Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update
+ Community/Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study







Project Summary

February 2026

About the Projects

Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update

Project Purpose:

To guide the continued delivery of high-quality parks and recreation services and facilities in the City for the next 10 years.



Objectives

1. Identify **improvements and future needs** for:
   a. Recreation facilities such as pools, arenas, sports fields and courts, and program spaces.
   b. Parks and park amenities such as playgrounds, splash pads, pavilions, and more.
2. Assess **policies and initiatives** that support community access, service delivery, and sustainability.

The Master Plan contains 72 recommendations, many of which are summarized herein.

About the Projects

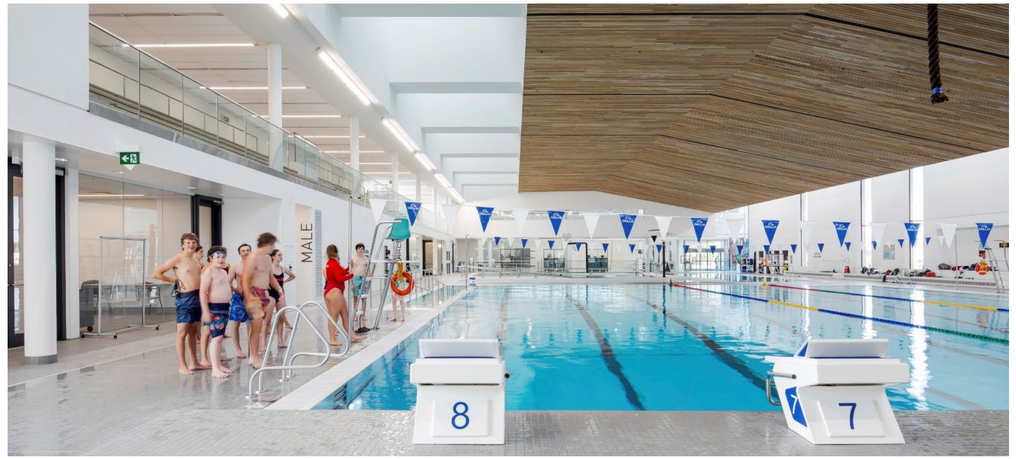
Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study

Project Purpose:

To determine the need and feasibility of an indoor pool facility, indoor turf facility, and other major indoor recreational spaces.

Objectives

1. Assess **facility needs**.
2. Identify potential **site characteristics**.
3. Determine **capital and operating costs**.
4. Determine a **timeline** for investment.
5. Identify **funding** and **partnership** opportunities.





Project Phasing

Phase 1:
Research & Consultation

Phase 2:
Feasibility Study

Phase 3:
Master Plan Update

Phase 4:
Project Finalization

Building Blocks

1. Public and stakeholder input
2. Demographics and growth forecasts
3. Usage and participation trends
4. Inventories and mapping
5. Municipal benchmarking and best practices
6. Policies and related initiatives

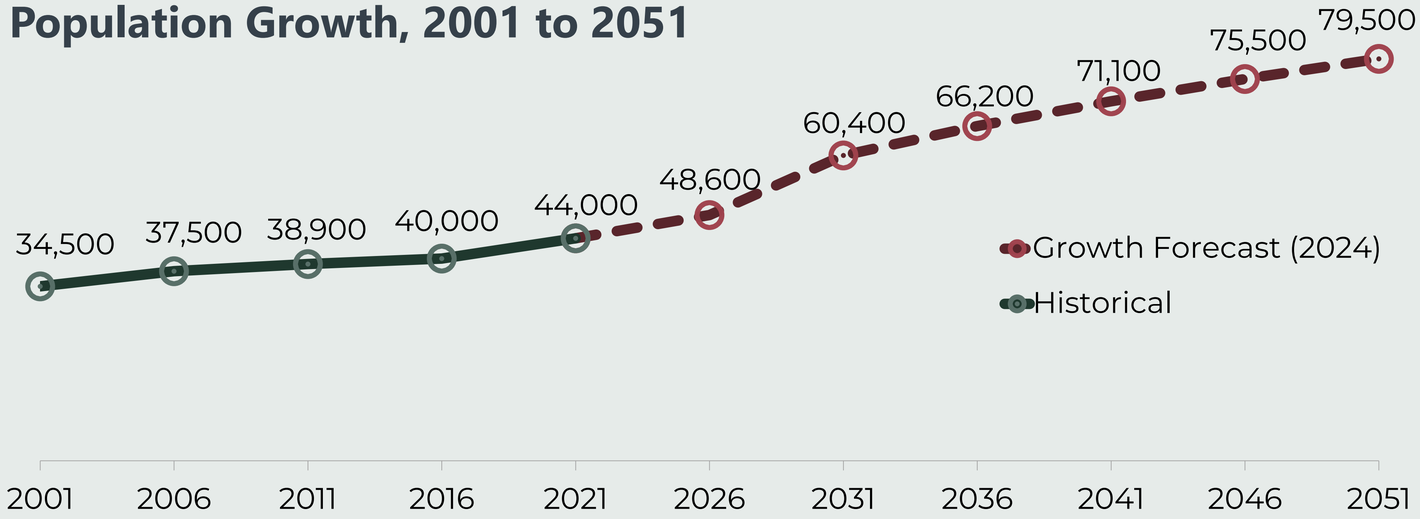


St. Thomas Community Profile

Rapid Population Growth

- **+35,000 people** by 2051
- **+5,800 jobs** from the PowerCo Electric Vehicle battery plant
- **2% population increase annually** from 2021 to 2051

