



Subject: *Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy Report*
To: Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee
Date Prepared: September 28, 2023
Related Motions: C21(315)
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Approved by: Kim Ramsay, CAO

Summary

The Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy is a guiding document intended to provide Council and Municipal staff with a road map on how to achieve Council's goals regarding recreational services within Districts 8 and 9. As the community grows and best practices advance, the strategy will adjust to reflect new guidelines to address community needs and recreation industry trends.

Financial Impact Statement

Any financial impact through the implementation of the Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy will be brought forward after Council's adoption of the strategy through staff work plans and Municipal budgets.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee recommend that Council adopt the Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy and that staffing options and onsite locations for staff within Mount Uniacke are further explored to support recreation service provision for Mount Uniacke Districts 8 and 9 as part of the 2024/2025 Municipal budget. It is also recommended that playgrounds in East Uniacke and Lakelands are further explored for future design/build options.

Recommended Motion

Move that the Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee recommend to Council:

- 1. The adoption of the Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy as a guiding document for future recreational opportunities in Districts 8 and 9 and that the Strategy be used to inform the Municipal Recreation Facilities Master Plan (scheduled for 2024/2025);*
- 2. That staffing options and onsite locations for staff within Mount Uniacke are further explored to support recreation service provision for Mount Uniacke Districts 8 and 9 as part of the 2024/2025 Municipal budget.*
- 3. That the design and build of a playground in East Uniacke at Charles Drive and the design of the Lakelands open space parcel (PID 45430006) are further explored as part of the 2024/2025 Municipal budget.*

Background

In October 2021, Council directed staff as per motion C21(315) to add a Mount Uniacke Recreation Study specific to Districts 8 and 9 to be funded from the Uniacke Recreation Fund to develop a 2-, 5- and 10-year plan for recreation in that area of the Municipality.

Discussion

From Council motion C21(315), an RFP was developed looking for consulting services to determine the future of recreation in Districts 8 and 9 in the Mount Uniacke area. The completed strategy would help shape the recreational services delivery model by examining operations for improvements, enhancements, efficiencies and recommend innovative solutions to meet current and future needs of the Mount Uniacke community. The intent was to understand Mount Uniacke needs with respect to recreation; understand how it compares to best practices and with other communities similar in size and population; identify what gaps and overlaps exist; determine what the communities needs and wants; and to develop a recreation strategy that addresses these items balanced against financial realities.

WSP Canada Inc, in collaboration with Nustadia Recreation and Architecture⁴⁹, were the successful proponents and conducted the work in three phases; a background report, engagement report and final recommendations report.

Phase 1 - Background Report

The background report (Attachment A - Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy - Background Report) was used to gather information to develop a baseline of recreational opportunities in Districts 8 and 9. It also provided demographic information from the community, a summarized facility inventory, organizational inventory, a summary of recreational trends and comparative communities' analysis.

Key points from the background report included:

- Population data suggests that many individuals and young families are returning or moving to Mount Uniacke to live.
- It provides a comprehensive programming and facility inventory listing current recreational opportunities within Districts 8 and 9, including programs and services offered at the Mount Uniacke Public Library, Royal Canadian Legion, Fire Hall, Uniacke District School and a number of outdoor parks and open spaces.
- There is a detailed listing of recreational facilities and opportunities in the surrounding areas including ice rinks, aquatic centres, fitness and gym facilities, recreation and community centres, dance studios, bowling alleys, playgrounds, courts and sportfields.
- Best practices were listed when planning recreational facilities and opportunities, including the creation of a broad range of activities for all age groups, promotion of unstructured play, strengthening the collaboration and partnerships to increase recreational opportunities, creation of programs to reduce barriers to marginalized groups, the adoption of policies and programs that support non-profit organizations and the integration of indoor and outdoor public spaces to introduce nature into non-traditional spaces.
- A comparative communities/jurisdictional scan that compared facilities within Districts 8 and 9 to the communities of Porters Lake, NS, Scotsburn, NS and Almonte, ON. Analysis included indoor ice surfaces, curling sheets, lane pools, public fitness facilities, gymnasiums, meeting rooms and halls and a vast array of outdoor spaces including pools, splash pads, sportfields, ball diamonds, parks, skate parks, sport courts, community gardens and trails.

