



RECREATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND MASTER PLAN COUNTY OF WETASKIWIN NO. 10

Prepared by:
WSP; dmA Planning &
Management Services

Prepared for:
The Leisure and Community
Services Department, County
of Wetaskiwin No. 10





Table of Contents

1.0	INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OVERVIEW	1
1.1.	Study Purpose	1
1.2.	Study Process	1
1.3.	Study Overview	1
2.0	COMMUNITY CONTEXT	3
2.1.	Population Profile and Projections	3
2.2.	Community Recreational Resources	8
2.5	Community Consultation	11
3.0	RECREATION OUTCOMES AND A SERVICE PROVISION MODEL	13
3.1.	Introduction	13
3.2.	Recreation Outcomes	13
3.3.	Recreation Service Provision Model	14
4.0	RECREATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT	16
4.1.	Introduction	16
4.1.1.	Needs Assessment Process	16
4.1.2.	Overview: Recreational Needs in the County	17
4.2.	Recreation Facilities	18
4.2.1.	Major Indoor Facilities	18
4.2.2.	Outdoor Playing Fields	22
4.2.3.	Other Recreation Facilities	23
4.3.	Recreation Programs	24
4.4.	Parks and Open Space	25
4.4.1.	Parks and Open Space	25
4.4.2.	Campgrounds	26
4.4.3.	Recreational Trails	26
5.0	RECREATION MASTER PLAN	28
5.1.	Introduction	28

5.2.	The Recreation Delivery System	28
5.2.1.	The Role of the Leisure and Community Services Department	29
5.2.2.	Municipal-Community Partnership – Support for Volunteers	32
5.2.3.	Planning and Service Evaluation	44
5.2.4.	Parks and Recreation Policies	48
5.3.	Development Strategies	51
5.3.1.	Introduction	51
5.3.2.	Facility Development Strategy	51
5.3.3.	Program Development Strategy	54
5.3.4.	Parks and Open Space Development Strategy	58
6.0	IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY	62

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OVERVIEW

1.1. Study Purpose

This study documents the present and future needs for recreation, trails, parks, open spaces and programs in the County of Wetaskiwin No. 10. This is achieved by identifying possible needs that are not currently being met, creating an inventory of current indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, and evaluating programs and services. Through this study, strategies are provided to meet identified needs for the residents of the County of Wetaskiwin No. 10 over the next 15 years.

1.2. Study Process

The project was undertaken in five phases. Phase One, Planning Context, documented the current state and established the context for the Needs Assessment Report. In Phase Two, Consultation, we engaged the public, stakeholders and staff to gather their thoughts regarding current services, the organizational structure and future needs.

In Phase Three, we prepared the Needs Assessment based on what we learned from the review of the planning context and what we heard in the consultation activities to identify broad needs and preliminary implications for recreation services. This information was reviewed in a working session with senior municipal staff and their input was used to further develop the Master Plan recommendations.

In Phase Four, Analyze and Evaluate, we used the overarching directions and priorities that came out of the staff workshop in Phase Three to guide the development of more specific recommendations for programs, facilities, policy requirements and the overall organizational structure. In the final phase, the Recreation Master Plan was produced which provides future direction on program, facility, organizational and policy recommendations.

The plan will be reviewed one year following the completion of the Master Plan. Any challenges of implementation will be recognized and successes will be acknowledged.

1.3. Study Overview

As noted above, this study both investigated the need for additional recreation facilities, programs and parks and the manner in which these services are provided in the County. Our assessment of needs is presented in Chapter 4. The community is largely satisfied with the supply of recreation facilities and parkland. There is an interest in expanded programming, but constraints on existing programs have less to do with facilities than with program leaders, marketing and volunteer resources.

Very few of the Master Plan's recommendations deal with the need for additional facilities or parkland. These were not the needs expressed by the community. Instead, we heard from volunteers operating existing facilities who require additional support to improve and enhance their facilities and programs. Residents told us they were interested in more recreational activities, but that it was difficult to recruit the volunteers, find the leaders, and design and offer the programs. Residents told us they were not sure what recreation services were available to them. Some residents suggested existing facilities are not always well used, are duplicated in nearby communities and are falling into disrepair.

We also spoke with many existing volunteers associated with agricultural societies, rodeos, and community run recreation facilities who are working hard to provide services for the community. These residents are willing volunteers, but they want to be sure their efforts are really benefiting the community. They were looking for assistance with planning, evaluating existing services and funding new initiatives.

The Master Plan addresses these concerns and builds on the extraordinary base of volunteers who are largely responsible for recreation today in the County. The volunteers can no longer do it alone. The County must play a more active role and join with the community to form an effective partnership for recreation service delivery. This is the key theme of the Master Plan and the focus of the majority of the Master Plan recommendations.

2.0 COMMUNITY CONTEXT

This chapter outlines population and demographic characteristics of the County of Wetaskiwin No. 10, relevant information on existing facilities, and briefly describes the structure and organization of the Leisure and Community Services Department. Also provided is a summary of the findings from the community consultation exercises, including stakeholder interviews and three community questionnaires.

2.1. Population Profile and Projections

Below is a summary of population information based on 2006 and 2011 census data, as well as 2013 estimated and projected demographic data generated from SitewisePro. SitewisePro is a web based program used for data analysis and visualization.

In 2011, the population of the County of Wetaskiwin was 10,866 individuals. The County had a total land area of 3,130 square kilometres and density of 3.47 persons per square kilometre. The projected population in 2013 is 11,292 which is a 3.8% increase. The following table illustrates the projected population changes over the next 5 and 10 years. Between 2008 and 2013 the population rose by 4.0%. Between 2013 and 2018 the population is estimated to rise by 2.5%. The population is estimated to continue to rise between 2018 and 2023 but by a lesser amount of 2.0%.

Table 2.1: Population Projections – 10 and 15 Years

Year	Total Population	Change (persons)	Change (%)	Trend
2008 estimated	10,853	-	-	-
2013 estimated	11,292	439	4.0	↑
2018 projected	11,585	293	2.5	↑
2023 projected	11,813	228	2.0	↑

Source: SitewisePro, 2013.

Based on knowledge of growth trends in the area, County Staff expressed that in their opinion the population will remain relatively stable. Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 illustrate the population changes within the dissemination areas that makeup the Census Subdivision (CSD) of the County of Wetaskiwin for 2013, 2018 and 2023 respectively.

Figure 2.1: 2013 Population by Dissemination Area

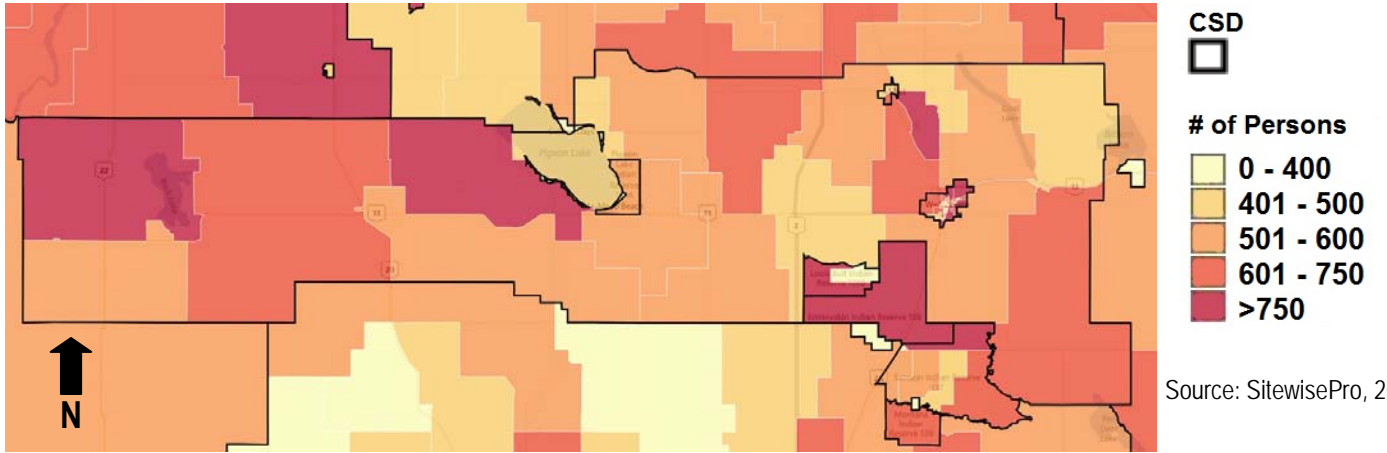


Figure 2.2: 2018 Population by Dissemination Area

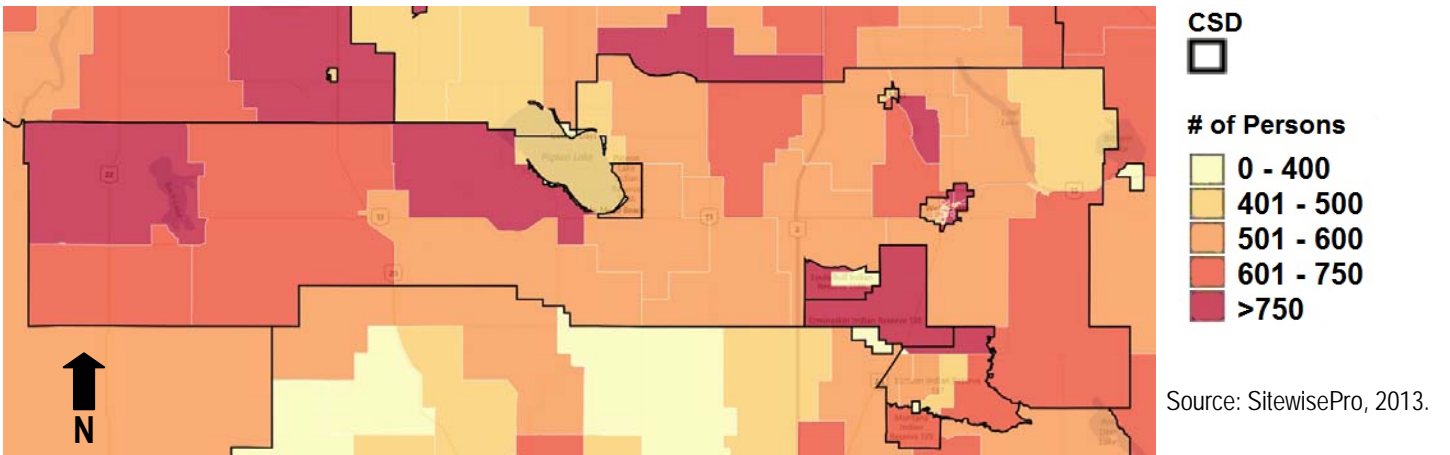
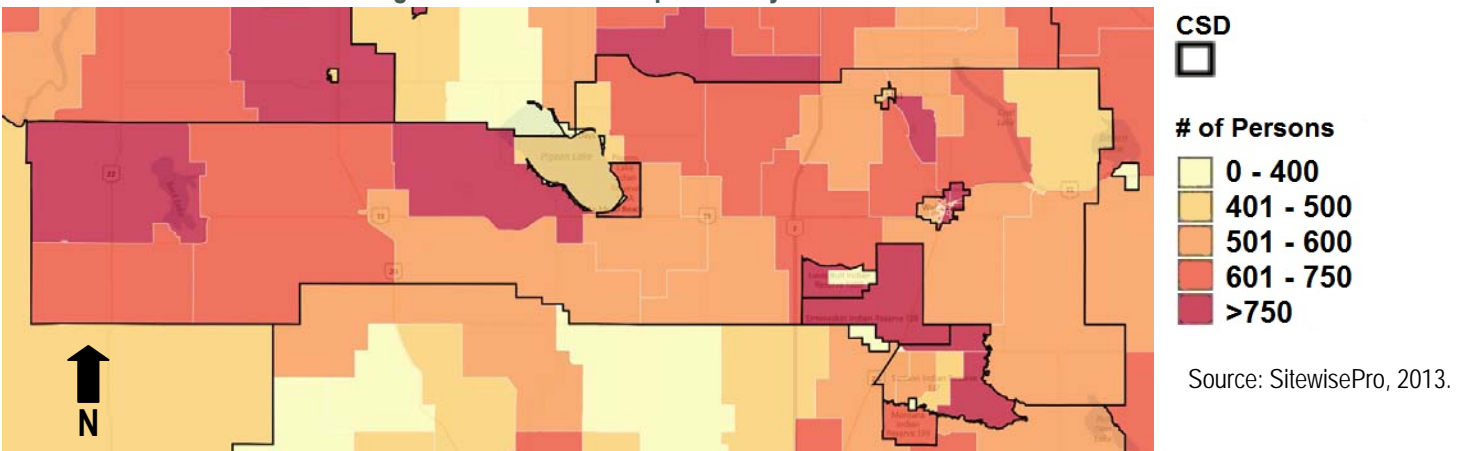


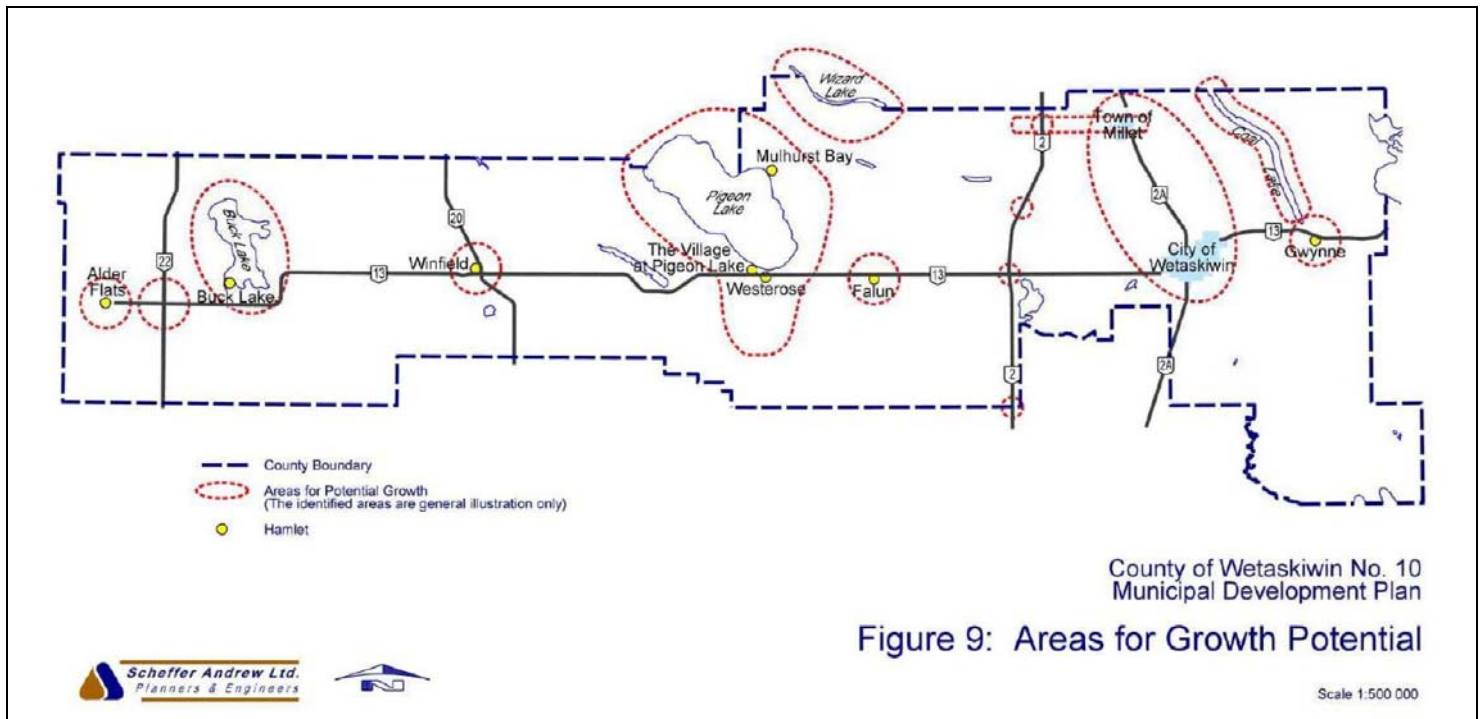
Figure 2.3: 2023 Population by Dissemination Area



Based on knowledge of population trends in the area, County Staff identified areas where, in their opinion, the projections should be adjusted. Staff noted that the area to the far west of the County should have a lower population than shown and the area around Pigeon Lake, and between the Town of Millet and City of Wetaskiwin should be shown as growing in population.

