

Town of Antigonish · Municipality of the County of Antigonish

Recreation Facilities and Recreation Needs Assessment

Final Report, Recommendations and 10-Year Implementation Plan

Prepared for
The Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish

Date
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Prepared by

ASBB
Economics & Research

ASBB Economics & Research Ltd.

Humanizing Economics

Prepared for
The Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish

Acknowledgements

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The thoughtful participation of community members through surveys, interviews, and engagement activities provided essential insights into the strengths of Antigonish's recreation system, as well as the challenges and opportunities that will shape its future. Their perspectives have been fundamental to the development of this assessment and its recommendations.

We extend our sincere appreciation to everyone who contributed to this process through their collaboration, openness, and commitment to enhancing recreation opportunities across the community. It is our hope that this assessment will serve as a meaningful resource to support informed decision-making and strengthen the partnerships and community capacity that underpin recreation delivery throughout Antigonish.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
ACH	Arts, Culture and Heritage
AT	Active Transportation
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CCTH	Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (Province of Nova Scotia)
CPRA	Canadian Parks and Recreation Association
DNR	Department of Natural Resources (Province of Nova Scotia)
FCM	Federation of Canadian Municipalities
MCOA	Municipality of the County of Antigonish
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NS	Nova Scotia

Abbreviation	Meaning
SRCE	Strait Regional Centre for Education
StFX	St. Francis Xavier University
TOA	Town of Antigonish
TOA/MCOA	The Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish, jointly

How to read this report

- **Figures and tables.** Figures are numbered 1 to 29 and tables 1 to 54 through the main body. Appendix tables carry the letter of their appendix (A.1, B.1, and so on). All figures are reproduced from the source charts supplied with the assessment, and all percentages and counts are reproduced as recorded in the underlying survey exports, booking records and site assessments. Nothing has been recalculated or redrawn for this report.
- **Coded figures.** Responses to open-text questions were reviewed and grouped into common categories to calculate percentages. These figures are marked as ‘coded’ and should be checked against the original responses in the Public Engagement Report before ranking capital spending.
- **Reported variations.** Where the same measure appears at two slightly different values in the underlying material, both are retained and the source of each is named. Appendix A sets out the reconciliation between figures reported in summary form
- **Appendices.** Appendix A reconciles reported figures against the raw survey data. Appendix B contains the full gap register with criteria scoring. Appendix C sets out the detailed implementation actions for each of the ten recommendations. Appendix D records comparable practice in other Canadian municipalities.

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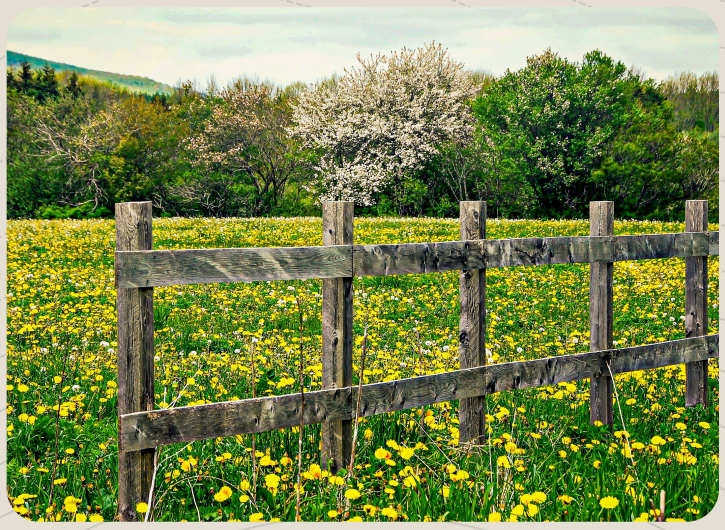
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1

SECTION 1

1.1 Structure of the Report

Executive Summary



The Town of Antigonish (the Town) and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish (the County) are two separate municipal units. Given their proximity and shared commitment to the community, they have strong partnerships to enhance service delivery, including between their recreation departments. The Town owns and operates several recreation assets, while the County supports many community-owned and non-profit facilities financially and by various other means and resources, rather than owning them directly. Together these form a wider community recreation system, and this Needs Assessment is one example of their collaboration.

All services provided are available to all town and county residents, and those who participate are based on interest, not who it is offered by. Residents regularly use parks, trails, beaches, sports fields, the Antigonish Arena, schools, St. Francis Xavier University (StFX) facilities, community halls, and cultural spaces across municipal boundaries. While the region has a strong recreation foundation, this assessment found that the greatest challenges are not a lack of facilities, but barriers related to accessibility, affordability, coordination, transportation, and awareness of available recreation opportunities.

The statistics below are drawn from the public survey administered by ASBB, with the MCOA and TOA, to residents of Antigonish, as a part of the Recreation Needs Assessment. It received 699 responses and some key insights are captured below, which shape our approach to this assessment.

89.9%
take part in recreation weekly

69.7%
leave Antigonish for recreation

38.6%
of organizations use no municipal facility

95.2%
drive to recreation

The purpose of this Recreation Facilities and Recreation Needs Assessment is to provide an evidence-based framework to guide recreation planning and investment in the future. The study combined demographic analysis, facility inventories and condition assessments, booking data, public and stakeholder engagement, jurisdictional reviews, and recreation best practices to identify current service levels, future needs, and priorities for investment.

The assessment found that Antigonish has a diverse network of recreation facilities, organizations, and natural recreation assets. However, several system-wide issues were identified, including limited indoor recreation space during the winter, accessibility barriers at many facilities, transportation challenges for rural residents, affordability concerns, increasing pressure on volunteers, and fragmented information and booking systems. At the same time, many existing facilities have opportunities for increased programming and more efficient use before major new infrastructure is considered.

To help prioritize future investments, the report classifies recreation needs into three categories: Core Needs, Supported Needs, and Wants. Core Needs address fundamental barriers to access, safety, equity, and system function, while Supported Needs focus on programming, partnerships, and gradual improvements. Wants represent desirable enhancements or major capital projects that should be considered only after higher-priority needs have been addressed. A decision-making matrix is also provided to help evaluate future recreation projects in a transparent and consistent manner.



KEY POINT

Wants represent desirable enhancements or major capital projects that should be considered only after higher-priority needs have been addressed.

TABLE 1

Gap tiers at a glance

Tier	What it means	Number of gaps	Character
Tier 1 — Core Needs	Must ensure access	**11**	These are the system-wide barriers, which have a high equity impact. These predominantly include access, safety and coordination gaps rather than capital gaps.
Tier 2 — Supported Needs	Important, partner-led	**35**	Needs that should be addressed but can be delivered through partners, grants, or incremental facility renewal. The municipality's role is mainly to support and enable delivery.
Tier 3 — Wants	Enhancement only	**11**	'Wants' are desirable and often strongly demanded, but are lower priority because they are substitutable, enhancement-focused or high cost relative to impact.

The report concludes with ten recommendations and a phased implementation plan. The recommendations focus on improving access to existing facilities, strengthening partnerships, expanding recreation programming, improving accessibility and affordability, supporting community organizations, and planning strategically for future capital investments.

No capital commitment is recommended in this plan.

The plan does not ask Council to commit to a capital plan or investment. It asks Council to secure access to facilities it does not own, to understand the true long-term cost of the assets it already owns, and to build the evidence required to make a defensible capital decision at a later date. Where a future recreation centre or aquatic facility is discussed, the plan provides a decision framework rather than a recommendation to build.

1.1 Structure of the Report

The report is organized into twelve sections. It begins with the background, purpose, and study methodology, followed by a review of the community profile and planning context. The report then examines the existing recreation system, including facilities, organizations, booking data, and facility condition assessments. This is followed by a comprehensive recreation needs assessment that identifies service gaps, future demand, and priority user groups. The final sections prioritize recreation needs, present a decision-making framework for evaluating future projects, and outline recommendations together with a phased implementation roadmap to guide recreation planning over the next decade. Four appendices carry the supporting detail.



SECTION 2

2 Introduction

2.1 Study Purpose
2.2 The Importance of Recreation
2.3 Recreation Trends Across Nova Scotia and Canada
2.4 Study Methodology
2.5 Study Limitations

2.1 Study Purpose

The Town of Antigonish (TOA) and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish (MCOA) recognize the importance of providing high-quality, accessible recreation facilities, programs, and services that meet the evolving needs of residents. As communities change through shifts in population, demographics, recreation trends, and community expectations, regular assessment is essential to ensure that recreation investments remain responsive, sustainable, and aligned with local priorities.



To support long-term planning, TOA and MCOA commissioned this Recreation Facilities and Recreation Needs Assessment to evaluate the current system, identify existing strengths and service gaps, assess future needs, and establish priorities for investment over the next ten years. The assessment provides an evidence-based framework to guide decision-making for staff and Councils related to recreation facilities, programs, partnerships, and program delivery.

The study is reflective of the entire Antigonish community. The Town is considered a hub for a majority of Antigonish's larger recreation offerings, as many of the region's major recreation facilities and community sport or organized programs are located within the Town. However, the County also comprises a network of rural communities where recreation is more often supported through smaller hubs, such as, community-based programming, volunteer organizations, schools, and local gathering spaces that are vital to the communities they serve.

This complementary relationship presents an opportunity for both municipalities to work collaboratively in planning and delivering recreation services. Recognizing the distinct roles of the Town and the County, this assessment considers how future investments, partnerships, facility development, and program delivery can be coordinated to improve access, maximize shared resources, and strengthen the regional recreation system for all residents, regardless of where they live.

2.2 The Importance of Recreation

Recreation is essential in building healthy, connected, and resilient communities. It contributes to physical and mental well-being, social inclusion, active living, community identity, environmental stewardship, and local economic development. Nationally, the Framework for Recreation in Canada recognizes recreation as a public good that enhances individual, community, and environmental well-being, while Nova Scotia's Shared Strategy for Advancing Recreation emphasizes active living, inclusion, access, connections with nature, supportive environments, and strong recreation systems.

Beyond its social benefits, recreation is also a significant municipal service. Canadian municipalities collectively invest billions of dollars annually in recreation, parks, and culture, with recreation typically representing 8–15% of municipal operating expenditures, depending on community size and service levels. Per capita operating expenditures commonly range from approximately $150 to over $300 per resident annually, with larger urban municipalities generally investing at the higher end of this range due to more extensive facilities and programming. These investments help reduce long-term healthcare costs, support community vitality, attract and retain residents, and generate economic activity through tourism, events, and local spending.

KEY POINT

Canadian municipalities collectively invest billions of dollars annually in recreation, parks, and culture, with recreation typically representing 8–15% of municipal operating expenditures, depending on community size and service levels.

For the Town and Municipality of the County of Antigonish, recreation represents both a quality-of-life investment and an economic development opportunity. Ensuring that recreation facilities, programs, and services continue to meet community needs will help create a healthy, inclusive, and sustainable region for current and future generations.

TABLE 2

Typical annual municipal recreation spending in Canada (operating budget)

Municipality population	Typical recreation spending (per capita)
Under 10,000	$150 – $220
10,000 – 50,000	$180 – $260

TABLE 2

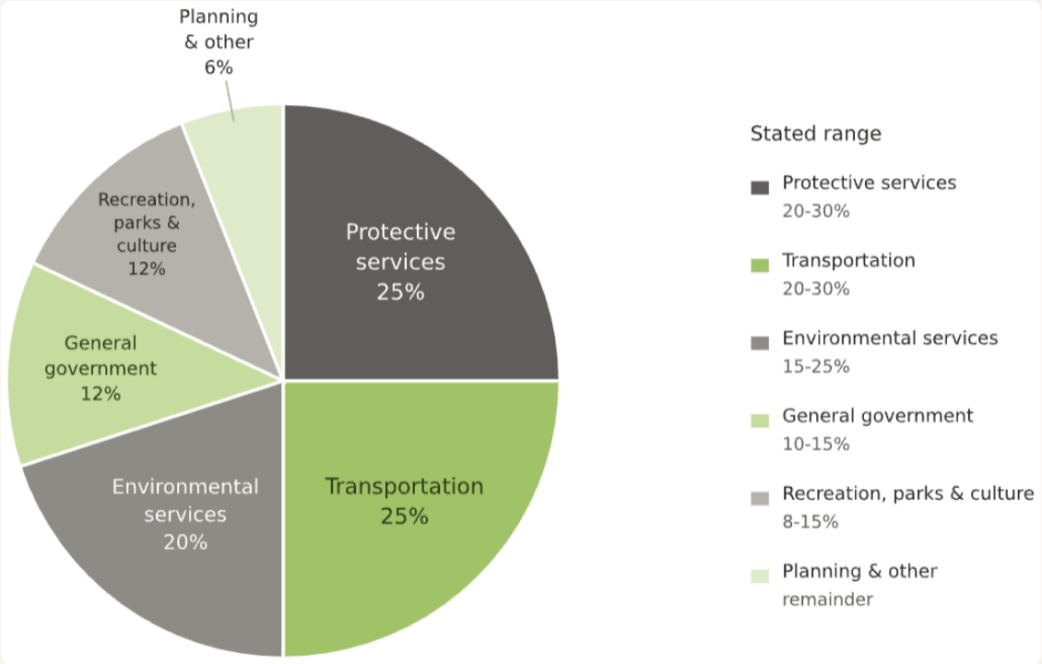
Typical annual municipal recreation spending in Canada (operating budget)

Municipality population	Typical recreation spending (per capita)
50,000 – 100,000	$220 – $300
Over 100,000	$250 – $400+

Source: Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA). Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015: Pathways to Wellbeing (updated 2024). This is the national policy document used in recreation master plans across Canada.

FIGURE 1

Municipal budget per service area



Source: Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) and Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (ISRC) (2015), A Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015: Pathways to Wellbeing, Gloucester, ON: CPRA.

2.3 Recreation Trends Across Nova Scotia and Canada

Recreation systems across Nova Scotia are changing. Municipally owned facilities are aging, rising costs of infrastructure, aging populations, higher accessibility expectations, and pressure on volunteers. This means future recreation decisions must be practical, phased, and financially sustainable.

National data also show that common places for physical activity include sidewalks and neighbourhood streets at 46%, walking trails or paths at 44%, and community parks at 23%.[1] This points to the value of everyday recreation spaces, not only major indoor facilities. Currently, major concerns and challenges include aging infrastructure, volunteer burnout, and rising capital and infrastructural costs.

Across Canada, most publicly owned culture, recreation, and sport facilities were built before 2000. In 2022, these facilities had a total replacement value of $154.1 billion. Facilities in poor or very poor condition represented $19.4 billion of that value. This points to a common issue municipalities in Canada face when prioritizing recreation assets across the various municipal spending areas.

Recreation delivery is also becoming more challenging. Statistics Canada reported that Canada's formal volunteering rate declined from 41% in 2018 to 32% in 2023, while total formal volunteer hours fell by 28%. This affects sport groups, community halls, trail groups, events, and local recreation organizations who rely heavily on volunteer hours to expand programming. Rising capital costs add further pressure by making maintenance and new construction costly. Statistics Canada does not track construction costs for a community the size of Antigonish; the nearest measured markets are Halifax and Moncton, the smallest centre in its index. From Q4 2024 to Q4 2025, non-residential building costs rose 2.3% in Halifax and 4.3% in Moncton. As an approximate guide, at those rates a $1 million recreation project delayed by one year would cost roughly $23,000 to $43,000 more. This indicates that strategic investment and planning is increasingly important when it comes to recreation strategy.

KEY POINT

Statistics Canada reported that Canada's formal volunteering rate declined from 41% in 2018 to 32% in 2023, while total formal volunteer hours fell by 28%.

[1] Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (2025). Community settings for sport, physical activity, and recreation. https://cflri.ca/publication/community-settings-for-sport-physical-activity-and-recreation/

2.4 Study Methodology

The following sets out how the assessment was carried out, moving from evidence gathering, through analysis, to the classification of gaps and the recommendations that follow from them. The table below outlines the details of each step.

FIGURE 2

Methodology at a glance

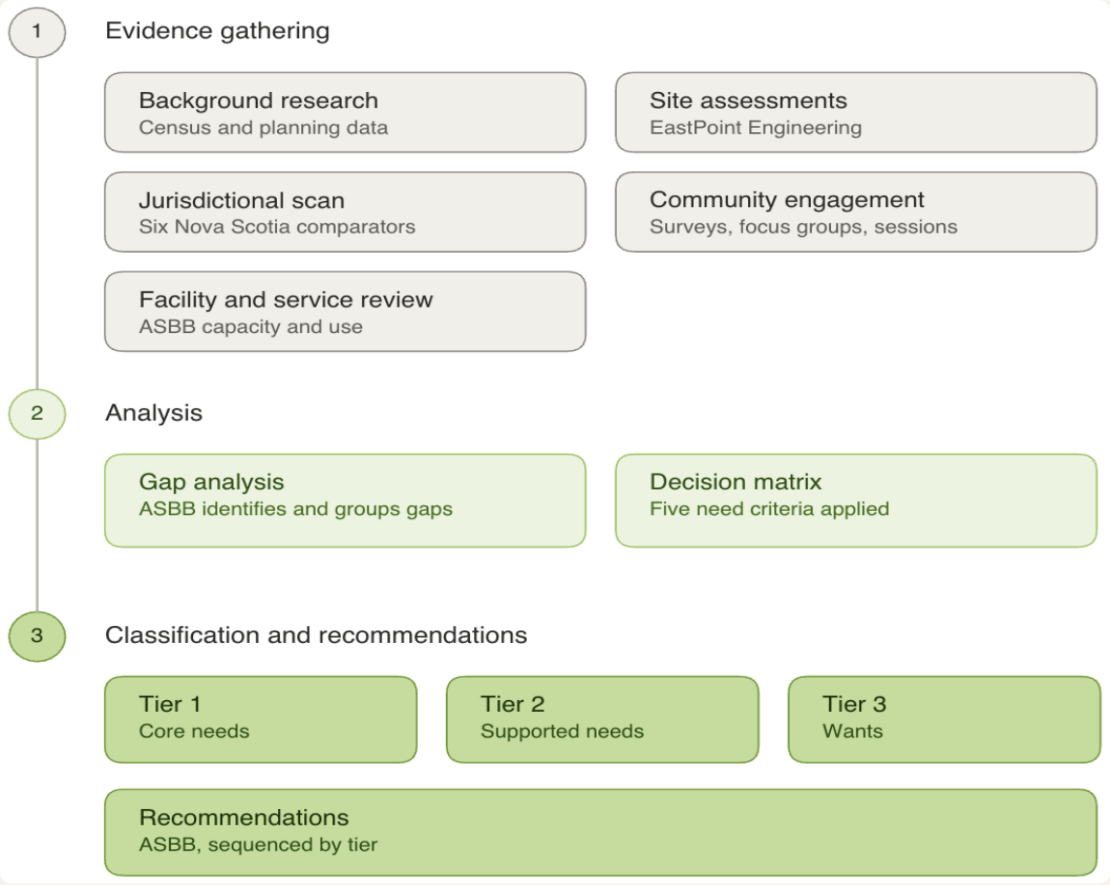


TABLE 3

Method components in detail

Method component	Detail
Background research and demographic review	Statistics Canada data, municipal planning documents, provincial recreation context, local demographic trends and socioeconomic indicators.
Site assessments	Conducted by EastPoint Engineering to assess the condition of municipally owned recreation facilities and sites across Antigonish.

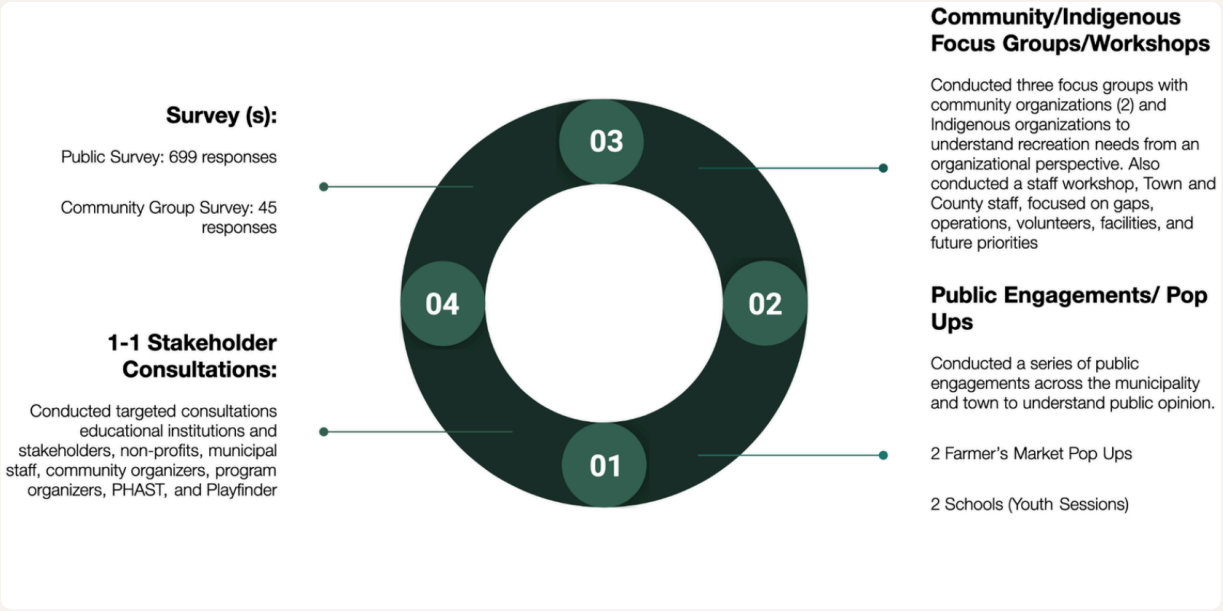
TABLE 3

Method components in detail

Method component	Detail
Jurisdictional scan	Comparators included Chester, Bridgewater, Yarmouth, West Hants, Kentville and Wolfville, drawing practical lessons on shared-use agreements, multi-use facilities, trails, booking systems, feasibility planning and regional delivery.
Community and stakeholder engagement	Showed how residents, organizations, partners and municipal staff experience recreation access.
Facility and service review	ASBB reviewed facility and service information covering capacity, access issues, operational challenges, utilization rates and opportunities to use existing spaces better.
Decision matrix	Priorities assessed against the five criteria, separating core needs, supported needs and wants.
Recommendations and gap analysis	Ten recommendations developed from the classified gaps, with a phased implementation plan and a decision framework for future capital proposals.

FIGURE 3

Community and stakeholder engagement methodology



2.5 Study Limitations

This assessment is based on multiple sources of information, including resident and community organization surveys, focus groups, interviews, site assessments, booking data, and demographic analysis. Using several sources helped provide a well-rounded understanding of recreation needs across Antigonish. However, there are some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Participation in both surveys was voluntary. The resident survey received 699 responses, representing approximately 3.5% of the combined Town and County population, while 45 community organizations completed the organization survey. Although this represents a strong level of participation for a municipal planning study, the results reflect the views of those who chose to participate and may not capture the perspectives of every resident or organization.



KEY POINT

The resident survey received 699 responses, representing approximately 3.5% of the combined Town and County population, while 45 community organizations completed the organization survey.

Some groups were less represented than others, including youth and several equity-deserving populations. To help address this, the study also included focus groups, stakeholder meetings, community pop-up events, and targeted engagement with groups such as the Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation. These activities helped provide additional context beyond the survey results.

The survey findings also reflect people's experiences and opinions at the time the engagement was completed. Recreation needs and participation patterns will continue to change as the community grows, demographics shift, and recreation trends evolve. For that reason, the findings should be viewed as a snapshot of current conditions rather than a permanent picture of community needs.

There were also some limitations in the available booking and facility data. Booking records were not collected consistently across all facilities, and informal use of parks, trails, and other public spaces is not captured in reservation systems. As a result, some recreation activity is likely underrepresented in the available data.

Overall, these limitations do not affect the main findings of the study. The recommendations are based on multiple lines of evidence rather than any single survey or dataset, providing confidence that the key priorities identified throughout the assessment accurately reflect the recreation needs of the community.


NOVA SCOTIA
55+
GAMES







3

SECTION 3

Community Context and Socioeconomic Profile

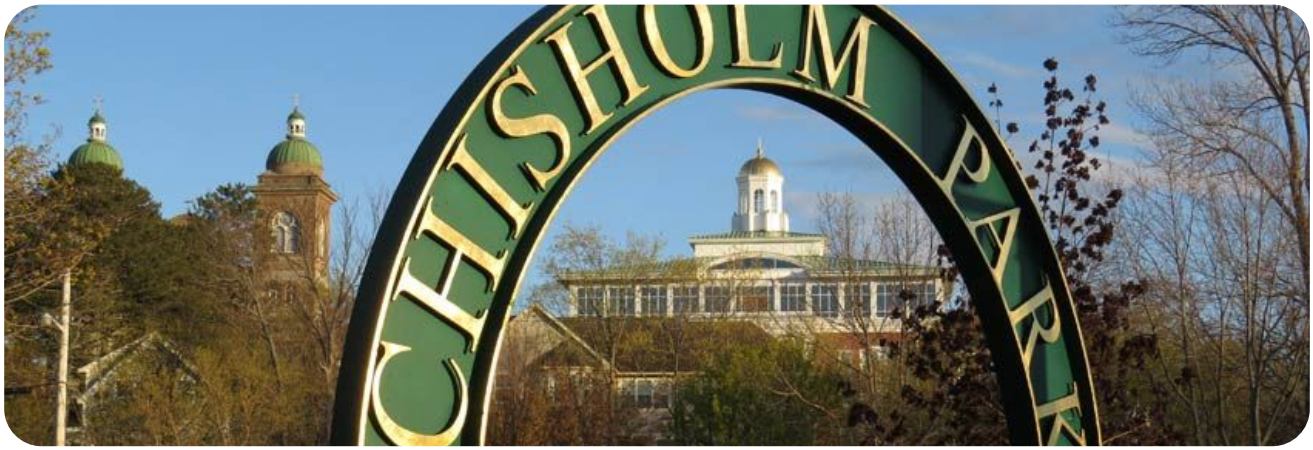
3.1 Community Profile

3.2 Socioeconomic Access Factors



3.1 Community Profile

Although the Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish have different settlement patterns in terms of where residents live, residents generally treat recreation as a single central system rather than the two separate municipal systems that currently exist. Town, with a smaller number of facilities and opportunities located in the surrounding County region, particularly in areas near the Town's boundaries. As a result, many County residents regularly travel to the Town to access recreation opportunities, while Town residents also benefit from outdoor and community-based recreation opportunities throughout the County. Some residents in the Eastern end of the county also travel to nearby Cape Breton to access recreation.



This interconnected pattern highlights the importance of planning recreation on a community wide basis, with both municipalities working together to coordinate facilities, programs, and investments that serve residents regardless of municipal boundaries.

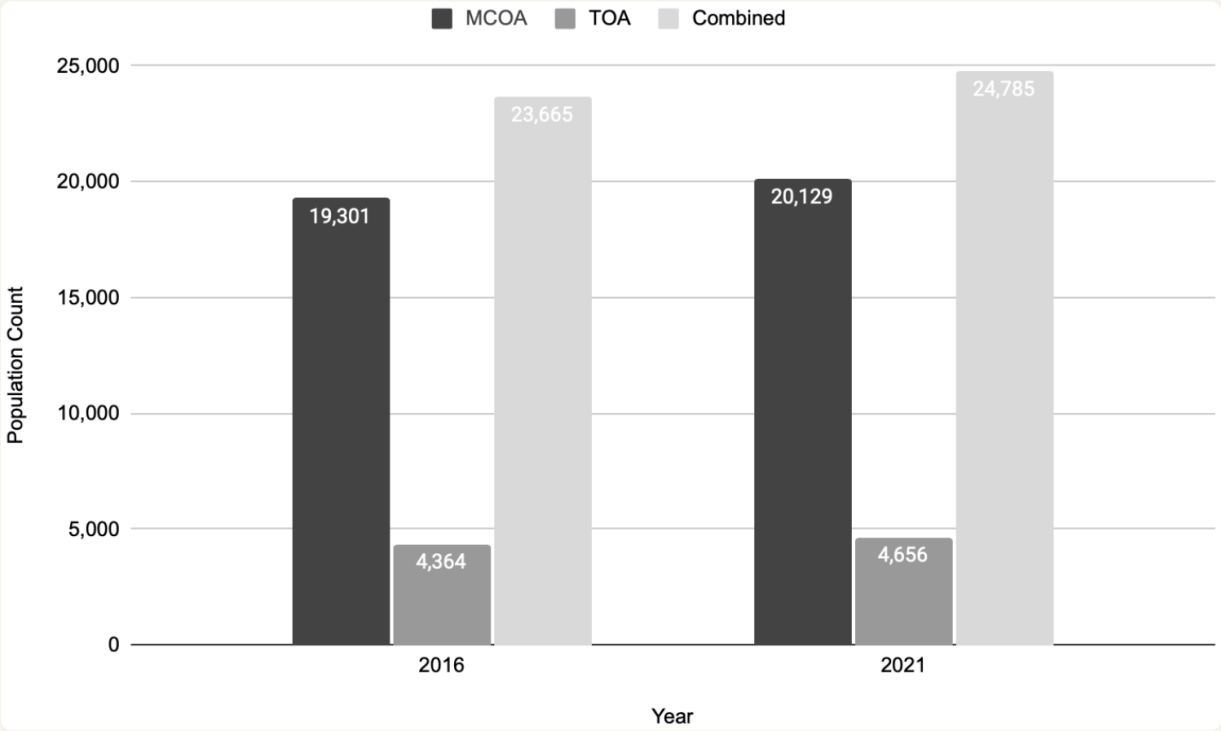
Population growth has occurred across the TOA and MCOA. From 2016 to 2021, there was a total increase in population of 4.73% across the TOA and MCOA. This can be broken down to a 4.29% increase in the County and 6.69% in the Town. The change was positive overall, but it was not evenly spread across the region.

KEY POINT

From 2016 to 2021, there was a total increase in population of 4.73% across the TOA and MCOA.

FIGURE 4

Population change in TOA and MCOA, 2016–2021



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population, Focus on Geography Series. Census subdivisions used: Antigonish Town for TOA and Antigonish County for MCOA. Combined TOA/MCOA total calculated by ASBB using Statistics Canada Census data.

The table below shows the breakdown of population by age. There is a large population of seniors in Antigonish, in both the Town and the County, which is only projected to grow.

TABLE 4

Population breakdown by age, 2021

Age group	TOA count	TOA share	MCOA count	MCOA share
0 to 14	560	12.0%	2,365	15.7%
15 to 24	865	18.6%	1,610	10.7%
25 to 34	595	12.8%	1,335	8.8%
35 to 44	440	9.5%	1,750	11.6%
45 to 59	725	15.6%	3,155	20.9%
60 to 74	895	19.2%	3,515	23.3%

TABLE 4

Population breakdown by age, 2021

Age group	TOA count	TOA share	MCOA count	MCOA share
74+	570	12.3%	1,380	9.1%
Total	**4,650**	**100%**	**15,110**	**100%**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2023 (table). Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001, Ottawa. Released 15 November 2023.

AN AGING POPULATION

Antigonish has a large senior population in both the Town and the County, and it is the fastest-growing segment. By 2032 the population is expected to grow by 4% overall, but the 65–84 group by 28% and the 85-and-over group by 30%.

This shift in the population segment will impact what the recreation system has to provide: more seniors-focused programming, more indoor space so participation is possible year-round, low-impact activity, opportunities for social connection, and accessible facilities throughout. Only 46% of seniors currently meet physical activity recommendations, with consequences for both individual health and healthcare costs. Provision also affects retention — residents who cannot find what they need locally may leave, narrowing the tax base for both the Town and County.

TABLE 5

Communities of residents in Antigonish

Demographic factor	What the data shows	What this means for recreation planning
St. Francis Xavier University students	5,021 students were enrolled in 2025.[2] About half lived off campus.	The presence of St. Francis Xavier University adds additional demand to the region's recreation system. Although many students live on or near campus, they participate in recreation throughout the Town and County, increasing use of local facilities, parks, trails, and programs. Students play a large role in the delivery of local recreation as program leaders, instructors, and volunteers, while student athletes support community sport through volunteer roles. This makes the university an important partner in both the use and delivery of recreation At the same time, university and school recreation facilities must accommodate varsity athletics, intramural sports, and school programming, which can limit public access during peak periods. This concentration of demand places additional pressure on recreation assets and highlights the importance of coordinated planning and shared use of facilities across the region.

[2] Association of Atlantic Universities. (2025). *2025–2026 preliminary survey of enrolments: Full-time plus part-time enrolment*. October 15, 2025. https://atlanticuniversities.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/PreliminaryEnrolments_25-26_Final-Oct.-1525-FTPT.pdf

TABLE 5

Communities of residents in Antigonish

Demographic factor	What the data shows	What this means for recreation planning
Families with children	TOA had 320 couple households with children. MCOA had 1,620.	Sustained demand for playgrounds, fields, courts, trails, family-friendly multi-purpose space and evening or weekend programming for families.
Immigrant and newcomer population	In 2021, the Town had 305 immigrants (6.8% of the population) and 240 non-permanent residents (5.4% of the population).[3]	Newcomers within Antigonish make up a growing share of the population. This calls for a recreation sector which needs to be easy to navigate and find, with culturally inclusive programming and spaces.

Source: Town of Antigonish. Municipal Housing Needs Assessment. Statistics Canada. Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population: Antigonish, Town. Statistics Canada: Population Census 2021, Nova Scotia

3.2 Socioeconomic Access Factors

Socioeconomic conditions play an important role in shaping access to recreation. Household income, transportation, and the cost of programs, equipment, and user fees all influence whether residents are able to participate. The average individual income, according to the 2021 population census, is approximately $40,700 in the Town of Antigonish and $43,300 in the Municipality of the County of Antigonish, both well below the Nova Scotia average of approximately $53,400. Lower incomes can make recreation costs a greater barrier for many households, highlighting the importance of affordable user fees, subsidized programming, equipment lending, and accessible recreation facilities. Ensuring recreation opportunities remain affordable and inclusive will help provide equitable access to the health, social, and quality-of-life benefits that recreation offers to all residents.

TABLE 6

Individual income groups

Income group	TOA (count)	MCOA (count)
Under $10,000 (including loss)	340	960
$10,000 to $19,999	600	1,465
$20,000 to $29,999	845	1,975

[3] Statistics Canada. Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population: Antigonish, Town.

TABLE 6

Individual income groups

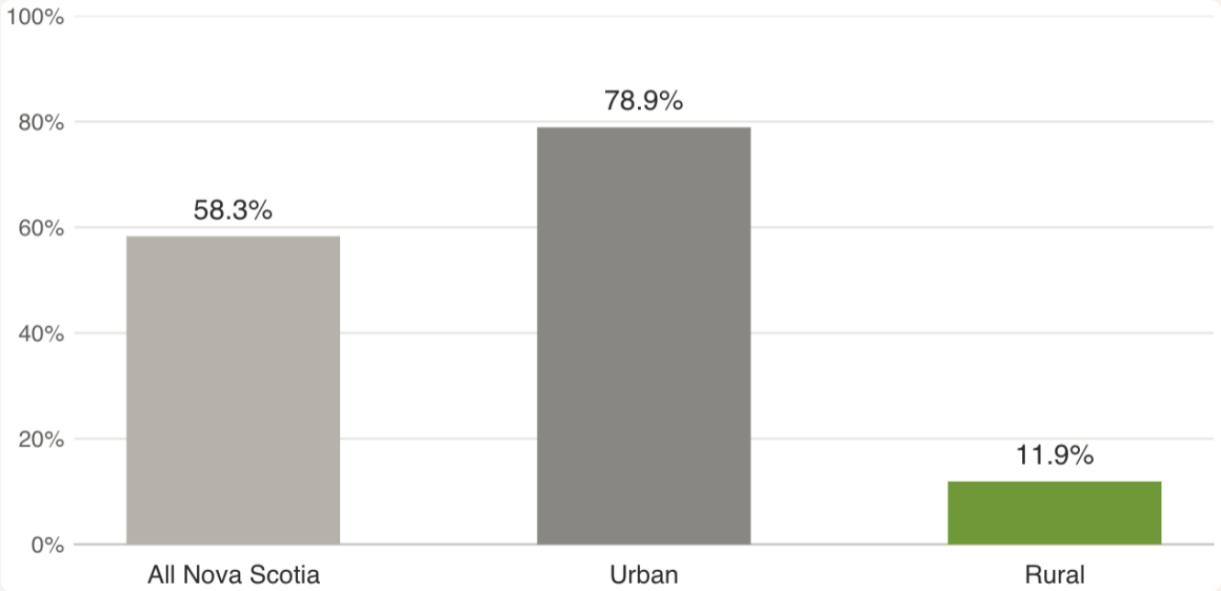
Income group	TOA (count)	MCOA (count)
$30,000 to $39,999	530	1,640
$40,000 to $49,999	430	1,620
$50,000 to $59,999	290	1,225
$60,000 to $69,999	185	810
$70,000 to $79,999	130	655
$80,000 to $89,999	125	520
$90,000 to $99,999	75	385
$100,000 and over	235	970
of which $100,000 to $149,999	*165*	*690*
of which $150,000 and over	*70*	*280*

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

TRANSPORTATION

FIGURE 5

Access to public transport in Nova Scotia



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 28-10-0313-01, Access to public transport by distance and public transport carrying capacity, geography, gender, and selected demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

Only 11.9% of rural Nova Scotians live within a transit service area, as compared to 78.9% of urban residents.

Transportation is a key factor influencing access to recreation, particularly in rural communities where residents are spread across a large geographic area and recreation facilities are more centralized. Census data show that virtually no residents in either the Town or the County commute by public transit, while more than 80% of County residents rely on a personal vehicle. Walking and cycling are more common in the Town, accounting for 17.8% of commuting, but only 3.2% in the County. These travel patterns highlight the challenges faced by residents without access to a vehicle. Even when recreation programs and facilities are affordable and of high quality, transportation can remain a significant barrier to participation. This shows the importance of considering facility locations, community-based programming, partnerships, and transportation solutions to ensure recreation opportunities are accessible to residents across the region.

KEY POINT

Census data show that virtually no residents in either the Town or the County commute by public transit, while more than 80% of County residents rely on a personal vehicle.

TABLE 7

Main mode of commuting

Main mode of commuting	Town — number	Town — share	County — number	County — share
Car, truck or van — as a driver	1,135	66.4%	5,135	83.6%
Car, truck or van — as a passenger	240	14%	435	7.1%
Sustainable transportation	305	17.8%	220	3.6%
of which public transit	*0*	*0%*	*30*	*0.5%*
of which active transportation	*305*	*17.8%*	*195*	*3.2%*
Other method	30	1.8%	125	2.0%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population, main mode of commuting. Antigonish County includes Antigonish subdivisions A and B.

4

SECTION 4

4.1 Provincial Policy and Funding Context
4.2 Municipal Priorities
4.3 Previous Community Engagement
4.4 Lessons from Comparable Communities
4.5 Strategic Planning Context (PESTEL analysis)

Policy and Planning Context



Before identifying future recreation needs and priorities, it is important to understand the current planning context. This section reviews the policies, plans, and existing commitments that shape recreation planning in the Town and County of Antigonish. It includes relevant provincial policies and funding priorities, municipal plans and strategies, and examples of recreation planning from comparable municipalities across Nova Scotia.



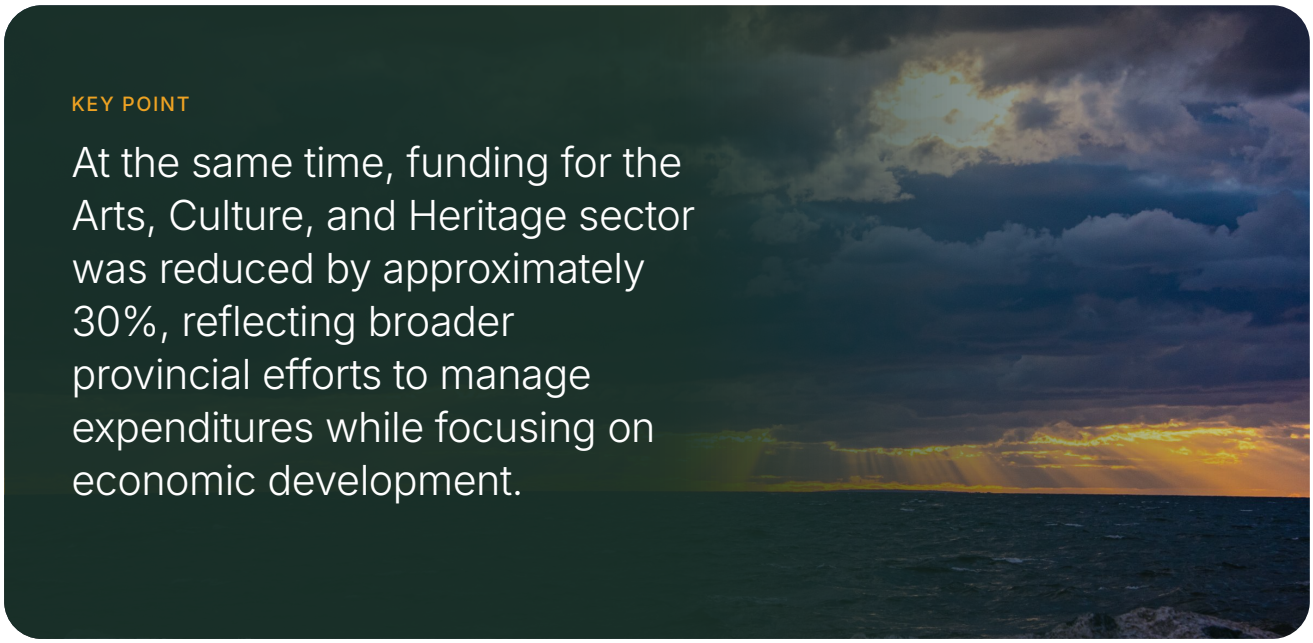
The review is based on documents provided by the Town and the County, provincial policies and budget information, published municipal plans, and previous community engagement undertaken by the municipalities. Rather than presenting new research, this section summarizes the existing policy and planning framework that provides the foundation for the Recreation Facilities and Recreation Needs Assessment.

4.1 Provincial Policy and Funding Context

Provincial policies continue to support recreation as a key contributor to healthy, active, and inclusive communities. The Shared Strategy for Advancing Recreation in Nova Scotia identifies priorities including active living, inclusion and access, connecting people with nature, supportive environments, and strengthening recreation capacity. Other provincial initiatives, including Let's Get Moving Nova Scotia, promote physical activity as a means of improving health and well-being, while the Nova Scotia Shared Strategy for Trails recognizes trails as important community infrastructure that supports recreation, active transportation, tourism, and environmental sustainability. The Province's Accessibility Act also requires municipalities to improve accessibility in recreation facilities, parks, programs, communications, and public spaces as Nova Scotia works toward becoming an accessible province by 2030.

While these policy directions remain in place, the current fiscal environment has become more challenging. The 2026–27 Nova Scotia Budget shifts provincial investment toward economic growth priorities such as housing, energy, natural resources, advanced manufacturing, defence, and the digital economy. At the same time, funding for the Arts, Culture, and Heritage sector was reduced by approximately 30%, reflecting broader provincial efforts to manage expenditures while focusing on economic development. Although recreation funding programs remain available, the reduction in arts and culture funding has implications for many

recreation organizations, community events, festivals, cultural programming, and shared community facilities that often rely on support from both sectors.



4.2 Municipal Priorities

The Town of Antigonish (the Town or TOA) and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish (MCOA) take different approaches to recreation, though both deliver programming. The Town owns and operates its own recreation assets, while the County provides significant financial support and resources to community-owned and non-profit facilities and organizations across the County. This distinction matters when considering each municipality's strategic priorities, financial commitments, and capacity for future recreation investments.

The Town of Antigonish's 2025–2029 Strategic Priorities Report identifies five corporate priorities: asset management, fiscal sustainability, environmental sustainability, strategic supports, and social sustainability. While recreation is recognized as an important municipal service, it is not identified as a stand-alone strategic priority. Recreation infrastructure ranked relatively low among capital investment priorities, while active transportation and trails received limited emphasis within the environmental sustainability priority area.

KEY POINT

Recreation infrastructure ranked relatively low among capital investment priorities, while active transportation and trails received limited emphasis within the environmental sustainability priority area.

This context is important because future recreation investments will compete with other municipal priorities for limited financial resources for the Town. As a result, recreation projects will need to demonstrate how they contribute to broader municipal objectives, including community health, accessibility, economic development, and public works projects.

The MCOA's quarterly strategic priorities show where the County's plans and priorities lie. Several AT pathways and connectors, such as the Harbour Hill Path, Florence Circle Connector, and Phase 4 of the AT corridor are planned. An accessibility plan overview is currently being undertaken with the accessibility fund launch being prepared. A key strategic priority and a part of the budget is Sewer Treatment Plant upgrade, a $5.4M project (50% provincially funded, remainder cost-shared with Town). These strategic priorities and ongoing projects are important to note because they directly influence how the recreation recommendations can be framed and what's realistic for Council to act on.[4]

Recreation delivery in the MCOA extends beyond facilities owned and operated by the Municipality. Community organizations and other local partners provide access to facilities that support recreation programming, even when the County does not own the buildings or infrastructure. Community facilities provide valuable spaces for residents to participate in sport, recreation, cultural activities, and community programming.

It is important to recognize community facilities and financial support as a municipal recreation priority. Although the MCOA does not own all recreation facilities in the County, it provides financial support to community organizations that operate and maintain them. These facilities are an essential part of local recreation delivery, enabling organizations to offer programs and services to residents. Maintaining this support is important for sustaining community capacity and ensuring that residents continue to have access to recreation opportunities.

[4] Municipality of the County of Antigonish. (2026, June 23). *Strategic priorities quarterly update*. https://antigonishcounty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/2026-June-Strategic-Priorities-Update.pdf

4.3 Previous Community Engagement

Prior to this assessment, the Town undertook public engagement as part of the Active Transportation Trail Project. The resulting report provides valuable context and highlights several themes that remain relevant to recreation planning.

Antigonish residents from both the Town and County expressed strong support for expanding active transportation infrastructure and recognized the health, environmental, recreational, and tourism benefits of a connected trail network. Participants also emphasized the importance of balancing recreation investments with other community priorities, including road maintenance, housing, and municipal infrastructure. Many residents also expressed a desire to see the existing trail network completed, noting that current gaps reduce its usefulness and accessibility. Safety improvements — including lighting, signage, crossings, drainage, winter maintenance, and accessibility for people with mobility challenges — were also identified as priorities.

The County has conducted Warden's Tours, Recreation Kitchen Talks engagement sessions, and similar engagement activities in each community. They have also conducted engagements through Make Your Move Antigonish to build a community-wide physical activity/movement plan. Engagement was conducted with both the Town and County of Antigonish, a multi-sector leadership team (StFX University, Nova Scotia Health, the Antigonish Chamber of Commerce, the regional library, local housing and family resource organizations, and others), provincial partners (CCTH, the Healthy Tomorrow Foundation), community partners, and Antigonish residents.

The Make Your Move Antigonish engagements show that there has been some strong progress in terms of infrastructure, with a phase of a 5 km multi-use pathway completed in 2024, an AT corridor project is progressing incrementally, and $18 million in ICIP infrastructure funding continues to anchor most of the natural/built environment work. Some movement counts are low, with cycling participation low amongst women, potentially an equity/safety gap. More than half of the accelerometry participants met the MVPA movement guidelines and awareness that is being spread is working, with 80% of participants intending to increase movement. It also shows that priority populations (less- active, equity-denied, rural residents) are the area most in need of deeper engagement going forward.

These findings reinforce several key themes identified throughout this assessment, particularly the importance of accessibility, connectivity, safety, and demonstrating clear community value when making recreation investments.

4.4 Lessons from Comparable Communities

Looking at different municipalities and regions in Nova Scotia which have similar characteristics — geographic size, population, population demographics, and a similar blend of rural and urban communities — such as Kentville, Wolfville, Chester, Bridgewater, Yarmouth, West Hants and Truro, this section compares approaches to recreation planning and demand. The criteria used to benchmark recreation strategies and systems, and to develop best practices, are set out below.

TABLE 8

Jurisdictional scan criteria

Criteria	Kentville	Wolfville	Chester	Bridgewater	Yarmouth	West Hants	Truro
Population	Metro area: 26,900	5,700 +3,000 during school year	10,560	10,200	Yarmouth County: 24,947	20,404	12,954
Similar geographic size	Yes	Yes	Yes	—	—	Yes	Yes
Similar blend of rural and urban communities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Income level	$46,480	$43,760	$47,360	$41,480	$41,880	$43,640	$41,840
University	No	Acadia University	No	No	No	No	Dalhousie Agricultural Campus (adjacent)

TABLE 9

Jurisdictional scan and benchmarks

Jurisdiction	Key approaches and recommendations
Kentville	• **Wellness first:** partner with organizations to offer diverse, low-structure activities, and work with Acadia University on community initiatives. • **Equitable access:** regularly review the facility allocation policy so spaces are shared fairly. • **Active transportation:** audit trails, build stakeholder-informed trail networks, and promote active travel with local businesses. • **Outdoor education and sustainability:** build climate considerations into facility planning, blend activity with environmental education, and remove barriers in outdoor spaces.
Yarmouth	• **Culture in recreation:** embed culture in recreation services, address cultural space needs, and study the feasibility of an arts facility. • **Events:** help community groups host festivals and events, including as tourism draws. • **Parks and trails:** a multi-use trail strategy linked to neighbouring municipalities; free, low-cost and nature-based programs in parks; multi-use fields for emerging sports. • **Access:** add prime-time public programming at anchor facilities, fee waivers for low-income households, and more casual, non-competitive programs. • **Partnerships:** keep delivering services with neighbouring municipalities and designate a culture, parks and recreation liaison.
West Hants	• **Reduce barriers:** free facility access for unstructured play, accessible programs through partners, and a larger equipment loan program focused on marginalized communities. • **One promotion channel:** a central way for all physical activity organizations to share facilities and programs with residents. • **Participation:** family-oriented and multi-generational programming, low-impact activities such as walking and hiking, and more community aquatic programs. • **Capacity:** support policy and leadership development, youth volunteers, and accessibility, inclusion and diversity training. • **Environment:** audit and upgrade outdated infrastructure for accessibility, and fund regular maintenance of trails and open spaces.
Truro	• **Shared regional facilities:** the Truro Amateur Athletic Club revitalization (2022) combined $3.2M federal and $2.6M+ provincial funding with $500,000 from the Town, $350,000 from Colchester County and $2M+ in community support. • **Partner-operated anchor facility:** the Rath Eastlink Community Centre is operated by a non-profit, the Central Nova Scotia Civic Centre Society. • **Asset master plans that unlock grants:** a 2019 Railyard Mountain Bike Park master plan guided phased upgrades funded federally and through the provincial Recreation Facility Development grant. • **Using school space:** Town staff supervise drop-in adult badminton and basketball at Truro Middle School.

Source: Kentville, West Hants and Yarmouth recreation and active living strategies and plans; Town of Truro; Government of Canada (2022 funding announcements).

4.5 Strategic Planning Context (PESTEL analysis)

A PESTEL analysis (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal factors) was completed to identify the external factors likely to influence recreation planning over the next decade.

TABLE 10

PESTEL analysis

Factor	Implications for recreation planning
Political	Provincial funding has become more competitive, while municipal resources remain limited. Recreation projects will require clear evidence of community need, strong partnerships, and alignment with broader government priorities. Regional collaboration between the Town and County will become increasingly important.
Economic	Household incomes in both municipalities remain below the provincial average, making affordability an important consideration. Rising construction, operating, and insurance costs also increase the financial challenges associated with maintaining and expanding recreation services.
Social	An aging population, a large university student population, growing newcomer and Indigenous communities, and declining volunteer capacity are changing recreation needs and increasing demand for accessible, inclusive, and flexible recreation opportunities.
Technological	Residents rely on multiple sources to learn about recreation opportunities, suggesting a need for improved communication, centralized program information, and modern booking systems.
Environmental	Seasonal weather, aging infrastructure, increasing maintenance requirements, and climate-related impacts such as drainage and flooding will continue to influence recreation facility planning and operations. Trails and natural spaces are expected to become increasingly important recreation assets.
Legal	The Accessibility Act establishes a clear requirement to improve accessibility by 2030. Municipalities must also strengthen facility agreements, risk management practices, and accessibility planning to ensure long-term sustainability and compliance.

Together, these external trends provide important context for the recommendations presented later in this report and highlight the need for recreation planning that is collaborative, financially sustainable, equitable, and adaptable to changing community needs.



SECTION 5

5

Public Engagement

5.1 Engagement schedule
5.2 Engagement Methodology
5.2 Summary of Findings
5.3 Participation and Travel Outside the Region
5.4 The most frequently used facilities
5.5 Facilities in Demand and Facilities Needing Repair
5.6 Overall Satisfaction with Community Assets
5.7 Getting There: Transportation and Access
5.8 Barriers and Timing

This section sets out what the community said during the engagement phase of the assessment. The two surveys are reported separately. One was a broad community wide survey, the other was dedicated for community sport organizations or nonprofit groups that organize programming.



Two terms are used throughout this report. Residents means people living in the Town of Antigonish and in the Municipality of the County of Antigonish, including Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation. Where Town and County results differ, that is stated. Community organizations means the clubs, associations, societies and non-profit groups that deliver recreation, sport, arts, cultural and community programming in the region.

5.1 Engagement schedule

Engagement ran from late March through the end of April 2026, with sessions held in the Town and across County communities, including virtual options for residents who could not attend in person. There were also dedicated sessions at Dr. JH Gillis Regional High School and Ecole acadienne de Pomquet, ensuring that perspectives of the two school boards were captured. Town and County staff attempted to schedule a similar session with East Antigonish Education Centre, but schedules with administration did not permit for this period of engagement.

TABLE 11

Engagement schedule

Date and time	Activity	Location
Sat 21 March, 10 am – 1 pm	Community pop-up	Antigonish Farmers Market
Tue 24 March, 6 – 8 pm	Engagement session, in person	St Andrew Junior School
Wed 25 March, 2 – 4 pm	Engagement session, virtual	County Office

TABLE 11

Engagement schedule

Date and time	Activity	Location
Wed 25 March, 6 – 8 pm	Engagement session, in person	Arisaig Community Centre
Thu 26 March, 2 – 4 pm	Engagement session, in person	St Joseph's Community Centre, 2752 Ohio East Road
Thu 26 March, 6 – 8 pm	Engagement session, virtual	County Office
Sat 28 March, 10 am – 1 pm	Community pop-up	Antigonish Farmers Market
Tue 31 March, 2:30 – 4:30 pm	Youth focus group	Dr. JH Gillis Regional High School
Tuesday, 12 May, 9:15-11:30	Youth Focus Group	Ecole Acadienne de Pomquet
Tue 31 March, 6 – 8 pm	Engagement session, in person	Heatherton Community Centre
Wed 1 April, 2 – 4 pm	Engagement session, in person	Antigonish Legion
Wed 1 April, 6 – 8 pm	Engagement session, in person	Mini-Trail Community Centre
Thu 2 April, 2 – 4 pm	Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation focus group	Paqtnkek Community Centre
Week of 6 April	Antigonish Recreation Facility Site Visits	—
Wed 29 April, 2 – 4 pm	Municipal recreation staff focus group	County Office

Sessions were deliberately spread across Arisaig, Heatherton, St Joseph's, Mini-Trail, Paqtnkek and the Town so that rural and Town residents each had a session within reach. The engagement phase reported here closed at the end of April 2026.

Source: ASBB Recreation Facilities and Needs Assessment, engagement schedule. Full addresses available on request.

5.2 Engagement Methodology

The table below summarizes our engagement methodology, how we conducted our engagements and details who our public engagement reached.

TABLE 12

Engagement Streams

Component	Details	Who it reached
Surveys	Public Survey Community Group Survey	699 responses from residents of TOA/MCOA 45 community organizations
1-on-1 Stakeholder Interviews	13 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders	The stakeholders included SRCE, Municipal staff, Sport NS, YMCA, Antigonish Culture Alive, StFX, Playfinder, Recreation NS, the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, TOA Staff, and the PARC group.
Focus groups	3 focus groups. Community and Indigenous Focus groups	Conducted three focus groups with community organizations and Indigenous organizations to understand recreation needs from an organizational perspectives
Pop-ups	2 Farmers Market pop-ups 2 Schools (Youth Sessions)	Conducted a series of staff and public engagements across municipality and town to understand their opinion.

TABLE 13

The two surveys at a glance

	ASBB Public Survey	ASBB Community Organization Survey
Respondents	699 residents	45 community organizations
Perspective	Users and households	Providers and delivery groups
Strongest single result	71.7% of respondents would like to see an indoor multi-use complex	Low-income households were most often identified as needing better access to recreation by 71.1% of responding community organizations
Leading barrier reported	20.9% of respondents reported timing of programs as the leading barrier	47.7% of respondents reported not enough space as a barrier to program delivery and expansion.
Known limitation	In the sample collected, most respondents are County residents, female, age 35 and over, long-tenured. About 1% are under 18.	Small sample. Each community organization moves any percentage by 2.3 points.

The public survey reports the experiences of residents, as users while the organization survey reports what recreation providers are able to deliver with the space and resources available to them.

Source: ASBB Public Survey and ASBB Community Organization Survey, both conducted to 21 April 2026.

5.2 Summary of Findings

- **Residents are active, but a large share recreate elsewhere.** 89.9% take part in recreation weekly and 81.2% take part outdoors. Even so, 69.7% leave Antigonish for recreation. Reasons include that programs are not offered there (42.9%) or facilities are better elsewhere (41.6%), and not so much because of cost (4.8%).
- **Overall satisfaction is moderate.** 63.1% of residents say facilities meet their needs very well or mostly, but only 8.3% choose "very well". Community organizations have even lower ratings, with only 11.1% finding facilities fully suitable for their programs.
- **Multi-use space.** 71.7% of residents named an indoor multi-use complex among their top three spending priorities, more than double any other item.
- **Access depends on a car.** 95.2% of residents drive. Fewer than 2.5% use a taxi or the Dial-a-Ride service, and no accessible public route connects housing to facilities.
- **Community organizations cannot meet the demand they already have.** 70.5% want to run programs they currently cannot. 63.6% report growing membership and none report decline, so this is a capacity constraint rather than a demand problem.
- **Low-income households and people with disabilities face the greatest access barriers.** 71.1% of community organizations identified low-income households as a group needing better access to recreation, followed by people with disabilities at 57.8%.
- **The system runs on space the municipality does not own.** 38.6% of community organizations use no municipal facility at all, and 59.1% use space they neither own nor lease, mostly without a written agreement.
- **Official information channels reach few people.** Residents learn about recreation through social media (78%) and word of mouth (73.2%). The municipal website reaches 24.6% and the Playfinder booking platform reaches 1.3%.

5.3 Participation and Travel Outside the Region

The following insights show the importance of recreation in Antigonish for the community, but also how a lot of residents leave Antigonish to access recreation. This provides important context for the report.

FIGURE 6

How often households take part in recreational activities (Q1)

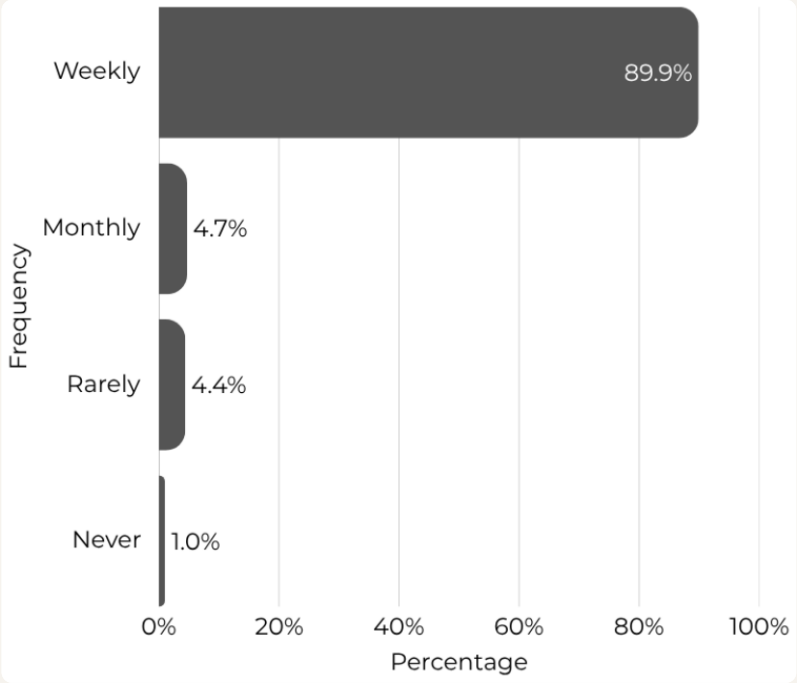
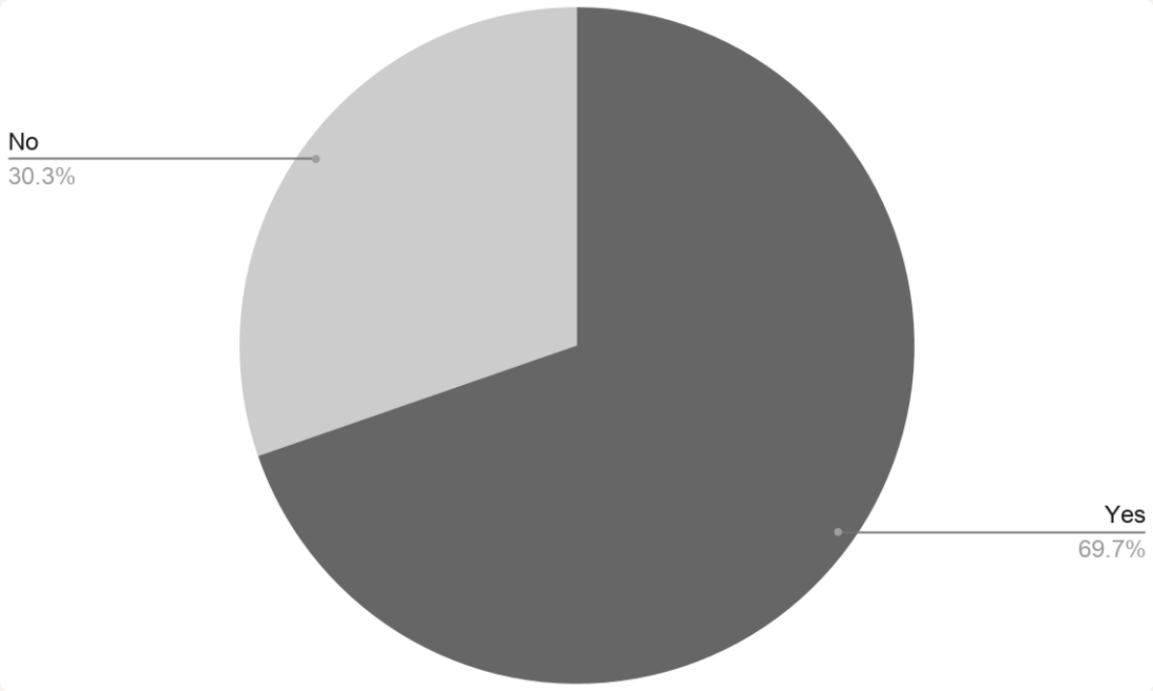


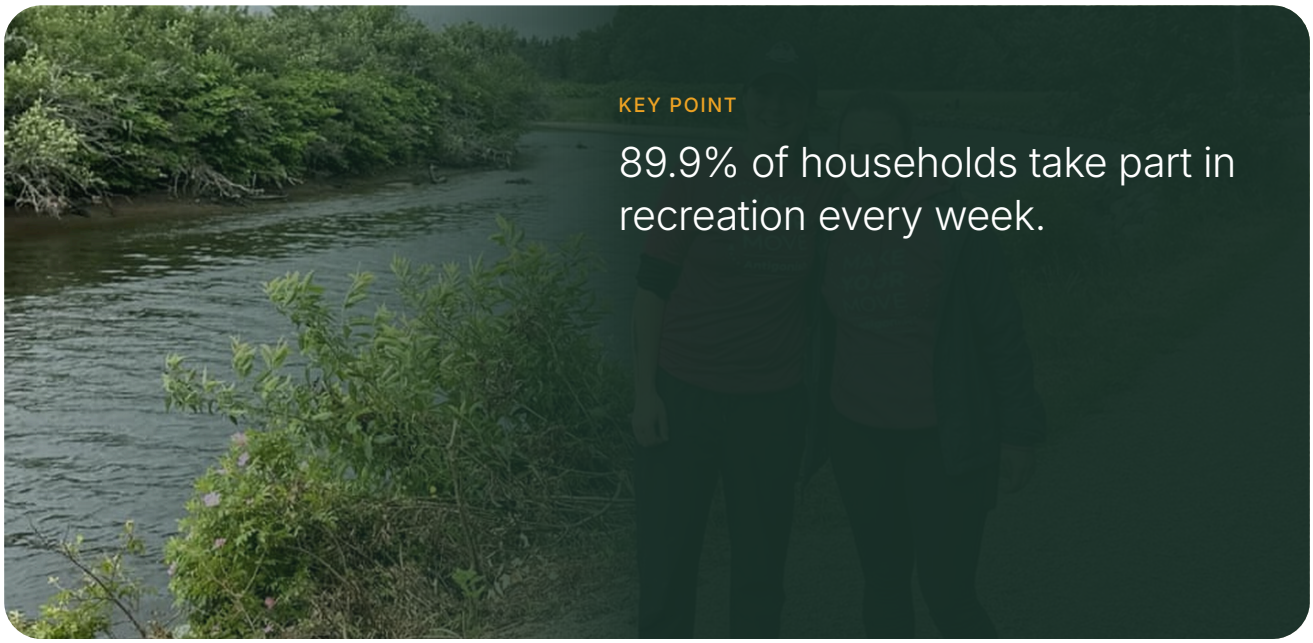
FIGURE 7

Whether residents leave Antigonish for recreation (Q22)



Source: ASBB Antigonish Public Recreation Needs Assessment Survey.

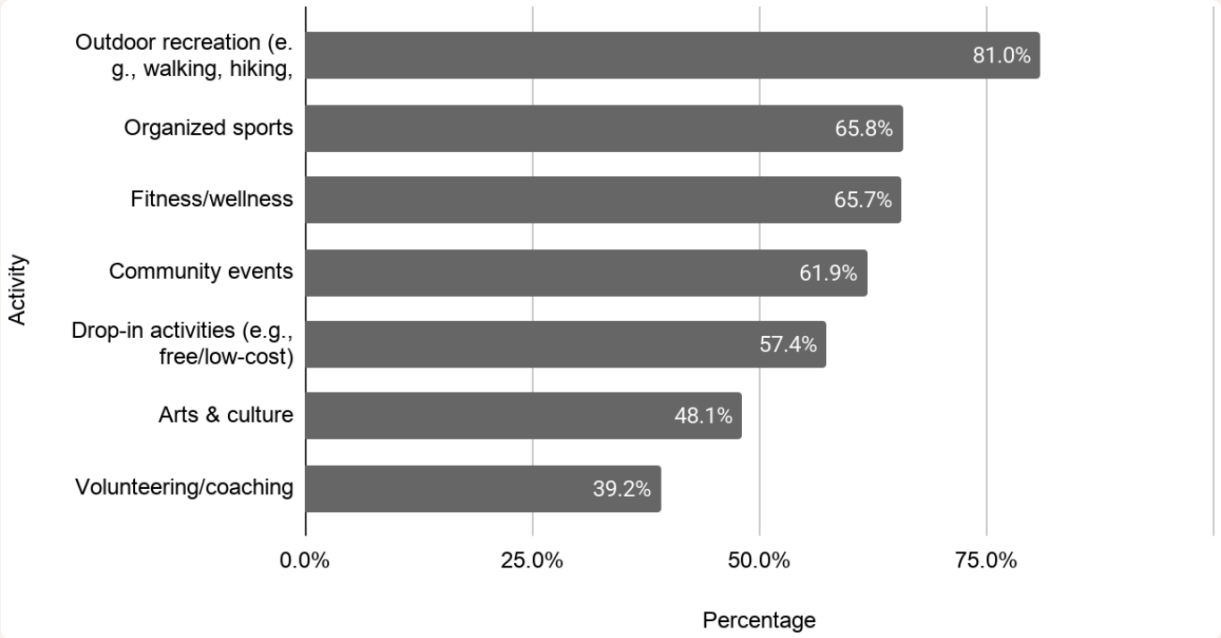
89.9% of households take part in recreation every week. Participation is close to universal, and only about one household in ten takes part monthly, rarely or never. There is no shortage of appetite for recreation in the Antigonish community.



At the same time, 69.7% of residents leave Antigonish to take part in recreation. Just under seven in ten travel outside the region for recreation programs or activities. Set against an 89.9% weekly participation rate, this is the clearest single measure of unmet local demand in the engagement. The reasons are set out later in this section: residents are travelling because a program is not offered here or because facilities are better elsewhere, not because of cost.

FIGURE 8

Types of activity households take part in (Q2)



Source: ASBB Antigonish Public Recreation Needs Assessment Survey, Q2.

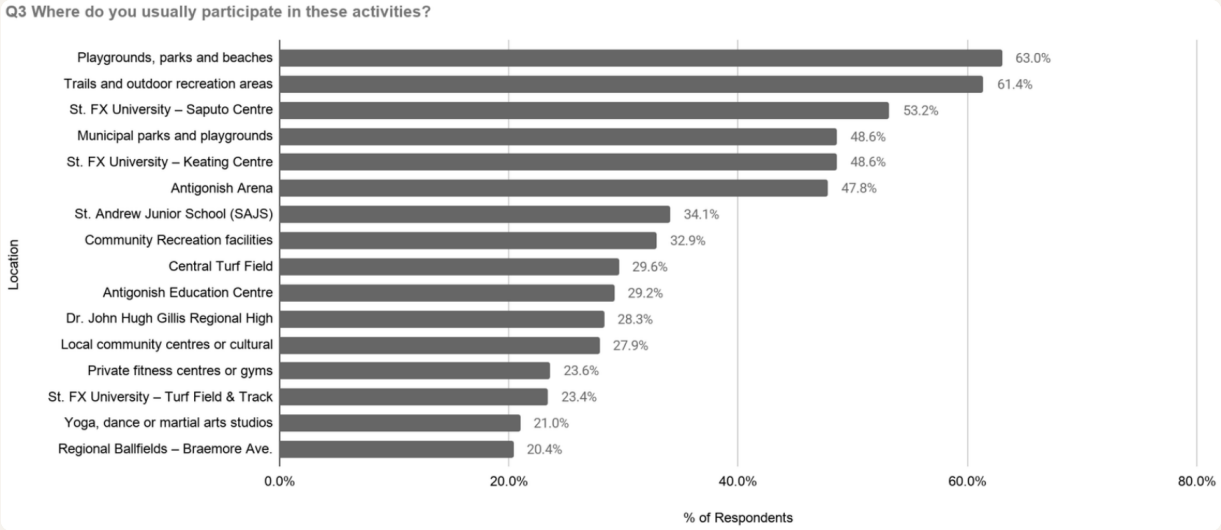
Outdoor recreation and community events outrank organized sport, so a program built around sport alone would miss most households. Outdoor recreation leads at 81%, ahead of organized sports at 65.8% and fitness and wellness at 65.7%. Community events reach 61.9% of households and arts and culture 48.1%. A program built only around organized sport would miss the largest category and the two most flexible ones.

5.4 The most frequently used facilities

Residents and community organizations were asked separately which facilities they use most. The two answers point in the same direction.

FIGURE 9

Facilities and places residents use most (Q3)



Source: ASBB Antigonish Public Recreation Needs Assessment Survey, Q3.

The most used assets are free and mostly small. No single built facility reaches as many residents as playgrounds and parks. Playgrounds and parks are the most used recreation assets in the system, at 63%, ahead of StFX Saputo Centre at 53.2%, municipal parks at 48.6% and the Antigonish Arena at 47.8%. The small, distributed, free-to-use assets are used by more residents than any specific facilities.

FIGURE 10

Facilities community organizations use most

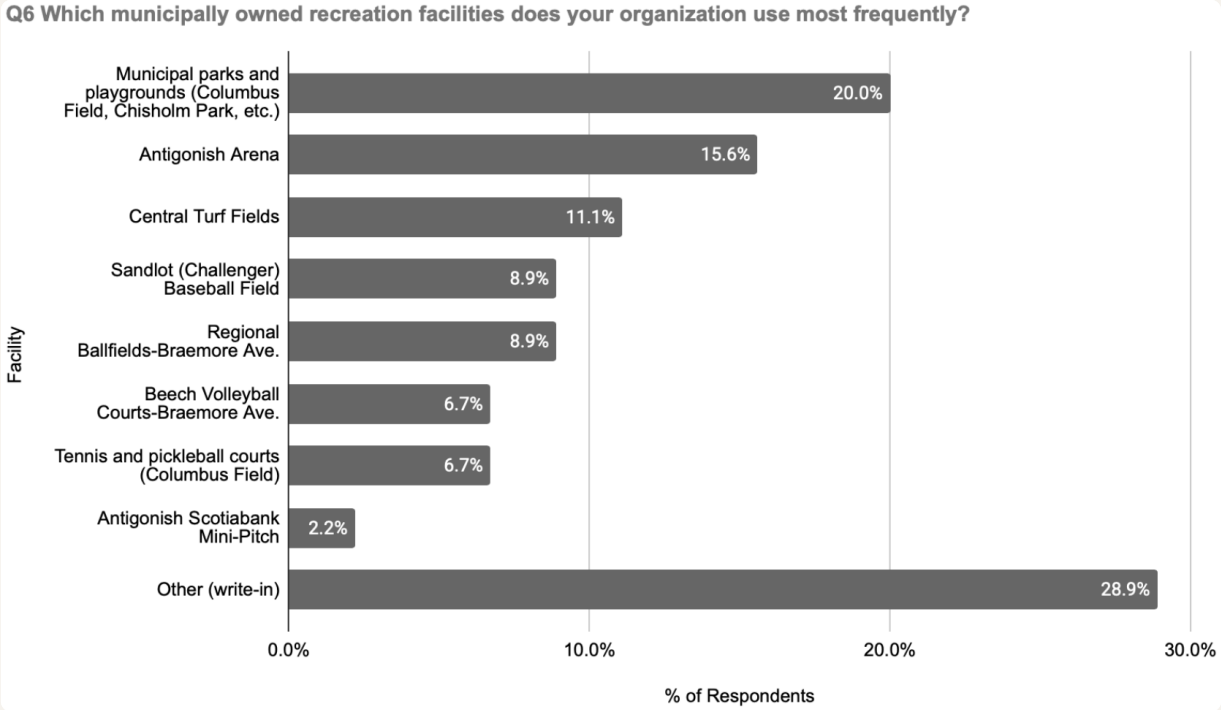
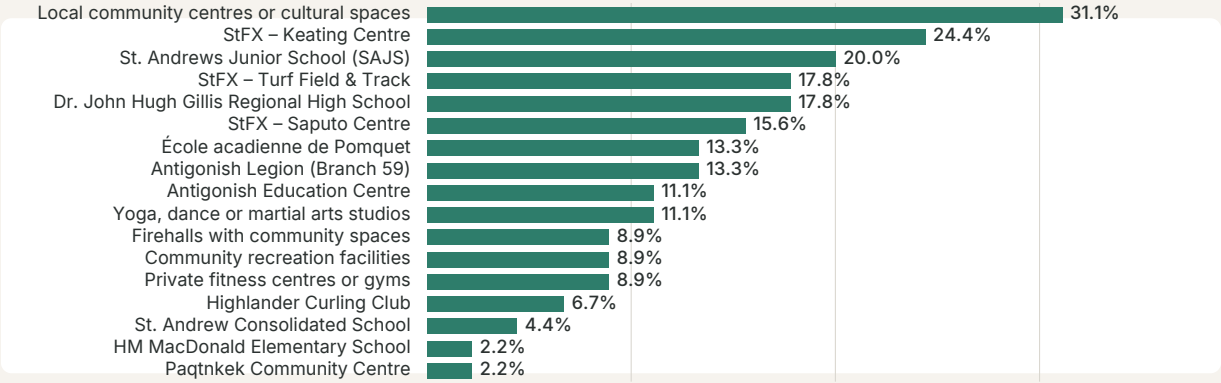


FIGURE 11

Which non-municipally owned recreation facilities does your organization currently use? (% of organizations, n = 45)



Source: ASBB Antigonish Community Group Recreation Needs Assessment Survey.

Community organizations depend most on space the municipalities do not own: community centres, StFX and school sites. For community organizations, local community centres lead at 31.1%, ahead of any single StFX facility, with the Keating Centre at 24.4%. School sites follow, with St. Andrews Junior School at 20.0% and Dr.

John Hugh Gillis at 17.8%. Municipal parks and playgrounds are used by 20% of community organizations and the Arena by 15.6%.

The pattern across both surveys

The most used assets in the recreation system are largely ones the municipality does not own, or ones that cost comparatively little to provide. StFX venues, school sites, church halls and local community centres carry a large share of use in both surveys, and 38.6% of community organizations use no municipal facility at all. Playgrounds, parks and trails carry more residents than any building.

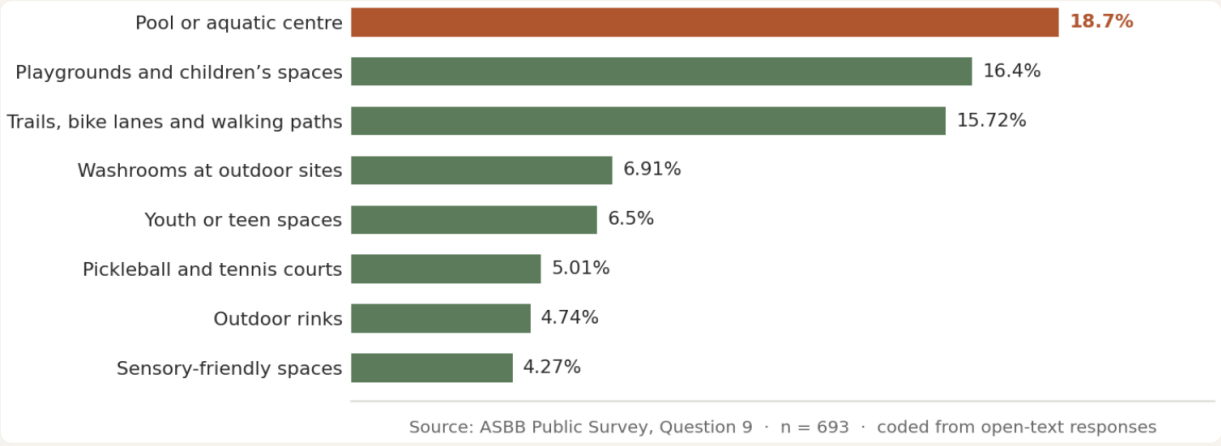
Securing written access to the first group, and maintaining the second, may reach more people than any single new facility would.

5.5 Facilities in Demand and Facilities Needing Repair

Two open-text questions asked residents what is missing from local parks and recreation areas, and which facilities most need repair or improvement. The responses were coded into categories. The figures below are drawn from that coding rather than from direct counts, and should be treated as indicative.

FIGURE 12

What residents say is missing from local recreation provision (coded)

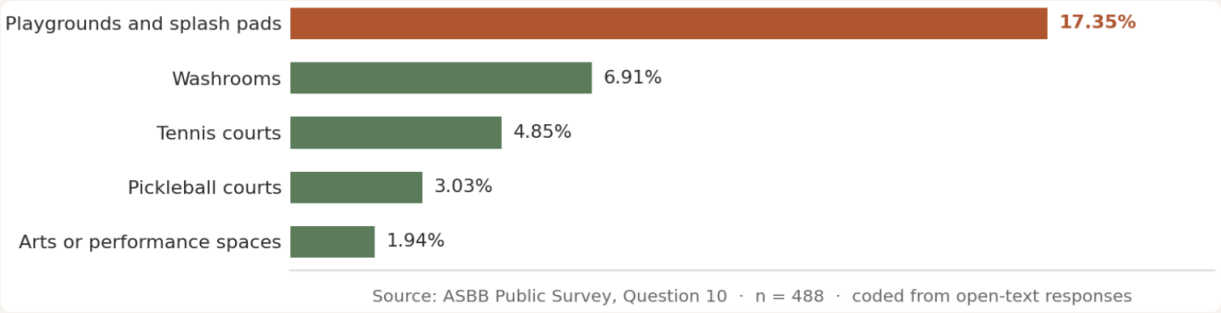


Source: ASBB Antigonish Public Recreation Needs Assessment Survey, coded open-text responses.

A pool leads the list, but the top three together are aquatics, playgrounds and trails, which is where most stated demand sits. A pool or aquatic centre is the single most frequently identified gap, at 18.70%, followed by playgrounds and children's spaces at 16.40% and trails, bike lanes and walking paths at 15.72%. Washrooms at outdoor sites, youth and teen spaces, courts and outdoor rinks follow further back. The top three account for over half of everything residents named.

FIGURE 13

Facilities residents identify as needing repair or improvement (coded)



Source: ASBB Antigonish Public Recreation Needs Assessment Survey, coded open-text responses.

Playgrounds appear at the top of both the missing list and the repair list, so renewal reaches more residents than any new build. Playgrounds and splash pads are the facilities most often identified for repair, at 17.35%. Washrooms follow at 6.91%, then tennis courts, pickleball courts and arts or performance spaces. Playgrounds therefore appear at or near the top of both questions: residents want more of them and want the existing ones improved.

KEY POINT

Playgrounds and splash pads are the facilities most often identified for repair, at 17.35%.

WHAT THESE TWO QUESTIONS TAKEN TOGETHER INDICATE

Aquatic access is the largest identified gap. However, the need is primarily for greater access to swimming opportunities, rather than specifically for a new aquatic facility. The gap register treats the gap accordingly, placing secured and affordable access to the existing pool ahead of construction of a new one. Playgrounds, splash pads and trails then dominate both the missing list and the repair list, which points to renewal of low-cost distributed assets as the work with the widest reach.

5.6 Overall Satisfaction with Community Assets

Four questions in the public survey measure how residents rate the recreation assets and the information about them. Read together they show a community that is broadly content but rarely enthusiastic, with a consistently large group who are neutral or unsure.

FIGURE 14
How well facilities meet the needs of households (Q7)

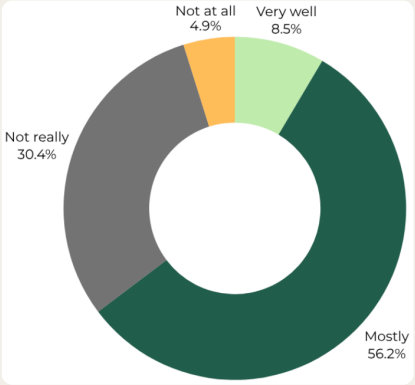


FIGURE 15
Whether spaces are welcoming and inclusive (Q31)

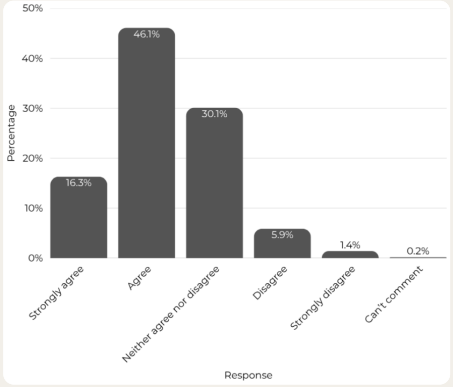


FIGURE 16
Whether spaces are safe and welcoming for different cultures (Q32)

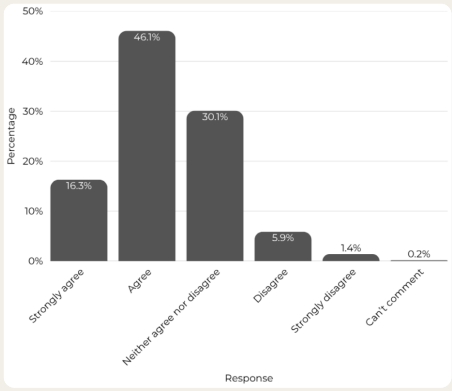
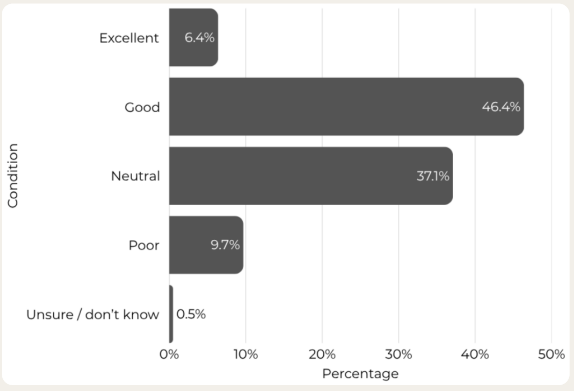


FIGURE 17
Municipal information about parks, open spaces and trails (Q20)



Source: ASBB Antigonish Public Recreation Needs Assessment Survey.

62.9% say facilities meet their needs very well or mostly, yet only 8.4% choose "very well" and 29.7% say "not really". 69.7% are positive on cultural safety and 59.6% agree that spaces are welcoming. Municipal information about parks, open spaces and trails is rated good or excellent by 55.7%.

35.1% are neutral on municipal information, and 30.1% neither agree nor disagree on cultural welcome. These are not negative judgments, they indicate residents who do not have enough information to form a view.

FIGURE 18

Community organizations: how well infrastructure fits their programs (Q10)

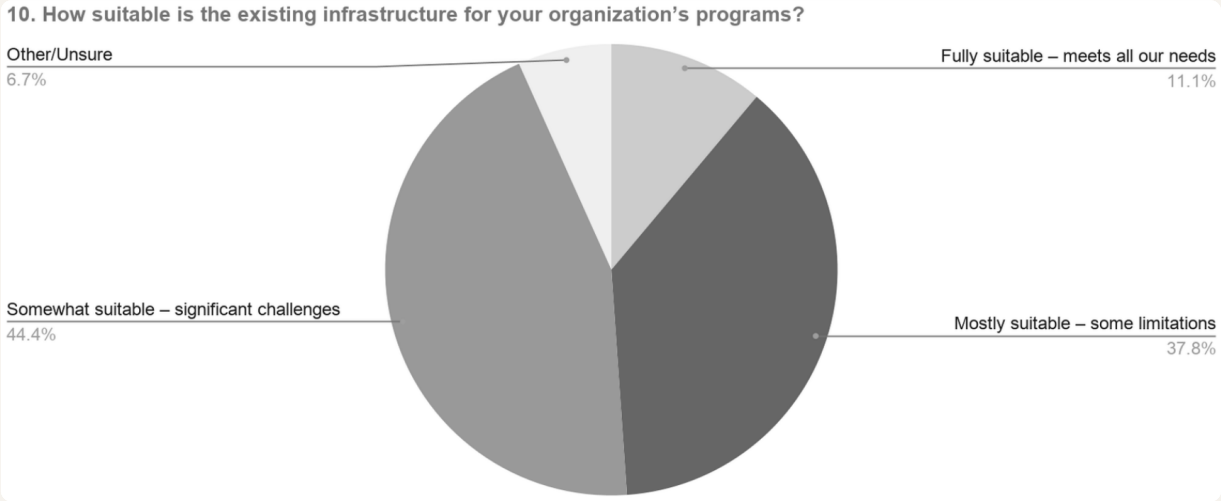
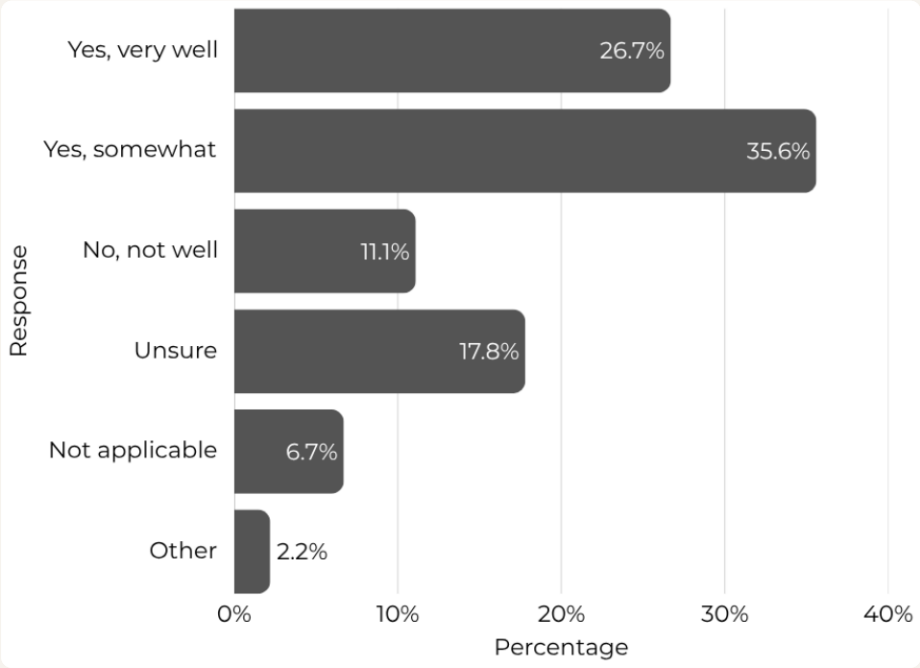


FIGURE 19

Community organizations: whether spaces are welcoming and inclusive of cultures (Q30)



Source: ASBB Antigonish Community Group Recreation Needs Assessment Survey.

Community organizations were asked how suitable the infrastructure is for their programs. 11.1% reported it fully suitable, 37.8% mostly suitable and 44.4% suitable with significant limitations. On cultural inclusion, 52.3% answered positively and 27.3% were unsure. Community organizations rate the state of infrastructure considerably lower than residents do. Only 11.4% find the infrastructure fully suitable and 43.2% report significant limitations. Residents are judging access, cleanliness and upkeep. Community organizations are judging whether a space can hold their program. Both readings are accurate, and any statement about satisfaction should carry both.

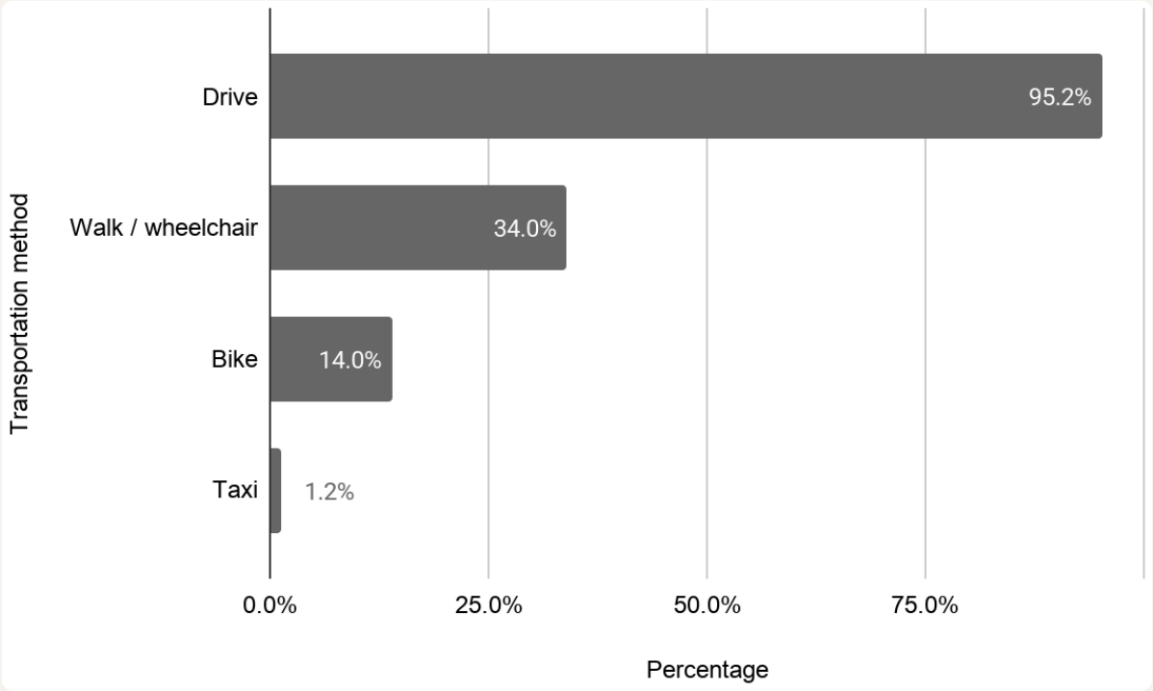
KEY POINT

Only 11.4% find the infrastructure fully suitable and 43.2% report significant limitations.

5.7 Getting There: Transportation and Access

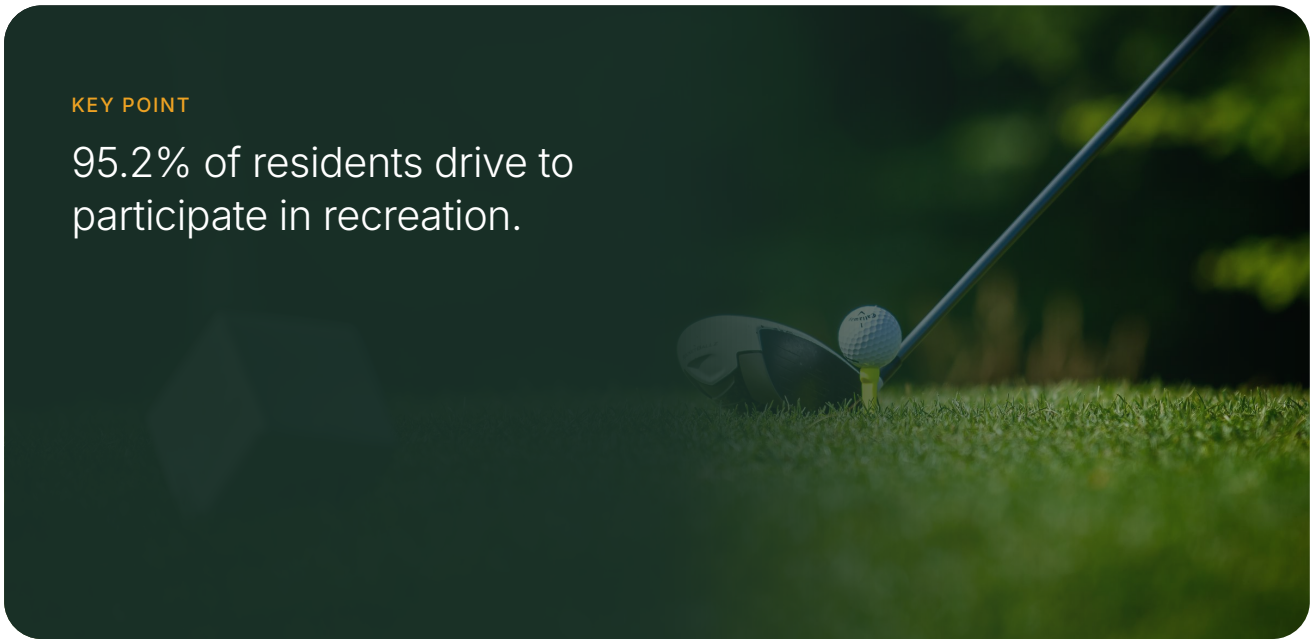
FIGURE 20

How residents usually travel to recreation spaces (Q4)



Source: ASBB Antigonish Public Recreation Needs Assessment Survey.

95.2% of residents drive to participate in recreation. A third walk or use a wheelchair and 14% cycle. Taxi and Dial-a-Ride use together account for around 1.2%, and municipal transit drew a single response. There is no effective public route into the recreation system.



Households without vehicles may find it harder to access recreation, no matter the capacity or cost. 6.1% of residents cite distance as a barrier, and that burden falls mainly on the County. The community organization survey shows the same gap from the provider side: transportation limits programs for 29.5% of delivery groups.

One in four households need at least one accessible feature at a facility. Barrier-free paths lead at 12.1%, followed by accessible parking and benches at 9.5% each, and accessible washrooms at 9.0%. 21.4% of households report living with a disability. Improving transport without repairing sidewalks and connecting routes would leave the last stretch of the journey unsafe for the residents least able to drive.

A low-cost route already exists

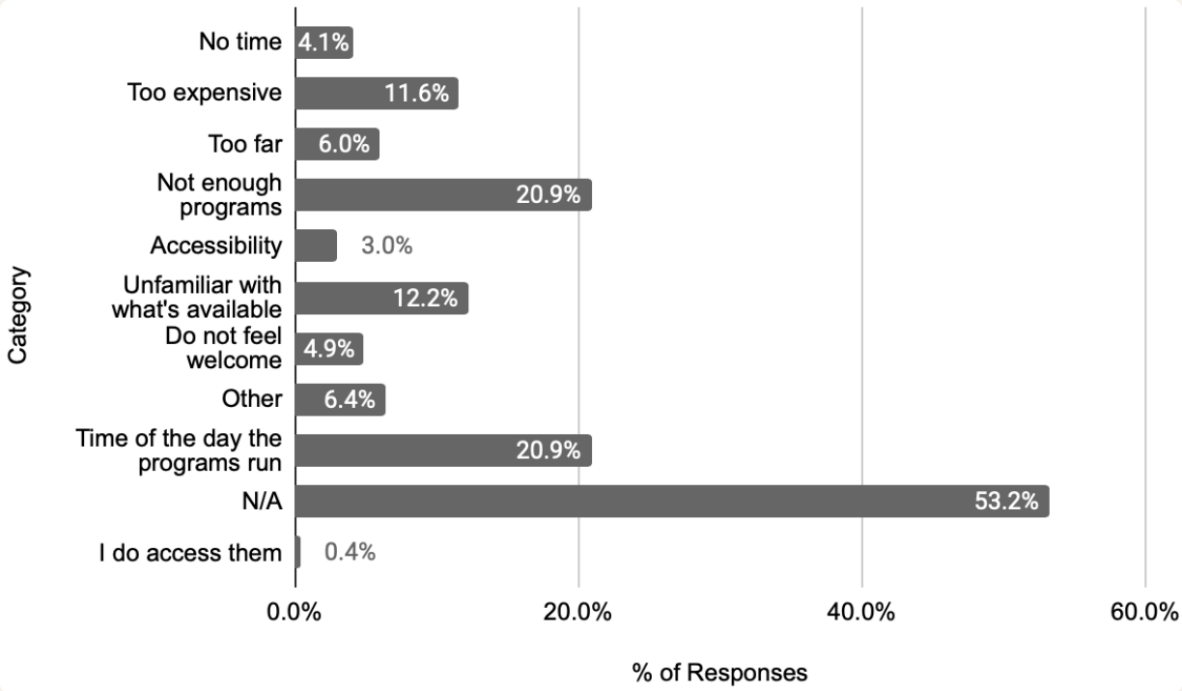
Community organizations propose using school buses to move young people from schools to recreation facilities as these vehicles already make that trip. A pilot would test whether transport, rather than new construction, resolves part of the access problem, and would be significantly less costly than a new building.

5.8 Barriers and Timing

The timing of programs is the leading barrier residents report, at 20.9%, as well as there not being enough programs (20.9%), followed by unfamiliarity with what is available (12.2%) and costs (11.6%).

FIGURE 21

Reasons residents give for not accessing recreation spaces (Q8)

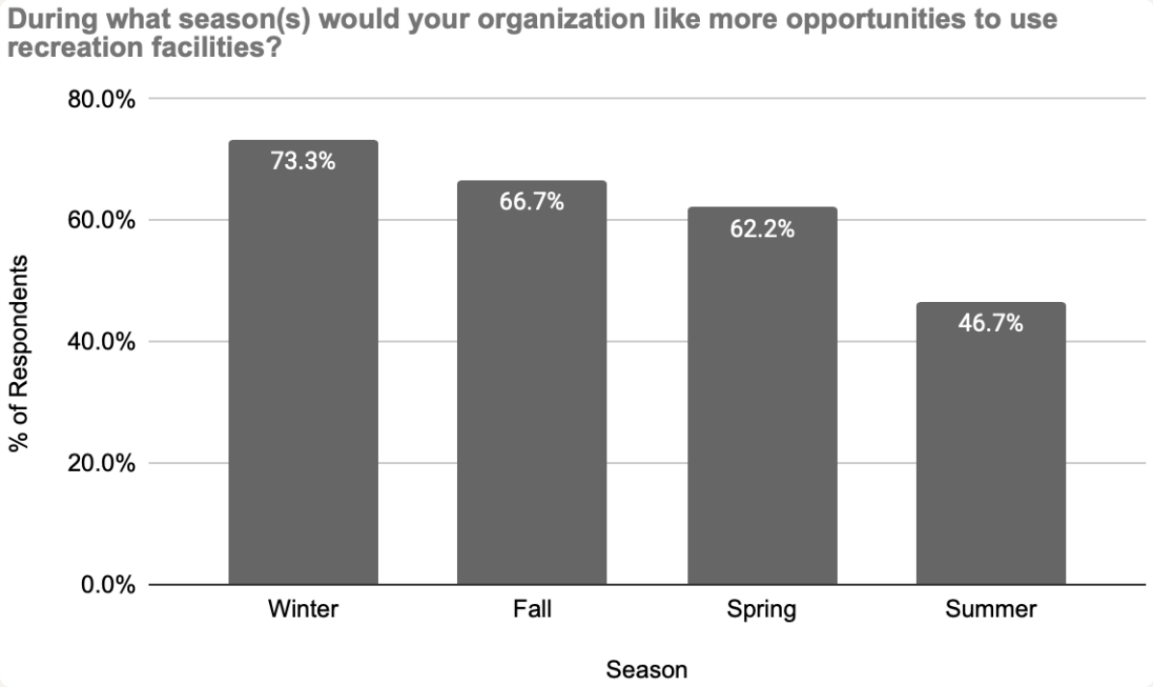


Source: ASBB Antigonish Public Recreation Needs Assessment Survey.

A program offered when residents cannot attend serves fewer people than the same program at a different hour, at the same cost. Community organizations record the same issue: evening access is the time slot they most often request, and several report being scheduled around school sport as secondary users. This can be due to supply not meeting demand.

FIGURE 22

Seasons in which community organizations want more facility access



Source: ASBB Antigonish Community Group Recreation Needs Assessment Survey.

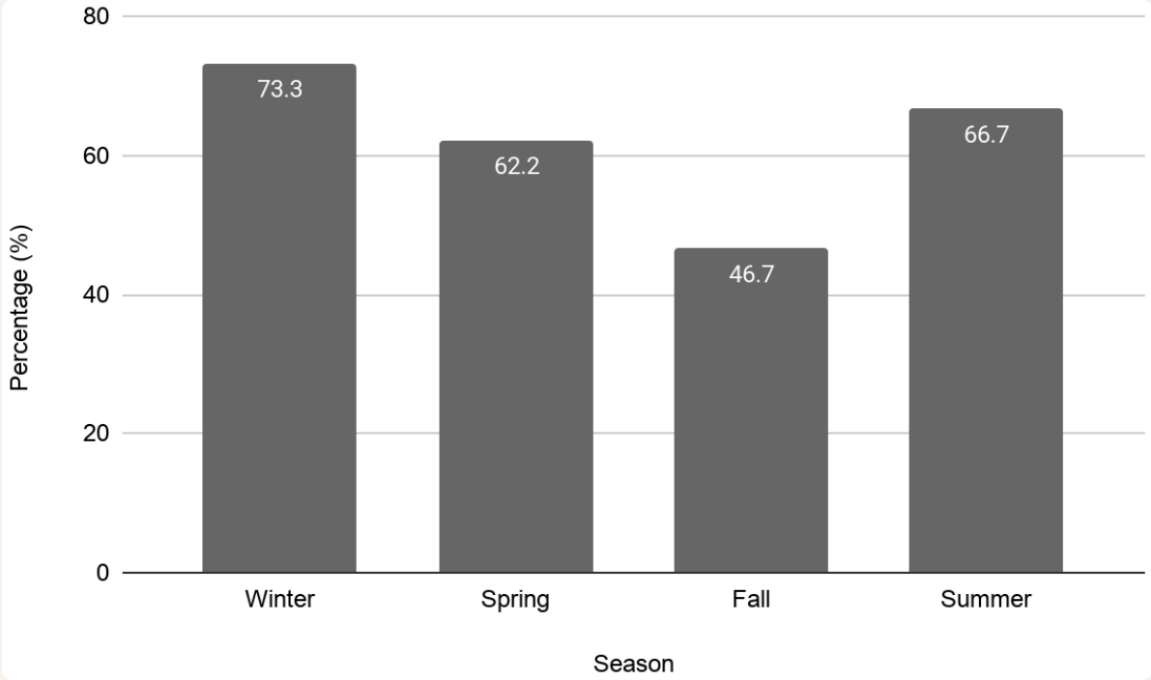
Winter leads at 73.3%, with fall at 66.7% and spring at 62.2%. Residents report the same pattern, with 73.3% asking for more winter opportunities. The gap covers the eight-month period when outdoor options close and indoor space is committed to school sport, so it is a shoulder-season problem as much as a winter one.

KEY POINT

Winter leads at 73.3%, with fall at 66.7% and spring at 62.2%.

FIGURE 23

Seasons in which residents would like more access

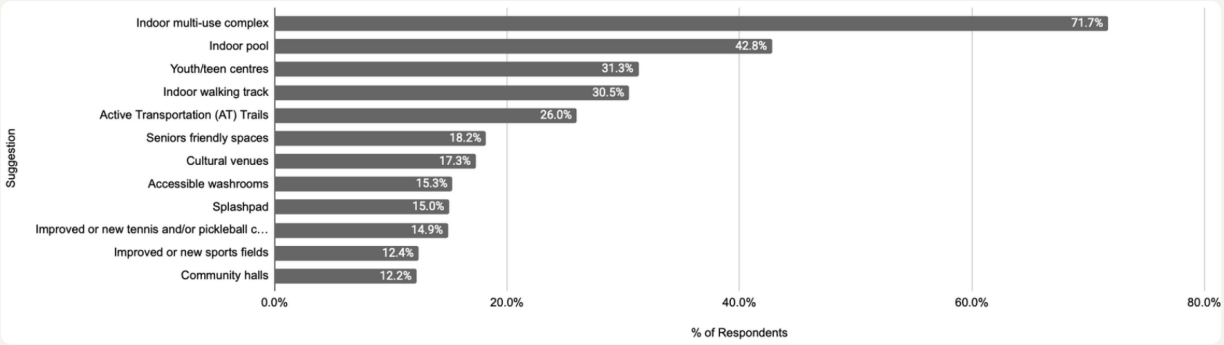


Source: ASBB Antigonish Public Recreation Needs Assessment Survey, Q12.

5.9 What Residents Want

FIGURE 24

Resident spending priorities, top three selections each (Q11)



Source: ASBB Antigonish Public Recreation Needs Assessment Survey.

The indoor complex is named by more than twice as many residents as any other item and is the most widely shared request in the engagement. 71.7% of residents named an indoor multi-use complex, or 497 of 699 people, more than double any other labelled item. Youth and teen centres follow at 31.2%, active transportation trails at 26.3% and cultural venues at 17.2%.

How this report treats the indoor complex

The gap analysis classifies an indoor complex as a want rather than a need on the basis that affordable indoor access through the winter can be secured in a more cost effective manner by negotiating use of school and university space. That reasoning is sound and should be kept, but it should be put to Council alongside the strength of the demand rather than instead of it. At 71.7% this is the most widely shared request in the whole engagement.

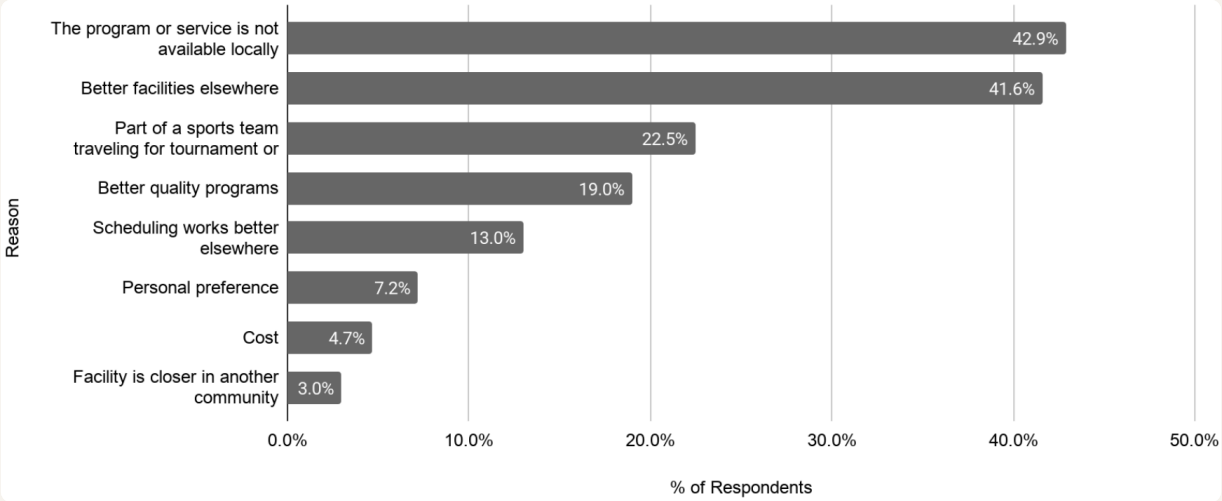
KEY POINT

At 71.7% this is the most widely shared request in the whole engagement.

The underlying community need — year-round indoor access — is classified as Core Need 1.01 and passes all five tests. What is classified as a want is the particular solution, not the outcome. A decision making matrix which explains how the test is conducted and was created can be found in Section 10.

FIGURE 25

Reasons residents leave Antigonish for recreation (Q22)



Source: ASBB Antigonish Public Recreation Needs Assessment Survey.

69.6% of residents leave the region to participate in recreation. The two leading reasons are that a program is not offered here, at 42.9%, and that facilities are better elsewhere, at 41.6%. Cost sits near the bottom at 4.7%. Residents are travelling for supply and quality rather than price, which suggests a wider program offer and better-fitting space could recover much of this activity locally.

5.10 Community Organization Capacity and Equity

FIGURE 26

Barriers preventing community organizations from offering more programs (Q23)



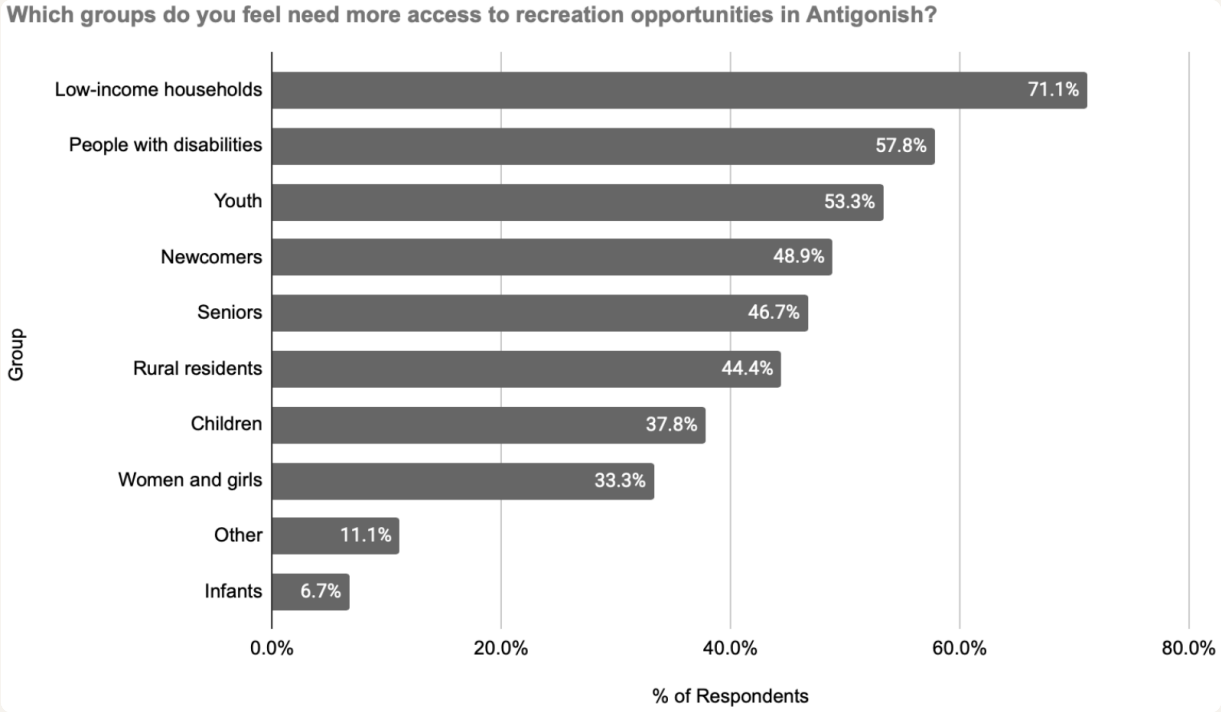
Source: ASBB Antigonish Community Group Recreation Needs Assessment Survey.

Funding and space are the binding constraints. There is demand for programs, so this is a capacity problem. 70.5% of community organizations want to offer programs they currently cannot. Funding is the leading obstacle at 51.1%, followed by suitable space at 46.7%. Demand is established and growing, with 63.6% reporting growing membership and none reporting decline, so this is a capacity constraint rather than a demand problem.

The delivery base is fragile. 56.8% of community organizations are fully volunteer-run and only 34.1% can recruit and retain enough volunteers, with 45.5% reporting volunteer burnout. 59.1% use space they neither own nor lease, mostly without a written agreement, and 38.6% use no municipal facility at all. Against that, 86.3% are open or possibly open to sharing space, so the willingness to coordinate already exists.

FIGURE 27

Groups community organizations identify as needing more access (Q24)



Source: ASBB Antigonish Community Group Recreation Needs Assessment Survey.

Low-income households stand out as the group most often identified as needing better access to recreation. 71.1% of community organizations selected low-income households, followed by people with disabilities (57.8%) and youth (53.3%). With 81.8% of organizations already serving underserved groups, these responses reflect the experience of providers working directly with the community. The results suggest that affordability is a bigger equity concern than a lack of facilities alone.



KEY POINT

71.1% of community organizations selected low-income households, followed by people with disabilities (57.8%) and youth (53.3%).

5.11 Focus Groups

We conducted three focus groups as a part of our public engagements, to ensure we captured a wide range of demographics, any that weren't sufficiently reflected in the survey, and qualitative insights that surveys may not be able to fully capture. Two focus groups were conducted with community hubs and organizations, and one was conducted with indigenous organizations.

TABLE 14

Key themes from focus groups

Theme:	Description:
Community organizations are filling important recreation gaps	Nonprofits, volunteers, and community organizations already provide a wide range of arts, wellness, sport, youth, and senior programming, but they often do so without dedicated facilities.
Lack of suitable and specific spaces is limiting program growth	Lack of appropriate, reliable, accessible space. Groups need larger rooms, storage, equipment, specialized spaces, year-round indoor facilities, and spaces designed for specific activities.
Recreation needs extend beyond traditional sports	Participants emphasized arts, film, wellness, youth programming, adult recreation, cultural activities, and informal gathering spaces alongside traditional sport. Recreation planning may benefit from a broader definition of recreation.
Rural and Indigenous communities need more recreation delivered locally	The Indigenous focus group particularly emphasized the difficulty of travelling to Antigonish or other off-reserve facilities. There was a strong preference for providers to bring programming directly into communities.

TABLE 14

Key themes from focus groups

Theme:	Description:
Communication and navigation	The lack of a centralized database for recreation programming and facility availability was identified as a challenge, Programs and opportunities are spread across Facebook, word of mouth, posters, Playfinder, and separate calendars. This makes it especially difficult for newcomers.
Volunteer, staffing, and funding	Groups are heavily dependent on volunteers and limited funding. Volunteer burnout and staff capacity constrain their ability to maintain and expand programs. Participants identified the need for dedicated coordination capacity to manage partnerships, grants, equipment, and programming.
Coordination and shared planning	Facility access, scheduling, and information are managed across multiple organizations, creating gaps and inconsistencies in how residents and groups access recreation opportunities.

A SWOT analysis was conducted from these findings.

TABLE 15

SWOT Analysis: Focus groups

STRENGTHS

- **Recreation is highly valued across Antigonish.** Residents, youth, seniors, staff, and community groups showed strong interest in recreation and regular participation.
- **Antigonish already has a strong base of recreation assets.** Parks, trails, beaches, schools, StFX spaces, the Arena, community centres, libraries, and outdoor spaces are well used.
- **Outdoor recreation is a clear community strength.** Trails, beaches, parks, walking routes, and active transportation were repeatedly identified as important local assets.
- **Community groups help fill important recreation needs.** Non-profits, sport groups, arts groups, wellness providers, and volunteers deliver many programs across age groups and interests.
- **Partnerships already support recreation delivery.** Schools, StFX, Keppoch Mountain, DNR, YMCA, Sport Nova Scotia, CCTH, Playfinder, and local groups all play a role.
- **Many recreation spaces are seen as safe and welcoming.** Youth, working age adults, and seniors often described spaces as safe, mostly safe, or welcoming.

WEAKNESSES

- **Rural access and transportation remain major barriers.** Youth, seniors, Indigenous residents, and people outside town often depend on others for rides.
- **Indoor, aquatic, and year-round options are limited.** Common gaps included swimming, indoor walking, youth spaces, winter programs, and flexible multi-use spaces.
- **Many existing assets are not fully usable for multi-use.** Parks, fields, halls, schools, and community spaces are limited by access rules, maintenance, amenities, or equipment gaps.
- **Facility access is hard to plan around.** School and StFX spaces are important, but booking rules, peak-time access, and custodial coverage are not always clear.
- **Basic facility issues affect daily use.** Washrooms, parking, lighting, drainage, storage, accessibility, and maintenance were repeated concerns.
- **Recreation information is hard to find.** Schedules, programs, booking details, and facility updates are spread across too many communication channels.

TABLE 15 (CONTINUED) — SWOT ANALYSIS: FOCUS GROUPS

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• **A shared TOA/MCOA recreation strategy can guide decisions.** A coordinated plan would clarify priorities, roles, funding, partnerships, and long-term investment. • **Shared-use agreements could unlock existing spaces.** Clear agreements with schools, StFX, and other facility owners could improve access without relying only on new construction. • **Multi-use spaces could respond to several needs at once.** Indoor recreation, aquatic access, youth spaces, arts space, walking options, and community gathering areas were common priorities. • **Transportation and active travel improvements could increase participation.** Transit, shared rides, bus passes, sidewalks, bike routes, trails, and event transportation could reduce access gaps. • **A central information and booking hub could make recreation easier to use.** Playfinder, a shared calendar, maps, signage, and a community navigator could reduce confusion. • **Inclusive and low-cost programming could reach more residents.** Free drop-ins, equipment lending, beginner programs, culturally welcoming spaces, and local delivery could support broader access.	• **Rising costs could make recreation less affordable.** Fees, equipment, insurance, staffing, maintenance, and facility costs may reduce participation for families and groups. • **Major capital pressures could delay recreation investment.** Core infrastructure, debt limits, aging facilities, and competing municipal priorities may limit funding for recreation upgrades. • **Aging facilities may become harder to maintain.** Pool, arena, turf, field, trail, park, drainage, washroom, and accessibility issues could worsen if improvements are delayed. • **Lack of coordination between municipal and non-municipal assets creates uncertainty.** Schools, StFX, non-profits, DNR, and community-owned spaces are essential, but access can change without shared planning. • **Volunteer and staff burnout could weaken programming.** Many programs depend on a small number of people, and pressure may reduce consistency or limit growth. • **Access barriers could continue to leave some residents behind.** Rural residents, youth, seniors, newcomers, Indigenous residents, lower-income households, and people with accessibility needs may face growing barriers.

5.12 One-on-One Stakeholder Interviews

Thirteen one-on-one stakeholder interviews were conducted with key stakeholders from the town, the county, with community organizations, provincial stakeholders and educational institutions.

The interviews point to a recreation system that has significant community assets, willing partners and community support in the form of volunteers, but is constrained by capacity, funding, access, and coordination. The strongest opportunity may be to better utilize existing spaces, formalize partnerships, improve coordination and information, and address staffing and volunteer capacity.

The challenges community groups reported facing were access to specific spaces with accessibility features, storage spaces, and evening access. Many community groups also don't have facilities or dedicated spaces so they are reliant on borrowing spaces from other facilities. Many other facilities prioritize their primary users, so community groups face changing schedules, unclear booking processes, janitorial requirements, and additional operating costs.

Staff shortages, geographic and transportation barriers are also key barriers reported, as well as the lack of a centralized database to navigate facilities and programs, which can be especially difficult for newcomers.

KEY POINT

Staff shortages, geographic and transportation barriers are also key barriers reported, as well as the lack of a centralized database to navigate facilities and programs, which can be especially difficult for newcomers.

A SWOT analysis was conducted to identify key themes, areas of strength, improvement, and challenges. This can be found in the table below.

TABLE 16

Stakeholder Interview SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• **Strong community value placed on recreation.** Recreation is viewed as contributing to health, wellbeing, social connection and inclusion. • **Strong network of existing partners.** Community organizations such as Sport Nova Scotia, YMCA and DNR, and institutions including schools and StFX, contribute programming or facilities, and stay active despite capacity constraints. • **Existing informal and community leadership.** Volunteers and local organizations help sustain many activities. • **Digital infrastructure.** Playfinder provides a platform for program discovery, booking, data collection and volunteer coordination. • **Existing recreation assets.** The community already has schools, university facilities, parks, trails, rinks, fields and other spaces that can support recreation.	• **Limited facility capacity.** Demand is concentrated in a small number of gyms, fields and other facilities, with prime-time spaces often fully booked. • **Fragmented facility access.** Community access to schools and university facilities is inconsistent and can depend on staffing, schedules and institutional priorities. • **Aging infrastructure.** Facilities such as the pool, arena, turf and track require investment for infrastructure and accessibility upgrades. • **No central platform for booking and availability.** Residents and organizations find it hard to see what programs and spaces are available and how to access them. • **Volunteer and workforce pressures.** Volunteer burnout, retirements, staffing shortages and recruitment challenges threaten service capacity. • **Lack of specific spaces.** Emerging preferences and demographic change create needs such as accessible space for seniors and storage for arts organizations.

TABLE 16 (CONTINUED) — STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW SWOT ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• **Digital platforms.** New and emerging booking platforms could be improved to include all facilities and their availability, and to stay reliable during periods of high registration demand. • **Underused or shared spaces.** Some existing spaces may have additional capacity, particularly outside peak school, university or program hours. • **Connection to broader community priorities.** Recreation intersects with health, active living, transportation, childcare, newcomer settlement and community wellbeing, so it can support multiple municipal objectives. • **External funding opportunities.** Provincial grants and funding programs can support recreation infrastructure, accessibility, energy efficiency, climate initiatives and programming.	• **Transportation and geographic barriers.** Rural distance and limited transportation make participation more difficult for some residents. • **Growing demand may outpace capacity.** Demand for recreation is increasing while budgets and staffing remain the same. • **Limited capital resources.** Several simultaneous infrastructure and strategic priorities may constrain capital investment in recreation. • **High operating costs.** Aging pools, arenas, turf fields and tracks require capital investment, creating risks if upgrades are delayed. • **Volunteer and workforce shortages.** Burnout, retirements, recruitment challenges and shortages of instructors and recreation staff could limit program delivery.

5.13 What the Community is Asking For

TABLE 17

Residents and community organizations, side by side

Theme	Residents said	Community organizations said
Top priority	71.7% of respondents would like to see an indoor multi-use complex	Capital funding was the most commonly identified form of municipal support by responding organizations, selected by 63.6% of community organizations, followed by operating funding (47.7%) and affordable space (45.5%).
Leading barrier	Timing of programs, 20.9%	47.7% of respondents reported not enough space as a barrier to program delivery and expansion.
Season of greatest need	Winter was identified by respondents (72%) as a time where recreation was harder to access.	Winter 72.7%, Fall 65.9%, Spring 61.4%
Most used assets	Playgrounds and parks were identified as the most used assets by 63.1% of respondents.	Local community centres, 29.5%

TABLE 17

Residents and community organizations, side by side

Theme	Residents said	Community organizations said
Equity concern	Cost and distance raised throughout	Low-income households were most often identified as needing better access to recreation by 71.1% of responding community organizations
What works now	62.9% say facilities meet needs	50% cite cleanliness, location and quality; 43.2% cite staff support

The same six themes, as residents described them and as community organizations described them. Where the two columns agree the finding is well supported; where they diverge each side is measuring a different part of the problem.

Source: ASBB Antigonish Community Group and Public Recreation Needs Assessment Surveys.

5.14 Place and Age

PLACE: TOWN AND COUNTY

About two-thirds of residents who responded live in the County, split between the rural area (36.2%) and the fringe around the Town (30.3%). 29.1% live in the Town. The aggregate results are therefore weighted towards rural experience. Transport and distributed programming matter more for the County than any single building would, while the Town case rests more on timing, cost and the condition of the stock it already has.

KEY POINT

About two-thirds of residents who responded live in the County, split between the rural area (36.2%) and the fringe around the Town (30.3%).

AGE: WHAT EACH GROUP ASKS FOR

Requests differ sharply by age. Swimming leads for infants, children and teenagers. Climbing and outdoor adventure lead for ages 13 to 18, fitness for ages 19 to 39, and walking for ages 40 to 64 and 65 and over. Walking or swimming is the leading request in five of the six age bands, and neither requires a new complex. Walking needs maintained, accessible and connected routes with an indoor option in winter. Swimming needs secured, affordable and well-timed access to the pool that already exists.

5.13 SWOT Analysis

Strengths and weaknesses describe the recreation system as it operates today. Opportunities and threats describe external conditions over the next five to ten years.

TABLE 18

Public engagement SWOT — internal factors

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Residents are highly active. 89.9% take part weekly, 81.2% outdoors	• Only 11.4% of community organizations find the infrastructure fully suitable. 43.2% report significant limitations
• Demand is growing. 63.6% of community organizations report growth, none report decline	• 70.5% cannot run programs they want to run. Capacity, not demand, is the constraint
• Municipal service delivery rates well. 50% cite cleanliness, location and quality; 43.2% staff support	• No security of tenure. 59.1% use space they neither own nor lease
• 62.9% of residents say facilities meet their needs very well or mostly	• 38.6% of community organizations use no municipal facility, so asset-based policy does not reach them
• Strong willingness to collaborate. 86.3% are open or possibly open to sharing space	• Fragile delivery base. 56.8% fully volunteer-run, only 34.1% can retain enough volunteers
• 81.8% of community organizations already serve underserved groups	• Cost excludes participants and community organizations alike. Low-income access named by 70.5%
• Good existing reach into ages 15 to 18, at 75.0%	• Official channels reach few residents. Website 24.5%, Playfinder 1.0%
	• Near-total reliance on cars. 95.3% drive, under 2.5% use taxi or Dial-a-Ride
	• No centralized calendar, booking system or coordinated capital plan

TABLE 19

Public engagement SWOT — external factors

Opportunities	Threats
• Shared-use agreements with SRCE, StFX and other partners could add winter capacity without building	• Single points of failure. The StFX pool closure left the community without aquatics for over a year
• Schools sit empty on snow days, holidays and through the summer. The barrier is regulation, not capacity	• Informal access can be withdrawn without notice, giving sudden rather than gradual service loss
• A centralized calendar and booking system is low cost and directly requested	• Volunteer burnout and an aging base threaten community organizations before facilities fail
• A uniform school rental and custodial fee schedule would release time groups have offered to pay for	• Insurance and certification costs are rising and are already prohibitive for some groups
• School buses already make the school-to-facility trip, so a transport pilot would be inexpensive	• The external grant environment is tightening
• Low-cost outdoor assets such as pickleball courts give up to nine months of use a year	• 69.6% of residents already travel out of the region for recreation
• Timing is the leading resident barrier at 20.9%, so rescheduling serves more people at the same cost	• Youth, newcomer and Indigenous views are underrepresented, so their needs risk being overlooked

Source: ASBB Public Survey and ASBB Community Organization Survey.









6

SECTION 6

Existing Recreation System

6.1 Facility Inventory

6.2 Organizations

6.3 Site Assessments

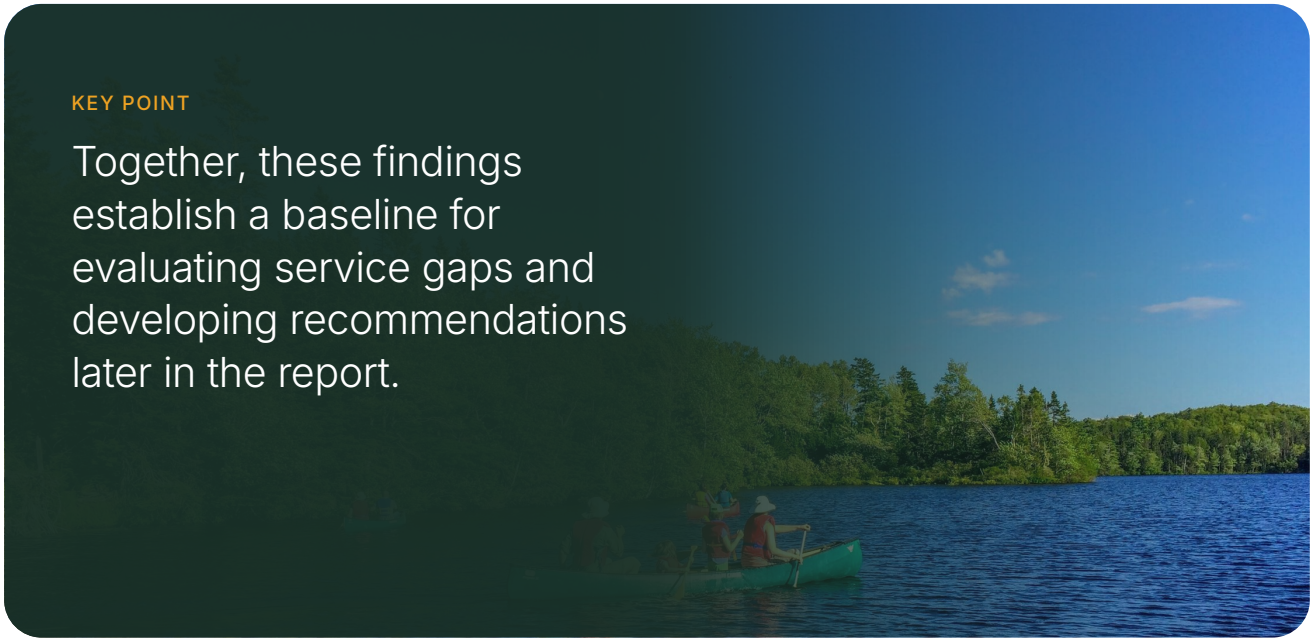


Understanding the existing recreation system is the foundation for identifying future needs and priorities. Before considering new facilities, programs, or investments, it is important to understand what recreation assets and services already exist, how they are distributed across the Town and County of Antigonish, and how well they meet current community needs.



The existing recreation system extends well beyond municipally owned facilities. It includes parks, trails, sports fields, community centres, schools, volunteer organizations, cultural groups, and outdoor recreation assets that collectively provide recreation opportunities throughout the region. Many of these assets are owned or operated through partnerships between municipalities, schools, community organizations, and other agencies.

This section provides an inventory of existing recreation facilities and organizations, summarizes the findings of facility site assessments completed by EastPoint Engineering, and identifies common themes related to facility condition, accessibility, maintenance, and future investment needs. Together, these findings establish a baseline for evaluating service gaps and developing recommendations later in the report.



6.1 Facility Inventory

The recreation system includes a range of indoor and outdoor facilities that support organized sport, informal recreation, community events, and active living. Facilities are owned and managed by the Town, the County, community organizations, schools and other partners. While many of the region's major municipally owned recreation assets are concentrated within the Town, they serve residents from across both municipalities.

TABLE 20

Facility inventory

Facility type	Facility name	Facility address	Ownership
Ice surface	Antigonish Arena	30 James Street, Antigonish	Town and County of Antigonish
Ballfield	Sandlot Ball Field (Regional High School)	105 Braemore Ave — Dr. JH Gillis	Town of Antigonish
Ballfield	Softball Field (Regional High School)	105 Braemore Ave — Dr. JH Gillis	Town of Antigonish
Ballfield	Credit Union Field (Regional High School)	105 Braemore Ave — Dr. JH Gillis	Town of Antigonish
Soccer field	Columbus Field Soccer Pitch and Track	121 Main St, Antigonish	Town of Antigonish
Pitch	Scotiabank Mini-Pitch	104 Appleseed Drive, Antigonish	Municipality of the County of Antigonish
Tennis court	Tennis Court	121 Main Street, Antigonish	Town of Antigonish
Volleyball court	Outdoor Volleyball Court (Dr. JH Gillis)	105 Braemore Ave, Antigonish	Town of Antigonish
Park	Chisholm Park	370 Main St, Antigonish	Town of Antigonish
Park	Columbus Field Off-Leash Park	121 Main St, Antigonish	Town of Antigonish
Park	Vincent J. MacDonald Memorial Participark/Arbor Drive Park	80 Arbour Dr, Antigonish	Town of Antigonish
Park	Columbus Field Playground	121 Main St, Antigonish	Town of Antigonish
Playground	Columbus Field	121 Main St, Antigonish	Town of Antigonish
Water park	Columbus Field	122 Main St, Antigonish	Town of Antigonish
Walking track	Columbus Field	123 Main St, Antigonish	Town of Antigonish

TABLE 20

Facility inventory

Facility type	Facility name	Facility address	Ownership
Playground	Playground	Whidden Street / Ross Street	Town of Antigonish
Trail	Trail	Chisholm Street / Dolorosa	Town of Antigonish
Trail	Antigonish Landing Trail	41 Adam Street	Town of Antigonish
Trail	Active Transportation Trail	One phase of four complete (West Street)	Town of Antigonish
Trail	Harbour Hill's Path	One phase of Trunk 4 multi-use path complete	County of Antigonish

Source: Data requested by ASBB and provided by MCOA/TOA, and EastPoint Engineering site assessment data.

FIGURE 28

High-level GIS mapping of the municipal and Town assets for Antigonish



COMMUNITY-LED RECREATION

Community-owned and volunteer-led recreation facilities

Many recreation services in the County have grown from the work of dedicated volunteers rather than being directly owned or operated by the Municipality. This volunteer-led model has helped build strong communities and continues to provide real value to residents.

Antigonish residents benefit significantly from recreation facilities that are owned and operated by volunteer-led organizations. These community assets include:

- Keppoch Mountain Outdoor Recreation Facility
- 3 outdoor rinks
- 1 curling club
- 7 ballfields
- Outdoor pickleball courts
- 4 community playgrounds
- Community trails
- Community halls and firehalls which house recreation services
- Community fitness centres and court surfaces housed within many community centres

6.2 Organizations

Approximately 110 non-profit community organizations focus on recreation in Antigonish. Categories include:

- Outdoor recreation, trails and adventure
- Team sports and field sports
- Ice sports and aquatic recreation
- Individual sports, fitness and martial arts
- Equestrian recreation
- Dance, performing arts and music
- Arts, culture and heritage
- Community recreation and social groups

- Recreation for older adults
- Inclusive, accessible and social-support recreation
- Youth development and organized youth recreation
- Libraries, education and institutional recreation and culture
- Recreation facilities, municipal and community infrastructure, and emergency and community assets
- Tourism, accommodation and recreation-related businesses

6.3 Site Assessments

The site assessments conducted by EastPoint Engineering assessed the condition of the recreation facilities and sites across Antigonish. The detailed report accompanies this assessment.

The site assessments were conducted on sites identified by the Town and County, and were specially done on sites owned by the Town or County. The site assessments identified several common themes across Antigonish's recreation facilities that should guide future capital investment and maintenance priorities. Key themes include:

KEY POINT

The site assessments identified several common themes across Antigonish's recreation facilities that should guide future capital investment and maintenance priorities.

- **Accessibility and inclusion:** improve accessible pathways, parking, washrooms, spectator areas, and connections throughout recreation sites.
- **Pedestrian safety:** enhance the separation of pedestrians and vehicles through improved sidewalks, crossings, pavement markings, and circulation routes.
- **Facility maintenance and renewal:** address aging infrastructure, lighting, fencing, drainage issues, and other lifecycle maintenance needs.
- **Pathway and site upgrades:** replace high-use gravel pathways with accessible surfaces and improve site connectivity.
- **Support amenities:** expand washrooms, seating, picnic areas, and other visitor amenities at major recreation sites.

- **Wayfinding and signage:** improve signage, park visibility, and navigation within larger recreation facilities and trail networks.
- **Strategic capital investment:** prioritize investments in high-use, multi-purpose facilities while evaluating whether major assets should be rehabilitated, expanded, or replaced based on long-term value.

These themes provide a framework for prioritizing future recreation investments and improving the safety, accessibility, and overall quality of the recreation system. A summary of the assessments follows.

TABLE 21

Site assessment summary — Dr. JH Gillis site

Site	Maintained by	Condition assessment	Recommendations
Credit Union Field	Town of Antigonish	Well-maintained single-use ball field in good condition; access is weak as the field is reached by a long gravel path with no adjacent accessible parking.	Re-grade gravel paths and add accessible pathways and adjacent parking. Add accessible outdoor washrooms. Add garbage receptacles.
Softball Field	Town of Antigonish	Overall good condition and amenities but constrained by poor accessibility.	Re-grade portions of the site to improve ponding issues. Add stairs or re-grade steep path between asphalt pathway and field gate. Add accessible outdoor washrooms.
Sandlot Ball Field	Town of Antigonish	Well-kept and relatively accessible field with moderate flexibility.	Portable washroom is not accessible for wheeled mobility devices. Add accessible parking stall close to the field.
Volleyball Court	Town of Antigonish	Single-use facility in good condition but lacking accessibility and supporting infrastructure.	Add fencing around the court. Add accessible pathways to the court. Improvements to contain sand at court perimeter.

TABLE 22

Site assessment summary — Columbus Field site

Site	Maintained by	Condition assessment	Recommendations
Off-Leash Park	Town of Antigonish	Functional open dog park in good condition with poor accessibility and moderate flexibility.	Replace garbage receptacle. Increase site maintenance. Re-grade gravel paths to improve accessibility.
Playground	Town of Antigonish	Family-oriented multi-use play area in fair condition, with accessibility and drainage issues.	Re-grade paths to improve accessibility. Relocate accessible picnic tables (currently situated on grass). Repair splash pad to improve drainage collection.

TABLE 22

Site assessment summary — Columbus Field site

Site	Maintained by	Condition assessment	Recommendations
Tennis Court	Town of Antigonish	Well-maintained racquet sport facility, with small opportunities for improved accessibility.	Pave entrance to court to create accessible pathway. Add stairs to second court entrance to support high slope.
Soccer Pitch and Track	Town of Antigonish	Large, versatile sports site in good condition but hindered by accessibility gaps and some maintenance needs.	Pave access pathways to improve accessibility. Repair fencing for baseball backstop. Upgrade running track to more durable, long-term surface material. Maintain and address seasonal flooding at the field. Repair lighting near gravel parking area.

TABLE 23

Site assessment summary — trails

Site	Maintained by	Condition assessment	Recommendations
Antigonish Landing Trail	Majority owned by the Province; Town of Antigonish and Municipality of the County of Antigonish own and maintain entrances	Good multi-use trail in generally good condition, but gravel surfacing, ponding, limited rest opportunities, and lack of accessible parking or paved sections limit inclusive use.	Add more benches for users requiring rest. Repair ponded areas. Pave entrances if opportunity arises.

Source: EastPoint Engineering site assessments.

KEY THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

TABLE 24

Key themes and recommendations

Area of focus	Recommendation
Accessibility and inclusion	Develop a site-wide accessibility improvement program focused on hard-surfaced routes, accessible parking and drop-off connections, washroom routes, spectator areas, court and field entrances, and picnic table sites.
Pedestrian safety and circulation	At sites with vehicle and pedestrian overlap, separate pedestrian routes from vehicular areas using sidewalks, curb cuts, pavement markings, bollards, and clearer, accessible paths of travel.
Drainage and grading	Drainage corrections at Columbus Field Playground splash pad, JH Gillis Softball Field, Columbus Field and track, and ponded areas on Antigonish Landing Trail (recognizing limitations of the Antigonish Landing Trail given it is a protected area that is primarily owned and maintained by the Province).
Pathway upgrades	Convert high-use gravel and crusher-dust access routes to paved or otherwise accessible surfaces where feasible, including at Columbus Field, Chisholm Park, Vincent J. MacDonald Memorial Park, Antigonish Landing Trail, and JH Gillis fields.

TABLE 24

Key themes and recommendations

Area of focus	Recommendation
Washrooms and support amenities	Consider outdoor washrooms where missing at major field complexes, particularly JH Gillis fields and the Scotiabank Mini-Pitch future washroom area. Confirm that washrooms identified as accessible have continuous accessible routes.
Lighting repair and replacement	Investigate non-functioning lights at Columbus Field and plan for lifecycle replacement of arena lighting noted as nearing end of service life.
Minor asset repairs	Repair missing backstop fencing at Columbus Field, replace or repair damaged garbage receptacles, repaint and update Chisholm Park bandstand, and address aging wood shingles.
Signage and wayfinding	Improve street visibility and signage at Vincent J. MacDonald Memorial Park, trailhead signage at Beaver Mountain Park, and wayfinding for larger multi-use parks and trail systems.

TABLE 23A

Site assessment summary — parks

Site	Maintained by	Condition assessment	Recommendations
Chisholm Park	Town of Antigonish	Small multi-use community park in fair condition. Gravel paths, accessible picnic tables on grass and an aging bandstand limit use.	Pave key pathways. Relocate accessible picnic tables onto hard surfaces. Repair and repaint the bandstand, including its aging wood shingles.
Vincent J. MacDonald Memorial Park	Town of Antigonish	Playground, community gardens and trails in good condition, but gravel trails are not accessible and the park is hidden from surrounding streets.	Improve signage and visibility from the street and parking. Upgrade pathways to paved accessible surfaces.
Beaver Mountain Park	Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources	Well-maintained park with paved, gravel and natural trails. Accessibility is better than at most sites, with some minor gaps.	Add trailhead signage. Extend accessible routes to the outdoor washrooms. Delineate parking. Add garbage receptacles.

TABLE 23B

Site assessment summary — facilities and outdoor recreation

Site	Maintained by	Condition assessment	Recommendations
Scotiabank Mini Pitch	Municipality of the County of Antigonish	High-quality, accessible multi-sport court in good condition, with no significant deficiencies.	No immediate upgrades needed. Support the planned second mini pitch and the washroom facility planned beside the parking lot.
Antigonish Arena	Town and County of Antigonish	Valuable hockey facility in fair condition. Pedestrians share vehicle areas, accessible routes are narrow, and major components are near end of service life.	Build a sidewalk separating pedestrians from vehicles. Widen ramps and accessible routes. Plan for Zamboni and lighting replacement.
Keppoch Mountain	Community group; County owned	Versatile, well-maintained outdoor recreation destination with good signage. Minor accessibility gaps at washrooms, picnic areas and trails.	Extend paved connections to washrooms and picnic tables. Improve accessible trail surfaces where feasible.

Source: EastPoint Engineering site assessments.

7

SECTION 7

7.1 How Facilities Are Used

7.2 Booking Trends

7.3 What Gets in the Way

Participation and Trends



To understand how recreation facilities are really used, booking records of known facilities were examined. Two sets of records were available. The Town's records cover outdoor spaces for one season, March to November 2026, booked prior to August 2026, which marks the switch of the Town's booking system to Playfinder. It should be noted the data collected is for Sports bookings only, the data does not capture the hours used for special events on Town owned facilities. The County of Antigonish records cover indoor spaces for two full years, 2024 and 2025. They are reported separately because they cover different spaces, different seasons, and different lengths of time.



7.1 How Facilities Are Used

TOWN OF ANTIGONISH — OUTDOOR SPACES

TABLE 25

Town of Antigonish outdoor space bookings, March to November 2026[5][6]

Space	Hours booked	Youth and club sports	School teams[7]	Programs for people with disabilities	Community and cultural groups	Open time for anyone
Sandlot ball field	648	64%	9%	23%	2%	2%
Regional Softball Diamond #2	629	85%	12%	3%	none	none
Regional Baseball Diamond #3	263	98%	2%	none	none	none

[5] Playfinder has only been used by Antigonish for one season to date, and has been changing rapidly since the data upload, and this table must be read in context of that.

[6] Booking For Fall: it might seem as though there is little utilization but these bookings were not out when this data was collected and therefore haven't been booked yet.

[7] It should be noted that most schools in Antigonish don't use Playfinder, it is only used by 3 schools to book facilities. Therefore, a lot of their usage data is not tracked, reflected and captured here.

TABLE 25

Town of Antigonish outdoor space bookings, March to November 2026

Space	Hours booked	Youth and club sports	School teams[7]	Programs for people with disabilities	Community and cultural groups	Open time for anyone
Columbus Field soccer pitch	303	none	none	4%	96%	none
Beach volleyball courts	133	23%	75%	none	2%	none
Chisholm Park[8]	15	none	none	none	100%	none
Columbus Field track	2.5	none	none	none	100%	none

Source: Town of Antigonish outdoor facility booking records, March to November 2026, as reported in the Antigonish Parks and Recreation Facilities Assessment Report, 31 July 2026. Figures are approximate and may be affected by overlapping, repeated, cancelled or incomplete records.

The table shows how the Town of Antigonish's outdoor recreation spaces were booked between March and November 2026. The data indicate that most outdoor facilities are used for organized activities, with youth sports accounting for the majority of bookings at the ballfields. School teams also make regular use of the Regional High School facilities, while the Columbus Field soccer pitch is used primarily for community events and cultural activities rather than organized sport. The beach volleyball courts are used mostly by school groups.

KEY POINT

The data indicate that most outdoor facilities are used for organized activities, with youth sports accounting for the majority of bookings at the ballfields.

The booking records also show that very little scheduled time is set aside for open public use. However, this does not mean these spaces are unavailable to residents, these hours are not tracked in the same manner. If the fields are open and not booked members of the community can use any space for free unorganized play. Parks, trails, tracks, and other outdoor facilities are often used informally without a reservation, and those activities are not reflected in the booking data. Overall, the results show that the Town's outdoor recreation facilities are well

[8] Although this data record thats Chisholm Park has low utilization rates, Chisholm Park is a type of space that doesn't need to be formally booked. These nuances aren't fully captured.

used and play an important role in supporting organized recreation while continuing to provide opportunities for informal community use.

WHAT HAPPENS AT EACH TIME OF DAY

Throughout this report, the day is divided into the time bands below. The Town records give exact booking times. The County records label bookings only as morning, afternoon or evening, so the standard bands shown here are used.

TABLE 26

Time bands used in this report

Time band	Hours used in this report
Early morning	Before 9:00 a.m.
Daytime	9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
After school	3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Early evening	5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
Prime evening	7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.
Morning (County records)	Before 12:00 noon
Afternoon (County records)	12:00 noon to 5:00 p.m.
Evening (County records)	After 5:00 p.m.

Source: Time bands set for this report. The County booking records use three labels — morning, afternoon and evening — without stating exact hours.

TABLE 27

Details of each time band

Time slot	Town — outdoor spaces	County — indoor spaces
Early morning	Courts open at 7:00 a.m. Tournament play can start as early as 6:00 a.m.	Youth sports book ice. In summer, recreation staff book school gyms.
Daytime	School teams during the school year. Large multi-day events in summer. Nothing regular for adults or community groups.	Youth sports book ice. School gyms are mostly not available to community groups during school hours.
After school	Very little recorded use.	Youth sports begin on ice and in gyms.
Early evening	Youth and club sport practices begin. One introductory program runs 5:00 to 7:00 on Mondays.	Community and cultural groups begin. Programs for people with disabilities run in this window.

TABLE 27

Details of each time band

Time slot	Town — outdoor spaces	County — indoor spaces
Prime evening	The busiest time. Games at the busiest ball field run until 9:30 or 10:00. Courts close at 9:00.	The busiest time. Community groups, adult leagues, university teams and youth sports all book here.
Weekends	Games, doubleheaders and tournaments. One tournament ran 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. for three days.	Games and tournaments, mostly on ice.

Source: Town and County booking records. Town times are taken from recorded booking times. The County records label bookings only as morning, afternoon or evening and do not give exact hours, so County times are approximate.

The booking records show that recreation demand varies throughout the day and follows predictable patterns based on the types of users and facilities. During the daytime, recreation spaces are used primarily by school groups and organized events. Outdoor facilities are often occupied by school teams during the academic year, while larger community events and tournaments make use of these spaces during the summer months. County indoor facilities are also heavily used by youth sports, while school gyms have limited availability for community use during school hours.

Demand increases significantly after school and into the evening. Youth sport practices begin in the late afternoon, followed by community organizations, adult leagues, and cultural groups in the early evening. Prime evening hours (7:00–10:00 p.m.) are the busiest period across both municipalities, with high demand for fields, arenas, gyms, and community spaces. Weekends are also heavily booked for games, tournaments, and special events, with some facilities in use from early morning until late evening. Overall, the booking data indicate that recreation facilities experience the greatest demand during evenings and weekends, when most residents are available to participate, while daytime use is largely driven by schools and organized programming.

WHO BOOKS AT EACH TIME OF DAY — COUNTY

The ratings below use the County records, which sort each booking into a morning, afternoon or evening band. Because the records cover 24 months, how often each type of user books in each band can be rated by counting the months they appear in it.

TABLE 28

Rating key

Rating	What it means
A lot	Books in this band in almost every month the facility is open — about 20 or more of the 24 months
Often	Books in this band in most months — about 12 to 19 of the 24 months
Sometimes	Books in this band in some months — about 4 to 11 of the 24 months
Rarely	Books in this band in only a few months — fewer than 4 of the 24 months

TABLE 28

Rating key

Rating	What it means
Never	Does not appear in this band anywhere in the records

Source: Rating scale set for this report. Ratings were assigned by reviewing which months each type of user appears in each band, and should be confirmed by counting from the original booking file.

TABLE 29

Booking records by user type and time band, 2024–2025

Type of user	Morning (before 12:00)	Afternoon (12:00–5:00)	Evening (after 5:00)	Where they book
Youth and club sports	A lot	A lot	A lot	Ice rinks and school gyms
University teams	Sometimes	Sometimes	Often	Ice rinks
Adult leagues	Never	Sometimes	Often	Ice rinks
Girls' and women's sports teams	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Ice rinks
Community and cultural groups	Rarely	Sometimes	Almost always	School gyms and meeting rooms
Programs for people with disabilities	Never	Never	Often	School gym
Town and County recreation staff	Often	Sometimes	Sometimes	Arena and school gyms
Private bookings	Sometimes	Sometimes	Often	School rooms and ice rinks

Source: Municipality of the County of Antigonish indoor facility booking records, 2024 and 2025. Ratings describe how often each type of user appears in each period; exact hours require the original booking file.

The County's indoor facility booking records provide insight into when different user groups access recreation spaces. Youth and club sports are the most consistent users, booking facilities throughout the morning, afternoon, and evening in nearly every month of the year. University teams and adult leagues primarily use facilities during the evening, while community and cultural groups also rely heavily on evening time slots. Programs for people with disabilities are offered almost exclusively in the evening, and private rentals are most common after 5:00 p.m. Overall, the data show that evening is the busiest period for indoor recreation facilities, with demand from organized sports, community organizations, and private users competing for the same limited time.

7.2 Booking Trends

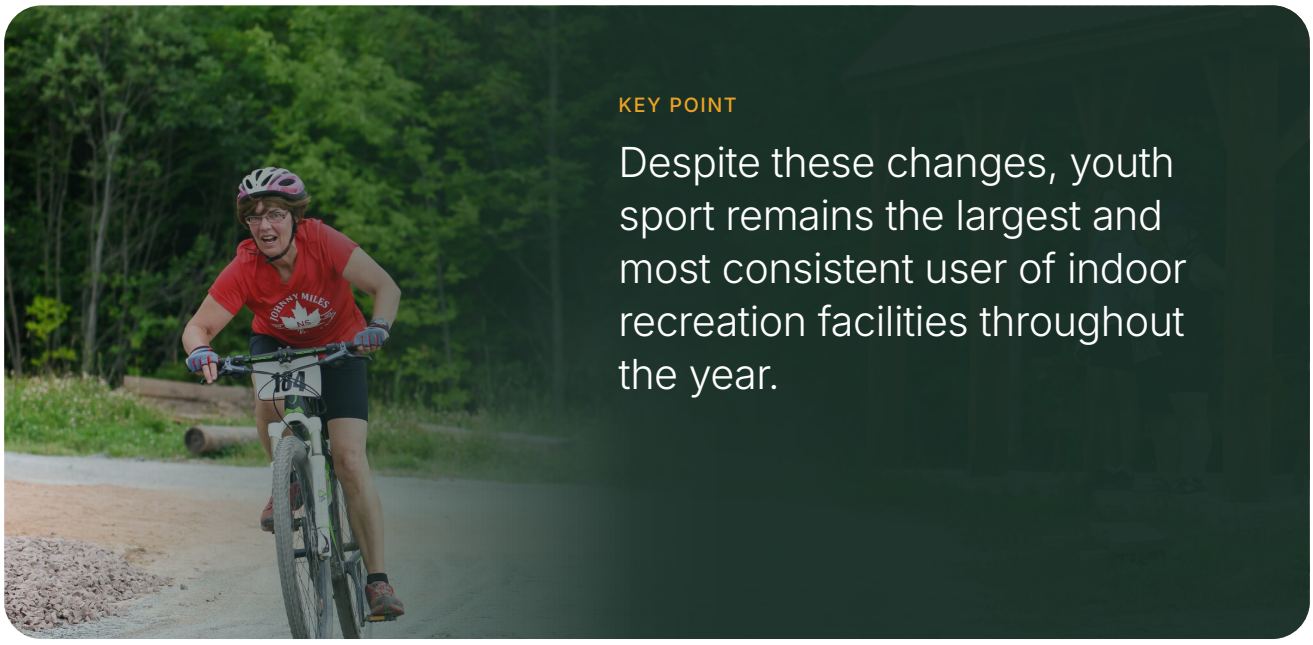
The Town and County booking records provide different insights into recreation trends. The Town's records cover a single recreation season and show how facilities are used throughout the year, while the County's records span two years and make it possible to identify changes over time.

TOWN OF ANTIGONISH

The Town's outdoor facilities experience their highest levels of use during the spring and summer months. Ballfields are busiest between May and August, while the beach volleyball courts are used almost exclusively during July and August. Use declines steadily through the fall as seasonal sports conclude. A relatively small number of organized sport groups account for most bookings throughout the season, while large community events occasionally occupy facilities such as the Columbus Field soccer pitch for several consecutive days. Because only one season of booking data was available, it is not possible to determine with the data whether facility use is increasing or decreasing over time. However, through anecdotal discussions with staff and community organizations the use of the Dr. JH Gillis Regional Fields has been steadily increasing over the past few years, especially at the Sandlot Baseball Field and the Credit Union Ballfield.

MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF ANTIGONISH

The County's two years of booking records reveal several emerging trends. Pickleball has become a growing activity, with new adult and senior groups beginning to book school gym space in 2025. Additional school facilities also entered the booking system, increasing available recreation space. There has been modest growth in girls' and women's sport, expanded summer recreation programming, and an increase in private facility rentals. Despite these changes, youth sport remains the largest and most consistent user of indoor recreation facilities throughout the year.



OVERALL TRENDS

Several patterns are consistent across both municipalities. Evening remains the busiest period for recreation facilities, with the greatest demand occurring after regular work and school hours. Organized youth and community sport continue to dominate facility bookings, while opportunities for casual, drop-in recreation are limited within the formal booking schedules. Community and cultural organizations generally access facilities outside the highest-demand sport times. Racquet sports, particularly pickleball, represent one of the few activities showing clear growth. Finally, the booking data likely underestimate overall recreation use, as informal recreation, school-day activities, and casual visits are generally not captured in the booking systems.

TABLE 30

Comparison of TOA and MCOA booking records

	Town — outdoor	County — indoor
Busiest season	May to August	Fall and winter
Quietest season	Late fall	July and August — almost no bookings[9]
Busiest time of day	Weekday evening	Weekday evening
Who books the most	Youth and club sports	Youth and club sports
Where community groups fit	On the spaces sports teams do not use	In school gyms, almost always in the evening
Open or drop-in time	2% at one field	No open or drop in times available[10]
Change over time	Cannot be measured — one season only	Measurable — two years of records

Although the Town and County manage different types of recreation facilities, their booking patterns are very similar. Youth and club sports are the primary users in both systems, and weekday evenings are consistently the busiest time for recreation. The main difference is seasonal demand: the Town's outdoor facilities are busiest during the spring and summer months, while the County's indoor facilities experience their highest use during the fall and winter. Community groups generally use facilities outside the highest-demand sport spaces or times, and there is very little scheduled time available for informal or drop-in recreation. Because the County has two years of electronic booking records, it is also possible to identify changes in demand over time, whereas the Town's single season of data provides only a snapshot of current facility use.

7.3 What Gets in the Way

The table below highlights the key challenges identified through the Town and County booking records. The results show that recreation demand is heavily concentrated during weekday evenings, leaving limited

[9] Playfinder utilization rates state that July & August hardly see bookings, but this is because access to schools in the summertime is difficult.
[10] Most individuals didn't book in formal drop-in sessions, so this was not recorded on playfinder.

availability for new users, while daytime and after-school periods show little booked use (schools hold their own gyms after school, and that use is not recorded). The data also show few casual or drop-in options, heavy reliance on organized sport for access, seasonal limits on indoor and outdoor space, and gaps in the records that make it hard to see how some facilities are used and whether access is shared equitably.

TABLE 31

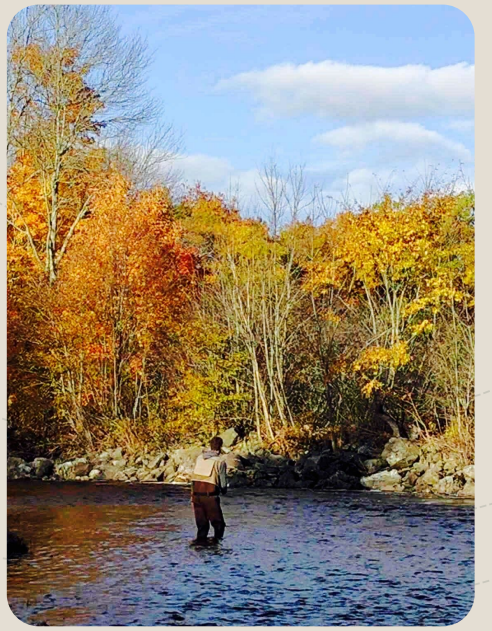
Key challenges identified in the booking records

The problem	What the bookings show	Who it affects
Evening is the only time most groups can get, and it is full	In the County, community groups, disability programs, adult leagues and university teams all book at night. In the Town, youth sports hold weekday evenings until 9:30 or 10:00.	Any group that cannot book during the day — which is nearly every community group
There is space during the day, but nothing is running in it	Town daytime use is for school teams and summer events only. In the County, only youth sports and recreation staff book mornings.	Adults, seniors, shift workers, and anyone who cannot come out at night
After-school hours show little booked use	Between about 3:00 and 5:00,[11] few bookings are recorded, but school gyms are reserved for school activities and recent school bookings suggest actual use is higher.[12]	Children and teens looking for something to do straight after school
There is almost nowhere to just show up and play	Open time is 2% at one Town field and nowhere else.[13] The County records have no drop-in or open category at all.	People who want to play casually without joining a team or paying for a season
Individuals mostly need to join a team to get access	Youth and club sports book 64% to 98% of the time at each Town ball field, and book at every time of day in the County.	People who are not part of a sports club, and new or small groups trying to get started
Big events take over a space for weeks	Two events used the soccer pitch for eleven days and ten days in a row, taking 96% of that field's yearly hours.[14]	Anyone who normally uses that field, who is shut out twice during the best weather
Indoor space closes for the two busiest outdoor months	County school bookings are close to zero in July and August — the same months when Town outdoor spaces are hardest to get.	Anyone who needs indoor space in summer, or a backup when outdoor space is full
Some spaces cannot be checked at all	Two Town facilities have no booking records. Court time is predetermined with a schedule for Pickleball and tennis and posted on the facility for users to abide by, not as actual bookings.	Fair sharing of space — you cannot share out or defend what you do not measure.

Source: Analysis of the Town and County booking records shown above. Not based on survey responses.

[11] This time is generally reserved (for 3/7 schools) for school activities and it is not open to the general public. Community use time is generally after this period.
[12] This data is reported as such because the dataset was incomplete and was collected only as of March. Most school sports take place from September to November, and recent bookings from school sports teams suggest that current after-school use is higher than reflected in the data.
[13] Approximately 2% of available field time is currently booked. Unbooked times remain available for public use, including informal and free play.
[14] It should be noted that this doesn't accurately capture the Columbus Field, as it is used all the time for open, free and informal play. It is only booked for 4 weeks out of the summer months. During the rest of the time, it is open and available for free play.


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SECTION 8

8 Needs Assessment

8.1 Service Levels
8.2 Equity and Inclusion
8.3 Facility Needs
8.4 Program and Service Needs
8.5 System Requirements
8.6 Summary of Needs

This section brings together the findings from the resident and organization surveys, facility condition assessments, booking records, mapping analysis, and community engagement to identify current and future recreation needs. Together, these sources provide a comprehensive picture of how the recreation system is performing, who it serves well, and where gaps remain.



The analysis shows that recreation demand will continue to grow as both the Town and County of Antigonish experience population growth. While the Town is growing more quickly, the County's dispersed rural population presents different challenges for recreation service delivery. Demographic trends indicate that future planning should focus on four priority groups: older adults and seniors, children under five, people with disabilities, and County residents who face transportation and access barriers. In contrast, organized youth sport is already well supported and accounts for the majority of booked recreation time across both municipalities.

KEY POINT

Demographic trends indicate that future planning should focus on four priority groups: older adults and seniors, children under five, people with disabilities, and County residents who face transportation and access barriers.

Several trends will shape recreation planning over the next decade. Participation in recreation is increasing, organizations report growing membership and demand for additional programming, and racquet sports such as pickleball continue to expand. Residents consistently identified swimming, walking, winter recreation, and affordable, accessible programming as priorities, while many continue to travel outside Antigonish to access programs and facilities that are unavailable locally. At the same time, an aging population, declining volunteer capacity, and increasing pressure on indoor recreation space during the winter months present ongoing challenges. Overall, the findings suggest that many of the community's recreation needs can be addressed

through better use of existing facilities, expanded programming, improved accessibility, and stronger partnerships, rather than through major new facility development alone.

8.1 Service Levels

Service levels are evaluated below across four dimensions: quantity, quality, accessibility and geographic distribution.

TABLE 32

Service levels across four dimensions

Dimension	Current position
Quantity	15 recreation sites assessed, plus ice, school gymnasiums and community rooms across eight County sites. Town outdoor bookings range from 648 hours at the busiest field to 2.5 hours at the track.[15] Capacity is not evenly used: two Town facilities were booked on most available days while three were booked fewer than ten times in a season.
Quality	Health, safety and code compliance rated Good at all 15 sites, with no immediate high-risk issues identified anywhere. State of good repair rated Good at 12 of 15. But flexibility and multi-use potential rated Good at only 2 of 15, meaning assets are well maintained and hard to repurpose.
Accessibility	Rated Poor at 10 of 15 sites and Good at only 2. The recurring causes are consistent: gravel or crusher-dust pathways, no accessible parking nearby, and accessible routes that stop partway. This is the largest single deficiency in the portfolio.
Geographic distribution	Facilities are well distributed but organized in clusters rather than dispersed. Two hubs concentrate active recreation, a third node combines indoor and outdoor sport, passive parks sit near residential areas, and natural recreation areas are on the outskirts. Facilities are connected mainly by roadways and local sidewalks rather than an integrated active transportation network.

Source: Parks and Recreation Facilities Assessment Report, 31 July 2026, Appendix A — condition ratings for 15 sites. Town outdoor booking records, March to November 2026, and County indoor booking records, 2024 and 2025.

TABLE 33

Condition ratings across 15 assessed sites

Consideration	Good	Fair	Poor
Health, safety and code compliance	15	0	0
State of good repair	12	3	0
Functionality and layout	3	10	2
Flexibility and multi-use potential	2	10	3

[15] This refers to the track being booked specifically.

TABLE 33

Condition ratings across 15 assessed sites

Consideration	Good	Fair	Poor
Accessibility and inclusion	**2**	**3**	**10**

Source: Parks and Recreation Facilities Assessment Report, 31 July 2026, Appendix A — condition ratings for 15 sites.

The assessment indicates that Antigonish's recreation system provides a solid foundation but has several important gaps. Overall, recreation facilities are in good physical condition, with all sites meeting health and safety requirements and most in a good state of repair. Specifics of each facility's ratings can be found in the secondary report conducted by EastPoint Engineering.

However, many facilities have limited flexibility to support multiple activities, and accessibility is the most significant weakness. Ten of the 15 assessed sites were rated poor for accessibility due to barriers such as inaccessible pathways, limited accessible parking, and incomplete accessible routes.

The distribution of recreation facilities is generally appropriate, with major recreation hubs serving both municipalities, although access remains more challenging for rural residents. Facility use is also uneven, with some sites operating at or near capacity while others are underutilized. These findings suggest that future investment should focus less on replacing facilities that are in good condition and more on improving accessibility, increasing multi-use functionality, and making better use of existing recreation assets.

8.2 Equity and Inclusion

The table sets out who is underserved and, in each case, why.

TABLE 34

Who is underserved and why

Who is underserved	Evidence	Why
People with disabilities	Accessibility Poor at 10 of 15 sites; 21.4% of households affected; 56.8% of organizations name this group.	The asset is in good repair but the route to it is not. Condition and accessibility have been managed as separate things.
Low-income households	Named by 70.5% of organizations — the highest of any group; 40.9% of organizations limited by rental cost.	No fee or subsidy policy sets who pays what, so cost is set facility by facility.
Rural residents	62.9% live in the County; 95.3% of residents drive; no accessible public transport to facilities.	Provision is concentrated where density is highest, and nothing connects the rest of the County to it.

TABLE 34

Who is underserved and why

Who is underserved	Evidence	Why
Anyone unavailable in the evening	Community groups, adaptive programs, adult leagues and university teams all book evenings; daytime is used only by school sport and youth sport.	Allocation is not documented, so the pattern persists by habit rather than by decision.
Girls and women	Girls' and women's teams appear only occasionally in County ice records; 34.1% of organizations name this group.	Historical allocation carries forward each season; no equity criteria are applied when time is assigned.
Newcomers and cultural communities	Only 24.5% of residents say spaces are culturally safe outright; 18.2% of organizations consider cultural programming sufficient.	Programming and staffing do not reflect the communities being served, and outreach is not resourced.
Indigenous and Francophone residents	2.2% of respondents are Paqtnkek members; Acadian and Francophone facilities recur in County records.	Engagement has occurred but is not separately reported, so needs are not documented in a form that drives decisions.
Children under 5	Only 25.0% of organizations serve ages 0 to 4; no recurring early-years programming in either booking dataset.	A coverage gap: no provider has taken this band on, and no municipal programming fills it.
Casual and unaffiliated participants	Open time reaches 2% at one Town facility and has no category at all in the County.	The booking system only recognises organized users, so unaffiliated residents have no route in.

Source: Public survey (699 responses) and community organization survey (45 organizations), . Parks and Recreation Facilities Assessment Report, 31 July 2026. Town and County booking records.

The assessment identified several groups that face greater barriers to participating in recreation. People with disabilities experience the greatest challenges due to accessibility barriers at many recreation sites, while low-income households are affected by the cost of programs and facility rentals. Rural residents face transportation barriers because most recreation facilities are located in the Town and there is limited public transit. Access is also limited for residents who are unavailable during evenings, as most recreation programming and facility bookings occur after regular work and school hours. Additional gaps were identified for girls, newcomers, children under five, and residents seeking informal or drop-in recreation opportunities. These findings suggest that future recreation planning should focus not only on expanding facilities, but also on improving accessibility, affordability, equitable scheduling, culturally inclusive programming, transportation, and opportunities for casual recreation so that the system better serves all residents.

KEY POINT

Rural residents face transportation barriers because most recreation facilities are located in the Town and there is limited public transit.

8.3 Facility Needs

Facility needs are grouped below into renewal, optimization, expansion and replacement.

TABLE 35

Facility needs

Category	What is needed	Basis
Renewal Restore existing assets to standard	Continuous accessible routes and accessible parking; accessible outdoor washrooms at major field complexes; pedestrian and vehicle separation; drainage and grading corrections; restore non-functioning lighting; repair backstop fencing, receptacles and the bandstand; signage and wayfinding.	Site condition assessment; accessibility Poor at 10 of 15 sites and functionality Poor at two.
Optimization Get more from what exists	Program the under-used spaces — the track, the park, the introductory field, the soccer pitch outside event periods; release daytime and after-school hours; set a minimum of open and drop-in time; secure community access hours in school and university facilities; record bookings at every facility.	Booking records: several sites booked fewer than ten days a season while evenings are saturated; two facilities have no records at all.
Expansion Add where evidenced	Second mini pitch and adjacent washroom facility, both already prepared for on site; additional outdoor court capacity if the growth in racquet sport continues; no new indoor facility until feasibility work is complete.	Site assessment notes the pad and washroom area are prepared; racquet growth appears in both municipalities' records.
Replacement Assets at end of life	Arena Zamboni and lighting; running track surface; aging wood shingles; splash pad drainage system.	Identified in the site assessment as nearing or at end of service life.

The assessment also recommends optimizing the current recreation system by increasing use of underutilized facilities, expanding daytime and after-school programming, creating more opportunities for drop-in recreation, improving access to school and university facilities, and strengthening booking data by comparing year over year for the next 5 years.

Where additional infrastructure is needed, the evidence supports targeted investments such as a second mini-pitch, a washroom facility at the existing mini-pitch site, and potentially additional outdoor court space if demand for racquet sports continues to grow. Major new indoor recreation facilities are not recommended at this time, pending further feasibility work. Replacement priorities are limited to assets that are nearing the end of their service life, including arena equipment, track surfacing, lighting, and other aging infrastructure.

The facilities assessment recommends delivering these in five phases: near-term safety and operations first, then accessibility upgrades, then maintenance and lifecycle work, then improvements at multi-use sites, and finally strategic reinvestment decisions for aging or high-cost assets.

8.4 Program and Service Needs

Programs are grouped below by whether they are missing, oversubscribed or underperforming.

TABLE 36

Programming gaps and needs

Category	Service	Evidence
Missing	Early years (0–5) programming	Only 25.0% of organizations serve ages 0 to 4; no recurring provision in either booking dataset.
	Youth space that is not sport	Organizations report children outside organized sport have nowhere to go; no drop-in youth provision in the records.
	After-school programming, about 3:00 to 5:00 Daytime programming for adults and seniors	Very little booked use in the Town; County bookings only beginning in that window.[16] Walking is the top request for both older bands, but weekday daytime is booked only by school sport and municipal summer programs.
	Open and drop-in time	Reaches 2% at one Town facility; no category at all in the County records.
Oversubscribed	Weekday evening field and gym time	The busiest diamond booked on about 110 of 119 days, with play to 9:30 or 10:00 p.m.; four user types compete for County evenings.
	Aquatic access	Most requested activity across three age bands; a single institutionally owned pool, closed for over a year during renovation.
	Winter indoor space	72% of residents and 72.7% of organizations want more, in the season when school access is most constrained.

[16] In the case of Town utilization rates, these need to be considered in the context of the data obtained for Town and County usage, as not all data has been recorded due to the platform being new, and some facilities not needing to be formally booked.

TABLE 36

Programming gaps and needs

Category	Service	Evidence
Underperforming	Columbus Field track	2.5 booked hours in a season; no recurring running, walking or fitness programming. However, the track and surrounding outdoor spaces are primarily intended for open, unprogrammed use, which is not captured in booking data.
	Chisholm Park	The park is designed as an open public space and also accommodates special events, flag raisings, and community programs that may not be reflected in the booking records.
	Soccer pitch outside event periods	About 20 hours across the whole season once two multi-day events are excluded. The pitch is primarily maintained as an open, freely available space, with closures for special events limited to approximately four weeks per year.
	Racquet courts as recorded	Approximately 1,288 hours allocated as set-aside time. The predetermined schedule is used to balance access between pickleball groups and individual tennis players. As a result, the booking records do not provide a direct measure of demand or available capacity.

Source: Resident survey (699 responses) and community organization survey (45 organizations) Town and County booking records.

The assessment identified several gaps in recreation programming and service delivery. The greatest unmet needs include early childhood programming, non-sport youth spaces, after-school activities, daytime programs for adults and seniors, and opportunities for casual drop-in recreation. Demand also exceeds available capacity for weekday evening field and gym time, aquatic programming, and indoor recreation space during the winter months.

The review found that booking records show relatively limited programmed use at several facilities, although these figures do not capture all forms of public access, community programming, or special events. The Columbus Field track and soccer pitch are primarily intended for open, unprogrammed use, while Chisholm Park supports community activities that may not be reflected in booking records. These circumstances should be considered when interpreting booking data and making future facility investment decisions. Overall, the findings indicate that many recreation needs can be addressed through improved programming, scheduling, and use of existing facilities, alongside targeted investments where demand clearly exceeds current capacity.

8.5 System Requirements

The needs above depend on organizational, financial, data and partnership conditions that are not yet in place.

TABLE 37

System requirements

Category	Requirement	Why it is needed	Considerations
Organizational	A facility allocation policy with explicit equity criteria	One to three organizations hold 64% to 98% of time at each field, and community groups are confined to evenings. Allocation currently happens by habit and is undocumented.	
	A single point of contact for recreation	Organizations report difficulty knowing who to approach for space, funding and support.	The Town and County have separate administrative structures, staff, and decision-making processes. Establishing one shared contact would require agreement on roles, responsibilities, and how inquiries are managed across both municipalities.
	Volunteer, insurance and certification support	Volunteer capacity is the limiting factor on programming; insurance and certification costs are repeatedly reported as barriers.	
Financial	A fee policy with a defined subsidy pathway	Low-income households are the group most often identified as underserved, and rental cost limits 40.9% of organizations.	
	A community recreation grant program	Funding is the single largest barrier to organizations expanding, at 52.3%.	
	Recreation assets in the asset management plan, with a ten-year forecast	Lifecycle items are identified but not costed, and both municipalities already participate in the provincial asset management pilot.	

TABLE 37

System requirements

Category	Requirement	Why it is needed	Considerations
Data	One booking and information system covering every facility Baseline data and an evaluation framework	The municipal website reaches 24.5% of residents against 77.9% for social media, and two Town facilities have no booking records at all, as currently, not all Town facilities require or maintain formal booking records. 27.3% of organizations are unsure whether their participants have access needs; participation and equity outcomes are not tracked.	The Town and County may use different booking processes, software, and facility management practices. A joint approach could establish consistent information, booking procedures, and public-facing guidance across both jurisdictions without requiring a single administrative system. Where feasible, they could also explore a shared booking and information system, with agreement on costs, administration, data management, and access.
Partnership	Written agreements with facility owners	38.6% of organizations use no municipally owned facility and 59.1% work from space they neither own nor lease. Access rests on informal practice.	
	Transportation partnership for rural access	95.3% of residents drive and no accessible public transport connects to facilities.	
	Separate reporting of engagement with under-represented communities	Focus group, consultation, pop-up and youth session findings are not reported separately, so several equity needs rest on open comments alone.	

The assessment found that addressing recreation needs will require more than facility and program improvements; it will also require strengthening the systems that support recreation delivery. Because the Town and County are separate municipal entities, some priorities will can be addressed independently, while others present opportunities for coordinated or joint approaches. Key priorities include developing clear facility allocation and fee policies, establishing clear points of contact for recreation services, and providing greater support for volunteers and community organizations. Improved financial planning, including recreation grant programs and long-term asset management, will help ensure sustainable investment. The assessment also recommends a coordinated booking and information approach across both municipalities, with consistent public-facing information and processes where practical, rather than assuming a single administrative system. Improving data collection will help better measure participation and equity outcomes, while formal facility agreements and transportation partnerships could strengthen access across municipal boundaries.



KEY POINT

Key priorities include developing clear facility allocation and fee policies, establishing clear points of contact for recreation services, and providing greater support for volunteers and community organizations.

8.6 Summary of Needs

The table consolidates the assessment, showing how much confidence can be placed in each finding and what has to be in place before it can be met.

TABLE 38

Summary of needs

Need	Strength of evidence	What it depends on
Continuous accessible routes at municipal sites	Strong — Poor at 10 of 15 sites, supported by both surveys	Municipal capital program; no external dependency
Pedestrian separation where vehicles and people share space	Strong — site assessment, immediate action band	Municipal capital program
Accessible outdoor washrooms at busy field complexes	Strong — site assessment and organization reports	Municipal capital program
Drainage, lighting and minor repairs	Strong — recorded at named sites	Municipal operating and capital budgets
Replacement of end-of-life assets	Strong — identified in the site assessment	A ten-year cost forecast, which does not yet exist

TABLE 38

Summary of needs

Need	Strength of evidence	What it depends on
Secured year-round indoor access	Strong — highest recorded demand; County school sites close for two months	Written agreements with school and university facility owners
Aquatic access across all ages	Strong — top request in three age bands	Continued access to university pool time, which is dependent on availability of lifeguards (who are recruited by StFX); coordinated lifeguard and swim-instructor recruitment and training between the university and municipal partners
Daytime, after-school and drop-in provision	Strong — booking records show the gap directly	Secured space and an allocation policy that releases those hours
Early years and youth non-sport provision	Moderate — clear coverage gap, but demand figures are coded from write-in responses	Secured space, delivery partners and grant funding
Transportation to recreation	Strong — 95.3% drive, no accessible transit to facilities	Partnership with school transport or community transit
Additional or new indoor facilities	**Not established — booking records show unused capacity at several sites**[17]	Feasibility work testing partnership and renovation against the cost of secured access

[1] Booking records should be interpreted alongside the intended use of each facility, including open/unprogrammed access, seasonal use, special events, and facility-specific scheduling practices. Recorded booking capacity does not necessarily indicate that a facility has available capacity for new programming or that additional indoor facilities are not required.

9

SECTION 9

Recreation Facilities and Recreation Gaps

9.1 Gap Classification: Needs and Wants

9.2 Assessing Recreation Need

9.3 Results in Tiers

9.4 Tier 1 — Core Needs (the Municipalities Must Ensure Ac...

9.5 Tier 2 — Supported Needs (Important, but Partner-Led)

9.6 Tier 3 — Wants

9.7 Key Findings



9.1 Gap Classification: Needs and Wants

The Recreation Facilities and Recreation Needs Assessment identified a wide range of recreation needs through community surveys, engagement sessions, facility assessments, and booking data. While each need is important, not all require the same level of municipal action or investment. This section prioritizes them to help guide decision-making and focus resources on the areas that will have the greatest benefit for the community.



The prioritization is based on findings from the resident survey (699 responses), the community organization survey (45 responses), facility condition assessments, booking records, and community engagement. In total, 57 recreation needs and opportunities were identified and evaluated. The complete list of needs and the prioritization methodology are provided in Appendix B.

9.2 Assessing Recreation Need

Each identified recreation need was evaluated using a consistent set of five assessment criteria (N1–N5). These criteria were used to determine whether a gap represents a demonstrated community need or a want. A gap was classified as a need if it met at least three of the five criteria, indicating that it was supported by multiple sources of evidence. Gaps that met fewer than three criteria were classified as wants, reflecting opportunities that may benefit the community but are not considered essential priorities at this time.

TABLE 39

Criteria for assessing recreation needs

Code	The test	The question asked	Example of passing
N1	Safety or law	Is this essential to someone's safety or health, or required by law?	Accessible routes are required under accessibility legislation
N2	Basic service	Is this part of the minimum a municipality should provide?	A washroom at a busy public field
N3	Risk	Is there real harm — social, economic or physical — if it is not provided?	Informal facility access can be withdrawn without notice
N4	No substitute	Is it true that no private business or other body will provide this instead?	Nobody else maintains municipal parks
N5	Deliverable	Can the municipality realistically do this, alone or with partners?	Access to school gyms through a written agreement

Worked example: why a gym is a want and a pathway is a need

Residents asked for a gym. Fitness is popular — 65.8% of residents take part — so demand is not in question. But 23.8% already use private gyms and studios, which means a private business provides this. It fails test 4, and it is not a safety matter, not a minimum service and carries no serious risk if absent. It passes one test out of five, so it is therefore classified as a want.

KEY POINT

Fitness is popular — 65.8% of residents take part — so demand is not in question.

By contrast, accessible pathways were mentioned by far fewer people, but they pass all five tests, so they are a core need. How many people ask for something is not what decides whether it is a need, the elements of the test indicate this classification.

9.3 Results in Tiers

The identified recreation gaps were grouped into three priority tiers to help guide future decision-making and investment. Tier 1 – Core Needs includes 11 priorities that address fundamental barriers to recreation, such as accessibility, safety, equitable access, and system coordination. These are considered the highest priorities because they have the greatest community-wide impact and require direct municipal leadership. Tier 2 – Supported Needs includes 35 priorities that are important but can often be addressed through partnerships, external funding, improved programming, or gradual facility renewal. In these cases, the municipalities play a supporting role by providing coordination, funding, facilities, or other resources. Tier 3 – Wants includes 11 priorities that would enhance the recreation system but are not essential to meeting current community needs. These opportunities can be pursued as circumstances allow, particularly when factors such as available land, external funding, new partnerships, community capacity, or other favourable conditions align. While these priorities are not considered immediate needs, they remain valid opportunities for future investment when the conditions to advance them are in place

KEY POINT

The identified recreation gaps were grouped into three priority tiers to help guide future decision-making and investment.

TABLE 40

Tier criteria

Tier	What it means	Number of gaps	What this tier is made of
Tier 1 — Core Needs	Must ensure access	**11**	System-wide barriers, high equity impact. The municipality is the only actor able to resolve them. Predominantly access, safety and coordination gaps rather than capital gaps.
Tier 2 — Supported Needs	Important, partner-led	**35**	Meet the need test but deliverable through partners, grants or incremental renewal. Municipal role is enabling: space, funding, coordination, data.
Tier 3 — Wants	Enhancement only	**11**	Desirable and often strongly demanded, but enhancing, substitutable or high cost relative to impact. Predominantly facility-driven requests and would be able to be achieve should the correct environmental conditions be present such as funding, land access, etc.

9.4 Tier 1 — Core Needs (the Municipalities Must Ensure Access)

The assessment identified 11 Core Needs that require municipal leadership because they address fundamental barriers to recreation access, equity, and safety. These priorities focus on ensuring residents can access recreation year-round through affordable programs, accessible facilities, safe transportation and active transportation connections, adequate indoor space, and equitable scheduling of facilities. They also emphasize improving access to non-municipal recreation spaces through partnerships, increasing program capacity, providing essential amenities such as washrooms, and creating a centralized booking and information system.

TABLE 41

Tier 1 Core Needs and the rationale for each

Ref[18]	Gap	Tests passed	Why this is a core need
1.01	**Indoor recreation access (winter and shoulder season)**	**5 of 5**	Meets every criterion. In a climate where outdoor options close for months, the absence of indoor space does not reduce physical activity — it removes it for part of the year, which is a health outcome rather than a convenience one (N1, N3). Year-round provision is a baseline expectation of a municipal recreation system (N2). No provider outside of municipal ownership offers affordable, inclusive indoor space at community scale locally, and the facilities that exist are institutionally controlled and scheduled around their own priorities (N4). It is nonetheless deliverable without construction, through negotiated access (N5). The corrected figures reinforce this: 72.7% of organizations and 72% of residents want more winter access.
1.02	**Space availability and program capacity**	4 of 5 (not N1)	Fails only the safety criterion. Almost every programming gap resolves back to this one: 70.5% of organizations want to run programs they cannot, participation is growing and none report decline. A system that cannot accommodate willing providers with established demand operates below a minimum acceptable level of service (N2), and the risk compounds — unmet demand becomes lost organizations and lost participants (N3). Organizations cannot self-supply space they do not own (N4). The Town and County can resolve much of it through allocation policy rather than capital (N5).
1.03	**Secured access to non-municipal facilities**	4 of 5 (not N1)	The corrected data makes this the structural finding of the assessment: 38.6% of organizations use no municipally owned facility at all, and 59.1% operate from space they neither own nor lease. Access rests on informal practice and inconsistent fee schedules, so it can be reduced or withdrawn without notice — the risk is sudden loss of service rather than gradual degradation (N3). Documented access is a precondition of a functioning system, not an improvement to it (N2). No substitute exists at this scale (N4), and only the Town and County can negotiate on the community's behalf (N5).

[18] This column refers to specific recommendations that are outlined in detail in section 11.

TABLE 41

Tier 1 Core Needs and the rationale for each

Ref[18]	Gap	Tests passed	Why this is a core need
1.04	**Affordability and cost barriers**	**5 of 5**	Cost excludes precisely those residents with the fewest alternatives, which makes it an equity failure rather than a service preference (N1, N3). At 70.5%, low-income households are the group organizations most often identify as needing better access — the highest figure recorded anywhere in either survey. Affordable access is the defining feature distinguishing municipal recreation from commercial provision (N2), and the market cannot resolve a barrier it creates (N4). Fee policy, subsidy and cost-sharing terms are within the Town and County's control (N5).
1.05	**Transportation and rural access**	**5 of 5**	At 95.3%, driving is effectively universal, so residents without a vehicle are excluded regardless of what is programmed or how affordable it is (N1, N3). A program a resident cannot reach has not been provided, which makes access part of the service rather than an adjunct to it (N2). No commercial route serves this need in a rural municipality where 62.9% of respondents live in the County (N4). Pilots using school buses and community transit make it deliverable at modest cost (N5).
1.06	**Accessible routes and site accessibility compliance**	**5 of 5**	This is the one gap carrying a legal obligation alongside the equity case (N1). Accessibility requirements apply to municipally owned assets irrespective of demand, and the site assessment identifies the absence of continuous accessible routes as the largest system-wide deficiency in the portfolio. An inaccessible route renders an otherwise serviceable asset unusable for the quarter of residents needing at least one accessibility support (N2, N3). No alternative provider exists for municipal parks and fields (N4), and the work is phased and grant-eligible (N5).
1.07	**Washroom provision at outdoor and high-use sites**	4 of 5 (not N4)	The absence of a washroom limits how long anyone can stay, and does so disproportionately for families with young children, seniors and people with medical conditions — a health and dignity matter (N1). Sanitation at a public facility is a floor, not an enhancement (N2), and the risk is participation loss at the busiest sites, with reports of long queues at tournaments (N3). Substitutability is the one criterion not met: portable units are a partial market substitute, though the assessment found the unit in place unusable with wheeled mobility devices. Delivery sits within the Town and County's capacity (N5).
1.08	**Pedestrian safety and vehicle separation**	**5 of 5**	Vehicle and pedestrian conflict are a safety defect carrying direct liability exposure, which satisfies the first criterion without reference to demand levels (N1, N3). Arriving safely is inseparable from using a facility, so this is part of minimum service rather than an upgrade to it (N2). The Town and County own the sites, and no other party can remediate them (N4, N5). The site assessment places this in the immediate action band, ahead of accessibility upgrades and lifecycle replacement. However, implementation will depend on coordination with the responsible property, and parking lot owners and consideration of the parking areas' other roles, such as school bus loops.

TABLE 41

Tier 1 Core Needs and the rationale for each

Ref[18]	Gap	Tests passed	Why this is a core need
1.09	**Program scheduling and timing**	4 of 5 (not N1)	Timing is among the most frequently reported barriers, and it is created by how the system is administered rather than by what it owns. Programs offered when residents cannot attend serve fewer people than identical programs rescheduled, at the same cost, so the gap represents forgone service from existing assets (N2, N3). Organizations cannot resolve conflicts among themselves across facilities none of them control, and provincial registration windows collide with school sport calendars in ways only a coordinating body can address (N4). Allocation policy can tackle this without capital input (N5).
1.10	**Information, awareness and centralized booking**	4 of 5 (not N1)	Residents cannot use what they cannot find. The municipal website reaches 24.5% of residents against 77.9% for social media and 73.3% for word of mouth, and only 44.2% rate parks and trails information as good. Unused capacity coexisting with unmet demand is a system failure rather than a communications preference (N3), and a recreation system that cannot be navigated is not fully provided (N2). No single organization can publish a calendar spanning owners it does not control — the Town and County are the only actors sitting across all of them (N4, N5).
1.11	**Active transportation and safe connecting routes**	**5 of 5**	Sidewalks that impede wheelchairs, walkers and strollers, and the absence of safe routes between neighbourhoods and schools, convert a transportation gap into a safety gap (N1, N3). A third of residents walk or wheel to recreation, so for them the route is the service (N2). Responsibility for streets, sidewalks and trails varies between the Town, County and other authorities, meaning improvements may require coordination with the party responsible for each route (N4, N5). This compounds 1.05: improving transit without fixing routes leaves the final stretch unsafe for the residents least able to drive.

9.5 Tier 2 — Supported Needs (Important, but Partner-Led)

The assessment identified 35 Supported Needs that are important to the long-term success of the recreation system but are best addressed through partnerships, phased investment, and community-led delivery. These priorities focus on expanding recreation opportunities rather than addressing fundamental barriers to access.

KEY POINT

These priorities focus on expanding recreation opportunities rather than addressing fundamental barriers to access.

Recreation delivery in Antigonish extends beyond municipally owned facilities. Community-owned and volunteer-operated facilities, programs, and services provide important recreation opportunities throughout the County and help residents access activities closer to their communities. The County already supports this network through funding, facility improvements, staff support, partnerships, and other forms of assistance. Maintaining and strengthening this community-based recreation network should therefore be considered alongside investment in municipally owned facilities.

The supported needs include expanding programming for all age groups, increasing non-competitive and drop-in recreation opportunities, improving cultural inclusion and representation, strengthening volunteer and organizational capacity, renewing existing recreation assets, and improving data collection and community engagement. While these needs are important for creating a more inclusive and vibrant recreation system, they can generally be implemented incrementally through collaboration with schools, community organizations, recreation providers, and external funding partners rather than through direct municipal delivery alone.

This approach recognizes that recreation is delivered through a combination of municipal facilities and services and community-owned, volunteer-led assets and programs.

TABLE 42

Tier 2 Supported Needs, grouped

Refs	Supported need	Municipal role and why it is a supported need
2.01–2.08	**Programming for all age groups**	Expand programming for children, youth, adults, and seniors through partnerships with community organizations, schools, and recreation providers. The municipalities' role is to provide facilities, funding, coordination, and scheduling rather than directly deliver programs.
2.09–2.11	**Recreation program diversity**	Increase non-competitive recreation, drop-in opportunities, and support arts and cultural programming. These services can be expanded by improving facility allocation and supporting community partners.
2.12–2.17, 2.32–2.33	**Inclusion and equitable participation**	Improve support for culturally appropriate programming, newcomer and Indigenous engagement, gender equity, French-language services, and accessible programming. Municipalities can support these initiatives through funding, partnerships, outreach, training, and inclusive policies.

TABLE 42

Tier 2 Supported Needs, grouped

Refs	Supported need	Municipal role and why it is a supported need
2.18–2.22, 2.35	**Community organization capacity**	Support organizations to strengthen volunteer recruitment and retention, organizational funding, equipment, insurance, certification, and administrative support. These organizations and facilities are an important part of recreation delivery in the County and can provide opportunities within local communities without requiring residents to travel to municipally owned facilities. Municipal support can include funding, coordination, facility improvements, staff support, and partnerships rather than direct municipal ownership or operation. These actions improve the ability of community organizations to deliver recreation services without requiring direct municipal program delivery.
2.23–2.29, 2.34	**Facility renewal and asset improvements**	Continue renewing playgrounds, splash pads, trails, drainage, signage, winter maintenance, and other recreation infrastructure through planned lifecycle replacement and phased capital investment.
2.30–2.31	**Data and community engagement**	Improve recreation data collection, accessibility reporting, and engagement with under-represented groups to support evidence-based planning and future decision-making.

9.6 Tier 3 — Wants

The assessment identified 11 Wants that would enhance the recreation system but are not considered essential to meeting current community needs. These priorities are primarily major capital projects or specialized facilities that should only be considered after Tier 1 and Tier 2 priorities have been addressed. Several of these projects were frequently requested by residents; however, they do not address the most significant barriers to recreation access, affordability, or equity.

KEY POINT

These priorities are primarily major capital projects or specialized facilities that should only be considered after Tier 1 and Tier 2 priorities have been addressed.

TABLE 43

Tier 3 Wants

Refs	Want	Why it is a want
3.01–3.10	**Major new recreation facilities and specialty amenities**	Includes a new community pool, indoor recreation complex, indoor turf facility, indoor walking track, dedicated pickleball and tennis courts, climbing walls, performing arts space, additional splash pads and outdoor rinks, commercial fitness facilities, and dedicated single-sport facilities. These projects require significant capital investment and should only be considered after core service gaps have been addressed and detailed feasibility studies have been completed.
3.11	**Tourism-oriented recreation development**	Recreation amenities designed primarily to support tourism and shoulder-season visitation should be pursued through partnerships and economic development initiatives rather than as core municipal recreation services.

9.7 Key Findings

- **The Antigonish recreation system relies on partnerships.** Many recreation organizations operate from facilities that are not municipally owned, highlighting the importance of strengthening partnerships and securing long-term access agreements to existing recreation spaces.
- **The Antigonish recreation system relies on a mix of municipal and community-based delivery.** Many recreation opportunities are provided through community-owned and volunteer-operated facilities, organizations, and programs rather than municipally owned facilities. These assets are an important part of the County's recreation system and provide opportunities within local communities. Continued municipal support through funding, facility improvements, staff assistance, and partnerships will be important to sustaining this network.
- **Affordability remains one of the largest barriers to participation in Antigonish.** Community organizations identified low-income households as the group facing the greatest challenges accessing recreation. Maintaining affordable fees, financial assistance programs, and sustainable funding models will be essential to ensuring equitable access.
- **Transportation is critical to recreation access in Antigonish.** With most residents relying on private vehicles and limited public transportation options, particularly in the County, improving transportation and local access should be considered an important part of recreation planning.
- **Residents are leaving the region to access programs rather than facilities.** Many residents travel outside Antigonish because desired recreation programs are unavailable locally. Expanding and diversifying recreation programming may help retain participation without requiring significant new infrastructure.
- **Aquatic recreation is vulnerable for Antigonish.** The community depends largely on a single indoor pool to meet demand. Given the high demand for swimming across all age groups, ensuring reliable access to aquatic facilities should remain a long-term priority.

- **Some community recreation assets are at risk.** The potential loss of cultural and performance spaces highlights the need to preserve and strengthen important community facilities as part of the broader recreation system.
- **Antigonish's Community organizations need greater support.** Recreation in Antigonish depends heavily on volunteers, yet many organizations report challenges with volunteer recruitment, retention, and burnout. Supporting volunteers and community organizations will be essential to sustaining recreation services over the long term.

10

SECTION 10

10.1 How the Tool was Created

10.2 The Six Questions

10.3 Bands and Dependencies

10.4 Limits of the Method

Decision-Making Matrix for Gaps and Priorities



To help prioritize recreation investments, this assessment includes a decision-making tool that scores and compares potential projects. Each project is evaluated against six criteria — impact, equity, urgency, feasibility, cost, and alignment with municipal and provincial priorities. Projects receive a score for each criterion, and the combined score places them into priority levels. This provides a consistent and transparent way to compare projects and explain why some should be addressed before others.



The decision-making matrix provides a consistent way to organize and prioritize the potential actions identified through the assessment. It does not replace the findings from the community engagement, facility review, or data analysis. Instead, it brings those findings together to help distinguish between actions that can be advanced in the near term, actions that require further planning or coordination, and longer-term opportunities that depend on future conditions.

The tool is intended to be used on an ongoing basis as new projects, funding opportunities, or facility needs arise. Rather than creating a fixed list of priorities, it gives the Town and the County of Antigonish a practical framework for making informed recreation investment decisions over time. The scoring criteria are based on recognized municipal asset management practices and the Nova Scotia Shared Strategy for Recreation, ensuring that decisions are evidence-based, fair, and aligned with established planning principles.

10.1 How the Tool was Created

Each question which is a criteria of our matrix, is drawn from an established source, as referenced in the table below.

TABLE 44

Where the six questions come from

Question	Where it comes from
Impact	Levels of service — the FCM concept of the quality and consistency of service provided to the community, applied here as the breadth of residents a project serves.
Equity	The Inclusion and Access pillar of the NS Shared Strategy for Recreation, combined with the under-served groups identified in this assessment.
Urgency	Risk of service interruption — the FCM requirement that an asset management plan consider the consequences of service failure or loss.
Feasibility	The fifth test of the needs-and-wants framework used in the gap classification: whether a service is deliverable within municipal capacity or through partners.
Cost	Lifecycle investment requirements — the FCM expectation that plans address short- and long-term investment needs, not capital cost alone.
Alignment	The five pillars of the NS Shared Strategy for Recreation, which also govern eligibility for provincial recreation grant streams.

The 1-to-5 scale mirrors the five-point rating used for asset condition in Canadian asset management practice, so that recreation scoring stays consistent with condition data collected under the provincial program.

The weighting set was prepared for this assessment as a starting point, and Council can adopt a different weighting; and doing so will change the order of results.

10.2 The Six Questions

The decision-making tool evaluates each recreation project using the six criteria above. Each project is scored from 1 to 5 for every criterion, with higher scores given to projects that benefit more residents, improve equity, address urgent needs, are easier to deliver, are more affordable, and align with strategic priorities. The scores are weighted and combined to produce an overall priority ranking.

TABLE 45

Weighting and scoring guide

Question and weight	A mark of 5	A mark of 3	A mark of 1
Impact: How many people benefit? 25%	Benefits residents across both Town and County, or removes a barrier affecting most participants	Benefits a substantial group, or several organizations	Benefits one group or one site

TABLE 45

Weighting and scoring guide

Question and weight	A mark of 5	A mark of 3	A mark of 1
Equity: Does it reach those least served? 20%	Directly reduces barriers for low-income, rural, disabled, youth, newcomer or Indigenous residents	Some benefit to under-served groups, but not targeted	No differential effect, or mainly benefits those already well served
Urgency: What happens if it waits? 15%	Time-limited factor recorded: access at risk, a safety defect, or a closing window	Recorded need, but no time-limited factor	No recorded consequence of delay
Feasibility: Can it be delivered? 15%	Deliverable with existing staff or an existing partner	Needs modest new capacity, or a partner not yet secured	Requires capacity, authority or partnerships not currently in place
Cost: What does it take? 15%	Within existing budgets, or under about $25,000	Moderate: roughly $25,000 to $250,000	Major capital, over about $1 million
Alignment: Does it fit provincial strategy? 10%	Maps directly to the NS Shared Strategy pillars and adopted Council direction	Broadly consistent	No direct mapping

Detailed instructions and a worked example of how to use this decision-making matrix can be found in the Appendix, including how evidence is sourced for each criterion, how scores are calculated, and how the resulting priority bands should be interpreted.

KEY POINT

Detailed instructions and a worked example of how to use this decision-making matrix can be found in the Appendix, including how evidence is sourced for each criterion, how scores are calculated, and how the resulting priority bands should be interpreted.

10.3 Bands and Dependencies

10.3.1 PRIORITY BANDS

The decision-making matrix groups options into four priority bands based on their overall score and any identified dependencies. These bands are intended to indicate the relative order in which options may be considered. The detailed recommendations provide the more specific timing and actions for each priority.

TABLE 46

Priority bands

Band	Definition
Act now	Total of 4.0 or above
Schedule	Total of 3.4 to 3.9
Plan	Total of 2.8 to 3.3
Contingent	Total below 2.8, or dependent on a study not yet complete

10.3.2 DEPENDENCIES

The matrix scores each project on impact, cost, urgency, etc., and ranks them by that score. But some pairs of projects have a cause-and-effect relationship that the score doesn't capture. In some cases, a project may need to be completed for another project to work.

The decision making matrix is useful for deciding among unrelated projects, but where two projects are linked this way, the order is decided by the dependency, not the score.

1. **A facility inventory comes before negotiation of agreements:** The facility inventory identifies which facilities organizations rely on and the basis on which they currently access them. This information is not consistently documented.

2. **Agreements precede programming expansion:** Program expansion depends on reliable access to facilities. Many organizations rely on space they do not own or lease, 59.1%, so confirming access to facilities is important before expanding or adding programs.

KEY POINT

Many organizations rely on space they do not own or lease, 59.1%, so confirming access to facilities is important before expanding or adding programs.

3. **Allocation and fee policies run alongside agreement negotiation:** Facility allocation and fee policies are closely connected to agreements because they establish how access is allocated and what financial terms apply.

4. **Cost per community access hour is established before any capital proposal is assessed:** The cost per community access hour provides a benchmark for comparing existing community access with potential capital investments.

10.4 Limits of the Method

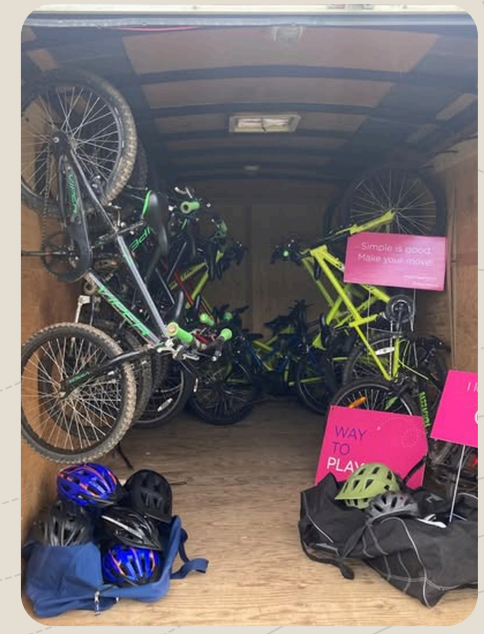
While this framework provides a useful tool to guide decision making, it has its limitations.

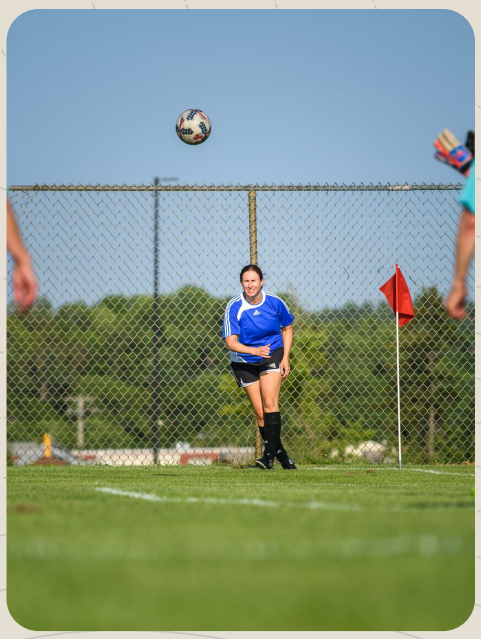
- The total is simply the score based on the criteria and weights used at the time. It helps compare options, but it does not lead to a decision.
- It also may not adequately capture contextual nuances, and this also needs to be considered alongside dependencies.
- Cost makes up 15% of the score, with lower-cost options receiving a higher score. This means a major capital project may score lower than a lower-cost action with a similar impact. The total score is therefore meant to help show which actions may be considered first, not which ones are more valuable in the long term.
- Small differences in scores should not be treated as meaningful rankings. If two options score within about 0.2 points of each other, they are essentially too close to distinguish using this scoring system.
- Scores are based on the information available at the time. Some assessment findings, including feedback from focus groups, stakeholder consultations, pop-up events, and school youth sessions, were not reported separately. Some survey responses were also coded from written answers that cannot be reproduced from the available data. Scores based on these sources should therefore be treated as provisional until the underlying information can be confirmed.

The recommendations that follow are based on the needs and opportunities identified throughout the assessment. The decision-making matrix is one tool used to consider the relative priority of these actions, alongside the evidence, implementation considerations, and dependencies identified through the assessment.






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SECTION 11

11

Recommendations

11.1 Summary of Recommendations

11.2 Guiding Principles

11.3 The Ten Recommendations

Recommendation 01 — Establish Formal MOUs with...

Recommendation 02 — Create a Shared TOA/MCO...

Recommendation 03 — Upgrade Existing Facilities ...

Recommendation 04 — Plan for Indoor, Aquatic and...

Recommendation 05 — Address Transportation as a...

Recommendation 06 — Expand Inclusive and Com...

11.1 Summary of Recommendations

The Recreation Facilities and Needs Assessment produced ten recommendations for the Town and County of Antigonish. They are organized under five priority areas — Governance and Agreements, Facilities and Infrastructure, Access and Inclusion, Information and Staffing, and Financial Strategy — and together they set a ten-year direction for recreation across both municipalities.



The recommendations rest on a consistent premise drawn from the engagement process, resident survey, stakeholder consultations and facility review. Antigonish does not primarily have a recreation facility shortage. It has an access, coordination and information problem layered on top of an aging municipal asset base and a heavy reliance on facilities the municipalities do not own or control. Residents identified indoor swimming, year-round indoor space, affordability and transportation as their leading concerns, yet much of the infrastructure required to respond already exists — at StFX, in SRCE and CSAP schools, on provincial land, and in facilities operated by community organizations. Access to that infrastructure is, in most cases, undocumented.

Municipal and strategic plans combined with stakeholder interviews confirmed that large capital projects are not feasible in the near term, given competing pressures from water, roads and wastewater infrastructure. The recommendations are therefore designed to maximize recreation value within existing fiscal constraints while creating the conditions — evidence, partnerships, reserves and decision criteria — for defensible future investment. No capital commitment is recommended in this plan.

KEY POINT

The recommendations are therefore designed to maximize recreation value within existing fiscal constraints while creating the conditions — evidence, partnerships, reserves and decision criteria — for defensible future investment.

11.2 Guiding Principles

Five principles guide the recommendations and provide an important reference for Council and staff when prioritizing investments, considering opportunities, and responding to requests over the life of the plan.

TABLE 47

Guiding principles

Principle	Importance and Relevance
1. Partnership before ownership	Partnerships can expand recreation access and make better use of existing facilities without requiring new municipal infrastructure. This is particularly relevant where recreation is already delivered through schools, community organizations and other providers.
2. Equitable access	Recreation access varies across the community due to geography, affordability, transportation, accessibility and other barriers. This principle keeps the needs of rural communities and residents who face greater barriers visible in future planning and investment decisions.
3. Build on existing assets	Existing facilities, parks, trails and community spaces are important parts of the recreation system. Maintaining and improving these assets can help extend their useful life and improve access while informing decisions about future facilities.
4. Support community-led recreation	Volunteers, community organizations and other local partners play an important role in providing recreation across the County. Supporting this network helps sustain local recreation opportunities and strengthens the capacity of communities to deliver services.
5. Financial sustainability	Recreation investments have ongoing operating, maintenance and renewal costs. Considering these costs, along with funding, partnerships and phased investment, helps ensure that future decisions are financially sustainable over time.

11.3 The Ten Recommendations

The recommendations are based on the assessment of community needs, priorities, and overall feasibility. They are intended to provide strategic direction and do not rely on detailed operational or facility-specific information that may be available only to the Town or the Municipality.

KEY POINT

The recommendations are based on the assessment of community needs, priorities, and overall feasibility.

Several actions exceed existing staff capacity. The plan identifies a substantial set of research, planning, evaluation and grant support tasks that cannot reasonably be delivered alongside day-to-day operations. These are set out in Appendix C as discrete scopes of work to be tendered or contracted, either individually or as phases of a longer advisory engagement and phased through the annual budget process rather than committed to at once.

TABLE 48

Priority levels used in the action tables

Priority	Meaning
HIGH	Must-do foundation. Most other actions depend on these.
MEDIUM	One-to-three-year window.
LOW	Enhancement phase.

Financial note on Recommendation 01

MOUs are the lowest-cost tool available to expand recreation access. A well-structured MOU with StFX or SRCE secures community access hours at a fraction of the capital cost of building equivalent municipal space. The cost-sharing contributions in each MOU should be funded from the Recreation Reserve Fund (Rec 09) and tracked as cost per access hour delivered.

Recommendation 01 — Establish Formal MOUs with Non-Municipal Facility Owners

Priority area: Governance and Agreements

1.1 FACILITY INVENTORY AND OWNERSHIP MAPPING

TABLE 49

Recommendation 01.1 — facility inventory and ownership mapping

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Compile a full inventory of all recreation facilities used by TOA/MCOA residents — parks, gyms, pools, arenas, trails, fields, halls, arts spaces. Map ownership: municipal, SRCE, StFX, DNR, non-profit, private.	Recreation Staff	Short term
HIGH	Document the current access basis for each non-municipal facility (verbal, historical practice, informal letter, expired MOU) and identify gaps. Halifax Regional Municipality clearly separates municipal facility rentals and HRCE school rentals, making the access basis easier for users to understand.	Consultants	0–12 months
MEDIUM	Identify highest-risk facilities: those most relied upon and with least formal protection (priority: StFX pool; SRCE gyms).	CAOs and Recreation	Short term
LOW	Update the inventory annually as part of the recreation planning cycle.	Recreation staff	Ongoing
LOW	To manage inventory, the Town and County develop a shared site or document library. Establish a framework for access, responsibility for updating, and asset management for each facility the municipalities control.	Recreation staff, Town and County	Ongoing

1.2 MOU TEMPLATE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

TABLE 50

Recommendation 01.2 — MOU negotiations, template and legal framework

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Develop and formalize partnerships through MOU agreements. Engage legal counsel to draft a standard MOU template covering community access hours, booking procedures, scheduling priority rules, insurance, custodial obligations, cost-sharing, notice periods for changes, and dispute resolution. Ensure the template includes a clause requiring annual disclosure of community access hours delivered — this data feeds the cost-per-access-hour tracking under Rec 09.	Recreation and Legal	Short term
HIGH	Create variants for school gyms (SRCE), CSAP schools, university facilities (StFX), provincial parks, and non-profit operators. In Pomquet, also engage the SASC, which runs the community centre in the CSAP school building under existing agreements.	Recreation and Legal	Short term
HIGH	Initiate MOU negotiation with StFX, covering pool, arena, indoor track, turf fields and gymnasium spaces, and SRCE for all school gymnasiums for after-hours, weekend and summer access. Seek a minimum five-year term. Include custodial responsibility, community access pricing and cost-sharing formula.	CAOs and Recreation, with StFX and SRCE	Short term
HIGH	Continue advancing the work done on the Facility Allocation Policy and work on its adoption. Ensure it provides a transparent framework for facility access, allocation, partnership agreements and community use across Town and County facilities, incorporates the partnership agreements being developed, and clarifies long-term community access and responsibilities.	CAOs	0–6 months
MEDIUM	Engage provincial partners to identify shared priorities, clarify roles and responsibilities, and determine opportunities for coordinated management of parks, beaches, trails and Crown land.	CAOs, Recreation and DNR	Short term
MEDIUM	Negotiate agreement with provincial partners covering provincial parks, beaches and Crown land — maintenance roles, signage and accessibility.	CAOs and DNR	Short term
MEDIUM	Develop variants for key non-profit operators, and negotiate using the standard template and framework.	Recreation and Legal	Short term

1.3 ONGOING AGREEMENT MANAGEMENT

TABLE 51

Recommendation 01.3 — ongoing agreement management

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Designate a staff lead as primary contact for all MOU relationships.	CAOs and Directors	Short term
MEDIUM	Digitalize MOU records: create a register of all active MOUs with expiry dates, review triggers and responsible staff.	IT and Recreation	Short term
MEDIUM	Hold annual check-in meetings with each MOU partner. Develop an annual report on access hours, cost per access hour and ongoing challenges.	Recreation	Annually

Recommendation 1 is a key prerequisite for the following recommendations.

Without formal MOUs there is no secured space in which the programming, aquatic access, information hub and arts and culture actions can operate. Grant applications are incredibly hinged on baseline data, and an adopted joint strategy, as the required language and capital decisions lack an evidence base.

When it comes to MOU adoptions, visible change will be limited in the first six to twelve months, but will be followed by a compounding effect as agreements, data and coordination structures come into place.

There is currently no up-to-date comprehensive inventory of assets and facilities. This includes a framework distinguishing public from private assets, and no assessment of whether these spaces are equitably distributed. An inventory is important to finalizing MOU agreements, a dependency, as identified in section 10.3.2.

Recommendation 02 — Create a Shared TOA/MCOA Recreation Plan

Priority area: Governance and Agreements

Financial note

A joint plan reduces duplication between the Town and County, improving per-dollar efficiency for all residents in Antigonish. A Recreation Master Plan is also a prerequisite for many provincial grants, which require applicants to demonstrate alignment with community recreation priorities and the NS Shared Strategy for Recreation.

2.1 RECREATION TASK FORCE

TABLE 52

Recommendation 02.1 — Recreation Task Force

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Establish a joint TOA/MCOA Recreation Task Force to provide strategic coordination on recreation priorities on a project- or issue-specific basis. The Task Force would strengthen collaboration between the municipalities, foster partnerships, and coordinate responses to emerging opportunities and community challenges. Membership is recommended to include municipal representatives and, where appropriate, key community organizations, holders of MOU agreements, owners of shared facilities, Indigenous partners, and other recreation-related stakeholders.	Recreation, community groups and CAOs	0–12 months
HIGH	Develop a Terms of Reference to establish the purpose of the Task Force and its roles, including reviewing implementation progress, coordinating partnerships and providing strategic input into annual priorities as determined by MCOA/TOA.	Consultants, Recreation and CAOs	12-18 months
MEDIUM	Convene the Task Force at least three times annually to provide input on budget priorities, address seasonal opportunities and challenges, coordinate recreation initiatives, and strengthen communication among partners.	Department of Recreation	Ongoing

C.2.2 JOINT RECREATION STRATEGY – AN AREA OF TOWN AND COUNTY COLLABORATION[20]

TABLE 53

Recommendation 02.2 — joint recreation strategy

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Develop a joint strategy with short (0–2 year), medium (3–5 year) and long-term (5–10 year) priorities for facilities, programs, transportation, staffing and funding. An opportunity for collaboration between the Town and County. Must reference NS Shared Strategy pillars explicitly, as required for provincial grant eligibility.	Consultants and Recreation department of TOA and MCOA	Short term
HIGH	Include a transparent decision framework for evaluating capital requests — no new facility investment without meeting defined criteria.	Directors, CAOs and both Councils	Short term
MEDIUM	Assign named leads and measurable milestones for each action.	Directors	Short term
LOW	Public progress review every two years, with updated community input on the department website to keep the public informed.	Recreation	Every 2 years

[20] This recommendation advises for the creation of a joint recreation strategy. It is important to note that the Town and County are separate entities with their own council, budget, responsibilities, and decision-making authority. This recommendation proposes collaboration between the two, and collaboration is proposed where it provides mutual benefits. A joint initiative does not necessarily mean a single department, budget, or operating structure. Any shared funding arrangement would require separate Council approval.

C.2.3 DATA AND EVIDENCE INFRASTRUCTURE

TABLE 54

Recommendation 02.3 — data and evidence infrastructure

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Compile baseline recreation data: facility usage, program participation by age group and geography, and unmet demand from this assessment.	Recreation	Short term
MEDIUM	Integrate census data, wellbeing indicators and demographic projections per CCTH recommendations.	Recreation	Short term
MEDIUM	Annual data collection protocol from all MOU partners on community access hours delivered.	Recreation staff	Annually

Recommendation 03 — Upgrade Existing Facilities Before Building New

Priority area: Facilities and Infrastructure

Financial note

Facility upgrades — including washrooms, drainage, accessibility improvements, lighting and other infrastructure renewal — should be implemented through a phased asset management approach based on the ranked facility improvement list. Capital improvements should be sequenced according to priority, asset condition, risk, community need and available municipal funding. Prioritizing the renewal and modernization of existing assets extends useful life, improves user experience and accessibility, addresses health and safety concerns, and reduces the long-term costs associated with deferred maintenance and future infrastructure replacement.

KEY POINT

Capital improvements should be sequenced according to priority, asset condition, risk, community need and available municipal funding.

C.3.1 FACILITY CONDITION ASSESSMENT AND PRIORITY RANKING

TABLE 55

Recommendation 03.1 — facility condition assessment and priority ranking

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Commission a facility condition assessment for all municipally owned recreation assets.	Recreation	Medium term
MEDIUM	Produce a ranked facility improvement list using safety risk, usage levels, accessibility compliance, community demand and life-cycle cost.	External partner	Medium term
LOW	Update condition assessment on a rolling three-year cycle.	Recreation	Every 3 years

C.3.2 WASHROOMS, ACCESSIBILITY AND BASIC AMENITIES

TABLE 56

Recommendation 03.2 — washrooms, accessibility and basic site amenities

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Audit all parks, and outdoor sites for accessible washroom provision and accessibility.	Recreation	Short term
HIGH	Prioritize washroom upgrades and installations at highest-use outdoor sites per the ranked improvement list.	Recreation	Medium term
HIGH	Ensure all wheelchair ramps, accessible parking and pathways meet current NS Accessibility Legislation standards.	Recreation	Medium term
MEDIUM	Upgrade lighting at high-use outdoor spaces and pathways to extend usable hours.	Recreation	Medium term
MEDIUM	Improve storage at key parks and community spaces so volunteer groups can operate without renting off-site.	Recreation	Medium term

TABLE 56

Recommendation 03.2 — washrooms, accessibility and basic site amenities

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
LOW	Add seating, shade and canteen access at major outdoor event spaces.	Recreation	Long term

C.3.3 DRAINAGE, TURF AND OUTDOOR FIELD CONDITIONS

TABLE 57

Recommendation 03.3 — drainage, turf and outdoor fields

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Identify all outdoor recreation sites with drainage or flooding issues; include in condition assessment and ranked improvement list.	Recreation	Medium term
MEDIUM	Develop a drainage improvement plan for highest-priority sites with cost estimates.	External partner and Recreation	Medium term
MEDIUM	Assess turf field quality at all municipally owned and shared-use sites.	Recreation	Medium term
LOW	Develop a turf maintenance schedule and off-season maintenance protocol.	Recreation	Short term

C.3.4 TRAIL NETWORK IMPROVEMENTS

TABLE 58

Recommendation 03.4 — trail network improvements

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
MEDIUM	Map the full trail network under TOA/MCOA jurisdiction — note repair needs, winter maintenance gaps and accessibility issues.	Recreation	Short term
MEDIUM	Implement winter trail maintenance on highest-use routes that allow for plowing and winter maintenance.	Recreation	Seasonal
MEDIUM	Install wayfinding signage (entrance and exit signs, trail maps, QR codes) at all major access points.	Public Works and Recreation	Medium term
LOW	Explore accessible trail surface upgrades on key segments — apply to Active Communities Fund.	Recreation	Ongoing
LOW	Coordinate with DNR on trail connections to provincial parks and Crown land (link to MOU, Rec 01).	Recreation and Province	Ongoing

C.3.5 PARKS PLANNING AND OUTDOOR SPACE EQUITY (RURAL VS URBAN)

Parks and outdoor spaces are among Antigonish's most valued recreation assets, supporting physical activity, social connection, and access to nature. However, there is currently no comprehensive inventory of parks and outdoor recreation spaces or framework to distinguish public and private assets, assess accessibility, or understand whether these spaces are equitably distributed across the Town and County. Developing a complete parks and outdoor recreation inventory, along with an assessment of accessibility and service distribution, is recommended as part of the joint recreation strategy.

TABLE 59

Recommendation 03.5 — parks planning and outdoor space equity

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Develop an inventory of all municipally owned and DNR-managed parks, beaches, community owned and managed trail systems, playgrounds and green spaces used by TOA/MCOA residents, with condition, amenities and usage where data exists.	Recreation staff	Short term
HIGH	Assess geographic equity: map the distribution of outdoor recreation spaces across the Town and County to identify underserved areas, particularly in rural communities and areas with limited access to other recreation infrastructure.	Recreation staff	Short term
MEDIUM	Develop minimum service standards for parks — what amenities (washrooms, seating, shade, lighting, accessible pathways, signage) should be present at each tier of park (neighbourhood, community, regional) — and use these to prioritize upgrades.	Recreation staff and CAOs	Short term
MEDIUM	Review playground equipment across all municipally maintained sites for age appropriateness, accessibility and safety. Develop a replacement and enhancement schedule.	Recreation	Medium term
MEDIUM	Assess natural space connectivity — identify opportunities to link parks, trails, beaches and green spaces into a coherent network that supports active transportation and nature-based recreation. Coordinate with DNR MOU (Rec 01).	Recreation staff and provincial partner	Medium term
LOW	Incorporate parks and outdoor space standards into the joint TOA/MCOA Recreation Strategy (Rec 02) so future land-use decisions protect and expand outdoor recreation opportunities.	Recreation and Planning	Long term
LOW	Explore opportunities for climate-resilient park design — shade structures, permeable surfaces, storm drainage — as parks face increased pressure from extreme weather events.	Recreation	Medium to long term

Recommendation 04 — Plan for Indoor, Aquatic and Year-Round Recreation Space

Priority area: Facilities and Infrastructure

Financial note

Given current financial pressures around infrastructure upgrades and repairs, a new recreation centre does not appear to be in the immediate interest of either municipality. The approach here is threefold: maximize access through MOUs in the short term at minimal capital cost; rebuild aquatic capacity without owning a pool; and commission a feasibility study that honestly assesses all options, including partnership and renovation, before any construction decision is made. No capital commitment is recommended in this plan.

C.4.1 SHORT TERM: MAXIMIZE ACCESS THROUGH MOUS

TABLE 60

Recommendation 04.1 — short-term access through MOUs

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Once MOUs with SRCE are finalized, work collaboratively with stakeholders to identify and publish additional community access times for school facilities during evenings, weekends and school holidays, maximizing existing infrastructure without requiring new capital investment.	Recreation staff	Upon MOU execution
HIGH	Work with StFX to establish a short-term aquatic access schedule for community swim lessons, aquatic leadership development and recreational swimming — governed by MOU — and better communicate opportunities for community use to the public.	Recreation and StFX	Short term
MEDIUM	Identify underused SRCE classroom and multipurpose spaces available for arts, wellness and seniors programs under MOU terms.	Recreation and SRCE	Short term
MEDIUM	Create a public indoor facility calendar covering all MOU-secured spaces through existing or new communication and booking platforms.	Recreation staff	Short term

C.4.2 AQUATIC PROGRAMMING CONTINUITY

The need for additional indoor swimming opportunities was one of the highest priorities identified through the community survey, with seniors in particular identifying expanded swim opportunities as a key need. As St.

Francis Xavier University currently operates the community's only indoor aquatic facility, maximizing access to existing facilities should be a priority before considering the development of a new aquatic centre.

TABLE 61

Recommendation 04.2 — aquatic programming continuity

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Explore options to strengthen aquatic leadership development, recruiting and training both lifeguards and swim instructors, to increase public swim and lesson opportunities at municipal and partner-owned facilities.	Recreation	Short term
HIGH	Establish a joint registration and communications system for aquatic programming across the Town and Municipality, providing a single source of information for swim lessons, public swims, clubs, lifeguard training and other aquatic opportunities.	Recreation staff	3–9 months
MEDIUM	Explore student recruitment pathways for lifeguards and swim instructors. Assess demand for smaller class sizes and private lessons.	Recreation and StFX	0–12 months

C.4.3 EVIDENCE-BASED PLANNING FOR FUTURE INDOOR SPACE

Since an indoor multi-use facility was identified as one of the community's highest recreation priorities through the survey, this subsection focuses on planning to better understand how this need can be addressed. It is deliberately scoped as planning only — not construction. A feasibility study should be completed before any capital commitment is made.

KEY POINT

Since an indoor multi-use facility was identified as one of the community's highest recreation priorities through the survey, this subsection focuses on planning to better understand how this need can be addressed.

TABLE 62

Recommendation 04.3 — evidence-based planning, not construction

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Apply to provincial and federal funding sources to fund a feasibility study for a future community multi-use indoor recreation facility. This is the appropriate precursor to any capital conversation.	Recreation	Opportunity-based

TABLE 62

Recommendation 04.3 — evidence-based planning, not construction

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	The feasibility study must evaluate at minimum three models: a new municipal build with full life-cycle cost; co-ownership or long-term lease; and renovation or expansion of existing municipal assets. No model should be pre-selected.	Recreation and external partner	Opportunity-based
MEDIUM	Develop an operating cost model for each feasibility scenario, including projected annual operating expenses and staffing requirements, so Council can make informed decisions regarding future capital investments.	Recreation, external partner and CAOs	Opportunity-based
MEDIUM	Include transportation access planning in the feasibility study scope (see Rec 05).	Recreation and external partner	Opportunity-based

Recommendation 05 — Address Transportation as a Core Recreation Barrier

Priority area: Access, Inclusion and Transportation

Develop and support transportation solutions that improve access to recreation opportunities, recognizing that the rural geography of the Town and County creates transportation barriers for many residents. Continue to invest in active transportation infrastructure, such as sidewalks, trails and bike lanes, to create safe, walkable and accessible routes to recreation facilities and programs, particularly for youth and others without access to a vehicle.

C.5.1 TRANSIT AND RIDE ACCESS PILOTS

TABLE 63

Recommendation 05.1 — transit and ride access pilots

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Pilot a seasonal recreation shuttle connecting rural communities to major recreation destinations.	Recreation	Medium term
HIGH	Negotiate with SRCE to explore school bus use for after-school recreation transport on select routes during the school year.	Recreation, CAOs and SRCE	Medium term

TABLE 63

Recommendation 05.1 — transit and ride access pilots

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
MEDIUM	Introduce a subsidized summer transit pass for youth under 18 and seniors over 65. The City of Edmonton links recreation access with Ride Transit through its Leisure Access Program, while Halifax Regional Municipality and the City of Calgary both provide reduced-cost transit and recreation access through affordability programs.	Finance, Recreation and Antigonish Community Transit	Medium term
MEDIUM	Partner with the YMCA and newcomer-serving organizations to coordinate ride access for newcomer families and Indigenous community members.	Recreation, YMCA and Antigonish Community Transit	Medium term
LOW	Evaluate pilots for utilization and community benefit after one full year.	Recreation and CAOs	Post-pilot

C.5.2 ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

TABLE 64

Recommendation 05.2 — active transportation infrastructure

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
MEDIUM	Map gaps in sidewalk, crosswalk and cycling infrastructure between residential areas and key recreation sites.	Recreation and CAOs	Short term
MEDIUM	Incorporate recreation access routes into future capital planning and budgeting, and collaborate with Public Works to identify opportunities that support shared transportation, accessibility and community development goals.	Recreation and Public Works	Ongoing

C.5.3 RURAL RECREATION DELIVERY

TABLE 65

Recommendation 05.3 — rural recreation delivery

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
MEDIUM	Develop transportation solutions that improve access to recreation opportunities for rural residents, including partnerships with community organizations, schools and transportation providers to connect residents with programs, facilities and events.	Recreation and community partners	Medium term
MEDIUM	Expand outreach and mobile recreation programming to rural communities where transportation barriers limit access, working with local organizations such as community halls to deliver programs closer to where people live.	Recreation and community partners	Opportunity-based

TABLE 65

Recommendation 05.3 — rural recreation delivery

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
LOW	Prioritize grant applications that support rural community recreation organizations, including funding for equipment, programming, storage and other resources that strengthen local recreation opportunities and reduce the need for travel.	Recreation staff	Ongoing

Recommendation 06 — Expand Inclusive and Community-Based Programming

Priority area: Access, Inclusion and Transportation

Financial note

Prioritize investment in recreation programming by making better use of shared-use agreements, partnerships and external grant funding to expand affordable recreation opportunities while minimizing additional operating costs. This represents one of the highest-impact, most cost-effective recommendations in the plan.

KEY POINT

This represents one of the highest-impact, most cost-effective recommendations in the plan.

C.6.1 FREE AND LOW-COST ACCESS PROGRAMMING

TABLE 66

Recommendation 06.1 — free and low-cost access programming

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Expand and diversify open gyms and open skates through partnerships with community organizations. Provide municipal support through grants, facility access or in-kind contributions where appropriate, while encouraging community-organization-led delivery. Aligns with the NS Shared Strategy pillars of Active Living and Inclusion and Access.	Recreation staff	Upon MOU execution
HIGH	Support the creation of a youth drop-in program at a central location — no registration, after-school and weekend.	Recreation and YMCA	Medium term
MEDIUM	Develop a seniors wellness drop-in series co-delivered with existing providers — apply to Active Communities Fund.	Consultants, Recreation and Public Health NS	6–12 months
MEDIUM	Introduce family recreation sessions — weekend morning open play, no registration, no equipment required.	Recreation staff	Short term
LOW	Review all program fees against the new low-barrier fee policy developed under Rec 09.	Recreation and CAOs	Medium term

C.6.2 EQUIPMENT LENDING AND GEAR ACCESS

TABLE 67

Recommendation 06.2 — equipment lending and gear access

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
MEDIUM	Partner with sport clubs to donate retired equipment to the lending pool. Insurance and liability concerns need to be taken into consideration.	Recreation and Sport NS	6–18 months
LOW	Explore targeted equipment subsidy for newcomers and lower-income households through Jumpstart and KidSport.	Recreation and YMCA	12–24 months

C.6.3 CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE AND INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING

TABLE 68

Recommendation 06.3 — culturally appropriate and inclusive programming

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Provide grant funding or in-kind support to recreation programming delivered by neighbouring communities and organizations, including Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation, where programs improve access and participation opportunities for Town and County residents.	Consultants, Recreation and Paqtnkek	6–18 months
MEDIUM	Strengthen cultural recreation by supporting community organizations that deliver arts, culture, heritage, music, dance, storytelling, festivals and cultural celebrations. Establish a dedicated funding and support framework that provides grants, in-kind assistance and clear administrative processes — facility bookings, registration, insurance and program development.	Recreation and cultural organizations	Long term

C.6.4 COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING FUND

Where municipal capacity to provide facilities or direct programming is limited, prioritize grant funding and in-kind support for cultural organizations and other community groups that may face barriers to accessing recreation spaces or compete for limited facility availability.

TABLE 69

Recommendation 06.4 — community programming fund

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
MEDIUM	Establish a dedicated annual community recreation grant program to support non-profit organizations that deliver recreation programs and services addressing identified community needs, particularly where municipal capacity or facility access is limited. The City of Moncton uses an annual Community Grant Program with streams such as Quality of Life Grants, Immigration Grants and Cultural Grants.	Recreation and CAOs	Medium term
MEDIUM	Provide shared storage solutions to community organizations operating out of borrowed spaces.	Recreation	Long term
LOW	Reduce administrative barriers for community recreation organizations by providing centralized booking and navigation support, improving access to affordable insurance, simplifying registration and facility booking processes, and offering shared resources and administrative assistance. A single municipal point of contact for recreation facility access would help community groups identify and secure appropriate spaces.	Recreation, CAOs, Legal and Finance	Long term

C.6.5 ARTS AND CULTURE AS RECREATION

Most contemporary Canadian recreation master plans formally recognize arts and culture as a core recreation domain alongside sport and physical activity. In Antigonish, arts organizations, film groups, pottery and visual

arts groups, musicians and performing arts practitioners were active participants in the engagement. This subsection establishes arts and culture as a named recreation priority.

TABLE 70

Recommendation 06.5 — arts and culture as recreation

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Support arts and culture organizations by improving access to affordable programming and creative spaces. This includes identifying existing arts and cultural spaces, expanding access to schools and other shared-use facilities where appropriate, and supporting long-term planning for future arts and cultural space needs.	Recreation and arts organizations	Upon MOU execution
HIGH	Support arts and culture community organizations to pursue a feasibility study for a dedicated community arts centre or multi-use arts hub.	Recreation	6–18 months
MEDIUM	Negotiate access to school facilities (SRCE MOU, Rec 01) for arts programming during non-school hours — particularly studio and classroom spaces with appropriate amenities for pottery, painting, visual arts, film and music.	Recreation and SRCE	Upon MOU execution
MEDIUM	Include arts and culture organizations in the community programming fund (Rec 06.4) and Recreation Task Force (Rec 02.1) so they are represented in recreation planning and grant processes.	Recreation staff	0–12 months

Recommendation 07 — Build One Recreation Information and Booking Hub

Priority area: Information, Booking and Staffing

Financial note

Create a single, easy-to-use source for recreation information, including facility bookings, programs, events and community recreation opportunities across the Town and County. A centralized system will make it easier for residents to find and register for activities, reduce administrative work for staff, and improve information for future recreation planning.

C.7.1 RECREATION NAVIGATOR ROLE

Throughout the needs assessment, residents and community organizations consistently identified challenges in navigating recreation opportunities, facility bookings, funding programs and available community spaces. Currently, these responsibilities are distributed across multiple staff members and organizations, making it difficult for residents and community groups to know who to contact and resulting in sometimes inconsistent communication, duplicated effort and missed opportunities for collaboration.

TABLE 71

Recommendation 07.1 — Recreation Navigator

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Develop a joint Recreation Navigator position to serve as a single point of contact for recreation inquiries, coordinate facility bookings across MOU-supported facilities, connect residents and organizations with appropriate programs and funding opportunities, and strengthen collaboration between municipal staff and community partners. This role requires increased investment. Even if the services are undertaken by an existing organization, such as Playfinder, it will require contract expansion. The Municipality of Bluewater, Ontario has a community recreation coordinator on a 12–18 month contract covering program planning and delivery, partnerships, facility bookings, volunteer management, sponsorship strategy and support for community-led events.	Both CAOs	Long term
HIGH	Publish the Navigator name, contact and role across all TOA/MCOA channels.	Recreation and Communications	Upon appointment
MEDIUM	Define Navigator responsibilities: maintain the hub, manage the booking calendar, liaise with MOU partners, and support community group applications.	Both CAOs	0–3 months
LOW	Review the role at 24 months and assess whether a full-time recreation coordinator is warranted.	Both CAOs	Long term

C.7.2 DIGITAL HUB INTEGRATION

TABLE 72

Recommendation 07.2 — digital hub integration

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Load all confirmed MOU facility hours onto a digital hub once agreements are signed.	Recreation staff	Upon MOU execution
HIGH	Launch a single recreation webpage or application covering programs, registration, facility maps, financial supports, trail information and contacts.	Recreation and IT/ Communications	Medium term

TABLE 72

Recommendation 07.2 — digital hub integration

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
MEDIUM	Enable public-facing facility calendars so groups can see availability without phoning staff.	Recreation and booking platform	Short term
LOW	Explore equipment lending, volunteer sign-up and financial assistance within the same platform.	Recreation staff	18–24 months

C.7.3 PHYSICAL WAYFINDING AND COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION

TABLE 73

Recommendation 07.3 — physical wayfinding and communication

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
MEDIUM	Install standardized wayfinding using tourism branding at all major parks and trailheads — entrance signs, exit signs, trail maps, QR codes linking to digital hubs.	Recreation	Long term
MEDIUM	Develop a quarterly community recreation bulletin distributed through schools, the library, community centres and partner organizations.	Recreation and Communications	Medium term
LOW	Establish a consistent social media presence — program announcements, facility updates, booking reminders.	Recreation and Communications	Medium term
LOW	Translate key recreation information into French and other community languages with the YMCA, or upon request as outlined in accessibility, equity, anti-hate and anti-racism plans.	Recreation and YMCA	Medium term

Recommendation 08 — Strengthen Volunteer and Staff Capacity

Priority area: Information, Booking and Staffing

Financial note

Volunteer burnout and aquatic staffing shortages are the most immediately costly capacity gaps — they directly limit program delivery. Shared umbrella insurance models can significantly reduce overhead for non-profit partners, removing a financial barrier to collaboration.

KEY POINT

Volunteer burnout and aquatic staffing shortages are the most immediately costly capacity gaps — they directly limit program delivery.

C.8.1 VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

TABLE 74

Recommendation 08.1 — volunteer recruitment and retention

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Develop a volunteer recruitment strategy targeting high school students and young adults, using SRCE, StFX and YMCA partnerships. Apply to the CCTH Recreation Community Development Grant for capacity development funding.	Recreation	Medium term
HIGH	Create a centralized volunteer database where groups post opportunities and residents sign up.	Recreation staff	Medium term
MEDIUM	Hold an annual volunteer recognition event if one does not already exist.	Recreation staff	Annually
MEDIUM	Reduce administrative burden: centralized onboarding resources, criminal record check support, simplified sign-up.	Recreation and CAOs	Medium term
LOW	Work with StFX programs (such as kinesiology) to create volunteer practicum placements.	Recreation and StFX	Long term

C.8.2 ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY SUPPORT

TABLE 75

Recommendation 08.2 — organizational capacity support

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
MEDIUM	Hold bi-annual partner coordination meetings with StFX, SRCE, the Province, Sport NS, the YMCA, arts groups and other stakeholders.	Recreation staff	Bi-annually
MEDIUM	Produce a simple annual state-of-recreation report, in tandem with a renewed Recreation Master Plan, for partners and Council.	Recreation	Every 3 years

Recommendation 09 — Adopt a Financial Planning Framework for Recreation

Priority area: Financial Strategy

This recommendation is intended to support Council in making informed, evidence-based financial decisions. It should be considered alongside Recommendations 01–08 and implemented in parallel with the programmatic actions outlined in this plan. Recreation investment competes with core municipal infrastructure — water, roads and wastewater — for limited borrowing capacity and tax-supported funding. Large capital projects are unlikely to be feasible in the near term.

KEY POINT

It should be considered alongside Recommendations 01–08 and implemented in parallel with the programmatic actions outlined in this plan.

Guiding financial principle for Council

The Town and County are encouraged to prioritize improving equitable access to existing recreation assets through partnerships, shared-use agreements, grant opportunities and cost-sharing arrangements before considering new municipal recreation facilities. Where new infrastructure is proposed, it is recommended that partnership opportunities be explored first and supported by a life-cycle cost analysis and a sustainable operating funding plan.

C.9.1 COST-SHARING BEFORE CAPITAL

TABLE 76

Recommendation 09.1 — cost-sharing before capital

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Consider adopting a partnership-first approach within the joint Recreation Strategy, encouraging the evaluation of shared-use agreements, partnerships and existing facilities before pursuing new recreation facility development.	Both Councils	Opportunity-based
HIGH	Negotiate cost-sharing clauses in all MOUs (Rec 01): define annual financial contributions TOA/MCOA will make toward operating costs of StFX, SRCE and provincial facilities in exchange for guaranteed community access hours.	CAOs and Legal	MOU negotiation
HIGH	Track the cost per community access hour delivered through each MOU and report this to Council annually — this is the benchmark against which any future capital proposal must be compared.	Recreation and external partners	Annually
MEDIUM	Develop a cost-sharing formula for joint TOA/MCOA recreation programming so costs and benefits are equitably split between the Town and County based on population and usage data.	CAOs and Finance	Long term

C.9.2 RECREATION RESERVE FUND

Establishing a dedicated reserve fund creates fiscal room for future investment without requiring tax increases or borrowing, and signals long-term commitment to Council and the community.

TABLE 77

Recommendation 09.2 — Recreation Reserve Fund

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Establish a joint TOA/MCOA Recreation Reserve Fund with annual contributions from both budgets. Start at a modest level ($25,000–$50,000 combined) and grow as fiscal room allows.	Recreation, CAOs and both Councils	Medium term
MEDIUM	Define eligible uses for the reserve: accessibility improvements, MOU cost-sharing contributions, one-time equipment purchases and feasibility studies. Exclude operating costs.	Finance and both Councils	0–12 months
LOW	Report on the reserve fund balance and planned uses in each annual budget, with a five-year projection and plan for reinvestment into recreation assets.	Finance and CAOs	Annually

C.9.3 LIFE-CYCLE COST PLANNING FOR EXISTING ASSETS

TOA/MCOA must understand the true long-term cost of existing recreation assets before making any new capital commitments. Deferred maintenance is a hidden liability.

TABLE 78

Recommendation 09.3 — life-cycle cost planning

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Include all municipally owned recreation facilities in the municipal asset management plan, with condition ratings, estimated remaining useful life and annual maintenance cost projections.	Recreation and CAOs	Medium term
HIGH	Complete an assessment of deferred maintenance needs across municipal recreation assets and present the findings to Council as part of the annual budget process, to support prioritization alongside other municipal infrastructure needs.	Recreation and CAOs	Short term
MEDIUM	Develop a 10-year capital forecast for recreation assets, showing when major reinvestment will be required and at what cost, to inform reserve fund targets and borrowing decisions.	Recreation and CAOs	Medium term
MEDIUM	Require any future capital proposal (including a new recreation centre) to include a full life-cycle cost analysis covering construction, operating, maintenance, staffing and debt servicing over a 30-year horizon.	Recreation and CAOs	Before any capital decision

C.9.4 REVENUE AND COST RECOVERY

Municipal recreation services are intended to improve quality of life by providing accessible, inclusive opportunities for sport, recreation and community participation. While recreation generates some cost recovery through user fees, the primary objective is not to recover costs but to reduce barriers to participation and support healthy, connected communities.

TABLE 79

Recommendation 09.4 — revenue and cost recovery

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
MEDIUM	Develop a recreation fee policy that establishes clear guidelines for full cost recovery, partial cost recovery, and subsidized or no-cost recreation opportunities based on community benefit, accessibility and equity objectives. This framework can also guide funding decisions for programs delivered through partnerships and shared-use agreements.	Recreation	Medium term
LOW	Explore naming rights, sponsorship and community partnership models for facility upgrades (trail sections, park benches, equipment) as a low-risk revenue supplement. The City of Ottawa's Richcraft Recreation Complex shows how recreation facilities can use public-facing naming tied to sponsorship or partnership models.	Recreation and CAOs	Long term
LOW	Investigate whether a regional service agreement between TOA and MCOA would provide tax advantages or grant eligibility improvements for joint recreation investment.	Recreation and CAOs	Long term

Recommendation 10 — Align All Recreation Decisions with Provincial Strategy and Plans

Priority area: Governance and Alignment

Grant eligibility, provincial funding support and credibility with regional partners all depend on TOA/MCOA demonstrating that its recreation decisions are grounded in provincial strategy and local evidence.

Nova Scotia's Shared Strategy for Recreation — five pillars

All TOA/MCOA recreation investments, grant applications and programming decisions should be mapped to these pillars: (1) Active Living — supporting physical activity for all ages and abilities; (2) Inclusion and Access — removing barriers for under-represented groups; (3) Connecting People and Nature — outdoor recreation, trails, parks and natural spaces; (4) Supportive Environments — safe, welcoming, accessible facilities and policies; (5) Capacity Development — building staff, volunteer and organizational capacity.

C.10.1 STRATEGY ALIGNMENT ASSESSMENT

TABLE 80

Recommendation 10.1 — strategy alignment assessment

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Conduct a strategy alignment assessment that maps all 10 recommendations in this plan against the NS Shared Strategy for Recreation pillars, provincial grant eligibility criteria, NS Accessibility Legislation (Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces), and Dismantling Racism and Hate Act requirements.	Recreation	Short term
HIGH	Ensure the joint TOA/MCOA Recreation Strategy (Rec 02) explicitly references the NS Shared Strategy pillars — this is required language for CCTH Recreation Community Development Grant applications.	Recreation	Short term
MEDIUM	Review any existing TOA or MCOA Municipal Planning Strategies for recreation-related policies and update them to reflect the priorities identified in this assessment, as required under the NS Minimum Planning Requirements Regulations.	Recreation and Planning	Long term

C.10.2 EVALUATION AND REPORTING FRAMEWORK

Good planning without evaluation is just documentation. An evaluation framework closes the loop and generates the data needed for future grant applications and Council decisions.

TABLE 81

Recommendation 10.2 — evaluation and reporting framework

Priority	Action item	Lead	Timing
HIGH	Develop a recreation evaluation framework that defines indicators for each recommendation: participation rates, access hours delivered, grant dollars leveraged, MOU compliance, barrier reduction and resident satisfaction.	Recreation	Medium term
MEDIUM	Conduct a mid-point progress review of the implementation plan at 18–24 months, assessing which actions are on track, which need revision, and whether priorities have shifted.	Recreation and CAOs	18–24 months
MEDIUM	Conduct a full program evaluation at five years using the evaluation framework, community re-engagement (survey and focus groups), and updated demographic data.	Recreation	Year 5
LOW	Publish a plain-language annual recreation report for residents summarizing what was done, what it cost, who it served and what comes next.	Recreation and Communications	Annually

EXTERNAL SCOPES OF WORK

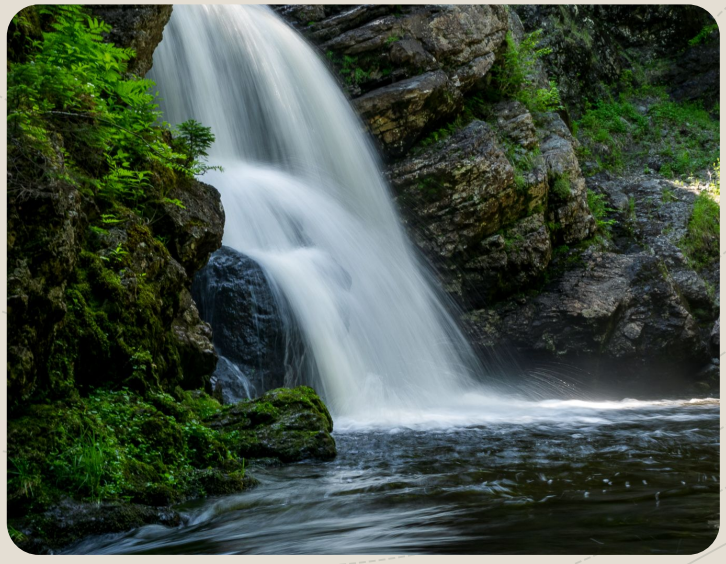
Delivery depends on matching actions to capacity. The scopes below cannot reasonably be absorbed by existing staff and should be tendered or contracted, either as individual projects or as phases of a longer advisory engagement, with Council approving each element through the annual budget process. Appendix C sets these out in full.

TABLE 82

External scopes of work by phase

Phase	External scopes of work
Immediate	Facility inventory and ownership mapping; MOU gap analysis; baseline recreation data report; parks and facility condition assessment with ranked improvement list; active transportation gap map; strategy alignment mapping.
6–18 months	Recreation strategy drafting with NS Shared Strategy alignment; capital request decision framework; equity impact assessment; demographic and wellbeing analysis; parks equity mapping; indoor facility feasibility study; transportation pilot design and grant application; community programming fund design; evaluation framework.
Ongoing / 18 months+	Biennial implementation review; natural space connectivity analysis; MOU financial modelling; recreation fee policy framework; ten-year capital forecast and deferred maintenance report; life-cycle cost analysis template; comparative municipal spending analysis; five-year program evaluation.

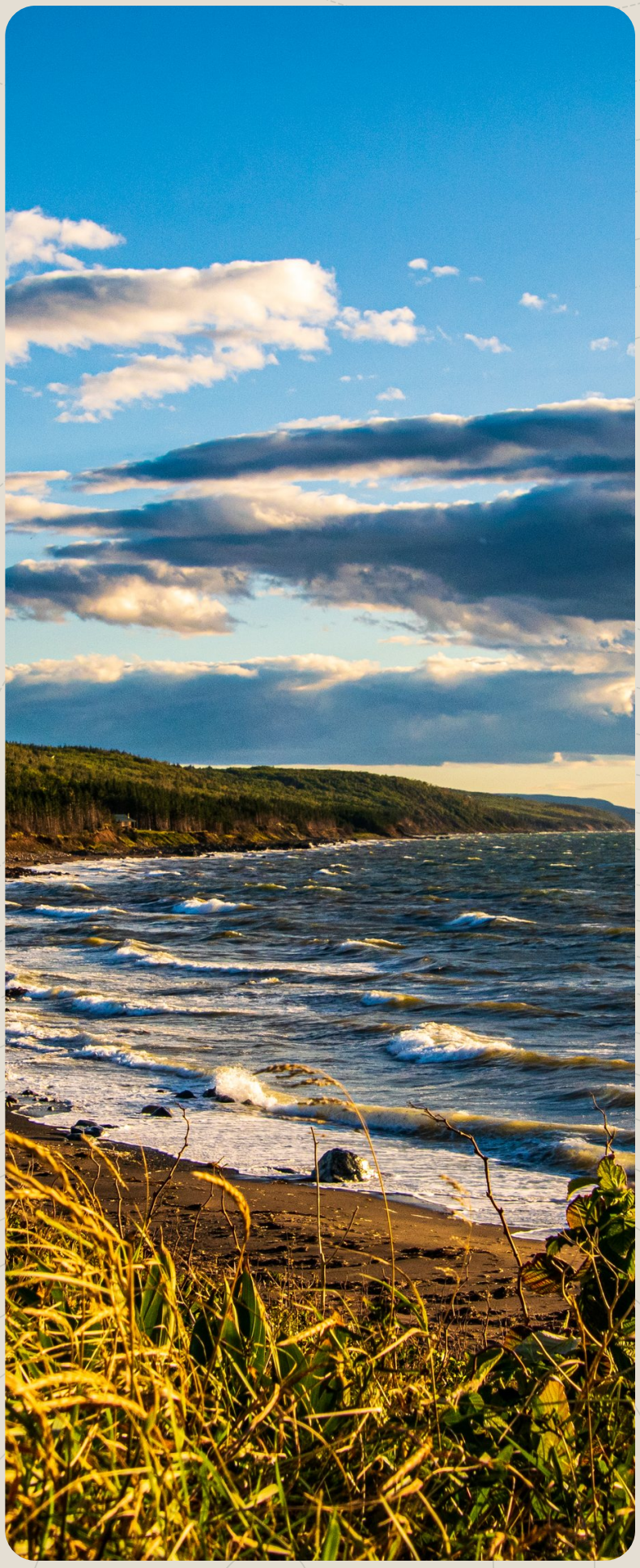








12



SECTION 12

Next Steps

12.3 Monitoring and Evaluation / Road Map

12.4 Risk Management and Evaluation Criteria

Our implementation approach translates the ten recommendations into sequenced actions with defined leads, timing and review points. The recommendations already identify an indicative timeframe, while the implementation approach provides more detail on how actions can be sequenced and revisited over time. Timeframes are not intended to be fixed commitments. Council priorities, annual budgets, available resources and other circumstances may change from year to year, and the timing of individual actions can be adjusted accordingly.



The implementation horizons are immediate (0–12 months), medium-term (1–3 years) and long-term (3–10 years). Council will have the opportunity to review, discuss and approve which elements move forward through the annual budget deliberation process. The plan is intended to remain flexible and respond to changing circumstances, with the mid-point review at 18–24 months providing a formal opportunity to revisit priorities, timing and implementation.

The following table summarizes the immediate, medium and long term actions, and the detailed implementation actions and horizons can be found in the appendix.

TABLE 83

Implementation horizons

Implementation Horizon	Detail	Actions
Immediate Actions (0-12 Months)	Immediate actions concentrate on foundation-building: securing access, establishing governance structures, and generating the evidence base. These items are largely low-cost and high-leverage, and the majority of later actions depend on them.	The facility inventory and ownership map; the MOU template and negotiations with StFX and SRCE; the baseline recreation data report including assessments and early service improvements.

TABLE 83

Implementation horizons

Implementation Horizon	Detail	Actions
Medium Term Actions (1-3 Years)	Medium-term actions move from securing access to improving the quality, reach and coordination of the recreation system. Most depend on the immediate actions being substantially complete, and several are contingent on successful grant applications.	Recreation Strategy and Task Force; facility upgrades and trail wayfinding; indoor/aquatic feasibility study; transportation pilots and programming; grant program, volunteer strategy and Reserve Fund; capital forecast and fee policy.
Long Term Actions (3-10 Years)	Long-term actions depend on the preceding foundations being in place and on fiscal room becoming available. Several are contingent rather than scheduled — they proceed only if the evidence generated in earlier phases supports them.	Capital decisions tied to feasibility and cost-benchmark results; Reserve Fund growth; parks standards in municipal planning; cost-sharing formula; reduced admin barriers; arts hub feasibility; revenue exploration; Navigator role review.

12.3 Monitoring and Evaluation / Road Map

Monitoring is an ongoing part of the plan. The framework below outlines what will be measured, how often it will be reported, and who will receive the information. This will also provide useful information for future grant applications and Council decisions. Where possible, the indicators use information that is already being collected, such as MOU access hours, registration data and budget reporting, rather than adding new reporting requirements for staff or community partners.

TABLE 84

Core indicators, reporting and review roadmap

Timing	Activities and milestones	Indicators tracked (source)	Responsibility
Recurring			
Ongoing	Facility inventory and MOU register maintained; Recreation Task Force convened at least three times a year	**Compliance:** MOU compliance and renewal status; accessibility standard compliance (MOU register and audit)	Recreation staff

TABLE 84

Core indicators, reporting and review roadmap

Timing	Activities and milestones	Indicators tracked (source)	Responsibility
Annually	MOU partner check-ins and access-hour data collection; cost-per-access-hour report to Council; reserve fund balance and five-year projection in budget; volunteer recognition; plain-language public recreation report	**Access:** community access hours by MOU, facility and season (annual MOU partner disclosure). **Financial efficiency:** cost per community access hour by facility and partner (Finance and MOU records). **Participation:** registrations and drop-in attendance by age group and geography (registration system / hub). **Equity:** participation and access by rural or urban location and priority population (registration data and survey). **Funding:** grant dollars leveraged; reserve fund balance and annual contributions (Finance). **Capacity:** active volunteers, certified aquatic staff, partner organizations supported (volunteer database)	Recreation, Finance, CAOs
Bi-annually	Partner coordination meetings with StFX, SRCE, the Province, Sport NS, YMCA and arts organizations	—	Recreation staff
Every 2 years	Public progress review with updated community input, published to the department website	—	Recreation
Every 3 years	Facility condition assessment update on a rolling cycle; state-of-recreation report to partners and Council	**Assets:** condition ratings, deferred maintenance backlog, capital forecast variance (asset management plan)	Recreation and Engineering
Phased			
Year 1	Secure and document access; establish governance and the evidence base. *Milestone:* MOUs with StFX and SRCE executed; Task Force operating; baseline data compiled	Baseline set for all indicators	Recreation, CAOs
Years 1–2	Adopt the joint strategy; assess asset condition; launch the information hub. *Milestone:* Joint Recreation Strategy adopted; ranked facility improvement list complete	First Assets baseline	Recreation, CAOs

TABLE 84

Core indicators, reporting and review roadmap

Timing	Activities and milestones	Indicators tracked (source)	Responsibility
Years 2–3	Deliver priority upgrades; expand programming; pilot transportation solutions. *Milestone:* mid-point implementation review at 18–24 months (what is on track, what needs revision, whether priorities have shifted); transportation pilots evaluated after one year	—	Recreation and CAOs
Years 3–5	Complete feasibility work; build reserve capacity; embed evaluation practice. *Milestone:* feasibility study complete; full program evaluation at Year 5 using the evaluation framework, with community re-engagement through survey and focus groups and updated demographic data	**Satisfaction:** resident satisfaction and self-reported barriers to participation (community survey, Year 5)	Recreation
Years 5–10	Consider capital investment on the evidence generated; sustain and renew. *Milestone:*capital decision, if warranted, supported by 30-year life-cycle analysis; plan renewal and successor recreation strategy at Year 10	—	Council, Recreation, CAOs

12.4 Risk Management and Evaluation Criteria

The risks below are drawn from the conditions identified through the assessment. Most are already present rather than hypothetical; the plan is in large part a response to them. Each is paired with the mitigation embedded in the recommendations, and each should be reviewed at the 18–24 month mid-point.

KEY POINT

Each is paired with the mitigation embedded in the recommendations, and each should be reviewed at the 18–24 month mid-point.

TABLE 85

Principal risks and mitigations

Risk	Description	Mitigation
Loss of informal access	Community use of StFX and SRCE facilities currently rests on verbal agreement, historical practice or expired arrangements. A change in partner leadership, scheduling pressure or institutional policy could reduce or remove access with little notice, with no municipal recourse.	Prioritize MOU negotiation for highest-reliance facilities; seek minimum five-year terms with defined notice periods and dispute resolution. (Rec 01)
Deferred maintenance liability	The true condition and remaining useful life of municipal recreation assets is not fully documented or up to date. Unquantified deferred maintenance is a hidden liability that can escalate into emergency capital demands and unplanned closures.	Complete the condition assessment and deferred maintenance report; integrate all assets into the asset management plan with a ten-year capital forecast. (Rec 03.1, 09.3)
Fiscal pressure and competing priorities	Recreation competes with water, roads and wastewater for limited borrowing capacity and tax-supported funding. Capital ambition could outpace fiscal capacity, or recreation could be deferred indefinitely.	Maintain the partnership-first, cost-sharing-before-capital position; require life-cycle costing and an operating funding plan before any commitment. (Rec 09.1)
Aquatic staffing shortage	Public swim availability is constrained by aquatic staffing (lifeguards and swim instructors), not only by pool time. This limits the community's highest-priority service and cannot be solved by facility access alone.	Explore options to strengthen aquatic leadership development for lifeguards and swim instructors, including student pathways with StFX. (Rec 04.2, 08.1)
Volunteer burnout and organizational fragility	Much of the recreation system depends on volunteers and small non-profits operating with limited administrative capacity, insurance access and storage. Loss of a single organization can end a program.	Reduce administrative burden through centralized onboarding, booking support and shared insurance models; provide grant and in-kind support and shared storage. (Rec 06.4, 08.1)
Municipal staff capacity	The plan identifies more research, planning and grant work than existing staff can deliver alongside daily operations. Attempting delivery in-house risks partial completion across many fronts.	Phase external scopes of work through the annual budget process; designate the Recreation Navigator to consolidate coordination functions. (Rec 07.1)

TABLE 85

Principal risks and mitigations

Risk	Description	Mitigation
Grant dependency	Several actions rely on CCTH, Active Communities Fund and federal streams. Application failure, program change or shifting criteria could stall implementation.	Maintain NS Shared Strategy alignment as required grant language; diversify through the Reserve Fund, cost-sharing and sponsorship; sequence non-grant-dependent actions first. (Rec 09, 10.1)
Persistent rural–urban access gap	Without transportation and outreach investment, improvements to Town-centred facilities may not reach rural residents, widening rather than narrowing the equity gap the plan seeks to close.	Apply equity mapping to prioritize investment; deliver transportation pilots and mobile programming; report participation by geography. (Rec 03.5, 05)
Implementation drift	Ten-year plans lose momentum without named ownership, scheduled review and visible reporting, particularly across two councils with separate budget cycles.	Assign named leads and measurable milestones to every action; hold the mid-point review and biennial public progress review; report annually to both Councils. (Rec 02.2, 10.2)
Partner relationship strain	MOU relationships can deteriorate where obligations are unclear, communication is inconsistent or costs are perceived as inequitably shared.	Designate a single staff lead for all MOU relationships; hold annual check-ins; include cost-sharing formulas and dispute resolution in every agreement. (Rec 01.3)

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR PRIORITIZING INVESTMENT

The following criteria should be applied consistently when ranking facility improvements, allocating available funding and responding to requests from community organizations. Applying them transparently protects Council from ad hoc spending pressure and provides a defensible basis for decisions that cannot all be funded.

5. **Safety risk** — the extent to which current condition presents a health or safety concern, or exposes the municipality to liability. Highest weighting.

6. **Usage levels** — the number of residents, organizations and programs served by the asset, measured against available data.

7. **Accessibility compliance** — alignment with NS Accessibility Legislation and the Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces.

8. **Community demand** — documented need from the resident survey, engagement process and participation data, with attention to underserved populations and geography.

9. **Life-cycle cost** — the long-term cost of acting now compared to continued deferral, including the escalation risk of delayed renewal.

DECISION GATE FOR ANY FUTURE CAPITAL PROPOSAL

No new recreation facility investment can proceed unless the proposal meets all of the following conditions. This gate applies equally to municipally initiated proposals and to proposals brought forward by community organizations or partners.

The seven conditions

1. Demonstrates that partnership, shared-use and renovation options were evaluated first and found insufficient to meet the identified need.

2. Is supported by a feasibility study assessing at least three delivery models — new municipal build; co-ownership or long-term lease; and renovation or expansion of existing assets — with no model pre-selected.

3. Includes a full life-cycle cost analysis over a 30-year horizon covering construction, operating, maintenance, staffing and debt servicing.

4. Includes a sustainable operating funding plan with projected annual operating expenses and staffing requirements.

5. Compares favourably against the established cost-per-community-access-hour benchmark achieved through existing MOU arrangements.

6. Demonstrates alignment with the NS Shared Strategy for Recreation pillars and with the adopted joint TOA/MCOA Recreation Strategy.

7. Addresses transportation access and geographic equity for rural residents as part of the proposal, not as a subsequent consideration.

A

APPENDIX A

Reconciliation of Reported Figures Against Raw Survey Data



Several figures previously circulated in summary form were calculated as a share of all selections made rather than as a share of respondents. Because most questions permitted multiple selections, that method understates prevalence — across both surveys, by roughly two to four times. The table below records each affected figure, the value held in the raw export, and the effect of the difference on the classification of need. Both versions are retained in the report body, and the source of each is named where it appears.

Sources: Recreation Needs Assessment Public Survey export, 699 responses; Recreation Needs Assessment Community Organization Survey export, 45 responses; both dated 21 April 2026. Percentages are of respondents unless stated.

TABLE A.1

Reconciliation of reported figures against raw survey data

Item	As reported in summary form	Raw survey data	Effect on the classification
Multi-select questions generally	Reported as a share of all selections made	Share of respondents selecting the option	Understates prevalence by roughly two to four times across every multi-select question in both surveys
Organizations limited by lack of space	18.3%	47.7% of organizations (21 of 45)	Strengthens 1.02
Organizations limited by storage	16.7%	43.2% of organizations (19 of 45)	Strengthens 2.21
Organizations limited by facility rental cost	15.8%	40.9% of organizations (18 of 45)	Strengthens 1.04
Low-income households need better access	17.1%	**70.5% of organizations (31 of 45)**	Strongest single equity signal in the assessment; strengthens 1.04 and 2.16
People with disabilities need better access	13.9%	56.8% of organizations (25 of 45)	Strengthens 1.06 and 2.17
Volunteer burnout	21%	45.5% of organizations (20 of 45)	Strengthens 2.18
Organizations wanting more winter access	27.5%	72.7% of organizations (32 of 45)	Strengthens 1.01
Residents who drive to recreation	65.47%	**95.3% of residents (654 of 686)**	Substantially strengthens 1.05
Capital funding as top municipal support	21.5%	63.6% of organizations (28 of 45)	Strengthens 2.19

TABLE A.1

Reconciliation of reported figures against raw survey data

Item	As reported in summary form	Raw survey data	Effect on the classification
Households including children under 18	35.5%	56.0% of households (388 of 699)	Strengthens child and youth gaps 2.02–2.05
Organized sports participation	3.4%	**65.9% of residents (457 of 699)**	
Organizations fully volunteer-run	50%	56.8% of organizations (25 of 45)	Strengthens 2.18
Spaces culturally safe — "Yes"	47.2% yes, 22.3% mostly	24.5% yes, 47.3% mostly, 22.4% unsure	Only a quarter of residents answer yes outright; strengthens 2.12 and 2.13
Top reason residents leave Antigonish	Tournament travel, 22.1%	Programs not available locally 42.9%; better facilities elsewhere 41.7%; tournament travel 22.5%	Ranking reversed. The leading cause is local absence of programs, not competitive travel
Community organization survey sample	45 organizations	45 organizations	All organization percentages shift slightly
Municipal facilities used by organizations (Q6)	Described as facilities "needing improvement"	Question asks which municipal facilities the organization uses most; the largest answer is Not Applicable at 38.6%	Materially different finding: over a third of organizations use no municipal facility at all. Strengthens 1.03



APPENDIX B

B

Full Gap Register, Evidence and Criteria Scoring

B.1 Tier 1 — Core Needs (Must Ensure Access)

B.2 Tier 2 — Supported Needs (Important, Partner-Led)

B.3 Tier 3 — Wants (Enhancement Only)

Every gap is put through the same five tests. A mark of Y means the gap passes that test. Three or more passes makes it a need; fewer makes it a want.

TABLE B.1

The five need criteria

Test	What it asks
N1 Safety or law	Essential to safety, health or a legal obligation
N2 Basic service	Part of the minimum a municipality should provide
N3 Risk	Real harm results if it is not provided
N4 No substitute	No private business or other body will provide it instead
N5 Deliverable	The municipality can realistically do it, alone or with partners

B.1 Tier 1 — Core Needs (Must Ensure Access)

TABLE B.2

Tier 1 Core Needs — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
1.01	Indoor recreation access (winter and shoulder season)	Residents and organizations lack access to affordable, inclusive indoor space when outdoor options close. 72% of residents want more winter opportunities, against 15.7% for summer, 7.8% spring and 4.5% fall. 72.7% of organizations want more winter access and 65.9% more fall access. Organizations report that school gyms prioritize school sports, leaving community groups scheduled second, and that outdoor assets such as the skatepark become unusable in snow and ice.	Resident survey Q12 · Organization survey Q12, Q13 · Organization comments Q13	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 5 of 5**	Municipal — enable via MOU access to school and university space
1.02	Space availability and program capacity	47.7% of organizations are limited by insufficient space or availability — the most frequently reported constraint. 70.5% want to run programs they currently cannot, and of those, 47.7% cite lack of suitable space and 52.3% lack of funding. 63.6% report growing membership and none report decline. Residents report programs filling quickly.	Organization survey Q8, Q9, Q21, Q23 · Resident comments Q47	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal — allocation policy, scheduling, shared use
1.03	Secured access to non-municipal facilities	The system runs largely on facilities the municipalities do not own. 38.6% of organizations use no municipally owned facility at all, and 59.1% rent or use space they neither own nor lease. The most used non-municipal spaces are local community centres (29.5%), StFX facilities (25.0%, 18.2% and 15.9% across three sites), St. Andrew's Junior School (20.5%), JH Gillis (18.2%) and École acadienne de Pomquet (13.6%). Organizations report inconsistent school rental fees, custodian charges that vary by school, loss of gym time to other groups, and rules excluding community use on snow days, holidays and through summer.	Organization survey Q6, Q7, Q25 · Organization comments Q11, Q37	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal — formal MOUs with SRCE, StFX and other partners as appropriate

TABLE B.2

Tier 1 Core Needs — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
1.04	Affordability and cost barriers	70.5% of organizations identify low-income households as needing better access — the highest-ranked group of any. 40.9% are limited by the cost of renting facilities, and lower rental or usage cost is among the top two requested improvements (40.9%). Among residents, cost is a leading barrier for non-participants, and open comments describe programs as inaccessible to low-income families. Only 40.7% of residents would support increased participation fees and 40.0% increased taxes, with 33% unsure.	Organization survey Q9, Q24, Q36 · Resident survey Q8, Q30 · Resident comments Q47	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 5 of 5**	Municipal — fee policy, subsidy, cost-sharing in MOUs
1.05	Transportation and rural access	95.3% of residents drive to recreation; 33.8% walk or wheel and 14.0% cycle. Dial-a-Ride and taxi together account for about 2%. 62.9% of respondents live in the County. 43.2% of organizations identify rural residents as needing better access and 29.5% are limited by transportation. Organizations report no accessible public transport to rehearsal, performance or recreation space, and propose school buses to move youth from schools to facilities.	Resident survey Q4, Q38 · Organization survey Q9, Q24 · Organization comments Q16, Q37	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 5 of 5**	Municipal — pilots with partners; school bus and community transit
1.06	Accessible routes and site accessibility compliance	The site assessment names accessibility as the biggest system-wide gap, with continuous accessible routes absent across sites. 25.5% of residents need at least one accessibility support: barrier-free paths (12.1%), accessible parking (9.5%), benches (9.5%), accessible washrooms (9.0%), sensory-friendly space (5.4%) and ramps (4.5%). 21.4% of households include someone with a disability. 56.8% of organizations identify people with disabilities as needing better access and 31.8% are limited by accessibility issues. Open comments cite missing handrails, non-level entries, inadequate parking, and an inaccessible Arts House.	Site assessment, all sites · Resident survey Q6, Q45 · Organization survey Q9, Q16, Q24 · Resident comments Q47	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 5 of 5**	Municipal — regulatory obligation on municipally owned assets
1.07	Washroom provision at outdoor and high-use sites	Outdoor washrooms are missing or inaccessible at major field complexes. Organizations report long washroom queues at Central Field and the Sandlot, absent restrooms at the mini pitch during tournaments, back doors locked at existing facilities, and no change rooms at the turf — girls must use school change rooms during games. 36.4% of organizations identify change rooms or washrooms among five to ten year priorities. The assessment found the portable unit in place unusable with wheeled mobility devices.	Site assessment JH Gillis and Mini Pitch · Organization survey Q28 · Organization comments Q11, Q29 · Resident survey Q6	Y	Y	Y	–	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal — sanitation and minimum level of service
1.08	Pedestrian safety and vehicle separation	The site assessment identifies pedestrian and vehicle overlap requiring separated routes, curb cuts, markings and bollards, with the Antigonish Arena noted for a pedestrian path away from vehicular traffic and ramps requiring widening. Organizations report using sidewalks to ride large adaptive bikes because no safe alternative exists. Sequencing places correction of pedestrian safety conflicts in the immediate priority band.	Site assessment, Arena and multi-site · Organization comments Q22	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 5 of 5**	Municipal — safety and liability on municipal assets
1.09	Program scheduling and timing	Timing of programs is among the most cited barriers for residents who do not currently participate (20.9%). Organizations report the greatest need for evening access, with a large share flexible if space is available at any time. Registration windows set by provincial sport bodies collide with school sport scheduling, restricting when tryouts and programs can run and directly capping enrolment. Open comments request more seniors options in the afternoon and note prime-time slots are unavailable.	Resident survey Q8, Q23, Q47 · Organization survey Q14 · Organization comments Q13	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal — allocation policy and coordinated scheduling

TABLE B.2

Tier 1 Core Needs — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
1.10	Information, awareness and centralized booking	Residents rely on social media (77.9%) and word of mouth (73.3%); the municipal website reaches 24.5% and Playfinder about 1%. Only 44.2% rate municipal parks and trails information as good and 9.2% rate it poor, with 35.1% neutral. Open comments describe the booking process as complex and frustrating. 43.2% of organizations identify promotion and communications among their top municipal supports, and organizations explicitly request a centralized calendar and booking system to reduce scheduling conflicts.	Resident survey Q20, Q21, Q47 · Organization survey Q34, Q37	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal — only actor able to consolidate across owners
1.11	Active transportation and safe connecting routes	33.8% of residents walk or wheel and 14.0% cycle to recreation. Open comments record strong demand for dedicated biking trails and safe pathways connecting neighbourhoods and schools, and identify poorly maintained sidewalks that impede strollers, wheelchairs and walkers. Organizations describe riding adaptive bikes on sidewalks for want of a safe route, and note the Accessible Trail will change how residents reach the community.	Resident survey Q4, Q47 · Organization survey Q22, Q37 · Site assessment, pedestrian routes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 5 of 5**	Municipal — safety and equity; coordinate with public works

B.2 Tier 2 — Supported Needs (Important, Partner-Led)

TABLE B.3

Tier 2 Supported Needs — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
2.01	Aquatic access through existing facilities (all ages)	Swimming is the most consistently requested activity across every age band in the open-text age questions, and a pool or aquatic centre is the most cited missing amenity. Organizations report the StFX pool was closed for over a year during renovation, removing the community's only indoor aquatic capacity: one organization notes that when a single facility closes it has major programming impact. Residents request supportive pool access and a warmer pool. Aquatic provision is a single point of failure.	Resident survey Q6, Q9, Q24–Q29 (coded), Q47 · Organization comments Q29	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 5 of 5**	Partner-led — StFX, with municipal scheduling, subsidy and contingency planning
2.02	Early childhood (0–5) programming and indoor play	56.0% of households include children under 18. Requested opportunities for infants centre on swimming or warm-pool access, indoor play space and parent-and-tot programs. Only 25.0% of organizations serve ages 0–4, the lowest of any age band, against 61.4% serving ages 5–9 — a coverage gap rather than a demand gap. Residents request stroller-accessible space, breastfeeding areas and baby change facilities.	Resident survey Q6, Q24 (coded), Q42 · Organization survey Q3	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — coverage gap; supportable through grants

TABLE B.3

Tier 2 Supported Needs — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
2.03	Children (6–12) programming	61.4% of organizations serve ages 5–9 and 72.7% serve ages 10–14. Requested additions for this band are swimming, arts and music, outdoor adventure and biking, climbing or gymnastics, and open gym play. Organizations request a more comprehensive offering for the U7–U9 range, introductory combat games for ages 4–7, drop-in sessions for children, and youth arts camps. 38.6% identify children as needing better access.	Organization survey Q3, Q24 · Resident survey Q25 (coded) · Organization comments Q22	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — mix of structured and open play
2.04	Youth and teen (13–18) activity programming	Organizations serve ages 15–18 more than any other band (75.0%), and 54.5% identify youth as needing better access — third-highest of any group. Requested additions include climbing and outdoor adventure, swimming, arts, music and theatre, girls-only programming, youth rugby, summer rugby, and greater differentiation between junior and senior high school programs. The skatepark is described as a free, barrier-free space serving youth from low-income backgrounds and those who do not connect with team sport.	Organization survey Q3, Q24 · Resident survey Q26 (coded) · Organization comments Q5, Q22 · Youth sessions	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — highest organizational reach already exists
2.05	Youth and teen non-sport third space	Distinct from activity programming. Organizations request a space for youth and teens that is not sport-related, offering pre-programming or somewhere safe and warm to spend time, noting that children not participating in sport are missing out. One respondent describes a teenager deeply engaged in music with no community support for it and proposes free music lessons or a youth battle of the bands. The skatepark demonstrates demand for unstructured, drop-in, no-cost space.	Organization comments Q5, Q22, Q37 · Resident survey Q9, Q11 (coded) · Focus groups · Youth sessions	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — municipal space access and grant support
2.06	Young adult (19–39) social and league recreation	68.2% of organizations serve ages 19–24 and 25–34. Requested additions include recreational rather than competitive formats — one organization notes it offers only competitive play and wants a recreational stream so athletes can play for fun — alongside adult ringette, adult wrestling and programs for university students. Open comments identify young professionals as underserved and link recreation to retaining working professionals and young families.	Organization survey Q3 · Organization comments Q22, Q37 · Resident survey Q27 (coded)	–	Y	–	Y	Y	**NEED 3 of 5**	Partner-led — league coordination and space access
2.07	Adult (40–64) walking and social recreation	63.6% of organizations serve ages 55–64 and 61.4% ages 45–54. Requested activities for this band centre on walking groups, swimming, social recreation and low-impact exercise. 57.3% of residents participate in drop-in activities and 61.6% in community events, indicating appetite for informal formats. These are low-cost, partner-deliverable programs requiring coordination rather than infrastructure.	Organization survey Q3 · Resident survey Q2, Q28 (coded)	–	Y	–	Y	Y	**NEED 3 of 5**	Partner-led — no new infrastructure required
2.08	Seniors (65+) programming and healthy aging	59.1% of organizations serve ages 65 and older and 47.7% identify seniors as needing better access. One provider reports 47% seniors and another 44%. Requested activities are walking, seniors-focused fitness, swimming, social gatherings and dance. Organizations report limited affordable and appropriate exercise opportunities for seniors, serve members up to age 92, and request facilitation so groups delivering movement programming to seniors across Town and County can coordinate. Pickleball is described as addressing loneliness and depression among seniors.	Organization survey Q3, Q5, Q24 · Resident survey Q29 (coded) · Organization comments Q11, Q22, Q37	Y	Y	–	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — existing providers with municipal support

TABLE B.3

Tier 2 Supported Needs — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
2.09	Non-competitive and recreational stream programming	65.9% of residents participate in organized sport but 57.3% also use drop-in activities, and organizations report demand for recreational alternatives to competitive streams. Open comments describe programming as weighted toward competitive sport, particularly hockey, with limited skating outside minor hockey. Arts organizations note their programming attracts participants uncomfortable in competitive environments, including LGBTQ2S+ community members.	Resident survey Q2, Q47 · Organization survey Q5, Q22	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — allocation policy can rebalance access
2.10	Low-barrier and drop-in recreation	57.3% of residents participate in drop-in activities, second only to outdoor recreation (81.2%) and organized sport. Organizations link drop-in space directly to combating loneliness and note that town and fringe residents have no central space to drop in year-round. Requests include drop-in maker and jam sessions, open gym, and unstructured after-school activity. The skatepark is cited as the model: free, public, no registration.	Resident survey Q2 · Organization comments Q5, Q22, Q37	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — delivered in MOU-secured space
2.11	Arts, culture and performance programming	47.8% of residents participate in arts and culture. Organizations request arts lessons, writing workshops, literary readings, music lessons, community theatre, film production, sound recording, printmaking, stained glass, improv and dance. One organization offers free music lessons to any age from 8 to 88 including equity-deserving groups; another selects Indigenous, racialized, disabled, LGBTQ2S+ and Francophone artists each year. An arts organization reports one inadequate, inaccessible space and frequent requests it cannot accommodate.	Resident survey Q2 · Organization comments Q5, Q11, Q22, Q37	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — space access and grant support
2.12	Culturally appropriate and inclusive programming	52.3% of organizations want more cultural festivals and community celebrations, 45.5% more arts, music, dance or storytelling from diverse cultures, 38.6% youth cultural leadership, 34.1% programs for newcomers, 34.1% intercultural events, 31.8% Indigenous cultural programming and 31.8% recreation rooted in cultural traditions. Only 18.2% consider current programs sufficient. Among residents, only 24.5% say spaces are culturally safe outright, with 47.3% saying mostly and 22.4% unsure.	Organization survey Q31 · Resident survey Q31, Q32 · Focus groups, community and Indigenous	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — funding and in-kind support to cultural organizations
2.13	Cultural representation in staffing and leadership	Only 15.9% of organizations say facilities support inclusive programming very well; 27.3% say somewhat, 11.4% not well and 36.4% are unsure or say it depends on the space. 50.0% need more staff or volunteer support and 47.6% need support with outreach and community engagement to deliver inclusive programming. Residents identify representation in leadership and coaching, more diverse staff and volunteers, cultural sensitivity training and multiple language options as what would help.	Organization survey Q30, Q32 · Resident survey Q33 (coded) · Focus groups	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — recruitment, training and outreach practice
2.14	Indigenous engagement and programming	2.2% of survey respondents (15 people) identify as members of Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation, and Paqtnkek appears as both a place of residence and a facility used by organizations. 31.8% of organizations want more Indigenous cultural programming. One organization supports Gaelic and Mi'kmaq cultural representation through tourism programming. Indigenous organizations participated in the focus groups. Survey data alone understates need, so continued direct engagement is required.	Resident survey Q35, Q38, Q44 · Organization survey Q7, Q31 · Organization comments Q5 · Focus groups	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — sustained relationship, not survey-driven

TABLE B.3

Tier 2 Supported Needs — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
2.15	Newcomer access and outreach	47.7% of organizations identify newcomers as needing better access and 34.1% want more programs for newcomers. One organization reports 10% immigrant membership; others describe serving newcomers, unhoused residents and people in care homes. Pickleball is described as a way for people new to the area to meet community members. Residents identify direct invitations to newcomers and better outreach as what would make recreation more welcoming.	Organization survey Q24, Q31 · Organization comments Q5, Q22, Q37 · Resident survey Q33 (coded) · Focus groups	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — with newcomer-serving organizations
2.16	Access for other underserved populations	81.8% of organizations serve underserved or under-represented groups. Priority groups identified are low-income households (70.5%), people with disabilities (56.8%), youth (54.5%), seniors (47.7%), newcomers (47.7%), rural residents (43.2%), children (38.6%) and women and girls (34.1%). Open text names people with intellectual disabilities, Special Olympics participants, people with chronic illness, those in care homes or hospital, unhoused residents, and L'Arche community members.	Organization survey Q4, Q5, Q24 · Organization comments Q16, Q22	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 5 of 5**	Partner-led — targeted subsidy and outreach
2.17	Sensory, neurodivergent and health-related accessibility	5.4% of residents need sensory-friendly space and open text records scent-free and fragrance-free requirements. 34.1% of organizations report members whose access needs affect facility use, with a further 27.3% unsure. Reported needs include wheelchairs, walkers and AFOs, visual and hearing impairment, cognitive limitations, COPD requiring air filtration and MS requiring air conditioning. One organization is piloting a sensory-inclusive program; another notes its constraint is adaptive equipment rather than the facility itself.	Resident survey Q6, Q46 · Organization survey Q15 · Organization comments Q11, Q16, Q22	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 5 of 5**	Partner-led — design standards, adaptive equipment and staff training
2.18	Volunteer capacity, recruitment and burnout	56.8% of organizations are fully volunteer-run and a further 31.8% mix volunteers with paid staff. Only 34.1% can recruit and retain enough volunteers; 43.2% report partial success and 15.9% cannot meet needs. Challenges are burnout (45.5%), difficulty recruiting younger volunteers (40.9%), an aging volunteer base (38.6%), time commitment (20.5%), training or certification requirements (18.2%) and liability or insurance concerns (9.1%). 22.7% identify volunteer recruitment support as a priority municipal support.	Organization survey Q17–Q20, Q34 · Resident survey Q15, Q19	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — municipal tools, database, onboarding support
2.19	Organizational funding (operating and capital)	63.6% of organizations identify capital funding or grants as the municipal support that would most benefit them, followed by operating funding (47.7%) and access to affordable space (45.5%). 52.3% are prevented from offering programs by lack of funding — the single largest barrier. 64.3% need increased funding to deliver inclusive programming. Open text records arts grants being cut and organizations unable to pass costs to participants.	Organization survey Q23, Q32, Q34 · Organization comments Q23	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal grant program; partner delivery
2.20	Program expansion constraints	70.5% of organizations want to offer programs they currently cannot. Barriers are funding (52.3%), suitable space (47.7%), volunteers or staff (31.8%), scheduling conflicts (22.7%), equipment or storage (20.5%), limited capacity (20.5%), facility condition or layout (15.9%) and accessibility limitations (15.9%). Demand is established and growing; capacity is the limiting factor.	Organization survey Q21, Q23	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	System constraint — resolved through space and coordination

TABLE B.3

Tier 2 Supported Needs — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
2.21	Storage and equipment	43.2% of organizations are limited by insufficient storage and 36.4% identify storage among five to ten year priorities. Organizations describe storage that is not weather-tight, equipment stored off-site, and responsibility for replacing nets and post systems used by both clubs and school physical education classes. One group is building a storage shed as an interim step toward a facility within walking distance of its community.	Organization survey Q9, Q28 · Organization comments Q11, Q29	–	Y	–	Y	Y	**NEED 3 of 5**	Operational — improves system efficiency, not direct access
2.22	Administrative burden, insurance and coordination	Insurance appears repeatedly as a standalone barrier: organizations report insurance costs when running events, that the cost of insuring an event is the main obstacle despite suitable space, and that insurance is prohibitive for a group whose activities need no facility upgrades. Organizations request umbrella insurance, previously provided through Recreation NS, and periodic access to recreation staff. 47.7% are open to sharing space and 38.6% may be, so coordination capacity exists but is unorganized.	Organization survey Q33 · Organization comments Q9, Q23, Q29, Q37	–	Y	–	Y	Y	**NEED 3 of 5**	Municipal enabling role — low cost, high leverage
2.23	Playground and splash pad renewal	Playgrounds and parks are used by 63.1% of residents — the most used facility type in the assessment — and municipal parks and playgrounds by 48.5%. Playgrounds and splash pads are the most frequently identified facilities requiring repair in the open-text question. The site assessment identifies the Columbus Field playground in fair condition with accessibility and drainage issues and a splash pad requiring drainage repair.	Resident survey Q3, Q10 (coded), Q47 · Site assessment, Columbus Field	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 5 of 5**	Municipal — phased renewal by ranked priority
2.24	Drainage, grading and turf condition	The site assessment identifies drainage corrections required at the Columbus Field splash pad, JH Gillis Softball Field, Columbus Field and track, and ponded areas on the Antigonish Landing Trail. An organization reports the turf field balloons in heavy rain, displacing filler material and making it unsafe, and that the turf is reaching end of life and needs assessment or replacement.	Site assessment, multi-site · Organization comments Q11, Q29	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 5 of 5**	Municipal — phased capital renewal by ranked priority
2.25	Lifecycle renewal of aging assets	Arena Zamboni and lighting are nearing end of service life; the running track requires a durable surface; the Chisholm Park bandstand and aging shingles need attention; lights at Columbus Field are non-functioning; backstop fencing is missing. 25.0% of organizations anticipate roof or building exterior work and 22.7% energy efficiency upgrades within five to ten years. Open text records a main building requiring relocation onto new foundations and a roof needed within two to five years.	Site assessment, Arena, Columbus, Chisholm · Organization survey Q27, Q28 · Organization comments Q29	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal — asset management and capital forecast
2.26	Trail surfacing, rest points and accessible parking	The Antigonish Landing Trail is in generally good condition but gravel surfacing, ponding, limited rest opportunities and absent accessible parking limit inclusive use. Residents request barrier-free paths and smooth trails more than any other accessibility support (12.1%). Organizations note the Accessible Trail will change how residents reach the community and ask that the trail be completed.	Site assessment, Landing Trail · Resident survey Q6, Q9 (coded) · Organization comments Q22, Q36, Q37	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal with provincial partners; grant-eligible

TABLE B.3

Tier 2 Supported Needs — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
2.27	Site amenities: seating, waste, water and lighting	The site assessment recommends replacing damaged garbage receptacles, adding benches, relocating accessible picnic tables from grass to firm surfaces and repairing lighting near gravel parking. 9.5% of residents identify benches among needed accessibility supports and open text requests places to sit, potable water fountains, year-round washrooms and improved parking. Organizations request better lighting in parking areas and around buildings, and a paved, marked parking lot.	Site assessment, multi-site · Resident survey Q6, Q47 · Organization survey Q11, Q29	–	Y	–	Y	Y	**NEED 3 of 5**	Municipal — low cost, immediate usability gain
2.28	Signage and wayfinding	The site assessment recommends improved street visibility and signage at Arbor Drive/Vincent J. MacDonald Memorial Park, trailhead signage at Beaver Mountain Park, and wayfinding across larger parks and trail systems. Only 44.2% of residents rate municipal parks and trails information as good, with 35.1% neutral and 9.2% poor, indicating that finding and navigating outdoor assets is itself a barrier.	Site assessment, Arbor Drive/Vincent J. MacDonald and Beaver Mountain · Resident survey Q20	–	Y	–	Y	Y	**NEED 3 of 5**	Municipal — improves utilization of existing assets
2.29	Winter maintenance of outdoor spaces	72% of residents want more winter opportunities. Organizations report outdoor assets becoming unusable in snow and ice and residents request improved winter access to outdoor spaces and side roads well plowed for walking. This compounds 1.01: when outdoor space is unmaintained and indoor space unavailable, winter participation has no route.	Resident survey Q6, Q12, Q47 · Organization survey Q13	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal — seasonal service level decision
2.30	Accessibility and inclusion information gap	27.3% of organizations are unsure whether participants have access needs, and 36.4% are unsure or qualified about whether facilities support inclusive programming. Among residents, 22.4% are unsure whether spaces are culturally safe. One organization notes it is not currently serving a community it could serve with more volunteer capacity. This is a data and awareness gap rather than a settled position.	Organization survey Q15, Q30 · Resident survey Q32	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal — baseline data and evaluation framework
2.31	Under-representation in the engagement evidence base	The sample skews to long-term residents (70.7% over ten years), women (69.0%), and ages 35 and over, with respondents aged 35–44 alone at 35.2%. Only 2.2% are members of Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation. Youth sessions were held at three schools, two pop-ups at farmers markets, and focus groups with community and Indigenous organizations, but their findings are not reported separately. 24 organizations volunteered for follow-up consultation.	Resident survey Q38–Q45 · Organization survey Q38 · Methodology: focus groups, stakeholder consultations, pop-up events, youth sessions	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal — report engagement streams separately; targeted follow-up
2.32	Gender equity in facility allocation	34.1% of organizations identify women and girls as needing better access. Specific reports: a request for more baseball fields with priority booking so female baseball stops losing out; girls needing to use school change rooms during turf games because no change facilities exist; ringette described as primarily a girls' sport competing for ice; and requests for girls-only wrestling programming. One organization reports 52% women and another 56%. Allocation practice, not demand, is the constraint.	Organization survey Q24 · Organization comments Q5, Q11, Q22, Q29	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Municipal — allocation policy with explicit equity criteria
2.33	French-language and Acadian community access	École acadienne de Pomquet is used by 13.6% of organizations, the fifth most used non-municipal facility. One organization identifies the French minority as the underserved group it serves, and French or bilingual activities appear among requested inclusive programming. An organization requests a storm shelter at Pomquet beach for summer camp use. Francophone access has not previously been treated as a distinct gap.	Organization survey Q7, Q31 · Organization comments Q5, Q11	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — with Acadian and Francophone organizations

TABLE B.3

Tier 2 Supported Needs — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
2.34	Imminent loss of performing and rehearsal space	This is a loss of existing capacity rather than an unmet aspiration. Organizations report the Bauer Theatre will permanently close to Festival Antigonish and Theatre Antigonish within a few years and that recent upgrades extend its life only briefly; the Arts House is inaccessible and too small; Immaculata Hall is expensive, has accessibility issues, steep front stairs and limited audience capacity; and church venues impose repertoire restrictions. A choir reports outgrowing its space. Without intervention, current provision falls rather than holds.	Organization comments Q11, Q29, Q37	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	**NEED 4 of 5**	Partner-led — succession planning for space already in use
2.35	Coach and instructor certification cost	Organizations report that access to trained or certified individuals is challenging because of the cost of acquiring training and certification, and that these costs together with facility rental make introductory programming for newcomers, youth, seniors and people with disabilities prohibitive. 18.2% identify training or capacity building as a priority municipal support and 18.2% cite training or certification requirements as a volunteer challenge.	Organization survey Q20, Q23, Q34 · Organization comments Q22, Q23	–	Y	–	Y	Y	**NEED 3 of 5**	Partner-led — bursary or shared certification funding

B.3 Tier 3 — Wants (Enhancement Only)

TABLE B.4

Tier 3 Wants — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
3.01	New community pool (family, outdoor, warm or therapy)	Repeated requests for a community pool, outdoor pool and warm or therapy pool. Demand is consistent across age bands, but the underlying need — access to swimming — is addressable through the existing partner facility at materially lower cost. The year-long StFX pool closure strengthens the case for contingency arrangements rather than for a municipal build.	Resident survey Q9, Q11 (coded), Q47 · Organization comments Q29	Y	–	–	–	–	**WANT 1 of 5**	Capital — only after feasibility and life-cycle costing; see 2.01
3.02	Indoor multi-sport or full-service recreation complex	The most frequently cited tax-dollar priority in the open-text question, described as a rec centre, multi-use complex or YMCA-style facility. Organizations propose a multi-use indoor facility supporting skateboarding, scootering, a climbing wall and a walking track. Reflects a genuine Tier 1 access need, but as a solution it is high-cost, long-horizon and not the only route to the outcome.	Resident survey Q11 (coded), Q47 · Organization comments Q13, Q29	Y	–	Y	–	–	**WANT 2 of 5**	Capital — test against MOU access benchmark first; see 1.01
3.03	Indoor turf or dome facility	Requests for indoor turf, a covered dome and off-season training space, with reference to the covered turf facility in Stellarton. One organization reports losing athletes for want of a year-round facility and another needs indoor turf for a spring football league. Serves specific sport groups rather than the general population.	Organization comments Q11, Q13, Q37 · Resident survey Q10, Q26 (coded)	–	–	–	–	–	**WANT 0 of 5**	Capital — specialized use; benefits specific groups

TABLE B.4

Tier 3 Wants — evidence and criteria scoring

Ref	Gap	What the evidence shows	Where it comes from	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	Verdict	What needs to happen
3.04	Indoor walking or running track (standalone)	An indoor track appears among the leading tax-dollar priorities and connects to the strong walking preference among adults and seniors. One organization can run winter programming for only 12 to 15 students it can safely coach outdoors, and states it could run far more year-round programs with an indoor track. As a standalone build it is a want; as a component of secured indoor access it supports a Tier 1 need.	Resident survey Q11 (coded) · Organization comments Q11, Q22	–	–	–	–	Y	**WANT 1 of 5**	Capital — or resolve through indoor access under 1.01
3.05	Dedicated pickleball and tennis courts	Organizations report huge demand for dedicated, quality, affordable court space, note that outdoor dedicated courts are relatively inexpensive and usable up to nine months a year in the region, and would pay weekend janitor fees for additional court time. One organization reports only one court available and another has lost gym time to pickleball, indicating competition between activities for the same space.	Organization comments Q9, Q11, Q13, Q29, Q37 · Resident survey Q9, Q10 (coded)	–	–	–	–	Y	**WANT 1 of 5**	Capital — low-cost outdoor option merits separate review
3.06	Climbing walls and specialty fitness amenities	Interest in climbing walls, rock climbing and parkour appears in both surveys, and climbing ranks high among youth requests. One organization notes residents travel outside the community to reach a climbing wall. Niche amenities not required for general recreation access.	Resident survey Q9, Q23, Q26 (coded), Q47 · Organization comments Q22	–	–	–	–	–	**WANT 0 of 5**	Capital — niche; consider only within a larger facility case
3.07	New performing arts or theatre facility	Requests for a performing arts centre with designated office space for local non-profits, proper stage facilities wide enough for six to eight dancers with tiered audience seating, accessible rehearsal and performance space, film screening and editing facilities with gear rental, and workshop and meeting space for writing, improv and visual arts. Distinct from 2.34, which concerns preserving space already in use.	Organization comments Q11, Q22, Q29, Q37 · Resident survey Q11 (coded)	–	–	–	–	–	**WANT 0 of 5**	Capital — community-led feasibility; municipal support role
3.08	Additional splash pads and outdoor rinks	Splash pads and outdoor rinks appear among tax-dollar priorities and missing amenities in the open-text questions. The existing splash pad requires drainage correction, so repair of the current asset precedes any addition.	Resident survey Q9, Q11 (coded) · Site assessment, Columbus Field	–	–	–	–	Y	**WANT 1 of 5**	Capital — repair existing before adding new; see 2.23
3.09	Commercial-style adult fitness and gym provision	65.8% of residents participate in fitness and wellness activities and 23.8% already use private fitness centres, gyms or studios, with a further 21.0% using yoga, dance or martial arts studios. Because private providers demonstrably serve this segment at scale, the gap fails the substitution criterion. The social and league components are classified separately at 2.06.	Resident survey Q2, Q3	–	–	–	–	Y	**WANT 1 of 5**	Market — substitutable by private sector
3.10	Dedicated single-sport facilities	Requests include a dedicated baseball diamond at Columbus Field with lights, power supply, portable mound and backstop; a shared community combat room; a dedicated indoor golf facility; an expanded golf practice facility and additional holes; and a relocated boat club clubhouse with expanded dinghy haul-out. Each serves one activity group. Where a request is a repair rather than a new build — backstop fencing, post systems — it is classified at 2.25.	Organization comments Q11, Q13, Q29	–	–	–	–	Y	**WANT 1 of 5**	Capital — distinguish from repairs under 2.25
3.11	Tourism-oriented shoulder-season recreation products	The Antigonish Tourism Association seeks visitor-focused recreation programming in shoulder and winter seasons, including guided hiking, snowshoeing and cultural tours and packaged bookable experiences, and identifies scope to align recreation facilities with tourism use. Economic development value, but outside the minimum level of service for residents.	Organization comments Q22, Q37 · Stakeholder consultations	–	–	–	–	Y	**WANT 1 of 5**	Partner-led — economic development rather than recreation level of service

C

APPENDIX C

Decision Making Matrix

10.3 How To Use It, Step by Step

10.4 A Worked Example



10.3 How To Use It, Step by Step

TABLE C.1

How to use the tool

Step	What to do	Practical note
1	List the options as decisions. Write each one as something that can be approved — a negotiation, a policy, a program, a study or a capital project.	Include the expensive options, or the comparison is incomplete.
2	Mark each option from 1 to 5 against all six questions, and record the source for every mark.	A mark without a recorded source cannot be checked later, and should be revised or marked provisional.
3	Multiply each mark by its weight and add the six results. The total is out of 5.	A spreadsheet performs this once the weights are entered.
4	Read the band the total falls into.	Act now (4.0+) · Schedule (3.4–3.9) · Plan (2.8–3.3) · Contingent (below 2.8).
5	Check dependencies and adjust the order where one project cannot start until another is complete.	Dependencies override totals. A project cannot begin earlier than its prerequisite.
6	Record the marks, the sources and the date. Re-score when the underlying evidence changes.	Grant outcomes, partnership changes and asset condition reports all change marks.

10.4 A Worked Example

Four projects are scored below to show how the method operates across the range. They are examples, not a recommended shortlist.

TABLE C.2

Worked example — four projects scored

Project	Impact 25%	Equity 20%	Urgenc y 15%	Feasibilit y 15%	Cost 15%	Align 10%	Total	Band
Written agreements with the SRCE and StFX	5	5	5	4	5	5	**4.85**	**Act now**
Rural recreation transport pilot	4	5	3	3	3	5	**3.85**	Schedule
Playground and splash pad renewal	4	4	3	3	2	4	**3.40**	Schedule
New indoor multi-use facility	5	3	2	1	1	3	**2.75**	Contingent

TABLE C.3

The evidence behind the top-scoring example

Question	Recorded evidence	Source	Mark	Result
Impact	38.6% of organizations use no municipally owned facility; 59.1% rent or use space they neither own nor lease	Organization survey Q6, Q25	5	1.25
Equity	70.5% of organizations identify low-income households as needing better access; 43.2% identify rural residents	Organization survey Q24	5	1.00
Urgency	Organizations report school access excluded on snow days, holidays and through summer, and rental fees that vary by school	Organization comments Q11, Q37	5	0.75
Feasibility	Action requires negotiation and legal drafting; no new staff, facility or authority is required	Method assessment	4	0.60
Cost	Staff time and legal fees; no capital component	Method assessment	5	0.75
Alignment	Maps to the Inclusion and Access, Active Living and Supportive Environments pillars	NS Shared Strategy for Recreation	5	0.50
Total				**4.85**

What the results mean: the indoor facility receives the highest available mark on impact and the lowest total of the four. Cost and feasibility together carry 30% of the weight, and it scores 1 on both. The agreements receive the same impact mark and score 5 on cost, producing a difference of 2.10 between the two totals.

KEY POINT

What the results mean: the indoor facility receives the highest available mark on impact and the lowest total of the four.

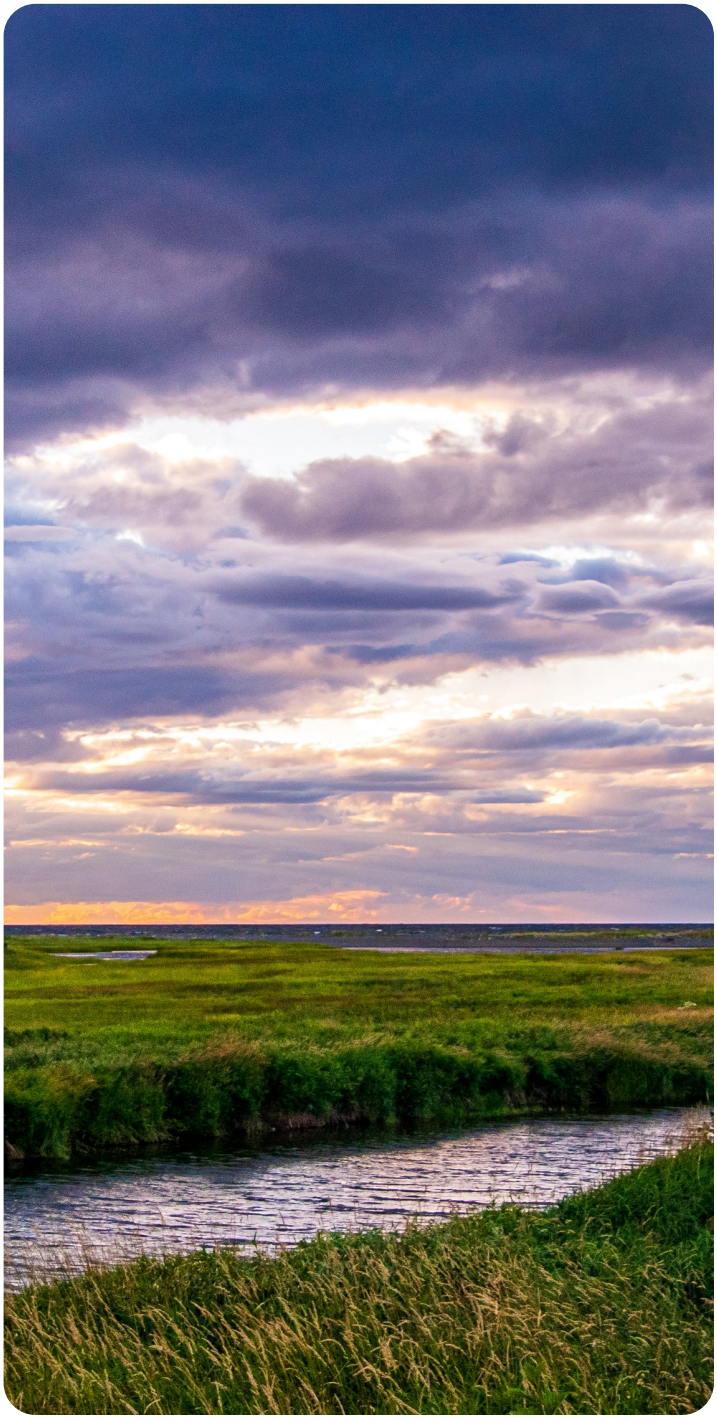
This is a property of the weighting set; changing those weights changes the result.

D

APPENDIX D

C.1 Scope for further consulting work

Detailed Implementation Actions



C.1 Scope for further consulting work

This implementation plan identifies a significant number of research, planning, evaluation and grant support tasks that will require external professional capacity to complete successfully. These are not actions TOA/MCOA staff can reasonably deliver alongside day-to-day operations. The items below represent logical scopes of work that should be considered to be tendered or contracted — either as individual projects or as phases of a longer-term advisory engagement — as the plan is implemented. Council will be given the opportunity to review, discuss and approve which elements are implemented on a year-to-year basis during the budget deliberation process.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY (SHORT TERM)

These items are prerequisites for most other actions in the plan and should be commissioned as early as possible.

TABLE D.1

Immediate priority scopes of work

Scope of work	Purpose	Linked to
Facility inventory and ownership mapping	Complete record of all recreation facilities, ownership and current access basis — essential input for MOU negotiations.	Rec 01
MOU gap analysis	Identifies unprotected facilities and prioritizes which agreements to pursue first.	Rec 01
Baseline recreation data report	Establishes participation, facility usage and demand benchmarks for future grant applications and evaluation.	Rec 02
Parks, outdoor space and facility condition assessment	Complete and updated record of all parks, outdoor spaces, amenities, management and conditions across TOA/MCOA, with condition ratings, deferred maintenance costs and improvement ranking for all municipally owned assets. Used to prioritize capital and maintenance actions by safety, usage, accessibility and life-cycle cost.	Rec 03
Active transportation gap map	Maps sidewalk and cycling infrastructure gaps between residential areas and key recreation sites. Identifies repair needs, winter maintenance gaps and accessibility issues across the trail network.	Rec 05
Strategy alignment mapping report	Maps all plan recommendations to NS Shared Strategy pillars, provincial grant criteria and NS Accessibility Legislation.	Rec 10

SHORT TERM (6–18 MONTHS)

These scopes support the implementation of early-phase actions and are required to access key CCTH and federal grant streams.

TABLE D.2

Short-term scopes of work

Scope of work	Purpose	Linked to
Recreation strategy drafting and NS Shared Strategy alignment	Joint TOA/MCOA recreation strategy document aligned to provincial pillars — required language for provincial grant eligibility.	Rec 02
Capital request decision framework	Evidence-based criteria for Council to evaluate future capital proposals, forming part of the Recreation Master Plan and preventing ad hoc spending decisions.	Rec 02
Equity impact assessment	Ensures recommendations are evaluated for their impact on different population groups — rural residents, youth, seniors, newcomers, Indigenous community and people with disabilities — helping identify barriers to participation and supporting equitable access.	Rec 02
Demographic and wellbeing analysis	Integrates census data, health indicators and population projections into the recreation planning evidence base.	Rec 02
Parks equity mapping	Geographic distribution analysis of outdoor recreation spaces; identifies underserved areas.	Rec 03
Indoor facility feasibility study (all models)	Options: new build; StFX co-ownership or lease; renovation or addition to an existing facility. Includes a 30-year operating cost model for each.	Rec 04
Transportation pilot design and grant application	CCTH Active Communities Fund application for the rural recreation shuttle; pilot design and evaluation framework.	Rec 05
Community programming fund design	Design, eligibility criteria and administration model for the municipal community recreation grant fund.	Rec 06
Recreation evaluation framework	Indicators and data collection methodology for tracking implementation progress across all ten recommendations.	Rec 10

ONGOING AND MEDIUM TERM (ANNUALLY OR 18 MONTHS+)

These scopes support sustained implementation, annual Council reporting, and longer-horizon planning decisions.

TABLE D.3

Ongoing and medium-term scopes of work

Scope of work	Purpose	Linked to
Biennial implementation review	Progress assessment against all recommendations every two years, with updated community input and recommended adjustments.	Rec 02
Natural space connectivity analysis	Maps opportunities to link parks, trails, beaches and green spaces into a coherent network.	Rec 03

TABLE D.3

Ongoing and medium-term scopes of work

Scope of work	Purpose	Linked to
MOU financial modelling	Cost-sharing formula development and cost-per-access-hour tracking framework for all MOU partner facilities.	Rec 09
Recreation fee policy framework	Tiered fee structure with explicit cost recovery levels and subsidy pathways by program type.	Rec 09
Ten-year capital forecast and deferred maintenance cost report	Projected capital reinvestment schedule and reserve fund contribution targets for all municipal recreation assets. Quantifies the current hidden liability from deferred maintenance for incorporation into the reinvestment schedule.	Rec 09
Life-cycle cost analysis template	Standard template for evaluating any future capital proposal over a 30-year horizon — required before any Council capital decision.	Rec 09
Comparative municipal spending analysis	Benchmarks TOA/MCOA recreation spending per capita against comparable NS municipalities.	Rec 09
Five-year program evaluation	Full re-engagement with the community through survey and focus groups, and impact assessment at Year 5.	Rec 10



APPENDIX E

E

Examples of Approaches to Recommendation and Goals

D.1 Establish formal MOUs with non-municipal facility o...
D.2 Create a shared TOA/MCOA recreation plan
D.3 Upgrade existing facilities before building new
D.4 Plan for indoor, aquatic and year-round recreation s...
D.5 Address transportation as a core recreation barrier
D.6 Expand low-cost, inclusive and community-based p...
D.7 Build one recreation information and booking hub
D.8 Strengthen volunteer and staff capacity
D.9 Adopt a financial sustainability framework for recrea...

This appendix identifies municipalities that have successfully implemented similar initiatives, providing practical examples, lessons learned and evidence to support implementation. Most are far larger than Antigonish, so they are ideas to adapt at a local scale, not service-level benchmarks.

D.1 Establish formal MOUs with non-municipal facility owners

A useful Canadian comparable example here is Halifax Regional Municipality, because it has built school rentals into its broader municipal bookings system instead of leaving access to separate informal arrangements. On its public rentals page, Halifax lists municipal facility rentals and also includes HRCE school rentals within the same overall booking structure, which is the clearest public-facing example found of a municipality formalising access to non-municipal school spaces.

Although far larger, the City of Vancouver offers ideas for facility inventory and system management. Its Park Board operates a large public recreation network that includes 250 parks and 24 community centres with swimming pools, arenas and playing fields, and its public recreation page connects facilities, schedules, park bookings, recreation programs, partnerships and service contacts in one place.

The main takeaway for TOA/MCOA is that municipalities get more reliable access, clearer booking rules, and better public communication when shared use is treated as an operating system, not just a goodwill arrangement.

D.2 Create a shared TOA/MCOA recreation plan

The clearest lesson from other municipalities is that the strongest recreation systems are the ones that connect planning, booking, access, facilities and equity instead of managing them in separate silos. The City of Moncton puts parks, arenas, sports facilities, arts and culture, community grants, diversity and equity resources and its strategic plan within one municipal system. Halifax Regional Municipality similarly connects affordable access, program registration, facility bookings, trails, field conditions and capital projects through one municipal platform. The City of Saskatoon is also useful because its Leif Erickson Park work publishes engagement, funding logic, upgrade concepts and frequently asked questions together, which is the practical side of evidence-based planning.

The City of Toronto adds a strong planning and evidence example. Its Parks and Recreation division has dedicated business units for capital project delivery, client services, community recreation, parks planning, policy, strategic planning, data analytics, performance metrics, research and evaluation. The City of Vancouver

adds a useful public engagement example because its parks and recreation system links facilities, schedules, recreation programs, major projects, service contacts, and public input tools. For TOA/MCOA, the lesson is that a shared plan works best when it is tied to real booking, budget, access, public input, staff responsibilities and reporting tools from day one.

D.3 Upgrade existing facilities before building new

This recommendation is strongly supported by current municipal practice elsewhere. The City of Saskatoon is a good example because its Leif Erickson Park upgrade addressed deficiencies, brought the park up to current standards, and included a food forest demonstration site, irrigation improvements, naturalized plantings, a new sidewalk, pathways and site furniture. Saskatoon also notes that coordinating related park projects reduced construction impacts, saved time and money, and made better use of grant funding.

Halifax Regional Municipality is useful because it publicly connects facility rentals, field conditions, recreation centres, arenas, sports fields, beaches, pools, all-weather turf fields, ball diamonds, tracks and HRCE school rentals within the same public recreation system. Its trail information also identifies that some trails are municipally owned while others are maintained by community groups or the province, which is relevant for TOA/MCOA's trail mapping and ownership work.

The City of Moncton remains a strong trail example through Irishtown Nature Park. The park has surfaced trails that are accessible for strollers and wheelchairs, gravel trails suitable for walking, running and biking, and trails that are cleared in winter. The City of Toronto adds a strong asset renewal example because its parks and recreation budget tracks state-of-good-repair investment, backlog, park washrooms, parkland maintained, natural areas managed, registrations and facility bookings. The City of Mississauga is also useful for drainage and climate resilience because it is building an underground stormwater management facility under part of Huron Heights Park to reduce flooding, improve water quality, and replace the north ball diamond after construction. The common pattern is clear: municipalities are getting more value by fixing usability, accessibility, drainage, trails and year-round function in existing assets before jumping to new builds.

D.4 Plan for indoor, aquatic and year-round recreation space

The best municipal comparators here show that indoor and aquatic access can be expanded through operations, scheduling, registration systems and partnerships, not only through new construction.

Halifax Regional Municipality uses a similar access logic by connecting recreation registration, facility rentals, HRCE school rentals, arenas, recreation centres, fields and pools through its broader municipal recreation platform. The City of Edmonton adds an access example because its Leisure Access Program links low-income residents to participating recreation facilities, registered program discounts, drop-in recreation, skating and transit support through one affordability pathway.

The City of Toronto is a strong comparator for aquatic continuity because its Aquatic Leadership pathway clearly connects Bronze programs, Bronze Cross, National Lifeguard, swim instructor certification and aquatic jobs. It also uses public drop-in swim maps, reservations, closure notices and weekly schedule information to make aquatic access easier to understand. The City of Mississauga provides a useful multi-use indoor facility example at Huron Park Recreation Centre, where an arena, indoor pool, therapeutic pool, double gymnasium, fitness spaces and rentable rooms are offered from one year-round facility. The City of Vancouver also shows how a larger recreation system can connect community centres, pools, arenas, schedules, recreation programs, facility hours and major recreation projects in one place. Together, these examples show that TOA/MCOA can improve year-round access right away by formalising schedules, centralising registration, rebuilding aquatic staffing pathways and using feasibility work before making any major capital decision.

D.5 Address transportation as a core recreation barrier

Transportation is often treated as part of recreation access. Edmonton and Calgary run their own transit, so the lesson for Antigonish is the single application pathway, not the transit service. The City of Edmonton is a strong example because its Leisure Access Program gives eligible low-income residents access to participating recreation facilities and attractions, and applicants are automatically considered for the Ride Transit Program.

The City of Calgary is another useful example because its Fair Entry system connects lower-cost transit and recreation supports through one application pathway. It includes low-cost monthly transit passes for adults and youth, an annual pass for seniors, and lower-cost access to City recreation facilities, golf courses, leisure centres and partner facilities.

The City of Vancouver is useful on the active transportation side because its greenway network is designed so residents can reach a city greenway within a 25-minute walk or 10-minute bike ride, and the City describes greenways as tools to expand urban recreation and encourage walking and biking. Halifax Regional Municipality also remains relevant because its trail system includes municipally owned, community-maintained and provincially owned routes, which is directly relevant to TOA/MCOA's need to map trail access and ownership. For TOA/MCOA, the main lesson is that recreation access improves when subsidized transportation, safe active routes, trail connections and recreation programming are planned together.

D.6 Expand low-cost, inclusive and community-based programming

The City of Edmonton offers a strong low-barrier model through its Leisure Access Program. Eligible low-income residents can access participating recreation facilities and attractions, and applicants are automatically considered for the Ride Transit Program. The annual program includes free admission to participating facilities, registered program discounts, child minding access, youth course access, drop-in shinny and member skate. The City of Calgary uses a similar access model through Fair Entry, which connects residents to lower-cost transit passes and lower-cost recreation fees for City recreation facilities, golf courses, leisure centres and partner facilities.

The City of Toronto is also a useful comparator because it combines free recreation centres, free drop-in programs, the Welcome Policy recreation fee subsidy, and older adult discounts. Toronto's free centres include City-delivered registered and drop-in programs for all age groups, as well as permits for local non-profit groups in rooms, gyms and kitchens. The City of Vancouver adds another strong access example through its Leisure Access Program, which provides free and reduced-fee access to Park Board facilities, including community centres. Vancouver also allows referrals through non-profit or government agencies, including for asylum seekers and temporary foreign workers, which is relevant to newcomer access.

The City of Moncton is strongest as a community funding and arts and culture comparator, with grant streams including Quality of Life Grants, Immigration Grants and Cultural Grants, while the City of Vancouver also treats arts and culture as part of its public recreation and culture system through arts grants, cultural activities, artist spaces, fieldhouse programs and performance spaces. For TOA/MCOA, the main lesson is that inclusive programming should combine low-cost access, simple registration, targeted subsidy, cultural programming, and support for local non-profits.

D.7 Build one recreation information and booking hub

Halifax Regional Municipality remains a strong comparator for a recreation information and booking hub because its public recreation pages connect program registration, facility rentals, field conditions, HRCE school rentals, arenas, sports fields, recreation centres, pools, beaches, tracks and booking contacts in one place. This is directly relevant to TOA/MCOA because the proposed hub needs to bring municipal and non-municipal recreation access into one public-facing pathway.

The City of Toronto adds a strong registration and client service example because residents can register online, by phone or in person; manage accounts through the online registration and booking system; contact Recreation Client Services; and connect with fee subsidy information through the Welcome Policy.

The City of Mississauga is another strong digital hub example because its recreation page links sports and activities, locations and rentals, memberships, program registration, community group information, recreation contacts, an e-newsletter, social media, sports equipment lockers and volunteer information in one public system. The City of Vancouver also provides a strong model because its parks and recreation page brings together facility hours, facilities and schedules, program registration, recreation activities, discounts, park bookings, recreation contacts, translation, 311 and public engagement links. For TOA/MCOA, the main lesson is that the hub should not only be a webpage. It should be a practical service point where residents and groups can find programs, book space, check schedules, access financial supports, contact the right person, and understand what is available without having to search across several separate systems.

KEY POINT

For TOA/MCOA, the main lesson is that the hub should not only be a webpage.

D.8 Strengthen volunteer and staff capacity

The City of Toronto is also a strong capacity example because its Parks and Recreation division has dedicated staff functions for community recreation, client services, capital delivery, policy, planning and management. This shows that recreation capacity is not only about recruiting more volunteers; it also requires clear staff roles, administrative support, training pathways and coordination systems that help programs run consistently. For TOA/MCOA, the main lesson is that volunteer and staff capacity should be treated as core recreation infrastructure, not as an informal add-on.

D.9 Adopt a financial sustainability framework for recreation

The City of Saskatoon's Recreation and Parks Master Plan remains a strong example because it uses a financing lens that includes lifecycle renewal, partnership opportunities, grants, sponsorships and non-traditional revenue. The City of Richmond also remains useful because its facilities planning and grant programs show how capital work, outside funding and community delivery can be phased together. Halifax Regional Municipality adds a useful affordability example through its Recreation Access Program, which makes support

rules more consistent across municipal recreation facilities. The City of Toronto adds a stronger lifecycle and reporting example: its 2025 Parks, Forestry and Recreation budget sets out a 10-year capital plan, tracks state-of-good-repair pressures, reports service measures, and identifies community recreation work such as facility booking, partnership investment, youth programming and affordable access. The City of Ottawa is also useful for sponsorship and naming rights, as the Richcraft Recreation Complex was tied to a 15-year, $500,000 naming-rights agreement. Together, these examples show that financial sustainability comes from clear rules around subsidy, lifecycle renewal, outside funding, user contribution, partnerships and non-tax revenue before large new capital demands are added.

D.10 Align all recreation decisions with provincial strategy and plans

The City of Saskatoon and the City of Richmond remain strong examples because both show how recreation planning can be connected to outcomes, community needs, phased implementation and public reporting. Halifax Regional Municipality remains useful because its shift toward a single Recreation Access Program shows how policy alignment can make access rules more consistent across facilities. The City of Toronto adds a stronger reporting and evaluation example. Its Parks and Recreation division has a dedicated Policy and Strategic Planning function that supports data analytics, performance metrics, research, evidence-based decision-making and evaluation. Its 2025 budget notes also report service measures such as recreation registrations, Welcome Policy-supported registrations, parkland maintained, natural area managed, trees planted, and state-of-good-repair pressures.

The main takeaway for TOA/MCOA is that alignment should not sit only in the wording of the plan. It should be built into indicators, budget reporting, public updates, access rules and future Council decisions.

KEY POINT

The main takeaway for TOA/MCOA is that alignment should not sit only in the wording of the plan.

F

APPENDIX F

Implementation Plan Actions and Timeline

12.1 Immediate Actions (0–12 months)

12.2 Medium- and Long-Term Actions



12.1 Immediate Actions (0–12 months)

Immediate actions concentrate on foundation-building: securing access, establishing governance structures, and generating the evidence base. These items are largely low-cost and high-leverage, and the majority of later actions depend on them.

Three items sit on the critical path

The facility inventory and ownership map; the MOU template and negotiations with StFX and SRCE; and the baseline recreation data report. These should be commissioned as early as possible — most other actions in this plan cannot begin until they are complete.

KEY POINT

These should be commissioned as early as possible — most other actions in this plan cannot begin until they are complete.

TABLE F.1

Immediate actions — governance and agreements

Action	Rec	Lead	Timing
Compile the full facility inventory and ownership map covering all recreation facilities used by TOA/MCOA residents, and document the current access basis for each non-municipal facility.	01.1	Recreation staff / consultants	0–6 months
Identify the highest-risk facilities — those most relied upon with the least formal protection, beginning with the StFX pool and arena and SRCE gymnasiums.	01.1	CAOs and Recreation	0–3 months
Engage legal counsel to draft the standard MOU template and facility-type variants for school, university, provincial and non-profit facilities.	01.2	Recreation and Legal	0–6 months
Initiate MOU negotiations with StFX and SRCE, seeking a minimum five-year term with defined community access hours, cost-sharing, custodial responsibility and annual access-hour disclosure.	01.2	CAOs and Recreation	3–12 months

TABLE F.1

Immediate actions — governance and agreements

Action	Rec	Lead	Timing
Complete and adopt the Facility Allocation Policy, ensuring alignment with the partnership agreements under negotiation.	01.2	CAOs	0–6 months
The Town and County each designate a single staff lead as primary contact for all MOU relationships and establish a digital register with expiry dates and review triggers.	01.3	CAOs and Directors	0–6 months
Establish the joint TOA/MCOA Recreation Task Force with an approved Terms of Reference setting out purpose, membership and roles.	02.1	Recreation and CAOs	3-12 months

TABLE F.2

Immediate actions — evidence and alignment

Action	Rec	Lead	Timing
Compile baseline recreation data — facility usage, program participation by age group and geography, and unmet demand identified through this assessment.	02.3	Recreation	0–12 months
Complete the strategy alignment assessment mapping all recommendations against the NS Shared Strategy pillars, provincial funding criteria, NS Accessibility Legislation and the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act.	10.1	Recreation	3–12 months
Develop the parks and outdoor space inventory covering municipally owned and DNR-managed parks, beaches, playgrounds and green spaces, including condition and amenities.	03.5	Recreation staff	0–12 months
Complete geographic equity mapping of outdoor recreation space distribution to identify underserved areas, particularly in rural communities.	03.5	Recreation staff	0–12 months
Audit all parks, and outdoor sites for accessible washroom provision and accessibility compliance.	03.2	Recreation	0–12 months
Complete the deferred maintenance assessment across municipal recreation assets and present findings to Council through the annual budget process.	09.3	Recreation and CAOs	12–18 months

TABLE F.3

Immediate actions — early service improvements

Action	Rec	Lead	Timing
Upon MOU execution, identify and publish additional community access times at school facilities for evenings, weekends and school holidays.	04.1	Recreation staff	On execution

TABLE F.3

Immediate actions — early service improvements

Action	Rec	Lead	Timing
Establish a short-term aquatic access schedule with StFX for community swim lessons, aquatic leadership development and recreational swimming.	04.2	Recreation and StFX	0–12 months
Explore ways to recruit and train lifeguards and swim instructors to address capacity constraints limiting public swim availability.	04.2	Recreation	0–12 months
Establish the joint aquatic registration and communications system as a single source of information for swim lessons, public swims, clubs and lifeguard training.	04.2	Recreation staff	3–12 months
Create a public indoor facility calendar covering all MOU-secured spaces through existing or new booking platforms.	04.1	Recreation staff	0–12 months
Define eligible uses for the Recreation Reserve Fund and confirm initial annual contributions from both municipal budgets.	09.2	Finance and Councils	0–12 months
Include arts and culture organizations in the Recreation Task Force and confirm eligibility under future community programming funding.	06.5	Recreation staff	0–12 months
Publish the Recreation Navigator contact and role across all TOA/MCOA channels once the function is assigned.	07.1	Recreation and Communications	On appointment

12.2 Medium- and Long-Term Actions

MEDIUM-TERM (1–3 YEARS)

Medium-term actions move from securing access to improving the quality, reach and coordination of the recreation system. Most depend on the immediate actions being substantially complete, and several are contingent on successful grant applications.

Strategy and planning.

- Complete and adopt the joint TOA/MCOA Recreation Strategy, incorporating short-, medium- and long-term priorities, named leads, measurable milestones, explicit NS Shared Strategy alignment, and a transparent decision framework for evaluating capital requests. (Rec 02.2)
- Convene the Recreation Task Force at least three times annually to inform budget priorities, coordinate initiatives and strengthen communication among partners. (Rec 02.1)
- Integrate census data, wellbeing indicators and demographic projections into the recreation evidence base, and establish the annual data collection protocol with all MOU partners. (Rec 02.3)

Facilities, parks and trails.

- Commission the facility condition assessment for all municipally owned recreation assets and produce the ranked improvement list. (Rec 03.1)
- Deliver priority upgrades in ranked order — washrooms at highest-use outdoor sites, accessibility compliance including ramps, parking and pathways, lighting to extend usable hours, and storage so volunteer groups can operate without renting off-site. (Rec 03.2)
- Identify sites with drainage or flooding issues, develop a costed drainage improvement plan for priority sites, and assess turf quality at all municipally owned and shared-use fields. (Rec 03.3)
- Map the full trail network, and install standardized wayfinding at all major access points. (Rec 03.4)
- Develop minimum service standards by park tier — neighbourhood, community and regional — and a playground replacement and enhancement schedule. (Rec 03.5)

Indoor and aquatic space.

- Pursue provincial and federal funding for the indoor facility feasibility study, structured to test at least three models with no model pre-selected, each supported by an operating cost model and staffing projection, and including transportation access within scope. (Rec 04.3)
- Identify underused SRCE classroom and multipurpose spaces for arts, wellness and seniors programming under MOU terms. (Rec 04.1)

Access, programming and transportation.

- Launch transportation pilots: the seasonal rural recreation shuttle, negotiations with SRCE on after-school bus use, and subsidized transit passes for youth and seniors, with evaluation after one full year. (Rec 05.1)
- Map gaps in sidewalk, crosswalk and cycling infrastructure between residential areas and key recreation sites, and incorporate recreation access routes into capital planning. (Rec 05.2)
- Expand programming: youth drop-in at a central location, a seniors wellness series co-delivered with existing providers, weekend family recreation sessions, and equipment lending in partnership with sport clubs. (Rec 06.1, 06.2)
- Establish the annual community recreation grant program with defined eligibility criteria and administration model. (Rec 06.4)
- Provide grant or in-kind support for programming delivered by neighbouring communities and organizations, including Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation. (Rec 06.3)

Information, capacity and finance.

- Launch the single recreation webpage or application covering programs, registration, facility maps, financial supports, trail information and contacts, with all MOU-secured hours loaded and public-facing calendars enabled. (Rec 07.2)
- Develop the quarterly community recreation bulletin and establish consistent social media practice. (Rec 07.3)

- Implement the volunteer strategy: recruitment targeting students and young adults, a centralized volunteer database, simplified onboarding and record-check support, and annual recognition. (Rec 08.1)
- Establish the joint Recreation Reserve Fund with modest annual contributions from both budgets, growing as fiscal room allows. (Rec 09.2)
- Bring all recreation assets into the municipal asset management plan and develop the ten-year capital forecast showing when major reinvestment will be required and at what cost. (Rec 09.3)
- Adopt the recreation fee policy establishing clear guidelines for full cost recovery, partial recovery and subsidized or no-cost opportunities based on community benefit, accessibility and equity. (Rec 09.4)
- Develop the recreation evaluation framework defining indicators for each recommendation. (Rec 10.2)

LONG-TERM (3–10 YEARS)

Long-term actions depend on the preceding foundations being in place and on fiscal room becoming available. Several are contingent rather than scheduled — they proceed only if the evidence generated in earlier phases supports them.

- Make any capital decision only after the feasibility study, a full life-cycle cost analysis over a 30-year horizon covering construction, operating, maintenance, staffing and debt servicing, and comparison against the established cost-per-access-hour benchmark. (Rec 04.3, 09.3)
- Grow the Recreation Reserve Fund toward targets informed by the ten-year capital forecast, with annual balance reporting and five-year projections in each budget. (Rec 09.2)
- Embed parks and outdoor space standards into the joint strategy and into TOA and MCOA Municipal Planning Strategies so future land-use decisions protect and expand outdoor recreation opportunities. (Rec 03.5, 10.1)
- Advance natural space connectivity — linking parks, trails, beaches and green spaces into a coherent network supporting active transportation and nature-based recreation, coordinated with provincial partners. (Rec 03.5)
- Explore climate-resilient park design including shade structures, permeable surfaces and storm drainage as parks face increased pressure from extreme weather. (Rec 03.5)
- As part of overall strategic planning, consider how the costs and benefits of joint TOA/MCOA recreation programming are shared. (Rec 09.1)
- Reduce administrative barriers permanently through centralized booking and navigation support, improved access to affordable insurance, simplified registration, and shared administrative resources for community organizations. (Rec 06.4)
- Support arts and culture space planning, including the community arts hub feasibility study and long-term creative space needs, and establish the dedicated funding and support framework for cultural programming. (Rec 06.5, 06.3)
- Explore supplementary revenue through naming rights, sponsorship and community partnership models, and investigate whether a regional service agreement between TOA and MCOA would improve tax treatment or grant eligibility. (Rec 09.4)

- Review the Recreation Navigator role at twelve months and assess whether a full-time recreation coordinator position is warranted. (Rec 07.1)
- Install standardized wayfinding using tourism branding at all major parks and trailheads, and translate key recreation information into French and other community languages. (Rec 07.3)

TOA/MCOA Recreation Facilities and Recreation Needs Assessment — final report, recommendations and implementation plan.

Prepared by ASBB Economics and Research Ltd.

Town of Antigonish · Municipality of the County of Antigonish

Humanizing Economics

Recreation Facilities and Recreation Needs Assessment

Final Report · October 2026

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