

## Background

During the 2017 budget deliberations, means testing and subsidy programs were discussed in the areas of recreation and transit services. At the December 6, 2016, Finance & Administration Committee, Council requested a report on means testing and subsidies for City of Greater Sudbury (City) programs. An overview of current means testing and subsidy programs was requested to be included as part of the report. The report would also provide a framework that could be applied to all programs and services offered by the City.

At the City Council meeting of November 22, 2017, Council received a report titled Affordable Access Conceptual Framework. The report provided an overview of affordable access to programs and services within the Community Development Department, as well as an overview of best practices from other municipalities and associations with respect to means testing and program subsidies.

The report identified the following principle statements to be used with future development of an affordable access strategy:

- Availability of universal, free programs and services to children, youth, seniors, individuals and families.
- Where program subsidies are implemented, the City will utilize the Low Income Cut-off/Low Income Measure (LICO/LIM) means testing to determine eligibility.
- Programs will contribute to maximizing use of underutilized facilities, programs and services.
- Subsidy programs will not stigmatize individuals participating.
- The City will develop public promotions to better inform residents regarding universal and program subsidies.
- Services will be responsive to the City's Diversity Policy and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.
- The City will engage and collaborate with community partners to develop, enhance and promote policies and affordable programs.
- Programs initiated will be sustainable.
- Affordable programs will be monitored upon implementation for the purposes of reporting and exploring opportunities to build on success, value for money.
- The City will adopt/make use of technology and/or systems that maximize efficiencies, accessibility, and flexibility (for recipients and administrators).
- Performance standards and program review will ensure success.

A report on affordable access to recreation was to be brought forward prior to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2018.

## Analysis

### Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan Review (2014)

The City's Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan Review states that access to affordable and high quality leisure programs is an essential component of a healthy community. Through the online survey completed for the Master Plan, 23% of local residents disagreed with the statement that "Leisure activities in Greater Sudbury are generally affordable to your household", indicating that there are many households that find it difficult to afford program fees and equipment/travel costs.

The Master Plan included the following action plans related to affordable access to recreation:

- Formalize the Affordable Access to Recreation policy in order to bolster universal access to physical activity and recreation opportunities.
- Build on the existing program offerings to maximize opportunities for free access to municipal facilities (for all age groups) where expenses would be neutral (e.g. drop-in programs, open gym, open houses at fitness facilities, public skating/swimming, etc.). In doing so, create pilot program opportunities at municipal facilities to evaluate public interest and to further evaluate the net budget impact. Explore funding opportunities to cover cost for wages, benefits, etc.
- Create and maintain an updated list of agencies that fund and/or provide subsidies, in order to refer citizens that require financial assistance to participate in municipal recreational programs.
- Build on the community mapping initiative (GIS and online) to identify leisure facilities and programs that are free to the community.
- Develop a communication strategy and create a brand for affordable access that could be incorporated within the City's Healthy Community initiative.
- Encourage all agencies and leisure organizations to be advocates by recognizing, celebrating, and advertising their support towards affordable access.

### Parks and Recreation Ontario – Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians

Parks and Recreation Ontario has produced a Policy Development and Implementation Guide for Communities regarding affordable access to recreation. This resource provides communities and organizations with strategies to increase access and examples of other policies and programs.

The Policy and Implementation Guide includes the following fundamental policy objectives:

- Access Policies – Municipal and community delivery organizations establish Affordable Access Policies to ensure individuals that face income barriers have equitable opportunities to participate.
- Core Set of Free, Universal Programs – Communities identify a core set of recreation programs that will be universally available to children, youth, individuals and families and offer these programs without a user fee.

The guide also suggests the following policy strategies for communities to advance affordable access to recreation:

- Community Access to Community Space – Maximize affordable access to community space that can be used for formal and informal recreation activities.
- Partnership and Collaboration – Establish community-based partnerships that will determine how to make affordable access to recreation a reality in communities.
- Targeted Community Outreach and Engagement – Build awareness among marginalized populations of benefits of recreation, affordable programs, and provide opportunities for community engagement in program design and delivery.