Phase 2 - Engagement Summary

The engagement summary was used to consolidate community responses, interviews with staff, Councillors and various stakeholders, including staff at the Uniacke District School, Mount Uniacke Public Library, Legion and Fire Hall. A full list of responses can be found in Attachment B - Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy - Engagement Summary.

Interviews and an online survey were conducted throughout the winter of 2022/2023 and the responses were used to frame a needs assessment which led to the overall recommendations in the final report. The online survey was shared via Municipal social media platforms and 463 respondents took part in the survey.

Key findings from the online survey included:

- Residents feel like most of the focus for recreation service provision is in other areas of the Municipality.
- 49% of survey respondents indicated they were extremely unsatisfied with current recreation opportunities with 23% moderately satisfied.
- Respondents indicated items that could improve their recreation experience in their community were new infrastructure (83%), new programs (77%) and new events (50%).
- Barriers contributing to the inability to take part in certain recreational activities was led by the activity not being offered (79%), affordability & accessibility (27%) and lack of equipment (26%).
- 34% of respondents indicated improved access to existing facilities would improve their experience and 32% indicated improving existing infrastructure would improve their experience.
- 76% of survey respondents indicated they do not volunteer with any community-based sport or recreation organization.
- Splash pads and an outdoor skating rink were highest on the list of requested outdoor infrastructure.
- Financial assistance was needed to operate and participate in recreation for people from all ages.
- There needs to be more awareness surrounding recreation activities offered within the community.

Staff, Council and stakeholder interviews provided some insight that validated the community engagement survey including the comments around residents feeling much of the focus is around recreation service provision is in other areas of the Municipality.

Overall, the response to community and stakeholder engagement was both strong and constructive with many individuals in the community thankful that the topic was being looked at by the Municipality. Respondents felt that they were unaware of current opportunities offered within the Mount Uniacke area and felt it was important to have opportunities within the community versus travelling outside of the community. A general frustration on the lack of infrastructure available to the community was identified, but there were general concerns around the cost of implementing new recreational opportunities within the community, specifically around higher tax rates.

Phase 3 - Final Recommendations & Implementation Report

The final report (Attachment C - Draft Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy - Final Recommendations) was categorized into:

- An inventory overview
- Needs assessment
- Human resource plan
- Implementation strategy

Inventory Overview

Predominantly gathered from the background report, the inventory overview provided detailed information on the various community facilities, hours of use and activities currently offered.

Needs Assessment

The third phase of the project incorporated the information gathered from the background report and engagement summary to frame a needs assessment. The needs assessment took the information gathered from the background report and engagement summary and helped to evaluate demand indicators to assess community needs in a logical manner. There were 28 recommendations resulting from the needs assessment grouped into three categories: recreation and sport infrastructure, programming and passive leisure opportunities and overarching recommendations.

Recommendations were developed by comparing the information on existing supply of facilities and spaces and current recreational opportunities offered with the demonstrated demand from the community. Throughout the engagement process of the project, it was clear that the community was dissatisfied with the quantity of programs available within the Mount Uniacke area. These individual recommendations were then grouped

together in the implementation plan as multiple items overlapped and a timeframe was determined according to when these items could be actioned.

Human Resources Plan

Recommendations within the strategy identified the need for on-the-ground staff in Mount Uniacke in order to champion more programs and activities for the community. One of the strategic directions from the 2018 East Hants Recreation Services Master Plan was to ensure appropriate, equitable and impactful recreation programs and opportunities outside of the primary growth areas. From this a number of human resource options were presented as part of the equitable service delivery. Options outlined a human resource staffing model that could support Districts 8 and 9, along with other communities outside of the primary growth areas and included:

- A full-time employee (Community Recreation Coordinator) that could support Mount Uniacke in districts 8 and 9, but also other areas in the Municipality.
- A part time employee could support District 8 and 9 specifically, but could be considered counter-intuitive to the Recreation Services Master Plan by not being equitable throughout the entire region.
- A contract employee which could provide a minor level of impact with a finite term.
- A student position could also be an option, but similar to a contract position may have minor impact with a finite term.

