Section 4: ACTIVE LIVING

This section contains analysis and recommendations relating to programs and activities.

Goal 1: ACTIVE LIVING

We will support and promote opportunities for active living. This will be achieved through unstructured and structured experiences that encourage regular physical activity and healthy aging.

Strategic Directions:

a. Foster active living through structured and unstructured activities that improve physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

b. Make parks and facilities walkable and accessible by residents through active transportation and connections to public transit.

c. Support programming that encourages introductory skill development, interaction, and community building.

The City of London strives to provide parks, recreation, and sport programs that introduce residents to new activities, encourage physical activity, and strengthen physical literacy. By facilitating access to high quality programs and spaces, the City of London can make sure that residents have access to the services they need to make healthy choices that will enhance individual and community wellbeing. The review of City programs and services revealed a high level of satisfaction with the quality and variety of these opportunities.

Sharpening our Focus

The following primary areas require continued focus for the duration of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan:

a. Increasing the frequency, duration, and intensity of physical activity for the general population; and,

b. Increasing participation and offering a broad range of programs and services to all residents.

Making the case for an aligned and collective approach to maximizing the intensity, duration, and frequency of physical activity through introductory programming will serve residents well. Making physical activity the easy choice should be the continued focus of the City and all related stakeholders.
Physical Activity

There is an increasing body of knowledge that supports the personal and societal benefits of participation in active endeavours including all forms of physical activity. It is well known that combining regular physical activity with proper dietary habits helps to form healthy lifestyles that contribute to a host of physical, social, and physiological benefits. Recreation and sport participation and physical activity are increasingly seen as health promotion tools in the fight against some of the most significant illnesses of the 21st century like heart disease, obesity, and diabetes.

Consistent with Canadian Sport for Life Model (CS4L), recreation providers play an integral role in developing physical literacy in children and youth, as well as promoting lifelong physical activity for all residents. Because many different institutions, agencies, and groups are involved in delivering sports and physical activity programs, CS4L recommends that recreational, educational, and sport clubs coordinate their efforts to prepare residents to have the skills to be more active in a safe manner. Physical literacy is integrated into programs and activities for all ages. Under the CS4L framework, recreation providers work together with organizations to introduce and promote physical literacy for all ages and abilities.

The goal of municipal recreation providers is to introduce various leisure pursuits to promote exposure to physical activity and sports, creative pursuits, and general interest programs. This in turn exposes residents to various opportunities generally at an introductory level and encourages people to try new activities and reap the benefits of participation. A review of the City of London’s Recreation Guide found that there is a broad range of opportunities for all age groups and abilities.

Staff regularly review registration statistics, reassess programs with low registration, and add new programs and opportunities to respond to trends and community needs. For example, the development of the Act-i-Pass program with other community recreation providers offers free activities for students in Grade 5 to promote engagement in recreation. The creativity in developing new programs is what program staff pride themselves in. The range of programs offered in London is intentional. An emphasis is placed on programs and clinics on the environment, science, and technology to respond to a growing need to ensure that young people are exposed to broader opportunities, can think more globally, and consider careers in these areas.

The Master Plan’s public engagement process yielded suggestions for additional drop-in programs, a greater variety of activities for older adults and seniors, adult sport leagues, and opportunities to connect with nature and optimize park use year-round. There were also suggestions for intergenerational opportunities and opportunities to increase physical literacy through the built environment. Recreation practitioners need to be nimble to respond to emerging needs and address critical social issues. City of London staff remain vigilant in determining new interests and monitoring participation rates in the range of opportunities by age group.

It is important to annually assess the number of people participating in recreational pursuits by age group, often referred to as the penetration or participation rate. This is typically measured by determining the percentage of the population (or age subset) that is registered in direct programs and engaged in casual pursuits. Staff have measured the location of program participants (to determine how far participants travel to engage in recreation pursuits) as well as participation in some sports and seniors’ activities. These data are intended to provide a high-level benchmark as some residents register in more than one program in each year. While there is no industry benchmark as each community is different, measuring participation rates year-to-year provides useful indicators locally and may identify gaps. The goal is to attain as much participation as possible given facility space and fiscal sustainability goals. All efforts must be taken to increase this participation rate to ensure that the health outcomes within the general population are positive ones.

