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TOWN OF ST. MARYS Recreation, Culture and Leisure MASTER PLAN

January 2025



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planning consultants



Recreation, Culture and Leisure Master Plan

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Land Acknowledgement

The Town of St. Marys acknowledges that we are located on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples. This area is within the boundaries covered by Treaty 29, known as the Huron Tract Purchase, and is protected by the Dish With One Spoon wampum agreement. Today, many Indigenous peoples continue to call this land home and act as its stewards, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to live and work on this territory.

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1. Introduction

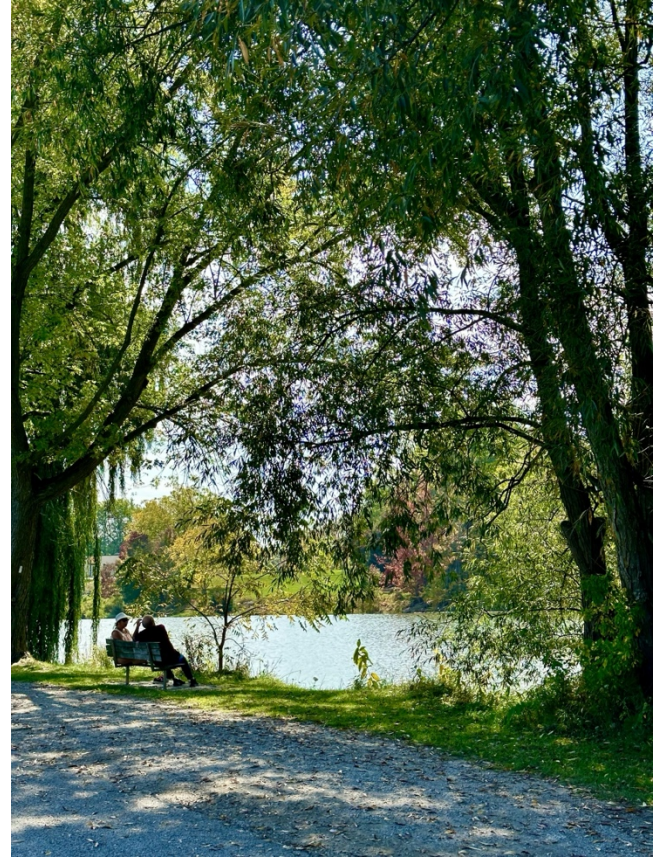
1.1 Master Planning for Recreation, Culture and Leisure

St. Marys population of nearly 7,800 residents benefit from the Town’s many desirable features. These include beautiful natural landscapes, an impressive array of public parks, recreation, and cultural facilities, as well as a strong employment base and expansive local industry.

Recreation, culture, and leisure services are an important part of providing positive visitor and resident experiences and support wellbeing. They contribute to community building, sense of place, and quality of life, offering significant social, economic, and environmental benefits by providing spaces, programs, and services for residents and visitors to gather and participate in meaningful activities and experiences. Universal access to recreation, culture, and leisure opportunities that address diverse needs and offer affordable, high-quality opportunities is vital to individual and community health and prosperity.

Over 7+ years, St. Marys has been guided by the 2017 Recreation and Leisure Services Master Plan that contained 56 recommendations. Approximately 84% of the recommendations were completed or are best practices currently being implemented on an ongoing basis; the remainder were not implemented due to the changing landscape of St. Marys’ recreation and leisure system and external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. A new plan is needed to guide priorities and future investments over the next 10 to 15 years to ensure that the Town continues to meet current and future community needs. This is particularly important given that St. Marys’ population is projected to grow to approximately 9,800 residents by 2040. The scope of this Master Plan includes:

- Indoor recreation and cultural facilities;
- Outdoor recreation amenities and sports facilities;
- Parks, open spaces, and trails; and
- Service delivery, including programs and practices.



1.2 Strategic Alignment

St. Marys’ corporate priorities, goals, and actions are established in the Town’s 2017 Strategic Plan Revision & Update. The updated Strategic Plan identifies six key pillars: infrastructure, communication and marketing, culture and recreation, economic development, growth, and housing. The Town recently worked with Council to renew its strategic priorities for each key pillar and those relevant to this Master Plan are highlighted below.

Table 1: Strategic Council Priorities

Strategic Priority	Key Tactics
Service Levels	Explore options to leverage third-parties to deliver services and programs. Develop a plan to reconcile current service levels and manage requests for service level increases.
Pyramid Recreation Centre	Develop an understanding of how the facility is used today to determine how best to use it in the future.
Quarry	Develop a strategic vision on how best to leverage the space at the facility to add new amenities. Review the opportunity to expand the facility’s operating season to attract new or expanded markets.
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Develop a formal framework that articulates how the Town will increase the application of diversity, equity and inclusion practices and educate the community on the principles of DEI.

1.3 Planning Process

Guided by the Town’s terms of reference, the Recreation, Culture and Leisure Master Plan consists of a background document review, data collection, demographics, and trends as well as an inventory of facilities, programs, and services. Extensive community engagement was undertaken to collect input from residents, visitors, and stakeholder groups. These inputs informed the needs analysis that resulted in recommendations identified throughout this Master Plan.

2. Community Profile

Understanding St. Marys’ community demographic profile and how it may change over the next 10 to 15 years is important to ensure that recreation, culture, and leisure services respond to local needs. This section summarizes the Town’s community profile based on available information, including the Statistics Canada Census, Town of St. Marys Official Plan, and other resources.

2.1 Historical and Projected Population

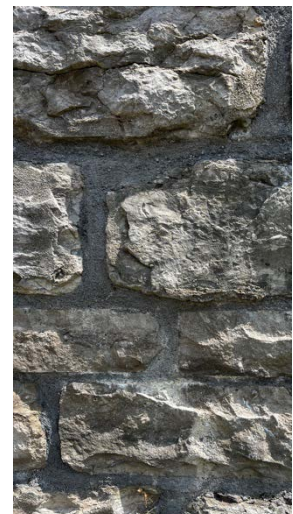
Statistics Canada reported a 2021 Census population of 7,386 people for the Town of St. Marys, which was an 11% growth (approximately 700 persons) compared to the 2011 Census. St. Marys’ Official Plan identified that the Town has adopted an annual growth rate of 1.5%, suggesting that the Town’s population is anticipated to be 7,840 persons in 2025 and reaching 9,800 residents by 2040 (Table 2).

Table 2: Current and Projected Population

Year	Population
2025	7,840
2030	8,450
2035	9,100
2040	9,800

Source: Population projections based on an annual growth rate of 1.5% (as per the Town of St. Marys Official Plan) from the 2021 Census population of 7,386.

The majority of population growth is expected to be accommodated in the north and west side of St. Marys where undeveloped residential lands are located; development may also take place through infill development in other parts of the Town. These projections will be used as the basis for the Master Plan.



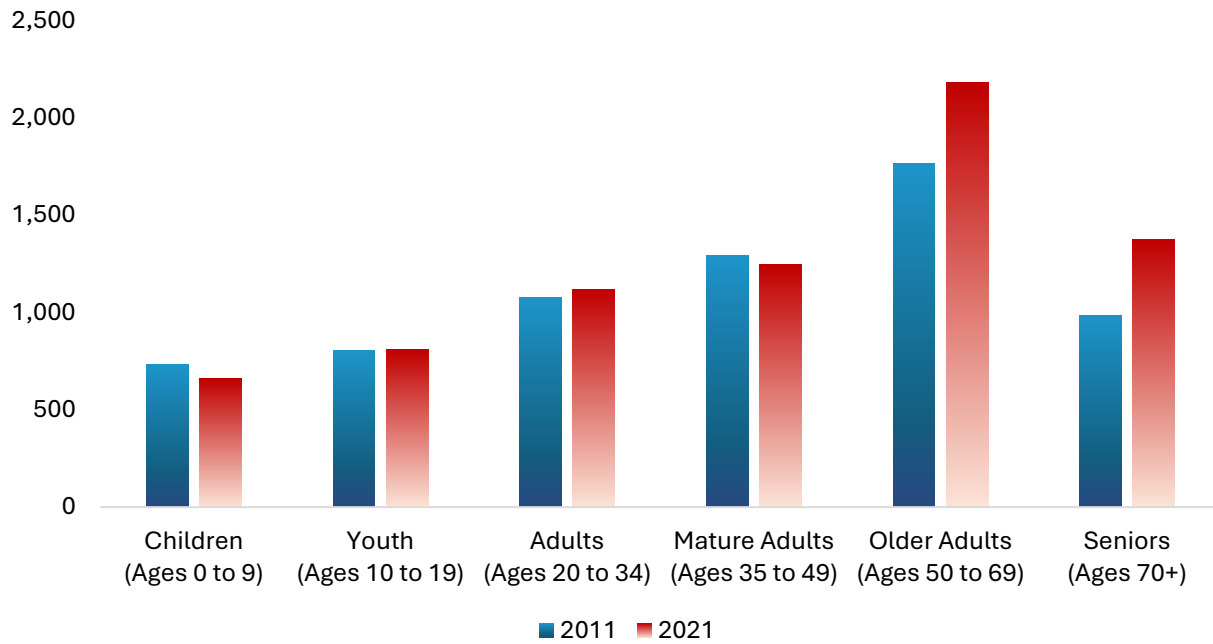
2.2 Population by Age

St. Marys is home to an aging population, which is consistent with trends across Ontario due to the aging baby boomer population. Between the 2011 and 2021 Census, St. Marys' median age increased from 44.4 to 48.4 years, which is higher compared to Perth County (42.4 years) and the Province (41.6 years).

Population growth by age group provides further evidence of St. Marys' aging population. Between the 2011 and 2021 Census, older adults (ages 50 to 69) and seniors (ages 70+) grew by 24% and 40%, respectively. By contrast, the population of children (ages 0 to 9) and mature adults (ages 35 to 49) declined by 10% and one percent, respectively; all other age groups generally remained stable (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Population Growth by Age Group, 2011 to 2021 Census



Source: Statistics Canada 2011 and 2021 Census

2.3 Income and Education

Costs associated with recreation programs such as user fees, transportation, and equipment can create barriers to participating in activities, particularly for households experiencing financial constraints. Research has found that income levels can influence (or at least be an indicator of) participation levels – the greater the household income, the more likely families are to engage with the community.

St. Marys' median household income in 2020 was \$86,000 slightly greater than that of Perth County at \$84,000, and much lower than the Provincial median of \$91,000. Further, the 2021 Census reported that 8% of residents live in households that are below the low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT), slightly less than the County (9%) and the Province (10%). This suggests that some St. Marys' residents are likely to experience financial barriers to participation, highlighting the importance of having access to a range of affordable recreation, culture, and leisure services that are inclusive of all households, regardless of income.

Similarly, the level of education attained can influence participation levels. Less than half of St. Marys' (48%) population holds a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree, which is slightly higher compared to the County (45%) but lower than the Province (55%).

2.4 Immigration and Ethnic Diversity

Immigration levels can influence recreation, cultural, and leisure interests and participation. The 2021 Census reported that 8% of the population were immigrants and 5% identified as a visible minority. This is a modest change from the 2016 Census where 7% of the population were represented by immigrants and 2% were visible minorities, which are both lower in comparison to Perth County and the Province as a whole. Nevertheless, the Town is becoming more diverse aligning with broader Provincial trends that indicate that communities like St. Marys are experiencing cultural diversification. At present, the Town's population continues to be homogenous suggesting that there will continue to be a strong demand for traditional Canadian activities. At the same time, the Town may receive requests for non-traditional opportunities as the community diversifies and interests expand, particularly as there is a greater desire for meaningful cultural experiences.



3. Trends in Recreation, Culture, and Leisure

This section highlights some of the key trends observed across the sector that may influence the provision of recreation, culture, and leisure facilities, programs, and services in St. Marys.

3.1 Participation Trends

3.1.1 Demand for Drop-in and Unstructured Activities

A lack of free time is commonly identified as a barrier to participation in physical activities, which is driving the popularity of drop-in and unstructured activities. With busy lifestyles and competing interests, committing to structured activities is much more difficult to maintain, and activities such as organized sports, particularly at competitive levels, often require considerable time commitments for travel, training, practices, and other league activities. As a result, municipalities are evolving their service delivery models to respond to this trend through strategies such as expanding drop-in programs and extending operating hours to accommodate participation patterns of users.

St. Marys provides a range of drop-in activities that are flexible in accommodating as many users as possible through programs such as sports, and public swims, which complement the Town's parks system and outdoor amenities such as trails, playgrounds, sport courts, open fields, splash pads and outdoor swimming quarry.

3.1.2 Active Living and Wellbeing

The 2024 Framework for Recreation in Canada Update (FRC) identifies active living as one of five key goals to engage residents and foster individual well-being. Active living also strengthens community wellbeing and municipalities recognize this through the promotion of physical literacy such as programming and outdoor play to reduce sedentary lifestyles. Statistics Canada's Quality of Life Framework also identifies community recreation, cultural, and leisure opportunities as key contributors to a high quality of life.

St. Marys worked with surrounding municipalities to create a Roadmap and Community Safety and Well-Being Plan providing a strategy to help residents lead a well-rounded, healthy life. The Plan identifies priorities and recommended actions to improve overall well-being and encourage active living such as improving access to various programs and supports and fostering a sense of belonging through community events.

To support personal wellbeing, the Town offers a Community Wellbeing Program, which is provided by the Friendship Centre, which offers resources and services to help residents through various ways, including delivering meals and essential goods, and telephone services.

3.1.3 High Levels of Physical Inactivity

Research by ParticipACTION found that less than one-third (29%) of kids and teens (ages 5-17) and less than half (49%) of adults (ages 18+) are meeting the national physical guidelines of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day.¹ The popularity of sedentary lifestyles has been the primary contributor to physical inactivity, impacting social wellbeing and also has economic impacts. Sedentary lifestyles are linked to premature death or mortality, placing financial strain on local healthcare systems. St. Marys has some influence in the daily schedules of individuals as communities can facilitate opportunities for physical activity by providing drop-in activities, offering extended facility hours, and promoting the benefits of staying active.

3.2 Park and Facility Trends

3.2.1 Multi-Use Recreation Facilities and Community Hubs

The development of community facilities is evolving as municipalities across Ontario are centralizing facilities and services at a single location. Experience in communities across the Province found that multi-use facilities offer a wider range of benefits, including being a single destination where all members of a household can gather and engage in various recreation, culture, and leisure activities, supporting opportunities for sport development, tourism, and operational efficiency. In many cases, library branches are also integrated into these multi-use facilities and community hubs.

The creation of these “community hubs” has been a focus in many communities as it offers tremendous social benefits, strengthens social cohesion, and fosters an enhanced quality of life. In line with this trend, the Pyramid Recreation Centre in St. Marys is the local community hub that combines a range of facility rentals and programs for all ages and interests, including swimming, skating, and community programming. The Town’s downtown core also functions as a cultural hub that combines the Public Library, Town Hall, and performing arts theatre (i.e., St. Marys Community Players) at the intersection of Queen Street East and Church Street North; the Station Gallery is also located a few blocks east in the downtown area.

3.2.2 Multi-Use Parks

The trend of creating multi-use spaces extends to outdoors where there is a growing demand for parks that contain something for everybody, rather than single-use spaces. While single-use parks still have merit in appropriate locations, parks that provide opportunities for a range of ages, family and household types, interests, and abilities provide multiple avenues for recreation, culture, and leisure for different members of a household.

The Town has several multi-use parks such as Milt Dunnell Field, while other parks such as Solis Park, are specific-use parks. The Town has several parks near each other and are situated either near or within residential spaces, many of these parks being open spaces without amenities.

¹ Participaction. Key Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.participaction.com/the-science/key-facts-and-stats/>

3.2.3 Multi-Seasonal Parks

While the majority of parks are used during the summer, many communities are creating formal and informal opportunities that can also be used during Canadian winters. For example, hills can be used for tobogganing while hard surface courts (e.g., tennis, pickleball, or basketball courts) can be converted into natural ice rinks for outdoor skating. While these methods create efficiencies and year-round opportunities, use as multi-season outdoor facilities may reduce the lifespan of infrastructure due to increased wear and tear requiring higher levels of year-round maintenance.

Creating parks to be year-round destinations is a way to maximize physical activity and encourage activity in all seasons. There are strategies that can allow more ideal circumstances for winter activity, including strategic tree planting and landscaping that can create wind buffers to offset the winter wind chill and blowing snow. Clearing internal walking pathways to be free of snow and/or creating cross-country ski paths also has benefits for encouraging an active and healthy community.

While there are both capital and operational costs associated with promoting park and trail use during the winter (even if it is limited to plowing of parking lots), the availability of no- to low-cost activities throughout the year is a benefit to the community and encourages equitable access to parks and trails. St. Marys currently promotes winter outings through the WinterLights holiday light displays at Milt Dunnell Field, snowshoeing rentals and trails, and winter tubing at the River Valley Golf Course.

3.2.4 Aging Park and Facility Infrastructure

The 2019 Canadian Infrastructure Report Card found that approximately one-third of Canada's sports and recreation facilities were in "Fair" condition or worse. This suggests that municipal sports and recreation facilities require attention, show signs of deterioration, or have deteriorating components. Provincially, many municipal facilities were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s and since this period, infrastructure province-wide has been underfunded. These pressures have been somewhat alleviated through various provincial and federal stimulus plans.

For St. Marys, the Town has been investing in updates to facilities such as the Pyramid Recreation Centre, particularly in relation to the indoor swimming pool, including removal of the hot tub and replacement of the roof and filtration systems. Additional work is planned to be undertaken during the short-term, including replacing the HVAC and exhaust systems, as well as other work to renew aging infrastructure. The Town has also been reinvesting in parks like Milt Dunnell Field to improve usability and functionality and attract more residents and visitors. The revitalization of the park will rely on grant funding over the next few years to transform the space into a multi-use, multi-season park to enjoy nature and outdoor activities. A number of reinvestment projects have also been identified related to the Town's recreation, culture, and leisure system, that are planned to take place within the next 10 years and are referenced in the appropriate sections of this Master Plan.

3.2.5 Environment and Sustainability Trends

The 2017 Master Plan identified park naturalization (reduced parkland maintenance) as a recommendation to lower emissions. Communities are placing a greater emphasis on the development of passive park space (e.g., woodlots, prairie grasslands, flower gardens, civic gathering spaces, etc.), often ensuring that a portion of new active parks remain in a natural state, which typically involves reduced grass cutting, planting of native species, community gardens, and public education to create awareness in the community.

The Town strives to minimize its impact on the environment through a number of ongoing strategies and initiatives such as park naturalization (by reducing grass cutting), community gardens, trails, and low maintenance plantings that can offer benefits to the ecosystem, provide ecological life support, provide clean air, water, and other services.

The Town also has a **Forestry Management Plan** that outlines some of the ways the Town is committed to maintaining, enhancing, and protecting urban forests. The plan guides tree placement to maximize tree canopy cover, outlines how trees will be cared for, protected, and maintain property boundary markers that don't encroach on natural spaces and native species.

Similarly, the **Sparling Bush Plan** (2020-2022) prioritizes strategies to protect and manage native species to preserve the ecological and recreational benefits that are under threat due to encroachment. Some of the strategies in the plan involved creating buffer zones between invasive species and placing mulch on adjacent trails to indicate permitted use. Identifying permitted walking paths is crucial because excessive trails erode soil quality, prevent regeneration of Sparling Bush, and facilitate the spread of threatening, invasive species.



3.3 Cultural Trends

3.3.1 Celebrating Local Through Special Events and Festivals

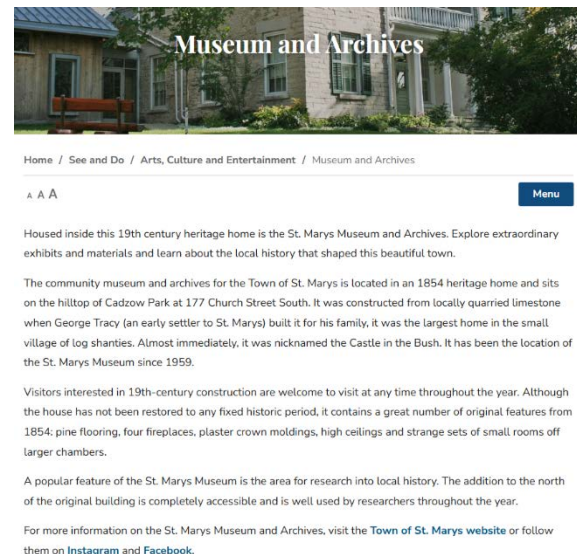
Local events and festivals are an important way for municipalities to foster and celebrate a sense of belonging and culture, while creating tourism and economic development opportunities. In St. Marys, a variety of festivals, events, concerts, and celebrations attract residents and visitors. Some of the highlights include the WinterLights show, the Stonetown Heritage Festival, Melodies at the Museum, and Canada Day celebrations. St. Marys also hosted the Ontario Summer Games Triathlon event in the summer of 2024, which brought athletes from across the Province. Additionally, local culture is celebrated at the St. Marys Farmers' Market that supports local farmers and businesses by hosting outdoor vendors selling fresh and organic foods and craft products every Saturday morning. The Town also partnered with St. Marys Farmer's Market to move the activity to Milt Dunnell Field, providing capital investment in paving and washrooms to improve visibility in the community and improve parking utilization of this location.

3.3.2 Digital Transformation of Culture

The cultural sector has been transformed by growth in the digital space, and digital technology has allowed creative individuals to no longer rely on traditional means of production, distribution, and marketing. It has allowed the creator to engage with their audiences directly and allows creators to reach mass markets across borders.

The culture sector must adapt to the digital transformation to keep up with the interests of Canadians. According to Statistics Canada, in 2020, 92% of Canadians used the internet, with approximately 62% of seniors aged 75 and older reporting internet use.

With technology engrained in our daily lives, St. Marys and its community partners provide resources and programs that centre around the use of technologies. The Town uses its website and social media accounts to connect with residents and visitors, allowing people to learn about community events, register for programs, and more. The Public Library offers a makerspace and media lab to allow users to tap into their creative outlet and offers resources like the Ancestry Library to learn about family lineage, World Health Online, the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Cantook radio station, CBC Corner to watch news, TV, radio and children's content, and more. The St. Marys Station Gallery also uses social media and its website to connect with a wider audience who may not have an opportunity to visit in person.



4. Community Engagement

4.1 Community Engagement Strategy

Community engagement is critical to the success of the Master Plan as the perspectives of residents, stakeholders, staff and Council are important elements to consider in the development of strategies to address community needs and priorities. Engagement tactics used to collect input from the public include the following:

- Public Open House (Recreation Fair)
- Community Survey
- Stakeholder Focus Groups
- Interviews and Workshops with Council, Staff and Key Community Representatives

The information presented in this section summarizes the community input that was received but are not recommendations; they were considered with other inputs as part of the Master Plan process. Community input has not been altered even in instances where comments incorrectly reflect the Town's actual policies, practices, or service levels. There may have been external influences that may have impacted the input through this process.

4.2 Public Open House

St. Marys' first Recreation Fair was hosted in June 2024 to promote the diverse range of recreation, culture, and leisure opportunities offered for all age groups in the Town. The Town utilized this event as an opportunity to launch public consultation for the Master Plan process. This provided an open forum to promote the project and encourage residents to get involved in the planning process. Display panels highlighted background information and residents had an opportunity to provide their initial input to be considered as part of the planning process.

The community survey was also promoted during the Recreation Fair. This included distribution of hard copy paper surveys as well as take-home bookmarks with a link to the digital form submission. As a wide range of community organizations were also in attendance to promote their organizations and create community awareness of their respective offerings which provided an excellent forum to introduce the Master Plan project, encourage organizations to promote the community survey, and to encourage organizations to provide get involved by providing their input. The following is a summary of the input that was received.

- Request for more gymnasium-type space for a wide range of activities, including indoor pickleball, basketball, etc.
- Offer more programs for all ages, abilities, and interests, including basketball.

Note: The information presented in Section 4 are community engagement findings only and are not recommendations.

- Provide separate and more outdoor courts for tennis and pickleball due to growing demand, conflicts between the sports, and lack of sufficient time for play. Install an outdoor basketball court to promote opportunities for youth and young adults.
- Ensure that the trail system provides opportunity for casual and active use for walking, running, and biking, ensure linkages connect the entire system, and engage the conservation authority as part of the planning process.
- Consider new or expand upon existing community events (e.g., haircut event).
- Parks should have flowers and other plantings.

4.3 Community Survey

A community survey was conducted in June of 2024 to collect data on participation preferences and barriers, satisfaction levels and priorities related to recreation, culture and leisure opportunities in St. Marys. The community survey was available to complete online or by hardcopy and it was promoted through the project webpage, social media, public events, the local newspaper, and through community stakeholders and word of mouth. A total of 562 surveys were received and analyzed, representing over 1,226 people across all age groups. The findings do not represent a random sample of the population as this was a voluntary and self-directed survey.

4.3.1 Survey Respondent Profile

The following information represents a high-level summary of respondents.

- The average age of the survey respondent was 56 years old.
- The average household size was 2.8 persons.
- 86% respondents were Town residents, with 14% from adjacent municipalities.

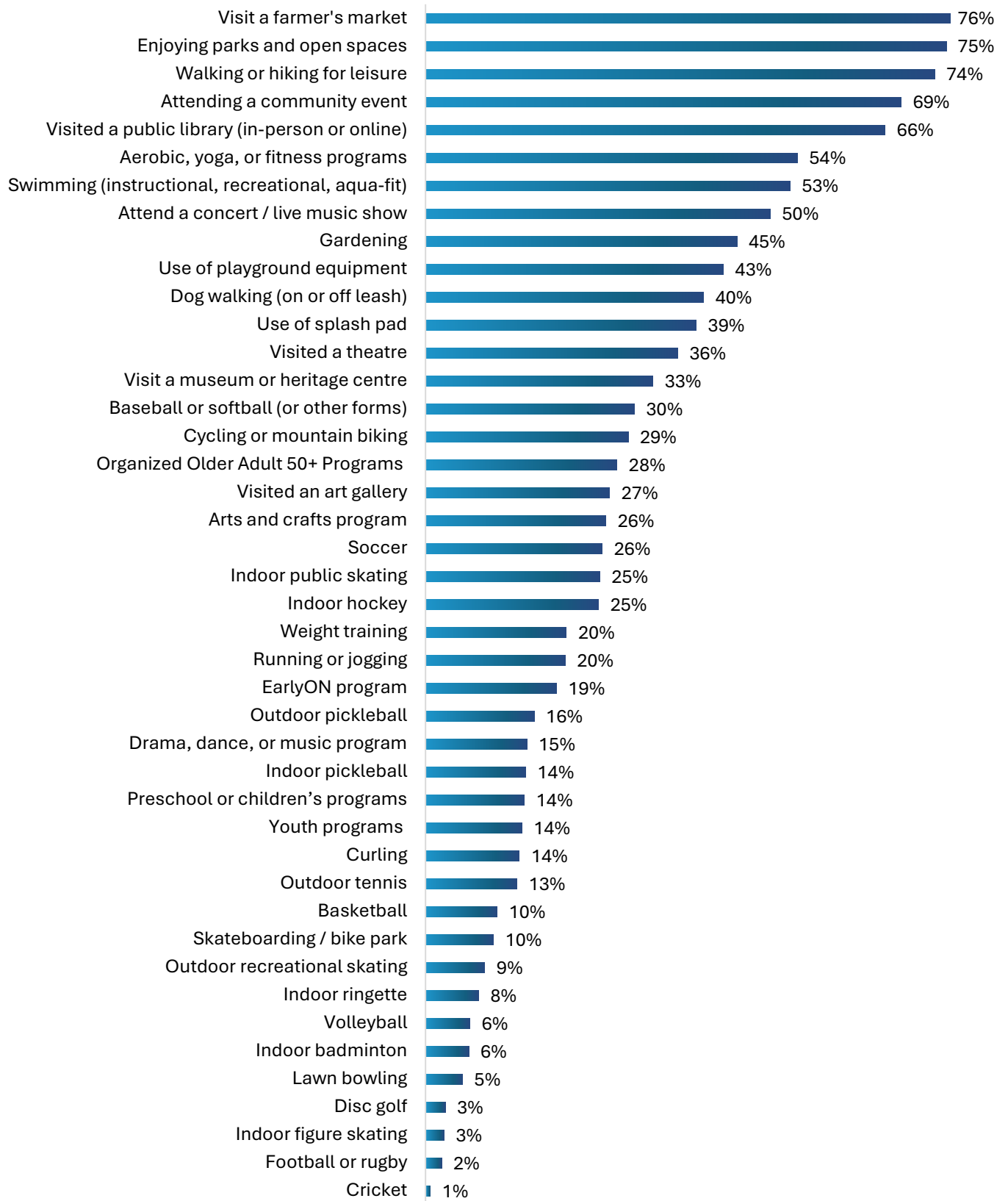
4.3.2 Participation in Recreation Activities

Visiting a farmer's market (76%) was identified as the most popular activity that respondents participated in over the past five years. This was followed by enjoying parks and open spaces (75%), walking or hiking for leisure (74%), attending community events (69%), and visiting a library (66%). The top five activities are in line with broader participation trends that point to a desire for unstructured and self-scheduled activities.

These results are similar to the community survey undertaken for the 2017 Master Plan, which found that the top five activities included walking or hiking for leisure, recreational swimming, aerobics and fitness, dog walking, and using playground equipment; it should be noted that the previous Master Plan did not include culture. These activities ranked highly among respondents given their appeal to a wide range of interests and age groups. Other recreation activities and sports tend to rank lower as they are often played by a subset of the community.

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Figure 2: Participation in Parks, Recreation and Culture Activities in the Past Five Years (n= 560)

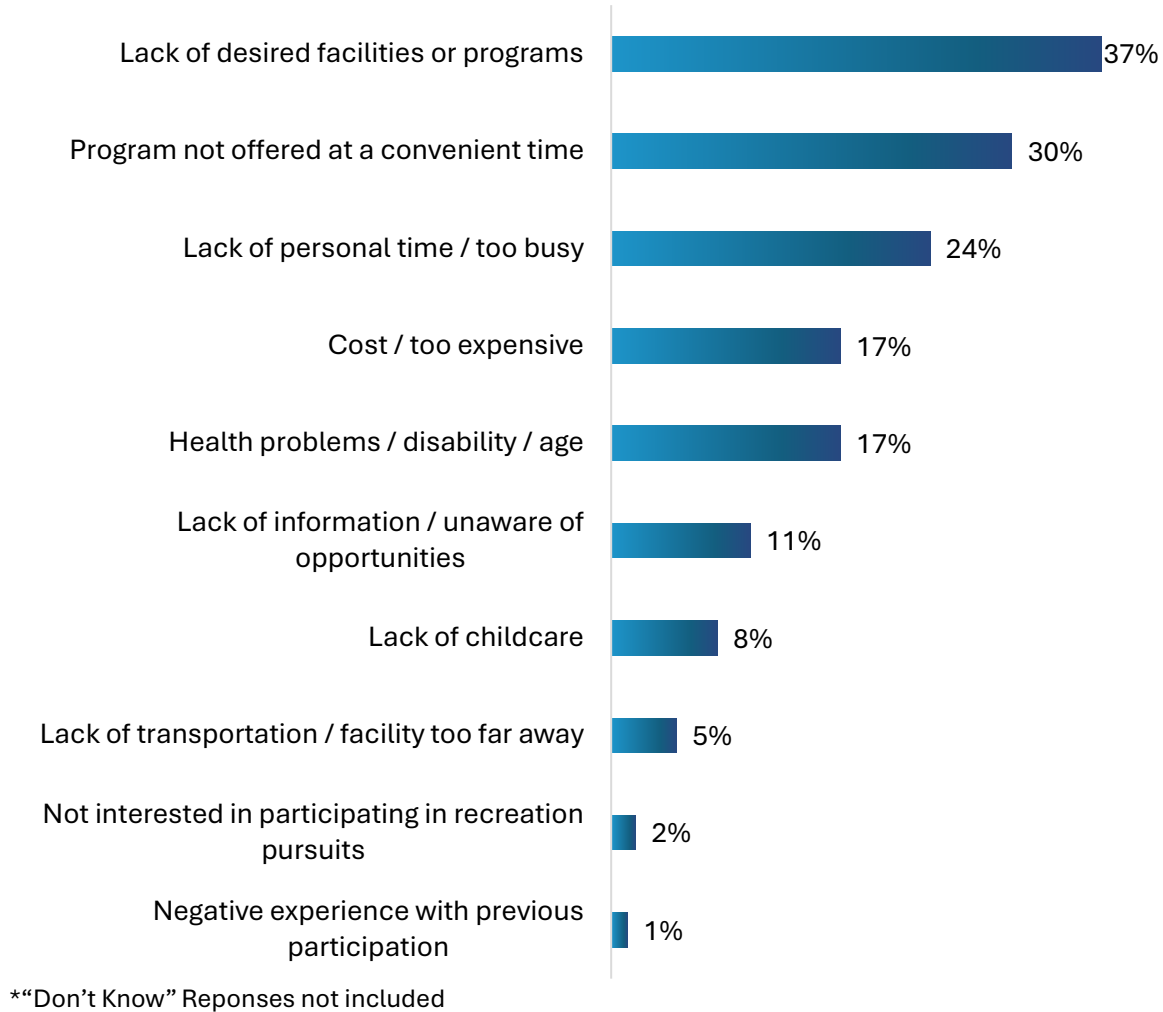


Note: The information presented in Section 4 are community engagement findings only and are not recommendations.

4.3.3 Participation Barriers in Recreation, Culture and Leisure Activities

Approximately one-quarter (26%) of respondents indicated that they or members of their household were not able to participate in recreation pursuits as much as they would like to. Among this group, more than one-third (37%) identified that the main barrier was that their desired facility or program is not available, which was followed by the program not being offered at a convenient time (30%), lack of personal time (24%), and affordability (17%).