Implementation Strategy

Based on the findings from the needs assessment, the recommendations were categorized and consolidated into four categories that helped to organize recommendations into an implementation plan. Recommendations in the four categories are:

1. **Building Capacity Within the Community:** To successfully implement many of the recommendations, an increase in capacity is required from a staffing perspective.

Recommendation	Timeframe	Organization/Group	Next Steps/Action
Invest in personnel to have on-the-ground presence within the community. Having an in-community presence will be important to re-invigorate momentum in program coordination, participation and offering. A staffing complement that is located within the community will also play a critical role in implementing many of the recommendations that have been provided as part of this strategy.	0-2 years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department	Explore Municipal and departmental budgets to identify what position may be possible for the immediate term.
Mount Uniacke currently has facilities that can support a variety programming through present and current flexible spaces (e.g., gymnasiums, meeting rooms, banquet halls). The Municipality should explore ways to support these facilities and work with the community and building operators to explore facility access and programming potential. On-the-ground presence and/or personnel to support programming initiatives and start-ups will be highly valuable.	0-2 years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department	Establish contact with facility operators to understand current facility usage, capacity, and opportunities for increased community use.

2. **Identify and Explore Improvements to Community Recreation Infrastructure and Services:** Identify and look to facilitate improvement to recreation facilities and infrastructure which in turn will improve upon recreation services and opportunities. Such improvements may include enhanced connection to recreation opportunities, improved accessibility requirements, improved communication and related resources, and/or expanding upon existing assets and infrastructure.

Recommendation	Timeframe	Organization/Group	Next Steps/Action
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Continue discussions and negotiations with the CCRCE to implement a Joint Use Agreement to permit the Uniacke District School to be used for community purposes on weeknights and weekdays.	Ongoing	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and CCRCE	Continue efforts to establish a Joint Use Agreement to expand school rental space beyond what is currently provided for.
In keeping with the Parks, Open Space and Active Transportation Master Plan, the Municipality should look for opportunities to improve the connectivity between parks and open spaces and residential areas to support recreation and to invest in the maintenance and improvements to existing trails/playgrounds where needed.	Ongoing	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department	Municipal staff to meet with CCRCE staff to draft a Joint Use Agreement regarding intentions to investigate options of a shared facility.
Identify and plan for the investments in improvements to existing outdoor facilities. In particular, promote discussions with CCRCE on feasibility of remediating drainage issues on Uniacke District School soccer field.	0-2 years (soccer field) Ongoing for all other	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and CCRCE	Coordinate with CCRCE on working to find a solution for drainage issues at school sports field. Identify how to address issues and explore cost sharing opportunities so it can be a usable resource for both students and the community.
Analyze whether different neighbourhoods in Mount Uniacke have adequate access to passive leisure opportunities. A spatial analysis should be done to understand how different communities could be served by passive recreational opportunities. This could be used to direct where new passive recreation facilities and/or interventions could be introduced. Current and future development should be considered during the life of this strategy.	5-10 years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department	Once recreation services increase and community momentum is established, identify where gaps in passive and active leisure exist within the community. Utilize on-the-ground personnel to work with the community to identify how more recreational services can be expanded to those in more rural settings.
Mount Uniacke lacks playground structures within the outskirts of the community. Playground areas support unstructured play for young children and parents. To serve communities who are underserved by playground facilities, properties for siting additional playgrounds should be identified and investment should be made to provide a play structure for these communities. As communities continue to grow, additional playgrounds should be accounted for.	0-2 years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department	Continue to plan for new playground structures within under serviced communities. Continue to evaluate gaps within the community for playground access and siting.
Expand the 'Equipment Loan' program (recreation equipment kits) within Mount Uniacke and explore alternative ways to encourage passive leisure opportunities for both indoor and outdoor facilities. Establish a location within the community suitable and accessible for storing recreation equipment kits, such as using the Mount Uniacke Public Library or the Legion. Passive recreation opportunities should not only focus on sport and physical activity, but also the arts and more passive recreation (e.g., musical instruments for rent, games and/or books available for use in parks, art bags available for pick up at the library). Provide equipment and resources to support such activities at current recreation hubs in the community.	0-2 years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and Community Partners (Library, Legion)	Converse with community and community partners (e.g., teachers, library) to understand desired equipment being requested by the community/visitors. Identify what could be purchased by the Municipality and where it can be housed for community rent/use. Utilize on-the-ground personnel to promote and use of passive leisure opportunities.
Look for areas to improve accessibility in current facilities including improved access (and signage to accessible entrances) to the Legion as well as to the school playground. While the Municipality may not necessarily own many of these facilities, they can be advocates and	2-5 Years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and Community Partners (Library, Legion)	Approach community partners on areas how to improve facility/amenity accessibility.

