ST. THOMAS
THE RAILWAY CITY

Parks and Recreation Master Plan
Update

February 2026



MONTEITH BROWN
PLANNING CONSULTANTS

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction 1

1.1 Making the Case for Parks and Recreation 1
1.2 Purpose of this Master Plan 1
1.3 Planning Process 2
1.4 Status and Accomplishments from the 2020 Master Plan 3

2 Planning Context 5

2.1 About the City of St. Thomas 5
2.2 How St. Thomas is Expected to Grow 6
2.3 The People Who Live Here Now 9
2.4 Policy Context and Supporting Documents 12
2.5 Sector Trends 13

3 What We Heard: Community Input 21

3.1 Community Survey 22
3.2 Public Input Sessions 43
3.3 Stakeholder and Community Organization Input 46
3.4 Youth Engagement 49
3.5 Staff Workshops 50

4 Strategic Framework 53

4.1 Vision 53
4.2 Guiding Principles 53

5 Recreation and Community Facilities 54

5.1 Indoor Facility Inventory Summary 54
5.2 Indoor Aquatics 58
5.3 Gymnasiums 61
5.4 Indoor Turf Fields 64
5.5 Arenas & Indoor Ice Pads 66
5.6 Halls, Meeting Rooms, & Multi-Purpose Spaces 68
5.7 Fitness Spaces 70
5.8 Indoor Tracks 72
5.9 Arts and Cultural Facilities 73

6 Parks and Outdoor Recreation Facilities 76

6.1 Parkland 76
6.2 Outdoor Facility Inventory Summary 88
6.3 Sports Fields 91
6.4 Sport Courts and Pads 97
6.5 Outdoor Aquatics 107
6.6 Specialized Facilities 110

6.7 Other Park Amenities 116

7 Service Delivery and Programming 123

7.1 Service Delivery Roles and Responsibilities 123
7.2 Programming and Events 124
7.3 Access, Allocation, and User Fees 126
7.4 Service Levels and Staffing 129
7.5 Communications and Marketing 130
7.6 Partnerships and Working with Others 131

8 Implementation 134

8.1 Monitoring and Updating the Plan 134
8.2 Funding Considerations 135
8.3 Timing and Priority of Recommendations 136

Appendix A. Status Update of Recommendations from the 2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan A-1

Appendix B. Policy Context and Supporting Documents B-1

Appendix C. Community Survey – Details C-1

Appendix D. Stakeholder Listing D-1

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of those who contributed to the development of the City of St. Thomas Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study. This report is a product of the vision and dedication of the community, the Project Team, and City Council. We also extend our thanks to the many area residents and community groups whose feedback has made the study a document that embodies the core values, beliefs, and priorities of the community.

City of St. Thomas Council

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Councillor Gary Clarke
Councillor Rose Gibson
Councillor Jim Herbert
Councillor Jeff Kohler
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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land on which we meet is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinabek, Attiwonderonk (Neutral) and Mississauga peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also recognize that this land is now home to the Munsee-Delaware Nation, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation and Oneida Nation of the Thames. This land was settled through Treaty 2, the McKee Purchase Treaty of 1790, and we, as beneficiaries of the treaty recognize our collective responsibilities to the land and water.

1 Introduction

1.1 Making the Case for Parks and Recreation

Parks and recreation services offer significant benefits to St. Thomas residents by promoting physical health, mental wellbeing, and social engagement. Accessible and inclusive spaces for physical activity, leisure, and play encourage healthy lifestyles for people of all ages and abilities. Participation in recreational programs, use of trails and open spaces, and opportunities for unstructured play contribute to improved physical fitness, reduced stress, and enhanced mental health. These services also help foster social connections and support a sense of belonging, particularly for vulnerable or isolated populations.

At the community level, parks and recreation are essential components of a high quality of life and a resilient urban environment. They enhance social cohesion by providing shared spaces for residents to gather, celebrate, and interact. Parks contribute to environmental sustainability through green infrastructure, biodiversity protection, and climate adaptation functions. Economically, these spaces and services support local businesses, create employment opportunities, and attract tourism.

The City is commended for recognizing these benefits as foundational to healthy, vibrant, and connected communities and for investing in the renewal of this Master Plan.

1.2 Purpose of this Master Plan

This project is an update to the City of St. Thomas' 2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. It is intended to guide decisions over a ten-year period (2026-2036) – with a longer-term view (to 2051) for major facility needs – by responding to anticipated growth and development in the city. It will assist the City of St. Thomas and stakeholders in making strategic investments to ensure a healthy community, improve the quality of life of residents, and encourage a strong economy and sustainable environment.

Specifically, the Master Plan analyzes and provides recommendations on the following:

- Recreation, sport and cultural facilities;
- Parks, open spaces and trails;
- Programs, events and activities; and
- Operations and service delivery.

St. Thomas' last Master Plan was prepared in 2020 and has been highly successful in guiding the municipality, including park improvements and program delivery. Since this time, new population forecasts have been developed and significant growth is now anticipated for the city over the next 25 to 30 years. This update addresses a similar scope of topics as the 2020 Master Plan, with an emphasis on growth-related capital needs.

Being prepared concurrently but under separate cover from this Master Plan update is a **Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study**. The purpose of the Feasibility Study is to provide a series of prioritized facility provision options, location requirements, and realistic financial estimates to guide future decision-making and budgeting for major community and recreation facilities such as indoor pools, gymnasiums, arenas, indoor turf fields, program space, and more.

Key objectives for the Master Plan Update and Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study include:

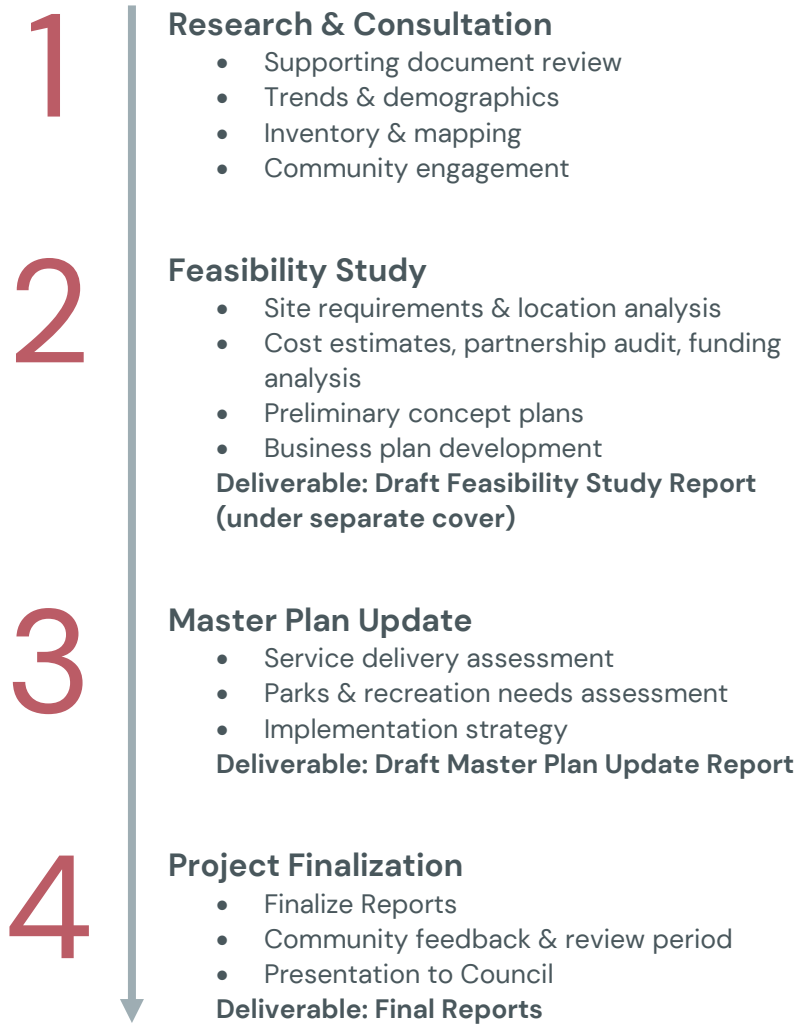
a. Updating the status of recommendations from the 2020 Master Plan.
b. Conducting background research on local demographics, participation trends, influencing factors, and leading practices to serve both the master plan and feasibility study.
c. Reviewing and assessing the inventory and distribution of public recreation facilities, parks, and programs available to area residents.
d. Gathering public and stakeholder input to identify facility and program needs, improvements, gaps, and future directions.
e. Conducting a needs assessment for parks and recreation facilities throughout the entire city for the next ten years, with a longer-term view towards 2051.
f. Assessing policies and needs for parkland acquisition, design and development.
g. Reviewing and assessing the City's capacity to implement service improvements.
h. Developing an achievable multi-year implementation plan to meet the highest priority needs through the efficient use and allocation of resources.

1.3 Planning Process

The planning process was divided into four phases. Each phase was designed to accomplish a variety of tasks and also included internal meetings and reporting. The following figure identifies the tasks undertaken in each of the project phases. Both the Master Plan and Feasibility Study have been informed from a wide-ranging and coordinated public and stakeholder engagement program.

This Master Plan Update contains recommendations and an implementation strategy to guide City decision-making over the next ten years. More detailed insights on the Feasibility Study and its findings – including preliminary concept plans, costing/funding analyses, and businesses plans – are delivered in a separate report.

Figure 1. Planning Process for the Master Plan Update and Feasibility Study



1.4 Status and Accomplishments from the 2020 Master Plan

St. Thomas' 2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan provided the City with recommendations to inform strategic investments to improve parks, recreation, and cultural facilities and services in several areas, including:

- strengthening partnerships between the City's Parks and Recreation Department and established service clubs, public agencies and not-for-profit organizations;
- building internal capacity to strengthen service delivery;
- maximizing the use of existing facilities and services;
- developing new services and facilities, such as increasing seniors programming and adding more pickleball courts; and
- improving existing and creating new parks and recreation amenities.

The 2020 Plan has been highly successful. Of the 79 recommendations put forward to be completed over ten years, **85% have been completed or are ongoing** in a short span of just four years (Table 1).

Table 1. 2020 Master Plan Implementation to Date

Action (to date)	Recommendations	Percent
Complete	7	**9%**
Ongoing	60	**76%**
Incomplete	12	**15%**
Total	**79**	**100%**

Several **key accomplishments** have emerged from this Plan, including (but not limited to):

- A partnership with the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin to provide residents with indoor swimming opportunities.
- Four new pickleball courts in Goddeeris Luyks Park (Burwell Park).
- Several new park amenities and improvements, including misting poles and outdoor fitness equipment.
- Trail expansion and the creation of an off-road mountain biking course in the Water Tower Mountain Bike Network.
- Improved year-round maintenance and signage at Lions Club Dog Park to support safe access and use.
- Playground equipment added to Shaw Valley Park, Parish Park, and Orchard Park.
- 1Password Park has fully opened for use.

Many of the recommendations from this Plan are still pertinent to today, but an update is needed to ensure the recommendations continue to align with current and future residents' needs. Any recommendations that have not been completed or for which the timeframe has not been reached will be reassessed through this update.

A full listing of the recommendations and their status can be found in Appendix A.

2 Planning Context

This section highlights key background inputs to establish an understanding of St. Thomas' current state, as well as key factors that influence the provision and use of parks and recreation facilities and services. Foundational inputs include St. Thomas' community profile, inventory and benchmarking data, relevant policy and background documents, and sector trends.

2.1 About the City of St. Thomas

The City of St. Thomas is located in Southwestern Ontario, right in the centre of Elgin County. Although St. Thomas operates independently from Elgin County, the County's seat is located within the City.

As the largest city in Elgin County, St. Thomas acts as a regional centre. Its strong industrial and commercial sectors employ residents throughout the city and the surrounding county. The newest industrial addition to St. Thomas is the PowerCo electric vehicle (EV) battery plant, which is anticipated to start production in 2027 and create 5,800 local jobs.

Known as the "Railway City" for its history of operating over 100 trains daily, St. Thomas attracts tourists to its railway heritage sites, such as the Elgin County Railway Museum. The St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art centre also attracts visitors by supporting local artists, promoting public art displays, and creating opportunities to experience culture.

St. Thomas is home to vibrant parks and recreation programs and facilities that enhance the quality of life of both city and county residents. The City's Parks and Recreation Department facilitates many sports, and recreation opportunities, including children's dance classes, drop-in racquet sports, day camps, public skating, and festivals. Residents are also well-served by a wide variety of established service clubs, public agencies, and not-for-profit organizations (e.g., Southwestern Ontario Public Health, local Conservation Authorities, the YMCA of Southwestern Ontario, minor sports organizations, and libraries) that contribute to the City's supply of parks and recreation offerings.

Located near the City of London (to the north) and the Lake Erie waterfront in Port Stanley (to the south), St. Thomas residents can also benefit from the variety of parks and recreation facilities in these areas.

With a population forecast of almost 80,000 people by 2051, St. Thomas continues to be a magnet for growth. With this growth, there will be an increased demand for parks and recreation facilities and programs provided by the City of St. Thomas and community partners.

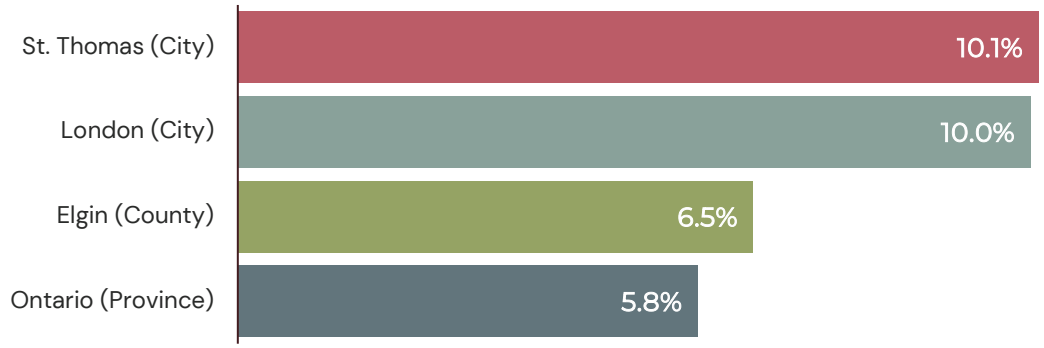
2.2 How St. Thomas is Expected to Grow

2.2.1 Historic Population Growth

With a population of 47,818 people in 2024, St. Thomas is a mid-sized city. [1] The community experienced a 10% population increase from 2016 to 2021, comparable to larger cities, such as London. St. Thomas also had higher percentage increases in population than Elgin County (6.5%) and Ontario (5.8%) (Figure 2).

With such rapid growth, an assessment of St. Thomas' parks and recreation facilities and services is needed to understand how the City will accommodate the needs of a larger population.

Figure 2. Percentage change in population from 2016 to 2021 (2021 Census)



2.2.2 Future Population Growth

Based on St. Thomas' 2024 Growth Analysis Study, the city's 2021 population of 43,186 residents is forecast to grow by approximately 36,314 residents to 79,500 residents in 2051 (Figure 3). [2] This growth represents a population increase of 2% annually over the 30 years.

Part of this rapid growth can be attributed to the PowerCo EV battery plant, which is anticipated to begin production in 2027. This plant is expected to create 5,800 jobs through direct, indirect, and induced employment, attracting more working-age residents to St. Thomas.

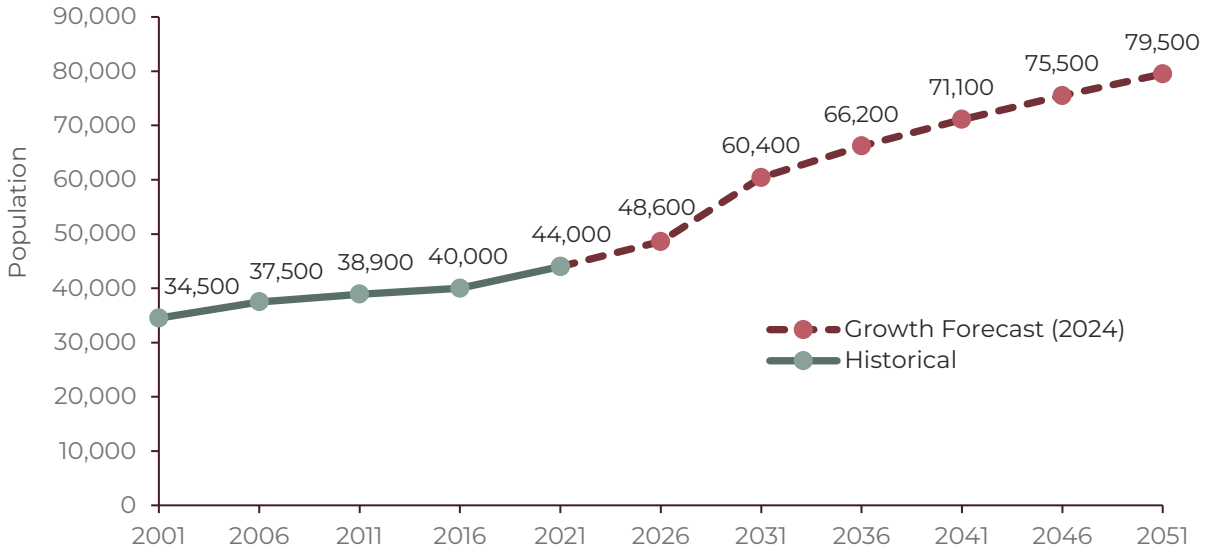
This growth will result in a need to strike an appropriate balance and mix of parks and recreation opportunities to respond to the needs of residents and ensure St. Thomas is positioned for growth. A sufficiently larger population base will also create an opportunity

[1] Statistics Canada. "Population estimates, July 1, by census subdivision, 2021 boundaries." January 16, 2025. Accessed March 4, 2025. https://doi.org/10.25318/1710015501-eng

[2] Forecast from Growth Analysis Study (2024) by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

to introduce new parks and recreation facilities to St. Thomas that were not previously available.

Figure 3. City of St. Thomas historical and forecast population, 2001 to 2051



Note: Forecast includes the net Census undercount of 2.7%.
Source: Historical data from Statistics Canada Census. Forecast from Growth Analysis Study (2024) by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

2.2.3 Residential Growth

St. Thomas has been witnessing steady residential growth in recent years, particularly through greenfield development and gentle infill. An assessment of long-term land requirements needed to support the new 2051 population forecast is currently underway and will inform the Official Plan update.

In the interim, various lands have been identified to accommodate shorter-term residential growth:

- **Greenfield Growth:** Presently, most of the City's greenfield / vacant residential lands are along the western and southern edges of the settlement area boundary. This includes lands in the south and southwest that have been actively building in recent years, as well as a draft approved plan of subdivision in the northwest (known as Area 1). Additional lands (Areas 2, 3, and 4) may hold longer-term potential for growth, subject to further study.

- **Infill Potential:** A portion of St. Thomas's future growth will occur through infill and intensification. Lands currently identified as having intensification potential are generally located along the primary corridors of Talbot Street (east-west) and Elgin Street / Wilson Avenue (north-south), although there are other localized pockets.

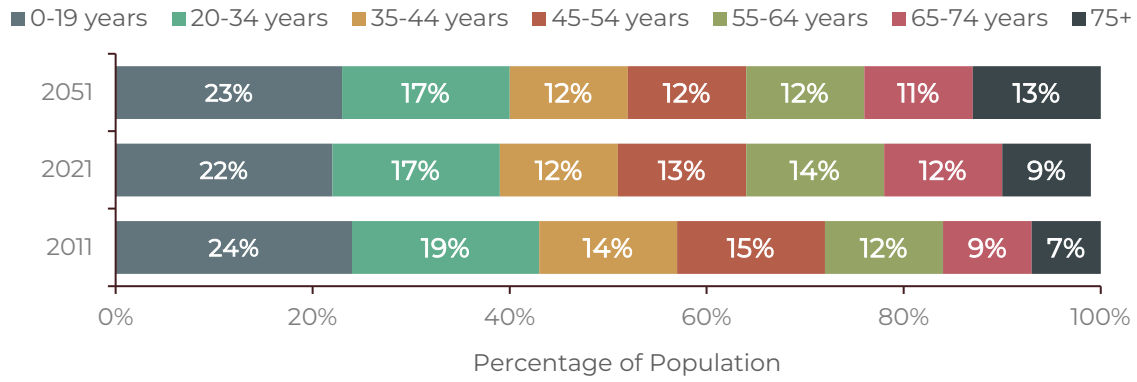
The "Railway Lands" also have potential for future development/redevelopment, to be guided through a future secondary plan.

- **Settlement Area Boundary Expansion:** Through the Official Plan update (anticipated timing 2026), the City may examine opportunities to further extend the settlement area boundary in order to address long-term land requirements.

2.2.4 Age Group Forecasts

Age group forecasts from St. Thomas' 2024 Growth Analysis Study summarize the city's population growth by major age groups from 2021 to 2051. Although the PowerCo EV battery plant is expected to attract more of the working-age population, older seniors are the only age group that is forecast to increase notably in proportion. As shown in Figure 4, older seniors (75+ years old) are expected to make up 13% of the city's population by 2051, which is 4% more than 2021 and 6% more than 2011. The forecast anticipates there will be 19,296 seniors (65+ years) in St. Thomas by 2051 which is a 119% increase from 2021.

Figure 4. City of St. Thomas historical and forecast population by age cohort, 2011, 2021, and 2051



Note: Forecast includes the net Census undercount of 2.7%.
Source: Population forecast by age derived from 2011 to 2021 Statistics Canada Census by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. 2021 to 2051; population forecast by age prepared by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., 2024.

Table 2. Age cohort forecasts for St. Thomas, 2021 – 2051

Age Group	2021	2051	Growth Increase from 2021 – 2051 (#)	Growth Increase from 2021 – 2051 (%)
Youth (0 - 14 years)	7,305	13,550	6,245	86%
Adolescents and Young Adults (15 - 24 years)	5,003	9,002	3,999	80%
Adults (25 - 54 years)	16,045	28,289	12,244	76%
Older Adults (55 - 64 years)	6,034	9,363	3,329	55%
Seniors (65+ years)	8,799	19,296	10,497	119%
Total	**43,186**	**79,500**	**36,314**	**84%**

Note: Forecast includes the net Census undercount of 2.7%.
Source: Historical data from Statistics Canada 2021 Census. Forecast from Growth Analysis Study (2024) by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

These findings demonstrate that St. Thomas' population is aging – a phenomenon being experienced throughout North America. As the Baby Boomer generation transitions into the older adult and senior age cohorts, a greater focus is being placed on age-friendly community design and leisure programming.

2.3 The People Who Live Here Now

2.3.1 Age and Household Composition

As noted, St. Thomas' population is aging and will continue to do so. The median age of St. Thomas residents has increased by three years in the last decade, from 40.7 years in 2011 to 43.6 years in 2021.

Relative to Elgin County and Ontario, St. Thomas has a higher percentage of its population over 65 years old, at 21.3% (Figure 5). Creating age-friendly parks and recreation spaces and programming is critical for engaging the growing older adult population.

Figure 5. Percentage of population over the age of 65 years old (2021 Census)

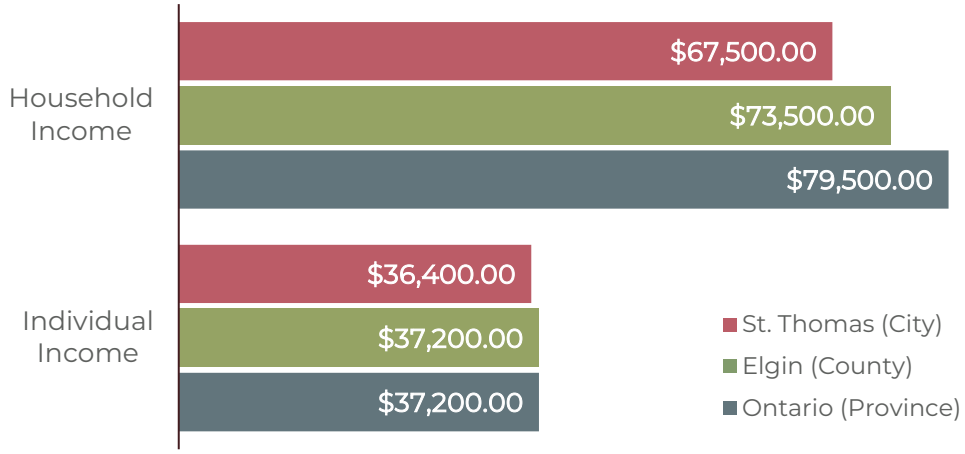


2.3.2 Income

Studies have shown positive correlations between income and participation in parks and recreation activities. Researchers have associated increased participation in leisure activities with higher levels of income, likely due to the participant's (or guardian's) ability to afford things such as registration fees, necessary equipment, and travel to activity sites.

According to the 2021 Census, the median after-tax household income in St. Thomas was lower than incomes in Elgin County and Ontario (by 8.2%, and 15%, respectively) (Figure 6). St. Thomas fared slightly better when examining individual after-tax household incomes; local resident earnings were only slightly lower than individual incomes in Elgin County and Ontario (2.1% lower for both) (Figure 6). These lower median incomes indicate that households and individuals in St. Thomas may face economic barriers to participation in parks and recreation activities.

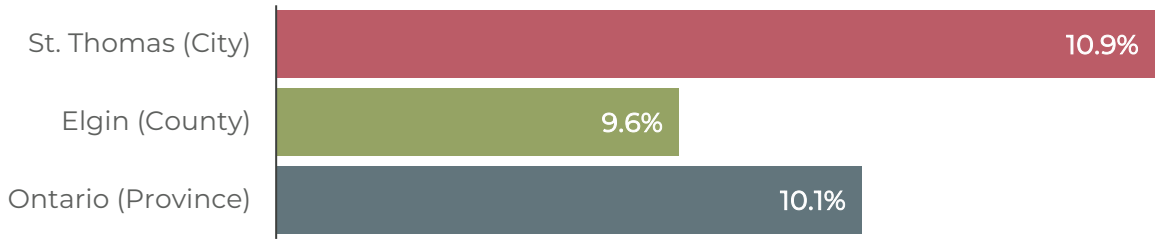
Figure 6. Individual and household median after-tax income (2021 Census)



Nearly 11% of St. Thomas residents are experiencing low income based on Statistics Canada's low-income measure, after-tax (LIM-AT). The prevalence of low income in St. Thomas is higher than in Elgin County (9.6%) and Ontario (10.1%) (Figure 7). These

findings indicate that some residents of St. Thomas may experience economic barriers to participation in parks and recreation offerings in the city. Providing financially accessible opportunities is important for removing financial barriers to parks and recreation activities, ensuring that all residents have a chance to participate, regardless of income.

Figure 7. Prevalence of low income based on the low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT) (2021 Census)



2.3.3 Education

Studies show that residents who have attained higher levels of education are more likely to participate in parks and recreation activities. This has been attributed to a better knowledge and understanding of the importance and value of regular physical activity and social interaction as well as individual and community health.

Approximately half (49.3%) of St. Thomas residents have a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree, which is less than the Ontario percentage (57.5%). As a result, St. Thomas residents may have slightly less interest or ability to engage in parks and recreation activities compared to the province.

2.3.4 Labour and Commuting

More than half (61%) of St. Thomas residents commute within the city for work, and another 10.5% commute within Elgin County for work. Since most residents work within St. Thomas or nearby, there is an emphasized demand for local parks and recreational opportunities within the city.

The main mode of commuting to work was cars, trucks, and vans, with 92.9% of the population using this mode. Public transit was the least common mode, with only 0.4% of the population using this mode to commute to work. As a result, locating parks and recreation facilities along public transit routes is likely less important to working residents at this time; however, residents without access to personal vehicles (e.g., youth) will have increased opportunities to access parks and recreation opportunities if they are located along public transit routes. Demand for public transit is also expected to grow as the system matures.

2.3.5 Diversity

The proportion of St. Thomas residents who identify as racialized groups has increased in the past decade, from 4.2% in 2011 to 7.1% in 2021. Similarly, the percentage of St. Thomas residents who identify as immigrants increased from 9.6% in 2011 to 10.4% in 2021[3].

Comparatively, nearly one in four Canadian residents are landed immigrants or permanent residents and this proportion is rising. According to Canada's Immigration Levels Plan, the nation welcomed 471,550 permanent residents in 2023 (with 44% choosing to settle in Ontario). Going forward, Canada will be accepting immigrants at a reduced rate, down to 365,000 new residents by 2027. In 2023, India (30%) was the leading source of immigration for Canada, followed by China (7%), Philippines (6%), Afghanistan (4%), and Nigeria (4%). In Ontario, 34.3% of the population identifies as racialized groups, while 30% identifies as immigrants.

Although St. Thomas has lower percentages of cultural diversity than other Ontario municipalities, it is expected that these percentages will increase in St. Thomas in the future. While newcomers have many similar leisure needs to long-time Canadians, many also bring their own activities, sports, and traditions to St. Thomas. Parks and recreation spaces are vital to supporting newcomers and celebrating our many cultures, underscoring their importance to a growing city.

2.4 Policy Context and Supporting Documents

The following documents provide a foundation and valuable context for this Master Plan Update. Summaries of each document can be found in **Appendix B**.

Table 3. Key Documents Reviewed

General Guiding Plans, Policies, and Studies	- Brighter Future Strategic Plan (2024 – 2027) - Accessibility Plan (2024) - Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2021) - Elgin St. Thomas Age Friendly Community Plan (2017) - St. Thomas City-Wide Urban Design Guidelines (DRAFT March 2024)
Growth-Related Plans	- Official Plan and OPA 90 (2018)
Aligned Partners	- Public Library Master Plan (2022 – 2025) - Public Library Strategic Plan (2023 – 2027)

[3] The 2021 data is from the Statistics Canada Census. The 2011 data is from the National Household Survey, since the information on racialized groups and immigrants were included in this survey rather than the 2011 Census.

Trails and Active Transportation	- Cycling and Trails Master Plan (2020) - Recreational Trail Lighting Policy (2021) - Transportation Master Plan Refresh (ongoing)
Assets, Budgets, Funding, and Infrastructure Gaps	- Approved Capital and Operating Budgets (2024) - Asset Management State of Infrastructure (2024) - Development Charges Background Study and Addenda (2020)

2.5 Sector Trends

This section provides an overview of trends that are impacting municipal parks and recreation provision in three key areas: (1) participation and emerging interests, (2) equity and inclusion; and (3) municipal constraints and opportunities.

2.5.1 Participation and Emerging Interests

Participation in parks and recreation is impacted by a variety of economic, demographic, and lifestyle trends. The following explores emerging trends in parks and recreation activities from communities across Canada.

Health and Well-being

Most Ontarians are well-aware of the physical, social, and mental health benefits of parks and recreation. Through a survey of community values, Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) identified that 97% of Ontarians believe parks, green spaces, and community recreation are very important to their quality of life.[4] These findings suggest that parks and recreation services are valuable to the vast majority of Ontarians and worthy of investment across all levels of government.

Connecting with Nature

During the COVID-19 pandemic, communities observed increased parks use and demand for outdoor activities. Post-pandemic participation in outdoor parks and recreation remains high, and as a result, municipalities are experiencing increased maintenance demands for outdoor settings.[5] There is also growing interest in accessing parks and trails during the colder months of the year. Many municipalities are developing winter maintenance strategies and winter parks activity guides to ensure residents can continue to access

[4] Parks and Recreation Ontario, "2024 Ontario Pre-Budget Consultation," *Parks and Recreation Ontario,* published January 2024, https://portal.prontario.org/public/PRO%20Submission%20-%202024%20Pre-Budget%20Consultation.pdf.

[5] Park People, "The 2024 Canadian City Parks Report," published 2024, https://parkpeople.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2024-Canadian-City-Parks-Report-English-2024.pdf.

nature year-round.[6] Park safety is another growing concern; many municipalities are adding lighting, signage, and wayfinding in parks to enhance their safety.[7]

Affordable, Self-Scheduled Programming

Due to inflation and the rising costs of living, affordability has emerged as a top barrier to participation in recreation. A 2023 cross-Canada survey found that 44% of parents cannot afford to register their children for organized sports. The rising costs to operate programs has also made it challenging for sports organizations, municipalities, and other program providers to maintain affordable programming rates.[8] As a result of the challenging economic climate, there is a strong interest for affordable and self-scheduled recreation opportunities, such as hiking, biking, outdoor court sports, fitness, outdoor skating, dog parks, community gardens, and more. Drop-in programming – such as dance, art, and fitness classes – also present more affordable and casual opportunities for recreation compared to organized sports.

Evolving Interests and New Activities

As municipalities grow, they typically observe increasing demands for a wider variety of sports and recreation opportunities. As Canada welcomes more newcomers, communities are seeing growing demand for sports and activities that are popular in other cultures, such as cricket, badminton, soccer, and outdoor gatherings/picnics. Due to the rising post-pandemic living costs, some communities are experiencing declining participation in hockey, which has expensive equipment and ice rental costs. More affordable sports, such as basketball, soccer, pickleball, and volleyball are growing in popularity instead.[9] There is also growing interest in more specialized recreation opportunities (e.g., rock climbing and bouldering) and competitive sports; however, these activities present affordability challenges for households with limited disposable incomes.[10]

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[6] Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, "Framework for Recreation in Canada," *Canadian Parks and Recreation Association*, published March 2024, https://tinyurl.com/RecreationFramework.

[7] National Recreation and Park Association, "Creating safe park environments to enhance community wellness," accessed April 20, 2025, https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/f768428a39aa4035ae55b2aaff372617/park-safety.pdf.

[8] Jumpstart, "State of Play Youth Report," published 2024, https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0122/8124/9892/files/State-of-Play-2024-EN.pdf?v=1713368242.

[9] Stephen Whyno, "Steady decline in youth hockey participation in Canada raises concerns about the sport's future" *CBC Sports*, published June 11, 2024, https://www.cbc.ca/sports/hockey/youth-hockey-canada-declining-participation-1.7231607.

[10] Daniel Wigfield & Ryan Snelgrove, "Who is climbing: Understanding participants within climbing escalade Canada," *University of Waterloo & Climbing Escalade Canada,* published 2021, https://climbingcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/2021-CEC-Demographic-Survey-Report.pdf.

Climate Change

The impacts of climate change are presenting barriers to participation. Within the past ten years, the number of annual weather alerts in Canada have more than doubled.[11] Heat waves, heavy rain, strong winds, flooding, and smoke-filled air can impact the ability of users to engage in outdoor physical activity. Many communities are seeking opportunities to mitigate and adapt to climate change so residents can continue to participate in parks and recreation. Examples include: [12, 13]

- Adding more environmentally friendly, nature-based elements to outdoor playgrounds (e.g., sensory gardens) to increase greenspace and support climate resilience objectives;
- Adding shade structures, wind-prevention structures, and cooling stations to outdoor parks and recreation spaces;
- Avoiding the use of dark colours for playground equipment and surfaces to reduce hot temperatures; and
- Modifying sport organization policies and regulations regarding water breaks and sun protection, particularly during hot weather.

2.5.2 Equity and Inclusion

Municipalities are increasingly striving to ensure equitable service provision for under-served groups such as people with disabilities, racialized populations, newcomers, women/girls, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and Indigenous people. The following explores parks and recreation participation trends for equity-deserving groups.

Persons with Disabilities

The 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability found that over 1 in 4 Ontarians (28%) aged 15 years or older had one or more disabilities, which is a 4% increase since 2017.[14] This increase is primarily due to the rising prevalence of mental-health disabilities among youth and working-age adults, as well as increases in pain-related and seeing disabilities in the aging

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[11] Environment and Climate Change Canada, "Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators: Temperature change in Canada," published 2024, https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/eccc/documents/pdf/cesindicators/temperature-change/2024/temperature-change-en.pdf.

[12] ParticipACTION, "The ParticipACTION report card on physical activity for children and youth, ParticipACTION, published 2024, https://www.participaction.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-Children-and-Youth-Report-Card-Highlight-Report-1.pdf.

[13] Tim Ross, Kelly-Arbour-Nicitopoulos, Ingrid M. Kanics, Jennifer Leo, "Creating inclusive playgrounds: A playbook of considerations and strategies," *Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital,* published July 2022, www.hollandbloorview.ca/playgroundsplaybook.

[14] Statistics Canada, "Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017 to 2022," published December 1, 2023, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231201/dq231201b-eng.htm.

population.[15] As St. Thomas' population is aging, it is likely that there will be an increase in the number of people with disabilities. Since recreation and physical activity are critical to physical, social, and mental well-being, it is important that people with disabilities have accessible opportunities to participate.

Racialized and Newcomer Populations

More newcomers are immigrating to Canada, and as a result municipalities in Canada are becoming more diverse. Between 2025 to 2027, Canada aims to welcome 1,733,850 temporary residents and 1,140,000 permanent residents.[16] Recreation and parks play an important role in helping newcomers integrate into society and build community connections; however, many newcomers experience discrimination and barriers to participation. A 2023 survey of 25,000 diverse youth in Ontario found that immigrant and racialized youth were disproportionately affected by barriers to participation including affordability, social isolation, lack of friends, and not feeling included. [17] Furthermore, from 2021 to 2023, there were increases in the percentage of youth experiencing racism in sports. [18] Training staff, instructors, and coaches on how to foster supportive and anti-discriminatory environments can help ensure parks and recreation spaces are inclusive for all residents. Additionally, providing culturally-specific and sensitive programming, as well as translated materials can support newcomer participation.

Women and Girls

A 2024 report on girls' participation in sports in Canada found that more girls are playing sports now than in previous years. Although girls' participation rates (63%) are slightly lower than boys' (68%), this trend suggests that efforts to create equitable opportunities for girls in sports are working.[19] While sport participation for boys and girls is similar, less women participate in sports than men. By age 16, young women begin to drop out of sports at accelerated rates, while young men's participation is relatively steady until their mid-to-late twenties.[20] To increase recreation and parks participation from women and girls, the Framework for Recreation in Canada Update recommends creating facility allocation policies that ensure women/girls have equitable access to quality facilities and programs at

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[15] Statistics Canada, "New data on disability in Canada, 2022," published December 1, 2023, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2023063-eng.htm.
[16] Government of Canada, "Notice – Supplementary Information for the 2025-2027 Immigration Levels Plan," published October 24, 2024, https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/supplementary-immigration-levels-2025-2027.html.
[17] Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment Foundation, "Change the game research report," published 2024, https://ssl.mlse.digital/foundation/MLSE-Foundation-Change-the-Game-Research-Report-2024.pdf.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Canadian Women & Sport, "Rally Report 2024," published 2024, https://womenandsport.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Rally-Report-2024_Canadian-Women-Sport.pdf.
[20] Ibid.

peak times.[21] Teaching coaches and instructors how to communicate with and support girls can also make sports environments more welcoming and foster long-term participation in sports.[22]

The 2SLGBTQIA+ Community

Members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community often experience discrimination and barriers to inclusion in sports. Studies have found that 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals have disproportionately lower participation rates than straight and cisgender individuals.[23, 24] Creating spaces and policies that are inclusive to the needs of all gender identities and sexual orientations can help ensure 2SLGBTQIA+ participants feel safe and welcome to participate in parks and recreation. Examples of inclusive actions include training coaches to support 2SLGBTQIA+ participants, having mixed-gendered teams, allowing participants to play on teams that match their gender identity, and creating gender-neutral changerooms.

Indigenous Peoples

The City of St. Thomas is on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinabek, Attiwonderonk (Neutral), and Mississauga peoples, and is now also home to the Munsee-Delaware Nation, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, and the Oneida Nation of the Thames. According to the 2021 Census, approximately 4% of the St. Thomas population has Indigenous ancestry.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) identified 94 calls to action to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Many of these calls to action can be directly or indirectly supported by the parks and recreation sector. As a result, the 2024 Framework for Recreation in Canada Update recommends working with the Indigenous community to address the TRC calls to action. Strategies to facilitate Indigenous access to recreation include creating opportunities for the long-term development of Indigenous athletes, supporting traditional sports and games, and facilitating environmental stewardship.[25]

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[21] Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, "Framework for Recreation in Canada," *Canadian Parks and Recreation Association*, published March 2024, https://tinyurl.com/RecreationFramework.
[22] Canadian Women & Sport, "Rally Report 2024," published 2024, https://womenandsport.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Rally-Report-2024_Canadian-Women-Sport.pdf.
[23] Out on the Fields, "Gay boys play team sports at half the rate of their peers," published December 3, 2020, https://outonthefields.com/male-sport-participation/.
[24] Martha Gumprich and Nicola Hare, "The Canadian non-binary youth in sport report," published in 2023, https://ankorstransconnect.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/non-binary-youth-in-sport-report.pdf.
[25] Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, "Framework for Recreation in Canada," *Canadian Parks and Recreation Association*, published March 2024, https://tinyurl.com/RecreationFramework.

2.5.3 Municipal Constraints and Opportunities

The ability of municipalities to provide parks and recreation opportunities are also impacted by external and internal trends, such as aging infrastructure, evolving expectations, staffing shortages, budget/funding availability, and partnership and co-location opportunities. The following explores trends influencing municipal recreation provision and operations.

Aging Infrastructure

The existing municipal recreation and park infrastructure supply is aging across Canada as a large proportion of facilities were built through government grants in the late 1960s to 1980s. The 2019 Canadian Infrastructure Report Card found that approximately one-third of Canada's sports and recreation facilities were in "Fair" condition or worse.[26] Since many recreation facilities were constructed before the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act,* 2005 (AODA) and various amendments to the Ontario Building Code – which require new or renovated buildings to be barrier-free – there are also accessibility challenges with these older facilities. The need to replace and improve old infrastructure presents challenges as investments in new infrastructure are also needed to support population growth.

Evolving Expectations and Responsibilities

Parks spaces are evolving from sport and recreation uses to broader community gathering spaces that can address social issues. Residents from municipalities across Canada agree that parks should play a role in mental health, biodiversity, climate resilience, racial justice, Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, and homelessness. With this change, the role of parks staff is shifting. [27] 92% of municipalities identified that their parks staff are increasingly needing to respond to challenges that are not traditionally parks issues; however, parks staff felt they lacked the knowledge, tools, and resources to deal with these new responsibilities. [28] Increased training, skill-building, and inter-departmental collaborations can help park staff build the skills and capacity required to meet people's evolving expectations of parks.[29]

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[26] Canadian Infrastructure, "Canadian Infrastructure Report Card," published 2019, http://canadianinfrastructure.ca/downloads/canadian-infrastructure-report-card-2019.pdf.
[27] Park People, "The 2024 Canadian City Parks Report," published 2024, https://parkpeople.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2024-Canadian-City-Parks-Report-English-2024.pdf.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Park People, "The 2024 Canadian City Parks Report," published 2024, https://parkpeople.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2024-Canadian-City-Parks-Report-English-2024.pdf.

Staffing Shortages

Many municipalities across Ontario are experiencing growing staffing shortages in the parks and recreation sector. Ontario data from 2023 identified that job vacancies in the sector increased by 18.6% since 2022. [30] Recent lifeguarding shortages have had notable impacts in Ontario; several municipalities have had to reduce aquatics programming due to limited lifeguards. [31] One challenge with employee recruitment and retention in the parks and recreation sector is that the average salary is lower than the provincial average. If liveable wages cannot be provided to staff, a significant labour shortage is anticipated for this sector by 2030. [32]

Budgets, Funding and Partnerships

Parks and recreation department budgets were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation rose to the highest levels in decades. Now, as participation levels have rebounded and even exceeded pre-pandemic levels, most municipalities are experiencing escalating cost factors that are leading to rapidly rising costs and delays in much-needed capital projects. In many cases, traditional forms of funding are not enough to address these cost escalations. Property taxes are often the primary source of funding for facility revitalization and replacement initiatives, whereas growth-related projects receive the majority of their funding from development charges and related fees. For many municipalities, large-scale capital projects require increased financial commitments from all levels of government – supplemented by approaches such as naming rights, operating partnerships, land deals, etc.