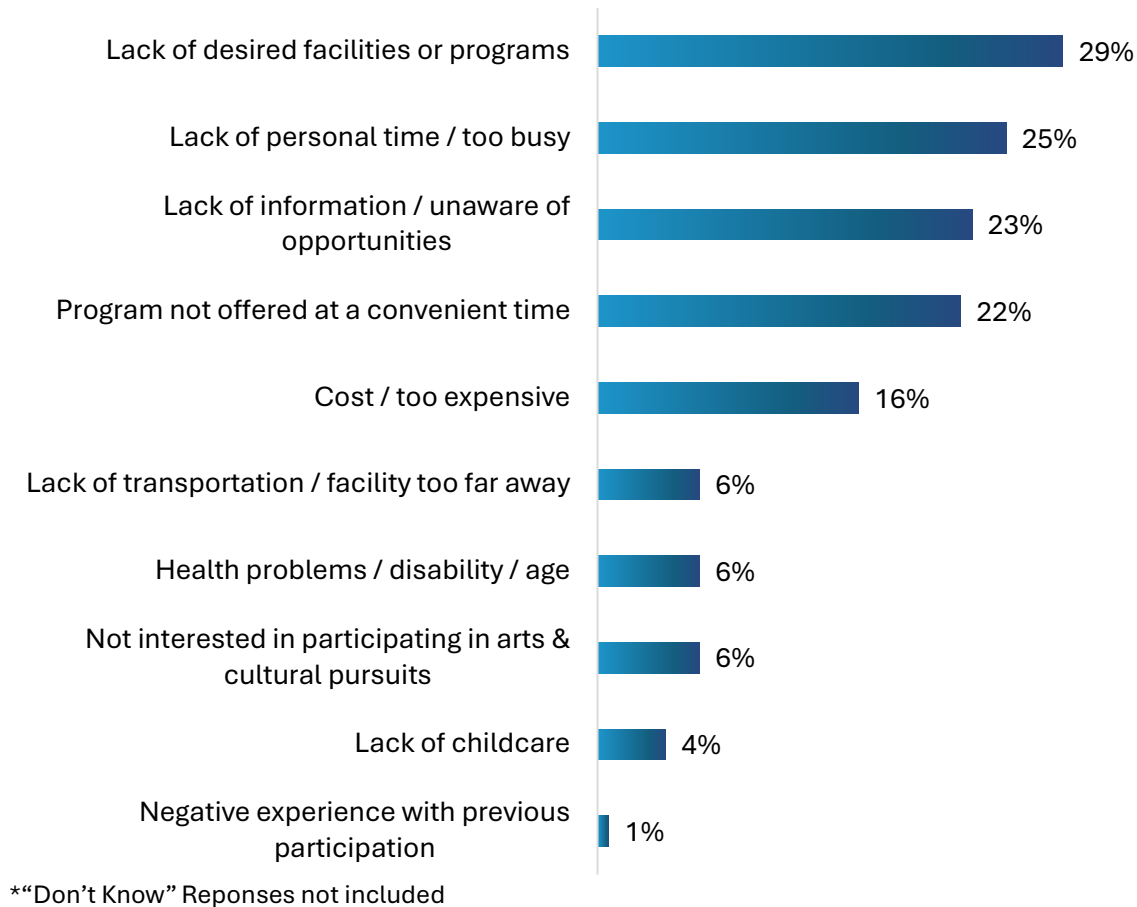
Figure 3: Participation Barriers for Recreational Activities (n= 161)



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One-fifth (20%) of respondents also indicated that they or members of their household were not able to participate in arts and cultural pursuits as often as they would like. Similarly, the lack of desired facilities or programs was the main barrier among this group (29%). This was followed by lack of free time (25%), lack of information (23%), and the program not being offered at a convenient time (22%).

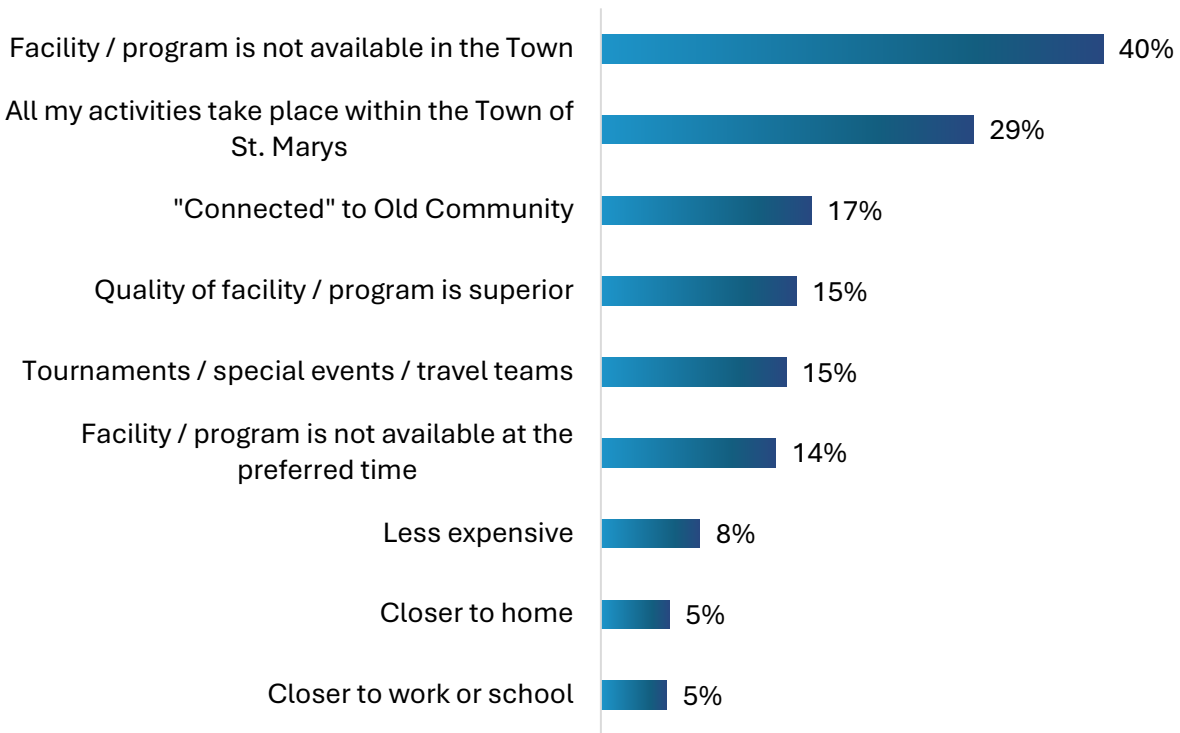
Figure 4: Participation Barrier in Art and Cultural Activities (n= 143)



4.3.4 Participation in Activities Outside St Marys

While 29% of respondents indicated that all their activities take place in St. Marys, 40% of respondents reported that they participate in activities outside of the Town because the facility and/or programs were not available locally. Others returned to communities where they felt more connected to, or they may have lived there before (17%).

Figure 5: Reasons Why Respondents Participate in Activities Outside St Marys (n= 501)



**“Don’t Know/Use” Responses not included

4.3.5 Requests for Recreation, Culture and Leisure Activities

Respondents had an opportunity to identify what activities they would like to see offered in St. Marys that are not currently available. It is noted that the Town does offer some of these activities.

Top Suggested Recreation Activities

- Pickleball Courts/Programs
- Fitness programs (e.g., tai chi, Zumba, yoga, etc.)
- Swimming programs
- Dance programs
- Gymnastic programs
- Adult programs (e.g., recreational sports)
- Gymnasium
- Indoor walking track

Top Suggested Arts and Cultural Activities

- Fine arts programs
- Performing arts programs
- Special events and festivals
- Live music and outdoor concerts

Note: The information presented in Section 4 are community engagement findings only and are not recommendations.

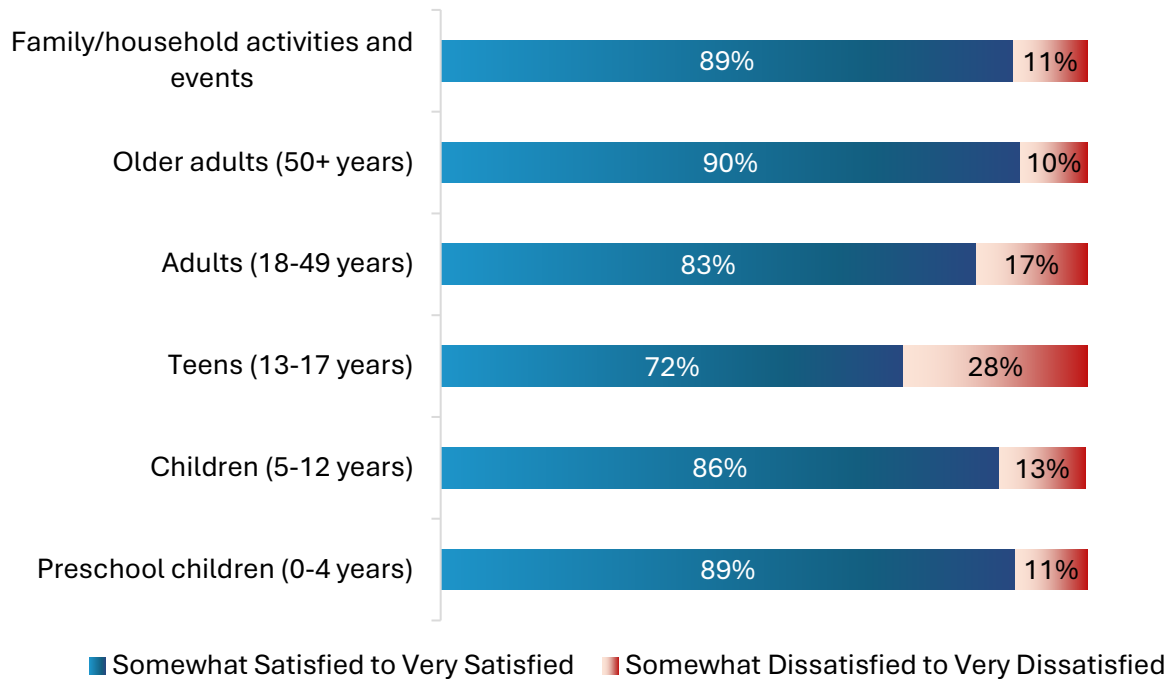
4.3.6 Importance and Satisfaction Levels

Participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the Town’s recreation opportunities. Excluding respondents who indicated that they don’t know or do not use, the highest satisfaction levels were reported for older adults (90%), followed closely by families (89%) and pre-school children (89%). Recreation opportunities for teens (ages 13 to 17) had the lowest level of satisfaction (72%).

Similarly for cultural opportunities, the highest satisfaction levels were for older adults (90%), followed by family activities (86%) and pre-school children (84%). Cultural opportunities for teens had the lowest satisfaction levels at 65%.

These findings suggest that the Town has provided a very good level of service resulting in high satisfaction levels for most age groups. There are some opportunities to improve satisfaction levels across all age groups, particularly among teens. It is commonly found in other communities that satisfaction levels among teens is low because there is often a perception that there are not enough things to do for this age group. This highlights the need to ensure that a broad range of opportunities are available to engage not only this age group, but all residents in the community that have broad interests and participation preferences. The Town does a good job in this regard and opportunities to boost engagement levels is explored further in this Master Plan.

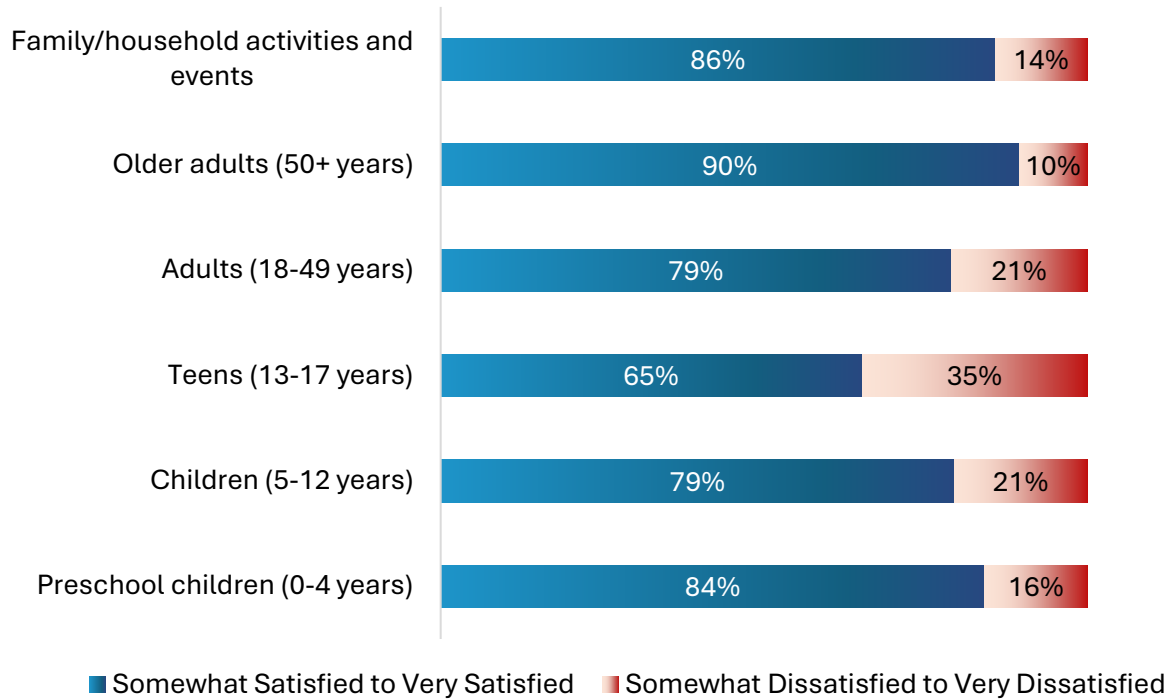
Figure 6: Satisfaction Levels with Recreation Opportunities



**“Don’t Know/Use” Responses not included

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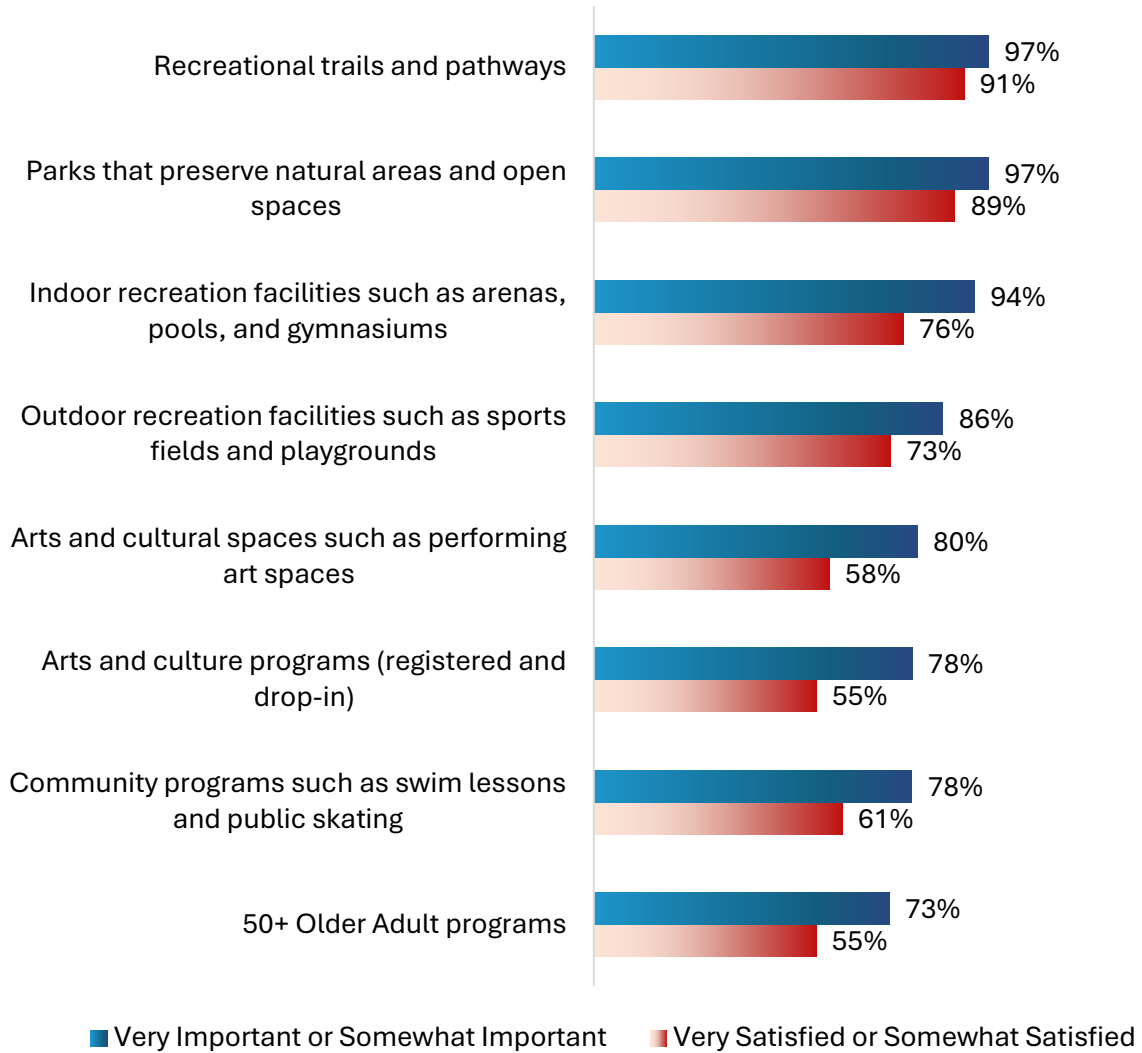
Figure 7: Satisfaction Levels with Cultural Opportunities



*“Don’t Know/Use” Responses not included

Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with various aspects of recreation, culture and leisure facilities and parks. High levels of importance paired with high levels of satisfaction suggest that expectations are being met. While there is some room for improvement across all areas that were measured, the area requiring the greatest attention is improving satisfaction levels among arts and cultural spaces and programs, community programs, and older adult programs.

Figure 8: Levels of Importance and Satisfaction with Recreation, Culture, and Leisure Opportunities



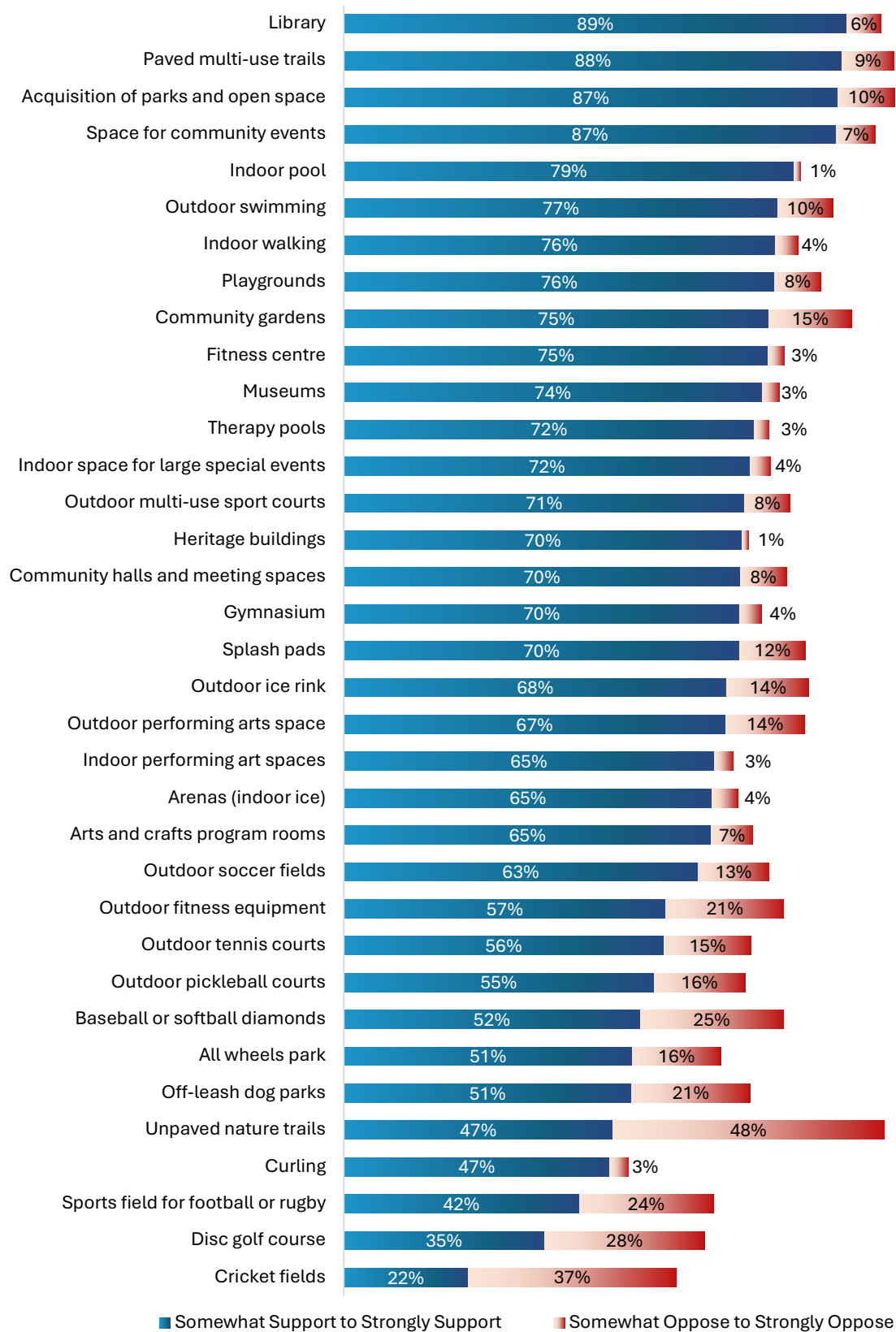
4.3.7 Support for Additional Spending

The following figure illustrates respondents’ level of support for spending additional public funds on improving or developing new recreation, culture and leisure facilities. The top five supported amenities include, the library (89%), paved multi-use trails (88%), acquisition of parks and open space (87%), space for community events (87%), and indoor pool (79%). The top five activities are consistent with industry trends that show increasing levels of demand and popularity for unstructured, self-directed activities. The results also align with findings from the 2017 Master Plan where facilities that supported casual, outdoor activities ranked highly, including unpaved nature trails, paved multi-use trails, playgrounds, passive parks and open spaces, and outdoor swimming. Interestingly, there was notable opposition to spending for natural trails and a number of indoor and outdoor facilities and spaces.

Note: The information presented in Section 4 are community engagement findings only and are not recommendations.

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Figure 9: Support for Additional Public Spending

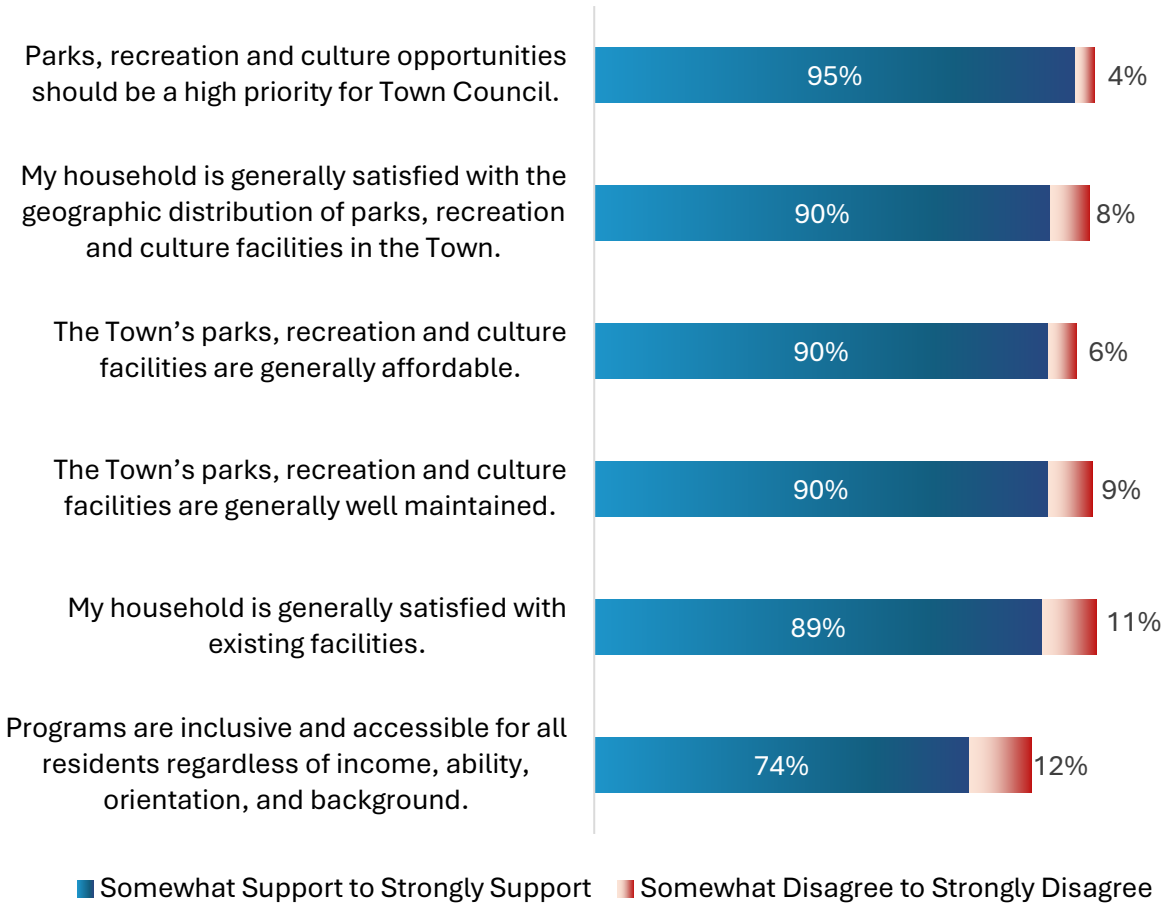


Note: The information presented in Section 4 are community engagement findings only and are not recommendations.

4.3.8 Level of Agreement on Recreation, Culture and Leisure Statements

Respondents shared their level of agreement with statements about recreation, culture and leisure in St Marys, which are highlighted in the figure below.

Figure 10: Level of Agreement Statements on Parks, Recreation and Culture (n=, 439)



4.3.9 Other Survey Comments

Additional comments were provided in an open-ended format. There were several positive comments about the Town's staff and the community programs offered in St. Marys. Some of the other key themes from the comments centered around improving accessibility, requests for more events throughout the year and later in the summer, and improved promotion of the Baseball Hall of Fame to attract more tournaments. Facility requests included pickleball courts, gymnasium, fitness centre, outdoor pool, and indoor walking track. The desire for enhanced indoor pool programs was suggested, including better program times and more public swims. With respect to parks, respondents expressed the desire for more washrooms and shade, as well as additional parking at key sites such as the quarry and sports fields.

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4.4 Stakeholder Focus Groups

Stakeholder focus groups were held with community organizations that have an interest in recreation, culture, and leisure in St. Marys to understand what trends and challenges they may be facing, how groups expect to evolve during the planning period, how facilities can be improved, whether there are provision gaps, and how the Town and organizations can work better together to help respond to their needs. For those who were unable to attend the focus group sessions, organizations were given an opportunity to provide written input or to complete a survey submission. The table below identifies groups that participated in the focus groups or provided written input, which is followed by a summary of key themes from each group.

- Alzheimer’s Society
- Adult Soccer
- Avon Maitland District School Board
- Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame
- Friends of the Library
- Friends of the St. Marys Museum
- Huron Perth Public Health
- Kinsmen Club of St. Marys
- Middlesex Swimming
- Northern Star Skating Academy
- St. John Ambulance
- St. Marys Badminton
- St. Marys Community Players
- St. Marys DCVI
- St. Marys Curling Club
- St. Marys Farmers' Market
- St. Marys Healthcare Foundation
- St. Marys Lincolns
- St. Marys Minor Ball
- St. Marys Minor Hockey
- St. Marys Minor Soccer
- St. Marys Pickleball
- St. Marys Ringette
- St. Marys Station Gallery
- St. Marys Tennis
- The Rotary Club of St. Marys
- Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

4.4.1 Indoor Recreation Focus Group

Indoor Recreation Facilities are a Strength – Participants expressed that the Town’s indoor recreation facilities are a strength of the community, and they are proud of the assets that are available in a community the size of St. Marys; the positive interactions with Town staff were also identified as a strength. Specific mentions were made about the twin pad arena at the Pyramid Recreation Centre, as well as access to the high school gymnasium (which is used for indoor recreation activities), although the desire for a Town-owned gymnasium at the Pyramid Recreation Centre was suggested to provide an opportunity to offer an expanded range of programs. Continued collaboration and open communication between the Town and organizations was expressed to ensure long-term success.

4.4.2 Outdoor Recreation Focus Group

Pressure for Sports Fields – Ball diamond and soccer participants described experiencing pressure for access to sports fields. For ball diamonds, concerns were raised over drainage issues and safety netting; access to more diamond time was also expressed. With a continued growth in soccer participants, the availability of soccer fields was also a concern. It was felt that Meadowridge Park and St. Marys DCVI are the best locations in Town for soccer, although drainage

concerns were raised with respect to the high school location. Playing on wet grass has resulted in field damage and in many cases, games have had to be rescheduled. Suggestions were made for an artificial turf field to provide a consistent field surface. The desire for an indoor field was also expressed for year-round programming. The majority of organized ball games are played at the Hall of Fame diamonds. Some suggested areas for enhancement at that site include a pavilion for shade and washrooms, enhanced parking, and adding lights to the premiere diamond.

Popularity of Pickleball – Like other communities, pickleball is a growing sport in St. Marys. The local pickleball group has approximately 137 members and there is a strong desire for additional courts to accommodate new players of all ages, as well as visitors to the community. The St. Marys pickleball community expressed their concerns and desires through a letter submitted to Town Council as well as received during the public forum. Common themes from the letters spoke to the fact that the existing courts are shared with tennis, which limits the amount of playing time for each organization. Other challenges with the courts that were mentioned included confusion of the multi-lined surface and parking constraints. To alleviate these challenges, the desire for additional dedicated courts was requested at the existing site or at a new location such as at the high school, although it was recognized that there is noise concerns associated with the sport. Forming an action committee to find a solution was suggested and requests were also made for an indoor playing facility.

4.4.3 Service Clubs Focus Group

St. Marys is Changing – St. Marys' community profile is changing as the Town is aging and becoming a retirement community. As a result there will be greater pressure for recreation, culture and leisure opportunities for this aging segment of the community. At the same time, participants recognized that the Town's Friendship Centre plays a big role in providing accessible and affordable senior services. Participants also described an increasing number of young families with children in the community and as a result, it will be important to ensure that there are amenities and programs that are geared towards these residents; in particular. Participants identified that these growth trends are being driven by newcomers to the community from larger urban areas that are seeking a more affordable lifestyle that St. Marys has to offer. Suggestions were also made to enhance wayfinding signage to promote and connect the Town's assets, particularly in the downtown area, and ensure that current residents, newcomers, and visitors are all aware of what St. Marys has to offer.

Use of Milt Dunnell Field – Participants recognized the importance of Milt Dunnell Field as a community focal point for events, sports, and access to trails and the Thames River. It's a highly valued asset that should continue to be promoted as a place for community gatherings, although participants recognized that there is risk given its location in a floodplain and being prone to flooding. Nevertheless, it was felt that there are parts of the park that can be better utilized such as the paved parking area for more events and offering camping along the Thames River. Winterizing washroom and ensuring that they can be used in the evenings and weekends was also suggested to encourage greater use.

Community Collaboration – Participants were supportive of greater opportunities to collaborate with the Town, as well as other service clubs, to pursue initiatives, such as jointly raising money for community projects. It was felt that there should be more collective meetings with the Town and other organizations to share insights, best practices, plan future events, identify priorities and collaborative opportunities, and to strengthen the effectiveness of community services, whether it's delivered by the Town or by organizations. One concern that was raised was that recruiting and retaining volunteers is an ongoing challenge, especially as current volunteers are aging out and many residents often have other competing priorities.

4.4.4 Arts and Cultural Organizations Focus Group

An Arts and Cultural Hub for St. Marys – There was a strong desire from participants to create an arts and cultural hub in St. Marys' downtown to provide a destination for likeminded, creative individuals to gather, perform, express, and share artistic abilities and talents. This would further bolster the vibrancy of St. Marys' downtown, creating a sense of place for residents and visitors. Participants recognize that the intersection of Queen Street East and Church Street South already functions as a community hub with the Town Hall, Public Library, and St. Marys Community Players Theatre, although more could be done to promote the area. Some examples of this included signage and wayfinding as well as investment in outdoor gathering spaces for events. The desire for a smaller performance space was also identified, such as a black box theatre, as well as space where the Station Gallery could be relocated to or a place where arts and cultural programming could be held.

Creating Connections – It was expressed that the people of St. Marys have a collaborative mindset and there is an opportunity to collectively foster a culture that is vibrant, artistic and lively. There are opportunities to work with the Town to strengthen marketing strategies to promote the arts and culture sector in St. Marys to boost local engagement as well as tourism as it was recognized that there are economic benefits, particularly in the downtown area. Regular opportunities for engagement between the Town and organizations was suggested to help spread knowledge and raise awareness about what other organizations are doing, which can also create collaborative opportunities and minimize overlap, as well as promote programs to engage new or expanded audiences, particularly targeting younger generations to encourage lifelong interest in the arts and culture sector.

