

Staff Report



To	Committee of the Whole
Service Area	Public Services
Date	Tuesday, October 3, 2023
Subject	Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Recommendation

1. That the Parks and Recreation Master Plan dated August 2023, included as Attachment-1 to this report, be approved.
 2. That the funding requirements for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan be referred to future operating and capital budgets in order to implement the recommendations of the plan.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

To seek approval of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP) and the implementation of the plan's recommendations. The PRMP is a strategic document that outlines the vision and objectives for Guelph's parks and recreation system for the next 10 years.

Key Findings

The PRMP replaces the 2009 Recreation, Parks and Culture Strategic Master Plan. An update is needed to set new priorities that are aligned with current community needs, the City's Strategic Plan and new approaches, legislation and guidelines in park and recreation planning. Key findings of the PRMP are:

- Guelph is growing. The population is planned to increase by over 60,000 to a total of 208,000 by 2051. As the population grows, so too must the parks and recreation amenities and services that support daily living and wellbeing in Guelph.
- Population growth is expected to be primarily driven by migration. The City's parks and recreation amenities and programs must be flexible to accommodate emerging trends.
- Guelph's population is aging. The seniors demographic is forecast to increase from 6% to 16% in 2051, while all other age groups are forecast to decline. The City's parks and recreation amenities must adapt to accommodate an aging population.
- Recreation programs and services are disproportionately distributed throughout Guelph. New strategies and approaches are needed to support the wellbeing of all Guelph residents more equitably.

- Parks and recreation land needs are greater than what can be achieved using parkland dedication alone. Future studies are needed to determine how many new sports fields are going to be required in the city, and how to acquire land to support these needs.

Strategic Plan Alignment

The vision and core values of the PRMP are founded on the current 2019 to 2023 Strategic Plan priorities of Sustaining our Future, Working Together for our Future, and Building our Future.

The PRMP aligns closely with the Building our Future pillar as park and recreation facilities and programs nurture social well-being, provide landmark beauty and offer a safe place where everyone belongs. The objectives and recommendations of the PRMP help support these Strategic Plan priorities:

- Working to enhance community well-being and safety through direct service and program delivery;
- Managing existing infrastructure; and
- Continuing working to develop new assets that respond to Guelph’s growing and changing social, economic and environmental needs.

The PRMP also aligns with the Sustaining our Future pillar as parks contribute to caring for the local environment and responding to climate change. The objectives and recommendations of the PRMP help support these Strategic Plan priorities:

- Protecting green infrastructure provided by woodlands, wetlands, watercourses and other elements of Guelph’s natural heritage system;
- Investing in “green” infrastructure to prepare Guelph for the effects of climate change; and
- Increasing Guelph’s tree canopy.

Finally, the PRMP aligns with the Working Together for our Future pillar as the plan aims to improve delivery of information to the community about parks and recreation and work with community partners. The objectives and recommendations of the PRMP help support these Strategic Plan priorities:

- Developing strategic partnerships with stakeholders to improve service delivery; and
- Exploring new funding options, service-delivery models and partnerships to ease taxes for residents and businesses.

Financial Implications

The capital investment over the life of the plan for PRMP initiatives is approximately \$17.25 million. This does not include initiatives or priorities included in other Council approved master plans, such as the Guelph Trail Master Plan, or outcomes from future plans such as the Sports Field Strategy or Parkland Acquisition Strategy.

The PRMP initiatives have been incorporated into the 2024-2027 multi-year budget (MYB) and 10-year capital and operating forecasts. Approval of specific annual capital investment and associated operating impacts will be referred to the 2024-2027 capital and operating budget requests. Projects will be prioritized based on fiscal and human constraints, and in alignment with all organizational priorities.

This investment will ensure that as the population grows, the current parks and recreation level of service will be maintained.