Multi-Use Facilities and Co-location

Multi-use facilities are growing in popularity in municipalities as they can accommodate growing demands for a wider variety of programming in one location, which can make operations more efficient. Co-location models are also emerging in many communities by combining facilities such as recreation centres, library branches, schools, seniors' centres and childcare into one community hub. Co-location can be advantageous as the combined building typically requires less space than multiple independent structures due to shared support spaces (e.g., lobbies, elevators, storage), which results in lower capital and operating costs. [33] Both multi-use and co-located facilities provide efficient opportunities

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[30] Parks and Recreation Ontario, "2024 Ontario Pre-Budget Consultation," *Parks and Recreation Ontario,* published January 2024, https://portal.prontario.org/public/PRO%20Submission%20-%202024%20Pre-Budget%20Consultation.pdf.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Parks and Recreation Ontario, "2025 Ontario Pre-Budget Consultation," *Parks and Recreation Ontario,* January 2025, https://www.prontario.org/_files/ugd/50cfa2_547ec4739d204cdaa17427f0a8217a4c.pdf?index=true.

[33] Sean Regan, "Colocation in Municipal Construction," *Urban Land Institute*, published June 15, 2011, https://urbanland.uli.org/planning-design/colocation-in-municipal-construction.

for municipalities to provide a variety of new recreation programs that can accommodate residents of all ages, abilities, and cultures.

Parkland Dedication and Land Assembly

In response to the housing crisis, the *More Homes Built Faster Act,* 2022 introduced significant changes to parkland dedication policies in Ontario. This includes capping the amount of parkland municipalities can require from developers and allowing for the conveyance of encumbered lands toward parkland dedication. Municipalities are concerned about the long-term impact on parkland availability (both quality and quantity) and funding for recreational spaces. Furthermore, as municipalities grow inwards and upwards, it has become more challenging to assemble land in areas of intensification due to scarcity and rising costs. Some municipalities are turning to land banking or purchasing large plots of land (often from other public agencies, such as schools) and using a portion to create new parks or recreation facilities, but selling off the remaining lands to help pay for part of the improvements.

Specialized Investment Challenges

Demand for competitive sports is growing; however, these programs typically require specialized amenities, facilities, and instructors that can be costly for municipalities to provide. As a result, municipalities often focus on investing in facilities and programs that have the widest public benefit. Where it is feasible, some municipalities may invest in competitive sports infrastructure to contribute to sports tourism and support the development of local athletes.

3 What We Heard: Community Input

Community engagement is important for ensuring a plan responds to the public's interests. City of St. Thomas Staff and the Consulting Team developed a comprehensive community input strategy to inform the development of this Master Plan Update and the concurrent Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study (under separate cover). The following engagement tactics were employed to gather input from residents, community organizations, school boards, and City staff and Council:

Community Survey

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

High School Student Input

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

Public Input Sessions

140 members of the public were engaged at public input sessions during Phase 1 and 4 of the project.

Staff Workshops

Frontline staff and management staff were engaged through staff workshops.

Community Focus Groups

Input was received from **49 community groups**, including service clubs, school boards, and sport user groups.

Council & Steering Committee

1 meeting held with the Steering Committee to discuss project directions. 5 members of Council have provided input.

These engagement tactics and findings are discussed in greater detail throughout the following subsections. It should be noted that the community input has not been fact-checked, therefore, the summary may not represent final themes or directions for the Master Plan.

What We Heard: Highlights

1. **Destination parks and trail systems** are highly valued and should continue to be fully supported.
2. There is a demand for a **wider variety of recreation programs**, including **affordable, year-round** opportunities.
3. There is widespread support for a **multi-use, multi-generational recreation hub**, which is preferred over single-use solutions.
4. Organizations indicate that they are constrained by **limited facility spaces**, such as arenas, gymnasiums, and ball diamonds.
5. The top community priority is an **indoor aquatic centre** and also a desire for **gymnasiums and other spaces** that can accommodate a flexible range of sports and activities.
6. Updates to **allocation policies** and **communication practices** may help to optimize high-demand spaces.
7. **Improvements to outdoor facilities** – such as parks, sports, fields/courts, and trails – will enhance their use and build capacity in the short-term.
8. Rising community expectations and service levels are putting pressure on existing **staff and community resources**.

3.1 Community Survey

To support the development of this Master Plan Update, a community survey was conducted to collect input about parks and recreation facility needs and priorities in St. Thomas. Specifically, the survey gathered information regarding parks and recreation participation, barriers, needs, satisfaction, improvements, and priorities for future investments. The survey also included questions that assess indoor pool utilization and needs to inform the development of the Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study (under separate cover).

The online community survey was available for a period of nearly six weeks from January 21 to February 28, 2025. An online link to the survey was posted on the City's website, in a media release, promoted on social media, circulated to community organizations, and discussed in the news. Additionally, a tax insert promoting the community survey was sent out to residents in the mail on January 29. Hard copy versions of the survey were available at City Hall, Joe Thornton Community Centre, St. Thomas Seniors' Centre, St. Thomas Public Library, and the Parks Administration Office in Pinafore Park. To prevent people from

submitting multiple survey responses, online survey submissions were restricted to one per Internet Protocol (IP) address.

3.1.1 Profile of Respondents

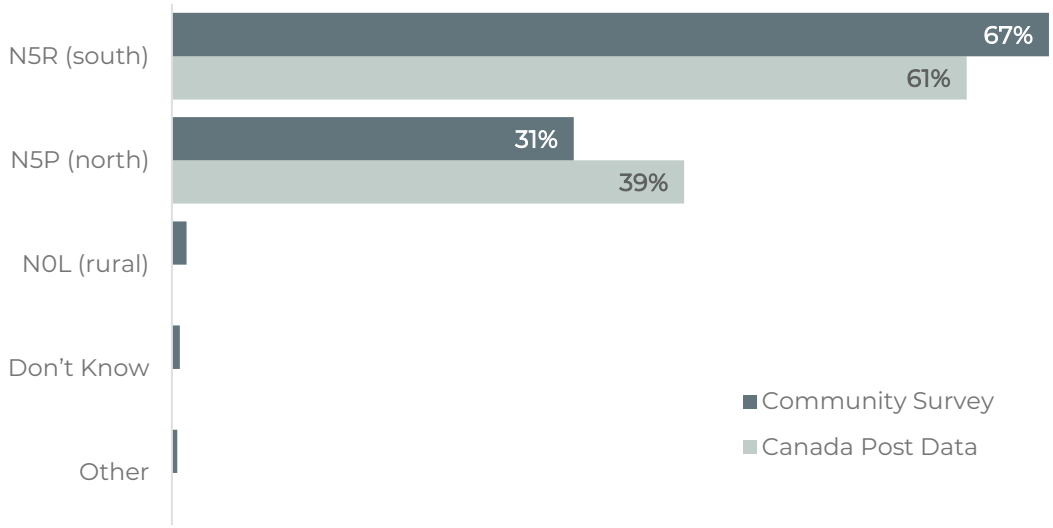
90% of the survey respondents reported living in St. Thomas, while the other 10% lived in nearby municipalities. For those living outside of St. Thomas, the most common locations were Central Elgin (4.5% of respondents) or Southwold (1.3% of respondents). Of the St. Thomas respondents, 67% of the responses came from residents living in southern St. Thomas (N5R postal code), while 31% came from residents in the northern end of the City (N5P postal code), which is similar to the actual distribution of St. Thomas residents (see Figure 8).

2,730 surveys completed

8,350 residents represented

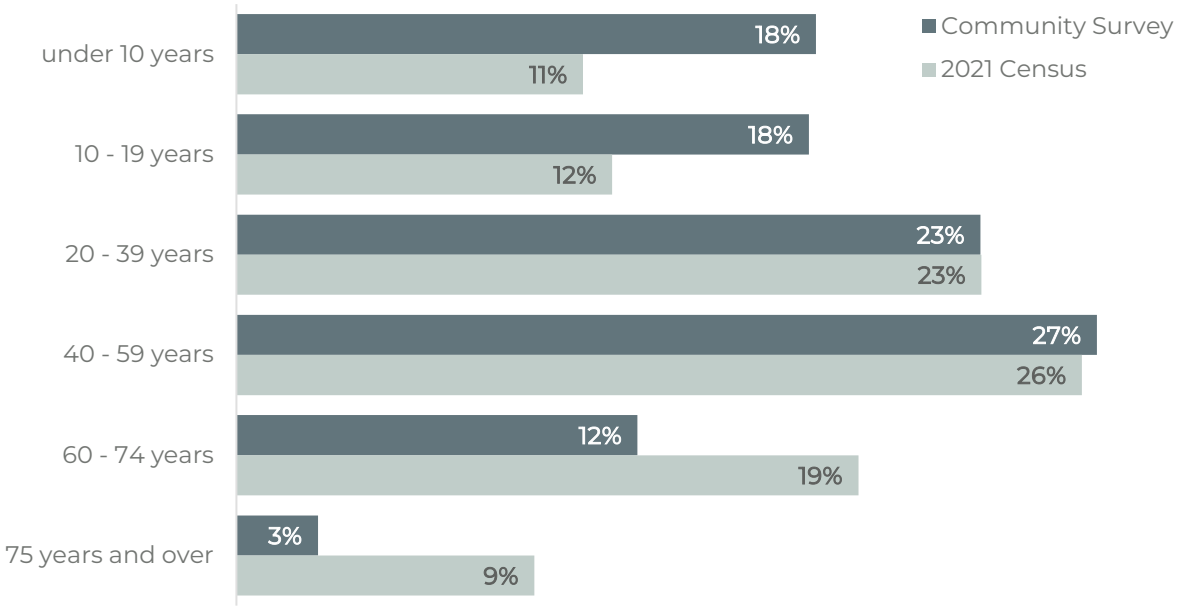
17.5% of the City's population

Figure 8. What are the first three digits of your postal code? (n = 1970)



The average household size was 3.4 persons, which is higher than the City's average of 2.3 persons per household in the 2021 Census. Households with children and adolescents were slightly overrepresented in the community survey, while older adults were slightly underrepresented (see Figure 9). To mitigate this limitation, the findings from other community inputs (e.g., open houses, focus groups), as well as other data inputs (e.g., utilization data) were also considered when making recommendations.

Figure 9. Including yourself, what is the total number of persons within your household that fall into the following age categories? (n = 2152)



3.1.2 Data Analysis

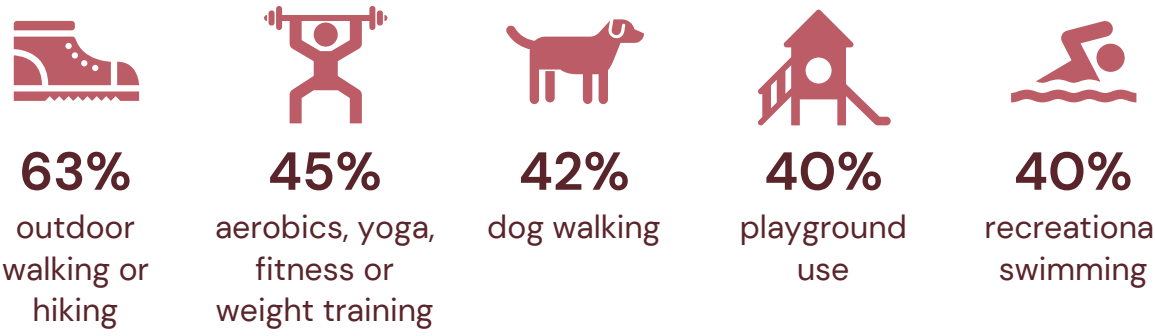
For all questions, the frequency and percentages of responses were calculated. Data tables displaying these statistics for all questions are included in **Appendix C**. For questions related to the potential aquatic centre and pool usage, a cross-tabulation analysis was performed to identify any areas of difference amongst pool user and non-user sub-groups. This analysis allowed for the isolation of key segments of pool users which will help to understand perceptions around support for the development and future use of a municipal indoor pool. The sub-group definitions and full results of the cross-tabulation analysis can also be found in **Appendix C.**

3.1.3 Participation, Barriers, Satisfaction & Gaps

Participation Profile

To understand parks and recreation participation in St. Thomas, survey respondents were asked to identify activities that their household participated in over the past 12 months. A breakdown of participation in all activities is shown in Figure 11.

Figure 10. Top five most participated in activities in St. Thomas according to survey respondents

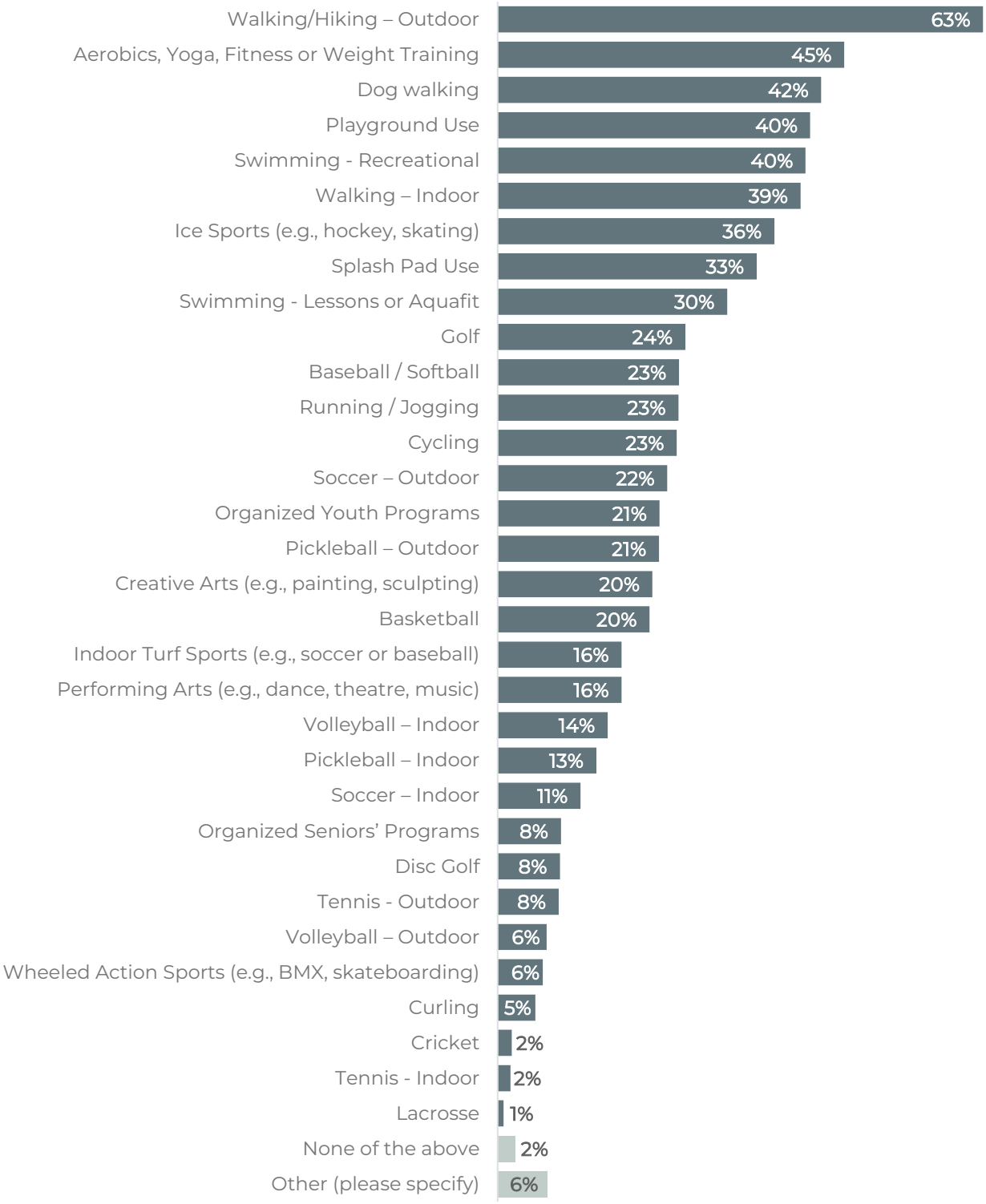


The top five most participated in activities in St. Thomas were outdoor walking or hiking (63%), aerobics, yoga, fitness or weight training (45%), dog walking (42%), playground use (40%), and recreational swimming (40%). Outdoor walking is often the most participated in activity for municipalities as it is a free, unstructured activity that can be done by almost any age group, at nearly any time or place. Playgrounds also provide opportunities for free, unstructured recreation for youth making it an accessible form of recreation for many households. Aerobics, yoga, fitness or weight training, playground use, and recreational swimming are typically available as drop-in times or self-directed activities, which makes them accessible to people with busy schedules. In addition to these top five activities, at least one in five households participated in the following pursuits:

- Indoor walking (39%)
- Ice sports, such as ice hockey, skating, or ringette (36%)
- Splash pad use (33%)
- Swimming lessons or aquafit (30%)
- Golf (24%)
- Baseball or softball (23%)
- Running or jogging (23%)
- Cycling (23%)
- Outdoor soccer (22%)
- Organized youth programs (21%)
- Outdoor pickleball (21%)
- Creative arts, such as painting or sculpting (20%)
- Basketball (20%)

Activities with the lowest household participation rates include indoor volleyball, indoor pickleball, indoor soccer, indoor turf sports, performing arts (e.g., dance, theatre), organized seniors' programs, outdoor tennis, outdoor volleyball, wheeled action sports, curling, cricket, indoor tennis, and lacrosse. These activities may have lower participation rates due to their more specialized nature, as well as the limited opportunities for indoor sports and recreation in St. Thomas. Since older adults were underrepresented in this survey, the percentage of households that participate in organized seniors' programs may be higher than what is reflected in these results.

Figure 11. In the past 12 months, have you or anyone in your household participated in any of the following activities in St. Thomas, at home, or elsewhere? (select all that apply) (n = 2730)

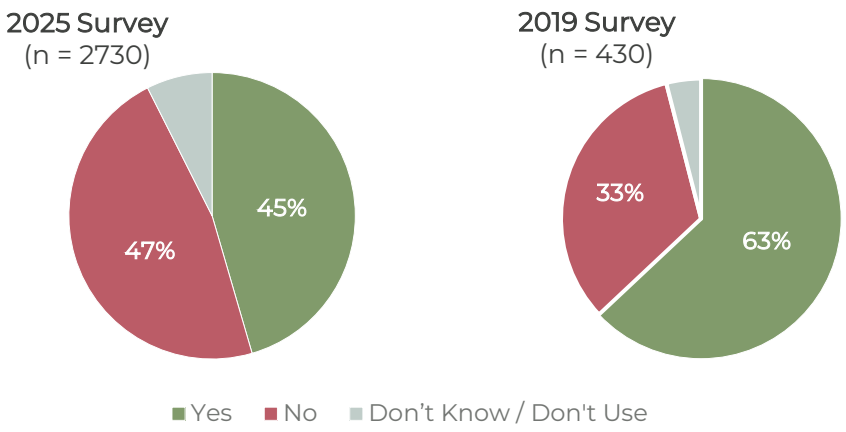


Note: Top "other" responses included badminton (n = 21), football (n = 11), gymnastics (n = 10), rock climbing (n = 8), roller skating (n = 8), therapy pool (n = 7), mountain biking (n = 6), canoeing/kayaking/paddle boarding (n = 6), and ball hockey (n = 5).

Barriers to Participation

When asked about their household's ability to participate in parks and recreation activities, nearly half of respondents (47%) reported they were unable to participate as often as they would like. This question previously asked through the City's previous Master Plan survey, and only 33% of respondents reported they were unable. As a result, more residents may be experiencing barriers to participation now than they were six years ago.

Figure 12. Are you and members of your household able to participate in parks and recreation activities as often as you would like?

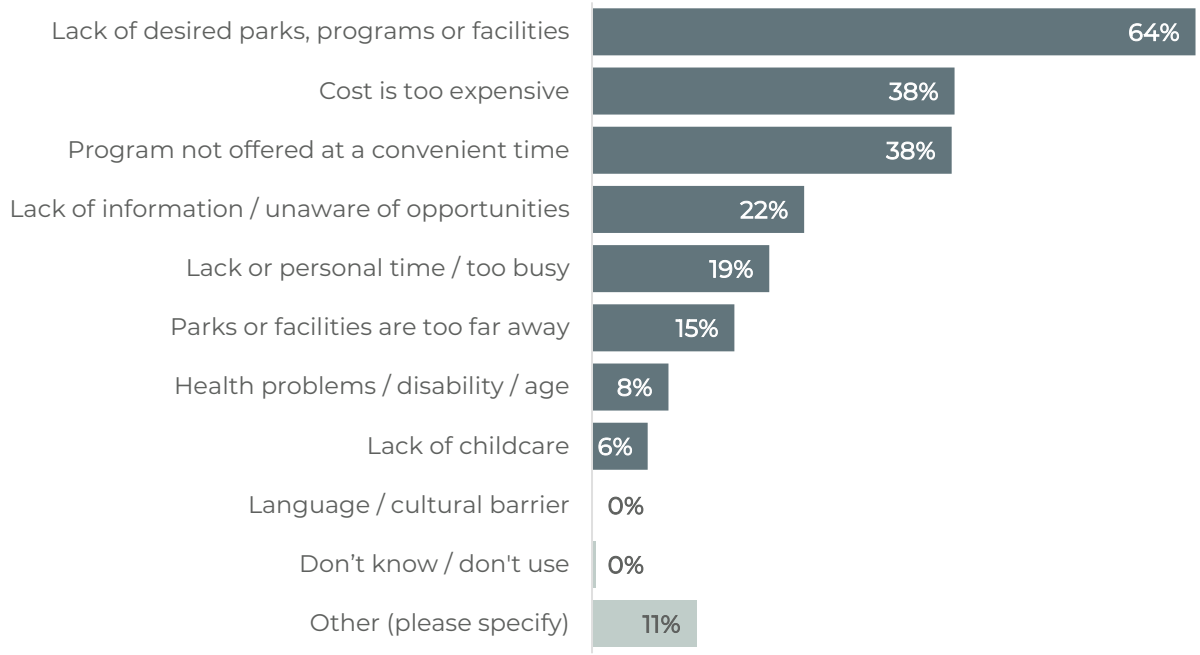


The main reasons respondents could not participate as often as they would like included:

1. A lack of desired parks, programs, or facilities (64%);
2. Cost is too expensive (38%); and
3. Inconvenient program times (38%).

These findings suggest there is demand for a wider variety of recreation programs in St. Thomas offered at prime times, as well as a desire for more affordable opportunities. The responses to the full list of participation barriers are summarized in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Why are you or members of your household NOT able to participate in parks and recreation activities as often as you would like? (select up to three) (n = 1272)

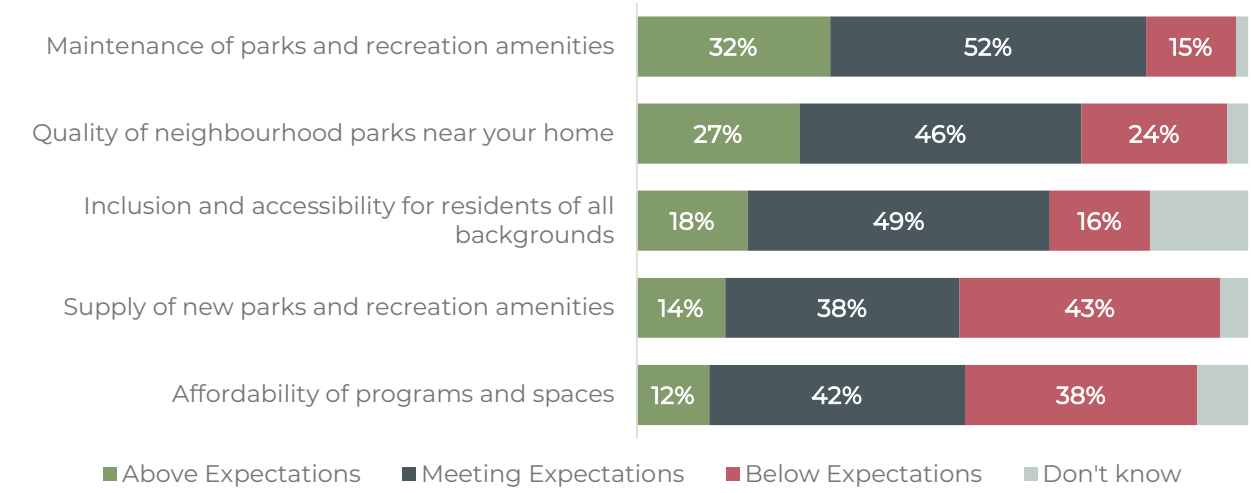


Note: Top "other" responses included program/facilities are full (n = 47), poor winter maintenance of trails (n = 8), lack of transportation (n = 5), lack of disability accommodations (n = 4). While only one survey respondent reported experiencing language/cultural barriers to participation, it is important to note that the survey was only offered in English which may have prevented people with language barriers from taking the survey.

Satisfaction with Parks and Recreation Services

Survey respondents were given a list of statements about the City's parks and recreation services and were asked whether their expectations were met for each statement (see Figure 14). For all statements, most respondents indicated that the City's parks and recreation services were either meeting or above their expectations. Respondents were the least satisfied with the City's supply of new parks and amenities which 43% of respondents indicated was below their expectations; based on the responses to other questions on this survey, this dissatisfaction is likely centred around a lack of indoor recreation facilities. The affordability of programs and spaces in the City was also below the expectations of 38% of respondents, suggesting that there may be dissatisfaction with the cost of services. These findings suggest that St. Thomas residents are overall fairly satisfied with the City's current parks and recreation services; however, potential areas for improvement include adding new recreation facilities and providing more affordable programming.

Figure 14. For the statements listed below, please indicate how the City's current ability to provide adequate parks and recreation services is meeting your expectations? (n = 2332 to 2354)



Program and Activity Gaps

To determine program and activity gaps, the survey asked an open-ended question to identify what parks and recreation opportunities respondents would like to see offered in St. Thomas. From these responses, 55 activity types were identified and organized into eight broader themes including (1) aquatics, (2) age and ability specific programming, (3) indoor recreation and community spaces, (4) gymnasium and court sports, (5) rink sports, (6) field sports, (7) parks and trails, and (8) other (see Figure 15). The three themes with the most activity requests included:

1. Aquatics (requested in 32% of responses);
2. Indoor recreation and community centre spaces (requested in 15% of responses); and
3. Gymnasium and court sports (requested in 14% of responses).

Based on these findings, an indoor aquatics facility is the most desired activity space in St. Thomas, followed by a multi-use recreation and sports facility.

Figure 15. What parks and recreation activities would you or members of your household like to see offered in St. Thomas that are NOT currently available, if any? (list up to three activities) (n = 1750)

Aquatics	
Activity	**# of requests (%)**
Indoor swimming / pool activities (e.g. aquafit)	1130 (29.4%)
Therapy pool	53 (1.4%)
Outdoor swimming / splash pads	42 (1.1%)
TOTAL	**1225 (31.9%)**

Indoor Recreation and Community Centre Spaces	
Activity	**# of requests (%)**
Fitness centre / fitness classes	182 (4.7%)
Indoor playground	90 (2.3%)
Indoor walking/running track	83 (2.2%)
Community centre	73 (1.9%)
Performing arts (e.g. dance classes, music lessons)	59 (1.5%)
Arts and crafts	48 (1.2%)
Cooking classes	15 (0.4%)
Library	7 (0.2%)
STEM Programs	7 (0.2%)
Indoor dog walking	7 (0.2%)
Card / board games	6 (0.2%)
TOTAL	**577 (15.0%)**

Gymnasium and Court Sports	
Activity	**# of requests (%)**
Volleyball	142 (3.7%)
Pickleball	111 (2.9%)
Basketball	89 (2.3%)
Gymnasiums / indoor courts	59 (1.5%)
Indoor tennis	47(1.2%)
Badminton	40 (1.0%)
Squash / racquetball	29 (0.8%)
Outdoor tennis	14 (0.4%)
Dodgeball	3 (0.1%)
TOTAL	**534 (13.9%)**

Field Sports	
Activity	**# of requests (%)**
Indoor turf sports (e.g., soccer, baseball)	252 (6.6%)
Outdoor baseball / softball / slo-pitch	52 (1.4%)
Golf	45 (1.2%)
Cricket	31 (0.8%)
Outdoor soccer	13 (0.3%)
Bocce / lawn bowling	12 (0.3%)
Lacrosse	11 (0.3%)
Football / rugby	10 (0.3%)
Disc golf	4 (0.1%)
Field hockey	2 (0.1%)
TOTAL	**432 (11.2%)**

Age and Ability Specific Programming	
Activity	**# of requests (%)**
Programming for children	149 (3.9%)
Programming for adults	79 (2.1%)
Programming for seniors	60 (1.6%)
Accessible / Inclusive programming	31 (0.8%)
Programming for youth / teenagers	31 (0.8%)
Programming for toddlers	23 (0.6%)
New parent programs / baby classes	13 (0.3%)
TOTAL	**386 (10.0%)**

Rink Sports	
Activity	**# of requests (%)**
Ice sports (e.g., skating, hockey)	141 (3.7%)
Outdoor ice rink	95 (2.5%)
Ball hockey / floor hockey / roller hockey / roller skating	64 (1.7%)
Curling	3 (0.1%)
TOTAL	**303 (7.9%)**

Parks and Trails	
Activity	**# of requests (%)**
Bike / Walking / Trail Infrastructure	107 (2.8%)
Events / Festivals	38 (1.0%)
Mountain biking / pump track / skate park	36 (0.9%)
Dog park	20 (0.5%)
Outdoor fitness stations	14 (0.4%)
Kayak / Canoe / Paddle boarding	8 (0.2%)
Fishing	6 (0.2%)
TOTAL	**229 (6.0%)**

Other	
Activity	**# of requests (%)**
Adventure / non-traditional programming (rock climbing)	98 (2.5%)
Free programming (e.g., free skate, free swim)	43 (1.1%)
Gymnastics	14 (0.4%)
Transportation Accessibility	3 (0.1%)
TOTAL	**158 (4.1%)**

3.1.4 Investment Priorities and Funding Options

Property taxes in St. Thomas in part allow the City to improve parks and recreation facilities. In 2024, approximately 7.3% of all property taxes in St. Thomas were directed to parks and recreation services. Since the City is considering the feasibility of new capital investments, the survey included questions that assess the community's support for additional public spending towards building new facilities and improving existing facilities. Questions regarding preferred funding models for new investments were also posed.

Over 70% of survey respondents would **support** additional public spending towards **indoor pools and gymnasiums/indoor courts.**

Indoor Facilities

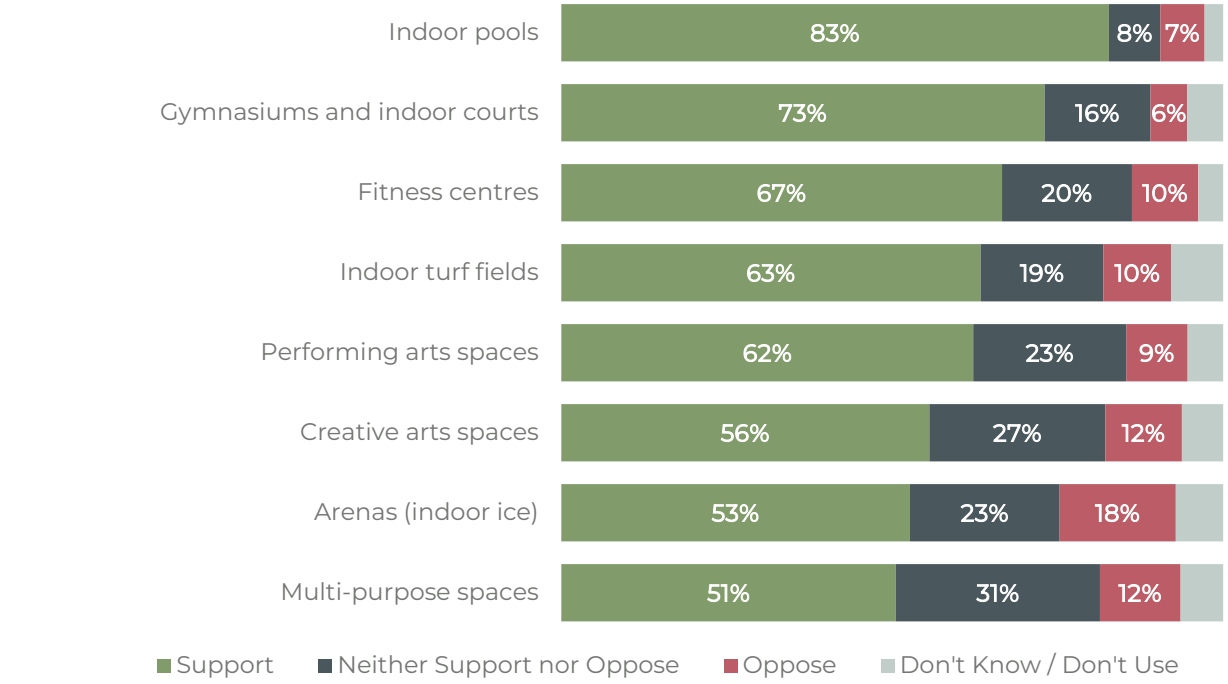
To understand what types of indoor recreation spaces residents would like to see in a new community facility, the survey asked respondents to identify the degree in which they would support or oppose additional public spending towards various facility types, as shown in Figure 16. Over 50% of respondents indicated they would support additional public spending for all the facility types listed, suggesting there is overall support for expanding and improving the supply of indoor recreation offerings. The top facilities that survey respondents identified they would support additional public spending towards were indoor pools (83%) and gymnasiums/indoor courts (73%).

~80% of survey respondents felt the development of an **indoor aquatic centre** should be a high priority for Council.

While 53% of respondents indicated they would support additional spending towards arenas, this facility type also received the most opposition towards additional investments (18% oppose). In the "other" comments for this question, some respondents indicated feeling the city has enough arenas and that investments are needed in other areas.

Over 70% of survey respondents would **support** investments in **park washrooms, recreational trails, parks and open spaces, and playgrounds**.

Figure 16. For the indoor amenities and facilities listed below, to what degree do you support/oppose additional public spending towards building new facilities or improving existing facilities? (n = 2269 to 2310)



Note: Top "other" responses for indoor facility investments included indoor playgrounds (n = 9), no additional public spending (n = 9), and a therapy pool (n = 7).

Furthermore, the majority (79%) of survey respondents– whether pool users or non-users – felt that the development of an indoor aquatic centre should be a high priority for Council (see Figure 17). While current and potential pool users have higher percentages of agreement with this statement, over 50% of non-users also agree (see Figure 18). Most (80%) survey respondents also agree that the City should consider partnering with others to help provide new indoor recreation facilities.

Figure 17. What is your level of agreement with the listed statements? (n = 2315 to 2320)

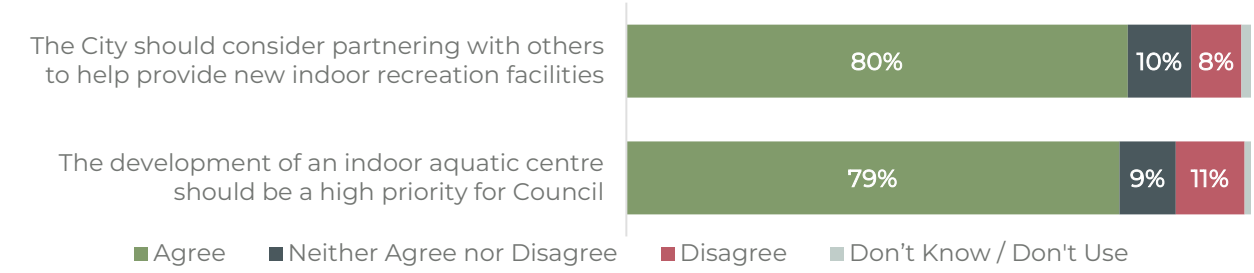
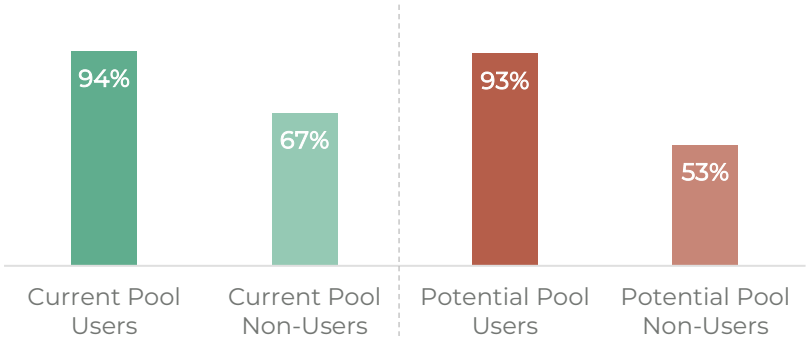


Figure 18. Percentage of respondents by sub-groups that agree that the development of an indoor aquatic centre should be a high priority for council



When asked about which funding options their households would be willing to contribute to in order to financially support the development of new indoor recreation and aquatic facilities, most respondents (72%) indicated they were willing to purchase a membership to access facilities (see Figure 19). The next most supported funding option was paying an increased fee for programs, with 58% of respondents identifying they were willing to support this option. The least supported funding options were paying higher property taxes (34% willing) and municipal debt/borrowing (37% willing). The majority of both current and potential pool users did not want their property taxes increased to support new recreation and aquatic facilities (see Figure 20). While these responses suggest residents may be willing to pay higher programming costs to support new facilities, it must be noted that 38% of respondents expressed earlier in the survey that programming costs are already too high for them to participate. Since 80% of respondents support partnerships to fund indoor recreation facilities, the City may want to explore partnered funding models that allow for more affordable programming provision before passing additional costs onto residents.

Figure 19. For the funding options listed below, how willing would your household be to help financially support the development and operation of new recreation and aquatic facilities? (n = 2219 to 2235)

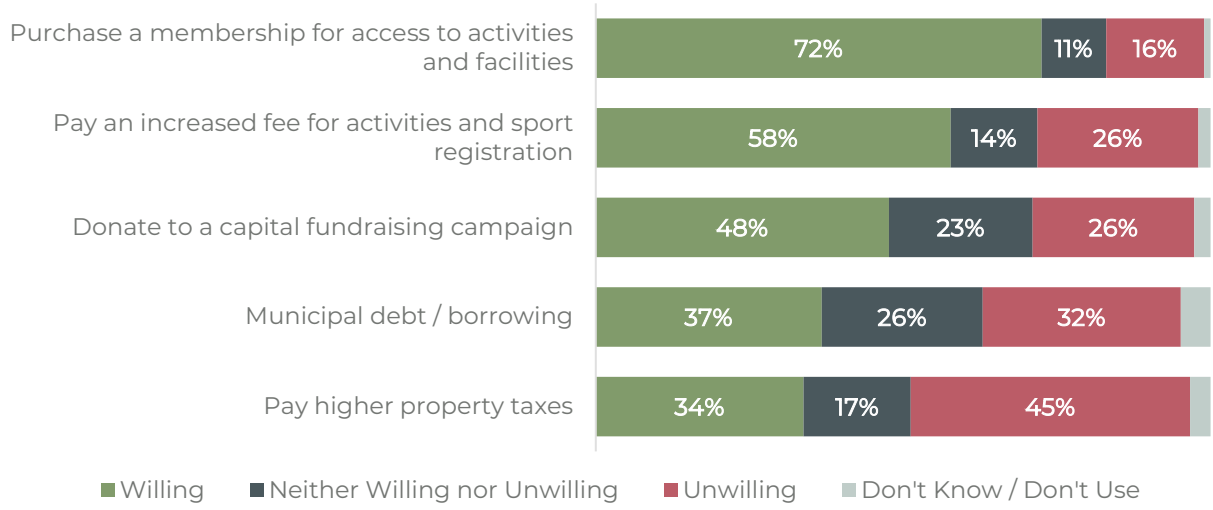
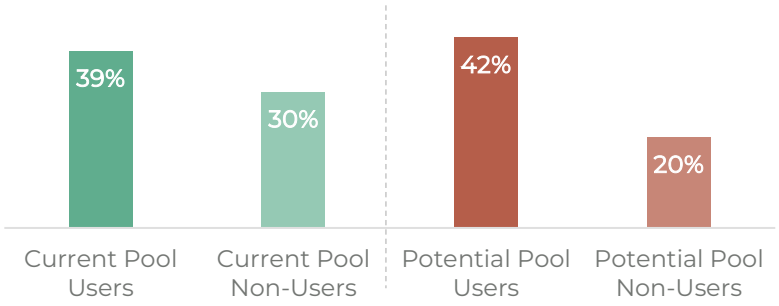


Figure 20. Percentage of respondents by sub-groups that are very or somewhat willing to pay higher property taxes to support the development and operation of new recreation and aquatic facilities.



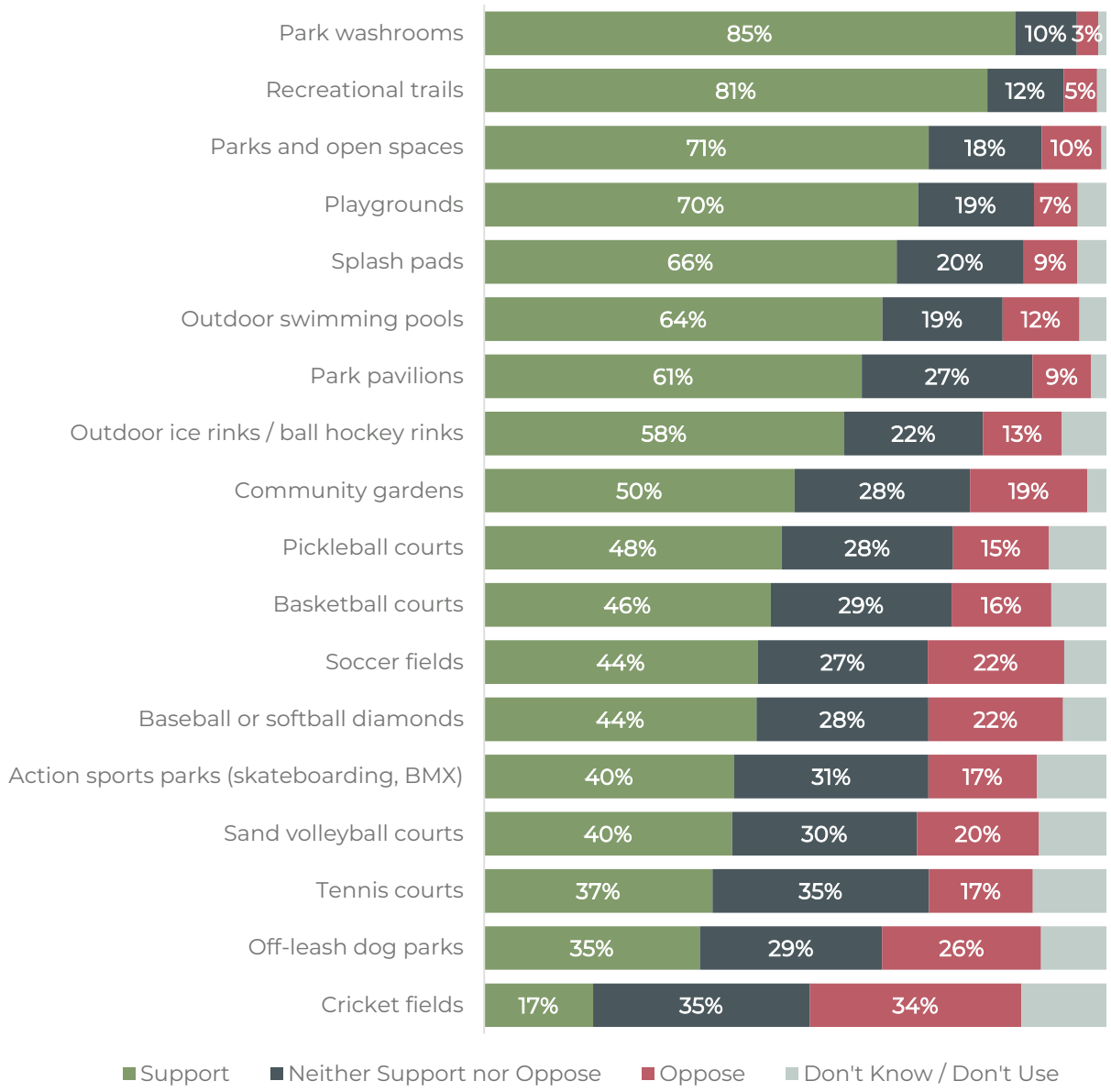
Outdoor Facilities

St. Thomas is also planning for investments in outdoor parks and recreation spaces to serve growth. The survey listed 18 different types of outdoor facility and amenity types, and respondents were asked to identify which ones they supported or opposed additional investments in (see Figure 21). Strong levels of support were identified for facility types that benefit residents of all ages and provide casual, unstructured, and affordable recreation opportunities including:

- park washrooms (85%)
- recreational trails (81%)
- parks and open spaces (71%)
- playgrounds (70%)

Most sport facilities had moderate levels of support for investment, ranging from 40% to 70%. Generally, facilities for activities with lower participation profiles had lower support for investments (e.g., cricket, tennis, wheeled action sports). Interestingly, dog walking was the third most participated in activity in St. Thomas; however, off-leash dog parks have the second lowest support for investments. These findings suggest that residents may be satisfied with the City's current provision of off-leash dog parks, or that on-leash dog walking is the preferred activity. The needs assessment will consider this data, along with other demand indicators to assess the current and long-term needs for facilities.