4.4.5 Community Public Health

Community Health Trends – Participants identified key trends in the public health sector that are relevant to the Master Plan. They can generally be grouped into three categories – built, social, and natural environments. Regarding the built environment, public health advocates highlighted the need to ensure that recreation, culture and leisure opportunities must be equitably distributed in the community to ensure they can be accessed by everyone, particularly those who may not have access to transportation. No cost and low-cost opportunities also need to be available for those experiencing financial constraints.

From a social perspective, having opportunities for residents to come together to connect and interact with others was identified as being important. Some key examples included opportunities for placemaking, makerspaces, community gardens, and bicycle repair stations. It was also felt that the ability for residents to age in place was important. Natural environment trends included the importance of having access to greenspace.

Overcoming Challenges – Participants identified that there is a need for continued enhancement of recreation, culture and leisure opportunities in St. Marys that focus on creating social connections and bringing people together. It was identified that an emphasis should be placed on equitable opportunities, with consideration given to geographic distribution, low cost and no-cost activities, promotion of financial subsidy programs, and consideration for the times that activities are being offered. Ease of accessing information was also raised; it was mentioned that mobile access to registering for programs was particularly challenging. Other suggestions included continuing to engage residents to understand interests and demands, intergenerational programming, virtual programming, and supporting organizations in delivering special events.

4.4.6 Schools

Communication is a Strength – School representatives identified that communication between staff is a strength. Participants were particularly proud of the reciprocal agreement with the Town that provides parties with access to both school and Town-owned facilities.

Maximizing the Use of Facilities – Suggestions were made to further bolster the use of Town facilities such as removing (or adjusting) the fees for using the pool. Exploring opportunities to use the Lind Sportsplex for curling was identified – recognizing that the St. Marys Curling Club would need to be involved. The Avon Maitland District School Board identified that there are currently no plans to change the supply of schools in St. Marys beyond planned capital enhancements.

4.4.7 Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

Focus on Passive Outdoor Recreation – Wildwood Conservation Area is located in proximity to St. Marys and offers a range of outdoor recreation opportunities including, but not limited to, motorized boating and use of personal watercrafts, camping, trails, cycling (including bike rentals), outdoor swimming, and sand volleyball. Participants expressed that this area is well used, which is driven in part by the demand for outdoor activities and connecting to nature since the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a desire to boost day-users with potential new or enhanced strategies, including improving existing camp sites and picnics areas, and encouraging more water-based activities such as canoeing and kayaking.

Opportunities to Work Together – Participants identified that the Conservation Authority is always open to working with the Town of St. Marys or other community partners to achieve common goals. The Conservation Authority is supportive of naturalization efforts, particularly within flood zones and along waterways, as well as trail development. Working together to deliver programming related to environmental conservation and stewardship was also identified such as planting trees and native species.

4.5 Staff Workshop

A workshop was held with Town staff to capture their valuable knowledge, insights, and experiences to be considered as part of the Master Plan. Eight staff members participated, including individuals from senior management and supervisory positions. Discussions were wide-ranging and key themes are highlighted below.

Provide High Quality User Experiences – The Town and external organizations work together to provide a range of high-quality facilities, programs, and services that are well utilized by residents and visitors. The Community Services Department has worked to create and maintain strong sustainable programs and services, which have continued to attract users. In addition to the programs and services, St Marys and its partners offer unique amenities (e.g., Friendship Centre, Super Splash Waterpark, indoor pool, double pad arena, etc.) Staff also voiced comments from the community regarding the desire to enhance and replace aging playgrounds.

Cherished Natural Features – The Town has worked to enhance and maintain natural features and trails to connect residents with the outdoors and to promote recreational tourism. Staff take pride in the work they do to keep the trails and parks in good shape. These spaces are highly utilized during all times of the day. The community is passionate about the Town’s trail network and there is a public desire for enhanced service levels and more amenities on the trail system such as lighting, seating, paved pathways, etc.

A Strong Staff Team – The Town’s Community Services Department work collaboratively with staff across other departments, as well as with external organizations, who are dedicated to serving the community. The dedicated staff team are regularly accessible to the community and do their best to listen and accommodate the needs of residents. Over the years, Town staff have worked to develop and sustain strong relationships with residents and local organizations.

Partnerships and Agreements – The Community Services Department has a variety of strong partnerships and agreements with external organizations, including local and private businesses, the hospital, school board, and more. These partnerships are used to provide access to spaces, deliver programs, or offset costs. There is a desire to review partnership agreements to ensure they are transparent, equitable, and consistent to better understand future strategic directions. Reviewing partnership agreements will also help minimize program duplication and optimize the use of recreation, culture and leisure spaces in St. Marys. The Town continues to work with all partners to ensure program and service delivery are meeting the needs of the community.

Funding & Subsidy – It is recognized that some residents face financial barriers that may limit their participation in recreation, culture, and leisure opportunities. The Town is proud to offer its Access to Recreation Grant, which provides qualifying individuals and families with \$100 per year for programs run by the Town or by external organizations. Staff felt that while this subsidy is helpful, they do not believe it is sufficient to sustain long-term participation. Staff help families navigate alternate sources of funding (e.g., Canadian Tire Jump Start, Kid Sport, Stratford Perth County Foundation) but these are only for individuals up to 18 years of age. While funding and subsidies are available, accessing them becomes a challenge when there are many layers involved in the

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application and approval processes. This may include document retrieval, application printing, travel to application offices, and time to complete the process.

Special Events and Sport Tourism – St. Marys is home to unique spaces and amenities that entice groups to hold events or host competitions (e.g., quarry, indoor pool, Milt Dunnell Field, double pad arena). The Town is supportive of events and regional competitions, and they assist external organizations to deliver community-based events, although the Town is best suited to deliver large-scale community events. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have seen an increase in the number and size of events being held in the Town, specifically at the Milt Dunnell Field. There have been some challenges with road closures required for events and sporting competitions. Staff do their best to mitigate these concerns and work through issues, so it does not negatively affect the Town's ability to host.

Business Minded Approaches – Recently, the Community Services Department has been taking on a more for-profit type of business approach to some of their operations such as Super Splash Waterpark within the St. Marys Quarry. Staff have been exploring ways to expand this operation given its success. However, lack of onsite parking has stifled the expansion of the park to some degree.

Staff are shifting their attention to other unique or underutilized areas to create activities and experiences that will generate additional revenue. Exploring additional types of revenue sources helps offset and subsidize other areas of the department. This represents a shift in mindset from the traditional approach used to run municipal recreation.

User fees are often relied on to help offset costs of running programs or facilities. There is no resident / non-resident fee structure in place as the Town relies on non-residents to help fund some expenses and run programs.

Maximizing Existing Space – The COVID-19 pandemic provided staff with the opportunity to make some changes to program offerings which helped maximize use of available facility spaces. Since this time, staff have continued to strategize on the best ways to use rooms and schedule programs and facilities to optimize available resources and increase revenues. There is a belief that there are more opportunities to maximize space to accommodate a wider range of community uses.

Responding to Community Requests – Staff are receiving requests for additional space and time for activities such as tennis, soccer, pickleball, and ice sports. While staff do their best to accommodate these requests, they recognize the need to balance the provision of existing services and operational implications such as staffing and funding with customer demands. While there are some spaces that might accommodate these requests, often they are not suitable for the type of activity (e.g., require different flooring, sports court lines, etc.). Currently, the only dry indoor multi-sport space (e.g., lines for multiple activities) exists at the local school gymnasiums. Alternative spaces have been explored to host events or run activities, but there may be conflicts, or constraint associated with these other venues. Staff have considered and are open to exploring renovations to accommodate more activities. For the time being, the Town does a good job at making their spaces work for everyone.

Policies and Procedures – The Town is working to update policies and procedures to reflect emerging issues and needs. Most recently, Council passed the Recreation Program Inclusion Policy that outlines additional supports the Town can provide individuals in their programs. Staff recognize that the Community Services Department has strong policies and procedures but there is a need to establish consistency in how these are applied amongst managers and other service areas. Creating a donation policy, developing a policy for accepting new program ideas, updating the Ice Allocation Policy, and establishing a procedure for evaluating programming service levels (e.g., recreational, competitive, elite, etc.) were a few areas staff noted.

Volunteers – Staff recognize that volunteers are valuable resources in St. Marys as they play a key role in delivering and/or supporting programs. There is a growing concern that volunteers are phasing out and there may not be enough people to support certain programs in the future. As a result, staff recognize that residents may look to the Town to assume the responsibility of delivering these programs. The Town can play a vital part in helping to promote and sustain volunteer driven programs, services, and events in the community, although it was identified that there is limited staff capacity in this area; it was suggested that there should be a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator to address this area.

4.6 Council Interviews

Individual interviews with Council members were undertaken to provide an opportunity for each member of Council to provide their perspectives and priorities on recreation, culture, and leisure in St. Marys. Key themes from the discussions include the following:

Proud of What We Have – St. Marys’ residents are well served with a range of recreation, culture, and leisure opportunities. Specific mentions were made with respect to the indoor amenities at the Pyramid Recreation Centre (such as the indoor pool and arena), trail system, racquet courts, sports fields, swimming quarry and splash pads, and cultural facility offerings.

Fiscal Responsibility – While there may potentially be need for an enhanced range of facilities, programs, and services, it is important to recognize that the Town has made significant investments in its recreation, culture, and leisure system, and existing assets to be properly maintained to serve the community. Balancing recreation, culture, and leisure needs with other corporate priorities should be within the scope of limited Town resources.

Connecting to Nature – The Town provides a strong trail network and is proud of key routes such as The Loop and the Grand Trunk Trail. Continuing to strengthen connectivity was mentioned as well as to build upon adding supporting amenities to enhance the user experience such as wayfinding signage, seating, garbage cans, and trail markers. Park naturalization and strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change should also be an important consideration in planning for parks.

Responding to Emerging Needs – There is a desire for enhancing and optimizing what the Town currently provides, including greater use of the Pyramid Recreation Centre hall, expanding outdoor swimming opportunities at the quarry, and undertaking accessibility retrofits (e.g., playgrounds). Suggestions were made for basketball courts, soccer fields, tennis and pickleball courts,

gymnasium, and indoor walking track; some of these amenities are provided by others such as the school and hospital, but it was suggested that it could be something the Town should explore in case the community no longer has access to these amenities.

Focus on Partnerships – The Town has benefited from partnerships and agreements with community groups, the private sector, and the school board to provide recreation, culture, and leisure facilities, programs, and services. There is a desire for the Town to build upon these partnerships to explore opportunities to expand services and programs, as well as to pursue new ones to complement what is currently available and to minimize reliance on Town resources.

Communication and Marketing – Exploring ways to enhance communication and marketing was suggested as one strategy to enhance the use of the Town’s recreation, culture, and leisure system. Suggested tactics included ensuring that the Town’s website is up to date, using social media and word of mouth, and advertising within community organizations and schools. Promoting the Town’s assets to regional communities was also suggested to boost recreational tourism.

Right-Sizing Service Delivery – It was emphasized that the Town’s approach to service delivery should be appropriate for the size of St. Marys’ population to avoid overbuilding and oversupplying services that may strain public resources. Where possible, consideration needs to be given to optimizing what is currently available, making strategic investments, exploring partnerships to share roles and responsibilities, and considering other strategies to ensure that resources are being used effectively and efficiently. While it is recognized that St. Marys’ recreation, culture, and leisure assets are enjoyed by regional users, the Town’s priority is to ensure that they are reflective of the needs of residents who make up the tax base.

5. Parkland Overview

5.1 Parkland Classification

St. Marys new Official Plan was approved by the Province of Ontario on October 9, 2024. Section 3.7.3.3 of the Town's new Official Plan outlines a parkland classification system that defines three active park types along with their purpose, size, service area, and intended use for Town Parks, Neighbourhood Parks, and Parkettes/Tot Lots (in addition to Other Open Spaces and Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum). The following is a summary of each park type.

- a) **Town Parks** are generally designed to primarily serve the Town population and on a more limited basis the surrounding rural areas; they are located along an arterial or collector road and are accessible by motorized and non-motorized forms of transportation. They generally consist of large lighted sports fields, ball diamonds, arenas, community centres, playgrounds and more. Ancillary uses including concession stands, pavilions, parking, washrooms and bleachers are also common to these types of facilities. Community programs, special events, organized sports teams, and sports tournaments are also supported. These uses are often serviced with water, sanitary sewers, and electricity. These facilities range in size from very large land areas to much smaller in size if, for example, a cenotaph is the main focus. They may include unique natural and physical features.
- b) **Neighbourhood Parks** are intended to serve local residential areas within a larger settlement area being designed to provide recreational areas and open space to serve residents within a 10-minute walking distance (approximately 800 metre service area), without obstruction of physical boundaries, preferably on the corner of two intersecting local roads. Permitted recreation uses include unlit sports fields, hard surface courts, playgrounds, and other neighbourhood-level recreation facilities. Supporting amenities may include seating and open space. The size of neighbourhood parks generally ranges between 0.5 hectares to 4 hectares in area. Larger park sizes are also acceptable.
- c) **Parkette/Tot Lots** are generally the smallest form of open space in the community. They are designed to serve the population in immediate proximity to the facility. Passive recreation uses including playground equipment and supporting amenities including seating and open space are permitted. These facilities service 50 to 100 people who are generally located within 500 metres of the site. Due to the type of user (younger children), physical barriers such as busy roadways and train tracks often define the service boundary. The development of parkettes/tot lots smaller than 0.5 hectares should be discouraged, except in instances that may be advantageous to the Town to reconcile gap areas and to address shortages in parkland.

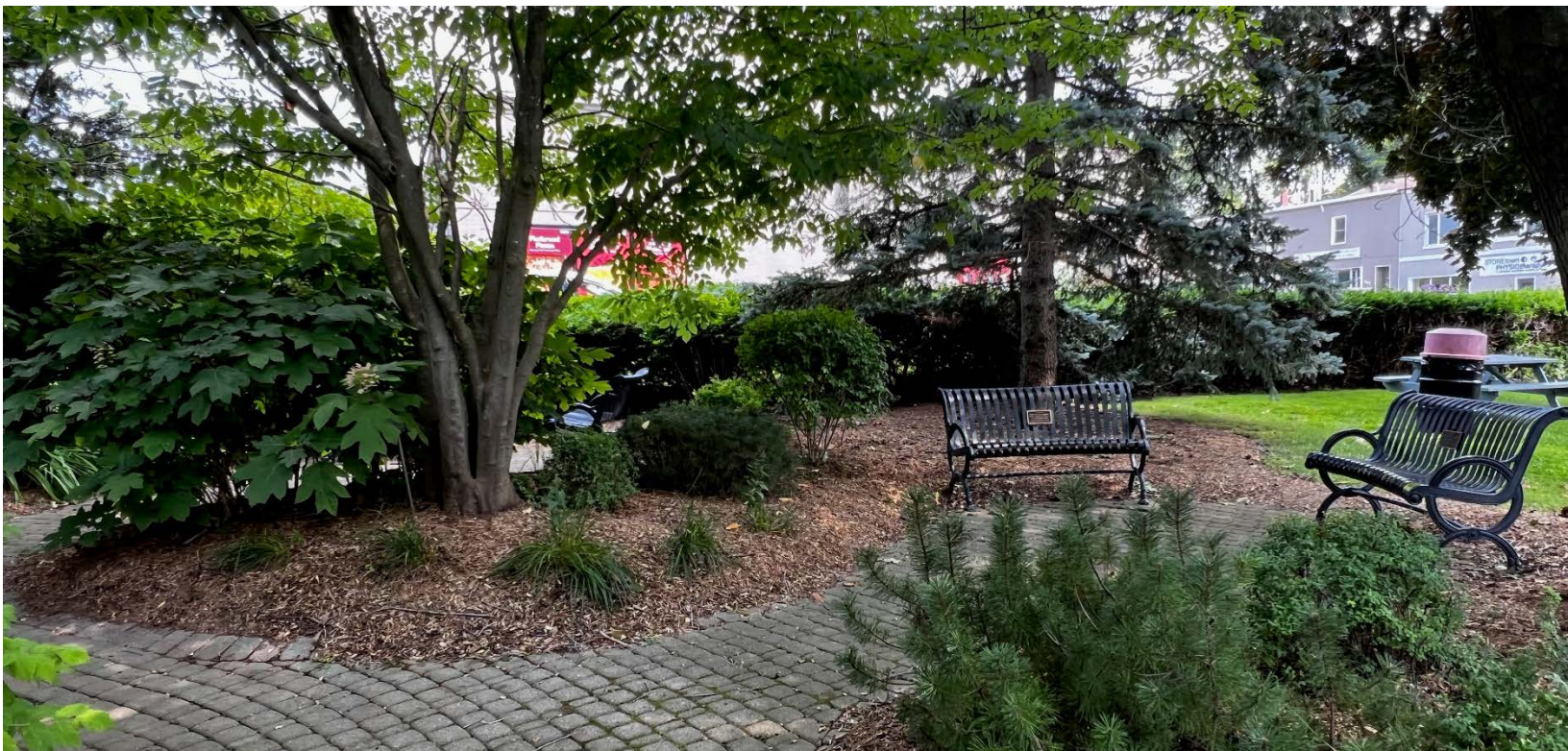
The parkland hierarchy contained in the new Official Plan was created based on information from the Town’s 2017 Master Plan. It reflects best practices in other municipalities for each park type based on the intended function, permitted uses and location, and it should continue to be used to guide park development in St. Marys.

The parkland classification provides a high-level summary of the program and function of each park, as well as key features that could be included with them. This Master Plan proposes a matrix of facility uses that are appropriate in each of St. Marys’ parks. This will provide the Town with direction on planning and developing its parks system. Guidance on the provision of amenities that support park use is also provided, which are key features to create welcoming and inclusive spaces.

The matrix on the following page can be used as a tool to help the public understand what types of facilities and amenities may be expected in different types of parks and help the Town respond to public requests in a consistent with transparent manner. The matrix also builds upon best practices in other communities, recognizing that some flexibility may need to be considered to account for site constraints (e.g., size, location, terrain, hazards, etc.), or other unique factors.

Recommendations

1. Use the recommended park facilities and amenities framework contained in this Master Plan to guide the planning and design of new parks and the revitalization of existing parks according to St. Marys’ parks classification system.



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Table 3: Recommended Park Facilities and Amenities by Park Type

● = Mandatory

○ = Optional

Facilities and Amenities	Town	Neighbourhood	Parkette
Rectangular Field (Lit Grass)	○		
Rectangular Field (Unlit Grass)	○	○	
Ball Diamond (Lit)	○		
Ball Diamond (Unlit)	○	○	
Sport Courts (Tennis, Pickleball, Basketball)	○	○	○
Outdoor Pools	○		
Splash Pads	○	○	
All Wheels Park	○	○	
Off-Leash Dog Park	○	○	
Community Gardens	○		
Outdoor Fitness Equipment	○	○	
Playgrounds (Rubber Surface)	●		
Playgrounds (Engineered Wood Fibre Surface)		●	●
Lawn Bowling Greens	○		
Skating Surfaces (Refrigerated)	○		
Skating Surfaces (Natural)		○	
Special Event Spaces	○		
Parking Lot	○		
Park Seating	●	●	●
Park Shade Structures	○	○	○
Park Washrooms (Permanent)*	●		
Park Washrooms (Temporary)**		○	
Public Art	○	○	
Bicycle Parking	●	●	●
Pathway/Trail Linkages	●	●	●
Drink Fountains / Bottle Filling Stations	●	○	
Unprogrammed Open Spaces	●	●	●
Naturalized Spaces	○	○	○
Environmental Sustainability Features	●	●	●

* Standalone permanent washroom or within an on-site community facility.

** A temporary washroom may be provided if there is a permitted sports field or diamond.

5.2 Parkland Inventory and Service Levels

Since the 2017 Master Plan was completed, the Town’s active parkland supply remained relatively unchanged. There are 34.2 hectares of active parkland in St. Marys. Based on a current population estimate of 7,840, the Town’s current parkland service level is 4.4 hectares per 1,000 residents.

Table 4: Parkland Inventory by Classification

Town Park			
Cadzow Park	1.3	Milt Dunnell Field	4.9
Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame	7.4	Quarry	2.6
Sub-Total			16.2
Neighbourhood Park			
Centennial Park	1.1	Rotary All Wheels Park	0.6
East Ward Park	1.7	Solis Park	3.6
Junction Station Dog Park	1.3	Southvale Park	0.9
Kin Park	3.5	Teddy's Field Diamond	0.7
Meadowridge Park	2.0	Tennis Courts	0.4
North Ward Park	0.6	West Ward Park	0.4
North Ward Park #2	0.7	Sub-Total	17.5
Parkette			
Lind Park	0.2	Millennium Park	0.1
Thamesview Crescent Park	0.2	Sub-Total	0.5
Total Active Parkland			34.2

Table 5: Parkland Service Level by Classification

Parkland Classification	Supply (Hectares)	Service Level
Town Park	16.2	2.07 ha / 1,000 residents
Neighbourhood Park	17.5	2.23 ha / 1,000 residents
Parkette	0.5	0.06 ha / 1,000 residents
Total	34.2	4.36 ha / 1,000 residents

Note: Service Level based on a 2025 population estimate of 7,840 residents. Supply excludes future parkland in the Thames Crest Subdivision (Block 175 and 176).

There are also other municipal open spaces and natural areas in and around St. Marys, as well as non-Town owned land such as schools, conservation areas, and golf courses. These spaces may have access constraints or have low to no development potential as they be primarily designated for preservation such as environmentally sensitive natural areas, watercourses, or floodplains. Due to the lack of development potential of these lands, they may have limited to no potential for recreation use. While open spaces and natural environmental lands are not a direct focus of this Master Plan, their important contributions to supporting the parks system are recognized.

5.3 Future Parkland Needs

5.3.1 Determining Parkland Needs

The 2017 Master Plan reported that St. Marys was providing a parkland service level of 4.6 hectares per 1,000 residents, which is a very strong level of service compared to other municipalities that provide parkland in the range of 3.0 to 4.0 hectares per 1,000 residents. The previous Master Plan recognized that the Town would have a challenge maintaining this high level of service because at this time, parkland dedication policies permitted under the Planning Act generally did not yield sufficient parkland amounts. Recent changes to the Planning Act have resulted in further reductions to parkland dedication amounts.

The 2017 Master Plan recommended that the Town target providing parkland at a rate of 4.2 hectares per 1,000 residents, which continues to be supported by this Master Plan update as it recognizes that residents place a high priority on having access to parks. Over the planning period, St. Marys' population is expected to reach 9,800 residents and based on the recommended target, 41.2 hectares of parkland will be required, seven hectares more than what is currently provided. There is currently one active development application in the north end of St. Marys (Thames Crest subdivision) that has two park blocks that is expected to be dedicated to the Town in the short term, which has a combined total of 0.9 hectares. As a result, the Town will need an additional 6.1 hectares of parkland.

This Master Plan recommends that the Town explore the feasibility of using vacant Town-owned property (designated as General Industrial) in the south end of St. Marys for recreation purposes that could potentially support rectangular sports fields and ball diamonds on a temporary basis. This property would not be considered as addressing the Town's parkland requirements given it is designated as General Industrial and may be required for such purposes in the future.

5.3.2 Maximizing Parkland Dedication

The Town's Official Plan identifies that the development process should be primary method of obtaining parkland (or cash-in-lieu of parkland). A focus should be given to maximizing parkland dedication, which would align with the public's desire for more parkland as 87% of community survey respondents felt that acquiring parkland (and open space) should be a priority.

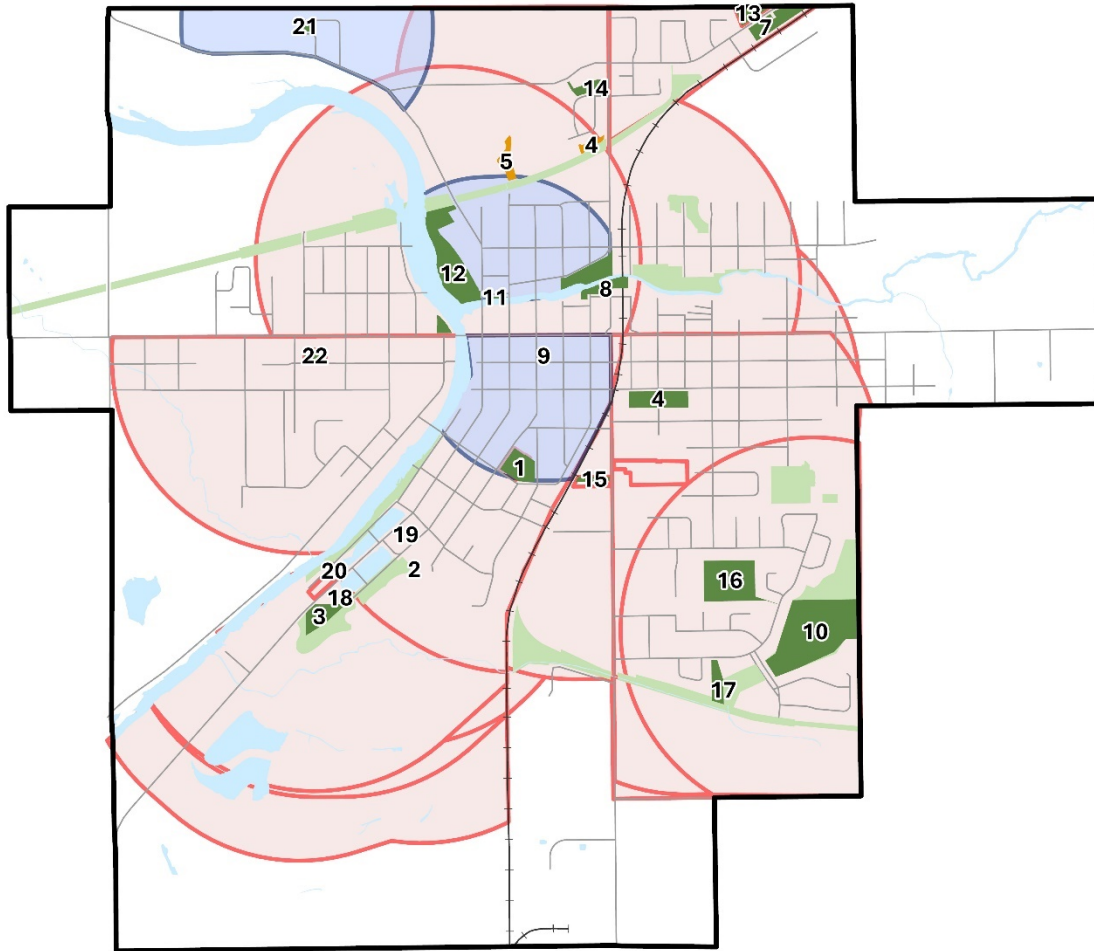
A particular emphasis should be placed on acquiring parks in areas that are not currently served by parks, although consideration would also need to be given to proximity and access to existing recreation facilities, parks, and users, size, shape, topography and drainage, development and maintenance costs, and potential for expansion. In some cases, it may be appropriate to accept cash-in-lieu of parkland such as in areas where parkland is not considered necessary or where the lands dedicated would be insufficient in size; accepting parkland smaller than 0.5 hectares in size should be discouraged.

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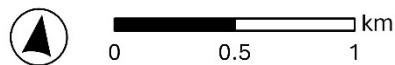
Figure 11: Distribution of Parkland

Parkland

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Cadzow Park | 9 Lind Park | 16 Solis Park |
| 2 Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame | 10 Meadowridge Park | 17 Southvale Park |
| 3 Centennial Park | 11 Millennium Park | 18 St. Marys Quarry |
| 4 East Ward Park | 12 Mitt Dunnell Field | 19 Teddy's Field Diamond |
| 5 Future Park (Block 175) | 13 North Ward Park | 20 Tennis Courts |
| 6 Future Park (Block 176) | 14 North Ward Park #2 | 21 Thamesview Cres Park |
| 7 Junction Station Dog Park | 15 Skateboard Park | 22 West Ward Park |
| 8 Kin Park | | |



- Active Parkland
- Future Parkland
- Passive Open Space or Woodlot
- 800m Service Area
- 500m Service Area



Source: Town of St. Marys, 2024



It has been the Town's best practice to provide Town and Neighbourhood Parks within 800-metres of residential areas (or 500-metres for parkettes). Applying these service areas in St. Marys revealed that there is a strong geographic distribution of parks as most residents have access to some level of parkland. However, the following gaps were identified:

- **West side of St. Marys, north of Queen Street West.** There are currently small park parcels (such as West Ward Park) that provide a limited range of outdoor recreation amenities. There is also a large amount of undeveloped land where residential development is expected to occur. Future parkland acquisition should be pursued as opportunities become available.
- **North of the Grand Trunk Trail, west of James Street North.** While residents currently have some access to parks many of these locations (e.g., Thamesview Crescent Park, North Ward Park, North Ward #2 Park and future parks in the Thames Crest subdivision) are small parks that only accommodate a narrow range of outdoor recreation amenities such as playgrounds.

There are undeveloped lands in these areas that are designated in the Town's new Official Plan as residential. Future population growth is expected to be accommodated in these areas and as development occurs, maximizing parkland dedication in these areas is recommended to address gaps areas, with an emphasis being placed on providing a good distribution of parks.

A portion of land in the north end of St. Marys is also designated for recreational uses, although Section 3.7.4(a) of the Town's new Official Plan indicates that these lands may be used to establish medium/high density blocks without an amendment. This policy identifies that the Town should work with developers to establish neighbourhood size parks in this area given that the 2017 Master Plan did not identify the need for new recreation facilities that require substantial parkland. However, this Master Plan identified the potential need for additional sports fields and ball diamonds to respond to efforts by the Town and its user groups to boost interest and participation in these sports. This Master Plan also identifies the need for other outdoor recreation facilities to meet the needs of residents in this growing area (e.g., playgrounds, sport courts, etc.).

With the above considerations in mind, a portion of land designated for recreational uses in the Town's north end could also help satisfy park requirements for outdoor recreation facility needs. An emphasis should be placed on securing park parcels that are large enough to support sports fields and ball diamonds. This would preferably be a Town Park although it is recognized that this is contrary to the Town's Official Plan that identifies the provision of neighbourhood parks in this area. If a Town size park cannot be secured, looking at acquiring an appropriately sized park in undeveloped areas designated for residential should be explored.

The east side of St. Marys is not currently served with any park, although these lands are primarily not residential and are therefore not a priority during this planning period. Acquiring parkland in this area should only be pursued if there is a change in the existing land use to residential where there would be parkland required to serve new residents.

While future residential development will primarily occur on the outskirts of St. Marys, the Town should be prepared to respond to infill development and intensification. In these instances, it may be logical to take cash-in-lieu of parkland (as directed by the Town's new Official Plan), although the Town could explore acquiring parkland of a suitable size to meet the needs of residents (minimum of 0.5 hectares). There may also be opportunities to enhance existing parks near the development.

5.3.3 Alternative Strategies to Acquire or Provide Additional Parkland

The amended Planning Act could result in the Town receiving less parkland or cash-in-lieu of parkland as a condition for development should higher density developments be proposed. While the Town is encouraged to maximize parkland dedication amounts, it will not likely be sufficient to meet the recommended parkland service target. As a result, parkland conveyance tools in the Planning Act must be complemented with alternative acquisition strategies to achieve the required amount of parkland, and in some cases, to acquire larger parcels of parkland. Although not land-based expansion, enhancements to existing parks through general renewal or redevelopment initiatives will need to be considered to increase park and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Alternative strategies to parkland acquisition include the following:

- Land purchase, exchanges or swaps;
- Off-site parkland conveyance;
- Establishment of a Parks Foundation (e.g., community, corporate, or municipal donations towards parkland acquisition);
- Acquiring surplus school sites;
- Reallocating surplus municipal lands for park use;
- Partnership/joint provision of lands with local partners under agreement; and
- Land lease (recognizing that this strategy may have restrictions on the use of the land and/or what facilities can be constructed and would be subject to the terms of the agreement).

In addition to maximizing parkland dedication and pursuing alternative strategies to acquire parkland, there may also be an opportunity to repurpose Town-owned property to make better use of existing land. This Master Plan identifies that filling in the north quarry on Water Street South could add up to two hectares of additional parkland to the Town's supply, depending on if all or a portion of the quarry is filled in. While this is not a gap area, it could provide much needed relief in parking to support the adjacent swimming quarry and it could be a potential location for additional racquet sport courts (pickleball or tennis) (see Section 6.10 and Recommendation #31).

Acquiring new parkland should be complemented with continuing to work with local non-municipal organizations (e.g., schools, St. Marys Memorial Hospital, Conservation Authority, etc.) to maximize access to a wide range of active and passive open space.

Recommendations

2. Acquire 6.1 of parkland to achieve a parkland service target of 4.2 hectares per 1,000 residents by maximizing parkland dedication and, where appropriate, using alternative acquisition strategies, particularly in gap areas such as in the north end of the Town; accepting parks smaller than 0.5 hectares should be discouraged.

5.4 Parkland Policies

In accordance with the Ontario Planning Act, the Town may require the dedication of land for park purposes or cash-in-lieu of parkland as part of the development process. Policies related to the dedication of parkland are identified in Section 3.7.3.6 of the Town's new Official Plan (approved by the Province on October 9, 2024). Council may require parkland at a rate of 2% for commercial or industrial development or 5% in all other forms of development (e.g., residential). The policy identifies that land conveyed to the Town must be suitable for park development and should not be smaller than 0.5 hectares, except in instances that may be advantageous to the Town to reconcile gap areas or address parkland shortfalls.

The policy also identifies that woodlots, stormwater management ponds, naturalized areas and environmentally sensitive areas should not be accepted as part of parkland dedication, although the Town may assume these lands (over and above) for the purposes of protecting natural areas for passive recreation and education. Council may also accept cash-in-lieu of parkland where a neighbourhood has sufficient park and recreation areas to meet the needs of residents or where the area of land to be dedicated would be impractical to use for park or recreational uses due to its size or shape. Council may specify a fixed amount of cash per dwelling unit created by By-law where such amount of cash is based on the market value of land in the Town.

