

Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members
Community and Protective Services Committee

From: Cheryl Smith, Deputy City Manager, Neighbourhood and
Community-Wide Services

Kelly Scherr, Deputy City Manager, Environment and
Infrastructure

Subject: Parks and Recreation Master Plan Annual Report

Date: March 18, 2024

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Managers of Neighbourhood and Community-Wide Services and Environment and Infrastructure, the [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) Annual Report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Executive Summary

This report presents the City of London's third annual [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) report since the Plan was approved by City Council on June 25, 2019. It will serve as a summary of the Plan, including the vision and goals, provide highlights of 2023 accomplishments, and identifies key priorities and projects for 2024 that will continue to move the Plan forward.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

The [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) is aligned with the following Strategic Areas of Focus and outcomes in the City of London's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan:

- Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion – The City of London is a leader in becoming an equitable and inclusive community.
- Wellbeing and Safety - London has safe, vibrant, and healthy neighbourhoods and communities.
- Climate Action and Sustainable Growth – London's infrastructure and systems are built, maintained, and operated to meet the long-term needs of the community.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- [Parks and Recreation Master Plan Annual Report](#) (January 31, 2023)
- [Parks and Recreation Master Plan Annual Report](#) (March 29, 2022)
- [Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update](#) (June 17, 2019)

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Background and Purpose

The City of London offers high quality parks, open spaces, recreation programs, sport services, and facilities that engage residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. Parks, recreation, and sport play a significant role in community building through the facilitation of active and passive activities, opportunities for structured and spontaneous play, and strengthening of neighbourhood connections.

These services provide places for people of all ages and abilities to be active and learn new skills, connect with one another, share their interests, exchange ideas, and experience diversity. They also contribute to larger outcomes in the city, such as engaging children in active play, decreasing childhood obesity, poverty reduction, improved mental health, city building and the creation of healthy and safe neighbourhoods, economic health, sport tourism initiatives, environmental management and protection, connecting with and developing an appreciation of nature, cultural prosperity, and more.

The [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#), approved by City Council on June 25, 2019, provides overall vision, direction, and guidance for planning and making decisions about parks, open spaces, environmental management, recreation programs, sport services, and facilities. It is informed by public input and is aligned to local, provincial, and national policies, strategies, best practices, trends, demographics, and growth forecasts.

The Plan contains a series of recommendations, some of which refer to discrete projects or actions and others that provide ongoing and incremental guidance. In total, there are 119 recommendations aligned with five (5) overarching goals. Full implementation of the Plan will require ongoing community engagement, flexibility in approach, partnerships, and funding from a variety of sources.

The Master Plan has a timeframe of ten years (2019 to 2028) and includes a longer-term outlook for major capital projects to 2039.

The purpose of this report is to:

- a) Update City Council and the public on COVID-19 recovery in recreation and sport service delivery;
- b) Highlight accomplishments from 2023 against the Plan's goals and recommendations; and,
- c) Identify key priorities and projects for 2024 that will continue to move the Plan forward.

2.2 Parks and Recreation Master Plan Vision and Goals

Vision

In London, all residents – regardless of age, ability, culture, gender, income, or where they live – have the opportunity to participate and share in meaningful and accessible parks, recreation, and sport experiences.

Goals

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.

Goal #2 – Inclusion and 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.

Goal #3 – Connecting People and Nature:

We will strengthen residents' connections with their neighbourhoods and nature. This will be achieved through public awareness, neighbourhood-driven activities and decision-making, and opportunities to animate and enjoy London's outdoor spaces and places.

Goal #4 – Supportive Environments:

We will invest strategically in parks, recreation, and sport infrastructure to support the Master Plan goals. This will be achieved by responding to demonstrated community needs through the thoughtful design, delivery, and management of parks, facilities, and spaces.

Goal #5 – Recreation Capacity:

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

2.3 COVID-19 Recovery

Parks, recreation programs, sport services, and facilities were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Facility closures, program restrictions and capacity limits, increased demands on parkland/trail/pathway systems, and delays in planned capital works are all examples of this impact.