Figure 21. For the outdoor amenities and facilities listed below, to what degree do you support/oppose additional public spending towards building new facilities or improving existing facilities? (n = 2194 to 2223)



3.1.5 Current Use of Swimming Pools

Profile of Pool Users

The survey questions shown in Figure 22 to Figure 24 were used to gather insight into pool usage behaviours. More survey respondents participated in indoor swimming than outdoor swimming. Nearly half (46%) of the survey respondents indicated that they made regular use of indoor swimming pools in the past 12 months, while only 18% of respondents used Jaycees outdoor pool in St. Thomas. The Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin pool was the most commonly used indoor pool amongst respondents (43%), followed by public indoor pools in London (26%), and private/hotel pools (12%). Although it is now closed, the St. Thomas-Elgin General Hospital (STEGH) therapeutic pool was also used by 11% of respondents.

Figure 22. In the past 12 months, did you or anyone in your household make regular use (once a month or more) of indoor swimming pools in St. Thomas or elsewhere? (n = 2240)

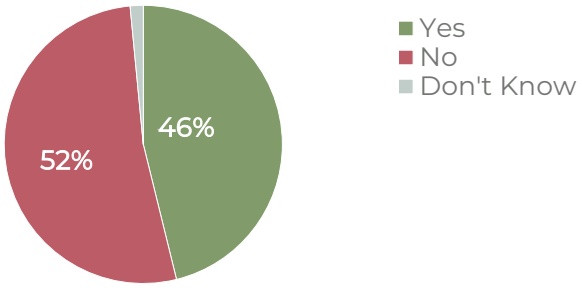


Figure 23. What indoor pool did you use the most? (n = 1058)

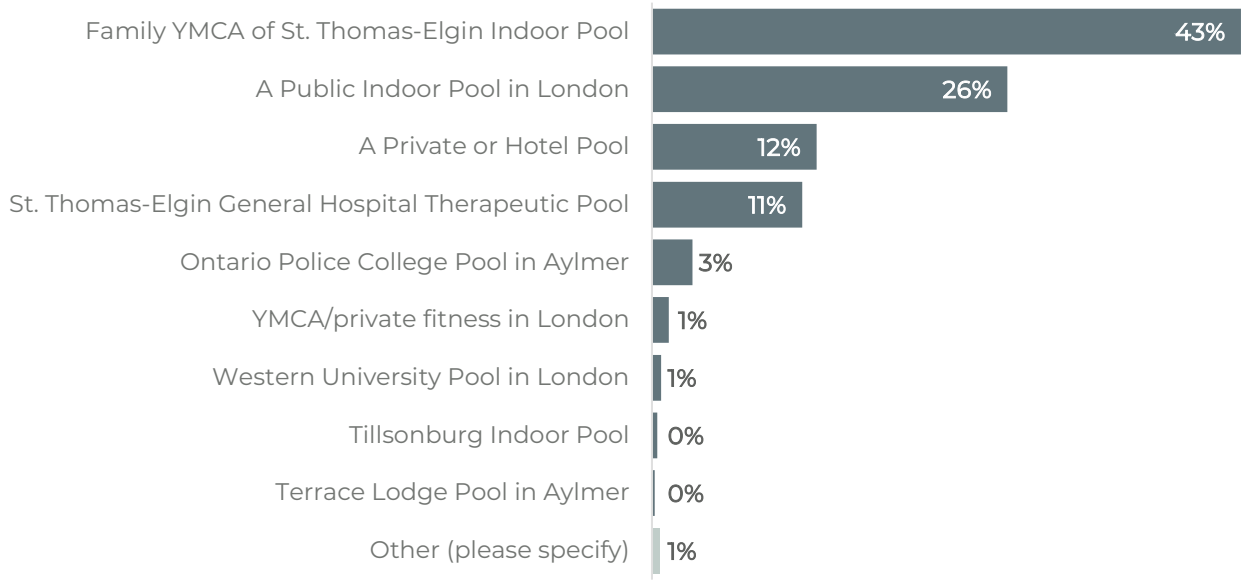
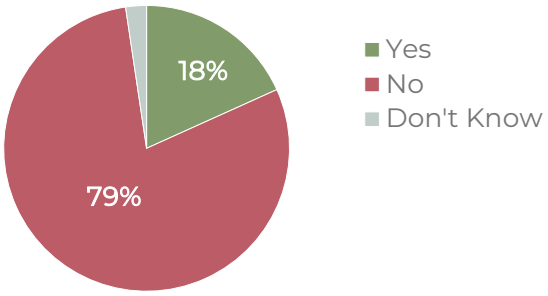


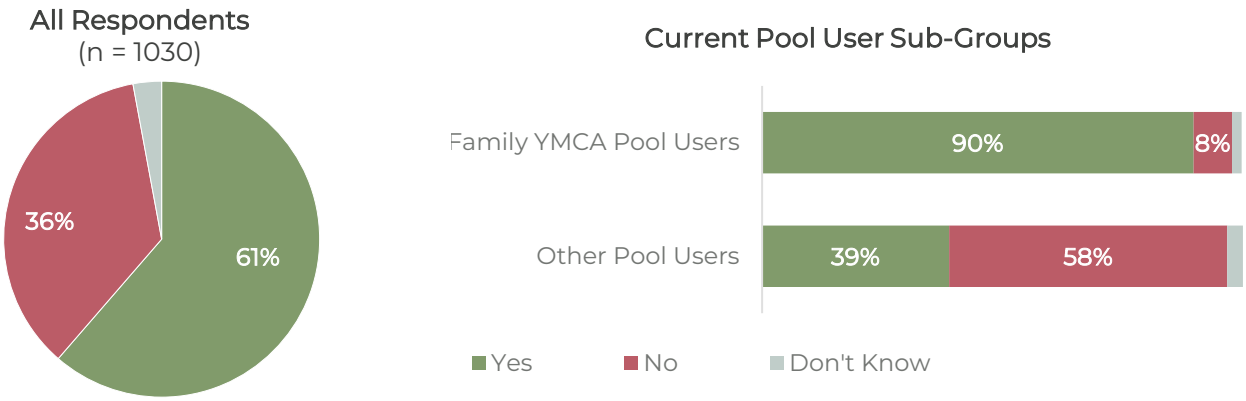
Figure 24. Did you or anyone in your household make regular use (once a month or more during the summer) of the Jaycees outdoor pool in St. Thomas? (n = 2207)



Indoor Pool Satisfaction

The survey questions shown in Figure 25 to Figure 27 were used to gather insight into indoor pool satisfaction in St. Thomas. Convenience and proximity to pools appear to be factors in facility usage. The Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin is likely the most used pool as it is located within St. Thomas and easier for residents to get to. The majority (90%) of respondents using the Family YMCA Pool indicated their travel time was reasonable, while only 39% of users of other pools indicated that their travel time was reasonable. Furthermore, respondents living in south St. Thomas (N5R) were more likely to have used the St. Thomas Family YMCA within the past 12 months (47% v 36%). Meanwhile, respondents living in north St. Thomas (N5P) were more likely to have used a public pool in London (31% v 24%) and the Jaycees outdoor pool (24% v 17%) within the past 12 months.

Figure 25. Do you consider the time it takes to travel to this indoor pool to be reasonable?



Most respondents (65%) indicated the indoor pool they use the most meets some (but not all) of their household's needs. The main reasons that indoor pools did not meet the needs of households included:

- Location is too busy / cannot get into programs (23%);
- Location is too far away (20%, mostly users of pools outside of St. Thomas);
- Program not offered at a convenient time (18%); and
- Cost is too expensive (17%).

The Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin indoor pool performs similarly to other indoor pools in the region with respect to meeting the needs of users. 12% of Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin indoor pool users reported that this pool did not meet any of their needs, while 17% of other pool users indicated that the pool they use did not meet any of their needs. One area where the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin pool users are less satisfied than other pool users is cost and affordability. One-quarter (27%) of users of the Family YMCA felt that the cost was too expensive; this was less of a concern for users of other indoor pools (8%). These responses suggest that indoor pool users are generally satisfied with the existing indoor pools; however, there is an interest for additional pool space and programs in St. Thomas that operate at more convenient times and have lower costs.

Figure 26. Does this indoor pool meet the needs of you or your household?

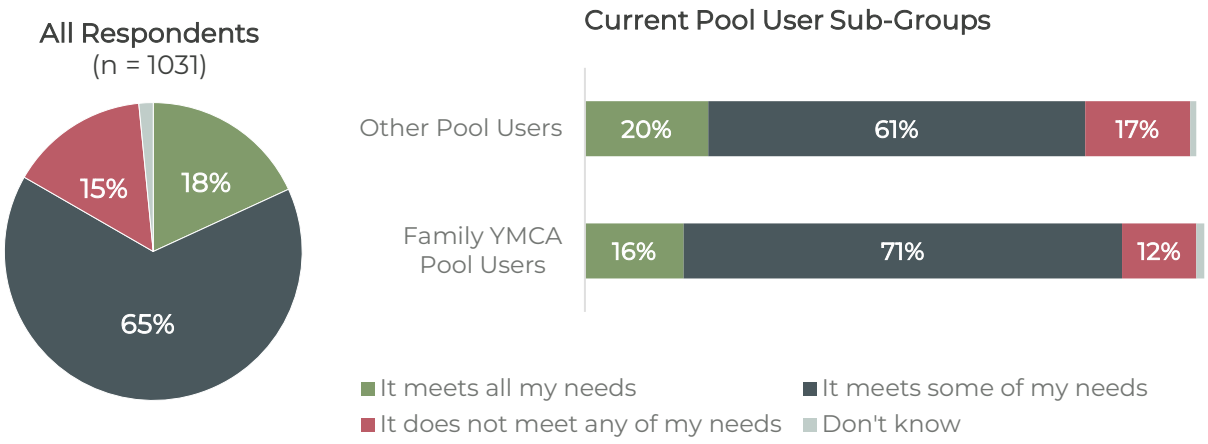
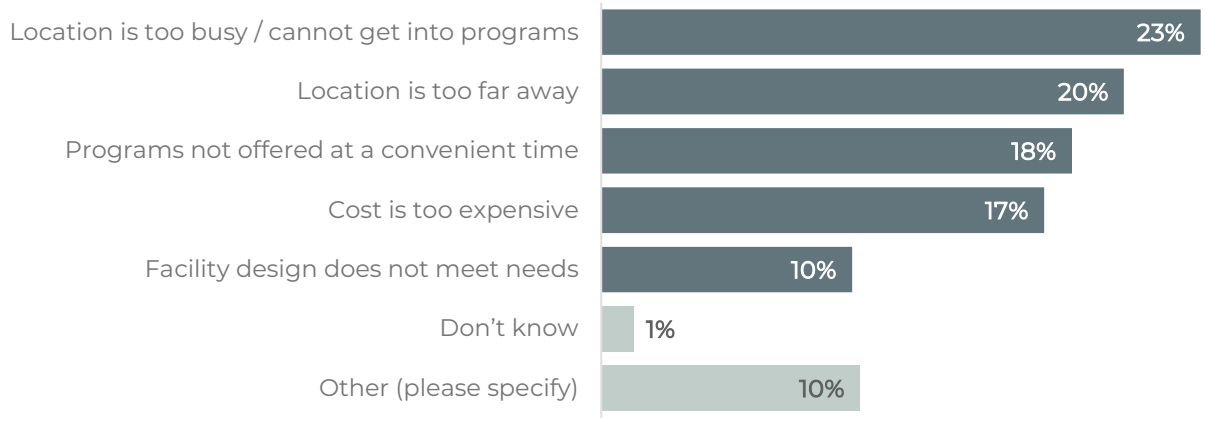


Figure 27. Why does this indoor pool not meet your needs or those of your household? (select up to three) (n = 1583)



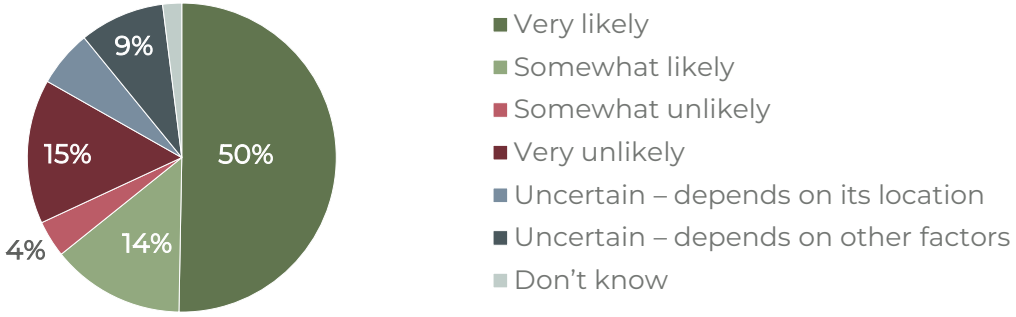
Note: Top "other" responses included: pool closed (n = 52, mostly referred to the STEGH therapeutic pool closure but some other pools were closed temporarily during the time of the survey), water is too cold (n = 11), poor quality of facilities and programs (n = 11), not suitable for competitive swimming / swim teams (n = 7), and program not offered (n = 7).

3.1.6 Potential Usage of a New Indoor Pool

As was previously discussed, nearly 80% of respondents felt the development of an indoor aquatic facility should be a high priority for council. The survey questions shown in Figure 28 to Figure 30 were asked to get further insight on how a new indoor pool would be used and what operational models are preferred.

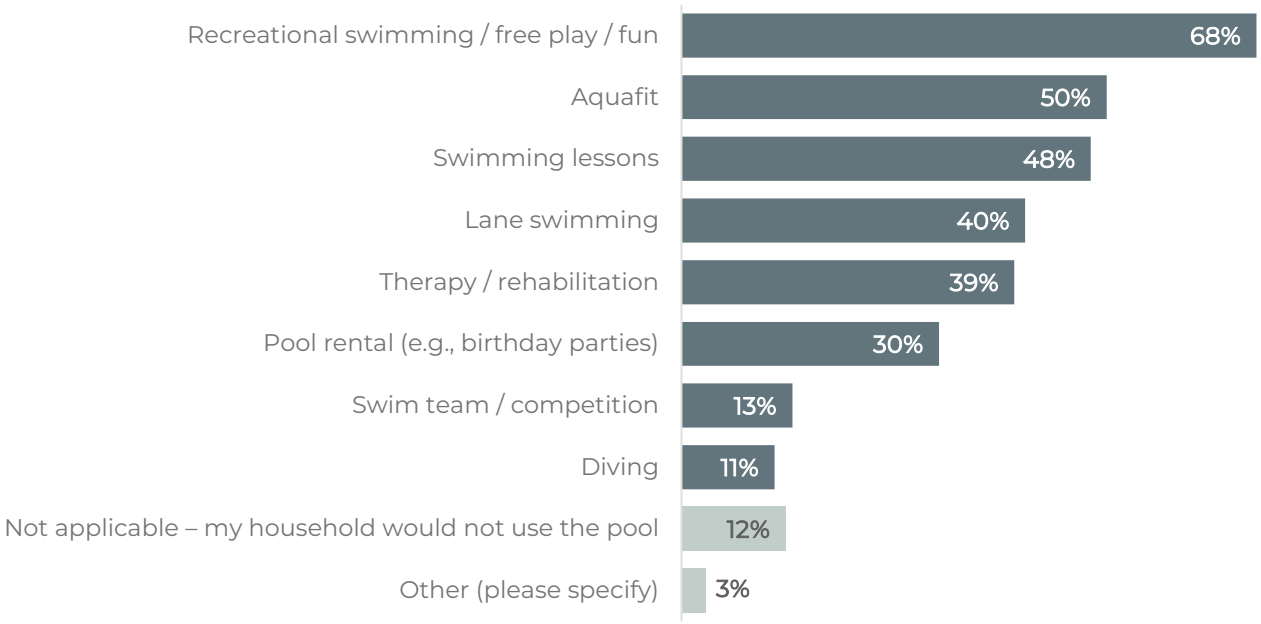
The majority of respondents (64%) indicated that they would be very likely or somewhat likely to use a new indoor pool, suggesting that this facility would be well utilized if it were developed. Findings also suggest that a new indoor pool in St. Thomas has the potential to significantly increase participation amongst current pool non-users. Nearly half (45%) of respondents whose households have not used an indoor pool in the past 12 months indicated they would likely use a municipal indoor pool if one were built. A high percentage (85%) of Family YMCA pool users also indicated interest in using a future City indoor pool.

Figure 28. If the City were to develop an indoor pool, how likely would you and your household be to use it on a regular basis (once a month or more)? (n = 2215)



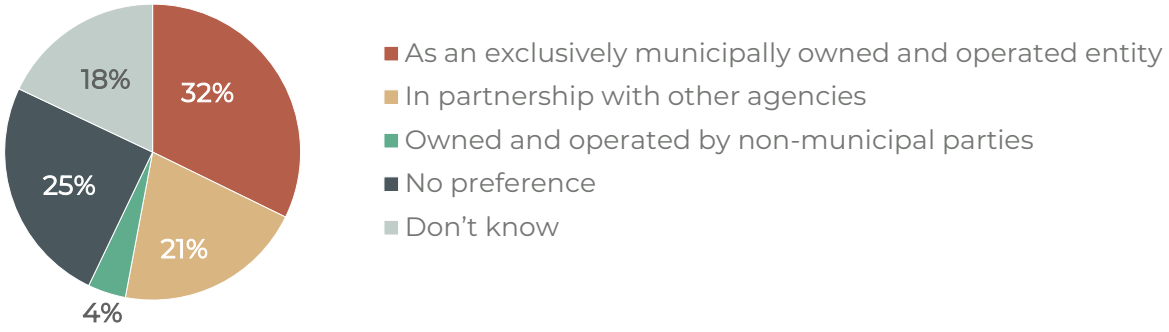
The activity that most respondents (68%) indicated their household would use a new indoor pool for were recreational uses (e.g., free play, fun, casual swimming). The top 'structured' activities respondents would use an indoor pool for would be aquafit (50%) and swimming lessons (48%). Swim team / competition uses ranked much lower at 13%.

Figure 29. If the City were to develop an indoor pool, what activities would you and your household use it for? (select all that apply) (n = 2216)



Respondents did not have a strong preference for the operational model of a new indoor pool. Nearly half (43%) of the respondents had no preference or did not know how this pool should be operated. The operational model that received the highest response rate (32%) was "an exclusively municipally owned and operated entity;" however, a notable number of responses (21%) supported partnership models instead. The least favourable operational model was for the indoor pool to be owned and operated by non-municipal parties, with only 4% of respondents selecting this option.

Figure 30. If the City were to develop an indoor pool, how should it be operated? (select one) (n = 2215)



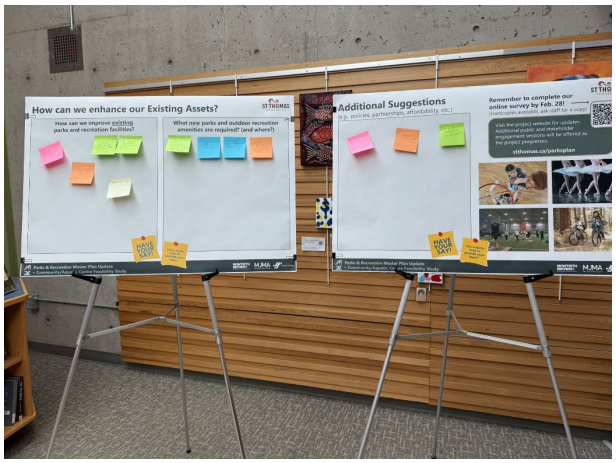
3.1.7 Additional Comments

Of the 2,730 respondents, 1,028 people took the time to provide additional open-ended comments at the end of the survey. Through a review of these inputs, several common themes emerged, including:

- The parks and trails systems are highly valued; however, there is a desire for the City to continue expanding the trail system and add more amenities to parks to enhance their use (e.g., washrooms). Respondents also indicated growing needs for ball diamond improvements, outdoor rinks, pickleball courts, beach volleyball courts, cricket fields, and more.
- St. Thomas is growing, and more facilities are needed to keep up with programming demand and interests.
- There is demand for an indoor multi-use recreation hub that provides year-round opportunities for sports and recreation. Desired indoor spaces include a pool, gymnasiums, turf field, ice pads, indoor playground, and more.
- The high demand for spaces has raised questions about how the City allocates space to sport organizations.
- Many residents are concerned about program affordability and the potential tax impacts of a new pool. Some residents felt that the City should prioritize spending tax dollars in other areas, such as affordable housing and social services.
- While some comments noted barriers to using the current YMCA pool (high cost, cold water, too busy), others highlighted the success of YMCA partnerships models in other cities.
- Many indicated they enjoy using Jaycee's pool in the summer and find the prices affordable; however, this pool has its limitations (cold water, too busy, outdated, renovations needed, not accessible year-round).

3.2 Public Input Sessions

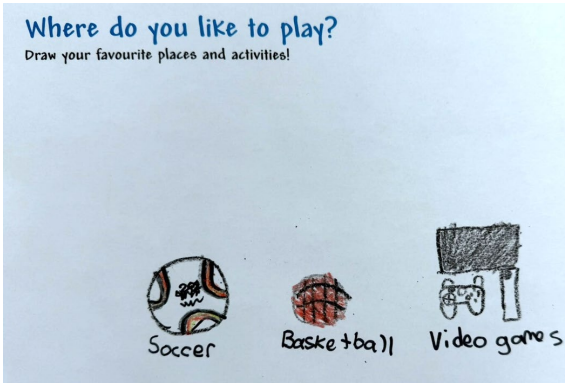
3.2.1 Phase 1: Public Input Sessions and Home Show



Public input sessions were held at the beginning of the planning process to raise awareness for the Master Plan Update and concurrent Feasibility Study. Two public input sessions were held in St. Thomas Public Library on February 13, 2025, from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm and 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Approximately 40 people participated in these sessions.

At these sessions, information boards were provided to highlight the purpose of the projects, provide an overview of community demographics and trends, and identify the city's current parks and recreation facility inventory. Attendees had an opportunity to ask questions and share their feedback verbally with the consultants. Sticky notes and comment sheets were also available for attendees to provide written responses to prompts on the information boards. Additionally, colouring sheets and crayons were available to gather input from children.

The City also set up an information table during the St. Thomas & Elgin Home Show in mid-April 2025 at the Joe Thornton Community Centre to raise additional project awareness. At this event, over 70 people interacted with the City and provided input.



Priority Voting Exercise

Most of the people who interacted with the project displays at the public input sessions and Home Show participated in a polling exercise; participants were given five blocks to vote for what they thought should be the highest priority for a new indoor recreation facility in St. Thomas. The votes were distributed relatively evenly across all facility types indicating there are diverse interests for indoor recreation offerings (see Figure 31). The top four spaces that received the most votes included an indoor leisure pool with warmer water (12%), a gymnasium (11%), an indoor therapy pool (10%), and an indoor walking track (10%).

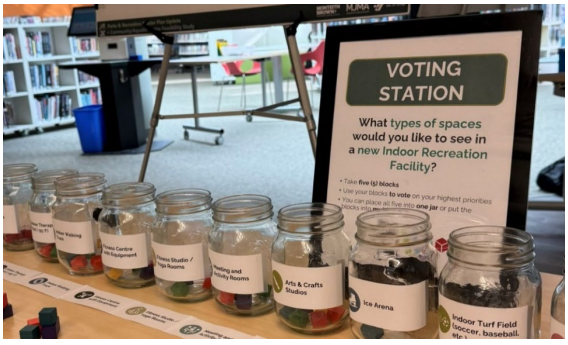
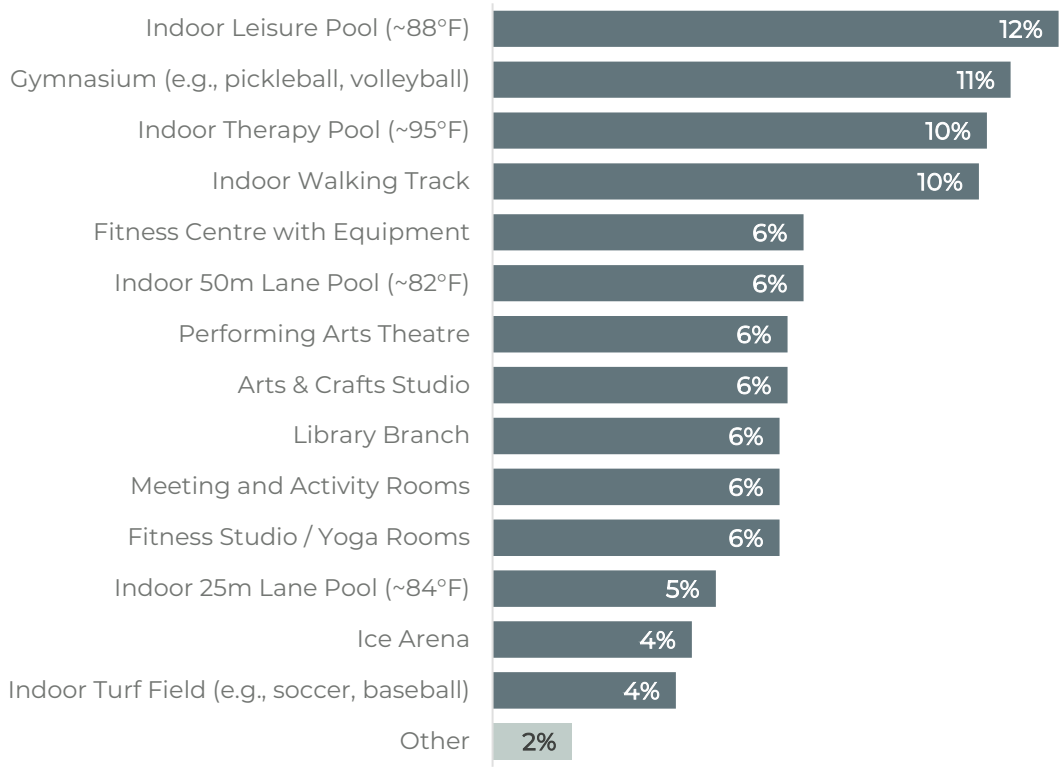


Figure 31. Public Input Sessions and Home Show Priority Voting Results (n = 105)



Other responses included board game / billiards rooms (n = 3), arcade / bowling (n = 3), cricket pitch (n = 1), activity centre for youth (n = 1), employment training (n = 1), and farmers' market areas (n = 1).

Emerging Themes

Recognition for the City's destination parks and improving trails system: A lot of positive feedback was received about high-quality and well-maintained parks and trails in St. Thomas. As the City develops, participants indicated they would like to see the trail network extended into additional communities. Participants also expressed interest for park beautification initiatives, such as adding decorative lighting to trails and adding flower gardens to parks.

New indoor recreation facility needs: Most participants were enthusiastic about the idea of a new indoor recreation facility and expressed that St. Thomas needed more indoor recreation offerings. When asked about their interest in a new indoor pool, most participants indicated they would use these facilities for leisure swimming and indicated they would prefer warmer water. Many participants were also interested in an indoor gymnasium, which they could use for activities such as volleyball, basketball, and pickleball. Numerous participants indicated they used the STEGH therapy pool before it closed and wanted to see it replaced in a new facility.

Multi-use, multi-seasonal, and multi-generational facilities: Another theme amongst the feedback received from participants was the desire for a multi-use community centre that would meet the needs of various demographic groups, as well as fill programming gaps in the winter. Some participants identified that another library branch would pair well with a pool and would give parents/grandparents/guardians a place to wait while children attended swimming lessons. The StarTech.Com Community Centre in London was mentioned as a design best practice.

Additional outdoor recreation facility needs: Not as many participants were interested in additional outdoor recreation facilities compared to indoor; however, some participants wanted additional pickleball courts, soccer fields, and a cricket field.

Support for the provision of recreation through partnerships: Some participants identified they supported partnerships to provide additional recreation offerings to the City, such as with the school boards and the YMCA.

'Non-traditional' municipal recreation offerings: There was also an interest for the City to provide recreation facilities that are not typically operated by municipalities, such as bowling alleys, arcades, billiards rooms and board game cafés.

3.2.2 Phase 4: Public Input Sessions and Review Period

Once the draft Master Plan and Feasibility Study were prepared, the documents were posted online for approximately four weeks for public review and comment. By the February 13, 2026 comment deadline, 30 emails were received with written input from community members. A community-led petition in support of a second pool in St. Thomas was also created and received over 500 signatures.

Additionally, two public input sessions were held on January 22, 2026, from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm and from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm at the Joe Thornton Community Centre. Approximately 100 people participated in these input sessions, with many providing verbal or written feedback.

The emerging themes from the verbal and written input received during the public review period are summarized below – the large majority addressed the timing and design of major recreation facilities and are relevant to both this Master Plan and the Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study.

Emerging Themes

Strong support for a municipal indoor aquatic facility in St. Thomas in the short-term: 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 more diverse range of needs, including recreational, therapeutic, and competitive uses. Residents involved with competitive swimming, particularly members of the St. Thomas Jumbo Jets swim team, 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. Additionally, some residents expressed support for a 50-m pool. Some residents expressed disappointment that a location and development timeline were not yet solidified for the indoor aquatic facility.

Gymnasium users emphasized the need for double gymnasium space in the short-term: St. Thomas Shock (basketball) and pickleball user groups indicated that they do not have enough gymnasium space to service their programs and are frustrated with the unreliability of the school gymnasiums they use. To support the growth of their clubs, two full-size gymnasiums were desired as part of the proposed sports dome or community and aquatic centre, ensuring the facilities could support hosting games and tournaments. Design suggestions included regulation court dimensions with appropriate run-off space, adequate spectator seating, high-quality floor finishes (e.g., hardwood surfaces), change rooms and washrooms, scoreboards, timing systems, and dividers.

Additional ice pads are desired in the short-term: St. Thomas Minor Hockey Association identified that they have recently been designated as an AA Base Category Program beginning in April 2026. This will increase their practice time requirements and they are concerned as they will not be able to achieve this standard within ther current ice allocation allotment. The club supports the addition of a double ice pad facility to the community aquatic centre; however, they would like to see a single ice pad included in the first phase of the project to address current needs.

Support for the proposed indoor turf field: The president of the St. Thomas Slo-Pitch Association identified a need for more indoor training space in the winter and believes the proposed indoor turf field in a sports dome would help meet their organization's needs.

Arts and cultural improvements are desired: Some residents wanted to see more detailed arts and cultural recommendations in the Master Plan Update. Suggestions were received to develop a theatre space to support local groups such as the Elgin Theatre Guild or Kettle Creek Players.

Desires for enhancements to the parks and trail systems: Some residents requested improvements to parks and trails, such as enhanced trail connections, year-round park washroom access, and downtown park improvements.

3.3 Stakeholder and Community Organization Input

Focus groups were held on February 20 and March 3, 2025 with community representatives from a range of organizations, such as user groups, service clubs, and current/potential partners. Additional key informant interviews were held throughout April 2025. The purpose of these sessions was to engage key community representatives, create

awareness of the projects, and seek feedback on challenges and priorities related to parks and recreation. Input was received from 49 of the 90 invited organizations.

Emerging Themes

The City's parks and trails are great but can be improved: Pinafore Park (including Lake Margaret) and Waterworks Park were repeatedly regarded as the City's greatest strengths in parks and recreation. The nature, gardens, horticulture, trails, and pavilions in these parks were greatly valued. While the current trails are enjoyed, there was a desire to extend the trail system into the northern parts of the City and new development areas, as well as improve its connectivity to the City's amenities. There was also an interest in expanding the mountain bike trails in Water Tower Mountain Bike Network. Some bikers are currently entering the Dalewood Conservation Area adjacent to Waterworks Park to extend their ride time; however, the trails in the Conservation Area are not wide enough to support bike use. There was also an overall desire to improve the accessibility of parks and trails, as well as add amenities that enhance these spaces (e.g., washrooms, lighting, community gardens, shading, electrical connections for events).

Many programs are at capacity: Representatives from user groups for volleyball, basketball, pickleball, skating, hockey, swim teams and baseball have indicated their programs are at capacity and they cannot grow due to limited facility space. Multiple user groups revealed they are using facilities outside of St. Thomas to meet their programming needs. User groups that use school gymnasium spaces for programming experience additional barriers since access is not always reliable. Additionally, the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin indicated that their gymnasium spaces are at capacity. Although service clubs reported that their membership is generally declining, they indicated that they are still experiencing challenges with finding meeting spaces in the City that can accommodate their club size. While St. Thomas Soccer Club is satisfied with the City's outdoor fields due to the addition of 1Password Park, their indoor soccer programming is at capacity due to the limited availability of rental space at gymnasiums and the BMO Centre in London.

Demand for a multi-use community centre: A new community centre with an indoor pool, multi-use gymnasiums, and multi-purpose rooms can accommodate the growing demand for sports and recreation in St. Thomas. Sports groups that use courts, such as volleyball, pickleball, basketball, and badminton, are interested in a large gymnasium with wooden floors that can be divided into smaller courts and easily adapt to the needs of different sports groups. Swim teams such as the St. Thomas Jumbo Jets and Aylmer Optimist Arrows indicated they are at capacity in their current facilities and would use a new aquatic centre. Groups also identified there are interests in multi-purpose spaces to accommodate arts and cultural uses, such as painting, dance, theatre, events, and knitting. It was also suggested that a new community centre have a concession area, lobby space, and viewing areas to accommodate spectators and people waiting in between activities. Furthermore, St. Thomas Soccer Club indicated they have demand for a moderately-sized indoor turf facility. They expressed that this does not necessarily need to be part of a new community centre.

Location of a new community centre: There was no consensus on a specific location for new community centre; however, many groups agreed that the site should be well connected to active and public transportation routes, have adequate parking, and be located near shops, restaurants, hotels, and other amenities.

Improving outdoor facilities can enhance their use and build capacity in the short-term: Acknowledging that new facilities may take several years to construct, outdoor sport user groups identified several ways existing outdoor facilities could be improved to enhance the facilities and extend their hours of use, including:

- Adding wind screens and lighting to the Goddeeris Luyks Park pickleball courts;
- Improving lighting at Pinafore Park pickleball and tennis courts to reduce shadowing at night;
- Adding lighting to unlit ball diamonds to provide more opportunities for game play during prime hours;
- Regrading ball diamond slopes and improving the drainage so these facilities can drain quicker after rainfall; and
- Repurposing underutilized fields into 7v7 pitches which have more demand from the St. Thomas Soccer Club.

Affordability concerns: Some sports groups expressed concern when the City recently increased the cost of renting facilities. Since many of these sports groups are non-for-profits, they indicated that these higher renting costs have ultimately resulted in higher programming costs for participants.

Partnership and co-location opportunities: Many of the groups suggested that neighbouring municipalities should help fund a new facility in St. Thomas as residents throughout Elgin County will likely use it. The Thames Valley District School Board, London Catholic District School Board, and St. Thomas Community Christian School are open to partnering with the City to create shared recreation facilities at new schools. Additionally, the St. Thomas Public Library and EarlyON Child and Family Centres are interested in discussing co-location opportunities with a new community centre. Furthermore, the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin expressed interest in partnering with the City on a new community centre. They indicated that they have a variety of distinct partnership models with other municipalities and are open to creating a partnership model that would work for the City of St. Thomas. They also indicated their pool still has some capacity during off-peak hours, and they are interested in continuing their aquatics partnership with the City to maximize use of their current pool before a new pool is constructed. The YWCA of St. Thomas-Elgin indicated they are satisfied with their aquatics programming spaces at the Aylmer Ontario Police College and Terrace Lodge. Although their current participants would likely not commute to an aquatics facility in St. Thomas, the YWCA expressed they would consider a partnership if the City needed to fill programming gaps in a new aquatic centre.

Accessibility improvements: Accessibility for people with disabilities was also identified as a challenge with the existing facilities (e.g., narrow changerooms and elevators, lights that

cannot be dimmed to accommodate light sensitivities, etc.). There was a desire for a new indoor community centre to be designed with accessibility in mind.

Updates to allocation policies: Some user groups indicated that a review of the City's allocation policies may be required to reflect evolving sport participation trends and accommodate the high demand for facility spaces.

Regular meetings to coordinate programming: Several sports user groups and service clubs suggested the development of a formalized reference group that meets a few times a year to discuss relevant topics. Sports organizations mentioned this would be helpful for them to coordinate facility timeslots with the other sports groups and identify opportunities for them to use other groups' timeslots in the event of over-booking or last-minute cancellations. Service clubs identified that these meetings could help them coordinate events, so they are not competing with other events. It was suggested that advance notice from the City prior to the implementation of policy changes (e.g., fee increases, event permit change) would be beneficial so groups can adjust their programming, events, and fees accordingly.

3.4 Youth Engagement

Through the 'Student Build Cities' program run by Andrew Gunn Consulting and the Young & Free Press in collaboration with the Thames Valley District School Board, the input from nearly 150 local high school students was gathered. Six separate engagement sessions were held with classes at Central Elgin Collegiate Institute and Parkside Collegiate Institute. At these sessions, students were asked to identify recreation needs through their perspective as young members in the community. Students were provided with an overview of the parks and recreation master planning and why it needs to be updated. Students were also informed of the current supply of parks and recreation amenities, as well as current trends, to prompt them to think about what services St. Thomas may need.

Emerging themes

Parks and trails are appreciated: Most students mentioned that they enjoy using Pinafore Park and 1Password Park for a variety of recreation activities and sports. The Railway City Skatepark, Athletic Park, Optimist Park, Cowan Park, and the St. Thomas Elevated Park were also highlighted. For Parkside students, the Whistlestop Trail and Lake Margaret trails were particularly important. Many students reported walking and occasionally cycling on the trails, mainly with family members or to walk their dogs. A few students mentioned they like how the City has parks throughout the community and within walking distance of most houses.

A multi-use community hub: A recurring theme throughout the student engagements was the desire for a multi-use community hub where families and friends can gather for several hours at a time. Students liked the idea of combining recreation and cultural amenities in one location so there is something for everyone to do. Several students suggested including

a food court or café in the facility, as well as seating areas, to transform this facility into a social gathering place. Students also noted that locating this facility near parks, shops, and other forms of entertainment it would make it a more convenient gathering space.

New indoor recreation facility needs: Many students identified a need for more indoor facilities so they could participate in recreation year-round. For aquatic facilities, many students mentioned the need for an indoor pool that is large enough for swimming lessons, swim meets, and diving. For sports, many students noted the need for a flexible indoor gymnasium space that could accommodate basketball, volleyball, badminton, and pickleball. Several students also noted that St. Thomas could benefit greatly from indoor turf fields for football and soccer training.

More places for youth to 'hang-out:' For outdoor recreation, youth want more places where they can just 'hang-out' with their friends. One idea included 'social parkettes' with swing seating where entertaining events can take place, such as food trucks and outdoor movies. They also suggested creating more spaces for teenagers to hang-out in neighbourhood parks by providing adequate seating, shadings, and even WIFI access.

'Non-traditional' municipal recreation offerings: Students felt that there were not many 'things to do' in St. Thomas for their age group. They were interested in recreation offerings that are not typically provided by the municipal sector, such as laser-tag, indoor paintball/airsoft, arcades, rock climbing, trampoline parks, indoor playgrounds, and indoor waterparks. Many students reported traveling to London to use The Factory (an indoor adventure park and entertainment complex) and would like to see similar recreation opportunities in St. Thomas.

Active and Public Transportation Connectivity: Students emphasized the importance of having facilities that are accessible to public transportation routes and walking/biking paths. Many students do not have access to a vehicle, and they do not want their ability to participate in recreation restricted to when someone can drive them. While most students identified that a central, downtown location would be the most accessible location for a new facility, they expressed concerns over the safety of these neighbourhoods. Students felt that improving community safety would make them feel more comfortable with walking to facilities.

Affordable rates for youth: Students were also concerned about the affordability of programs. They suggested the City offer discounted rates to youth for certain programs, such as fitness centres, to reduce the barriers to participation.

3.5 Staff Workshops

Two staff workshop sessions were held with City of St. Thomas staff on April 11, 2025. The purpose of these sessions was to learn about the daily operations and functions of each segment of the department from those who engage directly with users (front-line staff) as well as maintenance, operations, supervisory, management, and administrative staff.

Emerging Themes

Staff are proud of the City's parks and trails: City staff took pride in the St. Thomas' trail network and connectivity to greenspaces. Lake Margaret and Pinafore Park were identified as being well-used with roughly 350,000 users a year. Both these parks also have winter maintenance and continue to see use from residents in the colder months. The pavilions in Pinafore Park were also reported as having high demand in the summer and are often fully booked on the weekends. Staff also highlighted the conservation and naturalization initiatives in parks, as well as the Wild Wisdom Series which educates residents about why they are naturalizing areas. Although Pinafore Park successfully hosts many events, improving the electrical systems and providing better washrooms would allow for more types of events to be hosted.

Frontline staff are nearing capacity: Rising community expectations for park maintenance and increased use of facilities are placing pressure on existing staffing capacity. As the population of St. Thomas grows, staff reported that more residents are using the City's parks. In the summer months, large groups are gathering and leaving waste in parks which increases the time city staff have to dedicate to maintenance. There are also increasing reports of needles in parks, and staff need to dedicate more time to addressing homelessness in parks.

Year-round interest in recreation: Staff reported that there is growing interest in the community to use facilities during seasons that they do not currently operate in. For instance, outdoor field/court user groups were interested in running outdoor leagues in the fall; however, since the summer student staff are no longer available to maintain these facilities, these spaces are closed for the season. Additionally, staff indicated that residents are interested in the winter maintenance of trails so they could continue to enjoy these spaces year-round. Having additional staff to support the maintenance and operation of facilities when summer students leave can help extend the playing seasons.

New facilities and programs are needed: Staff mentioned that many of the City's facilities are at or nearing capacity, such as the Senior's Centre, artificial turf field, outdoor pool, ice pads, ball diamonds, and gymnasium. Some indicated there is a growing interest in summer camp programs; however, these programs cannot expand due to limited facility space. It was noted that there is limited programming for teenagers, as most youth programming is for ages 4 to 12. Staff also reported hearing more interest from the community regarding the provision of a cricket pitch.

Need for a thoughtfully designed, multi-use facility: Many staff noted the maintenance, function, and accessibility limitations of the existing indoor recreation facilities in St. Thomas. Most notably, the gymnasium was reported as not being large enough to safely accommodate certain sports, such as basketball. The small changerooms and elevators in some of the buildings were also noted as not being very accessible for people with wheelchairs. Acknowledging that buildings are much harder to update once they are already built, staff indicated that a new facility should be thoughtfully designed to

accommodate the functions of multiple user groups and create accessible spaces for people with disabilities.

Desire to improve active and public transportation connectivity: Staff mentioned that new facilities should aim to have connectivity with the updated Transportation Master Plan routes. This initiative will be addressing active transportation and exploring opportunities to connect trails to new development areas and industrial parks that have infrastructure gaps. When possible, trails should be accessible for the fire department to access in the event of an emergency.

Balancing capital investment timelines: The City is investing in several large projects that may impact the borrowing capacity for a community and aquatic centre.

Leveraging partnerships: It was noted that the operation of a community and aquatic centre would represent a new level of service for the City and would need to be properly resourced. Partnerships, such as the one with the YMCA (which currently runs swimming programs in the municipality), Public Library, school boards, etc. might need to be considered further. The group also noted that many facilities in St. Thomas are used by a regional market and there may be an opportunity to work with neighbouring municipalities to help support a community and aquatic centre.

