STRATHCONA COUNTY
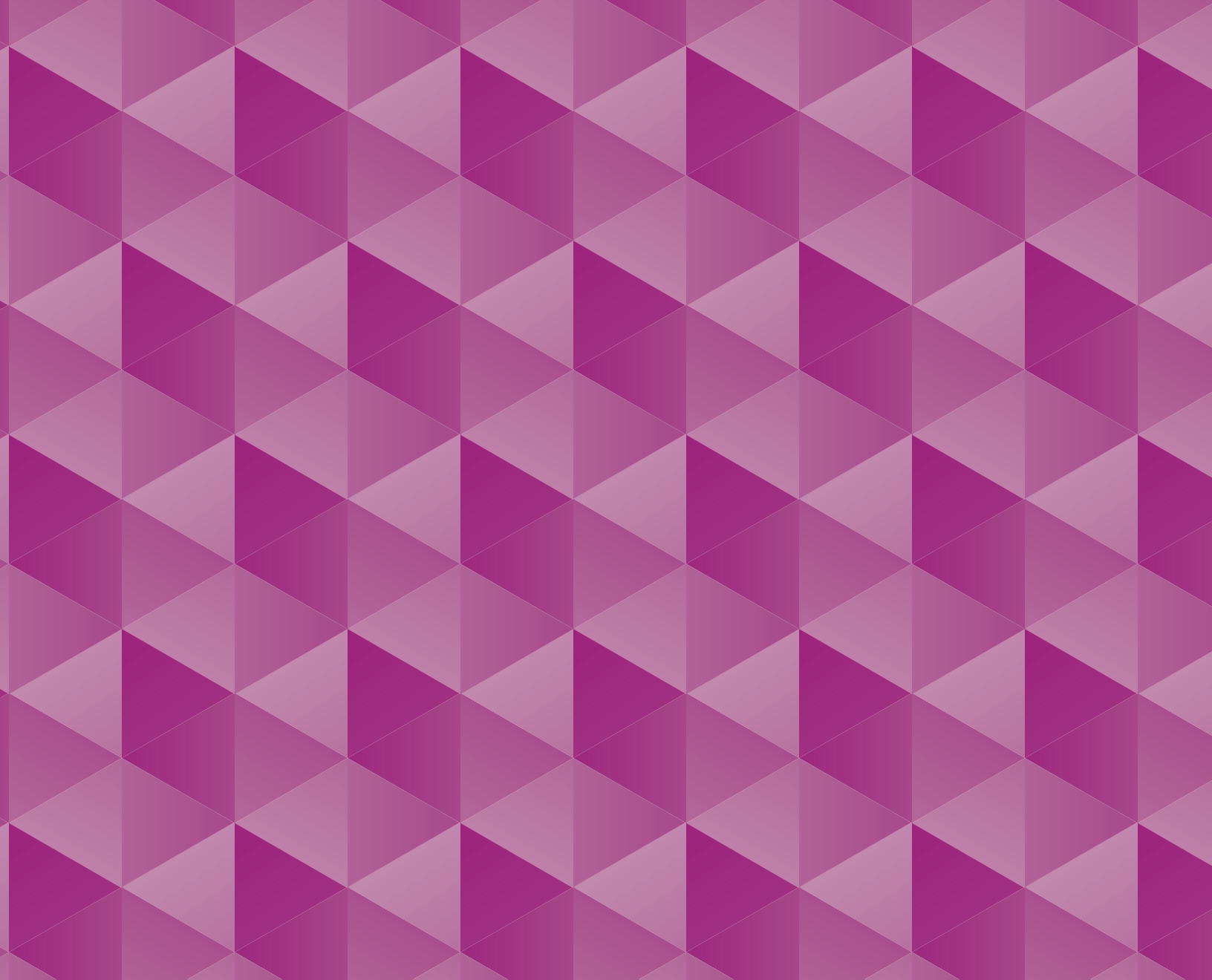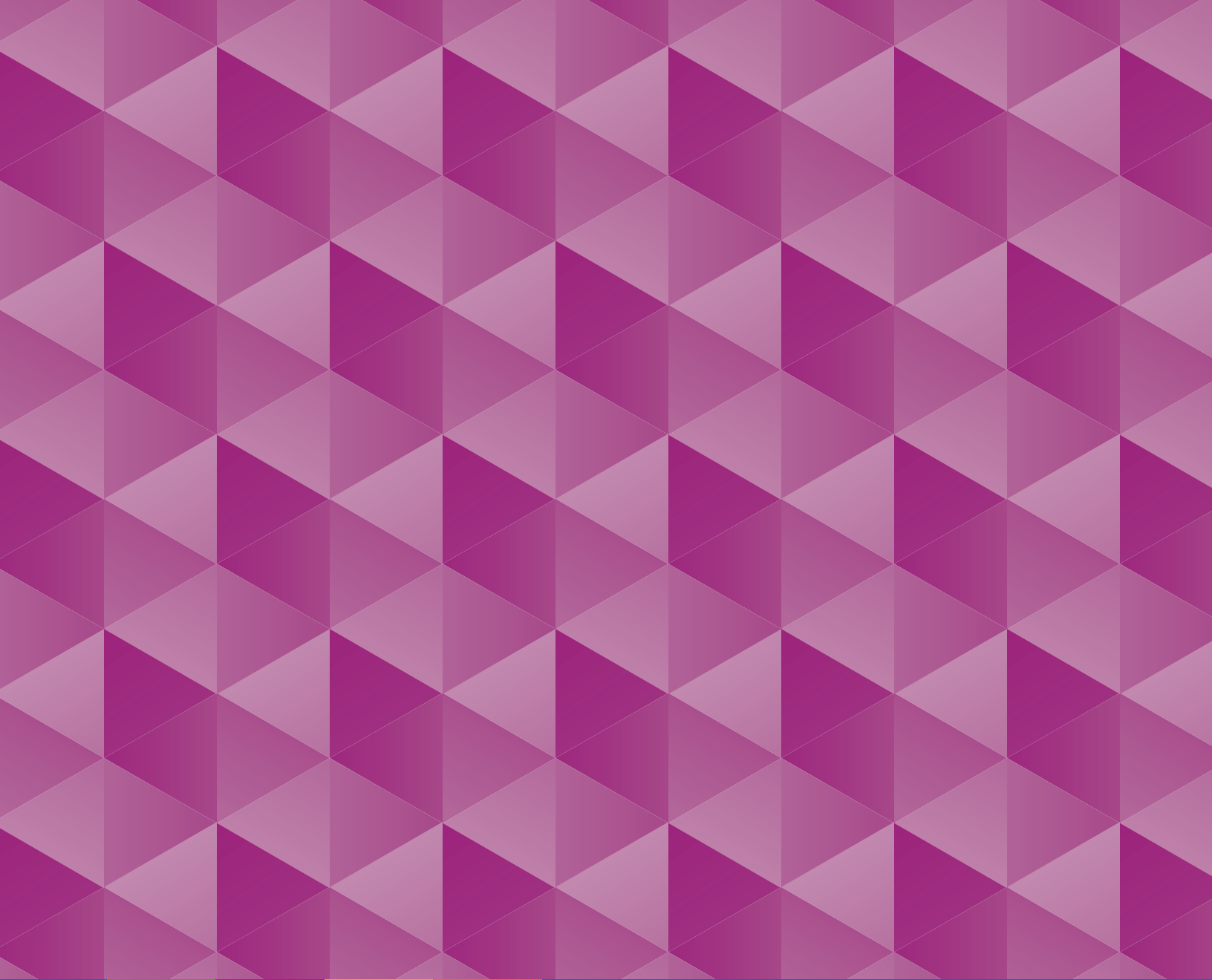# RECREATION AND CULTURE STRATEGY

TRENDS AND BEST PRACTICES

PREPARED BY: RC STRATEGIES+PERC
DRAFT – APRIL 2019

STRATHCONA COUNTY

RC + PERC
strategies

Lord
Cultural Resources

SUMMARY

BENEFITS

There are many proven **benefits of recreation and culture**:

- Essential to personal health and wellbeing
- Reduces self-destructive and anti-social behavior
- Is a significant economic generator
- Provides a foundation for quality of life
- Builds strong families and healthy communities
- Reduces health care, social service and police/justice costs
- Green spaces are essential to environmental and personal wellbeing

RECREATION

Trends in recreation services include:

- Increased popularity of unstructured spontaneous activities
- Volunteers are looking for term-defined opportunities to bolster their skills and resumes
- Aging infrastructure is a major concern for municipalities throughout the country
- Social inclusion is being considered in facility design
- Promotion methods to ensure all demographics are being reached

CULTURE

Trends in cultural services include:

- Transformation of public spaces for events and activities
- Encouraging local artists to shape the character of neighbourhoods
- Less reliance on new physical infrastructure
- Greater engagement with the private sector
- Cultural mapping to promote opportunities

COMPARISON

Compared to other municipalities and regions in western Canada, Strathcona County provides many facilities and spaces at a better provision rate (i.e. residents per facility). Fewer off leash dog parks and skateboard parks are seen in the County as compared to the other municipalities. The County is not lacking in the provision of indoor facility spaces. Strathcona County has a relatively high cost recovery and low net spending per person compared to other Alberta municipalities.
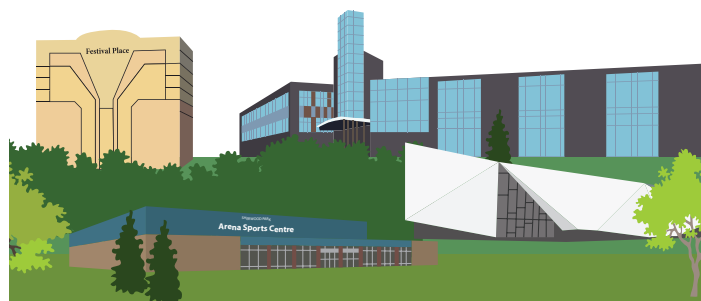
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TRENDS AND BEST PRACTICES

The following is a review of trends and best practices relating to recreation and culture services. A review of trends can help identify leading practices in the delivery services as well as emerging or evolving interests that may be important to consider when developing programming and infrastructure. Contents include the benefits of as well as trends and best practices in recreation and culture services. Municipal benchmark comparisons are also included.