Population Growth, 2001 to 2051



Source: Statistics Canada 2011 to 2021 Census; Forecast from the St. Thomas Growth Analysis Study (2024) by Watson & Associates Economists. Forecast includes the net Census undercount of 2.7%.

A Changing Community – Forecasted Increases by Age from 2021 to 2051



Youth
(0 -14 years)
+86%



Teenagers & Young Adults
(15 – 24 years)
+80%



Adults
(25 – 54 years)
+76%



Older Adults
(55 – 64 years)
+55%



Seniors
(65+ years)
+119%

Source: Forecast from the St. Thomas Growth Analysis Study (2024) by Watson & Associates Economists. Forecast includes the net Census undercount of 2.7%.

Round 1 Engagement (Phase 1, 2025)

Community Survey

2,730 surveys were completed, 8,350 residents represented (17.5% of St. Thomas' population).

High School Student Input

Nearly **150 students** were engaged through the 'Student Build Cities' program.

Public Open Houses

40 members of the public were engaged at two open houses held at the St. Thomas Public Library.

Staff Workshops

Frontline and management staff were engaged through workshops.

Community Focus Groups

About **50 community groups**, (service clubs, sport assoc., etc.) provided input through workshops, interviews and questionnaires.

Council & Steering Committee

Meetings have been held with the Steering Committee and all members Council have been invited to provide input.

Summary of Round 1 Input: Master Plan

- **Destination parks and trail systems** are highly valued and should continue to be fully supported.
- There is a demand for a **wider variety of recreation programs**, including **affordable** year-round opportunities.
- Organizations indicate that they are constrained by **limited facility spaces**, such as arenas, gymnasiums, and ball diamonds.
- Updates to **allocation policies** and **communication practices** may help to optimize high-demand spaces.
- **Improvements to outdoor facilities** – such as parks, sports, fields/courts, and trails – will enhance their use and build capacity in the short-term.
- Rising community expectations and service levels are placing pressure on existing **staff and community resources**.

Summary of Round 1 Input: Feasibility Study

- **Existing facilities** have practical constraints that cannot address the full range of current and future needs.
- There is widespread support for a **multi-use, multi-generational recreation hub**, which is preferred over single-use solutions.
- The top community priority is an **indoor aquatic centre** to support leisure swimming, aquatic fitness classes, and swimming lessons.
- There is also a desire for **gymnasiums and other spaces** that can accommodate a flexible range of sports and activities.
- Facilities have a lasting positive impact on the community and should be **thoughtfully designed** and connected to the surrounding community.
- Access to services must be **affordable to residents**. There are concerns about tax impacts, but a recognition that St. Thomas is growing.
- There is support for **partnerships** that can bring value to the community.

Survey: Participation Profiles

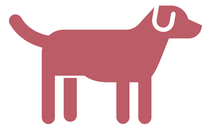
Top activities (household participation)



63%
outdoor walking or hiking



45%
aerobics, yoga, fitness or weight training



42%
dog walking



40%
playground use



40%
recreational swimming



39%
indoor walking



36%
ice sports (e.g., hockey, skating)