#### Municipal Best Practices

Municipalities across Ontario have adopted formal affordable access to recreation strategies and policies. Many municipalities have established fee assistance programs to allow individuals to access programs and services where user fees are a barrier. Typically, fee assistance policies provide a credit for qualifying individuals to be applied towards municipal recreation programs, memberships, etc. It is common practice for municipalities to establish a fund which is used for the purpose of providing financial assistance to low-income individuals. Among municipalities researched, annual credits ranged from \$100 to \$300 for each qualifying individual.

The following are examples of universal programs offered at no cost by Ontario municipalities:

- Free sport development introductory programs.
- Cultural programs in targeted communities.
- Youth drop-in programs.
- Free universal summer playground programs.
- Community events, concerts and festivals.
- Family fitness classes.

Municipalities across Ontario have achieved community access of community space through the following strategies:

- Establishment of reciprocal agreements with local school boards.
- Setting Community Group rental rates for all facilities at a reduced rate so that fees are not a barrier to programming and participation.
- Ensuring the availability of passive and open spaces.
- Formal partnerships with a variety of stakeholders that facilitate affordable access to spaces and recreation programming.

## Current Status

The following is a summary of current universal programs, subsidy programs and means testing with respect to affordable access to recreation at the City of Greater Sudbury:

### Access Policies

The City does not currently have a policy established so that individuals facing income barriers have equitable opportunities to participate. The City is not currently conducting means testing for recreation programs and services.

Residents inquiring about program subsidies are referred to local community agencies including JumpStart, the Sudbury Manitoulin Children's Foundation and the Human League of Sudbury.

### Core Set of Free Universal Programs

The Feel Free to Feel Fit program provides free public swimming once per week at municipal pool locations. Since the program's inception in 2009, there have been approximately 10,000 participants taking part annually.

Older Adults (individuals age 65 and over) are offered free public skating. The City also provides discounted access to public swimming, public skating and downhill skiing on Family Day. These rates are captured in the City's Miscellaneous User Fee By-Law. During the 2016-2017 skating season, 158 Older Adult season skating passes were issued.

The City also has a number of facilities and recreation opportunities that are universal and free of charge including access to 55 outdoor rinks, the Ramsey Lake skating path, Queens Skating Oval, 7 supervised beaches, 10 splash pads, 173 kilometers of non-motorized trails, 8 skate parks and 5 youth drop-in centres.

The City was one of 45 communities selected by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) to receive funding to implement the Healthy Kids Community Challenge (HKCC). The City receives \$375,000 per year to implement programs and activities related to children's healthy eating and physical activity. Many of the programs through HKCC have provided universal recreation programs and activities. The HKCC is a three year initiative incorporating four themes which will be ending in September 2018.

Through the Ontario Sport and Recreation Communities Fund (OSRCF), the City received funding for the Feel Free to Have a Ball project. In 2014-2015, the project provided three, eight-week sessions teaching physical literacy to over 900 children ages 6-9 years through conventional and emerging sports.

### Community Access to Community Space

As per Miscellaneous User Fee By-Law, the City allows any non-profit group to use meeting rooms and community halls at no charge for the purposes of a meeting. In addition, non-profit groups are entitled to one free community hall rental per calendar

year for an event that is outside the definition of a meeting (fundraisers, dances, holiday events, large scale events related to tournaments or other leisure activities).

#### Partnership and Collaboration

The City of Greater Sudbury is a member of the Greater Sudbury Physical Activity and Recreation Roundtable, a partnership among local community agencies that strive to promote access to physical activity and recreation. The roundtable is comprised of professionals from public health, recreation, healthcare, education, not-for-profit and social service organizations.

#### Targeted Outreach and Communication

In 2012, the City produced the Feel Free to Feel Fit Healthy Community Maps. The maps provide a visual snapshot of the sport and leisure activities available in neighbourhoods. In addition to being made available on-line, the maps were produced in a book format and made available to social assistance recipients.

As part of the City of Greater Sudbury website redevelopment, affordable fun activities are featured prominently providing residents with information about no cost and low cost activities and recreation opportunities.

The City also produces the Seniors Active Living Guide on a quarterly basis. This publication provides information about low and no cost activities for older adults. The publication is circulated to locations such as local senior's centres, retirement homes, and public libraries.