In recent years, changes have been made or proposed to the parkland dedication requirements established in the Planning Act:

- **Bill 108** (More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019) proposed sweeping changes to parkland dedication requirements, but these changes were not brought into force as they were ultimately further amended through Bill 197.
- **Bill 197** (COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020) introduced a clause for existing parkland dedication by-laws that use the alternative rate (September 18, 2022); whereby new by-laws are appealable to the Ontario Land Tribunal.
- **Bill 109** (More Homes for Everyone Act, 2022) amended parkland requirements on lands designated as transit-oriented communities, including allowances for encumbered lands.

- **Bill 23** (More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022) was introduced in October 2022 and came into effect on November 28, 2022. This Act introduced significant changes to parkland dedication requirements (among many other aspects of the Planning Act, Development Charges Act, etc.), including but not limited to reductions in the alternative parkland dedication requirement (including capping based on land area), exemptions for affordable, attainable, and non-profit, inclusionary zoning affordable, and additional residential dwelling units and allowing the Province to prescribe criteria for municipal acceptance of incumbered lands and privately owned public spaces (POPs) for parks purposes.
- **Bill 134** (Affordable Homes and Good Jobs Act, 2023) was enacted on November 28, 2022, whereby the definition of affordable residential units was amended to introduce an income-based test for affordable rent and purchase price and increased the threshold for the market test from that originally defined through Bill 23).

A summary of changes is highlighted below. As part of reviewing development applications, the Town will need to ensure that it is in alignment with these changes and monitor future changes to evaluate the impact on the provision of parkland.

- The **maximum alternative dedication rate** has been reduced to one hectare per 600 units for parkland and one hectare per 1,000 units for cash-in-lieu. Further, the legislation caps the maximum alternative dedication rates at 10% of the land for sites five hectares or less and 15% for sites larger than five hectares.
- Affordable residential units, attainable residential units, inclusionary zoning residential units, non-profit housing and additional residential unit developments are **exempt** from parkland dedication requirements as outlined in the Planning Act.
- **Parkland rates are frozen** as of the date that a zoning by-law or site plan application is filed. The freeze is effective for 18 months to two years after approval, depending on the date of when the application was filed.
- To take effect at a future date, developers will be able to identify the land they intend to convey to the municipality for parkland, which **may include encumbered lands**. If an agreement cannot be reached, the municipality or the landowner can appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal. This may result in less suitable lands being provided as parkland dedication.
- There is a new requirement for municipalities to **spend or allocate at least 60%** of the monies in their parkland reserve at the beginning of each year.
- A **parks plan** must be developed prior to passing a parkland by-law. Previously, this requirement applied only to those municipalities that authorized use of the Section 42 alternative rate, but now includes those that include the standard rate. This Master Plan will fulfill this requirement for a Parks Plan (schools were engaged as part of the Master Plan process), which is a requirement under the Planning Act for this document to be considered a Parks Plan.

Recommendations

3. Monitor changes to the Planning Act as it relates to parkland dedication and evaluate its impact on future parkland provision and amend the Official Plan, as necessary.

5.5 Park Design Strategies and Best Practices

5.5.1 Strategic Park Development and Redevelopment

Continued investment in St. Marys' recreation, culture and leisure system is critical for building a sense of community and social belonging. Park development and redevelopment opportunities have been identified over the course of this Master Plan to add new infrastructure in growth areas and to reconcile gap areas to respond to community needs. Park renewal is also an important part of attracting continued use over time. Rejuvenation efforts can be major in scale, ranging from complete park development to review of park amenities to renewing aging assets, and repurposing underutilized amenities to address other in demand needs. Opportunities for new or enhanced outdoor recreation facilities are identified throughout this Master Plan, with more specific re-imagining opportunities identified below.

Milt Dunnell Field – The Town has been proactive in finding ways to make better use of this space and has found success in investing in several areas, including enhanced washrooms and lawn bowling facilities, parking lot paving (which also supports the Farmers' Markert), and installation of an accessible dock. Future plans are also underway to expand the successful Yak Shack program, which is provided by the Town and key partners. Recognizing its position along two waterways and its environmental constraints such as the frequent flooding, opportunities for active recreation are limited; the two existing ball diamonds should be removed from this site and it should continue to be used for passive activities, including special events. Ensuring that the existing pavilion is maintained in a state of good repair to support park and special event use is recommended.

Lind Park – Lind Park is one of the parks in the Town's downtown area and within walking distance of the Town Hall and the Library; the Station Gallery is also within walking distance to the east. The Town is currently in the process of undertaking enhancements at this location to create a welcoming and accessible gathering space, including creating an attractive outdoor eating area with picnic tables, seating, low-maintenance gardens and bike racks. These enhancements are aimed at animating the space, supporting the downtown area, and preserving the historical significance of the park. Future enhancements to the park should consider a small-scale performance area and public art. The public art installation at Centennial Park could also be relocated to this park to support parking enhancements for the swimming quarry and surrounding area.



East Ward Park – Two ball diamonds and a playground are located at East Ward Park, which is an important park that serves residents in this area and has a unique history in St. Marys. While it has been used as a park and its assets are maintained by the Town for more than 60 years, it is not municipal property as it is a former cemetery that is owned by local churches. There is currently no known use and maintenance agreement between the Town and the churches for the site. This Master Plan identifies potential opportunities that could be considered at East Ward Park, including enhancements to the ball diamonds to support greater use; however, the Town must engage the current property owners to establish a user agreement for the property, as well as establish an understanding of the burial locations to ensure that any activity or capital work taking place at this site respects the past use of the property. As a contingency, the Town should evaluate alternative park opportunities within the same general area to accommodate the existing assets (e.g., playground and ball diamonds), should it be determined that an agreement cannot be established.

Future Park Opportunities – This Master Plan identifies that as residential development occurs during the planning period – particularly in the north and west ends of St. Marys – there may be an opportunity to acquire additional parkland as part of the development process (or through alternative means) to satisfy parkland requirements. Should this come to fruition, there may be opportunities to incorporate new outdoor recreation facilities, as identified in this Master Plan. While the scope of facilities will be determined based on the type and size of park, this Master Plan identifies outdoor recreation facility needs in the north end, including sports fields, tennis or pickleball courts, basketball court, small-scale all wheel park, and playground. Recreational amenities in the west end include a playground, basketball court/skate area, and community garden.

During the interim, there may be opportunities to address the Town’s sports field needs on a temporary basis using vacant Town lands. The Town currently owns approximately seven hectares of vacant land in the south end of St. Marys (on the south side of Given Road, east of James Street South). While this property is currently designated as General Industrial, Section 3.4.3.15 of the Town’s new Official Plan permits recreational uses on these lands as an interim use, provided that uses involve minimum capital investment and would not preclude or hinder the expansion or continued use of existing operations or the feasibility of changing the recreational use to an industrial use for reasons of cost of conversion, public health or public safety.

While this Master Plan encourages the Town to work with its user groups to maximize the use of existing fields through enhanced scheduling or monitoring future improvements to the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame that could increase booking capacity, this vacant site could be a viable opportunity to construct sports fields to meet community needs, at least on a temporary basis. A cursory review suggests that the site could be large enough to accommodate two soccer fields and ball diamonds (or a combination thereof), along with parking and circulation areas. The development of temporary pickleball courts could also be explored to address short-term needs.

A feasibility study should be undertaken to determine its development potential for rectangular sports fields, ball diamonds, and pickleball courts as an interim use, including understanding site constraints given that a hydro corridor bisects the property. The feasibility study should also consider site design and supporting components, as well as capital costs and funding sources.

Alternative Uses for Underutilized Parks – While it is important provide parks within walking distance to residents living in growing areas of St. Marys, it is essential to ensure that existing parks are appropriately located and are an effective use of space. There may be instances where residents are served by more than one park (e.g., parks serve overlapping catchment areas), resulting in a service duplication. One example that exists is at Southvale Park, which is a four-minute walk (270 metres) from Meadowridge Park. Southvale Park historically has a soccer field that was removed due to on-street parking conflicts, and it is currently not used for any purpose. This Master Plan did not identify any outdoor recreation amenities that would be suitable at this location and given that it is underutilized, it could be a potential candidate for an alternate use. This could include the sale of the lands, which could result in operational savings to the Town; portions should be preserved and maintained for passive recreational use, including trail connections. Any park space removed from the Town’s inventory should be replaced in another area of St. Marys to ensure that there is no net change to the existing service level. Any proceeds from the sale of parkland should be reinvested into the park system.

5.5.2 Parks are Inclusive Public Spaces

Designing parks as inclusive public spaces is important to ensure that they are welcoming of all residents, regardless of age, income, background, orientation, and ability. Not all parks or areas within them may be appropriate for universally accessible infrastructure (e.g., naturally sensitive areas); however, community-focused spaces should consider the ability for all users to access them. As a best practice, parks are generally universal spaces that can:

- Introduce low to no-cost opportunities for people who may not otherwise have the means to participate in sports or events.
- Provide access and opportunities for able-bodied and differently abled residents to connect with the outdoors by developing parks in accordance with accessible design standards.
- Provide multi-generational experiences that benefit residents of all ages.
- Recognize the interests of people from various backgrounds through their ability to host community special events and festivals (including performing arts) and recreation activities and sports.
- Provide unstructured areas in parks for picnicking and social gatherings.
- Promote the Town’s commitment to providing safe and tolerant spaces for all residents to feel welcome.

St. Marys should continue to focus on creating inclusive parks that offer something for everyone whether it be for active sports, non-programmed uses, or for casual gatherings and special events. Minimizing physical barriers within parks should also be undertaken to increase park use for persons with disabilities. This may include, but not be limited to, ensuring that parks have firm and stable walking surfaces, not only for circulation within the park, but to connect users to on-site features such as playgrounds and sports fields. Some parks, such as Cadzow Park, have pathways connecting users to park amenities, while others, such as North Ward Park or the community garden at the St. Marys Cemetery, do not. Suggestions were also made by the public for more wayfinding signage to minimize the information barrier as some residents felt that it would help raise awareness about where the Town's parks (trails and facilities) are located.



5.5.3 Climate Change Resiliency, Environmental Sustainability and Stewardship

St. Marys recognizes the climate is changing, which is having an impact on the daily lives of residents and has worked collectively with Perth County and other county municipalities to develop a Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan (2021), which included the following relevant actions:

- Decrease lawn cutting and maintenance by increasing naturalization and planting projects.
- Partner on a tree management and resilience plan to increase canopy coverage
- Increase urban forestry projects
- Develop more low impact developments on municipal property
- Increase efficiency and climate resiliency in existing buildings
- Embed climate considerations into inspections, maintenance and designs of municipal assets
- Develop education and awareness programs and strategies
- Actively work with the Huron Perth Public Health Unit to create strategies for mitigating climate risks and protect residents and vulnerable populations
- Develop better interconnectivity by improving walkability of neighbourhoods
- Work collaboratively on active transportation strategies

In addition, the Town's 2018 Forestry Management Plan aims to protect, preserve, and enhance St. Marys' forest through strategies, including maintenance, inspections, replacement, strategic placement, and community engagement (e.g., stewardship and awareness).

Parks, trails and open spaces play a key role in climate change mitigation, resiliency, and adaptation. Many examples exist in St. Marys, including the Town's naturalization efforts at Meadowridge Park, protection of Sparling Bush (guided by UTRCA's 2015 Sparling Bush Management Plan), and pollinator and community gardens at the St. Marys Cemetery. The Town also invests in shade structures, splash pads, and the quarry to help residents cool down during hot summer days. From a facilities perspective, the integration of sustainable and renewal materials and energy efficient systems are also beneficial in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The importance of mitigating climate change through parks (and facilities) cannot be understated and opportunities to address it are encouraged where feasible. It is recognized that there may be a higher cost associated with integrating climate change mitigation features. As a result, cost implications will need to be considered as part of planning, design, and development and additional funding may be required, which could be offset by external sources, such as senior levels of government (e.g., grants) and community partners. Collaborating with others on environmental sustainability and stewardship projects is encouraged, including strategic naturalization of parks and open spaces. Parkland areas that are naturalized should be replaced through future park development, particularly in areas that are park deficient such as in emerging residential areas, to ensure that there is no net loss in programmable park space.

5.5.4 Comfort Features and Park Safety

Parks that offer comfort features are more likely to be successful in attracting people and encouraging them to stay for longer periods of time. The consultation process found that there is a desire for comfort amenities such as seating, shade, wayfinding signage, and other amenities that make parks more comfortable. This aligns with research undertaken by Huron Perth Public Health that found that park features are highly desirable such as seating, picnic tables, shade structures, garbage cans, drinking fountains, trails, and washrooms.

Recognizing that there is a cost to providing these amenities, investment may be strategically directed to parks based on their intended function, particularly if parks feature permitted facilities or are used for special events and gatherings. For example, the most basic park amenities such as seating, signage, and pathways should be provided at Parkettes and Neighbourhood Parks, while a greater range of amenities, including higher order conveniences such as shade, lighting, washrooms, and parking should be considered at Town Parks (see Section 5.1, Table 3). It may also be more cost effective to plant trees to provide shade, which supports Perth County's climate change goals, rather than building shade structures, although the benefits of natural shade may not be realized until trees have matured.

Parks are also being designed with user safety in mind through the application of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. For example, it is a best practice to locate parks with ample street frontage and to ensure that there is clear visibility into the park from the street and nearby residences to discourage undesirable activities. Strategically lighting pathways and trails may also be beneficial to support evening use; the lighting along the Town's Grand Trunk Trail is one example. Engaging local emergency services such as police and fire departments to aid in park design is encouraged in St. Marys.

Some requests were made for enhanced beautification projects, although it is recognized that these come at a significant cost to the Town; the Town currently uses contract services to install and maintain its flower beds, which are primarily located in the downtown area. Council recently reduced its beautification service level in response to staff report PW 52-2024 and as a result, no changes to municipal beautification is recommended.

5.5.5 Planning and Designing Spaces for Special Events and Festivals

St. Marys hosts special events and festivals throughout the year for the community to foster a sense of culture, belonging, and pride, as well as to promote tourism. These events take place on Town-owned property or in St. Marys' downtown and include Canada Day celebrations, the Stonetown Heritage Festival, Ontario Summer Games, Farmers' Market, and the holiday WinterLights displays. There are also recurring events such as Melodies at the Museum Summer Concerts. These events celebrate local traditions, build community spirit, fundraise for causes, and facilitate tourism and economic activity, as well as contribute to building a sense of place with unique experiences.

There is a public desire for more events and festivals as the community survey found that requests were made for opportunities for these types of community gatherings, as well as opportunities for live music and concerts; 87% of community survey respondents also supported greater investment in space for community events, which was ranked as the fourth highest priority. There is a need to ensure that the Town's public parks (and facilities) are flexibly designed for public gatherings and events such as festivals and markets. This means consideration for adequate parking (on site or in proximity) and access to active transportation infrastructure, appropriate servicing, washrooms (permanent or temporary), stage or amphitheatre (permanent or temporary), and other amenities to create a strong user experience and enhanced accessibility such as signage, pathways, seating, and shade. Town Parks should be the focus of events (versus neighbourhood parks or parkettes) due to the support facilities and amenities available such as parking and washrooms.



Recommendations

4. Engage the landowners of East Ward Park to establish a user agreement for the property and to understand burial locations to ensure that park use, and future improvements respect the past use. As a contingency, explore opportunities to establish a new park within the general area to relocate existing park assets if an agreement cannot be established.
5. Explore the feasibility of developing vacant Town-owned lands for the purposes of addressing interim needs for soccer fields, ball diamonds, and pickleball courts to understand site constraints, facility components and site design, capital costs, funding sources, and other details. An emphasis should be placed on minimizing capital investment as this is intended to be a temporary measure until these lands are required for its original intent or they are deemed to be surplus and a permanent site for sports fields can be identified.
6. Evaluate the potential to repurpose underutilized parks to minimize service duplication, which could include the sale of land; if applicable, preserving parkland to maintain trails is encouraged. Parkland repurposed to other uses should be replaced in other areas of St. Marys to ensure that there is no net loss in programmable park space or the park service level. Any proceeds from the sale of parkland should be reinvested back into the park system.
7. Coordinate with staff and stakeholders (e.g., Huron Perth Public Health, persons with disabilities, etc.) to create inclusive park designs.
8. Design new and redeveloped parks (and facilities) with a climate change mitigation lens to help achieve Perth County's greenhouse gas reduction targets.
9. Work in partnership with other corporate departments and community organizations such as the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority to identify, develop, and implement strategies to enhance and promote environmental sustainability initiatives and strategic naturalization of parks and open spaces. Areas of parks that are naturalized should be replaced through future park development, particularly in areas that are park deficient as identified in this Master Plan to ensure that there is no net loss in programmable park space or the park service level.
10. Strategically plan and design Town Parks in a flexible manner to accommodate special events and festivals (such as at Milt Dunnell Field), with consideration given to shade structures/pavilions, parking, servicing infrastructure, accessibility features, washrooms and stage/amphitheatre.
11. Create welcoming and inviting spaces when developing and renewing parks with a focus on placing comfort amenities like shade, seating, signage and pathways in strategic areas. Neighbourhood Parks and Parkettes should have basic amenities, including seating and pathways, while Town Parks may have more and a broader range of amenities such as seating, pathways, shade, lighting, signage, parking, washrooms, etc. Safety considerations will also be important, including incorporating Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles and engaging local emergency services such as police and fire departments to aid in park design.

5.6 Recreation Trails

5.6.1 Current Supply

The Town’s recreation trail network consists of approximately 22 kilometres of trails, which includes a combination of off-road and on-road routes, which is augmented by a comprehensive sidewalk system of more than 47 kilometres. St. Marys’ complete network provides a strong system of trails that encourages low impact physical activity and active movement throughout the Town, including walking, cycling, jogging, in-line skating, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and other human-powered forms of transportation. There are also non-municipal trail systems near St. Marys such as at the Wildwood Conservation Area. The regional Avon Trail connects to the Town’s trail network at Water Street South and Glass Street providing 130 kilometres of trail from St. Marys to Conestoga.

Table 6: Recreation Trail Inventory

Trail Name	Length (kilometres)
Avon Trail	3.9
Grand Trunk Trail	2.7
Quarry Trail	0.5
Riverview Walkway	1.1
Taylor Trail	0.3
The Loop	13.9
Sub-Total	22.3
Sidewalks	47.2
Total	69.5



5.6.2 Market Conditions

Research has found that recreational trails are highly desirable community amenities as they encourage no-cost physical activity and movement, and they can be used by residents of all ages and abilities. Most recently, many communities have experienced a surge in trail use since the COVID-19 pandemic as people have a greater desire to connect with the outdoors and nature.

These trends are being experienced in St. Marys with residents and visitors using the Grand Trunk Trail and the Riverwalk Trail for their leisure or The Loop to access the downtown area or other destination. The community survey undertaken for this Master Plan found that walking and hiking for leisure was the third most popular activity undertaken in the past five years. Residents also felt that trail development should be a high priority for the Town as 88% of survey respondents supported additional public spending on paved multi-use trails, which was the second most popular facility type; 47% of survey respondents supported additional public spending on unpaved nature trails (although a similar opposition to additional spending on unpaved trails was voiced).

Public requests were made to enhance the trail network with requests made for paving more sections of trail, or using gravel at a minimum as opposed to natural trails, to ensure that routes are accessible (ensuring that they are clear of debris and obstacles was also mentioned). A comment was received suggesting that paved trails should be reduced or minimized, recognizing that there is an environmental impact. Improved trail amenities were also suggested such as more waste receptacles.



The Town's Official Plan supports the provision of trails as Section 3.7.3.4 encourages the development of a connected trail system to facilitate active movement, including walking, cycling, running, in-line skating, and cross-country skiing, and encourages the development of trails on public lands, floodplains adjacent to watercourses, and private land. This section of the Official Plan also permits the Town to require land for pedestrian and bicycle pathways as a condition of new development, in accordance with the Planning Act. The Official Plan also supports the development of accessible trail heads and pathways, water crossings, signage, and parking.

5.6.3 Continued Recreational Trail Development

The Town has been successful in creating an integrated trail network that creates a looped route that connects users around St. Marys to key destinations such as the downtown, Thames River, and other parks, and recreation and culture facilities. The Town has plans to undertake an Active Transportation Master Plan over the short-term, which should evaluate future opportunities to build upon St. Marys' robust recreational trail network to recognize the priority that residents place on this important amenity.



Short-term strategies include ensuring that there are walking pathways within parks to provide accessible circulation areas and linkages to internal amenities (e.g., playgrounds, sports fields, public art, etc.). Site visits to St. Marys' parks found that many locations do not have designated pathways, which may be a physical barrier for some users that would limit access the Town's parks.

Building upon the Town's trail network should focus on connecting future residential areas to the existing network, particularly in the north and west end of St. Marys. There are undeveloped lands in these areas that

are designated in the Official Plan for residential and as a result, there will be opportunities to plan and acquire lands for recreational trails as part of the development process and ensure that logical trail connections are provided, which could link to, or form an expansion of, The Loop trail. There may also be opportunities to establish connections to the Grand Trunk Trail, particularly on the west side of St. Marys, such as creating a new trail head with parking at Thames Road North, where there is currently an entry point to the Grand Trunk Trail. Other specific connections should be determined as part of the Active Transportation Master Plan or as development applications come forward.



As it is recognized that it may not be feasible for St. Marys acquire contiguous parcels of land on its own, the Town may be required to work with others, including landowners, agencies, and senior levels of government, although exploring strategies to acquire land for active transportation infrastructure should be explored such as through the development process or strategies identified in this Master Plan (as discussed for parkland).

Trail design and comfort features should also be considered. As a best practice, there is merit in developing a recreational trail classification system to determine the design standards for different types of trails, as well as the appropriateness of features, including (but not limited to), paved surfacing, trailheads, wayfinding signage and distance markers, shade, seating, drinking fountains/bottle filling stations, parking, access to washrooms, and other amenities to support and encourage trail use.

5.6.4 Winter Trail Maintenance

Since the pandemic, many communities, including St. Marys, experienced increased use of recreational trails. Through the consultation process, public comments were received suggesting that the Town's trails should be clear of snow for winter-time usage. This is a trend being experienced in other communities that are experiencing a greater desire for year-round, outdoor physical activities, including winter trail use. The Town provides snow clearing along trails, although some sections are maintained for other winter activities such as snowshoeing (snowshoes are available for rent through the St. Marys Public Library).

Continuing snow removal efforts along trails is supported to promote winter outdoor activities and further strengthens the Town's position as a year-round recreation destination for regional visitors and day tourism. While there are inherent costs associated with winter maintenance, the availability of no-cost activities during the winter season is a benefit to the community and encourages equitable access to leisure opportunities. As the Town continues to expand its network of paved trails, ensuring that these routes are maintained during the winter is encouraged. It is recognized that it may not be feasible to clear snow along unpaved (e.g., gravel) trails due to the risk of damaging equipment and unpredictable weather conditions causing ice formation.

Recommendations

12. As part of the development of the upcoming Active Transportation Master Plan, explore opportunities to strengthen the existing recreational trail network with consideration given to the following:
 - a. The development of a recreational trail classification system to define the design standards for different types of trails, including width, surface type, and other details. The appropriateness of trail amenities should be included such as signage, seating, shade, drinking fountains/bottle filling stations, bicycle parking, accessibility features, trail heads, etc.
 - b. Establish recreational trails within future residential areas with an emphasis on linking the north and west ends of St. Marys with the existing network, potentially by connecting to, or expanding, The Loop trail and the Grand Trunk Trail. Specific routes and connections should be identified through an Active Transportation Master Plan or as development applications come forward.
 - c. Design new and redeveloped parks with designated circulation pathways to guide users through parks and public spaces and connect to on-site amenities (e.g., playgrounds, sports fields, public art, etc.).
 - d. Work with non-municipal landowners to ensure the development of a continuous active transportation network. Where feasible, explore opportunities to acquire land for active transportation infrastructure, including through the development process or alternative strategies as identified in this Master Plan.
 - e. As paved recreational trails are expanded, ensure that these routes are clear of snow to encourage walking during the winter season.

6. Facility Overview

6.1 Summary of Recreation and Cultural Facilities

The following table highlights the indoor and outdoor recreation, culture, and leisure facilities that are owned or maintained by the Town of St. Marys. Non-municipal facilities are excluded, although their contributions to the community are recognized and referenced in this Master Plan. A facility benchmarking comparison with adjacent municipalities is also summarized on the following page.

Table 7: Summary of Recreation and Cultural Facilities

Facility Type	Supply	Location(s)
Arenas	2	Pyramid Recreation Centre (2)
Curling Pads	4	Lind Sportsplex (4)
Indoor Pools	1	Pyramid Recreation Centre
Multi-Purpose Community Spaces	10	Pyramid Recreation Centre (4), Pyramid Recreation Centre End Zone, Pyramid Recreation Centre Hall, Friendship Centre Program Room, Lind Sportsplex Lounge, Town Hall Auditorium, Friendship Centre Main Hall
Youth Spaces	1	Pyramid Recreation Centre
Older Adult Spaces	1	Pyramid Recreation Centre
Cultural Facilities	5	Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Museum and Archives, St. Marys Public Library, St. Marys Station Gallery, St. Marys Town Hall (theatre),
Rectangular Sports Fields	8	<u>Lit</u> : St. Marys DCVI (Town maintained)
Lit	1	<u>Unlit</u> : Meadowridge Park (2), Solis Park (2), St. Marys DCVI (2), West Ward Park
Unlit	7	
Ball Diamonds	10	<u>Lit</u> : Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame (2), Solis Park, Tedd’s Field
Lit	4	<u>Unlit</u> : Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame (2), East Ward Park (2), Milt Dunnell Field (2)
Unlit	6	
Tennis Courts and Pickleball Courts	4	St. Marys Racquet Courts (4 Lit) – 2 tennis courts are lined for 4 pickleball courts
Skate Parks	1	Rotary All Wheels Park
Outdoor Aquatics	3	
Splash Pad	2	<u>Splash Pad</u> : Cadzow Park, Pyramid Recreation Centre <u>Outdoor Swimming</u> : Quarry
Outdoor Swimming	1	
Off-Leash Dog Parks	1	Junction Station Dog Park
Playgrounds	9	Cadzow Park, East Ward Park, Kin Park, Meadowridge Park, Milt Dunnell Field, North Ward Park, North Ward #2, Solis Park, West Ward Park
Lawn Bowling Green	1	Lawn Bowling Club

Note: Includes Town-owned facilities or those maintained by the Town of St. Marys.

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Table 8: Summary of Regional Recreation and Cultural Facilities and Service Levels

Facility Type	St. Marys (2025)	Thames Centre	Zorra	Perth South	Lucan Biddulph	Stratford
Arenas (Ice Pads)	2 (1:3,920)	2 (1:7,662)	2 (1:4,728)	0	1 (1:6,562)	4 (1:8,834)
Curling Pads	4 (1:1,960)	0	0	0	0	0
Indoor Aquatics	1 (1:7,840)	0	0	0	0	0
Multi-Purpose Community Spaces	10 (1:784)	7 (1:2,178)	8 (1:1,182)	2 (1:2,033)	2 (1:3,281)	3 (1:11,778)
Youth Spaces	1 (1:7,840)	0	0	1 (1:4,066)	0	0
Older Adult Spaces	1 (1:7,480)	1 (1:15,324)	0	0	1 (1:6,562)	0
Cultural Facilities	6 (1:1,307)	1 (1:15,324)	0	0	2 (1:3,281)	2 (1:11,778)
Rectangular Sports Fields	5 (1:1,568)	12 (1:1,270)	2 (1:4,782)	8 (1:508)	8 (1:820)	8 (1:4,417)
Ball Diamonds	10 (1:784)	11 (1:1,386)	5 (1:1,891)	4 (1:1,107)	5 (1:1,312)	7 (1:5,048)
Tennis Courts and Pickleball Courts	4 (1:1,960)	8 (1:1,905)	0	0	5 (1:1,312)	9 (1:3,926)
Basketball Courts	0	0	2 (1:4,728)	1 (1:4,066)	4 (1:1,640)	5 (1:7,067)
Skate Parks (All Wheels Parks)	1 (1:7,840)	2 (1:7,622)	1 (1:9,456)	0	1 (1:6,562)	0
Outdoor Aquatics	3 (1:2,613)	4 (1:3,811)	2 (1:4,782)	1 (1:4,066)	2 (1:3,281)	2 (1:17,668)
Off-Leash Dog Parks	1 (1:7,840)	2 (1:7,622)	1 (1:9,456)	0	1 (1:6,562)	1 (1:35,335)
Playgrounds	9 (1:871)	13 (1:1,172)	6 (1,576)	2 (1:2,033)	5 (1:1,312)	26 (1:1,359)
Lawn Bowling Green	1 (1:7,840)	0	0	0	0	0

Population source: Statistics Canada <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710015501>.

St. Marys population based on an annual growth rate of 1.5% (as per the Town of St. Marys Official Plan) from the 2021 Census population of 7,386.

6.2 Arenas

6.2.1 Current Supply

St. Marys has two ice pads located at the Pyramid Recreation Centre, which are known as the Rock Rink and the Blue Rink. The Rock Rink was the first ice pad constructed at the Pyramid Recreation Centre site in 1977 and offers supporting amenities such as seating for approximately 1,000 spectators. The Blue Rink was constructed in 2007 as part of a facility expansion that included seating for 700 people. Other support spaces include a total of 11 change rooms, two referee rooms, and storage space. Over the next 10 years, the Town has planned various capital works to the arenas, including replacing the ice re-surfacer, ice plant, netting, lighting, and floor at a total cost of approximately \$1.5M.



6.2.2 Market Conditions

Ice sports such as hockey and figure skating are widely viewed as Canada's most popular activities; however, there have been signs that participation in these sports has been waning. Hockey Canada indicates that registration in minor hockey has been steadily declining over the past decade. According to Hockey Canada reports, there were 550,137 registered participants for the 2022/2023 ice season, which was a 14% decline from the 2016 to 2017 season. Similarly, registration with Ontario Hockey Federation also declined by 16% during the same period from 221,388 to 185,069 participants.

By contrast, participation in figure skating is on the rise. Between the 2016/2017 and 2022/2023 seasons, Skate Canada reported that participation levels increased by 15% to 202,392 registrants. Skate Ontario also increased by 21% during the same period to 83,786 participants.² Skate Canada attributes this increase to strong interest in CanSkate and PowerSkate programs.

Ringette Canada reported that participation has generally remained unchanged compared to pre-COVID-19 levels. For the 2023/2024 season, there were 32,738 participants registered with organizations affiliated with Ringette Canada, which matches registration levels for the 2019/2020 season. It is known that participation in ringette is dependent on many factors, including the strength of the organization, ability for the group to obtain ice time, and interest in female hockey, which has impacted ringette in many communities.

² Skate Canada Annual General Meeting Reports.

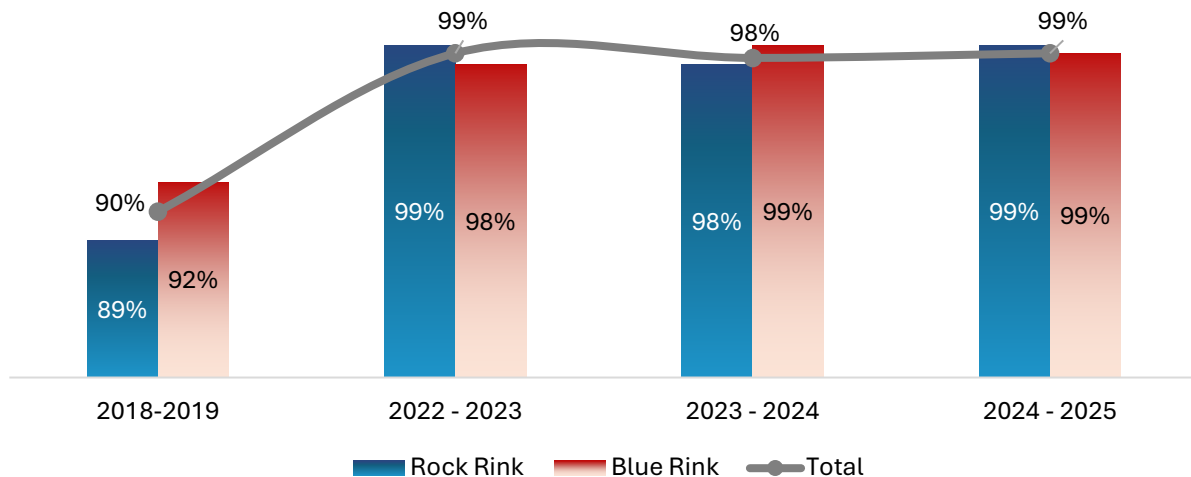
The decline in ice activities, particularly in hockey, is driven by several factors such as the escalating cost of equipment and travel, the increasing cost of ice, time commitments, and immigration trends since the country’s growth is being driven by newcomers arriving from countries where ice activities are not traditionally played.³ Additionally a survey commissioned by Hockey Canada and Bauer Hockey Inc. for non-hockey playing families found that one of the top reasons for not playing the sport is due to safety concerns (e.g., concussion risk).⁴

Locally, arena organizations in St. Marys have been able to “buck the trend” when it comes to participation in ice sports. This has been seen in other smaller town or rural communities where good demand remains for ice with hockey being a popular sport for both participation and spectators. For the 2024/2025 season, the Town’s primary provider of organized ice activities for youth collectively had 855 participants (subject to change based on registration).⁵ This is higher compared to what was reported in the 2017 Master Plan (524 participants) and provides local evidence that there is strong interest in ice sports.