Affordable programming options are needed: City staff reported that more households are reaching out to inquire about affordable recreation opportunities and fee-subsidy options. Adjustments were recently made to program and rental fees for the first time since 2019/2020, which raised discussions in the community about the affordability of recreation programming.

4 Strategic Framework

4.1 Vision

A "vision" is an inspiring statement describing an ideal future state. Setting a vision for the City in the delivery of parks, recreation and culture programs, facilities and services is the initial step in setting a strategic path forward. A vision statement depicts how the City wants to be viewed in the future and compels Council, staff and residents to work together to achieve their collective goals over time. Based on supporting documents and public input, the following vision statement has been established to guide the development and implementation of this Master Plan.

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

4.2 Guiding Principles

The Master Plan Update's development and implementation are also guided by a series of guiding principles that reflect the values and aspirations articulated by the City and the community as a whole. Together, the guiding principles describe the core directions that the City and its partners should strive to achieve over time.

1. **Enhancing Community Wellbeing:** We will facilitate and support services and programs that promote health and social equity, including affordable opportunities for all residents to be physically active, connect with others, and experience nature.

2. **Investing in Facilities and Parks:** We will set a high standard in maintaining our parks, trails, and recreation facilities and be a leader in sustainable infrastructure renewal and development to meet our growing needs.

3. **Leveraging Partnerships:** We will work with partners and the community to build facility and service capacity, optimize resources and land, and support regional markets when feasible.

4. **Ensuring Financial Responsibility:** We will maintain fiscal accountability through the efficient use of public resources, user fees, and third-party funding opportunities.

5 Indoor Recreation and Community Facilities

St. Thomas provides several indoor community facilities, including the Joe Thornton Community Centre (twin-pad arena, multi-use rooms, walking track, small gymnasium), St. Thomas Elgin Memorial Centre (single-pad arena, auditorium, meeting room), and St. Thomas Seniors' Centre.

St. Thomas residents also benefit from amenities provided in nearby municipalities (e.g., London, Port Stanley, Belmont, Aylmer, etc.), many of which are highly accessible by vehicle due to their location. Private operators (e.g., Family YMCA of St. Thomas Elgin), schools and not-for-profit organizations also support community recreation in the city.

This section evaluates the City's current provision rates and provides recommendations for future development needs up to 2051. A more detailed assessment on the feasibility of a new indoor community facilities can be found in the Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study.

5.1 Indoor Facility Inventory Summary

Assessed further within this section, the City of St. Thomas provides the following indoor recreation and community facilities.

Table 4. City of St. Thomas Recreation and Community Facility Inventory

Recreation Facility	Supply	Location(s)
Arenas (Ice Pads)	3	Joe Thornton Community Centre (2), St. Thomas-Elgin Memorial Centre
Community Centres	1	Joe Thornton Community Centre
Meeting Rooms and Multi-Purpose Spaces	7	Joe Thornton Community Centre (2 – Ohi Ontario Room & Doug Tarry Room) St. Thomas-Elgin Memorial Centre (2 – Auditorium & PJ Lynch Meeting Room) St. Thomas Seniors' Centre (3 – Board Room, Kinsmen Hall, Joanne Brooks Room) – Board operated
Seniors' Centres	1	St. Thomas Seniors' Centre
Indoor Tracks	1	Joe Thornton Community Centre (200-metre track)
Fitness Centres	0	Not currently provided by the City (there is a fitness classroom at the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre)
Gymnasiums	1	Joe Thornton Community Centre (small)
Indoor Pools	0	Not currently provided by the City
Indoor Turf Fields	0	Not currently provided by the City

Source: City of St. Thomas, 2025

There all also a variety of notable non-municipal facilities that provide recreation and community spaces and/or services to St. Thomas and area residents. Although the City is not responsible for the operation or maintenance of these facilities and programs, they contribute to local offerings and should be considered when assessing needs. This list was compiled from various sources and may not be complete.

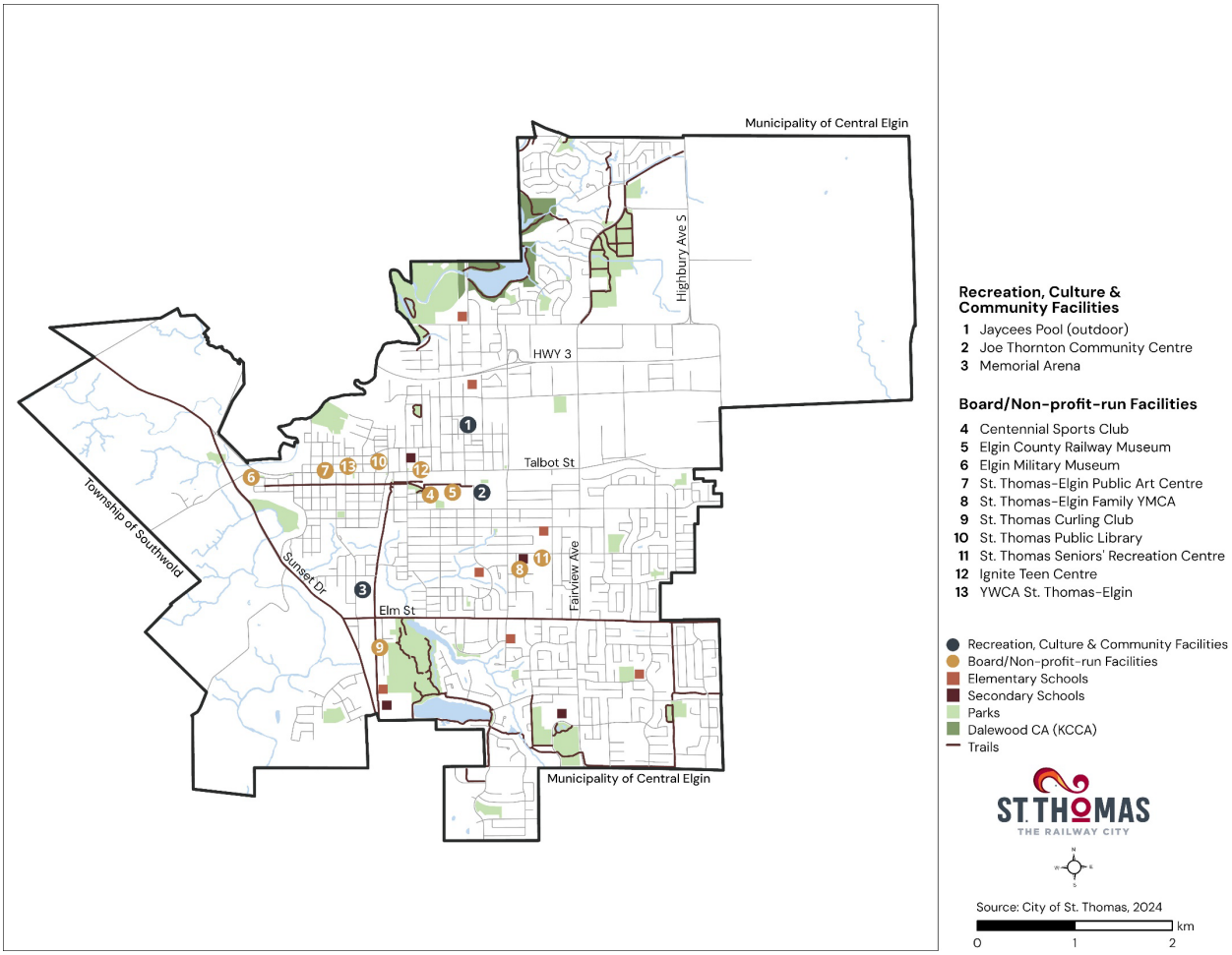
Table 5. Non-Municipal Recreation and Community Facility Inventory

Facility Name	Type
Columbus Club	Banquet Hall (e.g., receptions, parties, meetings, etc.)
St. Anne's Centre	Banquet Hall (e.g., receptions, parties, meetings, etc.)
Ignite Youth Centre	Community Centre
Elgin County Museum	History Museum
Elgin County Railway Museum	History Museum
Elgin Military Museum	History Museum
Club Champions Lounge	Indoor Golf Simulator
Princess Avenue Playhouse	Performing Arts Centre
St. Thomas Curling Club	Private Recreation – Curling
Power Alley	Private Recreation – Indoor Baseball
Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin*	Private Recreation – Indoor Pool (25 metre, 5 lanes, 84° F), Fitness Centre, Gymnasium, Program Rooms
The Court House	Private Recreation – Pickleball (6 indoor courts)
YWCA St. Thomas - Elgin	Private Recreation – Programs, Events, and Training
St. Thomas Community Christian School • 1 elementary school • 1 middle school • 1 secondary school	Private School - Recreation Facilities (e.g., gymnasiums, fields, and classrooms)
St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre	Public Art Gallery
St. Thomas Public Library	Public Library
London District Catholic School Board • 2 elementary schools • 1 secondary school	Public School - Recreation Facilities (e.g., gymnasiums, fields, and classrooms)
Thames Valley District School Board • 7 elementary schools • 3 secondary schools	Public School - Recreation Facilities (e.g., gymnasiums, fields, and classrooms)

Note: May not be a complete list.
* Note: City of St. Thomas has recently initiated a program offering subsidized access to open swim times, lane swim times, swimming lessons, and aquafit classes for St. Thomas residents.

The following map shows the locations of recreation and community facilities in St. Thomas, including both municipal and notable non-municipal facilities.

Figure 32. Recreation and Community Facility Locations in St. Thomas



A benchmarking exercise was undertaken to collect information on facility provision levels in other municipalities in relation to their population size. This data provides insight into what facilities might be needed in the St. Thomas community and is one of several inputs informing the provision targets and recommendations in this Master Plan Update.

The data represents a snapshot in time and must be viewed in context with other factors. For example, the benchmarking data does not address the difference between facility quality, size, access and service, all of which contribute greatly to the value provided by each of these facilities. Combining the observations from this exercise with other analyses will allow the Master Plan to achieve balance in defining the needs of future growth, historically underserved areas and changing trends.

The comparator group used to benchmark facility provision includes seven similarly (or slightly larger) sized urban municipalities in Ontario. Unless otherwise noted, the data includes facilities that are owned and/or permitted for public use by each municipality, including facilities that are leased or under agreement. Non-profit and private facilities are excluded.

Table 6. Municipal Comparator Population Counts

Municipal Comparators	2024 Population Estimates
Woodstock	53,583
Cornwall	52,465
North Bay	61,709
Belleville	61,725
Welland	63,874
Aurora	67,828
Sarnia	80,264
AVERAGE	**63,064**
St. Thomas (2024)	**47,818**
St. Thomas (2051)	**79,500**

Population Source: Statistics Canada.

Table 7. Average Municipal Recreation and Community Facility Provision Levels (2025)

Facility Type	St. Thomas Provision *(# of residents per facility)*	Average Municipal Comparator Provision *(# of residents per facility)*	St. Thomas Provision vs Average Municipal Comparator Provision
Seniors' Centres	47,818	94,935	**99%**
Indoor Tracks	47,818	88,290	**85%**
Gymnasiums	47,818	73,575	**54%**
Arenas (Ice Pads)	15,939	16,350	**3%**
Community Centres	47,818	18,394	**-62%**
Indoor Turf Fields	Not offered	110,362	**n/a**
Fitness Centres	Not offered	73,575	**n/a**
Indoor Pools	Not offered	63,064	**n/a**

Sources: Population count data was retrieved from the Statistics Canada population estimates for 2024. Municipal facility data was retrieved from municipal websites, open data, and recent parks and recreation master plans.

5.2 Indoor Aquatics

Current Supply	The City of St. Thomas does not own or operate any indoor aquatic facilities, although one is available at the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin. To provide residents with year-round swimming opportunities, the City has launched a new pilot partnership with the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin that allows residents to purchase swim passes, aquafit classes, and swimming lessons at city rates (no YMCA membership required). This partnership offer is available all year except when the city-operated outdoor aquatic centre (Jaycee's Pool) is open in July and August for lessons, aquafit, and recreational swimming.
Current Provision	n/a
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 63,100 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	• The Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin has a 25 m, 5 lane pool at 84° F. While the YMCA operates with a membership model, the City has partnered with them to provide St. Thomas residents with access to drop-in swims and swimming lessons at City rates. 43% of survey respondents used this indoor pool the most. • The St. Thomas-Elgin General Hospital therapy pool, which recently closed, has left many residents wanting a replacement. 11% of survey respondents used this indoor pool the most. • Public indoor pools in London are also well-used by St. Thomas residents. 26% of survey respondents used these pools the most. Swimming activities are also accommodated in Aylmer at the Ontario Police College and Terrace Lodge; however, they were only used by 3% of survey respondents.
Demand Indicators	Investment Priority: • Indoor pools were the #1 investment priority for indoor recreation facilities amongst survey respondents (out of 8 options; 83% support). • 79% of survey respondents agreed that the development of an indoor pool should be a high priority for Council. • Aquatics activities were the #1 activity gap identified in open-ended survey responses (out of 8 thematic categories). 1130

	requests (30%) were made for indoor swimming from survey respondents. Participation & Usage Trends: • Recreational swimming was the 5th most popular activity amongst survey respondents (out of 32 options; 40% of respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • Swimming lessons / aquafit was the 9th most popular activity amongst survey respondents (out of 32 options; 30% of respondents). • The top activities respondents would use a new indoor pool for would be leisure/recreation (68%), followed by aquafit (50%), and swimming lessons (48%). • There is notable community interest in more affordable, warmer-water indoor pool options. • The City's population is aging and there is a growing demand for low-impact fitness activities, such as aquafit. There is also strong demand for swimming lessons amongst youth and families. • The Family YMCA has indicated that their indoor pool – which operates predominantly on a membership model–is nearing capacity at peak times but still has some capacity for greater use. • Swim teams, such as the St. Thomas Jumbo Jets and Aylmer Optimist Arrows, have indicated they are at capacity in their current pool facilities, and would use a new pool in St. Thomas. Combined, these swim teams have approximately 65 members, although membership figures were higher before the pandemic. • Most (65%) survey respondents indicated that the indoor pool they use meets some (but not all) of their household's needs. The top reason existing indoor pools did not meet all their needs was that the location is too busy (23%).
Provision Challenges and Opportunities	• Indoor pool facilities are amongst the most expensive investments to build and operate. Due to the rising costs of land, labour, and materials, the cost of a pool presents affordability challenges. Some residents are concerned about the rising costs of living, and many (45% of respondents) do not want to pay higher property taxes to support investments in new aquatic and recreation facilities. • Since the pandemic, the parks and recreation sector across Ontario has been experiencing staffing shortages, particularly with lifeguards. Aquatic centres typically require a lot of staff to operate due to the need for lifeguards, instructors, maintenance

	staff, programming coordinators, and administrative staff. Communities without post-secondary institutions often have more challenges as students typically fill most of these positions. • As the largest municipality within Elgin County, St. Thomas serves as a regional hub for the County. The lower-tier municipalities of Central Elgin and Southwold, which surround St. Thomas, do not have public indoor aquatic facilities and their residents would likely use a new aquatic centre in St. Thomas. Combined, Central Elgin and Southwold are projected to have a population of 28,450 in 2051.[34] Additional users from behind this area may also use a new facility. • A new pool could create competition with the existing Family YMCA indoor pool, challenging its viability. If the City decides to construct a new aquatic centre, the YMCA indicated they are interested in a partnership and are flexible to a variety of partnership models. • Co-locating indoor pools within multi-use community centres is a trend in many municipalities as it creates well-utilized community hubs, that typically have lower capital and operating costs than multiple independent structures due to the shared staffing and support spaces (e.g., lobbies, parking, elevators, storage). Since St. Thomas will need a variety of new indoor recreation facilities to accommodate its notable anticipated population growth, co-locating an indoor pool within a multi-use community centre will provide a cost-effective approach to building and delivering these new services. • To address community-level needs, a multi-tank aquatic centre with a 25-metre lane pool and leisure pool is the preferred option due to its flexibility to easily accommodate a wide-range of uses (e.g., leisure, lane swimming, lessons, fitness classes, club training, and competitions). The City's Community and Aquatic Centre Steering Committee is also seeking more research into 50-metre pool options.
Recommended Service Target	A population-based service target of **one municipal indoor pool per 50,000 residents** is recommended. This provision is slightly higher than that of the benchmarked municipalities to

[34] Hemson Consulting Ltd. "Updated Growth Forecasts and Land Needs Assessment for County of Elgin." February 2025.

	accommodate the anticipated regional use from Elgin County residents.
Future Needs to 2051, less Existing Supply	While the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin Pool was not included in the City's inventory, it is counted as half (0.5) a pool for the purpose of determining future needs since residents can access this pool at subsidized rates through the City's partnership program. Based on population projections, a total of 1.6 pools by 2051 (1.1 additional pools).
Recommendations	1. Identify and **acquire land** for a multi-use community and aquatic centre. The selected site should align with the land requirements and criteria outlined in the Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study. Create a **financial plan** to support the development of a community and aquatic centre. 2. **Construct a community and aquatic centre** that should at minimum include a multi-tank 25-metre 8-lane pool and leisure pool to address the recreational needs of a growing population. The design and development of this facility should be guided by the considerations and concepts detailed in the Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study. 3. Continue to **partner with the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin** indoor aquatic centre to provide residents (non-members) with access to aquatic services at reduced rates until such time as a municipal pool is provided.

5.3 Gymnasiums

Current Supply	1 small gymnasium at the JTCC (0.5 Full Gymnasium Equivalents)
Current Provision	1 per 47,800 residents (1 per 95,600 residents based on the Full Gymnasium Equivalents)
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 73,600 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	• The Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin has a gymnasium that is operating at capacity, with considerable demand from members. • Elementary and secondary schools in St. Thomas have gymnasiums that sports user groups can rent; however, these are also operating at capacity. New schools are planned to be

	built in St. Thomas, which will provide some additional gymnasium space. Permits are managed by the school boards and school use takes priority, which can impact rental availability. • The Court House is a newly opened private, for-profit indoor pickleball facility in St. Thomas with 6 courts, which may fill some of the demand for indoor pickleball opportunities.
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Gymnasiums / indoor courts were the #2 investment priority for indoor recreation facilities amongst survey respondents (out of 8 options; 73% support). • Gymnasium and Court Sport Spaces were the #3 activity gap identified in open-ended survey responses (out of 8 thematic categories; 520 requests (14%) from survey respondents for indoor gymnasium sports). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Indoor gymnasium / court sports had moderately low participation rankings in the community survey, which may be reflective of a lack of facility space in St. Thomas for these sports. • St. Thomas Express Volleyball Club, St. Thomas Shock (Basketball), St. Thomas Pickleball Club, Railway City Pickleball League, Joe Thornton Community Centre Pickleball, and St. Thomas Badminton indicated they would make regular use (at least once per week) of a new indoor gymnasium. These user groups have a combined total of approximately 750 registrants at present. Many of these groups have registration waitlists and have indicated they cannot grow as they are at capacity in the current facilities. • Other groups that indicated interest in occasionally using a new gymnasium facility for training include St. Thomas Optimist Softball Association, St. Thomas Minor Hockey, St. Thomas Skating Club, and St. Thomas Stars. EarlyON St. Thomas-Elgin also identified a potential interest in gymnasium use. The Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin also expressed interest in additional gymnasium space to serve its members. • St. Thomas Summer Camps are also in high demand with 823 participants in 2024, which is more than double the number of participants in 2019. City staff have indicated that they could expand these programs if there were more indoor community spaces. Gymnasiums are a key programming location for many

	summer camps and additional gymnasium space could support an expansion of the City's summer camp programs.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• The City does not currently provide access to a full-size gymnasium. Due to the JTCC gymnasium's small size and insufficient playouts, it cannot adequately accommodate many sports user groups, particularly basketball and volleyball. The lack of spectator seating was also noted as a limitation for hosting tournaments. As a result, the JTCC gymnasium functions more as a larger 'multi-purpose room' rather than a gymnasium space. • Most gymnasium / indoor court sport user groups in St. Thomas play at school gymnasium spaces. Many of these groups have expressed that access to these facilities is unreliable, and the space is not adequate for tournaments.
Recommended Service Target	A population-based service target of **one municipal gymnasium per 35,000 residents** is recommended. This is a slightly higher level of provision than that of the 2020 Master Plan (one per 50,000) to accommodate the high demand for indoor gymnasium space in St. Thomas.
Future Needs to 2051, less Existing Supply	The small gymnasium in JTCC is counted as half (0.5) a gymnasium for the purpose of determining future needs as it is not large enough to adequately accommodate many of its key sport user groups. Based on population projections, St. Thomas will need a total of 2.3 gymnasiums by 2051 (1.8 additional gymnasiums).
Recommendations	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. Facility design and development should be guided by the considerations and concepts detailed in the Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study. 5. Explore opportunities to **partner with school boards** to maximize public access to gymnasiums at existing and future schools.

5.4 Indoor Turf Fields

Current Supply	Not offered
Current Provision	n/a
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 110,400 residents (Note: 4 of the 7 benchmarked municipalities have indoor turf facilities, and their provision average is 1 facility per 59,400 residents).
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	• St. Thomas Minor Baseball indicated that the Power Alley (an indoor baseball/softball training facility operated by the club) has been filling the demand for their indoor baseball needs. • Although not in St. Thomas, the BMO Centre in London is currently being used to fill St. Thomas Soccer Clubs' indoor turf needs. As the BMO Centre is in high-demand, the Club cannot get sufficient time slots here or at local gymnasiums.
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Indoor turf fields were the #4 investment priority for indoor recreation facilities amongst survey respondents (out of 8 options; 63% support). • Field sports were the #4 activity gap identified in open-ended survey responses (out of 8 thematic categories). Within this category, indoor turf sports were the most requested activity (252 requests from survey respondents, 7%). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Indoor soccer was the 23rd most popular sport (out of 32 options; 11% of respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • St. Thomas Soccer Club is one of the largest sports groups in St. Thomas, with approximately 2,300 registrants. This Club services residents throughout the City and surrounding County. The majority of participants are youth, but there are some adult participants as well. • St. Thomas Soccer Club expects approximately 650 registrants would play indoor soccer if a proper facility was available locally. This number of players could support a modestly sized indoor turf facility (e.g., two small-sided fields). • The Elgin-Middlesex District Soccer League has approximately 8,000 youth registrants (indoor and outdoor), with an estimated 20% living in St. Thomas. This League uses the BMO Centre on a regular basis and is seeking a new facility with expanded access.

	Estimated demand for an indoor turf field was around 100 hours a week (divided into small fields). Additionally, they indicated they would be willing to contribute financially to a new indoor turf facility. Their location preference would be in the north end of the City (close to south London, and Highways 401 and 402). • Demand for indoor baseball space is lower due to satisfaction with the Power Alley.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Future high schools may present an opportunity to develop an artificial turf field that can be domed in the winter through a partnership arrangement. • 1Password Park's artificial turf is not a suitable site for a winter dome as it was not designed to support this use.
Recommended Service Target	A provision target of **one small-sided (e.g., 7v7 or 9v9) indoor field per 35,000 residents** is recommended for St. Thomas. An indoor turf facility should contain more than one small-sided field to optimize the capital and operating costs. This provision target is similar to that of the benchmarked municipalities that have indoor turf facilities; these municipalities offer one facility per 59,400 residents, with each facility containing multiple small fields (approximately 100 by 200 feet each) or a large dividable field.
Future Needs to 2051, less Existing Supply	Based on population projections, St. Thomas will need a total of 2.3 small-sided fields by 2051.
Recommendations	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. Preliminary concepts, costing, and locations for a sports dome can be found in the Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study.

5.5 Arenas & Indoor Ice Pads

Current Supply	3 ice pads (2 at JTCC and 1 at Memorial Arena)
Current Provision	1 per 15,900 residents (1 per 460 youth participants)
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 16,200 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	n/a
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Arenas (indoor ice) were the second lowest investment priority for indoor recreation facilities amongst survey respondents (ranked 7 out of 8 options; 53% support). This facility type also received the most opposition for additional investment (18% oppose). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Ice sports (e.g., skating, hockey) were the 7th most popular activity amongst survey respondents (out of 32 options, 36% of respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • While some other communities have experienced decreases in ice sport participation due to rising costs, demand for ice sports appears to be growing in St. Thomas. • There are approximately 1370 total youth participants (~17% of the City's total youth) in ice user group leagues in St. Thomas, including St. Thomas Minor Hockey, St. Thomas Skating Club, St. Thomas Panthers, St. Thomas Ringette, and St. Thomas Stars. • Many ice user groups indicated that they are at capacity in the current arena facilities and are renting ice in other municipalities to meet their needs, particularly for competitive participants/teams. St. Thomas Minor Hockey and St. Thomas Skating Club indicated they cannot grow their clubs further due to ice availability constraints. • Participation in the City's Spring Hockey, 50+ Hockey, and 65+ Hockey Leagues is also increasing. Spring hockey has 240 participants, while the 50+ and 65+ leagues have a combined total of 150 participants. • Based on an assessment of a typical week of ice usage, St. Thomas' prime time ice is booked to 87% capacity and non-prime time ice is booked to 30% capacity. All pads book 100% of their weekday prime time hours; however, there remains

	opportunities to book limited prime time ice on weekends at all pads. JTCC's STMHA Community Rink is the most utilized pad, with its prime-time ice booked to 92% capacity and its non-prime time ice booked to 51% capacity. JTCC Presstran-Formet Ice Rink and Memorial Community Centre Rink still have capacity for additional bookings. Most non-prime time ice is used to run City programs during daytime/school hours. Ice user groups indicated that there is interest in using non-prime time ice to train their competitive athletes, such as early morning time slots. • The Ontario Hockey Federation recently removed the residency regulations in minor hockey for the U10 age group and above for all leagues (competitive and recreation). As a result, players no longer have to play where they live, which may impact local registration and should be monitored. • Demand for summer ice is also growing. Ice user groups indicated they cannot get sufficient ice time at the one ice pad that is open in the summer. Expansion of summer ice to a second pad at JTCC is limited as the facility is used for summer camp programming at this time.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Ice groups identified areas for improvement at JTCC and Memorial Arena (e.g., sound systems poor at both rinks, make netting removable, more parking at JTCC, Presstran-Formet rink is too cold and only has 4 small change rooms, Memorial Arena needs LED lights). • Investments in LED lighting in JTCC Pad B and washroom partitions in JTCC have been approved under the City's 2025 Capital Budget. • Neither the JTCC nor Memorial Arena have expansion potential to add more ice rinks. • The Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee recommended accessibility improvements at JTCC (e.g., elevator, dressing rooms). • As St. Thomas currently has three ice pads, there may be an opportunity in the future to open a second ice pad in the summer to meet rising demand, should summer camps be moved to the proposed community and aquatic centre. • Some user groups indicated that a review of the City's allocation policies may be required to reflect evolving sport participation trends, support gender equity, and to accommodate the high demand for facility spaces. See Section 7.3 for a recommendation pertaining to the allocation policy.

Recommended Service Target	A provision target of **one ice pad per 15,000 residents** is recommended for St. Thomas. This population-based target was converted from a youth participation-based provision target of one rink per 400 to 450 youth participants, a range that is suitable for accommodating typical ice demand during prime times. Participation figures should be monitored to inform changing demand, with the population-based target adjusted accordingly.
Future Needs to 2051, less Existing Supply	Based on population projections and assuming stable participation rates, St. Thomas has a current deficit of 0.2 ice pads. By 2051, St. Thomas will need a total 5.3 ice pads (2.3 additional ice pads). Arenas are best delivered in multiples of two to achieve economies of scale and enhance tournament potential.
Recommendations	7. Create a plan for a **comprehensive renewal project** at Joe Thornton Community Centre. The plan should address facility upgrades and modernizations to improve functionality, efficiency, and accessibility priorities. Actively pursue grants and funding opportunities to support this project. 8. **Develop a twin-pad arena**, with timing influenced by capital funding, aligned projects, and demand trends. Space permitting, this arena should be located on the same site as the proposed community and aquatic centre. 9. Evaluate the feasibility of operating a **second summer ice pad** at Joe Thornton Community Centre once the proposed community and aquatic centre is constructed and summer camp programming is relocated.

5.6 Halls, Meeting Rooms, & Multi-Purpose Spaces

Current Supply	5 meeting rooms, 2 community halls at three locations (Joe Thornton Community Centre, St. Thomas-Elgin Memorial Centre, St. Thomas Seniors' Centre)
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	• The Ignite Youth Centre provides a variety of programs for 12–19-year-olds, including arts & crafts, cooking classes, gaming, and sports. • The St. Anne's Centre and Columbus Club banquet halls are used by many organizations for events where larger spaces are needed (e.g., receptions).

	• Other non-municipal multi-purpose spaces can be found in churches, schools, Centennial Sports Club, etc.
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • While multi-purpose rooms were the lowest indoor recreation investment priority amongst survey respondents (out of 8 options, 51% support), they provide flexible programming spaces that can meet the needs for other higher priority facilities, such as space for fitness, art, and dance classes • Age and ability specific programming was the #5 greatest activity gap identified in open-ended survey responses (out of 8 thematic categories). The most popular requests in this category were programming for children (149 requests, 4%), programming for adults (79 requests, 2%), and programming for seniors (60 requests, 2%). Multi-purpose rooms can create flexible spaces for age-specific programming and camps. <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Activities that could be run in multi-purpose spaces had moderate participation levels based on the community survey responses • Organized youth programs were the 15th most popular activity in St. Thomas (out of 32 options; 21% of respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • The City currently lacks spaces to support the growing demand for summer camps. Summer Camp participation numbers have doubled in the past 5 years to 820 registrants. • Children's Sessional Programs run by the City in multi-purpose spaces have roughly 350 to 500 participants each session (Winter, Spring, and Fall), but are constrained by space. • User groups and service organizations in St. Thomas indicated that there are limited meeting spaces available to book and use for internal meetings or discussions with parents/guardians.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• The Seniors' Centre programming rooms have capacity on Fridays and weekends that the City can potentially use for recreation programming. • The City lacks a centralized facility with multiple program / activity rooms that would offer the critical mass needed for an expanded recreational programming role. • The upper level of the Pinafore Park Dance Pavilion will be available for community use once required accessibility components are addressed.

Recommended Service Target	All new community centres should aim to have two or more meeting / multi-purpose rooms, plus active spaces for expanded programming.
Future Needs to 2051, less Existing Supply	Due to the growing demand for a variety of indoor programming opportunities, more multi-purpose spaces are needed in the city to flexibly accommodate a diverse range of program needs. As the City currently lacks a community centre with a variety of programming and activity spaces, it is challenging for the City to expand their recreational programming role. The proposed community and aquatic centre should include a minimum of two to three multi-purpose rooms to allow the City to offer a broader range of recreational programs.
Recommendations	10. **Optimize programming** of the City's multi-purpose spaces to meet short-term demand, such as using the Seniors' Centre outside of their programming hours and extending the staffing hours of Memorial Arena's meeting room and hall. 11. Provide a minimum of **two to three (2-3) multi-purpose rooms** as part of the proposed community and aquatic centre.

5.7 Fitness Spaces

Current Supply	The City does not currently offer any municipal fitness centres. While there is one fitness classroom in the Seniors' Centre it does not have strength/cardio machines, and it is only accessible to members over the age of 50. This fitness room is well used by Seniors' Centre members for a variety of wellness and fitness activities, such as yoga and tai chi.
Current Provision	There are no municipally offered fitness spaces in St. Thomas that are accessible to the general public.
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 73,600 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	• The Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin has a fitness class space and a fitness centre with strength/cardio equipment available to members. While their popular fitness classes (e.g., yoga) are increasing in demand, they still have capacity for most of their fitness classes and equipment spaces.

	• Other private fitness centres/studios in St. Thomas at this time include St. Thomas Health Club, CrossFit Elgin, Tru for U Health Fitness & Medi Spa, Crazy Joe's Gym, Fit4Less, REPS Sports & Fitness Training, Iron Temple, etc.
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Fitness centres were the #3 investment priority for indoor recreation facilities amongst survey respondents (out of 8 options; 67% support). • Indoor recreation and community centre activities were the #2 activity gap identified in open-ended survey responses (out of 8 thematic categories). Within this category, fitness centres / fitness classes were the most requested activity (182 requests, 5%). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Fitness classes / weight training was the 2nd most popular activity amongst survey respondents (out of 32 options; 45% of respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • The Seniors' Centre fitness classes are in demand in their current facility. Many of the Seniors' Centre users would be interested in using a weight room. • Community engagement identified that there is interest in affordable fitness opportunities in the City. • Ice user groups, such as St. Thomas Minor Hockey, St. Thomas Skating Club, and St. Thomas Stars, indicated they would be interested in using fitness spaces for off-ice training, particularly for more competitive teams/participants.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• The Seniors' Centre programs do not run on Fridays or weekends. There may be an opportunity for the City to run fitness programming for other residents out of the Seniors' Centre fitness space on these days.
Recommended Service Target	No recommended service target. Evaluations will be project specific.
Future Needs to 2051, less Existing Supply	Future fitness space needs should be accommodated through multi-purpose rooms in new community centres. A fitness centre with strength/cardio equipment may be considered as part of the proposed community and aquatic centre if a partnership model is pursued. The City should continue to maintain its existing supply of fitness spaces in the Seniors' Centre.

Recommendations	12. Accommodate **fitness activities** through the multi-purpose rooms in the proposed Community and Aquatic Centre. Consideration may be given to developing a **fitness centre** in the proposed community and aquatic facility – with a focus on affordable fitness opportunities - if partnered with other providers.

5.8 Indoor Tracks

Current Supply	1 indoor walking track at JTCC
Current Provision	1 per 47,800 residents
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 88,300 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	n/a
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Indoor recreation and community centre activities were the #2 activity gap identified in open-ended survey responses (out of 8 thematic categories). Within this category, indoor walking/running tracks were the 3rd most requested activity (83 requests from survey respondents, 2%). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Indoor walking was the 6th most popular activity amongst survey respondents (out of 32 options; 39% of respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • Spectators enjoy using the walking track while watching games/practices, especially during the winter season.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Some survey respondents identified that the JTCC walking track is too cold as it is in an arena and that it can be crowded/obstructed/closed when there are hockey games and events. • Memorial Arena cannot feasibly accommodate the addition of an indoor walking track.
Recommended Service Target	No recommended service target. Evaluation will be project-specific.

Future Needs to 2051, less Existing Supply	The City should consider adding indoor walking tracks to new indoor community facilities (e.g. arenas, sports dome, community centre, etc.) as they are dependent on co-location with larger community facilities. There is not a strong need for an additional walking track in the community at this time, but a track may be considered as a value-added component in new facilities.
Recommendations	13. Explore opportunities to add an **indoor walking track** to a future indoor community facility.

5.9 Arts and Cultural Facilities

Current Supply	The City currently provides some arts and cultural programming for children in the multi-purpose rooms and gymnasium space at the Joe Thorton Community Centre or St. Thomas Elgin Memorial Arena. The St. Thomas Seniors' Centre also provides some arts and cultural opportunities to its members. The Pinafore Park Bandshell provides some opportunities for local performing arts and events. There are limited municipally offered arts and cultural opportunities for adults in St. Thomas.
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	The St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre is a not-for-profit, volunteer-based operation with a small paid staff complement. The Centre is primarily funded by internal fundraising and donations amounting to approximately 65% of their annual operating budget. The remaining portion is comprised of a combination of Elgin County contributions (where the Centre is a line item in the budget) and City of St. Thomas contributions (where the Centre applies for funding through its annual grant program). The Centre takes pride in their programming and offers options for all ages and artistic abilities throughout the entire year. St. Thomas Public Library also provides some arts and culture programming for a variety of ages. Owning a library card also provides people with access to the Library's Creativebug subscription which provides free access to online tutorials and crafts, such as knitting, crochet, design, sewing, illustration, and more.

	The Ignite Youth Centre, sponsored by the City and others, provides arts and cultural programming opportunities for youth aged 12 to 19, such as cooking classes, baking classes, and arts and crafts. Stages in schools may also provide some opportunities for local theatre and performing arts. Some other non-municipal facilities that provide arts and cultural opportunities to St. Thomas residents include: • Elgin County Heritage Centre • Elgin County Railway Museum • Elgin Military Museum • Princess Avenue Playhouse Although the City does not directly own or operate many of these spaces, they do support local arts and culture through grants, promotion and in-kind use of municipal spaces.
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Performing arts spaces ranked 5th out of 8 options for indoor investment priorities (62% support), while creative arts spaces ranked 6th out of 8 options (56% support). <u>Participation and Usage Trends:</u> • Creative arts were the 17th most popular activity in St. Thomas (out of 32 options; 20% of respondents). • Performing arts were the 20th most popular activity in St. Thomas (out of 32 options; 16% of respondents). • Engagement with the community revealed desires for more creative and performing art opportunities in the City for all ages, but particularly to fill the gap in adult programming. Dance classes, music lessons, and arts and crafts were common additional programming requests on the community survey. • There were also desires for a flexible, black box theatre space to allow for theatre, music, and dance performances.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• There are limited spaces in St. Thomas for the City to provide more creative and performing art opportunities. Most of the multi-use spaces in St. Thomas are operating at capacity to provide the current programming. • Although the City of St. Thomas offers a sample of arts and cultural programming (children's art classes, dance lessons, painting, clay and sculpture, etc.), duplication of programs and services should be avoided. It is recommended that the City regularly confer with local providers of arts and cultural services

	to coordinate timing and availability of offerings to maximize public participation and access to opportunities available in St. Thomas. • The St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre does not currently have a formal relationship with the City of St. Thomas, but has been asked to provide guidance and assistance in municipal arts and cultural matters in the past and houses the City's art collection. A strong partnership with the St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre would help ensure a coordinated approach to programming.
Recommended Service Target	No recommended service target.
Future Needs to 2051, less Existing Supply	Opportunities for the City to strengthen partnerships and coordinate programming with non-municipal providers of arts and cultural programs will help to optimize opportunities within the existing supply of facilities. In the long term, the City should consider programming at new multi-purpose spaces when they are constructed.
Recommendations	14. Continue to pursue arts and cultural-related programs and activities in **partnership with community groups**. 15. Seek opportunities to **expand municipal arts and cultural programming** in the proposed community and aquatic centre.

6 Parks and Outdoor Recreation Facilities

St. Thomas' parks and open space system is a strength and residents generally express high levels of support for investment. Satisfaction is high with the City's signature parks (e.g., Pinafore Park, Waterworks Park), major sports parks (e.g., 1Password Park, Douglas J. Tarry Sports Complex), many neighbourhood parks, and the growing recreational trails system, although requests for improvements were also received. Expanded land-based opportunities for outdoor activities and sports, social and natural connections, and greenspace preservation should continue to be a priority as the city grows.

This section focuses on the City's parkland supplies and related policies and guidelines, as well as an assessment of the recreational amenities within St. Thomas' parks system. Outdoor recreation facility needs are evaluated to 2036, with a longer-term outlook in some instances.

6.1 Parkland

6.1.1 Parkland Supply and Classifications

Public parkland is the land base required for many recreation activities and outdoor facilities. Among other benefits, parks and open space contribute to the preservation and conservation of natural features, provide opportunities for passive recreational activities, provide physical linkages for the movement of humans and wildlife, build a sense of community and contribute to the city's aesthetic value.

The City of St. Thomas maintains **208.2 hectares of active parkland distributed across 45 sites** that are used for a wide range of structured and unstructured recreational activities. This service level of parkland translates into **4.35 hectares per 1,000 residents** at this time. Excluded from these figures are open space properties that are largely preserved in a natural state for their environmental benefit; these spaces are not mutually exclusive and some parks may contain open space, woodlots, ravines, and natural heritage features.

Several of these parks (e.g., 1Password Park, Orchard Park, Parish Park, Shaw Valley Park, etc.) have been added to the inventory in recent years. The City has also focused on the improvement of many neighbourhood parks, such as Goddeeris Luyks, Kin, Applewood, and Greenway Parks through with the installation of recreational trails and new amenities, increasing the use of these older parks.

The City of St. Thomas Official Plan (amended by OPA 90 in 2018) identifies a parkland classification system that includes Community Parks and Neighbourhood Parks, as well as Open Space lands. The 2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan proposed an amended classification system – adding Regional Parks, Sub-Neighbourhood Parks, and Parkettes – to guide the ongoing planning and development of the City's parks and open space system.

This classification system has been partially integrated into operational practices, but is not yet reflected in policy; it may be considered further through the City's Official Plan update.

Table 8. Parks Inventory by Park Type (proposed)

Park Type (proposed)	Number of Parks	Total Size (ha)	Current Provision Level (ha/1000 residents)
Regional Parks	3	76.89	1.61
Community Parks	7	91.03	1.90
Neighbourhood Parks	16	31.54	0.66
Sub-neighbourhood Parks	10	8.30	0.17
Parkettes	9	0.46	0.01
Total Parkland (excluding open space lands)	**45 parks**	**208.21 ha**	**4.35 ha / 1000**

A current population estimate of 47,818 has been applied.

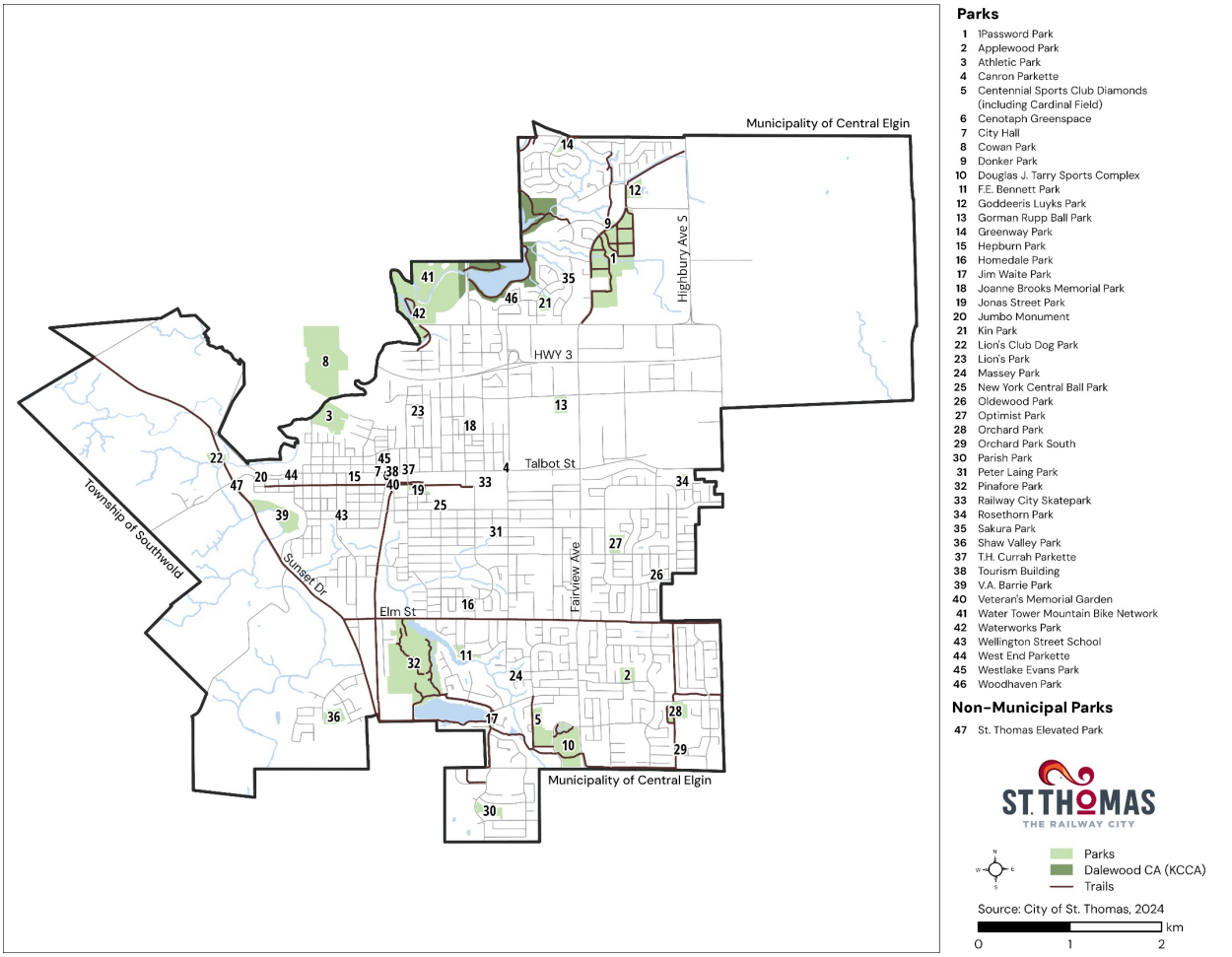
Table 9. City of St. Thomas Parks and Open Space Inventory

Park Name	Area (ha)	Classification (proposed)
1Password Park	26.30	Regional Park
Douglas J. Tarry Sports Complex	6.07	Regional Park
Pinafore Park	44.52	Community Park
Athletic Park	14.16	Community Park
Cowan Park	25.90	Community Park
Lion's Club Dog Park	1.78	Community Park
Railway City Skatepark	1.37	Community Park
V.A. Barrie Park	11.29	Community Park
Veteran's Memorial Garden	0.11	Community Park
Waterworks Park	36.42	Community Park
Applewood Park	1.34	Neighbourhood Park
Centennial Sports Club Diamonds (including Cardinal Field)	2.51	Neighbourhood Park
Goddeeris Luyks Park	2.95	Neighbourhood Park
Greenway Park	0.93	Neighbourhood Park
Joanne Brooks Memorial Park	1.65	Neighbourhood Park
Jonas Street Park	1.62	Neighbourhood Park
Kin Park	2.83	Neighbourhood Park
Lion's Park	1.62	Neighbourhood Park
Massey Park	1.62	Neighbourhood Park

Park Name	Area (ha)	Classification (proposed)
Optimist Park	2.71	Neighbourhood Park
Orchard Park	4.05	Neighbourhood Park
Orchard Park South	0.82	Neighbourhood Park
Parish Park	2.43	Neighbourhood Park
Sakura Park	0.01	Neighbourhood Park
Shaw Valley Park	4.05	Neighbourhood Park
Westlake Evans Park	0.40	Neighbourhood Park
Donker Park	0.53	Sub-neighbourhood Park
F.E. Bennett Park	1.21	Sub-neighbourhood Park
Gorman Rupp Ball Park	1.01	Sub-neighbourhood Park
Homedale Park	0.49	Sub-neighbourhood Park
Jim Waite Park	0.69	Sub-neighbourhood Park
New York Central Ball Park	1.01	Sub-neighbourhood Park
Oldewood Park	1.21	Sub-neighbourhood Park
Peter Laing Park	0.20	Sub-neighbourhood Park
Rosethorn Park	1.34	Sub-neighbourhood Park
Woodhaven Park	0.61	Sub-neighbourhood Park
Canron Parkette	0.01	Parkette
Cenotaph Greenspace	0.02	Parkette
City Hall	0.05	Parkette
Hepburn Park	0.10	Parkette
Jumbo Monument	0.19	Parkette
T.H. Currah Parkette	0.02	Parkette
Tourism Building	0.02	Parkette
Wellington Street School	0.01	Parkette
West End Parkette	0.04	Parkette

Source: City of St. Thomas, 2025
Note: Excludes open space and undeveloped lands.