The County's Municipal Development Plan identifies areas of growth potential in the County. These growth areas include the Hamlets of Alder Flats, Winfield, Falun and Gwynne; the areas around the major lakes including Buck Lake, Pigeon Lake, Wizard Lake and Coal Lake; and the area between the Town of Millet and the City of Wetaskiwin.

Figure 2.4: Areas for Growth Potential Identified in the County's Municipal Development Plan



Source: County of Wetaskiwin No. 10 Municipal Development Plan, 2010.

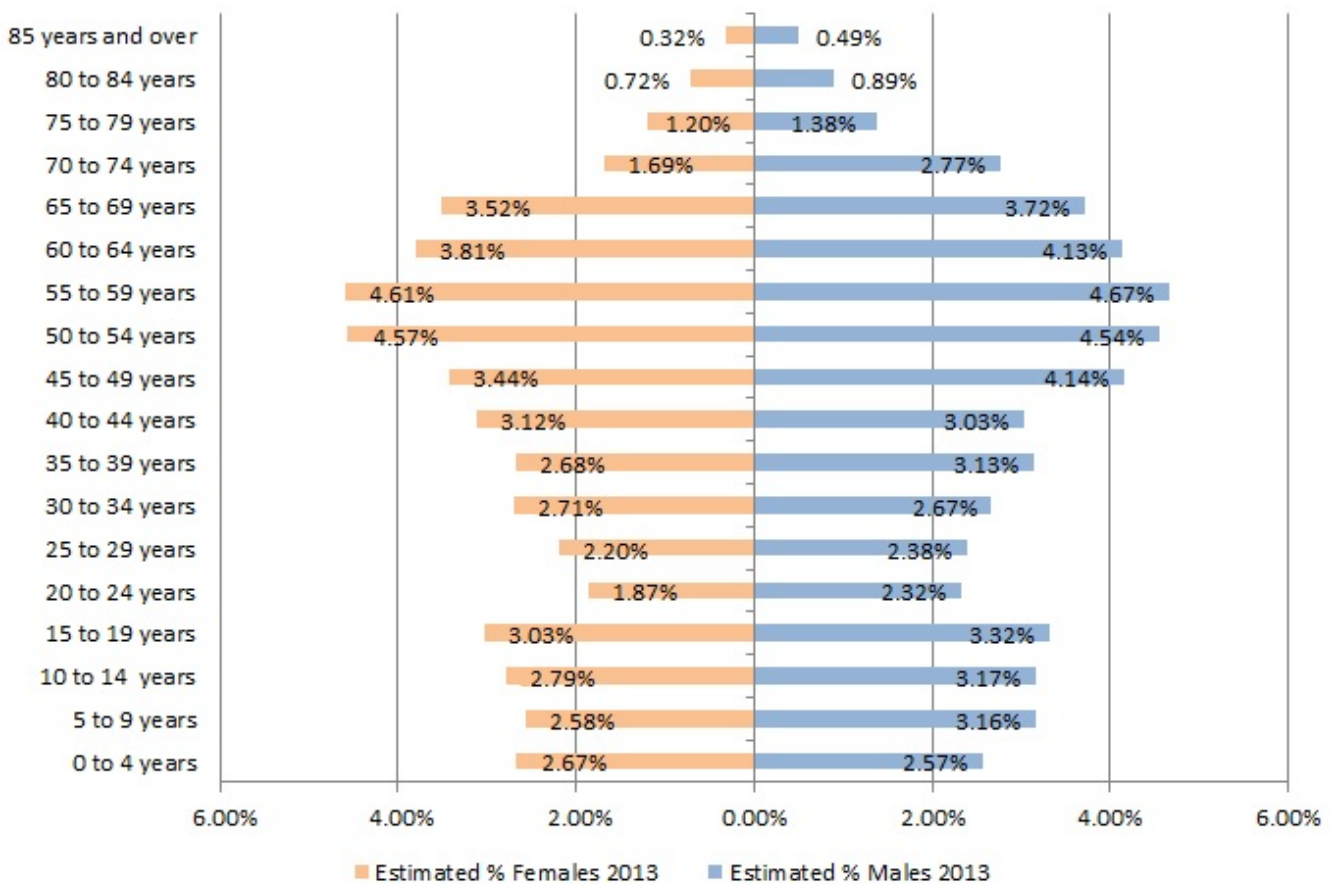
An analysis of changing age structure provides demographic trends that will affect delivery of services and market opportunities in the region. Chart 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 show the estimated percent population by age and sex for 2013, 2018 and 2023 respectively.

The total estimated female population is 5,366 individuals (47.5% of the total population). The total estimated male population in 2013 is 5,926 individuals (52.5% of the total population). There are more males than females with the average age for males being 45.6 years and 45.2 years for females. The charts on the following pages illustrate that the population is aging. The projected

average age for males in 2018 is 46.6 years and 46.2 years for females compared to 47.4 years for males and 47.1 years for females projected for 2023. Also apparent in the population charts below is the aging of the 'baby boomers' that are in their 50s in 2013 and 60s in 2023.

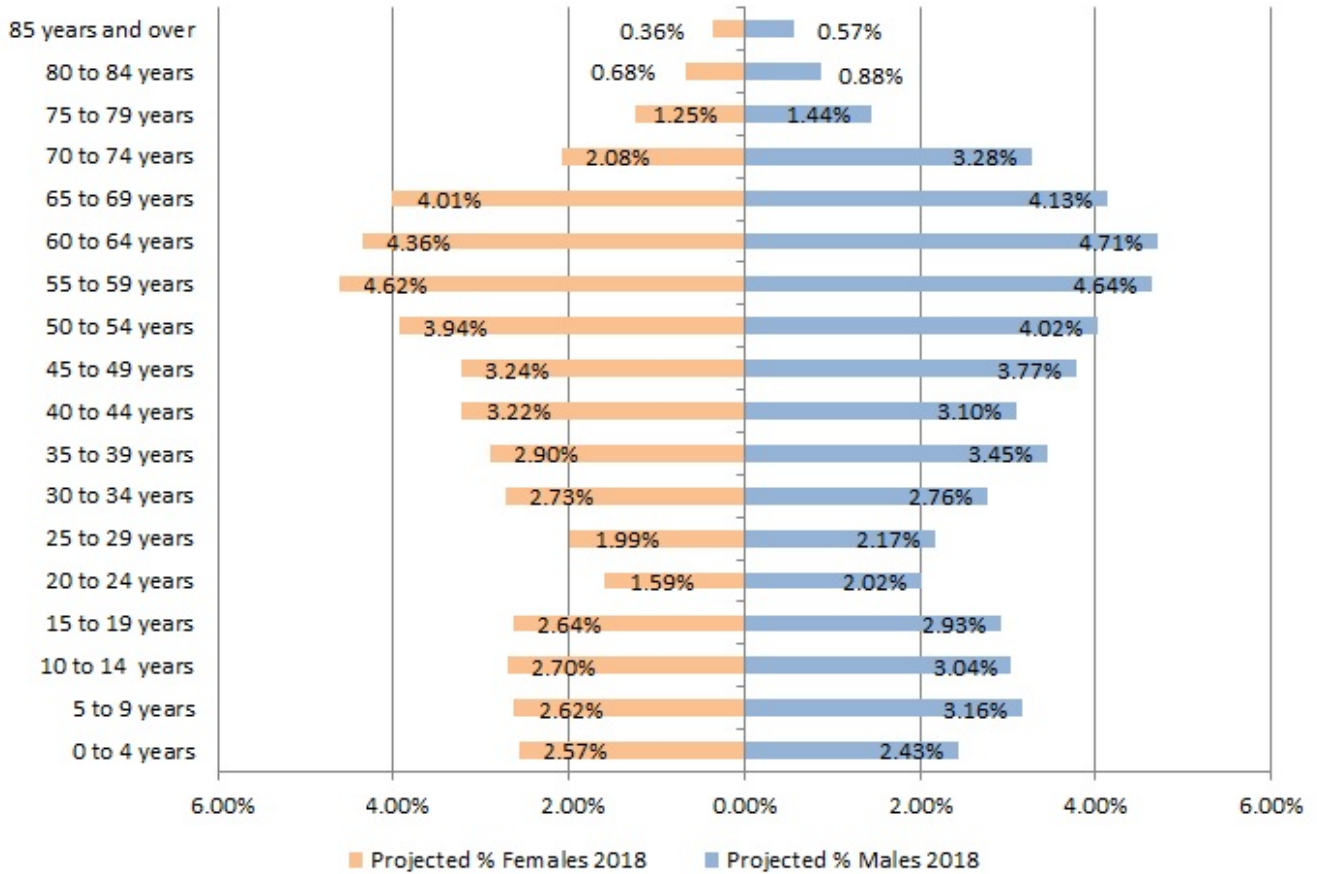
Growth is projected in the 35 – 44 years age cohort. This cohort makes up 12.0% of the population in 2013 compared to 13.5% of the population in 2023. While the population overall is growing (as shown in Table 2.1 on the previous page), the charts also illustrate that there is a decline in the percentage of young people. Youths (up to 19 years of age) make up an estimated 23.3% of the population in 2013 compared to 2023 where youths make up 21.4% of the population. There is also a relatively low young adult population (individuals 20 – 29 years of age) which makes up 8.8% of the population in 2013 and is projected to decrease to 6.8% in 2023.

Chart 2.1: 2013 Estimated Population by Age and Sex



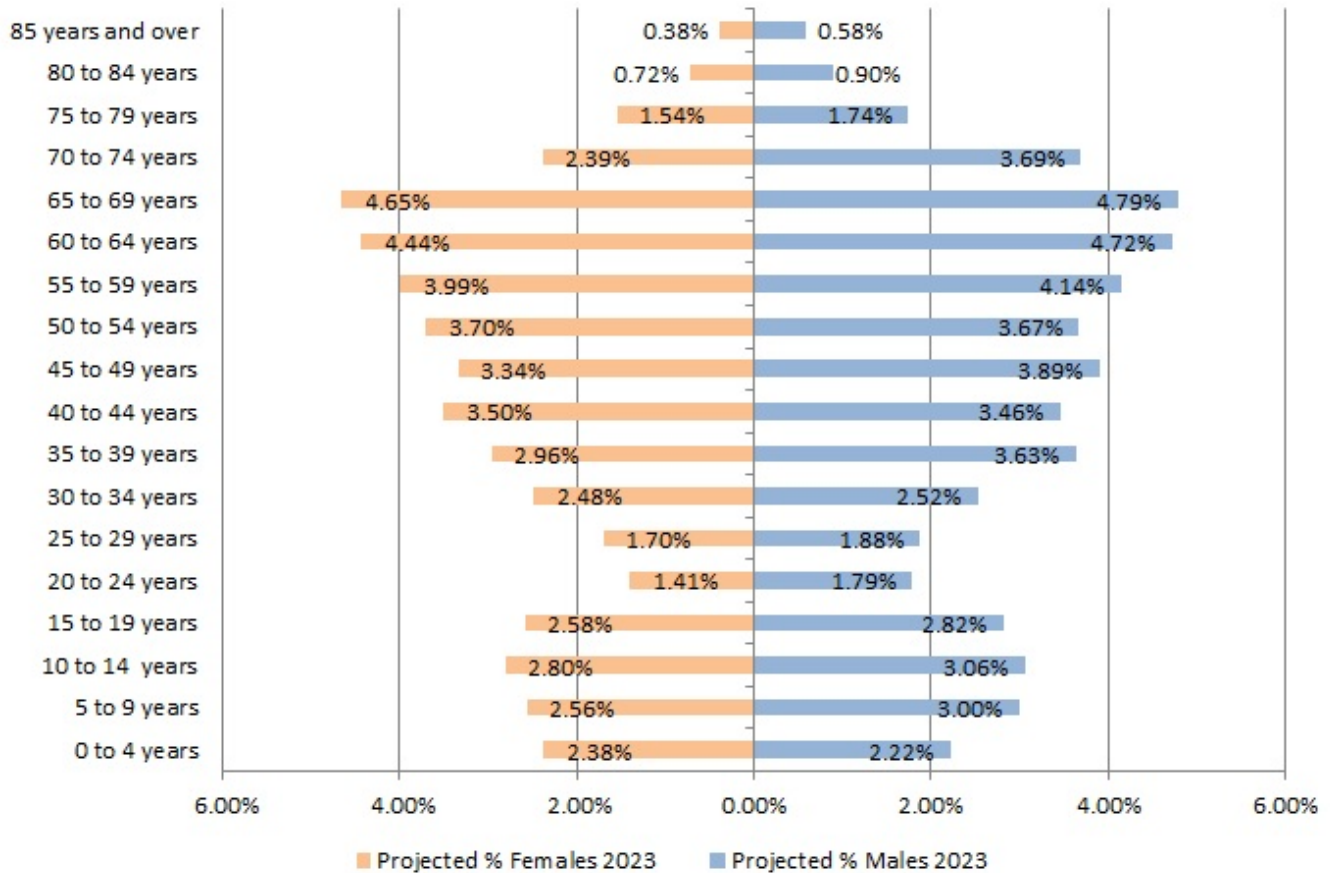
Data Source: SitewisePro, 2013.

Chart 2.2: 2018 Projected Population by Age and Sex



Source: SitewisePro, 2013.

Chart 2.3: 2023 Projected Population by Age and Sex



Source: SitewisePro, 2013.

2.2. Community Recreational Resources

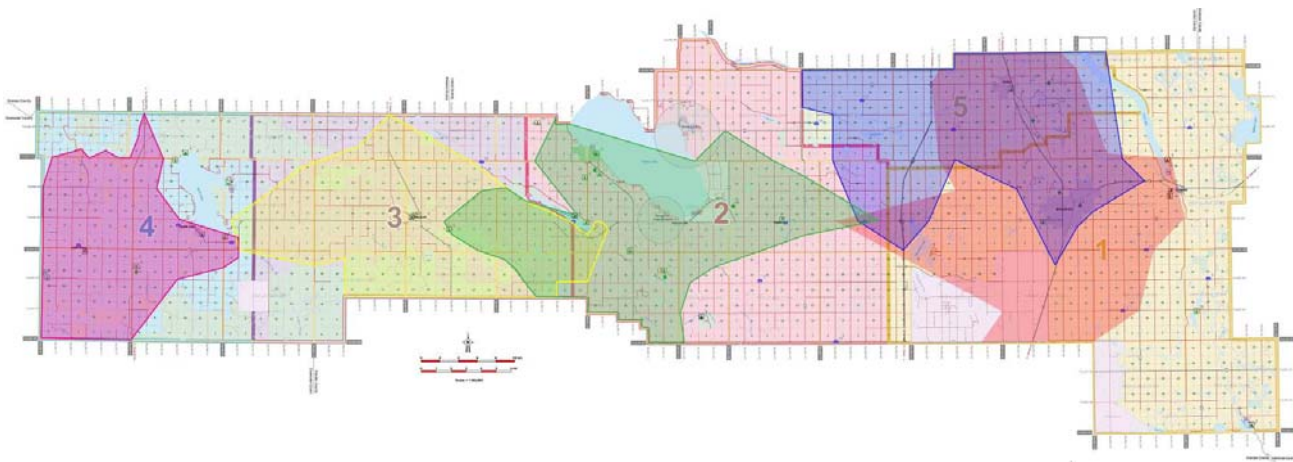
The County's recreational infrastructure is comprised of recreation centres and arenas, ball diamonds, rinks and other specialized facilities, playgrounds, parks and campgrounds, as well as a trail system located in the County of Wetaskiwin No. 10 (see Table 2.2). One facility, the Millet Agriplex, is located in the Town of Millet, but is included in the inventory because the County provides funding. A more detailed inventory of these facilities can be found in the *Planning Context Report* (September, 2013).

