

Recreation Facility & Programming Plan

What We Heard Summary Report

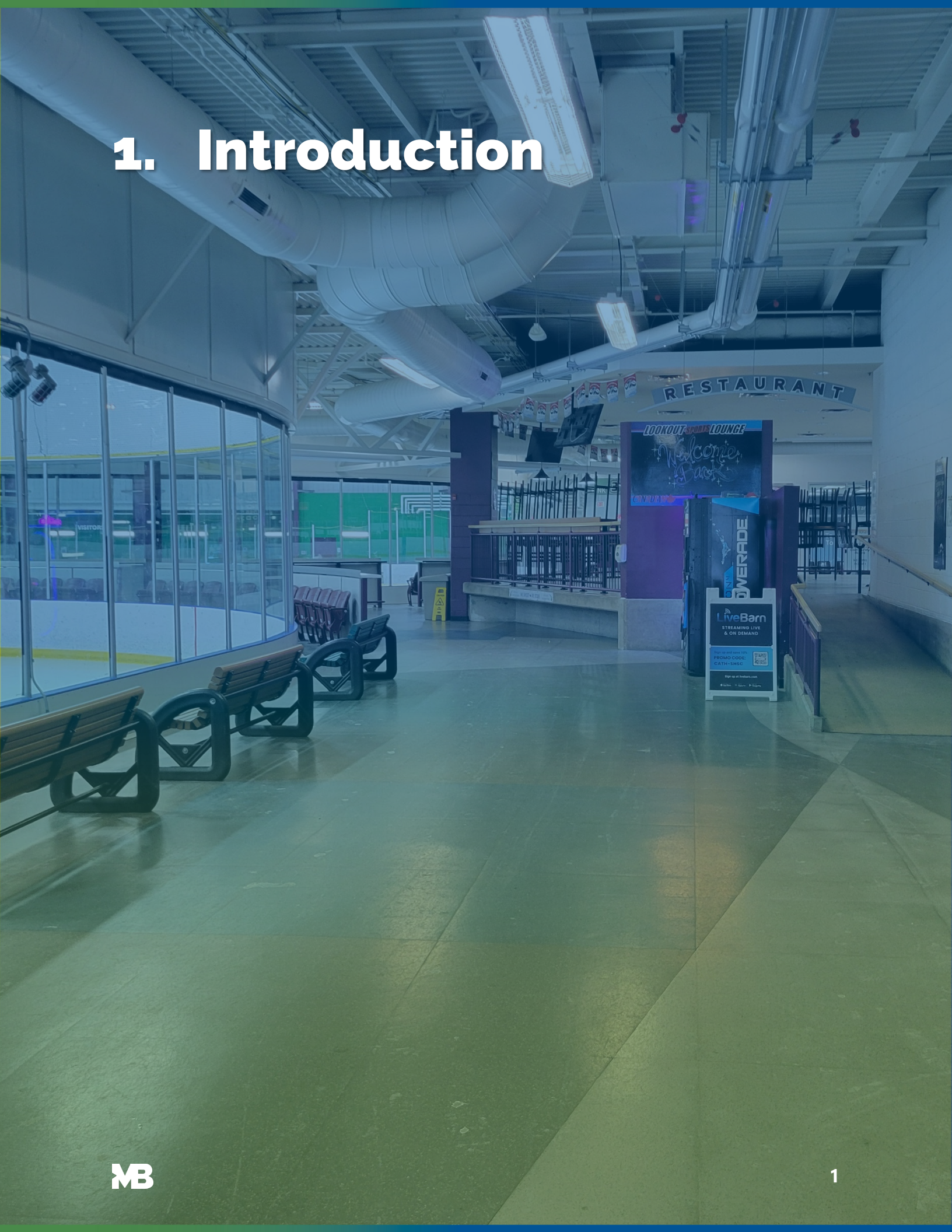
April 2025



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1. Introduction





Introduction

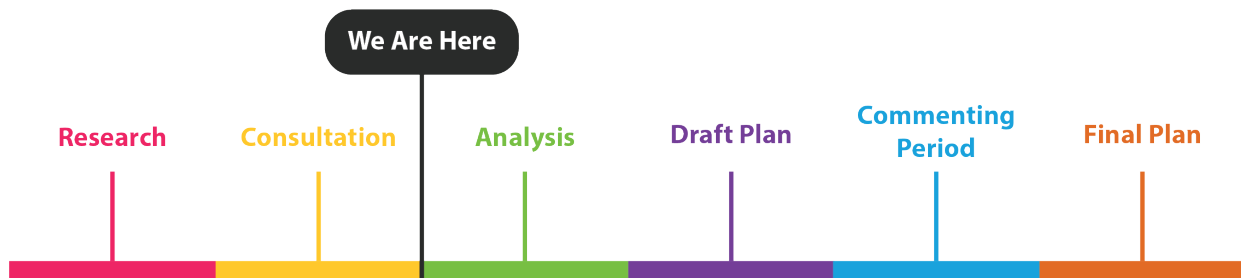
About the Project

The Recreation Facility & Programming Plan (“the RFPP”) guides how the City of St. Catharines plans, invests in and delivers quality recreation experiences over the next 10 years. Through collaboration with the community, City Staff and Council, a robust engagement process was employed to ensure the RFPP reflects the core values of the people living in St. Catharines.

Purpose of this Summary Report

This ‘What We Heard’ Summary Report is a snapshot of what we heard from the public during the initial stages of the RFPP’s development. People shared what they love, what they would change, and made suggestions for the future of recreation in St. Catharines.

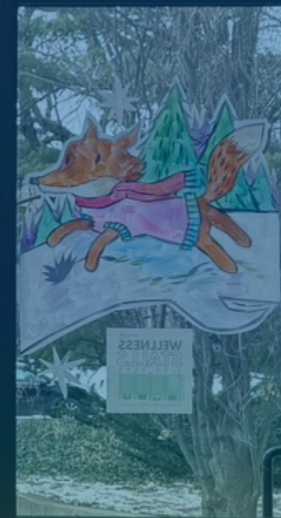
Project Timeline



2. Engagement Approach

Market Square

James Street



Engagement Approach

Scope and Objectives

The community engagement gathered input from St. Catharines residents and community groups regarding the use of recreation and parks facilities and programs. In-person, digital, broad-based, and targeted engagement tactics were used to maximize widespread outreach with the hopes of providing St. Catharines' diverse community with ways to provide feedback.