Other methods may also be used to determine the effectiveness of the parks, recreation, and sport programs and services. Understanding quality assurance measures, legislative compliance, and participant satisfaction levels will offer a broader view. Once the rates are understood, staff can develop realistic and achievable targets in increasing participation. The City is encouraged to work with other providers to understand participation figures and the degree to which the participation rate extends beyond City-delivered programs.
Casual and unstructured opportunities to be active are proving to be most popular. Walking, hiking, cycling throughout the city, dropping into a community centre to play in the gym, and using park spaces to master new skills on one’s own time are popular in terms of participation. The City of London has recognized this trend and offers the loan of large-scale games for residents to use for family picnics and gatherings. Many municipalities are also increasing daytime and unstructured use of gymnasiums by allowing residents to use them through independent or self-organized play outside of program times. Other promising examples that help to keep residents outside and active longer include sand/dirt hills that allow children and the general public to climb, build, and explore, as well as supports that can be used for slacklines (balancing sports).

Active Living

Active living is critical to individual and community wellbeing – it reduces the risk of chronic disease, enhances physical and mental health, and brings residents together. It is about working together to create places where active transportation, physical activities, and play are integral parts of everyday life.

Accessibility and affordability are essential to providing opportunities to be active in neighbourhoods and on the way to work, school, or play. To achieve maximum benefit, active living should be integrated into daily routines, such as walking to the store or bus stop or taking the stairs. Supporting safe, connected, and healthy neighbourhoods requires collaboration with internal and external stakeholders.

The City is mindful that policy decisions, community design, service delivery, and education initiatives impact public health and peoples’ abilities to make active lifestyle choices. Convenient, safe, and connected walking and cycling routes are at the core of promoting active living. Aside from specific infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians, the way neighborhoods and communities are built affects walkability and levels of activity. The notion of making “the healthy choice the easy choice” is supported by several City of London plans and strategies, such as the Age Friendly Action Plan, London ON Bikes Cycling Master Plan, London’s Child and Youth Agenda, London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy, and more.

Note: See Section 6 “Connecting People and Nature” for more on recreational trails and pathways, which are key components of London’s active transportation system.

Note: For definitions of Park types refer to the London Plan - Parks and Recreation, for Natural Heritage definitions refer to The London Plan – Environmental Policies. Further definitions are available in By-Law No. PR-2, A By-law relating to use, protection and regulation of Public Parks and Recreation Areas in the City of London.

Active Aging

The City of London will experience an increase in the number of older adults (55 years and older) over the course of the next two decades. It is anticipated that the number of older adults will increase by 34,400 residents between 2021 and 2041. While the City’s population will also rise during this time period, older adults will account for about 45% of the growth.

The current service delivery approach for older adult services includes a “hub and spoke” model of facilities, anchored by two seniors’ community centres and supported by seniors’ satellites across the city. The model includes programming and casual opportunities offered directly by the City, as well programs and services offered by older adult clubs. Demand will likely increase as the population expands and the City will need to be prepared. In 2017, older adults registered in 13,500 program opportunities of the 16,500 opportunities offered (with an 82% fill rate). Public spaces provided to older adult clubs may also need to be reviewed as demand changes.
Recommendations

Physical Activity, Active Living, and Active Aging

1. Continue to embrace a **strength based service delivery and program role** that maximizes access by leveraging contributions from the full range of providers. Programs provided by the City of London will continue to emphasize physical activity and physical literacy for residents of all ages and abilities through registered and drop in opportunities.

2. Expand the variety, frequency, location, and promotion of **drop in programs** through the use of community centres, neighbourhood locations, and parks. Develop a strategy to identify, administer, and evaluate drop in programming that responds to changing demographics and diversity.

3. Offer more **family recreation opportunities** to meet the needs of newcomers and minority groups (including more intergenerational opportunities and options for children ages 0-2 years) and to help foster lifelong participation.

4. Work with the Child and Youth Network priority area leads to explore options for integrating **physical literacy and new physical activity elements** into the built environment, such as incorporating literacy decals, murals, etc. into community centres.

5. Explore how to best meet the increasing demands and unique needs of **older adults**. Meet with partners such as the Huff N’ Puff Seniors Fitness Association and other organizations to explore needs/plans moving forward, including the exploration of a **therapeutic line of programming** with community partners.

6. Continue to review **program participation data** to make informed decisions about program development by age group and location through the establishment of participation targets.

7. **Work together with other service providers and stakeholders** to understand and address overall participation rates and gaps in parks, recreation, and sport pursuits in London.