33%
splash pad use



30%
swimming lessons or aquafit

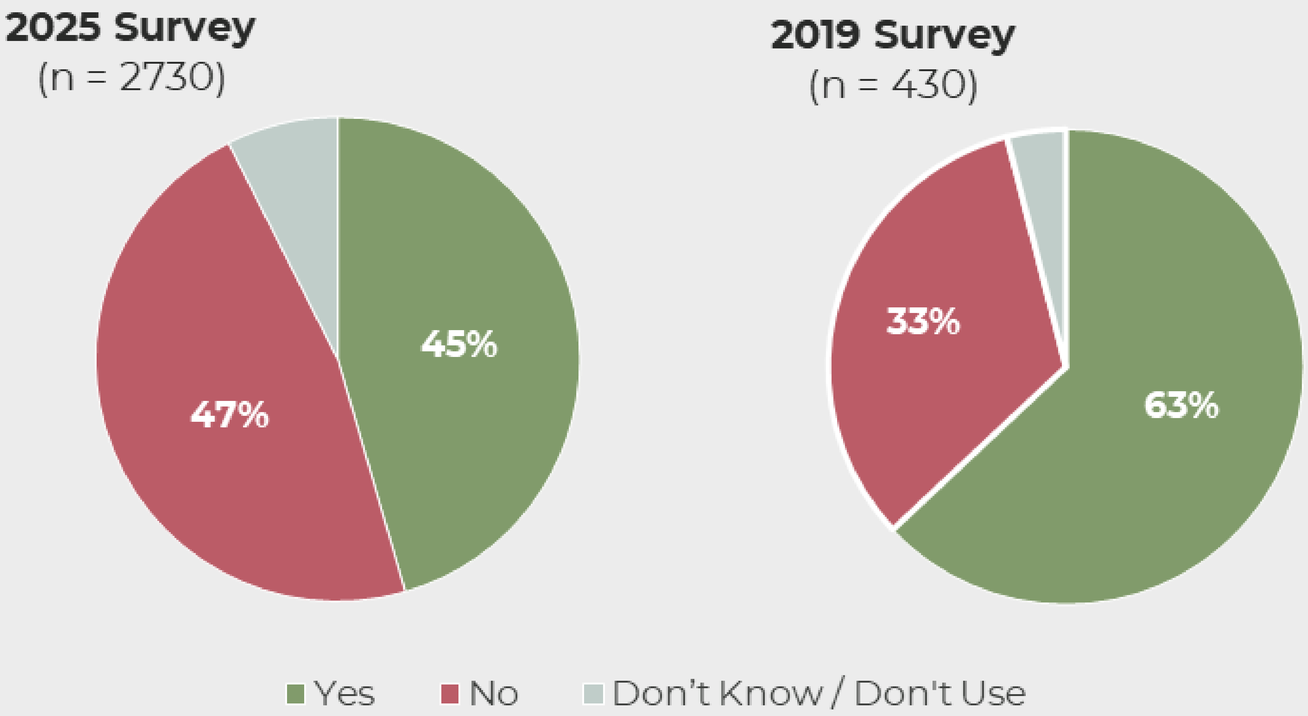


24%
golf

Survey: Barriers to Participation

More residents face barriers to participation now than 6 years ago

Are you or members of your household able to participate in parks and recreation as often as you would like?



Top barriers:

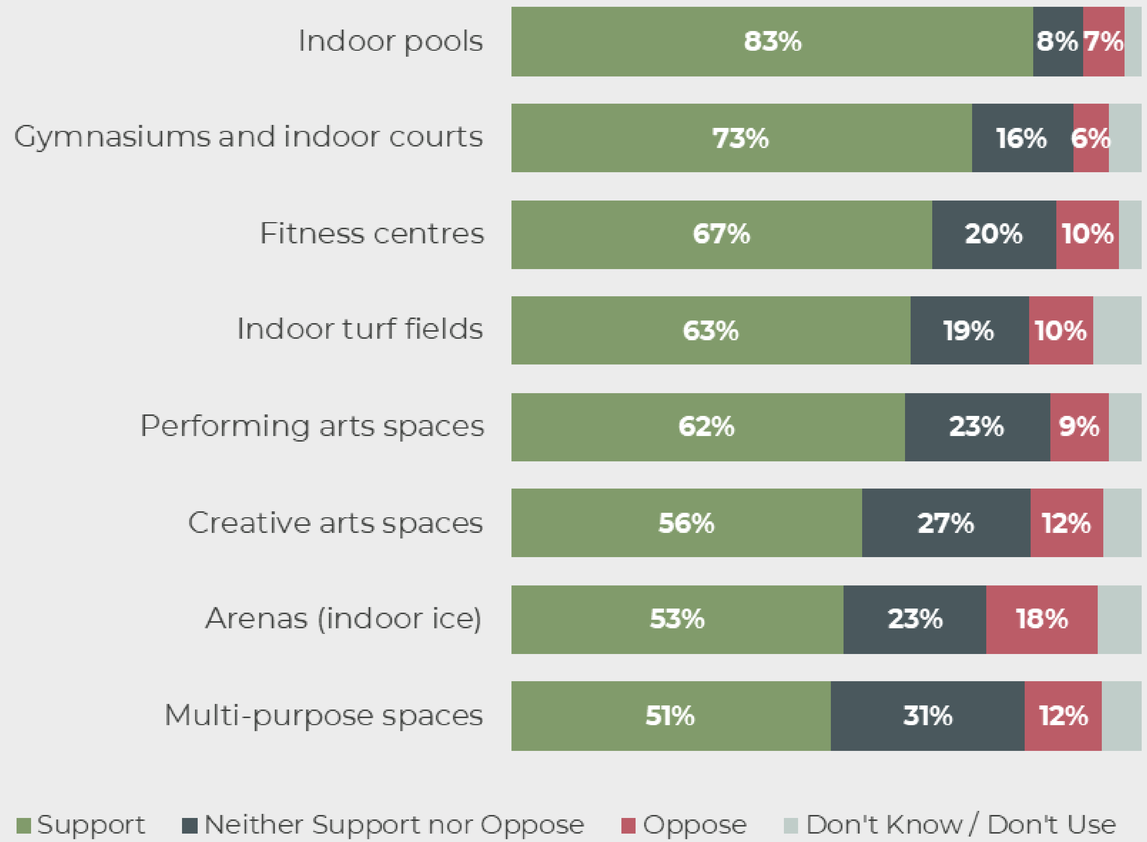
1. Lack of desired parks, programs, or facilities (64%)
2. Cost is too expensive (38%)
3. Program not offered at a convenient time (38%)