6.2.3 Usage Trends

For the purposes of comparison, an analysis of core prime-time hours was undertaken during a typical week of ice use, which was from 5pm to 10pm during the week and 8 am to 10 pm during the weekend. Ice use during this period is strong with a Town-wide utilization rate of 99% for the 2024/2025 season; bookings are evenly split between both ice pads with a total of 1.5 hours of available ice during the late evening and weekend. It is fair to say that both ice pads have been fully utilized since the Town re-opened its indoor facilities after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 12: Town-wide Ice Utilization During Core Prime-Time Hours, 2018 to 2025.



Note: Data not available for 2019-2020 to 2021-2022 seasons.

³ Urciuoli, A. (2020). Fewer Canadians are playing hockey, but does it matter? Retrieved from <https://quickbitenews.com/>

⁴ Hockey Canada. (2013). Bauer Hockey, Hockey Canada research shows that growing the game is achievable. Retrieved from <https://www.hockeycanada.ca/>

⁵ Youth arena users include St. Marys Minor Hockey Association, St. Marys Snipers Ringette, St. Marys Lincolns, Northern Star Skating Academy and Huron Perth Lakers.

6.2.4 Analysis

The 2017 Master Plan found that there was capacity with the existing arena supply to accommodate additional use, particularly during the weekend. Since that Master Plan was completed, the Town has had success increasing the use of its two ice pads during the prime-time period through strategies such as promoting the use of available ice; the Town also introduced a special rate for shoulder periods to help drive ice rentals during periods of low utilization. This differs from many larger municipalities where the shrinking prime time window and lower demand for shoulder hour prime slots have presented challenges. Local arena organizations have also found success in increasing participation. As previously identified, the Town's youth ice organizations reported 855 registrants for the 2024/2025 season, which was a 63% increase from participation figures reported in the 2017 Master Plan.

Efforts by the Town and user groups to increase ice use has translated into an arena utilization rate of 99% with very limited time for additional use. Should participation levels continue its upward trajectory, it would suggest that there would be a need for a third ice pad during the planning period. The Town historically provided ice pads at a rate of one per 400 participants, which is on the higher end of the spectrum compared to other communities that target ice pad provision at a rate of one per 400 to 500 participants. Using a target to identify ice pad needs during this planning horizon is not recommended at this time given that while local ice usage levels are strong, the Town has an aging population and while there are young families with children in St. Marys, with new families expected in the future, Provincial participation trends suggests that children and youth have broader leisure interests that are impacting ice sport participation and arena usage. As a result, St. Marys' strong ice usage levels may not be sustained over long-term.

Based on the above considerations, maintaining the current ice pad supply is recommended. While this may create some short-term pressure for ice time, taking this conservative approach to facility provision is prudent given the major commitment required to construct a third ice pad. This Master Plan also identifies other recreation, culture, and leisure priorities that also require attention, and it is recognized that the Town needs to be fiscally responsible and sustainable in providing the right mix of community amenities.

The recommended course of action is to optimize the use of the Town's two ice pads in a manner where they are being used as efficiently and effectively as possible. This include ensuring that ice time is being allocated and distributed fairly, transparently and equitably as guided by the Town's Ice Allocation Policy; this Master Plan recommends updating this policy (see Section 7.2.1, Recommendation #47). Other strategies include continuing to encourage the use of non-prime time and shoulder hours, as well as working with adjacent municipalities to explore the feasibility of accommodating local ice use in other communities. For example, Lucan Biddulph may be exploring developing a second ice pad, which is located within 20 minutes of St. Marys. There is also available time at Stratford arenas, particularly during the weekends.

Recommendations

13. In conjunction to updating the Town's Ice Allocation Policy, (see Recommendation #48), continue to accommodate ice pad needs within the existing arena, including promoting the use of non-prime time and shoulder hours.



6.3 Curling Pads

6.3.1 Current Supply

The St. Marys Curling Club operates the four sheets at the Lind Sportsplex during the fall and winter.

6.3.2 Market Conditions

Regional differences exist with respect to curling trends. Experience in many other communities reveals that some curling clubs are challenged with keeping doors open as their memberships decline (with some clubs folding completely). Other clubs continue to thrive due to their ability to maintain a strong user base that serves a regional area. Research completed by Curling Canada revealed that although the sport appeals largely to older adults and seniors, many curling clubs are offering youth leagues and programs to recruit new members and help sustain membership levels as older members become less active in the sport.



St. Marys Curling offers a range of programs including men's and women's socials, competitive leagues, and junior and learn to curl programs. The Club currently has approximately 200 players for 2024, which is generally on par with membership figures reported from the 2017 Master Plan, although club representatives stated that the organization is still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Club promotes its organization and encourages new members through social events and grassroots programs such as learn to curl. In December 2024, the St. Marys Curling Club received a \$150,000 grant through the Ontario Trillium Foundation to undertake upgrades to curling infrastructure, including the refrigeration plant.

6.3.3 Analysis

Curling facilities are provided based on a target of one sheet per 100 members. With a current membership of nearly 200 members (including learn to curl players), there is ample capacity within the current supply to accommodate additional members. As a result, no new curling sheets are recommended. Going forward, it will be important for the St. Marys Curling Club to continue providing curling in the community and attract new members and interest in the sport to grow their programs. During the consultation process, it was revealed that there may be interest from schools to use the curling facility during the daytime, which could help introduce students to the sport.

Recommendations

14. Encourage the St. Marys Curling Club to work with school boards to promote the use of daytime curling sheets.

6.4 Indoor Pools

6.4.1 Current Supply

The Pyramid Recreation Centre offers a 25-metre pool with four lanes and an adjoining leisure tank. Other supporting amenities include an accessible ramp, chair lift and off-deck sauna. Since the completion of the 2017 Master Plan, the Town has reinvested in the pool, including replacement of the roof and filtration system as well as removal of the on-deck hot tub.

At the time of preparing this Master Plan, work is being done to replace the HVAC system to improve air quality and additional capital work is planned over the short-term to replace and renew other components, including a new mechanical equipment such as a rooftop air handling unit and exhaust fan and associated low level exhaust, remote condensing unit, high level exposed aluminum ductwork and return duct routed through existing ceiling and controls for all equipment. Other work will include structural reinforcement or existing east high-level wall above pool, modifying the existing sprinkler system to suit new layout/ceiling, cleaning and repainting roof beams and sprinkler piping, replacing sprinkler heads, repainting the remainder of interior walls, new acoustic wall panels, replacing of both main pool filters, replacing lifeguard chairs, cleaning or replacement of stainless-steel railings as required, and spot replacement of stained deck tile as needed from moisture damage.

6.4.2 Market Conditions

Indoor swimming pools are popular community amenities as they can be used by people of all ages and abilities, either in structured or drop-in programs. As with most municipalities, St. Marys places considerable focus on swim programming. While group lessons are usually the highest demand use, there is also a strong aquatic fitness market that is well suited to adults and older adults as it is a low impact, social activity that promotes physical health. Swim clubs are also major users that tend to prefer traditional rectangular pool configurations with lanes and cooler water temperatures, while the aquafit and early childhood learn-to-swim markets are increasingly shifting their preferences to warmer water temperatures. Other modern amenities that are typically desired include family or gender-neutral change rooms, spray features, updated viewing galleries, and universal design elements.

6.4.3 Usage Trends

The Town offers registered swim lessons and in 2023, there were 1,845 participants registered, which was an increase from 1,360 in 2022. The pool was also used by 22,388 participants in other drop-in programs, including aquafit, family swims, public swims, and EarlyON swims. Additionally, there were nearly 1,800 people attending pool rentals and 88 participants were enrolled in the Town's leadership courses. All program areas experienced an increase in participation from the prior year, except for lane swims, which remained stable. Program participation matches or exceeds usage levels prior to the COVID-19 pandemic as the 2017 Master Plan reported 1,400 registered participants and 23,000 in drop-in swimmers, suggesting that the Town's aquatic programs have recovered to pre-pandemic levels, which aligns with broader participation trends.

Table 9: Participation in Indoor Aquatic Programming, 2022 to 2023

Aquatic Program	2022	2023	Change (%)
Registered Lessons	1,360	1,845	36%
Aquafit	10,522	12,480	19%
Lane Swims	2,548	2,549	0%
Family/Public Swims/EarlyON	6,190	7,359	19%
Pool Rentals	907	1,763	94%
Leadership Participants	77	88	14%

6.4.4 Analysis

A population-based service target of one indoor swimming pool per 30,000 residents is typically used to determine facility needs in small to mid-sized communities. The existing pool is fully expected to be sufficient for meeting needs during the planning period.

Continued use of the pool will require that the Town ensure that it is maintained in a state of good repair. This aligns with residents’ expectations as 79% of community survey respondents supported additional public investment in the pool, which was the fifth highest priority overall. The Town has actively been reinvesting in the pool to replace aging infrastructure and mechanical equipment. While this will result in temporary service disruptions, it is necessary to ensure that the pool remains operational to continue serving the growing community. Although no additional indoor aquatic centres are recommended during the planning period, the Town should continue to maximize the use of the existing pool through provision of a range of aquatic programming, including swimming lessons, public swims, private rentals such as birthday parties, and aquatic leadership courses.

Recommendations

No recommendations are identified for the indoor pool at the Pyramid Recreation Centre given the recent and ongoing investments.

6.5 Multi-Purpose Community Spaces

6.5.1 Current Supply

Multi-purpose spaces include the following, which complement other spaces available in the community such as through the Public Library and St. Marys DCVI:

Multi-purpose Program Rooms

- Pyramid Recreation Centre Meeting Rooms (4)
- Pyramid Recreation Centre End Zone
- Friendship Centre Program Room
- Lind Sportsplex Lounge

Community Hall

- Pyramid Recreation Centre Hall
- Friendship Centre Main Hall
- Town Hall Auditorium

6.5.2 Market Conditions

Multi-purpose spaces are core elements of recreation and leisure facilities – they are flexible spaces that bring the community together. St. Marys provides multi-purpose spaces that can be used for a range of activities, including community programs (e.g., group fitness, EarlyOn, youth programs, etc.), meetings, birthdays, weddings and banquets, and other types of rentals. The Town’s multi-purpose spaces are available in a range of sizes and configurations with a variety of amenities including kitchens, storage, washrooms, tables, chairs and audio-visual components.



6.5.3 Usage Trends

The Town’s community facilities are available for programs and rentals during the day and evening and operating hours vary based on when spaces need to be used. Generally speaking, the Town’s multi-purpose spaces can be used between 7 am until 9 pm, although this can be extended until midnight depending on what is needed. Availability may also vary based on the time of year. For example, there may be fewer hours available to be used during the summer when demand tends to be lower.

With these factors in mind, the Town’s multi-purpose spaces typically have 40,000 hours of available time that can be booked each year and in 2023, the spaces were used for 9,172 hours, representing a usage rate of 22%. This was an increase from the 15% usage rate recorded in 2022 (6,512 hours booked). These statistics suggest that St. Marys’ multi-purpose spaces have a moderate level of use, which is typical for these types of amenities as they are not viewed as highly used spaces, but they are provided to ensure that the community has access to flexible indoor space for programming and rentals. There is capacity to accommodate additional use in the existing system, although it is recognized that the Town has been experiencing increased demand for space during the evenings for programs and community rentals.

St. Marys does not have a gymnasium, although the Town regularly book indoor recreation programs in gymnasium at St. Marys DCVI four evenings per week. Community organizations use the school gymnasium to deliver programming and activities such as soccer, basketball, badminton, pickleball, and a walking program. The Town also works with the YMCA of Three Rivers to utilize space at St. Marys General Hospital to deliver adult fitness programming.

6.5.4 Analysis

The Town makes effective use of its existing multi-purpose rooms for municipally delivered programs, as well as programs offered by community organizations. Internally, the Blue Rink dry arena floor pad is used daily for the entire 9 weeks of summer for full day Camp PRC programming. While the Town does not directly provide a municipal gymnasium space, there are growing pressures for more active, indoor recreation programs like fitness classes and drop-in pickleball at the Pyramid Recreation Centre. Access is available to school gymnasiums, although this has limitations as the community does not have access during the daytime.

An opportunity exists to better utilize the main hall at the Pyramid Recreation Centre by renovating the space to be more “gymnasium friendly” with more durable flooring and increased ceiling height to allow for more active recreation. As part of this strategy, multi-sport lined flooring could be used to achieve program efficiencies and eliminate staff time required to manually tape and remove lining. Where demand exists and program alignment allows, full use of the main hall, rather than the existing two-thirds hall and one-third hall configuration, should also be considered to maximize program enrollment capacity. Utilizing the arena floor pad during the summer to offer more active, gymnasium-based activities is also encouraged.



To accommodate growing program demands, using other facility spaces should be explored. One example includes use of the Lind Sportsplex, which is largely underutilized during the non-curling season with the exception of a weekly shuffleboard league that is provided through the Friendship Centre, potentially opportunities may include group fitness programming, pickleball, basketball, and summer camps, rentals (e.g., birthday parties, etc.); there may be program synergies that could be aligned with using the adjacent quarry or outdoor courts. As the Town continues to grow, St. Marys may continue to experience pressure for a gymnasium to accommodate indoor sports and other community rentals. Engaging the Avon Maitland District School Board and St. Marys DCVI to explore the feasibility of expanding the small gymnasium to make it more desirable for community use could be an option to consider.

Recommendations

15. Renovate the main hall at the Pyramid Recreation Centre to be more gymnasium friendly to accommodate active recreation, which should include durable, wood flooring with multi-lining for sports and other activities.
16. Should the Town continue to face pressure for a gymnasium, engage the Avon Maitland District School Board and St. Marys DCVI to investigate expanding the small gymnasium to improve community use.

6.6 Dedicated Age Spaces

6.6.1 Youth Spaces

The St. Marys Youth Centre is located at the Pyramid Recreation Centre and is open to all members between the ages of eight to 14 years old. The Youth Centre is operated by the Town of St. Marys and in the past has benefitted from the financial support of local service agencies such as the United Way, Lions Club, Rotary, Optimists, Kinsmen, Kinettes, and other funders to provide youth with a safe and inclusive place to socialize, play, and access services. The Youth Centre offers a variety of organized and unstructured activities and spaces, including arts and crafts, homework space, technology area, and lounge. For the 2023 to 2024 season, the Youth Centre had 90 members, which was an increase from 75 members the year prior. The average number of daily participants using the space also increased during this time from 15 to 27 youth.

Dedicated spaces such as the St. Marys Youth Centre provide invaluable opportunities for local adolescents to participate in drop-in, unstructured activities that support active and creative play. Research suggests that this is the preferred type of engagement for this age group and as such, the Town of St. Marys is encouraged to continue offering this service and should regularly connect with members to inform programming decisions. Provision of these spaces is beneficial in combatting declining physical activity levels and supporting positive interactions to improve youth mental health outcomes.



6.6.2 Older Adult Spaces

The Friendship Centre is the Town's older adult space where members ages 50+ can gather, socialize, and participate in recreation, culture, and leisure activities. Activities vary month to month and include, but not limited to, arts and crafts, low-impact fitness, health and wellness, education, dining, and other social and leisure programs.

Dedicated older adult spaces have important physical and social benefits as they are generally regarded as an important part of the health care and recreation sectors. Research has found that members of older adult centres tend to be healthier and have strong activity patterns that help them remain physically well (55% of members described their level of physical activity as fair/moderate, and 33% as good/excellent).⁶ In general, older adult centres province-wide have been most successful in attracting individuals from lower or middle income brackets, including a very high portion of single women. Thus, older adult spaces play a key role in engaging this segment of the community, particularly those who may be at risk, to minimize isolation and achieve lifelong engagement.

6.6.3 Analysis

The Town and its partners have made intentional efforts to engage local youth and older adults to lead positive, active, and healthy lifestyles. St. Marys also strives to offer lifelong learning and engagement opportunities for all through its spaces, programs, and services at the Pyramid Recreation Centre. Activities in these spaces are complemented with programs at the Lind Sportsplex and a wide range of outdoor recreation amenities that appeal to residents and visitors of all ages, placing the Town in a strong position for providing recreation, culture and leisure opportunities.

While no new dedicated youth or older adult spaces are required during the planning period, the recommended strategy going forward is to continue to maximize the use of existing spaces, including under-utilized multi-purpose community spaces. With both the St. Marys Youth Centre and Friendship Centre located within the Pyramid Recreation Centre, they already benefit from cross-programming opportunities available at this location. The Youth Centre is generally well positioned to meet the needs of youth. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that the space offers the technology and amenities that they desire such as computers and a wide range of video games and consoles; supporting creative minds and talents should also be considered such as creating a visual arts wall.

⁶ Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario. 2010. Building Bridges to Tomorrow: User Profile of Older Adults Centres in Ontario. p.4, p.68.

Over the planning period, the population of St. Marys is expected to continue aging and as a result, the importance of the Friendship Centre will continue to grow. The Town recognizes this, and the Master Plan supports increasing delivery of senior services, particularly as it relates to programming as discussed in Section 7.1 and 7.4. From a space perspective, the Friendship Centre is will continue to be an important space for older adults for social gatherings and programs. The Town and community groups also leverage the use of St. Marys DCVI for some programming for all ages such as indoor walking and soccer.

There may be opportunities to better utilize other Town spaces for satellite older adult (and youth) activities at the Lind Sportsplex (for active indoor summer programming), Museum and Archives, and in the downtown area (e.g., Town Hall, Station Gallery etc.). This approach aims to maximize the use of existing space, while ensuring that there is a good distribution of opportunities for the community to get involved. This also aligns with community input received through the consultation process as not all residents use, or have access to, the Pyramid Recreation Centre. Additionally, continuing to work with other space providers such as the Public Library, St. Marys YMCA, and others is also encouraged.

Continued collaboration between St. Marys and community partners to make the Town's indoor and outdoor spaces more age-friendly is also encouraged. The Town and its partners have a strong history in this regard with enhancements to the trail system such as expanding paved surfaces to increase accessibility and investing in children and youth infrastructure, including the new Cadzow splash pad and improvements to the Rotary All Wheels Park on St. James Street (in partnership with the St. Marys Rotary Club). Other opportunities to provide community recreation spaces exist, including continuing to make the Town's parks and facilities more accessible, creating casual gathering spaces with seating, including in lobby areas or open greenspaces, and more. Regularly engaging youth and older adults in planning for age-friendly spaces continues to be encouraged.

Recommendations

17. Continue to engage youth and older adults as part of the planning process to make St. Marys' more age-friendly to create welcoming, attractive, safe, and inclusive spaces with consideration given to enhancements to the Youth Centre and Friendship Centre, and other indoor and outdoor spaces.
18. Explore opportunities to use of the Lind Sportsplex, St. Marys Museum and Archives, and facilities in the downtown area (e.g., Town Hall and the Station Gallery) to strengthen the distribution of where youth and older adult programming opportunities are offered. Continued collaboration with partners to provide spaces for youth and older adults, including St. Marys YMCA, Library, and school boards is also encouraged.

6.7 Cultural Facilities and Spaces

Preferences in how people spend their leisure time is shifting. The popularity of sport activities, either as a participant or spectator, has historically been high, although there has been an increasingly desire for more meaningful cultural and creative experiences, which directly benefits the art and culture providers, as well as other sectors such as tourism and local businesses through economic spending. This is being experienced on a Provincial level as the Ontario Arts Council reported that approximately \$11.4 billion was spent on arts and culture tourism in Ontario in 2023.⁷

Local interest in arts and culture opportunities is high. The community survey found that over the past five years, 76% of respondents visited a farmers' market, which was ranked as the most popular activity. Other popular arts and culture activities included attended a community event (69%), visited a public library (66%), and attended a concert or live music show (50%). There was also support additional public spending for cultural facilities, the most popular ones being the library (89%), space for community events (87%), and museums (74%).

The Town's cultural assets are highlighted below.

6.7.1 Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

The Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum was originally founded in Toronto in 1982, and it was later relocated to St. Marys in 1998. The Hall of Fame and Museum showcases Canadian players, teams, and accomplishments through displays and exhibits, and hosts events throughout the year. This space is owned by the Town, and it is operated by a third-party organization who is responsible for programming the space and associated maintenance and capital work, although the Town may provide support as necessary (financial or otherwise).



In 2017, the museum underwent an extensive expansion project that resulted in a 2,500 square foot addition to the facility to create archive and auditorium and event space, as well as renovation to the existing space; the project was made possible by donations and the Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Program. Continued collaboration between the Town and the third-party operator is encouraged to ensure the success of the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, which should include promotional strategies to bring greater awareness of its presence in the community to draw local and regional visitors.

⁷ Ontario Arts Council. 2023. Ontario Arts and Culture Tourism Profile.

6.7.2 Museum and Archives

Museum and Archives is located at Cadzow Park and is a local heritage home constructed from limestone in 1854. Home to an early settler in St. Marys, the home was recognized as one of the largest homes in the village. It has been a museum since 1959 where visitors can view collections, and exhibits, as well as participate in programs and events. Visitors can also learn about the house itself, which boasts several original features.

The Town is also proud to offer archive services at this location to support local research. An addition to the museum was completed in 2006 to store the archive material where people can access genealogical information, newspaper articles, photographs, and records pertaining to architecture, property, municipal services, and the cemetery.

The Museum and Archives continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of visitors. Prior to the pandemic, the Museum and Archives would typically draw approximately 6,000 people per year. In 2023, there were 4,200 visitors, which was a 46% increase from 2022, suggesting that visitation is trending upwards.⁸ To better connect with users, the Museum and Archives has also digitized many historical photographs about St. Marys that can be viewed online.



6.7.3 St. Marys Town Hall Theatre

The St. Marys Town Hall is one of the Town's primary locations for civic services and it is also the location of the local theatre. The theatre is home to the St. Marys Community Players that puts on several productions annually. The space is also available to be used by others for concerts and other performances, as well as community programming.

⁸ St. Marys Museum 2023 Year in Review.

6.7.4 St. Marys Public Library

St. Marys Public Library is a place for people to celebrate the joy of reading and connecting with others in a supportive environment. The Library offers a range of free programs and services and promotes universal access to a broad range of knowledge, experience, information, and ideas through a range of mediums, including print and digital material. The Library also offers a range of programs, events, and services, including book clubs, writing groups, and arts and crafts, as well as a makerspace, newcomer welcome package and Library Pantry (funded by the Friends of the Library), and loan library.

Specific recommendations regarding the Library are beyond the scope of this Master Plan as the provision of this service is guided by the St. Marys Public Library Strategic Plan 2022-2026 and St. Marys Library Space and Service Needs Study (2016). It is recognized that the Library Space and Service Needs Study is nearly 10 years old and there may be value in working with the Library to update this document to reconfirm library space and service needs, particularly given that much has changed in terms of the Library's role in the community and what it offers. This would also respond to the community's desire for enhanced library opportunities as 89% of community survey respondents supported additional investment in the library.



6.7.5 St. Marys Station Gallery

St. Marys Station Gallery was formerly a train station that was built in 1907 and is recognized as a heritage property under the Ontario Heritage Act. The building is now owned by the Town, who is responsible for maintaining the structure. A complete restoration was undertaken in the 1980s with the support of upper-level government funding and Via Rail. The Station Gallery is curated by a local artist and visitors can view exhibits and displays. The gallery estimates that approximately 350 people visit in-person each year, although many more people are engaged online through virtual events on the gallery's website and social media channels. Working with Station Gallery staff to find solutions to increase use, such as marketing and offering programming is encouraged.



6.7.6 St. Marys Farmers' Market

The St. Marys Farmers' Market was established in 1992 and is run by a community organization at the Milt Dunnell Field. This event runs on a weekly basis from May to October and provides a venue for local growers and small businesses to come together to sell produce and products, some events are held indoors during the winter season. Interest in farmers' markets is high as 76% of community survey respondents identified that they have visited a farmers' market in the past five years, which was the most popular activity.

6.7.7 Heritage Properties

Protecting St. Marys' heritage properties is important to celebrate the past and the Town's unique identity, as well as to showcase the evolution of architecture and the use locally-sourced limestone from the quarry, giving the Town an aptly-named moniker "Stonetown". St. Marys is home to 48 properties designated as a heritage property under the Ontario Heritage Act, as well as one Heritage Conservation District with over 151 properties, and numerous buildings that are non-designated heritage properties that have historical value. Some of these important facilities are owned by the Town including, but not limited to, Town Hall, VIA Station (now the St. Marys Station Gallery), St. Marys Museum and Archives, quarry, St. Marys Public Library (recognized as one of Ontario's Carnegie libraries), and St. Marys Cenotaph.

6.7.8 Public Art and Outdoor Space

The Town displays public art and monuments throughout the community such at Town Hall, Library, and Lind Park. These assets are guided by the Town's Public Art and Monuments Policy to ensure that there is a standardized and transparent process to acquire, approve, and fund public art, and more. Public art is encouraged in strategic locations to create a sense of place, animate spaces, spark creativity and imagination, and showcase historical and cultural values.

There may be opportunities to re-orient public art in St. Marys to better serve the community. For example, a public art installation exists at Centennial Park on the east side of Water Street South, adjacent to Lind Sportsplex. There may be a benefit to relocating the installation to another site, such as to Lind Park to strengthen this space as a cultural space, which could allow for the space to be repurposed to support the quarry (see Recommendation #36). As part of planning and developing future public art installations, community consultation with the public and others such as Indigenous Peoples is encouraged.



6.7.9 Other Non-Municipal Cultural Facility Providers

St. Marys' cultural spaces are complemented by non-municipal community service providers such as local artisans and craftspeople, music instructors, and other talented creatives. It is recommended that the Town undertake a cultural mapping exercise to create an inventory of community-based arts and culture providers to understand what's available and explore future collaborative opportunities; greater promotion and awareness of these providers is encouraged.

Recommendations

19. Promote St. Marys' downtown core of Church Street and Queen Street as the Town's cultural hub to recognize key assets, including the Town Hall, Public Library, Lind Park, as well as the St. Marys Station Gallery, and encourage arts and culture-related programs and gatherings within these spaces.
20. Undertake a cultural mapping exercise to create an inventory of community-based arts and culture providers to understand what's available in the community and explore future collaborative opportunities.
21. Continue to support cultural space operators, program and service providers, and creative industries to ensure long-term success. Strategies include greater promotion and awareness, supporting organizations to undertake space enhancements (including understanding the Town's role in capital investment), and regularly engaging groups to understand short-term plans, challenges, and where greater support is required.
22. Work with the St. Marys Public Library to update its 2016 Library Space and Service Needs Study. This update should provide a fresh look at the changing landscape of providing inclusive and accessible library spaces and services to ensure that the Library is positioned to serve current and future residents.
23. Explore opportunities for future enhancements to Lind Park to strengthen the site for gatherings and cultural opportunities, including potentially the relocation of the art installation from Centennial Park; engaging all parties involved with the development and installation of the public art piece is recommended.

6.8 Rectangular Sports Fields

6.8.1 Current Supply

There are eight rectangular sports fields in St. Marys that are used for soccer, which includes one lit and two unlit fields at St. Marys DCVI (which are owned by the school but maintained by the Town). Lit fields are equivalent to 1.5 unlit fields as they can accommodate extended playing capacity during the evening. As a result, the Town has an unlit equivalent supply of 8.5 fields. This supply includes a reduction of one field compared to the 2017 Master Plan as the Town no longer offers soccer at Southvale Park.



6.8.2 Market Conditions

Soccer is one of the most popular organized sports in Ontario, which is largely due to factors such as its global appeal, good fitness level, and relatively low cost to participate. In 2023, Ontario Soccer reported approximately 284,000 registered players. The Elgin Middlesex District Soccer League is the regional affiliate that covers St. Marys, which had more than 21,000 registered players, which represents a growth of 67% compared to 2013. The St. Marys and Area Minor Soccer Association is the Town's local club, which reported 543 outdoor players for the current year, more than double registration levels reported in the 2017 Master Plan. This growth was attributed to the Association's efforts to grow the organization and interest in the sport, as well as an overall desire among residents to get children and youth more active outdoors. The Town's fields are also used by adult groups that have 82 participants, resulting in a combined total of 625 minor and adult players.

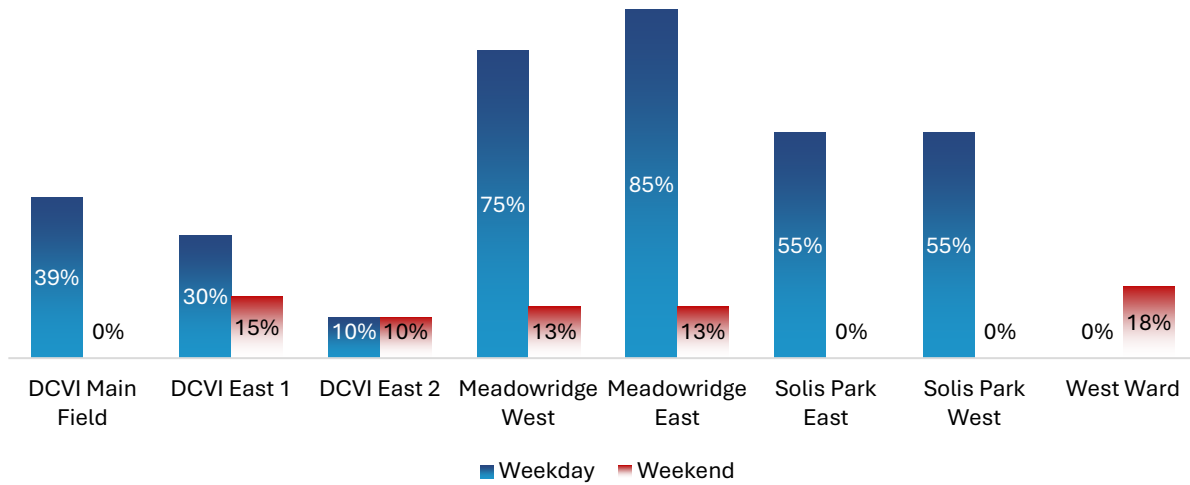
6.8.3 Usage Trends

The growth in soccer since the 2017 Master Plan has driven the demand for field time. Most of the Town's soccer fields (including the DCVI fields) are used between four to five nights per week, including during the weekends. There are also some morning uses during the weekends. There are no bookings on Fridays, which are reserved for field resting and recovery.

For the purposes of this Master Plan, the prime-time window is defined as 5:30 pm to 8:00 pm during the weekday evenings (or until 9:00 pm for lit fields), and from 8:30 am to 6:30 pm during the weekends (or 7:30 pm for lit fields), which is when the Town's fields are in use. During a typical schedule for the 2024 season, the Town's fields were booked for 50 hours per week. Based on the total number of hours available during the prime-time window and the number of hours booked, the Town's rectangular sports fields have a usage rate of 20%. Most bookings were during the weekday evenings (36.5 hours or 43% capacity) with limited use during the weekends (13.5 hours or 7% capacity). While participation in the sport has increased since the previous Master, there is still time and space available to accommodate use, although it is recognized that the ability of the local minor organization to schedule field use is limited by Canada Soccer's programming guidelines, depending upon the age group. For example, most age groups can play one game per week (up to 60 or 80 minutes per day), although there can be multiple practices each week.

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Figure 13: Town-wide Rectangular Field Utilization During Prime-Time Hours, 2024



6.8.4 Analysis

The 2017 Master Plan identified a service target of one rectangular field per 80 participants, which continues to be recommended going forward to align with industry best practices. With a membership of 625 minor and adult players, there is currently a need for eight rectangular fields, which suggest that the Town is currently able to meet needs. If membership levels grow in proportion to population growth, it is estimated that there will be 773 participants by the end of the planning period and a future need for 10 fields, 1.5 more fields than what is currently available.

Table 10: Projected Rectangular Field Requirements

	2025 (Current)	2040 (Projected)
Total Population	7,840	9,800
Children/Youth Population (Ages 5 to 19) Based on a proportion of 16% based on the 2021 Census	1,254	1,568
Number of Youth Soccer Participants Based on an existing capture rate of 43%	543	679
Number of Soccer Fields Required for Youth Based on a target of one field per 80 participants	6.8	8.5
Adult Population (Ages 20 to 49) Based on a proportion of 32% based on the 2021 Census	2,510	3,136
Number of Adult Soccer Participants Based on an existing capture rate of 3%	82	94
Number of Soccer Fields Required for Adults Based on a target of one field per 80 participants	1.0	1.2
Total Number of Soccer Fields Required (rounded) Current field supply = 8.5 unlit field equivalents	8.0	10.0

Due to the surge in minor soccer participation, St. Marys has experienced pressure for additional time at sports fields and to accommodate demand. The Town has already implemented strategies to address demand such as adding new small-sided fields at St. Marys DCVI. The Town also explored the feasibility of adding a soccer field at Milt Dunnell Field, although this was ultimately not implemented due to field the condition, including frequent flooding.

A cursory review of the Town's existing parks suggests that there are currently no appropriate locations to construct additional rectangular fields. It is recognized that the Town removed the rectangular field at Southvale Park due to conflicts with on street parking. Reintroducing a rectangular field at this location is not recommended due to the negative impact on the surrounding area.

As a result, it is recommended that the Town continue to pursue opportunities to maximize the use of existing fields. This should include working with field users to review schedules given that there is capacity to accommodate additional use. While it may not be reasonable to expect all fields to be fully used, efforts should be made to increase use of existing locations. A scan of the weekly field schedule suggests that there is ample time available during the weekends to accommodate additional use, although it is recognized that there is a need for the local soccer organization to maintain Canada Soccer playing standards. There are also some days where certain fields are not being used, and other days where there is only a one-hour booking. A focus should be placed on increasing the use of fields at parks with on-site parking such as at Meadowridge Park, Solis Park, and St. Marys DCVI.

Engaging the Avon Maitland District School Board and St. Marys DCVI could also be an option to explore the feasibility of adding more fields on the school property. Using other school fields could also be considered such as at Holy Name of Mary School, although it is recognized that some field improvements would likely need to be undertaken.

