



# Community Services & Facilities

## Master Plan

September 2023





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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Master Planning for Community Services and Facilities

With a growing emphasis on personal health and wellness, environmental and economic sustainability, and community vibrancy, the availability of high-quality community services and recreation facilities has never been more important. Thames Centre and its community service providers offer a wealth of leisure amenities that contribute to the Municipality's vision of creating a vibrant and safe community for residents at all life stages and its commitment to enhancing these opportunities is reinforced through updating its 2013 Master Plan. This renewed 2023 Master Plan provides the Municipality with a fresh look at community needs for parks and recreation services, with consideration given to projected population growth, trends, facility use, community input, provincial legislation, and other relevant inputs. The updated Master Plan establishes and prioritizes strategies and provision options to address community needs over the next 10 years and should be implemented in conjunction with Thames Centre's Official Plan and other related studies.

As a living document, the Master Plan will need to be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure it responds to new opportunities and changing needs in the community. In doing so, the Master Plan will assist the Municipality in prioritizing initiatives and informing departmental budgets, while supporting the search for external funding and partnerships to support the implementation process.

Specifically, the scope of the Master Plan includes:

- Parks and open space;
- Indoor and outdoor recreation facilities; and
- Service delivery, including policies and programming.

### 1.2 Benefits of Community Services and Facilities

The strength of community services and facilities is crucial to the community's success and wellbeing. Community services and facilities are significant contributors in supporting economic, environmental, health, psychological, and physical benefits. These community services offer residents with the benefits of a healthy lifestyle through physical and social opportunities, contributing to a vibrant community. The Municipality recognizes these benefits and will advance them through this Master Plan and its associated implementation.

There is plentiful support for community services at the local, provincial, and national levels. Supporting charters such as Parks for All and the Framework for Recreation in Canada, this Master Plan identifies the Municipality's high-level needs and priorities. The Master Plan will help the Municipality and its community partners continue to provide for the needed programming and servicing for community services and facilities to engage residents in meaningful physical and social opportunities.

## 1.3 Alignment with Strategic Documents

Understanding guiding documents, findings and recommendations in relevant documents is critical to ensure that the Master Plan aligns with municipal and upper-tier priorities, as well as parks and recreation frameworks. The following strategic documents were reviewed to inform the Master Plan, together with other material, including usage data, staff reports and more. Relevant findings from these resources are embedded throughout the body of the Master Plan.

### Provincial Policy Statement

Issued under the Planning Act, the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) contains overarching policy directions on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. Municipalities use the PPS to develop their official plans and to guide and inform decisions on planning matters. On April 6, 2023, the province released for comment the proposed 2023 Provincial Planning Statement. It proposes to repeal “A Place to Growth – the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe” and the 2020 Provincial Policy Statement, and replace both with an integrated policy statement.

Policy 3.9 of the proposed policy statement addresses Public Spaces, Recreation, Parks, Trails and Open Space (see below). Notable changes to this policy include new language to consider “persons of all ages and abilities” and the removal of “equitable distribution” when considering the planning of public spaces.

Healthy, active, and inclusive communities should be promoted by:

- a) planning public streets, spaces and facilities to be safe, meet the needs of persons of all ages and abilities, including pedestrians, foster social interaction and facilitate active transportation and community connectivity;
- b) planning and providing for the needs of persons of all ages and abilities in the distribution of a full range of publicly-accessible built and natural settings for recreation, including facilities, parklands, public spaces, open space areas, trails and linkages, and, where practical, water-based resources;
- c) providing opportunities for public access to shorelines; and
- d) recognizing provincial parks, conservation reserves, and other protected areas, and minimizing negative impacts on these areas.

## Framework for Recreation in Canada

The Framework for Recreation in Canada (FRC), which is currently being updated, was developed through significant consultation with Canadians as to their thoughts on the benefits and importance of recreation. The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association – in collaboration with the senior levels of government and the Provincial Recreation and Parks Associations – developed a framework that rejuvenates the definition of recreation and parks, articulates the economic impacts of recreation and parks, identifies their benefits, and states five evidence-based goals for communities across Canada to strive towards.

Thames Centre’s Master Plan presents an opportunity to recognize the framework, integrate elements of the FRC into the vision that will be created for the Recreation & Community Services Department, and ensure that the recommendations align with each of the FRC’s goals.



## Parks for All

Parks for All is an Action Plan for Canada’s Parks Community, published in 2017 through a collaboration between the Canadian Parks Council and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association. This document aligns with and supports the Framework for Recreation in Canada, particularly the FRC’s third goal of “Connecting People and Nature”.

Parks for All focuses on how all Canadians benefit from healthy parks and natural areas and shares the community’s vision and goals for our parks. Parks for All includes a variety of perspectives that help form a distinct set of responsibilities and practices moving forward. Parks for All is intended to unite the parks community through specific actions, priorities and strategic directions. The plan is guided by four strategic directions: **Collaborate, Connect, Conserve, and Lead**. Some specific actions that may be considered through the Thames Centre Master Plan or subsequent implementation initiatives include:

### Collaborate

- Reach out to unconventional partners and organizations that could creatively contribute to the Parks for All vision.

### Connect

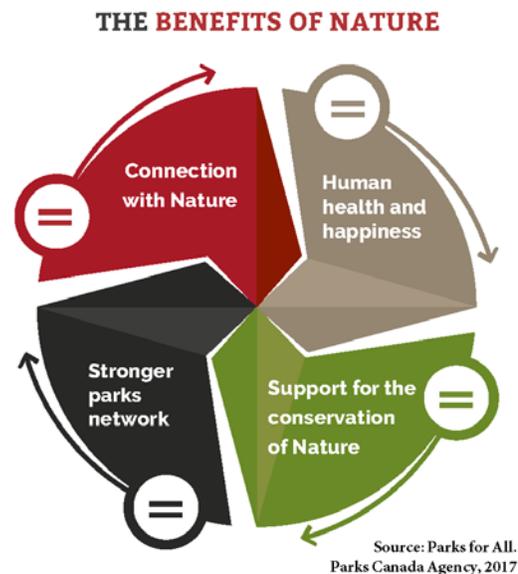
- Forge connections between community parks and less accessible wilderness parks by sharing information and coordinating activities and campaigns.
- Support the creation of new parks and the expansion of current parks to offer more opportunities for local connections.

### Conserve

- Share expertise and best practices among the parks community.
- Champion the economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits provided by healthy ecosystems. Ensure these are accounted for in decision-making as contributing to stronger economies.

### Lead

- Invest time and money in employees for the development of high-performing, dynamic, and caring leaders.



## Thames Centre Strategic Plan 2020 - 2024

Thames Centre's 2020 – 2024 Strategic Plan outlines corporate initiatives and objectives that Council and Staff hope to achieve over a four-year period. It helps guide decision making and provides direction for the Municipality.

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Vision	Thames Centre is a vibrant, safe community combining innovation and tradition for all stages of your life.
Mission	Working together to sustain and grow our community through quality services and responsible leadership
Core Values	<p><b>Collaboration, cooperation and mutual respect</b> are foundational to all aspects of Thames Centre's work</p> <p><b>Open, ongoing two-way communication and inclusivity</b> to ensure engagement and participation for all residents, businesses and staff</p> <p><b>Safety and security</b> of residents, businesses, staff and property</p> <p><b>Balanced and responsible</b> growth</p> <p><b>Effective, efficient and sustainable</b> service delivery</p> <p><b>Transparency, fiscal responsibility, accountability and resiliency</b> are essential for all departments, leadership and staff</p>

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## Municipality of Thames Centre Community Services & Facilities Master Plan

Three strategic pillars are presented in the Thames Centre Strategic Plan. Each pillar contains several key initiatives to achieve the Municipality's desired future state. Initiatives with direct relevance to the Master Plan are identified below (some of which have already been completed or are already underway).

Strategic Pillar	Relevant Initiatives
<p><b>Community Development</b></p> <p>Thames Centre will have opportunities for all to live a vibrant engaged life, making the municipality an attractive place to enjoy lifelong vitality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize and promote municipal events such as BridgeFest, Canada Day, Earth Day, Artisan Markets</li> <li>• Expand recreation centre programming</li> <li>• Establish a dog park in Dorchester (completed) and Thorndale (on schedule to complete in September)</li> <li>• Community beautification</li> <li>• Modernize pool (completed)</li> <li>• Trails and Cycling Master Plan</li> <li>• Recreation Master Plan (completed)</li> <li>• Seniors and youth engagement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Infrastructure</b></p> <p>Thames Centre focuses on infrastructure to support all stages of your life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Thorndale Lions Community Centre (completed)</li> <li>• New Thorndale Fieldhouse to support local athletics and sport tourism (completed)</li> <li>• Wading Pool replacement in Dorchester</li> <li>• Dorchester Senior Centre Addition (ongoing)</li> <li>• Improved WIFI access at parks, outdoor spaces and community facilities</li> <li>• Expand Baseball Diamonds at Outdoor Recreation Complex (completed)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Responsive Leadership</b></p> <p>Thames Centre encourages an environment of innovation, resilience, and community through responsive leadership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equity, Diversity &amp; Inclusivity and Accessibility Strategy</li> <li>• Development of Communications Strategy, tools and resources</li> <li>• Create dedicated staff position for communications and legislation</li> <li>• Municipality of Thames Centre mobile application (completed)</li> <li>• Online registration for public meetings, training and programs</li> <li>• Citizen Request Portal (completed)</li> <li>• Support professional development</li> <li>• Promote civic pride</li> </ul>

## **2013 Community Services Master Plan Update**

Thames Centre's 2013 Community Services Master Plan Update provided Council with strategic direction on guiding investment in parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services to respond to population growth, participation preferences, community input, and more. The 2013 Master Plan contained leisure services policies and strategies, park and open space delivery strategies, community services communications plans; leisure facilities recommendations; and an organizational development and implementation framework. Since the Master Plan was completed, the Municipality has made significant investments in its parks and recreation system. Notable achievements are highlighted below.

### **Key Achievements in Dorchester**

- Planning is underway to expand the FlightExec Centre.
- Renewal of the Dorchester Outdoor Pool was undertaken.
- The Outdoor Recreation Complex was constructed.
- An accessible playground was added to Dorchester Community Park.
- An off-leash dog park at the Outdoor Recreation Complex has been re-established.
- One tennis court was converted into two pickleball courts.
- Four ball diamonds were upgraded to clay infields.
- Blindsquare and GoodMaps wayfinding mobile applications were added to the FlightExec Centre and Dorchester Community Park.

### **Key Achievements in Thorndale**

- Thorndale Lions Community Centre was constructed, which is much larger than the previous facility.
- Fieldhouse was constructed.
- One tennis court was converted into two pickleball courts.
- Four ball diamonds were upgraded to clay infields.
- A new playground was installed.
- A new parking lot was added along Agnes Street.
- Blindsquare and GoodMaps wayfinding mobile application were added to the Thorndale Lions Community Centre and Park.
- A process has been initiated to establish an off-leash dog park.

## 1.4 Planning Approach

The Master Plan was initiated in early 2023 and has been comprised of three phases, which are highlighted below. Each phase has been designed to accomplish key tasks and included internal meetings and reporting.

### **Phase 1: Research and Consultation**

1. Background Document Review
2. Socio-Demographic, Parks and Recreation Trends
3. Parks and Facility Inventory
4. Consultation and Project Awareness
5. Council Presentation

### **Phase 2: Draft Master Plan**

6. Vision, Mission Statement and Guiding Principles
7. Parks, Recreation and Service Delivery Assessment
8. Implementation Strategy
9. Draft Master Plan Update

### **Phase 3: Test and Finalize Master Plan**

10. Final Public Open Houses
11. Finalize Master Plan
12. Council Presentation

## 2.0 Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles

### 2.1 A Compelling Vision – A Picture of the Future in Words

A vision statement is a simplistic statement that reflects the outcome of the work in Thames Centre to deliver community services in partnership with the public, stakeholders, and local organizations. The work to design, develop, construct, maintain and deliver programs, facilities and greenspaces is for one purpose and one purpose only. That is to ensure that all residents can be active, engaged, and healthier as a result of participating. A vision statement must be compelling and remembered by those who help to organize activities and those who participate. Vision statements are articulated in the present sense to denote an immediate commitment to the outcomes in the Master Plan.

**Thames Centre Community Services – Collaborating with community partners to ensure that all residents are healthier by being more active, and engaged, more often.**

### 2.2 Our Mission - Who We Are, What We Do and How We Do It

A Mission Statement identifies the work of the Community Services & Facilities Department, what they are setting about to achieve and how they go about their work. This helps all staff, volunteers and partners align with the vision and goals with a clear focus on how services are delivered and achievements.

**Thames Centre Community Services & Facilities - We are dedicated to maximizing residents' participation in parks and recreation opportunities by:**

- **Offering/enabling a full range of quality experiences for everyone**
- **Sharing the leadership with our volunteers and partners**
- **Strengthening pride and cohesion by supporting our unique community spirit**
- **Promoting lifelong engagement in active living**

## 2.3 Guiding Principles – Our Common Beliefs

Guiding Principles are value statements that are essential elements of all the work that Thames Centre does to address service delivery in the present and the future. These values are what makes Thames Centre unique, welcoming, and strong.

We believe that:

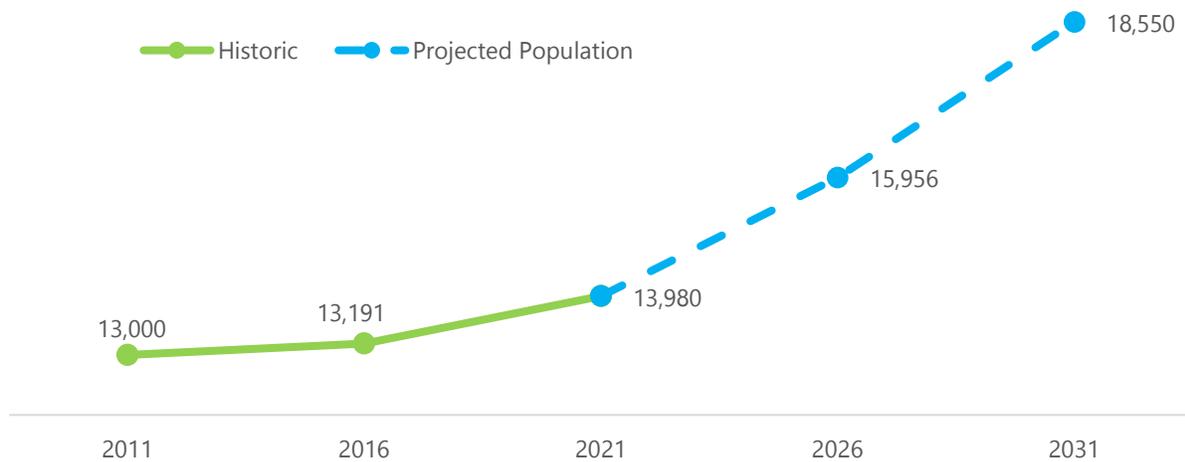
1. We are **stronger together** - The reach of our collective efforts is greater than any one organization. It is critical to our success that we work well together.
2. **Communication and engagement** with residents will provide meaningful programs and services.
3. **All residents must feel welcome** in our facilities, parks, and programs - We make special efforts to understand the needs of equity seeking populations and make adjustments to ensure that everyone is included.
4. **Environmental sustainability and the impact of climate change** is a shared responsibility and are considered in everything we do.
5. **Accountability for our work** ensures that we measure our outputs, efficiencies, and effectiveness, set realistic targets, and make evidenced-based decisions.
6. **Fiscal accountability** enables Thames Centre to provide/enable more opportunities efficiently. We keep costs contained and seek alternate revenues to broaden our reach.
7. **Continuous improvement** drives us to be innovative, set high performance standards and keep abreast of trends and new developments in our field.
8. **Celebrating** our collective and individual **successes** motivates us to dig deeper and reach higher. If an individual or group is successful – we are all successful.

### 3.0 Community Profile

#### 3.1 Historical and Projected Population

Between the 2011 and 2021 Census, Thames Centre’s population experienced an increase of 8% to 13,980. Dorchester is the largest settlement in the Municipality where nearly one-third (31%) of residents reside. Thames Centre’s 2021 Development Charges Background Study identifies a slightly higher 2021 population of 14,141 people, or 14,630 residents when adjusting for Census undercount (2.3%). By 2031, Thames Centre is forecasted to grow by 27% as the population is expected to reach 18,550 residents (including Census undercount). More than half of the population growth is expected to occur in Dorchester, which is expected to accommodate more than half (57%) of the Municipality’s new residents by 2031, with Thorndale accommodating the remainder of population growth. A marginal decrease in population is projected to occur within Thames Centre’s rural areas and hamlets.

Figure 1: Thames Centre Historic and Projected Populations (2011 to 2031)



Source: Statistics Canada 2011 to 2021 Census; Municipality of Thames Centre 2021 Development Charges Background Study

#### 3.2 Population by Age Group

Thames Centre’s age profile provides insight into the types of parks and recreation opportunities that are, or will be in demand. For example, a large market of children and youth tends to bolster physical activities such as sports, while a larger segment of older adults and seniors tends to drive demand for low impact and cultural activities that centre around social interaction and cognitive stimulation.

Thames Centre is an aging community. Between the 2011 and 2021 Census, the median age increased from 43.9 years to 45.2 years, which is higher compared to the Province (41.6 years) and Middlesex County (39.6 years). This aging trend is consistent with other municipalities across Ontario, which is being driven by the aging baby boomer population.

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Population growth by age group reveals additional evidence of an aging community. Between 2011 and 2021, the number of older adults (age 55 to 69) and seniors (ages 70+) increased by 28% and 51%, respectively. Adults (age 20 to 34) also increased by 17% and children (ages 0 to 9) grew by 6%. By contrast, the population of youth (age 10 to 19) declined by 7% and mature adults (age 35 to 54) decreased by 14%.

A review of the Municipality’s active subdivision applications provides insight into who may be living in Thames Centre during the planning period. Active subdivision applications are currently being assessed by the Municipality in Dorchester and Thorndale, which primarily consist of low density, residential dwellings, as well as medium density dwellings. These proposed developments suggest that the Municipality will attract young families with children who are seeking more affordable lifestyles. While an influx of families may potentially contribute to a younger population, aging of the population is also expected to continue. As a result, it can be anticipated that all age groups will experience varying levels of growth. This emphasizes the need to ensure that a broad range of active and passive recreation opportunities are available to respond to the needs of all age groups.

*Table 1: Population Growth by Age Group, 2016 to 2021*

Age Group	2011 Census	2021 Census	Change (2011-2021)
Children Ages 0 to 9	1,405	1,490	6%
Youth Ages 10 to 19	1,930	1,795	-7%
Adults Ages 20 to 34	1,750	2,040	17%
Mature Adults Ages 35 to 54	4,130	3,560	-14%
Older Adults Ages 55 to 69	2,560	3,270	28%
Seniors Ages 70+	1,210	1,825	51%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,000</b>	<b>13,980</b>	<b>8%</b>

Source: Statistics Canada 2011 and 2021 Census

### 3.3 Income and Education

Research has found that income and education levels influence (or are at least an indicator of) participation levels in community services and facilities. The greater a person’s level of income and education, the more likely they are to participate in these opportunities. The 2021 Census reported that Thames Centre’s median household income in 2020 was \$112,000, which was higher compared to the Province (\$91,000) and Middlesex County (\$79,500). This suggests that Thames Centre residents may be more affluent and thus, the cost to participate in recreation activities may be less of a barrier compared to their Provincial and County counterparts. However, it is also recognized that some households in Thames Centre may be facing financial barriers. The 2021 Census reported that 5.3% of residents live in households that are below the low-income measure, after tax. This proportion is less than the Province (10.1%) and the County (12.6%). Nevertheless, providing a range of affordable community services and facilities is important to ensure that all residents can participate, regardless of income.

In terms of educational attainment, 56.3% of Thames Centre’s residents have completed a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree, which is slightly lower than the Province (57.5%) and County (57.7%).

## 4.0 Community Consultation

### 4.1 Community Consultation Strategy and Awareness

Thames Centre residents have been engaged throughout the planning process to collect input about how community services and facilities can be enhanced to better meet their needs and to help set priorities for the future. To guide the engagement activities, a Community Engagement Strategy was prepared as a “Game Plan” to identify the purpose, target audience, format and other details for each engagement session. The Municipality promoted the Master Plan using a range of awareness tools, including a project webpage, social media, posters, newspaper articles, and word of mouth. The engagement process used a variety of consultation tools that were designed to maximize participation using both in-person and virtual activities, including the following:

- Project webpage and awareness
- Public Open Houses (in-person)
- Community Survey (online and hardcopy)
- Stakeholder Focus Groups (virtual)
- Staff and Council Input (virtual)
- Draft Master Plan Public Feedback Sessions (in-person)
- Written Submissions

**The information and suggestions presented in this section should not be interpreted as recommendations. Community input has not been altered even in instances where comments may incorrectly reflect the Municipality’s actual policies, practices or level of provision.**

## 4.2 Summary of Consultation Themes

Based on the input received from all the consultation activities, the following key themes were identified, presented in no particular order:

1. Residents are proud of **the range of community services and facilities** that are offered in Thames Centre, including parks, trails, community centres, sports fields, and programs.
2. There is a strong **demand for casual/unstructured activities** for residents of all ages.
3. **Requests** were made for a variety of facilities and amenities, including trail enhancements, indoor pool, improved parking areas, arts and cultural spaces, basketball and fitness centre. Requests were also made for pickleball courts and a velodrome.
4. It was suggested that community services and facilities should be **balanced between Dorchester and Thorndale**, with consideration given to **rural needs**.
5. Enhancing **communication and marketing** of community services and facilities was suggested to raise awareness about what is available in the community.
6. **Community organizations and volunteers** are a strength in the community, but concerns were raised about the ability to attract and retain volunteers, particularly among the younger demographic. Continuing to support established organizations was also suggested to ensure that they are successful.
7. The Municipality's **staff are highly valued** in the community. Requests were made for customer service at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre.

### 4.3 Public Open Houses

Two in-person Public Open Houses were held on April 24<sup>th</sup> in Thorndale and April 26<sup>th</sup> in Dorchester to introduce the Master Plan project to the community and to collect initial input. Attendees to these drop-in sessions were invited to learn more about the project by reviewing project information presented on display panels and participants were encouraged to respond to questions regarding opportunities to enhance recreation facilities, parks, and programs. The Public Open Houses were promoted through the Municipality's project webpage, social media, news articles, and word of mouth. The sessions were highly successful with over 40 members of the public in attendance. This section highlights the key themes from the input that was received.

#### Enhancing Indoor Recreation Facilities

Attendees suggested that arts and culture spaces should be provided within community centres or in dedicated facilities that should include a stage for performances, auditorium, museum or space for display of artifacts, and a catering kitchen. Some participants felt that the kitchen at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre should be larger, similar in size to the kitchen in the previous facility. Concerns over limited parking areas at the FlightExec Centre and Thorndale Lions Community Centres were identified as attendees felt that they were undersized, particularly during major events and sports games.

#### Enhancing Outdoor Recreation Facilities

A key theme attendees noted that would improve outdoor recreation facilities was outdoor lighting to extend the period that amenities could be used during the evening. Improvements or the addition of lighting was suggested for ball diamonds, soccer fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, and splash pads. Other improvements suggested included improving the drainage at Thorndale Park and ensuring there is an adequate amount of parking to support amenities.

#### Enhancing Parks and Trails

Improving connectivity throughout Thames Centre was a focus for trail improvements. Specific comments were made pertaining to trails connecting to recreation fields and facilities and ensuring they are paved and accessible, especially within parks such as Thorndale Park. Residents also wanted more cycling trails connecting the municipality, including through Dorchester and Thorndale to Fanshawe Conservation Area.

#### Enhancing Programs and Activities

A key issue that was identified by attendees was the need to balance programs offerings throughout the Municipality to ensure all communities have access to programs and services. Specific suggestions were made for weddings, music concerts, and theatre; however, some attendees suggested that there is a need for appropriate facility space for these events.

## 4.4 Community Survey

A Community Survey was conducted between March and May, 2023, to collect input about local parks and recreation opportunities in Thames Centre. The survey gathered information about participation, barriers to participation, facility usage, suggested improvements, priorities for investment, and opinions on various statements.

The community survey was available online and hardcopies were available at the Municipality's community centres, the Lion's Senior Centre, and library branches. A total of 115 responses were received, representing over 270 residents of all ages, including children, youth, adults, and older adults 55+. As a voluntary, self-directed survey, respondents were not required to answer every question. This section provides a high-level summary of the survey and additional details can be found in Appendix A.

### Summary of Respondents

The following is a summary of survey respondents:

- The median age of respondent was 57 years old, which was higher compared to the 2021 Census (45 years).
- Compared to the 2021 Census, the survey was slightly under-represented in children (ages 0 to 9) and over-represented in youth (ages 10 to 19); all other age categories were comparable to the Census.
- Half (51%) of responding households identified that they reside in Dorchester; 19% live in Thorndale and the remainder live in a hamlet or rural area.

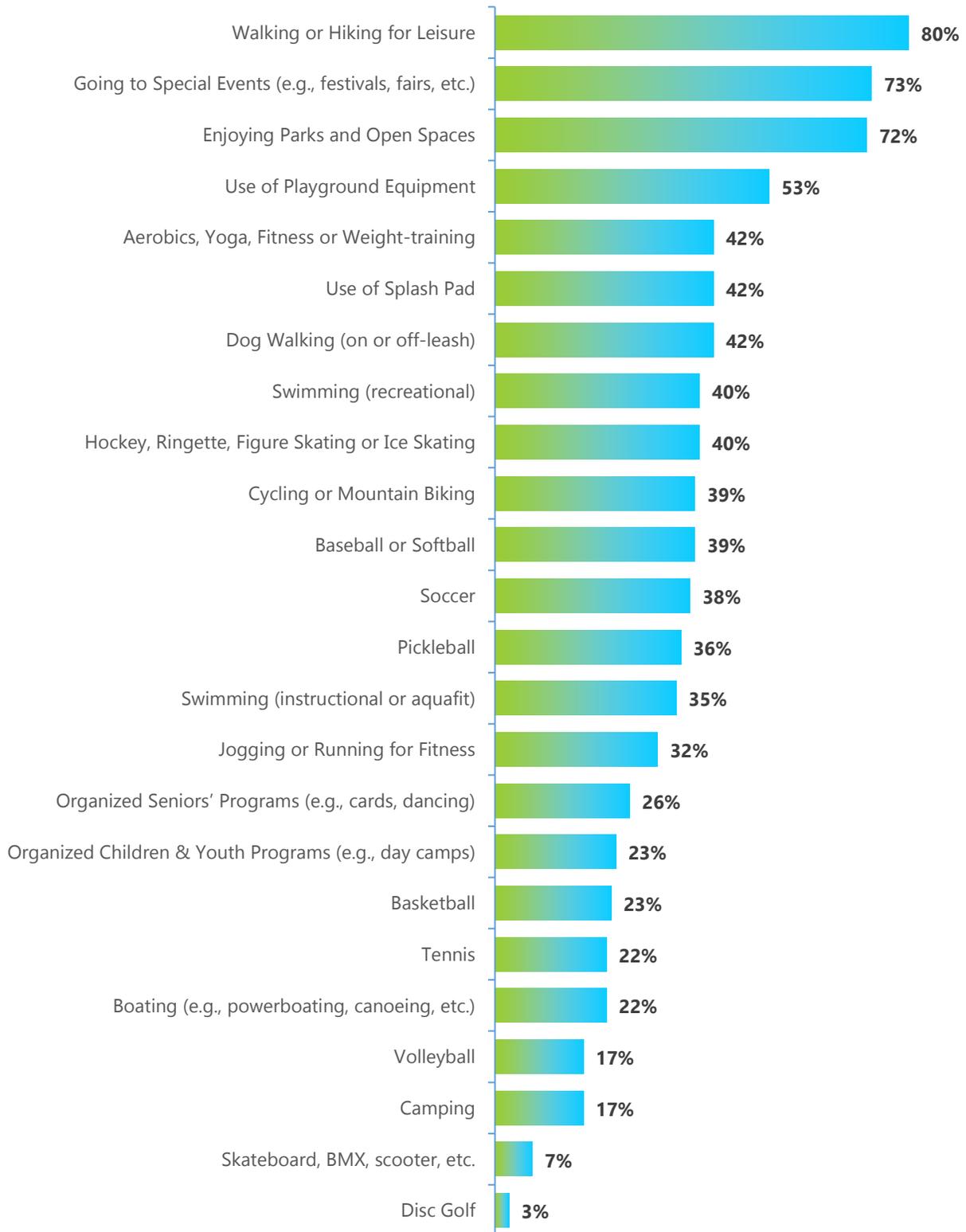
### Participation in Parks and Recreation Activities

Four-out-of-five (80%) respondents identified that walking or hiking for leisure was the most popular activity their household participated in. Other top activities identified included going to special events (73%), enjoying parks and open spaces (72%), and using a playground (53%). Figure 2 summarizes participation in parks and recreation activities.

A commonality among the top four activities is that they are all unstructured and self-scheduled activities, which is consistent with broad participation trends. These types of activities tend to rank highest as they can be undertaken through all ages and stages of life. Organized sports such as hockey, soccer and baseball ranked lower and tend to be played by a subset of the community. Specialized or age-specific activities such as skateboarding and disc golf ranked lowest.

