

# Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy

October 2023



**EAST HANTS**

## Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy

- 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.
- 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.

## Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy

- The intent was to understand Mount Uniacke specific recreation needs; how it compares to best practices within other communities similar in size and population; identify gaps and overlaps that exist; determine what the communities needs and wants; and to develop a 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 was used to gather information to develop a baseline of recreational opportunities in Districts 8 and 9.

Key points from the background report included:

- Many individuals and young families are returning or moving to Mount Uniacke to live.
- There is a significant percentage of children in the 5-14 age range, as well as seniors in the 65-74 age range.
- A programming and facility inventory listing current recreational opportunities, including programs and services offered at the Mount Uniacke Public Library, Royal Canadian Legion, Fire Hall and Uniacke District School.
- 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.
- A comparative communities analysis.

## Comparative Communities Analysis - Population

This analysis compared recreational facilities, including 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, with the communities of Porters Lake, NS, Scotsburn, NS and Almonte, ON.

	Population (2021)	Population (2016)	Population Change (%)
Mount Uniacke (District 8 & 9)	4,916*	3,643	34.9%
Porters Lake, NS	3,716	3,202	16%
Scotsburn, NS	3,915	3,379	15.9%
Almonte, ON	6,098	5,536	10.2%

## Comparative Communities Analysis - Indoor Facilities

Asset	Mount Uniacke, NS (# of facilities)	Porters Lake, NS (# of facilities)	Scotsburn, NS (# of facilities)	Almonte, On (# of facilities)
Indoor Ice Surface	0	0	0	1
Curling Sheets	0	0	0	4
Lane Pool	0	0	0	0
Leisure Pool	0	0	0	0
Public Fitness Facility	0	1	0	1
Gymnasium	1	6	1	5
Meeting Room	3	3	2	1
Large Hall	1	3	5	3

## Comparative Communities Analysis - Outdoor Facilities

Asset	Mount Uniacke, NS (# of facilities)	Porters Lake, NS (# of facilities)	Scotsburn, NS (# of facilities)	Almonte, On (# of facilities)
Outdoor Pool	0	0	0	0
Splash Pad	0	0	0	1
Beach/Water Access	3	5	0	2
Sportfield	1	6	1	11
Paint Ball	1	0	0	0
Ball Diamonds	2	3	1	3
Outdoor Ice Surface	0	0	2	1
Park& Green Space	5	5	3	6
Playground	3	9	4	11
Basketball Court	3	4	2	4

## Comparative Communities Analysis - Outdoor Facilities

Asset	Mount Uniacke, NS (# of facilities)	Porters Lake, NS (# of facilities)	Scotsburn, NS (# of facilities)	Almonte, On (# of facilities)
Tennis Court	0	2	2	3
Lawn Bowling	1	0	0	1
Outdoor Gym	1	0	0	1
Community Garden	0	0	1	1
Disc Golf	0	0	0	1
Skateboard Park	1	0	1	1
Horse Ranch	1	0	1	0
Running Track	0	0	0	1
Trails	15km+	30km+	40km+	20km+



## Phase 2 - Engagement Summary

Consolidated community responses, interviews with staff, Councillors and various stakeholders, as well as staff at the Uniacke District School, Mount Uniacke Public Library, Legion and Fire Hall. Interviews and an online survey (463 respondents took part) 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.

Key points from the background report 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%).

## Phase 2 - Engagement Summary

Key points (continued) :

- 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.

## Phase 2 - Engagement Summary

Key points (continued) :

- 47% of residents don't use any community facilities, 31% access the Fire Hall and 29% access the Mount Uniacke Public Library.
- Use of facilities used outside of Mount Uniacke included the Sackville Sports Stadium (55%) with 34% using more than 1 time per week and the West Hants Sports Complex (34%) with 45% using more than 1 time per week.
- 50% of respondents responded that they were willing to travel 15mins or less to recreational activities with 37% willing to travel 15-30 mins.

The response to community engagement was both strong and constructive. 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 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 - Recommendations & Implementation Report

The recommendations and implementation report was categorized into:

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

## Inventory Overview

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

## 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 developed by comparing the information on existing supply of facilities and spaces and current recreational opportunities offered with the demonstrated demand from the community.

These individual recommendations were then grouped together in the implementation plan as multiple recommendations overlapped and a timeframe was assigned according to when these items could be actioned.

# Phase 3 - Recommendations & Implementation Report

## 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.

# Phase 3 - Recommendations & Implementation Report

## Recommendations & Implementation Plan

Recommendations were consolidated into four categories that helped frame 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.