Report

Introduction

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP) is a strategic document that guides how the City plans, designs, funds, builds, and maintains the park and recreation network. It replaces the 2009 Recreation, Parks and Culture Strategic Master Plan. An update was initiated to set new priorities that are aligned with community need, the City's Strategic Plan, and new approaches, legislation and guidelines in park and recreation planning. At the same time, Culture Plan 2030, a 10-year strategic plan has been developed with the dedicated focus on the enjoyment and participation of arts and culture.

The PRMP sets the direction for parkland, recreation facilities and recreation programs in the city over the next 10 years and beyond. It identifies needs for current and future residents, establishes future initiatives, and guides strategic investment. It is a framework that lays the foundation for parks and recreation service delivery, while allowing for flexibility to respond to changing needs.

The PRMP was developed over four phases of work:

- The first phase of work confirmed parks and recreation assets. A detailed inventory of resources was compiled using data from many different sources.
- The second phase of work identified strengths and opportunities within the parks and recreation system. A review of emerging trends and comparison of services and infrastructure to similar communities was undertaken.
- The third phase of work included an in-depth review of parkland needs, which resulted in the development of the Council-approved Park Plan. The Park Plan examined the need for parkland in the city and was a requirement under the Ontario Planning Act to support the City's continued use of a Parkland Dedication Bylaw. The Park Plan was advanced before the completion of the PRMP to meet provincially mandated timelines.
- The fourth and final phase of work included the development of a Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment and the PRMP. The Needs Assessment used data gathered throughout the PRMP project to identify gaps and opportunities among the City's indoor and outdoor recreation facilities. The purpose of this assessment was to recommend evidence-based provisioning of park and recreation assets to be carried forward into the PRMP. The final PRMP builds on the needs established in the Park Plan and Needs Assessment.

Vision and core values

The plan is guided by an overall vision that outlines a desired future for parks and recreation in Guelph:

"Parks and recreation are essential to everyday life in Guelph. To be future-ready, Guelph needs parks, facilities and programs that are sustainable, inclusive, adaptable and have a built-in ability to respond to a growing and diverse community. The City needs to connect people to each other, healthy living and the environment."

Six core values of the plan support the vision for parks and recreation. These core values drive the outcomes for the PRMP and will be embedded in the work of the Parks and Recreation departments. The core values of the plan are:

- All people can participate in recreation.
- Parks and recreation facilities are welcoming and meaningful places for all people.
- A healthy and vibrant community is supported through parks and recreation.
- Infrastructure is maintained, sustainable and responsive to community changes.
- The natural environment is protected, restored and responsibly managed.
- The Parks and Recreation departments work together with the community.

Implementation and recommendations

The PRMP provides nearly 100 recommendations relating to park planning, park amenities, indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, aquatics service delivery, community development, recreation programming, and departmental strategy documents. Each of the objectives is intended to guide parks and recreation service delivery to achieve the vision of the plan. Key themes and examples include:

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA): the Needs Assessment and PRMP highlight numerous barriers to access for equity deserving communities, as well as an unbalanced distribution of recreation programs and resources throughout the city. The PRMP recommends an IDEA strategy and updated service delivery model to help address locally identified barriers and improve equitable access to parks and recreation for all residents.

Park and facility optimization: population growth, land scarcity, rising costs of construction, and changes to the way people recreate are driving the need to maximize use of existing amenities and infrastructure. The PRMP recommends exploring strategic ways to increase use and opportunities in existing outdoor spaces and indoor facilities. Examples include a field strategy, multipurpose facility designs, placemaking investments, programming in parks and open spaces, updating facility allocation and distribution policies and processes, and investigating the feasibility of renewing or repurposing existing facilities to meet changing recreational needs and interests.

The implementation of the plan's recommendations will require a balance of investing in new and existing infrastructure and services. To meet the needs of the community with limited land resources, careful consideration for intensifying and optimizing existing parks and recreation facilities will be required.

Meaningful community engagement for capital projects and processes will be coordinated as appropriate during implementation of recommended objectives.

The implementation timeline identified in the PRMP is meant to demonstrate prioritization of each of the recommendations and is not a finalized work plan. The proposed pace of implementation allows for flexibility and will be based on need, resource capacity, budget approval, and in some cases timing of Secondary Plan development, including the Guelph Innovation District and Clair-Maltby.