Survey: Recreation Facility Priorities

Over 70% of respondents support additional public spending towards an **indoor pool** and **gymnasium**

When asked specifically, **nearly 80%** of respondents think "the development of an **aquatic centre** should be a high priority for Council"

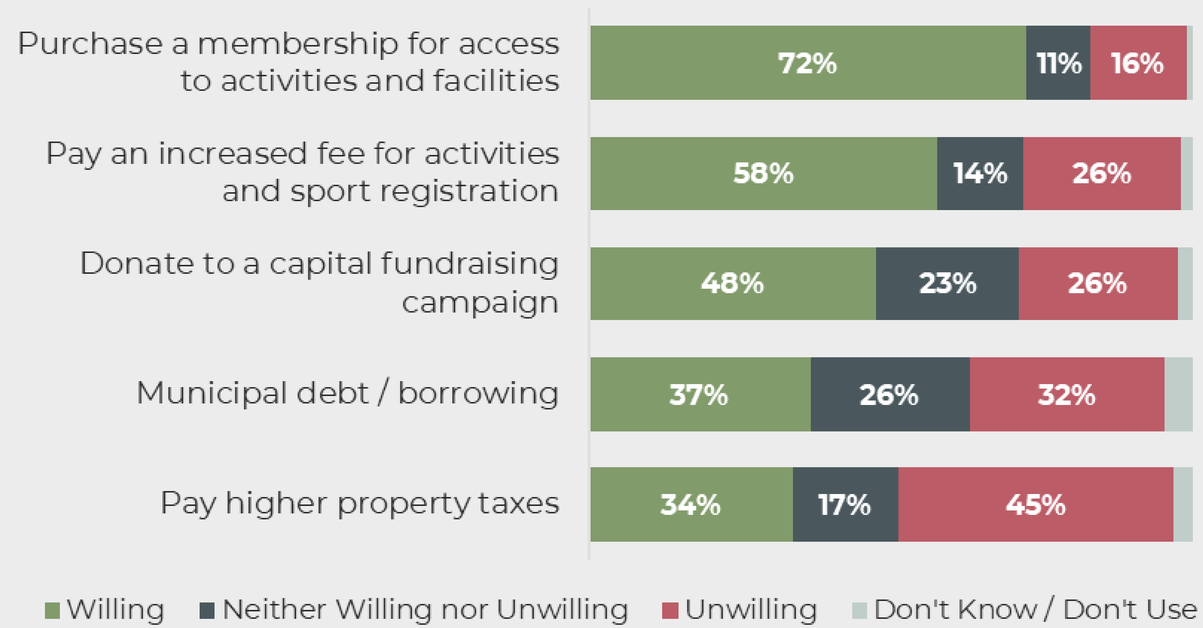
Degree in which respondents support public investments in towards building new indoor facilities or improving existing facilities



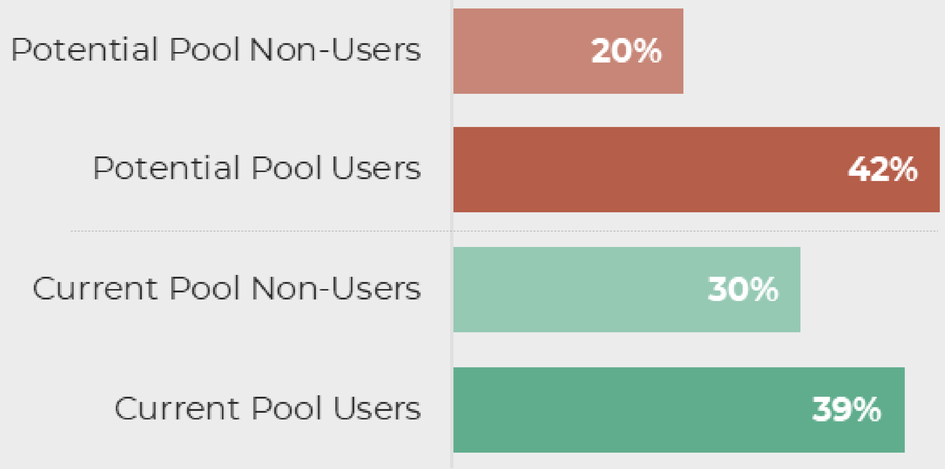
Survey: Willingness to Pay

34% of residents are willing to pay **higher property taxes** to support new recreation and aquatic facilities

Willingness of survey respondents to financially support the development and operation of new recreation and aquatic facilities:



Percentage of respondents that are wiling to pay higher property taxes by sub-group



Survey: Partnership & Co-location Opportunities

80% of survey respondents think the City should **partner with others** to provide new indoor recreation facilities.

