Outdoor Sports Facility Strategy Community Engagement Summary No. 2

Engagement purpose

In 2024, we engaged over 700 community members to better understand Guelph's outdoor sports needs and priorities. The feedback we received helped shape the direction of the Outdoor Sports Facility Strategy and identify key opportunities for improvement.

As we moved into the next phase of the strategy, we shifted our focus from identifying needs to evaluating what is practical and achievable.

With limitations related to funding, parkland availability and competing priorities, there are difficult choices and tradeoffs to consider. The input received through the second round of engagement will help prioritize investments and determine where resources can have the greatest impact.

How did we listen?

To better understand community priorities, we invited residents to share their thoughts and opinions through many different forms of listening from April through July 2026:

- **Two (2) workshops** with current City of Guelph sports facility user groups
- **77 responses to an online trade-offs voting activity** (May 25 to June 30)
- **11 comments on an online comment board activity** (May 25 to June 30)
- **Two (2) pop-up events** at Margaret Green Park and the Guelph Multicultural Festival

While the two engagement activities approached the issues from different perspectives, they revealed several consistent themes regarding the future direction of outdoor sports facility planning in Guelph.

What we heard

Key Takeaway

Overall, participants supported a sports field system that provides quality facilities, makes the best use of existing spaces and balances neighbourhood recreation opportunities with larger city-wide sports destinations.

Overall summary

- People generally support investing in **higher-quality sports facilities**, even if that means having fewer specialized facilities. Specialized facilities would serve the whole city instead of singular neighbourhoods.
- Participants recognized that **different parks can serve different purposes**. Neighbourhood parks are important for casual recreation, while larger sports complexes can support organized sports, tournaments and specialized facilities.
- There was strong support for **getting more use out of existing facilities** through upgrades, lighting, partnerships with schools and other improvements that increase field availability.
- Maintaining and improving existing fields was seen as important. Participants preferred investing in upgrades and good maintenance rather than accepting lower-quality facilities.
- People generally preferred **flexible, multi-use facilities** that can support a variety of sports and users.
- Participants supported making investment decisions based on **community needs and demand**, rather than providing the same types of facilities in every neighbourhood.
- Sport organizations also highlighted the importance of **better communication, booking systems, volunteer support and ongoing collaboration with the City**.

Sport User Group Workshops

We met with representatives from ten (**10) user groups** and we asked user groups:

- How can we manage overuse and maintain facility quality?
- Which facilities should be prioritized for upgrades?
- What types of support do volunteers and organizations need from the City?

How can we prevent overuse and keep facilities performing their best?

- Growing demand is outpacing capacity, highlighting the need for more fields and another sports complex.
- Greater flexibility through lighting, synthetic turf and adaptable field layouts could help balance use across facilities.
- Land constraints continue to limit opportunities for new sport facility development.

What existing facilities should be prioritized for improvement, and how should investment decisions be made?

- Prioritize low-cost, high-impact upgrades such as drainage, washrooms, parking and other improvements that quickly increase field usability.
- Key gaps include a shortage of baseball and softball diamonds, limited tournament amenities, insufficient lighting and inadequate parking.
- Investments should focus on facilities that:
    - Serve multiple user groups and age levels.
    - Can accommodate more use through targeted upgrades.
    - Support tournaments and competitive play.
    - Advance equity, particularly for girls' sports.
- Aging infrastructure is limiting capacity, and strategic upgrades could significantly improve the user experience and increase utilization.

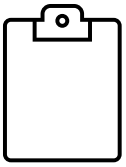
What does meaningful City support for volunteers and organizations look like?

- Organizations want a more flexible, self-serve booking system that makes it easier to access available field time and reduce unused bookings.
- Clearer, more timely communication on field conditions, closures and availability is needed.
- Regular engagement opportunities should continue through allocation meetings and ongoing user-group discussions.
- Access to information, training, funding and educational resources would strengthen volunteer-led organizations.
- Amenities such as clubhouses, indoor training spaces and concessions can help recruit and retain volunteers.
- A stronger Sport Council could enhance collaboration, advocacy, information sharing and support for emerging sports.

Online Trade-offs activity

An online voting activity that prompted participants to agree or disagree with statements about different trade-offs ran from June 1 to June 30, 2026. The trade-offs activity was advertised through direct emails, social media posts, and through two (2) pop-up events through June.

