into innovative and complex partnerships as evidenced by the Walker Sports & Abilities Centre. Through an agreement with the City of Thorold and Brock University, St. Catharines has access to over 50 hours of prime time ice per week and the public is able to use the walking track at no cost. Like any new partnerships, there are emerging lessons being learned but it is important to regularly revisit agreements and communicate successes and challenges with each partner.



Walker Sports & Abilities Centre

The City is continually exploring ways to strengthen relationships with local school boards and has been able to actively deliver programs at Harriet Tubman Public School and Jeanne Sauvé French Immersion Public School while also nurturing a positive working relationship with Ridley College over the years. Ridley College, the District School Board of Niagara and Conseil Scolaire Viamonde provided feedback for the RFPP and all indicated a continued willingness to engage the City of St. Catharines as how the public can benefit from their facilities. Based on experience in other parts of Ontario, reciprocal or joint-use agreements between municipalities and school boards can be effective ways to increase consistency and affordability for the public to access school gyms.

St. Catharines Public Library (SCPL) is another partner by virtue of its presence in the SKAC and through its community programming across the City. Staff units within CRCS and SCPL should continue to coordinate facility development strategies, capital projects and program delivery to maximize financial efficiencies and avoid duplication of services. With a new indoor aquatic centre and gymnasium facilities being proposed, SCPL should be engaged to determine if library services are needed where these new recreation facilities will be built.

Each partnership opportunity is evaluated on its own merit and must be consistent with the strategic priorities of the City. Other factors include:

- The partnership provides support to an ongoing service or new need.
- The public doesn't necessarily expect the City to provide a specialized service.
- The City's financial obligations are shared or reduced completely.
- The quality of the service meets legislative and quality standards.
- Accountabilities and responsibilities are clearly defined in an agreement.

The City has a history of seeking out meaningful sponsorships that strengthen service provision and reduce the reliance of services on the tax base and user fees. This is both efficient in reducing the cost of services and can be an effective and seamless form of service delivery. Further, the City seeks out sponsors who wish to increase their brand and name recognition to facilities; for example, the Meridian Centre is a result of a naming right and is considered a sponsorship.

An emerging best practice is for a municipal website to list partnership and sponsorships in an open and transparent fashion. This process allows businesses to respond to opportunities using the same rules and evaluation methods as other interested businesses and potential sponsors/partners. For staff to measure effectiveness of partnerships, reporting requirements for partners may include participation numbers, expense reduction or revenue growth, and data on participant satisfaction levels. Seeking, negotiating, managing and tracking effectiveness of sponsorships are time-intensive tasks requiring a unique skillset; as such, the City would benefit from dedicated staff resources for sponsorships that could potentially be integrated into the Economic Development and/or CRCS Department portfolios.

6.6 Recommendations

Rec. #34. Establish a formal set of service levels guiding the provision, operation and maintenance activities for the City of St. Catharines' recreation and culture services. These service levels should form part of a broader service prioritization framework as recommended through the City's Core Service Review Update.

Rec. #35. In anticipation of population growth and required adjustments to facilities and service provisioning frameworks, form cross-functional staff teams to explore ways to optimize service delivery processes through periodic reviews of staffing and service standards, customer service practices, use of technology, etc.

Rec. #36. Ensure the Community, Recreation and Culture Services Department has the appropriate staff complement and resources, to effectively serve a growing population.

Rec. #37. Undertake an exercise to determine the direct and indirect costs of providing services, as well as the recommended cost recovery levels, to develop a fair-minded User Fee / Cost Recovery Framework.

Rec. #38. Budget requests to fund capital recommendations of the Recreation Facilities & Programming Plan should be accompanied by operating cost estimates informed by facility designs and business plans.

Rec. #39. Develop a one page set of performance measures that reflect capacity, utilization, efficiencies, and satisfaction levels of recreation and culture services. These measures could potentially be aligned with or inform a municipal Service Level Dashboard.

Rec. #40. Regularly engage St. Catharines Public Library to coordinate capital projects and program delivery with a view towards maximizing financial efficiencies, providing well rounded programming, and avoiding service duplications.

Rec. #41. Explore opportunities to further strengthen relationships with elementary, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions to determine ways to pursue capital projects, share costs, and increase public access to new and existing recreational facilities operated by each party.

7.0 Moving Forward with the RFPP





Implementation of the RFPP over the next 10 years is an incremental but important process. With 35 Recommendations, many of which are tied to population and market-based factors, timing needs to be identified as well as monitoring and updating Recommendations in response to how the future unfolds.

7.1 Monitoring & Updating the RFPP

The City should regularly review, assess, and periodically revise the RFPP's recommendations to ensure that they remain reflective of local conditions and responsive to the changing needs of the community. This will require monitoring of activity patterns, tracking user satisfaction levels, dialogue with community organizations, annual reporting on implementation, and short-term work plans. Through these mechanisms – or as a result of other internal or external factors –resources and priorities identified in the RFPP may need to be adjusted.

Keeping the RFPP alive requires a commitment from staff involved in the planning, financing, and delivery of recreation services, as well as City Council and the public. Departmental budgeting processes are an appropriate time for an annual review of the RFPP and the following steps may be used:

1. Review of the past year (recommendations implemented, capital projects undertaken, success/failure of new and existing initiatives, changes in participation levels, issues arising from the public and community groups, etc.);
2. Identification of issues impacting the coming year (anticipated financial and operational constraints, emerging opportunities, etc.);
3. Cursory review of the RFPP for direction regarding its recommendations;
4. Preparation of a staff report to indicate prioritization of short-term projects and determination of which projects should be implemented in the coming year based upon criteria established by staff (e.g., financial limitations, community input, partnership/funding potential, etc.);
5. Communication to staff and City Council regarding the status of projects, criteria used to prioritize projects and projects to be implemented in the coming year; and
6. Budget requests or revisions as necessary.

In the past, the City updated its recreation master plans using a 10-year cycle which was appropriate at the time as the population growth rates had plateaued. However, St. Catharines has reverted to a growth scenario where populations are forecasted to increase significantly. In addition, the City's new Official Plan will define a new vision and create a new urban structure which has the potential to change baseline information that underpins the RFPP. Development Charge legislation has also been amended to require updates every five years and the City has become more proactive with its asset management planning, and thus accurate recreation capital strategies need to consider all of these factors and inform holistic decision-making and planning. As such, it is recommended that the RFPP be updated in five years (targeting the year 2031.

7.2 Implementation Strategy

The recommendations identified in this RFPP are not intended to be a definitive list as additional capital repairs, operating expenditures and other initiatives outside the scope of the RFPP may be identified and prioritized on a case-specific basis. By approving the RFPP, the City is not bound to implementing every recommendation or providing facilities/services in the order, amount or timing indicated; rather, the RFPP provides guidance on community priorities and sets a general course for meeting the needs as they are presently defined.

Determining priorities is an exercise that should be revisited prior to budget development. The City will make decisions for individual projects and funding sources through the multi-year budget process. In addition to funding availability, factors that affect priorities year to year may include:

- capital lifecycle and considerations of safety;
- legislation and mandated requirements;
- changes to service standards;
- public input and community interests;
- emerging trends and changes in participation rates;
- availability of alternate providers; and
- socio-demographic changes and growth forecasts.

Priority is often tied to timing – the higher the priority, the sooner the action should be implemented. All recommendations are important and, if properly implemented, will benefit parks and recreation services in St. Catharines. The priority/timing of recommendations is organized into the following four categories:

- Short-Term Priority: 2026 to 2028
- Medium-Term Priority: 2029 to 2031
- Longer-Term Priority: 2032 to 2035 and beyond
- Ongoing: Continuous directions that should be implemented throughout the course of the entire planning period

Timing is subject to change based on several factors such as population growth, park developments, facility usage, and trends. Regular monitoring and tracking facility use is recommended and if necessary, timing of development and projected supply needs should be evaluated prior to construction. In the following table, Recommendations are numbered according to the order in which the related content is presented in the body of the RFPP; they are not listed in any order of priority.

Table 7: Summary of LSMP Recommendations & Timing

Recommendations		Suggested Timing
A Framework for Recreation in St. Catharines		
Rec. #1	Have regard for the Framework for Recreation in Canada, along with its subsequent updates and iterations, to guide the overall planning, management and implementation of recommendations for the City of St. Catharines recreation, culture and parks system.	Ongoing
Rec. #2	Identify and allocate the appropriate resources to implement the Recreation Facilities & Programming Plan through ongoing monitoring, review and implementation of its Recommendations.	Ongoing
Foster Active Living Through Recreation		
Rec. #3	Promote Canada's 24-Hour Movement Guidelines within City of St. Catharines recreation facilities and communications channels used by the Community, Recreation & Culture Services Department.	Ongoing
Rec. #4	Supplement the moveSTC initiative by joining the annual ParticipACTION Community Challenge. During the Challenge, engage with community partners to raise awareness about physical activity and the various programs offered by the City for people of different age groups, interests and abilities. The ultimate goal is to be awarded "Canada's Most Active Community."	Ongoing
Rec. #5	The City's physical activity initiatives should be measured and reported to City Council and community partners each year. At a minimum, articulate opportunities available to all age groups, trends in participation, noted barriers and interventions, as well as key performance indicators that demonstrate the results of the City's efforts. The initial focus should be on municipal programs and services but could involve contributions from community partners as relationships are formed and strengthened.	Ongoing
Rec. #6	Test satisfaction levels in recreation and culture programs annually to understand where to implement service improvements, as well as determine program priorities that respond specifically to the needs of St. Catharines residents.	Ongoing
Embed Inclusion & Access		
Rec. #7	Continue to schedule regular reviews of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Niagara Regional Native Centre. In addition, identify and meet with Indigenous organizations that can help encourage greater rates of physical activity within Indigenous communities, and continue to move the City towards fulfilling its role in Truth and Reconciliation through the delivery of recreation, culture and sport.	Ongoing