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Figure 2: Participation in Parks and Recreation Activities (n=111)



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Only 11% of survey respondents identified that all their park and recreations activities needs are met within Thames Centre (Figure 3), suggesting that the majority of respondents travel outside of the Municipality to participate in parks and recreation activities. The most common reason respondents participate in parks and recreation activities outside of Thames Centre is because the facility or program they are interested in is not available in the Municipality (65%). Other factors include the facility or program is not available at the preferred time (40%), or tournaments and special events (21%) (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Proportion of Parks and Recreation Activity Needs Met in Thames Centre (n=114)

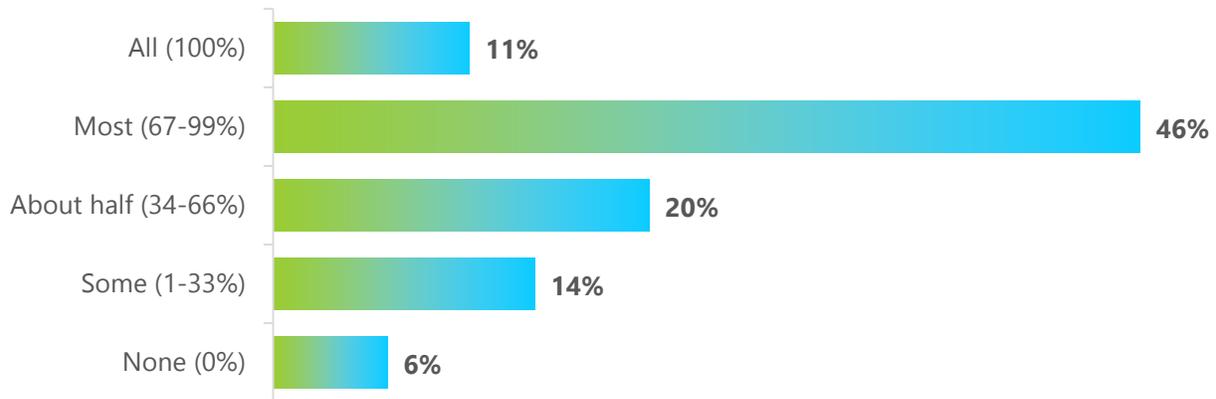
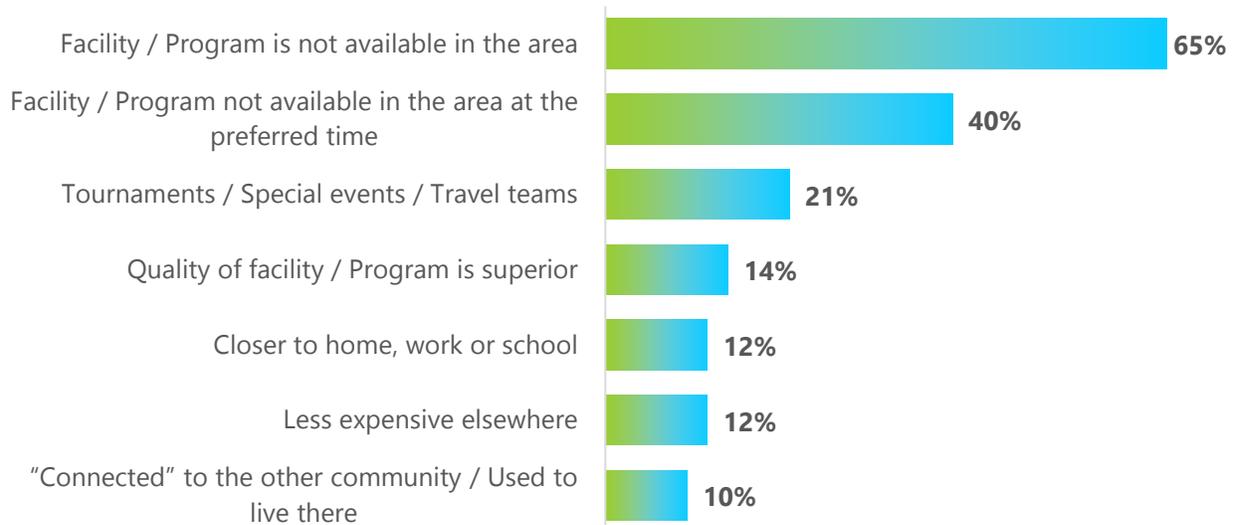


Figure 4: Reasons for Participating in Parks and Recreation Activities Outside of Thames Centre (n=84)

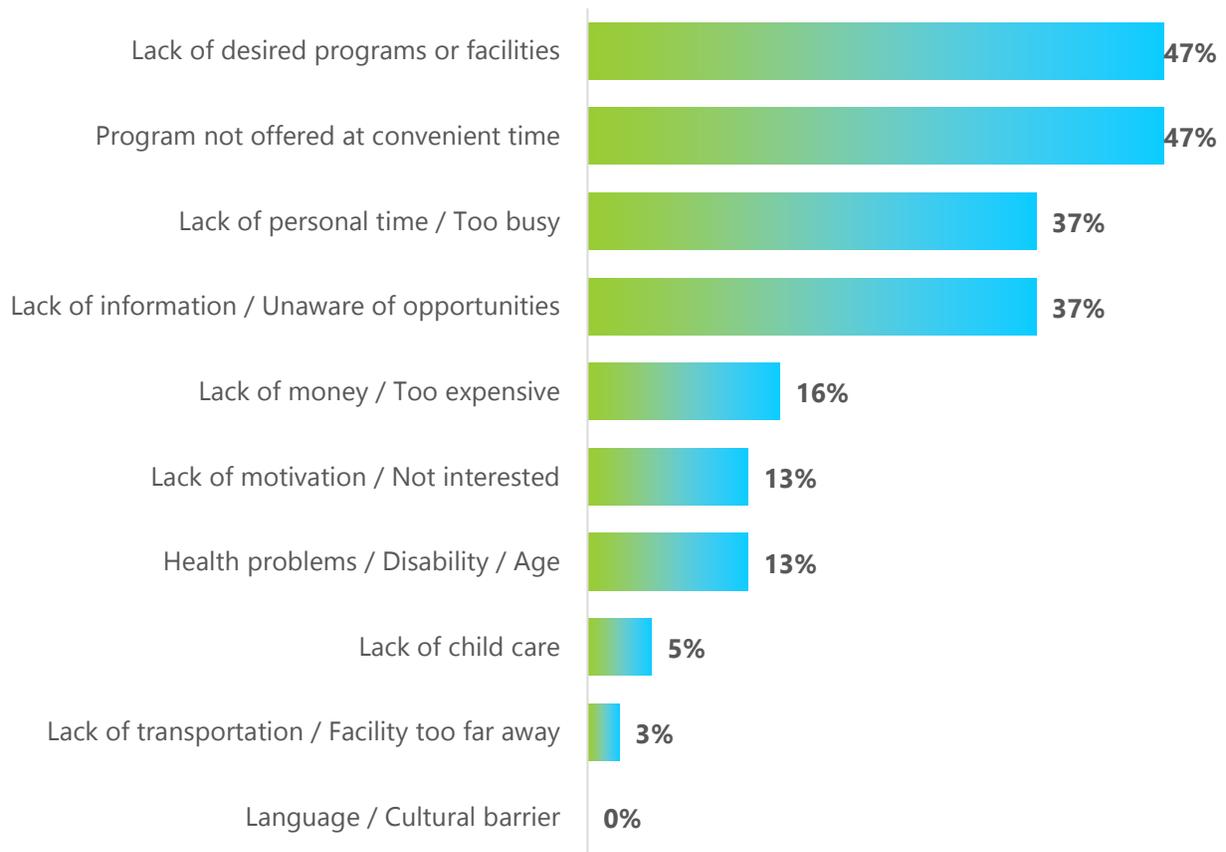


'Other' and 'Don't Know' responses not shown.

### Barriers to Participation in Parks and Recreation Activities

In the past 12 months, 35% of respondents said that they have not been able to participate in parks and recreation activities as often as they would like. Nearly half (47%) of these respondents indicated that they were not able to participate as often as they would like due to the lack of desired programs or facilities, or the program was not offered at a convenient time. Other common barriers included a lack of personal time (37%) and the lack of information or being unaware of the opportunities that are available (37%). A summary of participation barriers identified by respondents is contained in (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Barriers to Participation in Parks and Recreation Activities (n=38)

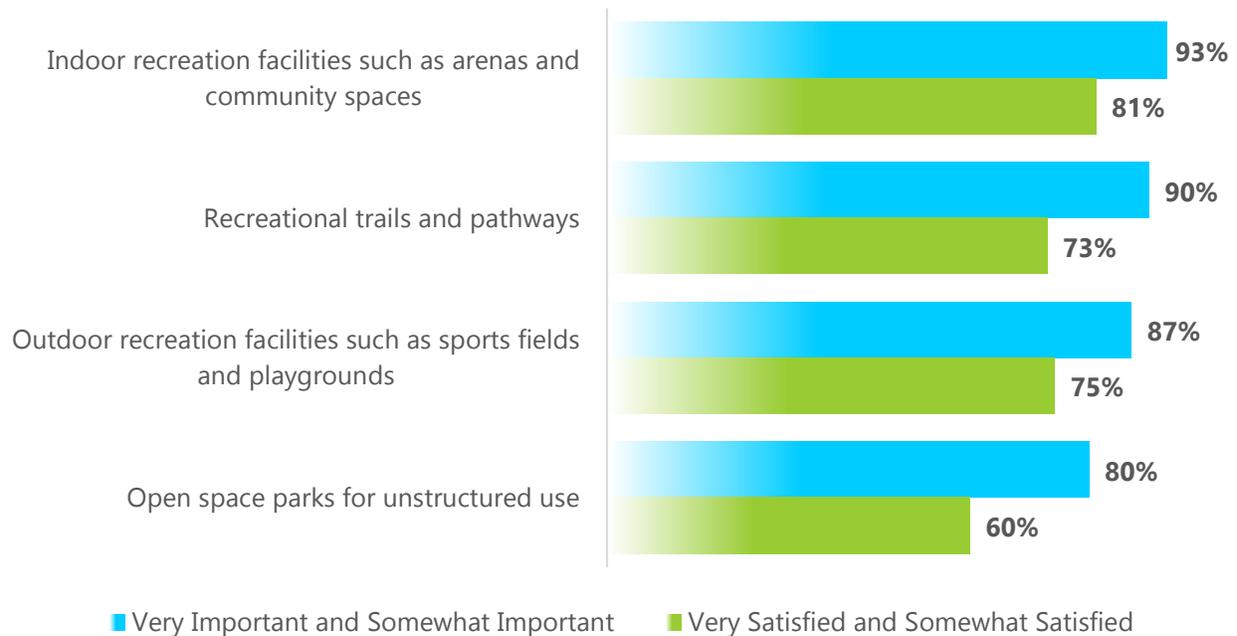


'Other' and 'Don't Know' responses not shown.

## Importance and Satisfaction Levels

Respondents were asked to rate their level of importance and satisfaction with respect to parks and recreation facilities, including indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, parks and trails, and open spaces. Generally speaking, high levels of importance paired with high levels of satisfaction suggests that expectations are being met. With this in mind, expectations are not being met in all areas, with the largest discrepancy in open space parks for unstructured use. These findings suggest that there is some room for improvement in all areas.

Figure 6: Importance and Satisfaction with Parks and Recreation Amenities (n=101 to 102)

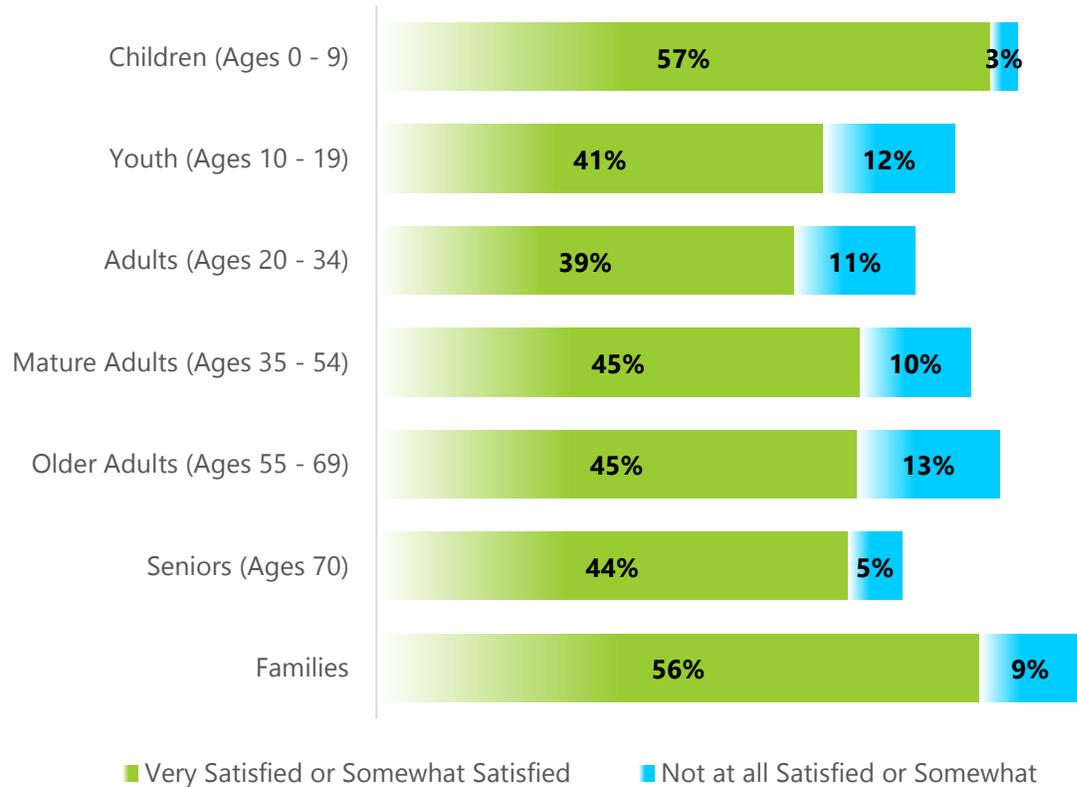


'Neutral' and 'Don't Know' responses now shown.

## Municipality of Thames Centre Community Services & Facilities Master Plan

Figure 7 illustrates respondents' satisfaction levels with parks and recreation opportunities by age group. Respondents were most satisfied with parks and recreation opportunities for children (ages 0 to 9) and families. The lowest satisfaction levels recorded were for adults (ages 20 to 34), although these findings suggest that there are opportunities to improve satisfaction levels among all age groups.

Figure 7 Satisfaction Levels for Parks and Recreation Opportunities by Age Group (n=75 to 83)



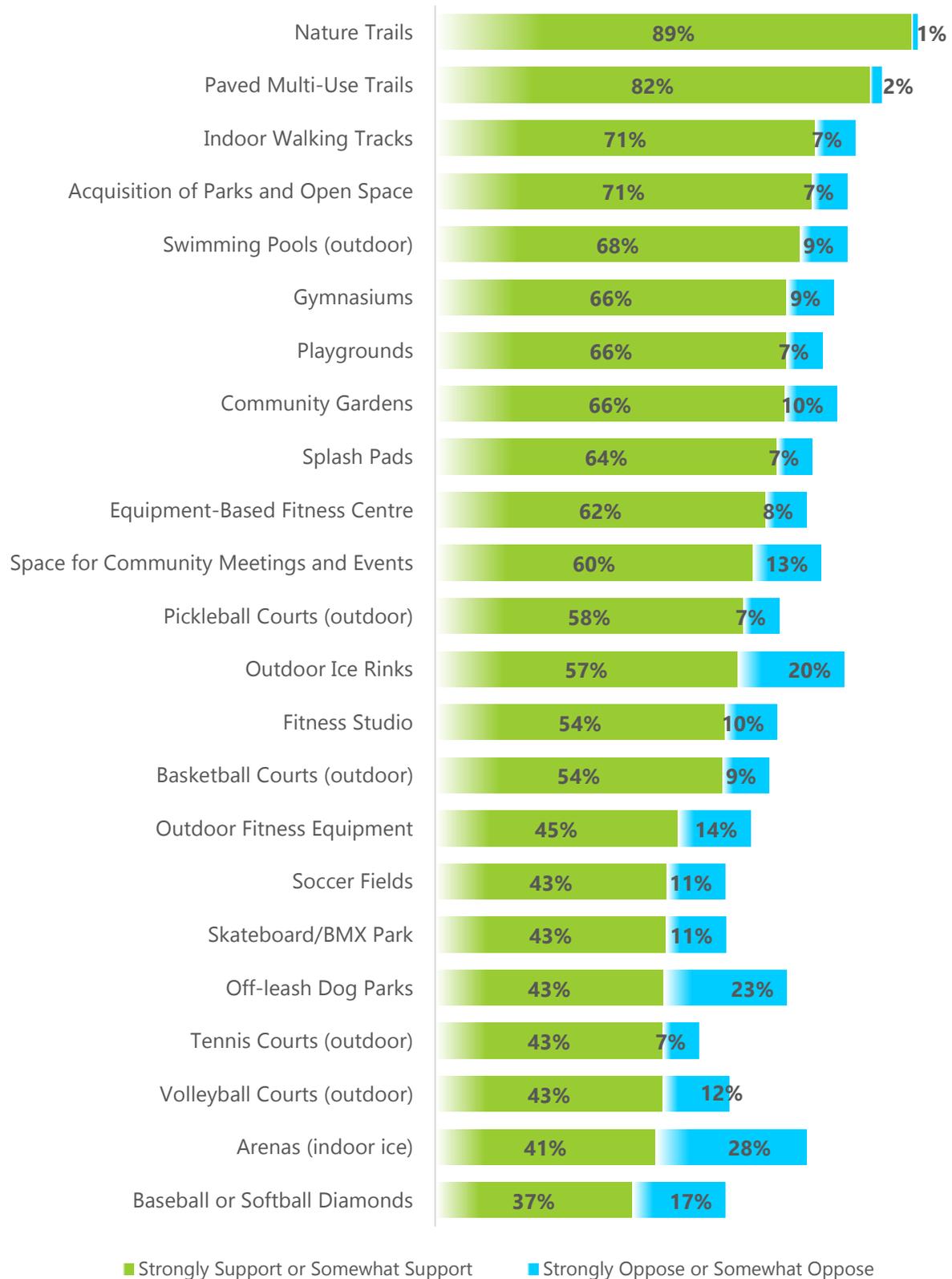
Neutral and 'Don't Know' responses not shown.

### Priorities for Investment

Figure 8 illustrates respondents' level of support for spending additional public funds on improving existing or developing new parks and recreation facilities. Consistent with trends in the sector, facilities that support unstructured and self-scheduled activities were most commonly supported for additional spending. The top supported facilities were nature trails (89%), paved multi-use trails (82%), indoor walking tracks (71%), acquisition of parks and open space (71%), and outdoor swimming pools (68%).

## Municipality of Thames Centre Community Services & Facilities Master Plan

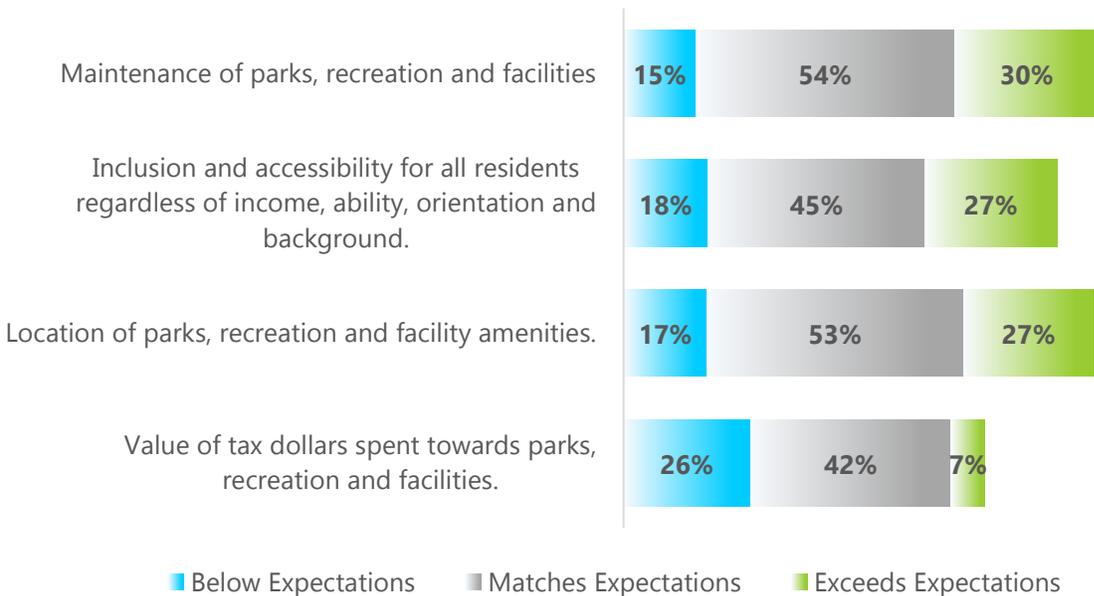
Figure 8: Support for Public Spending on New or Improved Parks and Recreation Facilities (88 to 94)



## Expectations for Parks and Recreation Services

Figure 9 summarizes respondents' level of expectation for parks and recreation opportunities in Thames Centre. Generally speaking, approximately half of survey respondents identified that their expectations are being met in the areas of maintenance, inclusion and access, distribution of parks and recreation amenities, and value of tax dollars. These findings reveal that enhancements are needed to each of these areas to meet residents' expectations.

Figure 9 Respondents' Expectations for Parks & Recreation in Thames Centre (n=91 to 93)



Neutral and 'Don't Know' responses not shown.

### 4.5 Stakeholder Focus Groups

Three stakeholder focus groups were held to engage community organizations in discussions on a range of topics related to enhancing parks and recreation opportunities in Thames Centre. Virtual focus groups were held on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023 with sports organizations that use indoor and outdoor fields/courts/facilities, and services clubs and community groups. The sessions were attended by 12 individuals representing 11 groups. An in-person focus group was also held with members of the Lion's Senior Centre on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023. Following the focus groups, a Stakeholder Survey was made available to all groups to submit input, including groups that were unable to attend the sessions and no submissions were received. The following is a summary of key themes from the stakeholder input that was received.

## **Municipality of Thames Centre Community Services & Facilities Master Plan**

### **Key Strengths**

Stakeholders felt that the Municipality's parks and recreation facilities were well maintained with specific mentions made about the quality of ball diamonds, arena, trails, FlightExec Centre and Thorndale Lions Community Centre, and splash pads. Stakeholders also viewed municipal staff as a strength in the community and the Municipality's commitment to investing in parks and recreation amenities, as well as ensuring that opportunities are accessible for all residents.

### **Trail Enhancements**

There was a strong desire to enhance trail opportunities in the Municipality. Suggestions were made to ensure that there is a connected system of sidewalks and pathways throughout the Municipality, as well as a mix of natural and paved trails. There was a desire for walking pathways within parks, particularly at Thorndale Community Park. Connections to trail systems in adjacent municipalities was also suggested. The need for supporting trail amenities was also suggested, including seating and signage.

Strengthening connections to the Outdoor Recreation Complex was identified, as well as ensuring that trails are accessible, particularly at Mill Pond, with supporting amenities at key locations such as parking, seating, and more. The need to promote where trails are located and to encourage their use was also suggested. Enhanced trail maintenance was also suggested to ensure that they are not overgrown.

### **Requests for Recreation Facilities**

Stakeholders generally felt that there was a good mix of recreation facilities in the Municipality, particularly for a community the size of Thames Centre. Some suggestions were made for new or enhanced recreation facilities, including an indoor pool, pickleball courts, fitness centre, BMX pump track, sand volleyball court, basketball court, rock climbing wall, velodrome, lawn bowling, artificial turf soccer fields, arts and cultural space, enhance senior centre space, and a community hall. A suggestion was received to create an equipment loan library for residents who may not be able to afford equipment or would like to try a new activity. Suggestions were put forward to enhance existing recreation amenities such as ball diamond lighting, skateboard park renewal, and creating a viewing area at Mill Pond.

Stakeholders expressed that if an enhanced level of service is provided, or new facilities are developed, consideration needs to be given to the need for additional staff resources. Concerns were raised about the limited availability of staff in Thorndale, particularly in the evenings if community groups required staff assistance. It was identified that there is a general need for staff at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre. Affordability of participating in recreation activities and renting meeting spaces was mentioned as being an important factor in encouraging physical activity and community engagement.

### **Distributing Resources and Working Together**

Stakeholders wanted to ensure that resources and facilities are evenly distributed throughout the municipality's main settlement areas of Dorchester and Thorndale. It was emphasized that Dorchester should not be prioritized and that consideration should be given to parks and recreation opportunities in Thorndale and other areas of the Municipality.

## Municipality of Thames Centre Community Services & Facilities Master Plan

It was suggested that the Municipality should continue to support community organizations and work collaboratively to provide parks and recreation services. Community groups play a key role in providing programs and services within the Municipality's spaces and are important to promote opportunities and engage residents. There may be new opportunities for the Municipality and stakeholders to work together to raise awareness about parks and recreation in Thames Centre.

### 4.6 Staff Workshops

Two staff focus groups were undertaken on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023 to collect input to inform the Master Plan. Engaging staff was a key component of the consultation strategy to gather important knowledge from individuals that collectively have years of experience in providing and delivering Thames Centre's parks and recreation services. These sessions also provided an opportunity to understand current challenges and brainstorm potential solutions. The first session engaged administration and operations staff and the second session included management staff such as the Director of Community Services and Facilities, Director of Finance, Director of Public Works, and the Director of Planning and Development, as well as the Interim CAO. Key points of discussion are highlighted below:

- Staff are proud of the wide variety of parks and recreation facilities that the Municipality provides. Specific mentions were made to the new Thorndale Lions Community Centre, the future expansion of the Dorchester FlightExec Centre, inclusive playground at Dorchester Community Park, the Outdoor Recreation Complex, and the relationships and partnerships with community groups that provide programs and services in the community.
- The population is aging and new residents are attracted to Thames Centre. These changes are influencing the types of parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services that are in demand with new residents often having high expectations for what amenities should be provided.
- Suggestions for new or enhanced parks and recreation opportunities were identified, including community requests that staff have received from the public, such as more programming (particularly for teenagers and adults), trails, parking at community centres, dog parks in Dorchester and Thorndale, customer service staffing in Thorndale, inclusive and accessibility initiatives, fitness centre, indoor pool, and tennis and pickleball courts.
- The Municipality has recently made a number of major capital investments in improving its parks and recreation facilities. It was noted that it will be important for the Master Plan to be financially sustainable with consideration given to operating impacts and external funding opportunities.
- Consideration should be given to monitoring and tracking key performance indicators, satisfaction levels, participate rates, facility utilization, and other factors to guide decision making and ensure that the department is a high performing organization.

## 4.7 Council Interviews

Individual interviews with each Council member were undertaken to understand their perspective (or what they may have heard from the public) on parks and recreation in Thames Centre, priorities, and how they can be enhanced to strengthen the quality of life for current and future residents. The following is a summary of key themes from the discussions.

- Council members recognize the importance of parks and recreation in the community and their contributions to creating active and healthy residents. Council is proud of the variety of parks and recreation opportunities that appeal to broad interests.
- It was mentioned that it is important to ensure that the community is aware of what facilities, programs and services are available in Thames Centre, and that effective promotion and awareness is vital to ensure that residents are engaged and active in the community.
- There have been community requests for recreation amenities, including an indoor pool, dog parks, community garden, ball diamond enhancements, fitness centre, banquet hall, and trails. The Municipality provides a strong range of recreation facilities but there needs to be more focus on facilitating unstructured and passive activities.
- Community organizations and volunteers are a strength of the Municipality and continuing to support these groups is important as they are the primary service providers in Thames Centre.
- Top priorities that should be considered as part of the Master Plan process include ensuring that there is something for everyone, dog parks, community gardens, ball diamond lighting, trails, parking, community beautification, and raising awareness about what's available.



## 4.8 Draft Master Plan Public Feedback Sessions

Once the draft Master Plan was prepared, the document was made available to the public to review and provide feedback on prior to being finalized. Residents were invited to review the full draft Master Plan on the Municipality's website and to provide their comments through an online feedback link, by e-mail, or written submission. Two informal public feedback sessions were also held at the FlightExec Centre in Dorchester and the Thorndale Lions Community Centre to provide an opportunity for the public to review a summary of key recommendations and provide feedback in person. Members of staff and Council, as well as the Consultants, were in attendance to listen to feedback and respond to questions. The following is a summary of feedback that was received, which have been reviewed and considered as part of finalizing the Master Plan.

- Skate parks should be redeveloped with concrete and offer basic to challenging components. Engaging the skate community is encouraged.
- Consideration should be given to repurposing a tennis court at Dorchester Community Park to expand the number of pickleball courts.
- There is a desire for a large commercial kitchen and a community hall at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre.
- There is support for trails and the development of new linkages, including to and through new subdivision developments. There is a desire for the Municipality to work with land owners and others to expand the trails system.



## 5.0 Parkland

### 5.1 Key Park Trends to Consider

#### Multi-Use and Multi-Season Parks

Municipalities are designing parks to be multi-use to appeal to broad audiences to encourage use. This is becoming increasingly important as municipalities are facing less park development opportunities and thus, there is a need to maximize the use of existing parks. There is also an operational benefit associated with multi-use parks that achieves maintenance efficiencies at fewer, but larger multi-use parks, rather than more, but smaller parks. The development of multi-use parks is encouraged as a best practice, although it is recognized that design is ultimately guided by park classification systems in each municipality. Thames Centre's Thorndale Community Park and Dorchester Community Park are excellent examples of multi-use parks that offer many outdoor recreation amenities and open spaces for residents of all ages to enjoy.

Municipalities are also experiencing a greater desire to engage in year-round physical activity, which has prompted many communities to explore strategies to activate their parks during the winter season. This may include clearing trails and pathways for walking, while grooming other pathways for snowshoeing. Plowing parking lots and winterizing washrooms are also being implemented, although there is an operational consideration which can be a challenge to overcome, particularly in municipalities with lean staffing. Relying on volunteers can often offset operational requirements to provide facilities such as outdoor skating rinks, which are often neighbourhood-driven amenities. Additionally, communities face pressures to accommodate outdoor sports and activities within indoor space to support continued physical activity during the winter season.

#### Connecting with Nature

There is a growing amount of research that demonstrates that there is a correlation between improved mental and physical health with interactions with nature, especially through activities such as walking and hiking, as well as general outdoor enjoyment. The importance of connecting with nature has been further heightened following the COVID-19 pandemic as many municipalities observed an increased use of public parks and trails. Thames Centre, and key organizations such as the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, offer a broad range of parks and outdoor recreation amenities to encourage residents and visitors to get active outdoors.

## **Climate Change Resiliency and Environmental Sustainability**

Principles of environmental sustainability and environmentally conscious facility designs are being ingrained in the sector. Parks are being increasingly recognized for their role in improving air quality, mitigating flooding from extreme weather, and reducing the urban heat island effect. Common standards for environmental sustainability help to guide investment and ensure that new infrastructure includes design features such as low-impact development practices, solar panels, geothermal heating, recirculation systems, etc.

Through an amendment to the Municipality's Official Plan (OPA 27), Thames Centre adopted new policies to minimize its impact on climate change and to become more environmentally sustainable. This includes, but is not limited to, encouraging compact and low-impact development, developing trails, constructing environmentally friendly buildings (e.g., LEED, net-zero, etc.), and more.

## **Park Comfort and Design**

Designing parks that are welcoming is important to attract users and encourage frequent park use. This typically involves incorporating comfort-based features in strategic park locations. Research demonstrates that there is a desire for a variety of comfort amenities including, but not limited to, pathways, seating, shade, trees, signage, landscaping, bathrooms, lighting, parking, and more. Designing parks with safety in mind is also a key consideration to create inviting public spaces. The Municipality's parks boast a number of these comfort features to draw users and encourage use.

## **Active Transportation**

Active transportation is becoming a core element of complete communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many municipalities observed a surge in usage of their active transportation systems as residents recreated close to home and sought connection with nature through trails. Active transportation also has an environmental benefit to road uses because it alleviates road congestion and minimizes vehicular greenhouse gas emissions, land consumption, and the costs for road construction and maintenance. The Municipality boasts a number of trail routes across Thames Centre with its most notable trail system being the Mill Pond Trail in Dorchester. The development of the Municipality's trail system is guided by its 2015 Trails & Cycling Master Plan, which provides Thames Centre with a framework for creating a community connected with trails and cycling infrastructure.

## 5.2 Parkland Classification

A parkland classification system is a core element of park planning, design, and development. Classifications define the range of characteristics found in municipal parks such as their size, form, function, and/or range of amenities. Such definition encourages a broad range of park types and facility combinations that enable a consistent management approach that can be tailored to respond to community needs, while providing the general public, developers, and others with an understanding of the Municipality's parkland provision objectives.

The Municipality's previous Master Plan defined parkland based on three categories – Specialized Parks, Community Parks, and Neighbourhood/Local Parks. Through a review of the classification system, a renewed definition for each park type is proposed which takes into consideration the past definition, existing state of Thames Centre's parks, and best practices in parks planning, design, and development. The recommended parkland classification consists of the following:

**Specialized Parks** offer unique park experiences and amenities to residents and visitors that are accessible by driving, walking and other modes of transportation. Amenities found within Specialized Parks may vary depending on its intended use and therefore, the minimum park size varies. Specialized Parks may include sports complexes that contain lit and unlit sports fields that are capable of hosting tournaments, to small park lots with important historical features and open spaces. Park features found in Community and Neighbourhood Parks may also be located in Specialized Parks, as well as supporting indoor facilities.

**Community Parks** serves the entire Municipality and visitors and can accommodate all amenities found within Neighbourhood Parks, in addition to multiple sports fields, splash pads, community gardens, off-leash dog parks, special event and open green spaces, arts and cultural installations, and other supporting park amenities. Community Parks should prominently be located along a major road and be accessible by driving, walking and other modes of transportation. Community Parks may be located adjacent to indoor community facilities and schools. The minimum size for a Community Park should be four hectares.