Figure 33. Parks and Open Space Locations in St. Thomas



Recommendations

16. Use the **parkland classification system** identified in the 2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan (regional parks, community parks, neighbourhood parks, sub-neighbourhood parks / parkettes) to guide the development or redevelopment of parks and open spaces according to type, size, service level, and the amenities that they provide. Integrate this classification system into the **Official Plan update** as appropriate.

6.1.2 Parkland Needs and Opportunities

An adequate quantity and quality of parkland is required to support resident needs and broader community objectives. The value that residents place on parks was noted through the online survey, which found that 71% supported additional acquisition of parks and open space, while another 81% supported expansion of recreational trails.

The assessment of current and future parkland needs includes both supply and distribution factors. St. Thomas currently has a provision rate of 4.35 hectares of municipally-owned parkland per 1000 residents. This figure was bolstered recently through the development of 1Password Park. The City's per capita supply of parkland is well above that targeted by comparable municipalities, many of which strive to achieve provision rates in the range of 2.0 to 3.0 hectares per 1,000 residents to meet their active recreational needs.

A parkland target is particularly important as it is becoming more complex and costly to secure quality parcels for parkland given new higher density forms of development. With recent changes to the Planning Act and smaller residential lots, development is generating less parkland per capita and smaller park blocks than in the past, making it difficult to accommodate the desired recreational activities that residents have come to expect from the City's parks system. As a result, the City's parkland to population ratio will likely decline over time.

Nevertheless, additional parkland will be required to serve growth, particularly to provide convenient and localized opportunities, as well as to support growth-related amenities. The City must continue to strive to provide parkland in populated areas that do not have adequate access to parks, including neighbourhood parks in new subdivisions and sub-neighbourhood parks or parkettes in areas of intensification. Longer-term needs for new community and/or regional parks should also be closely examined.

The City's current Official Plan notes a service target of **1.8 ha/1000 population**, which is suitable as a minimum target to be applied to growth (not to be confused with a long-term, city-wide target). Depending on the range of needs – particularly for sports fields and other land-intensive park uses – this target may need to be supplemented through other means of land acquisition. For the reasons above, the sale of parks or their conversion to other uses is not recommended.

In the short-term, anticipated park expansion opportunities include:

- A new neighbourhood park (1.2 hectares) to serve **Northwest Area 1**, along with an integrated trail network.
- The new **Dalewood Water Reclamation Facility**, which offers an interim opportunity for open space use as it is constructed in phases over a period of time ranging from 10 to 50 years or more. It is estimated that approximately 6.7 hectares of land may be available for uses such as active recreation (sports fields or courts), an expanded trail network, community amenities (playground, off-leash area, all wheels park, etc.),

and/or passive uses. Due to the interim nature of this property, no permanent structures will be supported.

On their own, these park developments will not allow the City to achieve its parkland provision target of **1.8 hectares per 1,000 residents**. Between 2026 and 2036 (when St. Thomas reaches a population of 60,400), there will be a need for an additional 31.7 hectares of parkland. Longer-term (between 2036 and 2051, when St. Thomas reaches a planned population of 79,500), there will be a need for an additional 23.9 hectares of parkland. The total parkland requirement to 2051 will be **55.6 hectares** (or 47.7 hectares, less the known acquisitions noted above); if the City achieves this, its city-wide parkland provision ratio will be 3.25 ha/1000 by 2051.

Table 10. Approximate Parkland Dedication / Acquisition Targets to 2036 and 2051

	2026 to 2036	2036 to 2051	Total (to 2051)
Population Growth	17,600	13,300	**30,900**
Additional Parkland Requirements (1.8 ha/1000 – growth-related)	31.7 ha	23.9 ha	**55.6 ha**
Planned Park Development	7.9 ha (NW Area 1, Water Reclamation Plant)	to be determined	--
Balance of Needs	**23.8 ha**	**23.9 ha**	**47.7 ha**

Although not included in the ratio, it is also important to recognize that the City's parks system is supplemented by other public lands that are not defined as parkland, but that can provide valuable contributions to community life, such as open spaces, conservation lands, schools, and similar properties.

As equity and accessibility are key elements of any parks system, it is recommended that the City continue to strive to provide parkland in populated areas that are void of park facilities (assessed using a 500-metre walkshed). The City's parks system provides good geographic coverage, although one there is a gap in the vicinity of **Fairview Avenue and Elm Street** In relation to population, this supply will likely decline over time as it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure large blocks of land, particularly through the development process. Although parcels with park potential will be limited in this established neighbourhood, residential infill projects are possible. Opportunities to secure parkland or public access to private amenities in this area through the land development approvals process should be a priority.

Additional opportunities may also be presented in the future that assist the City in achieving its goal of a comprehensive and connected parks and active transportation network, such as parkland dedication from development or more formal relationships with other providers.

Recommendations

17. Strive to achieve a minimum parkland provision level of **1.8 hectares per 1,000 residents through new development (2026 to 2051).** With a population of 79,500 by 2051, this translates to a need for a minimum of 55.6 hectares of additional parkland by 2051. Land may be secured to:

    a. meet localized needs and ensure accessibility to growing areas;
    b. address gaps in park distribution within established and intensifying areas through development of sub-neighbourhood parks or parkettes or enhancement of existing parks (e.g., Fairview Avenue and Elm Street area); and
    c. expand and/or build new regional and community parks where necessary to support growth-related recreational amenities.

6.1.3 Parkland Acquisition Policies

There are several provincial and municipal regulations, policies and guidelines governing the acquisition and location of parkland. Amongst these, the practice of requiring parkland conveyance as a condition of subdivision or development/redevelopment has long been the primary tool for the City of St. Thomas. Use of cash-in-lieu to purchase parkland as well as other acquisition tools are projected to become more prominent in the future.

The Ontario Planning Act establishes a framework for the dedication of parkland and the City's Official Plan sets out policies for securing and developing parkland. **There have been several changes to Planning Act that have negatively affected parkland conveyance amounts in recent years.** For example, parkland ratios have been decreased, and new exemptions have been instituted (e.g., affordable residential units, attainable residential units, inclusionary zoning residential units, non-profit housing and additional residential unit developments may now be fully or partially exempt from parkland dedication). These changes have resulted in reduced amounts of land and/or funding available for parkland dedication, leading to a decline in parkland provision levels across the province.

Figure 34. Parkland Dedication Rates in the Ontario Planning Act



* no conveyance may exceed 10% of the land for sites under 5 hectares or 15% of the land for sites 5 hectares or larger.

Presently, the St. Thomas Official Plan allows the City to require the conveyance of up to 5% of land proposed for residential development or redevelopment. Typically taken under Section 51.1 of the Planning Act (plans of subdivision), this is referred to as the **"standard rate"** and is the manner in which most parkland has been dedicated to the City in the past. At the City's discretion, the municipality may accept cash-in-lieu of the conveyance or a combination of land and payment. The Planning Act also allows the City to require 2% of land for non-residential development (or a blended rate for mixed use developments), but this requirement has not been implemented locally at this time.

With St. Thomas's growth expected to gradually shift away from plans of subdivision towards more infill development on serviced lots, the Planning Act offers another tool for these scenarios. Also available to municipalities is the application of an **"alternative rate"** of 1 hectare of land per 600 units (1 hectare per 1,000 if taking cash), which is permitted under Section 42 of the Planning Act. This alternative rate is capped at 10% of land or the value of the land for development or redevelopment that is 5 hectares or less in area and 15% for development or redevelopment that is greater than 5 hectares in area. St. Thomas' Official Plan notes this as 1 hectare per 300 units, but this reference is outdated and should be updated through the upcoming review.

There are certain provisions that must be met to apply this alternative rate, but it is not advantageous to the municipality unless development exceeds 30 units per hectare (for land) or 50 units per hectare (for cash-in-lieu). Higher densities are more common in infill and intensification scenarios, which the City is expected to see more of in the future.

A **parkland dedication by-law** is required to use the alternative rate (with reference to this Master Plan as the "Parks Plan"), as well as amendments to the City's Official Plan to bring it into conformity with the Planning Act. Both are recommended to ensure that the City has the full range of tools necessary to maximize parkland dedication and create complete communities. The City is also required to actively monitor parkland acquisitions and track annual spending and allocation of parkland cash-in-lieu funds.

Open space properties (e.g., valley lands, hazard lands, natural areas, woodlots, etc.) and stormwater management (SWM) facilities have not historically been accepted as part of the required parkland dedication. There is value in preserving many open space lands and the City is encouraged to work with stewardship groups to ensure these remain protected and appropriately managed.

It is noted that – to be enacted through forthcoming Planning Act regulations – landowners will be permitted to identify lands capable of meeting parkland conveyance requirements. This may include **encumbered lands**, as well as privately-owned public spaces (POPs) and strata parks (lands on top of parking garages, stormwater facilities, etc.). Municipalities may enter into agreements with the owners of the land to enforce conditions and these agreements may be registered on title. The suitability of land for parks and recreational purposes will be appealable by the municipality to the Ontario Land Tribunal. Fee simple (municipal ownership) should continue to be the City's first option and priority as

encumbered lands are more expensive to maintain and harder to program, but criteria for accepting non-traditional parkland may be considered further through the City's Official Plan update.

Given St. Thomas's anticipated growth and current policy restrictions, it is likely that the allowances under the Planning Act will be unable to satisfy the full range of the City's future parkland needs. Additionally, the ability to secure larger parcels for parkland (e.g., for sports fields and city-serving amenities) is reduced over time due to land scarcity and higher land values.

To meet the recommended parkland target, it is recommended that the City adopt a **"parkland-first" approach** that directs staff to prioritize the dedication of land in appropriate locations (with consideration to minimum size and location requirements) rather than cash-in-lieu of parkland during the development review process. Additionally, the City may need to utilize alternative financial tools and other parkland acquisition approaches beyond traditional parkland conveyance mechanisms.

Some **supplemental park acquisition strategies** that the City may pursue, include (but are not limited to):

a) Municipal land purchase or lease (ideally in priority parkland locations or expansion of existing park sites), funded from cash-in-lieu reserves, Community Benefit Charges, general tax funding, grants, donors, etc.;
b) Land exchanges or swaps;
c) Off-site conveyance of parkland (ideally in priority parkland locations);
d) Donations, gifts, and bequests;
e) Reallocating surplus municipal lands to park use; and/or
f) Partnership/joint provision of lands with local partners under agreement.

Recommendations

18. Adopt a **"Parkland First" approach** that prioritizes parkland conveyance (new parks should generally be a minimum of 0.5 hectares) over cash-in-lieu of parkland in order to address future parkland requirements. The sale of existing parks or conversion to other uses is not recommended.
19. Develop a **Parkland Dedication By-law** to formalize the policies and procedures associated with parkland conveyance in the City, including provisions for the alternative parkland dedication rate. Furthermore, update the parkland dedication policies in the City's **Official Plan** to support this and the recommended "parkland-first" approach.
20. In growing areas, support **front-end dedication of park blocks** and funding mechanisms to minimize the lag between subdivision development and park development. Employ a range of parkland acquisition tools where applicable.

6.1.4 Parkland Design and Maintenance

To ensure that parks are functional and responsive to current and emerging needs, there are several factors that the City may consider as it develops and redevelops parkland. Below are some key considerations that arose through the Master Plan consultation phase; this is not intended to be an exhaustive list:

1) **Informal and Unstructured Uses:** Effective parks are destinations where residents and visitors can engage in a variety of individual and community activities of an active or passive nature. Increasingly, people and families are seeking parks that they can enjoy at their own convenience, thus an emphasis should be placed on flexible and informal park spaces that can be used for unstructured activities and quiet reflection. This has been a unique and successful trait of St. Thomas' community parks for some time and should be maintained and supported.

2) **Growing Variety of Interests:** Parks in the City of St. Thomas contain a growing variety of features that are indicative of evolving interests, such as splash pads, off leash dog parks, and pickleball courts. Maintaining a parks system not only takes time and resources, but also thoughtful design and programming that includes age-friendly and accessible amenities, organized and non-programmed uses, and best practices in beautification, environmental management, and stewardship.

3) **Aging Infrastructure:** Aging infrastructure is a growing concern for most communities. There are many challenges with older parks, which were often built with outdated construction and design standards and lack modern amenities, including barrier-free spaces. St. Thomas has been highly effective in updating its parks and responding to emerging community needs. But as the parks system grows, a greater focus will need to be placed on maintaining existing spaces. For example, St. Thomas's signature parks – such as Pinafore and Waterworks Parks – contain a very wide range of site works and amenities; these sites also receive a great deal of use and set a high standard for the community. Sustainable funding is needed to ensure that these and other park spaces are able to be maintained in a safe and effective manner.

4) **Investing in Key Park Sites:** The City has been able to create well-sized parks in new subdivisions by joining together phases, creating local hubs and flexible opportunities for new amenities. However, some smaller parks do not receive as much use, including some in the downtown area. Recent improvements focused on murals and public art have been well received and, as the City grows inward, there will be a greater need to leverage the community benefits of these public spaces. A continued focus on design is needed, with consideration of new and upgraded amenities that reflect local demographics, comfort features (seating, shade, etc.), and outdoor programming to help people connect with the parks and public spaces. The City currently has concepts and/or designs for Hepburn Park and 606 Talbot that will help the community see the value of these downtown sites.

5) **Park Animation:** Traditional park uses include organized activities (such as sports) and unorganized pursuits (such as informal play; e.g., playground use). Increasingly, park spaces are being animated through events, programming, and new forms of community engagement. Some examples include (but are not limited to) fitness in the park, food trucks, and cultural events such as music, concerts, and theatre. With rolled curbs at the street, the new Westlake Evans Park was designed with animation in mind and could be a location for future street festivals; the City is investigating the feasibility of developing a piano/music enclosure at this site. Viewing parks as "outdoor living rooms" helps to expand the scope of use and engages a broader range of residents and visitors, leading to experiential learning, participation, and community mobilization.

6) **Aging Population:** Like most communities, the City's population is aging, and the number of older adult residents is rising. In general, the "new older adult" is more physically active than past generations and is interested in non-traditional activities, such as pickleball. This is leading to increased use of parks, trails, and recreation facilities at different times, including daytime.

7) **Youth-friendly Spaces:** For outdoor recreation, youth indicated that they are seeking more places where they can just 'hang-out' with their friends. One idea included 'social parkettes' with swing seating where entertaining events can take place, such as food trucks and outdoor movies. They also suggested creating more spaces for teenagers to hang-out in neighbourhood parks by providing adequate seating, shadings, and even WIFI access.

8) **Accessibility:** It is essential that parks – both existing and future – be inclusive and barrier-free, as guided by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and contemporary design guidelines. To ensure that the parks system is able to serve people from all segments of the community, accessible seating, washrooms, shade (structures and trees), pathways, bike racks, parking, connections to public transit and active transportation routes, and safety strategies must be considered within appropriate park types. Accessibility audits should be incorporated into the City's asset management planning to identify a multi-year strategy for addressing barrier-free compliance.

9) **Naturalization and Environmental Stewardship:** The importance of environmental protection is being increasingly recognized and demand for passive settings that connect people to nature is on the rise. Many communities (including St. Thomas) are placing a greater emphasis on the provision of passive park space (e.g., woodlots, prairie grasslands, flower gardens, pollinator habitats, restored landscapes, etc.), often ensuring that portions of new or redeveloped parks remain in a natural state. Naturalization typically involves reduced grass cutting, planting of native species, and public education to create awareness in the community (e.g., interpretative signage). To be successful, these initiatives must be supported by focused communications to residents and businesses, as well as civic engagement

through volunteer programs (St. Thomas' Wild Wisdom series is a great example). The City recently began the development of a Strategic Urban Forest Management Plan to enhance the urban forest provision, increase equity in urban forest canopy coverage, increase species diversity, and more. The City should continue to seek innovative and engaging initiatives that encourage naturalization, beautification, and environmental stewardship/education.

10) **Technology:** Because technology is readily available in so many forms, it has also become an integral part of the public realm. Many public parks and facilities across Ontario support and even encourage use of technology. Some municipalities now provide public access to Wi-Fi in parks and public facilities, encourage technology-focused participation, and use of trail counters in many locations to monitor usage levels. Locally, St. Thomas had made good use of solar lighting at key sites along trails for instance.

11) **Safety in Parks:** People sometimes feel unsafe in parks because of things like poor lighting and visibility, a lack of activity, or the presence of unwanted activities such as visible homelessness. While homelessness itself is a broader social issue, its presence in parks can affect how comfortable some residents feel using these spaces. Municipalities are addressing these concerns by designing parks to be more open, visible, and welcoming. This includes adding better lighting, reducing hidden spaces, increasing monitoring and surveillance to deter negative activity, and encouraging more positive use through community programs and activities. The goal is to make parks feel safe, inviting, and well-used by everyone.

12) **Maintenance and Operations:** Improved maintenance in parks (such as grass cutting, trash removal, and beautification) are often common public requests but ones that St. Thomas generally receives high marks for. However, expanded park use is placing greater pressure on existing resources and the City's growth will also necessitate increases in investment, including additional staff, equipment, and space. A long-term plan is needed to ensure that these physical resources are expanded in step with community growth.

Recommendations

21. Maintain a commitment to **universal accessibility, safety, and comfort** within the City's parks system through compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) – including consultation with the City's Accessibility Advisory Committee – and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. Emphasize the provision of amenities such as benches/seating areas, bike parking, shade (structures, tree canopy, etc.), and barrier-free washrooms in appropriate park types.
22. Using this Master Plan as a reference, create an updated **concept plan** to guide the long-term redevelopment of Joanne Brooks Memorial Park and initiate **site-specific**

planning exercises for Orchard Park (phase 2), Applewood Park (phase 2), Railway City Skatepark (phase 2), and the Dalewood Water Reclamation Facility interim excess lands. Engage stakeholders and the public when designing new and redeveloped parks.

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. Potential goals may include improving connections and accessibility, enhancing activations and events, supporting local businesses, and creating greener, more inclusive spaces that strengthen the downtown's role as a vibrant, welcoming destination.
25. Establish a long-term capital plan to identify and prioritize **investment in the parks system – especially signature park sites** (e.g., Pinafore Park, Waterworks Park, 1Password Park, Douglas J. Tarry Sports Complex) – with a focus on addressing lifecycle renewal and strategic upgrades that enhance accessibility, functionality, and capacity.
26. Develop a **long-term space accommodation plan for the parks maintenance team**, with consideration of service levels, staffing and resource requirements, and the feasibility of establishing an expanded works building at 1Password Park.

6.2 Outdoor Facility Inventory Summary

Assessed further within this section, the City of St. Thomas provides the following outdoor recreation and community facilities.

Table 11. City of St. Thomas Recreation and Community Facility Inventory

Recreation Facility	Supply	Location(s)
Playgrounds	26	1Password Park, Applewood Park, Athletic Park, Centennial Sports Club Diamonds, Cowan Park, Donker Park, Douglas J. Tarry Sports Complex, Goddeeris Luyks Park, Gorman Rupp Ball Park, Greenway Park, Homedale Park, Jonas Street Park, Kin Park, Lion's Park, Oldewood Park, Optimist Park, Orchard Park, Parish Park, Peter Laing Park, Pinafore Park (Emslie Field), Rosethorn Park, Shaw Valley Park, Waterworks Park, Wellington Street School, Westlake Evans Park, Woodhaven Park
Outdoor Fitness Equipment	2	Optimist Park, Orchard Park

Recreation Facility	Supply	Location(s)	
Ball Diamonds	21 30 ULE*	3 Hardball (lit)	Centennial Sports Club Diamonds, New York Central Ball Park, Pinafore Park
		6 Softball (lit)	Douglas J. Tarry Sports Complex (5), Gorman Rupp Ball Park
		12 Softball (unlit)	Centennial Sports Club Diamonds (8), Goddeeris Luyks Park, Lion's Park (2), Optimist Park
Soccer and Multi-Use Fields	49 51.5 ULE*	1 Multi-Use Turf (lit)	1Password Park
		6 Full – 11v11	Athletic Park (2), Cowan Park (3), Optimist Park
		1 Intermediate – 9v9 & 7v7 (lit)	Athletic Park
		14 Intermediate – 9v9 & 7v7	1Password Park (10), Athletic Park (3), Cowan Park
		27 Mini – 5v5 & 3v3	1Password Park (26), Athletic Park
Tennis and Pickleball Courts**	21	9 Tennis	Pinafore Park (8, lit), Rosethorn Park
		12 Pickleball	Pinafore Park (8, lit), Goddeeris Luyks Park (4)
Basketball and Multi-Use Courts	14	13 Basketball	1Password Park (2), Goddeeris Luyks Park (4), Horton Street Farmers' Market (3), Lion's Park, Optimist Park (2), Rosethorn Park
		1 Multi-Use	Cowan Park
Cricket Fields	0	Not currently provided by the City	
Outdoor Ice Rinks	0	Not currently provided by the City	
Outdoor Pools	1	Jaycees Pool	
Splash Pads	3	1Password Park, Pinafore Park, Waterworks Park, plus 1 misting pole station at Shaw Valley Park	
Skateparks	1	Railway City Skatepark	
Mountain Bike Courses	1	Water Tower Mountain Bike	
Disc Golf Courses	2	V.A. Barrie, Waterworks Park	
Off-Leash Dog Parks	1	Lion's Club Dog Park	
Community Gardens	2	Kains Street, First Avenue	
Pavilions / Gazebos	15	1Password Park, Cowan Park, Douglas J. Tarry Sports Complex, Jonas Street Park, Orchard Park, Parish Park, Pinafore Park (6), Shaw Valley Park, Waterworks Park (2)	

Source: City of St. Thomas, 2025

*Unlit Equivalents (ULE) are counted as 3.0 for every lit turf soccer field or 2.0 for every lit ball diamond and 1.5 for every grass soccer field to account for extended periods of play.
** Six of the eight tennis courts and six of the eight pickleball courts at Pinafore Park are reserved for club/ league use. Typically, two tennis courts and two pickleball courts at Pinafore Park are available for public use.

There all also a variety of notable non-municipal facilities that provide outdoor recreation spaces and/or services to St. Thomas and area residents. Although the City is not responsible for the operation or maintenance of these spaces, they contribute to local offerings and should be considered when assessing needs. This list was compiled from various sources and may not be complete.

Table 12. Non-Municipal Recreation and Community Facility Inventory

Facility Name	Type
Elevated Park (rail bridge)	Public greenspace, scenic overlook, public art
Dalewood Conservation Area	Conservation Area
Kettle Creek Dog Park	Off-leash dog park
Moore Food Garden	Community Garden
Various Schools	Outdoor fields, playgrounds, open space, etc.

Note: May not be a complete list.
* Note: City of St. Thomas has recently initiated a program offering subsidized access to open swim times, lane swim times, swimming lessons, and aquafit classes for St. Thomas residents.

A benchmarking exercise (described in Section 5) was undertaken to collect information on facility provision levels in other municipalities in relation to their population size. The results of the benchmarking exercise for outdoor recreation amenities are summarized below.

Table 13. Average Municipal Outdoor Recreation Facility Provision Levels (2025)

Facility Type	St. Thomas Provision *(# of residents per facility)*	Average Municipal Comparator Provision *(# of residents per facility)*	St. Thomas Provision vs Average Municipal Comparator Provision
Disc Golf Courses	23,909	110,362	**362%**
Pickleball Courts (dedicated)	3,985	9,597	**141%**
Soccer and Multi-Use Fields	976	2,207	**126%**
Outdoor Fitness Equipment	23,909	52,453	**119%**
Basketball and Multi-Use Courts	3,416	7,357	**115%**
Ball Diamonds	2,277	3,532	**55%**
Splash Pads	15,939	23,234	**46%**
Mountain Bike Courses	47,818	55,181	**15%**
Tennis Courts	5,313	5,133	**-3%**

Facility Type	St. Thomas Provision *(# of residents per facility)*	Average Municipal Comparator Provision *(# of residents per facility)*	St. Thomas Provision vs Average Municipal Comparator Provision
Off-Leash Dog Parks	47,818	44,145	**-8%**
Playgrounds	1,839	1,599	**-13%**
Outdoor Pools	47,818	36,787	**-23%**
Skateparks	47,818	36,787	**-23%**
Community Gardens	23,909	16,510	**-31%**
Cricket Fields	Not offered	88,290	**n/a**
Pickleball Courts (shared)	Not offered	10,033	**n/a**
Outdoor Ice Rinks	Not offered	7,611	**n/a**

Sources: Population count data was retrieved from the Statistics Canada population estimates for 2024. Municipal facility data was retrieved from municipal websites, open data, and recent parks and recreation master plans.

6.3 Sports Fields

6.3.1 Ball Diamonds

Current Supply	21 ball diamonds (30 ULE*; 9 lit, 12 unlit)
Current Provision	1 per 2,300 residents (1 ULE ball diamond per 1,600 residents)
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 3,500 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	There may be some opportunity for play at school fields, mostly for casual use. Several groups also use diamonds in adjacent municipalities.
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Ball diamonds received moderately low support from survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked the #13 investment priority out of 18 options; 44% support).

	Participation & Usage Trends: • Baseball / softball was the 11th most popular activity (out of 32 options; 23% of survey respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • The Doug Tarry Sports Complex has very high use as a tournament site. • Based on registration data from the St. Thomas Slo-Pitch Association (Coed, Men, and Women Leagues), St. Thomas Minor Baseball, and St. Thomas Optimist Softball Association there are approximately 3,450 players in 2024. Of these players, 950 of them are youth participants, making up 2% of the city's population. • Approximately 72% of all diamond users in St. Thomas are adults, and about 15% of the adult league participants live outside of St. Thomas. These adult leagues noted large spikes in growth post-pandemic. This rapid pace of league growth is unlikely to continue, particularly considering the rising interests for other activities in St. Thomas. • Many of the ball diamond sport leagues are at capacity with the existing diamonds and indicated that they will need to start a waitlist and will be turning away players next year. Teams are making use of underutilized diamonds in Central Elgin to meet demand.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Kin Park has a backstop and enough open space to support a proper youth ball diamond. The City has begun revitalizing this backstop into an unlit ball diamond for 2026. • There may be opportunity to increase capacity by adding lighting to unlit ball diamonds to extend game play during prime hours. • Emslie Field Grandstand is not wheel-chair accessible. As part of the City's Accessibility Plan, it is undergoing an assessment to determine capital investment requirements. A structural report has been completed under the City's 2025 Capital Budget. A capital request for rehabilitation or replacement has been proposed in the City's 2026 Capital Budget. • Some user groups indicated that some diamonds should be regraded with improved drainage systems. • The City should encourage adult groups to also make use of ball diamonds beyond St. Thomas to accommodate their regional memberships.
Recommended Service Target	As ball diamond sport participation rates are anticipated to grow more slowly in the future, a population-based target of **one ULE ball**

	diamond per 4,000 future residents is recommended[35]. This target will allow the City to construct additional diamonds to support growth, while also being mindful of the growing popularity of other sports and activities.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	4.6 additional ULE ball diamonds will be needed by 2036 to meet the recommended service target. The revitalization of the Kin Park ball diamond for 2026 will account for one of these additional diamonds. This provision does not need to be met solely through new ball diamonds; it can also be achieved by adding lighting to existing ball diamonds to increase the ULEs.
Recommendations	27. Explore opportunities to **add up to two (2) ball diamonds** to the Dalewood Water Reclamation Facility interim excess lands to address medium-term needs. The potential for adding lights to the diamonds may be explored further. 28. Improve the user experience and playability at existing ball diamond sites by **addressing accessibility and drainage** challenges and **adding lighting to at least one unlit diamond** to extend game play.

*Unlit Equivalents (ULE) are counted as 2.0 for every lit ball diamond to account for extended periods of play.

6.3.2 Soccer and Multi-Use Fields

Current Supply	49 fields (51.5 ULE*); the artificial turf field at 1Password Park is lit)
Current Provision	1 per 980 residents (1 ULE soccer field per 930 residents)
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 2,200 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	There is some opportunity for casual use of school fields.
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Outdoor soccer fields were ranked moderately low by survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked the #12 investment priority out of 18 options;

[35] Future residents are calculated by subtracting the 2024 population estimate from the population projection. By 2036, there will be approximately 16,400 additional residents.

	44% support). This was likely influenced by the City's recent investment in 1Password Park, which was designed to accommodate current and foreseeable future needs. <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Outdoor soccer was the 14th most popular activity (out of 32 options; 22% of survey respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • Approximately 1% of survey respondents played other field sports such as lacrosse and football. • The City's artificial turf field is primarily used by soccer (~90% of the time) and football (~10% of the time). This turf is booked locally, and by groups outside of St. Thomas (e.g., Whitecaps London). • St. Thomas Soccer Club is one of the largest sports groups in St. Thomas, with approximately 2,300 registrants, representing nearly 5% of the population. This Club services residents throughout the city and surrounding county. The majority of participants are youth, but there are some adult participants as well. • St. Thomas Soccer Club reported demand for field sizes is changing. They have noted that there is less demand for 11v11 and 3v3 fields now and more demand for 7v7 fields.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• St. Thomas Soccer Club identified that Cowan 1 Field is underutilized. They expressed interest in repurposing this field into a 7v7 field, but are also supportive of its conversion to a cricket field. • The City is also considering the development of an indoor turf facility, which would add additional capacity for soccer year-round. • The St. Thomas Soccer Club has been a valuable partner to the City, financially contributing to facility improvements such as providing goals for fields at various parks, donating an irrigation system to Athletic Park Fields #1 and #2, and contributing to lights at Athletic Park Field #1. • The City should explore options for improving field booking and allocation, particularly for the artificial turf field at 1Password Park.

Recommended Service Target	A population-based service target of **one ULE field per 6,000 future residents is recommended.**[36] This target will allow the City to construct additional fields to support growth, while also being mindful of the recent field additions at 1Password Park.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Up to 3.1 additional ULE fields will be needed by 2036 to meet the recommended service target. This provision does not need to be met solely through new fields; it can also be achieved by adding lighting to existing fields to increase the number of ULEs.
Recommendations	29. Focus efforts on maximizing the use of existing soccer fields by continuing to work with partners such as the St. Thomas Soccer Club on **facility improvements** (e.g., lighting, irrigation, reconfiguration, etc.) and **adding lighting to at least one regulation field**.

*Unlit Equivalents (ULE) are counted as 3.0 for every lit turf soccer field or 1.5 for every lit grass soccer field to account for extended periods of play.

6.3.3 Cricket Fields

Current Supply	Not offered
Current Provision	n/a
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 88,300 people (4 of the 7 benchmarked municipalities have cricket fields and their provision average is 1 facility per 50,000 residents)
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	n/a
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Cricket fields were the lowest ranked outdoor recreation investment priority by survey respondents (out of 18 options; 17% support). The low support for this facility type is likely reflective of the fact the emerging nature of the sport and the potential underrepresentation of newcomers (a demographic that cricket is popular amongst) on the community survey.

[36] Future residents are calculated by subtracting the 2024 population estimate from the population projection. By 2036, there will be approximately 16,400 additional residents.

	Participation & Usage Trends: • Cricket was the 3rd least participated in activity (out of 32 options; 2% of survey respondents played cricket in the past year); however, this is not surprising given the lack of proper fields in the area. • Cricket is popular amongst newcomer populations, which are expected to increase in St. Thomas. The City has received growing input from cricket players in the past few years expressing desires for a cricket field. As newcomers typically face barriers to accessing City resources (e.g., lack of awareness, language and cultural differences), this population was likely underrepresented in the community survey which may have contributed to the low participation and support for cricket. • Increasingly, municipalities (e.g., London, Kitchener, Waterloo, etc.) are actively seeking to expand their supply of cricket fields.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• The large size of cricket fields (about 2 hectares) can be a limiting factor to their provision. • The City has concepts to repurpose two of the soccer fields in Cowan Park into a Cricket Field.
Recommended Service Target	A population-based service target of **one cricket field per 50,000 residents** is recommended. This service target is consistent with the provision of benchmarked municipalities that provide cricket fields.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Based on population projections, the City will need 1.3 cricket fields by 2036. As the City's population is estimated to be 47,800, they are large enough to support a cricket field at this time.
Recommendations	30. Provide **one (1) full-size regulation cricket field** by repurposing the two under-utilized soccer fields at Cowan Park. Further consultation with potential cricket user groups should be undertaken to identify detailed design needs and future provision strategies.

6.4 Sport Courts and Pads

6.4.1 Tennis Courts

Current Supply	The City offers 9 dedicated tennis courts (8 lit at Pinafore Park, 1 unlit at Rosethorn Park). Six of the eight tennis courts at Pinafore Park are reserved for club use at certain times throughout the week; all eight courts may be booked by the club for tournaments.
Current Provision	1 per 5,300 residents
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 5,100 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	n/a
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Tennis courts were the third lowest ranked outdoor recreation investment priority by survey respondents (out of 18 options; 37% support). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Outdoor tennis was the 26th most popular activity (out of 32 options; 8% of survey respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • The Pinafore Tennis Club has approximately 130 members, and offers leagues for men, women, and persons with disabilities. • Pinafore Park tennis courts are well-used by the club; however, there are desires for additional courts that can be accessed by the community for casual use. • The City's tennis courts, particularly those at Pinafore Park are used by individuals and groups outside of St. Thomas. For example, outdoor courts are booked by London groups for tournaments.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• The City explored the option of doming some courts at Pinafore Park (third-party operator) but did not receive any viable bids; the Tennis Club remains interested in this. • A tennis court is planned to be installed in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands in northwest St. Thomas. As tennis courts are best delivered in groups of two or more, building two tennis courts at this site would optimize use.

	• The City is encouraged to create two classifications of tennis courts; one classification for club courts and another for public courts. Club courts should provide a higher level of amenities than public courts.
Recommended Service Target	A population-based service target of **one court per 5,000 residents** is recommended. This is consistent with the recommendations of the 2020 Master Plan and is similar to the provision used by many municipalities across the province. Future courts should aim to address geographic gaps in courts at the neighbourhood level to enhance community access.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Based on population projections, a total of 13.2 tennis courts will be needed by 2036 (4.2 additional courts).
Recommendations	31. Construct **four (4) public tennis courts** by 2036 within neighbourhood parks. These courts may be provided by building two (2) courts in Applewood Park and two (2) courts in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands. Joanne Brooks Park or Lions Park may also be options for court development beyond 2036.

6.4.2 Pickleball Courts

Current Supply	The City offers 12 dedicated pickleball courts (8 lit at Pinafore Park; 4 unlit at Goddeeris Luyks Park). Six of the eight pickleball courts at Pinafore Park are reserved for club use at certain times throughout the week; all eight courts may be booked by the club for tournaments.
Current Provision	Total courts: 1 per 4,000 residents • Dedicated courts: 1 per 4,000 residents • Shared courts: Not offered
Municipal Benchmark	Total courts: 1 per 4,900 residents • Dedicated courts: 1 per 9,600 residents • Shared courts: 1 per 10,000
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	The Court House is a newly opened private, for-profit indoor pickleball facility in St. Thomas with six courts. While this facility may fill some of the demand for indoor pickleball opportunities –

	along with the JTCC, Family YMCA, and schools – many people enjoy playing pickleball outdoors in the warmer months.
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Pickleball courts received moderate support for investment from survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked #10 out of 18 options; 48% support). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Outdoor pickleball was the 16th most popular activity (out of 32 options; 21% of respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • The St. Thomas Pickleball Club and Railway City Pickleball Club use the Pinafore Park pickleball courts for organized league play. Combined, these organizations have approximately 175 members. • The purpose-built pickleball courts at Pinafore Park are highly desired and serve as a regional hub. • The City's tennis courts, particularly those at Pinafore Park are used by individuals from municipalities outside of St. Thomas.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Users indicated they would like lighting, windscreens, and higher fences at Goddeeris Luyks Park to enhance game play. • Pinafore Park user groups suggested improving lighting at Pinafore Park pickleball courts to reduce shadowing at night. • The City explored the option of doming some courts at Pinafore Park (third-party operator) but did not receive any viable bids; Pickleball user groups remain interested in this. • The City has a proposed concept for four pickleball courts in Orchard Park in the southeast area of St. Thomas. • The City also has a proposed concept for six pickleball courts in Joanne Brooks Memorial Park. • Due to noise, many municipalities are finding pickleball courts should be a minimum of 50 metres from residential lot lines; this is a guideline only and should be confirmed through site-specific analysis and noise studies. • The City is encouraged to create two classifications of pickleball courts; one classification for club courts and another for public courts. Club courts should provide a higher level of amenities than public courts.

Recommended Service Target	A population-based service target of **one court per 4,000 residents** is recommended, which is consistent with the level of provision in the 2020 Master Plan and will support desires to improve court distribution throughout the city.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Based on population projections a total of 16.6 pickleball courts will be needed by 2036 (4.6 additional courts). Future courts should address geographic gaps in courts at the neighbourhood level to enhance community access and relieve demand for the club courts at Pinafore.
Recommendations	32. Construct **four (4) public pickleball courts** at Orchard Park by 2036. Joanne Brooks Park may also be an option for court development, beyond 2036.

6.4.3 Basketball and Multi-Use Courts

Current Supply	The City of St. Thomas currently supplies fourteen (14) basketball and multi-use courts at seven (7) locations in the central and northern parts of the city. Cowan Park is home to the City's only multi-use court; this facility functions as a basketball court but also accommodates ball hockey and other hard-surface sports. Three basketball courts are located in the Horton Street Farmers' Market parking lot; they are well used when the Farmers' Market is not in session.
Current Provision	1 per 3,400 residents
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 7,400 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	The supply of basketball courts is supplemented by non-municipal providers, such as schools, which are used in a similar manner to City courts.
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Basketball courts received moderately low support for investment from survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked #11 out of 18 options; 46% support).

	Participation & Usage Trends: • Basketball was the 18th most popular activity (out of 32 options; 20% of survey respondents participated in this activity within the past year) • Basketball is popular among youth and young adult demographics, including amongst immigrant communities. • The sport is accessible to many because there are few equipment requirements and basic skills and rules can be learned easily.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Multi-purpose courts can be designed to accommodate use by a variety of age groups and support multiple activities. Using a basic basketball court template, these hard surface courts can be painted with multi-colour lines to identify a basketball key, a ball hockey crease, or even host community events / gatherings (e.g., movie nights, farmers markets, etc.). Multi-use designs are preferred because they can offer recreation opportunities to a wider user base throughout the year. • A geographic basketball / multi-use court gap exists in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands. The City has plans to include one basketball / multi-use court near the proposed playground in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands to fill this gap. • Another geographic gap exists in southern St. Thomas. The City has plans to add one basketball court to Shaw Valley Park once the addition of the three acres is completed to fill the gap in southwest St. Thomas. A gap will still remain in the southeast end of the City.
Recommended Service Target	A service target of **one full court per 4,000 residents** is recommended to support growth and enhance coverage, particularly in new and growing neighbourhoods. Additionally, a geographic-based target **of one full court within 2 kilometres of residential areas** is recommended to ensure an equitable distribution of courts throughout the city.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Based on population projections, the City will need a total of 16.6 courts (2.6 additional courts) by 2036. Based on the 2-kilometre service radius, basketball / multi-use court gaps exist in southeast and southwest St. Thomas, as well as the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands. There is a school basketball court adjacent to the Applewood Park lands, which supplements the court gap in southeast St. Thomas. It is not recommended that the City duplicates facilities here.

Recommendations	33. Proceed with plans to build **one (1) basketball court in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands** and **one (1) basketball court in Shaw Valley Park** to fill geographic coverage gaps. Other court developments may be considered on an as-needed basis. 34. When it is time to repaint the lines on existing basketball / multi-use courts, consider adding both ball hockey and basketball lines to **increase the number of multi-use courts** throughout the city.

6.4.4 Outdoor Volleyball Courts

Current Supply	Not offered
Current Provision	n/a
Municipal Benchmark	n/a
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	n/a
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Outdoor volleyball courts received low support from survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked the #15 investment priority out of 18 options; 40% support). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Outdoor volleyball was the 27th most popular activity (out of 32 options; 6% of respondents participated in this activity within the past year). As St. Thomas does not offer beach volleyball courts, residents would have participated in this activity outside of the city or informally without official courts. • Municipalities across Ontario have been seeing increased demand for outdoor volleyball courts. London and Norfolk County – municipalities near St. Thomas – have recently added beach volleyball courts to address this increasing demand. • The City has been receiving requests for outdoor volleyball court facilities. • St. Thomas Express Volleyball indicated that they would like outdoor volleyball courts that can be booked for league use.

	They would prefer multiple courts at one location to maximize programmability and allow for tournament potential.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• As there is interest in using outdoor volleyball courts for league use, these courts should be located in a Regional or Community Park with adequate parking and staff maintenance to accommodate this level of amenity. • The City has preliminary plans to install six (6) outdoor volleyball courts in Pinafore Park. This location can accommodate the parking needs, noise levels, and staff maintenance requirements of an outdoor volleyball court facility.
Recommended Service Target	**One outdoor volleyball complex** that can address City-wide use and support organized league play.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	One outdoor volleyball facility with up to six (6) courts should be provided by 2036. While outdoor volleyball courts should have some community-use hours, these courts should be able to be booked for organized league play to maximize their utilization.
Recommendations	35. Develop an **outdoor volleyball court complex** with six (6) courts at Pinafore Park.