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Festival Place

1 BENEFITS OF RECREATION AND CULTURE

The National Benefits HUB is a research database providing access to numerous resources that identify the positive impacts of recreation, sport, fitness, arts/culture, heritage, parks and green spaces on a community. Identified as follows is an overview of the benefits of recreation and culture with supporting evidence that has been sourced from benefitshub.ca.

Recreation and culture amenities are essential to personal health and wellbeing	Recreation and culture amenities reduce health care, social service, and police/justice costs	Recreation and culture amenities build strong and healthy communities
Recreation and culture amenities are a significant economic generator	The **8** Benefits of Quality Recreational and Cultural Opportunities	Green spaces are essential to wellbeing
Recreation and culture amenities provide a foundation for quality of life	Recreation and culture amenities provide the key to balanced human development	Recreation and culture amenities reduce self-destructive and anti-social behaviours

RECREATION AND CULTURE IS ESSENTIAL TO PERSONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Increased leisure time and physical activity improves life expectancy.[1]

- Physical activity contributes to improved mental health and reduced rates of depression.[2]

- Participation in physical activity can reduce workplace related stress.[3]

- The provision of green spaces has been linked with a number of health and wellbeing benefits including; increased physical activity, reduced risk of obesity, minimized utilization of the healthcare system, and stress reduction.[4]

RE/MAX Spray Park at Broadmoor Lake Park

RECREATION AND CULTURE PROVIDES THE KEY TO BALANCED HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

- Regular physical activity is likely to provide children with the optimum physiological condition for maximizing learning.[5]

- Low income students who are involved in arts activities have higher academic achievement and are more likely to go to college.[6]

- The arts and other forms of creativity can have profound individual social outcomes and generate a deeper sense of place and local community.[7]

- Individuals that participate in physical activity in a social setting have improved psychological and social health, and often also benefit from increased self-awareness and personal growth.[8]

- Improvement in cognitive development has been shown to be associated with surrounding greenness, particularly with greenness at schools.[9]

1   Moore SC, et al. (2012) Leisure Time Physical Activity of Moderate to Vigorous Intensity and Mortality: A Large Pooled Cohort Analysis. PLoS Medicine 9 (11): e1001335. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001335

2   Gallegos-Carillo, Katia et al. (2012). Physical Activity and Reduced Risk of Depression: Results of a Longitudinal Study of Mexican Adults. Health Psychology. In press. doi: 10.1037/a0029276

3   Burton, James P. , Hoobler, Jenny M. and Scheuer, Melinda L. (2012) Supervisor Workplace Stress and Abusive Supervision: The Buffering Effect of Exercise. Journal of Business and Psychology.

4   Heinze, John. (2011). Benefits of Green Space – Recent Research. Chantilly, Virginia: Environmental Health Research Foundation.

5   Marten, Karen. (2010). Brain boost: Sport and physical activity enhance children's learning. Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia.

6   Catteral, James S. (2012). The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies. Washington, District of Columbia: National Endowment for the Arts

7   Mulligan, M. et al. (2006). Creating Community: Celebrations, Arts and Wellbeing Within and Across Local Communities. Melbourne, Australia: Globalism Institute, RMIT University

8   Eime, Rochelle M et al. (2013). A systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for adults: informing development of a conceptual model of health through sport. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity. 10(35).

9   Dadvand, Payam et al. (2015). Green spaces and cognitive development in primary schoolchildren. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1503402112

RECREATION AND CULTURE PROVIDES A FOUNDATION FOR QUALITY OF LIFE

- The arts are seen as an important contributor to quality of life in communities.[10]

- High quality public spaces can enhance the sense of community in new neighbourhoods.[11]

- Feelings of dissatisfaction, stress, challenge, immobility, and alienation can be mitigated through participation in leisure and recreation activities are perceived to improve life quality.[12]

- Evidence has suggested that arts and culture make the aging population feel happy and healthy, help them meet other people, and improve their overall quality of life.[13]

RECREATION AND CULTURE REDUCES SELF-DESTRUCTIVE AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

- Youth participation in recreational activities such as camps increases leadership and social capacities.[14]

- Participation in recreation and leisure related activities by low income and other at risk children and youth populations can result in decreased behavioural/emotional problems, decreased use of emergency services, and enhanced physical and psycho-social health of families.[15]

- Teen athletes are less likely to use illicit drugs, smoke or to be suicidal.[16]

RECREATION AND CULTURE BUILDS STRONG FAMILIES AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

- People with an active interest in the arts contribute more to society than those with little or no such interest.[17]

- Evidence indicates that adults who attend art museums, art galleries, or live arts performances are far more likely than non-attendees to vote, volunteer, or take part in community events.[18]

- Structured sport and recreational activities can help foster a stronger sense of community among children and youth.[19]

- The more time a family spends together at a community playground, the greater their sense of family well-being.[20]
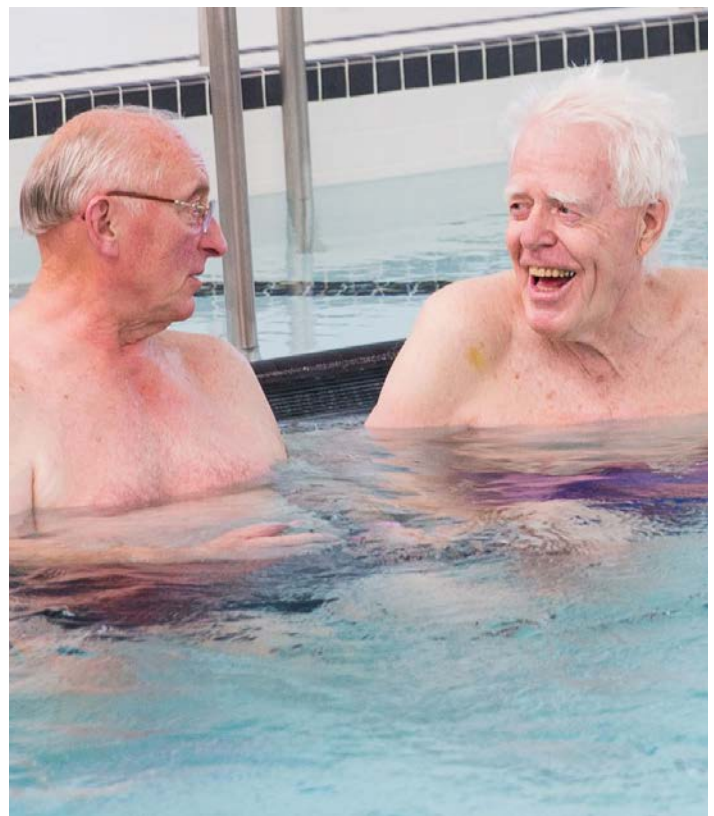
Emerald Hills Leisure Centre

10 Environics Research Group. (2010). The Arts and the Quality of Life. The attitudes of Ontarians. Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Arts Council.

11 Francis, Jacinta et al. (2012). Creating sense of community: The role of public space. Journal of Environmental Psychology. 32(4): 401-409. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2012.07.002

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13 ComRes. (2016). Arts Council England: Older people and arts and culture. Cobham, UK: ComRes.

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15 Totten, M. (2007). Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families in Ontario: The Health, Social and Economic Benefits of Increasing Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families; Research Summary Report. Toronto, Ontario: Ministry of Health Promotion.

16 Poway High School Library. (2001). Teens and sports: The perfect combination? Better Nutrition, 63(9), 16.

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18 National Endowment for the Arts. (2009. Art-Goers in Their Communities: Patterns of Civic and Social Engagement. Nea Research Note #98. Washington, D.C.: Author.

19 Hutchinson, Susan L. (2011). Physical Activity, Recreation, Leisure, and Sport: Essential Pieces of the Mental Health and Well-being Puzzle.

20 Harris Interactive (2011). Playgrounds Increase Sense Of Family Well-Being. Washington, District of Columbia. Foresters.

RECREATION AND CULTURE REDUCES HEALTH CARE, SOCIAL SERVICE AND POLICE/JUSTICE COSTS

- Physical inactivity has a number of direct and indirect financial impacts on all levels of government.[21]
- Parks and recreation programming during non-school hours can reduce costs associated with juvenile delinquency and obesity.[22]
- Increased fitness leads to lowered risk factors for substance abuse among youth populations.[23]
- Arts and cultural related recreational activities can contribute to neighbourhood renewal and make a real difference to health, crime, employment and education in disadvantaged communities.[24]

RECREATION AND CULTURE IS A SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC GENERATOR

- Recent Canadian research indicated that cultural activities have the potential to be significant drivers of economic outputs and employment.[25]
- Evidence suggests that creative activity shapes the competitive character of a city by enhancing both its innovative capacity and the quality of place so crucial to attracting and retaining skilled workers.[26]
- Cities with physically active populations are more economically competitive and they also benefit from increased productivity, improved school performance, and higher property values.[27]

GREEN SPACES ARE ESSENTIAL TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOLOGICAL WELLBEING

- Sustainable public green spaces provide crucial areas for residents of all demographics to be physically and socially active.[28]
- Increasing green spaces in urban centres has a number of positive environmental outcomes which can increase sustainability and lower long term infrastructure costs.[29]
- When children and youth have positive experiences with parks and green spaces, they are more likely to have stronger attitudes towards conservation and preservation of the environment as adults.[30]

In addition to its intrinsic value, culture provides important social and economic benefits such as improved learning and health, increased tolerance, and opportunities to come together with others. Culture can serve to enhance quality of life and improve wellbeing for both individuals and communities. The following outlines these and other findings from various reports and our experience in the field as it relates to the individual, social and economic benefits of culture.

21 Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (CAHPERD). (2004) Physical Activity: Health benefits and costs to health care system. Ottawa, Ontario: Author.

22 Witt, Peter A and Cladwell, Linda L. (2010).The Scientific Evidence Relating to the Impact of Recreation on Youth Development, in The Rationale for Recreation Services for Youth: An Evidenced Based Approach. Ashburn, Virginia: National Recreation and Parks Association.

23 Collingwood, Thomas R. et al. (2000). Physical Training as a Substance Abuse Prevention Intervention for Youth. Journal of Drug Education. 30 (4): 435-451.

24 Reeves, M. (2002). Measuring the economic and social impact of the arts: a review. London, England: Arts Council of England.