Recommendations		Suggested Timing
Rec. #8	Continue to work with Indigenous agencies, organizations and communities to integrate public art within parks and public spaces that showcase Indigenous histories applicable to the traditional territory that St. Catharines falls within.	Ongoing
Rec. #9	As the City prepares its next Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, staff should consult the Accessibility Advisory Committee, regional partners, and residents with disabilities to identify ways to add or improve recreation programs and services.	2026 to 2030
Rec. #10	Consistent with the Sports Field Strategy, construct an inclusive ball diamond containing synthetic surfacing and other barrier-free features at St. Patrick's Park or another suitable location determined by the City.	2032 to 2035
Rec. #11	Engage Niagara Region Transit to explore opportunities to place bus stops closer to selected community centre entrances as well as discussing enhanced weekend and holiday transit service along routes with major recreation facilities such as the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre and event spaces.	2026 to 2028
Rec. #12	Regularly review and update the FAIR program, potentially to match terms of City Council. Reviews should apply a diversity lens with an emphasis on eligibility criteria, the application process, accepted proof of documentation, promotion, and annual subsidy amount. As part of the update, the City should determine characteristics of the population using the FAIR program, those who are not using it in order to identify unknown barriers, and to inform development of a User Fee Framework (see Recommendation Rec. #38).	2026 to 2028
Rec. #13	Engage the Canadian Women in Sport to collaboratively assess the City of St. Catharines' policies and practices for ways to encourage more women and girls to become involved in sport and recreation activities taking place in municipal parks and community facilities.	2026 to 2028
Connect People with Nature		
Rec. #14	Update the City of St. Catharines Parks Policy Plan to provide a renewed basis for planning, acquiring and designing municipal parkland. At a minimum, the Parks Policy Plan should establish a parkland classification system that is integrated into the new City of St. Catharines Official Plan.	2026 to 2028
Rec. #15	Acquire at least 5.5 hectares of District Parks, including one that is located in the Ontario Street Corridor Secondary Plan.	2029 to 2031
Rec. #16	Target the acquisition of 20 hectares of Neighbourhood Parkland and Special Urban Parks across St. Catharines, with a focus on communities that are underserviced by parkland on a per capita basis including, but not limited, the downtown and central areas of the City.	Ongoing

Recommendations		Suggested Timing
Rec. #17	Revitalize Joe Kushner Park in a manner that responds to needs resulting from nearby infill developments and redevelopment of the Pen Centre. At a minimum, the City should upgrade the rectangular field to a Type A facility while integrating a basketball court, playground, paved pathway, and additional seating.	2031 to 2035
Rec. #18	Prepare a conceptual plan for Pic Leeson Park and the adjoining John Dempsey Park that illustrates its ability to integrate the ball diamond relocated from Alex McKenzie Park, thereby creating a four-diamond complex designed for competitive play and tournaments.	2026 to 2028
Rec. #19	Prepare a conceptual plan for Alex McKenzie Park that defines a new vision to address the recreational needs of the existing neighbourhood along with new populations being added through the development of the former General Motors lands located immediately to its north and west. Relocation of the ball diamond (per Rec. #19) provides the potential to offer a much broader range of park amenities than found there today.	2026 to 2028
Rec. #20	Implement the Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan to address selected recreational needs identified in this Recreation Facilities & Programming Plan.	2026 to 2031
Rec. #21	Continue to allocate sufficient annual funding towards the renewal of outdoor recreational assets found within parks, targeting $1.5 million per year (and adjusted for inflation). Annual priority projects should be informed by the City of St. Catharines Parks Renewal Plan, asset management plans, potential to align with other approved park repair and redevelopment projects, and ability to use the City's Parks Legacy Fund.	Ongoing
Rec. #22	Prepare a Trails Renewal Plan (or similar) to guide the City's recreational trails system.	2026 to 2028
Rec. #23	Enhance public education related to environmental stewardship and importance of naturalization to better inform the objectives of associated municipal policies, programs and service levels encompassing use of no-mow zones, green infrastructure and climate change resiliency initiatives, encroachment, illegal dumping and other topics. Collaboration with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and other environmental partners is encouraged in the implementation of environmental policies and programs.	Ongoing
Provide Supportive Environments		
Rec. #24	Identify a site and construct a new indoor aquatic centre within the short-term that contains a 25 metre rectangular pool with a minimum of six lanes, a separate leisure pool, and potentially a therapeutic tank.	2026 to 2028
Rec. #25	Identify a site and construct a gymnasium, group fitness studio and indoor walking track with consideration given to co-locating all or some of these facilities with a new indoor aquatic centre, an arena, or alternatively at the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre.	2026 to 2028

Recommendations		Suggested Timing
Rec. #26	Carry out an architectural analyses and concepts that examine the feasibility with reconfiguring and/or expanding Russell Avenue Community Centre and the Haig Bowl in order to meet growth-related needs resulting from intensification along the Geneva Street corridor and the City's core.	2029 to 2031
Rec. #27	Explore the ability to revitalize St. Catharines' older adult centres in a manner that modernizes interior spaces and enables a greater range of physical activity and community programs to be delivered. At a minimum, consider lighting, flooring and furniture upgrades as repurposing underutilized areas to more functional spaces (e.g. group fitness) that are conducive to the promotion of healthy aging objectives.	2029 to 2035
Rec. #28	Enclose Kiwanis Field, with either a seasonal dome or a permanent structure, in order to enable rental and programming for indoor field sports.	2026 to 2028
Rec. #29	Construct 3 lit rectangular fields, install field lighting at Joe Kushner Park and Trapper Leo Park, and initiate a boxed soccer court pilot program consistent with the Sports Field Strategy.	2026 to 2028 (pilot) 2029 to 2036 (fields)
Rec. #30	Identify a site to add a new ice pad in the longer-term with consideration given to twinning either the Bill Burgoyne Memorial Arena or Merritton Centennial Arena, subject to confirmation by future study.	2029 to 2031
Rec. #31	Identify a location in the Port Dalhousie Ward at which to construct a splash pad.	2029 to 2031
Rec. #32	Establish pickleball hubs in the north, central and south parts of the city including one such hub at Burgoyne Woods. Each pickleball hub should contain a minimum of 6 dedicated courts, ensure sufficient setback distances from residential areas, and ideally provide onsite parking.	2032 to 2035
Rec. #33	Explore opportunities to bolster sport tourism in St. Catharines by facilitating regular touchpoints between staff working in the Economic Development and CRCS Departments. Engage area municipalities to discuss a regional approach to sport tourism and consider the development of a Sport Tourism Plan.	Ongoing
Reinforce the Capacity of the Recreation System		
Rec. #34	Establish a formal set of service levels guiding the provision, operation and maintenance activities for the City of St. Catharines' recreation and culture services. These service levels should form part of a broader service prioritization framework as recommended through the City's Core Service Review Update.	2026 to 2028
Rec. #35	In anticipation of population growth and required adjustments to facilities and service provisioning frameworks, form cross-functional staff teams to explore ways to optimize service delivery processes through periodic reviews of staffing and service standards, customer service practices, use of technology, etc.	2026 to 2028

Recommendations		Suggested Timing
Rec. #36	Ensure the Community, Recreation and Culture Services Department has the appropriate staff complement and resources, to effectively serve a growing population.	2026 to 2028
Rec. #37	Undertake an exercise to determine the direct and indirect costs of providing services, as well as the recommended cost recovery levels, to develop a fair-minded User Fee / Cost Recovery Framework.	2026 to 2028
Rec. #38	Budget requests to fund capital recommendations of the Recreation Facilities & Programming Plan should be accompanied by operating cost estimates informed by facility designs and business plans.	Ongoing
Rec. #39	Develop a one page set of performance measures that reflect capacity, utilization, efficiencies, and satisfaction levels of recreation and culture services. These measures could potentially be aligned with or inform a municipal Service Level Dashboard.	2026 to 2028
Rec. #40	Regularly engage St. Catharines Public Library to coordinate capital projects and program delivery with a view towards maximizing financial efficiencies, providing well rounded programming, and avoiding service duplications.	Ongoing
Rec. #41	Explore opportunities to further strengthen relationships with elementary, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions to determine ways to pursue capital projects, share costs, and increase public access to new and existing recreational facilities operated by each party.	Ongoing

Appendix A:
Recreation Facility Needs Assessments

Aquatic Facilities 1
Arenas 4
Gymnasiums 7
Fitness Space 9
Older Adult Centres 12
Sports Fields 15
Tennis & Pickleball Courts 19
Basketball & Multi-Use Courts 22
Skateboard Parks & Pump Tracks 24
Playgrounds 26

Aquatic Facilities

The centrally located St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre (SKAC) contains an 8 lane, 25 metre rectangular indoor competition pool along with a separate leisure pool. In recent years, the City has prioritized interactive waterplay experiences through its five splash pads while retaining three outdoor pools in Port Dalhousie, Merritton Community Park and at Lincoln Park. There are also three City-owned beaches at Lakeside Park Beach, Sunset Beach and Jones Beach that offer natural amenities and are not lifeguarded which augment aquatic experiences in St. Catharines.

Pools provided by others in St. Catharines include the:

- **Eleanor Misener Aquatic Centre at Brock University** whose 50 metre indoor competition pool is available to the public at selected times and offers lessons, aquatic leadership, aquatic fitness, drop-in swims, and camps; however, the University's pool is a 15 minute drive from the downtown, which may present a barrier to individuals without access to an automobile.
- **Niagara Children's Centre** on Glenridge Avenue is part of the Hotel Dieu Shaver Hospital Campus near the St. Catharines southern border. This fully accessible heated salt-water pool is used for therapeutic and rehabilitative programs along with non-structured swims for clients and their families at scheduled times.
- **Private Sector** pools include the Goodlife Fitness on Bunting Road and Reflexions Fitness Centre on North Service Road have indoor pools that are available to members or daily rates charged to non-members.