Table 2.2 County of Wetaskiwin No. 10 Facility Summary

Facilities	Details
Recreation Centres / Community Halls	11 municipally owned, 13 privately owned and 1 school board owned
Ball Diamonds	7 ball diamonds at 4 facilities
Soccer Pitches	5 facilities with soccer pitches
Tennis Courts	2 owned by the Town of Millet
Playgrounds	5 municipally owned
Publicly supervised beaches / splash pads	4 public supervised beaches including Viola Beach, Mulhurst Bay, Buck Lake Provincial Day Use Area, and Ma-Me-O Beach as well as a splash pad park in Millet.
Seasonal Outdoor rinks	Located in Millet, Falun, and Mulhurst Bay
Ski Hill	1 privately owned ski hill in Gwynne
Parks with Campgrounds	7 municipally owned (including Winfield Lions Pioneer Park operated by a non-profit group on County land) and 3 provincially owned parks with campgrounds as well as a Girl Guides campground. The County campgrounds total 302 acres while the Provincial campground totals 2,135 acres
Trail System	CPR Canyon Hiking Trail system totally 4 km

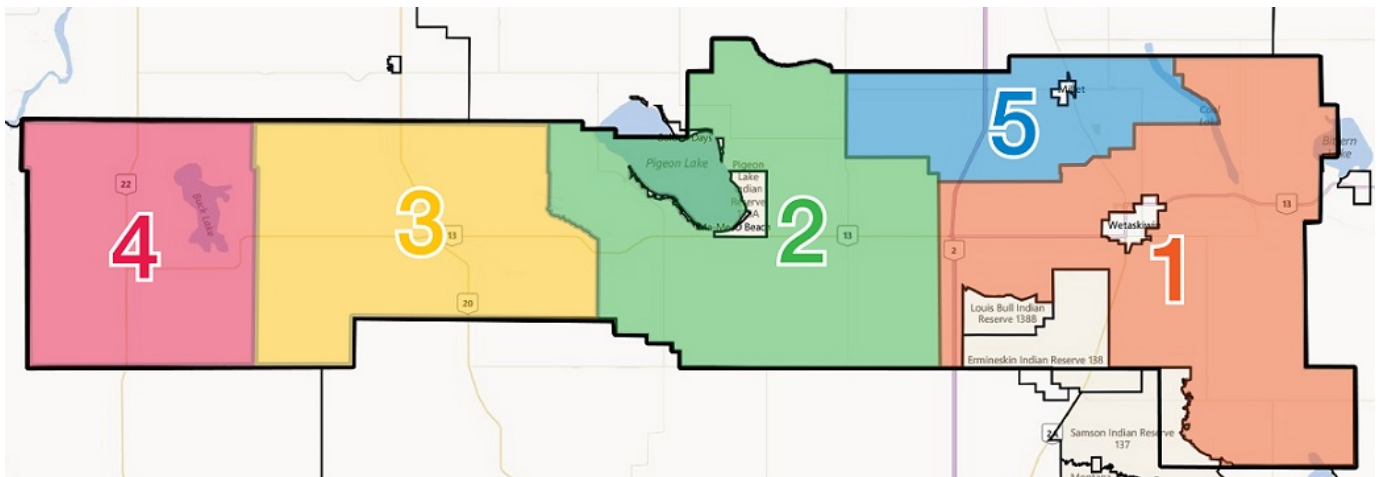
A map of the existing recreation facilities in the County has been produced by the Leisure and Community Services Department. A copy of this map is found in the *Planning Context Report* (September 2013). Figure 2.5 identifies approximate 20 minute drive time areas from the major recreation facilities in the County including Alder Flats Agri-complex, Winfield Rec Centre, Lakedell Community Centre, the City of Wetaskiwin (central location) and the Town of Millet Rec Centre.

Figure 2.5: 20 minute drive time areas from major recreation facilities



The County is divided into five zones for the administration of recreation services (see figure 2.6). Zone 1 includes the City of Wetaskiwin and surrounding area. Zone 2 includes areas surrounding Battle Lake, Westeros, Falun, Usona, Mulhurst Bay, Wizard Lake, and Pipestone. Zone 3 includes Winfield and surrounding area. Zone 4 includes Alder Flats, Bucket Lake, and the surrounding area. Zone 5 includes the area surrounding the Town of Millet. Recreational services in the County are administered by the County Council, County of Wetaskiwin Regional Recreation Board and Zone Committees as outlined in Bylaw 99/11. The exception to this is Zone 1, which is governed by an agreement between the County of Wetaskiwin No. 10 and the City of Wetaskiwin. Zone Committee members are elected and must be residents in the Zone. The Zone Committees are responsible for hearing and making recommendations to Council regarding individual organizations requests for recreational funds. It is a requirement that the recommendations are in the general interest of all citizens of the Zone.

Figure 2.6: County of Wetaskiwin Recreation Zones



The County recently hired a Director responsible for recreation services. The Leisure and Community Services Department is comprised of core staff including a Director who is assisted by a part-time Administrative Assistant, a Parks and Recreation Facility Foreman, and a Coordinator of Family and Community Support Services for Wetaskiwin and Winfield (the Coordinator reports to the Director but does not play a direct role in recreation services). The Parks and Recreation Facility Foreman oversees several permanent and seasonal staff including park maintenance staff and park attendants, as well as an Arena Assistant and a Custodian responsible for the Winfield Agriplex. This facility is also managed by the Winfield Agriplex Advisory Committee (WAAC) Board. The Recreational Needs Assessment and Master Plan was facilitated by the County's Leisure and Community Services Department.

2.5 Community Consultation

In the initial stages of the project, the consultants conducted interviews with a number of stakeholders and key informants who could offer a perspective on the community, current recreation services and possible future improvements. The interviews were conducted with Council members and staff, and with representatives of various groups and organizations in the community. All County Councillors holding a seat at the time of the consultation phase and senior staff were interviewed. Groups not interviewed were provided with the opportunity to make their views known through surveys and briefs.

Stakeholder Consultation

These interviews served two purposes: (1) to compile specific information from staff or community organizations operating facilities or services as input to the needs assessment, and (2) to identify issues and opportunities associated with recreation in the County for further investigation in the Master Plan. Many of the community groups providing input identified particular projects they were pursuing, or discussed specific needs, or challenges facing their organization. This information is not documented here but was considered in the needs assessment. The following summarizes key themes from our discussions of issues and opportunities:

- Positive overall assessment of recreation services
- Support for facility improvements versus expanded supply
- Support for the Recreation Department
- Interest in expanded programming
- The need for recreational trails
- Continued major community role in recreation services
- Community development and volunteer support
- Improved marketing and promotion
- Support for regional partnerships
- Widespread agreement that small community centres and highly decentralized model of recreation facility provision that has emerged over many years in the County is no longer a viable model and that a more centralized, regional serving approach was a better option for the future, the problems of access were noted due to the large service area
- Access to major indoor recreational facilities
- Community funding policies
- The absence of recreation planning in the past was frequently cited as a limitation. There was support for the Master Plan and for recommendations that would clarify recreational outcomes and specify an approach for ongoing planning and service evaluation.

Other issues that may have implications for the Master Plan were identified, including:

- The possible closing of schools in the County
- The County's relationship with the Summer Villages
- The campgrounds were identified as an important and beneficial recreational resource
- Residents moving to the County from other municipalities may bring higher expectations for recreational services

Community, Youth, and User Group Questionnaires

Three surveys were administered as part of the consultation phase, including Community, Youth, and User Groups Questionnaires. It is important to emphasize that the surveys were not intended to provide a statically valid representation of opinions from community members, local youth and user groups. While not statistically valid, the responses provide an interesting perspective on the current conditions, residents' desires for recreation services, and some of the unique challenges faced by the County of Wetaskiwin in administering recreational services to residents. Below is a summary of the key themes from the Community Questionnaire:

- Reasonable levels of overall satisfaction with existing services:
 - About 50% satisfied or somewhat satisfied
 - Only 21% express dis-satisfaction
- While close to 70% reported the County could do more to meet residents' needs, there is no clear consensus on a future strategy or a major deficiency (requests for "more and better" facilities; programs, trails)
- No major facility deficiencies noted:
 - Roughly 50/50 split on whether more facilities are needed to meet residents' needs
 - No single facility dominated the list of needs
- High levels of satisfaction with parkland:
 - More than 80% indicate supply is adequate to meet needs
 - Very few ranked existing quality as poor
 - Only 55% indicated there were enough trails
- Expanded programs/community development activities received some support:
 - Over 60% not participating in leisure activities as often as they would like
 - Almost 60% report more programs needed to meet needs
 - Only 33% agree there is plenty to do regardless of your interest
- Agreement that volunteer groups should receive additional support from the County (50%); and only 40% agree that 'volunteers alone can provide a full range of programs.'
- Major barriers to participation noted included:
 - Lack of awareness of what's available (55%)

- Access (40% report facility locations not convenient)
- Transportation/access major constraint for youth
- Affordability/cost not a major barrier
- Over 75% of respondents regularly use facilities outside of the County; No indication that this is unacceptable (50% see improving access to neighbouring facilities as an important strategy for the County to pursue).

Below is a summary of a few of the key themes from the Youth Questionnaire:

- Over 40% indicated that there are activities that they would like to do, but are not doing. Reason being access:
 - Over 50% indicated that the activities are not available in their community
 - Close to 50% indicated the activities are too far from home
- Health and having fun are most important to youth:
 - 70% indicated staying healthy was a very important motivation to participate in recreation
 - Close to 60% indicated it is very important for leaders to be fun, respectful, and welcoming

For a complete summary of the consultation activities see the *Consultation Report* (November, 2013).

3.0 RECREATION OUTCOMES AND A SERVICE PROVISION MODEL

3.1. Introduction

This is the first Recreation Master Plan prepared by the County and as such sets a number of fundamental directions for the delivery of recreation services. The Master Plan will not only make recommendations for the development of facilities, parkland and programs in the immediate future, it will define the County's perspective on municipal recreation services. This chapter describes that perspective with reference to two important considerations: (1) Recreation Outcomes, and (2) A Service Provision Model.

3.2. Recreation Outcomes

Outcomes describe what the County, through the efforts of its Leisure and Community Services Department, hopes to achieve by investing in parks, facilities, recreational and leisure programs.

Outcomes are the benefits residents and visitors enjoy from the Department's efforts. It is understood that the County invests resources in recreation to achieve these outcomes.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- **Active and Healthy Community:** Providing opportunities for all County residents to have active and healthy lifestyles.
- **Rewarding Leisure Time:** Providing opportunities for all residents to have enjoyable, rewarding leisure time activities.
- **Community Development:** Fostering community development, creating stronger community organizations and community leaders.
- **Community Cohesion:** Providing opportunities for social interaction and building stronger, more cohesive communities.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Protecting and preserving the County's environment through a sustainable parks and open space system.
- **Sustainable Communities:** Creating an attractive community with a high quality of life that retains our youth and attracts new residents, businesses and visitors.

Research clearly demonstrates that these outcomes can be achieved with high quality parks and recreation systems. Of course, the return is proportionate to the investment – communities that invest in parks and recreation services realize the benefits. A number of stakeholders interviewed for the Master Plan raised this issue and argued that the County needed to play a more active role in recreation service delivery, particularly to realize the economic and social benefits associated with sustainable communities.

3.3. Recreation Service Provision Model

The Recreation Service Provision Model describes guiding principles for the future delivery of recreation services in the County. The model will guide staff and Council decision-making on future planning decisions, capital and operating investments and a preferred role for municipal staff. All other Master Plan recommendations will be consistent with the preferred Recreation Service Provision Model. While the model proposed here will likely guide service delivery for the 15 years of the current Master Plan, these principles should be reviewed regularly and where warranted the Master Plan should be updated.

Principle 1: Partnerships with other service providers is the County's preferred approach to delivering recreation services. This over-riding principle describes the County's main approach to recreation service delivery. With respect to the development and operation of facilities and parkland and the provision of programming, the County will work with neighbouring municipalities,

educational authorities, other public and private agencies, and community volunteers. However, this is understood as an active partnership where the County's roles and responsibilities are clearly understood and implemented. It is also recognized that the County alone is responsible for some activities, such as assembling parkland in new residential developments, and in some cases the County is the only party that can reasonably assume some responsibilities, such as County-wide long range planning.

Principle 2: Community based, volunteer organizations will continue to play the major role in the delivery of recreation programs and services in the County but these community efforts will be increasingly supported by the Municipality. Volunteer associations have been the mainstay of the parks and recreation system in the County in the past and this will continue in the future. However, the County can and should play a more significant role in support of these community efforts, consistent with the County's role as an active partner in the delivery of these services.

Principle 3: Service provision will respect local identity and access while recognizing the realities of the market and the necessity to concentrate some services at a limited number of locations. The County is comprised of many communities to which residents have a strong attachment and commitment. Historically, these communities have all attempted to provide recreation facilities; however, this no longer reflects the realities of the local market. To the extent possible, service provision will reflect an appropriate balance between services that preserve and promote local identity and access and the need to have a sufficient number of users to operate in a sustainable and cost effective manner. This principle suggests that major facilities and some programs and services in the County will increasingly be concentrated at a few recreational nodes.

Principle 4: The County will continue to partner with adjoining municipalities to provide residents with access to most major recreation facilities and many recreation programs. This principle reflects current practice and will continue for the life of the Master Plan. Residents currently use facilities in the City of Wetaskiwin and the Town of Millet (where financing agreements exist) but also use major recreation complexes in other neighbouring municipalities including Leduc and Drayton Valley. The population and the population distribution in the County will not support major recreation complexes and as such residents will continue to use certain facilities (such as indoor pools) in adjacent municipalities. In addition, while this Plan describes a significantly expanded programming role for the County, many recreation programs of interest to residents will continue to only be available outside of the Municipality.

Principle 5: Recreation services will encompass a broad range of initiatives and undertakings that not only meet residents' needs for productive leisure time pursuits, but also contribute to a healthier and more active community, a sustainable environment, a stronger economy and a higher quality of life. It is widely acknowledged that recreational activities and the municipal park system can contribute to a variety of social, economic and

educational objectives, all of which build stronger communities. The parks and open space system can be a part of the County's environmental strategy. A high quality parks and recreation system both attracts and retains residents and investors. To fully realize the potential contribution of the parks and recreation system, programs, facilities and services, the County will promote initiatives that encompass this broad view of leisure benefits.

Principle 6: The County will assume the overall responsibility for planning, management and evaluation of parks and recreation services. Until recently, the County's primary recreational role has been to fund community-based volunteer organizations and negotiate agreements for access to major facilities in adjoining municipalities. While this has changed in recent years with the hiring of a Leisure and Community Services Director, the County's role as the overall manager of recreation services is relatively limited. Prior to this Master Plan, the County was not involved in long range recreation planning. The Municipality has had a limited role in evaluating existing services, developing partnerships, preparing policies and actively managing the parks and recreation system. Undertaking the Master Plan is an acknowledgement that this must change and a significantly expanded management role for parks and recreation will be required in the future. Further, an important part of the management of recreation service delivery is quality assurance. The County, in partnership with the community and other service providers, has a role to play in ensuring all services are provided in a manner that is consistent with accepted standards of service, safety and enjoyment. Finally, effective management is premised on the effective use of resources. Recreation services must be provided in the most cost-effective manner possible through community partnerships, effective management, appropriate fees and charges, and policies.

Recommendation 3.1: County Council should confirm the Outcomes and preferred Recreation Service Delivery Model as appropriate guides for future decision-making regarding capital investments and County roles and responsibilities for parks and recreation services.

4.0 RECREATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

4.1. Introduction

4.1.1. Needs Assessment Process

A formal process was employed to evaluate the recreational needs of the community which considered both supply and demand. Supply is determined by inventorying existing facilities, evaluating the capacity and use of the facilities, and identifying any known changes to the current supply. Demand is determined by identifying unmet demand or perceived need, considering any anticipated population change and considering participation trends. Consequently, while the

community's perception of the need for additional recreation facilities or programs is a consideration, the needs assessment is driven by market considerations.

The Recreational Needs Assessment simply identifies any need for changes in the supply of recreational services. Chapter 5 deals with strategies to support identified need and strategies to assist existing organizations to plan and implement improvements and upgrades.

4.1.2. Overview: Recreational Needs in the County

The overall findings of the Needs Assessment can be summarized as follows with respect to supply and demand considerations:

Supply

- There is a good supply of most facilities. Issues associated with existing facilities focused on upgrades not additions to the supply.
- There was no indication of capacity/use constraints. Indeed most of the facilities in the County are under-utilized. There is no indication that prime time is fully utilized at any of the County's existing major sport and recreation facilities.
- The County has agreements with neighbouring municipalities to facilitate access to major facilities, such as indoor aquatic centres and arenas. These agreements augment the supply and provide access to facilities that could not be supported by the local population alone.
- The public did not report constraints on their participation in leisure time pursuits that were directly associated with the supply of facilities or parkland; however, the supply of programming was an issue. Other than program supply, constraints were more likely to be associated with transportation; awareness and personal constraints such as lack of free time.

Demand

- There is limited public demand and limited perceived need for most facilities; the only major exception was recreational trails.
- With respect to recreation facilities that are currently provided in the County, such as arenas, curling rinks, and community halls, participation trends do not suggest a major increase in demand in the future.
- There is modest growth in the County. This is a key consideration because population growth will drive demand in most communities. The growth anticipated in the County during the life of the Master Plan will generally not create sufficient demand to support major new facilities.