25 Momer, Bernard. (2011) Our City, Ourselves: A Cultural Landscape Assessment of Kelowna, British Columbia. Kelowna, British Columbia: City of Kelowna Recreation and Cultural Services.

26 Gertler, M. (2004). Creative cities: What are they for, how do they work, and how do we build them? Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Policy Research Network.

27 Active Living Research. (2015). Designed to Move: Active Cities. A Guide for City Leaders. San Diego, CA: ALR. 80 pp.

28 Cohen, D. et al. (2007). Contribution of Public Parks to Physical Activity. American Journal of Public Health, 97(3), 509.

29 Groth, P. (2008). Quantifying the Greenhouse Gas Benefits of Urban Parks. San Francisco, California: The Trust for Public Land.

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INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF CULTURE

While numerous surveys support perceptions of the value of culture, the actual individual and social benefits of culture can be appreciated within four key categories:

- **Intrinsic Benefits:** participation can benefit individuals in a variety of ways, such as through being a source of delight and wonder, emotional or intellectual stimulation, as leisure, entertainment, learning and shared experiences with others. These qualities are intrinsic to culture and often the motivators for why individuals are motivated to participate.

- **Improved Learning and Valuable Skills for the Future:** There are strong links between culture and literacy and improved learning outcomes both in public education and the development of skills for the workforce. Cultural heritage can also create opportunities for lifelong learning. Libraries, museums and other cultural institutions play key roles in expanding educational opportunities and literacy and improving the understanding of history.

- **Better Health and Wellbeing:** Creativity and cultural engagement have been shown to improve both mental and physical health. Culture is being integrated into health care, and a growing body of research demonstrates the importance of arts particularly for older adult health. Research has also shown that revitalization of Indigenous cultures plays a key role in supporting the health, well-being and healing of Indigenous individuals and communities.

- **Vibrant Communities:** The benefits of culture for individuals can affect society as a whole. This occurs through the creation of social capital, solidarity, cohesion, social inclusion, community empowerment, and capacity–building. Culture also enhances confidence, civic pride and tolerance. Cultural engagement plays a key role in poverty reduction and communities-at-risk strategies. Culture helps cities to develop compelling narratives and distinctive brands with unique selling points for both tourists and potential investors.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF CULTURE

Culture helps support the economy through direct and indirect job creation, spurring innovation in other sectors, and through regional development, community branding and increased tourism. These categories are expanded on below:

- **Contribution to Job Creation:** As economies transition from industrial models to knowledge and creativity based models, culture becomes increasingly important as an economic stimulant. According to research done by Hill Strategies, the direct contribution of culture industries to GDP was $6.5 billion in Alberta in 2014 (1.8% of provincial GDP). But the value added of culture industries in Alberta, as a proportion of the province's overall GDP, is well below the national average of 3.3%. Hill Strategies also reports that there were 61,800 jobs directly related to culture industries in Alberta in 2014, or 2.7% of the 2.3 million jobs in the province. This percentage is also below the national average (3.9%).

- **Contribution to Tourism:** Organizations such as Tourism Alberta and the provincial Department of Culture and Tourism do keep statistics on tourism, but data on the impact of cultural tourism specifically are hard to find for the province. Nevertheless, we know that cultural tourism has a major impact throughout Canada. For example, available data for Ontario show that cultural tourism has generated $3.7 billion in GDP and 67,700 jobs for Ontarians. Some 90% of the 21 million North Americans who visited Ontario (among other destinations) in a two–year period sought out a cultural activity on their visit, while 25% attended festivals and sporting events.

- **Cultural Planning:** As Strathcona County is doing, municipalities across the continent are recognizing the contribution of culture to sense of place, quality of life, and community and economic prosperity, and are harnessing its potential via municipal cultural planning efforts to strengthen the management of these resources and to integrate them into all facets of local planning and decision making.

2 TRENDS AND BEST PRACTICES IN THE PROVISION OF CULTURE SERVICES

This section highlights:

- Cultural participation in Alberta
- Key national and international trends
- Trends and best practices in municipal cultural planning

Clay Hut @ Smeltzer House

CULTURE PARTICIPATION IN ALBERTA

The 2017 Survey of Albertans on Culture found that 86% of Albertans either attended arts events or participated in artistic activities over the past year.

These activities included:

- Performing arts events - 62%
- Community arts festivals, fairs or cultural performances and events - 46%
- Visual arts events at galleries and studios or art exhibitions of things - 35%
- Artist talks or lectures about their work - 12%
- Literary events - 10%
- Attendance at other arts and culture events - 14%

The survey also found that attitudes towards the arts are positive in Alberta:

- About 86% of adult Albertans think arts and culture make their community a better place to live
- 81% of adult Albertans think arts activities are an important contributor to their quality of life
- And nearly 88% of adult Albertans think the government should continue to fund and support the arts in Alberta

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

The subsequent content discusses national and international trends, which present a number of high-level or contextual issues that are affecting arts and culture.

GOVERNMENTS, POLITICAL PRIORITIES AND POLICIES

Attitudes towards culture (visual arts, performing arts, festivals, heritage, creative industries, etc.) and recognition of its value and role in economic development and community wellbeing is very different from city to city, province to province, and country to country. This attitude and the platform of the political body in power will have a distinct impact on whether culture is prioritized and whether it is funded through government sources. Most recently, there has been a renaissance in the cultural sector and the federal government has restored and committed to new funding sources for the sector. However, changes can be expected with shifts in leadership and governance after each election period. Being able to advocate for culture and weather the waxing and waning of government funding and changing priorities is a continued challenge.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The internet and digital technology have great potential to both disrupt and provide opportunity. This has had a profound and cross-cutting impact not only on the way we connect with each other, but on how culture is created, consumed, displayed, distributed, and preserved. It changes who our audiences are and how we communicate with them, as well as revolutionizing the skills needed to participate and operate in a digital world on a daily basis. In this ever-changing world, the challenge is not only to keep up with innovation, but to find a way to integrate digital opportunities.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Canada is recognized and admired for being one of the most diverse nations in the world. With the highest global rate of immigration, Canada is a growing nation. We are also an aging nation. Despite this increasing mix of perspectives, backgrounds, traditions, abilities, and creativity, arts and culture often present barriers – physical, intellectual, financial – to participation, engagement and consumption. Ensuring culture is as inclusionary as possible, celebrating diversity in all aspects from content to staffing is a key challenge, as is ensuring that culture is able to breakdown those barriers of inequity.

RECONCILIATION

A top concern for Canadians going forward is the subject of reconciliation with our Indigenous communities. Ensuring that Indigenous peoples have the same opportunities, platforms and support to tell their own stories in their own way and share their perspectives, traditions and cultures is important. It is essential to include Indigenous voices in planning and development for the future of the cultural sector.

CHANGING AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS, ENGAGEMENT AND CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

Digital technologies and changing preferences have drastically altered the way people engage with and consume cultural and creative content. More people own a smartphone and access the internet using mobile technology than ever before. Culture is experienced simultaneously through a physical and a digital presence. Regularly changing content is expected in an open format and more people consume content through subscriptions to online providers than through traditional print or broadcast media. Content is also used and reimaged to create new content which throws copyright into question. The challenge here is keeping up with these growing expectations, delivering content in the format and on the platforms people want, and ensuring that organizations can be as open as possible while still generating income to support their activities.

NEW INSTITUTIONAL ROLES, MISSIONS AND ARTISTIC PRACTICES

The role of our cultural organizations (museums, art galleries, visual artists, heritage sites) is changing. In the 21st century, these institutions and individuals are expected to achieve more than simply artistic creation, preservation, and education. They are now expected to be forums for discussion, community spaces, healers, political advocates, and more. Understanding how to fulfill these new roles effectively and efficiently is challenging, particularly while remaining relevant in the eyes of their audiences, supporters, and funders. How art and culture is created is also changing, many artists are working with digital media to create art, music, and performance. The challenge will be recognizing these new art forms and emerging artistic practices and ensuring that they are welcome and supported along with more traditional art forms and practices.

URBANIZATION, PLANNING AND THE PACE OF DEVELOPMENT

More Canadians live in urban centres now than at any other time in history. However, due to our geographic size, the country is characterized by large urban cities, surrounded by sprawling rural areas and untouched landscapes. The pace of growth is unprecedented, as is the pace of development of new housing, facilities and infrastructure. This has a drastic impact on design, affordability, availability of space, and ensuring that sites of natural, heritage and cultural value are protected for future generations. The continuing challenge will be to not only make space for culture and artists but to ensure affordability and appropriate use and development of heritage assets.

Art Gallery @ 501

MUNICIPAL CULTURE PLANNING

The following are trends in municipal cultural planning, focusing on recent approaches as demonstrated in cities across North America.

ACTIVATION OF PUBLIC SPACES

"Activation of public spaces" includes the following key attributes:

- People-driven, not facility driven– connectivity and accessibility are emphasized
- Engagement with local cultural organizations and businesses
- Temporary or underused spaces (i.e. "pop-ups") are utilized
- Fostering an environment of social inclusion
- Events, programs and activities

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

Creative placemaking is about bringing together the public, private, not-for-profit and community sectors to strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighbourhood around arts and cultural activities, giving voice to local artists and creating authentic experiences. Creative placemaking is happening in many cities across the United States and Canada. It includes the following key attributes:

- Leverages the creative potential already present in a place
- Supports diversity in the community, providing multiple points of entry and interaction
- Contributes to a mix of uses and people that makes places more diverse, more interesting and more active
- Fosters connections among people and across cultures

LESS RELIANCE ON NEW PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Physical infrastructure is a requirement in many cases (theatres, museums, dance studios, etc.) but there is a general trend away from new physical infrastructure in municipal cultural planning. Instead of new "bricks and mortar"-based development, cities are moving toward:

- Signature festivals and major events
- Redefining what a "cultural space" is
- Digital placemaking

A key indicator is the increasing importance of festivals in municipal cultural planning. Festivals, both big and small, are becoming a more prominent feature of the cultural landscape and in many cases supplanting "bricks and mortar" cultural infrastructure. These events range from small street fairs to signature events attracting both residents and tourists and serving as an economic driver. Festivals are nimble; they can take place in non-traditional spaces and can change up programming if necessary. Many are free to the public; utilize existing public spaces and cultural assets; spark interactions among community members; and nurture positive images of urban areas, especially neighborhoods that might need a boost.