The SKAC is at Capacity

Pressures placed on the SKAC have been compounded with the closure of indoor pools at the Walker Family YMCA and Ridley College. The City has experienced a post-pandemic resurgence in aquatics participation at the SKAC, and pressures are mounting given the number of people displaced from the YMCA's local aquatic programs. The City's waiting list for aquatic programs has more than doubled to over 500 persons in the past six years despite creative efforts of City staff to find spots for 1,000 more program participants at the SKAC through scheduling and programming efficiencies, as well as a competitive process to recruit and retain lifeguards and instructors. Annual drop-in recreational swims at the SKAC increased 75% from an average of 60,000 per year before the

pandemic to nearly 104,000 recreational swims in 2024. The SKAC is effectively at capacity considering indoor aquatic centres service population thresholds in the range of 40,000 to 50,000 persons; the SKAC is presently servicing 145,000 people. In addition to strong uptake for aquatic programs with fill rates above 85%, local aquatic sport clubs are requesting more rental hours that cannot be granted due to the need for municipal programs.

Construct a New Indoor Aquatic Centre in St. Catharines

There is a strong need for a new indoor aquatic centre and it is recommended that the City target provision within the next three to five years after factoring in site selection, detailed design and construction. The aquatic centre should contain a 25 metre pool with a minimum of six lanes, a leisure pool, and potentially a therapeutic tank; a slightly larger design specification can be rationalized based on the size of the City's population and forecasted growth in younger and older age groups. The Aquatics Facility Strategy made a new indoor pool contingent upon decommissioning two outdoor pools in order to provide sufficient financial means to fund the indoor aquatic system enhancements and eliminate programming inefficiencies; this direction continues to be supported.

Land availability and geographic distribution are two important elements to consider in terms of where to locate a new indoor aquatic centre. The SKAC's central location affords access to areas between Lakeshore Road and Eastchester Avenue, to the east of Twelve Mile Creek. Areas west of the creek and south of the downtown are considered to be gaps but there is limited land that is either owned by the City or in the form of large vacant parcels in the size required for a facility of this scale.

Splash Pads

The Aquatics Facility Strategy recommends that at least one spray / splash pad is offered in each political ward. With five splash pads found at Bogart Street Park, Catherine Street Park, Lester B. Pearson Park, Secord Woods Park and West Park, only the Port Dalhousie Ward remains without such a facility and a splash pad should be added in this area of the City.

Outdoor Pools

In April 2021, City Council approved a modified-balanced approach based on scenarios advanced through the Aquatic Facility Strategy. The modified-balanced approach supports construction of a new indoor aquatic centre but also redevelopment of the Lion Dunc Schooley and Port Dalhousie outdoor pools, as well as the renewal of the Lincoln Park outdoor pool.

Beaches

The City operates three beaches in addition to its pools and splash pads. Beaches complement built aquatic facilities by providing residents with a different experience, allowing swimming and cooling along with enjoyment of the outdoors. City-owned beaches consist of:

1. **Lakeside Park Beach** - offers picturesque views of the Port Dalhousie harbour, lighthouse and the north shore of Lake Ontario. It shares a number of amenities with the park including washrooms, concessions, sand volleyball courts and a picnic area.
2. **Sunset Beach** - located in a protected bay, offers a picturesque view to Lake Ontario and small lighthouse beacon.
3. **Jones Beach** -365 metres of sandy beach located along the Waterfront Trail and in proximity to the Welland Canal Parkway Trail.

Beaches contribute to the overall aquatics experience in St. Catharines but should not be treated as providing the same opportunity as would a pool or splash pad. Swimming in the lake requires a relatively strong skillset, the City does not offer any open-water aquatic programs, and water quality/water levels can be inconsistent. The City is committed to providing enjoyable beachgoing experiences and completed a $6.9 million rejuvenation of Sunset Beach in 2026.

Capital Implications

The capital cost of constructing a multi-tank indoor aquatic centre anchored by a 25 metre pool is estimated between $28 million and $35 million depending upon the ultimate size of the facility and level of finishes, exclusive of cost escalations and land acquisition. The Aquatics Strategy identified the capital cost of reconstructing the Lion Dunc Schooley pool between $6 million and $9 million while new splash pad development was estimated at $600,000 per location. For both the outdoor pool and splash pads, costs will depend on their ultimate size, amenities and exclude future cost escalations. Architectural and/or landscape architectural exercises should confirm capital implications in order to inform the City's capital budgeting.

Aquatic Facility Development Strategy

- Identify a site and construct a new indoor aquatic centre within the short-term that contains a 25 metre rectangular pool with a minimum of six lanes, a separate leisure pool, and potentially a therapeutic tank.

- Construct a splash pad in the Port Dalhousie Ward along with a splash pad identified through the Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan.

Arenas

The City has Increased its Arena Capacity

The City operates Bill Burgoyne Memorial Arena, Merritton Centennial Arena, Seymour-Hannah Sports and Entertainment Centre and the Meridian Centre. The Walker Sports & Abilities Centre (WSAC) at Canada Games Park is jointly-owned consortium that includes the City of St. Catharines, City of Thorold, and Brock University who share use of the ice pads there. Collectively, these 5 arenas contain 9 ice pads.

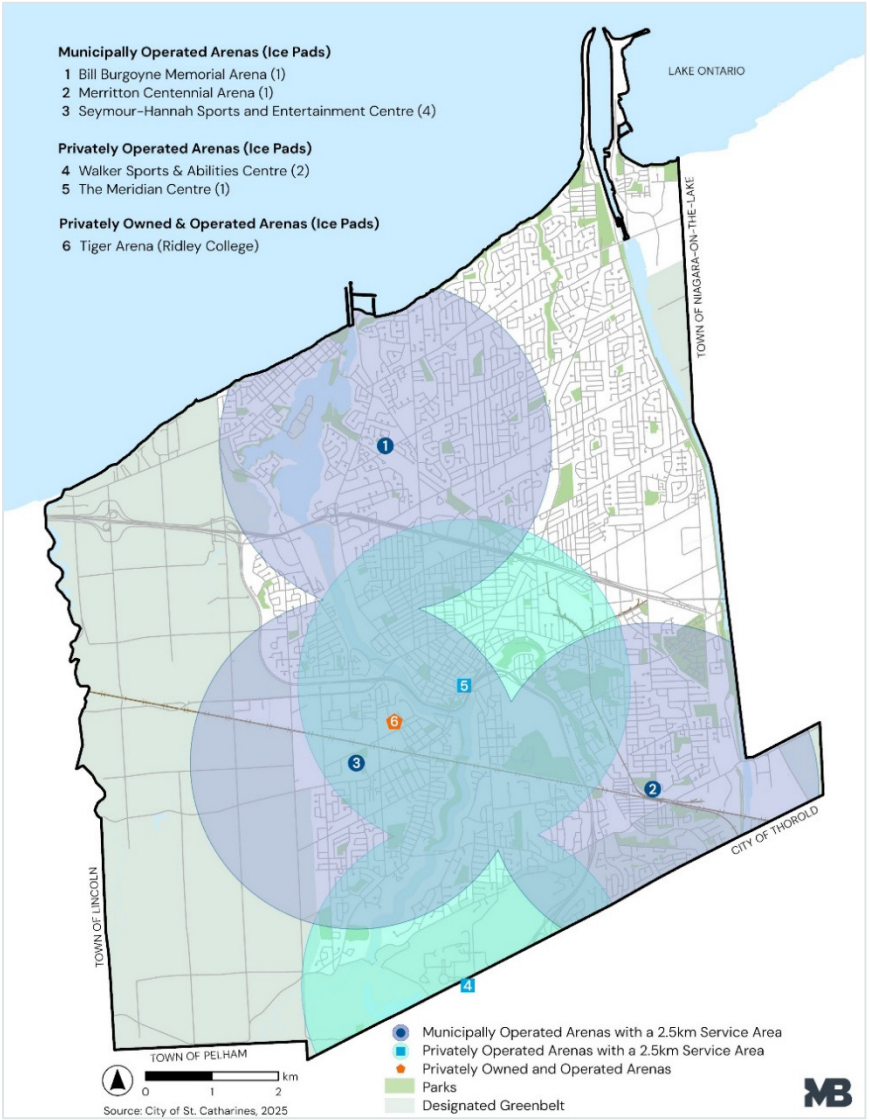
Consistent with methodology established in the St. Catharines Arena Strategy, an "effective" supply of 7.25 ice pads reflects the unique operating characteristics of the Meridian Centre and WSAC's three ice rinks for use by St. Catharines residents. Despite closure of the former Garden City Arena Complex, the City has increased available capacity in the last five years by the equivalent of 0.35 ice pads (adding over 20 prime time hours per week). This has been achieved through the addition of the WSAC and assuming operational responsibility of Merritton Centennial Arena that was historically operated by the Merritton Lions Club.

Arenas operated by others in St. Catharines include:

- **Tiger Arena at Ridley College** which has an NHL size ice rink along with spectator seating for up to 500 persons. The ice pad is maintained year-round and Ridley College makes its ice pad available to the public for community rentals in the evening.
- **Ballhockey.com** who operate three dry pads (i.e. no ice) at two locations, including the Haig Bowl which they lease from the City. Their other location along the Welland Canal contains two outdoor dry pads, one of which is covered by a tent.

The effective arena supply is 7.25 ice pads, reflecting operating models and public ice rentals at the Meridian Centre and WSAC.

Figure 4: Arenas in St. Catharines



Registrations are Gradually Recovering & Arena Efficiencies are Improving

Ice sport registrations in St. Catharines have been on an upward trajectory following the disruptions that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic with an estimated 5,200 youth and adult ice sport participants registered with St. Catharines and regionally-based organizations as of the last full ice season in 2024/25. Interestingly, actual registrations are close to the level projected by the Arena Strategy for the year 2026, albeit with a greater proportional share of adult participants.