Financial Implications

Investment is required to support the vision, core values, and recommendations of the PRMP over the next ten years and beyond. The PRMP will be aligned with the existing capital and operating plans, providing consideration to fiscal constraints and the human resource capacity to deliver. Adjustments to the priorities and sequencing of projects over the lifespan of the plan is inevitable. The PRMP needs to be flexible and able to respond to new opportunities and changes as they arise.

The capital investment for PRMP initiatives over the life of the plan is approximately \$17.25 million. The Parks and Recreation capital budget costs shown in **Error! Reference source not found.** represent costs for the recommendations of the PRMP and are not representative of the entire Parks and Recreation budgets. These costs do not include initiatives or priorities included in other Council approved master plans, such as the Guelph Trail Master Plan, or outcomes from future plans, such as the Sports Field Strategy or Parkland Acquisition Strategy. The costs include policy creation, planning, design and construction.

Table 1: Parks and recreation capital budget costs for PRMP initiatives

	Total budget cost over life of the plan
Growth	\$1,300,000
Service Enhancement	\$11,150,000
Infrastructure Renewal	\$4,800,000
Total	\$17,250,000

The funding requirements to implement the recommendations of the plan will be referred to future operating and capital budgets. Based on the outcomes of recommended strategies within the PRMP, further initiatives and capital investment may be required. Any updates will be included in the PRMP mid-term review and referred to the multi-year budget (MYB) for consideration.

Staffing resources have been identified to activate recommendations within the PRMP. These positions are critical to the implementation of PRMP recommendations and have been referred to MYB for consideration.

Consultations

Internal Engagement

The PRMP was developed in collaboration with key staff across many departments. Key involvement from staff in Parks, Recreation, Policy Planning, Engineering, Accessibility and Finance ensured a collaborative approach to future park and recreation planning and development.

External engagement

A robust community engagement process was delivered to ensure that the PRMP reflects community opinions and priorities for future parks and recreation needs. Through four phases of the project and various platforms efforts were made to consult with a broad range of Guelph residents and organizations across various

geographic areas and demographic groups. In total, over 40 different opportunities to share feedback took place with community and stakeholders.

Public consultation took the form of community surveys, open houses, public workshops, focus groups, community pop-ups, meetings with local school boards, meetings with representatives from Indigenous nations, and presentations to advisory committees of Council. Emphasis was placed on engaging with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) to understand the barriers that people with disabilities face when accessing parks and recreation facilities and services. Staff engaged with the AAC four times throughout the project and feedback from the AAC has been incorporated into the plan.

Community engagement built on the previous work of the Community Plan and Strategic Plans, and where possible, feedback from related City projects and initiatives was captured. Specifically, feedback collected as part of the 2022 Park Plan and the 2019 Parkland Dedication Bylaw update was used to help inform the PRMP.

Common themes identified throughout engagement included:

Accessibility and inclusion

Accessible and inclusive parks and recreation facilities and programs are a priority for Guelph residents. This includes removing physical and financial barriers to participation as well as ensuring equitable access to facilities and information.

Green spaces

Overwhelmingly, Guelph residents value green spaces, including parkland and trails. People want more trees and naturalized areas in parks.

Land supply

Guelph residents have an interest in parkland inventory and ensuring the supply of land for parks and recreation is sufficient for future generations. People want to protect existing parks and continue to grow the park system.

Amenity and program variety

Residents value a highly developed parks and recreation system that offers a wide range of amenities and programming geared towards all ages, abilities, backgrounds and interests.

Investment in aging infrastructure

People want existing parks and recreation facilities to be in good condition and replaced as quality declines. There is particular interest in ensuring each area of the city has the same quality of parks and recreation amenities.

Attachments

Attachment-1 Parks and Recreation Master Plan, dated August 2023

Attachment-2 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment, dated August 2023

Attachment-3 Council Presentation

Departmental Approval

None

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