With public art programs now widespread, a "cultural space" can be virtually any place – an alley or a train trestle or a public park, to name a few. And the redefinition of cultural spaces can include buildings that are not typically thought of as spaces for culture, so the trend extends into creative re-use of existing structures (as opposed to new ones) and integration of arts and culture into existing buildings with other primary functions.

Digital placemaking is in its early stages. Essentially it entails the integration of social media into placemaking practices, encouraging public participation, collaboration, and transparency.

GREATER ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

There is a general recognition amongst municipalities, arts, culture and heritage organizations and other creative organizations and individuals that governments cannot be expected to carry the whole responsibility of managing and supporting culture. Greater engagement with the private sector is a major trend.

"Percent for art" funding to support public art programs are nothing new, but municipalities are extending these beyond a percentage of just municipal capital projects to also include private sector capital projects. Other revenue tools include setting aside a percentage of development charge money for support of culture grant programs (other than public art), more skillful and sophisticated cultivation of potential private sector donors and sponsors, and an approach to philanthropy that recognizes that many potential donors and sponsors want to be partners in new developments or projects in which they actually contribute to planning, not simply sources of cash for them.

Josephburg Mural, Bi Yuan Cheng, Moyer Recreation Centre

CULTURAL MAPPING

It is common today for municipalities to create "culture maps" that are accessible online and locate the various cultural resources in the city. The most common categories are:

- Cultural facilities and spaces
- Cultural events and festivals
- Public Art

But many are now revisiting their cultural maps and asking a key question: are they intended to act as an internal resources for municipal staff or a public engagement tools for community members?

If the primary audience of the culture map is municipal staff, then other aspects of the tool become the focus of future plans. Fundamentally, the culture map has the potential to inform decision making across divisions regarding investments in cultural facilities and the spatial distribution of cultural programs and services.

Regardless of whether the culture map will be used primarily by residents or municipal staff, there are four overarching areas that require attention. Good municipal cultural maps should:

- Be a source of current information about cultural assets in the municipality
- Be compatible and integrate well with other municipal geospatial data and resources
- Have the technical capacity to integrate with mobile devices and other datasets
- Include features that improve the user experience (e.g. filters and timely event information)

Apart from these requirements, the map could act as a catalyst to build partnerships both within and beyond the local culture sector. Updating information about existing entries is also an opportunity to strengthen ties with organizations that already provided information for the map. The development of additional categories could also be used to gather information about the cultural contributions of specific groups (e.g. individual artists, specific cultural communities, or business improvement areas) and support the promotion of underground or less visible cultural activity. The range of possibilities is wide, but also very specific to the municipality in question and municipal goals and requirements.

3 TRENDS AND BEST PRACTICES IN RECREATION SERVICES

Summarized in the following section are selected trends related to:

- Participation
- Service delivery
- Volunteerism
- Infrastructure
- Parks and open spaces
- Summary of trends analysis conducted in 2017

Strathcona County Bike Skills Park

PARTICIPATION

🏃 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS REMAIN CONCERNING

The Canadian Health Measures Survey (Statistics Canada) concludes that the fitness levels of Canadian children and youth, as well as adults, have declined significantly between 1981 and 2009. Among youth aged 15 to 19, the percentage who were at an increased or high risk of health problems more than tripled; for adults aged 20 to 39 this percentage quadrupled.

The 2017 Alberta Survey on Physical Activity found that while physical activity levels have remained consistent over the past 10 years, a high proportion of Albertans remain inactive. Key findings from the survey are summarized below.

- Overall, 57% of Albertans get enough physical activity to achieve health benefits
- 26% of Albertans achieve high levels of walking (>12,500 steps per day)
- Albertans spend an average of 9 hours per weekday and 8.5 hours per weekend day in sedentary activities

ParticipACTION is a national non-profit organization that strives to help Canadians sit less and move more. The Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth is a comprehensive assessment of child and youth physical activity, taking data from multiple sources, including the best available peer-reviewed research, to assign grades for indicators such as overall physical activity, active play, sleep, and others. The most recent report card (2018) states that "Canadian kids aren't active enough" and an overall physical activity rating of D+ was assigned.

- 35% of 5- to 17-year-olds meet the physical activity recommendation within the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth (2014-15 CHMS, Statistics Canada).
- 62% of 3- to 4-year-olds meet the physical activity recommendation within the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the Early Years (2009-11, 2012-13 and 2014-15 CHMS, Statistics Canada).

🍁 NATIONAL SURVEY RESULTS: PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES

The 2013 Canadian Community Health Survey[1] indicates that the five most popular adult activities are walking, gardening, home exercise, swimming and bicycling. The five most popular youth activities were walking, bicycling, swimming, running/jogging, and basketball.

A research paper entitled "Sport Participation 2010" published by Canadian Heritage[2] also identified a number of trends pertaining to participation in specific sports. Swimming (as a sport) has experienced the most significant decrease while soccer has had the highest rate of growth; while golf and hockey remain the two most played sports in Canada. The Paper further identifies a number of broad participation trends related specifically to sport focused participation utilizing Statistics Canada data from the 2010 Federal Census and the General Social Survey.

- Students (15 years and older) participate in sport in greater numbers than any labour force group.
- Participation is highly concentrated in a few sports. Participants in golf, ice hockey, and soccer tend to prefer these three sports and have less diversity in their overall sporting pursuits than participants of other sports.
- Relaxation and fun were ranked as being important by 97% of sport participants.
- A lack of time and lack of interest are the main reasons for not participating in sport.

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1   Statistics Canada: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/140612/dq140612b-eng.htm

2   Government of Canada: http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2013/pc-ch/CH24-1-2012-eng.pdf

UNSTRUCTURED SPONTANEOUS ACTIVITIES ARE INCREASING IN POPULARITY

The Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institutes 2011 – 2012 Sport Monitor Report identifies that the highest proportion of Canadians prefer non-competitive sports or activities (44%).[3] While many structured or organized activities remain important, there is an increasing demand for more flexibility in timing and activity choice. People are seeking individualized, informal pursuits that can be done alone or in small groups, at flexible times, often near or at home. This does not however eliminate the need for structured activities and the stakeholder groups that provide them. Instead, this trend suggests that planning for the general population is as important as planning for traditional structured use environments.

Strathcona Wilderness Centre

PROVIDING RECREATION AND LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER ADULTS

The World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health identifies a number of benefits that can result due to the provision of quality and appropriate physical activity opportunities for older adults.

- Lower rates of all-cause mortality, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, type 2 diabetes, colon cancer and breast cancer, a higher level of cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, healthier body mass and composition.
- Biomarker profile that is more favourable for the prevention of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and the enhancement of bone health.
- Exhibit higher levels of functional health, a lower risk of falling, and better cognitive function.
- Have reduced risk of moderate and severe functional limitations and role limitations.

The WHO further outlines six specific guideline recommendations for older adult physical activity levels.

1. Older adults should achieve at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity.

2. Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes duration.

3. For additional health benefits, older adults should increase their moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes per week, or engage in 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, or an equivalent combination of moderate-and vigorous-intensity activity.

4. Older adults, with poor mobility, should perform physical activity to enhance balance and prevent falls on 3 or more days per week.

5. Muscle-strengthening activities, involving major muscle groups, should be done on 2 or more days a week.

6. When older adults cannot achieve the recommended amounts of physical activity due to health conditions, they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow.

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3   Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institutes 2011 – 2012 Sport Monitor: http://www.cflri.ca/node/78

☙ ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

To maximize the benefit of community infrastructure and programs, residents need to participate. The "build it and they will come" approach may work for some assets, but it should not be the only approach. It is important to promote opportunities to create awareness and reach under-served markets.

The following examples have been used in other communities to encourage participation:

- **Free Drop-in:** This refers to providing free drop-in opportunities such as public skate or public swim. Often these opportunities are sponsored by local businesses to generate revenue.

- **Impromptu Conversion of Public Space:** This involves setting up temporary (or permanent) equipment for activities in public spaces such as plazas, alleys, parks, and closed roads. Some activities and equipment have included table tennis, basketball, chess, pianos, skateboard parks, concerts and gallery spaces.

- **Social Media:** Most municipalities utilize social media as a method to promote leisure opportunities; however, the extent to which it is effective varies greatly among communities. Techniques to improve the use of social media include partnerships (i.e. retweeting promotional material from partner organizations), using all platforms together (i.e. synchronizing the use of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram from a single dashboard), planning and pre-scheduling posts (i.e. weekly opportunities are automatically promoted the morning of), and by adding the municipality's social media handles to everything possible (i.e. just as a logo would be added to the header or footer of a flyer, newsletter, webpage or poster).

- **Prescription to Get Active:** Some municipalities have partnered with local health organizations to honour "prescriptions" to recreation facilities and programs.

- **Try-it Day:** The Grande Prairie Sport Council, in partnership with the City and County of Grande Prairie, hosts an annual event in which children ages 6 to 12 can participate in a variety of sports at no cost. During the inaugural event in 2015, introductory experiences were offered for 30 different sports; participants registered for two activities. The goals of the event are to increase sport participating, introduce families to new sports, increase the profile of regional sport organizations, and to establish relationships among sport stakeholders.

- **Youth Nights:** A youth centre in Swift Current, Saskatchewan hosts drop-in youth nights on Friday and Saturday evenings. The event regularly attracts around 250 youth to the alcohol and drug-free environment.

Basketball at Millennium Place

SERVICE DELIVERY

⚑ FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY IS A FOCUS

Recreation consumers have a greater choice of activity options than at any time in history. As a result, service providers are being required to ensure that their approach to delivery is fluid and is able to quickly adapt to meet community demand. Many municipalities have also had to make hard decisions on which activities they are able to directly offer or support, versus those which are more appropriate to leave to the private sector to provide. Ensuring that programming staff and management are current on trends is important in the identification and planning of programming. Regular interaction and data collection (e.g. customer surveys) from members are other methods that service providers use to help identify programs that are popular and in demand. The development of multi-use spaces can also help ensure that municipalities have the flexibility to adapt to changing interests and activity preferences.

🏋 FINANCIAL BARRIERS LIMIT PARTICIPATION

Research and available data has determined that many Canadians face barriers that impact their ability to reap the numerous physical, social, and mental benefits that are accrued from participation in recreation and leisure pursuits. Understanding these barriers can help service providers identify strategies to mitigate issues and encourage participation.