## **City of Greater Sudbury Affordable Access to Recreation Strategy**

Using the principles established by the City for affordable access policies and the policy strategies established by Parks and Recreation Ontario, the following action items are recommended to be incorporated as part of the City's Affordable Access to Recreation Strategy:

#### Establishment of an Affordable Access Policy & Fee Assistance Fund

Research confirms that one of the primary barriers to participation in recreation courses or memberships is user fees. To date, low income individuals interested in City programs or activities with user fees associated have been referred to third parties for fee assistance (Human League of Canada, Sudbury Manitoulin Children's Foundation, etc.)

It is recommended that the City establish a fee assistance fund for low income individuals wanting to participate in recreation activities where user fees are a barrier. An annual credit of \$200 per calendar year is recommended to all individuals as per the Low Income Cut Off (after tax). An initial annual budget of \$175,000 for fee assistance is suggested. The budget estimate is based on applying the percentage of unique individuals currently accessing City programs (7.9%) to the number of LICO (after tax) individuals in Greater Sudbury (11,095).

The City's fee assistance policy would include:

- All Greater Sudbury residents with a total net individual or combined family income below LICO (after-tax) qualify.
- Maximum fee assistance is \$200 per individual per calendar year.
- Financial assistance is available for recreation programs, activities or memberships provided by the City with the exception of personal training and private lessons.
- To ensure for confidentiality, the City's Social Services Division will administer the fee assistance program.
- The process of obtaining financial assistance will be non-intrusive and respect an individual's dignity and confidentiality.
- The City will report back annually on the fee assistance program as part of budget deliberations.

#### The Development of Additional Universal Recreation Programs

The following rationale for universal recreation programming from Parks and Recreation Ontario's Policy Development and Implementation Guide for Communities demonstrates the importance of universal programs:

"Ideally, all types of recreation would be available to everyone at no cost. This is unrealistic today and the negative, unintentional consequence of rising user fees has been marginalization of those who cannot afford these fees. Evidence-based research provides a strong argument for the sector to reverse this trend. The goal is to identify those program opportunities which align with the social determinants of health and quality of life indicators, and those that support positive social and physical development and provincial policy priorities. These are the kinds of publicly-funded programs that constitute an essential, core activity and should be available to everyone to ensure the healthy development of individuals and to enhance the overall quality of life within the community. As an essential service, these programs must be funded 100% and offered at no cost so that financial status does not determine who does and who does not participate."

The City currently offers a variety of facilities and programs at no charge. It is recommended that the following universal programs be considered to expand the no cost offerings available to residents:

#### **Feel Free to Skate**

Building on the success of the Feel Free to Swim program, it is recommended that user fees associated with public skating, adult skating and parent & tot skating programs be eliminated. The City will provide a minimum of one skating program at each of the community arenas on a weekly basis. As the Skate Exchange program, hosted by the City and the Public Health Sudbury & Districts already exists, the barrier of a lack of equipment is also mitigated. It is estimated that the annual impact would be \$20,000 due to foregone public skating revenues.

### **Expansion of the Saturday Morning Sports Program**

Through the 2018 Budget Process, Council approved funding in the amount of \$12,000 annually for the Percy Playground Sports Program. This program provides a weekly drop in opportunity for children and youth to learn fundamental movement skills and get an introduction to a variety of sports. As part of the program, children and youth in the area have opportunities to learn and play sports such as hockey, football, basketball, etc. with instruction provided by local sporting clubs at no charge. This program also builds on the success of the Feel Free to Have a Ball funded program that the City hosted in 2014-2015.

It is recommended that the program be expanded to six additional sites throughout Greater Sudbury at an estimated annual cost of \$72,000. The program would be introduced to priority neighbourhoods based on socioeconomic factors.

### **Introduction of Two New No Cost Family Festivals**

One of the largest successes of the Healthy Kids Community Challenge has been the annual Snow Day event at Bell Park. Snow Day is an excellent example of a no cost event which brings together all residents to celebrate the many seasonal activities that showcases the quality of life and place in Greater Sudbury. Council had approved annual funding for Snow Day in the amount of \$15,000 through prior budget deliberations.

It is recommended that two additional no cost family events be introduced, one in the spring season and the other in the fall. These events could be rotated to other regional parks across Greater Sudbury. The events would feature seasonal activities for families at no cost. Activities would include seasonal sports, entertainment, free transit, games, crafts, etc. modeled after the success of Snow Day. The estimated annual budget required for the introduction of two new family events is \$30,000 annually.

