



# REVIEW OF MUNICIPAL RECREATION FACILITIES AND PROGRAMMING

MUNICIPALITY OF WESTLAKE-GLADSTONE

September 2023

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2022, the Municipality of Westlake-Gladstone (the “Municipality” or “Westlake-Gladstone”) engaged BDO Canada LLP (“BDO”) to review its governance and administration of the recreational programming portfolio. The broad objective of this review was to support the Municipality ongoing efforts to improve the quality of recreational services available to its residents. This project was fully funded through Province of Manitoba’s Municipal Services Delivery Improvement Program (“MSDIP”).

Throughout the report detailed recommendations have been provided. Below is a summary of the key findings and recommendations by each section:

#	FINDING	RECOMMENDATIONS
1	Collaborative policies for the governance of recreational facilities are absent	It is recommended that the Municipality implement policies on providing grants and levies. In addition, the recreational facilities should implement policies for financial resource management.
2	Recreational facility financial information is insufficient.	It is recommended that policies, templates, tools and training be developed to support the systematic reporting of financial information. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Municipality integrate this reporting into their internal analysis and regular reporting to Council.
3	Recreational programming data is insufficient.	It is recommended that each facility collects data (customer satisfaction, utilization rate, program outcomes) on recreational programming to make informed decisions.
4	Hidden costs of decentralized management should be considered	It is recommended that the Municipality develop a comprehensive budget plan that accounts for both expected revenue and anticipated expenses and that support be provided to increase the financial literacy of Community Boards. These will help ensure a more accurate financial planning and enable more effective resource allocation.
5	Regulating effect of Community Boards should be considered	It is recommended to formalize policies defining the relationship between Community Boards and the Municipality and, in doing so, explore options to support the continued engagement of Community Boards. This may include supporting the organization of fundraising events to alleviate the financial burden on the Municipality while increasing

#	FINDING	RECOMMENDATIONS
		<p>awareness. In addition, enlisting volunteers to serve on community boards not only alleviates financial strain but also promotes inclusive decision-making for recreational program offerings that align with the available budget.</p>
6	<p>Streamlining governance and process with simple technology should be considered</p>	<p>It is recommended to conduct a comprehensive IT assessment. This assessment will help determine the most suitable systems and technologies that best fit the needs of the Municipality in efficiently managing the operations of all the community centers. Low-cost tools that leverage smartphones may be available and, if so, may help with the sustainment of Community Boards.</p>
7	<p>Prioritizing transparency in municipal priorities should be considered</p>	<p>It is recommended that city councils prioritize regular communication with community stakeholders, provide accessible and accurate information about recreational facilities, and implement recommendations such as enhancing financial reporting and publishing performance metrics to ensure accountability and community engagement.</p>



## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND

This project was fully funded through Province of Manitoba's (the "Province") Municipal Services Delivery Improvement Program ("MSDIP"). MSDIP was introduced in 2021 as a voluntary program allowing municipalities and planning districts to conduct value-for-money service delivery reviews. The reviews were intended to result in recommendations that may result in cost savings. Under the Program, the successful municipal applicants were paired with pre-qualified consulting firms who undertake the work for the municipality, while being funded by the Province. Resulting cost savings may be reallocated to other municipal priorities without any impact to Provincial transfers.

In November 2022, the Municipality of Westlake-Gladstone (the "Municipality" or "Westlake-Gladstone") engaged BDO Canada LLP ("BDO") to review its governance and administration of the recreational programming portfolio. This engagement was pursuant to an application made by the Municipality to MSDIP. In the interim period between the application to MSDIP and the engagement of BDO, Westlake-Gladstone held an election resulting in changes to Council; these changes did not materially affect the nature of this review. The broad objective of this review was to support the Municipality's ongoing efforts to improve the quality of recreational services available to its residents - to improve its value for money.