While these considerations all point to limited existing demand for an expanded supply of recreation facilities, there is a 'chicken and egg' situation in the County. Historically recreation services have been limited in the County and enhancements to the supply will increase program interest and participation. Furthermore, current recreation program support from the County (including marketing, volunteer support and regional partnerships) is limited and volunteers are primarily responsible for all programming. A strong volunteer sector will result in a stronger, more diversified supply of programs. The Master Plan recommends a role for the County that will enhance programming and support volunteers. This will likely create demand for programming that may lead to demand for facilities. Consequently, it will be necessary to monitor changes in supply and demand factors and update the needs assessment as the Master Plan is implemented.

As noted, with the exception of trail development, facility upgrades and program development (discussed further in Chapter 5), very few immediate needs were identified. The following is a summary of the needs assessment for key facilities.

4.2. Recreation Facilities

4.2.1. Major Indoor Facilities

Indoor Aquatic

Key Considerations:

- There are no indoor aquatic facilities within the County of Wetaskiwin.
- Within the City of Wetaskiwin at the eastern end of the County, there is an existing pool that is being replaced with a new aquatic facility currently under construction. The new facility is a leisure pool of contemporary design that will meet a wide range of training, instructional, and therapeutic needs. The County provided funding for the new aquatic facility and County residents will have access to this new facility.
- Recent attempts to expand programming, and in particular the programs to access indoor aquatic facilities in the City of Wetaskiwin, were frequently mentioned by stakeholders and very positively evaluated.
- While not subject to a formal agreement, residents in the western portion of the County report using indoor aquatic facilities in neighbouring municipalities.

Assessment:

The current and projected population will not support an indoor aquatic facility solely for County use. For the period of the Master Plan, County residents should be served by indoor pools in neighbouring municipalities.

Ice Arena

Key Considerations:

- The current supply includes the Winfield Arena operated by the County and the Millet Agriplex for which the County has an agreement with the Town of Millet regarding use. In addition, many County residents are served by the arenas in the City of Wetaskiwin. The Hockey Alberta boundaries for minor hockey designate the eastern portion of the County and the City within the same zone.
- There is a proposal from a community group in Falun to enclose an outdoor ice surface.
- The usage data for the arenas in the County and Millet show underutilization of existing ice surfaces. Prime time hours are available at these ice surfaces. We do not have specific scheduling information for the City's arenas, but understand that they are accommodating existing demand.
- There was limited demand expressed from users groups. Neither the Winfield Minor Hockey Association nor the Millet Minor Hockey group indicated that they require additional ice time. The Winfield Pond Hockey group did not complete the user group survey; therefore we have no indication of additional need.
- Trends indicate stable to declining participation in ice sports.

Assessment:

Based on the underutilization of existing facilities and the limited demand from users there does not appear to be an immediate need for additional indoor ice arenas.

Currently there is an outdoor ice surface in Falun. The group who oversees the facility has expressed interest in enclosing the rink. This is a very high quality outdoor facility which includes bleachers and boards/glass that is complementary to the current stock of arena facilities in the County. The group responsible for the project has done an extraordinary job of building support for the facility and constructing a premier outdoor rink. Their contribution to date has been in the order of \$250,000; however, enclosing the facility would represent considerable additional costs. We have no doubt that the group has the capacity and commitment to pursue their objective of enclosing the facility. However, based on the needs assessment, we would not support this course of action. There is no indication that the facility would address a current problem with access to ice time and it would likely have a detrimental effect on the operation of the Winfield arena.

The group pursuing this project has not prepared a feasibility study to investigate the actual use of an enclosed ice surface at this location, provide a business plan with detailed projections of operating costs and revenues, and address other implementation issues (such as the location on school property). This is an essential requirement for funding a facility of this type (see detailed discussion in Chapter 5). The group has apparently considered doing a feasibility study and this

should still be done if they wish to pursue the project, however based on the Needs Assessment it is our opinion that the project most likely will not be feasible. We recommend that the facility continue to be operated as an outdoor rink.

Gymnasia

Key Considerations:

- Currently, community groups in the County can access school gymnasia.
- The Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools' policy dealing with use of school facilities and grounds encourages use by community and other groups providing that it does not interfere with school operations (Administrative Procedure 545). The Principal or designate is responsible for approving school facility or grounds use. Despite this policy, some community representatives indicated that access to schools can be a problem.
- Organized sports leagues that require gymnasia for their activities (such as basketball or volleyball) are not active in the County and consequently there was not demand for gym time.
- Gymnasia activities are generally growing in popularity and will continue to do so in the future.
- There is a possibility that some schools in the County may close. The Board of Trustees of Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools is in the process of reviewing the school viability at Lakedell and Pipestone schools. This could affect the community's access to gymnasia.

Assessment:

In the short term, the community should continue to rely on schools for gymnasia use. While we have not identified a current need, gym sports are prime candidates for growth in the County when the Department expands its programming role. Consequently, while not currently an issue, community access to a gym could emerge in the future. The preferred approach to meeting this need is to use school facilities. This may require formal agreements between the County and the educational authorities to ensure community access. If access to school facilities proves unworkable, a gym could be a future facility supported by the County and developed in conjunction with an existing recreation complex. This is likely a long term project and a feasibility study should only be prepared to confirm the viability of the project.

Curling

Key Considerations:

- The current supply of curling facilities in the County includes the Lakedell Community Centre, Usona Agricultural Society, Alder Flats Community Centre, Buck Lake Community Centre, and the Pipestone Community Centre. While these facilities exist, we understand that in some cases they have not been used for curling in recent years partly due to limited interest.
- Key informants indicate the facilities are underused and some facilities have closed or experienced temporary closures due to facility conditions. This is consistent with national trends which indicate that curling is a declining.
- The interest in curling in the County is likely constrained by poor facilities (e.g. two-sheet facilities which do not allow for tournaments and large group activities; limited social space or member amenities, etc.)
- There was not a strong community demand expressed for additional curling facilities. Neither the Wetaskiwin Curling Association nor the Winfield Floor Curlers completed the user group survey; therefore we have no indication of additional need.

Assessment:

There is no need for additional curling facilities in the County. Indeed, the continued existence of the existing facilities likely depends on consolidating membership and building fewer, higher quality rinks. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Community Halls/Multipurpose Space

Key Considerations:

- There are a number of small community halls throughout the County. In addition to the community halls, there is multipurpose programming space at some other locations, such as the Lakedell Agricultural Complex.
- Limited information is available on the scheduled use of multipurpose and community hall space. However, we understand multipurpose space is not used to capacity and the halls are used very infrequently
- In addition to limited use, the small community halls are operated by an aging and diminishing volunteer base; in most cases have limited programming potential; and in many cases require substantial upgrades and improvements.
- There was widespread agreement that the small community centres and the highly decentralized model of recreation facility provision that has emerged over many years in the County is no longer a viable model.
- While it was noted that despite limited use some of these centres, they are still strongly supported by local residents, retaining them in the future will be an increasing challenge.

Assessment:

Currently, there is an ample supply of multipurpose space and hall space throughout the County that, in most cases, is underused. There was no indication of additional need in the immediate future and the short term emphasis should be on expanding the community use and programming of these spaces (discussed further in Chapter 5).

As with gymnasium space, discussed earlier, as programming expands in the County there may be a need for multipurpose space that is better designed to accommodate a wider range of programming (e.g. appropriate flooring and wall finished; storage; washrooms/change rooms; proper acoustics, dividers to create separate program spaces that can be used simultaneously, etc.). It is possible that within the timeframe of the Master Plan, the County will require both a regulation size gym and associated multipurpose space. If provided, this type of facility would best be accommodated with an existing major recreation complex. Planning for this possibility is discussed in Chapter 5.

4.2.2. Outdoor Playing Fields

Ball Fields

Key Considerations:

- There are seven ball diamonds at four facilities throughout the County and in the Town of Millet.
- These diamonds which are generally appropriate for organized use are complemented by a number of “pick-up” play facilities in school yards and parks in the County. While not appropriate for most league activities, these diamonds provide opportunities for casual use and practice.
- We have no information on how these facilities are scheduled, but understand they are not used to capacity.
- Ball leagues in Alberta operate under the auspices of the Provincial sport organizations rather than local, community based organizations. We understand the shift to Provincial organizations resulted in part from declining participation in these activities. There is no indication of unmet demand or a lack of facilities in the County for organized ball.
- There was no significant demand expressed in the community or youth survey for additional ball fields.
- Trends indicate declining participation in baseball and stable participation in softball.

Assessment:

The current supply is adequate. There was no need for additional ball diamonds.

Soccer Fields

Key Considerations:

- The County has access to soccer pitches at four schools including Lakedell, Pigeon Lake, Winfield and Buck Mountain. There are also seven soccer pitches owned by the Town of Millet.
- Additional playing fields are available for unorganized use. While not appropriate for most league activities, these fields provide opportunities for casual use and practice.
- No information is available on the actual scheduling of the fields, but we understand they are not heavily used.
- Trends indicate continued growth in soccer.
- The Pigeon Lake Soccer group did not respond to the User Group Survey and therefore did not express any demand for additional facilities.

Assessment:

Based on the available information, additional use of existing fields is possible and given modest population growth there will be no need for soccer fields during the period of the Master Plan. This is however a growing sport and demand should be monitored and projections of future requirements adjusted as warranted.

4.2.3. Other Recreation Facilities

There are a number of other facilities in the County that are important to note. While we identified no need for additional facilities, in some cases there are issues associated with improvements, expansion and expanded use for programming. These issues are addressed in Chapter 5.

Ski Hill

The Gwynne Valley Ski Area is a non-profit ski hill on private land operated solely by volunteers. The Wetaskiwin Ski Club's mission is to provide affordable skiing and snowboarding to the surrounding communities. The hill is open on the weekends during the winter (3 – 4 months depending on snow accumulation). The season is unpredictable year to year as the group does not have the appropriate equipment for snow which makes it difficult for the club to predict their yearly needs and usage. There is no business plan prepared for the facility. In the immediate future the group expressed a need to fix erosion issues and would like to consider upgrading their equipment to have a more predictable season (snow production). The group could benefit from assistance with business planning, grant applications and hill maintenance. Chapter 5 discusses these issues.

Seniors Centres

There are a number of community halls and halls specifically designated as senior's centres in the County including Alder Flats Senior Centre and Buck Lake Senior's Drop in Centre. These centres offer activities geared towards seniors including floor curling, bowling, bingo, crafts, cards, dinners, etc. While it appears the existing senior's centres are meeting the needs of the older adults who use these facilities, there was some need expressed in the community survey for more programs for seniors.

Stampede Grounds

There are several rodeo grounds in the County including Winfield Arena, Alder Flats Community Centre and Buck Lake Stampede. These facilities are used for a limited time during the year for local stampedes and rentals. The stampedes contribute to tourism in the County and many individuals use the local campgrounds during the events. There is no need for additional stampede grounds/riding arenas. The facilities may benefit from the community grants program and the associations may benefit from other forms of volunteer assistance (discussed in Chapter 5).

Unstructured Parks Amenities

There are a number of unstructured park areas, playgrounds and multipurpose courts in the County. Playgrounds are installed in some of the County's day-use areas and campgrounds as well as some recreation centres/arenas. The supply of these facilities may be expanded as long range plans are prepared for recreational areas. There may also be issues associated with safety audits and inspections, particularly of playground equipment. These points are discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.3. Recreation Programs

Key Considerations:

- A reoccurring theme in most interviews was the need for additional programming. Many residents are leaving the local community to access programming and are in support of opportunities to make greater use of existing facilities for a broader range of programming.
- A need for expanded programming was expressed with respect to youth, older adults, physical activity and wellness, outdoor education and art and cultural activities.
- Recent attempts to expand programming, and in particular the programs to access indoor aquatic facilities in the City of Wetaskiwin, were frequently mentioned and very positively evaluated.
- To date, the community volunteers have played the predominant role in recreation service delivery including recreation programming. This community based approach to recreation service delivery was expected to continue in the future. However, most volunteer associations reported a need for additional assistance and support from the County.

Assessment:

There was a need expressed for increased programming in the County. Some areas we would expect to see high levels of demand for programming based on community input, trends, and experience in other communities include:

- Outdoor activities and education (e.g. nature hikes, astronomy, bird watching, biking and riding, rock climbing)
- Drop in sessions and programs geared towards recreation rather than organized leagues
- Family activities (e.g. movie nights, family sports)
- Youth programming and social activities (e.g. dance classes, drama club, game tournaments, movie nights, industrial arts)
- Older adult programming (e.g. woodworking, pool, indoor walking in the winter, technology courses)
- Art and cultural activities (e.g. social dancing)
- Programs focused on health promotion, physical activity and wellness
- Winter activities (e.g. cross country skiing, skating, indoor sports)

While there is interest in the community for additional programming, the Department's ability to respond, particularly in the short term will be limited. We have discussed the Department's role in program development in Chapter 5 of the report.

4.4. Parks and Open Space

4.4.1. Parks and Open Space

Key Considerations:

- The County of Wetaskiwin's current supply of parkland and campgrounds is 122 ha or approximately 10.8 ha per 1,000 population. This does not include the many park reserves that are undeveloped. While there is no commonly recognized standard for parkland provisions, many municipalities would provide between 3 and 4 ha of developed parkland per 1,000 population. In addition to the municipal parkland, there is 864 ha of provincial camp ground land within the County.
- There is no broad based public demand for additional parkland and no deficiency issues were raised through the consultation process.
- There are no outstanding demands for additional recreation facilities that will require a land base; consequently existing parkland is more than adequate to meet the need for anticipated recreation facility development during the period of the Master Plan.
- There is not a significant growth in population anticipated for the County.

- The existing population is widely dispersed and there are park parcels in the majority of the established settlement areas.
- Current land use is characterized by private single family residences with ample private open space and/or rural developments; indicating limited demand for neighbourhood level parks.
- The County has policies in place that addresses parkland dedication in new subdivisions.

Assessment:

Current levels of provisions, community demand for sport and recreation facilities, and the results of the public consultation indicate parkland supply is not an issue and will not be for the period of the Master Plan. This assumes parkland will continue to be assembled in new residential areas through the parkland dedication process. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.4.2. Campgrounds

Key Considerations:

- There are seven campgrounds owned and operated by the County in addition to three Provincial campgrounds and one privately owned Girl Guides campground.
- The campgrounds were identified as an important and beneficial recreational resource.
- The campgrounds add to local tourism. The park visitor statistics for 2013 show that between 70 – 90% of visitors to the campgrounds were from outside of the County.

Assessment:

The campgrounds have been noted as an important aspect of recreation in the County. Additional campgrounds are not required but an overall strategy for their long term development would be useful. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.4.3. Recreational Trails

Key Considerations:

- The CPR Canyon Hiking Trail is a 4 km trail on private land near the Gwynne ski area. Permission is granted for hiking the trail.
- While not included in the inventory, we understand there are a number of other informal trails used by the community in the County.
- There was demand expressed in the community survey for more trails.
- While the need for additional facilities for recreation was generally not a major issue, the exception was recreational trails. The need for trails was often cited. Many felt there were opportunities to make better use of natural features in the County and municipal reserve lands for trail development. However, the ongoing cost of maintenance and operation was also a concern and trail development was supported by some on the condition that it is a

community initiative. It was also noted that there are informal trails in various parts of the community, and some of these are maintained to a limited extent by volunteers. However, many residents would not be familiar with these trails. There may be an opportunity therefore to create a trails development strategy around existing resources and expanded marketing.

Assessment:

There is interest in more recreational trails being developed in the County. Trail development is the key feature of the parks development strategy discussed in Chapter 5.

5.0 RECREATION MASTER PLAN

5.1. Introduction

The Master Plan describes our recommendations for the future development of recreation and leisure services in the County. The Master Plan is primarily concerned with the County's role and responsibility for recreation. It is a high level assessment of needs and the County's role in addressing those needs in partnership with the community. Our recommendations will initiate a significant transition in the County role. To this point, the municipality has had a very limited role in recreation services. These services have largely been provided by community volunteers, who built, operated and programmed facilities. While the County has helped to fund these facilities, in the future their role will be expanded. Increasingly, the County will be an active partner supporting the efforts of community volunteers. The Master Plan describes the key elements of this changing role.

In large measure, recreation master plans deal with two key questions: what do we need and how do we provide it. This Master Plan is primarily concerned with the second question; how recreation services will be provided. As noted in Chapter 4, our analysis suggests that the supply of recreation facilities and parkland is largely meeting needs and, for immediate future, new capital projects are not the priority. In the short term, the County's focus should be on planning for improvements to existing recreation infrastructure. The most significant need that was identified in this study was for an expanded supply of programming. However, program expansion requires human resources and community development initiatives, not new facilities. Consequently, this plan addresses operational and management issues to a much greater extent than capital projects.

