

# Town of Whitby Staff Report

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## Report Title: Parks and Recreation Master Plan

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**Report to:** Council

**Date of meeting:** October 28, 2024

**Report Number:** CMS 12-24

**Department(s) Responsible:**

Community Services Department

**Submitted by:**

John Romano, Commissioner,  
Community Services

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| <b>Acknowledged by M. Gaskell,<br/>Chief Administrative Officer</b> |
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### 1. Recommendation:

1. That Council endorse the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and the recommendations within, appended to Report CMS 12-24 as Attachment 1;
2. That staff be directed to prioritize the recommendations identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and incorporate them into the Town's long-term financial plans and strategies; and,
3. That staff be directed to report annually on the progress of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

### 2. Highlights:

- Once complete, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan will guide decision making related to parks and recreation services in the Town for the next ten years.
- All developmental phases of the Parks and Recreation have been completed including: Phase 1 – A Comprehensive Background Review, Phase 2 – Community Feedback and Report to Council, Phase 3 – Plan Development with

recommendations and Phase 4 – Draft Plan Review, Report to Council and Finalization of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

- A tremendous amount of community feedback was used to formulate the recommendations including over 4,700 individual residents, 29 Sport Organizations representing over 18,000 members, 5 Advisory Committees, the Library Board, and 2 School Boards.
- Final Community Engagement took place which included Council feedback, Advisory Committees consultations, as well as communication to recreation user groups, Connect Whitby project followers, Youth Council, School Boards and Indigenous communities.
- 79 recommendations have been developed through the plan based on the background review, gap analysis and community and Council feedback.
- After Council endorsement, Staff will prioritize and bring forward identified project items through Staff Reports and the Town's Capital and Operating budget processes.

### **3. Background:**

Whitby is expected to experience population growth of 25% by 2031, particularly in West Whitby, Brooklin and in established areas through intensification (Hemson Consulting, 2021). This growth will increase demand on parks and recreation amenities, programs, and services.

In September of 2021, Council approved the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Terms of Reference through Report [CMS 15-21](#) to update the 2006 Culture, Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (CPROS Plan) for the Town of Whitby. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan provides a road map to prioritize and address community needs and guide future decisions. The plan focuses primarily on parkland and trails, waterfront use, indoor and outdoor facilities and recreation programs.

In March of 2022, The Town selected Monteith Brown Planning Consultants to develop the plan based on their reputation and experience in developing over 400 studies related to parks, recreation, culture, trails and libraries. Development of the plan was organized into the following four phases:

#### **Phase 1 – Background Review:**

In the draft plan, the Consultants provided an analysis of current/future demographics, current inventory and usage rates of parks and recreation amenities and facilities, sector trends, benchmarking, gap analysis and best practices. This information was presented in a Background Report.

#### **Phase 2 – Community Engagement:**

Next, a Community Engagement Strategy was developed to get feedback from residents and key stakeholders. This was done through a community survey, stakeholder focus groups, in-person pop-up events, virtual public consultation sessions, staff workshops and council interviews. A total of 4700 people were engaged through consultations.

The results of the two phases were consolidated into the Parks and Recreation Master Plan – Background and Community Engagement Summary Report and brought to Council for information in May 2023 (refer to Report [CMS 04-23](#)).

**Phase 3 – Plan Development - Strategies, Actions:**

The focus of this stage was on developing a draft Parks and Recreation Plan based on the information gathered through the Background Report and from Community Engagement. Recommendations were developed concentrating on the use of parkland and trails, waterfront enhancement, strategies for indoor and outdoor recreation facilities and service delivery.

**Phase 4 – Draft Plan Review:** In May of 2024, the draft plan was brought to Council (Refer to Report [CMS 07-24](#)) and a month-long community consultation period began with the circulation of the draft Master Plan to the community and stakeholders for feedback.

Now that Phases 1 through 4 are complete, Staff are reporting back to Council with the final Parks and Recreation Master Plan, in accordance with the work plan in the Terms of Reference.

**4. Discussion:**

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan is a critical guiding document that will be used to inform and support decisions, related to Parks and Recreation services in Whitby. The information contained in the Plan will be used to develop strategies and recommendations for the future provision of Parks and Recreation services.

The plan was developed through an inclusive process, seeking input from Council, staff and the community. After the completed draft plan was presented to Council, a community consultation period ran from May 21 – June 30, 2024, which included:

- A Project update on Connect Whitby;
- Email communication and a link to the plan and survey went to all Committees of Council. Specific consultation occurred with
  - the Accessibility Advisory Committee (June 4),
  - the Sustainability Advisory Committee (June 5),
  - the Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (June 6),
  - the Active Transportation Advisory Committee (June 13); and
  - the 55+ Recreation Advisory Committee (June 14).
- Email communication about the plan and location to send feedback went to all Whitby partner community organizations and recreation users, the Town's Indigenous community contacts and to both the Durham District School Board and the Durham Catholic District School Board.
- A Community Survey to test public agreement with the plan resulted in:
  - 94% in agreement with Parkland recommendations;
  - 92% in agreement with Waterfront recommendations;

- 94% in agreement with Indoor Facility recommendations;
- 92% in agreement with Outdoor Facility recommendations; and
- 93% in agreement with Service Delivery recommendations.