The 2014 CIBC – KidSport Report reflects barriers to participation in sport for 3 to 17 year olds in Canada. The cost of enrollment, the cost of equipment, and a lack of interest were identified as the top 3 barriers.

Education and income levels impacts impact sport participation. Canadians with a University education and those making more than $80,000 annually have the highest rates of sport participation.[4]

Financial barriers to participation in recreation, sport, and leisure activities continue to exist for many Albertans. Understanding the potential benefits that can result from engaging citizens in a broad range of activities and programs, municipalities have undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at removing financial barriers. Current initiatives being led or supported by many municipalities include the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's 'Everybody Gets to Play' program, KidSport, and Canadian Tire JumpStart.

🤝 PREVALENCE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships in the provision of parks, recreation, and culture opportunities are becoming more prevalent. These partnerships can take a number of forms, and include government, not for profit organizations, schools, and the private sector. While the provision of parks and recreation services has historically relied on municipal levels of government, many municipalities are increasingly looking to form partnerships that can enhance service levels and more efficiently lever public funds. Examples of partnerships include facility naming and sponsorship arrangements, lease/contract agreements, the contracted operation of spaces, entire facilities, or delivery of programs.

It is estimated that over three-quarters of Canadian municipalities work with schools in their communities to encourage the participation of municipal residents in physical activities.[5] Just under half of Canadian municipalities work with local non-profits (46%), health settings (40%), or workplaces (25%) to encourage participation in physical activities amongst their residents. Seventy-six percent (76%) of municipalities with a population of 1,000 to 9,999 to 80% of municipalities over 100,000 in population have formed agreements with school boards for shared use of facilities. In fact since 2000, the proportion of municipalities that have reported working with schools, health settings, and local non-profit organizations has increased by 10% to 20%.

Partnership frameworks are used to guide the development of partnerships as well as to keep them accountable. A number of criteria are considered to determine whether a potential partnership is worthwhile and ethical to pursue.

Partnership criteria could include:

- Alignment with municipal planning vision, values, goals, etc.
- Type of organization (non-profit, private company)
- Provision of additional/diverse variety of opportunities
- Capital cost savings
- Operating cost savings
- Enhancement of health and wellness of individuals
- Provision of social and wellness benefits to the community
- Safety and risk management
- Access and affordability
- Equity and fairness
- Sustainable approach
- Competency of the organization (clear demonstration of business/feasibility planning)

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4   Government of Canada: http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2013/pc-ch/CH24-1-2012-eng.pdf

5   "Municipal Opportunities for Physical Activity" Bulletin 6: Strategic partnerships. 2010, Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute.

PRIVATE SECTOR PROVISION

The provision of exercise and fitness opportunities has increased and what has traditionally been an area of responsibility for municipalities is now being provided by private operators. While it is still important that municipalities ensure a base-level of service, the extent to which provide fitness is becoming unclear. With the increase in competition wanted to be avoided, some communities have developed agreements with local private service providers to help prevent overlap of services. It is not uncommon for municipalities to lease its fitness spaces to private operators; however, affordability to residents could be a concern.

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Social isolation, which is related to concepts such as loneliness, social vulnerability, and exclusion, has profound impacts on the health and wellbeing individuals. The understanding of this issue has gained more traction in Canada recently, particularly for seniors. It is estimated that 16% of seniors in Canada experience social isolation including 6% never or not often participate in activities with family and friends.[6] The Government of Canada conducted a literature review on social isolation; an element of the review was to compile a list of promising interventions for seniors, which included group activities, arts and culture based activities, and friendship programs.

ADDRESSING SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social inclusion is about making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected, and contributing members of society. It involves the basic notions of belonging, acceptance, and recognition. The concept of social inclusion is becoming an issue communities are addressing. Its significance has risen as communities have become more diversified through immigration. For immigrants, social inclusion would be manifested in full and equal participation in all facets of a community including economic, social, cultural, and political realms. It goes beyond including "outsiders" or "newcomers." In fact, social inclusion is about the elimination of the boundaries or barriers between "us" and "them."[7] There is a recognition that diversity has worth unto itself and is not something that must be overcome.[8]

The Framework for Recreation in Canada[9] stresses the importance of increasing inclusion and access to recreation for populations that face constraints to participation. This goal aims to achieve equitable participation for all regardless of socioeconomic status, age, culture, race, aboriginal status, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and geographic location.

Social inclusion is being considered in facility design to create welcoming environments, promotion methods to ensure all demographics are being reached, and program planning to offer opportunities for all community members. Social media is being embraced as a modern communication tool useful for effectively sharing messages with younger, more technologically savvy audiences.

7   Omidvar, Ratna, Ted Richmand (2003). Immigrant Settlement and Social Inclusion in Canada. The Laidlaw Foundation.

8   Harvey, Louise (2002). Social Inclusion Research in Canada: Children and Youth. The Canadian Council on Social Development's "Progress of Canada's Children".

9   A Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015: Pathways to Wellbeing

6   Statistics Canada: Who's at Risk and What Can Be Done About It? A Review of the Literature on the Social Isolation of Different Groups of Seniors. February 2017.

FOSTERING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The combined factors of decreasing support from other levels of government, increasing demand for new and exciting recreation infrastructure and programs, and the changing nature of volunteerism has led many municipalities to adopt a community development focus in service delivery. This, in addition to the direct delivery of recreation facilities and programs, includes the empowerment of local non-profit groups to operate facilities and/or offer programs to residents thereby leveraging public resources and providing more value for public investment.

Community development is the process of creating change through a model of greater public participation; the engagement of the entire community from the individual up. The concept of community development has a broader reach than just the delivery of parks and recreation programs and facilities; it is commonly understood to be the broader involvement of the general public in decision making and delivery. Community development in recreation delivery encompasses supporting and guiding volunteer groups to ultimately become self-sufficient while providing facilities and programs.

The benefits of recreation experiences contribute to community development. Socializing, volunteering, friendships, civic pride, preserving history, and appreciating one another's differences are just a few examples of the way recreation activities relay into community development. Participating in recreation creates leadership development opportunities that build strong communities, social capital, and social cohesion.[10]

The development of children and youth is a large factor in community development. Access to public recreation facilities and parks is important for youth to engage in a variety of activities, especially at-risk youth and vulnerable populations.

ALIGNING WITH PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Municipal service providers are aligning their strategic planning and overall service provision with provincial and national level strategic planning conducted by higher levels of government or governing bodies. Strategically aligning service delivery can provide a number of benefits which include:

- Increased access to grant funding
- Ability to access and utilize research and other available resources
- Consistency of messaging to local community groups and organizations

Within the sport and recreational sphere, national initiatives such as the Long Term Athlete Development model and Canadian Sport for Life Policy have been implemented locally by many municipalities in their programming. Municipalities are starting to require that local sport groups and associations align with these initiatives in order to receive funding and ongoing support.

Youth Kickboxing Class at Millennium Place

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10   Alberta Parks and Recreation Association (2002). A Re-established Urban Parks Program.

VOLUNTEERISM

VOLUNTEER TRENDS ARE SHIFTING

Nine current trends in volunteerism are identified by Volunteer Canada.[11]

Much comes from the few. While 47% of Canadians volunteer, over one-third (34%) of all volunteer hours were contributed by 5% of total volunteers.

- **The new volunteer.** Young people volunteer to gain work related skills (Canadians aged 15 – 24 volunteer more than any other age group). New Canadians also volunteer to develop work experience and to practice language skills. Persons with disabilities may volunteer as a way to more fully participate in community life.

- **Mandatory volunteering.** There are mandatory volunteer programs through Workfare, Community Service Order and school mandated community work.

- **Volunteering by contract.** The changing volunteer environment is redefining volunteer commitment as a negotiated and mutually beneficial arrangement rather than a one-way sacrifice of time by the volunteer.

- **Risk management.** Considered part of the process of job design for volunteers, risk management ensures the organization can place the right volunteer in the appropriate activity.

- **Borrowing best practices.** The voluntary sector has responded to the changing environment by adopting corporate and public sector management practices including standards, codes of conduct, accountability and transparency measures around program administration, demand for evaluation, and outcome measurement.

- **Professional volunteer management.** Managers of volunteer resources are working toward establishing an equal footing with other professionals in the voluntary sector.

- **Board governance.** Volunteer boards must respond to the challenge of acting as both supervisors and strategic planners.

VALUE OF VOLUNTEERISM

The following information was compiled by Propellus (formerly Volunteer Canada) on behalf of Volunteer Centres in the province. They pulled together statistics and ways to form a template so everyone could use similar numbers and ways of adding up statistics.[12] Through these templates, the Government of Alberta intents to calculate the value of volunteerism moving forward.

Calculating the value of volunteerism in Strathcona County:

- The population of Strathcona County is 98,400.
- The latest volunteer rate for Alberta from Statistics Canada is 50%.
- This estimates that a total of 49,200 residents volunteer in Strathcona County.
- The average number of volunteer hours per volunteer in Alberta is 161.
- 49,200 estimated volunteers multiplied by an average of 161 hours totals 7,921,200 million hours per year in Strathcona County.
- The new idea in the sector is to calculate the value of volunteerism. This is estimated by multiplying the number of volunteer hours by the average wage.
- The average wage according to Statistics Canada in Alberta is $28.39 per hour.
- The value created by volunteerism in Strathcona County is estimated to be worth $224,882,868 ($28.39 x 7,921,200).
- Another way to look at it; volunteering is the equivalent of 4,352 full time jobs in the sector in Strathcona County.

11 Alberta Heritage Community Foundation. http://www.abheritage.ca/volunteer/index.html

12 All statistics are taken from Stats Canada and the Government 2017 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey

ENHANCING VOLUNTEERISM

Since many recreation opportunities are provided by volunteers, supporting volunteerism is critical. Communication initiatives are imperative to help link people with opportunities and vice versa as well as for recognizing volunteers. The recognition of volunteers is a nice touch to remind the individuals that their efforts make a difference. Communicating recognition to the public is also a strategy to spread the word about volunteer opportunities.