Over the planning period, there could be a need for up to 1.5 new rectangular fields to meet long-term needs but there are currently limited options to construct new fields. This Master Plan identifies that there may be opportunities to utilize vacant Town-owned lands (designated for General Industrial) on a temporary basis, although the Town would first need to confirm that this is a feasible strategy and that the site is suitable for sports fields. If it is feasible to achieve, it may be worth pursuing on a temporary basis until a permanent solution can be found, including establishing fields at future parks (likely in the north end of the Town). Other options also exist to address long-term field needs including investigating the feasibility of lighting existing fields, such as at Solis Park.



It is imperative that the Town of St. Marys work with the local soccer club to determine the highest and best use of existing facilities. It is recognized that as an Ontario Soccer affiliate organization, St. Marys and Area Minor Soccer is required to provide programming aligned with the Sport for Life model. This requires a set number of players per field, for a set amount of time per week (variations exist for practices, games, festivals, and tournaments), and on designated age and skill appropriate field sizes. All these factors will need to be considered as the two groups partner to offer the best available soccer experience for all participants.

Recommendations

24. Work with rectangular field users to maximize the use of existing locations at Meadowridge Park, Solis Park, and St. Marys DCVI through strategies, including increasing the efficiency of field bookings, including encouraging weekend use.
25. The following strategies are recommended alleviate pressure for rectangular fields using school property.
 - a. Engage the Avon Maitland District School Board and St. Marys DCVI to evaluate the potential to establish additional rectangular fields.
 - b. Work with the Huron Perth Catholic District School Board and Holy Name of Mary School to investigate the feasibility of using the rectangular field.
26. Should there continue to be a demand for additional field capacity, explore opportunities to increase the supply of rectangular fields including developing temporary fields on vacant Town-owned lands (see Section 5.5.1, Recommendation #5), constructing new fields at future parks (in the north end of the Town) or adding lighting to the field at Solis Park.

6.9 Ball Diamonds

6.9.1 Current Supply

The Town has 10 ball diamonds, including the four ball diamonds located at the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame complex. Four of the Town's ball diamonds are lit and six are unlit. Each lit diamond is equivalent to 1.5 unlit diamonds due to its extended playing capacity and as a result, the Town has an unlit equivalent supply of 12 ball diamonds. The Town's 10-year capital plan identifies investment of \$30,000 in upgrades to the Solis Park diamond that includes replacing the safety netting.

6.9.2 Market Conditions

Participation in baseball has been experiencing a resurgence as Baseball Ontario reported that there were approximately 17,800 participants in 2023, which was a growth of 45% compared to



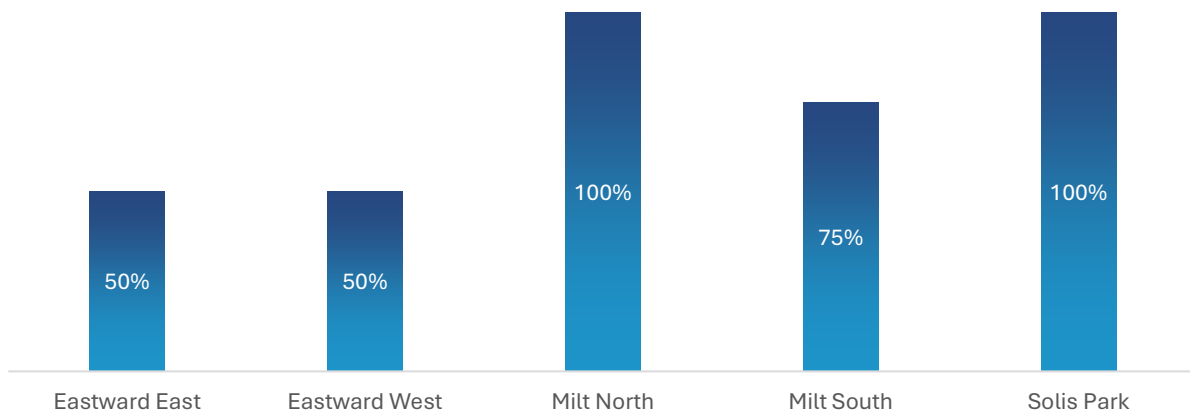
2013, although these figures exclude recreational/house leagues and non-affiliated ball groups. As a result, actual participation figures are greater. The Western Ontario Baseball Association, which is the regional affiliate that includes the St. Marys Minor Ball Association, experienced an increase of 14% during the same period. Locally, participation in minor ball has grown since the 2017 Master Plan. St. Marys Baseball Association reported a current membership of 257 participants, which was an increase of 9% from 2016. The Town also estimates that there are approximately 500 participants registered among adult slo-pitch teams, yielding a total of 757 youth and adult players.

6.9.3 Usage Trends

The Town permits the ball diamonds at Milt Dunnell Field, East Ward Park, and Solis Park on a four-day schedule (Monday to Thursday) during the warm-weather months. Based on the Town’s permitting schedule, the diamonds are well used with 40 hours booked per week, equating to 83% utilization during the evenings. The ball diamond at Solis Park is the Town’s most heavily used location, which is booked every evening during the four-day schedule; it is also the only lit diamond so it can accommodate bookings later in the evening. The two ball diamonds at East Ward Park are the least used diamonds as they are only booked on Tuesdays and Thursdays although it is known that these diamonds are undersized which limits use to younger age groups. The Town’s permitting data shows that the diamonds at Milt Dunnell Fields are used; however, it is known that in practice, the diamonds have environmental constraints that often renders the diamonds unusable (e.g., animal excrement and flooding).

The diamonds at the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame complex are booked by the third-party operator and it is understood that they are used very well by local groups, including minor ball and adult teams, as well as non-resident users, and includes recreational and competitive play. The diamonds are used daily during the playing season between 5:00 pm and 8:30 pm during the weekday evening and from 9:00 am to sundown during the weekends. The majority of available time is at the smaller diamond between Friday and Sunday (St. Marys Minor Ball Association does not run programming during this period).

Figure 14: Town-wide Ball Diamond Utilization During Prime-Time Hours, 2024



Note: The Town’s diamond schedules indicates that the ball diamonds at Milt Dunnell Park Field are well used; however, it is known that in practice, these diamonds are not used due to site conditions such as frequent flooding.

6.9.4 Analysis

The 2017 Master Plan used a target of one ball diamond per 100 participants to identify future needs, which continues to be recommended as it aligns with targets used in similar comparable municipalities. With a total of 757 youth and adult ball participants and the assumption that participation capture rates remain steady, it is projected that there will be 970 ball players (345 youth and 625 adult) by the end of the planning period. Based on the recommended target and projected registration levels, there would be a need for 10 ball diamonds by 2040, which is two less than what is currently provided (Table 11).

Table 11: Projected Ball Diamond Requirements

	2025 (Current)	2040 (Projected)
Total Population	7,840	9,800
Children/Youth Population (Ages 5 to 19) Based on a proportion of 16% based on the 2021 Census	1,254	1,568
Number of Youth Ball Participants Based on an existing capture rate of 22%	257	345
Number of Ball Diamonds Required for Youth Based on a target of one diamond per 100 participants	2.8	3.5
Adult Population (Ages 20 to 49) Based on a proportion of 32% based on the 2021 Census	2,510	3,136
Number of Adult Ball Participants Based on an existing capture rate of 20%	500	625
Number of Ball Diamonds Required for Adults Based on a target of one diamond per 100 participants	5.0	6.3
Total Number of Ball Diamonds Required (rounded) Current Ball Diamond Supply (12 unlit diamond equivalents)	8.0	10.0

While this projection provides us with an understanding of the quantity of ball diamonds that are required, it is important to understand that not all diamonds are equal due to factors such as size and condition, which influence the ability to meet the needs of organizations. For many years, ball organizations have had challenges with the diamonds at Milt Dunnell Fields due to flooding throughout the season, resulting in unpredictable conditions that impacted scheduling. Given its location adjacent to the Thames River, it is also a known habitat for geese, contributing to unfavourable turf conditions and maintenance challenges. For these reasons, the St. Marys Minor Ball Association does not use these diamonds. It is recommended that the Town stop permitting Milt Dunnell Field, adjust its maintenance requirements for non-sports uses and redirect use to other locations. Milt Dunnell Field should continue to be used for other passive uses, including special events and community gatherings.

The reduction of two ball diamonds from Milt Dunnell Field would result in an adjusted supply of 10 unlit ball diamond equivalents, which would match the long-term requirements identified in this Master Plan. This would suggest that no additional ball diamonds are required during this planning period. However, local users must also compete with non-resident ball diamond users at the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame. While this location is a Town-owned property, it is permitted by a third-party organization and it is recognized that it is part of their mission to grow the game of baseball and support local economic development opportunities, which includes drawing regional users and visitors.

Continued efforts to work collaboratively with the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame are recommended to ensure that existing ball diamonds are accessible for local users, while continuing to attract and accommodate regional users and sports and recreation tourism. Consultation with the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame operator revealed that there is a desire to undertake enhancements to the facility that could increase capacity and functionality, including adding lighting to premiere hardball diamond, increasing parking, and constructing washrooms and pavilion. These capital projects would primarily be the responsibility of the facility operator.

The Town has also been exploring other strategies to enhance the user experience and playing capacity at Town-permitted diamonds. Opportunities may exist to accommodate more use at the two diamonds at East Ward Park, although it is recognized that this property is not owned by the Town. This Master Plan recommends that the Town form a user agreement with the landowner prior to undertaking any further capital improvement to the property (including to the ball diamonds) (see Section 5.5.1, Recommendation #4).

As a contingency, the Town may be required to pursue alternative opportunities to relocate the East Ward Park ball diamonds to another location if an agreement is not established. One option to consider is to establish ball diamonds on the vacant Town-owned site (designated General Industrial) to address ball diamond needs over the planning period. An added benefit to this option is that it would allow the Town to design diamonds that would be suitable for a wide age group; the East Ward Park diamonds are currently only suitable for younger age groups. The feasibility of this option would need to be confirmed through a separate study (see Section 5.5.1, Recommendation #5).

Working with organizations to adjust and optimize scheduling to maximize the use of existing ball diamonds should also be explored. For example, there is currently ample capacity to accommodate use during the weekends, which are currently not being used. Monitoring the effectiveness improving the use of the ball diamonds, as well as the improvements to the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame is recommended to understand how ball diamond use improves and if additional strategies should be explored.

Recommendations

27. Work with user groups to maximize the use of existing ball diamonds, including encouraging weekend use.
28. Monitor any future improvements undertaken by the third-party operator to the ball diamonds at the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame to understand how demand can be accommodated and if other strategies need to be explored, including constructing new ball diamonds at future parks, including potentially developing temporary fields on vacant Town-owned property (see Section 5.5.1, Recommendation #5).
29. Remove Milt Dunnell Field from the ball diamond inventory and adjust the Town's maintenance practices for non-sport uses.

6.10 Tennis and Pickleball Courts

6.10.1 Current Supply

There are four lit tennis courts in St. Marys, including two courts that are multi-lined to provide four pickleball courts, which was implemented in 2021. The courts are available to the public except during designated times when they are permitted by organized racquet sport groups.

6.10.2 Market Conditions

Tennis has been experiencing a resurgence over the past several years. Tennis Canada reported that 6.6 million Canadians played tennis at least once in 2018, a growth of more than 23% since 2014. Nearly 3 million Canadians are frequent players – those who play at least once a week during the tennis season – which is twice as many compared to 2014.^{9, 10} The growing popularity in tennis can be attributed to the growing segment of baby boomers that seek social, and, to some degree, lower impact activities. There is also a focus on promoting the sport at the grassroots level. Tennis Canada reported that in 2022, over 1,000 kids participated in free tennis programs in underserved communities. Tennis Canada also worked with organizations to engage new Canadian children in tennis camps and partnered with others to hold major events such as the Rogers Rookie Tour and Orange-Green Ball Circuit to provide a fun competitive experience.¹¹ The St. Marys Social Tennis Club has been working diligently to generate local interest in the sport by encouraging new players to try tennis and hosting youth clinics.



⁹ Tennis Canada. 2018 Annual Report.

¹⁰ Charlton Strategic Research. 2014 Canadian Tennis Brand Health Study.

¹¹ Tennis Canada. 2022 Annual Report

Pickleball is widely recognized as the fastest growing sport in North America, and it continues to gain popularity. It is played by older adults, but younger age groups are also taking up the sport as interest grows and more opportunities and locations become available to play; it is also played in high schools in many communities, including at St. Marys DCVI. As the sport matures, participation will become broader and more diverse and include more or larger established organizations, greater interests for competitive leagues and programming, and demand for more courts. A survey completed in January 2022 by Pickleball Canada found that 8% of Canadian households report at least one household member plays pickleball at least once a month,¹² a near tripling of the number of pickleball players in Canada over a two-year period. The St. Marys Pickleball Association has been providing league play to the community, in addition to casual play by residents and visitors to the community.

6.10.3 Analysis

The 2017 Master Plan used a population-based target of one tennis court per 4,000 to 6,000 residents to determine needs, which continues to be recommended; it is generally consistent with targets used in other communities. With a projected population of 9,800 residents over the planning period, St. Marys' would need two dedicated tennis to meet community needs.

From a tennis club perspective, communities typically provide courts at a rate between one per 50 to 75 members. The St. Marys Social Tennis Club currently has 72 members, which is an increase of 60% from the 45 members reported in the 2017 Master Plan. While the Club has experienced growth, the current membership level suggests that two dedicated tennis courts are adequate to meet both club and non-club play. Part of the challenge is that the club shares court time with the public. At present, the club has exclusive access to two courts in May and September for a total of eight hours each week (four hours per court) and all four courts from June to August for a total of 16 hours per week, which the St. Marys Social Tennis Club indicates is insufficient to meet their needs.

Municipalities are beginning to adopt service targets for pickleball courts that, at present, align with targets established for tennis courts to ensure that both sports are equally represented in the community. This suggests that the Town would require two dedicated pickleball courts at present. However, locally, the St. Marys Pickleball Association has approximately 140 members and consultation with the organization found that accommodating new members has been a challenge due to the lack of opportunities to play and the need to share the courts with non-club members who play on a casual basis, and tennis players. Currently, the association has exclusive access to all four pickleball courts between May and October for 16 hours per week (four hours per court). Additionally, the popularity of pickleball in St. Marys continues to grow and its audience is expanding to include youth and young adults, as well as visitors to the community, creating pressure for additional opportunities to play.

Longer-term, the Town should seek to acquire a park site that can accommodate new courts to address growing demand for tennis and pickleball courts. Usage of the existing courts by both the St. Marys Social Tennis Club and the St. Marys Pickleball Association should be monitored to

¹² Pickleball Canada. 2022. January 2022 Survey. Retrieved from <https://pickleballcanada.org>

determine if future courts should be dedicated to tennis and/or pickleball based upon membership and utilization. Currently, the challenge is identifying a viable location(s) to construct new courts without negatively impacting other outdoor recreation uses.

Ideally, new courts should be located together in a Town Park where there are supporting amenities such as on-site parking, washrooms, seating, shade, and exterior lighting to support play in all favourable conditions. Maintaining adequate separation from residential areas or commercial businesses is also encouraged due to loud noises associated with play. As a best practice, locations with four or more dedicated pickleball courts should have a minimum separation distance of 75 metres from a residential property line; this may be reduced if noise abatement measures are used such as landscaping or other sound mitigation solutions are implemented. Through the consultation process, potential locations for pickleball courts were suggested, which included partnering with St. Marys DCVI to use school lands, although there would likely be incompatibility concerns with adjacent land uses.

One potential option that could be considered is to repurpose the quarry on the north side of Water Street to create additional land for pickleball courts. There are benefits with this option given that it is already adjacent to the existing courts, and it is not located near residential areas. It may also help provide enhanced parking opportunities for the adjacent swimming quarry. While this would result in the loss of passive recreation space, a similar experience is offered at Milt Dunnell Field.

Recognizing that it will take time to identify and develop a suitable solution to address racquet court needs, interim measures are required to provide immediate relief for tennis and pickleball users by maximizing the use of the existing courts through the following strategy:

- Expand the time reserved for the St. Marys Tennis Social Club to include Saturdays between May 1st and September 30th from 7 pm to 9 pm on all four courts, adding eight more hours of dedicated court time per week to the club.
- Expand the time reserved for the St. Marys Pickleball Association to include Fridays between May 1st and October 31st from 7 pm to 9 pm on all four pickleball courts and adding daytime periods on Monday and Wednesdays from 8 am to 11 am, thereby adding 32 hours of dedicated court time per week to the club (including eight additional hours during the evening and 24 hours during the daytime).
- Explore the feasibility of constructing temporary courts for pickleball on vacant Town-owned property (see Section 5.5.1, Recommendation #5).

This approach provides both tennis and pickleball groups with additional access during peak playing periods, while maintaining public access for drop-in, non-club play. Once implemented, the Town should monitor use to determine if adjustments are needed and if further strategies need to be explored to meet demand, which may include painting pickleball court lines on the southwest side tennis courts and providing pickleball nets (courts 3 and 4).

There is currently insufficient evidence to recommend indoor tennis courts to support year-round play. St. Marys' existing courts are not likely to be suitable for a temporary dome and the Town does not own any land that would be appropriate for constructing indoor tennis courts. This type of facility is typically provided to meet regional needs and thus, the Town should encourage the use of public and privately-operated indoor tennis courts in the surrounding area such as in London. At the time of this report, there is also a known potential for development of an indoor tennis dome in Stratford, although timing for development is unknown.

Some requests were also made for more places to play indoor pickleball, which is currently being played locally at the Pyramid Recreation Centre and St. Marys DCVI. There may also be opportunities to offer indoor pickleball during the non-ice season by using the Lind Sportsplex when it is not being used for shuffleboard or curling. Promoting the use of regional indoor pickleball opportunities, such as in Thames Centre and Stratford, should also be encouraged.

Recommendations

30. The following strategy is recommended to alleviate demand for tennis and pickleball on an interim basis until a permanent solution can be found to provide additional racquet courts. Once implemented, monitoring use will be required to determine if further strategies need to be explored to meet demand, which may include painting pickleball court lines on the southwest side tennis courts (courts 3 and 4):
 - a. Expand the time reserved for the St. Marys Tennis Social Club to include Saturdays between May 1st and September 30th from 7 pm to 9 pm on all four courts, adding eight more hours of dedicated court time per week to the club.
 - b. Expand the time reserved for the St. Marys Pickleball Association to include Fridays between May 1st and October 31st from 7 pm to 9 pm on all four pickleball courts and adding daytime periods on Monday and Wednesdays from 8 am to 11 am, thereby adding 32 hours of dedicated court time per week to the club (including eight additional hours during the evening and 24 hours during the daytime).
 - c. Explore the feasibility of constructing temporary courts for pickleball on vacant Town-owned property (see Section 5.5.1, Recommendation #5).
31. Over the long-term, seek to acquire a new park site, possibly through filling in the north quarry (see Recommendation #36) or through the land development process (e.g., future subdivision approval) for the provision of additional racquet courts. Expanded usage recommended for the existing courts by both the St. Marys Social Tennis Club and St. Marys Pickleball Association should be monitored to determine if future courts would be best designed for tennis and/or pickleball based upon membership and utilization levels.
32. Investigate opportunities to increase space for indoor pickleball at the Lind Sportsplex when it is not being used for shuffleboard or curling.
33. Promote the use of regional indoor tennis and pickleball facilities.

6.11 Basketball Courts

6.11.1 Current Supply

The Town does not provide any basketball courts, although courts and hoops are located at local schools, including St. Marys DCVI, Little Falls Public School, and Holy Name of Mary School.

6.11.2 Market Conditions

Basketball courts are rudimentary outdoor recreational facilities that are used by people of all ages either individually or in small groups. The popularity of basketball courts in Ontario and Canada is partially linked to the international appeal of the Toronto Raptors. Basketball courts can vary in size, surface, and design, and in other communities, they tend to be designed as multi-purpose surfaces to accommodate other activities and uses such as pickleball or ball hockey.

6.11.3 Analysis

The Town has historically relied on basketball courts on school properties to meet community needs, although public access is somewhat limited as they are not available during the school time and the quality and condition of courts may vary. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a growing community interest in walkable, high quality, casual, outdoor recreation activities. This was apparent through the consultation process as requests were made for basketball courts in St. Marys. There is merit in introducing outdoor basketball (multi-use) courts as a new level of service for the Town to demonstrate St. Marys' commitment to providing an enhanced level of outdoor recreation amenities, particularly for youth and young adults. Expected population growth over the planning period also lends additional support for basketball courts.

The 2017 Master Plan recommended that the Town construct a minimum of one basketball court in the southwest and north area of St. Marys, which has not been implemented and continue to be logical areas to consider. The Rotary All Wheels Park would be an ideal location as co-locating amenities that are geared towards the same age group would strengthen the park as a public gathering space. It is recognized that the Town is currently undertaking a separate environmental assessment that would influence whether a basketball court could be accommodated at this location, and as a result, it should be a long-term recommendation subject to the findings of the assessment. Alternatively, another site in the south end could be explored.

There are also locations in the north end where a basketball could be considered, including North Ward Park #1 and #2, or at a future park in the north or west end. Consideration should also be given to co-locating a north-end basketball court with a small-scale skateboarding/all wheel area, as recommended in this Master Plan. As a best practice, all outdoor basketball courts should be full-size and consideration could be given to multi-lining for other activities such as pickleball and ball hockey.

Recommendations

34. Construct two outdoor basketball courts to establish a Town-owned and operated local supply. All outdoor basketball courts should be full-size and multi-lined for other activities such as pickleball and ball hockey. The following locations should be considered:
- a. At the Rotary All Wheels Park, subject to the completion of any study impacting the lands to confirm that it can be accommodated on site. Alternatively, another site in the south end could be explored.
 - b. At North Ward Park #1 or #2, or at a future park in the north or west end of St. Marys.

6.12 Outdoor Aquatics

6.12.1 Current Supply

The St. Marys Quarry has been a popular public swimming area since the 1940s after being converted from a limestone quarry that closed in 1920. St. Marys also provides two splash pads at Cadzow Park (Rotary Outdoor Splash Pad) and Pyramid Recreation Centre; the latter location is planned to be decommissioned in the short-term as it has reached the end of its useful life.

6.12.2 Market Conditions

Over the past two decades, outdoor aquatic facilities have evolved significantly, largely due to the increasing number of indoor pools and the aging infrastructure of outdoor pools. Splash pads offer several advantages over traditional outdoor swimming pools. They are more affordable to construct and maintain, can be seamlessly integrated into various park settings, and can be designed to be accessible for people with disabilities. Additionally, splash pads do not require supervision because they lack standing water. Their popularity has surged among families looking for no-cost ways to cool off on hot days, especially as communities experience hotter summer temperatures. St. Marys recognizes the positive impact and benefits of splash pads in the community through the development of its Cadzow Park location in 2018 in partnership with the community and groups, including the Rotary Club.



The Town's swimming quarry is an important community asset, and its uniqueness draws visitors from across the County and beyond. Staff have worked diligently to enhance the use of the quarry through initiatives such as the Super Splash Inflatable Waterpark, which is an agreement with a private sector partner established in 2020. The Town has also undertaken other strategies to improve the user experience, including adding an accessible floating dock (funded in part by the Canada Community Revitalization Fund), expanding the parking lot, adding a crosswalk, partner to provide services and programming, offering and/or expanding summer camps, as well as promotion and advertising.

Most recently, the Town has been investigating in strategies to enhance the use of the quarry to draw more use from residents and beyond. Beginning in 2024, staff initiated various tactics, including holding summer camps at the adjacent Lind Sportsplex, encouraging rental of the space, partnering with Tourism London and the local BIA, establishing a tourism kiosk, and focusing on greater promotion. Other opportunities that the Town has previously identified, but not yet implemented, include exploring new ventures either independently or in partnership with the private sector such as stand-up paddleboarding and kayaking, as well as tree trekking, expanding summer camps, and greater programming of the Lind Sportsplex. Future use of the adjacent fishing quarry could also be an opportunity. It is recognized that the Town previously explored extending the swimming season at the quarry to draw more use from schools, although it was identified that it would not generate more revenue as school boards deemed swim trips to be a liability.¹³

6.12.3 Analysis

The 2017 Master Plan recommended that once the splash pad at Cadzow Park was completed, the Town should monitor the use of the Pyramid Recreation Centre splash pad to determine its future. The Pyramid Recreation Centre splash pad is used sporadically during between June and September by students at the Little Falls Public School and residents within walking distance; it also receives some use by those who travel to the Pyramid Recreation Centre by car.

The Pyramid Recreation Centre splash pad was originally installed in 2008 and over the past number of years, the user experience has diminished as features are not working as intended or not at all. As a result of its age and deficiencies, Council has decided to decommission this splash pad. While this space is limited, alternative uses should be explored such as storage space, staff break space, informal space for gatherings, outdoor programming, outdoor fitness equipment, or other uses.

In comparable communities, it is common for municipalities to provide one splash pad per urban area, suggesting that the new splash pad at Cadzow Park is sufficient to meet the needs of the community. Given the recent splash pad investment at Cadzow Park, together with the swimming quarry and indoor pool at the Pyramid Recreation Centre, no additional splash pads are recommended during the planning period.

¹³ Town of St. Marys. DCS 17-2024 Quarry Strategic Planning. April 2024.

Access to natural waterbodies for swimming and aquatic activities at the quarry and Thames River is one of the Town's most treasured features that is enjoyed by residents and draws regional visitors to the community. The Town has actively sought to connect people to the water through past initiatives such as the development of the floating accessible dock and offering free kayaks rentals at the Yak Shack at Milt Dunnell Field as well as partnering with a private operator to provide the splash park at the quarry. Opportunities to continue exploring enhanced use of the quarry is encouraged, either alone or in partnership with a third-party provider. This could include aquatic-based opportunities or complementary outdoor recreation activities in the vicinity of the quarry.

While the popularity of the quarry is largely reviewed as positive, there are growing safety concerns over traffic and parking over during peak season, which has also affected the use and enjoyment of other surrounding amenities such as the tennis and pickleball courts. One strategy that could be considered to alleviate parking is to create a drop-off area on the south side of the Lind Sportsplex, which is currently passive open space. Although to achieve this, the removal of some mature trees may be required, as well as relocation of the existing public art installation (either within the site or at another location such as Lind Park. Nevertheless, the feasibility of this option should be explored to help alleviate safety and parking concerns.

The quarry on the north side of Water Street South is used for more passive outdoor enjoyment and related activities such as fishing; swimming and using watercrafts are not permitted. This Master Plan identifies that there is currently a strong demand for dedicated pickleball courts. The Town could investigate the feasibility of filling in the north quarry to address the Town's pickleball court needs. The Town has implemented this strategy in the past, having filled in a quarry to create Teddy's Field. If the Town pursues this strategy, it could not only help address pickleball court needs but provide much needed parking relief for the adjacent swimming quarry and support expanded tourism opportunities.

Recommendations

35. Explore alternative uses for the decommissioned splash pad at the Pyramid Recreation Centre, such as storage space, staff break space, informal space for gatherings, outdoor programming, outdoor fitness or other use.
36. Explore strategies to improve parking opportunities at the swimming quarry, including investigating the feasibility of creating a drop-off area on the west side of the Lind Sportsplex. This may require tree removal and relocating the public art feature at Centennial Park, either within the site or at another location such as Lind Park (see Recommendation #23) and filling in the north quarry add additional parking.

6.13 Skate Parks (All Wheels Parks)

6.13.1 Current Supply

The Rotary All Wheels Park on St. James Street is St. Marys' sole skate park, which is located adjacent to the fire hall and across the street from St. Marys DCVI. As the name suggests, it is open for all types of wheeled action sports such as skateboarding, roller blading, scooter riding, and BMX biking. The All Wheels Park recently underwent a major renovation to renew and expand the park, which was completed by the Town with the support of volunteers and community donations, including the Rotary Club. The enlarged park features elevation changes, quarter pipe, bowl, and pump track.

6.13.2 Market Conditions

Skate parks offer meaningful gathering spaces for youth and young adults to engage in skateboarding, rollerblading, scootering, biking, and other wheeled action sports. Historically seen as hubs for negative behavior, skate parks have now evolved into popular spots where people can gather and socialize in a positive setting. They promote physical activity and are considered affordable ways to be active and spend time with friends. The expansion of the Town's all wheel park aligns with the growing trend of increasing the availability of facilities for wheeled action sports, responding to the rising demand for such amenities in Ontario communities.



6.13.3 Analysis

The Rotary All Wheels Skate Park serves local youth and young adults well, particularly given its proximity to St. Marys DCVI and the Pyramid Recreation Centre. As additional growth occurs in the north end of Town, there will be a growing need to serve this area, particularly for users who may not be able to travel to the existing location. While there is no evidence to suggest that this is a short-term priority, the Town should monitor long-term needs in the north or west end, potentially as part of any future park development. This could be a small-scale skate zone with a limited number of mobile features, such as a ramp, curb and/or rail, that could be provided as a complementary feature to a basketball court, which is also recommended in Section 6.11 in this Master Plan, as they serve the same target demographic (see Recommendation #34).

Recommendations

37. Evaluate opportunities to provide a small-scale all wheel park in the north or west end of St. Marys that features limited skate components such as a ramp, curb and/or rail, and potentially complementary to a basketball court.

6.14 Off-Leash Dog Parks

6.14.1 Current Supply

An off-leash dog park is located at the Junction Station Dog Park, which offers amenities, including shade, seating, and water.

6.14.2 Market Conditions

Off-leash dog parks are designated areas where dogs can run, play, and socialize freely without being restricted by leashes. These parks provide a safe and controlled environment for both dogs and their owners to exercise and interact with others, which can be beneficial for their physical health, mental stimulation, and social interactions. These parks allow dogs to interact with other dogs and people, which helps with their socialization and can improve their behavior and temperaments. Off-leash parks are typically enclosed with fencing to ensure dogs remain within the designated areas. Common amenities in off-leash parks include agility equipment (such as tunnels and jumps), water access, waste disposal stations with bags and bins, shaded areas, and lighting.



6.14.3 Analysis

In communities like St. Marys, it is common to provide one off-leash dog park to serve the entire community as they are drive-to amenities. On this basis, St. Marys' existing off-leash dog park is considered adequate to serve the community. An emphasis should be placed on enhancing the existing location to meet the needs of dogs and their owners.

There is no standard guiding the size of spaces for large and small dogs as it varies based on the amount of space available. A broad scan of off-leash dog areas in other communities found that sizes vary. For example, the off-leash dog park in Lucan Biddulph is approximately 3,300 square metres in size and about 3% (or 95 square metres) is dedicated to small dogs. Zorra provides an off-leash dog park that's 3,800 square metres and approximately 18% (or 680 square metres) is dedicated to small dogs. On this basis, St. Marys could designate a portion of the existing off-leash dog park for small dogs in the range of 100 to 700 square metres, although this is only a guideline.

Additional shade was requested either through tree plantings or a built structure. Lighting should also be explored to provide users with extended periods of use in the evening. This could also be beneficial during the summer period when it may be too hot during the daytime for dogs and their owners to be outdoors.

Recommendations

38. Undertake enhancements to the Junction Station Dog Park such as creating an area to separate large and small dogs, adding additional shade through tree plantings or a built structure, and lighting to provide extended hours of use during the evenings.

6.15 Playgrounds

6.15.1 Current Supply

There are nine playgrounds at parks across St. Marys that vary in design, size, and range of components. Some locations feature accessible components such as Cadzow Park. In addition, play structures are also available at schools.

6.15.2 Market Conditions

Playgrounds are highly sought-after features in parks, especially by young families, because they support early childhood development, enhance cognitive and social skills, and promote physical activity. Over time, playground designs have evolved from basic equipment like swings and slides to more imaginative structures that inspire creativity and unique play experiences. Modern designs often include bright colors, interactive elements, thematic themes, sensory-stimulating components, and accessible surfaces made from materials like engineered wood fiber and rubber.

There are some communities that have been introducing natural playgrounds within parks. Natural playgrounds are beneficial in connecting children with natural materials such as wood and boulders and encourages risky play. However, natural playgrounds may not be as durable as traditional play structures, requiring higher maintenance, thus potentially requiring a greater level of investment, although this varies depending on its location and level of use.



6.15.3 Analysis

The 2017 Master Plan recommended that the Town provide playgrounds within 800 metres of residential areas, taking into consideration barriers such as major roads, railway crossings, and waterways. This continues to be a best practice used in communities like St. Marys. The Town has been making progress with resolving playground gaps with the future development of a playground at Thamesview Crescent.

Applying the 800-metre service area revealed that a playground gap continues to exist on the north side of Queen Street West, west of the Thames River, which comprises of single detached dwellings, industrial and commercial uses, and hospital (Figure 15). No parkland exists in this area and thus, opportunities to reconcile this gap area are limited, although it is recognized that residents in this area have some access to the playground at Milt Dunnell Field. As a result, providing a playground in this area should be provided on an opportunity basis, although it is a low priority. Providing playgrounds at future parks in emerging residential areas should also be considered, such as in the north end, to ensure that residents in this area have access to this type of amenity.

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), all new and developed playgrounds should be accessible. This requires that the Town consider key design features, including providing accessible play components, firm and stable surfaces, seating, pathways and entry points. The level of accessibility should vary based on the type of park each playground is located in. For example, a Town Park playground should have a rubber surface, while Neighbourhood Parks and Parkettes may have engineered wood fibre surfaces (see Section 5.1, Table 3).

