Cobourg
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINAL DRAFT

Parks and Recreation Master Plan

July 2026

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We respectfully acknowledge that the Town of Cobourg is located in the traditional and treaty territory of the Michi Saagiig (Mississauga) and Chippewa Nations, collectively known as the Williams Treaties First Nations, which include: Curve Lake, Hiawatha, Alderville, Scugog Island, Rama, Beausoleil, and Georgina Island First Nations.

We respectfully acknowledge that the Williams Treaties First Nations have been stewards and caretakers of these lands and waters, and that today remain vigilant over their health and integrity for generations to come. In the spirit of truth and reconciliation, we acknowledge that these treaties have not always been honoured, and often they've been broken. We also acknowledge that we are all a part of building good relations.

We are all Treaty People.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan would not have been possible without the dedication, insight, and commitment of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Task Force. Comprised of Cobourg residents who generously volunteered their time, the Task Force played an invaluable role in guiding the planning process, providing thoughtful feedback, sharing local knowledge, and helping to ensure the voices and needs of residents were reflected throughout the Plan:

- Anne McCaughey, Chair
- Beth Bellaire
- Christopher Chafe
- Dan Hallatt
- Joey Hatem
- Jennifer Weaver
- Kim Evans
- Olivia Lawson
- Councillor Miriam Mutton
- Mayor Lucas Cleveland, Ex Officio
- Lacricia Turner, Director, Community Services
- Lyndsay Aitken, Manager, Recreation
- Stu Dafoe, Manager, Parks
- Jodi Ware-Simpson, Administrative Assistant, Community Services

thinc.

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The Parks and Recreation Master Plan and this Executive Summary were prepared for the Town of Cobourg by thinc design and Mehak, Kelly & Associates. All images are provided by the Town or taken by the consulting team, unless otherwise noted.

A roadmap for Cobourg's parks and recreation spaces

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan serves as a high-level, 10-year strategic roadmap designed to guide future decision-making for Cobourg's parks, facilities, programs, and service delivery. Operating at a "30,000-foot level," it establishes the "what" and "why" for the Town's recreational future by outlining long-term goals and providing a framework for future capital investments, grants, and partnerships.

While the Plan reflects broad community needs, it is not a detailed architectural blueprint, an operational maintenance schedule, or a finalized budget. The Plan represents the first step in the municipal project lifecycle, ensuring that as Cobourg grows, individual decisions align with a unified community vision before advancing to detailed design, further community consultation, and budget approval.

As a compact municipality of 22.41 km^2, the vast majority of Cobourg's land area is already fully developed. The remaining undeveloped land is located in the eastern edge known as Cobourg East. Because the Town is nearing its development limits, now is an ideal time to proactively plan for its future parks and recreation needs.

Now (2026)

20,519 residents
(2021 Canadian Census)

34.1%
seniors aged 65+ years

43.7%
adults aged 20-64 years

17.1%
youth aged 0-19 years

Then (2036)

25,901+ residents
(2021 Development Charges Background Study projections)

1,970+
new homes

393
new people per year, with increasing % of visible minorities

Cobourg is navigating:

- population growth
- an influx of seasonal visitors to its waterfront geography
- demographic transitions as diverse newcomers and their families arrive to fill gaps in the workforce
- pressures as a regional hub serving 50,000+ residents in Northumberland County

The Plan relates Cobourg to 7 other Ontario communities with similar population sizes and current challenges.

Community Engagement

Community involvement is essential to the Master Plan's success, helping to ensure it reflects the values and needs of those who use and enjoy parks and recreation in Cobourg. Throughout the project, a dedicated page on the Town's Engage Cobourg online platform provided progress updates and promoted tools for engagement including an online survey, virtual Post-It idea boards, a social map, and a Q&A forum.

Beginning in Fall 2025, the Cobourg community was encouraged to meet with the consulting team at an in-person workshop and share their feedback on parks and recreation priorities through an online survey open to everyone. A telephone survey was administered to landlines as well as cell phone-only households to capture a statistically representative sample of community needs and interests, including users and non-users of parks, facilities, and programs.

The consulting team also conducted engagement activities with Town Council, municipal staff, and community partners, organizations, and groups that use parks and recreation facilities including sports leagues, seniors, and youth.