Methods to support volunteerism are varied and can include:

- Recognition events
- Recognition communiqués
- Opportunity postings
- Establishing and updating a database/list of potential volunteers to email opportunities
- Training and development opportunities
- Communicate the benefits of volunteering and explain how it makes a difference in the community
- Benefits for volunteers (e.g. discount to some programs/facilities)

Youth Leaders in Training

INFRASTRUCTURE

AGING INFRASTRUCTURE IS A MAJOR CONCERN

The Canadian Infrastructure Report Card[13] includes an assessment and analysis of the state of sport and recreation facilities in Canada. The report reveals concerns and issues that will impact sport and recreation infrastructure over the next number of years. Key findings from the report include:

Canada's infrastructure, including sport and recreation facilities, is at risk of rapid deterioration unless there is immediate investment.

- The average annual reinvestment rate in sport and recreation facilities is currently 1.3% (of capital value) while the recommended target rate of reinvestment is 1.7%–2.5%.
- Almost 1 in 2 sport and recreation facilities are in 'very poor', 'poor' or 'fair' condition and need repair or replacement.
- In comparison to other municipal infrastructure assessed in the Report Card, sport and recreation facilities were in the worst state and require immediate attention.
- The extrapolated replacement value of sport and recreation facilities in 'poor' or 'very poor' condition is $9B and $14B for those in 'fair' condition.

FLEXIBLE AND MULTI-USE SPACES

Recreation and leisure facilities are being designed to accommodate multiple activities and to encompass a variety of different components. The benefits of designing multi-use spaces include the opportunity to create operational efficiencies, attract a wide spectrum of users, and procure multiple sources of revenue. Providing the opportunity for all family members to take part in different opportunities simultaneously at the same location additionally increases convenience and satisfaction for residents. Creating spaces within a facility that are easily adaptable and re-configurable is another growing trend observed in many newer and retrofitted facilities. Gymnasium spaces and field house facilities are being designed with adjustable barriers, walls, bleachers, and other amenities that can be easily set-up or removed depending on the type of activity or event.

INTEGRATING INDOOR AND OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTS

A newer concept in recreation infrastructure planning is to ensure that the indoor recreation environment interacts seamlessly with the outdoor recreation environment. This can include such ideas as indoor/outdoor walking trails, indoor/outdoor child play areas, and indoor/outdoor aquatics facilities. Although there are a number of operational issues that need to be considered when planning indoor/outdoor environments (e.g. cleaning, controlled access, etc.) the concept of planning an indoor facility to complement the site it is located on (and associated outdoor amenities included) as well as the broader community parks and trail system is prudent and will ensure the optimization of public spending on both indoor and outdoor recreation infrastructure. Integrating indoor and outdoor environments is also achieved by ensuring interiors have good opportunities to view the outdoors.

ENSURING ACCESSIBILITY

Many current recreation facilities are putting significant focus on ensuring that user experiences are comfortable including meeting accessibility requirements and incorporating designs that can accommodate all potential participants. Meeting the needs of various user groups is also an important aspect of accessibility. Incorporating mobile technologies, rest spaces, child-friendly spaces, crafts areas, and educational multi-purpose rooms for classes and performances is an emerging trend. Accessibility guidelines set by governments, as well as an increased understanding of the needs of different types of visitors, is fueling this trend.

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13 http://www.canadainfrastructure.ca/downloads/Canadian_
Infrastructure_Report_2016.pdf

ACHIEVING FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH REVENUE GENERATING SPACES

Operators of community facilities are being required to find creative and innovative ways to generate the revenues needed to both sustain current operations and to fund future expansion or renovation projects. By generating sustainable revenues outside of regular government contributions, many facilities are able to demonstrate increased financial sustainability and expand service levels. Lease spaces provide one such opportunity. Many facilities are creating new spaces or redeveloping existing areas of their facility that can be leased to food and beverage providers and other retail businesses. Short term rental spaces are another major source of revenue for many facilities. Lobby areas, programs rooms, and event hosting spaces have the potential to be rented to the corporate sector for meetings, team building activities, holiday parties, and a host of other functions. Advertising spaces, sponsorships agreements, and naming rights are tactics used to generate revenue.

MODERN AMENITIES AND FOSTERING SOCIAL INTERACTION

The inclusion of modern and social interaction amenities provides the opportunity for multi-purpose community facilities to maximize the overall experience for users as well as to potentially attract non-traditional patrons to the facility. Examples of such amenities include attractive lobby areas, common spaces, restaurants and cafeterias, spectator viewing areas, meeting facilities, and adjacent outdoor parks or green space. It is uncommon for new public facilities, especially in urban areas, to not be equipped with public wireless internet. Another significant benefit of equipping facilities with technology and modern amenities is the opportunity to increase usage and visitation to the facility during non-peak hours. Including spaces such as public cafeterias and open lobby spaces can result in local residents visiting the facility during non-event or non-program hours to meet friends or is simply a part of their daily routine. Many municipalities and non-profit organizations have encouraged this non-peak hour use in order to ensure that the broader populace perceives that the facility is accessible and available to all members of the community.

HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS IN RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

In 2010, the Public Health Nutritionist Working Group of Saskatchewan developed a resource guide for creating food policies at worksites and recreation facilities. Saskatchewan is one of the five provinces in Canada that have published guidelines or policy making 'tool kits' to help recreation centres improve their food environment. Albeit a good resource, it is up to the business or facility to use the guide to adopt healthier food policies. In studies, patrons of recreational facilities have indicated interest in healthier food options, but there are mixed results when operators institute policies.

A success story for instituting a health food initiative exists in the City of St. Albert's Recreation Facilities. The City of St. Albert partnered with Alberta Recreation and Parks Association to request vendors to create a plan for healthy food implementation. The plan required the vendors to provide 20% choose most often foods, 80% choose sometime foods and 0% choose least often foods (based on Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth). The success of this initiative was represented by profit stabilization of vendors and businesses that offered the healthy food options. Additionally, the City of St. Albert received positive media support for providing healthy options in recreation facilities and patrons were making better food choices.

Another successful initiative was conducted in Edmonton when a healthy fast food vendor (Moo's) in Kinsmen Sports Centre strategically promoted and marketed their healthy products to generate customer demand. A specialized menu was created, tailoring the items to athletes, coaches and trainers who frequented the facility. The menu consisted of 85% healthy choices based on the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth. The success was identified by the demand for the healthy menu items which resulted in the ability to expand the business to develop a seasonal kiosk and concession stands at other recreation facilities throughout Edmonton.

SYNTHETIC PLAYING SURFACES

More and more municipalities are utilizing synthetic playing surfaces as an alternative to natural turf for the provision of rectangular fields, outdoor rink spaces and ball diamonds. These surfaces allow for more intense and continuous use regardless of weather, and extend the playing seasons of scarce outdoor spaces. Although synthetic surfaces have higher construction and replacement costs as compared to natural turf, these surfaces allow for more intense and continuous use regardless of weather and they extend the playing season and increase program and tournament capacity. Other benefits of synthetic surfaces include ease of maintenance and reduced injuries/safer playing surface for athletes (subject to further research).

INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

Spaces for recreation and culture activity are important in facilitating participation and achieving community benefits. Most often, municipalities are looked upon to provide publicly accessible community infrastructure for activities to occur. The planning of such spaces is critical to ensure accessibility, to maximize usage, and to understand financial implications.

The following topics should be considered during the planning of community infrastructure:

- Capital costs
- Operating costs
- Funding models (capital and operating)
- Revenue sources
- Capital replacement and maintenance contributions
- Partnerships
- Primary and secondary uses of the space(s)
- Current provision in the municipality
- Current provision in the region
- Tournament hosting standards
- Accessibility standards
- Non-gender specific and flex spaces
- Site selection criteria

Glen Allan Recreation Complex

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY PARKS AND OUTDOOR SPACES

Research supports that individuals continue to place a high value on the availability and quality of parks, trails, and outdoor spaces. A 2013 Canadian study commissioned by the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation[14] found that nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) indicated that local parks were "very important" to them and their family. Additionally, 68% of Canadians are concerned about the loss of green space in their community.

A 2011 study[15] of over 1,100 parents of 2 to 12 year olds in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom found that the more time a family spends together at a playground, the greater their overall sense of family wellbeing. Three-quarters also wished that their family had time to visit a playground more often.

Parks and outdoor spaces also play a key role in helping to combat "nature deficit disorder" amongst children and youth. This phrase, first coined by Richard Louv in his bestselling book "Last Child in the Woods," suggests that children are becoming estranged from nature and natural play, which results in a number of cognitive, physical, and developmental issues.

While all residents benefit from the availability of quality park spaces, a significant amount of research and attention has been given to the myriad of benefits that result from children and youth being able to play and interact in outdoor settings. Findings include:

- Children who play regularly in natural environments show more advanced motor fitness, including coordination, balance and agility, and they are sick less often.

- Exposure to natural environments improves children's cognitive development by improving their awareness, reasoning, and observational skills.

- Children who play in nature have more positive feelings about each other. Outdoor environments are important to children's development of independence and autonomy.

- Children with views of and contact with nature score higher on tests of concentration and self-discipline. The greener, the better the scores.

PLANNING ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION ROUTES AND PATHWAYS

Active transportation refers to any form of human-powered transportation, such as walking, cycling, using a wheelchair, in-line skating, or skateboarding.[16] In 2011 in Canada, 5.7% of commuters walked to work regularly while 1.3% cycled, accounting for over one million Canadians.[17]

A generational trend is that younger professionals are using active modes of transportation more now than ever. A number of factors are contributing to this such as people are becoming more environmentally conscious, financial limitations (active transportation is generally a cheaper mode of transportation), and a trend is occurring in which people are moving back from the suburbs into urban communities where they live closer to work.

Urban parks encourage active traffic if they are adjacent to a roadway or can provide a shortcut through the community. Pathway systems that connect neighbourhoods across a municipality are becoming increasingly important to accommodate alternative methods of transportation. Including multi-use pathway systems is becoming a standard within park design as they not only serve a transportation function, but facilitate a wide range of recreational uses. Experienced active transportation commuters, especially cyclists, tend to favour more direct routes and will utilize roadways instead of paved pathways. Paved pathways that are planned to encourage active transportation commuters are wide and typically have separate lanes for cyclists and pedestrians.

Relationships to analyze include the types of amenities on pathways and user numbers, lighting and its effects on night usage, and the surface material and the types of usage (e.g. bicycling, walking). An analysis of why certain pathways receive high usage can be applied to other corridors that do not attract as much active traffic volume. Gathering utilization data with trail trackers is a practice that municipalities are beginning to undertake on a regular basis.

