Section 8: RECREATION CAPACITY

This section contains analysis and recommendations relating to the following topics service excellence, sport services, and partnerships.

Goal 5: RECREATION CAPACITY

We will deliver exceptional parks, recreation, and sport services. This will be achieved through the use of effective and responsive practices, partnerships, innovation, leadership, and accountability at all levels.

Strategic Directions:

a. Demonstrate leadership and service excellence in the management of quality parks, facilities, programs, and services.

b. Adopt evidenced-based continuous improvement models in the delivery of service.

c. Respond to a changing community through continued professional development and training.

d. Seek out partnership and community relationship opportunities that maximize benefits to Londoners.

e. Work with community partners to create a sustainable sport development model.

f. Promote alignment between the Master Plan and other community strategies and initiatives.
8.1 Leading in Public Service

The City of London staff in Parks and Recreation and Neighbourhood, Children, and Fire Services have historically been leaders in striving for service excellence. This involves making a commitment to providing services at a higher standard through an integrated approach.

Figure 8: Service Excellence in the Delivery of Service

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading in Public Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture of Innovation and Service Excellence</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Developing a Culture of Innovation and Service Excellence: One way to signal to an organization that a positive culture is important and that staff play a significant role in building a high performing public service is to define service excellence in a local context and continually build on its application.

Resident-Driven Services: The needs of residents are central to the success of the parks, recreation, and sport service delivery model in London. The development of this Master Plan has engaged the voice of residents – as do all ongoing efforts to develop and refine programs and services. The analysis of participation rates, satisfaction levels, and ad hoc groups to study key issues and under-represented resident populations are methods utilized to keep services nimble and reflective of current trends and the needs of all residents.

Staff Excellence: Engagement and empowerment allow staff to thrive in a supportive and innovative culture. Guiding principles and a strong departmental culture require discussion and clarification. While actions to support staff excellence are generally implied, occasional conversations with staff are necessary to provide opportunities to clarify expectations, identify needed training, and recognition of exceptional public service. A large portion of the staff who deliver these parks, recreation, and sport programs and services are casual or part-time and there is a challenge in continually engaging and supporting them as their terms and hours vary. Efforts are made during training and meeting opportunities to strengthen input and react to identified issues.

Quality Assurance Frameworks: Most of Ontario’s municipalities offer or enable parks, recreation, and sport opportunities through direct and indirect programming models. Residents should be able to anticipate an emphasis on quality assurance in service delivery. Providing services to hundreds of thousands of users requires standard policies and practices that not only ensure that legislative requirements are met, but also a level of assurance that customer service and quality standards are key service delivery drivers.

The two key phases of the quality assurance framework centre on: HIGH FIVE Quest 1 (to train relevant staff and volunteers and test policies, procedures, communications, and adherence to practices); and Quest 2 (a program assessment and improvement tool). London is involved in the HIGH FIVE quality assurance program, which ensures that children’s programs are age-appropriate, meet safety and supervisory needs, are enjoyable, and offer some skill mastery. This quality assurance program has recently been extended to older adult programming (Active Aging).

High Utilization and Satisfaction Levels: Measuring excellence in the delivery of service is generally assessed by examining satisfaction levels and use of services, which are intentional approaches assessing effectiveness and gaps. Quantified data can support defining refined approaches based on satisfaction levels and/or utilization and participation rates in each program and service. Practitioners apply these quality standards as part of their regular attention to duty and consider new approaches as appropriate.

The City of London takes a proactive approach in evaluating programs and services through program evaluations and conducting surveys to identify...
strengths and gaps. Improving quality of service delivery continues to be required as the population changes and an annual review can place emphasis on areas where service improvements are needed.

**Performance Measures:** Measuring performance allows an organization to quantify various elements of service delivery to demonstrate if progress is being made toward intended outcomes. In a municipal setting there is a need to demonstrate to the public that the investment of tax dollars is allocated toward worthwhile ends and that these investments are utilized efficiently and effectively. This data provides the information needed to complete an analysis and to ensure that program decisions are knowledge-based. At a higher level (department or program) performance is measured by collecting data on inputs, outputs, efficiencies, and effectiveness. These data can also be utilized to compare levels of service year-to-year and develop initiatives to demonstrate continued improvement. To assist with comparisons to other large municipalities, the City of London is a member of MBN Canada.

**Costing and Pricing of Programs and Services:** The Master Plan survey indicated that 80% of respondents feel that City programs are affordable. This is a positive indication that the City has been mindful of their costs and recovering a reasonable percentage of costs levied through user fees. Offering a balance of no fee/low fee programs enables universal access. The use of the Play Your Way financial assistance program ensures that all London residents can participate in recreation programs and pursuits without financial barriers. Nevertheless, a review of both fee/rates and the Play Your Way program are appropriate to make sure that participation is maximized and that financial barriers are addressed.
Recommendations

Leading in Public Service

103. To inform program and service provision, increase collaborative efforts with community groups and volunteers by:
   a. Continuing to collect feedback from neighbourhood groups about programs and services they want to see and use this feedback to inform program decisions;
   b. Working with new and partner organizations to fill gaps using a strength based delivery approach (organizations that focus on different abilities, markets, etc.);
   c. Identifying populations and neighbourhoods not currently accessing services and forming new program delivery relationships to jointly address those needs (e.g., targeted Leader in Training options, Indigenous program opportunities, etc.);
   d. Building leadership capacity within the community to support local initiatives and create strong neighbourhoods;
   e. Hosting regular forums with service providers and funders to identify and address potential improvements to customer service practices, the built environment, etc.; and,
   f. Regularly communicating the Master Plan priorities to internal and external partners to improve coordination, alignment, and implementation.

104. Undertake a review of the effectiveness of the Play Your Way financial assistance program and “Policy for waiving or reducing fees for use of city owned community centres and recreation facilities”, including opportunities to simplify the process to register for programs and apply for subsidy.
8.2 Sport Services

London has a thriving sport community made up of self-governing sport organizations, the City, Tourism London, and the London Sport Council. The sport system works collaboratively to ensure that infrastructure and allocation of space can adequately meet the current and future needs of sport participants.

The London Sport Council has specific responsibilities to oversee the fundraising efforts for KidSport and to allocate these funds to enable sport participation of children from low-income backgrounds. Further, the Sport Council organizes and hosts the Sports Hall of Fame dinner to recognize sport excellence and volunteer recognition in London. Tourism London works with the City and other partners to attract and retain sport competitions. The City plays a distinct role in sport development in the community, including the development and maintenance of sport facility infrastructure, allocation of space to groups, and the promotion of physical activity and sport participation. Several requests for additional support to the sport sector have emerged since the last Parks and Recreation Master Plan was developed. There is a need to develop a Sport Policy and Plan that articulates the City’s role in supporting this sector and that outlines strategies to increase participation in sport through the a safe, supportive, and inclusive sport environments.

London Sport Policy and Plan

The development of a successful Sport Policy and Plan relies on gaining an understanding of the needs, strengths, and challenges and mapping out a realistic and achievable course for the future. Creating performance measures and annual reporting around the goals of the Sport Policy and Plan will ensure that stakeholders and partners keep priorities in focus and continue to work cohesively toward the vision by each playing their part.

A strong local community sport system relies on role clarity, a league of volunteers and sport groups, promotion and communications, a continuum of sport opportunities, sound infrastructure, coordination, and celebration. London has been building a strong sport system over decades and continues to see the impressive benefit to residents, families, and the community.
The Municipal Role in Sport Delivery

Municipalities are one of the largest investors in Canada’s physical activity and sport infrastructure and are the owner/operators of most pools, quality sport fields, arenas, trail and bike systems, parks, and recreation centres. Parks and recreation departments provide or facilitate the introduction and delivery of sport programs for all age groups. The significance of the municipal role becomes even clearer when sport groups work together to define their contributions to the sport delivery system.

Local sport volunteer organizations look to municipalities as a primary partner along with provincial and national sport governing bodies. Municipalities are positioned to:

- Encourage active lifestyles through proactive introductory programming and indoor and outdoor facilities and open spaces;
- Develop policies and programs that emphasize accessibility to services whatever the age, gender, ability, or economic circumstances of the targeted participants;
- Facilitate discussions regarding safe, athlete-centred, and quality sport experiences;
- Bring partner organizations together to address community needs, assess the state of sport delivery, and monitor participation levels;
- Work directly with school boards and other institutions on joint venture development and common use of facilities agreements;
- Employ a variety of communication vehicles that promote active lifestyles, ensure a broad reach, and the ability to influence the general public; and,
- Measure the impact and outcomes that sport has on a community.

By placing a greater focus on promoting sport participation and active lifestyles, the City and stakeholders will enhance broader community goals around health and wellness. Bringing attention to the importance of sport participation and other healthy behaviours allows community partners to plan more effectively and carry out actions that have an even greater impact on the community at large.

Sport Tourism and Economic Impact

The economic impact of sporting events is usually one of the drivers of municipal engagement in sport tourism as municipalities typically ensure the coordination and execution of funding, bid development, and facility allocation. London is no different with the development of bids through Tourism London and the involvement of the City regarding logistics and other supports. The City seeks to find balance in its commitment to develop community-serving multi-purpose facilities and the requirement for specialized facilities to meet the needs of elite-level sport tourism.

Tourism Spending

In a recent report (September 2018) issued by the Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance (CSTA), it was stated that in 2017 the Canadian sport tourism industry reached $6.8 billion in total consumer spending an increase of 0.5% from 2016.