How We Engaged

The first phase of community engagement took place during January and February 2025, shortly after the RFPP began. Outreach methods and engagement tactics used are summarized in the following pages.

Outreach Methods

The following communication methods introduced the RFPP and spread awareness about the engagement opportunities:



EngageSTC

The online hub for all project information and engagement opportunities.



Email Blasts

Emails were sent to registered Recreation users to raise awareness about the project and promote opportunities for participation.



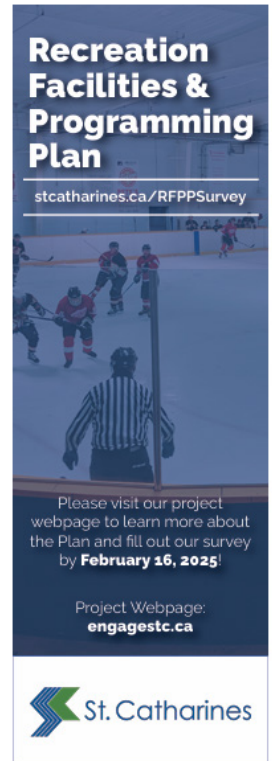
Social Media

Social media posts on Facebook, X (Twitter) and Instagram were used to promote the project and share engagement opportunities.



Bookmarks & Posters

Bookmarks & posters with project information were distributed at arenas, community centres and libraries.



Engagement Tactics

The following tools and methods were used to engage the public and hear from a diverse range of voices:



Public Open Houses

Morning, afternoon and evening open houses were held in January 2025 at the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre and Central Library.