14 TD Friends of the Environment Foundation survey. Conducted by Ipsos Reid (2013).

15 Harris Interactive (2011). Playgrounds Increase Sense Of Family Well-Being. Washington, District of Columbia. Foresters.

16 Public Health Agency of Canada. http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/at-ta-eng.php

17 Statistics Canada. 2011. Commuting to Work. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011003_1-eng.cfm

🌿 ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

Focus on environmental preservation has become more prevalent. As the population continues to grow, so does urban development. The balance between active-use and passive-use park spaces is important to consider and differences in opinions exist between preservation and utilization. Each park is different and examination on a case-by-case basis may be warranted. Some parks contain flourishing ecosystems from forests to wetlands and are home to a variety of species that rely on the protection of the park. Sensitive natural areas within urban municipalities can be put aside for preservation. It is important for each municipality to define the balance between use and preservation and arrive at a balance for the sustainability of nature based recreation. Partnerships with regional municipalities, other levels of government, and private landowners is becoming more prevalent in discussing and addressing environmental preservation on a larger scale as sensitive environments often extend beyond municipal boundaries.

🌍 CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is becoming a popular topic for municipalities and it is now a standard consideration in decision making and policy formation. Whether they realize it yet or not, municipalities play a huge role in introducing their residents to the natural environment. Encouraging residents to appreciate their local urban parks translates into caring for the greater environment as well.

🤲 PARKS TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE HERITAGE AND CULTURE

Preserving and further developing the historical aspects of urban parks is a strategy municipalities apply to embed the importance of these spaces within the community and increase resident interest and utilization. Municipalities showcase the history of a community via its prominent community builders and significant events from the past by dedicating the name of a park, including interpretative information, and displaying art installations that contribute to a sense of place.

Aspects of cultures are celebrated and preserved in parks. In Chinese gardens, for example, plants are carefully selected for their symbolic association and installed to dictate the arrangement of spaces. The idea that a garden should invite aesthetic appreciation and the enjoyment of nature is important to some park visitors, but is not limited to a single culture. Festival venues, art displays, amphitheatres, and garden features are examples of cultural infrastructure in urban parks that can set a municipality apart. These amenities provide identity-defining features and establish iconic places.

Broadmoor Lake Park Accessible Playground

2017 RECREATION, PARKS, CULTURE TRENDS ANALYSIS

The following points are a summary of the trends discussed in the 2017 Recreation, Parks, and Culture trends Analysis document (under separate cover).

PARTICIPATION TRENDS

- Mitigation strategies should be identified to reduce barriers to participation and encourage recreational involvement in the community.
- Service providers should provide environments that support both structured and spontaneous recreation, parks, and culture opportunities to appeal to the broadest possible markets.
- Increased reinvestment rates and long-term planning is needed to maintain existing recreation and culture infrastructure assets (indoor and outdoor) and service provision.
- The incorporation of leading practices in recreation, parks, and culture infrastructure can contribute towards sustainable facilities and spaces that provide flexibility in meeting community needs and priorities over time. This includes high-quality, multi-use, and accessible design components which increases the longevity and sustainability of recreational facilities and services.

SERVICE DELIVERY

- The development of outcome-based performance indicators/intended outcomes is needed to inform future recreation needs and services.
- Increased provision of diverse and inclusive participation opportunities can promote socially inclusive communities.
- Strategic partnerships and capacity building can leverage organizational capacity and public engagement towards improved service delivery.
- Volunteer coordination and best practices should be considered a vital component of recreation, parks, and culture programming and facility operations.
- Sustained internal resources and capacity are required for the continuous improvement of recreation facilities and services provided by the County.
- Strategic investment in sport tourism can provide opportunities for economic development, growth, partnerships, and infrastructure development.
- Promotions and marketing can be used to deliver key messages on recreation, parks, and culture opportunities and enhance public awareness on the benefits of participation (and thus motivation to participate).
- The use of technology can enhance service delivery, increase participation, and improve overall user experience.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- A sponsorship policy can encourage private sector partnerships towards increased external investments to support infrastructure and service delivery.
- Non-traditional fee-based services and amenities complementary to existing facilities and services can generate revenue towards recreation development.
- Public, private, and non-profit partnerships can be used to leverage public investment in recreation infrastructure and services.
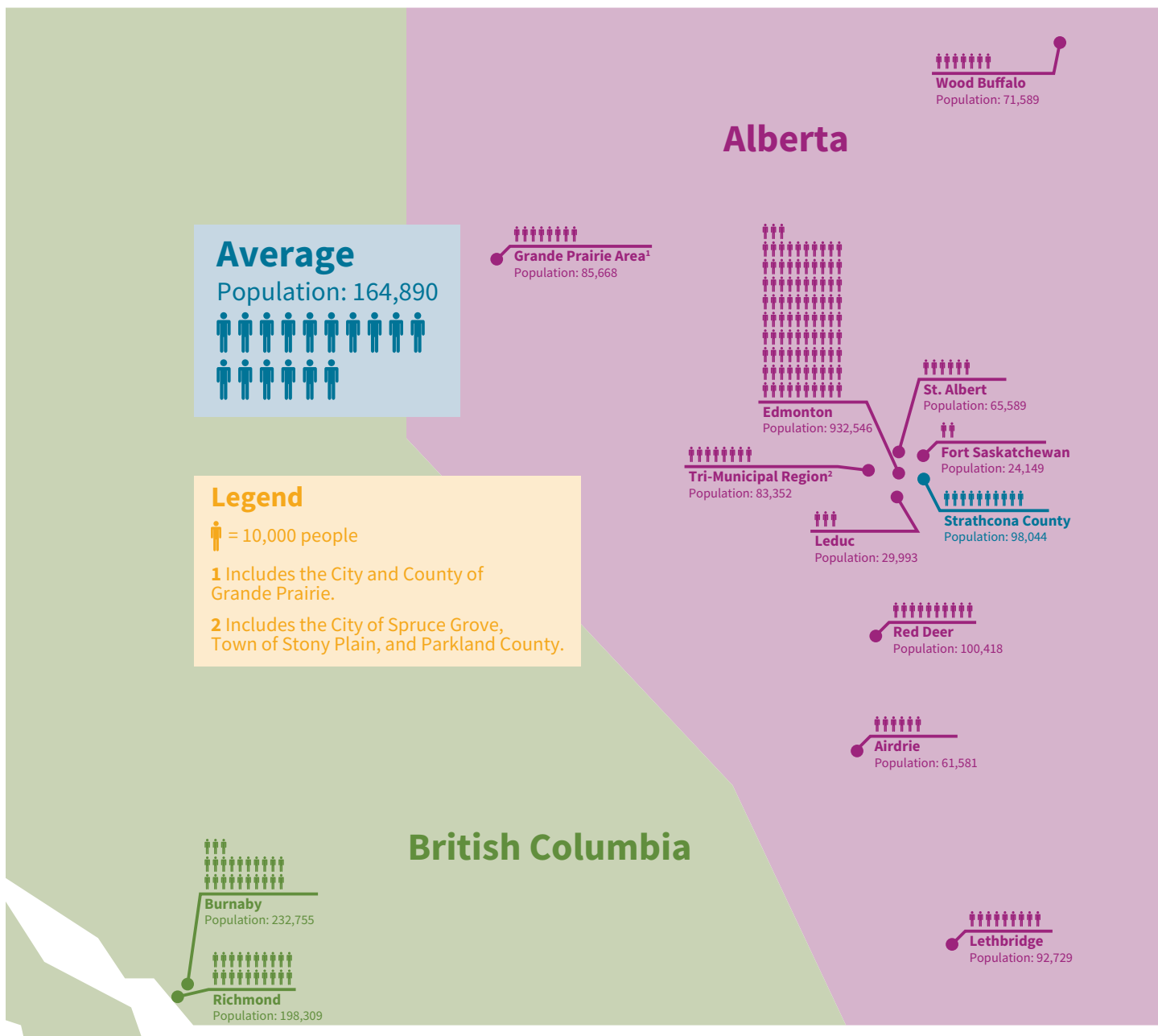
4 MUNICIPAL BENCHMARK COMPARISONS

The purpose of this municipal comparisons section is to benchmark Strathcona County to other similarly sized communities in the province in regard to infrastructure provision and municipal spending.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION

The infrastructure provision element compares the number of facilities provided by Strathcona County and the comparable communities as well as the number of residents per facility type. This information helps to identify strengths and gaps in the quantity of facility types located in Strathcona County relative to the comparative communities. The limitations to this element is that it does not consider the quality or condition of the facilities. It is also important to note that the preferences and needs of local residents are different in each community and that variations in geographic characteristics are also a factor in the number of facilities that a municipality provides.

The following municipalities were used for the Benchmark Comparisons:

Wood Buffalo
Population: 71,589

Alberta

Average
Population: 164,890

Grande Prairie Area[1]
Population: 85,668

St. Albert
Population: 65,589

Fort Saskatchewan
Population: 24,149

Edmonton
Population: 932,546

Tri-Municipal Region[2]
Population: 83,352

Strathcona County
Population: 98,044

Leduc
Population: 29,993

Legend

👤 = 10,000 people

1 Includes the City and County of Grande Prairie.

2 Includes the City of Spruce Grove, Town of Stony Plain, and Parkland County.

Red Deer
Population: 100,418

Airdrie
Population: 61,581

British Columbia

Burnaby
Population: 232,755

Lethbridge
Population: 92,729

Richmond
Population: 198,309

INDOOR SPACES

In regards to quantity of spaces, Strathcona County has a similar number of indoor recreation spaces compared to the benchmarking communities. When looking at provision (i.e. the number of residents per facility space), Strathcona County provides more community halls, curling rinks, ice arenas, indoor playgrounds, and seniors centres. The County is not lacking in the provision of indoor facility spaces.