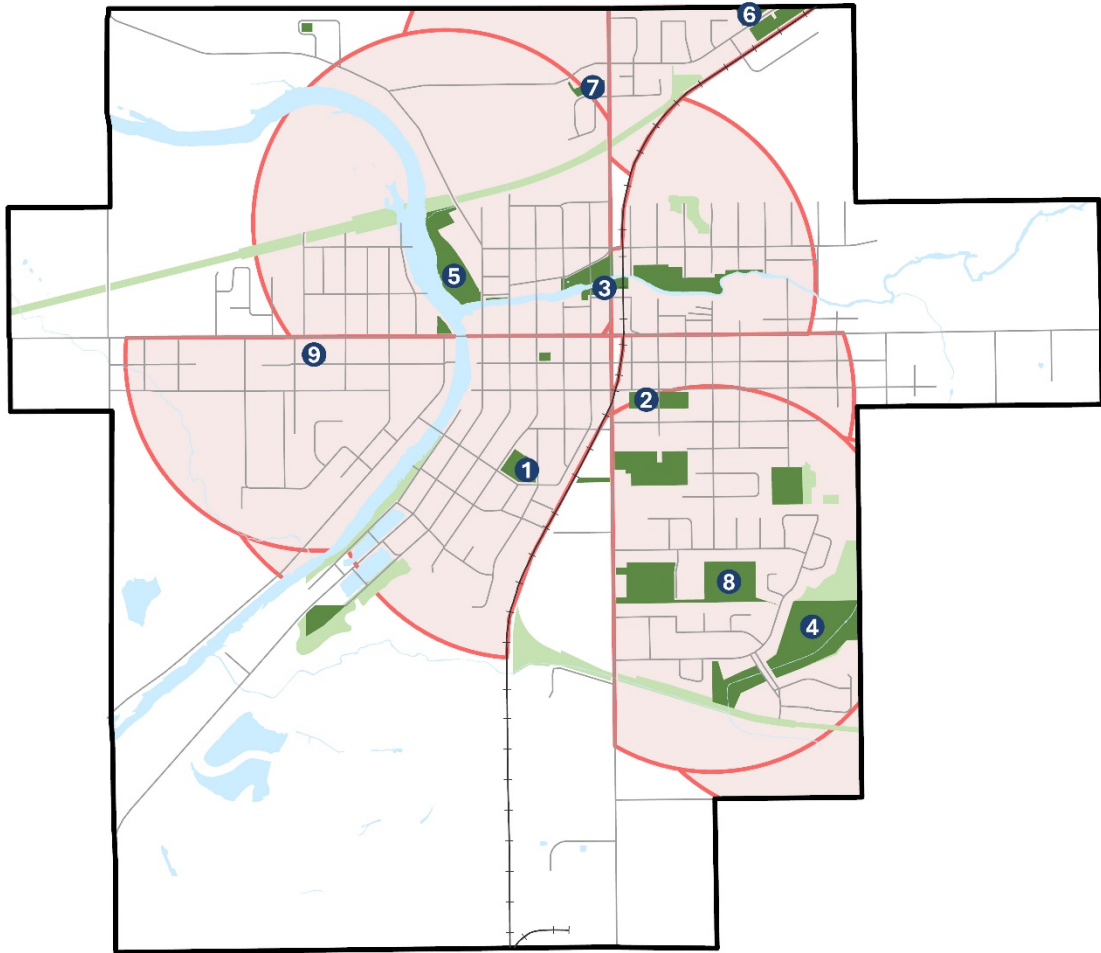
Recommendations

39. Provide playgrounds to reconcile gap areas or to ensure that residents in developing residential areas have access to this type of outdoor recreation amenity. All playgrounds should have accessible features with rubber surfaces at Town Parks and engineered wood fibre at Neighbourhood Parks. A focus should be placed on providing playgrounds in the following areas, as future parks are identified:
 - a. North side of Queen Street West, west of the Thames River.
 - b. North of the Grand Trunk Trail, west of James Street North.

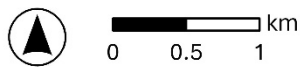
Figure 15: Distribution of Playgrounds

Playgrounds

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| 1 Cadzow Park | 6 North Ward |
| 2 East Ward Park | 7 North Ward #2 |
| 3 Kin Park | 8 Solis Park |
| 4 Meadowridge Park | 9 West Ward Park |
| 5 Milt Dunnell Field | |



- Playgrounds
- Active Parkland
- Passive Open Space
- 800m Service Area



Source: Town of St. Marys, 2024



6.16 Community Gardens

6.16.1 Current Supply

A community garden with water service is located at the St. Marys Cemetery, which has been available since the 1990s. This initiative was originally the responsibility of the Public Works Department until the responsibilities were transferred to the Community Services Department in 2020. There are currently 45 gardening plots with the majority booked for personal use, although some are used to grow produce for the local food bank.

6.16.2 Market Conditions

Community gardens foster social interaction and horticultural education. With the increasing cost of living, including rising food prices being experienced across Ontario, a greater emphasis is being placed on food security and sustainable food sources, further contributing to the popularity of residents growing their own food (the St. Marys Public Library also offers a free food pantry). The demand for community gardening is also being driven by the focus on health and well-being, as well as from diverse residents that have the desire to cultivate, preserve, and prepare cultural produce.

6.16.3 Analysis

Community gardens are provided based on local demand, rather than to meet a specific service target. Historically, the Town provided 20 gardening plots and there has generally been a moderate level of demand. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a renewed interest in community gardening opportunities and to respond to public demand, the Town expanded the community garden to 45 locations, which sell out every year.

With a growing concern over the cost of living and food sustainability, there is merit in continuing to expand the Town's community garden program to provide enhanced access to gardening opportunities. This is supported by the public as three-quarters of community survey respondents supported additional investment in community gardens, which ranked ninth out of 35 facility types.

There is ample space at the existing location to accommodate more plots, but there is a need to ensure that there is an equitable distribution of gardening opportunities in St. Marys. According to the 2021 Census, residents on the west side of St. Marys may be more likely to be experiencing financial constraints compared to residents on the east side. Providing a community garden to serve the west side should be explored although there are currently limited opportunities in this area. West Ward Park may be a potential location, although this would likely require removal / relocation of the existing soccer field; it is currently only used during the weekend, although this Master Plan encourages greater use of existing fields to accommodate demand. Other options may include providing a community garden at a future park in the west end or working with a partner to provide a community garden on non-Town owned lands.

In addition to strengthening the geographic distribution of community gardens, ensuring that they are physically accessible is important, particularly for persons with disabilities. Between two to four

raised garden beds should be provided at each location to gauge demand; additional raised beds should be provided as necessary; firm and stable walking surfaces are also recommended.

Recommendations

40. Undertake upgrades to the St. Marys Cemetery community garden by adding two to four raised garden beds and constructing a firm and stable pathway from the roadway to the garden to support persons with disabilities.
41. Explore opportunities to provide a community garden on the west side of St. Marys, potentially at West Ward Park (repurposing or relocating the soccer field may be required) or working in partnership with others to provide a community garden on non-Town owned lands (e.g., St. Marys Memorial Hospital or private landowners). The design process should identify the number of garden plots to provide, with a minimum of two to four raised garden beds and a firm and stable walking surface.

6.17 Lawn Bowling Greens

6.17.1 Current Supply

The Town has one lawn bowling green at Milt Dunnell Field, which is operated by the Parks Lawn Bowls Club. The wooden gutter boards were recently replaced in 2023, which was funded by a grant from the Canada Community Revitalization Fund.

6.17.2 Market Conditions

Lawn bowling is predominately played by older adults and seniors, although some organizations have had success in introducing the sport to younger generations. This is partly due to its social nature and the Ontario Lawn Bowling Association's buddy program that partners entry-level players with experienced members to enable skill development and overall understanding of the game. The Parks Lawn Bowls Club, which is St. Mary's local organization that has 66 members, also offers Learn to Bowl programs to draw interest from new players.

6.17.3 Analysis

There is no service target guiding the provision of lawn bowling greens. These amenities are primarily provided based on community demand and there is currently no evidence to suggest that there is a need for additional lawn bowling greens in St. Marys. It is recommended that the Town work with Parks Lawn Bowls Club to maintain or increase participation and use through promotion and greater awareness to ensure long-term success.

Recommendations

Given the recent investments in the lawn bowling green, no recommendations are identified.

6.18 Other Facilities

From time to time, St. Marys may receive requests that are not currently provided as part of its core service mandate. The Town must be prepared to respond to these requests and decisions that Council make should be based on demonstrated needs and evidence presented by proponents as public requests come forward. To guide Council decisions, proponents should prepare supporting business plans demonstrating the rationale for their proposals for new levels of service that should involve an examination into (but not limited to) the following:

- Local demand for the activity and/or facility (including the scope of residents that would benefit).
- Local, regional, and provincial trends identifying the level of popularity of the activity and/or facility.
- Examples of delivery models in other municipalities.
- The ability for existing municipal facilities or parks to accommodate the new level of service.
- The feasibility for the Town to provide the service and/or facility as a core service with consideration given to resources and be able to do so in a cost-effective manner.
- The willingness and ability of the requesting organization to provide the service and/or facility.
- Potential funding sources, including financial contributions from the proponent or partner.
- The availability of Town resources (e.g., staffing) to deliver or assist with delivering the new service without impacting existing obligations or if additional resources will be required.

Recommendations

42. Requests for new indoor and outdoor recreation and cultural facilities should be examined on a case-by-case basis with consideration given to local demand, trends, examples in other municipalities, feasibility of using existing space, need for municipal resources (e.g., staffing), funding, partnerships, and ability to deliver the new service and/or facility without negatively impacting existing obligations.

7. Service Delivery Overview

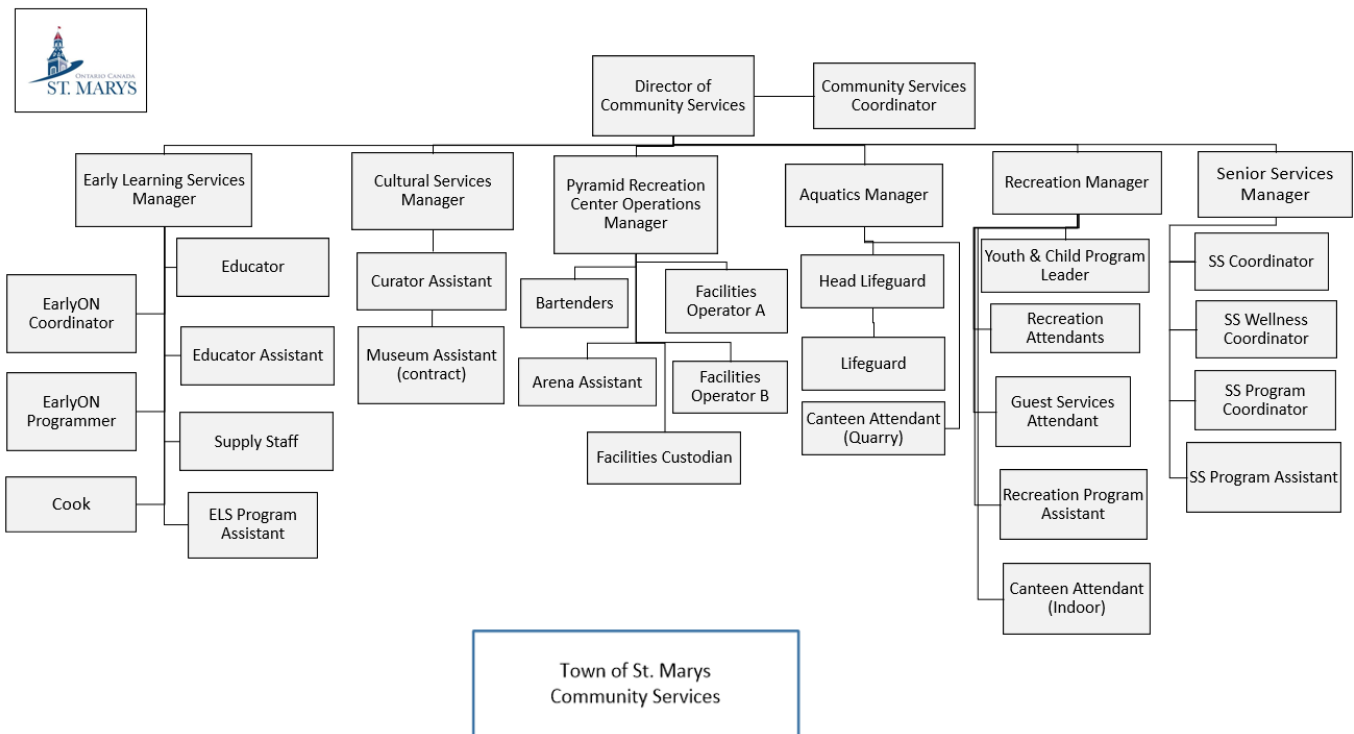
7.1 Staffing and Governance

7.1.1 Community Services Department

The Town of St. Marys’ Community Services Department is the primary staff team that is responsible for delivering many aspects of the recreation, culture, and leisure services offered to the public. The Department is led by the Director of Community Services who oversees several areas, including Early Learning Services, Cultural Services, the Pyramid Recreation Centre, Aquatics, Recreation, and Senior Services. The Department is supported by staff in other areas of the corporation, including Public Works, who assists with parks maintenance and operations, and Building and Development Services, who oversees facilities.

St. Marys underwent an organizational review in 2020 to improve overall effectiveness and efficiency of the corporate structure, processes, and service delivery. With respect to the Community Services Department, key changes were recommended, including shifting roles and responsibilities and removing and creating positions, such as the Community Services Coordinator, with the goal of streamlining and growing services (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Community Services Department Organizational Structure



Source: Town of St. Marys

Many of the recommendations from the organizational review have been implemented and continuing to monitor the effectiveness of these changes will be important to identify successes and where future adjustments to the staffing model will be required. As St. Marys grows, the staff team within the Community Services Department, and potentially other Departments with a role in recreation, culture and leisure in St. Marys, will need to increase in tandem to continue to maintain or expand existing service levels.

One area that will need to be monitored is St. Mary's older adult population, which represents the Town's largest segment of the community. This market will continue to grow during the planning period, which will translate into increased demands and expectations for high quality programs and services. Appropriate staffing levels will be required in this area to address needs for senior services, as well as the needs for youth given the increase demand for camps, youth centre, and childcare services.

This Master Plan also recommends examining the merit of adding a Volunteer Coordinator / Community Liaison to ensure that the appropriate Town resources are allocated to supporting volunteers. Discussed further in Section 7.3.2 (see Recommendation #52), the success of community services in St. Marys partly relies on the dedication of local volunteers, which is shrinking due to challenges with recruitment and retention. This new position would aim to reverse this trend and strengthen volunteerism to ensure long-term success of local community organizations as without them, residents will look to the Town as an alternative, which would result in additional pressure for staff. Alternatively, this position could be incorporated elsewhere within the St. Marys corporation to play a multi-departmental role.

7.1.2 Advisory Committees

The Town's Recreation and Leisure Advisory Committee advises Council on matters pertaining to recreation and leisure. According to the Committee's Terms of Reference, duties include:

- Reviewing and understanding the current inventory of recreation and leisure programs, including how much it costs to deliver those services and how much revenue it creates.
- Researching and recommending strategies to Council on how to increase public participation in existing programs, services, and facility use.
- Researching and recommending strategies for generating revenue through the recreation and leisure sector.
- Advising and recommending improvements to the public's recreation facilities user experience.
- Researching and recommending on how to foster more partnerships with recreation and leisure entities.
- Advocating of the community recreation and leisure users.

- Promoting greater participation and volunteering opportunities through recreation and leisure projects, programs, and services.

St. Marys also has a Heritage and Culture Advisory Committee, and its Terms of Reference identifies that the group is responsible for:

- Advising and making recommendations to Council on St. Marys' built heritage and other heritage features as it relates to the Ontario Heritage Act.
- Advising Council on matters related to the St. Marys Museum, specifically related to the St. Marys Museum's Strategic Plan.
- Advising Council on matters related to public art as identified within the Public Art Policy.

The Town's Advisory Committees provides a voice for the community as it relates to recreation, culture and leisure opportunities. With St. Marys' staff resources, these Advisory Committees play an important role in the community. It is recommended that these Committees be collectively tasked with providing support in implementing the Master Plan. For example, the Advisory Committees would continue to provide Council with advice as directed by their Terms of References, but also assist the Town with supporting community and stakeholder engagement and coordination, identifying short-term recommendations that should be implemented, and provide general oversight and input on the Master Plan's implementation.

Recommendations

43. Undertake a review of roles, responsibilities, and requirements within the Community Services Department to ensure that the staff team is positioned to respond to a growing and aging population and demand for enhanced service delivery, particularly in the areas for children, youth and older adults. This may require shifting responsibilities, additional staff, new or enhanced partnerships, and other strategies to meet community needs. Staffing needs for other departments that support recreation, culture and leisure in St. Marys will also need to be considered.
44. The Recreation and Leisure Advisory Committee and Heritage and Culture Advisory Committee should support implementation of the Master Plan's recommendations. This may include, but not be limited to, supporting community and stakeholder engagement and coordination, identifying short-term recommendations to implement, and provide general oversight and input on the Master Plan's implementation.

7.2 Policies and Procedures

The delivery of community services in St. Marys is becoming more multifaceted and sophisticated as the Town continues to grow. Population growth naturally creates higher expectations for quality services and to support this, having up to date policies and procedures will be important to ensure that services are delivered in a fair, consistent, and transparent manner. It will be important for the Community Services Department to regularly review and, if necessary, amend existing policies or create new ones to address emerging situations. It will be prudent for Department to ensure that its policies and procedures are reflective of current conditions and community needs and expectations and align with the corporate-wide guiding principles. It will also be important to ensure that the Department's policies and procedures are understood by the staff team and the public. The following are some policy gaps that were identified through this Master Plan process.

7.2.1 Ice Allocation Policy

The Town has an Ice Allocation Policy that outlines the process for prioritizing available ice time to established community user groups. Following discussions with staff and representative user groups, it has been established that the current policy is ineffective and requires review and revision to reflect current demands. Since the development of the last Master Plan, each of the Town's primary ice user groups have experienced significant changes in their operations because of policy changes from provincial and national sport regulating bodies and adoption of the Sport for Life athlete development model. In addition to regulatory recommendations, ice users have also experienced fluctuation and recovery of registration numbers during and after the pandemic as well as the evolution of competitive local play for sports like hockey and ringette.

This Master Plan recommends completing a comprehensive review of the existing Ice Allocation Policy to reflect current ice user demands and availability capacities within the facility. Following a 2025 policy update, staff should regularly review this policy to ensure that it remains fair, transparent, equitable, and reflective of community needs. This should include working closely with user groups to understand user needs such as individual and shared practice times, partial versus full ice programming, game ice, tiered competition levels (e.g., 'A' centre demands versus local league requirements), development program requests, tournament schedules, registered learn to skate programming, and public use. For the allocation policy to achieve its goals of being fair, transparent, and equitable, user groups would be required to submit registration data and provide the Town with league administrative deadlines such as registration dates, team declaration dates, and league boundary changes or expansions.

7.2.2 Sponsorship and Advertising Policy

Sponsorships and advertising can be an affective revenue source to support municipal facilities, programs and services, as well as operations. Creating a sponsorship and advertising policy can help solicit and manage collaborative opportunities with businesses, community groups, and others, while maintaining the Town's strategic priorities, brand, values, image, policies, and community interests. This policy can outline general guiding principles, what types of sponsorships and advertisements are permitted (or not permitted), and guide the development of sponsorship

and advertising agreements that speaks to details, including the duration (or term) of the sponsorship/advertisement, how the revenue is allocated, and other legal terms and conditions.

7.2.3 Public Art and Monuments Policy

St. Marys' Public Art and Monuments Policy that establishes a standardized and transparent process for the Town and the Heritage and Culture Advisory Committee to acquire and support public art and monuments for municipally owned public spaces and publicly accessible private spaces through purchase, commission, or donation. A review of this policy found that there may be an opportunity to update this policy to recognize the Town's Indigenous roots as it is located on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe Peoples.



7.2.4 Donation and Memorial Policy

Donations such as cash, goods, services, land, facility, and other in-kind contributions provided to the Town can be beneficial for the betterment of the community. This policy can outline general guiding principles associated with donations, who the Town can accept donations from, identify what types of donations are acceptable (or not acceptable), and specify how donations are used. It will be important to ensure that the donation policy is structured in a manner that ensures that any contributions are free of encumbrances and that it can be used by the Town in the best interest of the community.

This policy could also provide guidance on memorials displayed on Town property. For example, there may be interest from the public to purchase a memorial plaque, tree or bench, or other amenity to be displayed or incorporated within a Town space. This policy could contain direction matters related to this such as identifying appropriate locations, the duration of displaying the memorial, maintenance levels, replacement and other pertinent details.

Recommendations

45. Regularly review and update policies and procedures relevant to the Community Services Department to ensure that they reflect current conditions, community needs, and public expectations.
46. Create new policies where gaps exist, such as a Sponsorship and Advertising Policy and Donation and Memorial Policy.
47. Update the goals and objectives of the Public Art and Monuments Policy to recognize St. Marys' roots and connection with Indigenous Peoples.
48. Conduct a comprehensive review of the Town's Ice Allocation Policy, which should be reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure it is fair, transparent and equitable. Consideration should be given to regularly meeting with user groups to understand ice time needs, requiring groups to submit registration data and ensuring that the deadline for allocating ice time is suitable for ice users.
49. Publish the policies and/or procedures on the Town's website so it can be used as a public resource.

7.3 Partnerships and Volunteers

7.3.1 Partnerships

Community services in St. Marys are provided through a blended delivery model where the Town works collaboratively with partners to ensure the successful provision of facilities, programs, and services. These partnerships are vital in any community as there may be instances where no one party is able to provide a program, service, or facility on its own, or the risk may be too great to overcome. In such instances, partnerships can be a benefit in addressing identified needs or service gaps, while minimizing service duplication.

From a community services perspective, the Town is proud of many of its successful partnerships with the Public Library, St. Marys YMCA, school boards, private operators, and local sports and service organizations, and more. One example that the Town is particularly proud of is the free kayak program at the Yak Shack, which is provided at Milt Dunnell Field and serves about 1,000 users per year (including many non-residents). This program was made possible through a partnership with the Town and its sponsors, including Canadian Tire, the Hodges Family and Home Hardware, Stratford Perth Community Foundation, Granson International Sourcing, and others.

Consultation found that community organizations support continued efforts to build upon these relationships over the foreseeable future. This will require the Town to engage organizations on a regular basis to understand their needs and challenges, ways to provide support, help plan and coordinate initiatives, promote and bring awareness to programs and services, and more.

During the planning period, there may be opportunities to formalize new partnerships to make use of existing facilities, or to offer programs and services. When considering partnerships, there are a number of factors the Town should consider in evaluating the risks and benefits, and to ensure that it is mutually beneficial to the parties involved. The following criteria should be used as a standard framework for partnership evaluation:

- The purpose of the proposed partnership and how it aligns with St. Marys' mandate and philosophies;
- The role of the Town in providing the proposed program or service;
- Whether there is quantifiable or justified need for the program or service in St. Marys;
- If there is a cost-benefit to establishing a partnership to provide the program or service;
- The program or service can be accommodated within St. Marys' parks and/or recreation and leisure facilities without negatively impacting existing users;
- How the service be can appropriately accommodated within St. Marys' long-term capital and/or operating resources;
- If the partner is sufficiently capable/qualified to deliver the program or service over the long-term and in compliance with legislative policies and municipal standards;
- That the level of risk is acceptable to both parties and there is a plan in place to manage the risk;
- Whether the potential partner can provide the program or service on a sole basis; and
- There is a full agreement of the terms, conditions, standards, and responsibilities for all parties involved.

7.3.2 Volunteers

Volunteers contribute to the Town's quality of life and are important for creating a sense of place, strong community cohesion, civic pride, and economic development, while also learning valuable skills, giving back to the community and for some, earning high school volunteer hours.

The Town promotes volunteerism in the community and advertises volunteer opportunities on the St. Marys website, which may include assisting with aquatic lessons, the delivery of older adult programs and services at the Friendship Centre and running events. To incentivize some volunteer positions, the Town also offers discounts on programs. For example, aquatic volunteers are eligible to receive a discount on aquatic programs after volunteering a minimum number of hours. Other initiatives to encourage, retain and recognize volunteers is the Town's annual internal recognition event for volunteers, as well as the Town's Strong as Stone recognition program where the public can nominate volunteers from various community organizations and events.

Volunteering in St. Marys is guided by the Town's Corporate Volunteer Policy, which speaks to the responsibilities of the Town and volunteers, provides general guidelines and direction on health and safety, training, support, and other important information. Community organizations are also regularly seeking volunteers to help run programming.

Consultation with community organizations found that many groups were challenged with the ability to recruit and retain volunteers, which many believed to be driven by increasingly busy lifestyles of residents. This is a growing concern among groups that will face, as well as St. Marys, as volunteers continue to age out of volunteering and other long-time volunteers burn out. This is a challenge that other communities face, particularly in small municipalities like the Town who rely heavily on volunteers to assist with delivering community services.

There may be benefit in allocating additional staff resources to help support local volunteerism to ensure the long-term success of community organizations, programming, events and other service delivery areas. It is recognized that there is limited capacity for current staff to take on this role and as a result, consideration should be given to creating a new staff position (e.g. Volunteer Coordinator/Community Liaison) that could be responsible for raising the profile of volunteerism. This position could be incorporated as part of the Community Services Department or positioned elsewhere within the St. Marys corporation to play a multi-departmental role. Potential responsibilities that this new position may include, but not be limited to:

- Developing a strategy to increase volunteerism among all ages.
- Promoting volunteer opportunities with community organizations through the Town's website, social media.
- Regularly engaging community groups to understand their volunteer needs.
- Supporting volunteers with necessary training.
- Creating and organizing annual events to recruit and recognize volunteers (e.g., volunteer fair, recognition events, etc.); this could tie into other events (e.g. Recreation Fair).
- Establishing and maintaining a volunteer database that can be used to promote future opportunities.

Recommendations

50. Community partnerships and joint initiatives with others continue to be encouraged to share roles and responsibilities to meet the needs of residents, while minimizing service duplication, including to implement the recommendations of this Master Plan. New partnerships should be evaluated based on the criteria identified in this Master Plan.
51. Engage community organizations on a regular basis (e.g., bi-annually or annually) to understand their needs and challenges, ways to provide Town support, help plan and coordinate initiatives, promote and bring awareness to programs and services, and more.
52. Examine the merit of creating a Volunteer Coordinator/Community Liaison position for the Community Services Department (or elsewhere within the corporation to play a multi-departmental role) to ensure that the appropriate resources are available to support local community volunteerism. With the support of other staff, potential responsibilities may include (but not be limited to), developing a volunteer strategy, using the Town's network to promote volunteer opportunities, providing volunteer training, hosting volunteer events (e.g., volunteer fair, recognition, etc.) and creating a volunteer database.

7.4 Programs and Services

The Town provides a range of programs and opportunities for different age groups and interests, which are highlighted in this section. In addition to these program opportunities, there are programs offered by a wide range of providers, including community volunteer organizations, St. Marys Public Library, YMCA of Three Rivers, and more.

7.4.1 Children

St. Marys offers programs and camps for children, which primarily take place at the Pyramid Recreation Centre such as Camp PRC (which hosts up to 50 campers per week), swimming programs, and skating. Children's programming is also provided by others in the community such as the library and YMCA of Three Rivers Child Care.

The Town works with Perth County to operate an EarlyON Centre at the Pyramid Recreation Centre that offers a variety of free programs for parents, caregivers, and children under six years old. The programs offer play times, reading groups, swimming, skating, car seat safety classes, museum tours and more. In 2024, the EarlyON Centre has been averaging nearly 1,000 participants per month, which is an increase from an average of 650 participants per month recorded in 2023.

St. Marys also works with the City of Stratford to operate a childcare program for infants, toddlers, and preschool children up to the age of six at the Town's Child Care Centre, which is located at the Holy Name of Mary Catholic School. The Town also offers a before and after school program at Little Falls Public School and Holy Name of Mary Catholic School for children between the ages of four and 12. These programs are valuable community services in St. Marys as it provides parents and caregivers with peace of mind during daytime working hours. The Town strives to ensure that

these programs are affordable for residents as St. Marys opted into the Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care Agreement, which is the national initiative to make childcare more affordable and accessible for families. Subsidy programs can also be used towards the childcare and before and after school programs.

These programs are in high demand, which is consistent with trends seen across the Province. The Town’s childcare centre has 72 spaces, while the before and after school program has a total of 112 spaces that are evenly split between the two locations. While there was one year where there was capacity available at Holy Name of Mary Catholic School, these programs have been fully subscribed since emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic with extensive waitlists. As of July 2024, there were 528 people on the waitlist; 43% were infants, which was the largest group seeking care.

The consultation process found that while there is generally sufficient space available to accommodate more participants (particularly those on the waitlist), the primary constraint is staffing, although the Town is currently working to address this to accommodate childcare demand.

7.4.2 Youth and Adults

The Town offers a range of recreation, culture, and leisure opportunities that appeal to youth and adults. Many of these opportunities take place outdoors at the Town’s parks in an unstructured environment where residents can take part in basketball, sports, walking and hiking, social gatherings, and more; the Town also operates the Youth Centre that offers both structured and unstructured activities. Since emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Town has experienced a growth in youth memberships. Between 2022 and 2024, youth memberships have increased from 73 to 90, the Town reports that the frequency of members using the youth space has also grown from 15 to 30 participants per day.



Additionally, the Town works with others, including the Public Library, YMCA of Three Rivers, and sports organizations to provide structured programming, including fitness programs, basketball, pickleball, tennis, and others; some of these activities take place at non-Town owned facilities.

7.4.3 Older Adults

The Town provides a wealth of older adult programming through its Friendship Centre at the Pyramid Recreation Centre. The Friendship Centre is a gathering place for older adults to connect with each other in an inclusive environment and engage in activities and events that foster social, mental health, and physical wellbeing. Since emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of memberships to the Friendship Centre has been trending upwards with 498 recorded for 2023, an increase of more



than one-third (36%) from 2021. Various programs are offered through the Friendship Centre including, but not limited to, fitness and falls prevention, music, cards, pickleball, education, health screening, home support, indoor walking, and more. In 2023, Friendship Centre programs were attended by more than 36,000 participants.

In addition to the Friendship Centre, the Public Library also provides programs and events that appeal to older adults and organizations such as the St. Marys Memorial Hospital offers some older adult programs and health services.

7.4.4 Programming Outlook

The consultation process found that there is a desire for more year-round program opportunities for youth and older adults, sports and fitness programs, as well as non-sport activities such as arts and culture, as well as special events and live music. As the Town and its community partners continues to explore and expand program offerings, prioritizing activities that align with the goals of the Framework for Recreation in Canada is encouraged. This includes programs that:

- Focused on children, youth, older adults and seniors, as well as under-represented populations;
- Are affordable and accessible;
- Incorporate physical literacy;
- Support healthy living and active aging;
- Strengthen community partnerships;
- Support and encourage unstructured and self scheduled activities;
- Promote the appropriate use of parks and facilities for special events;
- Optimize the use of the use of existing public parks and facilities; and
- Allow people to connect with nature and be stewards of the environment.

There is a clear desire among St. Marys residents for enhanced programs to respond to a greater variety of interests. As the Town's population continues to grow and diversify, new residents will be seeking a range of activities. Continuing to work with community partners to promote existing programs and explore new activities is recommended to maximize the use of all Town-owned indoor and outdoor spaces and facilities, as well as making use of non-municipal spaces such as schools, library, and facilities owned by others.

Specific opportunities to strengthen community activities are highlighted below. Additional community engagement is recommended to identify, plan, and develop programs and an emphasis should be placed on providing a broad range of different activities to respond to all age groups and interests. Providing programming on a trial basis is encouraged to test demand before implementing activities on a full-time basis, which may need to consider resource requirements.

7.4.1.1 Offer Convenient and Unstructured Activities

The consultation process found that 30% of respondents were not able to participate in recreation, culture, and leisure opportunities as often as they would like due to programs not being offered at a convenient time. Nearly one-quarter (24%) of respondents also reported being too busy. This is common in many communities, particularly with residents who are faced with competing priorities. Activities that are convenient, accessible, affordable, and relevant – like unstructured, drop-in activities – have proven to be popular. Across Ontario, drop-in exercise/group-fitness, public swimming and skating, and social activities such as pickleball are on the rise. Convenient and unstructured activities continue to be emphasized.

7.4.1.2 Expanding Low to No Cost Outdoor Recreation Opportunities in Parks

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that there is a strong public desire for affordable recreation opportunities, as well as outdoor public spaces for people to gather and socialize. The Town already provides a number of these opportunities including, but not limited to, a connected trails system, playgrounds, water play, arts and cultural offerings, community programming and events, natural areas and open spaces. Throughout this Master Plan, recommendations are made to build upon these offerings by filling in gaps where they exist and providing new opportunities to ensure that residents have an expanded range of recreation amenities and gathering spaces, as well as provide an equitable distribution of activities across St. Marys. Such recommendations contained in this Master Plan include acquiring and developing new parkland to serve growing areas, expanding trails, community gardens, playgrounds, basketball courts, outdoor fitness, racquet sport courts and more.

7.4.1.3 Focus on Children, Youth and Older Adults

The consultation process found that there is a demand for more activities for children, youth, and older adults. The Town does an excellent job in providing direct programming at the Pyramid Recreation Centre, which is complemented by casual opportunities found across St. Marys and the activities offered by community partners. Engaging these segments of the community is more important than ever to combat issues of social isolation and acceptance, physical inactivity, and mental wellness. A wider range of programming is required to address the needs of current and future residents that are beyond traditional sports and older adult programming, particularly if the Town's population is expected to continue diversifying during the planning period. People have a broad range of interests including, but not limited to, education and learning, arts and culture, skill development, low-impact fitness, and more. Recognizing that the Town already brings children, youth, and older adults together at the Pyramid Recreation Centre, intergenerational programming should be explored to provide opportunities for people to engage with different age groups.