A Consultation & Engagement Summary Report was presented to Council in January 2026 and is found in Appendix A of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

In May 2026, after a draft Master Plan had been written, its recommendations were shared with the community for feedback. Comments were accepted via email, on the dedicated project webpage on Engage Cobourg, and in person at a Public Open House at the CCC. The project team reviewed feedback with staff to confirm revisions to be made to the final draft of the Plan.

589
total contributions on Engage Cobourg

471
respondents to public online survey

300
randomly-selected households surveyed by telephone

100+
attendees at in-person Spring 2026 Open House

39
surveys from parks & recreation user groups

31
attendees at youth & seniors focus groups & fields/courts/ice stakeholder meetings

29
attendees at in-person Fall 2025 Community Workshop

21
interviews with Council and key Town Staff

Master Plan at a Glance

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan is divided into **four needs assessments**. Within each of the assessments are recommendations to guide the Town over the next 10 years. The consulting team developed these based on site observations, usage data, facility schedules, municipal goals, feedback from the community, related plans and policies, discussions with staff, comparator municipalities, and emerging trends.

The next few pages summarize the recommendations for each topic. Before Town Council approves and acts on any of these ideas, many will need more public feedback to make sure they still fit the community's needs, current trends, and the Town's budget. Some of the projects must be finished before others can even start, while others should be grouped together to save time and effort.

1. PARKS & OPEN SPACES

2. RECREATION FACILITIES

3. PROGRAMS & EVENTS

4. SERVICE DELIVERY

To see all of the recommendations with details and rationale, please view the full Parks and Recreation Master Plan document at https://engagecobourg.ca/parksandrec.