The Municipality is situated in south-central Manitoba and spans an area of almost 2,000 square kilometers with a population of approximately 3,300. Census data shows that the municipal population has grown 3.8% between 2015 and 2021; this is slightly lower than both the provincial average of 5.0% and the national average of 5.2% over the same period. The dominant industry in the region is agriculture; however, a large proportion of residents commute to larger centers for work. At the helm of the Municipality's governance is the Council, consisting of an elected team of a Mayor, Deputy Mayor and five (5) Councillors. Each Councillor is responsible for a geographical division. Regular Council meetings are held to discuss and vote on various matters related to municipal services, budgets, and strategic planning. Council is supported by a small team of staff led by the Chief Administrative Officer.

The Municipality was amalgamated in 2015 from communities of Westbourne, Lakeview, and the Town of Gladstone. The amalgamation was the result of timelines stipulated under *Bill 33: the Municipal Modernization Act* (the "Act") whereby municipalities of less than 1,000 people were required to amalgamate such that the aggregate population exceeded this threshold. The implications of amalgamation were significant and underscored the importance of ensuring good and robust processes for the governance and management of public services, such as recreational services. Not only did service delivery become an increasingly difficult challenge as physical distances between residents and recreational facilities increased, but Section 8(8) of the Act effectively conveyed the pre-existing legal obligations from the underlying communities into the amalgamated Municipality - immediately, governance and management of all facilities became a practical and legal concern for the new Municipality.

The residents of Westlake-Gladstone enjoyed access to several facilities across the Municipality. As is common in many communities, the facilities and their programs often filled multiple roles and may equally serve physical fitness goals, as they may serve social and community goals. In addition, these facilities may be heavily supported by the local communities and be managed through local 'Community Boards'. Community Boards are

volunteer committees of local stakeholders who manage the operation of a given facility - they are independent and separate from the Municipality. While the Act made provisions for the continuation of locally supported programs, it did not provide any guidelines for the continuation of those programs into the future - hence the Municipality was left with the practical matter of integrating them into future plans. This matter is further complicated by differences in legacy approaches to operating, governing and funding individual facilities.

Ultimately, recreational programming was funded through several sources, including property taxes, federal grants, local donations and user fees. Details were outlined in an annual financial plan, which allocates funds to various essential services, including recreation and cultural activities; however, funding and contributions in-kind from local residents were not represented in this data which made a comprehensive analysis challenging. The Municipality allocated approximately \$382,000 in 2021, and \$412,000 in 2022, for expenses related to recreation and culture.

There are four (4) community centers, three (3) curling rinks, and three (3) ice skating arenas located across Gladstone, Plumas, Langruth and Westbourne. An outdoor pool is currently nearing completion in Gladstone. All community centers were available for rent for various functions including socials, showers, weddings, fundraisers and community events; Gladstone and Langruth also have theatrical stages and equipment. Except for the Gladstone outdoor pool which was built in 2023, all facilities were created and operated by their respective communities up until amalgamation in 2015. While management of these facilities largely continues to be driven by the local communities, under the Act, amalgamation shifted legal accountability to the Municipality. Regular reviews of cultural and recreational facilities are an integral part of this ongoing effort to meet the needs of the community while being fiscally responsible.



## OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of this review was to evaluate the current state of recreational programming as to provide municipal administration and council with meaningful recommendations for improvement and cost reduction. More specifically, this review was designed to:

- ▶ Improve the cost effectiveness of recreational programming across the Municipality
- ▶ Identify opportunities to improve coordination and governance of recreational programming.
- ▶ Support Council and staff in optimizing recreational programming in relation to other municipal priorities.

## SCOPE

The scope of this review included the programming directly associated with facilities within the Municipality, as well as the Municipality's overarching framework governing recreational programming. There are four (4) community centers, three (3) curling rinks, and three (3) ice

skating arenas located across Gladstone, Plumas, Langruth and Westbourne. An outdoor pool is currently nearing completion in Gladstone and was out of scope for this review.

In practice, many facilities largely operated as they did before the 2015 amalgamation and had limited involvement from the Municipality. Limited data and formal policy were available for many facilities and, as a result, much reliance was placed on consultation with municipal staff. Where available, data included financial and operating information of facilities as well as grants and levies provided to the facilities.

## APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

As the availability of data and policy varied widely between facilities, this review used a 'top-down' approach whereby municipal and regional level considerations were evaluated first. This evaluation was subsequently elaborated upon through the evaluation of detailed information pertaining to specific facilities, as available. The review's design considered several elements:

- ▶ Evaluation of the Municipality's inventory of recreational facilities and the implications of their respective histories and providence.
- ▶ Evaluation of the municipal framework governing recreational facilities and programming, including a review available municipal bylaws, policies and procedures related to the administration and coordination of recreational activities.
- ▶ Evaluation of available financial and operational performance information related to recreational facilities.
- ▶ Consultation with municipal staff and user groups to identify informal, unwritten, policy and practices supporting the recreational programming.



## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite limited facility specific quantitative information, Municipal staff were helpful and forthcoming in their assistance. The following section outlines the findings and recommendations.

### 1) Collaborative Policies for the Governance of Recreational Facilities

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Finding 1: There is an absence of policies governing relationships between the Municipality, recreational facilities and Community Boards. This gap erodes the ability to collaborate in ensuring uninterrupted and high-quality service delivery to the community while ensuring prudent management of Municipal legal and financial obligations.

#### Discussion

The Municipality does not have financial policies and requirements regarding to the levies and grants it provides the recreational facilities. Recreational facilities do not have financial policies to manage their financial resources.

It is essential to establish clear and well-defined financial policies for providing grants or levies. These policies should outline the criteria for eligibility, application processes, evaluation metrics, funding limits, and reporting requirements. Implementing transparent and consistent policies will promote fairness, accountability, and effective utilization of resources, ultimately enhancing the organization's or community's financial stability and reputation. Regular reviews and updates to the policies will ensure they remain relevant and aligned with changing needs and priorities.

#### Analysis

Policy considerations exist in relation to both the Municipality ("Municipality Policies"), as well as those that directly support the recreational facilities, individually ("Facility Policies").

#### Municipality Policies

The absence of financial policies regarding providing grants or levies can lead to several challenges and concerns for an organization or community. Some of the issues noted include the following:

- **Risk of Fund Misallocation:** The absence of well-defined policies can result in the misallocation of funds. Grants or levies may be directed towards recreation programming that do not align with the community needs, wasting resources and missing out on more impactful opportunities.
- **Inefficient Resource Utilization:** Without established policies, there might not be a structured process to assess grant or levy applications in an efficient manner. As a result, resources may be inefficiently allocated, leading to missed opportunities for positive community impact.
- **Inadequate Reporting and Evaluation:** Comprehensive policies enable better tracking and evaluation of the effectiveness of grants or levies. The absence of policies can

make it challenging to measure the impact of funding and assess the success of funded projects.

- **Difficulty in Future Planning:** Absence of financial policies can create uncertainty about the availability of funds for future projects or initiatives. It may hinder effective planning and limit the organization's ability to achieve long-term goals.

To address the issues caused by the absence of financial policies regarding providing grants or levies, the following are areas to consider with the goal of establishing effective policies:

- **Formulate Clear and Comprehensive Policies:** Develop well-defined financial policies for granting funds and implementing levies. These policies should outline the purpose, criteria, and process for granting funds or imposing levies, ensuring transparency and consistency in decision-making.
- **Set Objective Criteria:** Establish objective and measurable criteria for granting funds or imposing levies. These criteria could include project impact, community benefits, financial sustainability, and alignment with the organization's mission and strategic goals.
- **Standardize Application and Evaluation Process:** Create a standardized application process for grant seekers and a clear evaluation process for reviewing applications. This will ensure that all applicants are assessed fairly based on the established criteria.
- **Regular Reporting and Evaluation:** Implement a system for regular reporting and evaluation of grant-funded projects and the use of levies. This will allow for tracking the impact of funding and ensuring accountability by the recreational facilities.

By implementing these areas noted for improvement, the Municipality can establish strong financial policies for granting funds and implementing levies. These policies will promote fairness, transparency, and accountability, leading to more effective resource allocation and greater community impact.