We have presented the Master Plan in two parts. The Recreation Delivery System is discussed first to clarify the County's role and discuss the implications for staffing, community development, planning and policy. The second part of the discussion, describes broad strategies for the future development of facilities, parks and programming.

5.2. The Recreation Delivery System

In addition to assessing demand for recreational facilities and services, the Master Plan addresses issues associated with the way in which these services are delivered to the community. We have referred to this as the Recreation Delivery System. The issues addressed in this chapter of the report were identified through the community consultation program; input from municipal staff and members of Council and the experience of the consultant.

The findings from the consultation activities indicate satisfaction with existing leisure facilities and services. Few community-specific projects and concerns were identified and organized user groups

did not make a case for additional facilities. The level of supply of facilities and parkland was generally not an issue.

However, a number of issues associated with the manner in which the County delivers parks and recreation services did emerge during the study process. These focused on the future role of the County, the partnership with the volunteer sector, funding, program support, planning and evaluation and marketing.

5.2.1. The Role of the Leisure and Community Services Department

Essential Functions and Responsibilities

Historically recreation has been a community responsibility in the County. While the County has funded community initiatives, it has generally left the planning, management and delivery of these services in the hands of community volunteers. For a variety of these reasons, this model no longer is viable. First and foremost, the community is requesting a change. The volunteers who participated in this study clearly stated their need for additional support and residents are increasingly asking for services that are unlikely to be provided solely by volunteers. However, there are other factors that indicate the need for a greater municipal presence in recreation service delivery. These include the increasingly complexity of delivering recreation services with multiple funding agencies; new legislative requirements; liability issues; more sophisticated programming interests and higher community expectations. This complexity is accompanied by a significant increase in information and available resources that most community based organizations are hard pressed to keep pace with. Finally, as recreation is increasingly a tax supported service, cost effectiveness is an over-riding consideration. Funding agencies and community ratepayers want guarantees that their tax dollars are being invested wisely. This has resulted in much greater attention being paid to planning; feasibility studies and business plans before a project is undertaken and to program evaluation and performance measurement after the project is in place.

Recreation Departments are often responsible for the following activities in communities that rely heavily on volunteers to offer community parks and recreation services. In the County, while the Department is currently involved in some of these activities, our assessment suggests that a stronger role will be required in the future:

- **Planning:** As discussed below, an ongoing planning process is required to support effective decision-making. Effective planning allows the Department to take the lead in identifying and anticipating needs - both in specific service areas (e.g. wellness, arts, culture) and among various groups in the community (e.g. youth, seniors). Currently, the Department's responsibilities in this area are limited and there are very few tools available to promote effective planning.

- Community Outreach: If the community hopes to continue to rely on volunteers for recreation services, the Department must have an ongoing, visible presence in volunteer recruitment (for both existing and new areas of interest), promotion/publicity, information-sharing, partnership development, etc.
- Training/Transfer of Skills: A strong and regenerative volunteer base is essential in the County. Volunteers and volunteer organizations will increase their capacity to provide improved leisure services if they are provided with the appropriate skills. The Department must play a role in anticipating needs in this area, particularly new requirements resulting from changes in the service environment, and providing the training necessary to transfer required skills to individual volunteers. In addition, the Department will be required to provide volunteers with the tools and knowledge necessary to participate in planning and evaluation activities.
- Facilitating Relations with Other Agencies: On behalf of volunteer organizations, the Department should liaise with other organizations/agencies and levels of government for such purposes as dealing with funding applications, setting up training programs, etc. At the local level, the Department must facilitate relationships between agencies and community groups to expand joint programming initiatives and access to facilities/resources.
- Information Clearing House/Referral: As the local agency with primary responsibility for leisure services, the Department is the preferred 'information clearing house' for all matters related to community leisure services. The Department must make up-to-date information available to the volunteer sector. Further, the Department has a role to play in ensuring that the volunteer organizations delivering services are aware of new policies and initiatives affecting their programs (e.g. funding, active living, subsidy programs for low income individuals, etc.).
- Program Services: Support with implementing programs is required (e.g. assistance with preparing promotion/publicity material, help in designing and evaluating programs, finding appropriate facilities, etc.), as well as assistance and encouragement to expand programming into new areas or adjust programs to reflect new approaches.

These functions define the County's partnership with volunteers and the municipal contribution to volunteer based recreation service delivery. Not all of these functions will be relevant to all volunteer organizations as some will have sufficient resources and experience to handle them independently or they will not be relevant to their programs and services. Further, it is expected that as volunteers develop their services and levels of expertise, they will assume increasing responsibility for these functions, thereby allowing the Department to focus on new initiatives. We have explored the need for a stronger County role in these areas in the discussion that follows.

Recommendation 5.1: The County, through the Leisure and Community Services Department, should work more closely with volunteers and provide additional support for core functions such as planning, community outreach, training, liaison, information and referral services, and program support.

Recreation Programmer /Community Developer

Assuming these responsibilities as their contribution to a partnership with community volunteers for recreation services, will significantly increase the Department's workload. It is not possible for the Director to assume these responsibilities in addition to his current duties. Consequently, we recommend that the County create a new position of Recreation Community Development/Programmer.

The position would report to the Director, with whom ultimate responsibility for programming and community development rests. The Community Development/Programmer, as recommended here, is a relatively junior position. The position would rely on the Director for supervision and support. The position would assist the Director to implement recommendations in the Master Plan for increased promotion and publicity, new program development and a closer working relationship with the volunteer sector.

The primary role of the Community Development/Programmer should be to support program development and improved use of existing facilities, parks, trails and recreational resources and opportunities through program development, working with other providers and community volunteers. As discussed above, this implies a new partnership between the County and the community volunteers. However, it also involves working with a wider range of community interests to develop new services. The following responsibilities should occupy most of the new position's time:

- Work with community and agency partners and community volunteers to identify opportunities to expand programming and increase the use of small community halls and other facilities with new programs and events
- Work with individuals or groups interested in offering new programs

- Recruit appropriate program instructors for identified program interests, and maintain a database of available instructors in each community
- Provide support for volunteers offering high quality, cost-effective programs and services in the County
- Foster the development of new community groups; work with new and existing groups to expand programming to respond to trends and identified needs
- Research, encourage, and provide liaison on training programs to improve the quality of leadership in recreation activities by staff and volunteers
- Assist the Director in the development of marketing tools and activities aimed at improving community awareness of parks, recreation and culture services
- Help groups recruit, recognize and retain volunteers
- Maintain a centralized hub for information on sports, recreation, and leisure programs offered in the County to effectively market and promote the programs
- Assist with the development and implementation of educational/marketing programs and activities that promote the benefits of active living
- Work with existing community organizations and related Boards and Committees to support special event programming and community events and festivals

Recommendation 5.2: The County should create a new position within the Leisure and Community Services Department of Community Developer/Programmer.

Recommendation 5.3: The Community Developer/Programmer should be a fulltime position reporting to the Director of Leisure and Community Services.

5.2.2. Municipal-Community Partnership – Support for Volunteers

Introduction

In addition to another staff position, other initiatives in support of volunteers are essential to fulfill the Department's community development role.

The delivery of recreation and leisure services in the County relies heavily on volunteer organizations. Not only are volunteers responsible for programming (which would be customary in most municipalities), they are often responsible for the development and maintenance of recreation facilities. This level of commitment is no longer viable in the County and will continue to deteriorate in the future. All of the volunteers who we met with as part of the planning process indicated that they required additional support. Among the approximately 70% of residents who feel the County

should do more to meet the recreational needs of residents, 50% cite more support for volunteers as a necessary strategy.

In the following paragraphs we have discussed the County's relationship with volunteers with respect to the two inter-related but different functions – volunteer assistance and community development.

Volunteer Assistance

This is a traditional volunteer support and facilitation role that all parks and Leisure and Community Services Departments must perform to maintain a healthy and vibrant volunteer sector. Volunteer assistance is focused on supporting organizations in their day-to-day operations. It is different from community development (discussed below) because it is a secondary and supportive role while acting as a community developer the Department provides leadership and direction and actively builds the capacity of volunteer organizations.

While volunteers were positive about the Department and viewed the decision to retain the Director as a significant improvement, volunteer organizations reported a number of concerns. These included the challenge of volunteer recruitment, planning and securing adequate funding, and problems with marketing and promotion. These considerations suggest the Department should expand its support to existing volunteer organizations.

Table 5.1 describes typical initiatives that might be undertaken to assist existing volunteer organizations. Some of these initiatives are currently in place, or partially in place, and should continue.

Table 5.1: Volunteer Assistance

Municipal Responsibilities	Approach/Activities
Standardize procedures for maintaining regular contact with voluntary organizations and for providing administrative and operational assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creating a common calendar of events to assist all volunteers with planning and maximizing the success of their programs ▪ Assistance might involve providing guidance for establishing new groups, helping with promotion and publicity, identifying grants, helping to prepare funding applications, making arrangements for the use of facilities, etc. ▪ Ensuring communication and contact between the County and volunteer organizations with regular meetings and a single source of contact ▪ Providing vehicles to ensure volunteers can effectively communicate with one another to share issues, ideas and successes
Encourage other sectors of the community to support volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage business and service clubs to sponsor volunteer groups and/or donate services
Provide short term financial assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue to provide funding to community associations. Restructure the community-funding policy for this purpose
Recognize the efforts of volunteers who serve the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased recognition enhances the individual volunteer's appreciation of his/her role, encourages sharing of resources among groups, stimulates volunteer activity, promotes private sector assistance and promotes community awareness of programs offered by volunteers

Community Development Strategy

The Department's community development role goes beyond the volunteer assistance noted above to focus on expanding the skills and capabilities of existing volunteers and building new volunteer organizations and leadership in the community. While there are many definitions of community development, it generally implies a pro-active role in facilitating change at the local level and building capacity within new or existing organizations to deliver programs and services. As discussed in Chapter 2, these are often important recreation outcomes. Community development requires staff to take the lead in identifying and responding to needs and issues, to assist in resolving issues, and to initiate processes and/or practices that will expand the community's capacity to work more effectively in meeting its own needs.

This is likely to be a more important role in the County than in other municipalities because of the reliance on volunteers. Supporting volunteers, as discussed above, is an important activity but it does not necessarily contribute to a sustainable resource. Volunteer development builds

community capacity and ensures that trained, skilled and committed volunteers are available in the future.

Community development activities are also the true expression of the County's partnership with the community for service delivery. In Chapter 2 of the report we discussed outcomes and service delivery principles that should guide leisure service delivery in the County. In some communities, these outcomes and service delivery principles would be achieved because Council would direct that municipal staff did so. This is not the case in the County. Because recreation service is largely delivered through volunteers, the volunteers will have a good deal to do with whether outcomes and service delivery principles are achieved. If Council wants to make sure that services are focused on outcomes such as a healthy community or are delivered in the most cost effective manner, this must be achieved through the volunteers. The Department therefore must work with the volunteers to achieve this goal. This involves community development activities.

The Department also has a critical role to play in supporting the renewal of the volunteer sector. This goes beyond supporting existing volunteers to working with volunteer groups to ensure that new members are recruited, trained and assume organizational responsibilities.

Finally, to a much greater extent than has been the case in the past, volunteer organizations are being affected by external practices, policies and legislation. Liability insurance is an obvious example, but there are many other provincial and national initiatives affecting sport and recreation that deal with inclusion, access for low income individuals, coaching, physical activity and health benefits, etc. In some cases, these initiatives can be sources of funding or support for skill development. The Department should make sure that volunteers have access to these.

Table 5.2 describes the types of community development approaches that would be appropriate in the County. These approaches, while represented in some of the Department's activities, require additional attention in the future. These activities are discussed further in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Table 5.2: Community Development

Municipal Responsibilities	Approach/Activities
Provide planning and market assessment assistance for proposed projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Department should work directly with and support the efforts of volunteers to regularly assess their needs and priorities and to put in place strategies to meet those needs in the most cost effective manner. Planning requirements are discussed further in subsequent sections of the report. ▪ Assist with market assessments and business planning so volunteers better understand the viability of their projects, possible risks and future potential financial liabilities
Help volunteers to get established in new program areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide advice on establishing volunteer sport or recreation organizations; developing programs, etc. ▪ Find suitable facilities for new programs ▪ Assist with promotion and marketing of new programs ▪ Provide 'seed money' for initial program development expenses (e.g. to contribute to equipment costs, publicity and organizations costs). This funding would be limited on the expectation the group would be self-sufficient in an agreed-upon timeframe.
Encourage volunteers to participate in training programs to improve effectiveness of their activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investigate the availability of appropriate programs ▪ Investigate interest in training programs among voluntary organizations and facilitate their participation in suitable programs
Organizational development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide assistance to volunteer organizations, directly or through referral to other agencies, with constitutions, governance, executive development and training, executive recruitment, fundraising, etc.
Volunteer sector coordination, planning and service assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assist and facilitate initiatives whereby all community volunteers come together to share information and coordinate activities with the objective of fostering and promoting a community-wide program of recreation ▪ Ensure that the programs of individual organizations are coordinated and focused on community-wide objectives and priorities

Recommendation 5.4 Council should endorse a comprehensive role in support of volunteers for the Leisure and Community Services Department that focuses on both volunteer assistance and community development.

Recommendation 5.5: The Department should expand volunteer assistance and community development activities.

Partnership for the Management of Community Recreation Facilities

As noted previously, a distinction can be made between volunteers that operate recreation programs for residents (e.g. minor hockey) and community organizations that have assumed responsibility for the management of community recreation infrastructure such as a park or a

recreation centre (e.g. the ski hill or facilities operated by agricultural societies in the County). In most cases this infrastructure is not owned by the County but is provided for community recreational uses. Furthermore, the volunteers manage this infrastructure on behalf of the County insofar as some of the tasks undertaken by these volunteers would, in many other communities, be done by municipal staff. This is a special type of arrangement that sets these volunteers and their organization apart from those that run a sports or recreation program.

While it was not unusual for community volunteers to operate major recreation facilities in the past with little if any involvement by municipal authorities, this is increasingly rare. Very few volunteers have the time to keep pace with changes in the management and operating procedures necessitated by changing legislation; liability issues; opportunities for energy saving and efficient operation of infrastructure; shifting funding opportunities; new programming initiatives and the many other developments that are a part of municipal recreation service delivery today. Furthermore, because of the limits on volunteer time and expertise, the facilities are often not as well maintained as they could be. The gradual deterioration of capital assets resulting from too little attention to preventative maintenance is often a major problem contributing to much higher long-term facility costs. We note that many of the volunteer organizations operating major facilities with whom we met were looking for additional assistance and advice in these areas. We also understand that a number of changes in management and operating techniques were introduced at the Winfield Arena when municipal staff assumed responsibility for the facility. This is to be expected. It in no way reflects poorly on the community volunteers who operate these facilities – it simply points to the increasing complexity of managing major recreation facilities safely, efficiently and cost-effectively.

Given the responsibilities assumed by volunteers when they operate major facilities for the community's benefit, the County should consider structuring an agreement or memorandum of understanding with the volunteer associations. At the core of this agreement is an understanding that the municipal-volunteer association relationship is a partnership whereby the County invests in the associations as a cost effective means to provide services; and the associations operate in a manner that ensures the investment results in a level of service that justifies the expenditure. Because it is a partnership, the agreement assumes both parties are contributing to the relationship. The County's contribution is financial whereby funding could be available to volunteer associations entering into these agreements and services. The topics that might be addressed in an agreement include:

- Ensuring all facilities and parks receiving support from the County under the terms of the agreement are available for general community use and are addressing priority parks and recreation needs as determined by Council through municipal initiatives such as the Recreation Master Plan.

- Adopting appropriate procedures to manage risks and liabilities (e.g. associated with the rental of a building or the use of a park for licensed functions or special events; ensuring appropriate insurance coverage is in place; ensuring that all staff working at such functions have been trained, etc.).
- Maintaining and improving facilities and parks in accordance with municipal guidelines and requirements. This would involve ensuring policies and procedures are in place to guarantee operating equipment and structures are appropriately maintained for safe community use (e.g. regular inspections of playground equipment).
- Identifying the Department's responsibility for ensuring communication and liaison to regularly share concerns and discuss the working relationship between the County and the volunteers and, perhaps more importantly, among volunteer groups. These meetings can be a forum to share program ideas, resolve conflicts, investigate joint projects and avoid duplication and poor use of resources, coordinate schedules and fundraising, etc.
- Confirming the Department's responsibilities for Volunteer Assistance and Community Development.