While registrations have been growing since the pandemic, they are approximately 15% below the more than 6,100 ice sport participants recorded in St. Catharines prior to the pandemic. The decline is a result of organizations that have folded, continued aging population trends affecting minor sports, along with costs for registration, equipment, and travel.

Nearly 8,800 hours of prime time was used in the City's arenas in 2024/25, amounting to 84% of available capacity, and representing 900 more hours of ice time than was used in 2022/23. The Arena Strategy recorded a prime time utilization rate of 80% during the 2018/19 season meaning that prime time use efficiency is improving across the arena system. This being said, 1,700 hours of prime time went unused during the 2024/25 season. The vast majority of unused times were after 10pm and weekend afternoons.

Maintain the City's Supply of Ice Pads

There is optimism as it relates to ice sports in St. Catharines based on recent registration and arena utilization trends, along with the City's investments to increase capacity through the Walker Sports and Abilities Centre and operational oversight of Merritton Centennial Arena. The City's supply results in a service level of one ice pad per 717 ice sport participants, aligning with the provision target of one ice pad per 700 participants established in the Arena Strategy and reflecting a healthy measure in relation to other municipalities where ideal provision levels are in the range of one ice pad per 700 to 800 participants. The ability for ice sport groups to rent evening times at Ridley College provides further options to play and practice locally.

Based on current participation rates, local registrations could grow to 5,600 ice sport participants (+8%) by the year 2035 which would necessitate 8.0 ice pads at that time, effectively requiring the

City to add a new ice pad to the supply. While pressures are mounting on the local arena system, a cautious approach is required due to factors such as:

- a 10-year decline in the number of children and teens (as recorded by the 2011 and 2021 Census) who constitute the minor player/skater base;
- capacity that exists in the late evenings and weekend afternoons that should be rented out before investing in a new facility;
- broader trends influencing ice sport participation;
- the Arena Strategy recommending an eighth ice pad upon exceeding 6,000 registered ice sport participants or the 145,000 population threshold contingent on ice sport participation rates remaining constant (when in fact capture rates have decreased); and
- the escalating construction and operating cost environment.

Adding one ice pad to the municipal supply in the year 2035 (or upon ice sport registrations reaching 6,000 participants) should be implemented by either:

- twinning Bill Burgoyne Memorial Arena or constructing a new twin pad arena at an alternative site to replace Bill Burgoyne Memorial Arena, in order to expand service to residential areas north of the QEW; or
- twinning the Merritton Centennial Arena, possibly in conjunction with the RFPP's recommended indoor aquatic centre and/or gymnasium.

Capital Implications

The capital cost is estimated to range between $22 million to add an ice pad to an existing arena, to over $50 million if constructing a new twin pad arena excluding escalations and assuming spectator seating oriented to local minor programs and an economical level of finishes. An architectural concept and costing exercise should confirm capital implications in order to better inform the City's capital budgeting.

Arena Development Strategy

- Construct a new ice pad by the year 2035 by either: 1) twinning the Bill Burgoyne Memorial Arena; 2) reconstructing the Merritton Centennial Arena with two ice pads as part of a broader multi-use community centre development; or 3) building a twin pad arena to replace one of the City's existing single pad arenas.

Gymnasiums

Access to Gymnasiums is Gradually Improving

The City owns two buildings with gymnasiums. The Port Weller Community Centre has a slightly undersized gym by modern standards (its size is similar to an elementary school gym) but has sufficient dimensions and height that allows community-level sport and recreation programs including basketball, badminton, pickleball and other activities. The Queen Elizabeth Community Centre (QECC) is leased to the Boys & Girls Club of Niagara who use the gymnasium for their own programming and the building is not used for City programs.

With the opening of the Walker Sports and Abilities Centre (WSAC) at Canada Games Park, four high-quality gymnasiums have become available for joint use between the City of St. Catharines, City of Thorold, and Brock University. Scheduling and rentals are managed by the Walker Sports and Abilities Centre WSAC's third party operator so while public access can be gained, the City does not directly program those gymnasiums. Public rentals are also available at Brock University's three gymnasiums, and at Ridley College's single gymnasium and triple gym fieldhouse which have competition-grade sprung wood surfaces.

School board gymnasiums in St. Catharines are also available for rental, however, are subject to certain regulations governing public access at different times of the day, permitted activities and sports, and fee schedules that are different from that of the City. Additional restrictions have been imposed by certain school boards in Ontario following the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the closure of the St. Catharines YMCA had an impact on the community's ability to access large gymnasium space.

On the whole, the addition of the WSAC has increased the supply of quality gymnasiums in St. Catharines although it is acknowledged that the ability of the public to use these facilities is somewhat different than a traditional municipal operational model, and the WSAC is located along the City's southernmost boundary which can make travel cumbersome for certain populations.

A City-Operated Gymnasium Would Improve Program Delivery Potential

Typically, municipalities target one gymnasium per 35,000 to 50,000 population, depending upon the accessibility and availability of school gyms. The City is providing one municipally-operated gym per 145,000 population (Port Weller) but it can be argued that the service level is 1:72,500 if including

the QECC since the Boys & Girls Club programming addresses a portion of local demand. While it would not be entirely accurate to include the WSAC's four gyms when comparing to other municipal benchmarks, it does meet certain needs particularly for competitive sport organizations operating in St. Catharines and the rest of Niagara Region.

Ultimately, the Port Weller Community Centre is the only gymnasium that the City can directly schedule and program. While City staff have done an admirable job of leveraging large multi-purpose rooms in facilities such as Russell Avenue Community Centre and the Dunlop Drive Older Adult Centre for selected floor sports, such rooms often have limitations that preclude the full range of gym programs from being delivered.

A new gymnasium in St. Catharines would significantly enhance the ability of the City to deliver modern and high quality programs that meet expectations of today's populace. More importantly, a new gym would add upwards of 100 programming and rental hours per week, considering the fact that many gymnasiums are now being used during daytime hours with the emergence of pickleball and traditional afterschool drop-ins, in addition to prime time usage. A third municipally-owned gym would improve the provision rate to 1:52,000 (including the QECC) if constructed within the RFPP planning period.

A municipal gymnasium is also a strong complement to the indoor aquatic centre being recommended in the RFPP. Depending on the location of the aquatic centre, the City should also evaluate the feasibility of expanding the SKAC given its relatively central location in the City to determine where a gym would be better suited.

Capital Implications

The capital cost of constructing a gymnasium is estimated to be $8 million depending upon the ultimate size of the facility and level of finishes, exclusive of cost escalations and land acquisition.

Gymnasium Development Strategy

- Construct one new gymnasium designed to a secondary school size. The gym should be co-located with an indoor aquatic centre, whether that is at the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre or integrated with a new indoor aquatic centre being recommended in the RFPP.

Fitness Space

The City is Creatively Integrating Fitness into Existing Spaces

Although the City does not operate equipment-based fitness centres nor does it have a purpose-built group fitness / active living studio, it delivers a wide range of fitness programs through its community centres as part of its commitment to physical literacy and healthy aging. The City has intentionally scaled fitness services to those that can be integrated in its existing community centres, older adult centres as well as the aquatic fitness programs at the SKAC which in turn deliver a range of movement and fitness activities including aerobics, low impact dance fitness, tai chi, yoga, etc.

While municipal spaces were not originally designed or purpose-built as fitness centres, the City has creatively adapted its infrastructure for programming to be delivered. A good example is the recent installation of TRX bands from the ceiling of the multi-purpose hall at Russell Avenue Community Centre to keep pace with fitness sector trends for functional training in a highly cost-effective manner and doing so in a way that will extend the range of services available to that neighbourhood and beyond. The City has also pursued outdoor fitness facilities with all-season exercise equipment placed at West Park. In looking at the City's current model, having multifunctional spaces at different facilities across St. Catharines allows fitness spaces to be equitably distributed.

St. Catharines has an established and growing private sector presence with national and international chains competing alongside local studios, with notable fitness providers now consisting of Goodlife, Fit4Less, Anytime Fitness, Energy Fitness Studio, Reflexions Fitness Centre, and others. In addition, Brock University's newly expanded 15,000 square foot "The Zone Fitness Centre" is also available along with the Brock Functional Inclusive Training Centre (Bfit) specifically for older adults.

The Walker Sports and Abilities Centre includes a high-quality indoor track that also facilitates year-round physical fitness that is available for community use. There are also 4 squash courts at Brock University and 5 squash courts at Ridley College's Jack Aylott Squash complex; Brock's courts can be booked by the public while Ridley's courts can be accessed by purchasing a membership through the College.

Focus on Group Fitness in Purpose-Built Studios

Service targets are not typically used for fitness centres as municipalities tend to provide these based on their corporate philosophies (such as whether to compete with the private sector) along with internal business planning based on prevailing market conditions and whether fitness space complements other

recreational offerings. Municipalities factor many variables in deciding whether to enter the fitness centre market, and if so to what extent, the size of the private fitness market, the availability of complementary municipal facilities, etc. Accordingly, a municipality may decide to provide fitness centres as part of a community centre if it deems fitness services will positively enhance the customer experience through cross-functional synergies as well as contributing to the facility's operational bottom line.

While municipally-operated equipment-based fitness centres (akin to a private sector club with weights, exercise machines, personal trainers, etc.) are becoming more prevalent in tandem with aquatic centres, entry into this market for the City would represent a new area of responsibility within the CRCS Department's structure. Requests for equipment-based fitness did not emerge as a high priority in RFPP consultations, potentially because of a competitive private sector environment that is being increasingly saturated with low-fee providers (e.g. Fit4Less). Entry into equipment-based fitness is not recommended at this time, however, the City may revisit this if supported by a business case to do so.