77 responses



77 people participated in the public activity, and 452 people viewed the Have Your Say page with the trade-offs activity.

Overall key insights

The activity results suggest a strong preference for a strategic, demand-based sports field system that:

✓ Invests in higher-quality facilities

✓ Supports specialized and tournament-quality destination facilities

✓ Recognizes different roles for neighbourhood parks and city-wide sports hubs

✓ Maximizes field use through lighting and partnerships

✓ Prioritizes flexible, multi-use infrastructure

✓ Balances service across age groups

✓ Focuses investment where demand and community benefit are greatest rather than distributing facilities evenly across all neighbourhoods.

Strong support for strategic investment in high-quality facilities

Participants consistently favored investing in higher-quality facilities, even when doing so may increase costs or require a more centralized approach.

Strongest findings:

- 96% agreed that specialized, tournament-quality facilities can serve the whole city (68 vs. 3).
- 92% agreed that higher-quality facilities are worth higher costs (55 vs. 5).
- 91% agreed that higher booking fees for premium fields are acceptable if affordable options remain available (61 vs. 6).
- 96% agreed it is acceptable to travel across town for tournament-quality or specialized facilities (68 vs. 3).
- Respondents generally preferred a few tournament-quality facilities over many basic facilities (36 vs. 22).

Neighbourhood parks and city-wide sports facilities serve different roles

Participants demonstrated a clear distinction between neighbourhood parks and specialized sports facilities.

Key findings:

- 87% agreed that smaller neighbourhood parks should prioritize informal recreation over formal sports fields (52 vs. 8).
- 96% agreed that some specialized facilities can serve the entire city (67 vs. 3).
- A majority supported travelling to destination facilities (68 vs. 3).
- More respondents supported large sports hubs than many smaller neighbourhood sites (42 vs. 21).

Implication: Residents appear comfortable with neighbourhood parks focusing on everyday recreation while larger or specialized facilities are concentrated at strategic locations.

Maximizing use of existing facilities is important

Participants generally supported approaches that increase facility capacity and utilization.

Key findings:

- 85% supported accessing additional fields through school partnerships (55 vs. 10).
- Strong opposition to limiting use through lower-intensity management:
  - Lower maintenance standards not supported (47 vs. 17).
  - Resting fields more frequently not supported (25 vs. 13).
- Strong support for lighting where appropriate:
  - Additional lighting supported (44 vs. 16).
  - Most respondents would personally accept lighting if living beside a field (54 vs. 12).
  - Strong opposition to keeping fields unlit if it limits use (43 vs. 17).

Multi-use facilities are preferred over sport-specific facilities

When presented with trade-offs, respondents tended to favour flexibility.

Key findings:

- Strong support for multi-sport fields (48 vs. 14).
- Sport-specific field design produced mixed results (32 vs. 29).
- Grass versus turf was almost evenly split (28 vs. 29).

Implication: Flexible, multi-purpose facilities may provide the best balance between serving a variety of sports and making efficient use of available space.

Support for serving all ages rather than prioritizing one group

Participants recognized the importance of youth sports but generally favoured balancing investments across age groups.

Key findings:

- Strong support for facilities that serve all ages (58 vs. 8).
- Moderate support for prioritizing youth sports (42 vs. 17).

Implication: While youth participation remains important, respondents generally prefer an inclusive approach that serves children, youth, adults and older adults.

Cost savings should not come at the expense of quality

Several questions tested cost-versus-quality trade-offs and showed a consistent preference for quality.

Key findings:

- Higher-quality facilities worth higher costs (55 vs. 5).
- Keeping costs low ranked lower than providing tournament-quality facilities (22 vs. 34).
- Higher fees for premium facilities were widely accepted when affordable options exist (61 vs. 6).
- Lower maintenance standards were strongly rejected (17 vs. 47).

Implication: Participants generally support paying more—through fees or capital investment—when it results in higher-quality facilities and better user experience.

Trade-off Activity Results

The trade-off activity helped identify where participants found common ground on key sports facility planning decisions. The table below summarizes responses from 77 participants and illustrates the level of support for each statement.