The following data points assist in quantifying both, the impact of COVID-19 on service delivery throughout 2020 and 2021, and the City of London's recovery trajectory, which now well exceeds pre-pandemic service levels, and represents record high numbers of participants, offerings, and utilization.

In future annual reports, this section will be focused more on Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), as opposed to COVID-19 impact or recovery.

Recreation Programs:

- 2019 – 74,411 total participants, 10,500 programs, 6,869 summer camp spaces
- 2020 – 23,077 total participants, 4,592 programs, 2,710 summer camp spaces
- 2021 – 18,864 total participants, 2,842 programs, 2,777 summer camp spaces
- 2022 – 71,028 total participants, 6,370 programs, 5,619 summer camp spaces
- 2023 -- 97,639 total participants, 8,955 programs, 6149 summer camp spaces

Aquatics:

- 2020 - 46,813 total participants, 1,690 registered programs, 5,756 drop-in sessions
- 2021 - 107,435 total participants, 1,387 registered programs, 8,238 drop-in sessions
- 2022 - 146,398 total participants, 3,088 registered programs, 7,560 drop-in sessions
- 2023 - 197,398 total participants, 3,209 registered programs, 9,992 drop-In sessions

*2019 Aquatics data unavailable at time of report production

Sport Services:

- 2019 – 36,905 hours allocated to groups for outdoor sports fields
- 2020 – 4,083 hours allocated to groups for outdoor sports fields
- 2021 – 18,044 hours allocated to groups for outdoor sports fields
- 2022 – 37,426 hours allocated to groups for outdoor sports fields
- 2023 – 39,018 hours allocated to groups for outdoor sports fields

Golf Services:

- 2019 – 104,667 rounds of golf played on City of London courses
- 2020 – 112,000 rounds of golf played on City of London courses
- 2021 – 110,550 rounds of golf played on City of London courses
- 2022 – 111,075 rounds of golf played on City of London courses
- 2023 – 120,295 rounds of golf played on City of London courses

2.4 Highlights of 2023 Accomplishments

The below chart is intended to capture high-level accomplishments from 2023. It should be noted that this list does not capture all day-to-day activities of the services provided that also further the Master Plan.

Goal	Accomplishments
Active Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 120,295 rounds of golf played in the municipal golf system. • 58,456 public skating participants and 3,725 Learn to Skate participants. • Huff N' Puff seniors sport and fitness programs fully returned to community centres, offering approximately 45 programs per week. • Provided 12 free senior events during seniors' month, and 144 free virtual senior programs. • 3 million+ visits to all recreation and sport facilities. • 500 hours of free opportunities added by increasing the variety, frequency, location, and promotion of programs. • 12 new fitness classes and 300 more participants added by expanding the partnership with the Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging (CCAC). • 2 million+ users of city operated trails and pathways. • Reintroduction of partner programs, such as, Swim to Survive and high school swimming. • 4,000+ visits during Statutory and Public Holiday free programming events and activities.
Inclusion and Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported 7,100 individuals accessing recreation opportunities through the Play Your Way financial assistance program. • Piloted sensory-friendly events at Storybook Gardens in partnership with Autism Ontario. • Offered free access to 5,254 children from June through August to Storybook Gardens on 'Festival Fridays', made possible by various sponsorships. • 70 approved applications through the Waiving or Reducing of Fees (WORF) program, representing 1,299 hours of recreation programming, which helps to reduce the cost of using recreational space if it proves to be a barrier. • Accessible washrooms installed at Labatt Park through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP). • In partnership with local Indigenous groups, undertook regular, and meaningful engagement on matters of importance related to parks, recreation programs, sport services, and facilities. • In partnership with N'Amerind Friendship Centre, facilitated 75 hours and 500 participants of recreational opportunities for Indigenous youth. • In partnership with the South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre, provided over 250 hours and 1,500 participants of recreational opportunities for newcomer youth and families. • Introduced a foodbank cupboard at Hamilton Road Seniors' Centre. • All Day Camp staff received targeted 2SLGBTQIA+ training to make camps more inclusive. • Seniors Centre and Seniors Satellite staff trained in dementia-friendly practices through a partnership with the Alzheimer Society. • All staff trained in mental health and suicide prevention strategies. • Completed a policy review and public education for the scattering of ashes and commenced upgrades to locations along the Thames River to support community gatherings.
Connecting People and Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognized by Provincial and Federal partners for leadership in invasive species management, efforts to keep parks, trails, and woodlands protected and safe. • Continued to support and expand London's provincially recognized recreational pathway system, bringing the total length of all pathways to 263.64 KM.