**Recommendations**

This feedback was considered and helped to shape the final 79 recommendations in the plan. The following are some of the highlighted recommendations:

**Parkland and Trails**

- Review Town's Official Plan, Parkland By-laws and policies to support the dedication of parkland;
- Develop a Land Acquisition Strategy;
- Investigate opportunities to acquire a site(s) to establish a future outdoor sports complex(es) that would provide various outdoor field types and supporting amenities;
- Revise the Parkland Development and Open Space Policy and develop a Parks and Trails Development Manual;
- Develop a Parkland Renewal and Re-envisioning Plan;
- Ensure standards established for the design of parks, trails and open spaces include climate change mitigation and adaptation measures; and
- Continue to implement the Town's Active Transportation Plan.

**Marina and the Waterfront**

- Undertake a Marina Master Plan; and
- Continue to implement the Town's Waterfront Parks and Open Space Master Plan.

**Indoor Facilities**

- Undertake a facility renewal strategy for Luther Vipond Arena;
- Undertake a building condition study of Heydenshore Pavilion to be used to develop a modern large flexible program and support spaces;
- Identify enhancement opportunities for the 55+ Recreation Centre;
- Explore opportunities to increase the utilization of municipal facilities through partnerships and increased programming; and
- Explore opportunities to increase access agreements with non-municipal gymnasium providers.

**Outdoor Facilities**

- Provide a refrigerated outdoor skating rink or trail at a Town or District Park and monitor its use to guide decisions about construction at additional locations;
- Construct lit soccer fields, baseball diamonds and cricket fields at a future sports field complex(es);
- Investigate possibility of adding lights to existing fields to increase playing capacity;
- Review existing fields, baseball diamonds, basketball courts and identify improvements to facilitate an enhanced playing experience;

- Construct lit tennis courts at identified parks; and
- Investigate opportunities to provide pickleball courts on the east side of Whitby, with consideration given to enhanced setback distances and noise abatement measures.

**Splash Pads and Skate Spots**

- Construct new splash pads at future District Parks;
- Update existing splash pads with spray features, themes, fountains, public art; and
- Explore potential to incorporate small scale “skate spots” at neighbourhood parks.

**Playgrounds**

- Develop playgrounds to ensure diverse elements and creative designs are barrier free and inclusive; and
- Evaluate opportunities to incorporate natural play structures and features that promote imaginative play.

**Programs and Services**

- Review the Community Connection service delivery model with an aim to increasing participation in neighbourhood programs;
- Employ physical literacy in existing programs and day camps with the goal of increasing individuals’ activity levels;
- Refresh Whitby’s Youth Strategy;
- Review 55+ participation rates and project programs, staffing and volunteers required to serve increase older adult population;
- Develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework for Community Services;
- Develop a Volunteer Strategy; and,
- Develop a fair-minded Pricing Policy and Performance Metrics.

**Next Steps**

Now that the Plan is completed, recommendations within the plan will be prioritized over the next ten years for implementation. Most recommendations will require additional Council consideration and approval. Staff will report annually on the progress of the plan and will prioritize implementation over the next ten years.

**5. Financial Considerations:**

The budget for the update of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan was approved as a part of the 2021 Community Services Capital Budget, capital project # 70247301, in the amount of \$257,500. The project is currently tracking to be approximately \$20,000 favourable with anticipated completion in Q4 2024. Surplus funds will be returned to original (reserve) funding sources.

Once the Parks and Recreation Master Plan is approved, recommendations from the Plan will be incorporated into the Town’s long-term financial strategies, studies, and plans including the next Development Charges Background Study and the Town’s 10-

Year Capital Forecast. Staff will bring forward capital projects/ incremental operating costs to support the priorities of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan in future budgets subject to Council budget adoption and funding availability. If the funding is not secured, implementation of certain projects within the Plan may be deferred.

## **6. Communication and Public Engagement:**

Council, staff and public engagement was a priority in developing the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Input was solicited as the Plan was being developed and then again once the recommendations were drafted. Key external communication tactics including Curbex signage in recreation areas, digital advertising, display ads, partner outreach, promotion on social media, 3x3 promotional cards, and promotion at recreation events. Public engagement sessions were offered to community members and the surveys and sessions were shared with all Advisory Boards and Committees, School Boards and community recreation user groups. As a result of this prioritization over 4,700 individual residents, 29 Sport Organizations representing over 17,000 members, 5 Advisory Committees, 2 School Boards, and the Library Board provided input into the plan.

## **7. Input from Departments/Sources:**

A staff steering committee was formed for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan development which included representatives from many departments including Parks Planning, Recreation, Accessibility, Sustainability, Communications, Facilities, Park Operations, Policy and Heritage Planning, and Finance.

Accessibility has been taken into consideration in each phase of the project. Accessibility and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion staff have been consulted throughout the development of the plan and both the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee were consulted directly for feedback in this final phase. Sustainability staff have also been consulted throughout the development of this plan and the Sustainability Advisory Committee were consulted directly for feedback in this final phase.

## **8. Strategic Priorities:**

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan includes a review of current practices within the Town of Whitby in relation to parks, recreation, and facilities. The Plan connects to the following pillars found in the Community Strategic Plan:

- Pillar 1 - Whitby's Neighbourhoods: Safe, Healthy & Inclusive
- Pillar 2 - Whitby's Natural & Built Environment: Connected & Resilient
- Pillar 4 – Whitby's Government: Accountable & Responsive

## **9. Attachments:**

Attachment 1 – Final Whitby Parks and Recreation Master Plan