**Neighbourhood Parks** serves the immediate surrounding residential area that accommodates facilities including, but not limited to, playgrounds, skate parks, sport courts, up to one sports field, trails, open greenspace, and other supporting park amenities. Neighbourhood Parks should be accessible by walking within 800 metres, or a 10 to 15 minute walk, without crossing barriers such as major roads, waterbodies, and railways. Neighbourhood Parks may be located adjacent to schools. The minimum size for a Neighbourhood Park should be 0.8 hectares.

### Recommendation

1. Use the updated parkland classification contained in the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan to guide the development and redevelopment of active parkland according to park type, form, function, size, and the features and amenities they provide.

### 5.3 Parkland Supply and Distribution

The Municipality owns 57.1 hectares of active parkland across nine sites. Active parkland refers to land that would be suitable for accommodating outdoor recreation amenities, as well as open space for unstructured uses. These parks offer recreation facilities such as sports fields and playgrounds, with supporting amenities, including pathways and seating and more. The parkland system also includes open greenspaces that can support unstructured activities and gatherings. An inventory of the Municipality’s parkland supply is summarized in Table 2 and the geographic distribution is illustrated in Figure 10. Thames Centre is providing a service level of 3.9 hectares of active parkland per 1,000 residents. The active parkland supply is complemented by natural areas, including lands owned by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, including Mill Pond Park and Dorchester Conservation Area.

There are four subdivision applications being considered where approximately 5.2 hectares of active parkland will be dedicated to the Municipality. Assuming that the Municipality will receive these parks within the planning period, The Municipality will have a total of 62.3 hectares of active parkland.

Table 2: Active Parkland Supply

Park Name	Area (ha)	Park Type
Avon Park	0.8	Neighbourhood
Crampton Park	1.1	Neighbourhood
Dorchester Community Park	12.0	Community
Harrietsville Park	1.6	Neighbourhood
Outdoor Recreation Complex	30.0	Specialized
Thorndale Community Park	10.7	Community
Wellburn Park	0.7	Neighbourhood
Woodvale Park	0.1	Neighbourhood
Wye Park	0.1	Neighbourhood
<b>Total</b>	<b>57.1</b>	



Table 3: Planned Active Parkland

Subdivision Name (Location)	Active Parkland Area (ha)*	Expected Park Type
Boardwalk at Millpond (Dorchester)	4.0	Community
Hawthorne Park (Dorchester)	0.06	Neighbourhood
Rosewood (Thorndale)	1.08	Neighbourhood
Vista Woods Estates (Dorchester)	0.14	Neighbourhood
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.2</b>	

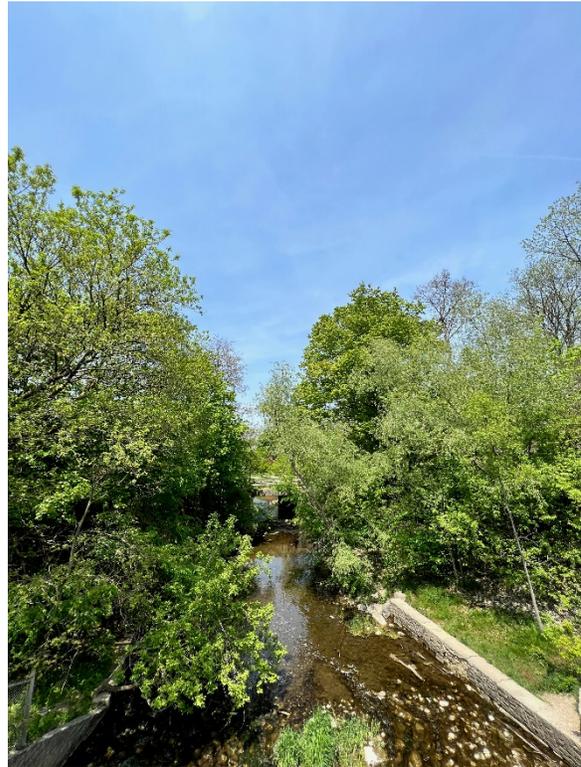
Note: Data provided by the Municipality of Thames Centre and is current as of March 2023 and subject to change. \*Active parkland area excludes open spaces, natural areas, buffers, trails and other spaces. Excludes approximately 6.62 hectares of land identified as parkland dedication in the Pemic Thorndale Land Corporation subdivision as this land is largely not suitable for active uses.

## 5.4 Future Parkland Needs

The Municipality currently maintains two parkland service targets. The Official Plan identifies that parkland should be provided at a rate of 3.0 hectares per 1,000 residents, while the previous Master Plan recommended that parkland be provided at 5.0 hectares per 1,000 residents. As previously mentioned, Thames Centre is currently providing parkland in middle of this range at 3.9 hectares per 1,000 residents (excluding properties such as Mill Pond and Dorchester Conservation Area). The Municipality's current parkland service level is within range of other municipalities across Ontario that target between 2.0 to 4.0 hectares of parkland per 1,000 residents.

Providing an appropriate supply of parkland is critical to ensuring a high quality of life and maximizing access to services and amenities that achieve community building objectives. As the Municipality grows, there will be a need for more parkland to serve an increasing number of residents. The consultation process also revealed that the Municipality's parks are viewed as a strength in the community and the community survey found that 71% of respondents supported investment in parks and open space, which was the fourth highest priority. Due to these factors, maintaining the Municipality's current parkland service level over the planning period is recommended in order to continue providing access to quality and geographically accessible parks in Thames Centre. Applying the current parkland service level to the Municipality's projected population generates a need for approximately 10 hectares of parkland, over and above planned parkland expected to be received as part of new subdivision development.

Determining parkland needs is also a measure of access. A distributional analysis using a distance of 800 metres was undertaken to better understand geographic accessibility to parks, taking into account barriers such as major roads, railways, and waterbodies. Within settlement areas, gap areas were identified on the north side of Dorchester, north of the Thames River, and the north side of Thorndale, north of Thorndale Road. While it is recognized that some of these gap areas will be addressed through planned parkland, future parks should be directed to these areas to address growing residential areas.

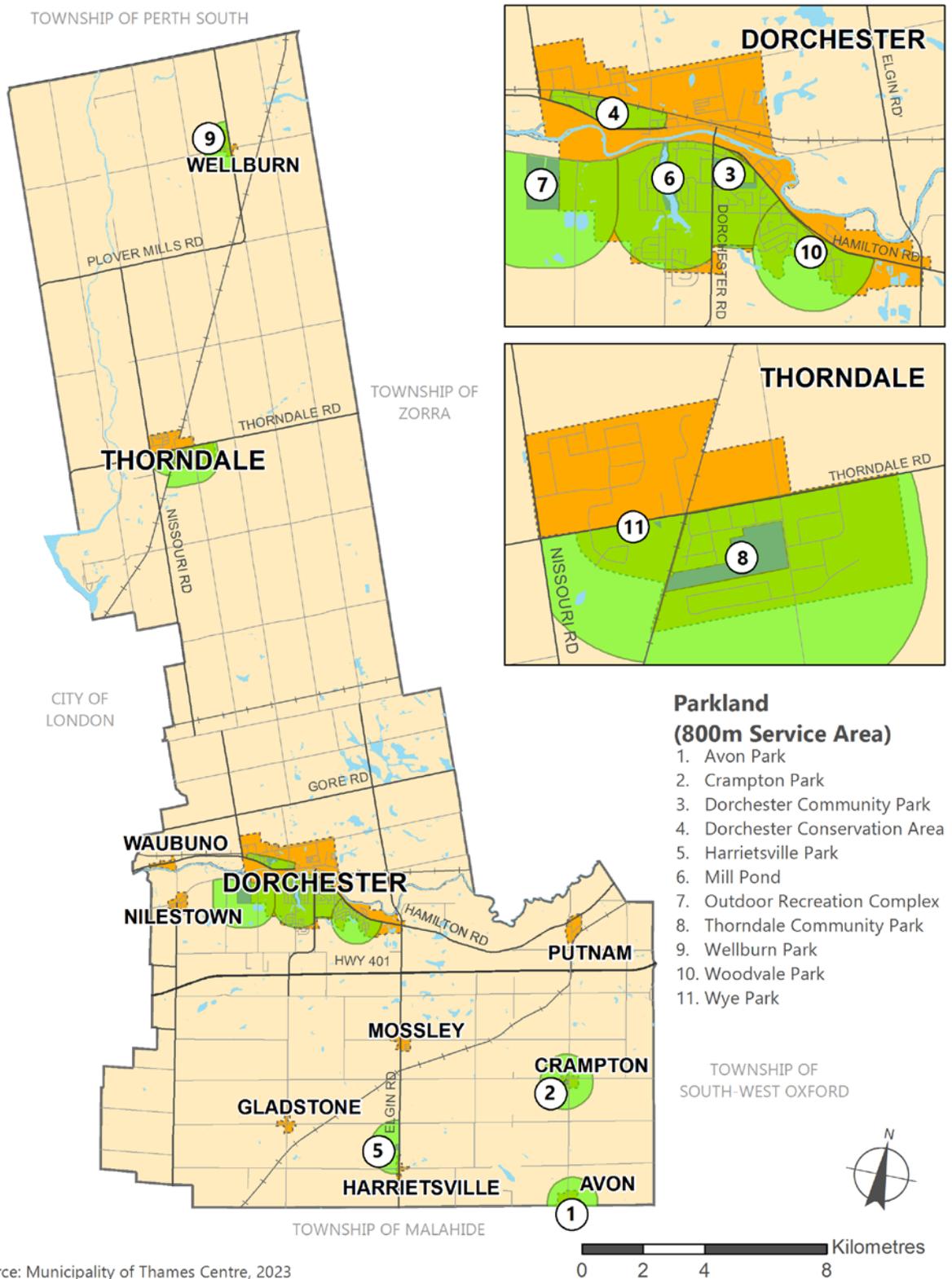


### Recommendation

2. Strive to add approximately 10 hectares to the Municipality's active parkland supply, over and above planned parkland associated with current plans of subdivision, to maintain a current service level of 3.9 hectares per 1,000 residents. Emphasis should be placed on securing parkland in future residential areas to address growth related needs.

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Figure 10: Municipality of Thames Centre Parkland



Source: Municipality of Thames Centre, 2023

## 5.5 Parkland Policy

### Ontario Planning Act

Parkland conveyance authority is established in the *Ontario Planning Act, R.S.O., 1990, c. P.13* and facilitated through the Municipality's Official Plan. Specifically, this includes Section 42 (which pertains to parkland conveyances associated with development and redevelopment) and Sections 51.1 and 53 (which pertain to parkland requirements as a condition of plan of subdivision approval and consent).

Under the *Act*, municipalities may levy a **standard rate** of 5% of developable residential lands (or cash-in-lieu) or 2% of commercial and industrial lands, or an **alternative rate** of up to one hectare of land for every 600 hundred residential units or an equivalent to one hectare of land for every 1,000 units when requiring cash-in-lieu of land. The alternative rate typically generates more parkland when densities exceed 30 units per hectare when accepting land and 50 units per hectare when accepting payment, although recent changes to the *Act* have instituted caps on this (10% of land or its value for sites under 5 hectares, and 15% for sites greater than 5 hectares).

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

- **Bill 108** (*More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019*) proposed sweeping changes to parkland dedication requirements, but these changes were not brought into force as they were ultimately further amended through Bill 197.
- **Bill 197** (*COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020*) introduced a sunset clause for existing parkland dedication by-laws that use the alternative rate (September 18, 2022); new by-laws are appealable to the Ontario Land Tribunal.
- **Bill 109** (*More Homes for Everyone Act, 2022*) amended parkland requirements on lands designated as transit-oriented communities; this clause is unlikely to apply to the Municipality of Thames Centre due to the lack of public transit.
- **Bill 23** (*More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022*) was introduced in October 2022 and came into effect on November 28, 2022. Bill 23 introduced significant changes to parkland dedication requirements (among many other aspects of the *Planning Act, Development Charges Act*, etc.), including but not limited to reductions in the alternative parkland dedication requirement.

The recent changes introduced by the ***More Homes Built Faster Act (Bill 23)*** will result in reductions to parkland dedication and cash-in-lieu requirements compared to the previous legislation, especially for areas of higher density. A summary of some of these recent changes is provided below:

- The **maximum alternative dedication rate** has been reduced to 1 ha/600 units for parkland and 1 ha/1,000 units for cash in lieu. Further, the legislation caps the maximum alternative dedication rates at 10% of the land for sites under 5 ha and at 15% for sites greater than 5 ha. This will dramatically reduce parkland dedication and cash-in-lieu to the Municipality.

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- Affordable residential units, attainable residential units, inclusionary zoning residential units, non-profit housing and additional residential unit developments are **exempt** from parkland dedication requirements. This will also reduce parkland dedication and cash-in-lieu to the Municipality, possibly increasing the financial burden on taxpayers and/or leading to reduced levels service.
- **Parkland rates** are frozen as of the date that a zoning-by law or site plan application is filed. The freeze is effective for two years after approval. This will reduce cash-in-lieu payments to the Municipality.
- To take effect at a future date, developers will be able to identify the land they intend to convey to the municipality for parkland. These lands may include **encumbered lands** and privately-owned public space (POPs). If agreement cannot be reached, the municipality or the landowner can appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal. This may result in less suitable lands being accepted as parkland dedication.
- There is a new requirement for municipalities to **spend or allocate** at least 60% of the monies in their parkland reserve account at the beginning of each year.
- Municipalities are required to develop a **parks plan** prior to passing a parkland by-law. Previously, this requirement applied only to those municipalities that authorized use of the Section 42 alternative rate, but now includes those that include the standard rate (e.g., 5% of lands as per Section 51.1).

### Thames Centre Official Plan (2022)

The Thames Centre Official Plan is the Municipality's primary guiding land use planning document. It is noted that the Official Plan has not been amended to conform to the recent changes associated with Bill 23 (as described above). Policies relevant to parkland are contained in Section 2.7. Section 2.7.1 identifies that parkland will be provided at a rate of 3.0 hectares per 1,000 residents. The Official Plan identifies that the greatest concentration of parkland is located within Dorchester. It identifies that while parks should continue to be located in urban areas, playfields may be developed to serve the larger community by locating them in an accessible location and may be established within the Agricultural designation, provided that it does not interfere with farm operations and that no alternative site within a Settlement Area exists, and that the location serves the greater community.

Section 2.7.2 provides direction on land conveyances. For residential development, the Municipality may require up 5% of land for development at 14 units per gross hectare or less, or one hectare for every 300 dwelling units for development at densities greater than 14 units per gross hectare. Up to 2% of land may be required for commercial and industrial development. Lands conveyed under this section of the Official Plan must be satisfactory to the Municipality and must be free of environmental constraints.

Alternative conveyances are outlined in Section 2.7.3, where the Municipality may require cash-in-lieu of parkland for development. The Municipality may require cash-in-lieu under the following circumstances:

- The required land dedication fails to provide an area of suitable shape, size, or location for development as public parkland;

## Municipality of Thames Centre Community Services & Facilities Master Plan

- The required dedication of land would render the remainder of the site unsuitable or impractical for development; or
- Existing park and recreational facilities in the vicinity of the site are, in the opinion of Council, are already adequate to serve the projected increase in population.

In addition to providing direction on parkland conveyance, the Official Plan provides direction on parks and open spaces in Thames Centre. Specifically, Section 4.8.2 establishes that the goals of the parks and open space designation in the Municipality are to:

- Provide a range and balance of public parks and recreation opportunities that meet the changing needs of area residents,
- Support the development and maintenance of recreation and conservation areas and the acquisition, beautification and maintenance of public parks, facilities and open space.
- Encourage an overall parkland supply of one hectare for every three hundred dwellings, all the while ensuring that the acquisition and maintenance of public parks and open spaces remains within the financial resources of the Municipality, and
- Preserve and enhance open space areas for the benefit of existing and future residents of the Municipality.

The Municipality's Official Plan will require updating to address the legislative changes introduced by Bill 23. These changes will result in reductions in parkland dedication and cash-in-lieu requirements. This will present new challenges for providing and maintaining adequate parkland service levels, including smaller park blocks that are used more intensely and are thus more costly to construct and maintain. New approaches will be required to both acquire suitable land for parks and to program them to meet the unique range of needs, which are described in this Master Plan. Incorporating policies that support planning, design, and development of parkland is recommended to recognize the value of parkland in Thames Centre. Utilizing this Master Plan as the basis for preparing a Parks Plan, in consultation with local school boards, is also recommended to align with the requirements of the Planning Act, prior to passing a parkland by-law.

### Recommendations

3. As part of a future Official Plan Review, update parkland policies to align with the amendments to the Ontario Planning Act and Bill 23 and incorporate policies to support the planning, design, and development of parkland, including consideration to the recommendations contained in this Master Plan.
4. Use this Master Plan as the basis for preparing a Parks Plan, in consultation with local school boards.

## 5.6 Parkland Acquisition

Through future development applications, Thames Centre will have the potential to add to the Municipality's current parkland supply. To help achieve the desired parkland target, it is recommended that the Municipality adopt a "parkland first" approach to prioritize parkland dedication rather than the alternative cash-in-lieu of parkland during the development process. This means that:

- a) Policies and practices that support on-site parkland dedication should be encouraged;
- b) Parkland will be required when the development will result in a park block that: (i) is at least 0.8 hectares in size at a minimum or (ii) expands an existing park.
- c) The Municipality may still collect cash-in-lieu of parkland when it is determined to be more beneficial, especially for development projects that would not meet the minimum requirements. For example, cash-in-lieu may be considered for development applications that cannot physically accommodate a minimum park block of 0.8 hectares. In addition, privately owned public spaces may be permitted.
- d) All lands to be dedicated for park purposes should be to the satisfaction of the Municipality. Encumbered lands such as Environmental Protection Areas, hazard lands, steep slopes, contaminated lands, easements, and stormwater ponds, should be kept to a minimum.

The Planning Act can only deliver a portion of the Municipality's future park needs. A growing focus will need to be placed on municipal parkland acquisition (partly funded through parkland cash-in-lieu reserves) and other tools to meet the Municipality's parkland target. This may include, but not be limited to:

- a) Municipal land purchase or lease (with a focus on priority areas, expansion of existing park sites, or land banking), funded from cash-in-lieu reserves, general tax fund, grants, donors, etc.
- b) Land exchanges or swaps.
- c) Off-site conveyance of parkland ideally in priority areas).
- d) Creating a Parks Foundation (e.g., community, corporate or municipal donations towards parkland acquisition).
- e) Reallocating surplus municipal lands (or purchasing surplus school sites) for park use.
- f) Partnering/joint provision of lands with local partners under agreement.
- g) Enhancing existing parks to increase recreational opportunities, particularly in areas where future growth is expected.

## Recommendations

5. Adopt a “parkland first” approach that prioritizes parkland conveyance over cash-in-lieu of parkland in order to address parkland longer-term parkland needs and deficits. Parkland conveyance should: (i) be acceptable to the Municipality; (ii) result in park blocks that are at least 0.8 hectares in area; and (iii) minimize the dedication of encumbered lands.
6. Seek to maximize parkland dedication through development and redevelopment applications, as well as alternative parkland acquisition strategies (e.g., purchase/lease, land exchanges, partnerships, land banking, off-site conveyance, reallocation of surplus lands, etc.).
7. Work with partners to maximize community access to non-municipal parks and outdoor spaces through permitting, long-term public access agreements, etc.

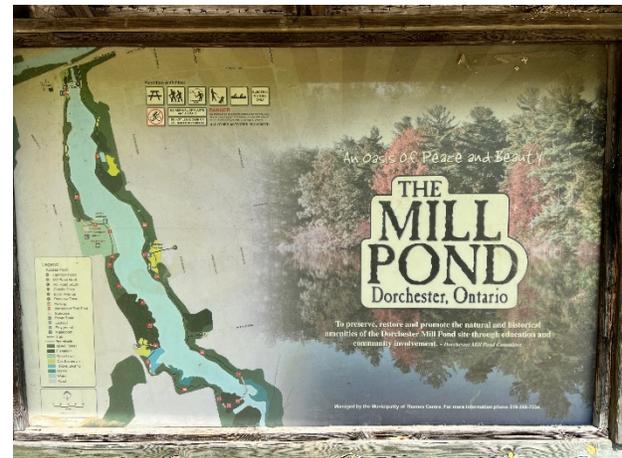


## 5.7 Parkland Design and Renewal

Access to quality parks is an important aspect in building complete communities and allows residents to spend more time in their neighbourhoods. While there continues to be a demand for traditional forms of parkland for recreation and sport, public spaces are increasingly being recognized for their contributions towards healthy communities, community greening, urban renewal, placemaking, public art and expression, and more. A wide range of public spaces are needed to fill a variety of community roles and the parkland classification system recommended in this Master Plan will help continue to guide development and renewal in Thames Centre.

The consultation process identified a growing need to incorporate more park amenities such as seating, shade, washrooms, pathways, and other recreation facilities that increase the usability of parks for residents of all backgrounds. Relatively modest investments can have dramatic improvements on parks and encourage participation and physical activity for everyone, regardless of age, gender, or income. For example, walking is the popular activity and looped trails and pathways draw people into parks and ensure that they are accessible, helping to create a sense of safety and community. The availability of supporting amenities such as seating, shade, and other features also need to be considered to encourage use among all age groups.

The renewal or development of parks and park infrastructure will become a greater concern over time as public spaces age or require a renewed focus to respond to new uses and preferences for facilities and amenities, as well as to accommodate growth-related needs. For example, the Municipality has enjoyed a long relationship with the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority who provides public access to Mill Pond and the Dorchester Conservation Area. These locations are predominantly passive parks where activities are generally limited to park enjoyment and trail use with limited amenities, including playgrounds. The Municipality is responsible maintaining these locations and there is a need to renew various aspects of these locations such as trail maintenance, boardwalks, playgrounds, and more. The Municipality has planned for some capital projects as part of regular asset management such as playground replacement; however, more focus is needed given the significance of these properties. A renewal strategy should be developed to establish priority projects, opportunities for enhancement, funding strategy, partnerships, and other details. Working in collaboration with the conservation authority, the public, and other stakeholders (e.g., Mill Pond Committee) is encouraged.



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This Master Plan also identifies potential opportunities to strengthen the Thorndale Community Park as an outdoor public place for recreation activity and community gatherings. Development of this park is guided by the Municipality's 2016 Thorndale Community Centre & Park Plan. During this Master Plan period, Thorndale is expected to undergo considerable population growth and thus there may be merit in re-engaging the public and community stakeholders (e.g., Thorndale Agricultural Society) to update this Plan to ensure that it continues to reflect the needs of the growing community and the activities that take place at this location.

Through the consultation process, a variety of comments and suggestions were heard such as the need for enhanced parking, walking pathways, drainage, and general beautification. Suggestions were made for the outdoor concrete pad, including a sport court or covered space for gatherings or events. Regarding the indoor space, there is a desire for a community hall and enhanced kitchen space (e.g., for catering), indoor walking track, and to ensure that audio and visual equipment is available. Heating the fieldhouse was also suggested. This Master Plan makes recommendations relating to enhancements at this park including, established designated pathways throughout the park to link the parking lot to site amenities, exploring the feasibility for outdoor fitness equipment, and renewing the splash pad and skate park. No recommendations are made to the indoor facility, although monitoring its use is encouraged to inform decisions for future improvements during the next planning period.

Dorchester Community Park is also one of the Municipality's major destinations for recreation and community gatherings. The park is well utilized and fully developed as there are limited opportunities to incorporate additional recreation uses as there is also a need to maintain open greenspace to support casual uses and special events. Recommendations identified in this Master Plan include moving forward with outdoor fitness equipment, exploring the feasibility of constructing an outdoor basketball court, and renewal of the skate park, wading pool and splash pad. As a long-term strategy, opportunity may also exist to relocate one or more ball diamond to the Outdoor Recreation Complex to strengthen that location as a sports destination that can support games, practices, and tournaments. This strategy may alleviate parking concerns experienced at the Dorchester Community Park and provide an opportunity to reclaim park space for casual uses, trails, and special events, as well as other outdoor recreation amenities. The Municipality is encouraged to solicit input from the community to create a future vision for the Dorchester Community Park with these considerations in mind.



### Recommendations

8. Maintain a commitment to universal accessibility, safety, and comfort within the parks and trails system. Regularly consult with the Accessibility & Inclusivity Advisory Committee to ensure compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), recognizing that some areas with natural terrain are more difficult to access.
9. On a case-by-case basis, incorporate amenities to encourage park and trail use such as seating, shade structures, signage, and other features.
10. Engage the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority to establish a renewal strategy for Mill Pond Park.
11. Initiate a review and update of the 2016 Thorndale Community Centre & Park Plan to ensure that it continues to reflect the needs of a growing community, with considerations given to the recommendations contained in this Master Plan. Consultation with the public and stakeholders should form part of this process.
12. Undertake a visioning exercise with the public and stakeholders to create a future vision for the Dorchester Community Park that considers potential relocation of one or more ball diamonds to provide an opportunity to reclaim park space while creating opportunity for enhance open space for casual use, trails, and special events, as well as other outdoor recreation amenities that meet broad community needs.

## 5.8 Recreational Trails

A system of off-road recreational trails is found in Dorchester and Thorndale that enables active movement within these two settlement areas. The Municipality's trails are primarily found within the parks system at key locations, including Dorchester Community Park Trail, Thorndale Community Park Trail, and Mill Pond Trail (owned by the Upper Thames Region Conservation Authority but maintained by the Municipality). Other off-road trails are also found throughout the Municipality's settlement areas within subdivisions and other areas, including Two Schools Trail, Valleyview Too Trail, Wye Creek Trail, Harry Small Trail, Dorchester Conservation Area, and more (Figure 11). These trails are complemented by a network of sidewalks.

The development of the Municipality's active transportation network is advanced through Thames Centre's 2015 Trails & Cycling Master Plan, which recommends nearly 105 kilometres of new pedestrian and cycling routes to be developed or formalized, including 19 kilometres of pedestrian and multi-use trails (the balance being on-road cycling routes). Since the 2015 Master Plan was prepared, the Municipality has continued to develop the Valleyview Too Trail in the southeast corner of Dorchester, which extends from Foxhollow Drive in the east to Dorchester Road to the west, and extended the trail at Thorndale Community Park to the other side of Agnes Street.

The desire for enhancing Thames Centre's trail system was heard through the consultation process. Requests for strengthening trail opportunities were expressed by many members of the public with

## Municipality of Thames Centre Community Services & Facilities Master Plan

suggestions to enhance what is currently available, or for new trail opportunities such as creating a walkway at Thorndale Community Park to connect users from the parking lot to the outdoor amenities for enhanced access and accessibility. It was clear that trails are popular amenities in the Municipality as 80% of community survey respondents identified that they have participated in walking or hiking, which was the most popular recreation activity. Additional investment in nature and multi-use trails was also identified as the top two priorities.

Continuing to improve active transportation infrastructure has been an important initiative for the Municipality. Investments have been made to expand the trail network and enhance existing routes such as repaving the trail at Dorchester Community Park and installing a story walk (Tales and Trails). Guided by the Municipality's Trails & Cycling Master Plan, several capital projects have already been identified to be implemented over the next 10 years that are aimed at enhancing the trail system in Dorchester and Thorndale. Planned trail projects include:

- Extending the Two School Trail (400 metres)
- Constructing the King Street Trail (1.5 kilometres)
- Constructing the Railway Trail (1.2 kilometres)
- Extending Eva Street Trail (distance not defined)
- Installing lights along Thorndale Trail
- Paving Valleyview Too Trail, Thorndale Community Trail, and Cromarty Trail
- Installing a crosswalk at Wye Creek Trail



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Trails are commonly the most desirable features in a community, lending support for continued investment in trails and associated amenities. A strong trails system provides countless environmental benefits, promotes physical activity, connects people with nature, enables unstructured and affordable recreation opportunities, and contributes to the development of a sustainable transportation system. Research has also found that trails heighten community vibrancy by encouraging the development of walkable neighbourhoods where people are more likely to socialize and interact with each other. Through these benefits, Thames Centre's trails contribute to an improved quality of life for its residents.

The key to the continued development of an effective and robust trail network is to ensure that safe, accessible, and convenient linkages exist between users and key destinations, including ensuring that existing and future residential areas are connected throughout settlement areas (Dorchester and Thorndale) through the development of sidewalks, walking pathways and trails. An emphasis should also be placed on ensuring that there are walking pathways within parks to provide accessible circulation areas to internal amenities (e.g., playgrounds, sports fields, etc.). Dorchester Community Park is a good example that contains designated walking pathways that could be incorporated at Thorndale Community Park and other park locations. Trail design features and comfort amenities should also be considered in appropriate areas, including (but not limited to) wayfinding signage, seating, and shaded areas.

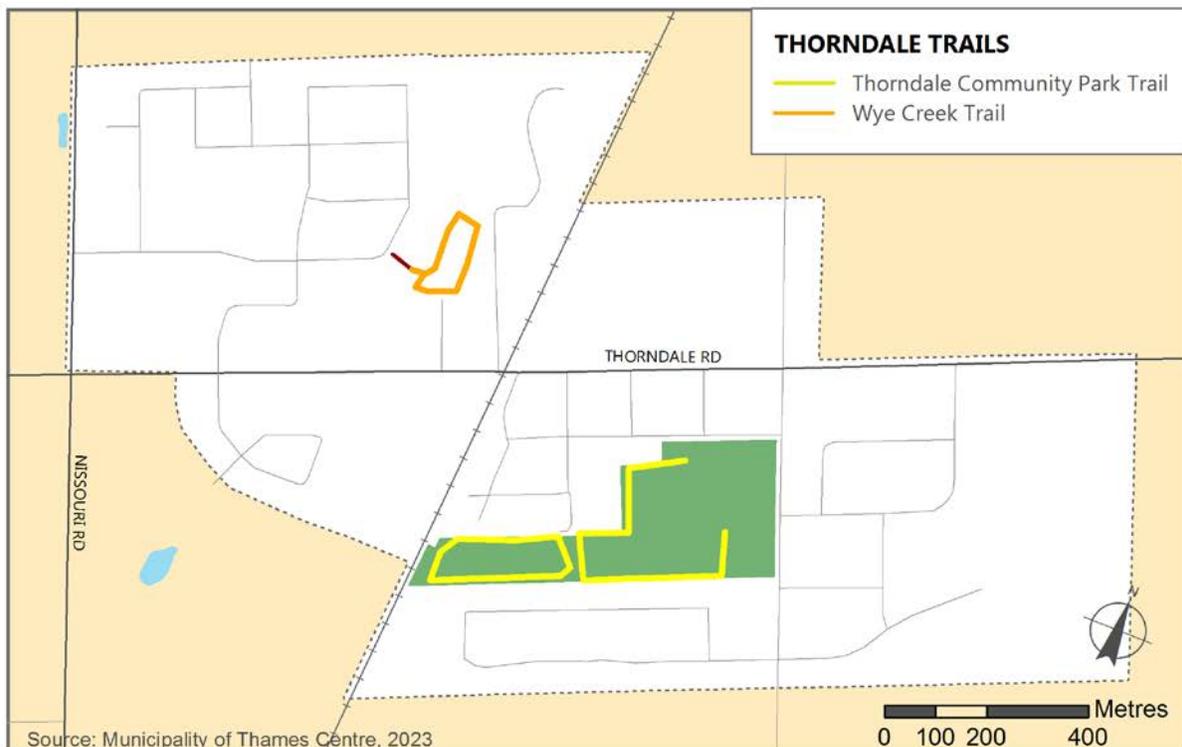
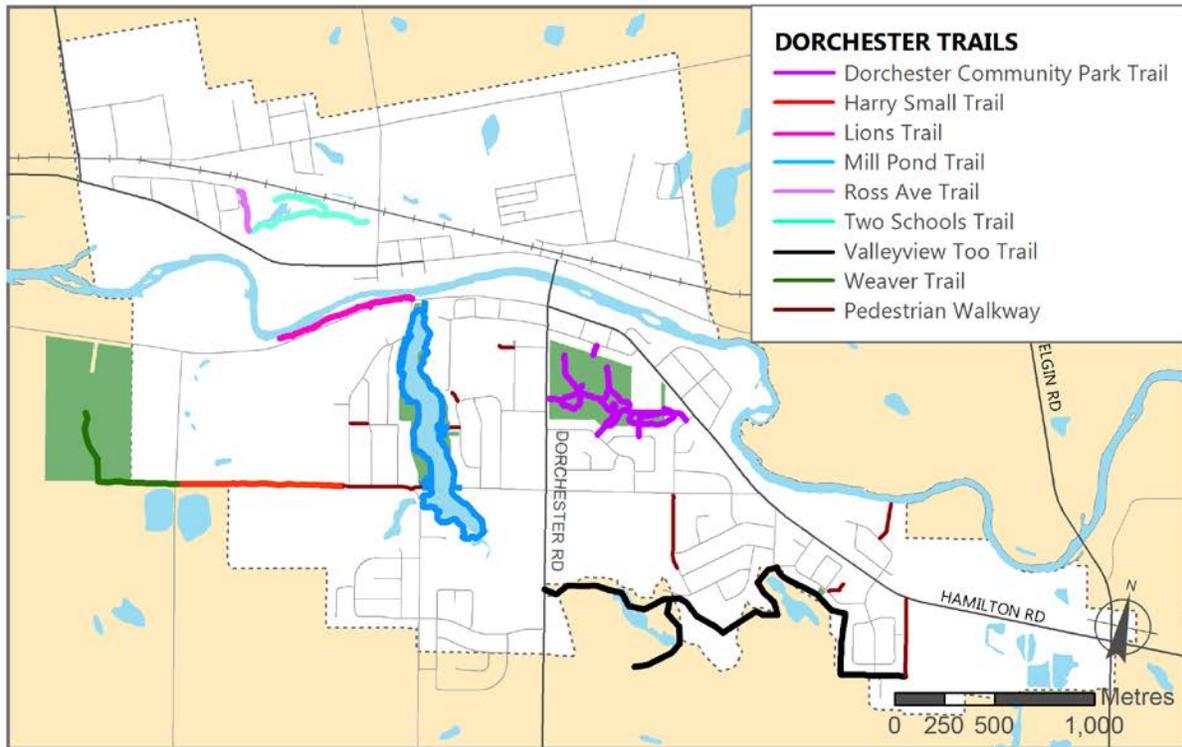
Long-term strategies to establish safe connections to the rural areas and adjacent communities should also be explored. This will involve coordination with Middlesex County to establish safe routes along major roads. Additionally, working with others to maintain or negotiate public access to non-municipal trails is encouraged.