Instead, the City's focus should remain on fitness programming through classes focused on movement, stretching and aerobics. A group fitness studio would be a strong complement to the new aquatics centre, providing synergies through cross-programming and a holistic wellness experience. A group fitness studio would be characterized by a room containing a sprung-wood floor, mirrored walls, and storage for group fitness equipment (program supplies, light weights, step platforms, etc.). The addition of a fitness studio can provide indoor dryland training areas for athletes using this facility or the general public.

If the City proceeds with a gymnasium at the SKAC, provision of a group fitness studio should also be considered given the economies of scale in construction that would be attained. The City should also investigate potential to:

- Repurpose an existing room at Dunlop Drive Older Adult Centre into a small group fitness studio to advance healthy aging principles.
- Repurpose space or expand Russell Avenue Community Centre to add a group fitness studio, positioning the facility to address growth-related needs associated with infill developments occurring in its catchment area.

The redevelopment of these community centres provides opportunity to include a purpose built group fitness room to provide a higher quality group fitness experience. Doing so will allow the City to expand its outreach efforts into neighbourhoods and deliver quality fitness programming by leveraging the

community centre. This builds convenience and will increase walkability for people reach municipal fitness programs.

Indoor Walking Tracks are Popular

Conversations with the Walker Sports and Abilities Centre operator and site visits to that facility during the RFPP suggest that the indoor track is well used. With Canada's varied climate conditions, there is a demand for indoor walking tracks that can be used year-round for walking and jogging, which was identified as among the most popular recreation activities in the RFPP community survey.

An indoor track should be considered with a future gymnasium and/or ice pad capital project in order to reinforce passive year-round physical activity and/or dry-land training for local sports groups. With a gymnasium proposed at the SKAC or a new multi-use community centre with an indoor aquatic component, as well as potential to add an ice pad towards the end of the planning period, an indoor track should be considered at one of these future capital projects.

Capital Implications

The capital cost of constructing a group fitness studio in a new community centre or by expanding the SKAC (the latter driven by whether a gymnasium is included) is estimated to be $1 million depending upon the ultimate size of the facility and level of finishes, exclusive of cost escalations and land acquisition. Assuming smaller studios can be integrated within the existing footprint of any or all of the older adult centres (subject to confirmation to architectural design), the City could reasonably estimate between $300,000 and $500,000 per location as a renovation budget.

The cost of an indoor track integrated within a gymnasium or arena is estimated at between $1 million and $2 million.

Fitness Space Development Strategy

- Develop a fitness studio in conjunction with a new indoor aquatic centre as well as at the Russell Avenue Community Centre. In the event that the SKAC is expanded in the future, a group fitness studio should be contemplated there as well.

- In conjunction with modernization efforts at the three Older Adult Centres, evaluate the ability to integrate dedicated group fitness studios at each location recognizing that expansion potential may be limited by their respective site constraints.

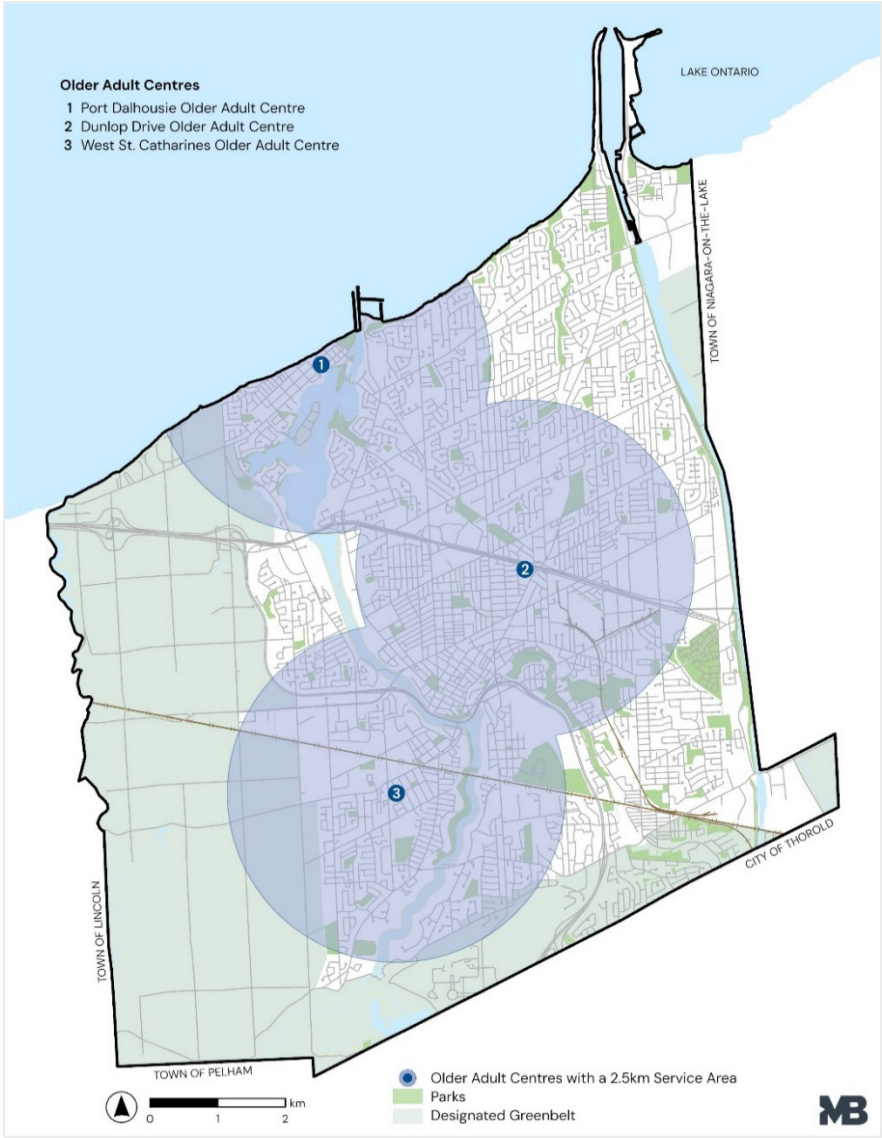
Older Adult Centres

A Longstanding Commitment to Older Adults

St. Catharines has recognized the benefits of providing well-distributed and dedicated seniors facilities for decades, and is an early adopter of 'Aging in Place' planning philosophies that allows people to spend their lives in their neighbourhoods. Between the Port Dalhousie Older Adult Centre, Dunlop Drive Older Adult Centre, and the West St. Catharines Older Adult Centre, there is strong geographic coverage across the city's north, central and south resulting in most older adults living within a 15 minute drive of an older adult centre. At time of writing, programs at Port Dalhousie Older Adult Centre have been temporarily relocated to the Port Weller Community Centre in order to accommodate municipal emergency services personnel while a new fire hall is being built.

The City has stayed on top of trends and best practices pertaining to older adult and seniors needs, and has adapted programming in the three older adult centres to deliver a wide range of programs and services including those that encourage physical activity, social connection, health and social services, meals, and more. The City's full-time Older Adult Coordinator oversees operations for this line of business. Memberships are available for Older Adult Centre programming provided by local senior associations in partnership with the City. Social programming currently provided at the three older adult centres include bid euchre, bingo, cribbage, darts, duplicate bridge, euchre, painting, quilting, scrabble, shuffleboard, table tennis, walk aerobics, Zumba gold and 500 cards. Additionally, the hall and meeting rooms at Dunlop Drive Older Adult Centre allow recreation programming, including badminton, pickleball and chair yoga.

Figure 5: Older Adult Centres in St. Catharines



Only a few municipalities have constructed dedicated older adult centres in recent years with trends suggesting that Baby Boomers are preferring to remain in multi-generational community centres. As such, new multi-use community centres are being designed and programmed to accommodate needs of all age groups which has likely contributed to less capital being directed to stand-alone seniors centres. With a new aquatic centre anchoring a multi-use community centre development as well as a potential SKAC expansion to include a gym, the City could deliver enhanced older adult programming in multi-generational settings.

Modernize the City's Older Adult Centres

Notwithstanding older adult use shifting to multi-generational community centres, a segment of the older adult population still values having dedicated space, and are seeking multiple programs and activities in these locations. This lends rationale to continue with the City's older adult centre model, particularly given their ideal geographic distribution; however, these facilities are aging and would benefit from reinvestment.

The temporary shift of older adult activities from Port Dalhousie to Port Weller exemplifies the potential that active programming can have when combined with traditional older adult activities. The City's recent reinvestment in Port Weller Community Centre has been well received by older adult members using the large program room, and having the gymnasium onsite has allowed for an expanded range of choice that encourages healthy aging. Functional and aesthetic improvements at the older adult centres would increase their ability to deliver a wider range of social, physical and other programs to the growing number of seniors in St. Catharines, particularly if the older adult centres can transition from their single purpose origins to become more "multi-use".



West St. Catharines Older Adult Centre



Dunlop Drive Older Adult Centre

The Dunlop Drive and West St. Catharines Older Adult Centres are advanced in their lifecycles having been in service for more than 55 years while the Port Dalhousie Older Adult Centre was opened in 2002. The changing needs of local older adults and seniors combined with the antiquated experience offered through the existing older adult centres building makes it clear that the time has come to modernize them and bring them in line with best practices. At a minimum, the City should investigate integration of group fitness space within the three centres as discussed earlier in the Fitness Space assessment.

Unfortunately, both older adult centres are on small sites with limited to no building and parking lot expansion potential. This means working within their existing floor plans unless the City were to assemble adjacent lands.

Capital Implications

Due to the many variables involved with an interior modernization and/or reconfiguration project for each location, it would be appropriate for the City to undertake an architectural and interior design review of the older adult centres to arrive at an accurate cost.

Older Adult Centre Development Strategy

- Explore revitalization of St. Catharines' older adult centres in a manner that modernizes interior spaces and enables a greater range of physical activity and community programs to be delivered. At a minimum, consider lighting, flooring and furniture upgrades as repurposing underutilized areas to more functional spaces (e.g. group fitness) that are conducive to the promotion of healthy aging objectives.

