
REPORT NUMBER 272-2023-Community Services-Recreation & Culture

DATE

PREPARED

September 25, 2023

FILE

MEETING DATE

October 16, 2023

SUBJECT

Recreation & Facilities Master Plan Update

RECOMMENDATION

This report is for the purposes of information only.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN

The Recreation & Facilities Master Plan (RFMP) relates to the Maamawe, Growing Together Strategic Plan directions and goals as follows:

1. **Maamawe – All together:** Several recommendations work towards strengthening relations with Indigenous communities, leaders and organizations to address reconciliation priorities together through recreation services.
2. **Safety and well-being:** Well-being is embedded throughout the plan as a goal of providing recreational activities. The RFMP strives for equitable access to affordable recreation and culture, particularly through Recommendations 66-68. Recommendations 18 and 53 help achieve the goal of creating strong neighbourhoods.
3. **Growth:** The RFMP acknowledges the role that recreational programs and facilities play in attracting and retaining new and diverse businesses and community members. Recommendations 59 and 61 also highlight the importance of digitizing services to meet user needs, in alignment with the City's new Digital Strategy.
4. **Sustainability:** The RFMP prioritizes access to recreational programs and services while recognizing the important economic and environmental impacts of recreation. Recommendations 70-75 promote economic development through sport, recreation and event-based tourism.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report provides an update on the progress of the Fit Together: Recreation and Facilities Master Plan (the Plan), approved by City Council in January 2017 (R 152/2016). It highlights key updates since the previous annual report for the Plan (R 63/2022), as well as an update on capital planning for a 3-year timeframe.

DISCUSSION

The Recreation and Facilities Master Plan is a Council-approved document intended to guide and focus activity within:

- Community Services Department - Recreation and Culture, Central Support and Facilities & Fleet
- Infrastructure, Development and Operations Department – Engineering and Operations Division, Environment, Parks & Open Spaces Section, Capital Facilities Construction & Energy Management
- City Manager’s Office – Strategic Initiatives & Engagement, Municipal Accessibility, Community Safety & Wellbeing
- Community Economic Development Corporation – Tourism.

The Plan was developed through extensive consultation with nearly 2,000 residents, user groups, stakeholders, City Staff and City Council to ensure the vision, goals and recommendations reflect the needs and priorities of the community. The Plan included an in-depth review of current and target standards for facility provision, including comparisons with other similar municipalities, while considering a range of other factors that impact recreation planning such as anticipated demographic changes, community demand and utilization trends.

The Plan is a municipal guide that outlines a series of short, medium and long term priorities for investment in facilities, services and programs owned and/or delivered/operated by the City of Thunder Bay. Its 81 recommendations were developed to guide future strategies and actions to invest in new and revitalized recreational facilities and affordable, accessible programs that meet the needs of people of all ages in their neighbourhoods.

Pillars of the Plan

The Plan’s recommendations are based on eight (8) key pillars:

1. City serving and neighbourhood focus
2. An inclusive city
3. Age-friendly and accessible recreation
4. Positive places and animated spaces
5. Core and evolving partnerships

6. Services for the evolving needs of the 21st century
7. A measurable plan
8. An affordable plan.

Plan Goals

There are five (5) key goals prioritized in the Plan:

1. **Invest in infrastructure** including capital planning for renewal, recreation zones and active transportation.
2. **Promote health, wellness, and physical activity** through programming, volunteerism, inclusivity, and accessibility.
3. **Optimize the City's role in program and service delivery** by adopting a social development approach, ensuring efficient resource allocation, including all populations.
4. **Create and maintain positive partnerships** and alliances internally and externally.
5. **Strengthen the City's tourism mandate** to attract users from surrounding areas and maximize tournament and event hosting opportunities.

The 15-year Plan has significant lifespan left and its pillars and goals remain valid. Updates and specific actions are brought forward to Council as needed for information, approval, or direction, including where planned actions have been impacted by factors such as budget reductions, organizational changes, the COVID-19 Pandemic, and other changes not anticipated at the time of the Plan's approval.

The Plan's performance is monitored on an ongoing basis and tracked by the Recreation and Culture Division. This allows for evaluation and adjustment of direction based on shifting municipal and community priorities and needs. As recommended in the Plan, the Division is currently developing a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These KPIs will capture performance in categories such as finances, customers, usage, accessibility, and growth. Implementation is anticipated to begin in January 2024. Going forward, KPI reporting will be included in the annual RFMP update reports and referenced as relevant in other Division reports and presentations.

Priority Actions

This report highlights progress made in the following priority action areas, which correspond to existing initiatives and available resources within the Corporation:

- Facility Investment & Accessibility Upgrades
- Investing in Community Hubs
- Investing in Turf & Field Improvements

- Increasing Opportunities for Youth and related Inquest Recommendations
- Park & Neighbourhood Programming
- Indoor Court Facility - Tennis Centre
- Recreation and Culture Division User Fees & Affordable Access to Recreation
- Evaluating the Community, Youth & Cultural Funding Program
- Support for Community and Sport Tourism Events
- Digital Advertising and Revenue Generation
- Active Transportation and Access to Recreation
- New Culture Plan Development
- Ice Allocation Policy
- Volunteer Appreciation & Training
- Monitoring Performance
- Digitizing Services for Recreation

Attachment A provides details on progress of recommendations related to priority areas since the last update to Council.