Community Survey

Available through EngageSTC and paper copies over four weeks.



Community Group Workshops

Three workshops were held to discuss a range of topics related to enhancing recreation and parks opportunities in St. Catharines.



Interest Holders Interviews

Interviews were carried out with Bridges Niagara, Niagara Regional Native Centre, Brock University, local school boards, and Ridley College.



City Council & Staff Feedback

Input was provided by parks and recreation staff as well as the City's Senior Leadership Team and members of City Council.



Advisory Committee Workshops

All Advisory Committees received the community survey and three Advisory Committees were engaged to seek out their knowledge, insights and experiences for consideration as part of the RFPP.



Who We Engaged

Community engagement is carried out so that the RFPP reflects the values, needs and desires of the people living and working in St. Catharines. We engaged with several different audiences in St. Catharines' community, organized broadly into the following groups who shared insights for recreation services in St. Catharines:

General Public

We engaged the general public through a comprehensive voluntary self-directed community survey, which received 807 unique responses (784 online and 23 paper submission). We also attended three Public Open Houses that directly engaged 160 people while distributing 100 project bookmarks to encourage additional feedback.

Community Group Representatives

Sessions focused on engaging local recreation and sport representatives, community and volunteer groups, and equity, and organizations focused on local diversity and inclusion initiatives were attended by 28 organizations in total.

Advisory Committees

Workshops and presentations were held with the Recreation Master Plan Advisory Committee, Accessibility Advisory Committee, and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.

Interest Holders

Interviews were carried with Bridges Niagara, Niagara Regional Native Centre, Brock University, Ridley College, the District School Board of Niagara and Conseil Scolaire Viamonde.

1000+
total
participants

807
survey
responses

160
open
house
attendees

28
community
groups

25
advisory
committee
members

6
interest
holder
interviews



What We Heard

This section provides an overview of insights from the community engagement. While further analysis will be undertaken, these findings will help shape the RFPP to ensure it reflects the values of the community. The following pages summarize the main themes emerging from consultations to date.

Key Findings

- 1 Recreation staff and services are valued in St. Catharines:** The importance and value residents placed on facilities and programs in St. Catharines came across loud and clear throughout all the consultations.
- 2 As the City grows and intensifies, more recreation and park opportunities are desired to keep up with demand:** The community is worried that population growth and limited land for new recreation and park spaces will place strain on existing services. Additional recreation and parks opportunities are desired to keep up with growing demands.
- 3 Facilities should be improved and optimized before expanding:** Improving and optimizing the use of existing facilities was expressed as a best practice approach before adding new facilities
- 4 There are opportunities for Reconciliation in recreation:** Community representatives identified opportunities to make parks and recreation inclusive and reflective of Indigenous communities such as providing access to sacred fire spaces, recognizing their right to smudge in facilities, and integrating Indigenous art and history in public spaces.
- 5 The City's FAIR program needs an update:** Although the City's Fee Assistance in Recreation (FAIR) program is appreciated, there are some residents that still cannot afford to participate in recreation programs. It was suggested that the City raise the low-income threshold to qualify for fee assistance to reflect current spending patterns and living standards.
- 6 Grassroots and recreation-level programs are desired over competitive and specialized programming:** It was expressed that the City's primary role in recreation should be to provide beginner and recreation-level programming for all residents. Competitive and specialized programming needs can be met by other service providers.

What We Heard: Community Survey

Participation Profile

In the last 12 months, the top five activities survey respondents participated in were:



72%

Enjoying parks and open spaces



70%

Walking or hiking for leisure



68%

Visiting a beach



42%

Swimming



41%

Gardening

Most Frequently Used Facilities



Respondents **visited indoor recreation facilities the most**, with 68% using arenas, pools, gyms and community centres **at least once a week**. By comparison, between 36% and 38% use parks and outdoor recreation facilities a minimum of once per week.