Promoting the use of trails in Thames Centre is strongly supported by the Master Plan to encourage outdoor physical activities and attract families, which is consistent with the Municipality's Strategic Plan. Promotional initiatives that should be considered include ensuring that the public is aware of the Municipality's online trails map, as well as making it available in print and through a mobile application. Other potential opportunities include installing wayfinding and information signage within the community such as at key trailheads. Working with other organizations to promote active transportation opportunities in Thames Centre is encouraged.

These opportunities should be considered further through the Municipality's Trails & Cycling Master Plan, which should be updated within this planning period. The updated Trails & Cycling Master Plan should explore detailed trail routing, policies, design guidelines, partnership opportunities, high level costs, and other details, and be informed by public input.

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Figure 11: Municipality of Thames Centre Recreational Trails





## Recommendations

13. Guided by public input, undertake an update to the Trails & Cycling Master Plan to provide a fresh perspective on active transportation opportunities in Thames Centre. At a minimum updating the Trails & Cycling Master Plan should consider:
  - a. Creating and promoting safe active transportation linkages within Dorchester and Thorndale, as well as between settlement areas and hamlets, including working with land developers in and around subdivision development to link new residential areas to the existing/planned trail network;
  - b. Strengthening linkages within existing parks such as pathways to outdoor amenities;
  - c. Enhancing connections to the rural area, non-municipal trail systems, and adjacent municipalities, including working with landowners to maintain or establish public access; and
  - d. Working alone or in partnership with others to promote active transportation opportunities, including publishing trail routes (e.g., online, print, or mobile application), develop wayfinding signage, and other strategies to encourage active transportation in Thames Centre.

## 6.0 Recreation Facilities

### 6.1 Recreation Facility Trends

#### Aging Infrastructure

The 2019 Canadian Infrastructure Report Card found that approximately one-third of Canada's sports and recreation facilities were considered to be in "Fair" condition or worse. This suggests that municipal sports and recreation facilities require attention, show signs of deterioration, or have deteriorating components.<sup>1</sup> Provincially, many municipal facilities were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s and since this period, infrastructure province-wide has been underfunded. These pressures have been somewhat alleviated through various provincial and federal stimulus plans and municipalities are pursuing renewal and reinvestment projects.

Many Municipalities in Ontario are faced with aging infrastructure (e.g., arenas, outdoor pools, courts, program spaces, halls, etc.) and are pursuing renewal and reinvestment projects. These projects also provide opportunities to rethink provision and consider facility conversion or adaptive re-use options that accommodate emerging activities. Thames Centre recently invested in the Thorndale Lions Community Centre and is in the early stages of expanding the FlightExec Centre to enlarge the Lion's Senior Centre to accommodate enhanced programming. This initiative will also enlarge the tenant space used by the Victoria Order of Nurses and the auditorium.

#### Maximizing Existing Assets

Strategic programming and design are key factors in maximizing functionality and utilization of existing parks and facilities. Municipal providers are improving use of non-prime facility times by encouraging non-traditional uses. Thames Centre works to optimize use of its facilities as well as community assets in Dorchester and Thorndale with its community groups, as well as offering a variety of engaging and popular activities (including drop-in opportunities). Designing facilities to accommodate multiple uses also helps to maximize usage.

#### Multi-Use Recreation Facilities and Community Hubs

Best practices in facility design consider safety, comfort, and opportunities for community socialization. This may include strategic placement of seating areas, proximity to washroom facilities and open concept design features, as examples. Many municipalities further support convenience in public spaces through provision of wireless internet access.

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<sup>1</sup> Canada Infrastructure. 2019. Canadian Infrastructure Report Card. Retrieved from <http://canadianinfrastructure.ca>

## 6.2 Summary of Municipal Recreation Inventory

Thames Centre residents have enjoyed numerous investments in the parks and recreation system in Dorchester and Thorndale such as the development of the Outdoor Recreation Complex in Dorchester, renewal of the outdoor pool, and installation of the accessible playground at the Dorchester Community Park. Thorndale has also benefited from a number of major investments in recent years, including construction of the Thorndale Lions Community Centre, which is much larger than the previous facility, a new playground at Thorndale Community Park, conversion of a tennis court to two pickleball courts, and more.

The table below summarizes the publicly-accessible indoor and outdoor facilities in Thames Centre. This includes municipally owned and operated facilities as well as municipal facilities that are operated by community organizations through a lease agreement. The distribution of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities is illustrated in Figure 12 and Figure 13, respectively.

In addition to these facilities, residents also benefit from amenities that are owned and/or maintained by others, although public access may be limited, such as schools, conservation area, religious institutions, community organizations, adjacent municipalities and private providers.



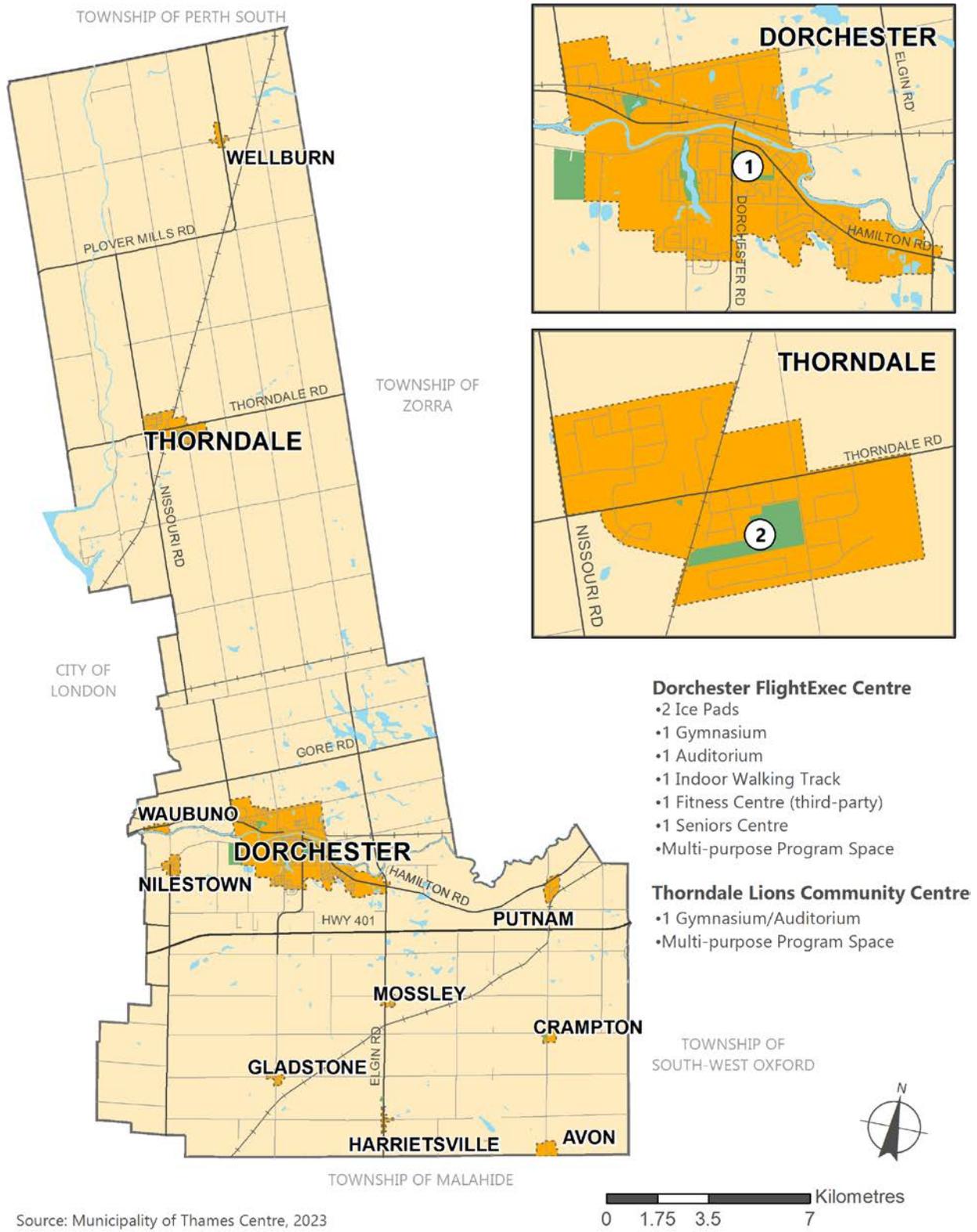
## Municipality of Thames Centre Community Services & Facilities Master Plan

Table 4: Thames Centre Recreation Facilities (Excludes non-municipal recreation facilities)

Facility Type	Supply	Location(s)
<b>Arenas</b>	2	FlightExec Centre
<b>Gymnasiums</b>	2	FlightExec Gymnasium, Thorndale Lions Community Centre
<b>Fitness Centre</b>	1	FlightExec Centre (Third-party operated)
<b>Multi-Purpose Space</b>	7	FlightExec Centre (4), Thorndale Lions Community Centre (3)
<b>Dedicated Older Adult Space</b>	1	Dorchester Lion's Senior Centre
<b>Soccer Fields</b>	12	<u>Lit Fields:</u> Outdoor Recreation Complex (2)
Lit	2	<u>Unlit Fields:</u> Avon Park, Outdoor Recreation Complex (3), Thorndale Community Park (6)*
Unlit	10	*Note: Includes portable nets used subject to program requirements
<b>Ball Diamonds</b>	11	<u>Lit:</u> Dorchester Community Park (2), Outdoor Recreation Complex (2), Thorndale Community Park (1)
Lit	5	<u>Unlit:</u> Dorchester Community Park (2), Harrietsville Park, Thorndale Community Park (3)
Unlit	6	
<b>Outdoor Aquatics</b>	4	<u>Outdoor Pool and Wading Pool:</u> Dorchester Community Park (2)
Outdoor Pool and Wading Pool	2	<u>Splash Pad:</u> Dorchester Community Park, Thorndale Community Park
Splash Pad	2	
<b>Basketball Courts</b>	3	Avon Park, Thorndale Community Park, Wellburn Park Note: One basketball hoop is located at Harrietsville Park
<b>Tennis Courts</b>	4	Dorchester Community Park (2 lit), Thorndale Community Park (1 unlit), Wellburn Park (1 lit)
<b>Pickleball Courts</b>	4	Dorchester Community Park (2 lit), Thorndale Community Park (2 unlit)
<b>Playground Locations</b>	13	Avon Park, Crampton Park, Catherine Street Day Park, Dorchester Community Park (3), Harrietsville Park, Mill Pond Park, Outdoor Recreation Complex, Thorndale Community Park (2), Wellburn Park, Woodvale Park
<b>Skate Parks</b>	2	FlightExec Centre, Thorndale Community Park

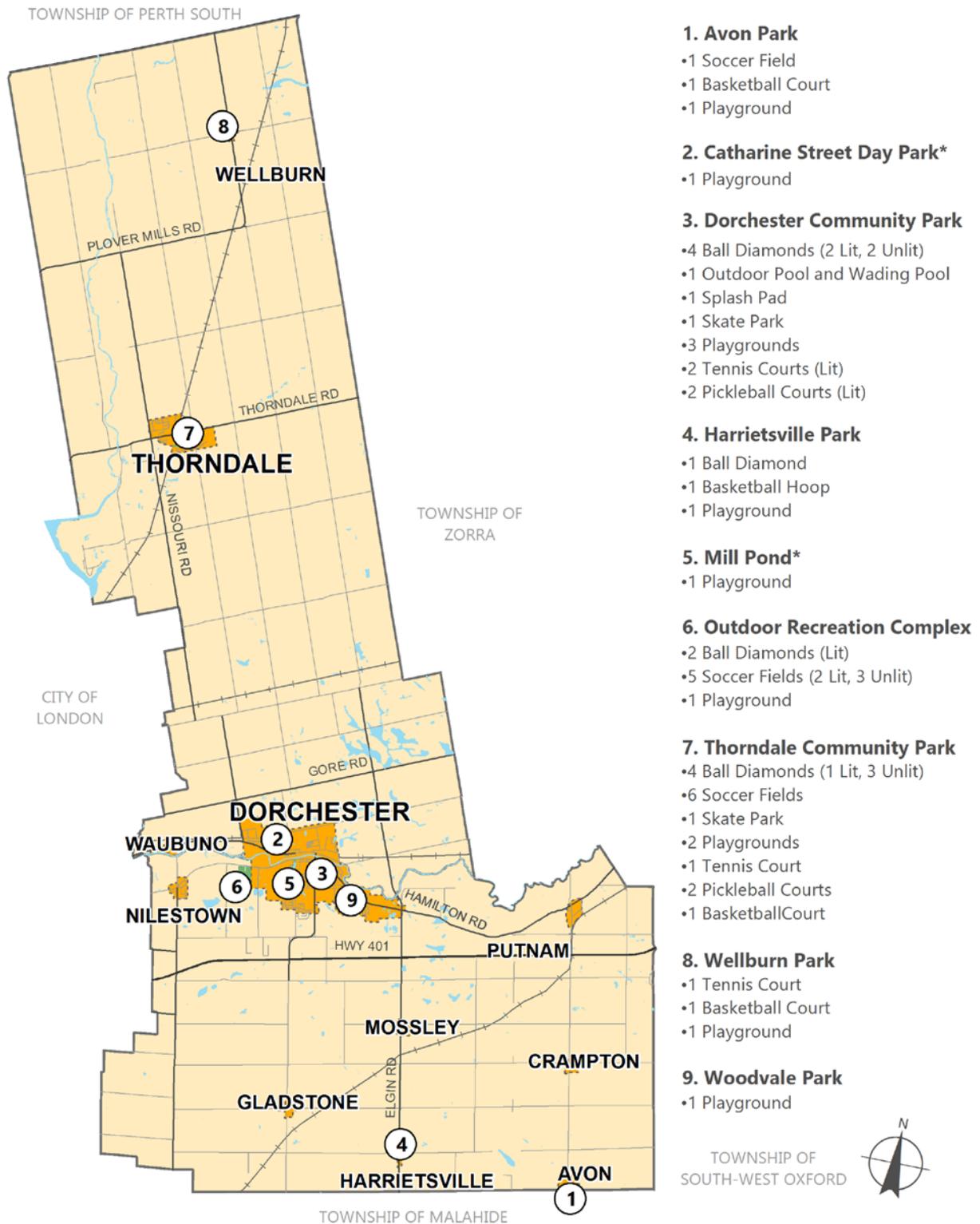
Municipality of Thames Centre Community Services & Facilities Master Plan

Figure 12: Inventory of Municipal Indoor Recreation Facilities



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Figure 13: Inventory of Municipal Outdoor Recreation Facilities



Source: Municipality of Thames Centre, 2023

\*Catharine Street Day Park and Mill Pond are owned by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority and managed by the Municipality of Thames Centre



### 6.3 Summary of Regional Recreation Inventory

It is common for residents in urban / rural municipalities such as Thames Centre to use recreation facilities in adjacent municipalities as it may be more convenient for them travel to these communities due to proximity or to access services that are not provided in the Municipality. Table 5 provides a high-level overview of the indoor and outdoor recreation facilities available in St. Marys, Zorra, Ingersoll, and London. The availability of the facilities in these communities has been considered as a part of the needs assessment process.

Table 5: Regional Municipal Recreation Facility Inventory

	Thames Centre	St. Marys	Zorra	Ingersoll	London
Indoor Aquatics		1		1	6
Arenas	2	2	2	1	22
Gymnasiums	2			1	10
Fitness Centres	1			1	3
Youth Centres		1		1	
Seniors Centres	1	1		1	9
Soccer Fields*	14	6	2	12.5	137
Ball Diamonds*	13.5	10	5	12	80
Outdoor Pools	1	1	1		11
Splash Pads	2	1	2	1	16
Basketball Courts	3		2	3	47
Tennis Courts	4	4		4	59
Pickleball Courts	4			0	8
Off-Leash Dog Parks		1	1	1	5
Playgrounds	13	9	6	13	140
Skate Parks	2	1	1	1	13

Note: Unlit equivalent supply is shown for soccer fields and ball diamonds given that lit fields/diamonds are generally equivalent to 1.5 unlit fields/diamonds.

## 6.4 Aquatics

Swimming is a popular recreation activity and pools are among the most sought-after public facilities due to their ability to accommodate a wide range of programs and the fact that they can be used by all ages and abilities. Through the public consultation process, a number of requests were received for an indoor pool. 40% and 35% of community survey respondents participated in public swimming and instructional swimming/aquafit, respectively.

### Indoor Swimming Pools

Thames Centre does not provide an indoor pool, although residents have proximity to several locations within driving distance in adjacent communities, including London, Ingersoll, and St. Mary's. Provincially, indoor pools are generally provided at a rate of anywhere between 30,000 to 50,000 residents, which includes both primary and secondary markets (e.g., non-residents). While communities with a smaller population base have provided indoor pools, they have done so recognizing the high cost of operating this type of facility at a significant deficit and rely on drawing users from the secondary market to reduce fiscal impacts.

A regional scan of indoor pools identified that there are a number of facilities within driving distance to adjacent municipalities, including in London, St. Marys, Ingersoll, and Tillsonburg. Using Dorchester as a starting point, residents are located within a 15 to 30 minute drive (15 to 40 kilometres) of these indoor pools, suggesting that residents already have a good level of proximity to this type of amenity. With a healthy supply of indoor pool options serving the secondary market, it is reasonable to assume that if an indoor pool was constructed in Thames Centre it would primarily be used by local residents and given the projected population size, it would not generate sufficient programming demand and revenue for it to be a financially sustainable endeavour to pursue, particularly as the Municipality recently made major investments in other areas of community services, including rebuilding the Thorndale Lions Community Centre, renovating the Dorchester Outdoor Pool, and upcoming expansion of the FlightExec Centre.

Indoor swimming pools are capital intensive recreation projects, although it is recognized that they can be managed with debt financing, fundraising, grants, and other funding sources. Annual operational costs are typically the responsibility of the Municipality and can have a significant impact on the municipal tax rate, particularly in smaller municipalities such as Thames Centre. Indoor swimming pools are provided as a community service and the decision to construct one is made from the perspective of intrinsic value (e.g., the community benefit that everyone should have the opportunity to learn to swim). As a result, indoor pools are generally operated at a deficit. For example, St. Marys and Ingersoll have projected for an indoor pool operating deficit of \$110,000 and \$257,000, respectively, for 2023. To minimize costs, municipalities may be able to leverage external funding sources or secure third-party operating agreements; however, there are currently no known partners at this time. Staffing indoor pools is also a challenge that many smaller municipalities face, particularly in communities that do not have post-secondary institutions.

With consideration given to the factors identified above, an indoor swimming pool in Thames Centre is not recommended during the time frame of this Master Plan. The recommended strategy is to augment outdoor aquatic opportunities by continuing to encourage the use of regional pools to meet local needs.

## Outdoor Aquatics

The Municipality provides an outdoor 25-metre swimming pool in Dorchester Community Park which was refurbished in 2020 to renew various aging components and to improve accessibility. The outdoor pool is complemented by a wading pool and splash pad. A splash pad is also located at the Thorndale Community Park.

Outdoor aquatic amenities such as pools, wading pools and splash pads are highly sought-after public facilities as they can be used to cool down during a hot day by a wide range of ages. The Master Plan community survey found that 68% and 64% of respondents supported additional investment in outdoor pools and splash pads, ranking fifth and ninth of out 23 facility types, respectively.

Outdoor aquatic facility models have changed substantially over the past 20 years due to many factors such as the growing number of indoor pools that have been constructed, aging outdoor aquatic infrastructure, increasing costs, staffing challenges, and unpredictable weather patterns. Some municipalities have been phasing out outdoor pools and wading pools in favour of splash pads as they have proven to be more cost effective to build and operate as they can be integrated into most park settings, are accessible, and do not require intensive staffing as there is no standing water to supervise. Other municipalities, including Thames Centre, have made efforts to reinvest in outdoor aquatic infrastructure to ensure that they continue to serve the public over the long-term, and respond to the demand for cooling facilities due to warmer summer weather associated with climate change.



No new outdoor pools are recommended in Thames Centre. Instead, an emphasis should be placed on renewing the Municipality's other existing outdoor aquatic facilities. The Dorchester wading pool is an aging asset that is due for renewal during this planning period. While the aquatic sector trends identify that many communities have moved away from wading pools, there is a strong community connection to this amenity in Thames Centre that provides an aquatic experience that is different from a splash pad and a traditional outdoor pool, particularly for small children who are starting to become comfortable with water play. The wading pool is also a free amenity for the community to use, which is a benefit for cost-conscious users, whereas there is an entry-fee for the outdoor pool. With these factors in mind, renewing the wading pool is recommended.

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Upgrading the Municipality's two splash pads in Dorchester and Thorndale should also be undertaken over the course of this Master Plan. These types of facilities generally have a lifespan of approximately 15 years before major renewal is required. The Dorchester and Thorndale locations were installed in 2005 and 2013, respectively and thus their renewal periods are expected during this planning period. Enlarging the physical footprint of the Dorchester splash pad is recommended given its prominent location in a community park that is well used by the community to provide an enhanced level of use and an expanded range of spray features. It is recognized that the Thorndale Community Park location has limited opportunity to expand due to its site constraints, however, renewal provides an opportunity to explore new spray features, etc.

### Recommendations

14. Undertake renewal of the wading pool at Dorchester Community Park.
15. Enlarge and update the splash pad at Dorchester Community Park to provide an enhanced user experience and expanded range of spray features.
16. Renew the splash pad at Thorndale Community Park.

## 6.5 Arenas

Thames Centre's two ice pads are located at the FlightExec Centre in Dorchester. The Municipality's primary rink is an NHL-sized ice surface (85' x 200') with seating for 850 spectators and a viewing area. The secondary rink (80' x 180') has seating for 500 spectators. Other supporting amenities include change rooms, pro shop and concessions.

While Canada is internationally regarded for ice sports such as hockey and figure skating, there are signs that the participation in these sports have been waning. Data from Hockey Canada indicates that participation in minor hockey has been steadily declining since 2009. Between the 2009/2010 to 2019/20 season, participation among affiliated minor hockey organizations declined by 14% to 206,000 players.<sup>2</sup> The decline in hockey and figure skating participation over the past decade has been driven by factors such as the escalating cost of equipment and travel, the increasing cost of ice, time commitments, and immigration trends since the country's growth is being driven by newcomers arriving from countries that do not have strong ice sport programs (e.g., Asian, Caribbean and South American nations) or are not familiar with arena activities.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, a survey commissioned by Hockey Canada and Bauer Hockey Inc. for non-hockey playing families found that one of the top reasons for not playing the sport is due to safety concerns (e.g., concussion risk).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hockey Canada. Annual General Meeting Reports.

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

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

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Minor hockey registration has been supported by increasing participation among females. Hockey Canada reports that females make up 21% of registration among affiliated organizations in Ontario, which is an increase from 16% reported in 2014/2015 season.<sup>5</sup> Anecdotally, the increasing popularity of female hockey has negatively impacted ringette, which has seen declining participation in some communities. The growth in female hockey is driven by a variety of factors such as changing lifestyle and personal commitments, efforts to break free from stereotypical gender roles and promoting sport participation among females.

As a result of increased participation in female hockey, there is greater competition for prime-time ice, placing renewed pressure on municipal arenas. However, this trend has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic as a study conducted by Canadian Women & Sport found that nine in ten girls decreased or stopped participating in sports during the pandemic and one in four girls are not expected to return to sport post-pandemic.<sup>6</sup> Reasons for not returning include a lack of self-confidence and a lack of opportunities (e.g., organizations no longer active). The study identified strategies to ensure that there are opportunities available for females to remain in sport, including involving females in the development of return to play plans and creating supportive environments that foster healthy social connections among participants and leaders.



<sup>5</sup> Hockey Canada. Annual General Meeting Reports.

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Women & Sport. (2021). COVID alert. Pandemic impact on girls in sport. Retrieved from <https://womenandsport.ca/>

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Participation in figure skating has also declined from historic levels. While the number of figure skaters registered with Skate Canada and Skate Ontario are not at levels experienced in past decades, Skate for Life registrations reported for 2020 (which include CanSkate and PowerSkate) have grown by 2% nationally since 2014 and provincial figures have rebounded to reach 2014 registrations.

Thames Centre's ice pads are well used. During a typically weekly ice schedule in 2022, the Municipality's ice pads had an overall prime time utilization rate of 94%.<sup>7</sup> Both ice pads are fully booked during the weekend with limited available ice time during the weekend (after 8:30 pm or 9:00 pm). This is indicative of an arena profile that is operating at near capacity. There is limited non-prime time ice use during the morning, daytime and late evening, which is typically compared to usage profiles in other communities, although the Municipality is working on increasing daytime usage such as allocating time to the Victus Academy. During the non-ice season the arena floor pads are heavily used in July and August for the summer day camp program, but are otherwise used on a limited basis.

The Master Plan community survey found that 40% of responding households have participated in arena activities. 41% of respondents supported additional public investment in enhancing the Municipality's arenas, which ranked second last out of 23 facility types; 28% opposed additional spending towards arenas. Requests from ice user groups were made for additional ice during the prime time period. It is recognized that organizations are able to find ice time at arenas outside of the Municipality such as in St. Marys and Ingersoll, although these may not always be at the preferred time given that they are non-resident users.

While the Municipality's arenas are at near capacity and there is a degree of pent-up demand for additional ice, there is a strong possibility that demand for ice time will soften due to several factors. Research from 2018 found that the cost of children's activities has put a strain on the finances of a majority (55%) of Canadian parents. As many as one in three (32%) Canadians used debt to fund the extracurricular activities of their children. Hockey topped the list as one of the most expensive extracurricular activities (an average cost of nearly \$750) and the research found that parents were increasingly less likely to enroll their children in hockey as a result. These results are compelling considering the current challenging economic climate. It is expected that cost will continue to be a barrier to ice sports, making it less inclusive and attainable for some families, although it is recognized that there are subsidy programs available to help offset the cost to participate.

Thames Centre's demographic profile is also changing. While the Municipality is expected to continue to attract young families with youth and children to the community, trends indicate that people are seeking a broad range of recreation activities and have interests beyond ice sports, which will impact future participation levels. The Municipality's population is also aging and it is expected that this will continue over the planning period. This may create opportunities for increased non-prime usage by older/retired ice users, along with expected growth by the Victus Academy hockey school.

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<sup>7</sup> Prime time period is defined as Monday to Friday from 5:00 pm to 10:00 pm and Saturday and Sunday from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm.

On this basis, additional ice pads are not recommended in Thames Centre over the foreseeable future. The preferred strategy is to promote the use of early morning weekday and weekend ice as there is available capacity during these periods, together with maximizing utilization of prime time hours and encouraging the use of available ice in other municipalities. Moving forward, the Municipality will need to ensure that its existing arena supply is maintained in a state of good repair to serve the community. One of the Municipality's two ice pads is older and due for major capital improvements related to the floor, boards and glass. This should be undertaken in a timely manner to avoid unplanned disruptions should major components fail.

### Recommendations

17. Accommodate ice pad needs by promoting the use of early morning weekday and weekend ice, together with maximizing utilization of prime time hours and encouraging the use of available ice in adjacent municipalities.
18. Ensure that the ice pads at the FlightExec Centre are maintained in a state of good repair, including undertaking lifecycle replacement of aging arena components, including ice pad flooring, boards and glass.

## 6.6 Gymnasiums

Two municipal gymnasiums are located at the FlightExec Centre (which can be divided in half to support simultaneous programming) and Thorndale Lions Community Centre. These municipal gymnasiums are complemented by school gymnasiums in Thames Centre.

Gymnasiums facilitate a variety of indoor sports and recreation opportunities that require a large open space with a hard surface and high ceilings. They support both registration-based and drop-in activities such as basketball, volleyball, badminton, pickleball, general fitness, and other active programs. Gymnasiums also support non-sports related uses, including social gatherings and special events. As gymnasiums accommodate broad uses, they are typically in high demand. Through the consultation process, requests were made for additional gymnasiums and gymnasium-based activities, such as pickleball. The Master Plan community survey found that 66% of respondents supported additional investment in enhancing or expanding gymnasiums, ranking sixth out of 23 facility types.



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Gymnasiums are designed with adaptability and flexibility in mind. At a minimum, gymnasiums are designed to accommodate a school-sized basketball court with lining for different sports activities. Supporting amenities may also include dividing walls or curtains, kitchens/kitchenettes, storage, change rooms, permanent or portable stages, and more. The Municipality's gymnasiums offer many of these features.

Thames Centre's gymnasiums have a good level of usage. Booking schedules reveal that the two gymnasiums have a combined utilization rate of 60% during the prime time period.<sup>8</sup> The Dorchester gymnasium at the FlightExec Centre is the most used location with a prime usage rate of 73% (70% weekday and 75% weekend). The gymnasium at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre has a total usage rate of 48% (68% weekday and 30% weekend). The FlightExec Centre gymnasium also has strong utilization during the weekday daytime as it is fully booked between 9:00 am until 4:00 pm. By comparison, weekday daytime usage at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre is sporadic.