SPACE	AVERAGE QUANTITY	STRATHCONA COUNTY QUANTITY	AVERAGE PROVISION (RESIDENTS PER FACILITY)	STRATHCONA COUNTY PROVISION
Community Halls	15.3	14	35,106	7,003
Curling Rinks (facilities)	2.5	3	65,359	32,681
Curling Rinks (sheets)	15.5	16	8,861	6,128
Fitness Centres	3.8	3	43,061	32,681
Gymnasiums	4.2	3	39,356	32,681
Gymnastics Centres	1.8	1	85,644	98,044
Ice Arenas (facilities)	5.8	7	26,705	14,006
Ice Arenas (sheets)	9.1	11	14,234	8,913
Indoor Playgrounds	1.6	3	93,746	32,681
Indoor Sports Fields	2.8	2	59,794	49,022
Museums	2.3	1	82,209	98,044
Performing Arts Theatres	0.9	1	92,467	98,044
Seniors Centres	3.2	4	62,312	24,511
Swimming Pools	3.8	3	45,902	32,681
Wilderness Centres	0.5	1	175,576	98,044
Youth Centres	1.4	2	155,681	49,022

OUTDOOR SPACES

Compared to the benchmarking communities, in regard to provision, the County provides more ball diamonds, beach volleyball courts, bike parks, pickleball courts, playgrounds, and spray parks. Significantly more park spaces is provided by the County as well. Less provision is seen with off leash dog parks and skateboard parks.

	SPACE	AVERAGE QUANTITY	STRATHCONA COUNTY QUANTITY	AVERAGE PROVISION (RESIDENTS PER FACILITY)	STRATHCONA COUNTY PROVISION
	Artificial Turf Fields	2.3	1	69,358	98,044
	Athletic Tracks	1.3	3	106,835	32,681
	Ball Diamonds	108.3	90	2,016	1,089
	Basketball Courts	20.3	9	12,172	10,894
	Beach Volleyball Courts	5.0	9	34,865	10,894
	Bike Parks	1.2	2	136,999	49,022
	Cricket Pitches	1.0	0	133,842	-
	Dog Off-Leash Parks	7.3	2	24,758	49,022
	Municipal Golf Courses	0.9	1	138,938	98,044
	Outdoor Rinks (boarded)	7.3	7	8,397	14,006
	Outdoor Rinks (non-boarded)	17.3	22	10,695	4,457
	Park Space (hectares)	225.3	1,940	187	51
	Pickleball Courts	8.0	21	12,538	4,669
	Playgrounds	95.3	147	2,524	667

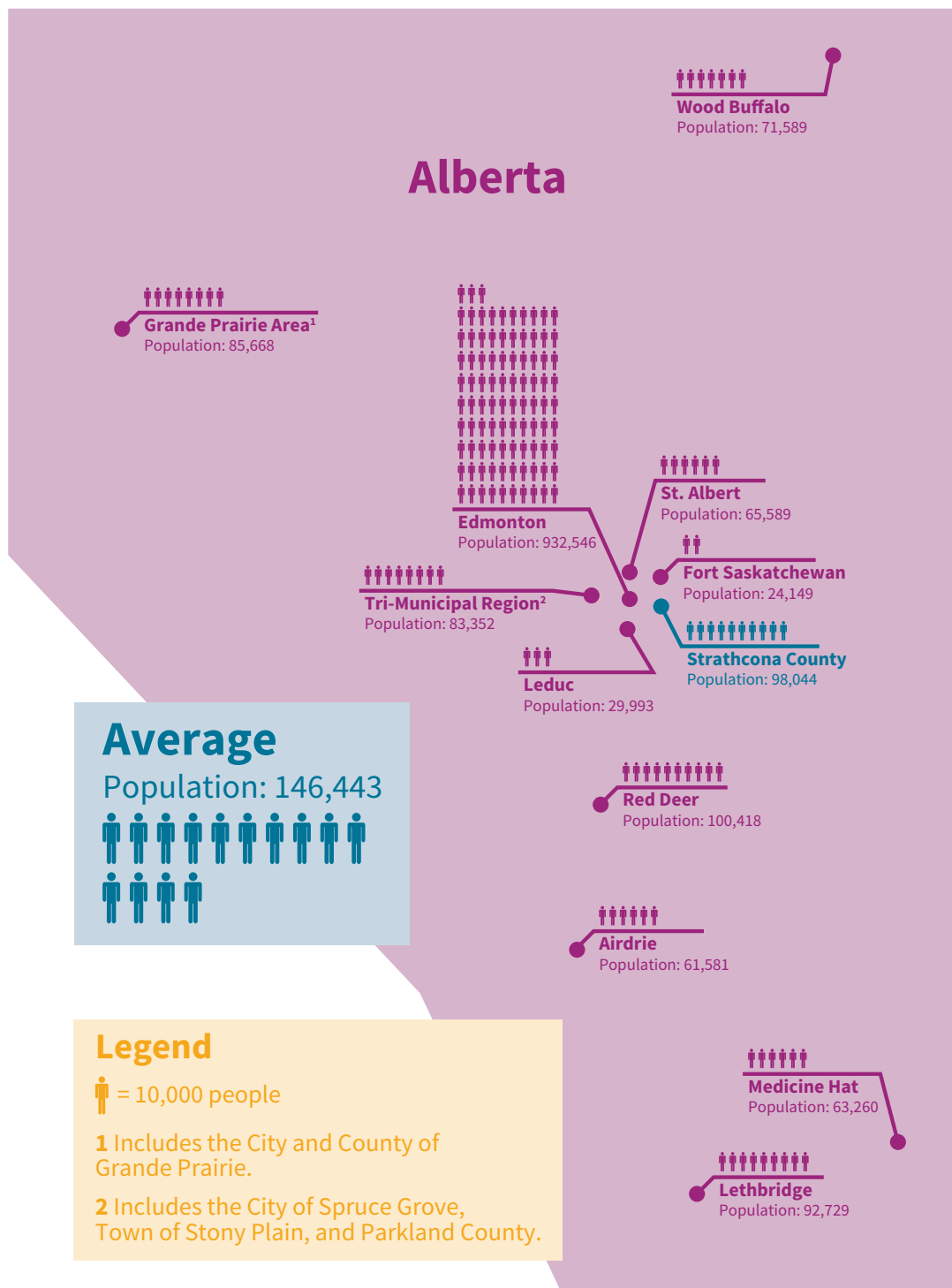| SPACE		AVERAGE QUANTITY	STRATHCONA COUNTY QUANTITY	AVERAGE PROVISION (RESIDENTS PER FACILITY)	STRATHCONA COUNTY PROVISION
	Rectangular Fields (grass)	138.2	105	1,726	934
	Skateboard Parks	2.4	1	60,722	98,044
	Spray Parks	8.3	7	32,731	14,006
	Tennis Courts	38.4	19	5,789	5,160
	Trails (km)	35.4	280	447	350

RE/MAX Spray Park at Broadmoor Lake Park

SPENDING COMPARISON

This spending comparison element compares the total and per capita amounts of municipal spending on recreation, parks, and culture in Strathcona County relative to the comparative communities. The data is sourced from Alberta Municipal Affairs. The amounts may not be precisely comparable as municipalities could report their spending in different ways; major capital projects that took place during that year (2016) can also inflate spending numbers.

The following eleven comparative Alberta municipalities/regions were analyzed.

Alberta

Wood Buffalo
Population: 71,589

Grande Prairie Area[1]
Population: 85,668

Edmonton
Population: 932,546

St. Albert
Population: 65,589

Fort Saskatchewan
Population: 24,149

Tri-Municipal Region[2]
Population: 83,352

Strathcona County
Population: 98,044

Leduc
Population: 29,993

Average
Population: 146,443

Red Deer
Population: 100,418

Airdrie
Population: 61,581

Medicine Hat
Population: 63,260

Lethbridge
Population: 92,729

Legend

= 10,000 people

1 Includes the City and County of Grande Prairie.

2 Includes the City of Spruce Grove, Town of Stony Plain, and Parkland County.

As seen in the chart below, Strathcona County spends a net of $16.7M on recreation, parks, and culture which is much lower than the $43.6M spend on average. If the City of Edmonton is taken out, the RPC net spending average becomes $24.8M which is still more than the County. Strathcona County has a relatively high cost recovery and low net spending per person.

COMPARATIVE COMMUNITY	RPC REVENUE	RPC EXPENSE	RPC NET SPENDING	COST RECOVERY	NET RPC PER PERSON
Airdrie	17,439,538	20,609,262	3,169,724	85%	$51
Edmonton	138,862,000	370,834,000	231,972,000	37%	$249
Fort Saskatchewan	7,154,876	17,812,615	10,657,739	40%	$441
Grande Prairie Area	24,066,721	62,982,130	38,915,409	38%	$454
Leduc	7,562,425	18,772,951	11,210,526	40%	$374
Lethbridge	38,844,000	59,000,000	20,156,000	66%	$217
Medicine Hat	11,542,000	30,028,000	18,486,000	38%	$292
Red Deer	15,244,754	52,784,696	37,539,942	29%	$374
St. Albert	17,665,693	38,658,677	20,992,984	46%	$320
Tri-Municipal Region	21,241,604	32,702,070	11,460,466	65%	$137
Wood Buffalo	17,735,015	93,237,649	75,502,634	19%	$1,055
Average	**28,850,784**	**72,492,914**	**43,642,129**	**46%**	**$360**
Strathcona County	35,173,219	51,922,335	16,749,116	68%	$171

5 KEY FINDINGS

BENEFITS

There are many proven **benefits of recreation and culture**:

- Essential to personal health and wellbeing
- Reduces self-destructive and anti-social behavior
- Is a significant economic generator
- Provides a foundation for quality of life
- Builds strong families and healthy communities
- Reduces health care, social service and police/justice costs
- Green spaces are essential to environmental and personal wellbeing

RECREATION

Trends in recreation services include:

- Increased popularity of unstructured spontaneous activities
- Volunteers are looking for term-defined opportunities to bolster their skills and resumes
- Aging infrastructure is a major concern for municipalities throughout the country
- Social inclusion is being considered in facility design
- Promotion methods to ensure all demographics are being reached

CULTURE

Trends in cultural services include:

- Transformation of public spaces for events and activities
- Encouraging local artists to shape the character of neighbourhoods
- Less reliance on new physical infrastructure
- Greater engagement with the private sector
- Cultural mapping to promote opportunities

COMPARISON

Compared to other municipalities and regions in western Canada, Strathcona County provides many facilities and spaces at a better provision rate (i.e. residents per facility).

- Fewer off leash dog parks and skateboard parks are seen in the County as compared to the other municipalities.
- The County is not lacking in the provision of indoor facility spaces.
- Strathcona County has a relatively high cost recovery and low net spending per person compared to other Alberta municipalities.