

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: January 31, 2023

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 second annual [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) report since the Plan was approved by City Council on June 25, 2019. It will serve as a reminder of the Plan, including the vision and goals, provide highlights of 2022 accomplishments, and identifies key priorities and projects for 2023 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 in the City of London Strategic Plan (2019 – 2023):

- Strengthening our Community, under the outcome Londoners have access to the services and supports that promote well-being, health, and safety in their neighbourhoods and across the city;
- Building a Sustainable City, under the outcome London's infrastructure is built, maintained, and operated to meet the long-term needs of the community; and,
- Leading in Public Service, under the outcome Londoners experience exceptional and valued customer service.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- [Parks and Recreation Master Plan Annual Report](#) (March 29, 2022)
- [Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update](#) (June 17, 2019)
- [Irregular Result Request for Proposal 18-09 "Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan Update"](#) (February 21, 2018)
- [Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan Interim Update](#) (January 24, 2017)
- [Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan – Accomplishments and Update Strategy](#) (April 26, 2016)

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 2022 against the Plan's goals and recommendations; and,
- c) Identify key priorities and projects for 2023 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 through the use of effective and responsive practices, partnerships, innovation, leadership, and accountability at all levels.

2.3 COVID-19 Impact

Parks, recreation programs, sport services, and facilities have been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic over the last three (3) years. 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 our current path to pre-pandemic service levels.

Programs:

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

Sport Services:

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

Trail/Pathways:

- Increase in user trips on the Thames Valley Parkway (TVP) from pre-pandemic levels of 1M trips/year to over 2M trips/year

2.4 Highlights of 2022 Accomplishments

The below chart is intended to capture high-level accomplishments from 2022. 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"> • Offered over 800 physical activity dry land, skating, and aquatics programs across the city per week throughout the fall. • Numerous day camps, sports, fitness, leadership, dance, and Playground programs were reintroduced at 36 neighbourhood schools, libraries, and Family Centres. • Began a new partnership with Western University’s Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging to deliver fitness programs and functional fitness assessments for ages 55+. • Created a new Cycling Without Age program that allows older adults to cycle on a specialized bicycle with the assistance of volunteers. • Huff N’ Puff seniors sport and fitness programs fully returned to community centres in the fall, offering approximately 45 programs per week. • Over 111,000 rounds of golf played in the municipal golf system.

Goal	Accomplishments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalized detailed design for the expansion of Foxfield District Park with Provincial Infrastructure Funding secured. • Extended Thames Valley Parkway (north branch) east from Highbury Avenue. • Opened East Lions Park (tennis, pickleball, basketball and soccer).
Inclusion and Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered approximately 850 free programs for a variety of age groups across the city including public swims and sports drop-ins at the newly reopened Carling Heights Optimist Community Centre, neighbourhood Playground programs, and Tim Hortons public skating. • Accessible customer service desks installed at various community centres and pools. • Purchased accessible equipment to support summer programs such as tablets with augmentative communication apps, a lift, and portable ramps. • With the assistance of the Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Division, began conversations directly with Indigenous communities on matters of interest in parks, recreation, and sport services leading to an increase in Indigenous-led program opportunities such as skating, volleyball, soccer, roller skating, and cooking. • Supported 5,374 low-income Londoners through the financial assistance program, Play Your Way Fund. • Offered a sensory-friendly event at Storybook Gardens in partnership with Autism Ontario. • Began a floor hockey program for children and youth with differing abilities, utilizing specialty sport chairs, in partnership with key stakeholders. • Implemented Our London Family projects including a Memorial Plaza, Community Garden, and West Lions Basketball Courts.
Connecting People and Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered new trail running and hiking programs through spring and summer and doubled offerings throughout the fall. • Introduced a new Nature Camp and Little Gardeners programs at Civic Gardens Community Centre. • Launched new outdoor yoga series at seven (7) parks across the city. • Recognized by Provincial and Federal partners for leadership in invasive species management. • Received the Green Umbrella/Green Brick Award and Cultural Landscape Design Award for Lorne Avenue Park and Kiwanis Park natural playgrounds. • Continued to support and expand London's provincially recognized recreational pathway system. • Completed a paddling plan for the Thames Valley Corridor to improve access and ensure sustainable use.
Supportive Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opened a new Seniors Satellite at Earl Nichols Recreation Centre, and reopened Seniors Satellites at Chalmers Presbyterian Church and East London Library. • Added new non-member recreation programs at Hamilton Road Seniors Community Centre to provide more opportunities for residents of different ages to gather at the Centre. • Hosted the grand opening of the East Lions Community Centre. • Reopened Carling Heights Community Centre (CHOCC) following its use as a COVID-19 Assessment Centre.