Municipalities are increasingly including gymnasiums within new and expanded community and recreation centres. Gymnasiums are appealing to a wide variety of active and community uses for people of all ages, provided they are designed to meet a broad range of uses with appropriate dimensions and support spaces (e.g., storage). Both of the Municipality's gymnasiums in Dorchester and Thorndale serve the community well although there is pressure for additional gymnasium space, particularly in Dorchester. The Municipality previously explored the potential for a second gymnasium at the FlightExec Centre as part of the ongoing expansion. While a second gymnasium was ultimately not pursued, the current expansion plan includes a large auditorium which may be capable of accommodating some gymnasium type activities and community gatherings. Monitoring the use of this space once it has been completed will provide the Municipality with data to guide decisions on future gymnasium space needs.

Going forward, opportunities may exist to work with local schools to increase access to school-owned gymnasium space to address gymnasium needs, although it is recognized that public school gymnasiums may be undersized for some community uses. Directing competing demand for gymnasium space in Dorchester to the Thorndale Lions Community Centre is encouraged given that there is available capacity at this location.

### Recommendation

19. Monitor the use of the expanded auditorium at the FlightExec Centre to guide decisions on future gymnasium space needs while also directing competing demand for gymnasium space in Dorchester to the Thorndale Lions Community Centre to strengthen the use of this facility.

## 6.7 Fitness Space

Dedicated fitness space is located at the FlightExec Centre, which is operated by a private third-party provider, offering a range of group fitness classes, training and therapy. The Municipality also provides

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<sup>8</sup> Prime time period is defined as Monday to Friday from 5:00 pm to 10:00 pm and Saturday and Sunday from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm.

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some group fitness activities within its multi-purpose spaces as part of the Lion's Senior Centre programming and aquafit in the outdoor pool at Dorchester Community Park. Most recently, the Municipality has awarded Phase 2 of the Inclusive Park to add an adult/seniors equipment area to Dorchester Community Park which is being completely funded by donations, sponsorships and grants. These fitness opportunities are complemented by other non-municipal providers across Thames Centre such as the Dorchester Golf Club and in adjacent municipalities, including London.

Physical fitness and individual wellness are top of mind issues among many Canadians, resulting in a greater emphasis being placed on personal health. Public requests have been made for a fitness centre. The Master Plan community survey found that 42% of respondents have participated in fitness activities such as aerobics, yoga, fitness or weight-training, which was the fifth most popular activity. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of respondents supported additional public investment in enhancing or expanding the Municipality's fitness centre. Half (52%) of respondents also supported investment in fitness studios. Group fitness programming has become one of the fastest growing segments of the fitness sector, more so than traditional weight-training, as these programs are designed to be fun and social activities. Municipalities are also keeping pace with fitness trends such as functional training (e.g., TRX, Cross-Fit, and High Intensity Interval Training) and virtual programming.

According to recreation surveys across Ontario, walking is typically identified as the most popular recreation pursuit given that it is a self-structured activity that residents can engage in at one's leisure. This is one reason, among many, that has resulted in the growing popularity of indoor walking tracks as they offer several benefits such as year-round training for sport organizations and providing a safe and controlled environment for walking. Canada's varied climate conditions provide further support for walking tracks within community centres. Intangible benefits are also achieved as walking tracks promote physical activity and encourage users to remain active during the winter months. These benefits are achieved locally with the indoor walking track at the FlightExec Centre and the indoor walking program in the Thorndale Lions Community Centre gymnasium. A consideration to add winter maintenance to the extensive paved walking paths at Dorchester Community Park would allow for outdoor recreational walking in the winter, and should Thorndale Community Park walking paths become paved, this option would become viable there as well.

Fitness centre service models vary in each municipality as some communities provide equipment-based facilities that provide an introductory-level experience, while others focus on floor-based, wellness programming to promote active and healthy lifestyles. The Municipality operates the latter service model through direct program delivery and by working with third-party service providers. Smaller municipalities typically do not have a sufficient market to construct and operate equipment-based fitness centres to justify the cost, particularly as there would be a cost associated with regularly maintain and replacing equipment. It is recognized that a large portion of residents commute to larger centres such as London where there are existing fitness services that are higher quality than what Thames Centre may be able to offer. On this basis, an equipment-based fitness centre is not recommended, although the Municipality should be open to potential partnerships to offer equipment-based fitness services should opportunities become available and/or encourage a private sector provider to locate in Thames Centre.

Continuing to encourage the use of existing fitness providers in the Municipality, as well as offering its group fitness programming, including indoor walking program, is recommended. Coming out of the

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COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a greater demand for outdoor activities. Once the Municipality has installed the outdoor fitness equipment at Dorchester Community Park, evaluating opportunities to incorporate similar components to the Thorndale Community Park is recommended.

### Recommendations

20. Encourage the use of existing indoor and outdoor public spaces for group fitness activities potentially to be delivered by a community partner, and promote existing private sector providers. Be open to potential partnerships to offer equipment-based fitness services should opportunities become available and/or encourage a private sector provider to locate in Thames Centre.
21. Explore the feasibility of incorporating outdoor fitness equipment at Thorndale Community Park should the outdoor fitness equipment prove successful in Dorchester.

## 6.8 Multi-purpose Space

The Municipality offers seven multi-purpose spaces at the FlightExec Centre (4) in Dorchester and at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre (3). Incorporating multi-purpose space within community facilities has been an ongoing best practice in modern facility planning and design due to efficiencies in cross-programming, staffing, construction, and other factors. Thames Centre's multi-purpose spaces are suitable for a variety of uses, including meetings, birthdays, social gatherings, community programs, arts and cultural activities, and other events. Amenities vary by location and may include kitchens, seating, tables, storage, dividing walls, and more.

The Municipality's multi-purpose spaces are generally well used as they can accommodate broad range of community uses, programs and gatherings. Discussions with staff and the community revealed that there is a desire for more of these types of spaces to accommodate growing demand, particularly for seniors' activities. Thames Centre is currently in the process of expanding the FlightExec Centre that will increase the number of community program spaces, including a large auditorium and three multi-purpose rooms (in addition to enhanced space for the VON Centre).

The Thorndale Lions Community Centre is a recently redeveloped facility that provides enhanced access to community space compared to what previously existed. There are three community rooms at this facility, with the first and second community rooms having a retractable partition wall between them, which allows the Municipality to program multiple spaces simultaneously, although careful attention will need to be given to what activities take place at the same time to minimize undue noise conflicts between the abutting rooms. Through the consultation process, requests were made for a large community hall space with a stage, as well as a larger kitchen, similar to what previously existed at this location, in order to hold banquet-style gatherings and theatres. In place of a community hall, a new gymnasium was constructed at this location and while it may not evoke the same banquet-style and theatre atmosphere that was requested, it functions as a large multi-purpose space that can accommodate a broad range of uses and as a best practice, these types of space tend to have higher levels of utilization. Given that the

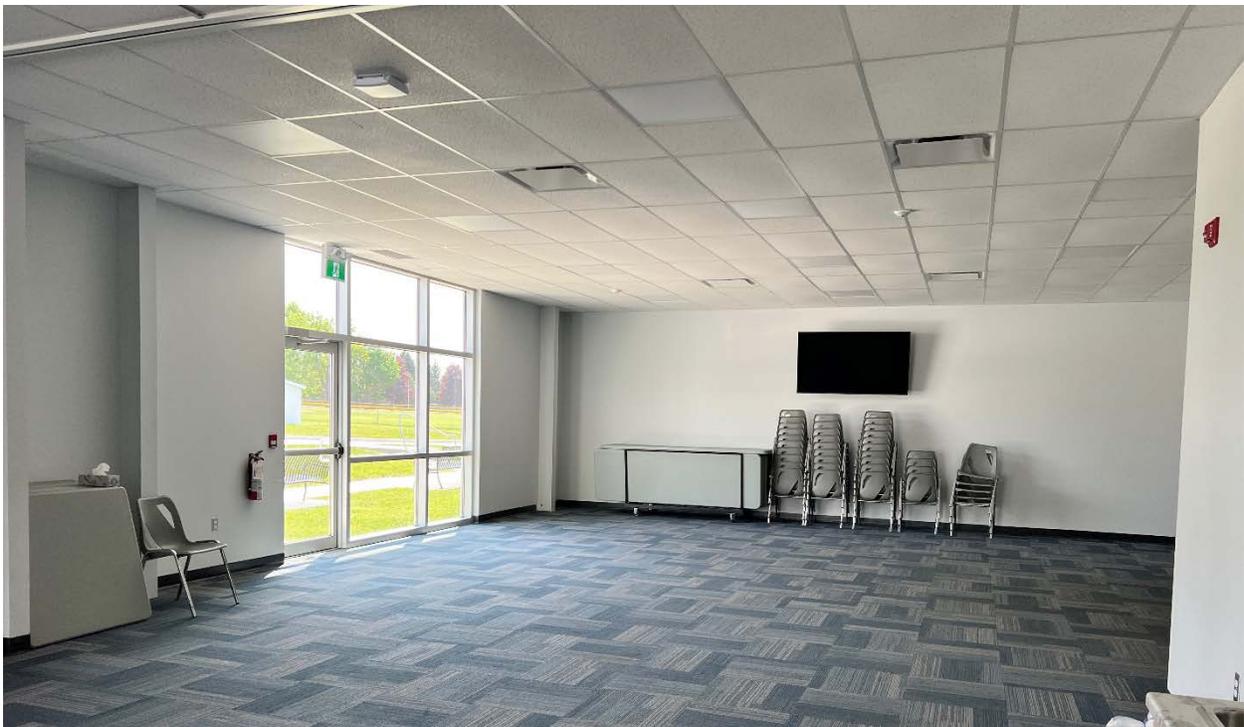
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Thorndale Lions Community Centre is a new facility, no additional multi-purpose spaces are recommended.

Due to the benefits associated with co-locating multi-purpose space in community facilities, the construction of new stand-alone program spaces is generally discouraged as they tend to be underutilized, have higher operational costs, and exhibit program limitations when compared to multi-purpose spaces within community centres. While no new multi-purpose program spaces are recommended, the Municipality is encouraged to promote the use of available community rooms in Dorchester and Thorndale to maximize community use, which may include exploring opportunities to partner with organizations and the community to provide activities and events within these spaces. Monitoring the use of these spaces will provide the Municipality with usage data to inform future expansion and space needs.

### Recommendations

22. Promote the use of existing multi-purpose rooms in Dorchester and Thorndale, including exploring opportunities to partner with organizations and the community to provide activities and events within these spaces.
23. Regularly monitor the use of the multi-purpose spaces to inform future expansion and space needs.



## 6.9 Dedicated Age Space

Thames Centre's Lion's Senior Centre is located at the FlightExec Centre in Dorchester. This location offers dedicated space for members aged 50 and above to gather, socialize, and participate in a variety of programs and events. The Municipality is currently undertaking an expansion to the FlightExec Centre, including expansion of the Lion's Senior Centre, which will enlarge the existing multi-purpose space to accommodate its membership and enhanced programming. While the Municipality does not provide any dedicated youth space, Thames Centre offers a number of organized and unstructured recreation activities for this age group within its facilities, which are complemented by local youth service providers and community sports organizations. The Master Plan community survey found that one-quarter (26%) of respondents participated in organized seniors activities, ranking 16<sup>th</sup> out of 24 facility types. 23% of respondents have also participated in children and youth programs.

There are currently limited opportunities to establish dedicated youth space and recognizing Thames Centre's large geography, it would be a challenge to identify a suitable location that would be equitable for the community as youth are limited in their travel patterns. The Municipality has been making efforts to accommodate youth within its existing spaces and to encourage them to use community facilities more, which continues to be the recommended approach moving forward.

For example, the Municipality has recently initiated processes to expand access to community spaces for youth, including enrolling in the ACT-i-Pass Program to provide Grade 5 students with free admission to various recreation activities in Thames Centre. The Municipality also recently partnered with The Playroom Experiment to provide free programs at the FlightExec Centre. Additionally, the Municipality extended its agreement to work with the Boys and Girls Club of London to provide youth programming at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre (and park). Consideration could be given to working with the Boys and Girls Club to offer similar programming in Dorchester, provided that it does not duplicate activities that are already offered. This strategy, together with other recommendations contained in this Master Plan related to outdoor recreation opportunities geared towards youth (e.g., skate parks, basketball courts, etc.) will address needs for this key age group during the planning period.

While more families are attracted to Thames Centre, the Municipality is an aging community and this is expected to drive the demand for activities and services geared towards this older adult age group. Trends suggest that the baby boomer population is generally wealthier compared to previous generations due to factors that include stock market booms, economic growth, pension plans and real estate;<sup>9</sup> however, older adult age groups are also vulnerable to experiencing low income, particularly for those living on fixed income. This supports the need to ensure that affordable and accessible opportunities are available for all residents within this cohort.

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<sup>9</sup> McMahon, Tamsin. (2014). Seniors and the generation spending gap. Retrieved from <https://www.macleans.ca>.

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Targeted consultation with members of the Lion's Senior Centre was undertaken for the Master Plan. Participants expressed several positive attributes in the Municipality such as the range of parks and trail opportunities found in Thames Centre, which appeal to all ages. The Thames Centre's indoor facilities are also viewed as a strength among the seniors community. Various suggestions were made to improve what already exists in the Municipality such as enhanced communication and marketing of local opportunities and continuing to offer a blend of in-person and virtual seniors programming. Trail enhancements were also suggested, including expanding the network and providing supporting amenities such as distance markers, seating, viewing points, and signage, as well as ensuring that trails are accessible.

From an indoor perspective, seniors expressed the desire for more program opportunities at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre to encourage increased use. Greater engagement with the seniors community was suggested to learn about what activities they would like to see, and if there are volunteers who would be interested in delivering programs, such as sharing hobbies and interests. In particular, the need for more parking at this facility was identified. Enhancements to the existing Lion's Seniors Centre were suggested, including a larger gathering space.

Dedicated community spaces for older adults and seniors are regarded as an important part of healthy aging in place as they provide locations for residents to gather and share interests. These spaces provide opportunities for active living, health and wellness education, and other activities that promotes cognitive stimulation and socialization. The Municipality's Lion's Senior Centre provides a range of activities, including pickleball, movie afternoons, meals, dancing, music, arts and crafts, bingo, shuffleboard, discussion groups, cards, group fitness, day trips, and more. Similar seniors programs are also offered at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre. The Municipality's major investment to expand the Lion's Senior Centre at the FlightExec Centre in Dorchester, along with other existing opportunities within Thames Centre are expected to accommodate the space needs of this growing segment of the community. As a best practise, monitor participation in seniors programming in Thorndale to inform decisions to expand or offer new activities, as necessary. These efforts are complementary to recommendations contained in this Master Plan that appeal to this segment of the community such as trails and community gardening.

### Recommendation

24. Engage the Boys and Girls Club of London to explore the feasibility of offering youth programs in Dorchester that are complementary to activities that are currently provided.

## 6.10 Soccer Fields

The Municipality provides 12 soccer fields of varying sizes, including five at the Outdoor Recreation Complex, six at Thorndale Community Park (including portable nets), and one at Avon Park. An equivalency factor of 1.5 unlit fields is applied to lit fields to recognize the fact that they can accommodate additional playing capacity during the evenings. With two lit fields at the Outdoor Recreation Complex, Thames Centre has an effective supply of 11 unlit fields. In addition to the Municipality's supply, there are other soccer fields in Thames Centre. For example, the Dorchester Soccer Club utilizes five soccer fields at Lord Dorchester Secondary School and additional portable nets can be added in the open field based on needs.

Registration in organizations affiliated with Ontario Soccer have been gradually declining for over a decade. In 2019 (the most recent year with available data), Ontario soccer reported approximately 273,000 players, which was 29% below its peak in 2007.<sup>10</sup> Declining registrations are driven by factors such as aging demographic trends, growing competition from other sports and activities, and the emergence of elite soccer clubs and academies that are not affiliated with provincial governing body. Despite declining participation trends, soccer continues to be a popular sport due to its worldwide appeal, high fitness quotient and relatively low cost to participate.

Based on the Municipality's booking schedules, Thames Centre's soccer fields are primarily used between Monday and Thursday between 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm, or until 10:00 pm for the lit field at the Outdoor Recreation Complex. Field use during these periods vary by location depending on how groups schedule their programming. For example, the Thorndale Soccer Club primarily plays on Tuesday and Thursdays, with fewer bookings on Monday and Wednesday (as well as Sunday). Generally speaking, there is available capacity throughout the week to accommodate additional use, particularly on Friday and during the weekends, although it is recognized that at least one day of the week is typically required for field resting.

The Master Plan community survey found that 38% of responding households have participated in soccer; 43% of respondents supported additional investment towards enhancing or expanding soccer fields, which ranked 17<sup>th</sup> out of 23 facility types. Discussions with soccer users identified that interest in local soccer is growing and there is a desire for additional soccer fields, particularly in Thorndale to respond to growing registration. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Thorndale Minor Soccer group had approximately 185 participants, which has now grown to nearly 200 players. As this settlement area continues to attract young families with children and youth who may be interested in the sport, the organization may continue to grow. At present, the organization is directing any players that are unable to accommodate to Dorchester.

As a general best practice, soccer fields are provided at a rate of one field per 90 registrants. Based on this measure it would suggest that the number of fields that are currently available are adequate. There may be opportunities to improve scheduling as the group primarily uses the fields on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with lower levels of use on Monday, Wednesday and Sunday. Monitoring soccer participation and

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<sup>10</sup> Ontario Soccer Association Annual General Meeting Reports.

scheduling will be needed prior to any long-term decision to increase the number of fields in Thorndale. Should it be required, there are currently limited opportunities to add new soccer fields at Thorndale Community Park, although the Municipality typically adds portable nets to accommodate programming needs (if space is available). There are also no other park spaces in Thorndale to accommodate new soccer fields. There may be an opportunity to work with Thorndale Minor Soccer to engage the West Nissouri Public School to utilize their outdoor space for soccer, similar to the arrangement between Dorchester Minor Soccer and Lord Dorchester Secondary School.

Requests from community organizations were also made for artificial turf fields and sports field lighting, although there is currently no evidence to suggest that there is a sufficient demand to warrant these amenities, nor is there a need for any additional soccer fields in Dorchester given the existing supply.

### **Recommendation**

25. Monitor participation data, schedules and demand to inform decisions to increase the supply of soccer fields in Thorndale. Should there be a need, evaluate potential locations for new soccer fields, including working with the Thorndale Soccer Club to engage West Nissouri Public School to utilize outdoor school lands.

## **6.11 Ball Diamonds**

Eleven ball diamonds are found at four parks in Thames Centre, including four at Dorchester Community Park, one at Harrietsville Park, two at the Outdoor Recreation Complex, and four at Thorndale Community Park. An equivalency factor of 1.5 unlit ball diamonds is applied to lit diamonds to recognize the fact that they can accommodate additional playing capacity during the evenings. With five unlit diamonds at Dorchester Community Park (2), Outdoor Recreation Complex (2), and Thorndale Community Park (1), the Municipality has an effective supply of 13.5 unlit equivalent ball diamonds.

The ball diamond supply includes Thames Centre's newest ball diamond, Royal Field, located at the Outdoor Recreation Complex. This initiative was made possible by working with the Great Lakes Canadian Baseball Club and others to install turf donated by the Toronto Blue Jays and construct supporting amenities, including spectator seating, batting cages, scoreboard, signage, and more. In addition to the Municipality's supply, a privately operated ball diamond complex (Slo-Pitch City) is located on the outskirts of Dorchester, which features eight ball diamonds and organized league play, as well as indoor and outdoor food services, and other recreation amenities including a playground.

After being considered a sport in decline for the better part of the past two decades, baseball and its variations (including softball, fastball, etc.) have experienced a resurgence in communities across Ontario. Baseball Ontario reported nearly 16,000 competitive participants in 2019, which was a growth of 39% compared to 2007, though that figure excludes recreational/house leagues and non-affiliated ball groups (thus actual participation figures are greater).<sup>11</sup> The renewed interest in ball diamond sports is driven by

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<sup>11</sup> Baseball Ontario. Annual General Meeting Reports.

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factors such as a greater focus on skill development, and grassroots programs to engage children and youth at a young age to participate in the sport. The popularity of the Toronto Blue Jays is also a contributing factor.

The Master Plan community survey found that 39% of responding households participated in baseball or softball. More than one-third (37%) of respondents supported additional investment in ball diamonds, which ranked last among 23 facility types. Discussions with ball diamond users identified that there is a desire for more lit ball diamonds to accommodate adult use later in the evening to ensure that earlier prime time is available for minor uses. They also identified a need to update existing lighting infrastructure as well as enhancing outfield quality, adding clay infields, and replacing bleachers.

Based on the Municipality's booking schedules, Thames Centre's ball diamonds are well used. Nearly all ball diamonds are used during the weekday evenings between 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm, with the exception of two ball diamonds in Thorndale, which are used a minimum of two to three times per week. About half of the Municipality's ball diamonds are in use on Fridays. The Municipality's lit diamonds are well used, especially in Dorchester, with bookings going as late as 10:30 pm. Thames Centre's ball diamonds are also used during the weekend, with most use taking place on Sundays.

There is capacity to accommodate additional use within the existing ball diamond supply as there is an opportunity for more bookings during times when the Municipality's ball diamonds are not in use. The booking schedules provided for this analysis excluded use of the new lit ball diamond at the Outdoor Recreation Complex, which is also expected to alleviate some of the pressure expressed through the consultation process.



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Given the recent addition of the ball diamond at the Outdoor Recreation Complex, no new diamonds are recommended until the Municipality has a firm understanding of how the new location is addressing demand. The recommended strategy is to optimize the use of existing diamonds throughout the week, which includes encouraging the use of all diamonds in Dorchester, Thorndale and Harrietsville. The Municipality should also ensure that the existing diamond supply is adequate to support ongoing use, which includes replacing aging lighting infrastructure as part of ongoing asset management and lifecycle replacement. It is noted that ball groups expressed the desire to upgrade other areas of the Municipality's ball diamonds, such as new bleachers. The Municipality should be open to working with user groups to identify and prioritize future upgrades. Given the Municipality recent major investments in its ball diamond inventory, consideration should be given to external funding strategies such as community fundraising.

The Municipality should monitor participation data, scheduling, and demand to evaluate the long-term need for future enhancements to existing diamonds, which may include installing lighting to extend playing periods. As part of this process, regular dialogue with Slo-Pitch City is encouraged to maintain open lines of communication and potential collaborative opportunities. Long-term consideration should also be given to relocating one or more ball diamonds from Dorchester Community Park to the Outdoor Recreation Complex to strengthen this location as a sports complex for practices, games and tournaments. This would also alleviate parking concerns at the Dorchester Community Park during peak periods and provide an opportunity to reclaim valuable park space for other uses such passive open space for casual park enjoyment and special events, trails, sport courts, and more.

### Recommendations

26. Monitor participation data, scheduling, and demand to evaluate future enhancements to existing ball diamonds, which may include installing lighting to extend playing periods. Regular dialogue with Slo-Pitch City is recommended to discuss their future plans and to evaluate potential collaborative opportunities.
27. Undertake replacement of aging lighting infrastructure as part of regular asset management. Work with user groups to identify and prioritize other future updates to existing ball diamonds, which should include external funding considerations such as community fundraising.
28. Relocate one or more ball diamonds from Dorchester Community Park to the Outdoor Recreation Complex to strengthen this location as a sports complex for practices, games, and tournaments. The availability of adequate supporting amenities and infrastructure should be considered as part of this process, such as parking.

## 6.12 Outdoor Basketball Courts

Outdoor basketball courts are found at three parks in Thames Centre, including at Thorndale Park, Avon Park, Wellburn Park. A basketball hoop is also located in the parking lot at Harrietsville Park and basketball courts are found at local schools. These outdoor basketball courts complement the Municipality's indoor gymnasium courts in Dorchester and Thorndale.

While outdoor hard surface courts are primarily used for basketball, they can accommodate informal and unstructured activities such as ball hockey, outdoor skating, programming, and more. The popularity of basketball can be attributed to factors such as affordability and access to free outdoor basketball courts, as well as its national appeal and the Toronto Raptors. Compared to other sports such as hockey, basketball is easy to learn, safe, affordable to play, and can be played with one person or in small groups.

The Master Plan community survey found that 23% of responding households have played basketball. More than half (54%) of respondents supported additional investment in enhancing or expanding the supply of basketball courts. Requests were also made for basketball courts in Dorchester.

In urban / rural municipalities such as Thames Centre, the provision of outdoor basketball courts are evaluated based on geographic distribution given that they are neighbourhood-level amenities and its primary user base are youth and young adults who are limited in the distance that they can travel. On this basis, Dorchester is viewed as a gap area where the Municipality does not currently provide this amenity. Dorchester Community Park may be a potential option as it is currently a major hub for recreation activity, particularly for youth and young adults, although it is recognized that space may be limited at this location. A future park in the Mill Pond subdivision area may also be a potential option. An opportunity also exists to construct a basketball court at Crampton Park to serve residents in the rural area.

Enhancing existing basketball courts is also recommended. Site visits to Wellburn Park revealed that the asphalt pad appeared to be in good condition but it could benefit from line painting to strengthen the playing experience. An opportunity also exist at Harrietsville Park, which currently provides a basketball hoop in the parking lot. At a high level, the site is not large enough to accommodate a full size basketball court, although there is an opportunity to construct a half court within the existing open space, potential by adding a concrete pad extension to the existing pavilion, which would create a multi-purpose space that could also be used for gatherings at this park. To provide flexibility in how courts are used, all new and redeveloped locations should be designed to be multi-use, including adding line markings for basketball and ball hockey.

### Recommendations

29. Investigate the feasibility of constructing a multi-use court for basketball and ball hockey in Dorchester, potentially at Dorchester Community Park or at a future park.
30. Construct a multi-use court for basketball and ball hockey at Crampton Park.
31. Extend the paved surface of the pavilion at Harrietsville Park to accommodate a half basketball court to replace the existing post and hoop in the parking lot.
32. Add multi-use playing lines to the court at Wellburn Park to support basketball and ball hockey.

## 6.13 Outdoor Tennis and Pickleball Courts

There are four tennis courts in Thames Centre, including two lit courts at the Dorchester Community Park, one unlit court at Thorndale Community Park, and one lit court at Wellburn Park. Tennis is experiencing a resurgence over the past several years. Tennis Canada reported that 6.6 million Canadians played tennis at least once in 2018, a growth of more than 23% since 2014. Nearly 3 million Canadians are frequent players – those who play at least once a week during the tennis season – which is twice as many compared to 2014.<sup>12, 13</sup>

The popularity of tennis can be attributed to the growing segment of baby boomers that seek social, and to some degree, lower impact activities. There is also a focus on promoting the sport at the grassroots level. Tennis Canada reported that in 2018, more than 200,000 children under the age of 12 were considered frequent tennis players, which was an increase of 40% compared to 2015.<sup>14</sup> Part of this growth can also be linked to the success of international Canadian tennis professionals. The Master Plan community survey found that one-fifth (22%) of responding households have played tennis. 43% of respondents also supported additional investment in tennis courts, ranking 19<sup>th</sup> out of 23 facility types.

Additionally, the tennis-playing community has been working diligently to generate interest in the sport. In 2017, Tennis Canada hosted Tennis Day across the country, which had activities such as clinics, lessons, exhibitions, and 'bring a friend' events. The purpose of Tennis Day was to introduce the sport to people that have never played before and to show them how easy it is to learn the game. Following the event, Tennis Canada indicated that 80% of tennis clubs reported an increase in participation.

Thames Centre provides four pickleball courts, including two lit courts at Dorchester Park and two unlit courts at Thorndale Community Park. Pickleball is a low-intensity sport that can also be played on a modified tennis court (pickleball courts are smaller in size with a lower net height). Older adults have been driving the interest in pickleball (although it is recognized that the sport is also attracting younger

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<sup>12</sup> Tennis Canada. 2018 Annual Report.

<sup>13</sup> Charlton Strategic Research. 2014 Canadian Tennis Brand Health Study.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

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players), which is recognized as one of the fastest growing sports in Canada. Pickleball Canada indicates that the number of players across Canada has grown ten-fold from 6,000 to 60,000 between 2012 and 2018, and the number of members with the governing body now stands at more than 22,000 individuals. Whereas Pickleball Canada recorded fewer than 500 pickleball courts in 2014, this number increased to more than 2,000 courts nation-wide in 2017.<sup>15</sup>

A number of public requests were made for more pickleball courts. More than one-third (36%) of responding households identified that they have played pickleball and 58% of respondents supported additional investment in enhancing and expanding courts, ranking 12<sup>th</sup> out of 23 facility types.

As a general guide, municipalities provide tennis courts in the range of one per 4,000 to 5,000 residents. The Municipality's four tennis courts are currently achieving a service level of one per 3,650 residents, which is above this range. During the planning period, the industry target would suggest that there could be a need for one new tennis court. An opportunity may exist at Avon Park or Crampton Park, where there is space available, which would strengthen the availability of outdoor recreation activities in the rural area. Undertaking enhancements to existing courts are also encouraged, including resurfacing at each location.



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<sup>15</sup> Pickleball Canada. April 2018 Newsletter. p.3

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While there is no industry standard for pickleball courts, municipalities have been constructing these amenities to respond to demand. With public requests for this type of facility and Thames Centre's aging population, it is logical to increase the Municipality's supply. There may be an opportunity to increase the number of pickleball courts at Dorchester Community Park within the existing court footprint by repurposing one of the two existing tennis courts provided that this could be done without negatively impacting tennis usage levels; although future population growth in Dorchester may also result in increased tennis demand. Monitoring the use of pickleball and tennis activities at this location is encouraged to determine future needs.

Constructing a minimum of two pickleball courts adjacent to the proposed tennis court at Avon Park or Crampton Park is also recommended. A tennis court is also located at Wellburn Park; however, constructing a dedicated pickleball court at this location is not recommended as it would reduce the amount of open greenspace at this park, although pickleball playing lines should be added to the existing court.

### Recommendations

33. Resurface the tennis and pickleball courts in Dorchester and Thorndale.
34. Monitor the use of the tennis courts at the Dorchester Community Park to determine the potential to be repurposed to additional pickleball courts.
35. Construct a tennis court and a minimum of two dedicated pickleball courts at Avon Park or Crampton Park.
36. Add pickleball playing lines to the tennis court at Wellburn Park.

## 6.14 Off-Leash Dog Parks

An off-leash dog park was previously located at the Outdoor Recreation Complex; however, it was removed due to the development of the new Royal Field ball diamond. Through report CS-011-23, staff made a recommendation to Council on June 12, 2023 to relocate the Dorchester dog park to a new location within the Outdoor Recreation Complex site which has been Council approved and was completed in the summer 2023.

With by-laws regulating the use of leashes, off-leash dog areas provide owners with an opportunity to exercise and socialize with their dogs in a controlled area. Off-leash dog areas should not be viewed strictly for pets as best practices suggest that they are also beneficial for residents and community interaction among those who share a common interest and those facing social isolation.

While off-leash dog parks are popular amenities for pet owners, finding the right site for the development of new locations can be a challenge due to noise concerns. Careful consideration, planning and consultation is a best practice when identifying new off-leash dog park locations with consideration given to a range of factors. As a best practice, municipalities should evaluate factors, including, but not limited

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to, setback and layout requirements, accessibility, site buffers, impact on the natural environment, future development potential, compatibility with on-site uses, the surrounding area, parking, and more.