## Facility Policies

The absence of comprehensive financial policies can present significant challenges and highlight areas in need of improvement in terms of financial resource management. Without well-defined financial policies in place, recreational facilities may encounter several difficulties and face potential risks. Here are some issues to consider:

- **Financial governance:** Comprehensive financial policies provide a framework for financial governance within an organization. In their absence, decision-making processes related to financial resource management may lack consistency and transparency.
- **Resource allocation:** Financial policies help establish guidelines for resource allocation across different areas of the recreational facility. Without these policies, there may be a lack of standardized criteria and procedures for determining budget allocations, resulting in potential inefficiencies. Comprehensive financial policies can help ensure

optimal allocation of financial resources based on strategic priorities and organizational needs.

- Risk management: Financial policies play a crucial role in identifying and managing financial risks. They define protocols for risk assessment, internal controls, and risk mitigation strategies. The absence of such policies increases the likelihood of inadequate risk management practices, leaving organizations vulnerable to financial fraud, misappropriation of funds, or errors in financial reporting.
- Financial accountability and transparency: Comprehensive financial policies establish guidelines for financial accountability and transparency. They outline procedures for financial reporting, documentation, and auditing processes. Without these policies, organizations may struggle to maintain accurate and reliable financial records, hindering transparency and the ability to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders.

To address the challenges caused by the absence of comprehensive financial policies in managing recreational facilities, the following areas for improvement should be considered for implementation:

- Development and Implementation of Comprehensive Financial Policies: Formulate clear and well-defined financial policies that cover all aspects of financial resource management, including budgeting, resource allocation, risk management, reporting, and compliance. Ensure that these policies align with the organization's mission, goals, and legal requirements.
- Establishment of Financial Governance Procedures: Create a structured framework for financial governance, defining the roles and responsibilities of individuals involved in financial decision-making. This will enhance consistency, transparency, and accountability in financial management.
- Standardization of Resource Allocation: Set standardized criteria and procedures for resource allocation based on strategic priorities and organizational needs. Implement a fair and transparent process to ensure optimal utilization of financial resources.
- Implementation of Robust Risk Management Strategies: Develop and implement risk management policies that identify potential financial risks and outline strategies for their mitigation. Establish internal controls and monitoring mechanisms to prevent fraud, mismanagement, and errors in financial reporting.
- Promotion of Financial Accountability and Transparency: Implement policies that promote financial accountability and transparency. Ensure that financial reporting processes are well-documented, and financial records are maintained accurately. Regularly communicate financial information to stakeholders to enhance transparency.
- Education and Training of Finance Staff: Provide education and training to staff members involved in financial resource management. Ensure they understand the financial policies and their roles in implementing them effectively.

By addressing these areas of improvement, recreational facilities can establish a strong financial framework that ensures effective resource management, reduces financial risks, enhances accountability, and promotes compliance with regulations and industry standards.

These comprehensive financial policies will contribute to the overall sustainability and success of the facilities while fostering trust and confidence among stakeholders.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the Municipality implement policies on providing grants and levies. In addition, the recreational facilities should implement policies for financial resource management.

## 2) Recreational Facility Financial Information

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Finding 2: Financial information regarding the performance and maintenance of recreational facilities is insufficient for purposes of Municipal planning and cash management. This lack of information affects the Municipality's ability to balance competing fiscal priorities, both currently and into the future, in a transparent manner.

### Discussion

Municipally held financial information was unavailable for the majority of the recreational facilities. Recreational facilities make, from time to time, ad hoc funding requests that are evaluated by staff and Council; however, there were no reporting standards in place to systematically collect and analyse financial information.