6.4.5 Outdoor Ice Rinks

Current Supply	Not offered.
Current Provision	n/a
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 7,600 residents.
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	A natural ice rink is available seasonally (weather permitting) at the Northside Neighbourhood Hub and was originally developed as part of the Doable Neighbourhood Project (a working group of Elgin Children's Network). Doug Tarry homes along with other community partners recently installed another outdoor rink during the winter of 2022 and 2023 with very little success due to the warmer winters, no further discussions for future installations at this time.
Demand Indicators	Investment Priority:

	• Outdoor ice rinks / ball hockey rinks received moderate support from survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked the #8 investment priority out of 18 options; 58% support). Participation & Usage Trends: • Historically, Canadians have had an affinity for outdoor skating rinks, and they help to improve access for residents seeking low to no-cost winter activities. • While participation in ball hockey, roller hockey, and roller skating were not evaluated directly through the community survey questions, these activities were among the top written-in responses for 'other' comments.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Natural outdoor ice rinks are becoming more unreliable due to changing weather conditions. Many municipalities are finding they can only operate artificial/refrigerated ice rinks in the winter due to the milder conditions; however, they are much more costly to build and operate than natural rinks. • Some factors to consider in the development of public outdoor ice surfaces include: proximity to available water sources, washrooms / changerooms and /or complementary facilities (efficiencies in shared maintenance and equipment), acceptable use (skating only, or allow for sticks and pucks), and opportunities for future use (e.g., if successful, boards could be installed to accommodate shinny in the winter and ball hockey in the summer).
Recommended Service Target	No recommended service target. Evaluation will be project specific.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Natural volunteer-led ice rinks may continue to be considered in partnership with others as viable proposals arise.
Recommendations	36. Continue to evaluate and support viable community proposals for operating unrefrigerated **outdoor natural ice rinks.**

6.4.6 Action Sports Parks

Current Supply	1 skatepark (Railway City Skatepark)
Current Provision	1 per 47,800 residents

Municipal Benchmark	1 per 36,800 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	n/a
Demand Indicators	Investment Priority: • Action sports parks (e.g., skateboarding, BMX) received low support from survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked the #14 investment priority out of 18 options; 40% support) Participation & Usage Trends: • Wheeled action sports (e.g., BMX, skateboarding) were the 5th least participated in activity (out of 32 options; 6% of survey respondents participated in this activity within the past year). This low response rate may be impacted by the underrepresentation of youth in the online survey. Discussions with staff confirm that the park is a well-used and valuable asset to the community. • During youth engagement sessions, the Railway City Skatepark was highlighted as one of the top facilities that youth enjoy using. • Youth also highlighted the importance of having facilities that are accessible by active transportation since many of them do not own or cannot operate vehicles. Since skate parks are a top facility used by youth, accessibility to these facilities via active transportation is important. • Community engagement from the 2020 Master Plan revealed that, there are desires for more challenging obstacles for the advanced and more adventurous riders, as well as support amenities such as shade and washrooms. • Skate parks are now a standard level of service in most municipalities, large and small. They respond to increasing interest in unstructured, low-cost activities and support physical activity. Participation in these sports has a broad appeal to both youth and young adults, as well as an emerging family market. • Pump tracks are closed circuits with an interesting blend of hills and banked turns. They provide wheeled sport users, particularly BMX bike riders, with exciting circuits to exercise, develop their skills, and connect with others. Some municipalities are co-locating skate parks and pump tracks

	together to create destination facilities for wheeled action sport users to enjoy a variety of courses. • Skate spots are another emerging best practice that cities are adapting to introduce opportunities for skateboarding throughout the City. These bring common elements of skate parks (e.g., rails, grind boxes) into neighbourhood parks, making these facilities more accessible to youth relying on active transportation.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• A future expansion of the skate park at this site was planned during the initial build. The addition of new, challenging components to the skate park (e.g., bowl) in a future development phase would meet the needs of more advanced users. The addition of bike pump track features may also be desired to appeal to bike users. • Shade structures in the Railway City Skatepark have been approved under the 2025 Capital budget plan to be installed in 2026. These shade structures will include a bike rack to make the park more accessible by active transportation.
Recommended Service Target	One destination skate spot is recommended along with more localized skate spots. Since skate parks and pump tracks are typically accessed by youth relying on active transportation modes, a geographic-based target of **one skateboard facility within 2 kilometres of residential areas** is recommended to ensure an accessible distribution throughout the city.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Railway City Skatepark is located in northwest / central St. Thomas and provides a city-wide level of service. Based on the 2 kilometre service standard, there are service gaps in southern St. Thomas, as well as service gaps that will exist when the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands are developed. These areas may be suitable for smaller, local-level skate spots oriented to younger children.
Recommendations	37. Re-engage with the community to assess demand for the planned **second phase of skate park development**. Expansion may focus on more challenging obstacles for advanced skaters and riders (e.g., bowl, etc.) and support amenities (e.g., washrooms, shade, etc.). The addition of bike pump track features may also appeal to bike users. 38. Explore opportunities to **add skate spots** to neighbourhood parks in gap areas, such as the new park in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands and/or Orchard Park.

6.5 Outdoor Aquatics

6.5.1 Outdoor Pools

Current Supply	The City of St. Thomas currently operates Jaycees Pool, the City's only municipal swimming pool facility. The facility includes one 25 metre, 6-lane rectangular swimming pool and one deep-water diving well; both tanks are non-heated.
Current Provision	1 per 47,800 residents
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 36,800 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	n/a
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Outdoor pools received moderately high support for investment from survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked #6 out of 18 options; 64% support). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Recreational swimming was the 5th most popular activity amongst survey respondents (out of 32 options; 40% of respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • Swimming lessons / aquafit was the 9th most popular activity amongst survey respondents (out of 32 options; 30% of respondents). • Jaycees Pool is the only publicly accessible pool available during the summer months since the City's partnership with the YMCA to access their indoor pool is not available in July and August. • During its operating months, Jaycees Pool supports recreational, fitness, and instructional swimming in St. Thomas (e.g., public swims, lessons, lane swimming, day camps, birthday parties, aquatic leadership courses). • Jaycees pool is well-appreciated by the local neighbourhood for the affordable and easily accessible recreation opportunities it provides in the summer. In 2024, the City had 663 registrants in its Registered Aquatics Programs at Jaycees Pool.

Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Jaycees Pool is over 50 years old and has become more costly to run and maintain; however, the City has made recent upgrades to the facility which are anticipated to allow it to remain in a good state of repair for approximately the next 15 years. • Due to their limited seasons, many municipalities are beginning to reduce their outdoor pool supply as the infrastructure ages, sometimes in favour of indoor pools that offer longer and more reliable operating seasons. • While Jaycees pool is well-used in the summer months, there are strong community desires for an indoor pool that can be used year-round. If a new indoor pool is built in St. Thomas, the cost and resources for the City to operate both pools will be high. The City's lifeguarding and aquatic resources would also need to be divided between two sites, and additional staff would be needed. Should an indoor pool be built, demand for Jaycees Pool may decline. • The development of recreation facilities at Joanne Brooks Memorial Park – a former brownfield site adjacent to Jaycees Pool — is being considered. Future investments in Jaycees Pool site should align and be synergistic with the plans for Joanne Brooks Memorial Park.
Recommended Service Target	Due to the high operating costs of pools, it is recommended that the City **only operate one indoor or outdoor pool that serves a City-wide population.**
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	If the proposed community and aquatic centre is constructed, Jaycees Pool should be decommissioned and operations shifted to the indoor pool.
Recommendations	39. **Avoid major investments or upgrades (beyond maintenance) to Jaycees Pool** until the status and timeline for the proposed new indoor pool is established. Prior to opening a new indoor pool, **prepare a study to evaluate community demand for the existing outdoor pool**, along with the cost of maintaining and updating the Jaycees Pool. Any decision to decommission Jaycees Pool should be accompanied by the identification of alternate recreation uses for the site.

6.5.2 Splash Pads

Current Supply	The City of St. Thomas currently supplies splash pads at three Community Park locations: Pinafore Park (southwest St. Thomas), Waterworks Park (northwest St. Thomas), and 1Password Park (northeast St. Thomas). There are also misting poles at Shaw Valley Park. All of the existing splash pads operate daily from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm from June until September (weather permitting) and are well used by the public.
Current Provision	1 per 15,900 residents
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 23,200 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	n/a
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Splash pads received high support for investment from survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked #5 out of 18 options; 66% support). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Use of splash pads was the 8th most popular activity (out of 32 options; 33% of survey respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • Splash pads are highly sought-after amenities for young families as they provide affordable and accessible opportunities to seek relief from summer heat and humidity. • To accommodate hotter days, the City extended the hours of splash pad operation from 10:00 am – 8:00 pm to 9:00 am to 9:00 pm.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Components have been installed at Orchard Park for the future construction of a splash pad at the south end of the park. • The misting poles at Shaw Valley Park have the potential to be converted into a splash pad, should demand warrant. As this park serves a more localized area and is proximate to Pinafore Park, a splash pad at this location is not a priority at this time.
Recommended Service Target	As the current quality and level of splash pad provision is valued by residents, a service target of **1 splash pad per 16,000 residents** is

	recommended to maintain the current level of provision as the City grows. To promote accessibility, splash pads are typically distributed throughout residential areas, within approximately a **2.0-kilometre radius.**
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Based on population projections, St. Thomas will need a total of 4.1 splash pads by 2036 (1.1 additional splash pad). Based on the geographic gaps, splash pads are needed in southeast St. Thomas and the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands to ensure all residents live within 2 kilometres of a splash pad. A splash pad in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands is a lower priority and can be considered after 2036.
Recommendations	40. Develop **one (1) splash pad** in Orchard Park to enhance access in southeast St. Thomas.

6.6 Specialized Facilities

6.6.1 Off-Leash Dog Parks

Current Supply	The City has one dog park, Lions Club Dog Park. Based on the 2020 Master Plan recommendations, signage has been updated at this park and there is regular maintenance (i.e., weekly inspections, mulch placement and vegetation control).
Current Provision	1 per 47,800 residents
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 44,100 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	Kettle Creek Dog Park is located just outside of the city's northeastern boundary, next to the Dan Patterson Conservation Area. This dog park is owned and managed by the Kettle Creek Conservation Authority (KCCA). The St. Thomas Dog Owners association provides assistance with ensuring rules are followed. This five-acre park has a fenced off-leash area with three separate sections (one for small dogs, one for large dogs, and an individual play area). The park is open for public use year-round.
Demand Indicators	Investment Priority:

	• Off-leash dog parks were the second lowest ranked outdoor recreation investment priority by survey respondents (out of 18 options; 35% support). Participation & Usage Trends: • Although dog walking was the third most popular activity amongst survey respondents (out of 32 options; 42% of respondents participated in this activity within the past year), there does not appear to be strong demand for additional off-leash dog park spaces. Minimal input regarding dog parks was received during public engagement. • Intensifying areas with higher density developments are experiencing growing demands for off-leash dog parks due to the lack of private yard space. The existing dog park in St. Thomas is well-positioned to address these needs.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• An additional off-leash dog park is planned for the new animal shelter (2026) in southern St. Thomas. • Many municipalities are experiencing challenges in locating new dog parks due to the high-costs and scarcity of parkland.
Recommended Service Target	No recommended service target. Evaluation will be project specific.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Once the dog park in southern St. Thomas is built, the City is not anticipated to need an additional dog park by 2036. In lieu of developing additional dog parks, continue to work with stewardship groups to improve the year-round maintenance and accessibility of dog parks in the city.
Recommendations	None

6.6.2 Mountain Biking

Current Supply	1 mountain bike course (Water Tower Mountain Bike Network)
Current Provision	1 per 47,800 residents
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 55,200 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	n/a

Demand Indicators	Participation & Usage Trends: • The City, in partnership with the Water Tower Mountain Bike Network, has recently developed a mountain bike network at the north end of Waterworks Park. This trail sees an average of 7,500 users per year. • Mountain biking and BMX riding are generally considered to be growth sports due to their relative affordability (depending upon the type / quality of bike used), their ability to be pursued easily in unstructured formats and the fact that a wide range of municipal infrastructure can accommodate them (e.g. trails, parkland, roads, skate parks, etc.).
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Yearly contributions from the Parks operations budget helps to build and improve trails and amenities with the help of the Water Tower Mountain Bike Network. • While mountain bikers are satisfied with the addition of this specialized facility in St. Thomas, there are desires for the trail to be longer. The nearby Dalewood Conservation Area has expressed concerns about spillover usage as their trails are too narrow to support both cyclists and pedestrians.
Recommended Service Target	No recommended service target. Evaluation will be project specific.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Explore opportunities to expand the expand the existing mountain bike network.
Recommendations	41. Continue to work with the local mountain biking community and Kettle Creek Conservation Authority to explore **opportunities to expand the mountain bike network**, including at the Dalewood Water Reclamation Facility.

6.6.3 Disc Golf Courses

Current Supply	2-disc golf courses (V.A. Barrie, Waterworks Park)
Current Provision	1 per 23,900 residents
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 110,400 residents

Notable Non-Municipal Supply	n/a
Demand Indicators	Participation & Usage Trends: • Disc golf was the 25th most popular activity (out of 32 options; 8% of survey respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • The City's two dedicated courses can be used casually by members of the public, or for organized games and tournaments facilitated by the St. Thomas Disc Golf Club. The Club is sanctioned by the Ontario Disc Sports Association and offers singles and doubles league as well as special events and tournaments throughout all four seasons. • While the St. Thomas Disc Golf Club did not provide input, City staff have indicated that these facilities are well utilized.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Community request for shorter tee boxes at VA Barrie Park • As a special-interest sport, disc golf facilities do not traditionally fall within municipal provision models. However, unique accommodations are often made when sufficient community interest and support is present, as has been the case in St. Thomas.
Recommended Service Target	No recommended service target. Evaluation will be project specific.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	The City's two existing disc golf courses are adequate to meet long-term needs.
Recommendations	None

6.6.4 Outdoor Fitness Equipment

Current Supply	2 parks with outdoor fitness equipment (Optimist Park, Orchard Park)
Current Provision	1 per 23,900 residents
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 52,400 residents.

Notable Non-Municipal Supply	n/a
Demand Indicators	Participation & Usage Trends: • As the population ages, more adults are seeking opportunities to get outside and be physically active. Outdoor fitness equipment typically provides low-impact, bodyweight activities that focus on mobility, flexibility and strength training. While these are great exercise options for older adults and seniors, they can also be enjoyed by older youth and adults. • Outdoor fitness equipment has been regaining popularity in Canadian parks following the installation of ParticiParks in the 1970s. • Despite educational signage, a lack of awareness or understanding of how to use the outdoor fitness stations can create barriers to participation.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• Outdoor fitness stations are generally provided based on interest and demand, rather than a target provision rate or distribution. • The City may seek opportunities to increase use of existing outdoor fitness components through guided programs or community events that encourage active participation in outdoor physical activity.
Recommended Service Target	No recommended service target. Evaluation will be project specific.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Considering the size of St. Thomas' population and use of these facilities, two outdoor fitness locations for the entire city should be enough to support demand. No additional outdoor fitness equipment is recommended at this time.
Recommendations	None

6.6.5 Community Gardens

Current Supply	2 community gardens (Kains Street, First Avenue)
Current Provision	1 per 23,900 residents
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 16,510 residents

Notable Non-Municipal Supply	Moore Food Garden (located on municipal property)
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Community gardens received moderate support for investment from survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked #9 out of 18 options; 50% support). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Community gardens are small plots of land that are collectively maintained by a group of people or stewardship organization. They are accessible by the public and often produce fruit, vegetables and / or flowers. • Community gardens not only provide aesthetically pleasing park spaces, but they also support community improvement, improve physical and mental well-being, and encourage social interaction among gardeners and visitors.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• The City's recently developed Community Garden Policy is aimed at facilitating current operations and the future establishment of community gardens on municipally-owned lands within St. Thomas. Through this policy, community garden members, organizations, neighbourhood associations and groups interested in developing a community garden can submit a written proposal for the City's consideration. • Priority locations for community gardens should be in proximity to senior-lifestyle developments and higher-density / higher-need residential areas. • There are site requirements for community gardens such as availability of a water source, satisfactory soil and drainage, and adequate sun exposure. Further site selection requirements are detailed in the City's Community Garden Policy.
Recommended Service Target	To maintain a similar community garden provision to the City's current provision rate, a service target of **at least one community garden location per 20,000 residents** is recommended. The City may enhance this supply further by accepting proposals from partners interested in developing and supporting new community gardens in high need areas.

Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Based on population projections, the City will need a total of 3.3 community gardens by 2036 (1.3 additional gardens). A minimum of 20 plots per location are suggested, with the overall size to be determined based on local demand, site capability, and partnership model (if appropriate).
Recommendations	42. Driven by community requests, the City should aim to develop **at least one (1) new community garden site**. Gardens may be operated by the City or with aligned community partners on municipal lands in alignment with the City's Community Garden Policy.

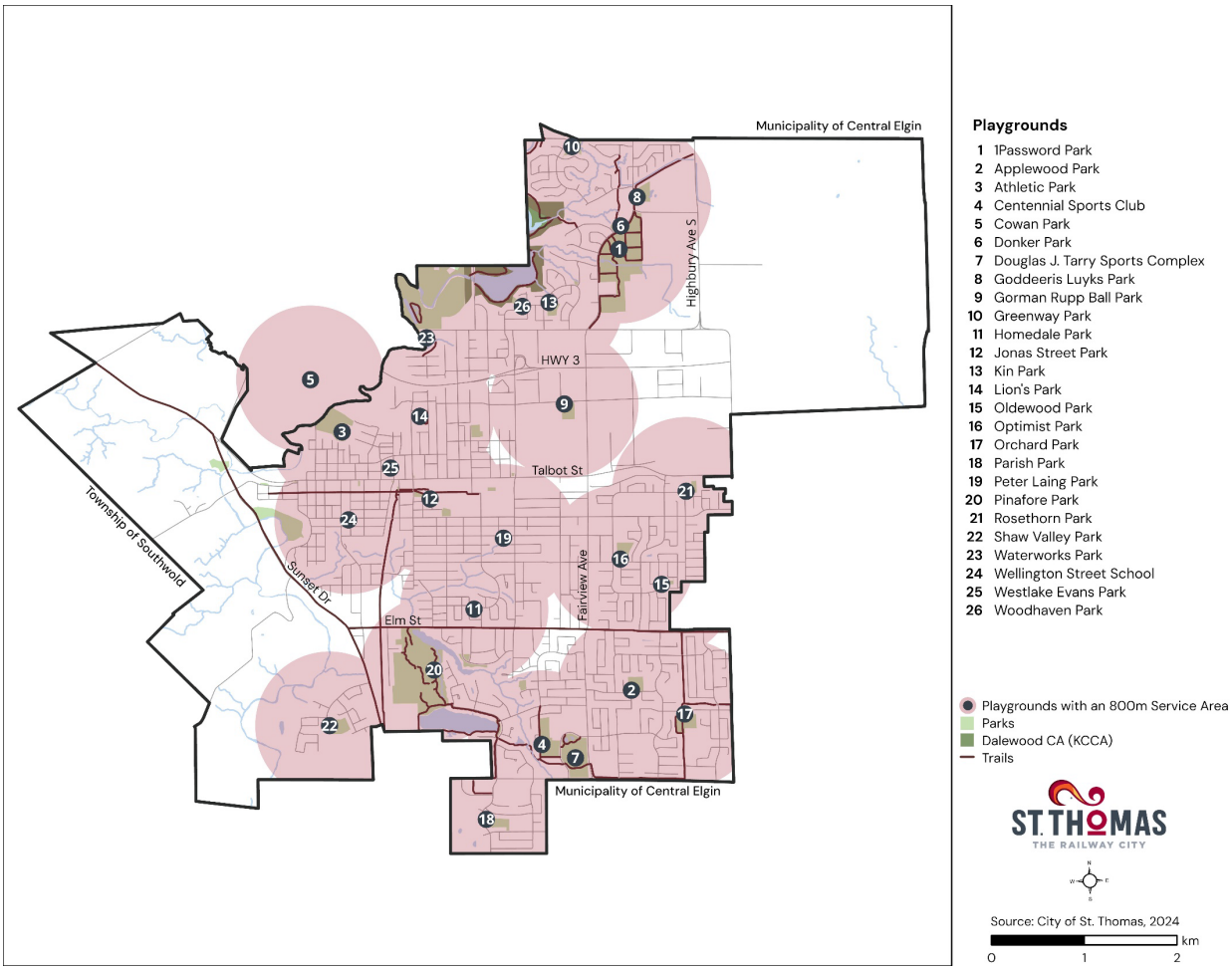
6.7 Other Outdoor Amenities

6.7.1 Playgrounds

Current Supply	The City of St. Thomas provides playgrounds at 26 playgrounds in St. Thomas. Refer to the map below for coverage.
Current Provision	1 per 1,800 residents
Municipal Benchmark	1 per 1,600 residents
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	Many schools provide public access to playgrounds outside of school hours.
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Playgrounds received high support for investment from survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked #4 out of 18 options; 70% support). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Use of playgrounds was the 4th most popular activity (out of 32 options; 40% of survey respondents participated in this activity within the past year). • Playground equipment provides young children in St. Thomas with flexible and unstructured play opportunities. • Modern playground designs supplement traditional swings, slides, and monkey bars with more adventurous or risky play elements. These may include climbing walls, balance or suspension lines, ninja-style obstacles, etc.

	• Natural playgrounds have also been installed in many municipalities – these include simple natural features such as tree stumps, strategically placed logs, or slides built into the park's natural slope. • Designing playgrounds to be accessible for children with disabilities is critical for ensuring equitable opportunities for play.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• The City has approved a subdivision plan for the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands which includes the development of an active park with playground equipment. • The long-standing geographic gap in the vicinity of Elm Street and Fairview Avenue may be difficult to address because the surrounding residential neighbourhoods are well-established and do not offer available open space or green space. • Some parks have connectivity gaps from pathways to the playground, reducing accessibility.
Recommended Service Target	Playgrounds are generally neighbourhood-level facilities and should be accessible **within 500- to 800-metres of residential areas without crossing a major barrier** (e.g., rail line, major intersection, water body, etc.) to ensure they can safely be accessed by children and youth through active transportation.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Coverage gaps exist near Elm Street and Fairview Avenue, as well as the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands.
Recommendations	43. Proceed with plans to **install playground equipment in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands** and evaluate other development applications to **ensure adequate coverage** across the City using an 800-metre radius in suburban areas and 500-metre radius in more urbanized growth areas. 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.

Figure 35. Map of Playgrounds in St. Thomas with an 800-metre Service Radius



6.7.2 Recreational Trails

Current Supply	Over 35 kilometres of recreational trails
Notable Non-Municipal Supply	• Dalewood Conservation Area Trails • St. Thomas Elevated Park Trail
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Recreational trails were the second highest ranked outdoor recreation investment priority by survey respondents (out of 18 options; 81% support). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Outdoor walking or hiking was the most popular activity amongst survey respondents (out of 32 options; 63% of respondents participated in this activity within the past year).

	• Trails have seen increased use since the pandemic. Trail counters have seen 350,000 uses per year at Pinafore Park / Lake Margaret. • The City's trail system was highly regarded by City staff and residents during community engagement. • With milder temperatures, more residents are using the trail system during the winter. The City's Off-Street Recreational Trails Maintenance Standard identifies that all recreation trails are maintained within 72 hours of the end of a storm, with some exceptions (e.g., back-to-back snowfall events, weekends, holidays, pathways are too narrow for maintenance, pathways are too hazardous for use in winter). Recreational trails are maintained on a priority basis after all parkland roadways are cleared of snow.

Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• The City has made notable progress with recent expansions of the trail system; however, there are still some connectivity gaps. Specific recreation trail investment opportunities include:
	  ○ Establishing an **east-west connection** parallel to the downtown railway corridor (suggested location is the proposed terminus of the Whistlestop Trail from Station Street to Flora Street)
	  ○ Connecting the **Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands** to the city's core through a multi-use trail (a potential location is along the abandoned rail corridor).
	  ○ Establishing a **north-south connection** to link Pinafore and Waterworks Park through a combination of multi-use trails and signed routes. Highway 3 presents a notable challenge at connecting the north and south trails; a pedestrian bridge may be needed.
	• The City is currently updating its Transportation Master Plan, which includes active transportation, such as bike lanes and signed routes. The proposed recreation trail investments align with some of the recommended active transportation routes in the City's Transportation Master Plan. Opportunities to align the development of recreation and active transportation trails should be considered to minimize disruptions and for cost efficiencies.
	• The eastern entrance to Waterworks Park was indicated as not being accessible for pedestrians. The St. Thomas Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee recently did a site audit of Waterworks Park that identified this accessibility challenge, amongst other challenges. The City is continuing to seek opportunities to improve the accessibility of this site.

	• The Elgin St. Thomas Age Friendly Community Plan (2017) recommended the development of a county-wide trail strategy with the leadership of the Healthy Communities Partnership to increase walkability and bikeability.
Recommended Service Target	No recommended service target. Evaluation will be project specific.
Future Needs to 2036, less existing supply	Recreation trails should be extended to address existing and emerging gaps to ensure all residents can easily access the City's trail system.
Recommendations	45. Continue to work in partnership with others to provide a **comprehensive trail network**, in alignment with the City's Transportation Master Plan. An emphasis should be placed on addressing connectivity gaps within and between trails, parks, open spaces, and community destinations. Objectives for creating a continuous trail network throughout the city, include: (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.

6.7.3 Pavilions, Gazebos, & Events

Current Supply	The City has approximately 15 pavilions / gazebos within its parks system. The preferred sites for special events / festivals in the city are Pinafore Park and 1Password Park (for Canada Day).
Current Provision	1 per 3,200 residents
Demand Indicators	<u>Investment Priority:</u> • Park pavilions received moderately high support for investment from survey respondents on the list of outdoor recreation investment priorities (ranked #7 out of 18 options; 61% support). <u>Participation & Usage Trends:</u> • Staff observed an increase in the usage of picnic areas, including later into the day and throughout the year. While these spaces were mainly used in the summer, they are now being used through September and into October. Additionally, people are using the picnic spaces after staff leave at 8:30 pm, creating maintenance challenges.

	• Demand for events is growing; the City held 29 events in 2024, with many at Pinafore Park. • Many user groups requested additional electrical service to increase capacity for hosting events, particularly during major festivals and community gatherings.
Provision Challenges & Opportunities	• With demand for picnic sites increasing, city resources are challenged to keep up with demand. • St. Thomas' Canada Day Festival is now held at 1Password Park. Since this facility was designed with the intention of being a sports field complex, it is missing some of the features needed for festival spaces to operate effectively. The City is working to improve the functionality of this park as a festival space. In 2026, the City will move a gazebo from its current location by the basketball courts to a higher-use area by the splash pads. • The reconstruction of the South pavilion at Pinafore Park has been approved by Council for Fall 2025 construction under the 2025 Capital budget.
Recommended Service Target	No recommended service target. Evaluation will be project specific.
Future Needs to 2036, less Existing Supply	Continue to work with others to improve the existing event spaces.
Recommendations	46. Develop a strategy to invest in upgrades and improvements in the City's existing **gazebos, pavilions, and event spaces**, particularly 1Password Park and Pinafore Park. This may include increasing electrical capacity, installing additional seating (temporary or fixed), upgrades to the dance pavilion and bandshell in Pinafore Park, etc.

6.8 Other Facilities

Addressed above are the facility types commonly provided in the City of St. Thomas. However, it is common for municipalities to receive requests for new and / or non-traditional parks and recreation facilities. Often these requests deal with emerging activities or facilities that are not part of the City's core service mandate (e.g., indoor rock climbing gym).

The City should be prepared to consider these requests on a case-by-case basis and may consider low-risk participation in unsolicited proposals if supported by additional research, appropriate sources of funding and the goals of this Master Plan. The Master Plan may be

used as a resource in determining if a proposal serves a clearly identified community need that is not currently adequately addressed.

The City's response to unsolicited proposals will depend on its capacity to participate in such projects, the focus on wide community benefits (versus individual benefits) and the specific aspects of the proposal. If the City were approached by a community partner for the development of a facility, the organization should provide the following (at a minimum) to assist the City in its evaluation of the proposal: justification of needs and business plan; statement of the organization's capacity; a demonstration of project sustainability; evidence of community benefits; and risk analysis.

Recommendation

47. Evaluate **unsolicited requests for facilities** that are not part of the City's core mandate. Proponent-led business plans should be developed to determine demand, alignment with Master Plan goals, the net benefit to the City of St. Thomas, and the degree of municipal involvement (if any).

7 Service Delivery and Programming

The City of St. Thomas aims to serve the public by providing and facilitating a range of parks and recreation opportunities for participants of all age groups and abilities. This is achieved through the collective efforts of staff, community organizations and providers, and volunteer groups.

This section provides guidance on service-related topics that were identified through the public engagement program, including considerations related to roles and responsibilities, programming and events, facility allocation, user fees, partnership development, staffing levels, and more.

7.1 Service Delivery Roles and Responsibilities

The vision and guiding principles identified in Master Plan Section 4 provide focus to the City's role in supporting parks, recreation, and culture in St. Thomas. All actions and initiatives should support the vision ("equitable, accessible, and inclusive opportunities") and one or more of the guiding principles.

The City's current service model takes a two-pronged approach of "direct" and "indirect" delivery structured around a "strengths-based" system that leverages contributions from a broad range of providers. Many services and programs are provided directly through resources deployed by the Parks and Recreation Department. At the same time, several services and programs are delivered by community groups, non-profit organizations, public agencies, and the private sector. The relationships with providers are paramount to the successful delivery of quality services. Through a combination of these approaches, the City will strive to ensure a diverse and accessible range of opportunities for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

Within this context, the suggested roles identified below (originally contained in the 2020 Master Plan) may be used to guide the City in its responsibilities relative to parks, recreation, and culture:

a) Understanding the growth of the municipality and planning for adjustments in service provision based on changes to demographic and socio-economic factors;
b) Ensuring that infrastructure and amenities are in a state of good repair and flexible in terms of their uses;
c) Incorporating quality assurance measures and legislative compliance in the delivery of service;
d) Providing a full range of activities based on the needs of the general population and within specific age groupings;
e) Incorporating program/service approaches that can address social development initiatives within the community, such as youth engagement, isolation in older adults, and improving physical activity levels;

f) Articulating levels of service and testing satisfaction levels on a regular basis;
g) Supporting staff and volunteers in the delivery of service;
h) Enabling partners and other providers to excel and play their part in complementing a full range of services;
i) Working collectively with partners and stakeholders in addressing needed improvements;
j) Promoting the benefits of being engaged in recreational pursuits and communicating current health and stewardship priorities, such as getting more time outdoors, increasing physical activity levels, etc.;
k) Communicating and sharing knowledge with partners;
l) Seeking out alternate revenue sources to expand services efficiently; and
m) Measuring the efficiencies and effectiveness of the City-wide parks, recreation and cultural delivery system.

To effectively fulfill this role, it is recommended that decision-making be aligned with the guiding principles of this Master Plan. The City can create alignment with this strategic framework in several ways, such as:

- Formally endorsing the vision and guiding principles at a Council level;
- Referencing them within staff reports;
- Using the framework to evaluate submissions to the partnership and grant programs;
- Informing the annual budget process; and
- Embedding the vision and principles within staff training, policy development, etc.

Recommendation

48. Align service delivery priorities and decision-making with the **vision and guiding principles** of this Master Plan.

7.2 Programming and Events

Quality recreation programs that are affordable and accessible are essential for fostering a healthy, active community. These activities engage residents, support skill development and active lifestyles, and build important relationships within the community.

In partnership with the community (public library, Family YMCA, minor sports, service clubs, community organizations, non-profit and private sectors, etc.), the City offers a wide range of recreation programs and services to its residents. The Department has shown that it is nimble enough to respond to new trends and interest in each age group where capacity exists. For example, the City has expanded youth opportunities (including a new Leadership in Training Program) and offers a broader range of seasonal recreation programs for all ages. City recreation programs and services are provided with a view to being cost efficient while delivering high quality and safe services that foster strong levels of public participation and satisfaction.

The online survey identified demand for a wider variety of recreation programs offered at prime times, as well as a desire for more affordable and year-round opportunities. Nearly half of respondents (47%) reported they were unable to participate as often as they would like, with the primary reason being a lack of desired parks, programs, or facilities.

The consultation program yielded requests for a range of new or expanded programs and activities, particularly affordable and accessible opportunities. Key requests include (note: a full list can be found in Section 3.1.3):

- indoor swimming (beyond the current partnership with the Family YMCA);
- expanded sport opportunities (volleyball, basketball, pickleball, badminton, hockey, figure skating, etc.);
- programs for youth/teens (swimming, sports, leadership, spaces to hang-out, non-traditional offerings such as arcades and rock climbing, etc.);
- arts and creative classes;
- inclusive programming and program supports; and
- outdoor programming.

In terms of special events (e.g., Canada Day, Car Show, Santa Claus parade, Railway City and Arts Festival, Downtown events, and more), community input revealed high levels of satisfaction, but demand for more.

However, the expansion of these opportunities is limited by space and staffing resources. For example, the City maintains waiting lists for its summer children's camps, as do most sports groups as nearly all spaces are fully subscribed during prime usage times. The City and local organizations work in partnership with others (such as schools) to offer programming beyond municipal facilities, but reliable access and access during certain times of the day and year is a challenge. With the growth that is projected for the city, these needs are projected to increase significantly over time. This Master Plan recommends two major capital projects to help alleviate these needs: a new Community and Aquatic Centre; and a Sports Dome.

In making decisions to support existing or new services and programs, the City should prioritize those that align with the guiding principles of this Master Plan and the Framework for Recreation in Canada. This includes programs that:

- maintain or enhance existing levels of service;
- focus on children/youth and older adults/seniors;
- are affordable and accessible;
- incorporate physical literacy;
- support healthy living and healthy aging;
- strengthen community partnerships;
- support unstructured and self-scheduled activities;
- promote the appropriate use of parks and facilities for special events;
- optimize the use of municipal parks and facilities; and
- allow people to connect with nature and be good stewards of their environment.

The Department is encouraged to track registration and participation data as a way to analyze trends and identify gaps. Regular reviews and satisfaction surveys should also be completed to assist the City in identifying key priorities for improvement.

Recommendations

49. Continue to work with the community to maximize participation and use of existing parks and facilities through **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.
51. **Review program provision annually** to ensure that priority age groups are receiving an appropriate range of opportunities and to consider new program offerings.
52. Continue to work with partners to support expanded **year-round park use, outdoor education, and programming** through community development activities, special event coordination, and stewardship initiatives.
53. Identify and track **key performance indicators and targets** that illustrate the value of parks and recreation services, such as (but not limited to) participation data from programs and satisfaction levels for activities offered and enabled by the City.
54. Prior to opening a new community centre, prepare a **Programming Strategy** to establish program priorities, identify ways to engage under-represented groups, define the role of partners, and inform staffing and budget needs.

7.3 Access, Allocation, and User Fees

As St. Thomas grows and demand rises for access to facilities, it is vital that the City have appropriate policies and practices in place that fairly and transparently set fees and allocate time across priority groups so that all users may be impacted in an equitable manner.

The 2020 Master Plan recommended that all municipal **allocation policies and processes** be reviewed to ensure that they are mindful of national and provincial sport association guidelines, trends in sports, and gender equity (at a minimum) and that use of space is being optimized. The City is preparing an updated Indoor and Outdoor Sports Field Allocation Policy to address matters related to soccer fields and ball diamonds.

Through the latest Master Plan consultation, several user groups continue to indicate a desire for the City to review its facility allocation policies and processes, particularly for arenas and gymnasium spaces. Comments noted that the current policies are partially based on how facilities have historically been allocated and do not reflect established standards of play, youth-first priorities, gender equity requirements, and accommodation of emerging groups.

The matter of priority access also extends to consideration of residents and non-residents. As many local organizations also serve a regional market, additional research may be required to understand the impacts of instituting a residency threshold, for instance. The collection of annual participant data from major groups with rental contracts at City facilities (anonymized but including gender, age, and area of residence) will help with this assessment and should be prioritized. The City and user groups may also benefit from annual meetings involving user groups that support a coordinated approach to scheduling.

Through this review, consideration may also be given to the development of an **affiliation policy** that establishes a framework for how the City will recognize, support, and allocate resources to community groups (e.g., minor sports associations, service clubs, etc.) that deliver programs in municipal facilities. Such a policy would, at minimum:

- establish eligibility criteria, such as a minimum percentage of members to be local residents, incorporation as a non-profit, financial transparency, alignment with municipal goals, etc.;
- outline benefits for affiliated groups, such as priority booking, discounted rental rates, promotional support, etc.;
- set expectations and responsibilities, such as following municipal codes of conduct, providing insurance, reporting on participation, etc.; and
- provide for a transparent allocation process.

User fees can also be a barrier to participation for some residents. Ensuring affordability – for parks and recreation users and taxpayers alike – was a strong theme expressed through the public engagement program. Reducing barriers to participation is a foundational goal of municipal service providers everywhere.

Fees and rental rates for the Department's programs and facilities do not recover their full costs. Recognizing the broader community benefits of participation, they are typically subsidized by general taxation and other funding sources, while still ensuring that a portion of direct costs are borne by users. However, while the City strives to offer programs, parks, and facilities that can be used by all, challenges still exist.

Many municipalities – especially those with extensive recreation program offerings – have affordable access policies that help to offset the cost of participation for lower-income households. A **financial assistance program** was recommended for St. Thomas through the 2020 Master Plan, and while this has yet to be actioned, the City does encourage those requiring assistance to apply to programs offered by external agencies (e.g., Canadian Tire Jumpstart, KidSport Ontario, etc.). The City has also partnered with the ACT-i-Pass program to provide free programming to grade 5 students. While these programs may be sufficient at the moment, the development of a City-funded affordable access program (with annual funding and administrative support) should become a priority as St. Thomas ramps up programming through the delivery of new facilities. Consideration may be given to a

partnership model that shifts the administrative burden from the City to the referral agency.[37] Options for equipment lending may also be considered.

In terms of rate setting, the City's past practice was to increase user fees by approximately 3% each year, with comparisons to the market. This practice was paused during the pandemic, but in 2025, City Council approved an updated fee schedule for the first time since 2019, including adjustments to how the charges are applied. This has been a challenge for some groups (e.g., tennis, pickleball, etc.) as these new fees were not phased in.

Going forward, the City now has a strong basis for establishing rates and maintaining them at levels that are reflective of inflationary rates. The City is encouraged to regularly examine its costs to deliver services and compare this to user fee and rental rates to maintain rates within a reasonable cost recovery range, which may vary depending on the service offered and degree of individual versus community benefit.

Lastly, many residents from **surrounding municipalities** also access programs and services in St. Thomas. As these services are subsidized by taxpayers, this may in some cases place an undue burden on St. Thomas residents. Options for instituting a non-resident surcharge, blackout period for registration, or cost-sharing agreements with adjacent municipalities should be more fully explored as the City advances its planning for new major recreation facilities. A recommendation regarding cross-municipal cost-sharing is contained in Master Plan Section 8.

Recommendations

55. Complete the review and update of recreation facility **allocation policies and processes** (e.g., arenas, gymnasium spaces, etc.) with the goals of improving fairness, transparency, and community access. Involve affected organizations in the review of these policies to ensure that they reflect standards of play, gender equity requirements, access for priority populations, and implementation practices (e.g., annual scheduling meetings).
56. Consider preparing an **Affiliation Policy** to establish a framework for how the City will recognize, support, and allocate resources to community groups. This includes establishing responsibilities for user groups, including the annual submission of participation data (age, gender, residency, etc.) to support trend tracking and allocation.
57. Review the City's parks and recreation **user fees and rental rates** every three years with the goal of recovering an appropriate portion of costs, while ensuring that

[37] Example of financial assistance referral model – We are the Villagers (Town of Penetanguishene, Township of Tiny, Township of Oro-Medonte). watvnew.com/contact-us/support-application/

recreation programs and facilities remain affordable and inclusive. Considerations for the next review may include:

- Applying inflationary rates and producing multi-year schedules that provide user groups with longer-term cost certainty.
- The potential to offer last minute facility rentals and/or online payment.
- Instituting a surcharge and/or blackout registration period on programs and/or rentals for non-residents (note: this may be administered through the recommended affiliation policy).

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 in community programs and using municipal facilities.

7.4 Service Levels and Staffing

The City's Parks and Recreation Department is a major employer within the community, with staff teams responsible for parks and trails maintenance, facility operations, event and tournament support, programming, and more. As the community grows, more residents will be seeking access to these spaces and services, requiring investment in additional staff and capital resources.

Further, the breadth of duties and services are evolving. Demand is not just more of the same, it is also more diverse – newcomers, older adults, and young families bring varied recreation needs. Without more staff, capacity to expand programs, maintain facilities, and respond to growth is limited, potentially leading to waitlists, reduced quality and public satisfaction, staff burnout and turnover, and missed opportunities.

Looking to the future, an emphasis must be placed on **increasing staffing in step with the development of new parks, facilities, and programs**. The recruitment of part-time and seasonal staff for parks maintenance has also been a challenge, especially during the Fall shoulder season when their employment term ends, yet parks remain well used by the community. Furthermore, expanded program opportunities are being sought as St. Thomas grows. An adequate complement of **operations staff** is necessary to maintain the high levels of public satisfaction with St. Thomas' parks, trails, and recreation system (e.g., Customer Service Representatives, labourers, program instructors).

Further, it is recommended that the Department consider establishing a new position – a **Community Development Coordinator**. This position is not intended to replicate responsibilities currently being undertaken by existing staff, but rather to enhance the Parks and Recreation Department's ability to address emerging needs. For example, this Coordinator could be responsible for community outreach and marketing, leading special projects, assisting with grant writing and policy development, soliciting sponsorships, measuring performance, and/or acting as a liaison with local volunteer organizations.

To inform longer-term decisions relating to staffing levels and skill alignment, the Department should continue to document maintenance standards and resultant service levels – a task recommended through the 2020 Master Plan. Updates to the Department's staff development and training plan should also continue to be a priority to ensure that services are delivered by a qualified and high performing staff team.

Volunteers are critical to the delivery of community-based parks and recreation activities and events; however, research indicates that the number of volunteers and their commitment are declining. The role of younger volunteers is vital to the sustainability of sport and recreation, and the City is encouraged to expand its leadership programming to help build this capacity. Engaging younger volunteers must continue to be a priority as it not only helps to develop skills but can also lead to future volunteer and employment opportunities within the sector.

Recommendations

59. Review and document **Departmental maintenance and service levels** to support a sustained and strategic approach to identifying staffing requirements. Additional staff resources will be required as the City's parks, facilities, programs, and services are expanded (e.g., Customer Service Representatives, labourers, program instructors).
60. Create a **Community Development Coordinator** position within the Parks and Recreation Department to address emerging needs such as community outreach, special projects, grant writing, policy development, sponsorships, etc.
61. Continue to actively **support volunteers and volunteer-led community organizations** in the development and delivery of parks and recreation programs and services. Seek to **expand youth leadership programming** to help build future capacity.

7.5 Communications and Marketing

The City of St. Thomas' website identifies the various recreation program opportunities available to the public, with online registration enabled for many services. An online calendar promoting a wide range of local events is maintained by Railway City Tourism. The City also maintains several social media accounts that are used to highlight local news and initiatives. These efforts are generally well received by the public, although it is recognized that residents access and consume information in many different forms. Further, as the population grows, St. Thomas will attract more newcomers that are not familiar with all the City has to offer, thus communications and marketing will require greater emphasis.

With this in mind, the City has developed a Corporate Communications Team, as well as a 2025-2029 Corporate Communications Strategy, that help to support clear, consistent,

and timely communication across all City departments and public communication channels.

To ensure that these communication and marketing tactics are effective in reaching the desired audiences, the City should remain nimble in how it disseminates information. Suggestions received through the Master Plan engagements included greater use of social media, digital billboards, direct links to organization websites (e.g., minor sports, clubs, etc.), and leveraging registrant profiles from the City's recreation management software for more targeted marketing. The key is to ensure that messaging is consistent, accurate, and in formats that are accessible to as many residents as possible, including messaging around the benefits of participation.