PARKS & OPEN SPACES

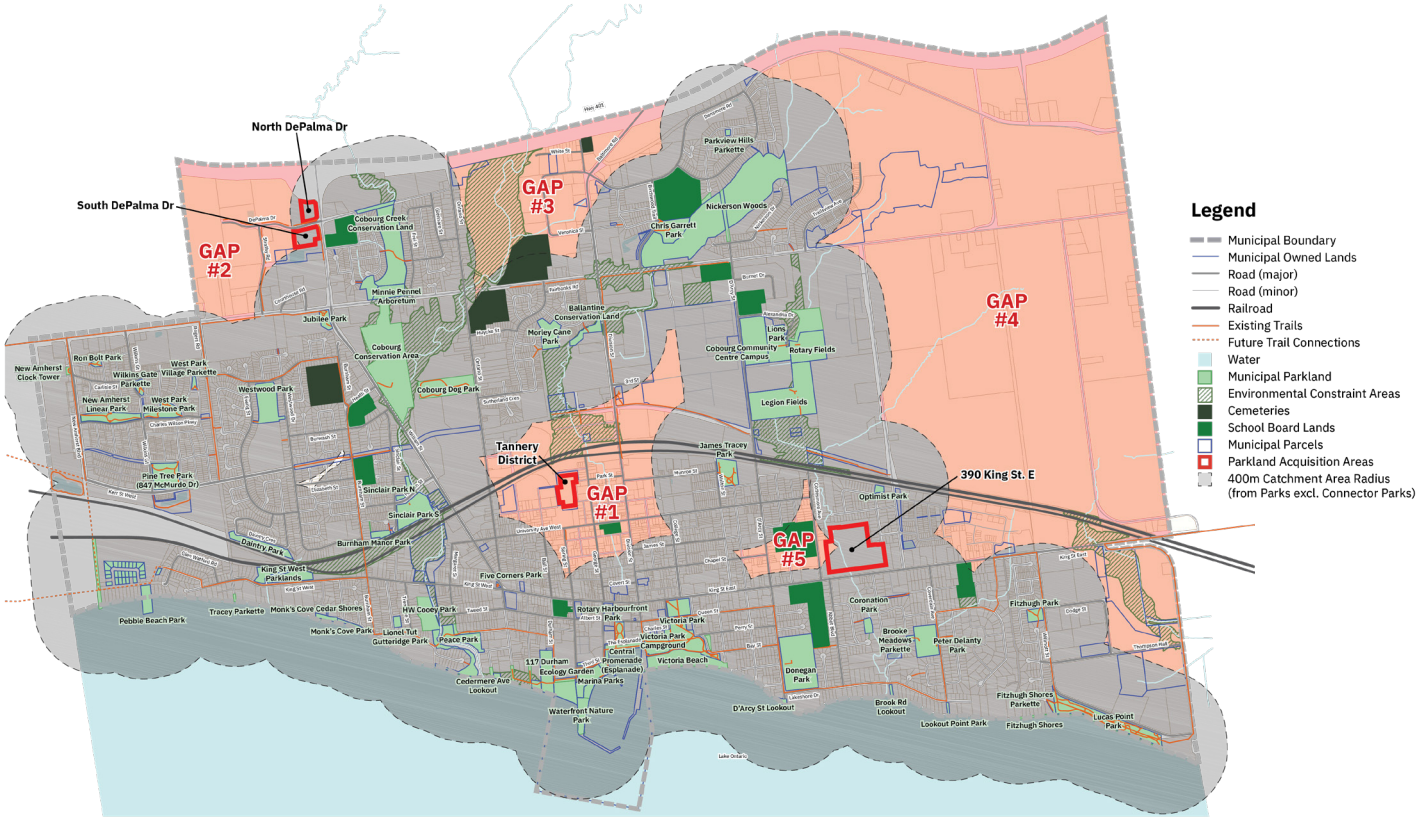
Summary of Master Plan Recommendations

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT PARKS

Cobourg currently manages 153.25 hectares (ha) of parkland spread across 70 parks, complemented by 41.9 km of trails, 10.6 km of waterfront, and significant woodlands. The Town provides an impressive 7.5 ha of parkland per 1,000 residents, which is well above the average of 5.6 ha in comparator municipalities and provincial standards of 4.0 ha/1,000. Cobourg has acquired significant parkland since the 2013 Parks Master Plan, which identified a parkland service level of 4.8 ha/1,000 residents.

FIXING SERVICE GAPS

The Plan proposes an update to the parks classification system introduced in 2013, organizing municipal parks into Regional, Town, and Neighbourhood levels of service to better guide park design, size, facilities, and location. While most residents live within a 5-minute walk (400m catchment area radius) of a park, the Plan identifies five "gap" areas without easy or consistent access, and recommends securing new land or improving trail connections in these zones (see image below).



Cobourg's Parkland Distribution

FUTURE NEEDS & FUNDING

If the Town wishes to maintain current service levels (7.5 ha/1,000 residents) as the population grows over the next 10 years, 49.5 hectares of new parkland will need to be secured. The Town will rely on developer requirements including parkland dedication, cash-in-lieu payments, and development charges. The Plan stresses acquiring actual, usable land for parks rather than undevelopable "leftover" parcels. Natural heritage lands could be conveyed to the Town independently for trails and nature conservation.

PARK COMFORT

Accessibility: All new parks must meet strict accessibility standards, and existing parks should be upgraded over time to support universal design.

Washrooms: Public washrooms are highly requested but incredibly expensive to build and maintain due to vandalism and winter weather. The Town is investing in improvements to the seasonal washrooms at Victoria Park. The Plan suggests piloting longer operational seasons for existing park washrooms and installing highly durable, vandal-resistant, pre-fabricated units.

Comfort: Parks continue to need more drinking water stations and shade structures (like pavilions or planted trees) to keep people safe from the sun and heat.

Parks Safety & Legislative Compliance: Through the Plan's consultation process, some residents mentioned safety concerns in public areas. While the County oversees social services, the Town has measures in place for safe, accessible parks. Council has adopted regulatory by-laws intended to ensure that parks and open spaces continue to serve their intended purpose, supporting community well-being by providing accessible, inclusive, and cost-effective opportunities for recreation. Additional efforts include increased patrols, partnerships with police and service providers, and practical safety measures. The Plan recommends improved lighting in Victoria Park and clear signage on reporting health hazards.

MAINTENANCE

Keeping up with routine park maintenance saves the Town money by preventing costly emergency repairs and helping equipment last longer. As Cobourg's population and its park system grows, the Town must increase its maintenance budget and staffing to keep pace with this growth and to keep parks safe and beautiful. The Plan recommends that whenever the Town approves funding to build or expand a park, it must also calculate and plan for the ongoing, long-term maintenance costs. The Plan also encourages the growth of grassroots, volunteer-led "Friends Of" park groups interested in protecting and maintaining local green spaces. The parks department would liaise with these independent groups to help safely coordinate hands-on community stewardship efforts (e.g., park clean-ups, environmental care) without administrative barriers and governance models.