Table 1 - Results of trade-off activity

#	Statement	Agree %	Disagree %
1	Build more fields at basic standards, even if fewer meet tournament-quality standards.	42.9% (33)	35.1% (27)
2	A few tournament-quality fields are better than many basic ones city-wide.	46.8% (36)	28.6% (22)
3	Investing more in higher-quality facilities is worth higher costs.	71.4% (55)	6.5% (5)
4	Keeping costs low should be prioritized over providing tournament-quality sport facilities.	28.6% (22)	44.2% (34)

#	Statement	Agree %	Disagree %
5	Not all neighbourhoods need the same types of sports fields.	75.3% (58)	10.4% (8)
6	Some specialized, tournament-quality facilities can serve the whole city.	87.0% (67)	3.9% (3)
7	Smaller neighbourhood parks should prioritize informal recreation over formal sport fields.	67.5% (52)	10.4% (8)
8	Facilities should be located evenly across the city, even if usage in some areas may lower.	26.0% (20)	62.3% (48)
9	Neighbourhoods with higher demand should receive more or better-quality fields.	42.9% (33)	27.3% (21)
10	New growth areas of Guelph should get new fields before upgrading older ones.	26.0% (20)	39.0% (30)
11	Older fields should be upgraded even if it limits building new fields elsewhere.	42.9% (33)	19.5% (15)
12	Fields should be designed for specific sports, even if fewer sports can use them.	41.6% (32)	37.7% (29)
13	Fields that can be used for multiple sports are a good option, even if some activities have fewer dedicated spaces.	62.3% (48)	18.2% (14)
14	Funding should support a diversity of sports, even if it means less for the most common ones.	37.7% (29)	35.1% (27)
15	Investment should be balanced across a variety of sports, even if popular sports receive less.	31.2% (24)	44.2% (34)
16	Youth sports should be prioritized over adult sport facilities.	54.5% (42)	22.1% (17)
17	Investment should be balanced to make facilities that suit all age groups.	75.3% (58)	10.4% (8)
18	Fields near homes should remain unlit to reduce impacts on nearby residents, even if it limits use.	22.1% (17)	55.8% (43)
19	Grass fields should be prioritized over turf fields even if it limits use in the early spring and late fall.	36.4% (28)	37.7% (29)
20	Lower maintenance standards are ok to make fields available for more time.	22.1% (17)	61.0% (47)
21	Fields should rest more often so the turf can recover, even if it reduces booking availability.	16.9% (13)	32.5% (25)
22	Higher booking fees for higher-quality fields are acceptable as long as there are affordable fields too.	79.2% (61)	7.8% (6)
23	Booking fees should stay low, even if it limits how many tournament-quality fields we offer.	37.7% (29)	33.8% (26)
24	Accessing more fields through agreements with schools is worth limited access during school hours.	71.4% (55)	13.0% (10)
25	Tournament hosting should be a priority even if it limits regular league access.	16.9% (13)	57.1% (44)

#	Statement	Agree %	Disagree %
26	Adding lights to existing fields should be prioritized over building new fields without lights.	31.2% (24)	32.5% (25)
27	Lighting should be added to more fields to increase playing time, even in residential areas.	57.1% (44)	20.8% (16)
28	It's ok to travel across town for tournament-quality or specialized facilities.	88.3% (68)	3.9% (3)
29	People should have access to sport fields of all quality levels close to home.	53.2% (41)	23.4% (18)
30	If my residence backed onto a sporting facility, I would accept extending play into the evenings by lighting the field.	70.1% (54)	15.6% (12)
31	A few large sports hubs with many fields are better than many small neighbourhood sites.	54.5% (42)	27.3% (21)

Note: Percentages are based on 77 respondents. Because some participants did not select either agree or disagree for every statement, the agree and disagree percentages do not always add up to 100%.

How we're using your feedback

Community feedback is one factor in creating a guiding plan for outdoor sport facilities in the future. As we prepare the plan we will also consider:

- Alignment with other plans and strategies (e.g. Community Plan, Strategic Plan)
- Overall community benefit
- Environmental sustainability
- Future trends and population changes
- Technical considerations and operating impacts
- Financial sustainability

It is important to note that community feedback data is only one source of information that helps paint one picture, but we check this data against other statistically valid sources like our citizen satisfaction survey, public health data and demographic information.

Next steps

We will take this feedback into consideration, along with staff and consultant expertise and best practices to inform a draft plan that will be presented to Council in 2027.