St. Thomas Public Library

School Boards

YMCA/ YWCA

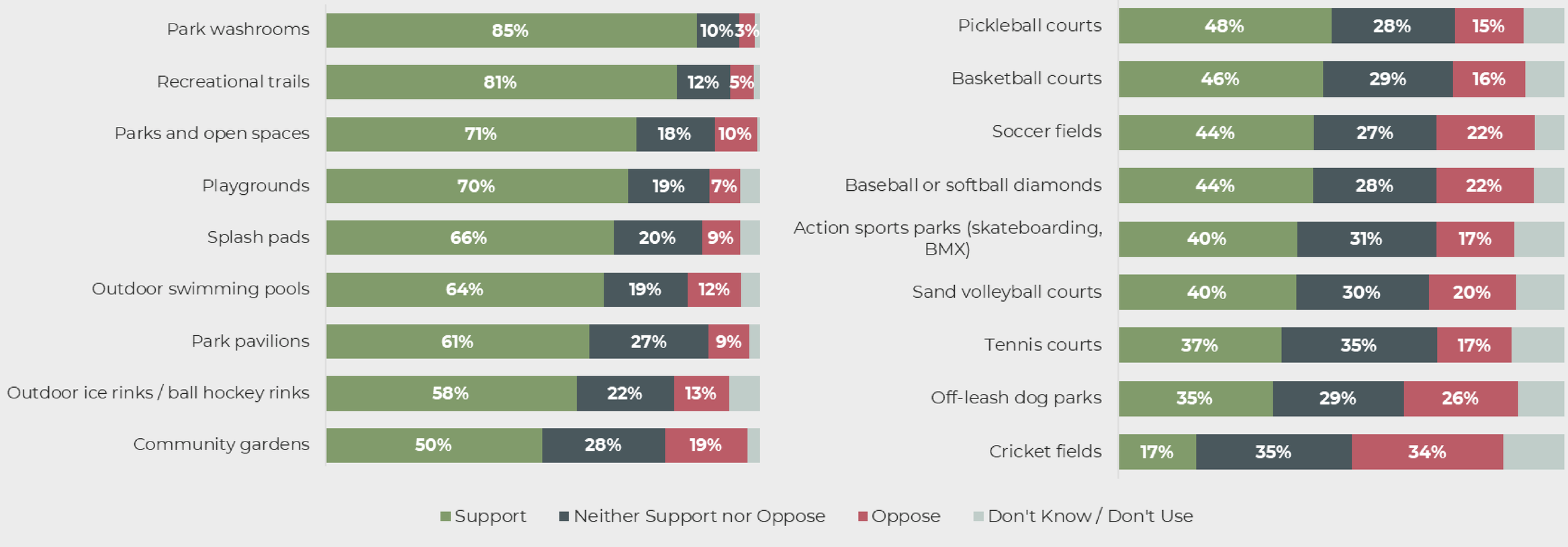
EarlyON Child & Family Centres

Neighbouring Municipalities

Survey: Park Facility Priorities

70+% support investments in park washrooms, trails, parks, and playgrounds

Degree in which respondents support public investments in outdoor amenities and facilities



Round 2 Engagement (Phase 4, 2026)

Public Open Houses

100 members of the public were engaged at two open houses held at the Joe Thornton Community Centre.



Public Review Period

The draft Master Plan and Feasibility Study were posted online for public review and comment. **30 emails providing feedback** on the documents were received.

Summary of Round 2 Input: Master Plan

- Gymnasium users (St. Thomas Shock and Pickleball Clubs) emphasized the **need for double gymnasium space in the short-term** to support the growth of their clubs, as well as games and tournaments.
- St. Thomas Minor Hockey Association would like to see **a single pad arena in Phase 1 of the proposed Community Aquatic Centre**, with expansion to a double pad in the future.
- The St. Thomas Slo-Pitch Association president expressed **support for an indoor turf field** in a sports dome.
- Some participants wanted to see **more detailed arts and cultural recommendations**.
- Some participants requested **enhanced trail connections**, **year-round park washroom access**, and **downtown park improvements**.

Summary of Round 2 Input: Feasibility Study

- There is strong community support for a **municipal indoor aquatic facility** in St. Thomas and desires for the City to start solidifying plans for this facility.
- Common reasons for this support included overcrowding of the existing YMCA indoor pool, affordability concerns with the YMCA membership model, and **desires for an aquatic facility that can support a diverse range of needs**, including recreational, therapeutic, and competitive uses.
- Some residents expressed support for a **50-metre lane pool**, while others expressed support for the proposed concepts that include a **25-metre lane pool and warm-water leisure pool**.
- The St. Thomas Jumbo Jets swim team and others involved with competitive swimming expressed **desires for the pool to be competition-ready** (e.g., 25-m, 8-lane pool at minimum with competition-grade starting blocks, adequate depth for racing, timing systems, and spectator seating).
- **Warm-water leisure pools and therapy pools** were desired by residents seeking to use the pool for recreational purposes or rehabilitation.

