

BACKGROUND

In 2017 Regional Council approved the Community Facilities Master Plan 2 (CFMP2), a framework for decision making for recreation facilities. The CFMP2 recommended that a Rural Recreation Strategy (RRS) be developed to inform the provision of community-supported recreation facilities and to increase recreational opportunities in outlying areas.

The RRS provides an analysis of current and future needs for Parks & Recreation services and assets in rural areas of HRM. The strategy has been developed through a collaborative approach that encompasses the recreation needs of rural residents, including opportunities for innovative service delivery and equitable access to indoor and outdoor recreation assets for lifelong participation in vibrant and healthy communities.

DISCUSSION

The RRS considers all areas outside the urban and suburban tax boundaries as rural. Further, rural HRM is divided into four distinct areas: Commuter West, Commuter East, Musquodoboit Valley, and Eastern Shore.

To develop the RRS, staff used a combination of the following information:

- Jurisdictional scans of similar municipalities across Canada;
- Best practices research;
- Spatial and socioeconomic analysis of rural HRM to understand the existing context regarding rural residents' experiences and barriers to accessing recreation opportunities; and
- Public consultation, which included a public survey for rural residents, targeted questionnaires for community groups providing recreation in rural communities, structured interviews with partner organizations, Parks & Recreation staff, and rural Councillors, and pop-up engagements throughout rural communities.

After extensive research and public engagement, the Rural Recreation Strategy is now complete and will provide the direction required to guide municipal decisions related to the provision of indoor and outdoor recreational facilities and assets, and to increase recreational opportunities in the rural areas of HRM. The following sections review the strategy's key findings, guiding principles, objectives, and will provide a list of the actions.

Key Highlights

Rural communities have an abundance of outdoor wilderness areas, beaches, coastlines, long-standing cultural traditions and events, community-led programming, and local stewardship of community facilities and outdoor sites. This said, the RRS demonstrates that there are unique challenges and barriers to providing recreation opportunities in rural communities across the Municipality.

This strategy established three approaches that set out guiding principles that shape all subsequent objectives and actions:

- 1) An HRM-specific Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery (RLRSD) provides staff with a tool they may use when considering context-sensitive and culturally relevant approaches to recreation service delivery in rural HRM and to prioritize the communities facing the greatest economic and travel barriers to participating in recreation.
- 2) An Asset-Based Community Development philosophy to ensure existing community assets are strengthened and harnessed to improve the provision of recreation opportunities in even the most remote communities.
- 3) Building partnerships to ensure all HRM business units and other levels of government with

connections to rural recreation are collaborating and coordinating initiatives, ultimately making the best use of resources.

The following highlights the key themes and objectives of the Rural Recreation Strategy. The strategy's six theme areas are:

- 1) Equitable access to indoor facilities;
- 2) Access to outdoor recreation opportunities;
- 3) Volunteer support;
- 4) Programming that meets rural needs;
- 5) Inter-departmental and inter-governmental partnerships; and
- 6) Advertising and communications that reflect rural communities.

Equitable Access to Indoor Facilities

Rural parts of the region have a wide array of indoor recreation and leisure spaces that are available to rural residents. However, there is a higher reliance in rural areas on community-run facilities and as such, it is essential that this strategy sustains and supports community-run facilities, and supports the building of trusting and workable partnerships such as with the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) and Halifax Public Libraries.

Objective: to make indoor recreation facilities available to all rural residents regardless of location, population, or socioeconomic factors.

Equitable Access to Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

Rural recreation takes place in a variety of outdoor locations, including municipal and provincial parks, wilderness areas, roadways, and waterways. Outdoor recreation is an essential part of living a healthy lifestyle and is accessible in the rural communities. The most popular forms of recreation, as expressed by rural residents, are walking, and cycling on roadways in their communities and water activities at local lakes, rivers, and beaches. Consultation and analysis reveal several challenges associated with achieving access to outdoor recreation opportunities. Addressing these challenges may discourage high risk recreational activities, such as using highway shoulders for walking and cycling, swimming without supervision, and use of unmarked trails.

Objective: to provide equitable, safe, accessible, programmable, and clearly identified access to the variety of outdoor recreation assets throughout rural HRM.