### Analysis

The absence of financial information poses significant challenges in the understanding the financial viability of the recreational facilities. Financial information provides crucial insights into the financial health, performance, and sustainability of the recreational facility. The following are issues of note:

- Lack of transparency: Financial information promotes transparency and accountability as it allows the Municipality understand how funds are utilized and managed. Without reliable data, the Municipality will not be able to identify potential risk and assess financial management practices.
- Impaired decision-making: Reliable financial data provides a basis for informed decision making specifically to allocation of funds and potential recreational programming inefficiencies.
- Hindered financial planning: Financial information is essential for effective financial planning and budgeting. It assists in forecasting revenues, estimating expenses, and setting financial goals. There is a potential unidentified risks, particularly related to cost overruns concerning operating, maintenance, and recreational expenses. Any material capital additions or required maintenance that is not identified early may not receive sufficient funding from the Municipality and could lead to a degrading recreational facilities and programs.

To ensure that the recreational facilities are managed effectively in the future, it is essential for the Municipality to have access to reliable financial data to make well-informed decisions. Key elements of financial data to be prepared are revenue and expenses by programs, municipal funding and how they were allocated, variable and fixed costs.

Each facility should develop an annual forecasting and budgeting model that aligns to a standardized template for the Municipality. This model will assist in anticipating costs and identifying any significant maintenance or capital expenses. If these costs cannot be covered through regular operations, the facility may request grants from the Municipality to support them. These models should be simplified and respect the small size of both the facility's operations and the Municipality as a whole - they do not have to be complex or overly burdensome, but standardized processes should exist.



By implementing these measures, the Council can ensure that decisions regarding costs are well-planned and that any necessary funding for maintenance or capital expenses is appropriately identified and secured.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that policies, templates, tools and training be developed to support the systematic reporting of financial information. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Municipality integrate this reporting into their internal analysis and regular reporting to Council.

### 3) Recreational Programming Data

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Finding 3: The collection and analysis of recreational-user and facility utilization information is insufficient for current and long-term Municipal planning. Absent this information, there is increased risk that recreational priorities and program areas fall out of alignment with the expectations and changing needs of residents.

#### Discussion

The Municipality's recreational facilities do not collect data to assess the performance, utilization, and overall community satisfaction of their programs.

#### Analysis

The absence of such data poses significant challenges to making informed decisions. As a result this can lead to inefficient resource allocation, financial sustainability challenges, compromised community welfare, and missed opportunities for program improvement:

- Informed decision-making: Without accurate data on utilization rates, Community Boards lack the necessary information to make informed choices regarding the allocation of resources, program improvements, or potential program elimination. It becomes problematic to assess the effectiveness and popularity of different recreation programs

- Resource allocation inefficiency: Without data on utilization rates, it becomes difficult to allocate resources effectively. Programs with low utilization rates may continue to receive funding and resources, leading to inefficiencies in resource allocation and determining optimal hours of operations. Conversely, popular programs could potentially be underfunded, resulting in missed opportunities to properly align the needs and interests of the community.
- Community welfare and satisfaction: By not assessing the impact of recreational programs on the community, particularly with regards to children, seniors and other underrepresented people, the overall welfare of the community may be compromised. Programs that are highly beneficial or have a significant positive impact on specific demographics may be overlooked or discontinued without proper evaluation.
- Missed opportunities for improvement: Collecting data on program utilization rates and community impact allows for identification of areas for improvement. Without this data, it becomes challenging to assess program effectiveness, make necessary adjustments, or introduce new initiatives to better meet the needs and preferences of the community.

With regards to data collection the Municipality should establish a systematic process for collecting and analyzing data on recreational programming utilization rates, impact on the community, and sensitivity to paid programs. To determine the impact of the recreational and sensitivity to paid programs to the Municipality should consider implementing mechanisms such as surveys, registration systems, and feedback forms to gather relevant data from participants and stakeholders. The collected data can be utilized for resource allocation decisions. Allocate resources based on utilization rates, community impact, and the financial viability of programs. Consider reallocating resources from underutilized programs to those with higher demand or exploring partnerships to enhance program offerings.

Examine the impact of recreational programs on the community, with a particular emphasis on the well-being of children and seniors. This can be achieved by conducting surveys, interviews, or focus groups to collect valuable feedback and insights from program participants, caregivers, and community members. Utilizing this information will aid in prioritizing and sustaining programs that cater to the specific needs of the community.