Indoor Recreation

Selected Needs and Recommendations

Refer to Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update for a full list of all recommendations.

Facility Type	Needs to 2051	Select Recommendation(s)
Indoor Aquatics	+1.1 pool locations	**#2.** Construct a **community and aquatic centre** that should (at minimum) include a multi-tank, 25-metre, 8-lane pool and a leisure pool. A 50-metre pool option was examined but not supported.
Gymnasiums	+1.8 gymnasiums	**#4.** Include a **double gymnasium** as part of the proposed community and aquatic centre and/or indoor sports dome. Gymnasiums should have appropriate dimensions, infrastructure, and lining to support volleyball, basketball, pickleball, and badminton.
Indoor Turf Fields	+2.3 small-sided fields	**#6.** Work with community partners to investigate options to **develop an air-supported dome** with a minimum of two (2) small-sided turf fields and a support building.
Arenas	+2.3 ice pads	**#7.** Create a plan for a **comprehensive renewal project** at the Joe Thornton Community Centre. **#8.** **Develop a twin-pad arena** with timing influenced by capital funding, aligned projects, and demand trends. **#9.** Evaluate the feasibility of operating a **second summer ice pad** once the proposed community and aquatic centre is constructed.
Library Branch*	+2 new branches	The proposed concepts for the community and aquatic centre in the Feasibility Study include the option of adding a **library branch**.

*Note: Library branch future needs were calculated to 2036 within the 2025 Addendum to the St. Thomas Public Library Master Plan. Library needs were considered in the Feasibility Study due to potential co-location opportunities.

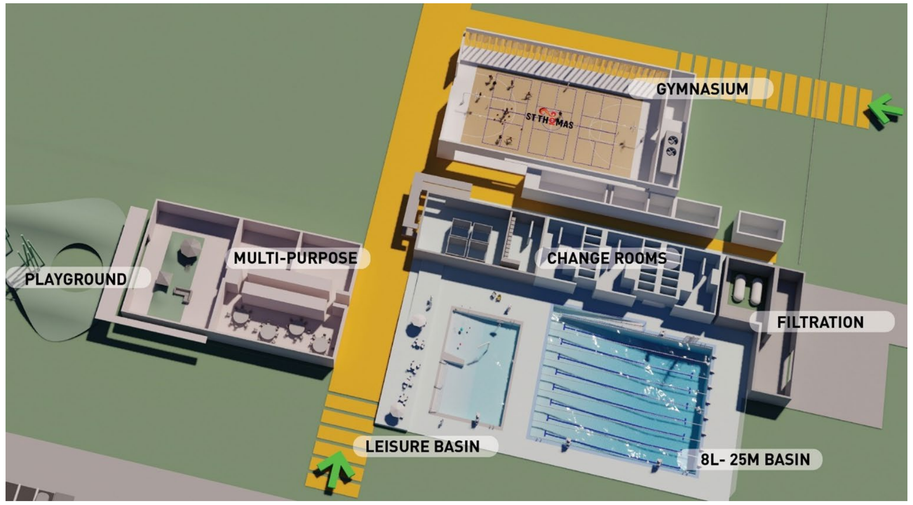
Proposed Community & Aquatic Centre

Refer to Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study for additional detail.

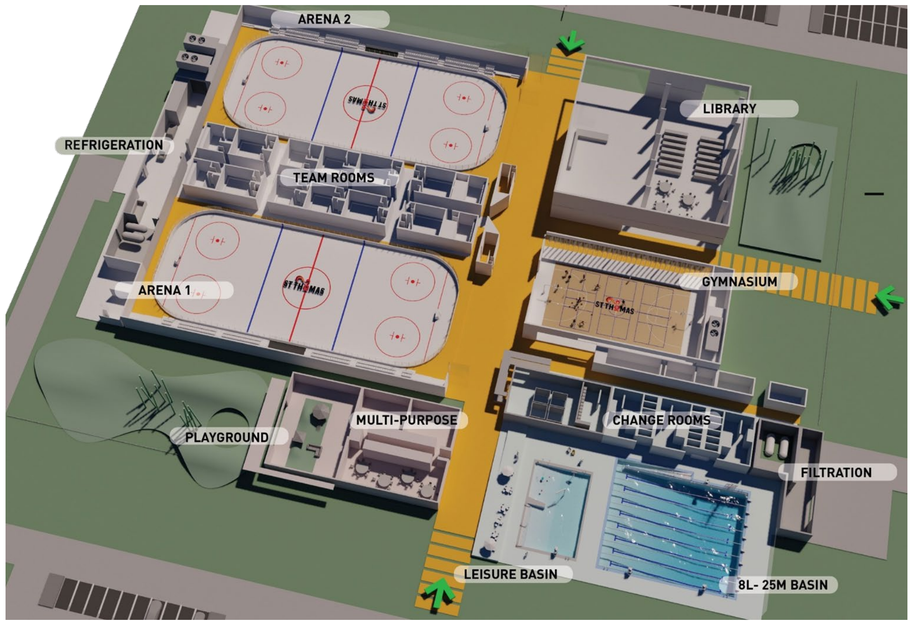
Overview of Options and Phasing	Concept 1a: Baseline Facility	Concept 1b: Enhanced Facility*
Phase 1: Facility Components	**Aquatic Spaces** • 2 tanks: 25M pool (with 8 lanes) and leisure pool **Community Spaces** • Double Gymnasium • Multi-Purpose Rooms (2-3) • Indoor Playground	**Aquatic Spaces** • 3 tanks: 25M 8-lane pool, leisure pool, and therapy pool **Community Spaces** • Double Gymnasium+ • Multi-Purpose rooms (3+) • Indoor Playground • Fitness Centre • Walking Track • Youth Centre
	*Concept 1b is may only be considered if the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin is removed from service, so as not to duplicate other services available to the community.	
Annual Operating Cost	**$910,000 to $1,100,000**	**$1,300,000 to $1,600,000**
Total Project Cost – Phase 1	**$69,876,800**	**$99,528,880**
Potential Future Phases: Facility Components	• Twin Pad Arena – may be on separate site • Library Branch	• Twin Pad Arena – may be on separate site • Library Branch
Total Project Cost – Potential Future Phases	**$90,158,480**	**$90,158,480**
Minimum Land Area	3.0 ha (Phase 1) to 5.0 ha (all Phases)	4.0 ha (Phase 1) to 6.0 ha (all Phases)
Total Project Cost – All Phases	**$160,035,280**	**$189,687,360**