WATERFRONT NATURE PARK

Waterfront Nature Park, renamed in 2022, is a quiet, natural area west of Cobourg's working harbour that is highly valued for its rare dune and wetland ecosystems. The park's ecologically significance has been recognized through numerous municipal studies and natural heritage reports because it serves as a vital habitat for hundreds of bird and plant species. The Plan recommends updating all Town data, mapping, GIS files, signage, and communications materials to reflect the park's new name. Cobourg should also establish clearly defined boundaries for Waterfront Nature Park through further engagement with Town staff, Council, advocacy groups, and the public.

Waterfront Nature Park

UPGRADING PARK AMENITIES

Trails: Trails, especially on the waterfront, emerged as a top priority for residents. The Plan includes trail directions and a trail classification system and recommends the Town develop a dedicated Active Transportation and Trails Master Plan to connect fragmented paths into a cohesive network.

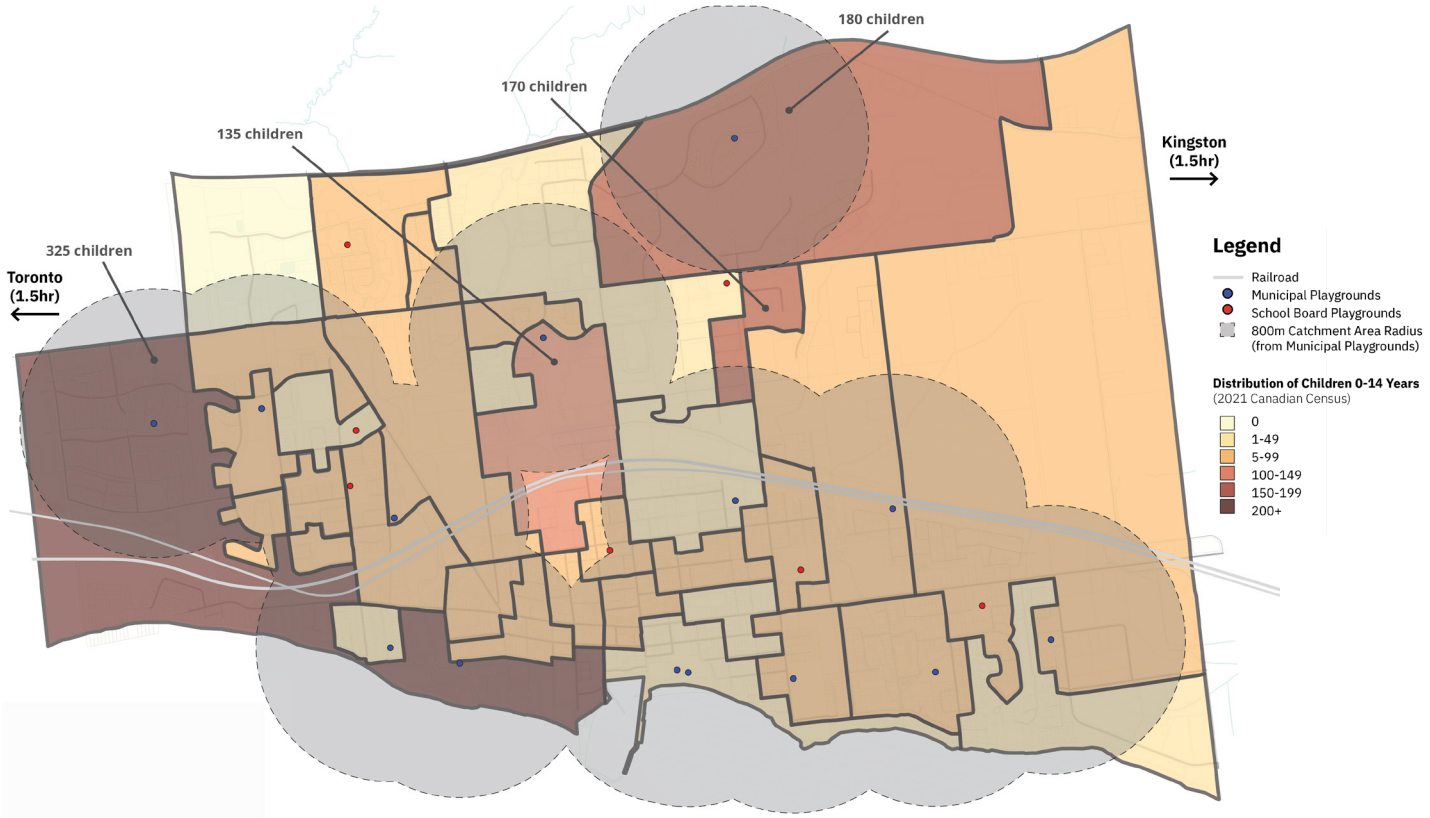
Playgrounds: Aging playgrounds should be updated with diverse play features like sensory play, nature play, and equipment for older youth. A fully inclusive, destination playground could be retrofitted at Victoria Park, potentially with a sensory garden. New playgrounds should be added to underserved areas (see image below) including 847 McMurdo Drive (Pine Tree Park), the Tannery District, and Pebble Beach-Cedar Shores-Monk's Cove, and at least three new playgrounds should be planned in Cobourg East.