Sports Fields

The City supplies 1 artificial turf field, 8 lit natural turf fields, 17 unlit natural turf fields, and four neighbourhood-based natural turf fields in 25 parks. To reflect added capacity of artificial and lit fields, an equivalency factor is applied consistent with the St. Catharines Sports Field Strategy which results in 37.0 unlit equivalents (ULEs) and a provision rate of one field per 3,900 population. Outside of the City's supply, school fields can be rented through the School Boards by the public and user groups. Brock University also has an artificial and six natural grass field that can be rented, while Ridley College has four natural grass soccer fields and two natural grass football fields.

The City supplies 10 lit diamonds (Type A) and 10 non-lit diamonds (Type B) in 14 parks throughout St. Catharines, representing 25.0 ULEs and a supply of one per 5,760 residents. Excluded from the supply but recognized for contributions to minor sports are the four diamonds at the Grantham Optimist Club along with 14 informal diamonds and backstops at City parks that enable spontaneous neighbourhood-level play.

Increase Outdoor Capacity through Rectangular Field Developments & Improvements

Through the RFPP, the rectangular field development strategy advanced in the St. Catharines Sports Field Strategy has been validated whereby the primary approach to addressing future needs is through investments in existing field quality. Over the RFPP planning period, 6.0 unlit equivalent fields are required, which can be achieved by developing new fields and converting existing fields to Type A facilities through securing land for a minimum of one lit rectangular field in the Ontario Street Corridor Secondary Plan area, upgrading the fields at Joe Kushner Park and Trapper Leo Park to Type A (i.e. adding lighting), providing two new Type A fields at a future park, and exploring potential partnerships.

A select few municipalities in Canada have used artificial turf for boxed soccer courts and pop-up soccer fields, something that the City should explore in areas of intensification – such as the Ontario Street Corridor and/or the GO Transit Station Secondary Plan areas - where neighbourhood parks may be smaller and unable to accommodate a traditional soccer field. The boxed court concept should also be explored in established areas that are deemed 'priority neighbourhoods' based on marginalization or vulnerability measures to provide safe and free physical activities.

Enhance the Ball Diamond Supply

Ball diamond users spoke to challenges in securing diamonds that are large enough for adult leagues and competitive minor divisions. Their other priorities were largely centred upon improved drainage and amenities such as shaded seating, fencing, replacing old light standards, and vehicular parking. The Sports Field Strategy recommended improvements to the amenities of various existing ball diamonds, which could ultimately assist with adding ball diamond capacity if registration warrants for it in future years.

Consistent with the Sports Field Strategy, the City should relocate the Alex McKenzie ball diamond to the Pic Leeson Park / John Dempsey Park in order to provide four diamonds at that location – all or some of which are full-sized for competitive play - to strengthen league programming, tournament potential, and centralize municipal maintenance operations. The City should also construct an inclusive diamond using synthetic surfacing and other barrier-free features through new construction or redevelopment of an existing diamond, potentially at St. Patrick's Park if the latter.

Cricket is Likely on the Horizon

Certain municipalities – primarily larger, culturally-diverse, GTA-based communities – target one cricket pitch per 100,000 population. With St. Catharines population at 145,000 persons, the City is at a threshold where a cricket grounds could be considered. While St. Catharines continues to become more culturally diverse, the segment of the community that are most likely to play cricket make up less than 5% of St. Catharines permanent population (as of the 2021 Census). As a result, the level of interest in cricket may still be lower in St. Catharines compared to other sports notwithstanding cultural composition of area municipalities and post-secondary populations. Due to these factors, application of a population-based provision target is not appropriate at this time.

While St. Catharines is above the 100,000 person threshold, there is limited rationale to support the provision of a cricket pitch over the next 10 years on the basis of a small local market defined by ethnocultural status of permanent residents, the lack of feedback received from cricket organizations and the low priority placed on these field among the general public participating in this Strategy's consultations (City staff have received a few requests in the past).

The City Should Provide Opportunities for Year-Round Field Sports

The topic of indoor turf has been raised by the field sport community through the RFPP consultations. There are no full-size indoor turf fields in St. Catharines that are operated by public or private providers, although Club Roma's Wolf Den contains smaller sized rectangular fields. All other winter indoor soccer activities are offered out of school gyms which are often too small for field sport activities and not conducive for training for certain sports. As a result, local organizations are travelling to other communities to rent time at indoor turf facilities for their increasing off-season training requirements. While soccer tends to be the primary user of indoor turf, other field sports such as baseball and softball, cricket, football and rugby, field lacrosse, field hockey and Ultimate Frisbee are increasingly seeking out indoor field times.

Indoor turf facilities have become prevalent in communities that have reached population thresholds between 50,000 to 100,000, and those with robust soccer programs. With a current population estimated at 145,000, St. Catharines has exceeded the above noted threshold and local soccer organizations report 1,500 participants in their indoor field programs, a level that could generate demand for up to 160 hours per week for their programs alone. Utilization rates are likely to be higher and could be in the range of 85% of prime time capacity when factoring other field sports such as football, baseball, etc. The estimated number of local indoor participants combined with a regional market participant base living within 30 minutes of St. Catharines – particularly in western Niagara Region – also rationalizes entry into indoor field turf provision based on an estimated projection of rental hour usage.

A cursory analysis has been done to confirm the suitability of Kiwanis Field to be used across the entire year. Kiwanis Field has a synthetic surface and is operational during the spring, summer and fall months. Potential exists to install a dome onsite, however, it would need to be seasonal in nature (i.e. taken down in the spring and reinstalled in the fall) if the City wishes to retain the nearly 900 spectator seating capacity presently provided. The option also exists to permanently enclose the field with a built structure, though many field sport user groups prefer to play outside during the warmer months.

Capital Implications

The capital cost is estimated to be approximately $7.2 million to install a seasonal dome or $19 million to construct a permanent pre-engineered building around the existing Kiwanis Field. Costs for

outdoor rectangular fields and ball diamonds will vary depending on the mix of lit and unlit fields provided but can be estimated to be in the range of $3 million for fields and diamonds.

Sports Field Development Strategy

- Add a total of 6.0 unlit equivalent rectangular fields by the year 2036 by developing 3 lit fields, and by adding lights to existing fields at Joe Kushner Park and Trapper Leo Park.

- Implement a pilot project to provide a boxed soccer court or pop-up field at a park in the Ontario Street Corridor or GO Transit Station Secondary Plan. Partnerships or sponsorships should be sought, potentially with the land development industry, a national or provincial sport organization, or others to help fund the pilot and/or a resulting permanent facility.

- Relocate the Alex McKenzie ball diamond to the Pic Leeson Park / John Dempsey Park in order to provide four diamonds at that location.

- Convert Kiwanis Field to allow indoor play by installing either a seasonal dome (preferred) or permanently enclosing it with a built structure.

- Land bank a parcel of land that is of sufficient size for a cricket grounds should the need arise in the future. In the event that the need for a cricket grounds does not materialize in the next 10 to 15 years, this land could be re-allocated to address other sports field needs.

Tennis & Pickleball Courts

The City supplies 34 tennis courts at 15 parks across St. Catharines. The supply consists of 21 lit courts and 13 unlit courts.

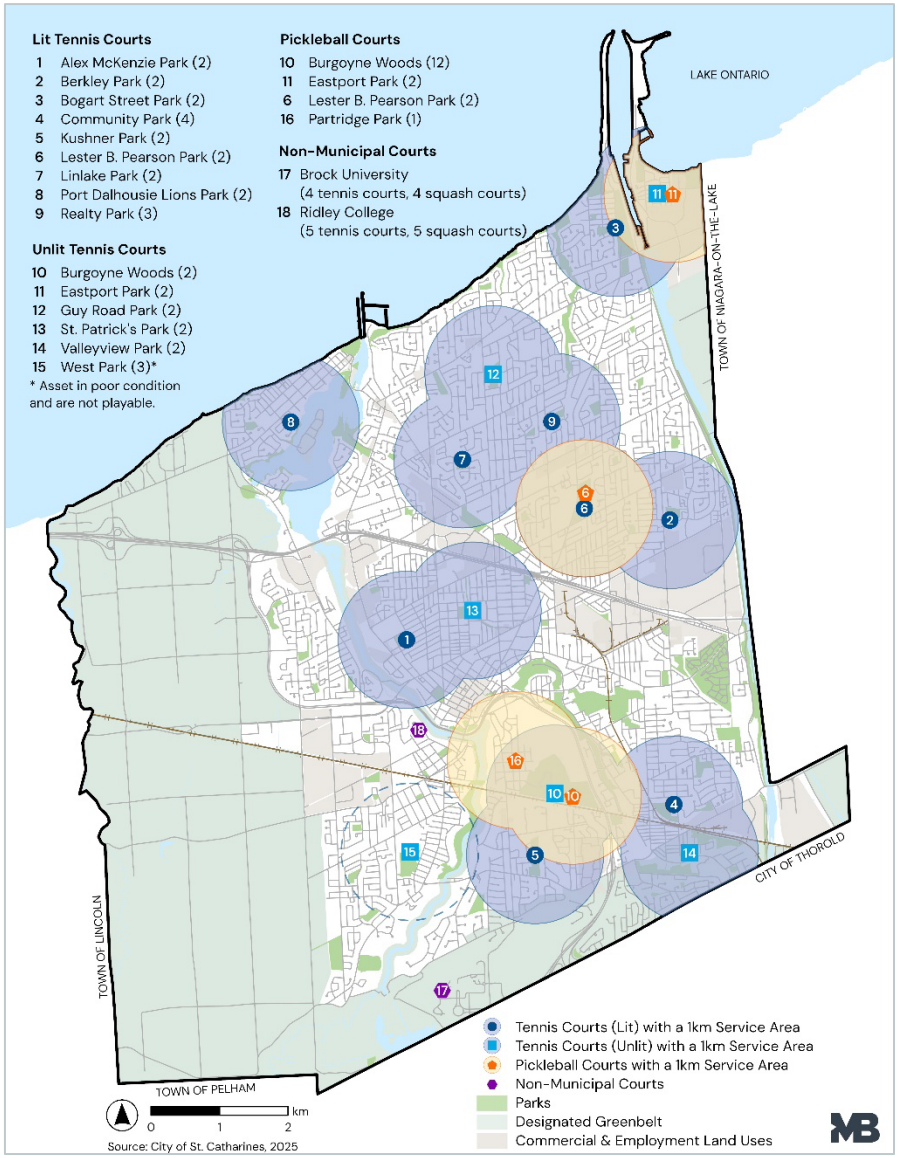
The City's approach to providing outdoor pickleball has been to choose locations that are not in close proximity to residential housing. The City has approved 8 dedicated pickleball courts for construction in 2026 at Burgoyne Woods which will add to the four shared courts at that location. Including these new courts, the City will have 8 dedicated and 9 shared pickleball courts at four parks, resulting in a total of 17 pickleball courts.