Goal	Accomplishments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northridge Sports Park opened including two baseball diamonds and one cricket pitch. • Obtained funding through the Green and Inclusive Community Building (GICB) Program to complete an energy retrofit project at Kinsmen Arena. • Completed up to date condition studies on all buildings on golf course properties to identify and create future funded capital plans. • Implemented numerous park projects associated with the Neighbourhood Decision Making (NDM) program. • Completed the Cavendish Park and Food Hub project. • Rolled out four (4) new electric ice resurfacers at the Lambeth, Stronach, Argyle and Kinsmen arenas, for a total complement of eight (8).
Recreation Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seniors Centre and Seniors Satellite staff trained in dementia-friendly practices through a partnership with the Alzheimer Society. • Program Supervisors and front-line staff trained in mental health and suicide prevention strategies. • \$663,292 of financial support obtained through the sponsorship and advertising program to enhance parks, recreation and sport facilities, programs, and services. • Began youth engagement efforts in high schools and post-secondary institutions to raise awareness of recreation, leadership training, and employment opportunities. • Began work with Thames Valley District School Board and the London District Catholic School Board to amend current Joint Use Agreements. • Land was acquired in the southwest to accommodate future sport and/or district park amenities. • 114 acres of River Road golf lands have been retained for future park use and environmental protection. • Established a new 9-hole disc golf site at Basil Grover Park. • Constructed new district level playgrounds in Kiwanis Park, Greenway Park, and Gibbons Park. • Upgraded and improved tennis and pickleball facilities in Hastings Park.

2.5 Key 2023 Priorities

The below chart is intended to capture high-level priorities for 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	2023 Priorities
Active Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the partnership with Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging to include new program locations. • Integrate physical literacy elements into indoor and outdoor space at community centres to encourage physical activity. • Expand pilates and yoga offerings, including new prenatal yoga programs. • Expand the variety, frequency, location, and promotion of drop-in programs. • Continue to review program participation data to make informed decisions about program development. • Construction of the Foxfield District Park expansion. • Coordinate improvements and upgrades to tennis and pickleball courts at Thames Park, White Oaks Park, Rowntree Park, Glanworth Park and Oakridge Optimist Park.
Inclusion and Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to purchase adaptive equipment for all services, such as new sport wheelchairs, stairs for pools, and sleds for sledge hockey. • Continue Indigenous-led collaboration with Indigenous communities to explore new partnership opportunities, staff recruitment, and with a commitment from Recreation and Sport to achieve meaningful reconciliation. • Continue to expand no cost program opportunities. • Undertake a review of the effectiveness of the Play Your Way financial assistance program including opportunities to simplify the process to apply for subsidy. • Renovate washrooms at Labatt Park and Storybook Gardens admission hall to improve accessibility. • Develop a new neighbourhood and urban park in Thompson Ravine Park to serve Glen Cairn neighbourhood and the new housing development project at 415 Thompson Road.
Connecting People and Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer new snowshoeing program at Thames Valley Golf Course. • Expand trail walking and hiking programs to younger age groups. • Support and expand the recreational pathway system with projects including the Stoney Creek Connection, Richmond Street North Pedestrian Crossing and extension of the Thames Valley Parkway main branch. • Utilize mapping tools, registration data, and participant surveys to identify and address gaps in program delivery.
Supportive Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop criteria for potential wading pool decommissioning for Council consideration. • Undertake required lifecycle renewal and service improvement capital projects to improve golf courses, utilizing the golf reserve fund's current \$3 million balance. • Continue to work with internal and external partners to explore the re-opening of the Glen Cairn outdoor pool for the 2023 season. • Explore and present options for Council consideration for the future of Thames Pool in Q1 of 2023. • Using \$2.2 million in approved funding, re-ignite engagement and planning for the future of Silverwoods Arena and Park campus with a goal of implementing improvements in 2024. • Bring forward and update Council on the future Southeast and Northwest Community Centres. • Add lights to outdoor sporting amenities to increase capacity and inventory available for the community.

Goal	2023 Priorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a new pavilion at Storybook Gardens to support group bookings and special events. • Evaluate the feasibility of providing water servicing in parks. • Explore opportunities for bicycle pump track and mountain biking facilities. • Add four (4) additional electric ice resurfacers to the current complement bringing the total to 12. • Complete an update to the Tree Planting Strategy. • Complete construction and open the Hyde Park Village Green Urban Park. • Implement over 12 neighbourhood decision making winning ideas in London's Park system.
Recreation Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue discussions with Thames Valley District School Board and London District Catholic School Board to amend Joint Use Agreements for Council approval. • Introduce new youth leadership program in partnership with area youth-serving organizations. • Expand staff training on gender diversity and 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion. • Continue to find innovative ways to recruit and retain lifeguards following the global shortage as an outcome of COVID-19. • Begin the process to develop 114 acres of the former River Road golf lands into district park by undertaking needs assessments and public engagement to inform the planning and design processes. • Establish locations for additional off-leash dog opportunities. • Review and implement policy and process changes resulting from Bill 23, <i>the More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022</i> including possible impacts to service standards and land acquisition for parks. • Seek operational and lifecycle renewal budgets for park infrastructure as the 2021 Corporate Asset Management Plan forecasts a 10-year gap of \$24 million.

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 \$130 million for Parks, Recreation and Neighbourhood Services between 2020 - 2023. 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 timeframe 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 second 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. It should also be noted that the Plan recommends 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.

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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