# Phase 3 -Recommendations & Implementation Report

**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
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.

# Phase 3 - Recommendations & Implementation Report

## 2. Identify and Explore Improvements to Community Recreation Infrastructure and Services (continued)

<p>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.</p>	<p>0-2 years</p>	<p>Parks, Recreation &amp; Culture Department</p>	<p>Continue to plan for new playground structures within under serviced communities.</p> <p>Continue to evaluate gaps within the community for playground access and siting.</p>
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>0-2 years</p>	<p>Parks, Recreation &amp; Culture Department and Community Partners (Library, Legion)</p>	<p>Converse with community and community partners (e.g., teachers, library) to understand desired equipment being requested by the community/visitors.</p> <p>Identify what could be purchased by the Municipality and where it can be housed for community rent/use.</p> <p>Utilize on-the-ground personnel to promote and use of passive leisure opportunities.</p>



# Phase 3 -Recommendations & Implementation Report

## 2. Identify and Explore Improvements to Community Recreation Infrastructure and Services: (continued)

<p>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 partners to building owners to explore funding opportunities.</p> <p>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.</p>	2-5 Years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and Community Partners (Library, Legion)	<p>Approach community partners on areas how to improve facility/amenity accessibility.</p> <p>Begin to identify grants/funding/cost sharing programs for improvements in accessibility standards.</p>
<p>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.</p>	10+ years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department	<p>Begin long term planning and identify opportunities for future facility expansion should it be required.</p> <p>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.</p>

# Phase 3 - Recommendations & Implementation Report

**3. Generate Momentum with 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	<p>Work with Municipal communications office to identify how best to promote opportunities for passive leisure in the community. Consider social media posts, hashtag competitions.</p> <p>Utilize on-the-ground personnel to promote and use of passive leisure opportunities.</p>
<p>Improve communication and promotion of programming in Mount Uniacke both offered by community groups and by the Municipality. Specific efforts could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expand the Municipal webpage and community calendar to include programs identified in Mount Uniacke.</li> <li>- Partner with the Uniacke newsletter coordinator to promote ongoing programs available to the public.</li> <li>- 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.</li> </ul>	0-2 years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and Community Partners	<p>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.</p> <p>Reach out to current community partners to identify collaboration opportunities to enhance the communication and promotion of recreation 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>

# Phase 3 - Recommendations & Implementation Report

## 3. Generate Momentum with the Community: (continued)

<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>	<p>0-2 years</p>	<p>Parks, Recreation &amp; Culture Department and Community Partners</p>	<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>	<p>0-2 Years</p>	<p>Parks, Recreation &amp; Culture Department and Community Partners</p>	<p>Identify opportunities in the near future of <a href="#">how to</a> 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>	<p>5-10 years</p>	<p>Parks, Recreation &amp; Culture Department and Community Partners</p>	<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>

## Phase 3 - Recommendations & Implementation Report

**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
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.	0-2 years	Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and Community Partners	Utilize on-the-ground personnel to identify potential community partners that could activate programming not currently offered.  Support community groups in items like facility booking, communications/promotions, and where appropriate, equipment provision.

# Phase 3 - Recommendations & Implementation Report

## 4. Identify and Collaborate with Partners: (continued)

<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 &amp; 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 &amp; 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 &amp; 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 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.

## 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.*

The draft 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. Recommendations that help frame a 2-, 5- and 10-year implementation plan will move recreation service provision forward in the Mount Uniacke area.

In this current fiscal year (2023/2024), increased recreational programming has been piloted in the Mount Uniacke region, including:

- Summer day camps with Mount Uniacke based summer staff, 4 weeks, with 30+ participants in each week
- Fall Recreation Program Guide
  - Art Exploration with Quentin Syliboy at Uniacke District School, Thursdays starting November 2
  - Pickleball at Uniacke District School, Wednesdays starting October 4
  - Ball Hockey at Uniacke District School, Mondays starting October 16
  - Recreational Basketball at Uniacke District School, Saturdays starting October 14
  - Open Gym Drop-In at Uniacke District School, Fridays starting October 6

Municipal staff continue to work with CCRCE to establish a Joint Use Agreement to establish access in schools throughout East Hants to provide better opportunities to program the spaces.



## What does this mean?

With the recommendations as presented, increased recreational opportunities would be provided in the following areas:

- An additional Community Recreation Coordinator would allow for more recreational programming opportunities in Mount Uniacke and surrounding areas. This could include additional camp activities, youth and senior specific programming and arts and culture based activities.
- This position would also allow for the community to have a more direct connection to Municipal recreation staff providing an ongoing opportunity to understand the community needs and plan programs, equipment loans and community group support to suits the growing recreational needs of the area.
- Additional playgrounds were identified as needed within the community and in alignment with the East Hants Playground Strategy, future playground development in East Uniacke at Charles Drive will be brought forward as part of 2024/2025 budget discussions with a design/build proposal.
- Also, as part of 2024/2025 budget discussions, a open space planning and design proposal will be brought forward for the Lakelands open space parcel (PID 45430006) to accommodate future playground installation along with spatial awareness to accommodate future recreational assets based on a Recreational Facilities Master Plan with proposed playground installation in 2025/2026.
- Municipal Recreation Facilities Master Plan scheduled for 2024/2025 would then be used to plan for community facilities throughout the entire Municipality of East Hants. This master plan would provide updated guidance for the provision of indoor and outdoor community facilities and would be extended to cover all recreation assets, including sport/ballfields, splash pads, community gardens and pump tracks.