Volunteer Support

There is heavy reliance in rural area on the community volunteer-run organizations to operate recreation and leisure facilities. Factors affecting the sustainability of these organizations include: insufficient finances, volunteer burnout, recruitment, advertising and promotions, lack of access to training, and the effects of COVID-19. The municipality can help to mitigate these challenges through training, funding supports, and engagement.

Objective: to provide the supports needed for volunteer-based organizations providing recreation opportunities to rural communities to continue to strengthen and thrive.

Programming that Meets Rural Needs

Rural recreation programming is not one size fits all across rural communities. Commuter rural regions tend to want recreation programming like what is offered in the urban core, while impromptu events, drop-ins, workshop-style programs, and outdoors activities are preferred in more remote communities. There are

unique challenges in delivering programs in rural communities, especially in the most remote communities with long travel times, fewer facilities, and small population sizes. Addressing these challenges requires a deep understanding of local needs and innovative and creative approaches to ensure there are more equitable recreation opportunities.

Objective: to provide residents with access to a variety of programs and opportunities that meet local needs and interests.

Inter-Departmental and Inter-Governmental Partnerships

There are 17 key internal and external governmental departments or agencies, some of which are arms-length, that significantly impact the provision of recreation opportunities in rural communities. Many of these departments/agencies support and impact programmed, self-directed, or spontaneous recreation opportunities, and/or support not-for-profits and volunteer-based groups who provide recreation opportunities.

Objective: to provide assets and programming related to recreation in collaboration and coordination with other government entities.

Advertising & Communications that Reflect Rural Communities

Communications for municipal recreation programming and services tend to have a greater prevalence of municipally run recreation opportunities in the urban core. Further, branding, imagery, photography, and communication styles predominately reflect urban culture that rural residents may not relate to. As well, Corporate Communications relies heavily on digital platforms and some rural communities across the municipality do not have the infrastructure for reliable or high-speed internet, which is required to view digital communications.

Objective: to reflect the culture and communication needs of rural communities in the municipality's marketing materials and communication strategies.

Implementation

To ensure follow-through with the actions of this strategy, a business unit and timeframe is assigned to each action. Staff have reviewed the recommendations in relation to other ongoing initiatives and are recommending that they be categorized into the following groups:

- Short Term Recommendations (0-1 years)
- Medium Term Recommendations (2-3 years)
- Long Term Recommendations (4-5 years)
- Implemented Recommendations

It is further recommended, within the strategy, that a progress report go to Regional Council within three years of the adoption of the strategy, and that a Rural Recreation Strategy survey be conducted with residents in rural areas to evaluate their satisfaction and to provide information for the progress report.

Regional Council's Strategic Priorities Plan 2021-2025

The proposed Rural Recreation Strategy aligns with the 2021-2025 Regional Council Strategic Priorities as they relate to:

- Involvement Communities: Residents are actively involved in their communities and enjoy participating and volunteering in a wide range of leisure, learning, social, recreational, and civic opportunities.
- Inclusive Communities: Residents are empowered as stewards and advocates for their communities, and work with the municipality and others to remove systemic barriers.

Conclusion

The municipality recognizes that equitable access to recreation facilities, assets, and programs encourages residents to participate in healthy active lifestyles, connect with their neighbours, and care for the environment. As directed by the CFMP2, the Rural Recreation Strategy provides clear direction on how to better govern the provision of community supported recreation facilities/assets and to increase the recreational opportunities in outlying areas. This strategy will strive to support rural recreation in an equitable manner, recognizing that service provision by community centres and parks is continually evolving and is recommending actions that support the rural recreation service delivery model.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report. All actions are to be supported through the existing budget. However, there may be financial implications that will need to be considered for future budget and business planning cycles, which will be the subject of future reports. This may result in a redistribution of future budgets affecting rural recreation.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations in this report. The risks considered are low. To reach this conclusion, consideration was given to hazardous, operational, financial, and strategic risks.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The community engagement process for the Rural Recreation Strategy included a combination of one-on-one interviews with partner organizations, staff, and rural Councillors, as well as an online survey, targeted direct mail of survey, a community organization questionnaire, stakeholder interviews and in-person and pop-up engagement sessions. The information collected from all forms of engagement helped to inform the key findings and recommended actions contained within this Strategy.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate environmental implications associated with this report.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Community Planning and Economic Development Committee may choose to not recommend that Regional Council approve the Rural Recreation Strategy or may request amendments to the Strategy.
2. Community Planning and Economic Development Committee may choose to not recommend that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to carry out the actions contained in the Rural Recreation Strategy as part of the multi-year budgeting and business planning process.
3. Community Planning and Economic Development Committee may choose not to recommend that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to bring forward a progress report in three years of the adoption of the Rural Recreation Strategy.