Continuous program improvement can be made through periodic surveys to identify areas for improvement and innovation. This will assist in evaluating program offerings, considering feedback from participants and emerging trends, to enhance the quality and relevance of recreational programs. This may involve introducing new programs, modifying existing ones, or discontinuing programs that no longer meet community needs.

In addition, foster open communication with the community, participants, and stakeholders about the data collection, program evaluation, and decision-making processes. Consideration should be given to maintaining transparency by sharing relevant findings and explaining how collected data informs resource allocation and program management decisions.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that each facility collects data (customer satisfaction, utilization rate, program outcomes) on recreational programming to make informed decisions.

#### 4) Hidden Costs of Decentralized Management

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Finding 4: Significant incremental costs were noted in Stride Hall's accession to the Municipality after its Community Board disbanded. Differences in management approach may trigger inflation of operating and maintenance costs as facility management shifts from the Community Board to the Municipality.

##### Discussion

Stride Hall, located in Gladstone, operates as a community hall that available for rent to host a variety of functions and thus fills multiple recreational roles in the community. At the end of 2020, mounting financial pressures prompted its Community Board to disband and return the custodianship of Stride Hall to the Municipality.

##### Analysis

Stride Hall was taken over by the Municipality at the end of 2020, when the Community Board disbanded. The operational flexibility of Stride Hall provides the ability to accommodate a range of events while charging a fee for those services. By offering various rental packages and additional services, Stride Hall aims to meet the diverse needs of its community and provide a welcoming venue for a wide range of occasions.

Budgets and forecasts were unable to be provided, as they were not performed by the Municipality. The financial data that is discussed below was summarized to BDO by the Municipality, based on historic data collected since the Municipality took control.

Income received in the form of rental fees was \$11,735 in 2022 and \$9,847 in 2021. The rates per the Municipality website appear reasonable in comparison to other halls within Manitoba per review of similar facilities online.

The main operational costs include electricity and janitorial services. Due to the first part of 2021 being impacted by the Covid pandemic, there was a reduction in both revenue and expenses. Operational expenses in 2022 and 2021 were \$16,803 and \$13,863 respectively. In both years, the hall resulted in a deficit of \$5,000 and \$4,000 respectively. Based on discussions with Staff, this is a reasonable deficit compared to other community services; a deficit of this nature is operational and covered by the Municipality as part of its recreational levies. Additional expenses were incurred in 2022 that included \$10,107 in maintenance parts and \$27,720 in maintenance services. A significant amount of the expenditure incurred related to boiler control and repairing the kitchen floor - costs that may have been more readily apparent under a formal budgeting and planning process.

Community Boards are generally responsible for the overall financial budget, development of policies,



monitoring of financial assets and strategic direction for the facility. As they disband, the burden passes to the Municipality which, in turn, may impact other competing municipal priorities. To address this, it may be valuable to conduct a thorough workload assessment, recruit skilled volunteers from the community to manage operations, and allocate specific responsibilities. Encourage participation from those with financial expertise for producing detailed budgets and forecasting. Promote data-driven decision-making and offer training for skill enhancement. Transparent communication with the community is vital, and regular performance evaluations may be valuable sources of real-time feedback. Long-term planning for sustainability should also be encouraged to ensure effective management and continued benefits to the community.

Recommendation 4 It is recommended that the Municipality develop a comprehensive budget plan that accounts for both expected revenue and anticipated expenses and that support be provided to increase the financial literacy of Community Boards. These will help ensure a more accurate financial planning and enable more effective resource allocation.

## 5) Regulating Effect of Community Boards

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Finding 5: Community Boards undertake significant programming, management, and financial activities in support of their associated facility which, in the Community Board's absence, would become the responsibility of the Municipality. There is a risk that Community Boards disband without sufficient forewarning and thus stress limited Municipal resources.

### Discussion

In 2021, the Municipality took over the management of Stride Hall in Gladstone due to the Board disbanding as a result of financial hardships after COVID 19 pandemic. Upon taking responsibility for the facility, significant additional costs were identified. There is a risk of other community boards disbanding and the Municipality would then be responsible.

