Section 5: INCLUSION AND ACCESS

This section contains analysis and recommendations to access and equity.

Goal 2: INCLUSION & ACCESS

We will remove barriers to participation by adopting a model of “access for all”. This will be achieved by welcoming and including all residents.

Strategic Directions:

a. Work collaboratively with populations that face constraints to participation – such as (but not limited to) Indigenous peoples, newcomers to Canada, residents with low income backgrounds, LGBTQ2S+ community, females, and persons with disabilities – to reduce and remove barriers.

b. Support diversity and inclusion by evaluating proposals, policies, and actions through an equity and gender lens.

c. Provide, promote, and enhance subsidy programs that improve affordability for all.

d. Increase the range of low- and no-cost programs within the city.

e. Promote the use of parks and public spaces.

f. Promote the use of trails and pathways in a way that protects significant features and functions.

g. Implement age friendly design standards and planning strategies that improve accessibility for all.

The City plays an active and important role in providing community access to parks, recreation, and sport opportunities and is committed to initiatives and community-based projects that are consistent with its vision, mission, and values.
Providing Access for All

Increased access to parks, recreation, and sport services improves individual, social, and economic wellbeing. The City is committed to providing:

- A full range of opportunities that reduce barriers and support all Londoners to feel engaged and involved in our community.
- Access to programs and activities for persons of all ages and abilities.

Services and spaces that are accessible to diverse communities, and people of all ages and abilities will create healthier individuals and a stronger community. The City strives to offer programs, parks, and facilities that can be used by all, but challenges still exist. Common barriers include costs, transportation, design and built environment, communication and awareness, and need for child care.

“It’s all about Participation!” These are the first words articulated in London’s Recreation Guide. This paragraph is followed by information on the Financial Assistance Policy to ensure that finances are not a barrier to participation in recreation programs and services. This is a clear demonstration that the City places importance on including all residents in a broad range of inclusive parks, recreation, and sport services.

It is vital that all residents can make easy choices to join in casual or formal activities and reap the benefits of participation. The simple – but big – idea is to reduce barriers that residents may face in accessing parks, recreation, and sport opportunities. In the past, this emphasis on barrier reduction has largely focussed on residents from low income backgrounds and persons with disabilities. Efforts to implement barrier-free park and facility designs, translate materials and signage into predominant languages, provide program assistance to residents with disabilities, deliver specialized programming, and offer recreation subsidy programs for low income residents are proving to be successful.

Residents expect exceptional customer service within universally barrier-free facilities. Accessible spaces and affordable services enable people to maintain or improve their health and wellbeing through all of their life stages. This is an increasingly important consideration given health trends that indicate an aging population, decreased mobility, and increased physical and mental illnesses.
Municipalities and other providers are now expanding their efforts to include other under-represented populations to ensure full inclusion. There is a clear distinction between “equality” (providing all residents the same opportunities regardless of their backgrounds) and “equity” (taking differing approaches to include under-represented residents).

More amenities that support people of all ages will be needed, including accessible, age friendly park and facility designs, as well as inclusive programming led by qualified instructors. The City must continue to adapt its spaces to serve people of all ages and backgrounds, setting priorities based on community input, demographics, utilization, and design factors.

**Key Tools and Practices for Inclusion**

The size and range of under-represented groups in London is growing, along with their needs. Ensuring **equitable access to parks, recreation, and sport services** is a vital role for all municipalities. For the City of London, this means continuing to:

- Develop baseline policies that state the commitment of the City and staff to include all residents regardless of backgrounds;
- Ensure that the makeup of staff and volunteers reflect the community that they serve;
- Provide staff and volunteers with adequate training to understand the needs of under-represented populations and the barriers that they face;
- Provide staff and volunteers with adequate training to address emerging behavioural, emotional, and cognitive needs of children and residents of all ages;
- Guide staff in considering diverse populations in the development, delivery, and evaluation of all programs and services;
- Engage diverse populations as services are reviewed and new ones developed;
- Develop partnerships, sponsorships, and donation programs to maximize resources;
- Attract youth from diverse backgrounds to engage in leadership training to become employment-ready for parks, recreation, and sport opportunities;
- Execute visual audits of parks, facilities, and programs to ensure that participation is reflective of the community makeup;
- Develop internal staff inclusion and equity committees to ensure that there is the capacity and readiness to include under-represented populations;
- Provide programs to teach an introduction to traditional Canadian sports and opportunities; and,
- Work with diverse populations to offer their own traditional sports and activities to all residents.
Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous awareness, recognition, understanding, and reconciliation are addressed through a number of sectoral documents, such as Parks for All (2017 Parks Canada Agency on behalf of the Canadian Parks Council and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association) and the calls to action identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. All communities have a role to play in recognizing the importance of Indigenous voices in parks, recreation, and sport. For example, many municipalities are showcasing Indigenous history through public art and plaques in community centres and parks, along with exploring programs and events reflective of First Nations sports and culture.

Indigenous Peoples: Truth and Reconciliation

The following Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) relate to “Sports and Reconciliation” and are applicable to all levels of government:

87. We call upon all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, sports halls of fame, and other relevant organizations, to provide public education that tells the national story of Aboriginal athletes in history.

88. We call upon all levels of government to take action to ensure long-term Aboriginal athlete development and growth, and continued support for the North American Indigenous Games, including funding to host the games and for provincial and territorial team preparation and travel.

Through this Master Plan and other initiatives (e.g., London’s Community Diversity and Inclusion Strategy), the City of London has shown leadership in reaching out to Indigenous peoples to better understand their needs and take concrete steps towards healing and reconciliation. These initiatives are in their initial stages and must demonstrate commitment over the long-term.
Persons with Disabilities

The 2012 Canadian Survey on Disability reported that approximately 3.8 million Canadians were living with a disability, equating to 13% of the population (1). Locally, the City estimates that approximately one in five residents have some form of disability (2), which would amount to over 80,000 residents.

The City of London is committed to providing quality goods, services, and facilities that are accessible to all and in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities. The City is committed to working with the community to meet the needs of persons with disabilities by preventing and removing barriers to accessibility in customer service, information and communication, employment, the design of public spaces, and transportation. The City is also committed to meeting the requirements of applicable legislation, including the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Human Rights Code.

Specific to parks, recreation, and sport, the City offers a range of services to ensure that persons with disabilities can engage in leisure activities, with guidance from the Accessibility Advisory Committee. For example, staff work directly with residents with disabilities to integrate them into programs/camps and provide the needed supports. Greater prominence and information on inclusive services was suggested by stakeholders, such as listing this information within the initial pages of the Recreation Guide and advertising the accessible features at all parks and facilities. In addition, specific opportunities for persons with disabilities are offered (e.g., Wheelchair Tennis) and other opportunities are provided in partnership with organizations supporting residents with disabilities. Ensuring that trails and pathways are accessible to all is one of the goals expressed by residents through the Master Plan’s engagement program.

Note: Unless otherwise noted, matters relating to barrier-free accessibility and AODA built environment requirements are addressed in Section 7 “Supportive Environments”.

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Residents with Low Income

The City of London recognizes that addressing affordability will likely increase participation in programs and services. Access to most outdoor spaces, parks, trails, and pathways is free, as are many programs and events. The City’s Financial Assistance Policy (“Play Your Way” fund) offers financial support to low income Londoners who wish to access recreation programs and activities offered by the City of London. A maximum of $300 per person is available for a 12-month period to eligible recipients (as of 2019). The City also offers a range of free and low-cost programs and services to ensure that there is universal access to parks, recreation, and sport opportunities. The City works with others such as the London Public Library system which provides information and assistance to allow residents to apply for recreation subsidies. With an annual contribution of over $1 million, the effectiveness of the Play Your Way fund should be reviewed to understand the participation rate of the number of residents with low income and work towards a participation target. The delivery of services at the neighbourhood level is also a successful model for serving low income residents and those with transportation barriers.