The consultation process revealed that there is also a desire for an off-leash dog park in Thorndale. Suggestions for potential dog park locations included in the rural area near Thorndale. Requests were also made to allow dog parks in the indoor walking track. Other comments were received regarding aggressive dog behaviour in public spaces and others opposed dog parks due to concerns about municipal spending and maintenance requirements. The community survey found that 42% of responding households have been dog walking (on or off-leash) and 43% of respondents supported additional investment in off-leash dog parks, ranking 19<sup>th</sup> out of 23 facility types.

There is no generally accepted provision target for off-leash dog parks, rather they tend to be provided to respond to demonstrated and sustained demand. The recently completed off-leash dog park at the Outdoor Recreation Complex in Dorchester is expected to serve residents well in this area. The Thorndale off-leash dog park was approved/included in the 2023 budget and a site has been identified. Construction is tentatively set to begin and be completed in September 2023. No additional off-leash dog parks are recommended.

### Recommendation

37. Construct the off-leash dog park in Thorndale.

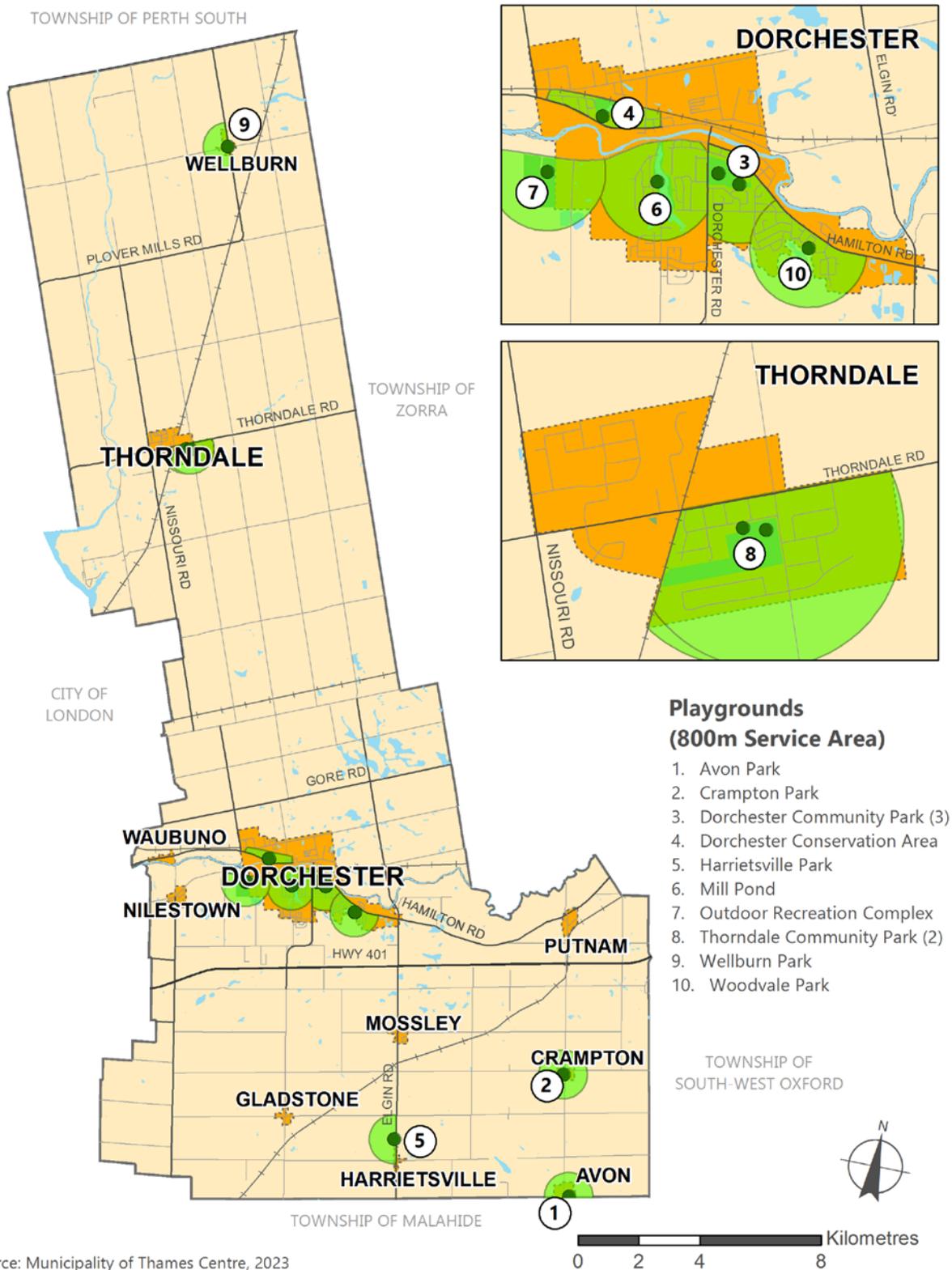
## 6.15 Playgrounds

There are 13 playgrounds in Thames Centre's parks, which are complemented by play structures at schools. The Municipality's playgrounds vary in design and size and some locations feature junior and senior play components. Thames Centre's first inclusive playground was recently installed at Dorchester Community Park and plans are in place to renew playgrounds at other parks, including Catherine Street Day Park, Harrietsville Park, Avon Park, Wellburn Park and Woodvale Park; cost estimates range between \$44,200 to \$50,000 per location.

Playgrounds support early childhood development, foster cognitive development and social skills, and encourage physical activity. They evoke a welcoming and friendly sentiment that draws users to parks and families to neighbourhoods. Due to these benefits, playgrounds are always in high demand. More than half (53%) of responding households to the Master Plan community survey have used a playground. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents supported additional investment in enhancing or expanding the supply of playgrounds in Thames Centre, ranking seventh out of 23 facility types.

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Figure 14: Distribution of Playgrounds



Source: Municipality of Thames Centre, 2023

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Traditional playground equipment generally consists of swings, slides and an array of climbing structures, while modern play structures are designed to offer more creative and unique play experiences and often integrate features in accordance with accessibility requirements. Natural and adventure style playgrounds are also gaining traction in many municipalities where they are installed in prominent locations such as major parks to showcase their uniqueness and to encourage play and interaction with landscape and natural materials such as wood, logs, ropes, stones, and boulders to allow users to create more daring opportunities.

Best practices suggest that within urban areas, playgrounds should be located within 800 metres of residential areas, without crossing major barriers such as arterial roads, watercourses, and railway lines. Applying this service area to the Municipality's playgrounds revealed that the majority of residential neighbourhoods in Thames Centre's settlement areas are well served, as well as the rural areas with some form of playground structure. Notable gap areas exist in north end of Dorchester (north of the railway), in the southwest corner, and on the east side (north of Hamilton Road and south of the Thames River). In Thorndale, a gap exists on the north side of Thorndale Road. As opportunities become available, the Municipality should strive to address these playground gaps through future park development. Service gaps also exist in the rural area, particularly in the hamlets, playgrounds should be constructed in these areas as opportunities become available.



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It is important for the Municipality to also renew aging playgrounds to encourage use and promote safety. The average age of playground equipment in Thames Centre is approximately 10 years old and as a best practice, playgrounds should be replaced every 15 years. Site visits to Thames Centre's parks revealed that several of the Municipality's playgrounds are aging and are due for replacement, many of which have been identified through the capital plan, including at Catharine Street Day Park, Harrietsville Park, Avon Park, and Wellburn Park. Future replacement of the playground at Mill Pond Park should also be considered; and opportunity exists to create a unique natural and adventure playground that reflects the local surrounding and beauty of the conservation area.

Consistent with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, all new and redeveloped play structures should be inclusive of all users, regardless of ability. This requires that playgrounds incorporate components such as accessible play features, ramps, accessible swing seat, and a firm and stable surface as well as access to the playground from a parking area or street sidewalk. Future plans are in place to upgrade the playground surface at Thorndale Community Park and add accessible features to the Woodvale Park playground.

### Recommendations

38. Ensure that residents in Dorchester and Thorndale are located within 800 metres of a playground, unobstructed by major barriers such as arterial roads, railway lines and watercourses. To achieve this goal, accessible playgrounds should be located at future parks within residential neighbourhoods and be accessible from a parking lot and/or street sidewalk.
39. Replace the playground at Mill Pond Park with a natural and adventure playground that incorporates wood, logs, ropes, stones, and boulders to create a unique playing experience.
40. Proceed with replacing the playgrounds at Catharine Street Day Park, Harrietsville Park, Avon Park, and Wellburn Park.

## 6.16 Skate Parks

Two skate parks are found at Dorchester Community Park and Thorndale Community Park that can be used for skateboarding, BMX biking, rollerblading, and scooters. Both locations feature a range of components, including rails, ledges, ramps, and stairs on a concrete pad.

Skate parks have become a core level of service for many municipalities. After being considered a fad, skateboarding has demonstrated sustained longevity and it has been embraced as a mainstream activity given its benefits in supporting the healthy development of youth and young adults. The Master Plan community survey found that 7% of responding households have participated in skate activities and related wheeled action sports. 43% of respondents supported additional investment in skate parks, ranking 18<sup>th</sup> out of 23 facility types.

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Skate parks provide a safe space for users to gather and socialize with others who also share common interests. Skateboarding, in particular, was introduced as part of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics for the first-time lending further credibility to the sport. This spotlight on the sport has the potential to drive interest and participation in this activity even higher which in turn could lead to greater demands for future skate parks. Skate parks are viewed as affordable physical opportunities and social activities that can be pursued as part of 'hanging out' with friends. The design of skate parks can vary from modular systems, such as those currently found in Thames Centre, to concrete forms.

In rural communities that are similar Thames Centre, one community-level skate park located in a prominent area of each urban settlement area is a common approach to meeting the needs of local users. The Municipality is currently providing this model with one in Dorchester and Thorndale. Site visits to both locations revealed that the concrete surfaces appeared to be in good condition; however, the modular skate components are aging and would benefit from updated features. The Municipality identifies replacing and upgrading the Dorchester skate park in its capital plan. Replacing and upgrading the skate park in Thorndale is also recommended. Engaging users of the skate parks, as well as the general public, is recommended to guide the design process.



Monitoring the use of the skate parks can also inform decisions about the creation of basic "skate zones" that can be integrated within parks in other areas of Thames Centre. A skate zone may be a small scale paved area with a few basic skate components (e.g. ramp, curb and/or rail) to serve local youth in an introductory manner. Providing beginner-level skate zones appeal to younger children and novice-level skaters to practice certain fundamental skills prior to transitioning to the larger skateboard locations. It also provides more local opportunities for skaters who are unable to travel to the major skate parks in

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Dorchester and Thorndale, particularly in the rural area. Opportunities for skate zones should be contemplated in parks where there is an existing basketball court as the user groups using these amenities are often very similar, including in Wellburn Park, Avon Park, and Crampton Park (where a basketball court is recommended). Future parks within Dorchester and Thorndale may also be considered.

### Recommendations

41. Engage youth and young adults to redevelop the skate park at the Dorchester Community Park to offer a range of basic and challenging components.
42. Engage youth and young adults to redevelop the skate park at the Thorndale Community Park to offer a range of basic and challenging components.
43. Consider incorporating small scale skate zones within rural parks that can be co-located with existing or proposed basketball courts, including at Wellburn Park, Avon Park, and Crampton Park. Future parks within Dorchester and Thorndale may also be considered as demand warrants.

## 6.17 Community Gardens

While the Municipality does not provide any community gardens, they have become popular outdoor amenities across the Province. This is driven by a number of factors such as the emphasis on social justice and food security, healthy eating, increasing physical activity, and providing a healthy and sustainable food source. Research conducted in diverse communities reveal that community allotment gardens also allow residents to cultivate, preserve and prepare cultural produce. Moreover, the social interaction and horticultural educational opportunities are also part of the appeal of community allotment gardens.

Community gardens are particularly popular in urban communities with medium and high density residential communities that have limited gardening opportunities although with land use directions for higher density housing, a demand for such gardens can be rationalized in smaller municipalities such as Thames Centre. Requests for community gardening opportunities in Thames Centre were received through the consultation process. The community survey also found that two-thirds (66%) of respondents supported investment in community gardens, ranking eighth out of 23 facility types.

As a best practice, community gardens are provided collaboratively between the municipality and a volunteer organization to share responsibilities, particularly in smaller communities where municipal resources are limited. This approach is recommended for Thames Centre. The Municipality should monitor requests for community gardening opportunities and should a volunteer organization express an interest in establishing this new level of service, the Municipality should work in partnership with this group to identify an appropriate location. The Municipality should be responsible for providing the land, appropriate infrastructure, and assisting with administering garden plots, while the volunteer group should be responsible for general oversight and maintenance.

### Recommendation

44. Monitor demand and requests for community gardening and should a volunteer group express an interest in establishing this new level of service, the Municipality should work with the group to identify and construct gardening plots in an appropriate location. The Municipality should be responsible for providing the land, appropriate infrastructure, and assisting with administering garden plots, while the volunteer group should be responsible for general oversight and maintenance.

## 6.18 Other Recreation Facilities

Thames Centre may receive requests for recreational facilities that are not currently provided through its core service mandate. The Municipality must be prepared to respond appropriately to requests pending future market characteristics related to population growth, emerging sports and activities, future recreational trends and preferences, and other demands that may arise for existing activities and facilities.

Public requests for new recreation opportunities were expressed through the Master Plan process, such as a velodrome, which is a steeply banked oval track used for cycling. The Forest City Velodrome London recently closed and is currently looking for a new location. A request for this type of facility was brought forward as a means to respond to the popularity of cycling and the desire for a venue for the activity that could be used by local residents and visitors. It was also suggested that a velodrome facility could be co-located with other indoor and outdoor uses.

It was identified that a velodrome could also be used for hosting tournaments, which could lead to economic and tourism spinoffs. However, it is recognized that the Municipality does not offer some amenities that may support tourism opportunities such as hotels. Indoor cycling is also a regional sport where tournament participants and spectators are willing to travel, and it is noted that the Mattamy National Cycling Centre in Milton is a major destination facility that is recognized across North America; this facility is located within a one and a half hour driving distance from Dorchester.

While it is not recommended that the Municipality pursue, even in partnership, the development of a velodrome, the municipality should be open to further exploring public requests for new, non-traditional, emerging and non-core municipal facilities. Such requests should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as requests are brought forward. At a minimum, this should involve an examination into (but not limited to):

- Local, regional and provincial trends pertaining to usage and popularity of the activity and/or facility;
- Examples of delivery models in other municipalities;
- Local demand for the activity and/or facility;
- The ability of existing municipal facilities to accommodate the new level of service;

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- The feasibility for the Municipality to provide the service and/or facility as a core service with consideration given to resources (e.g. staffing), and be able to do so in a cost-effective manner;
- The willingness and ability of the requesting organization to provide the service and/or facility if provided with appropriate municipal supports, including sound business planning;
- Available funding sources, including financial contributions from the potential partner; and
- The availability of Municipal resources (e.g., staffing) to deliver or assist with delivering the new service without impacting existing obligations, or if additional resources will be required.

### **Recommendation**

45. Public requests for new indoor and outdoor recreation facilities should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with consideration given to proponent led business planning, trends, examples in other municipalities, local demand, the feasibility of utilizing existing public space, the willingness of an organization to partner in providing the facility or space, and other relevant factors as may be determined appropriate.

## 7.0 Community Services

Determining the community service priorities for the next 10 years focusses on the clear goal of increasing participation in community services by all age groups in Thames Centre. The service delivery analysis includes consideration for community growth, services that exist, participation rates, community input and industry standards to identify any gaps in service delivery. This section provides background information and recommendations on:

- a) **The Service Delivery Model** - what exists and what could exist to strengthen service provision in Thames Centre.
- b) **Program and Service Provision Analysis** - the range of choices per age group and any predominant trends that should be addressed such as participation of girls and women in sport and recreation and the prevalence of inactivity in Canada.
- c) **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion** – identification of what populations might be equity seeking in Thames Centre, what is being done currently and what could be done to better serve underrepresented populations.
- d) **Community Services Departmental Capacity** – a comparison of existing practices, policies, and quality assurance models in place to continue to provide an exemplary level of service to participants and visitors.
- e) **Form Follows Function** – a review of the current organizational structure with a view to propose any changes as a result of the service delivery review and the identification of any gaps in staff capacity.

### 7.1 Community Services & Facilities Department

The Community Services Department embraces an **integrated service delivery model** in the delivery of programs and services to the public. Core services such as aquatic lessons/public swims, summer day camps, and older adult services, facilities and parks are offered/managed directly by the Municipality while community partnerships provide other opportunities to round out a range of choices for all age groups. For example, the Boys and Girls Club of London offers youth programming and engagement opportunities through a partnership agreement with Thames Centre. Local organizations use public space to offer a variety of community and sports opportunities. Public input is offered through Committees of Council to ensure that there is alignment between public needs, legislated requirements, preferences, and what the municipality delivers.

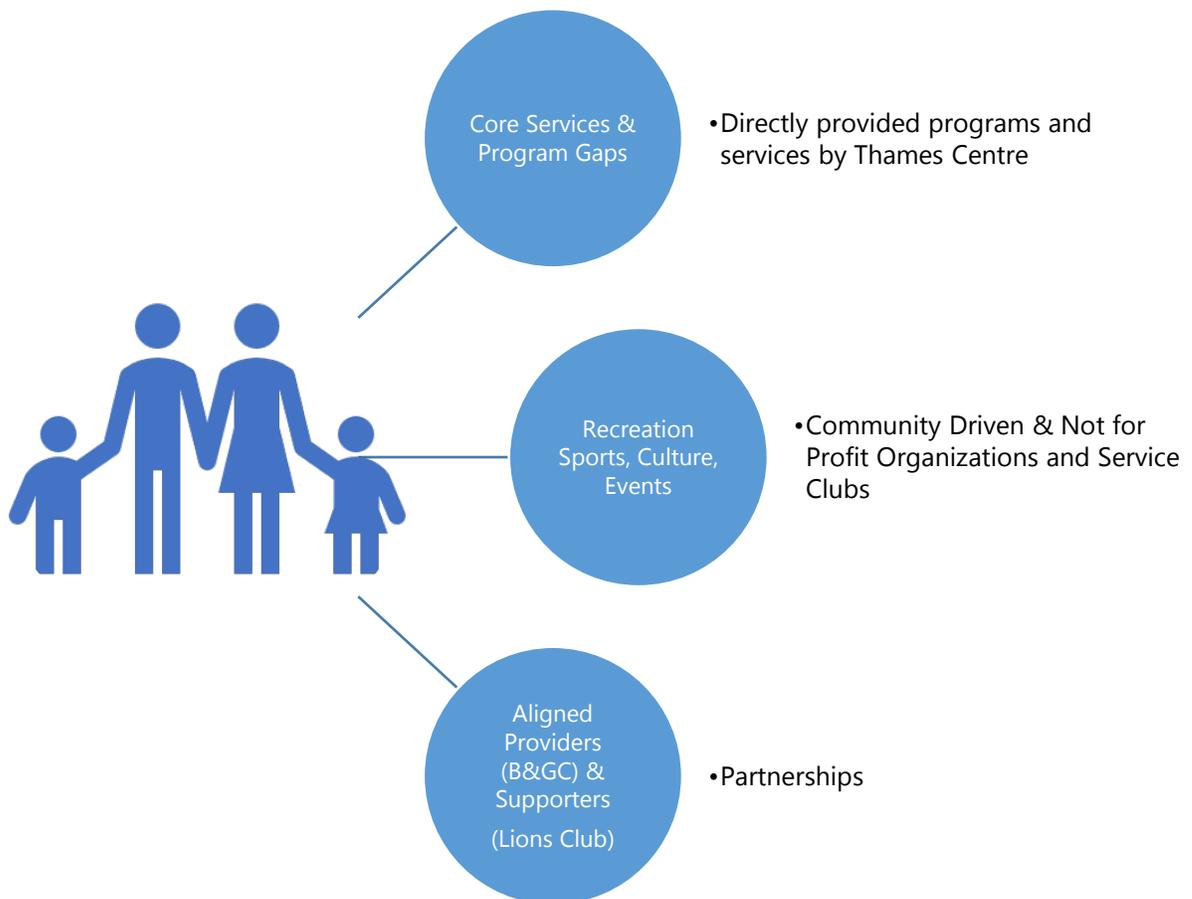
An Integrated Service Delivery Model is defined by:

- A **common goal** to increase participation by providing/enabling a range of opportunities for all age groups and to maximize participation by all residents;
- **Role clarity** amongst the various providers;

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- A **coordinated approach** through consistent **communications**;
- An **annual analysis** of what is being provided for each age group;
- Gaining community input on **priorities** and **respective satisfaction levels**;
- Determining **what group is best to provide** services that are needed but not currently provided;
- **Reducing duplication** amongst the collective of program and service providers;
- **Sharing of resources**, and employing industry standards and quality assurance models;
- **Collectively addressing** predominant issues such as inactivity and policy issues;
- Developing a **repository of recreation and parks choices** in one place with many links; and
- **Measuring participation** and participation/choices by age group and satisfaction levels.

The following illustration demonstrates that the residents of Thames Centre have a choice of activities and the role of the various groups in enabling and providing programs and services.



## Partnerships

The effectiveness of the service delivery model is reliant on quality community partnerships, which are in place. The Master Plan places a focus on increasing and strengthening existing partnerships to increase participation in quality experiences. Partnership agreements should reflect these stated expectations, quality assurance mechanisms, outcomes, and performance measures. A review of partnership agreements is appropriate to ensure that there is collective impact benefitting the community at large. Table 6 summarizes the community organizations in Thames Centre and Table 7 highlights the Municipality’s existing partnerships to augment directly offered programs and services.

Table 6: Summary of Community Organizations

Minor Sports Leagues and Associations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BAD Girls Hockey</li> <li>• Dorchester Dragons Ringette</li> <li>• Dorchester Girls Fastball</li> <li>• Dorchester Minor Hockey</li> <li>• Dorchester Minor Baseball</li> <li>• Dorchester Soccer Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great Lake Canadians Baseball</li> <li>• North Dorchester Skating Club</li> <li>• Thames Centre Minor Soccer</li> <li>• Thorndale Minor Baseball</li> <li>• Thorndale Minor Soccer</li> </ul>
Adult Sports Leagues and Associations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dorchester Dolphins Hockey Club</li> <li>• Dorchester Canadians</li> <li>• Dorchester Men’s Recreational Slo-Pitch League</li> <li>• Dorchester NBC Hockey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ladies Master’s Slo-Pitch</li> <li>• Ladies Slo-Pitch</li> <li>• Thorndale Men’s Slo-Pitch League</li> <li>• Wheelchair Rugby Team</li> </ul>
Community Service Providers and Clubs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Help Centre (CFDC)</li> <li>• Donnybrook Royal Canadian Legion</li> <li>• Dorchester Coop Nursery</li> <li>• Dorchester Lions Club</li> <li>• Dorchester Optimists</li> <li>• Dorchester Kinsmen</li> <li>• Middlesex County Library</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Dorchester Agricultural Society</li> <li>• Thorndale Agricultural Society</li> <li>• Thorndale Lions Club</li> <li>• Thorndale Optimist Club</li> <li>• Thorndale United Church</li> <li>• Victoria Order of Nurses</li> <li>• Upper Thames River Conservation Authority</li> </ul>

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Table 7: Summary of Community Partnerships

Partnership Organization	Purpose
ACT-i-Pass Program	To offer free admission to Grade 5 students for select recreational activities that are offered directly by Thames Centre (such as drop-in sports, public swims, public skates).
Boys and Girls Club	To provide the Boys and Girls Club of London with free use of space at Thorndale Lions Community Centre and Thorndale Park to offer youth programs that are currently not available in Thorndale.
Business Help Centre	To provide support services to local businesses.
Dorchester Co-Op Nursery School	For use of dedicated space at the FlightExec Centre to provide day care services.
Fat Olive	Fat Olive operates the concession spaces at the FlightExec Centre and the Outdoor Recreation Complex.
Great Lake Canadians Baseball	To use the ball diamond at the Outdoor Recreation Complex at designated times and at discounted rates. Great Lake Canadians Baseball is responsible for daily and as required maintenance as identified in the agreement.
I Love Community (I Love Thorndale)	For use of the Thorndale Lions Community Centre and associated fieldhouse and park for four annual community events.
Mad About Fitness	To provide group fitness classes, and small group/personal training to individuals of all ages, and abilities.
Thorndale Optimist Club	Free use of the Thorndale Park fieldhouse in exchange for operating the concession.
Thorndale Lions Club	Free use of the Thorndale Lions Community Centre in exchange for naming rights.
Thorndale Agricultural Society	Provides free use of the poultry building at Thorndale Park and the Thorndale Lions Community Centre for the Thorndale Annual Fall Fair.
Playroom Experiment	A free trial period to provide free programs and events for the community, using Smitty's Lounge at the FlightExec Centre.
Rogers Telecommunication	Designated space at Dorchester Community Park to erect a 5G tower.
Skate Sharpening	To provide skate sharpening services at the FlightExec Centre.
Upper Thames River Conservation Authority	Municipality maintains some lands and trails on UTRCA property.
VON	To provide a wide range of home care and community support services.

**Good Governance – Council Appointed Committees**

The quality of programs and services is heightened through the input of Council appointed Committees to respond to service requests, represent compliance with any legislative requirements and introduce promising practises that may be effective in increasing participation and providing quality experiences in Thames Centre.

*Table 8: Summary of Committees of Council*

Committee Name	Purpose
Thames Centre Special Events Committee	To enhance and provide a structured approach to special events in Thames Centre, including Canada Day Celebrations and Festival of Lights.
Thames Centre Sports Wall of Fame Committee	To recognize, honor, and preserve the athletic accomplishments and contributions of residents.
Lions Senior Centre Advisory Board	To provide Council with input on matters related to the Lions Senior Centre
Local School Advisory Committee	To work towards identifying opportunities to enhance publicly funded schools in Thames Centre and to address community needs with school boards.
Accessibility and Inclusivity Advisory Committee	To work towards promoting awareness and ensuring the barriers to accessibility in our community are identified and eliminated.
Thorndale Dog Park Ad Hoc Committee	To investigate, consider and provide recommendations to Council regarding various aspects of a new dog park in Thorndale.
FlightExec Centre Expansion Ad Hoc Committee	To work with the Municipality to guide the design and construction of the FlightExec expansion project.

**Strengths and Challenges in the Service Delivery System**

**Strengths**

- The Integrated Service delivery Model is an appropriate and effective model in Thames Centre. The shared resources through volunteerism and agency work provides additional programs and services without the added tax burden to the resident.
- There is evidence of role clarity in that Thames Centre through the partnership agreements, rental of space contracts and the development and supervision of directly offered programs and services.
- Staff have communications with other service providers regarding space needs, any changes to policies, joint training opportunities, and information sharing.

### Challenges and Opportunities

- During the community consultation, it was suggested that the Municipality should continue to support community organizations and work collaboratively to provide parks and recreation services. There are new opportunities for the Municipality and stakeholders to work stronger together in promoting physical literacy and activity, and to raise awareness about the importance and benefits of parks and recreation.
- While the service delivery system provides a range of opportunities to all age groups, there is no current data collection in place to measure the number of residents who participate and satisfaction levels overall as well as the range of choices. Service providers share a common goal which is to engage as many residents as possible to ensure that the social, emotional, and physical benefits are accrued to individuals, families, and the community.

There is an opportunity to strengthen service provision through having quarterly meetings with all program/service contributors to determine:

- a) The commitment to **jointly provide** a range of opportunities for all age groups, including but not limited to active/sport, creative, STEM and general interest programs/opportunities.
- b) To implement **cross marketing initiatives** to create a more fulsome e-repository of all opportunities listed together on one website with contacts and links to each respective websites and registration links.
- c) To discuss a methodology to a **seasonal and annual data collection** and summary that demonstrates the capacity of each program/service, the participation rates in the various activities by age group and activity type. This data will provide the evidence of where age groups may be underserved as well as demonstrate growth in program and service provision.
- d) To develop ways to share resources, **training opportunities, grant opportunities** and efficiencies that would serve to include a greater proportion of residents in active and leisure pursuits.

### Volunteerism

Smaller urban/rural communities such as Thames Centre have finite resources and thus, there is a heavy reliance on volunteers and partners to provide community services. Research suggests, however, that the pool of volunteers is shrinking as older adults and seniors primarily make up this core group (who will eventually move on) and interest among young adults and youth is generally low. Engaging younger generations in volunteering will need to be a key strategy to ensuring lifelong community involvement, which should be complemented with strong volunteer and partnership opportunities to continue providing quality community services.

The success of the community services delivery model in Thames Centre relies on volunteerism to expand opportunities beyond programs offered by the Municipality. Volunteers are needed to provide good governance and leadership to not for profit community stakeholder groups as well as coach, organize

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tournaments and competitions etc. Consultation with stakeholders found that volunteerism is decreasing within community stakeholder groups, making it difficult for organizations to achieve their fullest potential.

Volunteers are essential to the operation and delivery of high-quality programs and services where communities rely heavily on their assistance. Statistics Canada estimates that 47% of Canadians over the age of 15 volunteer, but experiences in many communities suggest that volunteer groups still struggle to find enough volunteers. Seniors currently represent the most active volunteer group in Canada; however, it is anticipated that this group will soon move on from the volunteer workforce, resulting in greater pressures on the delivery of services and negatively impacting program capacity. This gap in the volunteer base opens opportunities to attract new volunteers, particularly among youth, which represents the smallest proportion of volunteers. While volunteering is required as part of required community service for secondary school graduation, youth note that barriers to volunteering include a lack of time, unable to find opportunities or they are unsure of how to get involved.



While communities have witnessed a decrease in volunteerism in the last decade, the Pandemic has exacerbated this trend. Part of the recovery efforts to normalize the recreation and sport delivery system must include volunteerism. Evidence-based examples of interventions and strategies to increase volunteerism include:

- Identifying the skills and competency gaps.
- Assisting with Police Reference and Vulnerable Populations Checks.
- Municipal wide online volunteer software – to list volunteer opportunities and match volunteers with opportunities (also tracks volunteer hours).

### Recommendations

46. Work collectively with all service providers to discuss the program and service recommendations in the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan to determine how all related organizations can play a part in strengthening service provision in Thames Centre.
47. Update partnership agreements to include quality assurance mechanisms, legislative compliance, and reciprocal benefits.
48. Work collectively to develop a Volunteer Plan to enable all groups to attract, train, retain and recognize volunteers.

## 7.2 Programs and Services

**Goal: “To maximize participation by all age groups in recreation, sport and parks services in Thames Centre.”**

### Current State

The community consultations confirmed that residents are appreciative of the services and the customer service levels provided by staff. Continuing to provide quality experiences, increasing participation, and understanding participation rates by age group through collective measurement will need to be the focus in the next five years.

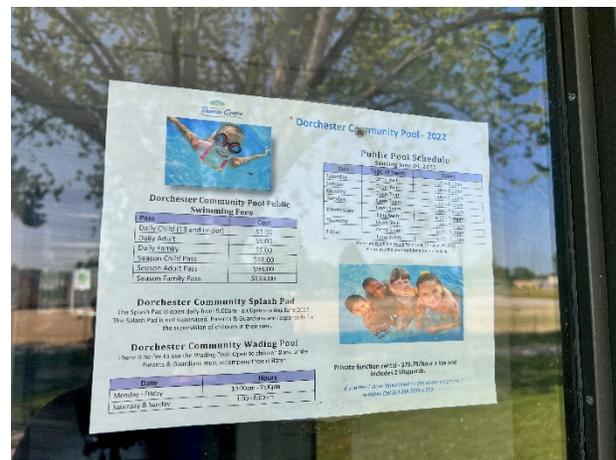
Staff, partners, and volunteers can improve their outreach and program development initiatives through understanding how many residents are engaged in the various programs and services. Engagement increases skill mastery, confidence levels, social connections, and a host of other benefits. Maximizing participation is important in addressing any gaps that exist. Each age groups should have a choice of activity, sport, general interest, creative and STEM opportunities – this assist in appealing to a wide variety of interests. Baseline data will include the number of residents in each age cohort who may be interested in participating. It will be important to understand the participation rate per age group in concert with all service providers as an initial step in increasing participation by determining baseline participation rates.