The Department should explore the development of such an agreement with the volunteer associations who own and operate community recreation infrastructure.

Recommendation 5.6: The County should consider adopting an agreement with volunteer associations who own and/or operate community recreation infrastructure to clarify the roles and responsibilities of both parties in the partnership.

Community Funding Programs

The County currently allocates recreational funding annually to five recreation zones. The "funding is provided for the development of a broad range of recreation services, which is given to non-profit organizations to provide opportunity for people of all ages to use their recreation time in a wholesome and satisfying manner."¹ Grants are available for operations (utilities, maintenance, upgrading, etc.); small capital projects and the purchase of equipment; and programming (training, special events, etc.). The five zones have different recreational mill rates and consequently are allocated different funding; however, these generally reflect the recreation infrastructure in each zone.

Applications are required from groups requesting grants and financial statements must be provided to account for the previous year's grants. Applications are reviewed by a Zone Committee comprised of residents living in the zone and elected at a public meeting. Committee members

¹ Guidelines for Recreation Funding Policy #7101. These grants are governed by two policies. #7101 deals with zones 2, 3 and 4. #7102 deals with zones 1 and 5. The latter differs in that it provides for the funding of major recreation facilities in the neighbouring municipalities of the Town of Millet and the City of Wetaskiwin.

make recommendations to Council for final approval. The bylaw establishing the Zone Committees specifies the membership, the general purpose of the Committee and requirements for electing members, holding at least one meeting a year, receiving applications, etc. However, there is no consistent process outlined in the bylaw for evaluating and recommending grants and apparently these vary considerably among the zones. Other than a few very general statements suggesting that the grants are for recreation broadly defined, for all age groups, and should serve community versus private interests, there are no criteria to evaluate the relative merits of the applications for funding. There is also no distinction between the manner in which program, operational and capital grants might be evaluated or the priority assigned to each.

This is a community driven process and staff have no formal role. However, since his appointment the Director has made presentation in at least two of the five zones addressing some of the issues associated with the grants program.

It is our opinion that a new community funding policy should be developed to address limitations with the existing approach to funding volunteer recreation associations. The subsequent paragraphs discuss these limitations and makes recommendations for a new community funding policy.

Funding Should Consider Demonstrated Need, Priority and Consistency with Municipal Outcomes

While there are procedures in place that govern the manner in which funding is allocated, there are no specific criteria that define projects that would be ineligible or that would assist in defining the relative merits or priority of competing projects.

This should be corrected with a new funding policy that clearly specifies eligibility, decision-making criteria and requirements for information to support applications. To be eligible for consideration, the project funded should be consistent with the recommendations, principles, and priorities of the County as outlined in the Master Plan and other approved planning documents. If, for example, a community group was interested in developing a facility where there is no demonstrated need, where there is currently an oversupply of facilities, or where declining participation is anticipated, the proposal should be rejected. Given that the funds available will always be limited, priorities consistent with County outcomes or other approved Council directions should be demonstrated before funds are granted.

For major contributions, a feasibility study or business plan should be in place to support the grant application and other sources of funding should be investigated before the funding application is considered.

The Community Funding Policy Should Differentiate Between Capital and Community Development/Programming Projects

Currently applications for capital projects and programming support are treated in the same manner. Different conditions should govern municipal financial support for capital projects and program development.

Cost Sharing and Alternate Approaches to Funding

The current program simply allocates tax revenue as collected by the County in each zone for recreation. This is an unsophisticated funding program – essentially it involves the County collecting taxes and asking residents for direction of how these monies should be allocated. Most community funding programs will incorporate other tools to increase the flexibility and effectiveness of the program and to better reflect the wide range of projects that must be captured in these programs. For example, under certain conditions, the applicant might be asked to cost share or to demonstrate that alternative sources of funding have been pursued. The flexibility to adopt different approaches to funding (e.g. no interest loans) might also be reflected in the policy.

The Municipality should develop a more sophisticated approach to community funding that incorporates a range of funding possibilities that better reflect the types of projects that may come forward from the community.

Zone Funding

Grants are currently allocated to zones and are based on relative assessments. While this provides a mechanism to ensure that funds are distributed geographically in a prescribed and presumably politically acceptable manner, it may not reflect the needs of the community and likely represents an unnecessary constraint on Council's ability to effectively invest in priority recreation projects. We understand in some cases, allocated funds are not used and in other cases there are insufficient funds to support desirable projects. The zone approach to funding also discriminates against facilities that serve a recreational role that extends beyond the zone boundaries. We expect this is the case for the Winfield Arena and possibly other major facilities.

From the perspective of meeting community recreational needs and making the best use of limited resources, a funding program based on demonstrated need and the willingness and capability of community residents to support recreational programs would be preferred. While the practice of ensuring that all communities in the County benefit from municipal recreation expenditures should continue, this is likely to occur in any event. The need to respect the County's geography and support recreation in settlement areas throughout the municipality is a recommended Service Delivery Principle (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, the Master Plan supports the development of recreational nodes that will see an ongoing investment in facilities and services throughout the

County. For these reasons, we would recommend that funds no longer be allocated on the basis of the five recreation zones.

A Funding Program Based on Council Approved Policy but Managed by Staff

While the Leisure and Community Services Director has participated in community meetings discussing zone grants, staff has no formal, prescribed role in the current process. We are of the opinion that this is inconsistent with best practices for municipal administration and removes staff's professional expertise and experience from the process. It is appropriate for Council approved policies be administered by staff. This principle should apply to the community funding policy. A formal procedure with criteria for funding should be adopted by Council and then managed by staff. The policy will clearly indicate the manner in which grant applications are to be submitted; the options available for funding; and the criteria used to evaluate applications. As warranted, the Director would be responsible for dealing directly with applicants to clarify the nature of their projects and their conformity with funding criteria. In some communities, a single Committee of residents (often an established municipal parks and recreation committee) may provide input on grant applications, but ultimately it should be the Director that makes recommendations to Council for their approval.

A Community Funding Policy should be a tool for Council to achieve important community objectives. The policies should provide Council with the opportunity to strategically invest in community projects that might not otherwise proceed as well as providing a sound rationale for consistently and equitably rejecting proposals of limited merit or that are not consistent with the County's plans, or recreation goals and objectives. This overall objective cannot be achieved with existing practices and consequently a new community funding policy should be developed.

It is not within the scope of the Master Plan to prepare a new funding policy for the County. This is a complicated undertaking and one that should involve municipal staff, Council, recreation stakeholders and the community. Furthermore, the policy should reflect the unique conditions in the County. While the community funding policy will be developed if Council endorses the recommendations of the Master Plan, the following are considerations that might be reflected in the policy.

Financial investment from the County could be requested for the following reasons:

- To build new or renovate existing facilities
- To assist a new group with start-up costs for a new program or service

- To directly subsidize the operating costs of a program or service, that would otherwise not be financially viable, because there is a social or economic return to the County that justifies the investment

These three cases should each be addressed in the Community Funding Policy in an individual manner.

A number of municipalities have introduced programs where they financially support community groups wishing to upgrade existing or develop new facilities, or undertake park improvements. In some cases, this is on a cost shared basis and in others it is in the form of a no-interest loan. Criteria would be established to determine when cost sharing would be required, and which projects would only be available for loans. Cost sharing for smaller capital projects and facility improvements are often favoured to allow municipalities to support more community initiatives but also as a sign of the applicant's commitment to and belief in the feasibility of the project. No-interest loans are generally used in situations where a non-profit organization operating a recreation program open to the community requires assistance but the project is not seen as a core recreation service that would typically be provided at taxpayers' expense (e.g. funding for a gymnastic club's facility). Both types of financial assistance are appropriate and can create very effective partnerships for facility development and upgrades. The following considerations would generally be reflected in these policies:

- Facilities or park improvements must be publicly accessible and serve all County residents
- Funding would only be available to non-profit community organizations
- Projects focused on improving existing facilities or parks, or increasing use of existing facilities or parks, and are consistent with the goals and recommendations outlined in the Master Plan, would be considered priorities. If new facilities are proposed, the onus would be on the community organization to demonstrate consistency with the goals and objectives of the Plan and the benefits to the community.
- All other sources of funding must be investigated before the funding application is considered
- Requests for funding would have to be submitted in a prescribed fashion and according to a schedule that allows the County to incorporate these in its annual budgeting process
- The recommended upgrades or improvements must be consistent with the recommendations and goals outlined in the Master Plan
- For major projects, a feasibility study and business plan would be required before funding was approved. The County would assist with the preparation of these studies.

- In cost sharing situations, the community organization would be expected to come up with their share of the funds before the County made its contribution; this share would be clearly set out in the policy (e.g. 50% of the approved capital expenditure after grants from external sources).
- The County would designate a set amount for the Community Funding Policy each year and it is understood that not all requests may be accommodated in the year they are made; if requests for funding exceeded the amount budgeted, funding would presumably be delayed until the following year.

Start-up funding for new organizations should also be considered in the Community Funding Policy. Start-up funding might be provided for a number of purposes, including purchase of equipment, access to facilities, staff assistance, marketing or organizational assistance and advice. This would be a short-term investment to help establish a self-sufficient program that can serve residents for a number of years. This funding should only be provided in response to a business plan. The business plan would demonstrate the financial viability of the project and the anticipated benefits to the community. Financing would generally be provided for the short term (2-3 years) on a declining basis. The business plan should demonstrate on-going viability after the start-up period. As with the direct financing noted above, this funding would generally only be available to non-profit community organizations serving a demonstrated need.

Finally, there may be circumstance where the County wishes to subsidize on an ongoing basis a program or service operated by a volunteer group. This might be the case, for example, if it can be demonstrated that there are directly related economic benefits that justify the investment, such as a special event that brings visitors into the community and supports local business. Similarly, a program aimed at isolated seniors might be worthy of a direct investment because of the unique social benefits associated with the program. In these situations, Council would consider a direct operating investment if justified by the anticipated social or economic return for the community. The onus, however, should be on the community organization to demonstrate that their program or facility is directly responsible for economic or social benefits that justify the investment. A business plan or similar assessment should be prepared by community organizations requesting direct operating subsidy and they might be requested to demonstrate that the anticipated benefits were realized.

A Community Funding Policy of this type, if carefully developed and consistently implemented, can be very beneficial. It is clearly preferable to ad hoc decisions made in the absence of any Council approved policy. More importantly, it provides Council with the opportunity to strategically invest in community projects that might not otherwise proceed as well as a sound rationale for consistently and equitably rejecting proposals of limited merit or that are not consistent with the County's plans, or goals and objectives in an area of service. In communities that have adopted these policies, an annual maximum municipal contribution is often established and criteria are adopted to set

WSP,

priorities when requests exceed the maximum. While committees of Council and staff are sometimes formed to review these requests, the intent is to have a Council approved policy that is clear enough to allow staff to administer the program. The purpose is defeated if Council reviews and approves requests on a case-by-case basis, particularly if exceptions are granted to the intent of the policy.

Recommendation 5.7: The County should prepare a Community Funding Policy to replace the current practice of allocating funds by Zone Committees. This should be a comprehensive policy that reflects the variety of projects that may require funding; adopts an appropriate range of tools to provide financial support; and where specified eligibility criteria are met, ensure resources are committed to the priority recreation needs.

5.2.3. Planning and Service Evaluation

While resident input is important when planning or evaluating recreation services, these services are County, not community, responsibilities. Only the County can adopt a community-wide perspective on recreational needs and priorities. The County has the responsibility to ensure all resources (volunteer and staff resources; funding from local and senior levels of government) are used effectively. Only the County can adopt the broad perspective necessary to ensure that all community groups and interests are treated fairly and work cooperatively for the community's benefit. Effective planning and service evaluation are the tools responsible for making this happen.

The need for improved planning in the County was clear, based on the input of stakeholders and the observations of the consultant. The basic tools required to effectively plan and manage recreational resources are either not in place or not consistently updated (e.g. inventories of parks and recreation facilities). Essential market indicators for key facilities are not available (e.g. the current scheduling or the extent to which existing facilities are used to capacity; changing membership and participation rates of recreation and sports groups, research on trends and best practices). There has not been a concerted effort to monitor the community's satisfaction with recreation services or investigate their perception of needs, local issues and opportunities. The absence of this information makes planning a very challenging process and ultimately limits effective planning and cost effective investment in recreation services.

However, perhaps the most significant problem with recreation planning today is that volunteer associations are receiving very little input or assistance from the County. Some of these associations are undertaking major projects and operating major facilities. Groups such as the Lakedell Agricultural Society and the Gwynne Valley Ski Hill operators have expressed a strong interest in preparing plans, but require support and direction from the County. In the Falun community a group of very committed and energetic volunteers have undertaken a major project to

create a community arena. The group set about to assemble materials, raise funds, and build an artificial outdoor ice surface that could be covered. They have accomplished a great deal. However, it was clear in our meeting with this group that their focus has been on the construction of the facility and they have not given enough thought to the market considerations and financial parameters that will govern ongoing operations. A needs assessment and business plan was not prepared prior to starting the project. The County should be working with groups such as these to ensure that they follow a process that covers all of the bases, including undertaking essential planning and needs assessment work, before building a major facility. It is the County's responsibility to support and guide community associations through this process to ensure that the considerable time and effort invested by volunteers is used to its best advantage.

The Master Plan is a first important step in addressing the lack of recreation planning in the County. This must be continued however with new and expanded planning and management techniques that are the responsibility of the Leisure and Community Services Department.

Long Range Planning and Performance Measures

The County should establish a database to provide a solid and defensible basis for future planning and decision-making. At minimum, the County should undertake the following activities:

- Review and update the current inventory of municipal parkland and open space resources to ensure accuracy and completeness
- Annually update the inventory of parks, culture and recreation facilities and note improvements and redevelopments and additions
- Track changes in population and update per capita ratios of facility and parkland supply
- Continually monitor best practices in the field through participation in conferences, visiting new/innovative projects, and monitoring trade journals and umbrella organization websites to keep abreast of trends in the field. Provide staff with appropriate training and professional development opportunities to support management functions.

These are simple steps that can be undertaken by the Department with limited support or involvement from community organizations. However, given the major role played by community associations in the County, an effective database for planning will only be possible with their active involvement. This will take some time and will only be possible if the County invests in the activity. A major part of this investment is the recommended staff position of Programmer/Community Developer, who would be largely responsible for coordinating these activities. However, the County may also invest in other systems, such as software to assist with scheduling, that will contribute to an improved planning database while also supporting the efforts of the volunteers through enhanced scheduling, publicity etc. Over time with the cooperation of community associations, the database could be expanded to include:

- Measures to determine the capacity and use of facilities and scheduling procedures that provide comprehensive, accurate data in a format suitable for this purpose. This data could then be used confirm that all existing resources are used to capacity before providing new facilities. Ideally, computer based scheduling software would be used for this purpose.
- Simple performance measures (e.g. number of program hours; number of active volunteer associations affiliated with the Department; program satisfaction; number of community events; funds raised in the community for recreation projects undertaken with the County, etc.) that are tracked to monitor/evaluate changes in the effectiveness and efficiency of recreation service delivery over time.

These tasks will contribute to an ongoing database useful for planning and decision-making. The updating of the database could rest with the Community Developer/Programmer. Ongoing interpretation of the information for planning and decision-making purposes is a senior management responsibility that should fall to the Director.

Recommendation 5.8: The County should adopt the procedures required to generate a database for long-range planning of facilities, programs, and services; performance measures tied to the Master Plan outcomes; and ongoing information collection procedures to evaluate services for users and program participants.

Recommendation 5.9: The County should update the Recreation Master Plan every five years.

Long Range Plans for Major Parks and Recreation Facilities

In addition to committing to an ongoing planning process for parks and recreation services, the County should work with volunteer associations to prepare long range plans for major parks and recreation facilities. Many of the parks and recreation services available to County residents are located at agricultural society properties such as those at Lakedell and Alder Flats. These locations accommodated major indoor facilities such as curling and community halls as well as outdoor stadia and sports fields. In addition to these properties, there are unique recreational resources, such as the Gwynne Valley Ski Area.

These facilities have generally been developed by volunteer associations who have attempted to provide facilities of interest to the community as resources permitted. The development of these important recreational resources has generally not been guided by a long range plan reflecting opportunities and constraints associated with the site or the facilities. In our discussions with the volunteers responsible for these facilities, a number mentioned the difficulties of making short term decisions without a long term plan. Without exception these groups are interested in continuing to improve and expand their properties to better serve the community, but they do not have the information necessary to make informed decisions about future investments in their facilities.

