



Recreation Master Plan Summary

Recreation is the physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual wellbeing. For a community, recreation plays a critical role in its cultural vitality, social cohesion, environmental responsibility, and economic prosperity.

Purpose

The Town engaged Stantec Consulting Ltd. to develop a Recreation Master Plan (RMP) that would provide direction for managing parks and recreation facilities, programs, resources, and investment over the next 10 years. The RMP informs Recreation Department operations, and identifies priorities for program and capital investments that meet the evolving needs of Town residents.

Process

Development of the RMP was completed in three phases:

- ✔ **Phase 1 – Situation Assessment.** Understanding the current situation of recreation programs and facilities in Amherst. Collection and analysis of demographic data, facility inventory, and recreation trends in town in relation to current recreation facility provisions.
- ✔ **Phase 2 – Public Engagement.** Understanding the recreation efforts, interests, and priorities of Amherst residents through a combination of stakeholder interviews, framework setting workshops, public meetings, as well as phone and online surveys.
- ✔ **Phase 3 – Master Plan.** Using the information gathered and analyzed in Phase 1 & 2, the Action Plan provides recommendations with respect to the Recreation Department's structure, service delivery, and capital investment priorities over the next 10 years.

What was learned

- ✔ **Demography** - The town's population, although stable, is aging. Amherst's older population appears to be one factor in slightly lower levels of recreation participation in the community relative to Nova Scotia and Canada as a whole. On the other hand, youth participation in recreation is higher than provincial and national norms.
- ✔ **Adult Activity** – 67% of Amherst residents identified walking as their main recreation activity. As such, the most heavily used recreation facilities are those used by walkers: Stadium Walking Track, Dickey Park Track, the town's trail system, and its sidewalks. Participation for adults tends to be higher in less organized, non-competitive individual activities like running, weight lifting, and yoga.
- ✔ **Youth Activity** - Youth are much more likely to participate in organized sports and competitive team activities, with swimming, hockey, soccer, basketball ranking at the top. Consequently, youth are the primary users of indoor facilities such as the YMCA pool, school gyms, and the Amherst Stadium ice surface.



🌿 **Facilities** – Survey participants indicated that existing facilities were adequate, and did not represent a barrier to participation. An inventory of facilities identified a need to better maintain what we already have.

Recommendations

The following is a summary of key RMP recommendations:

Organizational Structure & Service Delivery – Establish a Facilities Coordinator position and add horticulturalist expertise through training of existing staff or hiring new staff. Specific expertise is required to address needed improvements to maintenance standards and outcomes. This would allow other staff to focus on program and event coordination.

Walking Infrastructure & Trail Development – Recognize the community's number one activity by making trail and walking infrastructure a leading priority. Immediately invest in trail network maintenance, and complete trail loops and connections as soon as possible. Consider overhead lighting throughout the trail network. Adopt an Active Transportation Plan, and make sidewalk maintenance a higher priority, particularly snow clearing. Implement components of the Dickey Brook Rehabilitation Plan, particularly those relevant to trail development.

Parks & Open Space Improvements – Raise maintenance standards of existing parks and open spaces. Provide lighting for the Dickey Park Sports Field, and convert one of the three softball fields at Robb's into an off-leash dog park. Partner with the Lions Club to redevelop the former West Highlands School property, and consider creating two tennis courts on this property to replace the Church Street courts. Pursue joint use agreements with the Chignecto-Central School Board to allow community use of sports fields, particularly for soccer programs.

Indoor Facilities – Continue to maintain existing facilities, and look at programming and promotion as way to increase their use. The provision of or support for a youth centre should be considered.

New Facilities & Regional Cooperation – While the data and consultation did not identify a critical need for new facilities, there was interest by some for a regional multi-purpose recreation centre and all-weather sports field. However, it is acknowledged that Amherst cannot provide such a facility on its own. Consideration for an artificial turf field is recommended, as well as, the continued pursuit of opportunities to partner with other municipal governments in the region to provide facilities and services. Consideration was also recommended for a regional recreation commission to promote coordination, particularly with respect to a regional trail network.

Capital Budget Implications

The RMP also included a capital investment plan calling for approximately \$300,000 annually over the next 10-years that reflects the recommendations noted above. Highlights of this plan are as follows:

- 🌿 \$89,000 in year 1 for West Highland School redevelopment.
- 🌿 \$40,000 annually to replace/upgrade street banners, Victoria Square lights, and seasonal lighting
- 🌿 \$12,500 annually for trail maintenance and development.
- 🌿 \$57,000 in year 2-5 for trail lighting
- 🌿 \$15,000 annually for playground equipment replacement.
- 🌿 \$250,000 in year 4 for lights at the Dickey Park Sports Field
- 🌿 \$200,000 in year 6-10 to implement the Dickey Brook Rehabilitation Plan
- 🌿 \$70,000 in year 3 to replace 30% of Robbs Ball Field fencing
- 🌿 \$75,000 in year 5 for a synthetic skating rink
- 🌿 \$10,000 annually for benches in public spaces
- 🌿 \$20,000 in year 1 to update/develop an Active Transportation Plan

For more information contact Bill Schurman, Recreation Director at (902) 664-6370, or Andrew Fisher, Senior Planner at (902) 664-6580.