Basketball Courts: Five more outdoor basketball courts should be built over the term of the Plan to meet the population's needs.

Skate Park: The aging skate park at Donegan Park should be replaced with a larger concrete amenity that includes features for multiple ability levels and uses. The Town should engage the skater community in fundraising and design development.

Water Play: The splash pad in Victoria Park should be replaced, and the Town should explore adding water features to at least three parks across west, central, and east Cobourg.

Sufficient Amenities: During the term of this Plan, the Town should continue to monitor usage of beach volleyball courts, the disc golf course, and the outdoor ice rink.



Municipal Playground Distribution and Census Population of Children

SITES FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

Cobourg Dog Park: The Town should establish at least one permanent dog park on municipal parkland. The current off-leash park is in a good location but on leased land, making it vulnerable. The Town should meet with the landowner to try to acquire the current land (e.g., land swap, severance) and explore other appropriate municipal parcels. A potential new off-leash park or trail should be considered for Cobourg East.

117 Durham Street: This vacant land was purchased by the Town in 2022. The Plan recommends severing the 1.36-acre southern portion as a Nature Park and rezoning at least 1 of the remaining 2.8 acres as active parkland. The Town will also conduct additional consultation with the community to engage constructively on the future use of these lands.

Victoria Park Campground: This site occupies highly valuable public waterfront. To balance tourism with local needs, the Plan suggests reducing the number of RV/trailer sites along the most premium waterfront edge, exploring alternative overnight uses during the off-season, and partnering with mobile sauna operators to offer hot-cold experiences in the winter (see images below). The Town should also develop a dedicated Tourism Strategy to focus on year-round, sustainable tourism while respecting the local community.

Potential Year-Round Uses at Victoria Park Campground
(Images Generated by AI)

RECREATION FACILITIES

Summary of Master Plan Recommendations

The Town is generally well-supplied with indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, particularly at the Cobourg Community Centre (CCC) campus. During the term of the Master Plan, an important task will be finding ways to optimize the use of existing facilities through consultation with users to identify opportunities to expand the use of prime time. 'Prime time' refers to all hours on weeknights and weekends when a facility is open to be booked, even if those time slots are currently not being used. The Plan recommends the Town extend 'prime time' to formally include weekend hours on ice, ball diamonds, and rectangular fields and focus on upgrading existing facilities to optimize prime time use. This proposed definition of prime time was used in the facility assessments.

INDOOR FACILITY REQUIREMENTS

Cobourg Community Centre

Ice Pads: Because the CCC arenas serve regional users, the potential need for an additional pad during the term of the Plan will depend on continuing to serve this market. In the event, Cobourg can explore partnering with neighbouring municipalities to study, fund, and build a new pad. In the meantime, the Town can optimize prime time use at the existing arenas.

Gymnasiums: The CCC has a double gymnasium that can be divided into two spaces. While some groups requested a third gym, data shows the existing gyms have additional capacity in prime time. Although an additional gym will not likely be needed within the term of the Plan, tracking trends in participation in gym activities will help inform needs beyond 2036.

Multi-purpose Rooms: Since there is still plenty of unused time available, the Town should focus on upgrading existing spaces by adding features like mirrors, secure storage, or a new community kitchen. To further maximize available space, the Town can schedule more activities in the underused Grand Hall and continue directing rentals requests to local non-profit facilities if municipal facilities are not available or suitable.

Indoor Pool: An indoor pool was the most requested indoor facility by residents. The YMCA is proposing to build a new facility with a pool on the CCC campus. If this YMCA project does not happen, the Town should conduct a study to see if adding a municipal pool to the CCC makes financial sense.