Goal	Accomplishments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed a paddling plan for the Thames Valley Corridor to improve access and ensure sustainable use. • Expanded outdoor recreation programming with new programs such as, Outdoor Explorers, snowshoeing, trail running and hiking programs.
Supportive Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed renovations to Silverwoods pool. • Installed an urban park at Thompson Ravine Park. • Installed tennis courts at Rowntree, Glanworth and Oakridge Optimist Park. • Installed a basketball court in Westbury Park. • Obtained funding through the Green and Inclusive Community Building (GICB) Program to complete an energy retrofit project at Kinsmen Arena. • Completed a 'Garden of Reflection' at Hyde Park Village Green. • Installed a community garden at Jaycee Park with 25 plots and gardeners. • 11 Neighbourhood Decision Making projects were installed at city parks. • Completed the re-opening of the Glen Cairn outdoor pool. • Completed infrastructure work at both Thames Valley and Fanshawe golf courses. • Continued work on the lighting of sports fields at North London Athletic Fields. • Commenced construction of an expanded tennis and pickleball facility in White Oaks Park, with support from National Bank and Tennis Canada. • \$3.1 million in completed life cycle renewal on current infrastructure.
Recreation Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued partnerships with Thames Valley District School Board and the London District Catholic School Board providing recreational programming at 31 schools across London. • 73 businesses and community groups contributed \$638,282 in sponsorship value supporting programs and projects. These contributions support infrastructure enhancements, create free access to programs, and generate advertising revenue. • Improvements made in recruiting and certifying new lifeguards following the global shortage as an outcome of COVID-19. • Facilitated community access to Western University and Fanshawe College's recreation and sport amenities.

2.5 Key 2024 Priorities

The below chart is intended to capture high-level priorities for 2024. It should be noted that this list does not capture all day-to-day activities of the services provided that also further the Master Plan.

Goal	2024 Priorities
Active Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create additional unstructured and structured experiences that encourage regular physical activity. • Continue to maximize use for existing space in current Parks and Recreation system for all areas. • Expanding the variety, frequency, location, and promotion of recreation and sport programs. • Continue to review program participation data to make informed decisions about program development.
Inclusion and Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to remove barriers to participation to be welcoming and inclusive of all residents.