### A Focus on Children

Thames Centre offers drop-in opportunities throughout the year, along with aquatic programming and the Playground day camp in the summer months.

### Aquatic Programming

The role of the municipality in providing aquatic experiences is primarily to ensure that residents can be safe in and around water. Drowning prevention is a key goal in offering learn to swim lessons and water survival. The National Drowning Report produced by the Lifesaving Society of Canada indicates that 1.2 people in every 100,000 population drowns in Ontario annually. Drowning is considered a preventable accidental death and knowledge and swim survival skills can assist in drowning prevention.



The Municipality provides structured swimming lessons at the outdoor pool in Dorchester for residents from toddlers to adults. Drop-in public swim is also available (open swim and lane swim), as well as aquafit classes. Participation data in the Municipality’s aquatic programming is not available at this point; however, a look at annual aquatic revenue provides insight into program performance. Comparing 2019

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to 2022, revenues from registered swim classes have increased by 40%, while revenues for public swim opportunities declined by 9%. Revenue from aquafit passes and swim team rentals have not been received for 2022 (Table 9).

Table 9: Annual Revenue in Aquatic Programming

	2019	2022	Change
Registered Swim	\$24,259	\$34,011	40%
Public Swim	\$6,338	\$5,753	-9%
Aquafit Passes	\$352	n/a	n/a
Swim Team	\$4,275	n/a	n/a

Source: Municipality of Thames Centre

The Lifesaving Society – Ontario Branch has developed an Aquatic Safety Management Program, including the Aquatic Safety Accreditation Program to ensure that pool operators and aquatic service providers can comply with legislative requirements and industry standards. This is critical from a liability standpoint and to prevent the possibility of water incidents. The Society offers an audit service to review all aspects of safety in and around water at pools and waterfronts. An Aquatic Safety Accreditation Program shows recognition for compliance. This is a recommended quality and safety assurance initiative.

### Playground Program

The Municipality runs a summer day camp, called “Playground”, in Dorchester and Thorndale to engage children in games, crafts, sports, outdoor play, water play, and other activities. The Dorchester program generally serves between 600 and 800 children each summer. The Municipality offered the summer program in Thorndale for the first in 2022 and had 240 participants. In previous years, the Boys & Girls Club had offered a summer day camp program in Thorndale.

### Arena Programming

A variety of public skating programs are available to residents, including Parent and Tot Skate, Parent and Kid Stick and Puck, Adult Stick and Puck, Open Skate, and Adult and Senior Skate. During the spring and summer season, the Municipality also offers roller skating on the arena floor.

### Indoor Sports Programming

The Municipality offers a number of drop-in sports in the Dorchester and Thorndale gymnasiums for adults and teens, including basketball, badminton, and pickleball. Indoor walking is also offered at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre given that this location does not have a dedicated indoor walking track.

## **A Focus on Youth**

Youth engagement in meaningful leisure pursuits is of utmost importance with increasing reports of anxiety, depression, and self-harm amongst youth ages 12-17 years - summarized in the latest Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey conducted by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

While the Municipality does not provide any dedicated youth space, Thames Centre offers a number of organized and unstructured recreation activities for this age group within its facilities, which are complemented by local youth service providers (the Boys and Girls Club of London and the coordinator of the Playroom Experiment) and community sport organizations.

Historically, youth focused communities have applied for Youth Friendly Community Status through the Playworks Consortium which identified quality assurance standards to validate a real commitment toward youth engagement. Communities are awarded Youth Friendly Community status at varying levels by demonstrating their provision/enabling of services and youth engagement efforts. The criteria for Youth Friendly Communities are under review and redevelopment by Parks and Recreation Ontario. Using the existing criteria will ensure quality experiences for youth exist through the engagement and empowerment of youth. Thames Centre has a clear interest in ensuring that youth have the greatest life chances. Some of the criteria to ensure quality assurance and engagement of youth include:

- Youth have options for play.
- Youth are formally connected community wide.
- It is easy for youth to find information about activities in the community.
- The community recognizes and celebrates youth.
- The community formally commits funding for youth play.
- The community supports positive youth development.
- Youth feel valued by their community; and
- Schools and school boards support the youth friendly application.

The criteria may or may not change as a result of this review by Parks and Recreation Ontario. It is recommended that Thames Centre embrace these criteria in partnership with other service providers in the meantime.

## **A Focus on Older Adults**

Dedicated community spaces for older adults and seniors are regarded as an important part of healthy aging in place as they provide locations for residents to gather and share interests. These spaces provide opportunities for active living, health and wellness education, and other activities that promote cognitive stimulation and socialization. The Municipality's Lion's Senior Centre provides a range of activities,

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including pickleball, movie afternoons, meals, dancing, music, arts and crafts, bingo, shuffleboard, discussion groups, cards, group fitness, day trips, and more.

The Municipality is currently undertaking an expansion to the FlightExec Centre to expand the Lion’s Senior Centre, which will enlarge the existing multi-purpose space to accommodate its membership and enhanced programming. Thames Centre is an aging community, and this is expected to drive the demand for activities and services geared towards this age group. Trends suggest that the baby boomer population is generally wealthier compared to previous generations due to factors that include stock market booms, economic growth, pension plans and real estate;<sup>16</sup> however, older age groups are also vulnerable to experiencing low income, particularly for those living on fixed income. This supports the need to ensure that affordable and accessible opportunities are available for all residents within this cohort.



Between 2016 and 2023, the number of memberships to the Lion’s Senior Centre increased by 55% to 478 members. Growth in the number of memberships is strong and it is expected to continue as the Municipality’s population is projected to continue aging. It is also recognized that the Municipality additionally provides other older adult and senior activities outside of the Lions Senior Centre which are well attended such as pickleball and aquafit.

Table 10: Summary of Lion’s Senior Centre Memberships

	2016	2023 (as of June)
Memberships	308	478
Total Census Population of Older Adults and Seniors	5,630	6,115
Capture Rate of Older Adults and Seniors (Age 50+)	6%	8%

Source: Statistics Canada 2016 and 2021 Census; Municipality of Thames Centre.

<sup>16</sup> McMahon, Tamsin. (2014). Seniors and the generation spending gap. Retrieved from <https://www.macleans.ca>.

### Active Aging

Parks and Recreation Ontario has developed quality assurance criteria to ensure that the concepts of aging and older adult needs are addressed as programs and services are developed and implemented. The course offers staff an insight into the unique requirements of service delivery and engagement with the older population. It builds on the Principles of Healthy Child development for children and strengthens staff's ability to plan programs, respect what elders face with ageism, physical literacy, social connectedness, and overall enhancements to the quality of life for older adults. This is a suggested requirement for any full or part-time staff working with older adults and seniors.

### A Focus on Girls and Women

Participation in sport and recreation by girls and women is on a downward trend in Canada. Canadian Women and Sport in concert with the Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities released a report on a national study entitled The Rally Report in June of 2019 regarding sport participation for girls aged six to eighteen. The findings noted that girls' participation in sport is much lower than boys at the same age and that girls experience a significant drop out rate by late adolescence. One in three girls leave sport as compared to one in ten boys.



Among the barriers cited, girls stated low levels of confidence, low body image, lack of skills and feeling unwelcome in a sport environment. In 1992, over half of females over fifteen participated in sport. By 2019, 28% of females participate in sport, while 62% do not. Current studies are demonstrating that 25% of girls are not committed to returning to sport after the Pandemic. This declining participation rate is alarming, and the Federal government has declared that we will achieve gender equity in sport by 2035 in Canada.

### Demand for Unstructured Activities

Community consultation found that the top four activities that the respondents enjoy include walking or hiking, going to special events, parks, and open spaces as well as the use of playgrounds. Participation in Ontario is shifting away from structured and scheduled programs as there is a growing desire for drop-in, unstructured and self-scheduled times to participate. This is compounded by changes in demand for prime-time access – more adults and seniors are seeking activities during the evening, a shift from traditional daytime (seniors programming) or late-evening provision (in the case of adult hockey). Participation in adult recreational sports is also growing and youth engagement is being embraced in many municipalities. Thames Centre provides a range of unstructured indoor and outdoor recreation activities as well as parks for casual enjoyment.

### Special Events

Thames Centre hosts special events, including Bridgefest, Pride Event, Canada Day, Earth Day, and the Festival of Lights. Staff also support and set up for various other community driven events such as the Thorndale Annual Fall Fair. The Special Event Committee of Council sets about to provide structure to the execution of most special events organized by Thames Centre. A Special Events Policy would provide foundational guidance to describe the purpose and benefits of special events, the conditions in which the Municipality will provide support and the types of special events that will be sponsored by Thames Centre. Consulting other special event providers will ensure that the policy is grounded in a vision and guiding principles that ensure that the resources provided to enable special events are fair-minded and beneficial to residents and visitors in Thames Centre.

### Program and Service Strengths

- The summer playground program is well utilized and reaches a high percentage of the approximately 1,500 children ages 4 to 12 in Thames Centre. The expansion of the program has proven to be a success with 240 registrants registered in its first year being offered in 2022 in Thorndale.
- The availability of opportunities for all age groups is evident and many are directly offered on a drop-in basis. These opportunities appeal to an increasing preference to utilize facilities in a less structured fashion in Ontario.
- The Acti-Pass partnership provides grade five students with a free opportunity to experience various activities offered by the Municipality. This reduces any barriers to participation and an understanding of choosing activities and embracing lifelong active living.

### Program and Service Challenges and Opportunities

- Community consultation found that there is an average satisfaction level of 47% of respondents who are satisfied to very satisfied. Municipalities typically target an 80% to 90% satisfaction level. It should be noted that this indicator through the survey is only one input into the levels of satisfaction. Ensuring that regularized testing of satisfaction levels is built into program and service delivery either at the mid-point or end of the session is a requirement will lead to focus on needed improvements.
- There are many physical activity and sport opportunities in Thames Centre for residents of all ages. Municipalities typically provide a range of choices of opportunities, including creative, general interest, active and sport as well as STEM (science, technology, environmental and mathematics). Where partnerships cannot be achieved in an Integrated Service Delivery Model, the municipality typically fills in the gaps with directly offered programs. Working with all service providers to ensure that there is a range of choices for all age groups will serve to share resources and reduce duplication.
- During the consultation process, residents requested more adult specific programming apart from the sport and drop-in opportunities currently available to them.

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- Currently older adults and seniors (those over the age of 50 years) make up 44% of the Thames Centre’s population. This segment of the population is expected to continue growing, which is consistent with aging trends observed across Canada. The Lion’s Senior Centre, which offers a range of programs and memberships, has grown by 55% between 2016 and 2023 to 478 members, which captures approximately 8% of the older adult and senior population. While membership numbers are only one measure, knowing how many older adults are engaged in opportunities is an important metric to begin to engage non-users and increase participation at the Lions Senior Centre or other programs such as aquafit and pickleball.
- Quality assurance standards in offering children’s, youth and older adult services and programs are important elements of service provision. There are three quality assurance programs currently provided to municipalities and practitioners which include HIGHFive for children, Youth Friendly Communities for youth, and Active Aging for Older Adults. These are highly recognised quality assurance standards in Ontario and should be embraced by any service provider in Thames Centre.
- An issue that was identified by attendees at the community consultation sessions was the need to balance programs offerings throughout the Municipality to ensure all communities have access to programs and services.
- There is a desire for new or enhanced parks and recreation opportunities such as more programming particularly for youth and adults.

### Recommendation

49. Work with all recreation and sport service providers to determine participation per age group to understand baseline participation rates and realistic participation targets in the future.
50. Ensure that there is an equitable distribution of program opportunities throughout the Municipality, where feasible.
51. Provide/enable a range of choices per age group, including active, sport, creative, general interest, and STEM program opportunities.
52. Conduct focus groups of youth and adults to determine their program choices and look to a community partner(s) as a first line of accommodation to provide these program choices.
53. Work with the Lifesaving Society (Ontario Branch) to audit the adherence to industry standards and compliance to legislative requirements as per the Aquatic Safety Accreditation Program.
54. Ensure that all providers have access to quality assurance models and training, including HIGHFive for Child Development, Youth Friendly Community criteria, and Active Aging for older adults.
55. Develop a Special Events Policy to provide consistent guidance on the development and support of Special Events in Thames Centre.

### 7.3 Physical Activity

**Goal: “To support the improved health of Thames Centre residents by working with aligned partners to increase the frequency, duration and intensity of physical activity.”**

The 2019 and 2020 ParticipACTION report cards on physical activity graded overall physical activity levels a “D+”<sup>17</sup> for children and youth and “D” for adults, which was a marginal improvement compared to previous years. The findings from these studies suggest that there has been limited improvement overall to physical activity levels. Research suggests that this trend is primarily driven by a lack of free time as people are leading busier lifestyles with competing interests as well as not choosing active choices. This is further impacted by the increased screen time. Low physical activity levels negatively impact the health of Canadians, placing pressure on local healthcare systems.

Thames Centre has a limited ability to influence the daily schedules of individuals, however it does make efforts to facilitate physical activity opportunities such as providing drop-in activities, and a myriad of outdoor opportunities. While little improvement has been made over the last few decades in improving physical activity levels, continued emphasis is needed to influence activity patterns of residents through collective efforts with recreation, sport and health providers, public health offices, and local partners.

#### Canada’s 24-Hour Movement Guidelines

Canada’s 24-Hour Movement Guidelines have replaced Canada’s Physical Activity Guidelines. The new guidelines were introduced in 2020 and depict the amount of time various age groups should move in a 24-hour period. This is viewed as more a helpful tool for Canadians as the new guidelines speak to the amount of recreational screen time that is appropriate from a health perspective each day. Table 10 highlights the daily movement guidelines for children and youth between the ages of 7 and 17.

Table 11: Canada’s 24-Hour Movement Guidelines

Activity	Time / Day
<b>Sweat</b>	60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity
<b>Step</b>	Several hours of moderate physical activity
<b>Sleep</b>	9-11 hours for 5 – 13-year-olds
	8-10 hours for 14 – 17-year-olds
<b>Sit</b>	Limit sitting for extended periods
	No more than 2 hours of recreational screen time per day

<sup>17</sup> The ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Adults (2019) and Children and Youth (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.participaction.com>

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These guidelines have been developed for all age cohorts and should be communicated and promoted to the public within facilities, online and in promotional materials. Discussions with community partners to introduce Physical Literacy, promoting active opportunities in increasing the frequency, duration, and intensity of physical activity all play a part in addressing this chronic issue.

### Physical Literacy

One approach to increasing physical activity is to ensure that community members have the basic physical skills to participate in active opportunities. The Canadian Sport for Life Movement has developed a Physical Literacy program for all age groups to ensure that they can run, throw, catch, etc. and feel more confident in being active. Physical literacy can be taught in existing programs and environments such as in playground programs, seniors centres, schools, sport clubs etc. Once more residents are comfortable with the skills to be more active, it is hoped that some barriers to their participation in physical activities will be alleviated.

### The ParticipACTION Community Better Challenge – Top Prize \$100,000

ParticipACTION hosts an annual Community Better Challenge to encourage Canadian communities to get more active. It is open to all communities and residents are encouraged to track minutes of activity during the month of June. Total minutes achieved per capita count toward the national winner and a top winning community is identified within each province and territory. The fifty finalist communities are asked to apply explaining why they deserve to be Canada's Most Active Community. This initiative has helped community groups and organizations join in and improve activity levels. The prize of \$100,000 often helps to improve infrastructure, programs, and equipment levels.

Communities and organizations can apply for grants and event tool kits at the beginning of each year to assist with events and challenges. This could be a way to animate the neighbourhoods, and community groups in Thames Centre to improve fitness levels for all age groups and abilities and become an annual event.

### Recommendations

56. Work with other program, and sport providers to train facilitators in Physical Literacy. Include Physical Literacy training as part of the Playground Program and other like opportunities.
57. Promote Canada's 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for all ages in community centres and spaces and in the online Community Services Guide.
58. Work with the Special Events Committee and other aligned service and sport providers to determine the feasibility of participating in the Canada's Most Active Community event.

## 7.4 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

**Goal: “To identify, engage and reduce barriers to participation by equity seeking groups and individuals in Thames Centre.”**

### Current State – A Proactive Municipality

Thames Centre has shown leadership through its Accessibility and Inclusivity Advisory Committee to identify equity seeking populations, seek out needs and potential barriers and recommend proactive initiatives to Council for consideration. To ensure that all residents are welcomed in the community, Thames Centre has gone to a great extent to identify and implement policies to be more inclusive, including:

- The development of the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access Strategy;
- The advocacy for installing crosswalk illustrations to honour the LGBTQ2S+ community and Indigenous Peoples;
- The distribution of funds to community sport groups to ensure that persons experiencing low income can participate;
- The inclusion of Diwali celebrations in the by-law to allow fireworks along with July 1<sup>st</sup> Canada Day and the May 24<sup>th</sup> dates;
- The celebration of Pride Day to celebrate the LGBTQ2S+ community at Dorchester Community Park in 2022 and at Thorndale Community Park in 2023;
- The installation of BlindSquare and GoodMaps free mobile apps to provide wayfinding technology for the blind, partially sighted and other groups that can benefit from this technology, and
- The recognition of First Nations Traditional Lands.

The Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access Strategy will clearly outline what populations may be underserved in Thames Centre and what actions the Municipality will take in reducing barriers to accessing services. The Municipality will provide the guidance necessary and the departments and staff who may have the lead in these initiatives. The information provided in this Master Plan will augment this direction and provide practices that are effective in reducing barriers in a community services setting.

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Table 12: Potential Equity Seeking Populations in Thames Centre

Equity Seeking Group	% of the Population	Approximate Number of Residents	Promising Practises
Residents Experiencing Low Income	5.3%	740	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A Policy to provide subsidized programs and services</li> <li>- A range of free to low-cost programs</li> <li>- Encouragement to engage in subsidized opportunities through Social Services Workers</li> </ul>
Persons with Disabilities	22%	3,075	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Physical modifications to building and public places through the requirements of the OADA.</li> <li>- Policy that caregivers are offered free entrance to programs and services to assist with the participant's accessible participation</li> </ul>
LGBTQ2S+	Between 4% and 13%	600-1,900	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensuring that staff and volunteers are trained in providing safe and welcoming spaces for the LGBTQ2S+ community</li> <li>- Providing public spaces for safe gathering spaces for the LGBTQ2S+ groups</li> </ul>
BIPOC Community (Visible Minorities)	2.6%	370	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connect with key opinion leaders to introduce services and discuss any barriers to participation</li> </ul>
Indigenous Peoples	1.3%	185	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incorporating the components of the Truth and Reconciliation Report aimed at sport and recreation.</li> </ul>

### Who May be Underrepresented in Thames Centre

First efforts centre on identifying diverse and underrepresented populations and reaching out to have conversations about how these residents recreate, stay active and if there are existing barriers to participation within the current service delivery model. The responsibility of the Department is to plan how to reach out to underserved populations and better define the actions that will be taken in welcoming all residents.

**Equity vs Equality** efforts centre around defining diverse and underrepresented populations and ensuring that these needs and barriers are understood. Taking different approaches to ensure that varying underserved populations can be included begins to define taking an equitable approach.

**Intersectionality** is a term being used to ensure that there is an understanding of how residents define themselves. Residents do not typically define themselves as a singular identity and staff and volunteers must be aware to provide welcoming environments overall. One might define themselves as Indigenous,

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non-binary and with a physical disability or one might define themselves as female, experiencing low income. Needs will not often be met in a linear fashion, and therefore all programs and services must be welcoming and consider potential barriers to participation.

### **A Framework toward Greater Inclusion in Community Services**

Municipalities are making intentional efforts to ensure that public spaces and places are welcoming to all residents and programs and services reflect the fuller needs of a diverse population. Typically, departments identify ways of ensuring that programs and services are welcoming, that staff are trained, and that spaces and programs are provided with modifications if required. Historically the focus has been directed to persons with disabilities and those experiencing low income, however, municipalities have expanded their focus to include all marginalized peoples within their respective community.

#### **Create the Toolbox**

The development of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion outreach guidelines and training will ensure that staff and volunteers understand their role in welcoming all residents and the efforts that will be made to do so. Efforts to ensure that there is equitable representation within the staff and volunteer team, providing diverse input into the delivery and enabling and participation in programs and services.

#### **Listen, Learn and Act Together - Nothing About Us Without Us**

Developing meaningful approaches to including diverse populations must embrace the notion of "Nothing About Us Without Us." Each community is different with unique community service needs. Staff cannot act alone in developing inclusive approaches without listening and working closely with the groups who these approaches affect and have lived experience. Often diverse communities are independent and offer their own programs and simply require space and/or other supports. Needs may change over time and continued engagement will allow all allies to understand trends and modify service provision. The Municipality of Thames Centre has Council appointed Committees to hear these diverse voices to provide and broaden timely input.

#### **Create a Sense of Belonging**

With Thames Centre's diverse populations identified, staff now have clear target markets to engage and serve. Initial discussions should centre on what is in place to support their recreation and sport needs. What are the barriers to participation and how the parties can work together to increase participation? There are options to discuss with diverse groups as to whether they need assistance accessing and feeling welcomed into the current program and service mix, or if they need access to space to offer preferred activities. It is important to assess if residents would like to learn some skills to participate or if the fulsome service mix should include some more diverse program offerings.

### **Initiate Meaningful Conversations**

During the staff engagement sessions to support the development of this Master Plan, discussions centred on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Staff indicated that the approach to being more inclusive was currently organic; meaning that staff respond as opportunities arise and discussions occur. Staff have been successful when they have developed and executed specific policies and plans and are proud of the work that has been completed to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities, persons experiencing low income and some racialized groups. There is a clear aim to be more inclusive but there has been no direct and intentional path developed to date to reach out to other identified and underserved populations. Municipalities can play a strong role in facilitating community discussions and identifying and prioritizing policies and programs to meet their mandate of increasing participation.

### **Develop Programs and Services Together**

Working with diverse and equity seeking groups seeks to open lines of communication, reduce barriers, and increase participation in community services and facilities.

### **Promising Practises in Other Municipal Jurisdictions**

Some examples of inclusive practices in other municipal jurisdictions are provided to ensure that staff and service providers develop policies and tools to be fully inclusive of potentially underserved populations in Thames Centre.

### **An Equity Lens**

As community services are developed/enabled and reviewed, it is important to ask three questions to address equity principles in an increasingly diverse community. These queries include:

- What underrepresented groups were consulted as the program/service/policy was under development or under review?
- What were the results of this engagement effort and how did it change the implementation and delivery?
- What equity seeking residents were attracted to the program and what did the evaluations indicate?

### **Persons Experiencing Low Income**

Access policies serve to reduce barriers to participation for persons experiencing low income. The Policy is typically listed in a prominent space in the Community Services Guide and outlines the application process and what level of subsidies exist for residents. Staff monitor the number of residents that utilize the policy year over year. The overall goal should be to include the same percentage of residents who are underserved as participation by the general population.

### **Persons with Disabilities**

To participate in a full spectrum of program and services, residents with disabilities can choose to work with staff or service providers to achieve accommodation in programs by receiving modified instruction and/or by welcoming a caregiver into the specific class or camp. Further, a resident can choose to attend a program that has been adapted to accommodate varying exceptionalities.

### **The LGBTQ2S+ - Safe Spaces/Positive Spaces**

The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants developed the Positive Spaces Initiative through Citizen and Immigration Canada to denote public spaces that are safe for and welcoming to the LGBTQ2S+ community. Signage including the Pride flag in the graphic denotes that the space is positive for this population.

### **Indigenous Peoples**

The Aboriginal Sport Circle is a not-for-profit organization that was founded in 1995. It is designated as Canada's governing body and voice for Aboriginal sport throughout the country. Each Province and Territory is represented and is an excellent resource for recreation providers. It advocates for the Aboriginal community to engage in healthy and active lifestyles. The Regional Coordinators in Ontario work to better engage the community and offer grants to fund programs and activities through the Power to Play Program.

### **IndigenACTION**

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is a national organization representing First Nations in Canada. The AFN has developed an IndigenACTION Strategy which serves to develop partnerships with community level sport and recreation leaders to ensure that First Nations youth can live healthier lifestyles and overall well-being through recreation and sport.

### **Indigenous Cultural Competency Training**

The Indigenous Cultural Competency program is provided by Indigenous organizations and businesses. The program provides organizations that work with Indigenous peoples and groups to obtain the skills, knowledge, and respect for the history, terminology, values, and behaviours of Indigenous peoples. It is invaluable as communities begin to develop strong relationships built on respect.

### Recommendations

59. Work toward engaging the same percentage of participation in equity seeking populations in parks and recreation opportunities as the general population in Thames Centre.
60. Use the "Equity Lens" as described in the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan document as programs and services are developed and reviewed.
61. Develop an Access Policy with community partners to ensure that all residents can participate in the activity of their choice regardless of income.
62. Ensure that all public spaces are identified as Safe and Positive Spaces with training and criteria being met through the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
63. Meet with representatives of equity seeking populations and groups representing them to discuss reducing any barriers to participation in recreation and parks services.
64. Utilize the resources of the Canadian Women in Sport organization to assist in auditing current policies and approaches with the intent of increasing girls and women's participation in sport and recreation.
65. Complete regular visual observations of all parks and recreation related spaces in Thames Centre to determine who is using public spaces and most importantly who is not.

## 7.5 Community Services Operational Capacity

**Goal: "To continually improve service delivery through operational excellence initiatives in Thames Centre."**

The leadership and management of the Community Services & Facilities Department operation is complex. There are many components to the full operation of facilities, parks, programs, and services, including complying with industry standards and legislation associated with significant human, fiscal and physical resources. Infrastructure responsibilities include facility development, construction oversight and management, maintenance of facilities, including continued cleaning and upkeep, repairs and replacements, preventative maintenance to extend the lifespan of physical plants and assets. The design and offering of programs and services, and the hiring, training and retention of staff and volunteers. Paramount to the success of the operation in Thames Centre is the ability to work collectively with community groups and partners and deliver services that are meaningful and well utilized by all residents.

The review of Departmental capacity included the existence of a focussed mission, vision, and goals as well as policies, performance measures, leadership and training, levels of service, costing of services communications and marketing, and all other operational components to ensure that the performance of the Department is of a high standard.

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The key initiatives recommended for further refinement include:

- a) Costing and Pricing of Programs and Services;
- b) The Implementation of Performance Measures; and
- c) Enhancing Cross Promotion of Opportunities.

### Costing of Services & Pricing Policy

While most of the costs to provide recreation services are funded through the municipal tax base, levying user fees allows for a sustainable menu of services and ensures that services can be readily expanded when direct cost are recovered. A Pricing Policy provides a framework with which fair-minded and equitable decisions can be made with respect to costing as well as rates and fee development.

### Provincial Rates and Fees Requirements

Ontario Regulation 584/06 (Fees and Charges) issued under the authority of the Municipal Act specifically governs the role of the municipality in imposing fees and charges. With respect to recreation, there is a limit to not include the capital costs when programs and services are costed. Thames Centre approves a rates and fees schedule for services and fees which are posted for public information as per the legislated requirements for all municipal departments. Council has typically supported making programs and services affordable so as not to create a significant barrier to participation.

### Pricing Policy Purpose

The purpose of the Community Services User Fee and Pricing Policy is to provide a defensible fee framework while setting a standard methodology for costing and pricing recreation services.

Specifically, a Pricing Policy strives to ensure that:

- a) Participants contribute to the sustainability of recreation through contributing to the cost to provide the program or service.
- b) Ensure that user fees are not a barrier to participation in all recreation programs and services offered (by ensuring that an Access Policy welcomes residents experiencing low income).
- c) There is a balance between no fee/low fee and fee-based programs and services so that residents have a range of choice.
- d) User Fees are developed in a fair, defensible, and equitable fashion.
- e) User Fees generally capture a prescribed amount of the *Direct Cost* to provide a recreation program or service.

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- f) Program offerings that contribute to the public good and are accessible to all residents will be subsidized to a greater extent compared to program offerings that benefit an individual or a smaller group of residents at a more advanced level.
- g) The local market is considered to ensure that fees are comparable to providers of similar services within and surrounding vicinity.

The scope of a Pricing Policy includes the costing and pricing of all programs and services that are within the authority of the municipality. The Policy applies to all residents, community groups, businesses, and non-residents participating in programs (registered and drop-in) and the rental of facilities. The Policy addresses the cost of provision and the respective fees associated with all recreation programs and services, including:

- a) Fees for directly offered programs and services, including aquatics, general interest programs, fitness classes and memberships, camps, sports programs, March Break and Holiday Break programs, drop-in opportunities and any other services offered and organized through the municipality.
- b) Fees for municipal services offered through the municipality, including hourly costs for ice, pools, gymnasiums, community centre halls, meeting rooms, sports fields: and
- c) The use of recreation facilities and public spaces for commercial and private functions.

### **Costing and Setting Fee Structures for Programs and Services**

- a) Develop Common Costing Principles and Assumptions

Common costing principles ensure that allocation of costs is completed in a standard fashion for all departments and services. For example, overhead costs may be distributed as a percentage of the whole based on gross budget size. The assumption might be that larger departments require a greater amount of centralized assistance. However, some municipalities feel that central services such as the Clerks Department, Finance, the CAO's office etc. are central to the business of operating a municipality and are sometimes not allocated out to costing of the departmental services. Another costing principle might be that an hour of ice time will include all costs to maintain the ice but divide the costs by revenue producing hours only. The clear point is that these assumptions need to be decided upon at the outset of the costing exercise by the full senior management team.

- b) Identify the Units that will be Costed

Each Department should be costing units of production within their services and all departmental costs should be allocated out to provide these service units. In a community services and facilities setting Unit costs might include:

- Cost per hour to maintain an hour of pool time, ice time, community spaces
- A set of swim lessons

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- A week of Playground Program
- A kilometre of trail maintenance
- Cost per hour of tennis or pickleball
- Cost of a membership for various activities
- Cost per average number of attendees / special event

### c) Costing Services and Service Units

Develop a formula that speaks to identifying full-service provision costs and allocating them out to specific service. For example, the process to offer a swim lesson includes scheduling of pool time, developing courses based on utilization, marketing aquatics services, registering participants, hiring, and onboarding of staff, staff salaries and supply costs, an allocation of pool time, etc. Costing the process encourages staff to look for efficiencies to reduce the overall cost of provision. Quantifying the number of units produced will assist in developing unit costs. Again, the costing methodology needs to be agreed upon to ensure that results are meaningful, and these principles are applied consistently in all services.

### d) Identify Cost Recovery Levels Where Appropriate

Some of the services, including ice rentals, playground program, swimming lessons and parks/trails maintenance employ a revenue stream and therefore it will be important to understand the level of cost recovery for each revenue producing service.

### e) Consider the Value of the Service – Categorize the Service

Services and programs that generally serve a broad population bring benefits to the community and a larger number of residents are subsidized to a greater extent as these programs and services are considered to have community-wide benefits. Services that serve a few residents, are specialized/private and benefit individuals are not subsidized and work toward full cost recovery.

### f) Current and Desired Levels of Cost Recovery

Baseline data must include a reflection of the current levels of cost recovery with the fee structure that is in place. More recently there is a requirement to defend the pricing of services based on recovering a percentage of the actual cost to provide them. A delineation of the current cost recovery levels of the services under study will provide the baseline data that is required to determine reasonable cost recovery levels for the future.

### g) Comparison to the Market

Before an achievable draft Pricing Policy and structure can be formulated, a look to other fees levied for similar services in surrounding municipalities and other service providers must be

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undertaken. This will allow staff, and Council the ability to better understand the potential impacts of the set of proposed fees.