partners to building owners to explore funding opportunities. Investigate the opportunity to create additional passive and active leisure spots within existing parks in addition to those already provided in Mount Uniacke to help facilitate self-directed passive and active leisure for all ages and abilities with accessibility in mind.			Begin to identify grants/funding/cost sharing programs for improvements in accessibility standards.
Continue to monitor programming offering and facility capacity and identify opportunities (once existing facility use is deemed at capacity) for future facility expansion and/or infrastructure upgrades.	10+ years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department	Begin long term planning and identify opportunities for future facility expansion should it be required. Work with Planning and Development to understand long term plans and policies for the Mount Uniacke area and understand how (if) recreation services may require adaptation and change.

3. **Generate Momentum with the Community:** Generating momentum within the community will rely on leadership and presence within the community. On-the-ground leadership is a key component to generating community momentum and building promotional initiatives that can be implemented and/or supported by the Municipality to build greater use, excitement and participation in recreational services within the community.

Recommendation	Timeframe	Organization/Group	Next Steps/Action
Opportunities for passive recreation should be actively promoted by the Municipality through ongoing promotional campaigns (e.g., social media and tagging contests).	0-2 years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department	Work with Municipal communications office to identify how best to promote opportunities for passive leisure in the community. Consider social media posts, hashtag competitions. Utilize on-the-ground personnel to promote and use of passive leisure opportunities.
Improve communication and promotion of programming in Mount Uniacke both offered by community groups and by the Municipality. Specific efforts could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand the Municipal webpage and community calendar to include programs identified in Mount Uniacke. - Partner with the Uniacke newsletter coordinator to promote ongoing programs available to the public. - Foster and initiate programming, such as a recreation symposium or hosting incubator sessions for like-minded groups to help spark ideas and plans for new programming to help meet the gaps that exist in the community. 	0-2 years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and Community Partners	Work with Municipal communications office and IT to provide a central online hub for recreation services and programs available in Mount Uniacke. Create a recreation programming calendar or electronic seasonal brochure to advertise what is available within the community. Reach out to current community partners to identify collaboration opportunities to enhance the communication and promotion of recreation

			<p>services within the community.</p> <p>Utilize on-the-ground personnel to continue promotion and work with current and new community partners to effectively communicate with members of community.</p>
<p>Work with the community to gauge the level of interest of the current programs/activities offered and facilitate a more focused consultation to gather input on what the community would like to participate in, when they would like to do so and identify where these new programs could take place.</p>	0-2 years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and Community Partners	<p>Engage with community via in-person open house, online survey/questionnaire, town hall, to understand specific interests of the community, where/when programs would be the most preferable, and identify located of where they could be offered.</p> <p>Utilize on-the-ground personnel to coordinate community engagement and facilitate discussions with residents.</p>
<p>Explore enhancing the level of transparency on recreational efforts and investments within the community and work to build the level of trust between community and the Municipality by hosting events or piggybacking onto annual activities within the community to bring staff and community together to discuss current and ongoing efforts to improve recreation for Mount Uniacke.</p>	0-2 Years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and Community Partners	<p>Identify opportunities in the near future of how to bring community members, recreation providers and facility operators together to generate ideas and momentum for improving recreation services in the community.</p> <p>Utilize on-the-ground personnel to generate momentum and buzz amongst residents prior to the event.</p>
<p>Engage with existing trails groups to understand needs in order to improve Mount Uniacke's trail system. Trails groups provide valuable advocacy and volunteer work to the upkeep and maintenance of Mount Uniacke's trail system.</p>	5-10 years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and Community Partners	<p>As recreation uptake increases in the community, identify which outdoor facilities could benefit from an organized trails group to assist in upkeep and maintenance.</p> <p>Utilize on-the-ground personnel to spearhead volunteerism and uptake to these groups.</p>