The County should partner with associations operating major recreation facilities and parkland to prepare long range plans. This should be a joint effort with the active involvement of County recreation staff as well as the volunteers who operate the properties. The County should fund the long range plan on the understanding that it will provide direction for the future investment of municipal resources in the property. Depending on the property, the long range plan might address the following issues:

- Capital conservation – the physical condition of existing major structures or equipment and the anticipated cost of future maintenance and/or replacement.
- Market assessment – the anticipated demand for facilities and services at the property and the implications for existing and future facilities. Identification of current uses that should be decommissioned and those that should be improved and expanded. Potential demand for new facilities.
- Site planning – the current and preferred future configuration and location of facilities and uses on the property. Opportunities and constraints affecting the future expansion of recreation uses on the site.
- Management and operational issues – any issues associated with current operations such as safety audits, staff resources and skills, marketing, etc.

The development of long range plans has a number of advantages for both the volunteer associations and the County. The plans provide a comprehensive assessment of the current situation, including anticipated liabilities and challenges that will need to be addressed to retain the facilities. They also provide a clear focus for the future development of the major recreational resources in the County and ensure future developments are consistent with community needs and represent the best use of available resources. Finally, because the long-range plans offer a comprehensive, defensible vision of the properties future, they will raise awareness and support in the community; assist with local fundraising and the recruiting volunteers, and provide a solid basis for submitting applications for any grants that may become available from senior levels of government.

In our discussions with community associations, both the Lakedell Agricultural Society and the Gwynne Valley Ski Area were interested in long range plans. Assuming these associations are still interested, both are excellent candidates for this type of planning. Over time, every major municipal park and recreation facility managed by a community association should have a long range plan and no improvements or developments should be funded by the County unless they are consistent with the plan.

Recommendation 5.10: The County in conjunction with interested community associations who own and/or operate major parks and recreation facilities should prepare long range development plans for these properties.

5.2.4. Parks and Recreation Policies

Recreation Policies

Most parks and recreation departments will develop policies to guide key aspects of their recreation service delivery. Many of the customary municipal recreation policies are not in place in the County. In large part this is because facilities and services are operated by volunteer associations and, to date, the municipality's recreation role has been focused on funding these associations. While the Master Plan recommends a larger role for the County in the future, the development of recreation policies will not be a priority. The absence of policy is not a major problem at this time and was seldom identified by municipal staff or politicians as an issue for the Master Plan. In addition, policies will only be effective if embraced by the volunteer associations delivering recreation services. The Department can and should play the lead role in the development of policy, but it must be done in conjunction with the community providers. This demands a closer working relationship and a stronger partnership than is currently the case. Consequently, policies should be developed overtime as this partnership grows and as the County works with the volunteers to improve planning, enter into agreements and restructure funding as discussed previously.

While not a priority for the short-term, the following are areas where policy may be developed in the future:

- Facility allocation: A number of municipalities have adopted policies to govern access to facilities in situations where demand exceeds supply. These policies are adopted to ensure facilities are allocated in a manner that is fair and equitable but also that supports desired outcomes. This is not an issue in the County because the demand for existing facilities does not exceed supply.
- Capital conservation: These policies deal with repairs and replacement of major building components and systems due to natural aging, facility design, and construction or maintenance problems. Without a capital conservation fund, facility operators could be faced with major capital repair expenses and no resources to undertake the work. The need for capital conservation studies and facility audits was discussed earlier with respect to planning. The studies would identify the need for capital reserves on a facility and site specific basis and would be the logical first step. However, it may be prudent to adopt policies that will establish reserves in the future. Some municipalities accommodate this by ensuring a portion of fees are committed to reserves. Once established a reserve fund can

- be monitored and adjusted based on needs and assumptions concerning external sources of revenue (such as infrastructure grants).
- Safety audits: Regular safety audits of public infrastructure including community halls, recreation facilities, community parks, playground structures, and outdoor sport facilities ensure the safety of residents and limit the owner/operators exposure to undue risks. There are a number of established programs and resources for reviewing the safety of public recreation facilities. Handbooks and guidelines on the safe operation of events, especially licensed social activities, are readily available. The Canadian Safety Association has approved guidelines for inspecting play structures. Other measures to ensure safety and minimize risk, include such things as appropriate signage and staff training programs. All of these measures are customary in municipal recreation departments, but we do not know the extent to which they have been adopted by volunteer associations operating facilities. However, we understand that some customary measures to limit liability were not in place at the Winfield Arena until the Department assumed responsibility for its operation. This suggests safety audits may be issues at other facilities in the County. In the short term, these types of activities might be reflected in agreements with recreation associations and ultimately adopted as policy as a condition for municipal support and funding.
 - Pricing policies: Most municipalities will adopt user fee policies for programs and facilities that they operate and identify other approaches to enhance revenues (e.g. sponsorship, selling advertisement, etc.). These policies both provide a revenue stream to offset expenditures and help to manage operations (e.g. differential pricing to encourage use in non-prime time). Pricing policies are not currently an issue in the County. However, in the future, the Department may wish to work with recreation associations to review pricing and develop a consistent approach that maximizes revenues and the use of facilities for all operators.

Parks and Open Space Policies

Municipal policies dealing with parks and open space are largely managed by the Planning Department. The most important of these deal with parkland dedication in new subdivisions and those dealing with sensitive environmental areas such as wetlands.

Based on our review and input from Planning Department staff, current policies appear appropriate. The dedication process allows the municipality to assemble parkland, or take cash in lieu of parkland, when new subdivisions are developed. Cash payments are calculated based on the value of the land before subdivision approval and consequently yield very limited revenues. Consequently, it has been the County's practice to take land dedications. These properties are generally not developed as active parkland but rather are held as open space reserves. While this

practice appears reasonable, there is the possibility that many small parcels of land will be assembled with limited value as future parkland. This is not a problem in the County because there is an abundant supply of open space owned by the municipality and other potential partners that can meet any anticipated need for future recreation facilities. However, it would be advisable for the County to attempt to maximize the potential value of these dedications by assembling larger parcels when possible (particularly when dedications from more than one development can be located next to one another). It would also be advisable in negotiations with developers to assemble land that can function as future parkland. Relatively flat land in an appropriate configuration and without environmental constraints (poor drainage, wetlands and water courses, sensitive features etc.) would be preferred.

Recommendation 5.11: The Department should work with community associations that own and operate facilities to explore appropriate recreation policies to govern facility allocation, capital conservation, safety audits and pricing.

Recommendation 5.12: Existing park policies are appropriate and no changes are recommended at this time.

Recreation Committee Structure

As the recommendations outlined in this Chapter are implemented, they will lay the foundation for a new partnership between the community and the County and new roles and responsibilities for the Department and the Director. These changes should be reflected in a new recreation committee structure within the County.

While County bylaws identify a Recreation Advisory Board with a County wide responsibilities to which the Zone Committees report, we understand that it no longer meets and may have been disbanded. Consequently, the five Zone Committees currently constitute the formal committee structure for liaison between the municipality and community residents. However, they do not serve as a community-wide recreational advisory committee because they only address their specific zone; they are almost exclusively pre-occupied with grants²; and they have no formal connection to the Director of Leisure and Community Services. The recommended changes to the community grants program will eliminate the need for the Zone Committees as currently constituted. These might be replaced with a County-wide recreation advisory committee. The committee would have community representatives, appointed by Council, and broadly reflecting the leisure interests and various communities within the County. They would meet regularly, perhaps 4 to 6 times a year,

² While the general mandate assigned to these committees might be interpreted as promoting a broad range of recreational interests, in practice they primarily deal with grants. We understand many of these committees only meet once a year to deal with grant applications and few, if any, have an active, ongoing role in a broad range of recreational issues.

with the Director and other Department staff. Their role would be strictly advisory acting as a sounding board for the Department. The Department could ask for feedback on plans, possible projects and policies as well as updating the committee on regional or provincial recreation initiatives. The ongoing implementation of the Master Plan would be a focus of the committee's discussion. The committee could identify issues and opportunities based on their contacts in the community. They would also act as recreation ambassadors in their communities – providing information and collecting opinions.

It is our opinion that a recreation advisory committee may be a valuable replacement for the Zone Committees. However, we offer this recommendation with one qualification. These committees are only useful if they embrace their advisory role and adopt a County-wide perspective. Committees of this type require a good deal of staff time and resources and should only be considered if the benefits justify the investment.

Recommendation 5.13: The County should consider establishing a Recreation Advisory Committee to act as a resource to the Leisure and Community Services Department.

5.3. Development Strategies

5.3.1. Introduction

The development strategies describe key initiatives to be undertaken during the initial stage of the Master Plan for facilities, programming and parks. These are broad strategies, consistent with the outcomes and service delivery principles discussed in Chapter 2 and the transition from a predominately volunteer and community run recreation service to one where the County is a more active partner, as discussed above.

5.3.2. Facility Development Strategy

The Needs Assessment indicates that the supply of recreation facilities is not currently an issue in the County and given limited population growth will not be a concern during the life of the Master Plan. We have not identified a need for major capital projects.

In the short term, the priority will be on developing long range plans for existing recreational resources and redefining the County's role as a partner in facility development and funding (as discussed previously). As this relationship develops, and as long range plans are put in place, there will undoubtedly be a need for investments in parks and recreation infrastructure. Capital projects will be identified in the long range plans, but based on our needs assessment we expect these will have more to do with capital conservation and maintaining or upgrading existing facilities than building new facilities.

While building new recreation facilities will not be the focus of the recreation development strategy in the near future, there are some major challenges associated with laying the foundation for future facility developments and improvements. The most significant of these is confirming a facility model for the County.

Confirm a Future Facility Model

Social and recreation facilities in the County were developed by local residents to reflect the dispersed settlement pattern that includes many small halls. In many cases specialized, programmed facilities were developed to serve very small populations; curling rinks being the best example where facilities with 2 sheets of ice (rather than the customary minimum of 4) were provided within a 15-20 minute drive of one another. While this is not an unusual facility model in rural areas, virtually everyone providing input to the Master Plan felt it was no longer viable for the following reasons:

- No accurate information is available on the use of these facilities, although we understand many halls are used very infrequently and none of the curling rinks are used to capacity. There is no question that the social and recreational space provided by existing facilities is considerably more than is required to meet the community's needs.
- Most facilities are older buildings requiring ongoing and increasing investment to ensure they are appropriate for community use. While the extent of this possible future investment is unknown, for many buildings at some point the required investment will not be justified by the extent of community use. Changes in legislation may also impact these facilities. Very few would meet contemporary standards for full accessibility and in other jurisdictions changes to standards for serving food, occupancy levels and other considerations have rendered halls built decades ago no longer suitable for community use.
- The willingness and ability of volunteers to continue to operate these facilities is questionable.
- Finally, the adequacy of the facilities for programming is a concern. Few of the halls provide programming space that meet the standards of contemporary recreation facilities (e.g. flexible, large enough to accommodate programs with a number of active participants, with flooring, wall finishes and design, lighting and amenities such as storage, washrooms/change areas, kitchen areas to accommodate a range of activities and programs including fitness classes, dance lessons, day camps, youth drop-in activities, arts programming, social and special events, etc.). Membership based facilities, such as curling, are competing for the same participants while providing unappealing venues that cannot fully accommodate desired programs and events.

These challenges exist today and will be more pressing in the future. They indicate the need for a new facility model designed to (1) ensure an adequate supply of community programming space is available for future use in all areas of the municipality without investing scarce resources in under-utilized facilities with very limited programming potential, and (2) eliminate duplication where over-supply threatens the viability of two or more facilities in the same area. Clearly this is a major challenge because choices will need to be made about how best to invest limited resources. Difficult decisions will be required; however a pro-active approach is preferable to waiting until the condition of existing facilities deteriorate to the point they are no longer useable or volunteers are no longer available to operate them.

The County should undertake an assessment of current facilities to confirm a new facility model. The assessment should identify and designate a preferred facility in each service area to meet future recreation programming needs and, as warranted, eliminate duplication. Preferred facilities should be identified based on their location, physical condition, programming potential and community support. Criteria should be developed in the following categories for this assessment:

- Structural Condition: the estimated cost of repairing current deficiencies and maintaining the facility for community use over the next ten years
- Appropriateness for Public Use: the existence of, or cost to provide full accessibility or conform to other characteristics traditionally associated with public buildings (e.g. adequate parking; signage/visibility; security and safety of users, etc.)
- Size: the capacity of the areas available for public use
- Programming Potential: the range of community uses and programming that can be accommodated based on such considerations as ceiling height; design and coverings of floors and walls; amenities such as storage, change areas, food service, etc.
- Accessibility: both geographically to the proposed service area and for community use during day, evenings and weekends
- Volunteer Management: the existence, capabilities and willingness of a volunteer management group to operate the facility and potentially to take on greater use

The goal of this exercise is to ensure the best facility for programming is identified and that all County residents have reasonable accessibility to facilities. This will likely lead to the identification of recreational nodes centred on existing major facilities along the Highway 13 corridor. While the size of the County results in very long distances between settlement areas in the east and west, the configuration allows most residents to be within a 20 minute drive³ of recreation facilities. The designation of facilities will help to ensure reasonable access to a significant recreational node for all County residents.

³ See drive time analysis in Chapter 4 for further discussion.

While in many cases the designated facility will probably be an existing community hall or space associated with recreation facilities on agricultural society properties, it could be another community resource, such as a school, as long as community access is guaranteed. This assessment would identify a preferred strategy to ensure the community had adequate long-term access to recreational programming space. If existing facilities controlled by other agencies, such as school boards, are the preferred approach to meeting the need for program space in some areas, improved partnerships agreements with the County will be required.

The preferred facility based on this assessment should be identified as the area's designated community centre. The County should support the designated facilities with investments in their upkeep and other support to enhance their viability. Facilities that are not sustainable based on the physical condition and community support, or that are not required based on the availability of superior resources in the immediate vicinity, should be given a lower priority for municipal funding. Designated facilities should be eligible for enhanced funding (if required to support the physical structure or upgrades) and the volunteers should be targeted for assistance to ensure that they can continue to operate these facilities.

Recommendation 5.14: The Department should confirm a future facility model to eliminate duplication of facilities and to ensure that all areas have access to appropriate space for social and recreational activities. The plan developed in conjunction with the volunteer organizations responsible for the management of recreation facilities, community centres and halls will designate specific facilities as those best able to meet the community's long term needs. Designated facilities should be given priority for future municipal funding and the Department should work closely with the volunteer groups responsible for their operation to ensure their continued viability.

5.3.3. Program Development Strategy

Municipal Programming Role

The Master Plan recommends the Department strengthen its relationship with the volunteer sector and expand its community development functions to develop community capacity and ensure leisure services are effectively delivered through the efforts of community volunteers. When fulfilling these functions, the Department is facilitating the provision of recreation programs rather than acting as the direct provider. As a facilitator, the Department supports the efforts of community volunteers and other agencies that provide recreation programs and activities of interest to the community. This is an appropriate role for the Department in the vast majority of community programming.

There are, however, situations where the Department might assume a direct programming role. In these cases, the Department would assume responsibility for all aspects of a program including design, delivery, staffing and evaluation. Direct program delivery would be appropriate if:

- There is an immediate need to respond to continually high levels of community demand and no other provider is available
- For reasons of liability or required skills the Department is the preferred program provider;
- Programs contribute to important or essential outcomes that are not being met through other providers - such as preventative health and wellness or safety (e.g., learn to swim, water safety, life skills)
- Through direct program delivery, the County can realize revenues that can be used to offset the cost of programs requiring a subsidy

Currently, the Department does very little programming of any type; the exception being the recent swim program they organized and administered. While this was an important and very well received activity, given the resources required for direct programming and the need to significantly expand community development activities, direct programs should not be the Department's priority.

Recommendation 5.15: The Department's primary programming role should be to act as a facilitator and support the efforts of community volunteers who will take a lead role in the development of community programming. The facilitator role will be focused on the community development activities outlined in this report.

Recommendation 5.16: The Department should only act as a direct program provider where there is no other qualified or willing provider, essential outcomes can only be achieved through direct provision and/or revenues can be realized to offset subsidies for other programs. Direct programming should be a low priority until community development activities are significantly expanded.

Maximize the Use of Existing Facilities

Existing community facilities, including community halls, multipurpose space in Agricultural Society facilities and other indoor spaces available throughout the County are not well used and expanding the programming at these locations should be an immediate priority.

The consultation process identified general support for an expanded range of community programming, including a broader range of leisure, recreation, arts and cultural activities to meet a wide range of needs and make better use of existing facilities. The new position of Community Developer/Programmer should work with local volunteers, local program providers and other

community agencies and partners to provide programming at the community halls and indoor spaces in the County.

