



Community Services *Staff Report*

REPORT NO: CS-2024-24

TO: Council

SUBMITTED BY: Chris Catania, Director of Community Services

PREPARED BY: Chris Catania, Director of Community Services

REVIEWED BY: Greg Clark, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: September 23, 2024

SUBJECT: Community Services Master Plan Draft Recommendations and Service Delivery Review

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report CS-2024-24, Community Services Master Plan Draft Recommendations and Service Delivery Review be received for information; and

THAT staff be directed to bring a final Community Services Master Plan for adoption before the end of 2024.

SUMMARY:

To provide Council with information on the Community Services Master Plan Draft Recommendations resulting from key findings of the Situational Analysis Report and Service Delivery Review. Furthermore, provide Council final steps required for the approval of the Township of Wilmot's 2024 Community Services Master Plan.

BACKGROUND:

The Township of Wilmot offers a notable array of parks, facilities, trails, arts, culture, and recreation services, providing a diverse range of amenities for the community. These amenities encompass both active and passive play spaces, trails, sport courts, ice pads, playfields,

pools, culturally significant castle, off-leash dog park, boat launch, wetlands preserve, artificial turf field, and pioneer and active cemeteries.

Aligned with Council's Corporate Strategic Plan, the Community Services department assumes the responsibility for the strategic leadership and facilitation of a variety of high-quality spaces for residents to enjoy healthy and active lifestyles, and culturally rich experiences.

Why a Master Plan

The 2024 Community Services Master Plan with Service Delivery Review will prioritize services for the Town. It presents an excellent opportunity to establish a strong foundation for the future that staff and Council can take ownership of and accountability with the following:

- The recognition of human resources and financial pressures facing the Township and offers strategic insight to address requirements into the future.
- A companion Service Delivery Review reflecting the current issues confronting the Township's service delivery efforts and offers recommendations for future staffing alignments to better serve the community.
- A Master Plan allowing staff and Council to define a clear and strategic vision for community services. This vision will guide the development and enhancement of parks, recreation, and community services, ensuring they meet the evolving needs of residents.
- The Master Plan provides an evidence-based framework for making informed decisions about resource allocation. It ensures that taxpayer dollars are invested wisely, prioritizing projects that offer the most significant benefits to the community.
- By identifying short-term, medium-term, and long-term priorities, the plan aids in efficient budgeting and financial planning. This structured approach ensures that necessary funds are allocated appropriately over time, avoiding financial strain and ensuring sustainability.
- Developing a Master Plan involves extensive community engagement, giving residents a voice in shaping their community services. This inclusive process fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that the plan reflects the actual needs and desires of the community.
- Engaging with various stakeholders, including user groups, partner organizations, and residents, strengthens community bonds. It encourages volunteerism and collaboration, enhancing the overall sense of community.
- A well-developed Master Plan identifies and addresses gaps in services, and if acted upon, can improve the quality of life for all residents. Enhanced recreational and cultural opportunities and well-maintained facilities promote health, well-being, and overall community satisfaction.
- The plan provides a long-term vision, preparing the township for future growth and changes in demographics. It ensures that Community Services can adapt to new challenges and opportunities, maintaining their relevance and effectiveness.

- High-quality parks, recreation facilities, and community services enhance the Township's image and attractiveness. This positive reputation can attract new residents and businesses, contributing to economic growth and community vitality.

Situational Analysis Report & Key Findings

On August 26, 2024, Staff presented Council with the Situational Analysis Report (SAR) that provided key findings comprising of the culmination Research and Data Analysis (Phase 1), and Extensive Community Engagement and outreach (Phase 2). The purpose of the Situational Analysis Report is to create a benchmark with respect to how the Township is currently meeting the community services needs of its residents. This benchmarking exercise is evidence-based. It includes quantitative results of the current inventory of assets, utilization rates, financial performance, demographics, and growth projections. It is further informed by qualitative information through stakeholder engagement, policy alignment, trends, best practices, and sound planning principles.

The Situational Analysis Report did not contain any specific recommendations. Rather, the Situational Analysis Report helps determine, through a series of findings, what (if any) gaps currently exist and how, when, where, and why those gaps could be addressed. The report also clearly identifies which community needs the Township is already positioned to meet over the ensuing years. Some key findings from the Situational Analysis Report include; Asset Management planning, Under-utilized halls, Ice Pad needs, Capital and Operational resourcing, Volunteer sustainability and Programing expansion. These observations have informed the themes for the draft recommendations being presented in the Community Services Master Plan.

REPORT:

Master Plan Draft Recommendations

The Township's Community Services Master Plan was developed based on the needs and requirements of its residents. The Master Plan has seven (7) strategic themes with a total of 139 recommendations over 10 years. The recommendations (Appendix C) are grouped by subject area intentionally. Each subject area includes a preamble that sets the context for the recommendations. The context is directly related to the findings within the qualitative and quantitative analysis as outlined in detail from the Situational Analysis Report.