Note: Figures shown in 2025 dollars. Operating cost figures exclude capital replacement contributions. Calculation assumptions and exclusions are outlined further in the Feasibility Study (Section 5).

Phase 1 (Concept 1a)



Potential Future Phases (Concept 1a)



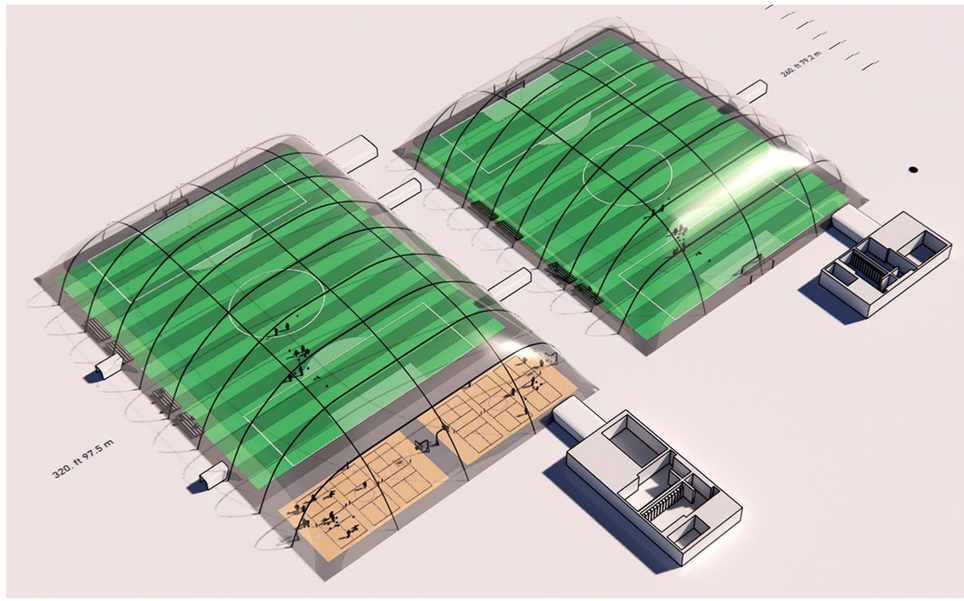
Proposed Sports Dome

Refer to Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study for additional detail.

Overview of Options	Concept 2a: Turf-only	Concept 2b: Turf and Courts
Facility Components	• 2 Small-Sided Turf Fields • Support Building	• 2 Small-Sided Turf Fields • Sports Courts (2 basketball, 4 volleyball, 6 pickleball courts)* • Perimeter Walking Track • Support Building
Annual Operating Profit	**$126,000 to 159,000**	**$131,000 to $161,000**
Total Project Cost – Phase 1	**$10,764,000**	**$14,003,500**
Minimum Land Area	2.5 ha	3.0 ha

*Sport courts may not be required if double gymnasium is included in proposed Community & Aquatic Centre; alternately, this space could be used to add an additional small-sided soccer field.
Note: Figures shown in 2025 dollars. Operating cost figures exclude capital replacement contributions. Calculation assumptions and exclusions are outlined further in the Feasibility Study (Section 5).

Sports Dome Concepts (2b on left, 2a on right)





Timing & Locations

Proposed Major Recreation Facilities

Timing

- The implementation process for the proposed Community & Aquatic Centre is likely to take a **minimum of five to ten years** from inception. It may be possible for the Sports Dome project to proceed more quickly.