Goal	2024 Priorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide drowning prevention campaigns combined with swimming opportunities, for newcomer communities. • Design and construct accessible washrooms at Thames Valley Golf Course. • Increase the number of free drop-in programs in all of recreation and sport. • Connect with newcomers to provide expanded access to recreational programming. • Work collaboratively with populations that face constraints to participation. • Undertake a review of the effectiveness of the Play Your Way and Waiving or Reducing of Fees financial assistance programs, including opportunities to simplify the processes. • Renovate washrooms at Storybook Gardens admission hall to improve accessibility. • Upgrade play equipment and improve playground accessibility in five different parks.
Connecting People and Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen connections with neighbourhoods and nature through public awareness, neighbourhood driven activities and decision making, and opportunities to animate and enjoy London's outdoor spaces and places. • Expand the recreational pathway system including the Stoney Creek Connection, Richmond Street North Pedestrian Crossing, and extension of the Thames Valley Parkway main branch. • Extend the Hyde Park Rotary Trail north to Sunningdale Road. • Explore partnerships with conservation areas on recreational programming opportunities. • Continue to expand outdoor recreation program offerings. • Continue to update and implement the Storybook Gardens Master Plan to meet the changing needs and expectations of visitors, with the goal of supporting a unique programming environment that provides opportunities for children to build developmental assets and for families to foster connections.
Supportive Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned expansion and construction at Foxfield Park for new spray pad and other improvements. • Host a forum with all sport providers and stakeholder groups to discuss the merits of developing a London Sport Agreement. • Upgrade current spray pad at Rowntree Park. • Install new multi-use court at Carling Heights Optimist Community Centre, launched from 'Carling Decides Program'. • Complete Neighbourhood Decision Making installations in 4 different parks. • Coordinate additional improvements and upgrades to tennis and pickleball courts at Thames Park, White Oaks Park, Rowntree Park, Glanworth Park and Oakridge Optimist Park. • Complete construction of new pedestrian bridge along Dingman Pathway in Lambeth Centennial Park. • Installation of 7 resident voted Neighbourhood Decision Making park projects. • Continue process of developing a multi-use community centre in Southeast and additional multi-use community centre in the Northwest. • Continue with the redevelopment of Silverwood Arena and Park. • Continue the redevelopment of Thames Park. • Commence design of teaching kitchen and elevator at Carling Heights Optimist Community Centre with funding provided through Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP). • \$5 million in planned life cycle renewal on current infrastructure.

Goal	2024 Priorities
Recreation Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work with our partners at Western, Fanshawe, Thames Valley District School Board and London Catholic District School Board on community access. • Review the Sports Field Allocation Policy to create efficiencies in providing space and scheduling recreation and sport opportunities. • Increase aquatics lifeguard training opportunities. • Form a regional Aquatic Providers committee creating partnership and collaboration opportunities with surrounding municipalities. • Complete expansion of new tennis and pickle ball courts in White Oaks Park. • Complete expansion of Foxfield District Park which includes a new soccer field and expanded pickleball facility.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

There are no financial impacts or considerations directly associated with this report.

The current Multi-Year Budget (MYB) contains approved capital spending of more than \$125 million for Parks, Recreation and Neighbourhood Services. Of this amount, approximately 60% is attributed to growth-related projects, approximately 30% to lifecycle projects, and approximately 10% to service improvements.

The [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) will continue to be used as a resource in developing the City’s annual budget updates, multi-year budget documents, growth planning, secondary plans, and related studies.

The goal is to work within the City’s multi-year budget by implementing capital recommendations in a period consistent with population growth and expected funding sources. A strategic direction of the Plan is to pursue a variety of funding options to implement the Master Plan including partnerships and other external funding sources when available.

4.0 Next Steps

This is the third annual Parks and Recreation Master Plan Report, reporting out on accomplishments and upcoming priorities. City Council can expect an annual report in all future years throughout the life of the Plan, which is ten (10) years, and twenty (20) years for major capital projects respectively.

City Council approved the [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) in 2019, and therefore, 2024 represents its fifth year. As per recommendation 119 of the plan, the City of London will complete more formal updates every five (5) years, where some recommendations may be revised due to changes in participation trends, demographics, growth patterns, and/or municipal best practices. Council will receive a project initiation report for the review of the Master Plan in the coming months.

The most important aspect of this process is to update growth projections to align with City Council’s 2023 approved population growth projections, as the previously utilized growth projections are out of date and no longer suitable to use to calculate future amenity provision. This will prepare these services for submission to the 2028 Development Charge Background Study which is a large funding source of growth-related capital infrastructure.

Conclusion

The [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) identifies broad needs and strategies based on best practices, public input, and local demand factors. It identifies the most pressing objectives and the opportunities for achieving them and prepares the City of London in its search for external funding opportunities, partnerships, and alignment with related initiatives.

This Plan aims to improve the quality of life for all Londoners through the provision of parks, recreation programs, sport services, and facilities that are welcoming and accessible for all. The Plan addresses barriers to access and aligns parks, recreation programs, sport services, and facilities with the evolving interests and requirements of Londoners.

Civic Administration will continue to build annual actions around the Master Plan deliverables and update City Council and the public on a regular basis.

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