OUTDOOR FACILITY REQUIREMENTS

Legion Fields

Fields at Cobourg Conservation Area (owned by the GRCA)

Ball Diamonds: Cobourg has three high-quality lit diamonds and eight unlit diamonds. Although local sports groups feel there is a shortage of ball diamonds, municipal data reveals that 70% of prime time goes unused because games are largely limited to weeknights. The Town should work with user groups to increase regular weekend scheduling and prioritize upgrades at its best facilities. By optimizing schedules and tracking actual use, the Town can better match its supply with community demands.

Racquet Courts: To better accommodate growing sports, the Master Plan recommends formally dedicating the three lit courts at Sinclair Park for pickleball and the three lit courts at Delanty Park for tennis. Both locations accommodate use by the clubs and the general public. The tennis club is interested in additional courts. For both pickleball and tennis, use levels during public hours should be tracked to determine if additional time can be provided to organized users as the need arises, before adding more courts.

Outdoor Pool: Centennial Pool is nearly 60 years old, breaking down frequently, and needs an estimated $3.6 million in major repairs. Despite running at a $140,000 annual deficit, the pool remains highly popular during the summer, and a proposed new indoor YMCA facility would not have enough space to replace it. The Plan recommends the Town consider preparing a design and cost estimate for a comprehensive revitalization, work with the YMCA to improve the facility's finances, and introduce a wristband system to better track daily attendance.

Rectangular Fields: To better accommodate a variety of sports like soccer and rugby, Cobourg should shift toward shared, multi-purpose "rectangular fields" rather than sport-specific facilities. Municipal data shows that the current supply is operating below capacity and can handle future population growth if regular use is also scheduled on weekends.

CCC CAMPUS PLANNING

The Cobourg Community Centre campus is essentially fully built out. There is interest in other facilities being added including a new YMCA, a potential third ice pad, and an outdoor tournament-style basketball court. Building these new facilities will displace several existing sports fields and significantly increase the demand for parking on the site. To successfully manage these additions, the Town should conduct a traffic and parking study, find replacement locations with proper amenities for the displaced fields, and formally update the campus master plan.

PROGRAMS & EVENTS

Summary of Master Plan Recommendations

Current Framework & Feedback

The Town runs over 40 recreation programs, with more than half geared toward older adults. There is a balanced mix of drop-in and registered formats. Programs for children are focused on ice activities and seasonal camps. To fill out the rest of the community's needs, the local YMCA provides aquatics and gym access, while volunteer clubs and non-profits deliver competitive, organized sports like hockey, soccer, and volleyball.

While residents are generally happy with the cost, quality, and location of municipal programs, working-age adults (ages 19-49) feel left out because most activities happen during the workday. Both the public and Town staff agree there is a need to offer more activities for youth.

Cobourg has a highly engaged community with a packed summer event schedule. The Town handles major civic holidays like Canada Day, the Downtown BIA runs events to boost local shopping, and various community groups host charity fundraisers, heritage walks, arts and culture activities, and niche festivals. Winter programming is lighter compared to other seasons.

Residents noted that communication about Town events needs to improve. There is also a "Groundhog Day" feeling that downtown festivals have become repetitive, relying on the same vendors and formats year after year.

New Opportunities for Activities

FUN & ACCESSIBILITY

Equipment Lending Library: The Town should partner with the public library so residents can check out items like volleyballs and Frisbees for self-directed play. Local organizations, service clubs, and businesses can sponsor or supply the equipment.

Park Crawls: The Town should explore creating gamified, themed scavenger hunts that encourage people to visit a series of parks. Ideas include a "Paws in the Park" dog route and a "Roll and Stroll" wheelchair- and stroller-friendly route with "Bench Bingo."

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Taste of Home: A monthly community kitchen event at the CCC could encourage newcomers and established residents to get together to cook and share traditional cultural meals.

Inclusive Events: The Plan's ideas include hosting tape-ball cricket games, throwing a diverse Night Market with local vendors, and showing international films at the outdoor summer movie nights.

ACTIVE AGING

Cobourg's older population is well served with existing programming through the Seniors Activity Centre. Future offerings should focus on accessible, low-impact activities that encourage socializing. The Plan recommends organizing free, year-round walking clubs (using outdoor trails in the summer and the walking track during winter) as well as expanding courts and beginner clinics for popular sports like pickleball.

WORKING ADULTS

Simultaneous Scheduling: Wherever possible, adult fitness classes should be scheduled at the same time and location as youth activities to remove the barrier of childcare.

Social Sports Leagues: The Town should introduce casual, late-evening sports leagues (e.g., co-ed spikeball, indoor volleyball, introductory pickleball) specifically for the working adult demographic. Local pubs or breweries could be approached as sponsors for socializing after the games.