### Analysis

Should other recreational facilities follow a similar trajectory to Stride Hall, necessitating intervention from the Municipality, the following potential implications were noted:

- Financial burden on the Municipality: Taking over multiple recreational centres can put a significant financial strain on the Municipality's time and resources. Maintaining and operating these facilities can be expensive, including staffing, maintenance, utilities, and other operational costs. It may require reallocating funds from other areas or increasing taxes to support the new responsibilities. While costs may be individually small, they may be significant relative to the relatively small municipal budget.
- Reduced diversity of recreational offerings: Recreational centres often cater to specific interests or demographics, providing a diverse range of activities and facilities. Should the Municipality takes over, there may be a tendency to standardize services, leading to a reduction in the variety of recreational offerings available to the public.
- Potential decline in quality: The facilities may face challenges in maintaining the same level of quality and customer service. Bureaucratic processes could result in potential declines in facility upkeep and overall user experience.

- Long-term sustainability: The sustainability of government-run recreational centers largely depends on the government's commitment and capacity to maintain them over the long term. If there are changes in political leadership or shifts in budget priorities, the quality and availability of recreational services could be affected.

Fundraising events (such as donation drives or event sponsorship) are one way to alleviate the financial burden on the Municipality while supporting recreational centres. These events provide additional funding beyond regular budgets, engage the community, and raise public awareness of the recreational programs each center offers.

Recruiting volunteers to sit on the community boards to take an active role in operations of the community centres. This could alleviate further financial strain and commitment required by the council members.

Involve the community in the decision-making process regarding recreational offerings. Conduct surveys, focus groups, and town hall meetings to understand the diverse interests and preferences of residents. By actively involving the public, the government can tailor services to meet the specific needs of the community, ensuring a more diverse range of recreational activities.

Recommendation 5: It is recommended to formalize policies defining the relationship between Community Boards and the Municipality and, in doing so, explore options to support the continued engagement of Community Boards. This may include supporting the organization of fundraising events to alleviate the financial burden on the Municipality while increasing awareness. In addition, enlisting volunteers to serve on community boards not only alleviates financial strain but also promotes inclusive decision-making for recreational program offerings that align with the available budget.



## 6) Streamline Governance and Process with Simple Technology

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Finding 6: Simple low-cost technology tools may be available to assist with standardizing the capture and reporting of financial and operational data. Currently, lack of standardized reporting formats challenges the Municipality's ability to gather and centrally analyze data.

### Discussion

The municipal recreational program is largely characterized by multiple facilities, geographically dispersed and managed under different approaches. As a result the collection of standardized information can be challenging. However, the Municipality's small size is significant because it precludes elaborate technology systems. The state of technology changes rapidly and there may be simple technology tools that effectively bridge smartphones to larger Municipal processes. It may be necessary to conduct a current state analysis of the existing technology infrastructure to manage all these facilities and understand how these existing capabilities align to the Municipality's reporting needs.

### Analysis

If the current IT infrastructure is inconsistent across community centres several issues can arise that can impact the efficiency, functionality, and overall effectiveness of community centre operations. Some of these issues include:

- **Inconsistent Service Quality:** Insufficient IT infrastructure can result in inconsistent service quality across different community centres. For example, lagging infrastructure may eventually lead to some centres experiencing delays and disruptions in providing services to residents such as registering for recreational programming.
- **Difficulty in Standardization:** Managing multiple community centres with inconsistent IT infrastructure can make it challenging to standardize processes and operations. This can lead to inconsistencies and creating difficulty in implementing policies associated with operations and finance.
- **Limited Data Analysis and Reporting:** Inadequate IT infrastructure can hinder the ability for the Municipality to obtain adequate data to review and make informed decisions.