Periodic reviews of the Situational Analysis Report in conjunction with the recommendations of the Master Plan will provide staff with the relevant background upon which to ensure alignment with resources and respond to changing information that may affect the short, mid, and long-term priorities. For example, access to an Infrastructure funding program may accelerate a project. Staff turnover may necessitate a heightened focus on staff training and knowledge retention strategies. Enhanced staffing availability can provide more options to offer new programs.

It should also be acknowledged that there is overlap and coordination requirements among many of the recommendation sections. For example, program delivery is contingent on space availability within parks and facilities. Events are related to facility staff and operational requirements. New revenue sources can drive new program offerings, improved data collection and tracking would support proactive decision making.

Finally, the recommendations all provide an expected (or predicted) outcome. This is intended to support the rationale for implementing the recommendation and can be used as a reporting mechanism in regular reports to Council regarding results and “key performance indicators”. Periodic surveys of users, customers and residents should be undertaken to understand community perception of results as noted in the expected outcome column.

The sections have been structured to address:

- Aquatics
- Asset Management
- Community Centres and Halls
- Ice Pads
- Parks and Outdoor Facilities
- Programming and Events
- Policy, Administration and Communication

Each recommendation and expected outcome(s) include a timing mechanism. Timing is defined as Short-Term (1-3 years), Mid-Term (4-6 years) and Long-Term (7-10 years). This timing may be adjusted through proactive monitoring of trends, funding programs, staff availability, alignment with corporate priorities, volunteer support and other external influences that may affect implementation plans.

Service Delivery Review

The Township of Wilmot commissioned a detailed Service Delivery Review (SDR) in tandem with the development of an updated Community Services Master Plan. The focus of the Service Delivery Review was to undertake a fulsome analysis involving citizen input, user group input, staff input, and comparative analysis of similar single tier growth municipalities.

The provision of parks, recreation, and cultural services is a dynamic environment. There are any number of external influences that can have various degrees of impact on resourcing the provision of services. These external influences are recognized as resting outside of the control of municipalities (i.e. Legislation, New Trends, Increased Customer Demands/Expectations, Shrinking Volunteer Base, Growing Financial Pressures) yet have a direct and often adverse financial pressure on municipalities.

The goal of this Service Delivery Review is to assess the current demands on the Community Services Department with a view to addressing these demands and to ensure that future

demands on the Township's Community Services department resources are strategically aligned to meet ever-changing resident needs.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The critical findings from MGA's municipal comparator review illustrated that the Township of Wilmot has the lowest tax levy per population for its parks and recreation services. While almost half of the Township's tax levy is allocated to Parks, Recreation, Cultural services, the Township has 3 times the amount of facilities per population than the next closest municipality. Even with this substantive number of facilities under management, the Township's full-time staff per population is only slightly higher than the comparator municipalities.

The Township's dedicated full-time staff compliment is lean. Staff resourcing has not been commensurate with historical expanded scope of responsibilities. The recent reduction in part-time staff hours has led to an adverse shift in skilled staff covering part-time staff responsibilities. The Township had a previous budget policy direction that restricted the Department's ability to increase part-time staff as it was interpreted as increasing service levels. This policy direction was recently revised when it was clear that the practice was to meet unplanned program and service demands that had off-setting revenues and responsive customer service. As an example, aquatic staff could not offer any additional programming that requires more part-time instructors/guards than what is budgeted, even though revenues from additional swim lessons could readily off-set the cost of part-time staff.

The Township's facility assets are aging, and limited capital reserves funds allocated to on-going capital repair and revitalization. Deferring capital repairs tends to accelerate deterioration of assets, and often results in unplanned, un-funded emergency repairs with service disruptions. Understanding these capital liabilities related to its parks and recreation assets may prioritize which assets the Township can reasonably afford to invest in.

The Service Delivery Review report (Appendix D) provides greater detail addressing issues presented. Completing a Service Delivery Review at regular intervals is sound, and in conjunction with the Community Services Master Plan is very strategic and leads to a more fulsome, insightful implementation of the final Plan.

Next Steps

Staff will begin final preparations for the adoption of the Community Services Master Plan. This includes further promoting to the community the draft recommendations presented in this report. Various communication channels will be employed along with a direct email to all community groups, service clubs, special event organizers, and sporting user groups. Community Services with MGA Consultants will solicit final feedback before presenting and recommending to Council adoption of the Community Services Master Plan this Fall.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE TOWNSHIP OF WILMOT STRATEGIC PLAN:

- Quality of Life through Recreation and Leisure Opportunities
- Community Engagement through support for Belonging
- Responsible Governance through Service Reviews and Master Planning

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix A - Community Services Master Plan Draft Recommendations Presentation
Appendix B - Service Delivery Review Presentation
Appendix C - Community Services Master Plan Draft Recommendations Report
Appendix D - Service Delivery Review Report