

# Engagement summary

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## Recreation Facility Allocation Process Review

The City of Guelph has engaged Overlap Associates to support a review of its Recreation Facility Allocation Process. This work is part of the City's effort to ensure that access to recreation space is fair, transparent, and responsive to community needs. To inform this project, Overlap and City staff engaged the community to understand how recreation spaces are currently allocated and how that experience could evolve to better serve Guelph's growing and diverse community.

This report brings forward the diverse voices of residents, community groups, and City staff to paint a picture of how recreation spaces function today and what changes are needed to create a more equitable, inclusive, and coordinated system. Through this engagement, participants described not only what is working, but also where barriers exist and what values should guide decisions about limited space.

## What we did

To capture a wide range of perspectives, the engagement process included the following activities:

- Survey: 290 responses from a wide range of community members
- Interviews: 14 one-on-one interviews with community members, user group representatives, and organizational stakeholders.
- Community Engagement Lab: One facilitated workshop with the 9 members of the Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition to discuss challenges and opportunities related to facility access.
- Employee Engagement Session: A facilitated discussion with 23 City employees who interact with the space allocation system to gather their perspectives on what works and what doesn't.

Together, these methods offered both breadth and depth—capturing large-scale patterns in how people experience the allocation system while also surfacing specific stories that reveal where improvements are most needed.

## What we heard

- Strong appreciation for relationships with staff
- Recognition of fair intent when balancing competing needs
- Demonstrated value of long-standing community programs
- Positive experiences with facility, quality and availability
- Appreciation for flexibility when possible, including changes, resolving conflicts or finding alternative solutions
- Support for clearer, more structured processes
- Shared commitment to community benefit rather than individual benefit

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- Recreation spaces should feel open, welcoming, and accessible to everyone. Participants called for systems and policies that remove financial, digital, and cultural barriers so all residents can participate fully.
  - Fairness means balancing the needs of established user groups with opportunities for new and emerging ones. The City must move from a history-based approach to an equity-based one that prioritizes community impact and inclusion.
  - People want clarity about how recreation spaces are booked and allocated. A transparent, consistent process supported by clear data and communication will help users and staff understand and trust decisions.
  - With demand exceeding supply, competition currently drives frustration and inequity. A culture of collaboration, shared scheduling, and flexible use can turn scarcity into collective stewardship.
  - Fairness depends on visibility. Clear, published principles and consistent decision-making would replace uncertainty and build public confidence in how recreation spaces are allocated.

## **What we are doing**

This summary presents the key themes and insights that emerged from the engagement process. The insights reflect the lived experiences and expectations of residents, recreation users, and City staff, as well as their shared aspirations for a fairer, more transparent, and more inclusive system.

The feedback we received is informational, not decisional. That is, it provides evidence-based perspectives that the City can use to inform upcoming phases of this work, including, decision-making framework design, and process recommendations. These insights point to where change is most needed and where strategic improvements can create the greatest impact for the community.

## **Next Steps**

The Recreation Facility Allocation Process Council Information Report will be presented to Council in March. The report includes a set of process features designed to improve transparency, fairness, and consistency in how recreation space is allocated in the City of Guelph have been developed. Successfully implementing these changes will require thoughtful sequencing, clear communication, and a shared understanding of how new tools and processes will be introduced over time.

Staff will use an updated version of the Facility Allocation Process to guide how the revised policy features can be rolled out in a way that builds trust, minimizes disruption, and supports customers and staff through the transition.

The updated Recreation Facility Allocation Process will be implemented for bookings taking place in the Fall/Winter booking season. This updated process will be used in the allocation of new space at the South End Community Centre as well as other recreation facilities.