Top Participation Barriers

1. Program isn't offered at a convenient time (28%)
2. Facilities or programs are too crowded (18%)
3. Lack of time (15%)
4. Facilities or programs do not reflect my household's interests (15%)
5. Unaware of opportunities (14%)

Importance & Satisfaction

Indoor recreation facilities were **important** to 94% of survey respondents while 71% reported being **satisfied** with the City's indoor facilities.

Priorities for Investment

89% of survey respondents agree that **recreational services** should be a high priority for council.

71% of survey respondents agree that **acquiring parkland** should be a high priority for council.

>80% of survey respondents support investments in **indoor swimming pools** (83%), **parkland** (81%), and **beaches** (80%).

What We Heard: Public Open Houses



SKAC is a source of community pride: Ample positive feedback was received about the St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Centre (SKAC) and the staff working there. People love the pool and its co-location with St. Catharines Public Library.



Online registration challenges for high-demand programs:

There was substantial feedback regarding challenges with the City's online recreation registration system. Most comments emphasized that since program demand is high, online registration fills quickly. Due to the high-demand and competitive nature of online bookings, participants who are not comfortable with electronic technology or cannot access the internet face barriers to program registration.



Priority registration for residents is desired: St. Catharines residents want first priority to enroll in City programming before non-residents, particularly for programs that are in high demand such as aquafit and pickleball.



Desire for an additional pool:

The topic of having another indoor pool was frequently mentioned at all open house sessions due to high demand for the City's existing swimming programs, as well as the closure of the local YMCA. Feedback suggests people would like to see a new indoor aquatic facility in other neighbourhoods that is similar to SKAC.



Additional community centres with gymnasium spaces are desired:

Programs and activities that received the most interest included those for seniors and youth, particularly gymnasium sports such as pickleball and basketball. A general desire for year-round indoor community spaces and programming was also stated.



Recreation spaces should be welcoming & inclusive:

There is a prevailing belief that everybody should feel welcomed and supported in the City's facilities, including residents that are new to the community and people experiencing economic challenges.

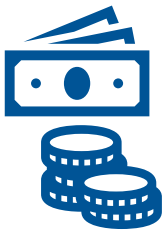
What We Heard: Community Focus Groups



Positive relationships with the City: Representatives of groups mentioned that City staff are helpful and have a great relationship with their groups.



Improving the comfort and safety of parks: Adding lighting, shade structures, trees, gardens, and washrooms was suggested as a way the City could foster more community involvement and participation in parks, as well as enhance park safety.



Affordable recreation is important: Several representatives indicated their organizations direct members facing financial hardships to Jumpstart while others hope to add low-income programs in coming years. Most groups try to set their rates based on what people can afford.



Volunteer recruitment challenges: Several groups are having trouble finding volunteers and think that promoting volunteer opportunities on the City's social media could be helpful. Some groups are able to meet their volunteer needs through high school students' volunteer hours.



Raising awareness about the FAIR program: There is a lack of awareness of the City's FAIR program. Promoting FAIR in community centres and libraries was suggested as a way to inform people of the program.



Additional facility spaces are needed: The SKAC and school gymnasiums were identified as having limited availability for new programs and users. Competitive groups would like more time to meet competition and training demands.



Creating welcoming spaces for Indigenous Communities: Groups expressed the importance of making facility spaces welcoming to members of Indigenous communities and acknowledging St. Catharines' Indigenous history.

4. Conclusion



Conclusion

How Will Input Be Used?

The feedback gathered through community engagement plays a key role in shaping the Recreation Facilities and Programming Plan to reflect what matters most to the community. The findings conveyed in this report are just a high-level overview of the feedback we gathered. The in-depth insights we received from the community have been reviewed thoroughly and will be considered as we move into assessing St. Catharines' needs and drafting priority recommendations.

Next Steps

Thank you to everyone in the community who provided feedback! We will engage St. Catharines once again during the public commenting period on the draft master plan, which will include two public information centres. Stay up to date on the project's progress by visiting EngageSTC.