### **h) Consideration of Phasing**

Often municipalities will consider phasing in user fees over several years to lower any negative impacts to participation in recreation programs and services. This approach is especially useful if the current cost recovery rates are low. Many municipalities include an inflationary increase to accommodate annual increases in costs to provide programs and services.

## **Performance Measures**

Typically, community services staff collect participation, utilization, and service satisfaction data to analyze current service delivery levels and to measure performance against the previous year's results. This is completed to demonstrate that there has been movement in addressing key goals and initiatives and that residents are well satisfied with service and program provision. Annual attendance and registration statistics are captured and shared with staff, to allow improved planning for the next session and accommodate any pent-up demands. Staff and partners need to be well versed in what is important within various disciplines and how do we know if goals are being met. Three questions are answered – 'What are the clear expectations?', 'What are our quantified targets?' and 'How do we know when we have been successful?'. Articulating specific targets and measures provides clarity and focus on key deliverables. This approach allows staff to share these expectations with all full and part-time staff and volunteers as well as relevant community groups so that everyone is working toward the same goals.

### **Examples of Performance Measures for Community Services and Facilities**

Current priorities within community services and facilities centre on ensuring that participation in all age groups continues to increase. Measuring performance to this degree will also take some time to implement by agreeing to the targets/measures, setting up data collection methodologies, determining baseline data, and refining subsequent service improvement approaches.

It is suggested that performance measures and targets be considered, and baseline data collected in year one. A shared file with data that is captured and summarized will allow staff and partners viewing access to see if participation targets and satisfaction levels are being met. Staff and partners will want to make appropriate and timely modifications and interventions to programs, scheduling, customer service, facility cleanliness and community outreach to maximize Thames Centre's performance.

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Table 13: Suggested Performance Measures

Measure	Suggested Performance Measure	Suggested Target
Inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget</li> <li>• FTEs</li> <li>• Square feet of facility space</li> <li>• Parkland hectares</li> <li>• Fields and amenities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These are baseline inputs and will be compared year to year. Increasing outputs, efficiencies and effectiveness with similar resources becomes the focus of staff.</li> </ul>
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facility and field utilization against capacity</li> <li>• Direct program utilization against capacity</li> <li>• Drop-in and casual use opportunities and utilization</li> <li>• Permit utilization</li> <li>• Participation through community partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80-90% of prime-time hours and 50-70% of non-prime hours</li> <li>• 80-90% of capacity based on facility time available and budget parameters.</li> <li>• 50-75% of capacity pending on the activity</li> <li>• 75% use of available hours</li> </ul>
Efficiencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficiencies as a result of better equipment, technology, streamlined processes, grants, partnerships, sponsorships etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An indication of cost avoidance, increased funding through alternate sources, reaching greater participation through partnerships etc.,</li> <li>• Value of volunteerism</li> </ul>
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facility cleanliness rating</li> <li>• Satisfaction levels with programs and services</li> <li>• Satisfaction levels with community development and sport development services</li> <li>• Staff engagement levels</li> <li>• Volunteer satisfaction levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80-90% rating</li> <li>• 80-90% rating</li> <li>• 80-90% rating</li> <li>• 50-75% rating</li> </ul>

### Cross Promotion and Communications

Residents and community discussions to support the Master Plan centred on the availability of one source that promotes all recreation and parks opportunities in Thames Centre. Many residents had difficulty navigating various websites and postings. The Thames Centre website mentions other organizations but there is no central source that provides a fuller description and listed by opportunity by age group. It would be beneficial for community partners to work together to provide one source of all opportunities with links to varying websites for registration.

**Recommendation**

66. Develop a fair-minded Pricing Policy to determine service costs and defensible cost recovery levels in Community Services.
67. Develop and implement performance metrics and targets that identifies the inputs, outputs, efficiencies and effectiveness of parks, facilities and recreation for the Community Services and Facilities Department.
68. Work with community partners to cross promote all recreation, special events and parks opportunities in Thames Centre to create one central source of information. Work toward engaging the same percentage of participation in equity seeking populations in parks and recreation opportunities as the general population in Thames Centre.

## **7.6 Form Follows Function – An Organizational Review**

The Master Plan evaluates current facilities, programs and services and their relationship to future service delivery requirements. It provides an opportunity to review the effectiveness of the organization and what changes may be required to create efficiencies and address deficiencies. Once these improvements are identified – a look to the structure of the organization is appropriate. The review of the organizational structure undertakes to articulate what structure exists, compares it to common organizational design standards and, provides an indication of some changes that require further review before concrete changes are made.

Organizations have different structures depending on the need for formalization and accountability. In a community service setting, there is a clear need to obtain the functional expertise and be clear about accountabilities. There are over 50 legislative acts, respective requirements as well as industry standards to provide safe, citizen-centred, and quality-driven programs and services.

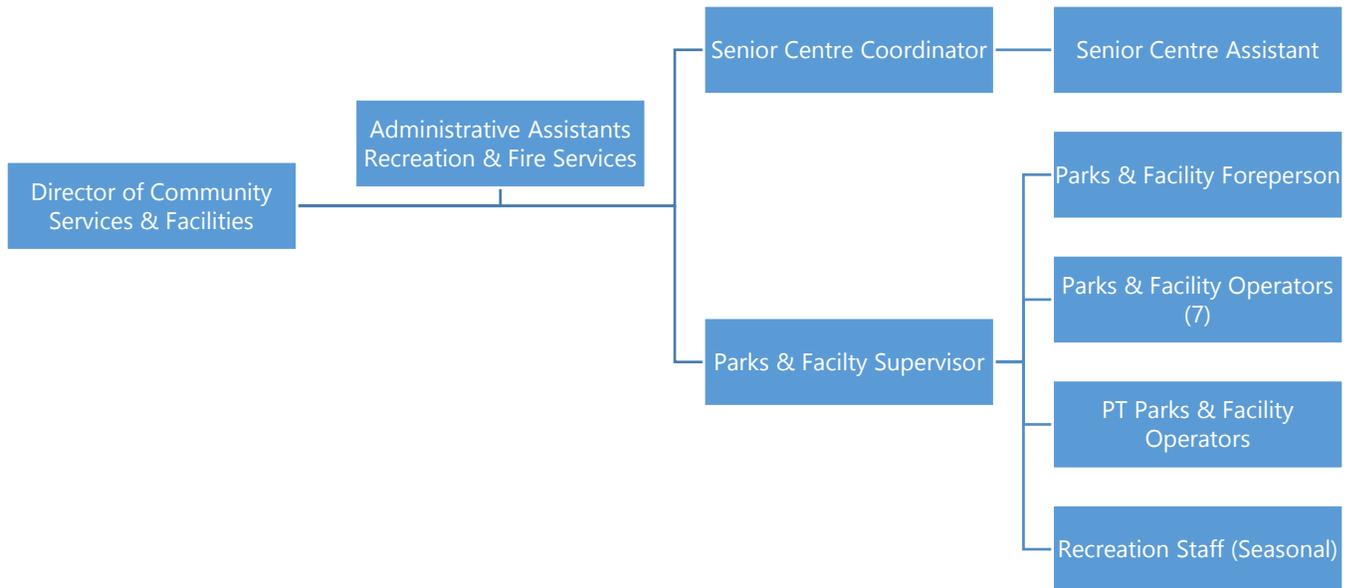
### **Current State**

The Municipality's Community Services & Facilities Department is responsible for delivering parks and recreation services in Thames Centre with the support of community organizations. The Municipality recently added two new facility operators and upgraded two administration staff members from part time to full time. In addition to providing and maintaining community services and facilities in the Municipality, Department staff are also responsible for maintaining the grounds of all municipal properties, including cemeteries.

The Department is led by the Director of Community Services & Facilities who oversees several staff, including the Parks & Facilities Supervisor, Senior Centre Coordinator with a full-time Administrative Assistant and two full-time Administrative Assistants (for Fire and Recreation Services). Each of the direct reports to the director have direct reports to ensure that the scope of responsibilities is managed according to legislative requirements and industry standards. The current organizational structure is outlined in Figure 15.

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Figure 15: Organizational Structure for the Community Services & Facilities Department



### Common Municipal Organizational Design Principles

The organizational structure within the Community Services and Facilities Department has been developed around common functions such as recreation, facilities, and parks. These outward facing services are supported by administrative functions such as permitting of spaces, and reception. Other corporate supports are provided such as financial controls, clerks services, human resources and diversity, equity, and inclusion, as examples.

A set of organizational design principles commonly utilized in municipal and government operations are offered for consideration as these principles are used in the following evaluation. It is assumed that the Human Resources Division would refine these as changes in technology, equipment, service provision, functions increase or streamlined processes affect organizational design. Common organizational design principles allow all departments and units to be structured in a fair and equitable manner. Organizational design principles include the following:

- There should be no more than six layers of staff between the Chief Administrative Officer and the public;
- Departments and/or divisions are centred around common customers and/or common functions;
- Departments will focus on common strategic goals which are aligned with corporate priorities;
- There will be an equitable distribution of workload where possible in terms of span of control (functions, staff, outputs etc.);

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- Each management position will have a range of 3-6 direct reports (unless a strategic priority requires focus and the use employment of a sole contributor). Volunteer engagement and community development responsibilities must be considered in the allocation of human resources; and
- One-on-one reporting relationships should be minimized or amalgamated with other like functions. A review of the position should include separate and distinct responsibilities from the position it reports to.

Generally, the Community Services & Facilities Department complies with these organizational design standards. The Department has common customers, partners and is organized by functions of parks, recreation, and facilities. Inner-departmental coordination and community engagement is the key to its success.

### **Challenges and Opportunities in the Organizational Structure and Resource Distribution**

- Staffing at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre - during the community engagement and staff sessions requests were made for customer service at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre. Stakeholders wanted to ensure that resources and facilities are evenly distributed throughout the municipality's main settlement areas of Dorchester and Thorndale. It was emphasized that Dorchester should not be prioritized, and that consideration should be given to parks and recreation opportunities in Thorndale and other areas of the Municipality.
- The recommendations in this Community Services & Facilities Master Plan will require additional staff effort over the next five years at a minimum to advance service provision and increase participation. Recommendations call for increased work with community partners, policy development, advancing the diversity, equity, access and inclusion agenda, the development of performance measures and targets, defining service levels etc. These important requirements will take additional staff efforts to what exists. Staff will need to determine if the existing capacity of staff can address these requirements, the options, and a recommended course of action. An increase in population will require additional effort.

### **Recommendations**

69. Identify resources required to address the recommendations in the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan as compared to the existing staff capacity.
70. Determine the feasibility and implications of housing staff at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre.

## 8.0 Implementation

### 8.1 Monitoring and Updating the Master Plan

Active implementation of the Master Plan is fundamental to its success. This requires coordinated efforts and commitment from Council, staff, stakeholders and the public, as well as a variety of funding options to implement certain aspects of the Master Plan.

The Municipality should regularly review and assess – and periodically revise – the recommendations of this Master Plan to ensure that they continue to reflect local conditions and that they are responsive to the changing needs of Thames Centre. This will require monitoring population projections and growth patterns, tracking activity trends and user satisfaction levels, coordinating with community organizations and the public, reporting on progress, and undertaking a comprehensive 10-year update to the Master Plan. Through these strategies – or as a result of other internal or external factors – adjustment of resource allocations and priorities identified in this Master Plan may be required.

This Master Plan should be reviewed annually as part of the Municipality's budget cycle – the following steps may be used to conduct an annual review of the Master Plan.

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

### Recommendations

71. Regularly monitor the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan implementation progress, including tracking population growth and demographic characteristics, activity patterns, facility usage, trends, sports participation, and completed recommendations. Provide annual status reports to Council and the community.
72. Establish annual work plans to identify Master Plan recommendations requiring implementation within the coming year. Work plans should identify departmental leads, partners, funding requirements and sources, etc.
73. Undertake a mid-cycle refresh within five years and a full update of the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan in 10 years.

## 8.2 Financial Considerations

The Master Plan calls for continued financial investments and outlines a series of planning priorities for the provision of new and upgraded parks and recreation infrastructure. The Municipality has limited resources and cannot afford to do everything that the community desires; underscoring the importance for undertaking the Master Plan. Although Thames Centre may experience various challenges in providing the applicable financial and human resources to achieve the Master Plan's recommendations, it is expected that the Municipality will make every effort to implement these strategies through appropriate means.

Full implementation of the Master Plan will require the use of numerous funding sources, including (but not limited to):

- Development charges
- Parkland cash-in-lieu for land purchases
- Municipal taxation and reserves
- Fundraising, donations, and sponsorships
- User fees and surcharges
- Debenture financing
- One-time grants
- Ongoing government programs, such as Provincial Gas Tax Revenues (for active transportation projects)
- Partnerships and sponsorships

### **Recommendations**

74. Where appropriate, consider alternative funding and cost-sharing approaches, including (but not limited to) fundraising, grants, private-public partnerships, sponsorships, surcharges, capital reserve contributions, and other strategies to provide the best value to residents.
75. Use the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan as a resource in establishing the Municipality's annual budget documents, Development Charge Background Studies, and other related studies.
76. Assess and ensure that operating budget implications are identified and appropriately resourced prior to approving major capital projects.
77. Conduct feasibility studies and business plans (with input from the public) prior to undertaking major capital projects to ensure that projects are aligned with community needs, partnership opportunities, and financial capabilities.

## **8.3 Summary of Recommendations**

The section contains a summary of the recommendations contained within this Master Plan. By approving the Master Plan, the Municipality is not bound to implementing every recommendation or providing facilities/services in the order, amount, or timing indicated; rather this Master Plan provides guidance on community priorities and sets a general course for action to meet the needs of residents as they are presently defined.

The timing of the recommendations proposed in this Master Plan recognizes the need for phased implementation and/or outside funding sources as some recommendations are based upon what is needed and not necessarily what may be financially achievable at the present time. As part of the annual budget process, this Master Plan will be reviewed to identify areas where the availability of resources may affect the timing of implementation. Analysis of implementation options and budget implications should be undertaken prior to approving major projects. As previously identified, the implementation of this Master Plan will require the use of various funding sources and partnerships.

To guide the annual budget process, high level costs are identified for capital recommendations in this Master Plan. These costs are intended to be a guide only and staff will be required to refine these estimates as recommendations are brought forward with consideration given to operating impacts. It is expected that the Municipality will make decisions on individual projects and funding sources annually at budget time.

Priority is often, but not always, aligned with timing – the higher the priority, the sooner the action should be implemented. Priorities have been established based on an assessment of need, as identified throughout the planning process (e.g., including public engagement, trends, demographics, assessment of amenities and services, etc.). Municipalities generally seek to address the widest range of needs and achieve maximum community benefit through the efficient use of resources. Determining priorities is an

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exercise that should be revisited each year prior to the Municipality's capital and operating budget process. In addition to funding availability, factors that might change priorities year to year may include:

- Capital lifecycle and considerations of safety;
- Legislation and mandated requirements;
- Changes to service standards;
- Public input and community interests;
- Emerging trends and changes in participation rates;
- Availability of alternate providers; and
- Socio-demographic changes and growth forecasts.

The priority and timing of recommendations are organized into the following categories:

### Priority

- **High Priority:** Immediate attention is strongly suggested during the planning timeframe.
- **Medium Priority:** Attention is required when high priority recommendations have been initiated or completed, or when suitable partners have been identified for funding.
- **Lower Priority:** Attention is required when high and medium priority recommendations have been initiated/completed.
- **Ongoing:** This represents a best practice or guideline that is to be followed on a continual basis.

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Recommendation	Suggested Timing	Resource Implications
<b>Parkland</b>		
<p>1. Use the updated parkland classification contained in the Community Services &amp; Facilities Master Plan to guide the development and redevelopment of active parkland according to park type, form, function, size, and the features and amenities they provide.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p>2. Strive to add approximately 10 hectares to the Municipality’s active parkland supply, over and above planned parkland associated with current plans of subdivision, to maintain a current service level of 3.9 hectares per 1,000 residents. Emphasis should be placed on securing parkland in future residential areas to address growth related needs.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p>3. As part of a future Official Plan Review, update parkland policies to align with the amendments to the Ontario Planning Act and Bill 23 and incorporate policies to support the planning, design, and development of parkland, including consideration to the recommendations contained in this Master Plan.</p>	Short Term	Staff time
<p>4. Use this Master Plan as the basis for preparing a Parks Plan, in consultation with local school boards.</p>	Short Term	Staff time
<p>5. Adopt a “parkland first” approach that prioritizes parkland conveyance over cash-in-lieu of parkland in order to address parkland longer-term parkland needs and deficits. Parkland conveyance should: (i) be acceptable to the Municipality; (ii) result in park blocks that are at least 0.8 hectares in area; and (iii) minimize the dedication of encumbered lands.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p>6. Seek to maximize parkland dedication through development and redevelopment applications, as well as alternative parkland acquisition strategies (e.g., purchase/lease, land exchanges, partnerships, land banking, off-site conveyance, reallocation of surplus lands, etc.).</p>	Ongoing	Staff time. Costs for land acquisition.
<p>7. Work with partners to maximize community access to non-municipal parks and outdoor spaces through permitting, long-term public access agreements, etc.</p>	Short Term	Staff time

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Recommendation	Suggested Timing	Resource Implications
<p><b>8.</b> Maintain a commitment to universal accessibility, safety, and comfort within the parks and trails system. Regularly consult with the Accessibility &amp; Inclusivity Advisory Committee to ensure compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), recognizing that some areas with natural terrain are more difficult to access.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p><b>9.</b> On a case-by-case basis, incorporate amenities to encourage park and trail use such as seating, shade structures, signage, and other features.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p><b>10.</b> Engage the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority to establish a renewal strategy for Mill Pond Park.</p>	Short Term	Staff time. Cost for undertaking improvements.
<p><b>11.</b> Initiate a review and update of the 2016 Thorndale Community Centre &amp; Park Plan to ensure that it continues to reflect the needs of a growing community, with considerations given to the recommendations contained in this Master Plan. Consultation with the public and stakeholders should form part of this process.</p>	Short Term	Staff time and/or cost for external study
<p><b>12.</b> Undertake a visioning exercise with the public and stakeholders to create a future vision for the Dorchester Community Park that considers potential relocation of one or more ball diamonds to provide an opportunity to reclaim park space while creating opportunity for enhance open space for casual use, trails, and special events, as well as other outdoor recreation amenities that meet broad community needs.</p>	Short to Medium Term	Staff time and/or cost for external study
<p><b>13.</b> Guided by public input, undertake an update to the Trails &amp; Cycling Master Plan to provide a fresh perspective on active transportation opportunities in Thames Centre. At a minimum updating the Trails &amp; Cycling Master Plan should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Creating and promoting safe active transportation linkages within Dorchester and Thorndale, as well as between settlement areas and hamlets, including working with land developers in and around subdivision development to link new residential areas to the existing/planned trail network;</li> </ul>	Short Term	Staff time and/or cost for external study

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Recommendation	Suggested Timing	Resource Implications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b) Strengthening linkages within existing parks such as pathways to outdoor amenities;</li> <li>c) Enhancing connections to the rural area, non-municipal trail systems, and adjacent municipalities, including working with landowners to maintain or establish public access; and</li> <li>d) Working alone or in partnership with others to promote active transportation opportunities, including publishing trail routes (e.g., online, print, or mobile application), develop wayfinding signage, and other strategies to encourage active transportation in Thames Centre.</li> </ul>		
<b>Recreation Facilities</b>		
<p><b>14.</b> Undertake renewal of the wading pool at Dorchester Community Park.</p>	Short Term	\$250,000 - \$400,000
<p><b>15.</b> Enlarge and update the splash pad at Dorchester Community Park to provide an enhanced user experience and expanded range of spray features.</p>	Short Term	\$250,000 - \$300,000
<p><b>16.</b> Renew the splash pad at Thorndale Community Park.</p>	Medium Term	\$250,000 - \$300,000
<p><b>17.</b> Accommodate ice pad needs by promoting the use of early morning weekday and weekend ice, together with maximizing utilization of prime time hours and encouraging the use of available ice in adjacent municipalities.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p><b>18.</b> Ensure that the ice pads at the FlightExec Centre are maintained in a state of good repair, including undertaking lifecycle replacement of aging arena components, including ice pad flooring, boards and glass.</p>	Short to Medium Term	To be determined on a case-by-case basis
<p><b>19.</b> Monitor the use of the expanded auditorium at the FlightExec Centre to guide decisions on future gymnasium space needs while also directing competing demand for gymnasium space in Dorchester to the Thorndale Lions Community Centre to strengthen the use of this facility.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time

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Recommendation	Suggested Timing	Resource Implications
<p><b>20.</b> Encourage the use of existing indoor and outdoor public spaces for group fitness activities potentially to be delivered by a community partner, and promote existing private sector providers. Be open to potential partnerships to offer equipment-based fitness services should opportunities become available and/or encourage a private sector provider to locate in Thames Centre.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p><b>21.</b> Explore the feasibility of incorporating outdoor fitness equipment at Thorndale Community Park should the outdoor fitness equipment prove successful in Dorchester.</p>	Medium-Term	\$50,000 - \$150,000
<p><b>22.</b> Promote the use of existing multi-purpose rooms in Dorchester and Thorndale, including exploring opportunities to partner with organizations and the community to provide activities and events within these spaces.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p><b>23.</b> Regularly monitor the use of the multi-purpose spaces to inform future expansion and space needs.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p><b>24.</b> Engage the Boys and Girls Club of London to explore the feasibility of offering youth programs in Dorchester that are complementary to activities that are currently provided.</p>	Short-Term	Staff time
<p><b>25.</b> Monitor participation data, schedules and demand to inform decisions to increase the supply of soccer fields in Thorndale. Should there be a need, evaluate potential locations for new soccer fields, including working with the Thorndale Soccer Club to engage West Nissouri Public School to utilize outdoor school lands.</p>	Short-Term	Staff time. Costs to be determined on a case-by-case basis
<p><b>26.</b> Monitor participation data, scheduling, and demand to evaluate future enhancements to existing ball diamonds, which may include installing lighting to extend playing periods. Regular dialogue with Slo-Pitch City is recommended to discuss their future plans and to evaluate potential collaborative opportunities.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time. Costs to be determined on a case-by-case basis

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Recommendation	Suggested Timing	Resource Implications
<p><b>27.</b> Undertake replacement of aging lighting infrastructure as part of regular asset management. Work with user groups to identify and prioritize other future updates to existing ball diamonds, which should include external funding considerations such as community fundraising.</p>	Long Term	Costs to be determined on a case-by-case basis
<p><b>28.</b> Relocate one or more ball diamonds from Dorchester Community Park to the Outdoor Recreation Complex to strengthen this location as a sports complex for practices, games, and tournaments. The availability of adequate supporting amenities and infrastructure should be considered as part of this process, such as parking.</p>	Long Term	Costs to be determined on a case-by-case basis
<p><b>29.</b> Investigate the feasibility of constructing a multi-use court for basketball and ball hockey in Dorchester, potentially at Dorchester Community Park or at a future park.</p>	Medium to Long Term	\$250,000 - \$400,000
<p><b>30.</b> Construct a multi-use court for basketball and ball hockey at Crampton Park.</p>	Medium Term	\$100,000 - \$200,000
<p><b>31.</b> Extend the paved surface of the pavilion at Harrietsville Park to accommodate a half basketball court to replace the existing post and hoop in the parking lot.</p>	Medium Term	\$50,000 - 100,000
<p><b>32.</b> Add multi-use playing lines to the court at Wellburn Park to support basketball and ball hockey.</p>	Short Term	\$5,000 - \$10,000
<p><b>33.</b> Resurface the tennis and pickleball courts in Dorchester and Thorndale.</p>	Short to Medium Term	\$50,000 - \$75,000
<p><b>34.</b> Monitor the use of the tennis courts at the Dorchester Community Park to determine the potential to be repurposed to additional pickleball courts.</p>		
<p><b>35.</b> Construct a tennis court and a minimum of two dedicated pickleball courts at Avon Park or Crampton Park.</p>	Short to Medium Term	\$200,000 - \$350,000
<p><b>36.</b> Add pickleball playing lines to the tennis court at Wellburn Park.</p>	Short Term	\$5,000 - \$10,000

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Recommendation	Suggested Timing	Resource Implications
37. Construct the off-leash dog park in Thorndale.	Short Term	\$36,000
38. Ensure that residents in Dorchester and Thorndale are located within 800 metres of a playground, unobstructed by major barriers such as arterial roads, railway lines and watercourses. To achieve this goal, accessible playgrounds should be located at future parks within residential neighbourhoods and be accessible from a parking lot and/or street sidewalk.	Ongoing	\$50,000 - \$100,000 each
39. Replace the playground at Mill Pond Park with a natural and adventure playground that incorporates wood, logs, ropes, stones, and boulders to create a unique playing experience.	Short Term	\$100,000 - \$200,000
40. Proceed with replacing the playgrounds at Catharine Street Day Park, Harrietsville Park, Avon Park, and Wellburn Park.	Short to Medium Term	\$50,000 - \$100,000 each
41. Engage youth and young adults to redevelop the skate park at the Dorchester Community Park to offer a range of basic and challenging components.	Medium Term	\$225,000 - \$400,000
42. Engage youth and young adults to redevelop the skate park at the Thorndale Community Park to offer a range of basic and challenging components.	Medium to Long Term	\$225,000 - \$400,000
43. Consider incorporating small scale skate zones within rural parks that can be co-located with existing or proposed basketball courts, including at Wellburn Park, Avon Park, and Crampton Park. Future parks within Dorchester and Thorndale may also be considered as demand warrants.	Ongoing	\$50,000 - \$100,000
44. Monitor demand and requests for community gardening and should a volunteer group express an interest in establishing this new level of service, the Municipality should work with the group to identify and construct gardening plots in an appropriate location. The Municipality should be responsible for providing the land, appropriate infrastructure, and assisting with administering garden plots, while the volunteer group should be responsible for general oversight and maintenance.	Ongoing	Staff time. Costs to be determined on a case-by-case basis

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Recommendation	Suggested Timing	Resource Implications
<p><b>45.</b> Public requests for new indoor and outdoor recreation facilities should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with consideration given to proponent led business planning, trends, examples in other municipalities, local demand, the feasibility of utilizing existing public space, the willingness of an organization to partner in providing the facility or space, and other relevant factors as may be determined appropriate.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time. Costs to be determined on a case-by-case basis
<b>Community Services</b>		
<p><b>46.</b> Work collectively with all service providers to discuss the program and service recommendations in the Community Services &amp; Facilities Master Plan to determine how all related organizations can play a part in strengthening service provision in Thames Centre.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p><b>47.</b> Update the partnership agreements to include quality assurance mechanisms, legislative compliance, and reciprocal benefits.</p>	Short Term	Staff time
<p><b>48.</b> Work collectively to develop a Volunteer Plan to enable all groups to attract, train, retain and recognize volunteers.</p>	Short Term	Staff time
<p><b>49.</b> Work with all recreation and sport service providers to determine participation per age group to understand baseline participation rates and realistic participation targets in the future.</p>	Short Term	Staff time
<p><b>50.</b> Ensure that there is an equitable distribution of program opportunities throughout the Municipality, where feasible.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p><b>51.</b> Provide/enable a range of choices per age group including active, sport, creative, general interest, and STEM program opportunities.</p>	Ongoing	Staff time
<p><b>52.</b> Conduct focus groups of youth and adults to determine their program choices and look to a community partner(s) as a first line of accommodation to provide these program choices.</p>	Short Term	Staff time

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Recommendation	Suggested Timing	Resource Implications
53. Work with the Lifesaving Society (Ontario Branch) to audit the adherence to industry standards and compliance to legislative requirements as per the Aquatic Safety Accreditation Program.	Medium Term	Staff time
54. Ensure that all providers have access to quality assurance models and training including HIGHFive for Child Development, Youth Friendly Community criteria, and Active Aging for older adults.	Ongoing	Staff time
55. Develop a Special Events Policy to provide consistent guidance on the development and support of Special Events in Thames Centre.	Medium Term	Staff Time
56. Work with other program, and sport providers to train facilitators in Physical Literacy. Include Physical Literacy training as part of the Playground Program and other like opportunities.	Medium Term	Staff time
57. Promote Canada’s 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for all ages in community centres and spaces and in the online Community Services Guide.	Ongoing	Staff time
58. Work with the Special Events Committee and other aligned service and sport providers to determine the feasibility of participating in the Canada’s Most Active Community event.	Long Term	Staff time
59. Work toward engaging the same percentage of participation in equity seeking populations in parks and recreation opportunities as the general population in Thames Centre.	Medium Term	Staff time
60. Use the “Equity Lens” as described in the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan document as programs and services are developed and reviewed.	Ongoing	Staff time
61. Develop an Access Policy with community partners to ensure that all residents can participate in the activity of their choice regardless of income.	Short Term	Staff time
62. Ensure that all public spaces are identified as Safe and Positive Spaces with training and criteria being met through the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants	Ongoing	Staff time

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Recommendation	Suggested Timing	Resource Implications
63. Meet with representatives of equity seeking populations and groups representing them to discuss reducing any barriers to participation in recreation and parks services.	Short Term	Staff time
64. Utilize the resources of the Canadian Women in Sport organization to assist in auditing current policies and approaches with the intent of increasing girls and women’s participation in sport and recreation.	Long Term	Staff time
65. Complete regular visual observations of all parks and recreation related spaces in Thames Centre to determine who is using public spaces and most importantly who is not.	Ongoing	Staff time
66. Develop a fair-minded Pricing Policy to determine service costs and defensible cost recovery levels in Community Services	Short Term	Staff time
67. Develop and implement performance metrics and targets that identifies the inputs, outputs, efficiencies and effectiveness of parks, facilities and recreation for the Community Services and Facilities Department.	Short Term	Staff time
68. Work with community partners to cross promote all recreation, special events and parks opportunities in Thames Centre to create one central source of information. Work toward engaging the same percentage of participation in equity seeking populations in parks and recreation opportunities as the general population in Thames Centre.	Ongoing	Staff time
69. Identify resources required to address the recommendations in the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan as compared to the existing staff capacity.	Short Term	Staff Time
70. Determine the feasibility and implications of housing staff at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre.	Short Term	Staff time
<b>Implementation</b>		
71. Regularly monitor the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan implementation progress, including tracking population growth and demographic characteristics, activity patterns, facility	Ongoing	Staff time

## Municipality of Thames Centre Community Services & Facilities Master Plan

Recommendation	Suggested Timing	Resource Implications
usage, trends, sports participation, and completed recommendations. Provide annual status reports to Council and the community.		
<b>72.</b> Establish annual work plans to identify Master Plan recommendations requiring implementation within the coming year. Work plans should identify departmental leads, partners, funding requirements and sources, etc.	Ongoing	Staff time
<b>73.</b> Undertake a mid-cycle refresh within five years and a full update of the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan in 10 years.	Medium Term	Staff time
<b>74.</b> Where appropriate, consider alternative funding and cost-sharing approaches, including (but not limited to) fundraising, grants, private-public partnerships, sponsorships, surcharges, capital reserve contributions, and other strategies to provide the best value to residents.	Ongoing	Staff time
<b>75.</b> Use the Community Services & Facilities Master Plan as a resource in establishing the Municipality's annual budget documents, Development Charge Background Studies, and other related studies.	Ongoing	Staff time
<b>76.</b> Assess and ensure that operating budget implications are identified and appropriately resourced prior to approving major capital projects.	Ongoing	Staff time
<b>77.</b> Conduct feasibility studies and business plans (with input from the public) prior to undertaking major capital projects to ensure that projects are aligned with community needs, partnership opportunities, and financial capabilities.	Ongoing	Staff time and/or cost for external study