Recommendation 5.17: The new Community Development/Program Position should plan and promote an expanded range of programs and activities to make better use of community halls and other indoor and outdoor spaces throughout the County.

New Regional Program Development

County residents currently make extensive use of recreational resources in adjoining communities. The County has agreements with both the City of Wetaskiwin and the Town of Millet for access to indoor aquatic and arena facilities and residents use these facilities. Survey responses also indicate that over 75% of residents are users of recreation facilities in the Town of Millet, the City of Wetaskiwin or other neighbouring municipalities.

While County residents have clearly embraced a regional recreation system, and this is reflected in the funding agreements with the City and Millet, there is very little contact among recreation departments around programming. In part this can be attributed to the very limited recreational role the County has played in the past. However, with the hiring of the Director and the recommendations of the Master Plan, this will change and the County can engage its neighbouring municipalities in stronger programming partnerships. The nature of these partnerships will develop over time. At the simplest level, it could involve joint publicity and promotion of programming. Beyond joint promotion, arrangements could be made to facilitate registrations or programs could be offered at locations outside of the host community. Regional special events could be organized. Unique resources in the County, such as the Gwynne Valley Ski Area or recreational trails, might become programming venues for neighbouring municipalities.

Regional programming offers a number of benefits to all parties, including a richer and more extensive supply of activities, enhanced revenues, more efficient use of under-utilized resources, opportunities to avoid duplication and offer more successful programs. The benefits of a regional approach can also extend to other departmental functions – such as shared training sessions for staff.

Recommendation 5.18: The Department should explore opportunities to offer programs in partnership with Recreation Departments in adjoining municipalities.

Marketing and Communications

Marketing and communication was a common theme in the consultation process. It was frequently mentioned as a limitation by those interviewed and about 55% of survey respondents reporting they are “not always aware of the programs and services that are available in the County”. While higher levels of familiarity were reported by survey respondents with facilities and programs in their local area, awareness does appear to be an issue.

In the short term, the County website would appear to be the best opportunity to address this limitation. Most of the information currently available on the website are simple inventories (e.g. lists of campgrounds, agricultural society facilities; libraries, etc.) and contact information for various community groups. In addition, residents can access a list of regional programs through a link to the Community Events Magazine and download selected municipal policies (e.g. the policy governing grants). Useful information is available on the website, but there are three key limitations.

First, the information is difficult to find and there is no one starting place for recreation services to be found. Information is accessed under multiple headings such as, departments, living in the community, and visiting.

Second, while information is provided, there is little that would engage an individual or encourage them to contact the Department.

Finally, the focus is on information instead of marketing and promotion. Much more could be done to enter into a dialogue with the community to promote recreation services (e.g. information encouraging people to adopt healthy lifestyles; to volunteer with a community organization; to take advantage of regional recreation opportunities, etc.).

Ideally the County’s website would have a page dedicated to the Leisure and Community Services Department, perhaps with a message from the Department’s Director; a description of the Department’s primary responsibilities; and a list of staff. The recreation page should bring together the following basic information:

- A map of the County showing the location of parks and facilities
- A list of programs offered by volunteer organizations
- Programs and activities offered by other community organizations and other providers, such as a local theatre group or heritage association. These listings could also include the commercial sector (e.g., a private dance school), preferably on a cost recovery basis.

- Identification of the local community and recreation associations and opportunities to become involved with the associations
- Opportunities and encouragement to volunteer for recreation programs
- Information on special events and other community activities
- Key contacts for information

The website should also be more interactive – inviting residents to ask questions; offer comments and otherwise become engaged with the Department. We note that youth identified social media as a preferred means of communication with the Department. Use of graphics could make the page much more appealing. The page should include easy-to-navigate, informative links to key facilities in the County as well as links to regional recreation departments and to copies of brochures and schedules.

In the short term, the website is the most appropriate venue for providing this information. In the longer term as programming expands, the publication of a simple program brochure should be considered.

In addition, the Director should assume a larger role in ongoing communication with recreation authorities in adjoining municipalities. County residents will continue to rely on facilities and programs in other communities for their recreation services during the period of the Master Plan. It is important therefore that opportunities to serve County residents be fully explored and any issues be resolved. This could involve a number of activities, including ensuring County residents are familiar with services available to them in surrounding communities, regional program development as discussed earlier, and representing the County in discussions concerning joint developments or regional planning and special events, etc.

Recommendation 5.19: The Department should expand its communication activities via the County website to inform local residents about upcoming program opportunities and events.

Recommendation 5.20: The Director should maintain regular contact with municipal recreation staff in adjoining municipalities and with other recreation providers to explore issues and opportunities of relevance to the County.

5.3.4. Parks and Open Space Development Strategy

Recreational Trails Master Plan

As noted in the Needs Assessment, the demand for an expanded supply of recreational trails was the single most significant facility request emerging from the community consultations. Currently, there are a number of informal trail opportunities in the County but these are often not well

publicized and community use is probably limited. We note that only one trail system was listed in the inventory of County recreational resources (the CPR Canyon Hiking Trail) but that a number of other trail locations were mentioned in our interviews with community residents. In addition, while there appear to be some community groups that have assumed responsibility for the maintenance and management of these trails (e.g. the Kisko Trail Society; Rose Creek Trails), this is not always the case and the County has no relationship with these volunteers. The quality of existing trails, and perhaps more importantly, the opportunities to develop new trails on municipal open space reserves, or other lands that could be used for this purpose, are therefore not known.

While the public interest in trails is clear, the best way to respond to this requires additional investigation. A Recreational Trails Master Plan should be prepared for this purpose. The following items should be addressed in the Plan:

- An inventory of existing trails and any available information of use and management
- An audit of municipal or other publicly accessible properties that may be informally used for trails or may have potential
- An assessment of existing and potential trails to determine their physical condition; trail opportunities and constraints; recreational potential; possible links to other trails or recreational resources; regional trail links, etc.
- The identification of possible trail developments and their relative priorities
- Preliminary costing for trail development and possible funding sources
- A proposed management and maintenance strategy, including the roles that might be adopted by community volunteers and the municipality
- An implementation strategy

The County should explore the support that may be available from provincial organizations (such as Alberta Trail Net) for trail planning and development.

Recommendation 5.21: The County should prepare a Recreational Trails Master Plan to confirm the opportunities, potential costs and management approaches for an expanded recreational trails network.

Campground Strategy

The County operates seven campgrounds. These are of varying size and quality with different visitor amenities. While the number of visitors varies among the campgrounds, they are generally well used and were positively evaluated by stakeholders interviewed for the Master Plan. Taken together, the campgrounds generate a small surplus in revenues. There were no major issues identified with respect to the campgrounds and they likely could continue to operate as they now do for the period of the Master Plan. However, the future of these campgrounds, and their possible contribution to County economic development objectives, may warrant further consideration.

Currently the campgrounds play a role as local recreational resources, but with between 70-90% of visitors from outside of the County, they also contribute to tourism. Many of the visitors are likely from the immediate area and often use the campgrounds in association with other events, such as rodeos. Differing opinions were expressed concerning these roles. Some felt that the current role was appropriate with a mix of local resident use complemented by a relatively low key role in accommodating visitors. Others felt that the campgrounds, if improved and appropriately marketed, could play a much more significant role in the local economy by attracting tourists.

The role of the campgrounds should be clarified by Council. If they are seen primarily as a resource for recreational tourism and a potential revenue generator for the County, a strategy to maximize their contribution should be prepared. This would involve two major steps: (1) Master plans are required for each site to determine the potential for expansion or redevelopment to better use existing resources and to assess environmental constraints and opportunities. This assessment may indicate that some of the campgrounds are not candidates for upgrades or further development as recreational tourism resources. (2) For sites that have potential for improvements, a business plan should be prepared to determine an operating and marketing strategy; pricing and occupancy policies; revenue potential and costs.

Recommendation 5.22: If Council believes the municipal campgrounds should play a more significant role as recreational tourism resources, site development and business plans should be prepared to further this objective.

Ongoing Parkland Improvement Program

The Master Plan did not include an assessment and evaluation of individual parks to identify possible upgrades and improvements. The supply of parkland was not a major issue and the quality of the parks was generally not a concern for residents. Consequently, parks improvement strategy is a low priority. However, based on visits to some parks and open space areas, we are of the opinion that the following issues may warrant attention:

- Possible safety issues such as poorly maintained equipment, lack of signage restricting park use or warning of the dangers, etc.
- Natural resource areas or existing vegetation that may deteriorate if improvements are not undertaken. Defining areas for community use and prohibiting inappropriate uses will protect natural resources
- Lack of amenities that support casual park use, such as areas for socializing with adequate and appropriate park furniture, shaded seating areas, well defined parking areas, etc.

- Need for signage that clearly identifies all municipal parks in a consistent manner and encourages community use and enjoyment of these resources

These items should be addressed in the long range plans that are prepared for recreation properties, as recommended earlier. They might also be addressed through the community grants program. While not an immediate priority, the Department should explore these issues with the non-municipal owners of parks and open space areas and address them over time. The Department should also address these issues in municipally owned and operated parks and open space areas, including the campgrounds.

Recommendation 5.23: The County should adopt a long-range strategy for the continuous improvement of parks and open space areas.

6.0 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

An implementation strategy for the study has been provided in Table 6.1. For each recommendation, the figure lists priorities and where relevant and feasible, estimated costs.

Table 6.1 indicates general priorities for the key directions. Those that address an immediate need or correct a current problem are high priorities (H) and should be acted upon immediately. Medium (M) priorities should be addressed in the next three years. Low (L) priorities deal with long-range needs or are policy issues that can be addressed over time, but most should be in place within 5-7 years and all within the 15-year time frame of the Master Plan. In a few cases, the recommendations involve ongoing planning or monitoring activities that will continue through the study's timeframe and beyond. These are not assigned a priority but are identified as Ongoing (O).

In a number of cases we have identified recommendations where external assistance could be retained to assist with implementation. Consulting budgets have been identified in these cases and consideration should be given to using consultants to ensure the work can be completed in a timely fashion.

The cost estimates are very general estimates to be confirmed with further study. Land acquisition costs are not included in these estimates. All costs exclude grants, community fund-raising or other contributions.

Table 6.1: Implementation of Recommendations

Implementation Strategy			
Recommendation	Estimated Cost	Priority	Comments
<p>Recommendation 3.1: County Council should confirm the Outcomes and preferred Recreation Service Delivery Model as appropriate guides for future decision-making regarding capital investments and County roles and responsibilities for parks and recreation services.</p>	Council responsibility	H	These are the guiding principles for the Master Plan and should be endorsed when the Plan is approved by Council
<p>Recommendation 5.1: The County, through the Leisure and Community Services Department, should work more closely with volunteers and provide additional support for core functions such as planning, community outreach, training, liaison, information and referral services, and program support.</p>	Staff responsibility	H	While we have identified this as a high priority because it is the principal direction for the plan, these initiatives will continue over the life of the Master Plan.
<p>Recommendation 5.2: The County should create a new position within the Leisure and Community Services Department of Community Developer/Programmer.</p>	\$55,000 annually	H	Many of the community development and programming recommendations in the Master Plan are not possible until this staff position is put in place.
<p>Recommendation 5.3: The Community Developer/Programmer should be a full time position reporting to the Director of Leisure and Community Services.</p>	Council responsibility	H	

<p>Recommendation 5.4: Council should endorse a comprehensive role in support of volunteers for the Leisure and Community Services Department that focuses on both volunteer assistance and community development.</p>	<p>Council responsibility</p>	<p>H</p>	
<p>Recommendation 5.5: The Department should expand volunteer assistance and community development activities.</p>	<p>Staff responsibility</p>	<p>O</p>	
<p>Recommendation 5.6: The County should consider adopting an agreement with volunteer associations who own and/or operate community recreation infrastructure to clarify the roles and responsibilities of both parties in the partnership.</p>	<p>Staff responsibility</p>	<p>M</p>	<p>This is not an immediate need but should be pursued as the Department develops a closer working relationship with the volunteer associations. Agreement issues that deal with safety and liability should be addressed as a priority.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5.7: The County should prepare a Community Funding Policy to replace the current practice of allocating funds by Zone Committees. This should be a comprehensive policy that reflects the variety of projects that may require funding; adopts an appropriate range of tools to provide financial support; and where specified eligibility criteria are met, ensure resources are committed to the priority recreation needs.</p>	<p>Council/Staff responsibility \$20,000</p>	<p>M</p>	<p>Primarily a staff responsibility. Budget assumes assistance from a consultant familiar with similar policies who would act as an advisor.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5.8: The County should adopt the procedures required to generate a database for long-range planning of facilities, programs, and services; performance measures tied to the Master Plan outcomes; and ongoing information collection procedures to evaluate services for users and program participants.</p>	<p>Staff responsibility</p>	<p>M-L</p>	

Recommendation 5.9: The County should update the Recreation Master Plan every five years.	\$75,000.	M	Assumes the work is done by a consultant and that the Department has in place the planning data base recommended above.
Recommendation 5.10: The County in conjunction with interested community associations who own and/or operate major parks and recreation facilities should prepare long range development plans for these properties.	\$35-50,000/property	M-L	This is a general budget estimate assuming consultants are retained to do the work. The actual budget will depend on the scope of work.
Recommendation 5.11: The Department should work with community associations that own and operate facilities to explore appropriate recreation policies to govern facility allocation, capital conservation, safety audits and pricing.	Staff responsibility \$20,000	M-L	Primarily a staff responsibility. Budget assumes some assistance from a consultant familiar with similar policies who would act as an advisor.
Recommendation 5.12: Existing park policies are appropriate and no changes are recommended at this time.		O	
Recommendation 5.13: The County should consider establishing a Recreation Advisory Committee to act as a resource to the Leisure and Community Services Department.	Council and Staff Responsibility	M	

<p>Recommendation 5.14: The Department should confirm a future facility model to eliminate duplication of facilities and to ensure that all areas have access to appropriate space for social and recreational activities. The plan developed in conjunction with the volunteer organizations responsible for the management of recreation facilities, community centres and halls will designate specific facilities as those best able to meet the community's long term needs. Designated facilities should be given priority for future municipal funding and the Department should work closely with the volunteer groups responsible for their operation to ensure their continued viability.</p>	<p>Staff Responsibility</p>	<p>M</p>	
<p>Recommendation 5.15: The Department's primary programming role should be to act as a facilitator and support the efforts of community volunteers who will take a lead role in the development of community programming. The facilitator role will be focused on the community development activities outlined in this report.</p>	<p>Staff responsibility</p>	<p>O</p>	
<p>Recommendation 5.16: The Department should only act as a direct program provider where there is no other qualified or willing provider, essential outcomes can only be achieved through direct provision and/or revenues can be realized to offset subsidies for other programs. Direct programming should be a low priority until community development activities are significantly expanded</p>	<p>Staff responsibility</p>	<p>O</p>	

<p>Recommendation 5.17: The new Community Development/Program Position should plan and promote an expanded range of programs and activities to make better use of community halls and other indoor and outdoor spaces throughout the County.</p>	<p>Staff responsibility</p>	<p>O</p>	<p>This activity should start immediately but it is an ongoing responsibility and presumably programming will expand over time.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5.18: The Department should explore opportunities to offer programs in partnership with Recreation Departments in adjoining municipalities.</p>	<p>Staff responsibility</p>	<p>O</p>	
<p>Recommendation 5.19: The Department should expand its communication activities via the County website to inform local residents about upcoming program opportunities and events.</p>	<p>Staff Responsibility</p>	<p>M</p>	
<p>Recommendation 5.20: The Director should maintain regular contact with municipal recreation staff in adjoining municipalities and with other recreation providers to explore issues and opportunities of relevance to the County.</p>	<p>Staff Responsibility</p>	<p>H</p>	<p>The County should adopt a regional perspective on recreation services and ensure County staff work closely and cooperatively with their counterparts in neighbouring municipalities.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5.21: The County should prepare a Recreational Trails Master Plan to confirm the opportunities, potential costs and management approaches for an expanded recreational trails network.</p>	<p>\$75,000</p>	<p>M</p>	<p>Assumes a consultant is retained for the work.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5.22: If Council believes the municipal campgrounds should play a more significant role as recreational tourism resources, site development and business plans should be prepared to further this objective.</p>	<p>To be determined</p>	<p>L</p>	<p>This study would involve consultants with expertise in environmental reviews and carrying capacities, and with campground operations. The cost will depend on the information available on current site conditions and the number of campgrounds involved in the assessment.</p>

Recommendation 5.23: The County should adopt a long-range strategy for the continuous improvement of parks and open space areas.	To be determined	L	Costs will be determined on a site specific basis.
---	------------------	---	--