- 4. Identify and Collaborate with Partners:** Working with key partners is a critical piece to the successful implementation of this Strategy. The Municipality should continue to work with current partners and explore new ones to successfully deliver an enhanced recreation service program for the community of Mount Uniacke.

Recommendation	Timeframe	Organization/Group	Next Steps/Action
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<p>Investigate the opportunity for strategic partnerships who are currently located within the community (e.g. Library) to activate programming currently not offered within Mount Uniacke. The Municipality could offer assistance with promotion, communication and could invite the organizations to collaborate on existing Municipal events.</p>	<p>0-2 years</p>	<p>Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and Community Partners</p>	<p>Utilize on-the-ground personnel to identify potential community partners that could activate programming not currently offered.</p> <p>Support community groups in items like facility booking, communications/promotions, and where appropriate, equipment provision.</p>
<p>Investigate the opportunity for strategic external partnerships (e.g., West Hants and HRM) to activate programming that can't be offered in Mount Uniacke, such as learn-to-skate, open swims, etc.</p>	<p>0-2 years</p>	<p>Parks, Recreation & Culture Department, Community Partners, adjacent Municipalities</p>	<p>Reach out to adjacent Municipalities in HRM and West Hants to discuss opportunities in facility rental for the use of Mount Uniacke residents.</p> <p>Utilize on-the-ground personnel to identify a set of preferred dates and times should the Municipality pursue facility rental commitments for making facilities in adjacent communities available to residents in East Hants.</p> <p>Utilize on-the-ground personnel to organize programming in these facilities during the decided dates/times (i.e. Learn to Skate, open swims, pick-up hockey).</p>
<p>Continue discussions and negotiations with CCRCE to implement a Joint Use Agreement to permit the Uniacke District School to be used for community purposes on weeknights (and continue current agreement) and weekdays.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and CCRCE</p>	<p>Continue to work with the CCRCE to come to a Joint Use Agreement that will provide greater access to the school amenities for community use.</p>
<p>Explore the opportunity to collaborate with respective Provincial departments to implement safety measures along the main roads to promote active transportation.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Parks, Recreation & Culture Department, NS Dept of Public Works</p>	<p>Continue to engage with NS Department of Public Works on the improvement measures for safer arterial roadways.</p> <p>Participate in Provincial studies on future road network planning and advocate for the current safety issues in communities including Mount Uniacke.</p>

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

There is alignment between the draft Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy, East Hants Strategic Plan, Recreation Services Master Plan and East Hants Parks, Open Space and Active Transportation Master Plan in informed and sustainable decision-making. This organizational value supports the development a recreation strategy specific to Mount Uniacke Districts 8 and 9. In order for the Municipality to consider all relevant information and make

decisions leading to a sustainable community, the organization benefits from a guiding document that Council could review and endorse.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Any financial impact through the implementation of the Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy will be brought forward after Council's adoption of the strategy through staff work plans and Municipal budgets.

Alternatives

Alternatives for Council's Consideration for the Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy:

1. The Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee do not recommend to Council the adoption of the Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy and provide further input on final recommendations for the strategy.

Attachments

Attachment A - Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy - Background Report

Attachment B - Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy - Engagement Summary

Attachment C - Draft Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy - Final Recommendations