Furthermore, an open line of communication with community organizations would also help to proactively address issues, ideas, and concerns. Several communities have had success with regular open forums to discuss initiatives and topics of broad appeal within the parks and recreation sector. Furthermore, public and stakeholder engagement should continue to be a mandatory requirement for all major capital projects and policy decisions that impact the community.

Recommendations

62. Regularly review **public communication and marketing strategies** to guide the use of various digital and print tools in promoting and gathering feedback on parks and recreation services and initiatives.
63. Convene bi-annual **information-sharing forums** involving Council, City staff, and the community on parks and recreation topics, such as capital projects, policy development, maintenance practices, activity and sport trends, Master Plan implementation, and more.

7.6 Partnerships and Working with Others

The City works with community partners to provide the highest level of service to the public while maximizing resources. Examples of successful partnerships include strategic alliances with local service clubs for fundraising and event support, rental agreements with organizations (e.g., minor sports, etc.), community initiatives (e.g., ParticipACTION, drowning prevention, etc.), and service agreements with program providers (e.g., Family YMCA, concessions, etc.). The City does not employ a standard approach for developing arrangements with outside groups or for responding to unsolicited proposals, but is drafting a Sponsorship Policy for future consideration.

Partnerships are key to creating a versatile range of parks, recreation, and cultural services in St. Thomas. They allow the City to leverage outside resources and maximize public funds, while meeting gaps and needs that are not traditionally within the municipal mandate. The community has expressed support in principle for more multi-sectoral partnerships that

leverage resources, avoid duplication, accelerate innovation, and enhance user convenience.

From time to time, the City may consider various arrangements with the private sector, non-profit sector, or other levels of government to develop and/or operate various facilities and services to achieve the desired community and municipal benefits. The goal is to maximize the community's assets and increase service levels while sharing an appropriate balance of costs and risks.

Relationships with outside groups may be considered when:

- the City does not have capacity or budget for direct program delivery or facility management;
- there is an established provider/partner already working with the City;
- the provider fills or augments service gaps that are a priority to the City; and/or
- the provider is the preferred/specialist for program delivery.

In all partnership arrangements, specifications and requirements must ensure that the partner respects and aligns with the City's key goals and objectives. The value in seeking out and formalizing partnerships provides a net benefit to both organizations and reduce costs to the municipality. Where possible, the City is encouraged to work with community partners and in coordination with other public entities to implement recommendations contained in this Master Plan that would benefit from shared roles, responsibilities, and resources. It is recommended that staff develop written agreements with community partners who may share public spaces or work collectively to offer programs and services.

To assist the City in evaluating current and future partnerships, the following criteria may be considered:

a) The outcome of the partnership should be aligned with municipal values, mandate, and priorities.
b) There should be an articulated need for the proposed program or service in the community.
c) The financial and liability risks to the City should be shared or reduced.
d) The partner should be equipped and qualified to co-deliver the service through identified efficiencies, with the ability to reach an identified segment of the population.
e) The quality of the program or service provided through the partnership should meet municipal quality assurance and risk management requirements and complies with legislation.
f) Unsolicited for-profit partnership proposals should be dealt with transparently and through a competitive process as identified in a procurement process.
g) Accountabilities and responsibilities should be clearly defined and complied with.
h) Annual reporting requirements should capture participation numbers, expenditure reduction or revenue enhancement, and are clearly aligned with departmental objectives.

Additional detail on partnerships specific to the operation of a future community and aquatic centre can be found in the accompanying Feasibility Study.

Recommendation

64. Continue to seek opportunities to collaborate with **non-municipal parks, recreation and culture providers** on initiatives that maximize community access and benefit. Regularly review **partnership agreements** to ensure an appropriate and sustainable distribution of operational and financial responsibilities.

8 Implementation

Active implementation of this plan is fundamental to its success. This requires coordinated efforts and a commitment from Council, staff, stakeholders, and the public. This section identifies key funding and implementation considerations, a framework for reviewing and updating the Plan, and a summary of all recommendations, along with their suggested timing and priority.

8.1 Monitoring and Updating the Plan

The City should regularly review, assess, and periodically revise the recommendations of this Master Plan to ensure that they remain reflective of local conditions and responsive to community needs. This will require monitoring of activity patterns, tracking user satisfaction levels, dialogue with community organizations, annual reporting on implementation and short-term work plans, and undertaking a detailed ten-year update to the Plan. Through these mechanisms – or because of other internal or external factors – adjustment of resource allocations and priorities identified in this plan may be required.

An appropriate time for the annual review is prior to the budget process. The following steps may be used to conduct an annual review of the Master Plan:

a) review of the past year (recommendations implemented, capital projects undertaken, success/failure of new and existing initiatives, changes in participation levels, etc.);
b) review of the plan to identify short term projects and priorities based on staff review and considerations (e.g., financial limitations, public input, partnership/funding potential, etc.);
c) identification of issues or constraints anticipated for the coming year;
d) communication to staff and Council regarding the status of projects, criteria used to prioritize projects, and upcoming projects; and
e) budget requests/revisions as necessary.

Recommendations

65. Enhance **community awareness** of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan by publishing the report on the City's website and reporting annually on key accomplishments and short-term priorities. Regularly seek feedback from the community and aligned bodies, such as the Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee.
66. Develop **annual work plans** to guide strategic implementation of the Master Plan, to feed into the yearly budget process and long-range capital plans.

67. Develop and implement a system for **regular monitoring and reporting** on the progress of the Master Plan, such as the collection of participation/registration data and annual reports to Council and/or the community.
68. Undertake a **full update of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan** in five to ten years (2030-2035). Timing may be influenced by the pace of implementation and changes within the community.

8.2 Funding Considerations

Recommendations are provided at the end of each subsection of this Master Plan; however, this is not a definitive list. Additional capital repairs, operating costs, and initiatives outside the scope of this plan may arise and be prioritized on a case-by-case basis. Approval of this plan does not commit the City to implementing every recommendation, nor to doing so in the exact order, scale, or timing presented. Rather, the plan is intended as a framework to guide decision-making, reflect community priorities, and establish an overall direction for meeting current needs.

Implementation will occur incrementally. Critical recommendations should be addressed in a timely manner, while less urgent – but still important – actions can be phased in over time. Each capital project will require detailed budgeting, operating impact analysis, and confirmation of funding sources prior to approval. The timing of projects will depend on available resources and may shift as circumstances change. Annual review of the plan during the budget process will ensure that priorities remain aligned with funding capacity.

Full implementation of the Master Plan will require the use of numerous funding sources, including (but not limited to):

- development charges;
- parkland cash-in-lieu for land purchases;
- municipal taxation and reserves;
- fundraising, donations, naming rights, and sponsorships;
- user fees and surcharges;
- debenture financing;
- ongoing government programs;
- one-time grants; and
- partnerships.

In addition to funding availability, factors that might change priorities year to year may include:

- capital lifecycle and considerations of safety;
- legislation and mandated requirements;
- changes to service standards;
- public input and community interests;
- emerging trends and changes in participation rates;

- availability of alternate providers;
- emerging partnerships and donations; and
- socio-demographic changes and growth forecasts.

The City's resources are limited, and it is not feasible to address all community requests, which underscores the importance of having a Master Plan to guide decision-making. Within these financial realities, it remains in the City's best interest to pursue the recommended strategies to the greatest extent possible. Implementation will require a phased approach supported by multiple funding sources and strengthened through collaboration with community and government partners.

As has traditionally been the case in St. Thomas, parks and recreation services are expected to continue as subsidized municipal services. Given limited financial growth, it is essential to revisit priorities each year and adjust resource allocations to maximize community benefit.

Recommendations

69. Use this **Master Plan as a resource** in developing the City's annual budget documents, Development Charges studies, growth plans, and related studies.
70. Where appropriate and consistent with municipal policies and priorities, consider **alternative funding approaches** such as (but not limited to) surcharges, fundraising, grants, sponsorships and naming rights, and various forms of collaboration to provide the best value to residents.
71. Explore the potential for **cost-sharing agreements with nearby municipalities** to support the development and/or improvement of facilities that serve a broader regional market.
72. Establish a **reserve fund for major recreation infrastructure projects** (e.g., community and aquatic centre, facility renewal, etc.) through the City's annual budget, with phased increases over time.

8.3 Timing and Priority of Recommendations

For ease of reference, all Master Plan recommendations are summarized in this section. Priority has been determined based on an assessment of need, as identified throughout the planning process (including public engagement, trend and demographic analysis, assessments of facilities, parks, services, etc.). Meeting the widest range of needs possible through the efficient use of resources is paramount.

Within the tables that follow, the priority and timing of recommendations are organized into the following categories, with key considerations and potential cost impacts identified for selected actions:

Priority

- **High:** Prompt attention is recommended during the recommended timeframe.
- **Medium:** Attention is required when high priority recommendations have been initiated or completed, or when suitable partners and/or funding have been identified.
- **Lower:** Attention is required when high and medium priority recommendations have been initiated or completed.

Timing (generally aligned with Council terms)

- **Short-term:** 2026 to 2030
- **Medium-term:** 2031 to 2036
- **Long-term:** 2037 and beyond
- **Ongoing:** Best practices to be followed on a continual basis

Potential Cost Impacts (all cost estimates to be confirmed through future study)

- **Minor ($):** estimated at $100,000 or less
- **Moderate ($$)**: estimated to be between $100,000 and $500,000
- **Major ($$$):** estimated at $500,000 or more

Table 14: Implementation Strategy

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
Indoor Recreation & Community Facilities (Section 5)			
1. Identify and **acquire land** for a multi-use community and aquatic centre. The selected site should align with the land requirements and criteria outlined in the Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study. Create a **financial plan** to support the development of a community and aquatic centre.	High	Short-term	$$$ (See Feasibility Study)
2. **Construct a community and aquatic centre** that should at minimum include a multi-tank 25-metre 8-lane pool and leisure pool to address the recreational needs of a growing population. The design and development of this facility should be guided by the considerations and concepts detailed in the Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study.	High	Short-term (financial plan) Long-term (facility development)	$
3. Continue to **partner with the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin** indoor aquatic centre to provide residents (non-members) with access to aquatic services at reduced rates until such time as a municipal pool is provided.	High	Ongoing	$
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. Facility design and development should be guided by the considerations and concepts detailed in the Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study.	High	Long-term	See recommendation #1
5. Explore opportunities to **partner with school boards** to maximize public access to gymnasiums at existing and future schools.	Medium	Short-term	--

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
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. Preliminary concepts, costing, and locations for a sports dome can be found in the Community & Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study.	High	Medium-term	$$$ (See Feasibility Study)
7. Create a plan for a **comprehensive renewal project** at Joe Thornton Community Centre. The plan should address facility upgrades and modernizations to improve functionality, efficiency, and accessibility priorities. Actively pursue grants and funding opportunities to support this project.	Medium	Medium-term	$$$
8. **Develop a twin-pad arena**, with timing influenced by capital funding, aligned projects, and demand trends. Space permitting, this arena should be located on the same site as the proposed community and aquatic centre.	Medium	Long-term	$$$
9. Evaluate the feasibility of operating a **second summer ice pad** at Joe Thornton Community Centre once the proposed community and aquatic centre is constructed and summer camp programming is relocated.	Lower	Long-term	--
10. **Optimize programming** of the City's multi-purpose spaces to meet short-term demand, such as using the Seniors' Centre outside of their programming hours and extending the staffing hours of Memorial Arena's meeting room and hall.	Medium	Short-term	--
11. Provide a minimum of **two to three (2-3) multi-purpose rooms** as part of the proposed community and aquatic centre.	High	Long-term	See recommendation #1
12. Accommodate **fitness activities** through the multi-purpose rooms in the proposed Community and Aquatic Centre. Consideration may be given to developing a **fitness centre** in the proposed community and aquatic facility – with a focus on affordable fitness opportunities - if partnered with other providers.	Medium	Long-term	See recommendation #1
13. Explore opportunities to add an **indoor walking track** to a future indoor community facility.	Lower	Long-term	See recommendation #1

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
14. Continue to pursue arts and cultural-related programs and activities in **partnership with community groups.**	Medium	Short-term	--
15. Seek opportunities to **expand municipal arts and cultural programming** in the proposed community and aquatic centre.	Medium	Long-term	--
Parkland (Section 6.1)			
16. Use the **parkland classification system** identified in the 2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan (regional parks, community parks, neighbourhood parks, sub-neighbourhood parks / parkettes) to guide the development or redevelopment of parks and open spaces according to type, size, service level, and the amenities that they provide. Integrate this classification system into the **Official Plan update** as appropriate.	Medium	Short-term	--
17. Strive to achieve a minimum parkland provision level of **1.8 hectares per 1,000 residents through new development (2026 to 2051)**. With a population of 79,500 by 2051, this translates in a need for a minimum of 55.6 hectares of additional parkland by 2051. Land may be secured to: a. meet localized needs and ensure accessibility to growing areas; b. address gaps in park distribution within established and intensifying areas through development of sub-neighbourhood parks or parkettes or enhancement of existing parks (e.g., Fairview Avenue and Elm Street area); and c. expand and/or build new regional and community parks where necessary to support growth-related recreational amenities.	High	Ongoing	To be determined through ongoing planning; additional funding may be required to support parkland acquisition.
18. Adopt a **"Parkland First" approach** that prioritizes parkland conveyance (new parks should generally be a minimum of 0.5 hectares) over cash-in-lieu of parkland in order to address future parkland requirements. The sale of existing parks or conversion to other uses is not recommended.	High	Ongoing	--

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
19. Develop a **Parkland Dedication By-law** to formalize the policies and procedures associated with parkland conveyance in the City, including provisions for the alternative parkland dedication rate. Furthermore, update the parkland dedication policies in the City's **Official Plan** to support this and the recommended "parkland-first" approach.	High	Short-term	--
20. In growing areas, support **front-end dedication of park blocks** and funding mechanisms to minimize the lag between subdivision development and park development. Employ a range of parkland acquisition tools where applicable.	Medium	Ongoing	--
21. Maintain a commitment to **universal accessibility, safety, and comfort** within the City's parks system through compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) – including consultation with the City's Accessibility Advisory Committee – and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. Emphasize the provision of amenities such as benches/seating areas, bike parking, shade (structures, tree canopy, etc.), and barrier-free washrooms in appropriate park types.	High	Ongoing	Site-specific
22. Using this Master Plan as a reference, create an updated **concept plan** to guide the long-term redevelopment of Joanne Brooks Memorial Park and initiate **site-specific planning exercises** for Orchard Park (phase 2), Applewood Park (phase 2), Railway City Skatepark (phase 2), and the Dalewood Water Reclamation Facility interim excess lands. Engage stakeholders and the public when designing new and redeveloped parks.	High	Short-term	$ (Concept plan)
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.	Medium	Ongoing	--

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
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. Potential goals may include improving connections and accessibility, enhancing activations and events, supporting local businesses, and creating greener, more inclusive spaces that strengthen the downtown's role as a vibrant, welcoming destination.	Lower	Medium-term	$
25. Establish a long-term capital plan to identify and prioritize **investment in the parks system – especially signature park sites** (e.g., Pinafore Park, Waterworks Park, 1Password Park, Douglas J. Tarry Sports Complex) – with a focus on addressing lifecycle renewal and strategic upgrades that enhance accessibility, functionality, and capacity.	Medium	Short-term	--
26. Develop a **long-term space accommodation plan for the parks maintenance team**, with consideration of service levels, staffing and resource requirements, and the feasibility of establishing an expanded works building at 1Password Park.	Medium	Short-term	$
Outdoor Recreation Facilities (Section 6.3 to 6.7)			
27. Explore opportunities to **add up to two (2) ball diamonds** to the Dalewood Water Reclamation Facility interim excess lands to address medium-term needs. The potential for adding lights to the diamonds may be explored further.	Medium	Medium-term	$$$
28. Improve the user experience and playability at existing ball diamond sites by **addressing accessibility and drainage** challenges and **adding lighting to at least one unlit diamond** to extend game play.	Medium	Medium-term	$$ (Site-specific)
29. Focus efforts on maximizing the use of existing soccer fields by continuing to work with partners such as the St. Thomas Soccer Club on **facility improvements** (e.g., lighting, irrigation, reconfiguration, etc.) and **adding lighting to at least one regulation field**.	Medium	Ongoing	$$ (Site-specific)

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
30. Provide **one (1) full-size regulation cricket field** by repurposing the two under-utilized soccer fields at Cowan Park. Further consultation with potential cricket user groups should be undertaken to identify detailed design needs and future provision strategies.	High	Short-term	$
31. Construct **four (4) public tennis courts** by 2036 within neighbourhood parks. These courts may be provided by building two (2) courts in Applewood Park and two (2) courts in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands. Joanne Brooks Park or Lions Park may also be options for court development beyond 2036.	Medium	Medium-term	$$
32. Construct **four (4) public pickleball courts** at Orchard Park by 2036. Joanne Brooks Park may also be an option for court development, beyond 2036.	High	Medium-term	$$
33. Proceed with plans to build **one (1) basketball court in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands** and one **(1) basketball court in Shaw Valley Park** to fill geographic coverage gaps. Other court developments may be considered on an as-needed basis.	High	Short-term	$$
34. When it is time to repaint the lines on existing basketball / multi-use courts, consider adding both ball hockey and basketball lines to **increase the number of multi-use courts** throughout the city.	Lower	Ongoing	$
35. Develop an **outdoor volleyball court complex** with six (6) courts at Pinafore Park.	High	Short-term	$
36. Continue to evaluate and support viable community proposals for operating unrefrigerated **outdoor natural ice rinks.**	Lower	Ongoing	To be determined
37. Re-engage with the community to assess demand for the planned **second phase of skate park development**. Expansion may focus on more challenging obstacles for advanced skaters and riders (e.g., bowl, etc.) and support amenities (e.g., washrooms, shade, etc.). The addition of bike pump track features may also appeal to bike users.	Medium	Medium-term	$$

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
38. Explore opportunities to **add skate spots** to neighbourhood parks in gap areas, such as the new park in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands and/or Orchard Park.	Lower	Ongoing	$
39. **Avoid major investments or upgrades (beyond maintenance) to Jaycees Pool** until the status and timeline for the proposed new indoor pool is established. Prior to opening a new indoor pool, **prepare a study to evaluate community demand for the existing outdoor pool**, along with the cost of maintaining and updating the Jaycees Pool. Any decision to decommission Jaycees Pool should be accompanied by the identification of alternate recreation uses for the site.	Medium	Medium-term	$ (Study)
40. Develop **one (1) splash pad** in Orchard Park before 2036 to enhance access in southeast St. Thomas.	High	Medium-term	$$
41. Continue to work with the local mountain biking community and Kettle Creek Conservation Authority to explore **opportunities to expand the mountain bike network**, including at the Dalewood Water Reclamation Facility.	Lower	Ongoing	$
42. Driven by community requests, the City should aim to develop **at least one (1) new community garden site**. Gardens may be operated by the City or with aligned community partners on municipal lands in alignment with the City's Community Garden Policy.	Medium	Medium-term	$
43. Proceed with plans to **install playground equipment in the Northwest Area 1 Expansion Lands** and evaluate other development applications to **ensure adequate coverage** across the City using an 800-metre radius in suburban areas and 500-metre radius in more urbanized growth areas.	High	Short-term	$$
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.	High	Ongoing	Site-specific

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
45. Continue to work in partnership with others to provide a **comprehensive trail network**, in alignment with the City's Transportation Master Plan. An emphasis should be placed on addressing connectivity gaps within and between trails, parks, open spaces, and community destinations. Objectives for creating a continuous trail network throughout the city, include: (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.	High	Ongoing	Site-specific
46. Develop a strategy to invest in upgrades and improvements in the City's existing **gazebos, pavilions, and event spaces**, particularly 1Password Park and Pinafore Park. This may include increasing electrical capacity, installing additional seating (temporary or fixed), upgrades to the dance pavilion and bandshell in Pinafore Park, etc.	Medium	Short-term	To be determined
47. Evaluate **unsolicited requests for facilities** that are not part of the City's core mandate. Proponent-led business plans should be developed to determine demand, alignment with Master Plan goals, the net benefit to the City of St. Thomas, and the degree of municipal involvement (if any).	Lower	Ongoing	--
Service Delivery & Programming (Section 7)			
48. Align service delivery priorities and decision-making with the **vision and guiding principles** of this Master Plan.	High	Ongoing	--
49. Continue to work with the community to maximize participation and use of existing parks and facilities through **affordable recreation programming** for children, youth, and older adults.	High	Ongoing	--
50. Develop an **Inclusive Program Design Framework** that identifies multiple pathways to support participation from people of all abilities in City programming.	High	Short-term	--
51. **Review program provision annually** to ensure that priority age groups are receiving an appropriate range of opportunities and to consider new program offerings.	High	Ongoing	--

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
52. Continue to work with partners to support expanded **year-round park use, outdoor education, and programming** through community development activities, special event coordination, and stewardship initiatives.	Medium	Ongoing	--
53. Identify and track **key performance indicators and targets** that illustrate the value of parks and recreation services, such as (but not limited to) participation data from programs and satisfaction levels for activities offered and enabled by the City.	Medium	Ongoing	--
54. Prior to opening a new community centre, prepare a **Programming Strategy** to establish program priorities, identify ways to engage under-represented groups, define the role of partners, and inform staffing and budget needs.	High	Medium-term	--
55. Complete the review and update of recreation facility **allocation policies and processes** (e.g., arenas, gymnasium spaces, etc.) with the goals of improving fairness, transparency, and community access. Involve affected organizations in the review of these policies to ensure that they reflect standards of play, gender equity requirements, access for priority populations, and implementation practices (e.g., annual scheduling meetings).	High	Short-term	--
56. Consider preparing an **Affiliation Policy** to establish a framework for how the City will recognize, support, and allocate resources to community groups. This includes establishing responsibilities for user groups, including the annual submission of participation data (age, gender, residency, etc.) to support trend tracking and allocation.	Medium	Short-term	--

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
57. Review the City's parks and recreation **user fees and rental rates** every three years with the goal of recovering an appropriate portion of costs, while ensuring that recreation programs and facilities remain affordable and inclusive. Considerations for the next review may include: a. Applying inflationary rates and producing multi-year schedules that provide user groups with longer-term cost certainty. b. The potential to offer last minute facility rentals and/or online payment. c. Instituting a surcharge and/or blackout registration period on programs and/or rentals for non-residents (note: this may be administered through the recommended affiliation policy).	High	Ongoing	--
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 in community programs and using municipal facilities.	High	Long-term	--
59. Review and document **Departmental maintenance and service levels** to support a sustained and strategic approach to identifying staffing requirements. Additional staff resources will be required as the City's parks, facilities, programs, and services are expanded (e.g., Customer Service Representatives, labourers, program instructors).	Medium	Short-term	--
60. Create a **Community Development Coordinator** position within the Parks and Recreation Department to address emerging needs such as community outreach, special projects, grant writing, policy development, sponsorships, etc.	High	Short-term	$
61. Continue to actively **support volunteers and volunteer-led community organizations** in the development and delivery of parks and recreation programs and services. Seek to **expand youth leadership programming** to help build future capacity.	High	Ongoing	--
62. Regularly review **public communication and marketing strategies** to guide the use of various digital and print tools in promoting and gathering feedback on parks and recreation services and initiatives.	Medium	Ongoing	--

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
63. Convene bi-annual **information-sharing forums** involving Council, City staff, and the community on parks and recreation topics, such as capital projects, policy development, maintenance practices, activity and sport trends, Master Plan implementation, and more.	High	Ongoing	--
64. Continue to seek opportunities to collaborate with **non-municipal parks, recreation and culture providers** on initiatives that maximize community access and benefit. Regularly review **partnership agreements** to ensure an appropriate and sustainable distribution of operational and financial responsibilities.	Medium	Ongoing	--
Implementation (Section 8)			
65. Enhance **community awareness** of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan by publishing the report on the City's website and reporting annually on key accomplishments and short-term priorities. Regularly seek feedback from the community and aligned bodies, such as the Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee.	High	Ongoing	--
66. Develop **annual work plans** to guide strategic implementation of the Master Plan, to feed into the yearly budget process and long-range capital plans.	High	Ongoing	--
67. Develop and implement a system for **regular monitoring and reporting** on the progress of the Master Plan, such as the collection of participation/registration data and annual reports to Council and/or the community.	Medium	Ongoing	--
68. Undertake a **full update of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan** in five to ten years (2030-2035). Timing may be influenced by the pace of implementation and changes within the community.	High	Medium-term	--
69. Use this **Master Plan as a resource** in developing the City's annual budget documents, Development Charges studies, growth plans, and related studies.	High	Ongoing	--

Recommendations	Priority	Timing	Costs/Notes
70. Where appropriate and consistent with municipal policies and priorities, consider **alternative funding approaches** such as (but not limited to) surcharges, fundraising, grants, sponsorships and naming rights, and various forms of collaboration to provide the best value to residents.	High	Ongoing	--
71. Explore the potential for **cost-sharing agreements with nearby municipalities** to support the development and/or improvement of facilities that serve a broader regional market.	High	Ongoing	--
72. Establish a **reserve fund for major recreation infrastructure projects** (e.g., community and aquatic centre, facility renewal, etc.) through the City's annual budget, with phased increases over time.	High	Ongoing	--

Appendix A. Status Update of Recommendations from the 2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
1. Begin more formal and joint discussions with **non-municipal parks, recreation and culture providers** (e.g., YMCA, Talbot Teen Centre, Seniors' Centre, Public Arts Centre, schools, etc.) in St. Thomas to reduce duplication, share resources and jointly focus on key community priorities.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
2. Increase the frequency, intensity and duration of **physical activity** within all age groups through education, engagement and working with other community partners.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
3. Review **program provision** annually to ensure that all age groups (e.g., seniors, youth, families) are receiving a wide range of opportunities and that registration and participation are maximized.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
4. Promote **free and low-cost activity options** to ensure universal access across the community.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
5. Support the recommendations of Southwestern Public Health's Access to Affordable Recreation Report. Begin with establishing an **Access to Affordable Recreation policy** in concert with community partners to demonstrate the belief that access to affordable recreation will assist in reducing poverty and increasing beneficial outcomes.	High	●	●		Incomplete
6. Work with all youth service providers in St. Thomas to ensure that the **Playworks Youth Friendly Criteria** are being met.	High	●	●		Incomplete
7. Consider development and implementation of **youth leadership programs** in St. Thomas.	High	●	●		Ongoing

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
8. Work with the Seniors Recreation Centre Board and other like partners to enhance **recreation program opportunities for older adults** across the City and integrate age-specific programs and services into future indoor recreation development.	High	●	●		Ongoing
9. Develop a **communication plan** and specific initiatives to increase access to nature and the outdoors in concert with all interested partners in St. Thomas.	Medium	●	●		Ongoing
10. Develop training opportunities, policies and intentional practices as outlined to better include residents who may be **marginalized** (including, but not limited to, residents from low income backgrounds, residents with disabilities and females).	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
11. Review and summarize the **staffing and resourcing requirements** needed to implement the recommendations housed in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, currently and in the future.	High	●			Ongoing
12. Establish a process to confirm the **levels of service and staffing** for parks, recreation and cultural services. Based on these levels, determine work effort and required full-time equivalents for Council consideration.	Medium	●	●		Ongoing
13. Work with adjacent municipalities to discuss a **reciprocal and / or cost-sharing arrangement** for use of parks, recreation and culture services and facilities in St. Thomas. This may take the form of a fiscal contribution from participating municipalities to offset the net expenditures for provision in St. Thomas.	High	●	●		Incomplete
14. Develop a **Pricing and User Fee Policy** based on the true cost to deliver parks, recreation and cultural services and programs. Set realistic recovery rates when considering revenue generating opportunities. Consideration should be given to utilizing external services to assist with this work.	High	●	●		Ongoing

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
15. Develop and apply a **health equity lens** when planning for and providing parks, recreation and cultural services. Work with local agencies such as Southwestern Public Health and Active Elgin to better understand participation and interest in municipal program offerings.	High	●	●		Ongoing
16. Review the City's existing **sponsorship agreements** and develop a full list of sponsorship and partnership opportunities available. Once complete, begin to proactively seek partners and funders.	Medium	●	●		Ongoing
17. Revisit the City of St. Thomas' **response time standards** for public complaints based on the severity of the complaint and the impact on other work requirements.	High	●			Complete
18. Implement **Quality Assurance Frameworks** for all municipal parks, recreation and cultural programs and services (e.g., Aquatic Safety Management Accreditation, etc.).	High	●	●		Ongoing
19. Review all **allocation policies and processes** to ensure that they are mindful of national and provincial sport association guidelines, trends in sports and gender equity (at a minimum).	Medium	●	●		Ongoing
20. Adopt the **Organizational Effectiveness Framework** (as presented within this Master Plan) for full staff engagement and accountability in the delivery of service.	High	●	●	●	Incomplete
21. Review the **training and development requirements** needed to fully implement the Parks and Recreation Master Plan recommendations.	High	●			Incomplete
22. **Measure performance** and report to the public annually on the results of parks, recreation and cultural service delivery in St. Thomas.	High	●	●	●	Incomplete

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
23. Consider the merits of convening regular **information-sharing forums** involving Council, City staff and the community. Discussions should focus on gathering information and ideas on challenging subjects or specific topics that would benefit from public discourse, such as capital projects, trend-watching, communications and more.	Medium	●	●		Ongoing
24. Continue to explore ways to increase the **online presence** of parks, recreation and culture services. Use the City's website, online calendar and social media accounts to disseminate pertinent information (e.g., service interruptions, registration dates, employment opportunities) and enable service providers to promote local activities and events.	Medium	●	●		Ongoing
25. Continue to **consult with stakeholder organizations** to discuss **ball diamond** allocation, participation / registration, site maintenance, etc.	Medium	●	●	●	Ongoing
26. Improve **user experience** and **playability** at existing **ball diamond** sites (e.g., install lights at Burwell Park, address parking issues at Douglas J. Tarry Sports Complex, etc.).	High	●			Ongoing
27. Consider development of **1.5 additional ball diamonds (ULE)** over the long term (once existing diamonds reach a minimum of 90% capacity). This may be achieved by improving existing sites (e.g., installing lights), aligning diamond design with intended use, re-purposing existing open space sites and / or future parkland acquisition.	Low			●	Ongoing
28. Focus efforts on maximizing use of **soccer fields** at the three core parks (1Password Park, Athletic Park and Cowan Park) and consider repurposing under-utilized stand-alone soccer fields to other in-demand uses, such as those at the Douglas J. Tarry Sports Complex and Optimist Park. No additional soccer or multi-use fields are recommended during the planning period.	Medium	●	●		Ongoing

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
29. Proceed with park development and installation of **playground equipment** in Shaw Valley Park, Parish Park and Orchard Park in the short-term. Park designs should offer unique play experiences for each neighbourhood, particularly considering the relatively close proximity of all three newly-developed neighbourhood parks.	High	●			Complete
30. Plan for installation of **playground equipment** within a future park within the **"Area 1" expansion lands** in the medium-to long-term.	High		●	●	Ongoing
31. Consider opportunities to address the **playground gap** near **Elm Street and Fairview Avenue** through redevelopment or intensification in the area.	Medium	●	●	●	Incomplete
32. Seek opportunities to increase use of existing **outdoor fitness** components through guided programs or community events that encourage active participation in outdoor physical activity. Additional outdoor fitness equipment is not recommended at this time.	High	●			Incomplete
33. Develop four (4) additional **pickleball courts** (short-to-medium term) and one (1) additional **tennis court** (long-term). Development should be designed in multiple court complexes (and / or multi-sport designs), preferably in the north end of the City.	Medium	● (pickleball)	● (pickleball)	● (tennis)	Ongoing
34. Develop a **single basketball / multi-use court** at one of the new park developments in the south end of St. Thomas (e.g., Orchard Park, Parish Park or Shaw Valley Park) and through future park development within the "Area 1" expansion lands to improve accessibility.	High	● South end		● Area 1	Ongoing
35. Continue to support proposals from service clubs or community volunteer groups wishing to assist with fundraising, maintenance, programming and monitoring of **outdoor natural ice rinks**. The viability of establishing a municipal artificial rink / trail may be evaluated through a business plan in the longer-term.	Low	●	●	● business plan	Ongoing

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
36. Proceed with the second phase of **skatepark** development (as was planned during the initial build) in the medium-to-long term. Expansion should focus on more challenging obstacles for advanced skaters and riders (e.g., bowl, etc.) and support amenities (e.g., shade, etc.).	Medium		●	●	Ongoing
37. Seek opportunities to improve the **user experience** (e.g., installation of pavilion, appropriate water features, seating area and resurfaced parking lot) and **maximize use** (e.g., special events, theme days, free swims, promotion, etc.) of **Jaycees Pool**.	High	●	●		Ongoing
38. Install one additional **splash pad** site in southeast St. Thomas to enhance geographic distribution throughout the municipality and address community demand. Potential sites for a splash pad may include: Parish Park or Orchard Park. Further consultation with staff and investigation into development costs and design capabilities (e.g., shade, parking, etc.) is required to inform this decision.	High	●	●		Complete
39. In lieu of developing additional **dog parks**, continue to work with stewardship groups to improve year-round maintenance and signage at the Lions Club Dog Park to support safe access and use by area residents.	Medium	●	●	●	Complete
40. Continue to work with local cycling community and Conservation Authority to select an appropriate location and management model for development of an **off-road mountain biking course**, possibly within the undeveloped portion of Waterworks Park and / or adjacent conservation authority lands. Trail development would be the responsibility of the sponsoring organization, under agreement with the City.	Medium	●	●		Complete
41. Continue to work in partnership with others to provide a **comprehensive trails network**. The City should further enhance the existing trails network by placing emphasis on connectivity within and between trails (i.e., addressing gaps), parks, open spaces, and local and regional destinations.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
42. Develop a strategy to invest in upgrades and improvements in the City's existing **gazebos and pavilions**. This may include increasing electrical capacity, installing additional seating (temporary or fixed), upgrades to the dance pavilion and bandshell in Pinafore Park, etc.	Medium	●			Ongoing
43. Continue to encourage establishment of **community gardens** in new developments and work with partners to evaluate opportunities to establish additional garden plots on municipal lands, where appropriate.	Medium	●	●	●	Ongoing
44. An additional **ice pad** in St. Thomas is <u>not</u> recommended at this time. To ensure supply and demand are in equilibrium, the City should remain apprised of the regional usage and supply as populations and participation rates evolve over time.	Low	●	●	●	Ongoing
45. Continue to seek opportunities to improve **user experience, functionality and equitable access** at existing **indoor ice facilities**.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
46. In the short-term, prepare a feasibility study and site selection to assess options and viability of a **multi-use recreation facility** containing flexible spaces capable of supporting multiple sports and activities (e.g., gymnasium, meeting rooms / multi-use spaces, etc.).	High	●			Ongoing
47. Discuss partnership opportunities with the Family YMCA and adjacent municipalities to maximize long-term public access to **indoor aquatic facilities**. This may involve an agreement for enhanced access to the existing YMCA pool or a partnership involving the development of a multi-tank replacement facility, possibly in connection with a future multi-use recreation facility.	Medium	●	●	●	Ongoing
48. Work with local soccer organizations to monitor demand for an **indoor artificial turf facility**. Should an external group approach with a proposal for an indoor soccer facility, a feasibility study may be prepared to examine development options (e.g., seasonal dome and / or year-round venue), costs, as well as operating and funding models.	Low	●	●	●	Ongoing

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
49. Evaluate **unsolicited requests for facilities** that are not part of the City's core mandate. Proponent-led business plans should be developed to determine demand, alignment with Master Plan goals, the net benefit to the City of St. Thomas, and the degree of municipal involvement (if any).	Low	●	●	●	Ongoing
50. Undertake a review and update of the **St. Thomas Cultural Map** with the goal of leveraging opportunities for a renewed map interface using new technologies. Work with **Railway City Tourism** to review and update the map every two years at a minimum.	High	●			Incomplete
51. Review opportunities for **repurposing surplus municipal buildings** for arts / cultural uses prior to disposal.	Medium	●	●	●	Ongoing
52. Review and update the **Public Art Committee mandate** to expand the scope of Committee responsibilities to include greater interaction and coordination with arts and culture service providers.	High	●			Complete
53. Establish a more formal relationship with the **St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre**. Partnership terms should outline requirements for annual reporting, performance measures, program planning, etc. Evaluate options for providing annual **stable funding** to the Public Art Centre.	Medium	●	●		Incomplete
54. Develop an **integrated marketing and promotion plan** to help boost interest and participation in local arts and cultural offerings. This should include hard copy, digital and word-of-mouth promotion of local opportunities.	Medium		●		Ongoing
55. Continue to pursue **arts and cultural-related programs** and activities that leverage municipal and community resources in a coordinated manner.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
56. Work with community partners toward the development of a **dedicated festival / event site** in St. Thomas, possibly on the **railway lands** (pending the satisfactory resolution of environmental concerns and a viable cost-sharing and site operational agreement). A **Site Master Plan** endorsed by the City may be prepared to confirm the project vision, program, costs and phased development plan (See also – recommendation in Section 7).	High		●	●	Incomplete
57. Maintain a minimum **parkland provision level of 4.0 hectares per 1,000**. Additional parkland may be secured to: a) meet growth-related needs and ensure accessibility to growing areas (including neighbourhood parks in the Area 1 settlement area expansion); b) address gaps in park distribution within established and intensifying areas through development of sub-neighbourhood parks or parkettes or enhancement of existing parks (e.g., Fairview Avenue and Elm Street area; northside of Downtown, near Jaycees Pool); c) establish linear/trail connections vital to creating a comprehensive active transportation network; and/or d) expand regional and community parks where necessary to install additional recreational amenities, based on demonstrated needs.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
58. Update the **parkland policies** within the City's Official Plan to reflect the changes imposed by **Bill 108 and this Master Plan** (e.g., parkland classification). Seek to **maximize parkland dedication and cash-in-lieu** for residential development and redevelopment through a Community Benefits Charge strategy (Bill 108) and the provisions of the City's Official Plan and Ontario's Planning Act.	High	●			Ongoing
59. In areas where the supply of parkland is adequate, prioritize the use of **cash-in-lieu for parkland improvements**, preferably in the vicinity of the development that generated the contribution. Develop a **cash-in-lieu policy** to direct the collection and use of parkland reserves (Section 42 of the Planning Act).	High	●			Ongoing

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
60. In growing areas, support **front-end dedication** of park blocks and funding mechanisms to minimize the lag between subdivision development and park development. Employ alternative parkland acquisition tools where applicable.	Medium	●	●	●	Ongoing
61. Establish **criteria and a process** for identifying, evaluating and disposing **surplus park properties** that are no longer required to meet current or long-term community needs. Redirect proceeds and operational savings from the sale or disposition of parkland to other high priority projects within the parks system.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
62. Undertake **park condition assessments** on a regular basis to inform the City's asset management plan and long-term capital plan. Identify and plan for park renewal and redevelopment projects that address aging infrastructure and capital improvements.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
63. Maintain a commitment to **universal accessibility, safety, and comfort** within the City's parks system through compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) – including consultation with the City's Accessibility Advisory Committee – and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. It is acknowledged that some parks may include areas of natural terrain that are more difficult to access.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
64. Emphasize the provision of **age-friendly amenities** such as washrooms, shade (e.g., tree planting in new parks, shade structures, etc.), benches/seating areas, pathways and bike racks in appropriate park types and along trails.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
65. Provide an appropriate balance of **active and passive spaces** within the parks system that can support recreation and sports, casual use, special events and cultural activities. Flexible park designs should be encouraged.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
66. Identify a long-term plan to renew and improve **neighbourhood parks**, including (but not limited to) Applewood, Greenway, Kin, Homedale and Optimist Parks. Engage stakeholders and the public when designing new and redeveloped parks.	Medium	●	●		Ongoing
67. Undertake a review of **signage for parks and trails** to ensure consistency with City branding, design guidelines and regulatory requirements.	Medium	●			Ongoing
68. Seek opportunities for **expanded park programming, 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.	Medium	●	●	●	Ongoing
69. Seek partnerships to facilitate the provision of **Wi-Fi** at key park sites.	Medium	●			Ongoing
70. Develop long-term strategies for the development and / or improvement of **Joanne Brooks Memorial Park and the CASO railway lands**, including potential funding sources and partnerships.	High		●	●	Ongoing
71. Post the Master Plan on the **City's website** as a resource for the community, Council and staff.	High	●	●	●	Complete
72. Develop **annual work plans** to guide strategic implementation of the Master Plan, with key priorities identified on a year-to-year basis.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
73. Develop and implement a system for **regular monitoring and reporting** on the progress of the Master Plan, such as the collection of participation/registration data and annual reports to Council and/or the community.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
74. Conduct **feasibility studies and business plans** (with input from the public) prior to developing or expanding major park sites and recreation facilities to ensure that projects are aligned with community needs, partnership opportunities and financial capacities.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing

Recommendations	Priority	2020 - 2022	2023 - 2026	2027+	Current Status (2025)
75. Undertake a **full update of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan** in five to ten years (2024-2029).	High		●	●	Ongoing
76. Where appropriate and consistent with municipal policies and priorities, consider **alternative funding and cost-sharing approaches** such as (but not limited to) surcharges, fundraising, grants, sponsorships and naming rights, parkland cash-in-lieu (CIL) reserves, and various forms of collaboration to provide the best value to residents.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
77. Assess operating **budget implications and partnership options** prior to approving major capital projects.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing
78. Continue to contribute toward **annual lifecycle reserves** to offset the repair and replacement costs associated with parks, recreation and cultural infrastructure. Annual funding amounts should be increased over time to achieve fully funded status.	High	●	●	●	Incomplete
79. Use this **Master Plan as a resource** in developing the City's annual budget documents, Development Charges and Community Benefits Charges studies, secondary plans and related studies.	High	●	●	●	Ongoing

February 2026

Appendix B. Policy Context and Supporting Documents

The following documents provide a foundation and context for this Master Plan Update.

General Guiding Plans, Policies, and Studies	- Brighter Future Strategic Plan (2024 – 2027) - Accessibility Plan (2024) - Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2021) - Elgin St. Thomas Age Friendly Community Plan (2017) - St. Thomas City-Wide Urban Design Guidelines (DRAFT March 2024)
Growth-Related Plans	- Official Plan and OPA 90 (2018)
Aligned Partners	- Public Library Master Plan (2022 – 2025) - Public Library Strategic Plan (2023 – 2027)
Trails and Active Transportation	- Cycling and Trails Master Plan (2020) - Recreational Trail Lighting Policy (2021) - Transportation Master Plan Refresh (ongoing)
Assets, Budgets, Funding, and Infrastructure Gaps	- Approved Capital and Operating Budgets (2024) - Asset Management State of Infrastructure (2024) - Development Charges Background Study and Addenda (2020)

General Guiding, Plans, Policies, and Studies

Brighter Future Strategic Plan (2024 – 2027)

In 2024, St. Thomas City Council approved a new Strategic Plan to serve as a framework to guide Council and staff in decision making processes and resource allocation. City service areas will translate the priorities and objectives of this plan into specific action plans, tasks, timelines, responsibilities, and budgets. The City will develop a scorecard to track the Plan's performance and will share these findings with residents.

Vision Statement

"Building a brighter future where everyone belongs and has opportunities to thrive."

Mission Statement

"We provide high-quality public services, stimulate sustainable development and economic growth, preserve and protect our environment, and cultivate a safe, accessible and inclusive City for everyone."

Guiding Values

- **Trust and Accountability**: We demonstrate reliability, follow-through, and transparency to earn the trust and respect of the people we serve and work with.
- **Inclusivity and Respect**: We value, respect, and include the unique needs, voices, backgrounds, and contributions of the people we serve and work with.
- **Collaboration and Teamwork:** We are at our best when we actively collaborate and engage with one another, those we serve, and our community, regional, and government partners. We lead or co-develop decisions and plans that are purposeful, action oriented, and focused on meeting the diverse needs of our communities.
- **Learning and Innovation**: We intentionally create time for learning, critical thinking, innovation, and developing our capacity to deliver excellence.
- **Safety and Well-being:** We provide a safe and secure work environment for all and foster a culture that nurtures the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of our staff and communities.