### **Community Access to Community Space**

One of the principles under the City's conceptual framework for affordable access strategies is to maximize the utilization of underutilized facilities. The following initiatives are recommended to provide further community access to municipal facilities:

### **Expansion of Indoor Walking Program at Community Halls**

In 2017, the City made available indoor walking opportunities at community halls located at Centennial, Dr. Edgar Leclair, Garson and TM Davies Community Centres. There was no operational impact with the introduction of these programs, as staffing was already in place.

It is recommended that the program be expanded to community halls located at the Capreol, Chelmsford, Onaping and McClelland Community Centres. The estimated budget impact associated with additional staffing required is \$5,000 based on walking program hosted twice per week from November through March.

### **Making Community Centres Available for Older Adult Groups at No Cost**

The Seniors Advisory Panel through the Age Friendly Strategy has identified access to municipal spaces for older adults as an action item for the City. It is recommended that

the City provide access to underutilized community halls to organized seniors and older adult organizations offering free programming. As an example, the Greater Sudbury Pickleball Association has inquired about utilizing community halls. Organizations would be required to provide proof of insurance. There would be some additional staffing hours required for tasks such as cleaning and the estimated annual impact would be \$2,500.

### **Ensure Leased Facilities Provide Affordable Access Opportunities**

The City leases a space to a number of community organizations which provide recreation and leisure activities. When finalizing the lease agreement with the Northern Water Sports Centre, language was included to ensure that universal and low cost programs were offered as well as ensuring there was community access to space. It is recommended that as lease agreements with municipal facilities are considered or renegotiated, that affordable access language is included in all agreements.

### Partnerships and Collaboration

In order to advance affordable access to recreation strategies in the community, the following actions are recommended:

### **Strengthen Relationships with Other Funding Agencies**

In order to ensure that residents are aware of other potential subsidies available, it is recommended that relationships be advanced with Canadian Tire Jumpstart, the Sudbury Manitoulin Children's Foundation and the Human League of Sudbury. It is further recommended that City staff be educated about referrals available and that this information is listed on the City website.

### **Greater Sudbury Physical Activity and Recreation Roundtable**

It is recommended that the City take a lead role in reconvening the Greater Sudbury Physical Activity and Recreation Roundtable to ensure that other associations and organizations are following the City's lead in advancing affordable access to recreation.

## Summary of Recommended Affordable Access to Recreation Strategies with Estimated Costs

Program Description	Estimated Annual Cost
Establishment of a Fee Assistance Program	\$175,000
Feel Free To Skate (Free Public Skating)	\$20,000
Expansion of Saturday Morning Sport Camps	\$72,000
Introduction of Spring & Fall No Cost Family Special Events	\$30,000
Additional Community Access to Community Space (expansion of indoor walking program & older adult group access)	\$7,500
Total	\$304,500

### Summary

Affordable access to recreation strategies ensure that the inability to pay is not a barrier for those wishing to participate in leisure and recreation activities. Numerous municipalities in Ontario have adopted policies and strategies to advance affordable access to recreation in their communities.

As part of the City's Implementation Plan for the 2015-2018 Corporate Strategic Plan, one of the actions included was to explore the expansion of healthy initiatives such as the Feel Free to Feel Fit Swim Program. Council further directed staff to develop an Affordable Access to Recreation Strategy during 2017 budget deliberations.

The strategies outlined in this report ensure that children, families and seniors have the ability to access City programs and facilities where ability to pay was previously a barrier.

### Next Steps

Upon Council's approval, business cases associated with affordable access to recreation strategies will be submitted for consideration as part of the 2019 budget process.

Feel Free to Skate and additional indoor walking opportunities will be introduced as a pilot program for the period September through December 2018, and funded by funds previously committed for population health initiatives.

## References

Healthy Kids Community Challenge – Year Three Update, Community Services Committee (May 14, 2018)

<http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=feed&action=file&agenda=report&itemid=8&id=1262>

Affordable Access Conceptual Framework, City Council (November 22, 2017)

<http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=feed&action=file&agenda=report&itemid=29&id=1137>

Population Health – Community Priorities, City Council (November 22, 2017)

<http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=feed&action=file&agenda=report&itemid=30&id=1137>

Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians – Policy Development and Implementation Guide for Communities, Parks and Recreation Ontario

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Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families Report – Promising Practices Guide, Parks and Recreation Ontario

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