Recommendations

53. Explore new program offerings to maximize the use of indoor and outdoor community facilities, particularly in locations that are underutilized or have capacity for additional use. In consultation with the community, an emphasis should be placed on providing a mix of affordable and accessible programs; activities for children, youth and older adults (including intergenerational activities); expanding low to no cost outdoor recreation opportunities year-round; and offering convenient and unstructured activities. Expanding or forming new partnerships with others to provide programs is encouraged.

7.5 Communication and Marketing

Effective communication and marketing are critical to ensure that there is a high degree of participation in parks, recreation, and culture activities. It is important to ensure that information is transmitted, received, and interpreted by residents but it is recognized that there is an overwhelming amount of information being directed to people daily. As a result, promoting parks, recreation, and culture opportunities can easily get lost.

Experiences across Ontario has found that people find it difficult to know where services are being offered by municipalities and community providers, but St. Marys has found success in this area by using various strategies to get information out to the community using print material (e.g., Visitor’s Guide, printed calendars, brochures, etc.), online website and social media, and community wayfinding and signage, and e-newsletter (e.g., Stonetown Crier). Using different mediums to engage the community is important as different forms of communication are favoured by different markets. For example, social media tends to be more effective for younger generations and tech savvy individuals, while print media, signage, and word-of-mouth may be more accessible for older adults and those without internet access or knowledge of using technology.

Continuing to work with the Town’s Corporate Communications staff to use a range of mediums to bring awareness to parks, recreation, and culture opportunities is encouraged by using a range of mediums to ensure that residents are informed about ways they can get involved in the community. This could involve working with community partners and service providers as part of cross promotional efforts, which may be beneficial for multiple parties. The Town has already been pursuing new ways to connect with residents though hosting its first Recreation Fair in 2024.

Other strategies exist such as streamlining ways residents get print material. The Town and its community partners currently provide a number of printed pamphlets that can make finding



information a challenge. Consolidating information into a community services guide should be explored containing information about parks, recreation, and culture opportunities, as well as other civic information, similar to what is offered in the Town's Visitors Guide.

From an online perspective, strategies to grow the Town's social media channels (e.g., Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly known as Twitter)) should be explored, such as offering incentives.

Recommendations

54. Working with Corporate Communications staff, continue to use a range of print and digital mediums to bring awareness to parks, recreation, and culture opportunities and encourage greater participation through the following strategies:
- a. Work with community partners and service providers in cross promotional efforts.
 - b. Pursue strategies to increase social media followers, such as offering incentives.
 - c. Explore opportunities to consolidate print promotional material by creating a community services guide containing information related to parks, recreation, and culture opportunities and potentially other civic information.

7.6 Inclusion and Access

Providing inclusive recreation, culture, and leisure services is a key outcome for many municipalities in Ontario. Minimizing barriers to participants is crucial to ensuring that all people can participate freely regardless of any physical, religious, financial, or cultural identities.

7.6.1 Barrier Free Parks and Facilities

The 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) found that 27% of Canadians over the age of 15 years old (roughly 8 million people) had one or more disabilities that impacted their daily lives. This is an increase of 5% of the population compared to the findings from the 2017 report. With a population estimate of 7,840 people, this would potentially represent over 2,100 residents of St. Marys.

St. Marys' recreation programs are guided by its Inclusion Policy, that recognizes that some individuals might have greater needs than others when it comes to participating in the Town's recreation and leisure programming and services. The Town has adopted the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion into its practices, and works to reduce stigma around mental health, addiction, racism, and discrimination. To adhere to such principles, Town staff will provide the necessary support to participants who might require it, and staff will work with the participant to create a care plan that identifies inclusionary support requirements needed. The Town is also committed to removing barriers to its spaces and programs, which is guided by its Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

The Town's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan outlines St. Marys' accessibility strategy, in accordance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005 (AODA)*. Most recently in 2024, the Town installed a new, accessible dock along the Thames River in the Milt Dunnell Field. The dock provides handrails, grab bars, and transfer benches so that people who require wheelchairs can move safely from their wheelchair to their kayak. Additionally, the Museum and Archives has an Accessibility Plan to accommodate persons with physical disabilities or other impairments such as visual or hearing, to ensure that all residents can enjoy the facility and its offerings.

7.6.2 Overcoming Financial Barriers

The Town's medium household income is \$86,000, which is slightly higher compared to Perth County (\$84,000) but lower than the Provincial median (\$91,000). This suggests that St. Marys' households may be less likely to participate in recreation, culture, and leisure activities compared to their Provincial counterparts given that St. Marys households may have less disposable income to spend on leisure; 8% of residents are below the low-income measure, after tax, compared to 9% in Perth County and 10% in Ontario. It is important to provide a range of low to no cost recreation, culture, and leisure activities as well as financial support programs to ensure that all residents can participate, regardless of income.

St. Marys strives to minimize barriers to participation through the Access to Recreation Grant, which provides up to \$100 per person, per year (whether to an individual or family) to support their participation in the Town's recreation, leisure, arts, and culture programs. This program was initiated in 2022 which had 13 recipients who received a total of \$1,045. At the time of writing this Master Plan in 2024, there were 18 participants who received a sum of \$2,070.

The Town also provides financial support to organizations that are interested in providing programs, projects, activities, and community events that enrich the lives of St. Marys' residents and help advance Council's strategic goals. Successful recipients of the grant may receive up to \$5,000.

A challenge that many households experience is that the cost of programs and services are increasing and for community organizations, the cost for delivering programs and running events are also on the rise. It is recommended that financial subsidies be reviewed regularly, and adjustments are made as necessary to barriers to participation and engagement in recreation, culture, and leisure opportunities are minimized.

7.6.3 LGBTQ2S+

Research suggests that between 4% and 10% of Canadians identify as a member of the LGBTQ2S+ community. It is particularly important to ensure that this group is fully engaged in the community, including in recreation, culture, and leisure opportunities, as advocacy groups attribute exclusionary attitudes with mental health issues, homelessness, suicides, and harmful practices within the community. To engage with this group, St. Marys celebrates June Pride month in partnership with Stratford-Perth Pride to offer the Pride Banner Program. During the program, 30 banners are displayed downtown and can be found on multiple streets; various events and activities are offered during Pride Day, including Pride in the Park organized by St. Marys Pride.

Promoting the Town as safe and welcoming space for the LGBTQ2S+ community continues to be encouraged. To support this directive, strategies to consider include displaying signage or stickers at the entrance of all public spaces as a visual cue to bring public awareness of the Town's commitment to creating safe spaces. Staff training with Safer Spaces Canada should also be undertaken, which could be undertaken as a broader corporate initiative, to ensure the provision of inclusive facilities, programs, and services.

7.6.4 Indigenous Roots

St. Marys is located on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples. Today, Indigenous People remain in the community and their roots are reflected throughout the community, including at the Museum and Archives. In September, the Town celebrates Indigenous People during the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation with a week of activities focused on healing and learning. While activities may vary each year, 2023 programs included a Sunrise Ceremony and Sacred Fire, curated reading list, films, exhibits, and virtual learning programs.

This Master Plan encourages a greater recognition of Indigenous Peoples through public art and programming. Other strategies include engaging Indigenous Peoples for input as part of future park and facility development or redevelopment projects to ensure that traditional knowledge and areas of significance are recognized, preserved, protected, and avoided. Reviewing programs, services, and materials to embed and recognize Indigenous Peoples is also recommended, including to address Truth and Reconciliation, particularly as it relates to the following calls to action:

87. We call upon all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, sports halls of fame, and other relevant organizations, to provide public education that tells the national story of Aboriginal athletes in history.

88. We call upon all levels of government to take action to ensure long-term Aboriginal athlete development and growth, and continued support for the North American Indigenous Games, including funding to host the games and for provincial and territorial team preparation and travel.

Recommendations

55. Regularly review the Town's financial subsidy programs for households and community organizations and adjust as necessary to recognize the increasing cost of programs, services, and events. Continuing to promote other subsidy programs such as Canadian Tire Jumpstart, as well as low to no-cost activities is also encouraged.
56. Continue to remove barriers from public facilities, programs and services to ensure that they are barrier-free for all residents and visitors, regardless of ability.
57. Implement strategies to create inclusive spaces, programs, and services for the LGBTQ2+ community, including displaying signage or stickers at the entrance of all public spaces and ensure that staff have training with Safer Spaces Canada; this could be undertaken as a broader corporate initiative.
58. Engage Indigenous Peoples for input as part of future park and facility development or redevelopment projects to ensure that traditional knowledge and areas of significance are recognized, preserved, protected and avoided.
59. Review programs, services, and materials to embed and recognize Indigenous Peoples, including to address relevant Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Report.



8. Implementation

8.1 Monitoring and Updating the Master Plan

Active implementation of the Master Plan is fundamental to its success. This requires coordinated efforts and commitment from St. Marys Council, Staff, stakeholders, and the public. The Town should regularly review and assess – and periodically revise – the recommendations of this Master Plan to ensure that they continue to reflect local conditions and that they are responsive to the changing needs of the community.

The Town should develop key performance metrics to track key statistics related to community services in St. Marys. Staff can use these statistics to help determine the success of initiatives, facilities, and services and also help demonstrate the importance of recreation, culture and leisure opportunities to Council. This could help provide rationale to implement recommendations or justify adjustments to resource allocations and priorities. Examples of key metrics include:

- Population growth and development activity;
- Program registration and participation rates;
- Staff and resident satisfaction levels;
- Indoor and outdoor facility utilization levels; and
- Uptake rate for the Access to Recreation Grant;

Working with the Recreation and Leisure Advisory Committee and Heritage and Culture Advisory Committee, the following steps should also be considered as part of implementing the Master Plan, which should also inform a mid-cycle review (around 2032) and a full 10 to 15-year update.

- Review of the past year (recommendations implemented, capital projects undertaken, success/failure of new and existing initiatives, changes in participation levels, issues arising from the public and community groups, etc.);
- Identification of issues impacting the coming year (anticipated financial and operational constraints, emerging opportunities, etc.);
- Cursory review of the Master Plan for direction regarding its recommendations;
- Preparation of a staff report to indicate prioritization of short-term projects and determination of which projects should be implemented in the following year based on criteria established by staff (e.g., financial limitations, community input, partnership/funding potential, etc.);
- Communication to staff and Council regarding the status of projects, criteria used to prioritize projects and projects to be implemented in the following year; and
- Budget requests/revisions as necessary.

Recommendations

60. Develop key performance metrics to track the success of community services and provide baseline data to track trends and make future decisions.
61. Working with the Recreation and Leisure Advisory Committee and Heritage and Culture Advisory Committee, create a system for regular monitoring and reporting on the Master Plan, such as collecting participation data, satisfaction levels and facility usage, and status of the Master Plan's implementation.
62. Undertake a mid-cycle review (around 2032) and a detailed 10 to 15-year review. Timing may be adjusted based on pace of implementation and changes in population growth, trends, and other internal and external factors.

8.2 Funding the Master Plan

St. Marys has limited resources to achieve everything that the community desires. While St. Marys may experience various challenges in providing applicable financial and human resources to achieve the Master Plan's recommendations, it is expected that the Town will make every effort to implement these strategies through appropriate means. Availability of funding may impact the timing of implementation. As part of the decision-making process on capital related recommendations, operational impacts should be also considered, as well as feasibility studies and business case development where necessary.

Full implementation of the Master Plan will require the use of a range of funding sources, including (but not limited to) the strategies below. Feasibility studies and sound business planning (with public input) should be conducted prior to undertaking major capital projects to ensure that they are aligned with community needs, partnerships, and financial capabilities. In addition to general taxation, potential funding sources are highlighted in Table 12.

Table 12: Potential Funding Sources

Funding Type	Description
Development Charges	Development charges are fees that are collected through the building process to address growth-related infrastructure needs of a community, such as new or enhanced recreation facilities. Some of the recommendations identified in this Master Plan may be eligible for development charge funding.
Parkland Cash-in-lieu Reserves	The Planning Act allows the Town to collect cash-in-lieu of parkland to purchase parkland or improve existing parks. As identified in this Master Plan, the amount that can be collected by the Town has been impacted by Bill 23.
User Fees and Surcharges	User fees for most recreation, culture, and leisure services – particularly those that are for broad use – are minimal as they exist to promote physical activity, social interaction, and community benefits. Fees are in place for some dedicated-use space or amenities (e.g., arenas) that benefit specific groups or individuals. Increases in user fees – such as through a project specific surcharge – can be used to offset the costs associated with capital upgrades. However, this can result in creating financial barriers to participation, reducing the number of participants which can impact program feasibility, etc.
Municipal Reserves	On occasion, municipalities may decide to set aside monies accrued from tax dollars or other revenue sources for special projects, such as the development or expansion of a specific community facility or park. Industry standards suggest that 2% of the capital value of assets be put into a reserve annually.
Fundraising, Donations and Sponsorships	Seeking assistance from the community to contribute resources towards the construction and/or operation of recreation, culture, and leisure services can be an effective way to provide services that are desired by residents.
Debenture Financing	In cases where alternate sources of funding are unavailable, some municipalities have shown a willingness to finance a portion of major capital expenditures.
One-Time Government Grants and Funding Programs	Municipalities often seek financial support from senior levels of government for major municipal capital projects. The Master Plan can be a valuable resource to support applications for grant and funding programs.
Partnerships	Partnerships between the Town and others should continue to be explored and/or enhanced to share resources and responsibilities to implement the recommendations of this Master Plan; the benefits and disadvantages of these relationships should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Recommendations

63. Where appropriate, investigate a range of funding and cost-sharing approaches to implement the Master Plan's recommendations, including (but not limited to) development charges, municipal or parkland cash-in-lieu reserves, user fees and surcharges, fundraising, donations, sponsorships, debenture financing, ongoing government and funding programs, one-time grants, and partnerships.
64. Use the Recreation, Culture and Leisure Master Plan as a resource to inform the Town's budget process and relevant financial planning studies.
65. At the time of approving capital projects recommended in this Master Plan, assess operating implications to ensure that appropriate resources (e.g., operating and staffing) are available at the time of implementation.
66. Conduct feasibility studies and business plans (with input from the public) prior to undertaking major capital projects to ensure that they align with community needs, partnership opportunities, and financial capabilities.

8.3 Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations have been identified throughout this Master Plan, which are summarized in this section. **By approving the Recreation, Culture and Leisure Master Plan, the Town is not bound to implement every recommendation or provide facilities/services in the order, amount, or timing indicated;** rather this Master Plan provides guidance on community priorities and sets a general course for action to meet the needs of residents as they are presently defined.

At a high level, resource implications have been identified along with potential capital requirements for facility development. Detailed resource requirements will need to be understood as staff bring recommendations forward for implementation. The timing for each recommendation has also been identified as a phased implementation of the Master Plan is required, although staff and Council must recognize that this should only be used as a guide and some flexibility should be taken into consideration as this may be adjusted based on factors such as partnership opportunities and funding availability. The timing of recommendations is organized into the following categories:

- Short Term (2025 to 2030)
- Medium Term (2031 to 2035)
- Long Term (2036 to 2040)
- Ongoing Best Practice

Parkland Recommendations

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
1. Use the recommended park facilities and amenities framework contained in this Master Plan to guide the planning and design of new parks and the revitalization of existing parks according to St. Marys' parks classification system.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
2. Acquire 6.1 of parkland to achieve a parkland service target of 4.2 hectares per 1,000 residents by maximizing parkland dedication and, where appropriate, using alternative acquisition strategies, particularly in gap areas such as in the north end of the Town; accepting parks smaller than 0.5 hectares should be discouraged.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
3. Monitor changes to the Planning Act as it relates to parkland dedication and evaluate its impact on future parkland provision and amend the Official Plan, as necessary.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
4. Engage the landowners of East Ward Park to establish a user agreement for the property and to understand burial locations to ensure that park use, and future improvements respect the past use. As a contingency, explore opportunities to establish a new park within the general area to relocate existing park assets if an agreement cannot be established.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
5. Explore the feasibility of developing vacant Town-owned lands for the purposes of addressing interim needs for soccer fields, ball diamonds, and pickleball courts to understand site constraints, facility components and site design, capital costs, funding sources, and other details. An emphasis should be placed on minimizing capital investment as this is intended to be a temporary measure until these lands are required for its original intent or they are deemed to be surplus and a permanent site for sports fields can be identified.	Staff Time and Cost for Site Development	Short-Medium
6. Evaluate the potential to repurpose underutilized parks to minimize service duplication, which could include the sale of land; if applicable, preserving parkland to maintain trails is encouraged. Parkland repurposed to other uses should be replaced in other areas of St. Marys to ensure that there is no net loss in programmable park space or the park service level. Any proceeds from the sale of parkland should be reinvested back into the park system.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
7. Coordinate with staff and stakeholders (e.g., Huron Perth Public Health, persons with disabilities, etc.) to create inclusive park designs.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
8. Design new and redeveloped parks (and facilities) with a climate change mitigation lens to help achieve Perth County’s greenhouse gas reduction targets.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
9. Work in partnership with other corporate departments and community organizations such as the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority to identify, develop, and implement strategies to enhance and promote environmental sustainability initiatives and strategic naturalization of parks and open spaces. Areas of parks that are naturalized should be replaced through future park development, particularly in areas that are park deficient as identified in this Master Plan to ensure that there is no net loss in programmable park space or the park service level.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
10. Strategically plan and design Town Parks in a flexible manner to accommodate special events and festivals (such as at Milt Dunnell Field), with consideration given to shade structures/pavilions, parking, servicing infrastructure, accessibility features, washrooms and stage/amphitheatre.	Staff Time and Park Development Costs	Ongoing Best Practice
11. Create welcoming and inviting spaces when developing and renewing parks with a focus on placing comfort amenities like shade, seating, signage and pathways in strategic areas. Neighbourhood Parks and Parkettes should have basic amenities, including seating and pathways, while Town Parks may have more and a broader range of amenities such as seating, pathways, shade, lighting, signage, parking, washrooms, etc. Safety considerations will also be important, including incorporating Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles and engaging local emergency services such as police and fire departments to aid in park design.	Staff Time and Park Development Costs	Ongoing Best Practice

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
<p>12. As part of the development of the upcoming Active Transportation Master Plan, explore opportunities to strengthen the existing recreational trail network with consideration given to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The development of a recreational trail classification system to define the design standards for different types of trails, including width, surface type, and other details. The appropriateness of trail amenities should be included such as signage, seating, shade, drinking fountains/bottle filling stations, bicycle parking, accessibility features, trail heads, etc. b. Establish recreational trails within future residential areas with an emphasis on linking the north and west ends of St. Marys with the existing network, potentially by connecting to, or expanding, The Loop trail and the Grand Trunk Trail. Specific routes and connections should be identified through an Active Transportation Master Plan or as development applications come forward. c. Design new and redeveloped parks with designated circulation pathways to guide users through parks and public spaces and connect to on-site amenities (e.g., playgrounds, sports fields, public art, etc.). d. Work with non-municipal landowners to ensure the development of a continuous active transportation network. Where feasible, explore opportunities to acquire land for active transportation infrastructure, including through the development process or alternative strategies as identified in this Master Plan. e. As paved recreational trails are expanded, ensure that these routes are clear of snow to encourage walking during the winter season. 	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Short</p>

Facility Recommendations

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
13. In conjunction to updating the Town’s Ice Allocation Policy, (see Recommendation #48), continue to accommodate ice pad needs within the existing arena, including promoting the use of non-prime time and shoulder hours.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
14. Encourage the St. Marys Curling Club to work with school boards to promote the use of daytime curling sheets.	Staff Time	Short
15. Renovate the main hall at the Pyramid Recreation Centre to be more gymnasium friendly to accommodate active recreation, which should include durable, wood flooring with multi-lining for sports and other activities.	Costs to be Determined through Future Study	Medium
16. Should the Town continue to face pressure for a gymnasium, engage the Avon Maitland District School Board and St. Marys DCVI to investigate expanding the small gymnasium to improve community use.	Staff Time (Costs to be Negotiated)	Long
17. Continue to engage youth and older adults as part of the planning process to make St. Marys’ more age-friendly to create welcoming, attractive, safe, and inclusive spaces with consideration given to enhancements to the Youth Centre and Friendship Centre, and other indoor and outdoor spaces.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
18. Explore opportunities to use of the Lind Sportsplex, St. Marys Museum and Archives, and facilities in the downtown area (e.g., Town Hall and the Station Gallery) to strengthen the distribution of where youth and older adult programming opportunities are offered. Continued collaboration with partners to provide spaces for youth and older adults, including St. Marys YMCA, Library, and school boards is also encouraged.	Staff Time and Costs for Promotion	Medium
19. Promote St. Marys’ downtown core of Church Street and Queen Street as the Town’s cultural hub to recognize key assets, including the Town Hall, Public Library, Lind Park, as well as the St. Marys Station Gallery, and encourage arts and culture-related programs and gatherings within these spaces.	Staff Time and Costs for Promotion	Short
20. Undertake a cultural mapping exercise to create an inventory of community-based arts and culture providers to understand what’s available in the community and explore future collaborative opportunities.	Staff Time	Medium

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
21. Continue to support cultural space operators, program and service providers, and creative industries to ensure long-term success. Strategies include greater promotion and awareness, supporting organizations to undertake space enhancements (including understanding the Town's role in capital investment), and regularly engaging groups to understand short-term plans, challenges, and where greater support is required.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
22. Work with the St. Marys Public Library to update its 2016 Library Space and Service Needs Study. This update should provide a fresh look at the changing landscape of providing inclusive and accessible library spaces and services to ensure that the Library is positioned to serve current and future residents.	Cost for Study	Short
23. Explore opportunities for future enhancements to Lind Park to strengthen the site for gatherings and cultural opportunities, including potentially the relocation of the art installation from Centennial Park; engaging all parties involved with the development and installation of the public art piece is recommended.	Staff Time and Cost for Consultant	Short-Medium
24. Work with rectangular field users to maximize the use of existing locations at Meadowridge Park, Solis Park, and St. Marys DCVI through strategies, including increasing the efficiency of field bookings, including encouraging weekend use.	Staff Time	Short
25. The following strategies are recommended alleviate pressure for rectangular fields using school property. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Engage the Avon Maitland District School Board and St. Marys DCVI to evaluate the potential to establish additional rectangular fields. b. Work with the Huron Perth Catholic District School Board and Holy Name of Mary School to investigate the feasibility of using the rectangular field. 	Staff Time	Medium
26. Should there continue to be a demand for additional field capacity, explore opportunities to increase the supply of rectangular fields including developing temporary fields on vacant Town-owned lands (see Section 5.5.1, Recommendation #5), constructing new fields at future parks (in the north end of the Town) or adding lighting to the field at Solis Park.	Cost for Site Development	Short-Medium
27. Work with user groups to maximize the use of existing ball diamonds, including encouraging weekend use.	Staff Time	Short

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
<p>28. Monitor any future improvements undertaken by the third-party operator to the ball diamonds at the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame to understand how demand can be accommodated and if other strategies need to be explored, including constructing new ball diamonds at future parks, including potentially developing temporary fields on vacant Town-owned property (see Section 5.5.1, Recommendation #5).</p>	<p>Cost for Site Development</p>	<p>Short-Medium</p>
<p>29. Remove Milt Dunnell Field from the ball diamond inventory and adjust the Town’s maintenance practices for non-sport uses.</p>	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Short</p>
<p>30. The following strategy is recommended to alleviate demand for tennis and pickleball on an interim basis until a permanent solution can be found to provide additional racquet courts. Once implemented, monitoring use will be required to determine if further strategies need to be explored to meet demand, which may include painting pickleball court lines on the southwest side tennis courts (courts 3 and 4):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Expand the time reserved for the St. Marys Tennis Social Club to include Saturdays between May 1st and September 30th from 7 pm to 9 pm on all four courts; thereby adding eight hours of dedicated court time per week to the club. b. Expand the time reserved for the St. Marys Pickleball Association to include Fridays between May 1st and October 31st from 7 pm to 9 pm on all four pickleball courts and adding daytime periods on Monday and Wednesdays from 8 am to 11 am, thereby adding 32 hours of dedicated court time per week to the club (including eight additional hours during the evening and 24 hours during the daytime). c. Explore the feasibility of constructing temporary courts for pickleball on vacant Town-owned property (see Section 5.5.1, Recommendation #5). 	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Short</p>
<p>31. Seek to acquire a new park site, possibly through filling in the north quarry (see Recommendation #36) or through the land development process (e.g., future subdivision approval) for the provision of additional racquet courts. Expanded usage recommended for the existing courts by both the St. Marys Social Tennis Club and St. Marys Pickleball Association should be monitored to determine if future courts would be best designed for tennis and/or pickleball based upon membership and utilization levels.</p>	<p>Staff Time and Costs for Park Development</p>	<p>Medium-Long</p>

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
32. Investigate opportunities to increase space for indoor pickleball at the Lind Sportsplex when it is not being used for shuffleboard or curling.	Staff Time	Short
33. Promote the use of regional indoor tennis and pickleball facilities.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
<p>34. Construct two outdoor basketball courts to establish a Town-owned and operated local supply. All outdoor basketball courts should be full-size and multi-lined for other activities such as pickleball and ball hockey.</p> <p>a. At the Rotary All Wheels Park, subject to the completion of any study impacting the lands to confirm that it can be accommodated on site. Alternatively, another site in the south end could be explored.</p> <p>b. At North Ward Park #1 or #2, or at a future park in the north or west end of St. Marys.</p>	\$100,000 per court	Medium
35. Explore alternative uses for the decommissioned splash pad at the Pyramid Recreation Centre, such as storage space, staff break space, informal space for gatherings, outdoor programming, outdoor fitness or other use.	\$7,500	Short
36. Explore strategies to improve parking opportunities at the swimming quarry, including investigating the feasibility of creating a drop-off area on the west side of the Lind Sportsplex. This may require tree removal and relocating the public art feature at Centennial Park, either within the site or at another location such as Lind Park (see Recommendation #23) and filling in the north quarry add additional parking.	Cost for Site Development	Medium-Long
37. Evaluate opportunities to provide a small-scale all wheel park in the north or west end of St. Marys that features limited skate components such as a ramp, curb and/or rail, and potentially complementary to a basketball court.	\$200,000	Medium
38. Undertake enhancements to the Junction Station Dog Park such as creating an area to separate large and small dogs, adding additional shade through tree plantings or a built structure, and lighting to provide extended hours of use during the evenings.	\$150,000	Medium

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
<p>39. Provide playgrounds to reconcile gap areas or to ensure that residents in developing residential areas have access to this type of outdoor recreation amenity. All playgrounds should have accessible features with rubber surfaces at Town Parks and engineered wood fibre at Neighbourhood Parks. A focus should be placed on providing playgrounds in the following areas, as future parks are identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. North side of Queen Street West, west of the Thames River. b. North of the Grand Trunk Trail, west of James Street North. 	\$150,000	Ongoing Best Practice
<p>40. Undertake upgrades to the St. Marys Cemetery community garden by adding two to four raised garden beds and constructing a firm and stable pathway from the roadway to the garden to support persons with disabilities.</p>	\$5,000 to \$10,000	Short
<p>41. Explore opportunities to provide a community garden on the west side of St. Marys, potentially at West Ward Park (repurposing or relocating the soccer field may be required) or working in partnership with others to provide a community garden on non-Town owned lands (e.g., St. Marys Memorial Hospital or private landowners). The design process should identify the number of garden plots to provide, with a minimum of two to four raised garden beds and a firm and stable walking surface.</p>	\$50,000	Short
<p>42. Requests for new indoor and outdoor recreation and cultural facilities should be examined on a case-by-case basis with consideration given to local demand, trends, examples in other municipalities, feasibility of using existing space, need for municipal resources (e.g., staffing), funding, partnerships, and ability to deliver the new service and/or facility without negatively impacting existing obligations.</p>	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice

Service Delivery Recommendations

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
<p>43. Undertake a review of roles, responsibilities, and requirements within the Community Services Department to ensure that the staff team is positioned to respond to a growing and aging population and demand for enhanced service delivery, particularly in the areas for children, youth and older adults. This may require shifting responsibilities, additional staff, new or enhanced partnerships, and other strategies to meet community needs. Staffing needs for other departments that support recreation, culture and leisure in St. Marys will also need to be considered.</p>	<p>Staff Time (Additional staff and supporting operating costs may be required)</p>	<p>Ongoing Best Practice</p>
<p>44. The Recreation and Leisure Advisory Committee and Heritage and Culture Advisory Committee should support implementation of the Master Plan’s recommendations. This may include, but not be limited to, supporting community and stakeholder engagement and coordination, identifying short-term recommendations to implement, and provide general oversight and input on the Master Plan’s implementation.</p>	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Short</p>
<p>45. Regularly review and update policies and procedures relevant to the Community Services Department to ensure that they reflect current conditions, community needs, and public expectations.</p>	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Ongoing Best Practice</p>
<p>46. Create new policies where gaps exist, such as a Sponsorship and Advertising Policy and Donation and Memorial Policy.</p>	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Short</p>
<p>47. Update the goals and objectives of the Public Art and Monuments Policy to recognize St. Marys’ roots and connection with Indigenous Peoples.</p>	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Short</p>
<p>48. Conduct a comprehensive review of the Town’s Ice Allocation Policy, which should be reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure it is fair, transparent and equitable. Consideration should be given to regularly meeting with user groups to understand ice time needs, requiring groups to submit registration data and ensuring that the deadline for allocating ice time is suitable for ice users.</p>	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Short</p>
<p>49. Publish the policies and/or procedures on the Town’s website so it can be used as a public resource.</p>	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Short</p>

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
<p>50. Community partnerships and joint initiatives with others continue to be encouraged to share roles and responsibilities to meet the needs of residents, while minimizing service duplication, including to implement the recommendations of this Master Plan. New partnerships should be evaluated based on the criteria identified in this Master Plan.</p>	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Ongoing Best Practice</p>
<p>51. Engage community organizations on a regular basis (e.g., bi-annually or annually) to understand their needs and challenges, ways to provide Town support, help plan and coordinate initiatives, promote and bring awareness to programs and services, and more</p>	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Ongoing Best Practice</p>
<p>52. Examine the merit of creating a Volunteer Coordinator/Community Liaison position for the Community Services Department (or elsewhere within the corporation to play a multi-departmental role) to ensure that the appropriate resources are available to support local community volunteerism. With the support of other staff, potential responsibilities may include (but not be limited to), developing a volunteer strategy, using the Town’s network to promote volunteer opportunities, providing volunteer training, hosting volunteer events (e.g., volunteer fair, recognition, etc.) and creating a volunteer database.</p>	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Short-Medium</p>
<p>53. Explore new program offerings to maximize the use of indoor and outdoor community facilities, particularly in locations that are underutilized or have capacity for additional use. In consultation with the community, an emphasis should be placed on providing a mix of affordable and accessible programs; activities for children, youth and older adults (including intergenerational activities); expanding low to no cost outdoor recreation opportunities year-round; and offering convenient and unstructured activities. Expanding or forming new partnerships with others to provide programs is encouraged.</p>	<p>Staff Time</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>54. Working with Corporate Communications staff, continue to use a range of print and digital mediums to bring awareness to parks, recreation, and culture opportunities and encourage greater participation through the following strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Work with community partners and service providers in cross promotional efforts. b. Pursue strategies to increase social media followers, such as offering incentives. c. Explore opportunities to consolidate print promotional material by creating a community services guide containing information related to parks, recreation, and culture opportunities and potentially other civic information. 	<p>Staff Time and Costs for Promotion</p>	<p>Ongoing Best Practice</p>

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
55. Regularly review the Town’s financial subsidy programs for households and community organizations and adjust as necessary to recognize the increasing cost of programs, services, and events. Continuing to promote other subsidy programs such as Canadian Tire Jumpstart, as well as low to no-cost activities is also encouraged.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
56. Continue to remove barriers from public facilities, programs and services to ensure that they are barrier-free for all residents and visitors, regardless of ability.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
57. Implement strategies to create inclusive spaces, programs, and services for the LGBTQ2+ community, including displaying signage or stickers at the entrance of all public spaces and ensure that staff have training with Safer Spaces Canada; this could be undertaken as a broader corporate initiative.	Staff Time	Short-Medium
58. Engage Indigenous Peoples for input as part of future park and facility development or redevelopment projects to ensure that traditional knowledge and areas of significance are recognized, preserved, protected and avoided.	Staff Time	Medium-Long
59. Review programs, services, and materials to embed and recognize Indigenous Peoples, including to address relevant Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Report.	Staff Time	Short-Medium

Implementation Recommendations

Recommendations	Resource Implications	Timing
60. Develop key performance metrics to track the success of community services and provide baseline data to track trends and make future decisions.	Staff Time	Short
61. Working with the Recreation and Leisure Advisory Committee and Heritage and Culture Advisory Committee, create a system for regular monitoring and reporting on the Master Plan, such as collecting participation data, satisfaction levels and facility usage, and status of the Master Plan’s implementation.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
62. Undertake a mid-cycle review (around 2032) and a detailed 10 to 15-year review. Timing may be adjusted based on pace of implementation and changes in population growth, trends, and other internal and external factors.	Staff Time	Medium – Long
63. Where appropriate, investigate a range of funding and cost-sharing approaches to implement the Master Plan’s recommendations, including (but not limited to) development charges, municipal or parkland cash-in-lieu reserves, user fees and surcharges, fundraising, donations, sponsorships, debenture financing, ongoing government and funding programs, one-time grants, and partnerships.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
64. Use the Recreation, Culture and Leisure Master Plan as a resource to inform the Town’s budget process and relevant financial planning studies.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
65. At the time of approving capital projects recommended in this Master Plan, assess operating implications to ensure that appropriate resources (e.g., operating and staffing) are available at the time of implementation.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice
66. Conduct feasibility studies and business plans (with input from the public) prior to undertaking major capital projects to ensure that they align with community needs, partnership opportunities, and financial capabilities.	Staff Time	Ongoing Best Practice