“Canada has a stellar reputation for our expertise in hosting summer and winter sports, with excellent facilities, organizational abilities, welcoming volunteers and strong hosting program financial support from both federal and provincial levels” said Rick Traer, CSTA CEO. “The data reflects the importance of sport tourism as a grassroots economic development initiative in communities across Canada and supports our #2 ranking as a Host Nation internationally.” Ontario received the highest visitation share in Canada at 37%.

Recommendations

105. Host a forum with all sport providers and stakeholder groups to discuss the merits of developing a London Sport Agreement as a commitment to engage collectively to develop a Sport Policy and Sport Plan for the City of London.
8.3 Partnerships

Achieving More by Working Together

The City of London seeks partnerships to advance services and initiatives in the most effective manner. A partnership in a municipal setting can be described as an arrangement to where the costs, resources and risks of providing services are shared between the City and an alternate provider or stakeholder group. Working together to advance an objective allows the sharing of ideas, funding, and human resources.

Partnerships are key to creating a versatile range of parks, recreation, and sport services in London. They allow the City to leverage outside resources and maximize public funds, while meeting gaps and needs that are not traditionally within the City’s mandate. Londoners have expressed a strong desire for more multi-sectoral partnerships that leverage resources, avoid duplication, accelerate innovation, and enhance user convenience.

The advantages of partnerships are many including cost containment, reduction of capital investments, specialized knowledge and possible initial start up investments. These advantages must be weighed against the ownership that the City sees as part of its core responsibilities. The risks must also be clear. All partnerships must be well structured and lead to efficiencies and effectiveness within the delivery of service. The same must be said of arrangements to work with other stakeholder groups to address key social issues within a City. While the risks are not as significant, the advantages of sharing resources offer more efficient means to the preferred outcome.

Partnerships have Helped London Create Community Destinations

The City actively supports opportunities to work with community groups, service providers, schools, and other levels of government to help fund parks, recreation, and sport projects with measurable impact. The Stoney Creek and Bostwick Community Centres are successful examples of this. Both facilities were built and managed in partnership with the City of London, YMCA of Southwestern Ontario, and London Public Libraries. They are municipal capital assets and serve as multi-functional community hubs that provide recreation and fitness programming through the YMCA, in addition to public library services. In neighbourhoods where the gathering places and programming space at City-owned sites are not achievable, stronger partnerships with the school boards, non-profit associations, private clubs, and other providers should be considered. Co-located facilities will be encouraged.

Another form of collaboration is the sponsorship, advertising, and naming rights program which is offered by the City to London. The programs provide an enhanced level of service through alternate funding mechanisms. The City has developed these programs and offers opportunities to the business community where there are likely benefits to residents in offering accessible programs and services and increasing visibility to businesses. Two such examples include the sponsorship of the Leader in Training Program by the Libro Credit Union and the sponsorship of free swim and skating opportunities by Tim Hortons. The opportunity to expand these programs will serve to provide greater parks, recreation, and sport activities for Londoners.
Working as a Collective with Other Providers and Municipalities

Communities in Ontario are building stronger relationships with other providers of parks, recreation, and sport services within their jurisdiction. This approach is imperative in a climate of increasing costs and declining resources. Results have proven to work toward common goals and address current social issues as well as to reduce duplication and share resources. "Integrated Service Delivery" is a term used to describe all related groups embracing a common vision and working together to realize better outcomes for the community.

Furthermore, approximately 78% of the London Census Metropolitan Area (which includes selected municipalities within the counties of Middlesex and Elgin) lives in the City of London. Many non-residents use parks, recreation, and sport services within the City of London, while some residents benefit from opportunities outside London. The proximity of other municipalities within the region provides an opportunity for partnerships in the delivery of parks, recreation, and sport.

While London does have relationships with many related providers and adjacent municipalities, more can be done to strengthen cohesiveness and positive community outcomes. Joint planning and coordination of assets provides residents with the best value for their tax dollars.
Recommendations

Partnerships

106. Expand and/or realign strategic partnership opportunities to further the directions of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan including (but not limited to) increasing physical activity, enhancing access for under represented and diverse populations, increasing outdoor play duration, strengthening diversity and inclusion, and increasing capacity for older adults and youth. Be proactive in partnership development through regular communication and establishment of a standardized framework and/or criteria to simplify and expedite partnership outcomes (see Appendix B).

107. Utilize the sponsorship, advertising, and naming rights program to capture an increased level of alternate funding to enhance parks, recreation and sport facilities, programs, and services.

108. Collaborate with school boards to identify opportunities to maximize community access to existing sites and future park/school campuses.

109. Collaborate with post secondary institutions to identify opportunities to maximize community access to existing and future sport facilities. Encourage opportunities to work together on the research and evaluation of community based approaches to prevailing issues in service delivery.

110. Support regional, provincial, and national initiatives that increase support for information sharing, research, and data collection.