Emerging Trends, Pressures and Needs

The Plan recognizes a number of significant changes in the population and social context of Thunder Bay – all of which have economic and service implications. The value proposition for investment in recreation lies in the creative ability of the sector to foster civic participation as well as resident health and well-being through the delivery of programs and services and investment in facilities. Linked to this are opportunities to sustain community pride, stem population decline, and revitalize communities and neighbourhoods through new investment. Enhancing quality of life in the city through investment in recreation contributes to resident retention and positions the City as an attractive place to live, work, and invest.

The work of the Recreation & Culture Division and related achievement of Plan objectives is impacted by various trends, pressures and needs within the Corporation, community, and sector. Examples include:

Cost Mitigation

Administration understands the pressures that the City is facing and the related need to implement cost mitigation strategies to meet budget directives during this challenging time.

It is important to note that these measures may limit or impact the target program and service delivery outlined in the RFMP. For example, 2023 and 2024 budget reductions impact recommendations around neighbourhood-based programming, a key pillar in the Plan (e.g. reduced Playgrounds Program sites, elimination of Movie Nights in the Parks, reduced hours of operation for Aquatics facilities, closure of 2 community centres).

Current and future service level reductions will have an impact on facility usage and participation numbers, and may limit the Division's ability to meet Plan goals and demonstrate positive trends in KPIs. Budget and service reductions may also impact user revenue, sponsorships and external funding, a possibility that the Division is currently monitoring.

Community Centres

In 2024 the Division will be updating the community centres section of the Plan, including addressing service level implications, in response to the budget mitigation decision to close two centres and planning for potential facility upgrades that centres have expressed interest in pursuing.

Requests for New Single-purpose Facilities

Since the implementation of the RFMP, the City has received a number of requests from community groups for new single-purpose facilities or sport-specific solutions. Such requests require review against the Plan to determine fit with the Plan or sufficient justification to deviate from the Plan. They also require significant administrative time from multiple divisions across the Corporation to provide a fulsome and diligent review and response.

Safety and Well-being

Thunder Bay is seeing higher rates of substance use, criminal activity and mental health concerns, particularly in younger populations, including those that attend Division facilities and participate in Division programs. There is an ongoing need to evaluate the capacity of Recreation & Culture to address the realities of what local youth are facing, what supports are needed, and how existing programs and services are impacted (e.g. resourcing, staff training, partnerships and adjustment of offerings).

The successful federally-funded Youth Inclusion Program (YIP) that was designed to address these needs concluded in mid-2023. Work is underway between the Division

and partners to leverage new opportunities to continue the work of the YIP Youth Navigator position that was vital in providing the continuous, trained support that vulnerable youth need. A final report on YIP will be brought to Council in the coming months along with information on new opportunities to continue this important work.

Funding and Revenue Sources

Administration continues to seek funding from Provincial, Federal, and other external sources to supplement its operations. These funding sources can be unpredictable which has implications for budget planning and variances. Administration has noted changes to typical Provincial funding sources in 2023 that have reduced funding received or required operational changes to meet revised eligibility criteria.

3-year Capital Planning Update

Success with a number of external funding sources has allowed the acceleration of some capital improvements in recreation facilities. These projects have been included/proposed through the annual Capital Budget process.

Work on the Fort William Gardens will continue into 2024 with box office accessibility and lobby seating improvements combined with the addition of a heat exchanger that will allow the facility to capture and reuse waste heat from the ice plant. Continuing in its final phase in 2025, renewal of change areas, replacement of existing heat exchangers and accessibility work to the concessions area is planned.

Other arenas will continue to see cyclical replacement of key mechanical components as well as upgrades to life safety systems as they come to end of life. The Current River Arena has been selected as a test site for facility electrification in 2025, should a funding application through the Green and Inclusive Community Building stream be successful.

The recently completed improvements at the Canada Games Complex should begin to yield energy savings in this operating season while also increasing accessibility in the facility. In 2025, building envelope upgrades will see sections of new roofing and enhanced insulation.

In 2024, a design study will be commissioned to consider the replacement of the Port Arthur Arena, which has reached the end of its useful life and is slated for replacement in 2030. As part of this study, consistent with the recreation hub concept identified in the Recreation & Facilities Master Plan, a new twin-pad arena and recreational space concept, potentially attached to the Canada Games Complex, will be developed. Port Arthur Stadium may also be contemplated as part of a combined project, and synergies between common spaces will be considered. Work towards Council's recent decision to consider lands in this area for indoor turf would also be considered. Finally, administration would look to leverage funding to consider a district heating & cooling plant in the study, incorporating the major City-owned buildings in the area to maximize efficiencies, as well as to modernize existing facilities to a net-zero ready state.

In 2026/27, substantial accessibility and building envelope upgrades are planned for Volunteer Pool, pending funding approvals through the Green and Inclusive Community Building stream.

Heath Pool will also require a filter plant upgrade within the next 3 years.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

There are no direct financial implications associated with the information included in this report.

Future financial implications resulting from implementation of the Recreation & Facilities Master Plan will be included in the annual Operating and Capital budget process and brought forward to City Council for consideration and approval as required.

Administration will continue to pursue funding to support the objectives of the Recreation & Facilities Master Plan through the various external sources.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that this report summarizes the status of work completed, or in progress, in 2022-early 2023 to implement the recommendations of the Recreation & Facilities Master Plan. Therefore, it is recommended that this update be received for information at this time.

BACKGROUND

The Fit Together: Recreation & Facilities Master Plan was approved by City Council on January 2017 (R 152/2016). Administration was tasked with providing updates on the progress of the Plan's implementation.

Plan updates have been provided to Council in June 2019 (R 49/2019), January 2021 (R 5/2021), and June 2022 (R 63/2022).

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

Attachment A – Priority Action Highlights

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10/06/2023