In addition to the City's supply, there are four tennis courts at Brock University and five tennis courts at Ridley College that can be booked by the public. Ridley College also has three pickleball courts.

The City is Investing in its Tennis Courts

Over the past 10 years, the City has added its supply. The most notable investment has been a major revitalization of the Community Park tennis courts in Merritton which added a new court along with upgrades to surfacing, fencing and lighting that enable community programs delivered by the Community Tennis Club of St. Catharines. Since 2018, the City has renewed 20 tennis courts at nine parks in accordance with asset management plans, which amounts to nearly two-thirds of its court supply.

Figure 6: Tennis & Pickleball Courts



Continue to Focus on Tennis Court Renewals

The City's current tennis court provision is one per 4,300 population. Based on population projections, St. Catharines will continue to meet the recommended service standard of 1 tennis court per 5,000 residents over the next 10 years. With requests for indoor tennis, the City reached out to a reputable third party operator who deemed the endeavour would not be financially viable. There is no present information to suggest that the business case for indoor tennis has changed, and the regional market is being served nearby through the Niagara Falls Racquet Centre which provides four indoor tennis courts and 16 pickleball courts through a public-private partnership.

The City's Parks Renewal Plan outlines a capital strategy to renew aging tennis courts, playgrounds, and basketball courts in the city. With renewal works well underway in St. Catharines, Guy Road Park, West Park and Joe Kushner Park tennis courts are the most pressing priorities that remain for remediation. By the end of the planning period, tennis courts at Alex McKenzie Park, Linlake Park, and Realty Park may require greater attention for repair and renewal works (these courts are presently rated to be in fair to good condition).

Shift Design to Dedicated Pickleball Hubs

Due to the emergence of pickleball over the past decade, municipalities have largely been testing demand prior to setting a provision target for outdoor courts. With St. Catharines having observed sustained demand for its courts, both outdoors and within its community centres, there is merit in establishing a provision target to guide future outdoor pickleball court development. A select number of municipalities are targeting one pickleball court per 5,000 population, which in the case of St. Catharines would require 29 pickleball courts in total and 12 more than available at present time. By 2035, a total of 31 courts would be needed of which two courts would be addressed by two pickleball courts (shared with tennis) proposed through the Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan.[2]

A growing body of research shows that pickleball and tennis have very different participant profiles and deliver different playing experiences. Whereas tennis courts can fit within neighbourhood parks, pickleball play is much more social and draws greater numbers of people per hour than a tennis court resulting in intensive demands placed on a park and for parking. Combined with the fact that noise generated by pickleball paddles is louder than tennis, and there is more evidence to suggest that outdoor pickleball be directed to parks that are larger and can ensure setbacks anywhere from 50 to 100 metres of adjacent residences.

[2] Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan. 2024. Prepared by SGL. p.32, 39

The City made an excellent choice in selecting Burgoyne Woods for the eight dedicated pickleball courts, effectively creating a hub for play that has parking and is set back from homes. To address the needs for 14 additional courts using a 1:5,000 target, the City should replicate this model by establishing two pickleball hubs that contain 6 courts respectively while the remaining two courts would be addressed at Fairview Park. With Burgoyne Woods adequately serving residential areas in south St. Catharines, the two proposed hubs would ideally maximize geographic distribution by situating one hub in the central part of the City and the other in the north.

Locations in the central and north are less apparent given that the areas are largely built-out, which limits the future park developments, and there are only a few larger parks found there. The City should undertake a review of existing and potential properties capable of accommodating pickleball hubs which could also include properties in industrial / commercial areas since research finds that many pickleball players are willing to drive.

These outdoor pickleball hubs will complement the City's indoor facilities that offer drop-in play, providing greater options for year-round activity.

Capital Implications

The RFPP does not identify the need to develop new tennis courts but rather emphasizes repair and replacement activities identified through Parks Renewal Plan which specifies $2 million in funding requirements over the next 10 years.

The City allocated $900,000 towards the eight pickleball courts at Burgoyne Woods in 2026. Based on this cost, two new pickleball hubs with 18 dedicated courts are estimated at $2,000,000 (note: Burgoyne Woods pickleball courts are not included in the RFPP capital implications as it is an approved project with expected completion this year).

Tennis & Pickleball Court Development Strategy

- Carry out renewal activities to tennis courts as identified in the Parks Renewal Plan, targeting a minimum of one tennis court location per year beginning with Guy Road Park and Joe Kushner Park.

- Establish two pickleball hubs containing 6 dedicated courts at each. Site should be identified through a more fulsome review of municipally-owned properties and potential park acquisitions.

Basketball & Multi-Use Courts

The City's 27 multi-use courts are primarily designed for basketball but in some instances are also conducive to ball hockey and other hard surface court activities. The City has built five new courts over the past 10 years and the resulting geographic distribution shows strong coverage, particularly to the south of the QEW (Figure 7).

Court Renewal is Vital

The City's Parks Renewal Plan outlines a capital strategy to renew aging basketball courts and other facilities. There are 18 basketball courts identified to be in poor condition, and means that two out of every three municipal basketball courts need renewal in the short-term.

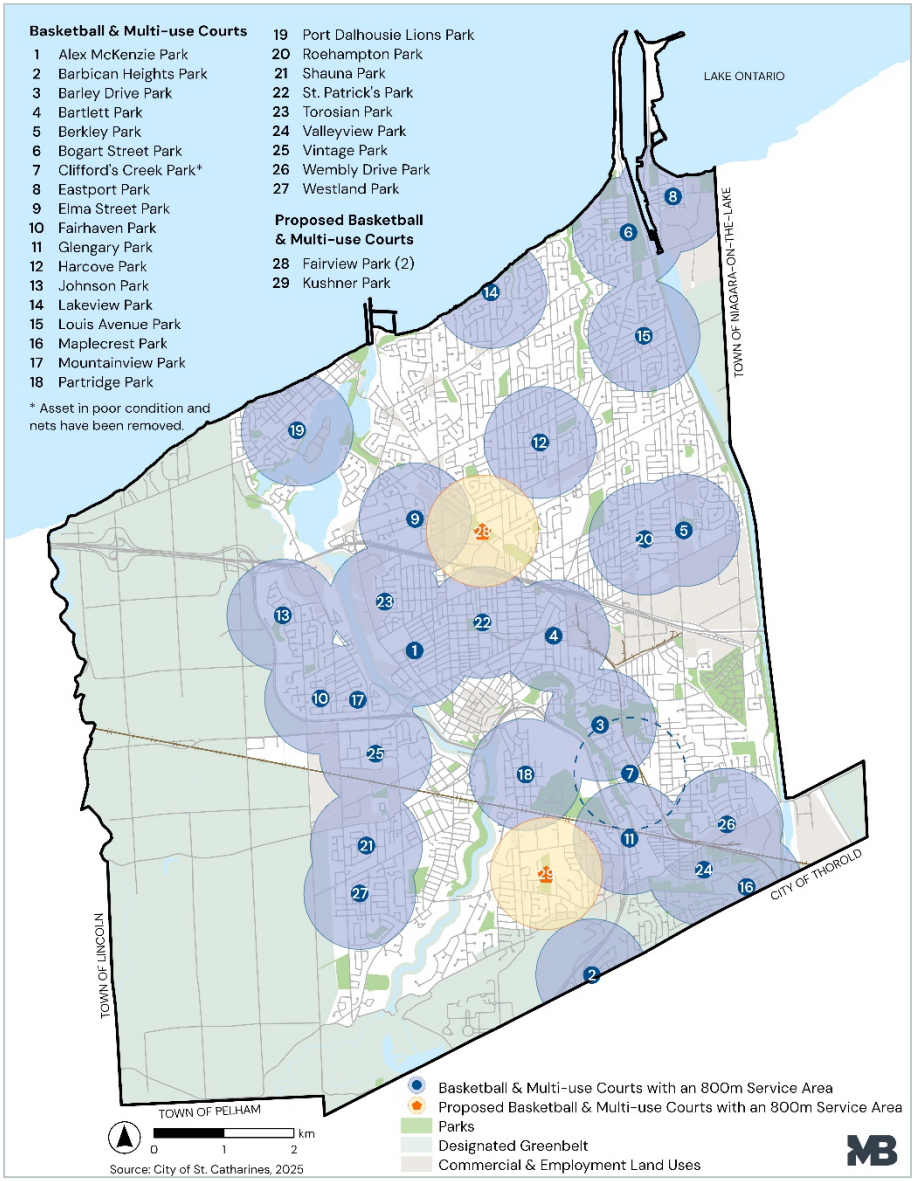
Clifford's Creek Park is an example of a court in St. Catharines that is unusable where poor court conditions are to a point where its nets were removed. Other courts that are in notably poor condition include those at Barbican Heights Park and Lakeview Park.