Bite-Sized Workshops: Recruit local artisans and skilled residents to teach single-night/two-week arts, culture, and life skills workshops targeted to adults (e.g., bike maintenance, sourdough baking, intuitive collage). To keep costs low, a skill-trade compensation model would see instructors teach a workshop in exchange for free enrollment in another class.

YOUTH RECREATION

Teens usually age out of highly structured summer camps and just want safe, autonomous places to hang out with their friends (known as "third spaces").

Teen Takeovers: The Town should pilot hosting monthly, peer-led takeover nights at the CCC where teens get the facility to themselves for sports, video games, and relaxing.

Pop-up Tournaments: Instead of multi-week leagues that teens are too busy to commit to, the Town can run single-day, low-pressure tournaments (like 3v3 basketball) on PA days featuring junior and senior age brackets.

Off-site Excursions: Working with community partners, the Town could offer subsidized trips to regional attractions like rock climbing gyms or regional forests so teens can safely build skills and experience new thrills.

ENGAGING WITH WINTER

Welcome to Winter: A program for newcomers could include free or subsidized beginner clinics to safely learn how to ice skate or snowshoe.

Winter Wellness Weekends: The Town could partner with private mobile sauna operators to bring trendy Nordic hot-and-cold contrast therapy to the waterfront or campground, turning the harsh winter climate into a tourist draw.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Summary of Master Plan Recommendations

ROLE & STAFFING

The Town and the local YMCA work together to offer different types of recreation for the community, from physical spaces like parks, sports fields, and arenas to swimming and fitness classes. The Plan recommends dedicating specific staff to help volunteer groups and creating a new position focused solely on marketing and generating revenue.

FACILITY MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

The Town should establish clear, tiered maintenance standards for its grass and clay sports fields so users know exactly what level of care to expect. The Town is preparing a sports field allocation policy to ensure all local groups get fair access to playing time when demand is high. There should also be policy to distinguish between standard recreation services funded by the Town and 'special project' upgrades to be funded by user groups. A formal storage policy is needed to manage limited space at Town parks and facilities.

FUNDING & REVENUE GENERATION

The Plan recommends conducting a pricing study to create a framework for gradually increasing user fees over time. To offset rising costs of providing recreation services, the Town should actively pursue new revenue streams such as selling advertising space, facility naming rights, and event sponsorships. Revenue can also be increased by promoting ice rentals during unused daytime hours to the business community for company tournaments, and last minute discounts for other facility rentals.

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

Groups indicated their interest in help from the Town with digital advertising, grant applications, and facility scheduling. The Town should create a formal Community Group Affiliation Policy to identify the benefits and support registered volunteer groups are eligible to receive.

PARTNERSHIPS & AGREEMENTS

All collaborations with non-municipal organizations (like sports clubs and local businesses) should be backed by formal written agreements. The Plan also recommends the Town try to secure reciprocal use agreements with local school boards so the community can use school facilities and schools can access municipal facilities.

ACCESSIBILITY & SAFETY

The Plan recommends adopting an Inclusion Policy to ensure affordable, barrier-free access for diverse populations. An "Rzone Policy" should also be established to enforce strict zero tolerance for violence, vandalism, and inappropriate behaviour at all municipal facilities. Future park designs can consider adding fully accessible, multi-sport courts that accommodate all ages and abilities (including wheelchair sports).

ONGOING PLANNING

The Town should use its recreation management system to assess needs, evaluate success, and plan future services in coordination with volunteer groups, school boards, and service clubs.

Next Steps

The Master Plan includes 175 recommendations to guide the Town's parks and recreation investments, asset management, and policy development over the next 10 years to 2036. These are flexible ideas, not strict rules, meaning they can adapt as the community changes.

Putting these ideas into action will depend on the Town's yearly budget and individual project plans, which will include specific designs and additional consultation. Town staff may naturally build many of the smaller ideas into their regular work routines. Section 6.0 of the full Master Plan contains a suggested schedule provided by the consulting team, with each recommendation divided into the short-term (0-2 years), medium-term (3-5 years), and/or long-term (6-10 years) accompanied by capital cost estimates as of 2026.

To make sure the Plan stays up-to-date and useful, it is recommended that progress is tracked every year during the budget process, and the Plan gets reviewed and updated in 2031, halfway through its 10-year lifespan.

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