Newcomers

Approximately one-fifth (22%) of residents in London are immigrants and it is anticipated that the number of newcomers will increase. London’s Community Diversity and Inclusion Strategy demonstrates the City’s commitment to ensure that residents feel engaged and welcomed in the community.

Making newcomers feel welcome is paramount, as is delivering appropriate program types. Some residents from other countries not only participate in different sport and activities, but also use public space differently, often with a greater focus on socializing. The City strives to welcome all residents within its parks and facilities through comfortable public spaces and high quality customer service. Building relationships with diverse communities and cultural groups also pays dividends in promoting understanding, enhancing access, and improving participation.

LGBTQ2S+ and Gender

Recreation departments play a role in welcoming members of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Trained staff and safe spaces encourage members of this community to engage in leisure pursuits. Safe and positive spaces to gather and recreate can assist this community with respect to freedom of expression. Many municipalities include the LGBTQ2S+ community in developing programs and services of interest to ensure that programs and partnerships are meaningful.

Female participation in parks, recreation, and sport pursuits declines as girls reach adolescence. Uninterrupted engagement is important in ensuring that females can embrace active lifestyles through the life course, and becomes a way of life. Further, due to cultural values some females prefer “women-only” experiences. This barrier to participation has been addressed by the City of London and other providers through a variety of ways, such as leadership opportunities, sport leagues, and more. A review of participation may assist in ensuring that the number of females in recreation and sport pursuits is reflective of the percentage of the general population.

Homeless Prevention and Belonging

The City of London has shown leadership in setting out to prevent homelessness and providing supports for the homeless population. The City also facilitates sports leagues such as baseball and floor hockey for the homeless community. Parks, recreation, and sport also plays a supporting role to stakeholder groups who provide services to this community. Participation in recreation and sport provides homeless residents with encouragement, increased physical activity levels, and confidence through skill development. Promising practices in other municipalities include similar active pursuits, parks ambassador programs, and community garden plots for the homeless. London should continue to work with other service providers to augment supports through leisure activities that offer encouragement and positive outcomes. Thoughtful park and facility design - with consideration of CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles - also enhances comfort, safety, and security.
Recommendations

Inclusion and Access

8. As the City grows, continue to expand low and no cost program initiatives. Continued research and engagement at the neighbourhood level is necessary to identify areas that will benefit the most from these initiatives.

9. Reach out to Indigenous people and organizations to:
   a) Undertake regular and meaningful engagement on matters of importance related to parks, recreation programs, sport services, and facilities;
   b) Explore new partnerships for including Indigenous programming in the Recreation Guide;
   c) Explore how to best ensure Indigenous peoples feel welcomed in programs and community centres;
   d) Target casual staff recruitment efforts through Indigenous organizations to increase the diversity in London’s leadership staff; and,
   e) Identify how parks, recreation, and sport can support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action.

10. Work with under represented populations to: identify participation rates in parks, recreation, and sport; remove barriers to participation; and, establish appropriate participation targets.

11. Expand our reach to newcomer populations by:
   a) Focusing on staff recruitment efforts and leadership development to increase the diversity of the staff team;
   b) Increasing the variety of recreational opportunities that are appropriate for various ethnocultural groups; and
   c) Translating promotional materials into predominant languages.

12. Expand programs and services for the special needs population, with a focus on increasing physical activity options for school aged children with special needs.

13. Expand staff training around accessibility, including sensitivity training sessions.

14. Expand gender diversity/LGBTQ2S+ inclusion by utilizing consistent signage at all centres and using the Ontario Human Rights Code and experts in the region to inform the staff training programs.

15. Evaluate the balance of female participation by age cohort in all direct, casual, community, and stakeholder-driven sport opportunities in London.

Note: Unless otherwise noted, matters relating to barrier-free accessibility and AODA built environment requirements are addressed in Section 7 “Supportive Environments”.