Provide New Courts at Fairview Park & Joe Kushner Park

St. Catharines service level translates into one basketball court per 540 youth between the ages of 10 and 19, which is appropriate in relation to its historical standard of one court per 800 youth. The focus moving forward should be to ensure courts are available within reasonable distance of residential areas given that youth walk or use other forms of active transportation to access courts.

The Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan identifies two multi-use courts which will strengthen access north of the QEW while building a court at Joe Kushner Park would address a gap in Glendale and service infill developments along Glendale Avenue.

Figure 7: Existing & Proposed Multi-Use Courts in St. Catharines



Capital Implications

The Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan identifies a capital cost of $350,000 for two multi-use courts. Assuming a more basic level of finish at Joe Kushner Park, $90,000 could be allocated to court construction at that location. In addition, the Parks Renewal Plan identifies $1.6 million in funding for basketball court replacements to the year 2031.

Basketball & Multi-Use Court Development Strategy

- Carry out renewal activities to basketball courts as identified in the Parks Renewal Plan, targeting three courts per year beginning with Harcove Park, Barbican Heights Park and Lakeview Park.

- Construct basketball courts at Fairview Park and Joe Kushner Park.

Skateboard Parks & Pump Tracks

Adjacent to the Seymour-Hannah Sports & Entertainment Centre is the City's sole skateboard park, which also allows other wheeled action sports such as BMX biking, skateboarding, rollerblading, and scootering.

Invest in a Skateboard Park & Pump Track North of the QEW

The Seymour-Hannah Skateboard Park has been in service for over 20 years. Since that time, wheeled action sports have grown mainstream and skate parks are now considered to be a core recreation facility. The popularity of skateboarding and BMX freestyle has grown global, which was seen during the 2024 Paris Olympics when representatives from several countries competed against one another on the world's biggest stage. Skateboard parks play an important role for young families as these facilities provide youth with adventurous ways to socialize and be physically active, as well as create safe environments for risk-taking which is critical for building skills, confidence, and resilience. Skateboarding is also not just for youth and teens as many young adults and adults enjoy this sport.

The City has historically targeted a provision level of one skateboard park per 7,500 youth between the ages of 10 and 19. With an estimated 14,000 youth living in St. Catharines at present along with skateboard parks having become part of core municipal facility portfolios, there is merit in considering a second such facility in the city. There have also been unauthorized skateboard and mountain bike trails built by people that suggests a degree of pent-up demand exists, and that a new municipal skatepark will potentially discourage encroachment into sensitive natural areas.

With youth having fewer transportation choices, spreading geographic coverage is a preferred strategy and suggests that the second skateboard park should be located north of the QEW. Fairview Park is a preferred location for the new skateboard park due to accessibility via transit, available space within the park, and the fact that it is located in a strategic growth corridor where infill and intensification activities will bring additional populations, including households with children and youth. The City has explored a skatepark and pump track through the Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan which demonstrated facility fit and community support as the most requested amenity during that visioning process.

Beginner-friendly Skate Spots are Important

Skate spots are a best practice that cities are adapting to encourage participation in wheeled action sports. These bring common elements of skate parks (i.e., rails, grind boxes, etc.) into neighbourhood parks, benefiting new and young participants residing in these areas with opportunities to try these activities at their convenience. Skate spots can also be incorporated in urban plazas by adding curbs and ledges that can be used for skate tricks, as space permits. Skate spots may also be appealing to experienced participants, as these elements provide access throughout the city to practice tricks. Since children/youth typically rely on active transportation to travel, a wider distribution of small skate spots throughout the city will make skateboarding more accessible.

Capital Implications

The Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan identifies a capital cost of $5.6 million for the skateboard park and pump track.

Skateboard Park Development Strategy

- Construct a skateboard park and pump track at Fairview Park by the year 2030.

Playgrounds

The City has 72 parks with playgrounds that employ different designs depending on age groups being served and the park's catchment area. Playgrounds were one of the most used facilities in St. Catharines and were one of the top priorities for investment among community survey respondents.

Playgrounds are Well Distributed

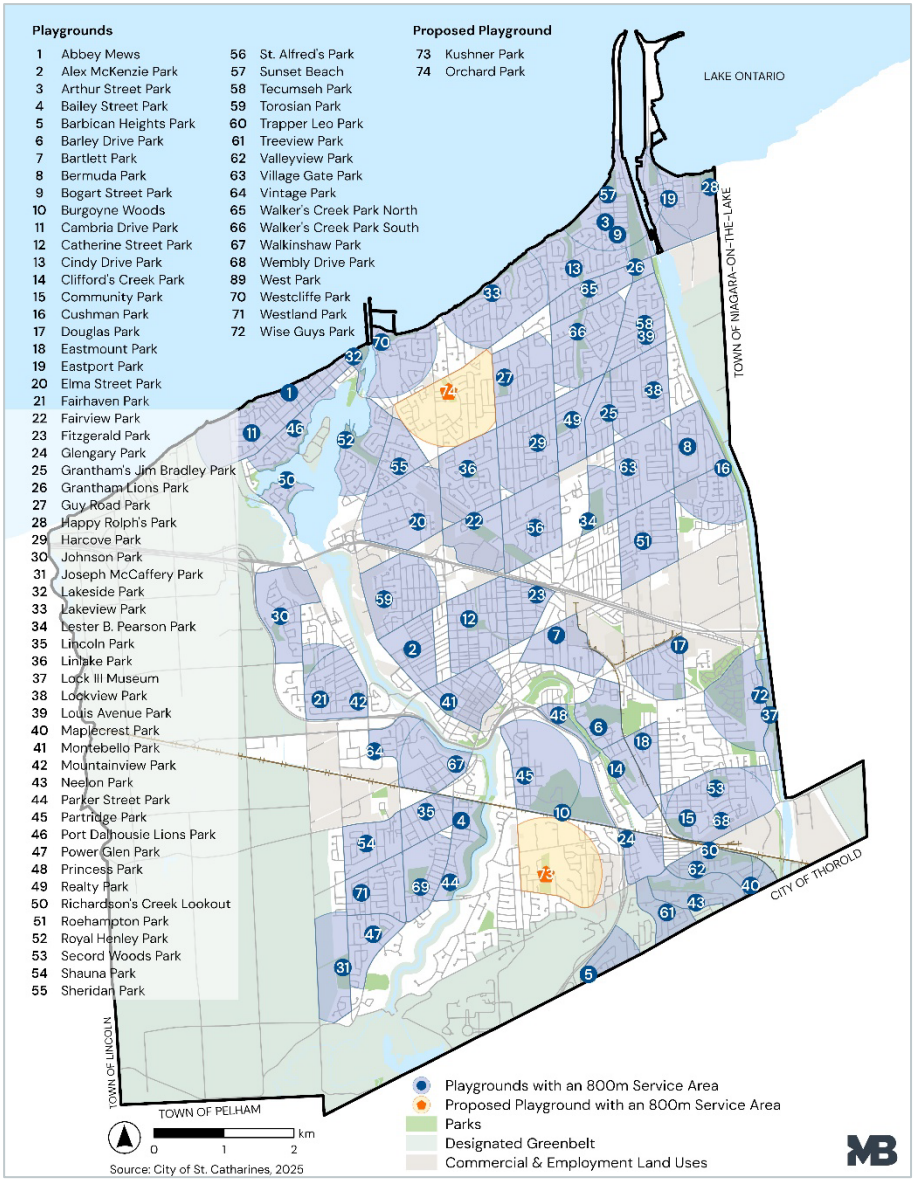
Most residential areas in St. Catharines are within a 10-minute walk of a playground, even after factoring pedestrian barriers such as major roads, railways, and natural hazards (see Figure 8). While there are some geographic service gaps, many have schools in these areas which supplement municipal provision outside of school hours.

The most notable gap is in Glenridge where a playground should be built at Joe Kushner Park as well as a gap in the north that could be reconciled with a play structure at Orchard Park. Other opportunities to address gaps in the city could include providing a playground in the Downtown area as part of the Civic Square Design Study, incorporating playgrounds into privately owned publicly accessible spaces (POPs) in new developments, and integrating a playground into the redevelopment of the Queen Elizabeth Centre.

A Sustainable Playground Replacement Strategy

Many of the playgrounds in St. Catharines are aging and need replacements. The Parks Renewal Plan identifies 47 playgrounds that are in poor condition, amounting to two out of every three locations, that require short-term attention. Another 13 playgrounds will require replacement within the RFPP planning horizon, thus necessitating a total of 60 renewals by the year 2035.

Figure 8: Existing & Proposed Playgrounds



The City has averaged between one and two playground renewals per year since 2019, a rate would need to be increased substantially. Targeting a minimum of four playground renewals per year will help bring play structures to a modern standard but also set in motion a fiscally sustainable replacement strategy for the future whereby renewals can be staggered, and avoid situations where the majority of assets require replacement at the same time.

As part of the City's Parks Renewal Strategy, all new and replacement playgrounds must follow the City's Facility Accessibility Design Standards (FADS), updated to align with the national standard for children's play spaces. Because many existing playgrounds were built before these guidelines, they do not reflect today's accessibility requirements. Playground budgets include hard-surface pathways so children and caregivers who use mobility devices can reach the equipment. Increasing the pace of playground renewal would help ensure more playgrounds become accessible for residents with disabilities.

Capital Implications

The capital cost is estimated to be $600,000 for two new playgrounds at Joe Kushner Park while the Parks Renewal Plan identifies $11.2 million in funding for playground replacements to the year 2031.

Playground Development Strategy

- Carry out renewal activities to playgrounds as identified in the Parks Renewal Plan, targeting a minimum of four playgrounds per year.
- Construct new playgrounds at Joe Kushner Park and Orchard Park.
- Investigate opportunities to add playgrounds in the downtown and central areas of St. Catharines, including by exploring use of privately-owned public spaces.