To address the challenges arising from an inadequate IT infrastructure the following areas for improvement may be considered:

- **Conduct a Comprehensive IT Infrastructure Assessment:** Conducting a thorough assessment of the IT infrastructure in each community centre would assist in identifying specific areas of weakness, outdated technology and inefficiencies that need to be addressed.
- **Standardize Guidelines:** Develop standardized guidelines and procedures for processes and operations across all community centres. These guidelines should clarify what systems are used, how they are maintained and consider the diverse needs of each centre while ensuring consistency in service quality and policy implementation.

- **Implement Data Analytics Tools:** Provide staff with basic data analytics tools and training to enhance their ability to analyze and interpret data (such as user demographics). These tools can help identify trends, measure performance, and make data-driven decisions for optimizing recreational programming services.
- **Capacity Building:** Invest in training and capacity building for community centre staff to enhance their IT skills and knowledge. Equipping staff with the necessary expertise will improve the utilization of IT resources and optimize data analysis and reporting.

By considering and addressing these areas noted for improvement, notably the enhancement of the current IT infrastructure, Council Members will be better positioned to manage the Municipality's community centres and undertake fulsome long-term planning.

**Recommendation 6:** It is recommended that the Municipality consider conducting a comprehensive IT assessment. This assessment will help determine the most suitable systems and technologies that best fit the needs of the Municipality in efficiently managing the operations of all the community centers. Low-cost tools that leverage smartphones may be available and, if so, may help with the sustainment of Community Boards.

## 7) Prioritizing Transparency in Municipal Priorities

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**Finding 7:** The limited data availability, related to the management of recreational facilities and programs, inherently impedes associated communication and consultation efforts. This increases the risk that residents become disconnected from financial and operational issues that ultimately affect budgets and competing municipal priorities.

### Discussion

Once sufficient data on both financial and operational information is available it is essential to share this information with the public. Transparency in disseminating such data would keep the community informed and help foster support collaboratively with the people.

### Analysis

Improving transparency about the current state of recreational facilities and programming, including financial metrics and overall operations, helps to alleviate the following risks:

- **Lack of Accountability:** Without transparency, there is a higher chance of mismanagement and misuse of funds, leading to a lack of accountability among Council.
- **Decreased Public Trust:** Lack of transparency can erode public trust in the city council, making it difficult to gain support for future projects or secure funding.
- **Inadequate Decision-Making:** Without access to relevant information, community stakeholders may not be able to provide valuable input or participate in decision-making processes, potentially leading to less effective and inclusive recreational programs.

To avoid these implications, city councils should prioritize transparency, regularly communicate with community stakeholders, and provide accessible and accurate information about the state of recreational facilities and programming. To improve the Municipality's communication of

recreational facilities and programming, the following mechanisms should be considered for implementation:

- **Enhance Financial Reporting:** Implement a clear and comprehensive financial reporting system that outlines the allocation of funds, expenditures, and revenue generated from recreational facilities and programs. Make this information easily accessible to the public through online portals or regular reports.
- **Regular Updates to the Community:** Hold periodic town hall meetings, community forums, or online surveys to update residents on the current state of recreational facilities and programming. Encourage open discussions and feedback to ensure the community concerns are heard and addressed.
- **Publish Performance Metrics:** Release performance metrics, such as attendance numbers, program evaluations, and customer satisfaction surveys, to gauge the effectiveness of recreational offerings. This data can help identify areas for improvement and promote transparency in decision-making.


Recommendation 7: It is recommended that municipal councils prioritize regular communication with community stakeholders, provide accessible and accurate information about recreational facilities, and implement recommendations such as enhancing financial reporting and publishing performance metrics to ensure accountability and community engagement.



## CONCLUSION

This review provides detailed recommendations on making available accurate financial information, recreational program data, implementing financial policies, conducting current state analysis of the IT infrastructure, improving the governance of community boards, and improving communications regarding recreational programming.

As these challenges continue to persist into the future it will be increasingly important for the Municipality to formalize its policies and procedures so it maintains clear and constant visibility to the constantly shifting financial and operational considerations that drive service delivery for the recreational programs. Active monitoring of the financial information and recreational program data will allow resources to be tailored as requirements change, and thus ensure the optimal model for service delivery.



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