Locations

- A preferred site for the Community & Aquatic Centre has not been identified due to a shortage of readily available and suitable sites in municipal ownership. **The possibility of purchasing land or partnering with others may be necessary.** Key criteria for evaluating potential sites are identified in the Feasibility Study.
- For the Sports Dome, the vacant lands north of **Fire Station No. 2 on Silver Street** are being recommended for Council consideration.

Funding, Partners & Next Steps

Proposed Major Recreation Facilities

Funding

- **The City does not currently have sufficient funds to implement all options presented.** A variety of funding tools will be needed to support facility development, including grants from government and other sources.
- The preparation of a final plan is a key next step. Potential tax impacts will be determined through this work.

Partnerships

- Neighbouring municipalities and others should be engaged to determine partnership interest.

Next Steps and Further Consultation

- Further work will be required to confirm sites, identify partners, confirm programs and phasing, secure funding, and initiate design. Several of these steps will involve additional consultation with the community to confirm needs, design, and service delivery approaches.

Parkland & Trails

Selected Recommendations

Refer to Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update for a full list of all recommendations.

#17. Strive to achieve a minimum parkland provision level of 1.8 ha per 1,000 residents through new development and secure a minimum of **55.6 ha of additional parkland by 2051**.

#21. Maintain a commitment to **universal accessibility, safety, and comfort** within the City's parks system.

#22. Initiate **site-specific planning exercises** (with public engagement) to guide the development of Joanne Brooks Memorial Park, Orchard Park (phase 2), Applewood Park (phase 2), Railway City Skatepark (phase 2), and the Dalewood Water Reclamation Facility interim excess lands.

#23. Continue to support opportunities for **expanded park programming and outdoor education and stewardship**, such as nature-based programming, tree planting, use of native species, naturalization initiatives, and butterfly/pollinator parks in conjunction with community partners.

#24. Prepare a **Downtown Parks and Public Realm Master Plan** to identify and guide coordinated improvements to parks and streetscapes within the City's core.

#45. Continue to work in partnership with others to provide a **comprehensive trail network**, including: (a) completing the east-west trail connection along the railway corridor, (b) connecting to the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands; and (c) expanding the trail network to connect to 1Password Park.



Outdoor Recreation

Selected Recommendations

Refer to Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update for a full list of all recommendations.

Sports Fields

#27. Add up to two (2) **new ball diamonds** to the Dalewood Water Reclamation Facility interim excess lands.

#28. Improve **existing ball diamonds** by addressing accessibility and drainage challenges and adding lighting to at least one (1) unlit diamond.

#29. Work with partners to improve **existing soccer fields** and add lighting to at least one (1) regulation soccer field.

#30. Provide **one (1) regulation cricket field** by repurposing the two under-utilized soccer fields at Cowan Park.

Outdoor Aquatics

#39. Continue to maintain – but avoid major investments or upgrades – to **Jaycees Pool** until the status and timeline of the proposed indoor pool is established.

#40. Develop **one (1) splash pad** in Orchard Park to enhance access in southeast St. Thomas.

Sports Courts & More

#31. Construct four (4) **new public tennis courts** by 2036 within neighbourhood parks, possible through two (2) courts in Applewood Park and two (2) courts in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands.

#32. Construct four (4) **new public pickleball courts** at Orchard Park by 2036.

#33. Build **new basketball courts** in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands and Shaw Valley Park to fill geographic coverage gaps.

#35. Develop an **outdoor volleyball court complex** with six (6) courts at Pinafore Park.

#37. Re-engage with the community to assess demand for the planned **Phase 2 of the skate park**.

#44. Ensure all **playgrounds** are connected to pathways, sidewalks and/or parking lots to improve accessibility, and continue to prioritize playground replacement based on lifecycle requirements.

Service Delivery & Programming

Selected Recommendations

Refer to Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update for a full list of all recommendations.

"Building brighter futures through equitable, accessible, and inclusive parks, recreation, and culture opportunities."

#49. Continue to work with the community to offer **affordable recreation programming** for children, youth, and older adults.

#50. Develop an **Inclusive Program Design Framework** that identifies multiple pathways to support participation from people of all abilities in City programming.

#52. Continue to work with partners to support expanded **year-round park use, outdoor education, and programming**.

#55. Complete the review and update of facility **allocation policies and processes** (e.g., arenas, gymnasium spaces, etc.) with the goals of improving fairness, transparency, and community access.

#57. Review the City's parks and recreation **user fees and rental rates** every three years.

#58. Prior to opening a new community centre, establish an **Access to Affordable Recreation Policy** to ensure that financial barriers do not prevent residents from participating.

#60. Create a **Community Development Coordinator** position to support community outreach, special projects, grants, policy development, etc.

#61. Expand **youth leadership programming** to help build future capacity.

Thank you!

MONTEITH BROWN PLANNING CONSULTANTS

The JF Group

MJMA ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN