

Westlock County

Recreation Needs Assessment and Facility Master Plan

Draft 1 - January 2025

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Territorial Acknowledgement

Westlock County is located on Treaty 6 Territory, the traditional land of the Metis, the Cree, and the Woodland Cree peoples.



This Recreation Needs Assessment and Facility Master Plan is intended to provide Westlock County with guidance related to future investment in recreation and parks services. This Plan is the first of its kind for the County and has been developed through community engagement and research. The planning process involved a Steering Committee comprised of County Elected Officials and administration as well as members of the general public.

Special thanks go to those who participated in community engagement, members of the project steering committee, County Council and administration, and members of the consulting team.

Summary

Westlock County recognizes, supports, and values the benefits that recreation provides for citizens of all ages and backgrounds and is focused on helping residents and communities create recreational habits for life.

This Recreation Needs Assessment and Facility Master Plan, the first of its kind for the County, is intended to support sound recreation related decision-making processes and to provide transparent, sustainable, and strategic long-term recreation planning for the County.

This Plan has been developed through thorough research and community engagement. 299 households in the region responded to a public survey, 32 groups provided feedback through an additional survey, and 15 discussions were hosted with various groups and contributors.

Within Westlock County borders, approximately 13,000 regional residents have access to:



Although this inventory reflects a combination of public, private, and nonprofit owned facilities and spaces, it represents close to \$500M in 2025 replacement value. The County supports many of these amenities in different ways including the ownership and operations of a campground, ski hill, and park as well as through a recreation cost sharing agreement with the Town of Westlock and a Community Grant Program.

Many regional residents are satisfied with services but some are experiencing barriers to participate (“facility operating issues” and “cost” were most commonly mentioned). A significant majority of households believe in the importance of recreation and that it is important to “ensure recreation opportunities are available to all residents”.

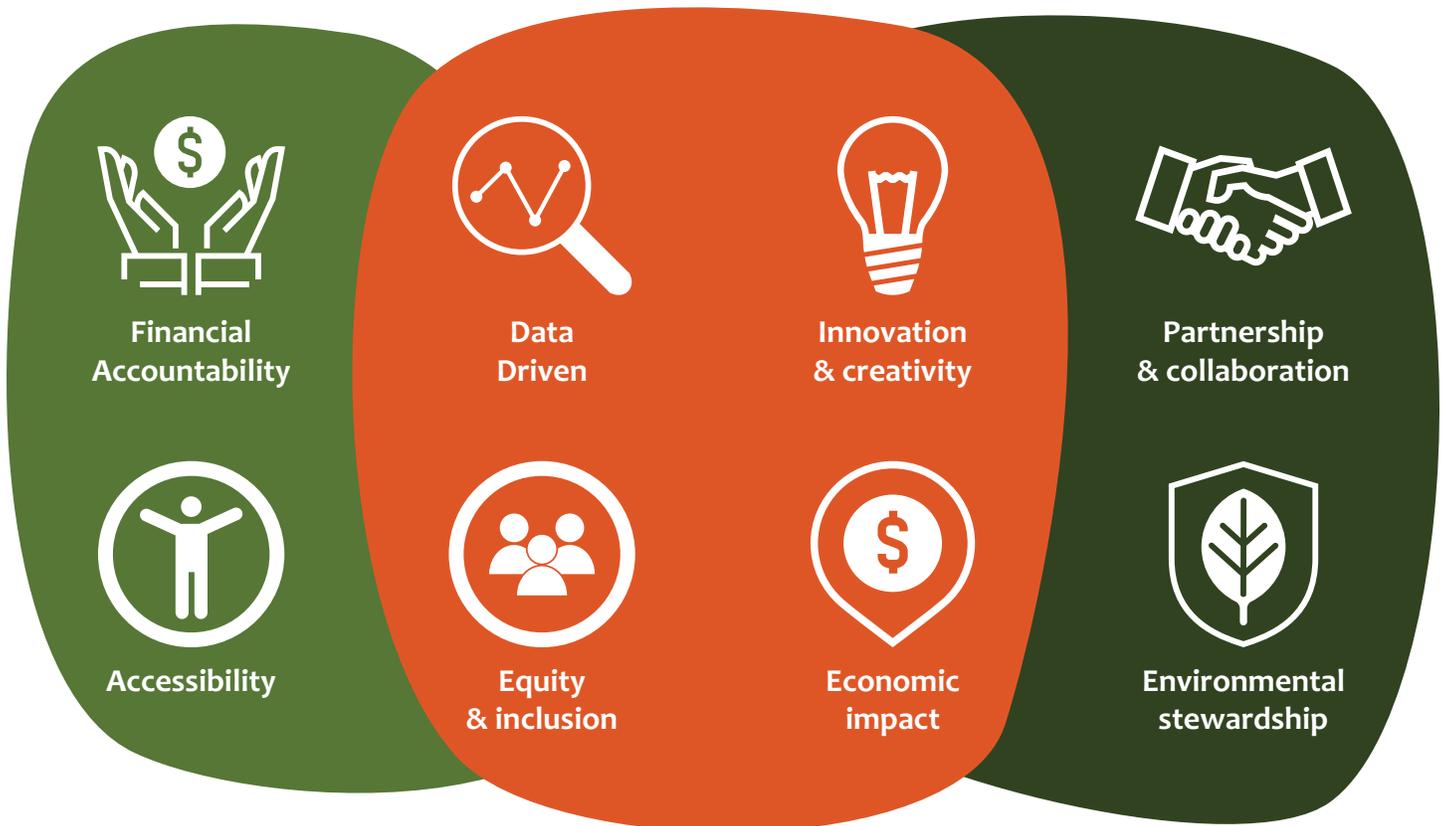
Based on the research and engagement conducted and under the guidance of the project Steering Committee (comprised of elected officials, administration and the general public), the the purpose of County investment in recreation is as follows:

The County invests in recreation so that people can be happier, healthier, and more connected to each other and their community. Recreation in the County also contributes to the local economy and provides an opportunity for the County to build strong relationships with other like-minded organizations.



This purpose statement is supported by a set of recreation specific values intended to help guide decision making and action related to recreation; these values are closely aligned with the County's broader organizational values and reflect leading practices in the recreation industry.

Westlock County Values for Recreation



Service level assessment and prioritization of indoor and outdoor amenities, applying values based criteria, has rendered that, 1) community halls and gathering spaces; 2) trails (nonmotorized and motorized); 3) picnic areas/ shelters; 4) campgrounds; 5) cross-country ski trails; and 6) lake access; are of highest priority of those amenities that are typically provided by the County (and rural municipalities in general). These priorities can help the County drive investment in its own assets while the findings for other amenities can help the County better devise potential support for partner-driven projects.

With a focus on improving County-owned outdoor spaces, it's suggested that the County focus on Rainbow Park, Long Island Lake Municipal Campground, and Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill (in that order) following the recommendations of professional landscape and building architects who conducted assessments of these three important outdoor spaces. Assessment of an additional 15 indoor recreation facilities and spaces were also conducted as part of this planning process; these 15 facilities are not owned by the County but do receive County support.

Sustaining already existing recreation-related cost sharing to the Town of Westlock, currently set at \$453,000 per year and due to be renegotiated in 2025, and recreation-related grants to Community Associations and other organizations (currently funded at \$90,000 per year) should also be prioritized by the County, with consideration given to a new hamlet-focused grant to provide unencumbered base level funds to each of the County’s nine hamlets to foster recreation participation and strengthen sense of community. All of these externally focused investments in recreation should ensure that the County has influence where appropriate and that the onus of proving value to the County be placed on partners receiving funds.

Some considerations to sustain and enhance the County’s recreation-related community development, partnership, economic development, and promotions and marketing efforts are also provided and are warranted based on research and community engagement findings.

Estimated financial implications of the ideas and initiatives outlined in this Plan are as follows.

Item	0-5 years	5-10 years	10-20 years
Potential investment in County-owned recreation assets	\$2,238,450	\$2,295,290	\$2,394,290
Average annual	\$447,690	\$459,058	\$239,429
Potential investment in partner-owned recreation assets	\$4,357,000	\$5,899,800	\$19,176,256
Average annual	\$871,400	\$1,179,960	\$1,917,626
Potential investment in service delivery enhancements	\$125,000	\$100,000	\$250,000
Average annual	\$25,000	\$20,000	\$25,000
Total	\$6,720,450	\$8,295,090	\$21,820,546
Average annual	\$1,344,090	\$1,659,018	\$2,182,055

In addition to measuring and reporting financial investment made, a number of other performance indicators such as participation related data and quantifying the impacts of investment made in recreation are outlined herein to help the County and its partners demonstrate value and justification for investment.

The County now has a better understanding of what residents think about recreation, where its current investment in recreation is going and what benefits that investment is achieving, and how to measure the impact and performance of its investment in recreation moving forward.



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1.0 Introduction

Westlock County recognizes, supports, and values the benefits that recreation provides for citizens of all ages and backgrounds and is focused on helping residents and communities create recreational habits for life.

The County currently invests in recreation through the provision of outdoor spaces and indoor facilities it owns as well as through investing in the efforts of others through grant funding to organized groups, community associations and organizations, and intermunicipal cost sharing.

In order to help County decision-makers contemplate future recreation related investment, the County embarked on a planning process focusing on recreation. Although the County has a host of other plans and initiatives that support its investment in recreation, the County has never had a Recreation Needs Assessment and Facility Master Plan. The intent of this document is as follows.

This Recreation Needs Assessment and Facility Master Plan is intended to support sound decision-making processes and to provide transparent, sustainable, and strategic long-term planning for the County.

In order to achieve this end, a variety of inputs and influences were uncovered and considered in the development of this Plan. A thorough program of community engagement was undertaken, the results of which are referenced throughout this document and found in the What We Heard appendix. Community input is integral in planning for recreation services as they tend to be more subjective than others that the County provides. In addition to obtaining community input, the County developed an inventory and assessment of existing recreation amenities, and it reviewed resident demographics and trends in recreation. A comparison of the County to other rural municipalities in Alberta was also conducted and a review of other pertinent local, regional, provincial, and national planning documents. The research components and findings are found in the What We Learned presentation appendix.

Westlock County has demonstrated its commitment to recreation through current and existing planning. Outlined as a pillar in the Strategic Plan, investing in and maintaining outdoor recreation spaces to ensure they are attractive is a priority. The Plan also highlights collaboration with neighbouring municipalities as a pillar to ensure quality delivery of services and that relationships with indigenous governments and organizations are strengthened. Furthermore, the County's dedication to recreation is reflected in the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) where reserving land for recreation purposes is identified as a key priority.

In 2023, Westlock County spent \$1,320,045 (Alberta Municipal Affairs) on recreation, representing 9% of the total municipal budget. This investment translated to a per capita spending of \$183.70.

Westlock County supports the development and enhancement of community facilities, events, sports, and tourism initiatives by providing funding to groups through the Community Facility, Recreation and Tourism Grant Program.

The following data and information informed the creation of this Master Plan:

Population and Demographic Analysis

+

Policy and Community Development Review

Thirteen (13) municipal policy plans and documents and eleven (11) regional, provincial, and national policy, plans, and documents were reviewed.

Facility Inventory and Analysis

+

Trends and Leading Practices

An extensive inventory of all of the recreation spaces and places in the region was developed and assessed in various ways.

Financial Analysis and Benchmarking

Financial benchmarking with eleven (11) municipalities was undertaken to understand how the County's spending on recreation compares to similar municipalities.

Indoor and Outdoor Facility Assessments

Three (3) outdoor facility assessments were conducted, and fifteen (15) indoor facility assessments were conducted to understand the condition of regional facilities and required investment to sustain them.

GIS Analysis

Geospatial maps analyzing the population, distribution, and provision of recreation in the County were developed.

Facility Utilization Analysis

Utilization for two County-owned recreation spaces was undertaken to understand how, when, and who is using the Ski Hill and the Municipal Campground.

Engagement: Resident Survey, Group/Operator Survey, and Discussion Sessions

Community engagement included two-hundred and ninety-nine (299) responses to the resident survey, thirty-two (32) responses to the group survey, and fifteen (15) groups and organizations were included in discussion sessions.



Recreation Needs Assessment and Facility Master Plan

2.0 Benefits of recreation

Recreation is good for people and for the communities they live in and visit. Communities that invest in robust and thriving recreation have healthier and more connected residents. The benefits of recreation are both direct (enjoyed by the participants in recreation activity) and indirect (enjoyed by the community in which they are provided). Recreation provides benefits to all, regardless of participation; benefits that cannot be escaped.



Health

- Improve physical health, including supporting rehabilitation post illness or injury
- Improve wellbeing, support mental health and positive self-esteem
- Provide safe environments for re-engaging individuals with physical activity
- Develop fundamental physical literacy skills



Social & Cultural

- Increase social interaction and cohesion for individuals and families
- Build community pride
- Offer welcoming, universal experiences to support inclusive communities
- Support reconciliation with Indigenous communities
- Reduce anti-social and risk behaviours of youth
- Provide leadership experiences and training
- Enhance appreciation of an areas' history & culture



Economics

- Support growth of the sport, culture, tourism, and event economies
- Create new direct and indirect jobs
- Attract new and retain existing skilled labour and businesses
- Increase land values and local government revenues
- Serve as important assets to deliver core government services and programs.



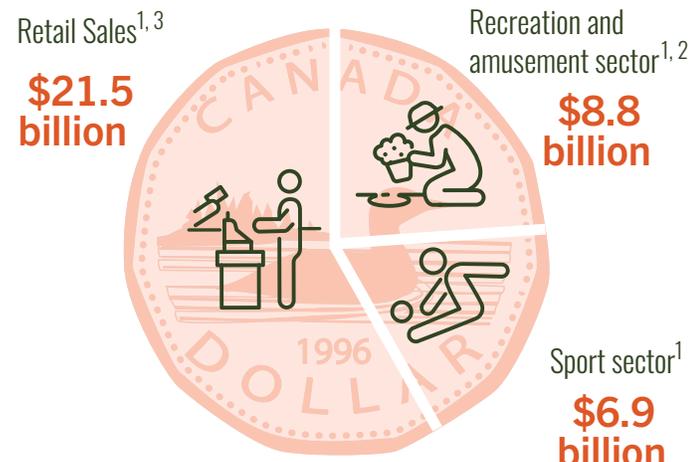
Environmental

- Build a culture of stewardship
- Protect & restore biodiversity
- Provide essential ecological service (e.g., water filtration, pollination, climate regulation)
- Enhance our resilience and mitigation of climate events
- Mitigate risk from extreme weather events

Sources include the Framework for Recreation in Canada (2015/2024) and Measuring-impact.ca.

Recent work by leading national recreation organizations the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) and the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) calculates recreation having an economic impact of \$37.2B, a health impact of \$3.9B, and a social impact of \$13.6B annually across the country (measuring-impact.ca).

Economic Impact (2022) \$37.2 billion



Economic impact reflected as the annual contribution to Canada's economy from SPAR and retail sales.

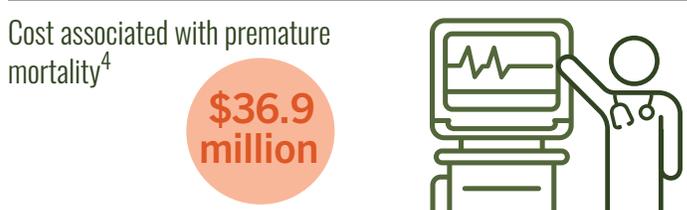
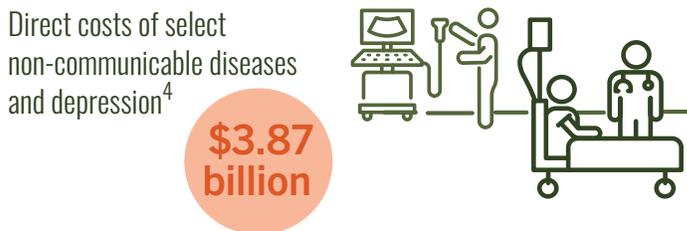
Social Impact (2020) \$13.6 billion



Social impact reflected as the value of volunteering for SPAR-based activities.

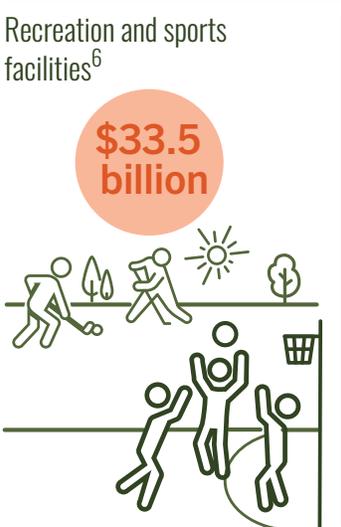
¹ Value as it relates to the gross domestic product.
² Recreation and amusement sector comprised of golf and country clubs, skiing facilities, fitness and recreational sports, and all other amusement and recreation facilities.
³ Retail sales comprised of athletic footwear, sporting equipment and recreation vehicles.
⁴ Based on non-communicable diseases which include coronary heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, colon cancer, hypertension, osteoporosis, depression.

Health Impact (2022) \$3.9 billion



Health impact reflected as the annual contribution to health care costs for select health conditions related to physical inactivity.

Environmental Impact (2020) \$42.5 billion

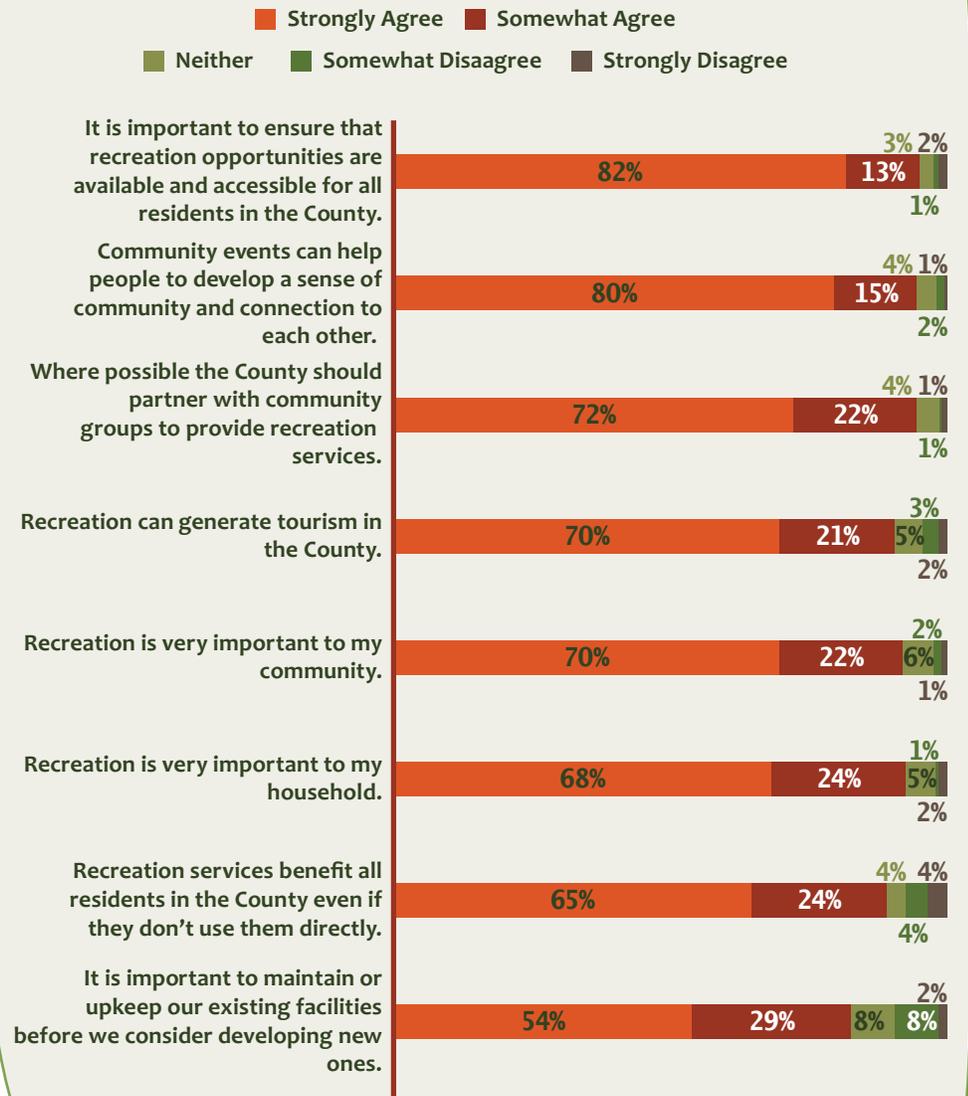


Environmental impact reflected as the replacement value of SPAR facilities and active transportation infrastructure.

⁵ Calculated using percentage of volunteers in sport, physical activity and recreation and hours spent.
⁶ Based on estimated replacement value of sport and recreation facilities, and active transportation infrastructure in 'very poor', 'poor' or 'fair' condition.

Although at a smaller scale, these same types of impacts are observed in Westlock County through the investment made by the municipality and its various partners. The County is a better place to live, work, play, and visit due to this important investment. 92% of County residents either agreed (strongly or somewhat) that “recreation is very important to my community” and that “recreation is very important to my household”.

Graph 1 - Household Survey: Values and Considerations

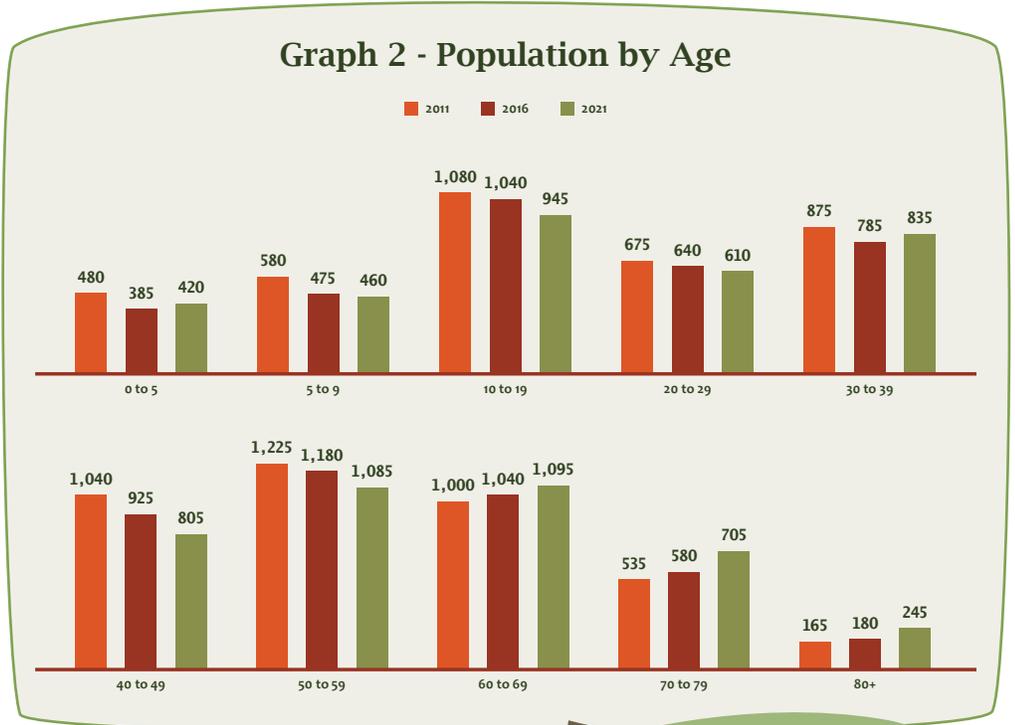


Prior to becoming Westlock County, the land was home to the First Nations, including Chipewyan, Slavey, Blackfoot, and Cree peoples and after the signing of Treaty 6, the region was opened to European Settlers. In conjunction with the European settlers and the opening of the railroad, new communities were formed such as the Town of Westlock, Village of Clyde, and the nine Hamlets. Established as a Municipal District in 1943, the area has since been renamed to Westlock County in 1998.

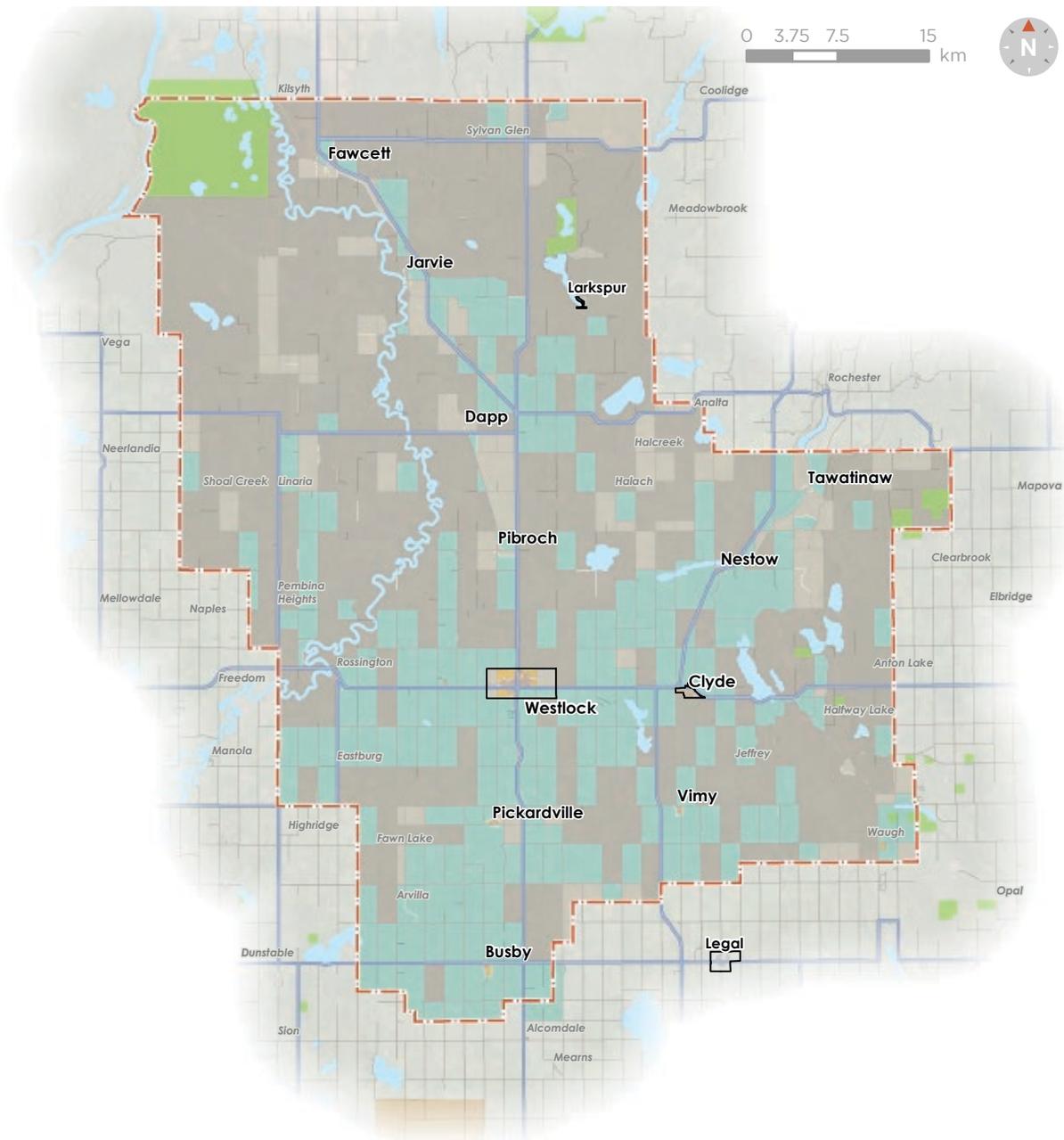
The 2021 Canadian Census conducted by Statistics Canada indicated a population of 7,186 in the County, a slight decrease from the previous census in 2016. The median age has increased slightly from each census period indicating the population in Westlock County is getting older. In addition to the County’s population, the Town of Westlock is home to 4,921 (StatsCan 2021) and the Village of Clyde has 415 residents (StatsCan 2021). The overall regional population is approaching 13,000 residents.

The County has seen a slight increase in those aged 0 to 5 years old and those aged 30 to 39 years and there has been an increase in the senior population, with those aged 60 to 69 and 70 to 79 also seeing an increase. There has also been a decrease of those aged 10 to 19, 40 to 49 years and 50 to 59 years indicating young families may be moving away from the County

Although some new residents are moving to the County, the population in the Westlock region (including the Town of Westlock which is the largest urban centre in the County) has decreased in the past decade.



The following outlines where people live in the Region, indicating relative population densities.



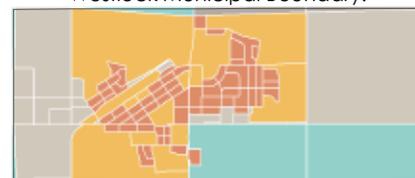
LEGEND

- Westlock County
- Town | Village | Summer Village
- Highway
- Road
- Waterbody
- Parks Protected & Areas
- First Nation Reserve

2021 Total Population Density (person per ha):

- Very Low
- Low
- Moderate
- High
- Very High

Westlock Municipal Boundary:

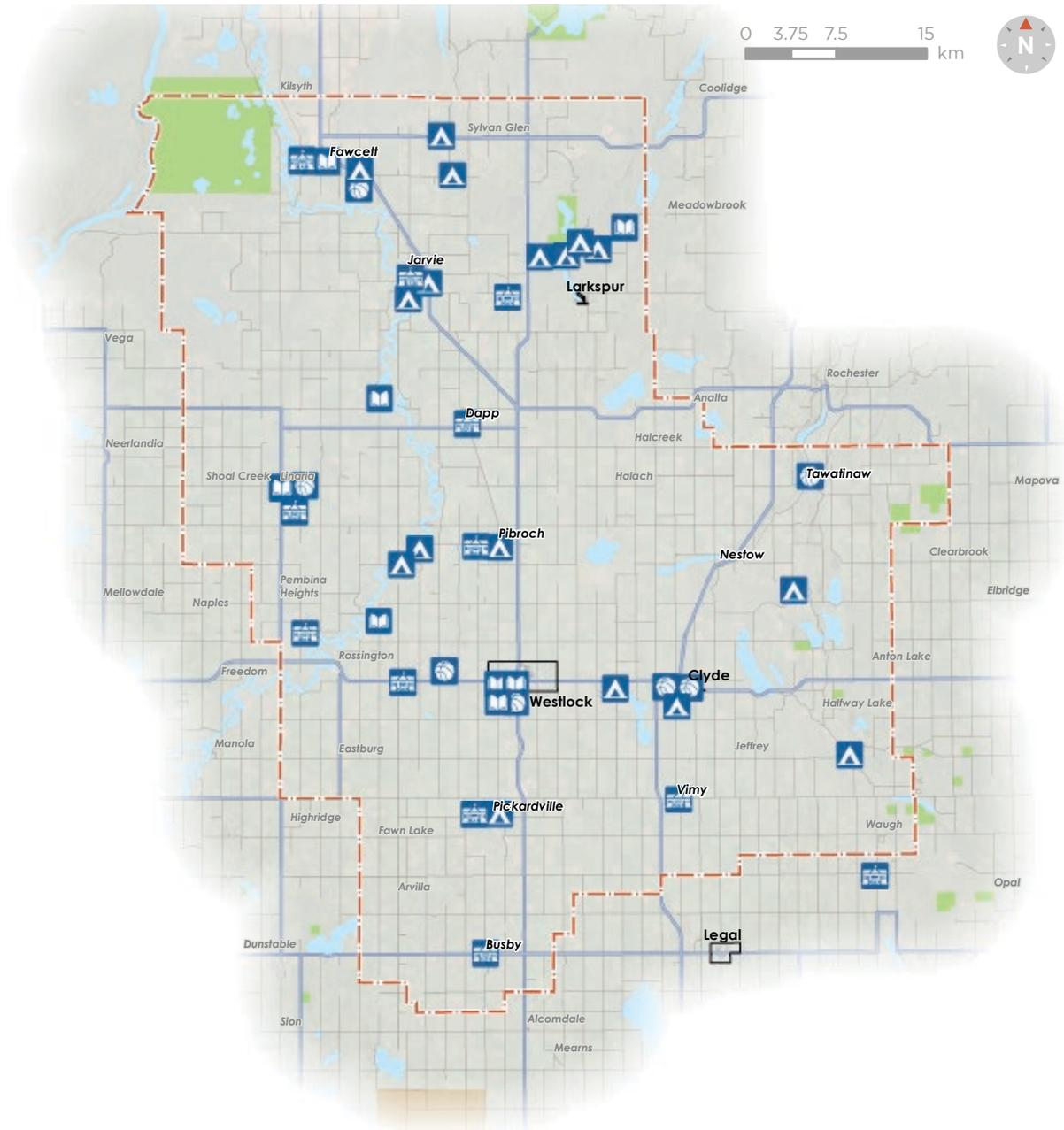


not to scale



3.2 Recreation opportunities and spaces

Residents and visitors to the County have access to a variety of recreation opportunities. Some of these opportunities are provided directly by the County while others are provided by other municipalities or organizations that the County partners with. The following map outlines the inventory of publicly funded recreation facilities and spaces in the region. Some private facilities and spaces are also identified.



LEGEND

- Westlock County
- Town | Village | Summer Village
- Highway
- Road
- Waterbody
- Parks Protected & Areas
- First Nation Reserve
- HALL Halls
- P Parks and Campgrounds
- R Recreation Facilities
- C Culture Facilities

Notes ¹ Icons may have been adjusted for visualization purposes

Notes ² Recreation Facilities include Arenas, Curling Rinks, Golf, Skate Parks, Ranches etc.

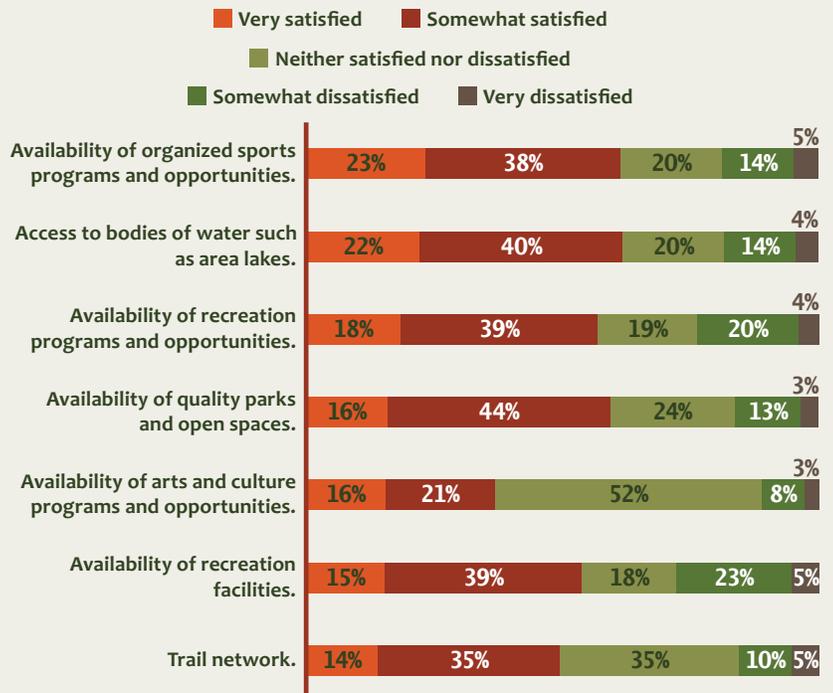
Notes ³ Culture Facilities include Libraries, Bible Camps, Senior Centres, Museums etc.

Within Westlock County borders, approximately 13,000 residents have access to:

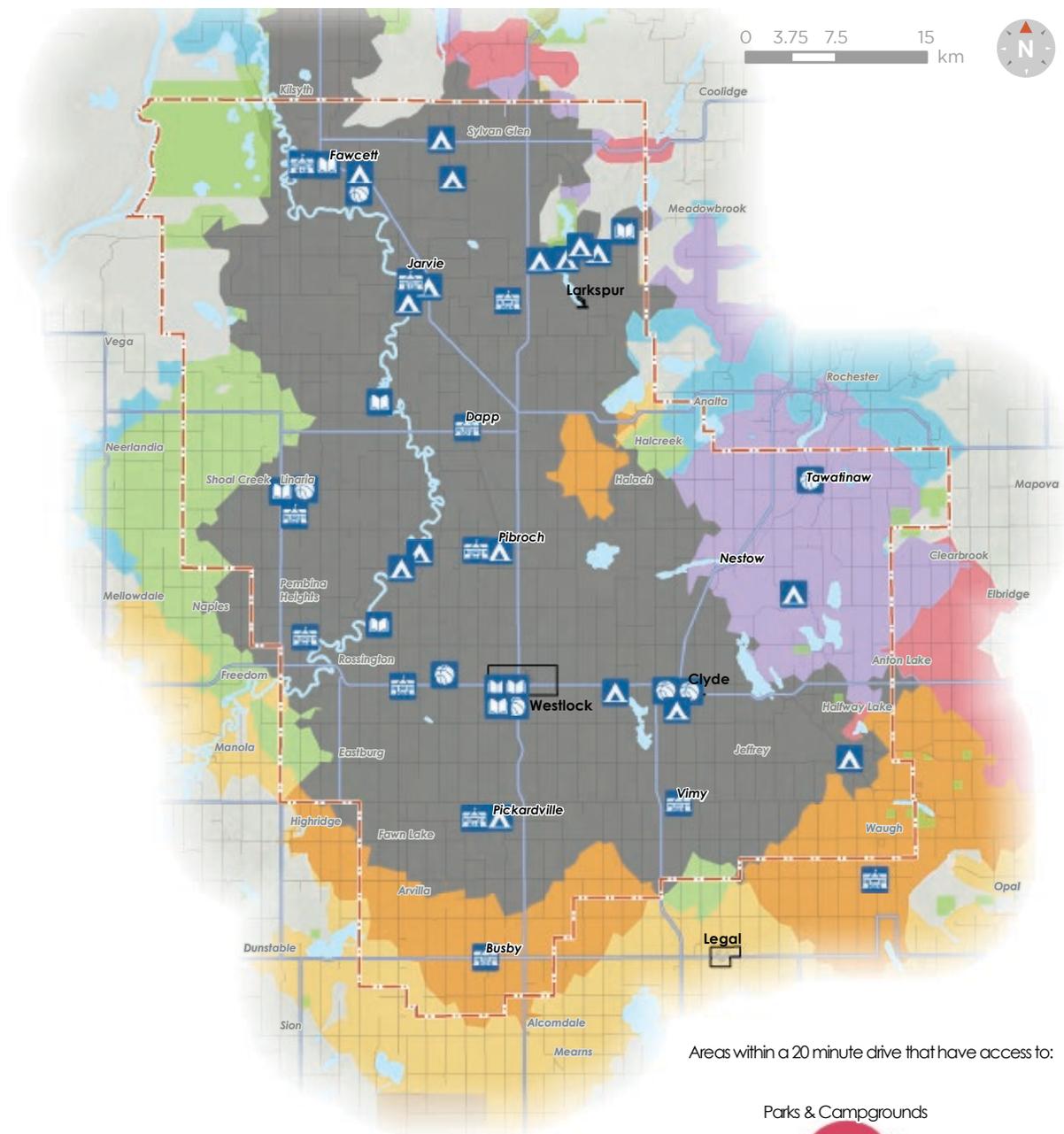


Although this inventory reflects a combination of public, private, and nonprofit owned facilities and spaces, it represents close to a \$500M in 2025 replacement value.

Graph 3 - Satisfaction With Recreation and Parks Services



The following map shows the breadth and depth of the inventory of recreation facilities and spaces and how well different areas within the County are serviced.



Areas within a 20 minute drive that have access to:



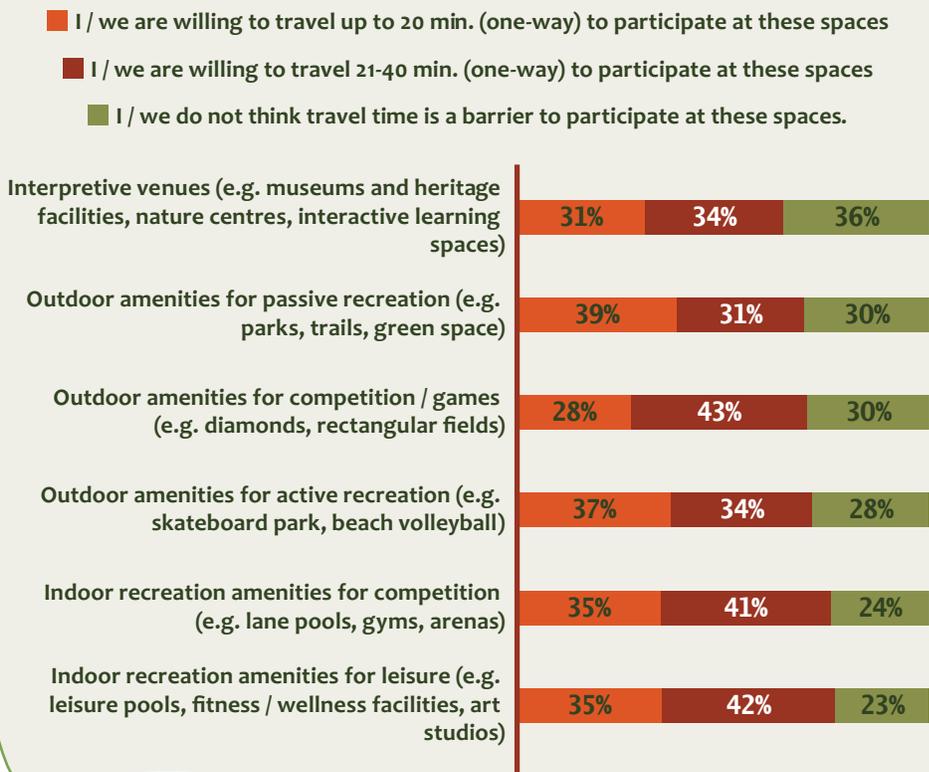
- LEGEND**
- Westlock County
 - Town | Village | Summer Village
 - Highway
 - Road
 - Waterbody
 - Parks Protected & Areas
 - First Nation Reserve
 - HALLS Halls
 - ▲ Parks and Campgrounds
 - ⚽ Recreation Facilities
 - 📖 Culture Facilities

Notes ¹ Icons may have been adjusted for visualization purposes
 Notes ² Recreation Facilities include Arenas, Curling Rinks, Golf, Skate Parks, Ranches etc.
 Notes ³ Culture Facilities include Libraries, Bible Camps, Senior Centres, Museums etc.

Many of these facilities and spaces are used by local regional residents and it is also important to note that people from outside County borders also visit the region to participate in recreation.

As part of the planning process, facility and space assessments were conducted on County-owned indoor and outdoor recreation spaces as well as 14 community halls by registered architects and landscape architects. The intent of the assessments was to understand the physical state of each facility and what level of investment might be required to keep these spaces safe and functional into the future. Key findings from these assessments are as follows. Detailed assessment reports can be found under separate cover.

Graph 4 - Willingness to Travel



In regard to the **three outdoor sites** reviewed:

- There is need for new signage at the Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill, Rainbow Park, and Long Island Lake Municipal Campground.
- There were improvements and potential safety issues identified for consideration as presented in the costing charts. Some improvements include new picnic tables, fencing, and additional washrooms.
- In total, approximately \$3M (in 2025 dollars) of reinvestment across the three sites was identified to bring each up to a modern user expectation but not to enhance the programs or activities occurring at either.
- Detailed site planning and reinvestment was recommended to create a more consistent level of quality and identity within County owned and operated park sites. Potential program expansion may or may not be considered as that detailed planning occurs.

In 2023-2024, 71% of users of the Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill were from outside the Westlock Region, while 20% were from the County, and 9% were from the Town.

In 2024, 72% of users of the Long Island Lake Municipal Campground were from outside the Westlock Region, while 3% were from the County, 10% were from the Town, and 15% were from “other”.

In regard to the **16 indoor sites** (the majority of which are not County owned and operated) reviewed:

- Recommended improvements across all 16 facilities varied and ranged from aesthetic improvements to structural and mechanical issues.
- In total, approximately \$5M (in 2025 dollars) of reinvestment across the 16 sites was identified to bring each up to a modern user expectation but not to enhance the programs or activities occurring at either.

3.3 County support services

In addition to investing in infrastructure and in helping its various partners, the County also provides a variety of support services to those community partners. These services include:

- **Cost Sharing:** Contributing financially to recreation services provided by the Town of Westlock and that are accessible to County residents (currently set at \$453,000 per year to be renegotiated in 2025).
- **Funding and Grants:** Offering financial assistance and distributing grants to eligible organizations through the Community Grant Program which allocates up to \$90,000 annually to community based organizations.
- **Grant Application Assistance:** Providing help with the completion and review of grant applications.
- **Fiduciary Services:** Acting as a fiduciary for organizations that do not qualify for external grant funding.
- **Playground Inspections and Hall Assessments:** Facilitating free inspections in collaboration with the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) for Additional Name Insured (ANI).
- **Insurance Support:** Promoting the RMA ANI program to nonprofits in an effort to lower their insurance premiums.
- **Information Sharing:** Disseminating relevant information to keep partners informed.
- **Event Promotion:** Supporting and promoting community events to enhance participation.

Continuing to build and renew relationships with community groups and support organizations is essential for delivering effective programs and services to residents. Initiatives like the Community Grant Program and collaborative projects not only foster community engagement but also empower local organizations to enhance their offerings. The County's various groups and partners have come to rely on these funds and supports and County residents benefit from them.



3.4 Trends and issues influencing recreation

The following trends and issues are important to consider when thinking strategically about public investment in recreation services. Many of these are highlighted in more details in the Framework for Recreation (2024) and other credible sources.



Inclusion and accessibility are important to think about when planning and operating facilities and spaces and designing programs and opportunities. The entire population can benefit from access to recreation opportunities but there are certain facets of the population that can benefit more than others. Recreation services can catalyze understanding and acceptance and can further important initiatives like reconciliation.



Recreation and culture services leave an **environmental footprint**. Consciously working to reduce that footprint is important for the facility and space owners and operators. In addition to reducing its footprint, recreation services can also provide a medium for education and **environmental awareness** with a captive and receptive audience.



Recreation services contribute to **better public health**. Recreation opportunities are “upstream”, proactive measures that can reduce disease and burden on the health care system by improving both physical and mental well-being.



One of the most challenging issues facing recreation and parks service providers over the past few decades is the fact that most major **recreation infrastructure is aging** and need to be either replaced or reinvested in. In addition to this requirement is rapid and significant capital cost inflation making major capital projects unattainable in some communities. Funding supports from other levels of government and innovative funding will need to be considered by owners and operators moving forward.



Maltreatment in sport, a major element of public recreation services, is an issue and is being reported more now than ever. Facility and space owners and operators have a role to play in enhancing the awareness of **Safe Sport** and in changing behaviours.



There is more data available to recreation service providers and decision-makers than ever before. **Gathering quality data and using it to measure performance and articulate community impact** should be a priority for recreation proponents. Measuring Impact, referred to herein, is an example of a data tool that service providers can use to help articulate impact.



Technology is impacting recreation services and experiences. From activity trackers to virtual reality, technologically advanced experiences are competing with, and sometimes part of, public recreation services. Using technology to enhance how users interact with recreation facilities, spaces, and services will be key moving forward.



Understanding the market for recreation services is important in optimizing investment and garnering as much benefit and impact as possible. Important **changing demographics** that are impacting recreation markets in Alberta include overall aging (there will be increases in older adults in communities over the coming decade) and immigration and the introduction of new cultures into Alberta communities (which entail different recreation and culture interests in many cases).

Many of these trends are highlighted in the Framework for Recreation in Canada (2024 update). The Framework provides practical ideas on how to advance five goals areas in Canadian communities.



1. Active living



2. Inclusion and access



3. Connecting people with nature



4. Supportive environments



5. Recreation capacity

3.5 Current policies and influences

In total, 12 County plans and initiatives were reviewed ranging from the Municipal Development Plan to Councils Strategic Plan through to the Fees and Rates Bylaw. As it relates to recreation, the following statements outline the findings of the review.

- Recreation, and more specifically outdoor recreation, is a priority of the County.
- Strengthening the County's economy and improving resident quality of life is a priority of the County.
- Investing in hamlets throughout the County is a priority.
- Strategic Planning between the County, Town, Village of Clyde, and the Summer Village of Larkspur is in place and highlights the importance of ensuring goals are aligned between local governments within County boundaries.
- Collaboration between the County and Town is important in maintaining and operating major recreation facilities.
- The development and maintenance of outdoor recreation spaces is a priority outlined in the current Strategic Plan, indicating these are valued spaces in the County.
- The grant funding provided by the County related to recreation for individuals, teams, and organizations that are pursuing a variety of activities and education programs is important to maintaining current recreation service levels.

In addition to County plans and initiatives, regional, provincial, and national sources were also reviewed. Key findings from this review are as follows.

- Investment in recreation is justified due to the impacts it has on fostering active lifestyles, catalyzing inclusion and accessibility, connecting people to nature, and building capacity in the sector.
- Recreation services have significant impact on people, communities, and the economy.
- Indigenous sport history and participation and reconciliation is important to consider when planning future recreation services.



3.6 Community engagement

Community input is a critical component in planning future recreation services. The What We Heard Report found in the Appendix describes the community engagement process and presents its findings. There were three (3) key engagement tactics deployed for this process.



Key findings from each of these tactics is noted below.

Household Survey

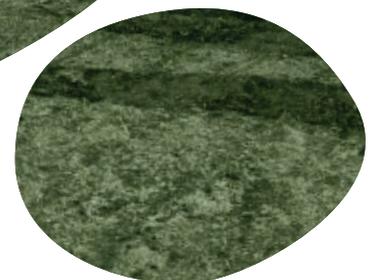
- Of total respondents to the household survey, 89% were from the County while 11% were from the Town of Westlock. Considering outdoor facilities and amenities, over half of respondents use outdoor spaces at community halls like ball diamonds, rinks, playgrounds (79%), Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill (68%), Long Island Lake Municipal Campground (63%), and nonmotorized trails (51%).
- Considering indoor facilities and amenities, over half of respondents use Westlock & District Community Hall (76%), Westlock Aquatic Centre pool (75%), Westlock Rotary Spirit Centre arena (67%), Westlock Rotary Spirit Centre walking track (64%), and Westlock Rotary Spirit Centre fieldhouse (63%).
- Approximately two thirds are satisfied with:
 - > Access to bodies of water such as area lakes (62%).
 - > The availability of organized sports programs and opportunities (61%).
 - > Top barriers impacting participation are facility operating issues (38%) and cost (32%).
- Indoor spaces that need enhancement are pools and community halls.
- Indoor spaces that are in need of additional development are indoor children's play spaces and youth spaces.
- Outdoor spaces that need enhancement are skating rinks and playgrounds.
- Outdoor spaces that are in need of additional development are spray parks.
- Over three quarters strongly agree that:
 - > It is important to ensure recreation opportunities are available and accessible for all residents of the County (82%).
 - > Community events can help people to develop a sense of community and connection to each other (80%).
- Two thirds (66%) say there are adequately or very informed about recreation opportunities.
- About three quarters (71%) identified the Westlock County social media as a preferred communication channel.
- Approximately one third (37% of total respondents and 35% of County respondents) said they would support an increase in property taxes for enhancement of existing services or new services.

Group / Operator Survey

- About half (6 out of 10) of respondents say current outdoor and indoor facilities and spaces meet their needs.
- Indoor spaces that need enhancement include youth spaces, arenas, curling facilities, community halls / gathering spaces, and seniors spaces.
- Indoor spaces that are in need of additional development are arenas.
- Outdoor spaces that need enhancement include campgrounds, BBQ and picnic areas, and nonmotorized trails.
- Outdoor spaces that are in need of additional development include spray parks, outdoor paved court spaces, and support amenities such as bathrooms, benches, and signage.

Discussion Sessions

- Recreation is important to people of Westlock County.
- There needs to be some recreation opportunities in the rural communities throughout Westlock County.
- There are numerous recreation opportunities that exist and these should be recognized by the County and supported.
- Tourism in Westlock County should be encouraged.
- The Town of Westlock and Westlock County need to work together in the provision of recreation.
- Collaboration between organizations and between the County and organizations is desired.



4.0 Foundations for recreation

In order to think strategically about recreation services being supported by the County, it is important to articulate what the intentions of the County are regarding investment in these important services. The following has been developed to answer the following two questions: “what outcomes does the County want to see from it’s investment in recreation?” and “how will the County make decisions and deliver recreation services?”.

Westlock county: a proud Agricultural community of Communities, rich in history, culture, and growth opportunities.

- Strategic Plan 2023-2026

The purpose of County investment in recreation is as follows:

The County invests in recreation so that people can be happier, healthier, and more connected to each other and their community. Recreation in the County also contributes to the local economy and provides an opportunity for the County to build strong relationships with other like-minded organizations.

In helping the County achieve the above-noted purpose, the following guiding principles articulate what the County considers in decision-making and action related to recreation investment.

The Countys broader corporate values are as follows. The values presented in this Master Plan closely align:

VALUE	WHAT IT MEANS
INCLUSIVENESS	We work to make our County the best possible place for everyone to live, work, and play, regardless of individual circumstances.
ACCOUNTABILITY	We hold ourselves to the highest possible standard while operating as responsible stewards of our community’s assets and resources.
COMMITMENT	We understand our job, we hear what citizens want, and we will do what we say we will do.
CREATIVITY	We are imaginative when it comes to creating the best potential future for Westlock County.
INTEGRITY	We are honest, forthcoming, and transparent with each other, with residents, visitors, and everyone in Westlock County.

- Strategic Plan 2023-2026



Financial accountability:

County investment in recreation occurs in a way that optimizes the use of County resources through efficient direct operations of services and in leveraging investment from other partners, be they municipal, nonprofit, or private organizations. All County investment in recreation must align with County’s strategic intentions.



Data driven:

There is more data and information available to decision makers and service providers in the recreation sector now than ever before. Quality data can inform important operational decisions and enrich business and feasibility planning. The County will strive to continuously improve the collection of quality data and also request that its partners do the same. The County will also invest time and effort into continuously enhancing the use of data analytics in using data to inform decision making and action.



Innovation and creativity:

Innovation and creativity in recreation can relate to the types of opportunities provided in a municipality as well as how those opportunities are delivered. The County does not shy away from opportunities to be more innovative and creative in recreation service delivery, even if it means approaching service differently than its municipal peers.



Partnership and collaboration:

The County relies heavily on public and nonprofit recreation service providers to help make up the array of recreation opportunities residents and visitor share access to. As such, the County partners with these other providers in a variety of ways. Partnerships are vital in sustaining the existing recreation service levels and the County strives to collaborate where possible to sustain and enhance services and to leverage public investment.

The County strives for “Organizational Excellence”. The ways in which the County provides and invests in recreation opportunities provide opportunities to demonstrate this.

EFFECTIVE MUNICIPAL OPERATIONS

STRATEGIES:

- Ensure a sound and effective legislative framework is established and maintained
- Create an organizational structure and culture that results in customer service excellence
- Incorporate information and communication technologies that support and enable innovation
- Establish effective communication protocols with external stakeholders

- Strategic Plan 2023-2026





Accessibility:

Recreation opportunities that the County invests in (directly or indirectly) are intended to be as accessible to as many people as possible. Accessibility relates to the types of activities that are supported (favoring activities that appeal to many) as well as the recognition and mitigation of barriers to participation related to recreation opportunities. The County favors investment in recreation services and initiatives that are easily accessible to the general public and that consider and mitigate barriers to participation.



Equity and inclusion:

Not all recreation activities in the current Alberta context are welcoming and inclusive to all. There are a variety of ways that opportunity providers are trying to address enhanced equity and inclusion ranging from fees and allocations policies that favor underserved facets of the population to ensuring alignment with initiatives and movements like Safe Sport and Truth and Reconciliation. The County favors investment in recreation services and initiatives that prioritize equity and inclusion.



Economic impact:

Recreation activity generates economic activity in the County. Private and nonprofit organizations invest in people and other business inputs in the County, and in many cases, pay taxes. Recreation activity can also draw people from outside of the County who in turn purchase goods and services within the Region. Having a thriving recreation service in the County can also make the County more attractive for both residents and employers. The County favors investment in recreation services and initiatives that can demonstrate economic impact and return.



Environmental stewardship:

The development and operations of recreation services can have a significant impact on the environment. Recreation can also be a medium for creating change in resident awareness and behaviour in reducing environmental impact. The County favors investment in recreation services and initiatives that reduce environmental footprint and promote enhanced environmental stewardship.

It is important for the County to be a “Welcoming Community For All” as demonstrated in the following goal. Recreation opportunities foster inclusion and help build sense of community.

CREATE A SENSE OF BELONGING, WELL-BEING, AND INCLUSION

STRATEGIES:

- Collaborate with neighbouring municipalities to establish and co-sponsor rotating, regional events
- Create diverse, inclusive, and accessible communities for everyone
- Improve Indigenous relations that advance reconciliation

- Strategic Plan 2023-2026

Recreation spaces and places can be opportunities to reduce environmental footprint and can be a medium to educate the public on stewardship. The County has prioritized environmental sustainability in its Strategic Plan.

ENSURE FUTURE ENVIRONMENTAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUSTAINABILITY

STRATEGIES:

- Develop and implement a process to prioritize infrastructure and guide operations and maintenance
- Establish bylaws and policies that result in effective and efficient land use plans that minimize our environmental footprint
- Create a framework that supports energy transition and creates economic diversification opportunities
- Support our agricultural community

- Strategic Plan 2023-2026

Westlock County Values for Recreation



Financial
Accountability



Data
Driven



Innovation
& creativity



Partnership
& collaboration



Accessibility



Equity
& inclusion



Economic
impact



Environmental
stewardship



5.0 Service level assessment and prioritization

The provision of recreation services and spaces is not legislated. There is no standard or requirements for municipalities (rural or urban) dictating the quantity and quality of recreation amenities they must provide. The provision of recreation is a choice for municipalities that is typically influenced by history, regionality, and public input.

In addition to the lack of structure and guidance is the fact that the demand for recreation opportunities in many cases is insatiable. Participants are always looking for broader and new opportunities, or for better access to those that exist. Amidst this insatiable demand, it is important to remember that all types of recreation amenities (the indoor and outdoor spaces and places where activities occur) help people become healthier and more connected to their communities.

All this being said, some recreation amenities can provide more benefit in a community than others, depending on the characteristics of the activities and the types of people that they impact. The following is meant to assess service levels for amenities in the Region and prioritize which ones might provide the most return to the County for its investment. This is accomplished by reviewing a number of criteria that help to understand demand and define social good.

5.1 Service level assessment

The following Service Level Assessment provides an initial point of reference for amenity-based infrastructure assessment by identifying if current service provision could be “enhanced”, “protected”, or “limited”. The intent of this assessment is to evaluate whether there is enough, more could be warranted, or there could be less of a certain amenity, both now and in the future. The assessment has been completed on all of the different amenities that the County currently supports (in some form) or that are provided publicly throughout the region and is intended to help the County better understand needs and demands for recreation amenities on a regional basis.

An “enhance” service level assessment suggests improvement in quality or quantity of the amenity could be warranted. It does not mean that immediate investment or development of that amenity type should occur. It suggests that further feasibility study is warranted should there be an ability to invest. As well, an enhance conclusion could mean increase quality or quantity of an amenity which would also need to be confirmed through further study.

A “protect” service level assessment suggests that the current quality and quantity of amenities is appropriate to meet need. Should significant growth occur, there may be a need to invest to maintain service levels but no adjustment is suggested immediately.

A “limit” service level assessment does not necessarily indicate immediate closure of an amenity but does suggest that when significant investment is required or when financial constraints and limitations are present that a reduction of service could be considered.



The following criteria have been identified to assess both supply and demand of recreation amenities in the region. These criteria align with the County’s recreation related values.

Supply Criteria

<p>CRITERIA Amenity Condition 01</p> <p>CONSIDERATIONS Does the amenity meet relevant design standards? What is the capital investment required to maintain the amenity?</p> <p>DATA Architectural assessment, Maintenance planning, Internal Engagement (staff), Community Engagement (public, group)</p>	<p>CRITERIA Capacity 02</p> <p>CONSIDERATIONS What is the current utilization capacity? Do waitlist exist for programming and services?</p> <p>DATA Local data sources Internal Engagement (staff) Community Engagement (public, group)</p>
<p>CRITERIA Relevance / Fit for Purpose 03</p> <p>CONSIDERATIONS Does the amenity meet the needs and expectations of users? Does the amenity meet current standards of play for relevant activities at appropriate levels?</p> <p>DATA Architectural assessment, Local data sources (program guides), Internal Engagement (staff), Community Engagement (public, group), Activity governing body policy</p>	<p>CRITERIA Access 04</p> <p>CONSIDERATIONS How available is the amenity for general use? What barriers exist to using the amenity?</p> <p>DATA Local data sources (program guides) Internal Engagement (staff) Community Engagement (public, group)</p>

Demand Criteria

<p>CRITERIA Community Population 01</p> <p>CONSIDERATIONS What is the profile of the community? Is the community experiencing population growth? What are other indicators of demand (health, social)?</p> <p>DATA Socio Demographics, Population Projections , GIS Analysis, Community Engagement (public, group)</p>	<p>CRITERIA Public Support 02</p> <p>CONSIDERATIONS What is the level of local support? What gaps currently exist in the recreation system?</p> <p>DATA Community Engagement (public, group)</p>
<p>CRITERIA Participation 03</p> <p>CONSIDERATIONS What activities are residents participating in? How often and where?</p> <p>DATA Activity governing bodies Market research Community Engagement (public, group)</p>	<p>CRITERIA Access 04</p> <p>CONSIDERATIONS What trends in recreation and culture activity participation and provision may impact future demand?</p> <p>DATA Activity governing bodies Market research Community Engagement (public, group)</p>

Applying these criteria to recreation amenities in the region with information gathered during the planning process produced the following findings. Alongside the findings, the following table also outlines what the County should consider for amenities within each category. These findings are in some cases consistent with public input gathered and in other cases they differ. This is due to all of the criteria being considered, not just public input.



ENHANCE

Considerations:

- Continue to monitor demand related to amenity provision and consider how partners (nonprofit, municipal, or private sector) may be leveraged or engaged to meet demand.
- Further study may be warranted to directly address service levels.
- Assess current assets to determine if reprogramming / reconfiguration could improve supply.
- Ensure an asset management protocol is adhered to, to protect existing amenity provision.

Amenities:



Indoor

- Arts and crafts creative spaces
- Arenas
- Gymnasium/flexihall
- Pools
- Indoor pickleball courts



Outdoor

- Ball diamonds
- BBQ and picnic areas / park shelters
- Outdoor fitness equipment
- Outdoor pools
- Outdoor festival and community performance spaces
- Outdoor paved court spaces



PROTECT

Considerations:

- Ensure an asset management protocol is adhered to, to protect existing amenity provision.
- Reinvestment to maintain amenities is warranted to maintain service level.
- If growth is expected, exploration into enhancing servicing levels may be warranted.

Amenities:



Indoor

- Community halls and social gathering type spaces
- Curling facilities
- Fitness facilities
- Indoor multisport facility
- Indoor children's play spaces
- Indoor walking/running track
- Multipurpose program rooms
- Seniors' spaces
- Youth spaces

- Outdoor public art
- Pickleball courts (outdoor)
- Pump track / bike skills park
- Support amenities such as benches, bathrooms, and signage
- Spray parks
- Trails – nonmotorized



LIMIT

Considerations:

- Investment outside of standard / operational maintenance is not warranted.
- Future investment into this amenity type should be limited unless the use of the amenity can be enhanced through innovation.

Amenities:



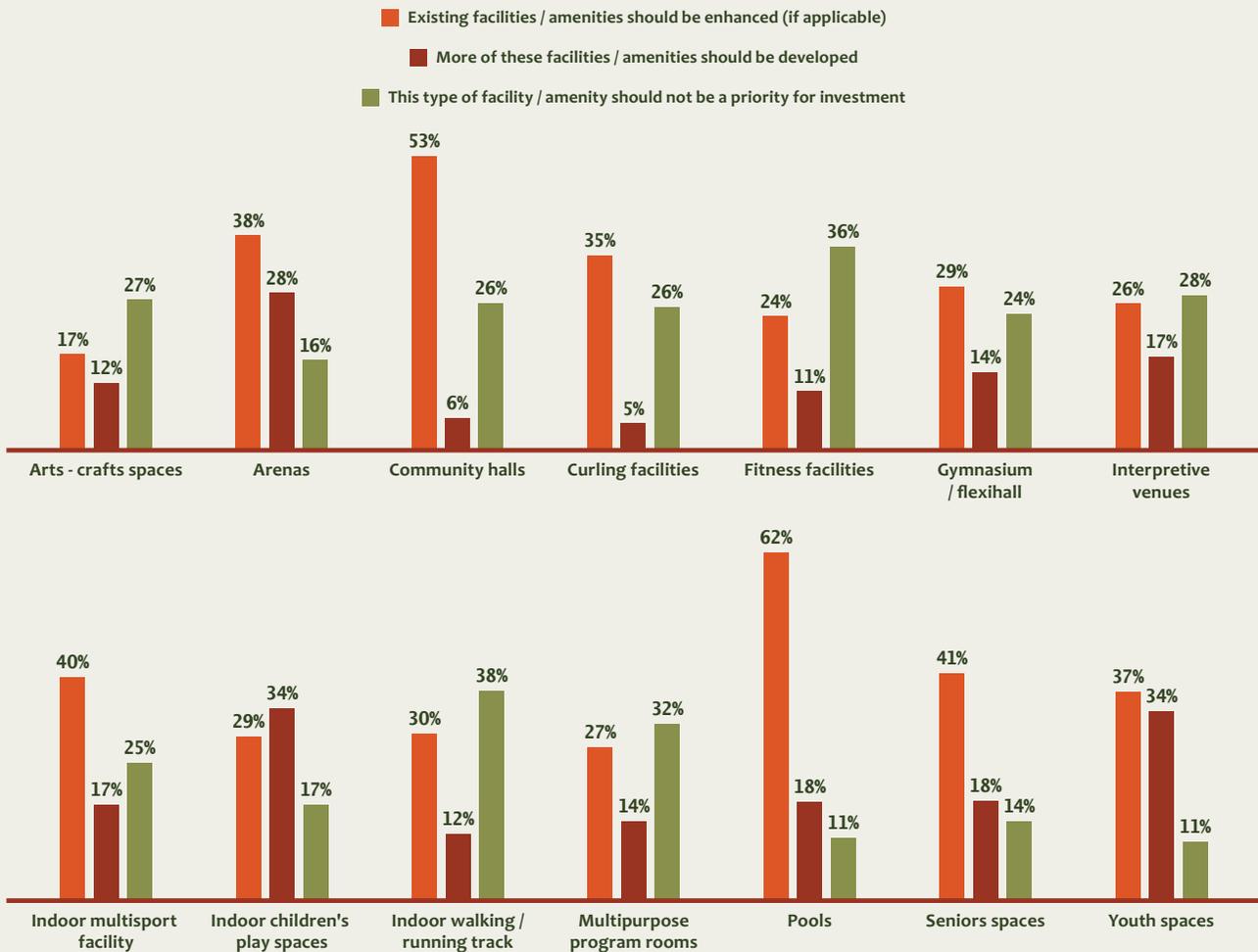
- Community halls and social gathering type spaces
- Interpretive venues



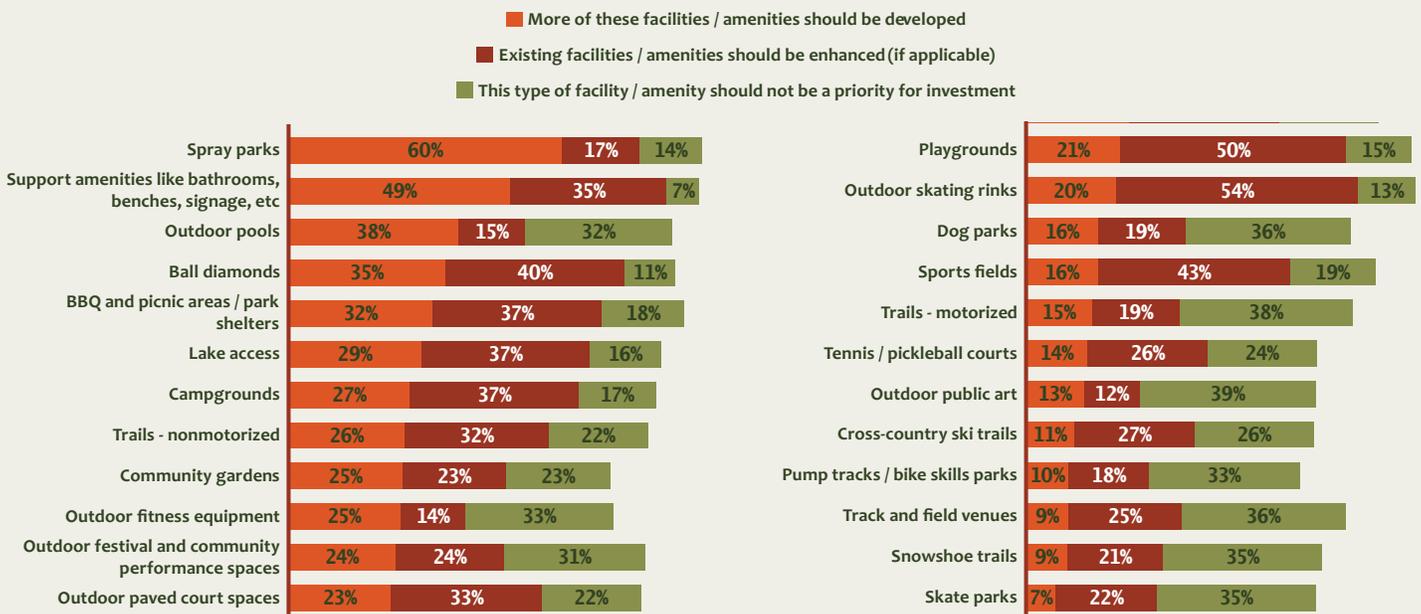
Outdoor

- Campgrounds
- Community gardens
- Cross-country ski trails
- Dog parks
- Lake access
- Outdoor skating rink
- Playgrounds
- Skate parks
- Snowshoe trails
- Sport fields
- Tennis courts
- Track and field venues
- Trails - motorized

Graph 5 - Future Facility Investment - INDOOR



Graph 6 - Future Facility Investment OUTDOOR



5.2 Prioritization

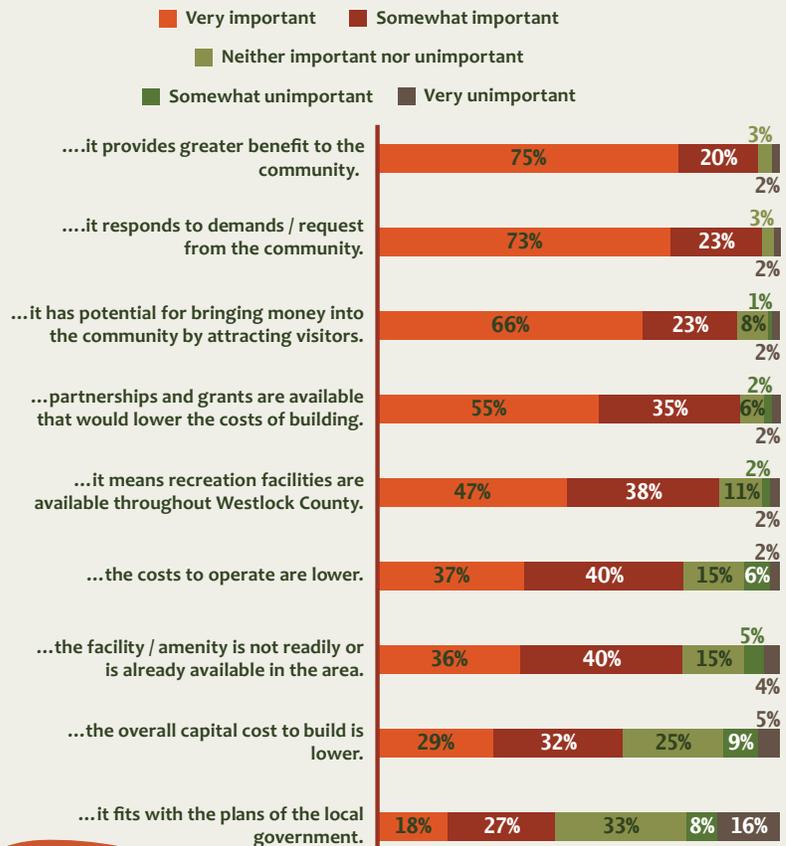
Although all recreation amenities lead to value in the region, prioritization of these amenities can help the County focus investment of limited resources into those projects that provide the most value. This prioritization, in addition to the service level assessment findings outlined previously, provides insight as to which amenities County investment could focus on first as the County contemplates new projects or is asked to support projects brought forward by partners.

Prioritization is based on the results of the Service Level Assessment in addition to the following criteria. These criteria and associated weighting align with the County’s recreation related values.

Prioritization Criteria	Description	Weighting
Service level assessment	Score based on service level assessment.	High
Public benefit	Score based the benefits (indirect and / or direct) the amenity would achieve.	High
Financial impact	Impact score that integrates capital, operating, and lifecycle.	High
Partnership	Score based on the potential of the amenity to attract capital and / or operational partnerships.	Medium
Future proofing	Impact score that considers the adaptability of amenity to meet and respond to unforeseen need and demand.	Medium
Support economic / community development	Score based on the potential level of economic development and community development the amenity would achieve (i.e., attract new residents, visitors, investment).	Low

Applying these criteria to recreation amenities in a Westlock County context renders the following priorities. It is important to note that many of these indoor and outdoor amenities are typically provided by partners and not by the County directly. Those highlighted in bold indicate amenities that the County currently invests in directly, or has in the past, while the others are provided by municipal or nonprofit partners.

Graph 7 - Importance of Criteria When Prioritizing Recreation Projects





Indoor Priorities

1. Arts and crafts creative spaces
2. Gymnasium / flexihall
3. Indoor children’s spaces
4. Arenas
5. Indoor multisport facilities
6. Pools
7. Youth spaces
8. Seniors spaces
9. **Community halls and gathering spaces**
10. Indoor pickleball courts
11. Fitness facilities
12. Multipurpose program rooms
13. Indoor walking / running track
14. Curling facilities



Outdoor Priorities

1. **Trails – nonmotorized**
2. Outdoor paved court spaces
3. Support amenities such as benches, bathrooms, and signage
4. Outdoor festival and community performance spaces
5. Outdoor pickleball courts
6. **BBQ and picnic areas / park shelters**
7. Outdoor public art
8. Outdoor fitness equipment
9. Spray parks
10. **Campgrounds**
11. **Trails – motorized**
12. Ball diamonds
13. **Cross-country ski trails**
14. Pump tracks and bike skills parks
15. Rectangular sport fields
16. Dog parks
17. Community gardens
18. Tennis courts
19. **Lake access**
20. Outdoor skating rinks
21. Skate parks
22. Snowshoe trails
23. Track and field venues
24. Outdoor pools
25. Playgrounds

Of note is that the Town of Westlock conducted a similar assessment process in 2023 which indicated the following amenities could warrant further exploration to be “enhanced”:

- 🏠 Indoor
 - Climbing wall
 - Child playground
- ☀️ Outdoor
 - Amphitheatre / event space
 - Ball diamonds
 - Nature trails
 - Pickleball courts
 - Playgrounds older children / youth
 - Spray parks

- Town of Westlock Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2023



These priorities and the associated service level assessment will help provide County decision makers a reference point for investing in County-owned infrastructure and contemplating investment opportunities brought forward by partners. As new information becomes available, the process for assessing service levels and prioritization should be revisited to ensure that these lists and conclusions reflect current market conditions.

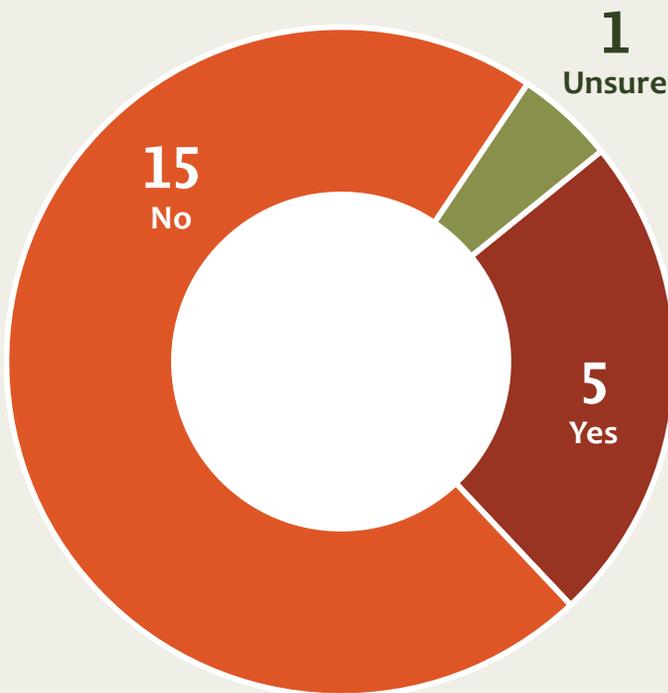
Although assessing service levels for and prioritizing recreation amenities is important to consider when contemplating future County investment, there were some other potential focus areas identified through research and community engagement for the County to consider. These include 1) community development and capacity building, 2) asset management and reserve budgeting, 3) data collection and analytics, and 4) partnership enrichment. Each of these potential focus areas is described as follows.

5.3 Community development and capacity building

Groups that offer recreation opportunities, either through owning and operating facilities or providing programs (or both) face many challenges. These can include issues such as having trouble getting volunteers, generating revenues, or investing in and maintaining infrastructure. If these same groups are not able to address these challenges the services they provide to residents and visitors may be compromised.

The County already provides a number of important supports to partner groups and volunteers. Helping groups attract and retain volunteers, develop strategic plans, fundraise and apply for grants, and better understand the markets they serve are just some ways that municipalities can help groups that provide important recreation opportunities. **The supports the County offers are relied upon by its partners and should be sustained and potentially enhanced moving forward.**

Graph 8 - Does Your Organization Receive County Support for Facility Operations?



Some of the biggest challenges identified by County groups and Community Associations through the community engagement included:

Improvements that would benefit facility users (operator response):

- Improved or enhanced support amenities such as washrooms.
- Enhanced information and community technology.

Operational Challenges (Non-operator response):

- Funding and keeping costs low.
- Attracting and retaining volunteers.
- Inadequate facilities and spaces.

5.4 Asset management and reserve budgeting

The majority of recreation facilities across Canada are 40+ years old. This is no different in the Westlock Region. As these important facilities age, they require reinvestment and, at some point, replacement in order to simply maintain existing service levels.

In order to better prepare for this inevitability, many municipalities are establishing life-cycle reserve funds where money is put away on an annual basis and will ultimately be used for major capital projects related to sustaining service levels. The Canadian Infrastructure Report Card (2016,2019) suggests that between 1.7% and 2.5% of contemporary replacement value be invested in reserves to best address expected reinvestment requirements. Although this is not achievable under the current financial realities of most municipalities and facility owners, the concept is still important to consider.

The County has a number of indoor and outdoor recreation assets that currently require investment and that will continue to move forward. **Planning financially to sustain its own existing facilities and spaces, while taking in to account that partners may also ask for the same for facilities and spaces that are supported by the County, should be undertaken.**

5.5 Data collection and analytics

The collection of quality data in the recreation sector helps facility owners understand how their assets are being utilized and can assist in important decision-making about future services.

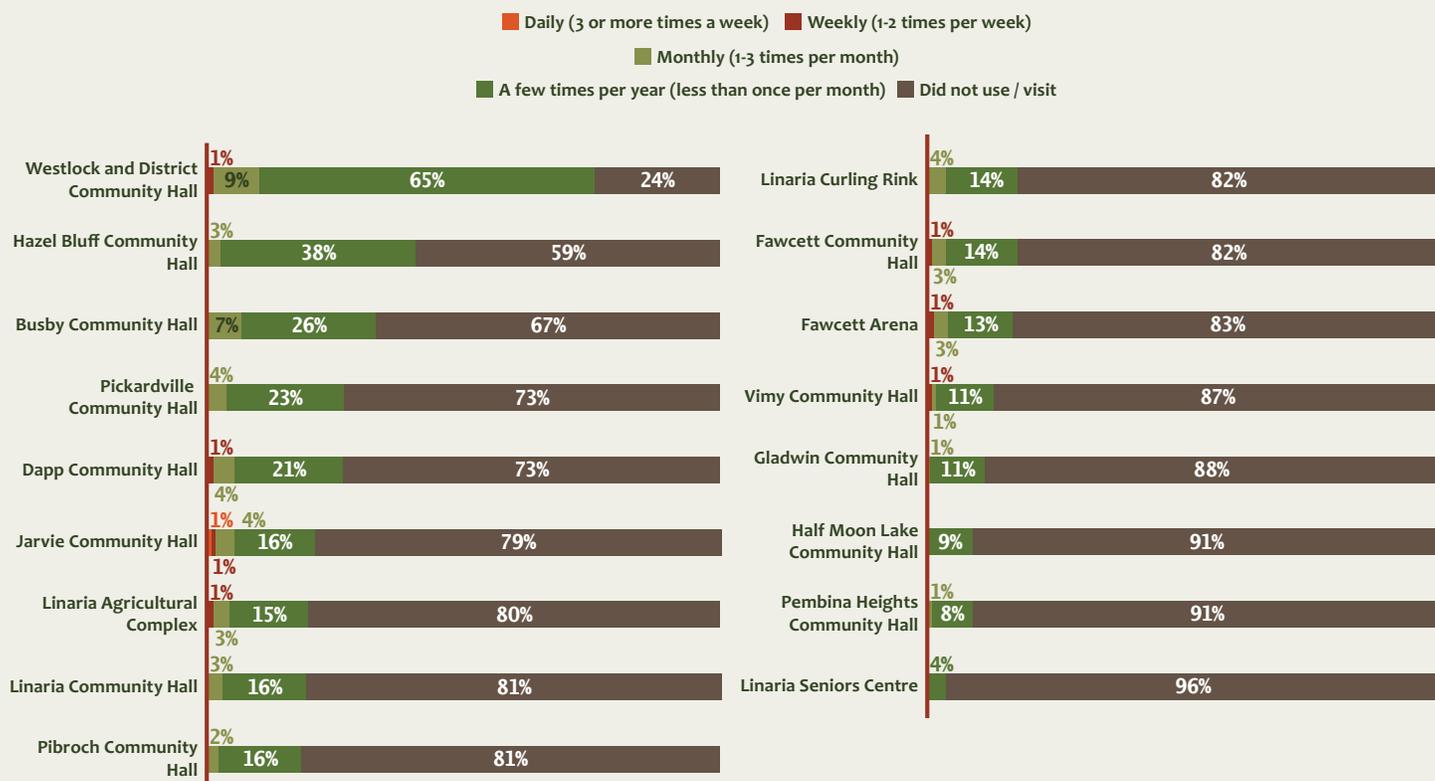
Recreation data can include information about users of facilities and spaces gathered through point-of-purchase and registration software, intercept surveys at facilities and spaces, and third-party data such as Google Analytics or third-party movement data.

The County currently gathers data for its existing spaces through a variety of means and these efforts should be sustained and enhanced moving forward. In addition to the data the County gathers about its own assets, it should find ways to better gather data from the partners it supports.

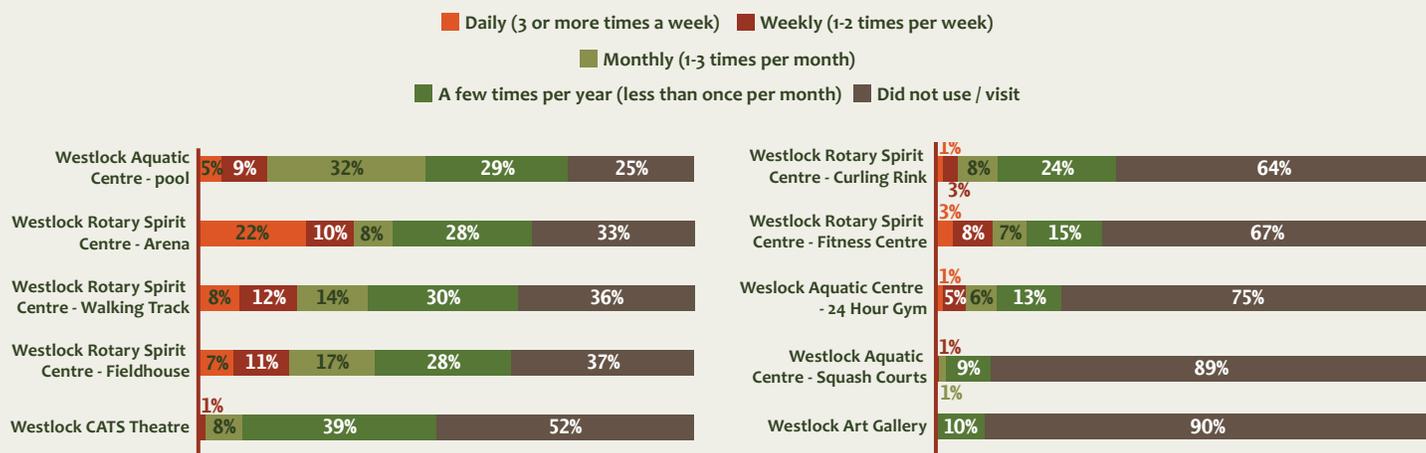


[facebook.com/westlockcounty/photos_by](https://www.facebook.com/westlockcounty/photos_by)

Graph 9 - INDOOR Frequency of Use Yearly in Season of Play Westlock County



Graph 10 - INDOOR Frequency of Use Yearly in Season of Play Town of Westlock



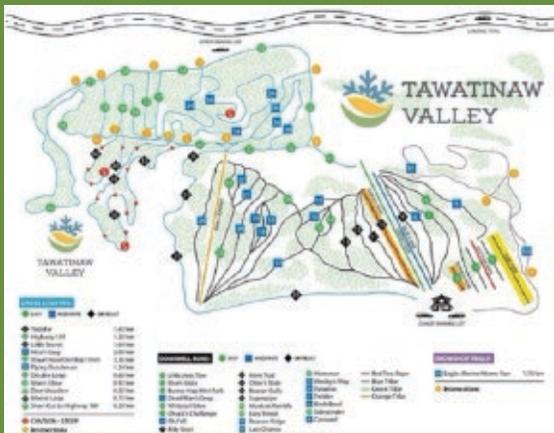
5.6 Partnership enrichment

The County currently employs a partnership approach to deliver recreation services. This includes partnerships with third-party operators who operate spaces on behalf of the County, as is the case at the Long Island Lake Municipal Campground and the Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill. The County also has partnerships with groups that operate facilities and spaces independently from the County (i.e. the County does not have an ownership stake), such as facilities and spaces in the Town of Westlock and throughout the various hamlets and communities throughout the County.

This partnership approach is in line with many Alberta municipalities and helps to lever County investment into as many different communities and markets as possible. The approach also meets legislated requirements for inter-municipal collaboration and provides balance between required investment by the County and providing amenities desired by residents.

The partnerships that the County has in place are vital to achieving current service levels and should be sustained and enhanced where possible. This could entail increased investment in partner relationships, enhanced community development supports, or enhanced communications and collaborations between the County and partners.

Partnerships need to be monitored and nurtured and although current relationships between the County and its recreational partners provide a solid foundation more could be done in enrichment these vital relationships.



The Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill and the Long Island Lake Municipal Campground are County-owned assets that involve operational partnerships.

The Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill is a unique regional asset that services visitors to the region and County residents. The facility and site is operated by a non-profit organization under agreement. This non-profit organization exists only to operate the Ski Hill and leverages community based commitment, passion, and volunteerism to operate in a way that is more efficient than if the County operated it directly.



The Long Island Lake Municipal Campground is also operated by third party under contract. This type of arrangement is typical for municipally owned campground facilities and enables the County to deliver the service as efficiently as possible.

Both of these third party arrangements help the County deliver services with the assets it owns while doing so in a way that minimizes operational responsibilities and leverages public funding.

6.0 The future of recreation space

Westlock County boundaries encompass a Town, a Village, and nine hamlets. Including its own population and that of the Town and Village, the regional market includes almost 13,000 residents. Although spread out across the County's 3,169 km², these 13,000 residents have access to an estimated \$500M in publicly and privately supported indoor and outdoor recreation infrastructure including three indoor ice arenas, a swimming pool, two indoor curling rinks, and a variety of other important spaces.

As a rural municipality there are some recreational opportunities that the County can invest in and provide in a rural setting that cannot be done in its urban partners. Conversely, there are some types of recreation spaces that are best provided in urban settings. The County's current approach to providing recreation spaces includes a combination of direct ownership and operations (where the County owns and operates spaces like Rainbow Park), direct ownership and contracted operations (like the Long Island Lake Municipal Campground and Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill), and investment in facilities and spaces that the County has no ownership of but that provide valuable services to its residents (including but not limited to the County's relationship with the Town of Westlock and various Community Associations throughout the County).

Although the County currently owns and operates three major recreation sites, the majority of the spaces available to residents are provided by others with support from the County. That being said, the County's approach to the majority of recreation spaces accessible to County residents is relatively passive and reliant upon the will of its partners. County investment in infrastructure, either owned by the County or not, would need to be explored and justified in a consistent and thorough way before decisions are made. This due diligence, typically called feasibility analysis, will provide County decision-makers with the information they need to move forward (or not) with investment. The recreation project approval process explains.

The County has prioritized investment in outdoor recreation spaces in its Strategic Plan

DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES

STRATEGIES:

- Ensure existing outdoor recreation spaces within the County remain attractive, well maintained, and environmentally sound
- Provide outdoor recreational opportunities that serve diverse needs and interests
- Develop and pursue recreation tourism opportunities that attract visitors and offset operational costs with external stakeholders

- Strategic Plan 2023-2026



County-owned recreation spaces

Spaces like the Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill and the Long Island Lake Municipal Campground provide skiing, boating, and camping experiences that are unique to the County in the Region and that accommodate usage by residents of the region as well as visitors to it. These rural recreation opportunities are typically outdoor and drive tourism in the County.

The County's investment in its recreational assets has been inconsistent and ad hoc in the past. Although the assets are utilized and meet community need, they would benefit from more consistent and strategic investment. **The County will focus investment in the existing recreational assets it owns at Rainbow Park, Long Island Lake Municipal Campground, and the Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill.**

Investments in existing assets should adhere to the contemporary asset management practices and protocols of the County. For indoor and outdoor recreation spaces these asset management efforts should focus on:

- sustaining asset **functionality**,
- meeting current **building codes**,
- meeting current **safety standards** or guidelines,
- enabling as much **accessibility** (physical and social) as possible, and
- **reducing environmental footprint** as much as possible.

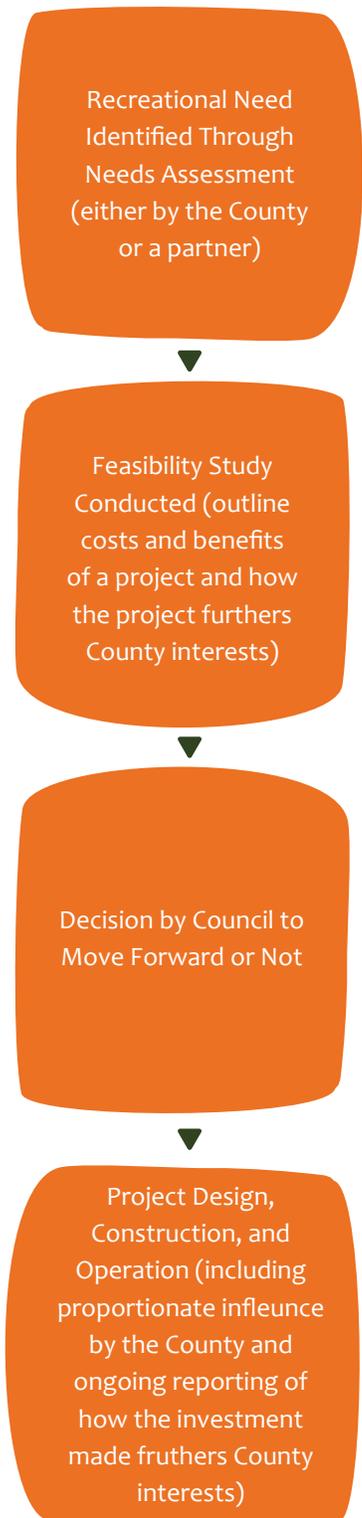
Key to prudent asset management is conducting **regular infrastructure assessment processes**, conducted by third-party professionals (similar to what was conducted during this planning process), to assess structural, mechanical, electrical, architectural, and functional aspects of facilities. In addition to these focus areas, accessibility audits and energy audits can also be useful in improving facilities and ensuring they meet modern standards and user expectations. For outdoor spaces, inspections of playgrounds by certified playground inspectors (either County staff or other) should also be conducted to ensure structures are safe and that the County is meeting its own insurance obligations and helping partners do the same. The procurement of some of these assessments and audits can be supported through support organizations, such as Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA), which should occur wherever possible.

Once these existing outdoor assets are invested in and improved to an appropriate level the County may also consider investment in other lands that have recreation potential such as:

- more and better campgrounds (outdoor priority #10),
- motorized trails and staging areas (outdoor priority #11), and
- access to other water bodies (outdoor priority #19).

Any investment in enhancing a service level (adding services to a campground) or in introducing a new amenity will require further feasibility analysis to provide decision-makers with the information they need to make informed investment decisions.

The recreation project approval process



Partner-owned recreation spaces

The County's investment in other major indoor and outdoor recreation assets will be determined through its Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework with the Town of Westlock and upon specific requests by municipal or nonprofit / community association partners. **When considering these requests, the County will refer to the amenity service level assessment and prioritization results herein (or a subsequent iteration thereof) in determining alignment of need balanced with the financial situation of the County at that point in time. It is important that when requests are brought forward to the County that the same feasibility information that the County would develop for its own projects be adhered to and presented to County decision-makers for consideration.**

Should the County conclude that a potential investment brought forward by a partner is warranted and feasible, the following conditions would apply to the project. These conditions should apply to any ICF arrangement or partnership the County has in place related to recreation delivery.

1. **The partner should demonstrate how the asset helps the County achieve its strategic goals on an ongoing basis.**
2. **The partner should demonstrate how the asset improves the quality of life of County residents.**
3. **The partner and the County should promote and share successes with regional residents related to the project on an ongoing basis.**
4. **The County should share on an agreed to and proportionate share of both the costs and responsibilities associated with providing the asset.**

These conditions should be built into agreements with partners and adhered to throughout the project life cycle.

Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks (ICF's) are required through the Municipal Government Act between municipalities that share physical borders. Recreation is one of the service areas that need to be addressed in ICF discussions.

The County realizes the value of regional partnerships and strives to enhance its regional relationships.

INCREASE COLLABORATION WITH REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

STRATEGIES:

- Further regional economic development efforts with municipal partners
- Develop a regional plan to ensure effective land use planning and infrastructure development that supports cost effective economic development
- Create a Memorandum of Understanding with Indigenous Partners focused on economic development strategies

- Strategic Plan 2023-2026

The recreation project approval process

Recreational Need Identified Through Needs Assessment (either by the County or a partner)

Feasibility Study Conducted (outline costs and benefits of a project and how the project furthers County interests)

Decision by Council to Move Forward or Not

Project Design, Construction, and Operation (including proportionate influence by the County and ongoing reporting of how the investment made furthers County interests)

6.1 A base level of support for hamlets

A goal of the County is to “build strong and vibrant hamlets” (Strategic Plan 2023-2026). Having robust and thriving recreation opportunities in hamlets is an important element of strength and vibrancy. More specifically related to investment in hamlets throughout the County, the following outlines an approach to enhance resident access to recreation opportunities.

The County currently allocates funding to support all community groups and a dedicated fund to support recreation in hamlets specifically could help to sustain and enhance recreation in these important centres.

A base level of support to bolster recreation within each hamlet and that could be relied upon by Community Associations or similar organizations to be used at their discretion would enhance current service offerings and reduce stress on community volunteers. This investment would be directed by representatives from each hamlet to what each believe most important to enhance recreation in their area but could include a variety of initiatives including programming, infrastructure investment, promotions and marketing, events, etc.. This base level of support would be exclusive to the existing County Community Grant Program funding (which entailed \$90,000 in 2024) and could be piloted at \$5,000 per hamlet (\$45,000 in total) for 2025.

This support would help to establish a base level to each hamlet while enabling each to use the funds in their own way. It would also not exclude them from accessing additional funds from the County for projects or events (as is the case now).

It is important that County investment in partners related to recreation is transparent, consistent, and demonstrates value to County residents, directly through access to recreation opportunities, and indirectly through broader social return and economic impact. That being said, the following table outlines a proposed investment plan for recreation infrastructure in the short, medium, and long term.

The County intends to invest in the vibrancy of its nine hamlets. Recreation opportunities can make communities more attractive and build sense of community.

ENSURE THAT COUNTY HAMLETS ARE BEAUTIFUL, SAFE, AND SUSTAINABLE

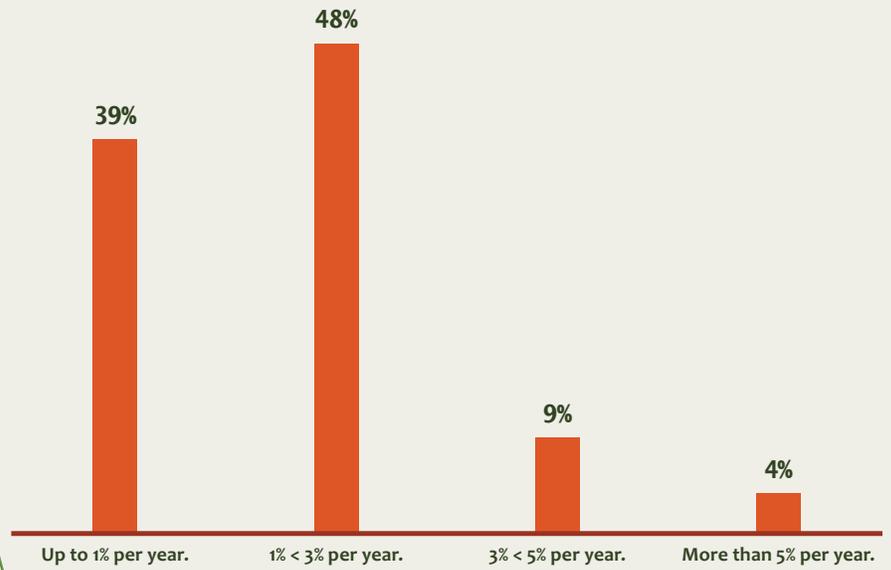
STRATEGIES:

- Provide infrastructure that protects and keeps our residents and their property safe
- Deliver well-managed, effective, and efficient services that contribute to quality of life improvements for residents
- Ensure emergency and protective services are adequately funded

- Strategic Plan 2023-2026

Asset	Description	0-5 years	5-10 years	10-20 years
County Assets				
Rainbow Park - Outdoor	Improvements as per Outdoor Assessment Report (November 2024)	\$250,470	\$121,440	\$349,140
Rainbow Park - Indoor	Improvements as per Indoor Assessment Report (December 2024)	\$21,000	\$28,000	
Long Island Lake Municipal Campground - outdoor	Improvements as per Outdoor Assessment Report (November 2024)	\$197,340	\$721,050	\$432,630
Long Island Lake Municipal Campground - indoor	Improvements as per Indoor Assessment Report (December 2024)	\$245,000	\$56,000	
Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill - outdoor	Improvements as per Outdoor Assessment Report (November 2024)	\$728,640	\$151,800	\$212,520
Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill - indoor	Improvements as per Indoor Assessment Report (December 2024)	\$196,000	\$567,000	
Feasibility planning and asset assessments	To explore potential service level enhancements	\$100,000	\$150,000	\$400,000
Asset management - County	Life-cycle reserve fund contribution (\$100,000 annual)	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$1,000,000
Sub total - County Assets		\$2,238,450	\$2,295,290	\$2,394,290
Average annual contribution		\$447,690	\$459,058	\$239,429
Partner Assets				
Town of Westlock Cost Sharing	Current contribution with inflationary increases (currently at \$453,000/year to be confirmed during next negotiation process) *+40% every 5 years	\$3,171,000	\$4,439,400	\$14,916,384
Community Grant Program (existing)	Current grant allocation with inflationary increases *+40% every 5 years	\$630,000	\$882,000	\$2,963,520
Hamlet-Recreation Enhancement Grant (proposed)	Proposed grant allocation with inflationary increases (starting at \$5,000/hamlet) *+40% every 5 years	\$63,000	\$88,200	\$296,352
Asset management - partners	Life-cycle reserve fund contribution to potentially assist partners (\$100,000 annual)	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$1,000,000
Sub total - Partner Assets		\$4,364,000	\$5,909,600	\$19,176,256
Average annual contribution		\$872,800	\$1,181,920	\$1,917,626
Total				
Total capital impact over time period		\$6,602,450	\$8,204,890	\$21,570,546
Average annual contribution		\$1,320,490	\$1,640,978	\$2,157,055

Graph 11 - Amount of Tax Increase Willing to Pay Annually



It is important to note that these figures should be considered +/-30% and are meant for high level capital budgeting purposes. When actual investment decisions are made, decision makers will be provided more accurate financial information.



7.0 The future of recreation service delivery

Although investment in recreation infrastructure is very important, whether it be in County-owned or partner owned spaces, has to be complemented by investment in resources to animate these spaces, oversee the operations of County-owned spaces, and maintain relationships and County influence on partner-owned spaces. These tasks are commonly referred to as **recreation service delivery** and the following table outlines future focus areas that could be considered by the County to enhance service delivery efforts. It is important to note that progress in each of these areas is being made by the County through its investment in staff and supports and that these suggestions are meant to enhance the effective work already happening in the County.

Focus Area	Description	0-5 years	5-10 years	10-20 years
Community development	Sustained and enhanced investment in supporting partners through individual relationship building, investment in and delivery of capacity building exercises (such as Board development, volunteer attraction and retention, external grant identification and application, etc.), and training for committed volunteers (such as subsidies to attend recreation events and conferences, training programs, etc.)	\$25,000		\$50,000
Partnerships	Once more formalized agreements are in place that include the partnership conditions outlined herein, time will need to be spent building and maintaining partnership arrangements and ensuring that agreements are being adhered to and reported on. This will include investment in human resources and may also require legal support.	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$50,000
Economic development	Recreation service delivery can catalyze economic development. In order to do so, collaboration between recreation and economic development functions within the County must occur and investment must be made in attracting nonlocal participation to existing recreation spaces and events. Effort related to event attraction includes both promotions and marketing as well as time in building economic development focused relationships.	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$50,000
Promotions and marketing	Ensuring residents and visitors are aware of recreation opportunities that exist within the County is critical to optimizing community benefit. Investment in promotions and marketing would entail the development of key messages and materials as well as the advertising of these materials to intended target audiences. Effort related to promotions and marketing should focus on bolstering both local and nonlocal use of recreation spaces in the County.	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$100,000
Total		\$125,000	\$100,000	\$250,000
Average annual contribution		\$25,000	\$20,000	\$25,000

It is important to note that these figures should be considered +/-30% and are meant for high level operational budgeting purposes. When actual investment decisions are made, decision makers will be provided more accurate financial information. Also important to note is that these costs are incremental and once agreed to, would be come regular annual operating budget allocations.

8.0 Implementation and implications

The County’s current investment and effort related to recreation is significant and effective at generating benefits throughout the County and enabling healthier and more connected County residents. This investment and effort should be sustained, at a minimum.

The suggestions and ideas outlined in this Needs Assessment and Master Plan are intended to enhance the current state of recreation in the County and build upon current service levels and successes achieved.

In order to implement these ideas, the suggestions for what could happen and the required investments are meant to provide a guideline for actual implementation and it is expected that some initiatives identified for short, medium, and long term implementation may not occur in the timelines indicated herein. That said, some potential actions that might be taken in the short, medium, and long term are presented as follows.

Short term

- Improvements to Rainbow Park, Long Island Lake Municipal Campground, and Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill
- Continued investment in cost sharing with the Town of Westlock and the existing Community Grant Program
- Implementation of new base level hamlet recreation grant
- Investment in time and resources to enhance community development, partnerships, economic development, and promotions and marketing efforts of the County related to recreation

Medium term (in addition to ongoing items outlined in short term)

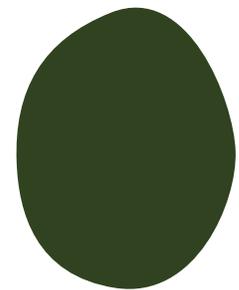
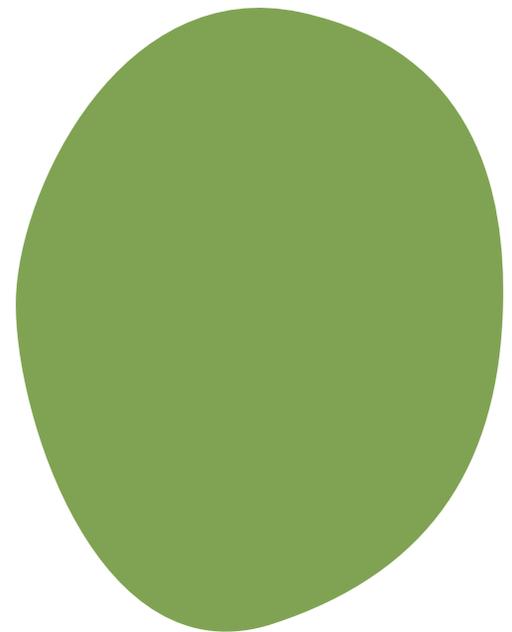
- Continued improvements to Rainbow Park, Long Island Lake Municipal Campground, and Tawatinaw Valley Ski Hill
- Revisiting input gathered in needs assessment process (community engagement, research, and facility / site assessments)
- Revisiting the Master Plan to ensure it remains relevant

Long term

- Feasibility exploration of potential new recreation sites, amenities, or enhancements to existing recreation spaces.

The following table outlines expected financial implications of the ideas and initiatives outlined in this Plan.

Item	0-5 years	5-10 years	10-20 years
Potential investment in County-owned recreation assets	\$2,238,450	\$2,295,290	\$2,394,290
Average annual	\$447,690	\$459,058	\$239,429
Potential investment in partner-owned recreation assets	\$4,364,000	\$5,909,600	\$19,176,256
Average annual	\$872,800	\$1,181,920	\$1,917,626
Potential investment in service delivery enhancements	\$125,000	\$125,000	\$250,000
Average annual	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000
Total	\$6,727,450	\$8,329,890	\$21,820,546
Average annual	\$1,345,490	\$1,665,978	\$2,182,055



In order to understand both successes related to current investment in recreation and the impacts of investing in the ideas and suggestions herein, the gathering and presenting of the following data on a regular basis would help inform decision makers and administration. Gathering this data and information will require effort and investment.

1. Participation data from County-owned and partner-owned indoor and outdoor recreation spaces broken down by local (within the region, County-residence, Town-residence and Village-residence) and nonlocal use. Gathered by County and partner staff and volunteers.
2. Investment made in County-owned recreation spaces. Gathered from annual County capital and operating budgets.
3. Investment made in partner-owned recreation spaces. Gathered from annual County capital and operating budgets.

As this is the first plan of its kind for the County, it is important to note that this Needs Assessment and Master Plan provides the tools for the County to update the conclusions herein when new information becomes available. The recreation market is dynamic and as such many conditions and considerations can impact the need for and importance of recreation spaces and services. This Plan and the inputs it is built upon should be revisited on an ongoing cycle to ensure that the directions herein remain relevant and that the County's investment in recreation is optimized. Although the timelines outlined in this Plan extend to 20 years, it would be prudent to revisit the needs assessment inputs every 5 years and the Master Plan components every 10 years.



9.0 Conclusion

The County believes in the importance of public recreation and invests in it in a variety of ways. This Needs Assessment and Master Plan is meant to help the County get even more out of its investment and to better articulate to residents and groups why recreation is a worthwhile and needed investment.

This Plan was developed via thorough and relevant research and extensive community input. It was guided and influenced by a Steering Committee comprised of County Councillors, administration, and the general public with the support of a team of industry experts.

The County now has a better understanding of what residents think about recreation, where its current investment in recreation is going and what benefits that investment is achieving, and how to measure the impact and performance of its investment in recreation moving forward.