Strategic Pillar #1: We Deliver 'Excellence in All We Do'

To achieve Strategic Pillar #1, the City identified 6 priority areas to focus on. Only the priority areas and their corresponding objectives and outcomes that are relevant for the Master Plan are included in the following table.

Table 15. St. Thomas Strategic Pillar #1 Priority Areas

Priority	Objectives	Outcomes
#1: Public Safety and Community Well-being	• Support wellness and active living by providing safe and clean parks, connected trails, green spaces, playgrounds, sports fields, and recreational and cultural programs and amenities. • Create and implement strategies to address the well-being, education, employment, and engagement needs of St. Thomas' youth. • Accelerate implementation of the Elgin St. Thomas Age Friendly Community Plan and the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan.	• Residents, business owners, and visitors feel safe in St. Thomas. • Residents have access to the services and resources they need to improve their quality of life and well-being. • Residents actively engage in community events, programs, and activities.
#2: Thoughtful, Strategic, and Sustainable Community Growth	• Maintain, renew, replace, and expand the city's infrastructure assets to strengthen St. Thomas, enhance resident safety, security, and accessibility, and provide	• City of St. Thomas is a well-planned, integrated, and vibrant city, ready to embrace growth. • City of St. Thomas is a safe, secure, and welcoming city for everyone.

Priority	Objectives	Outcomes
	essential services to support growth. • Ensure city policies enable thoughtful, age-friendly, sustainable, and environmentally responsible growth and development. • Develop a Mobility Plan, including transit and a network of trails, paths and parks to support people of all ages and abilities to move safely and efficiently across St. Thomas and between neighbouring areas.	• Residents are satisfied with the accessibility, quality, and efficiency of the city's mobility options
#3: Thriving Economic Development	• Continue to invest in new city attractions that respond to and meet the cultural, artistic, and recreational needs of the community and promote tourism opportunities.	• Residents feel St. Thomas is a great city to raise families, build careers, and age through life's stages.
#4: Equitable, Accessible, and Inclusive Communities	• Develop and deliver city services, programs, and infrastructure that are accessible, diverse, and comprehensive, meeting the needs of residents of all ages, abilities, cultures, and identities. • Ensure that the city fully complies with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.	• Residents have equitable access to the resources and public services they need. • Equity-deserving groups and newcomers / immigrants feel that St. Thomas welcomes and values diverse perspectives, experiences, identities, and contributions. • Services are delivered in ways that meet the needs of all residents, including those with disabilities or special requirements.
#6: Environmental Stewardship	• Preserve, protect, and expand the city's urban forest, green spaces, naturalization initiatives, and biodiversity on both rural and urban lands.	• The city's residents, communities, infrastructure, ecosystems and natural spaces are preserved, protected, and cared for. • St. Thomas demonstrates progress towards becoming a net zero community by 2050.

Strategic Pillar #2: We are a 'Prepared and Resilient City'

To achieve Strategic Pillar #2, the City identified 5 priority areas to focus on. Only the priority areas and their corresponding objectives and outcomes, that are relevant for the Master Plan are included in the following table.

Table 16. St. Thomas Strategic Pillar #2 Priority Areas

Priority	Objectives	Outcomes
#1: Effective Governance	• Foster transparent, accessible, and responsible two-way communication, information sharing, and performance reporting with the public. • Encourage and actively engage citizens in dialogue and decision-making forums.	• Residents are satisfied with the level of engagement and communication with the City of St. Thomas and its officials. • Diverse and inclusive representation is present in city decision-making bodies, including Council, advisory boards, and committees.
#3: Fiscal Accountability and Continuous Improvement	• Lead and manage efficient budgeting processes that support strategic, multi-year decision-making in alignment with the city's strategic plan, priorities, and goals. • Invest prudently in funding infrastructure, service, and programming renewal, growth, and long-term sustainability. • Efficiently manage the city's assets and risk management, focusing on maximizing asset value.	• Financial resources are used responsibly and allocated to the city's strategic priorities. • Residents and businesses are satisfied with the services and value they receive from city taxes, rates, and user fees.
#4: Progressive Technology and Data	• Explore and integrate progressive digital and technological solutions to enhance and revitalize city services, infrastructure management, emergency response, public safety, and citizen communication and engagement.	• The city achieves improvements in process and workflow efficiency, service delivery, and resource management.
#5: Reciprocal Partnerships	• Enhance local and regional collaboration with healthcare, education, social services, and other community partners to advance joint planning, service delivery, collective advocacy, and issue response.	• The city's collective capacity to effectively meet the needs of residents and businesses and address critical challenges and opportunities increases.

Accessibility Plan (2024)

The 2024 Accessibility Plan contains a review of the accessibility initiatives undertaken by the City of St. Thomas in 2023, a summary of barrier prevention measures that the City currently has in place, and a description of the strategic action planned for 2024. Several of the legislative requirements and strategic actions in this Plan directly relate to parks and recreation services and facilities.

Many identified parks and recreation accessibility actions have been completed. Ongoing actions for accessibility issues that may require further analysis in the Master Plan are included below:

- City Wide Recreational Trails: Installation of memorial benches for rest areas along trails (ongoing).

Some minor accessibility issues at the Doug Tarry Sports Complex are also listed as ongoing.

Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2021)

The Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan is a roadmap for how partners across different sectors can work to make the community a safer, more inclusive place for all residents over the coming years. This plan represents a shift from a reactive approach to safety incidents to a more proactive and holistic approach to community safety and well-being. The CSWB Plan aims to ensure community members are safe, have a sense of belonging, have opportunities to participate, and can meet their needs for education, health care, food, housing, income, and social and cultural expression. The overarching goals of the CSWB Plan can be used to ensure the Master Plan contributes to creating safe and inclusive communities.

Elgin St. Thomas Age Friendly Community Plan (2017)

In 2017, the Elgin St. Thomas Public Health Unit and its partners developed an Age-Friendly Community (AFC) Plan. An AFC is one where policies, services, and structures related to the physical and social environments support and enables older people to live in a secure environment, enjoy good health, and continue to participate fully in their communities. Implementation will be linked to the City's existing plans, such as the Official Plan and Strategic Plan. Although some of the objectives and goals of this plan have already been achieved, many efforts are ongoing as Elgin St. Thomas' population continues to age.

The AFC Plan identified the following recreation needs, which are relevant to the Master Plan:

- Transportation to venues
- More seniors' groups and clubs in rural areas
- More recreation facilities
- Cost relief/subsidies for events and facilities
- More trails and paths

The AFC Plan identified the following recreation, transportation, and community life goals and objectives, which are relevant to the Master Plan:

- Expand access to existing recreational facilities for families and seniors tailored to ability and age.
- Increase recreational activities and social outlets in rural areas.
- Increase the engagement of seniors in all aspects of community life.
- Improve accessibility to buildings and outdoor space.
- Design and build seniors hubs with access to shopping, recreation, entertainment, services and information.
- Pursue intergenerational programming.
- Develop a county-wide trail strategy with the leadership of the Healthy Communities Partnership to increase walkability and bikeability.

St. Thomas City-Wide Urban Design Guidelines – (DRAFT March 2024)

The purpose of the St. Thomas City-Wide UDG is to provide a city-wide design strategy and vision for future growth and changes in the urban environment that support sustainable development, streetscapes, parks and open spaces, and connections that enable healthy, accessible, and equitable communities. The UDG will be a user-friendly document for the development community, stakeholders, and the public, and be used as a decision-making tool for municipal staff. The guidelines from *3.3 Parks and Open Spaces Design Guidelines* and *3.4 Public Art* in the UDG draft have relevance to the Master Plan.

The *Parks and Open Spaces Design Guidelines* generally recommend:

- Safe, secure, accessible, high-quality and inclusive public parks
- Barrier-free programmable space for both passive and active recreation
- Connectivity to trails, cycling routes, sidewalks, and roads
- Facilities that encourage alternative modes of transport (e.g., bicycle storage)
- High-quality and readily available amenities in all park places (e.g., washrooms, tables, seating, water fountains, waste receptacles)

The *Public Art* guidelines recommend:

- Placing public art near-community-oriented spaces, such as parks, open spaces, public squares, plazas, and gateways, to maximize visibility.
- Including opportunities for public art in new park spaces.

Growth-Related Plans and Studies

Official Plan and OPA 90 (2018)

The Official Plan provides guidance and direction for growth and development in St. Thomas. An Official Plan Review has recently been launched to reflect the City's updated growth management strategy. As the update is not yet available, this Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update is based off of the information in the current Official Plan and Official Plan Amendment 90 (2018).

The Official Plan has outlined the following as goals for parks and recreation facilities in St. Thomas:

i. to provide recreational opportunities for all residents in St. Thomas through the provision of both active and passive parkland and indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities;
ii. to blend parkland and recreation facilities in a manner consistent with the natural environment;
iii. to provide municipal programs for the effective utilization of park and recreation facilities; and
iv. to achieve the coordinated use of all public facilities that can be used for recreational purposes.

The Official Plan identifies a parkland classification system, although amendments to this were proposed through the 2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

The Official Plan is also relevant to this Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update as it sets out policies for securing and developing parkland. There have been several changes to Planning Act that have affected parkland supplies in recent times. These changes have resulted in reduced amounts of land and/or funding available for parkland dedication, leading to a decline in parkland provision levels across the province. Presently, the St. Thomas Official Plan allows the City to require the conveyance of up to 5% of land proposed for residential development or redevelopment (or up to 1 hectare per 300 units – referred to as the alternative rate). Alternatively, the City may accept cash-in-lieu of the conveyance or a combination of the two approaches. Several changes have been made to these allowances in the Planning Act since the current Official Plan was approved; updates to these policies will be required through the Official Plan Update. The City may also consider establishing a parkland dedication by-law to address land conveyance through Section 42 of the Planning Act, which will be most relevant to infill situations on serviced lots.

Aligned Partners

Public Library Master Plan (2022 – 2025)

TCI Management Consultants were retained to undertake the development of a Master Plan for St. Thomas Public Library (STPL). The purpose of this work was to develop a Master Plan that would guide the operations of the public library over the next decade. STPL is currently reviewing the capital recommendations of this study in light of new population forecasts, which may result in updated facility development strategies.

The following are capital-related recommendations from the 2022 Library Master Plan, which may be relevant when considering new community facilities in St. Thomas:

- Optimize the utilization of the existing facility, located in downtown St. Thomas at 153 Curtis Street (Timeline: 2022 – 2027+).
- Begin planning for a new library branch (Timeline: 2024 – 2027+). St. Thomas is growing, and not all residents want to drive downtown to use the existing library facility. A smaller community branch of 15,000 – 20,000 sq ft is recommended in the north or south end of St. Thomas.
- Explore co-location of a library branch with another community facility (Timeline: 2024-2027+). The City is currently exploring the addition of an aquatic/community centre which may present an opportunity for a new library facility as part of the complex. If possible, this would be cost efficient from an operating cost perspective.
- Prior to establishing a new branch, alternative service delivery options should be employed (Timeline: 2022 – 2026).

The St. Thomas Public Library is in the process of updating the facility needs assessment component of this Master Plan, which will inform the City's Aquatic/Community Centre Feasibility Study.

Public Library Strategic Plan (2023 – 2027)

The Public Library Strategic Plan provides a high-level overview of the library's goals and objectives for 2023 to 2027. Key goals and objectives that have relevance to the Master Plan include:

- Keep changing and growing to meet the community's needs
- Make the library a fun and active place that is flexible in design
- Find ways to bring the library to you, no matter where you are

Trails and Active Transportation

Cycling and Trails Master Plan Map (2020)

Built off the recommendations from the Elgin-St. Thomas Cycling Master Plan (2014) and Elgin County Trails Study (2018), the Cycling and Trails Master Plan (2020) is a map of existing and future trails, cycling lanes, and signed routes. This resource can support the Parks and Recreation Master Plan by ensuring new proposed facility sites are well connected to existing and future cycling and trail infrastructure.

Recreational Trail Lighting Policy (2021)

The Recreational Trail Lighting Policy Statement states the City of St. Thomas will light recreational trail systems where community and program needs require trail usage in the evening and trail users can be assured of a reasonable expectation of safety. The purpose of this recreational trail lighting policy is to reduce the risks associated with evening trail use. Trail lighting is not intended to provide a safer alternative to evening routes, such as roads and sidewalks.

Transportation Master Plan Refresh (ongoing)

The Transportation Master Plan (TMP) is a strategic policy document that guides how the transportation system in a city will grow and develop over the long term. The TMP is being refreshed to address population growth, accommodate higher density development, and adapt to changing movement patterns. The TMP Refresh will consider a planning horizon to 2051, with consideration of new planned city road improvements, primarily in the future industrial lands.

With respect to mode share, public input was supportive of an aggressive mode shift, which would require an extensive expansion of trail / sidewalk networks and a broader network of cycling facilities. As of writing, this draft plan has not yet been released.

Assets, Budgets, Funding, and Infrastructure Gaps

Approved Capital and Operating Budgets (2024 and 2025)

The City of St. Thomas' Approved Capital and Operating Budgets for 2024 and 2025 provides a general guideline of the amount of money the City has allocated to Parks, Recreation and Library facilities. The Parks, Recreation and Property Management Budget for 2024 was $6,206,648, which was a 17% increase from the 2023 budget. None of the

parks and recreation capital projects that were recommended for approval in 2024 were anticipated carry debt or use future tax levies.[38]

Major parks and recreation capital projects that were completed in 2024 include (but are not limited to):

- **Active Transportation: Pedestrian Crossings:** The estimated cost $200,000, using money from development charges and the 2024 tax levy.
- **Complete Streets Program:** The estimated cost is $9.2 million, using money from development charges, water rates, sewer rates, and the 2024 tax levy.
- **Jaycees Pool Rehabilitation:** The estimated cost is $380,000, using money from the 2024 tax levy.
- **Annual Athletic Field Maintenance – Emslie Field Lighting:** The estimated cost is $275,000, using money from the 2024 tax levy.
- **Annual Playground Replacement – Goddeeris-Luyks Park:** The estimated cost is $200,000, using money from the 2024 tax levy.
- **Annual Trail Development – Cowan Park & Shaw Valley:** The estimated cost is $200,000, using money from the 2024 tax levy.
- **Recreation Trail Solar Lighting Phase 2:** The estimated cost is $60,000, using money from the 2024 tax levy.

Some of the major parks and recreation capital projects that were recommended for approval in 2025 include (but are not limited to):

- Sun shelters at Railway City Skatepark
- Talbot Street Park Developments
- JTCC Pad B LED Lighting
- JTCC Bathroom Partitions
- Emslie Field Grandstand Structural Report
- Annual Playground Replacement – Homedale
- Annual Trail Development
- Pinafore Shelter Replacement

Asset Management State of Infrastructure (2024)

The Asset Management State of Infrastructure was completed in November 2024. This Plan summarizes the total assets owed by the City of St. Thomas, the annual funding deficit, and the infrastructure gap.

There are 17 major asset classes, worth a total of $1.99 billion, that the City of St. Thomas manages. The City had a $9.9 million annual funding deficit and a $58.7 million infrastructure gap.

[38] Full details on the 2025 Capital Operating Budget were not available at the time of this summary.

City owned building assets (including Arenas, Fire Stations, Police Station, City Hall, Library, Social Services, Long term Care, Community Recycling, Public Works, Markets, Tourism Office, Animal Shelter, Transit Terminal, Monuments, Park Shelters/Pavilions, Signs, and Sculptures) have a total value of $200 million. City owned buildings have a $2 million infrastructure gap. The 2024 budget funding request for facilities was $2.3 million, which is $1.1 million below the annual funding target range ($3.4 million to $5 million annually). 86% of city owned buildings are in very good or good condition.

Outdoor recreation facility assets (excluding playgrounds) have a total value of $26.7 million; however, there was a $400,000 infrastructure gap. The 2024 budget funding request for outdoor recreation facilities was $400,000, which is at the lower end the funding target range ($400,000 to $600,000 annually). 65% of outdoor sports facilities are in very good or good condition.

Playground assets have a total value of $5.4 million; however, there was a $400,000 infrastructure gap. The 2024 budget funding request for playgrounds was $200,000, which is at the lower end of the annual funding target range ($200,000 to $300,000 annually). 70% of playgrounds in very good or good condition, an improvement over the past years.

Development Charges Background Study and Addenda (2020)

This background study was prepared based on the requirements of the Development Charges Act, 1997, and accordingly recommends new Development Charges (DC) and policies for the City of St. Thomas. Several changes have been made to the DC Act since this time and an update to the City's Development Charges By-law is ongoing.

The 2020 Background Study contains a variety of development-related capital requirements for parks and recreation services, some of which may have since been funded and implemented. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Joe Thornton Community Centre improvements
- Rubberized fitness track at Memorial Arena
- Park development (e.g., Parish Park, Orchard Park, Shaw Valley Park, Area 1 Expansion Lands, etc.)
- Community garden development
- Multi-use trail development
- Lake Margaret Fitness Trail Equipment
- Outdoor Ball Hockey Rink
- BMX Park
- Playground Development (Massey Park)
- Pickleball Courts (4)
- Outdoor Basketball/Multi-Use Court (Area 1 Expansion Lands)
- Skateboard Park Development (Phase II)
- Growth related studies

The City is updating the Development Charges By-law in 2025.

Appendix C. Community Survey – Details

Full Data Tables

Question 1. In the past 12 months, have you or anyone in your household participated in any of the following activities in St. Thomas, at home, ore elsewhere? (select all that apply)

	#	%
Aerobics, yoga, fitness or weight training	1219	45%
Baseball or softball	638	23%
Basketball	534	20%
Creative arts (e.g., painting, sculpting)	544	20%
Cricket	50	2%
Curling	133	5%
Cycling	630	23%
Disc golf	219	8%
Dog walking (on or off leash)	1138	42%
Golf	660	24%
Ice sports (e.g., hockey, figure skating, ringette, or ice skating)	973	36%
Indoor turf sports (e.g., soccer or baseball)	436	16%
Organized child & teen programs (e.g., day camps)	569	21%
Organized seniors' programs (e.g., cards, dancing)	223	8%
Lacrosse	21	1%
Performing arts (e.g., dance, theatre, music)	436	16%
Pickleball – Indoor	347	13%
Pickleball – Outdoor	567	21%
Running / jogging	636	23%
Soccer – Indoor	291	11%
Soccer – Outdoor	596	22%
Swimming (lessons or aquafit)	807	30%
Swimming (recreational)	1083	40%
Tennis - Indoor	45	2%
Tennis - Outdoor	215	8%
Use of playground equipment	1099	40%
Use of splash pad	911	33%
Volleyball – Indoor	387	14%
Volleyball – Outdoor	172	6%
Walking – Indoor (track or elsewhere)	1065	39%
Walking/Hiking – Outdoor (outdoor trails or elsewhere)	1707	63%
Wheeled action sports (e.g., BMX, skateboarding)	159	6%
None of the above	62	2%
Other (please specify)	175	6%
answered question	**2730**	
skipped question	0	

Question 2. Are you and members of your household able to participate in parks and recreation activities as often as you would like?

	#	%
Yes	1242	45%
No	1285	47%
Don't know	203	7%
answered question	**2730**	
skipped question	0	

Question 3. Why are you and members of your household NOT able to participate in these activities as often as you would like? (select up to three).

	#	%
Lack of desired parks, programs or facilities	814	64%
Program not offered at a convenient time	485	38%
Cost is too expensive	489	38%
Lack of information / unaware of opportunities	286	22%
Parks or facilities are too far away	192	15%
Lack or personal time / too busy	239	19%
Health problems / disability / age	103	8%
Language / cultural barrier	1	0%
Lack of childcare	75	6%
Don't know	5	0%
Other (please specify)	141	11%
answered question	**1272**	
skipped question	1458	

Question 4. What parks and recreation activities would you or members of your household like to see offered in St. Thomas that are NOT currently available, if any? (Up to three Activities)

	#	%
answered question	**1750**	**64%**
skipped question	980	36%

Note: This was an open-ended response question. Responses were reviewed and summarized in the report.

Question 5. For the statements listed below, please indicate how the City's current ability to provide adequate parks and recreation services is meeting your expectations.

	Well below expectations # (%)	Below expectations # (%)	Meeting expectations # (%)	Above expectations # (%)	Well above expectations # (%)	Don't know / Don't use # (%)	Answered # (%)	Skipped #
Affordability of programs and spaces	185 (8%)	707 (30%)	981 (42%)	202 (9%)	76 (3%)	196 (8%)	**2347 (100%)**	383
Maintenance of parks and recreation amenities	52 (2%)	294 (12%)	1216 (52%)	517 (22%)	228 (10%)	47 (2%)	**2354 (100%)**	376
Supply of new parks and amenities	198 (8%)	797 (34%)	893 (38%)	263 (11%)	74 (3%)	107 (5%)	**2332 (100%)**	398
Quality of neighbourhood parks near your home	117 (5%)	443 (19%)	1084 (46%)	446 (19%)	179 (8%)	81 (3%)	**2350 (100%)**	380
Inclusion and accessibility for residents of all backgrounds	77 (3%)	306 (13%)	1157 (49%)	304 (13%)	121 (5%)	377 (16%)	**2342 (100%)**	388

Question 6. Property taxes in St. Thomas in part allow the city to improve recreation facilities. For the INDOOR amenities and facilities listed below, to what degree do you support/oppose additional public spending towards building new facilities or improving existing facilities?

	Strongly oppose # (%)	Somewhat oppose # (%)	Neither support nor oppose # (%)	Somewhat support # (%)	Strongly support # (%)	Don't know / Don't use # (%)	Answered # (%)	Skipped #
Indoor pools	88 (4%)	66 (3%)	180 (8%)	382 (17%)	1529 (66%)	65 (3%)	**2310 (100%)**	420
Indoor turf fields (for year-round soccer and field sports)	114 (5%)	118 (5%)	423 (19%)	548 (24%)	893 (39%)	179 (8%)	**2275 (100%)**	455
Gymnasiums and indoor courts	66 (3%)	61 (3%)	366 (16%)	627 (27%)	1041 (46%)	124 (5%)	**2285 (100%)**	445
Arenas (indoor ice)	177 (8%)	221 (10%)	513 (23%)	432 (19%)	763 (34%)	163 (7%)	**2269 (100%)**	461
Spaces for community meetings and events	116 (5%)	161 (7%)	701 (31%)	619 (27%)	530 (23%)	146 (6%)	**2273 (100%)**	457
Fitness centres	93 (4%)	136 (6%)	449 (20%)	629 (28%)	892 (39%)	86 (4%)	**2285 (100%)**	445
Performing arts spaces (for dance, theatre, music, etc.)	89 (4%)	123 (5%)	527 (23%)	641 (28%)	781 (34%)	123 (5%)	**2284 (100%)**	446
Creative arts spaces (for painting, sculpting, etc.)	111 (5%)	152 (7%)	606 (27%)	595 (26%)	671 (29%)	142 (6%)	**2277 (100%)**	453

Note: Other responses = 134 (5%)

Question 7. For the statements listed below, please indicate your level of agreement:

	Strongly disagree # (%)	Somewhat disagree # (%)	Neither agree nor disagree # (%)	Somewhat agree # (%)	Strongly agree # (%)	Don't know / Don't use # (%)	Answered # (%)	Skipped #
The development of an indoor aquatic centre should be a high priority for Council.	139 (6%)	110 (5%)	210 (9%)	387 (17%)	1450 (63%)	24 (1%)	**2320 (100%)**	410
The City should consider partnering with others to help provide new indoor recreation facilities.	99 (4%)	93 (4%)	234 (10%)	568 (25%)	1285 (56%)	36 (2%)	**2315 (100%)**	415

Question 8. For the funding options listed below, how willing would your household be to help financially support the development and operation of new recreation and aquatic facilities?

	Very unwilling # (%)	Somewhat unwilling # (%)	Neither willing nor unwilling # (%)	Somewhat willing # (%)	Very willing # (%)	Don't know / Don't use # (%)	Answered # (%)	Skipped #
Pay an increased fee for activities and sport registration	286 (13%)	298 (13%)	314 (14%)	943 (42%)	345 (15%)	45 (2%)	**2231 (100%)**	499
Donate to a capital fundraising campaign	328 (15%)	258 (12%)	520 (23%)	750 (34%)	311 (14%)	59 (3%)	**2226 (100%)**	504
Pay higher property taxes	677 (30%)	335 (15%)	389 (17%)	592 (27%)	161 (7%)	75 (3%)	**2229 (100%)**	501
Municipal debt / borrowing	388 (17%)	327 (15%)	581 (26%)	595 (27%)	220 (10%)	108 (5%)	**2219 (100%)**	511
Purchase a membership for access to activities and facilities	182 (8%)	174 (8%)	235 (11%)	924 (41%)	696 (31%)	24 (1%)	**2235 (100%)**	495

Question 9. Property taxes in St. Thomas in part allow the city to improve recreation facilities. For the OUTDOOR amenities and facilities listed below, to what degree do you support/oppose additional public spending towards building new facilities or improving existing facilities?

	Strongly oppose # (%)	Somewhat oppose # (%)	Neither support nor oppose # (%)	Somewhat support # (%)	Strongly support # (%)	Don't know / Don't use # (%)	Answered # (%)	Skipped #
Parks and open spaces	75 (3%)	139 (6%)	403 (18%)	751 (34%)	837 (38%)	18 (1%)	**2223 (100%)**	507
Community gardens	157 (7%)	262 (12%)	625 (28%)	645 (29%)	461 (21%)	68 (3%)	**2218 (100%)**	512
Baseball or softball diamonds	176 (8%)	303 (14%)	611 (28%)	524 (24%)	444 (20%)	155 (7%)	**2213 (100%)**	517
Soccer fields	208 (9%)	276 (12%)	605 (27%)	568 (26%)	403 (18%)	151 (7%)	**2211 (100%)**	519
Cricket fields	412 (19%)	336 (15%)	768 (35%)	252 (11%)	133 (6%)	302 (14%)	**2203 (100%)**	527
Basketball courts	132 (6%)	223 (10%)	642 (29%)	649 (29%)	369 (17%)	196 (9%)	**2211 (100%)**	519
Recreational trails	51 (2%)	68 (3%)	273 (12%)	702 (32%)	1093 (49%)	34 (2%)	**2221 (100%)**	509
Off-leash dog parks	307 (14%)	259 (12%)	649 (29%)	412 (19%)	356 (16%)	233 (11%)	**2216 (100%)**	514
Outdoor ice rinks / ball hockey rinks	144 (6%)	137 (6%)	495 (22%)	577 (26%)	705 (32%)	159 (7%)	**2217 (100%)**	513
Pickleball courts	168 (8%)	173 (8%)	610 (28%)	598 (27%)	460 (21%)	205 (9%)	**2214 (100%)**	516
Tennis courts	156 (7%)	212 (10%)	767 (35%)	495 (22%)	314 (14%)	261 (12%)	**2205 (100%)**	525
Outdoor volleyball courts	226 (10%)	207 (9%)	655 (30%)	476 (22%)	404 (18%)	240 (11%)	**2208 (100%)**	522

	Strongly oppose # (%)	Somewhat oppose # (%)	Neither support nor oppose # (%)	Somewhat support # (%)	Strongly support # (%)	Don't know / Don't use # (%)	Answered # (%)	Skipped #
Playgrounds	65 (3%)	90 (4%)	411 (19%)	710 (32%)	829 (38%)	103 (5%)	**2208 (100%)**	522
Park washrooms	37 (2%)	39 (2%)	219 (10%)	696 (31%)	1191 (54%)	30 (1%)	**2212 (100%)**	518
Park pavilions	80 (4%)	128 (6%)	605 (27%)	744 (34%)	596 (27%)	55 (2%)	**2208 (100%)**	522
Splash pads	83 (4%)	106 (5%)	451 (20%)	651 (29%)	813 (37%)	105 (5%)	**2209 (100%)**	521
Outdoor swimming pools	134 (6%)	140 (6%)	428 (19%)	611 (28%)	808 (36%)	97 (4%)	**2218 (100%)**	512
Action sports parks (skateboarding, BMX)	177 (8%)	205 (9%)	685 (31%)	552 (25%)	329 (15%)	246 (11%)	**2194 (100%)**	536

Note: Other responses = 104 (4%)

Question 10. Through this study, we are taking a closer look at the need and options for new facilities, such as an indoor pool, that can be used year-round. In the past 12 months, did you or anyone in your household make regular use (once a month or more) of indoor swimming pools in St. Thomas or elsewhere?

	#	%
Yes	1034	46%
No	1172	52%
Don't Know	34	2%
answered question	**2240**	
skipped question	490	

Question 11. What indoor pool did you use the most?

	#	%
Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin Indoor Pool	451	43%
St. Thomas-Elgin General Hospital Therapeutic Pool	115	11%
Terrace Lodge Pool in Aylmer	2	0%
Ontario Police College Pool in Aylmer	31	3%
Tillsonburg Indoor Pool	4	0%
A Public Indoor Pool in London	272	26%
Ontario Police College Pool in Aylmer	31	3%
Western University Pool in London	7	1%
A Private or Hotel Pool	126	12%
Other (please specify)	19	2%
answered question	**1058**	
skipped question	1672	

Question 12. Do you consider the time it takes to travel to this pool to be reasonable?

	#	%
Yes	632	61%
No	368	36%
Don't Know	30	3%
answered question	**1030**	
skipped question	1700	

Question 13. Does this pool meet the needs of you or your household?

	#	%
It does not meet any of my needs	156	15%
It meets some of my needs	672	65%
It meets all my needs	187	18%
Don't know	16	2%
answered question	**1031**	
skipped question	1699	

Question 14. Why does this indoor pool not meet your needs or those of your household? (select up to three)

	#	%
Location is too far away	321	20%
Location is too busy / cannot get into programs	368	23%
Programs not offered at a convenient time	289	18%
Cost is too expensive	272	17%
Facility design does not meet needs	154	10%
Don't know	20	1%
Other (specify):	159	10%
answered question	**1583**	
skipped question	1147	

Question 15. If the City were to develop an indoor pool, what activities would you and your household use it for? (select all that apply)

	#	%
Aquafit	1106	50%
Diving	242	11%
Lane swimming	894	40%
Pool rental (e.g., birthday parties)	670	30%
Recreational swimming / free play / fun	1496	68%
Swim team / competition	289	13%
Swimming lessons	1065	48%
Therapy / rehabilitation	866	39%
Not applicable – my household would not use the pool	271	12%
Other (specify):	63	3%
answered question	**2216**	
skipped question	514	

Question 16. If the City were to develop an indoor pool, how likely would you and your household be to use it on a regular basis (once a month or more)?

	#	%
Very unlikely	335	15%
Somewhat unlikely	85	4%
Somewhat likely	309	14%
Very likely	1114	50%
Uncertain – depends on its location	131	6%
Uncertain – depends on other factors	197	9%
Don't know	44	2%
answered question	**2215**	
skipped question	515	

Question 17. If the City were to develop an indoor pool, how should it be operated?

	#	%
As an exclusively municipally owned and operated entity	714	32%
In partnership with other agencies	459	21%
Owned and operated by non-municipal parties	92	4%
No preference	552	25%
Don't know	398	18%
answered question	**2215**	
skipped question	515	

Question 18. Did you or anyone in your household make regular use (once a month or more during the summer) of the Jaycees outdoor pool in St. Thomas?

	#	%
Yes	403	18%
No	1752	79%
Don't Know	52	2%
answered question	**2207**	
skipped question	523	

Question 19. Please provide any additional comments you may have regarding parks and recreation opportunities in St. Thomas.

	#	%
answered question	**1028**	**38%**

Note: This was an open-ended response question. Responses were reviewed and summarized in the report.

Question 20. Are you a resident of St. Thomas?

	#	%
Yes	1976	90%
No	218	10%
Don't Know	7	0%
answered question	**2201**	
skipped question	529	

Question 21. What are the first three digits of your postal code?

	#	%
N5P (north)	606	31%
N5R (south)	1322	67%
N0L (rural)	22	1%
Don't know / no response	12	1%
Other	8	0%
answered question	**1970**	
skipped question	760	

Question 22. If you answered no to question 20, what municipality do you live in?

	#	%
answered question	**215**	**8%**

Note: This was an open-ended response question. Responses were reviewed and summarized in the report.

Question 23. Including yourself, what is the total number of persons within your household that fall into the following age categories?

	Households		People	
	#	%	#	%
under 10 years	782	29%	1298	18%
10 - 19 years	744	27%	1282	18%
20 - 39 years	998	37%	1666	23%
40 - 59 years	1153	42%	1927	27%
60 - 74 years	558	20%	898	12%
75 years and over	132	5%	183	3%
answered question	**2152**		**7254**	**100%**
persons per household	3.4			
skipped question	578			

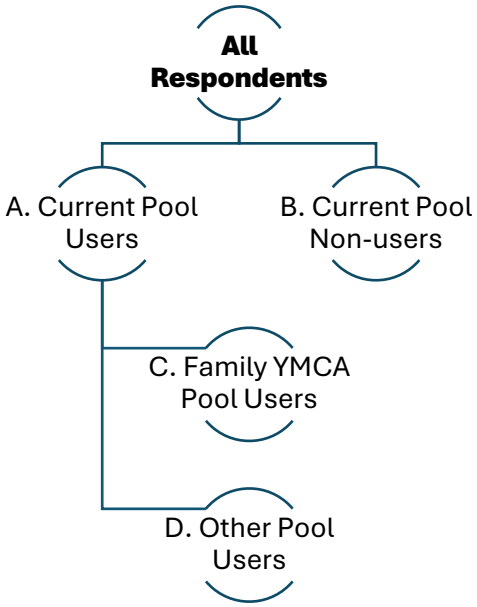
Question 24. In what year were you born?

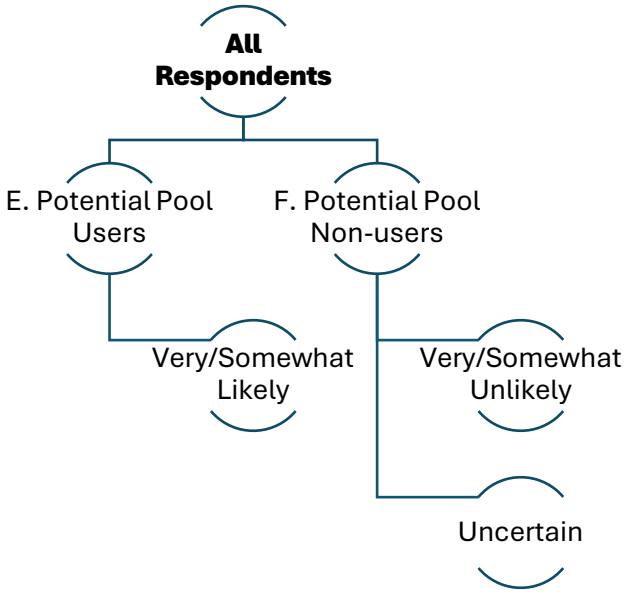
	#	%
Prior to 1950 (76 yrs or older)	73	4%
1950 to 1959 (66 to 75 yrs)	254	14%
1960 to 1969 (56 to 65 yrs)	296	17%
1970 to 1979 (46 to 55 yrs)	437	25%
1980 to 1989 (36 to 45 yrs)	641	37%
1990 to 1999 (26 to 35 yrs)	335	19%
2000 or later (25 yrs or younger)	54	3%
Average Age	48.3	

Cross-tabulation Analysis and Result Tables

For community survey questions related to the potential aquatic centre and pool usage, a cross-tabulation analysis was performed to identify any areas of difference amongst the selected sub-groups defined in the graphics below.

Cross-tabulation sub-groups





Cross-Tabulation Sub-Group	Definition
A. Current Pool Users (n = 1034)	Survey respondents whose household has used an indoor pool in the past 12 months (within St. Thomas or elsewhere).
B. Current Pool Non-Users (n = 1172)	Survey respondents whose household has NOT used an indoor pool in the past 12 months.
C. Family YMCA Pool Users (n = 451)	Survey respondents whose household most frequently used the indoor pool at the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin.
D. Other Pool Users (n =607)	Survey respondents whose household most frequently used indoor pools other than the Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin.
E. Potential Pool Users (n = 1423)	Survey respondents that indicated their household would be "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to use an indoor pool if the City developed one.
F. Potential Pool Non-Users (n = 748)	Survey respondents that indicated their household would be "very unlikely," "somewhat unlikely," or "uncertain" to use an indoor pool if the City developed one.

The following tables summarize the results of the cross-tabulation analysis. Significant differences are noted in **bold**.

In the past 12 months, did you or anyone in your household make regular use (once a month or more) of indoor swimming pools in St. Thomas or elsewhere?

Response	A Current Pool Users	B Current Pool Non-Users	C Family YMCA Pool Users	D Other Pool Users	E Potential Pool Users	F Potential Pool Non-Users
Yes	100%	0%	100%	100%	**62%**	18%
No	0%	100%	0%	0%	37%	**80%**
Don't Know	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Do you consider the time it takes to travel to this indoor pool to be reasonable?

Response	A Current Pool Users	B Current Pool Non-Users	C Family YMCA Pool Users	D Other Pool Users	E Potential Pool Users	F Potential Pool Non-Users
Yes	61%	n/a	**90%**	39%	61%	63%
No	36%	n/a	8%	**58%**	36%	31%
Don't Know	3%	n/a	2%	4%	2%	6%
Total	**100%**	**n/a**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Does this indoor pool meet the needs of you or your household?

Response	A Current Pool Users	B Current Pool Non-Users	C Family YMCA Pool Users	D Other Pool Users	E Potential Pool Users	F Potential Pool Non-Users
It does not meet any of my needs	15%	n/a	12%	17%	15%	15%
It meets some of my needs	65%	n/a	**71%**	61%	66%	61%
It meets all my needs	18%	n/a	16%	20%	18%	20%
Don't know	2%	n/a	2%	1%	1%	4%
Total	**100%**	**n/a**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Why does this indoor pool not meet your needs or those of your household? (multiple responses permitted)

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Response	**Current Pool Users**	**Current Pool Non-Users**	**Family YMCA Pool Users**	**Other Pool Users**	**Potential Pool Users**	**Potential Pool Non-Users**
Location is too far away	20%	n/a	3%	**36%**	20%	23%
Location is too busy / cannot get into programs	23%	n/a	27%	20%	23%	22%
Programs not offered at a convenient time	18%	n/a	21%	15%	18%	17%
Cost is too expensive	17%	n/a	**27%**	8%	17%	17%
Facility design does not meet needs	10%	n/a	13%	7%	10%	9%
Don't know	1%	n/a	1%	2%	1%	4%
Other (specify)	10%	n/a	9%	11%	10%	9%

The development of an indoor aquatic centre should be a high priority for Council.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Level of Agreement	**Current Pool Users**	**Current Pool Non-Users**	**Family YMCA Pool Users**	**Other Pool Users**	**Potential Pool Users**	**Potential Pool Non-Users**
Strongly Agree or Agree	**94%**	67%	92%	95%	**93%**	53%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3%	**14%**	6%	1%	3%	**19%**
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	3%	18%	3%	3%	3%	**25%**
Don't Know	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

How willing would your household be to "pay higher property taxes" to support the development and operation of new recreation and aquatic facilities?

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Willingness to Pay	**Current Pool Users**	**Current Pool Non-Users**	**Family YMCA Pool Users**	**Other Pool Users**	**Potential Pool Users**	**Potential Pool Non-Users**
Very or Somewhat Willing	**39%**	30%	39%	40%	**42%**	20%
Neither Willing nor Unwilling	18%	25%	14%	21%	17%	17%
Very or Somewhat Unwilling	39%	**51%**	43%	36%	38%	**59%**
Don't Know	3%	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

If the City were to develop an indoor pool, how likely would you and your household be to use it on a regular basis (once a month or more)?

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Likeliness to Use	**Current Pool Users**	**Current Pool Non-Users**	**Family YMCA Pool Users**	**Other Pool Users**	**Potential Pool Users**	**Potential Pool Non-Users**
Very or Somewhat Likely	**86%**	45%	85%	87%	**100%**	0%
Uncertain	8%	**21%**	8%	8%	0%	**44%**
Very or Somewhat Unlikely	6%	**30%**	6%	5%	0%	**56%**
Don't know	0%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

If the City were to develop an indoor pool, how likely would you and your household be to use it on a regular basis (once a month or more)? (multiple responses permitted)

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Aquatic Activity	**Current Pool Users**	**Current Pool Non-Users**	**Family YMCA Pool Users**	**Other Pool Users**	**Potential Pool Users**	**Potential Pool Non-Users**
Aquafit	**60%**	42%	58%	61%	**60%**	31%
Diving	**16%**	6%	15%	17%	**14%**	5%
Lane swimming	**54%**	29%	**59%**	50%	**51%**	22%
Pool rental (e.g., birthday parties)	**41%**	21%	35%	**46%**	**38%**	16%
Recreational swimming / free play / fun	**80%**	57%	78%	82%	**80%**	46%
Swim team / competition	**21%**	6%	20%	22%	**17%**	6%
Swimming lessons	**66%**	33%	61%	**69%**	**60%**	27%
Therapy / rehabilitation	42%	36%	40%	44%	**45%**	29%
Not applicable – my household would not use the pool	1%	**22%**	1%	1%	1%	33%
Other (specify)	3%	3%	3%	2%	3%	3%

February 2026

Appendix D. Stakeholder Listing

The following table identifies the community organizations that were invited to provide input into the planning process, with participating groups also highlighted.

Attended a focus group or interview	Provided written input only	Invited but did not participate
• Canada Day • Downtown Development Board • EarlyON Child & Family Centres • EarlyON Children's Festival (Formerly Teddy Bear Picnic) • Economic Development Committee • Elgin Middlesex District Soccer League • Family YMCA of St. Thomas-Elgin • Ice Box (Concessionaire) • Joe Thornton Community Centre Pickleball • Kettle Creek Conservation Authority • Knights of Columbus • Lions Club Car Show • London District Catholic School Board • Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee • Optimist Club Santa Claus Parade • Pinafore Tennis Club • Public Art Committee • Railway City Music & Arts Festival • Railway City Pickleball League • Special Events Committee • St. Thomas Badminton • St. Thomas Christian Community School • St. Thomas Co-ed Slo-Pitch	• Aylmer Optimist Arrows • Central Community Health Centre • Chamber of Commerce • Employment Services Elgin • St Thomas Shock - Basketball • Talbot Trail Physiotherapy • Watertower Mountain Bike Network - Mountain Bike Park	• Battle Hockey • Canadian Mental Health • Catfish Creek Conservation Authority • Centennial Sports Club • Cricket Rep • Destination Church • Elgin County Museum • Elgin Hiking Trail Club • Elite Stars Basketball League • Environmental Stewardship Committee • Great Lakes International Air Show • Heritage Committee • Hospice • League1 Soccer Club • Nostalgia Nights • Police Department Board • Port Stanley Rail • Railway City Cycling Club • Railway City Tourism • Railway Coalition Inc. • Senior Picnic • Slo-Pitch National • Slo-Pitch Ontario • Southwestern Public Health • St. Joes Hockey Academy • St. Thomas 45+ Hockey League • St. Thomas Cemetery • St. Thomas Curling Club • St. Thomas Disc Sports Club • St. Thomas Dog Walkers/Owners • St. Thomas Field Naturalist Club • St. Thomas Hawks Football • St. Thomas Home Show

Attended a focus group or interview	Provided written input only	Invited but did not participate
• St. Thomas Express Volleyball Club • St. Thomas Jumbo Jets • St. Thomas Kinsmen Club • St. Thomas Ladies Slo-Pitch • St. Thomas Lions Club • St. Thomas Men's Slo-Pitch • St. Thomas Minor Baseball • St. Thomas Minor Hockey • St. Thomas Optimist Club • St. Thomas Optimist Softball • St. Thomas Pickleball Club • St. Thomas Public Library • St. Thomas Seniors' Centre • St. Thomas Skating Club • St. Thomas Soccer Club • St. Thomas Stars • Thames Valley District School Board • YMCA of Southwestern Ontario • YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin		• St. Thomas Panthers • St. Thomas Ringette • St. Thomas Rotary Club • St. Thomas Special Olympics • St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre • Sunday Night Hockey League • Talbot Teen Centre • Valleyview Home for the Aged
Total: 42 groups	**Total: 7 groups**	**Total: 41 groups**