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1: Rural Recreation Strategy

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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Rural Recreation Strategy

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SEPTEMBER 11, 2023



HALIFAX

Executive Summary

Crafters, socializers and community supporters. Paddlers, trail runners, surfboarders and campers. Snowshoers, skiers, sledders and skaters. Whether it's taking in some arts and crafts or taking to our ocean waves and natural landscapes, residents, newcomers and visitors are drawn to the rural areas of our region. From Commuter West and East, to Musquodoboit Valley and the Eastern Shore, our rural regions are rich in natural beauty, and offer a diverse landscape for countless outdoor and indoor recreation opportunities.

At the heart of our rural communities are the people. The people who volunteer their time to keep community centres operating and events running. The people who regularly use our trail systems and put effort into their care and maintenance. The people who form groups to cycle, run, or walk their dogs on our active transportation routes. The people who take their kids to hockey practice and swimming lessons. And others who experience barriers to accessing municipal recreation services and programming. In consulting with our rural residents, we developed a deeper understanding of their varying needs and expectations. Diverse in culture, demographics, ages and abilities, our rural residents contributed valuable input that has informed the vision and development of the Rural Recreation Strategy.

The Strategy aligns with established long-term plans currently guiding growth in our region and the existing synergies that will serve to strengthen how we advance our municipality's rural recreation opportunities. The *Centre Plan*, *HalifACT*, *Integrated Mobility Plan*, Halifax Partnership's *People, Planet and Prosperity Plan*, and the *Regional Plan*, now being reviewed through extensive public consultation, all play an integral role. The Rural Recreation Strategy, in concert with these other plans, will help us to leverage our assets and infrastructure, invest in the right resources, and enable volunteers to continue their vital contributions to the delivery of rural recreation services.

This strategic direction is not a 'silver bullet' or a promise that all the challenges facing rural recreation will be immediately addressed. Rather, it paints a picture of the current status, acknowledges the barriers, and presents an action-oriented approach rooted in guiding principles and strategic partnerships.

The Strategy demonstrates a meaningful shift away from applying urban solutions to rural challenges. Designed to reflect and respond to the unique and evolving rural experience, it outlines six common themes based on the priorities identified in our public engagement. These include: 1) equitable access to indoor facilities; 2) access to outdoor recreation opportunities; 3) volunteer support; 4) programming that meets rural needs; 5) interdepartmental and inter-governmental partnerships; and 6) advertising and communications that reflect rural communities. The Strategy also identifies 60 actions for the short and longer-term to improve access to enhanced services, while prioritizing accessibility, inclusivity and engagement.

Grounded in Regional Council's direction to prioritize safe, involved, inclusive, affordable communities, the Rural Recreation Strategy is the result of thoughtful collaboration and consultation. Its focus is on the wellbeing of our rural populations and fostering a lifetime of recreation, exploration and community.



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1 | Introduction

The municipality recognizes that fostering lifelong participation through a variety of accessible recreational opportunities contributes to healthy lifestyles, vibrant communities, and a sustainable environment. Recreation assets also have an important role to play in attracting residents and stimulating community economic development.

Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is unique in that it has the largest proportion of rural residents among census metropolitan areas in all of Canada and the largest rural population across all of Nova Scotia's counties. Still, each rural community within the municipality is unique in terms of its culture, demographics, expectations and access to publicly available recreation and leisure assets and locations. There are context-sensitive opportunities, challenges, and barriers to providing an equitable level of recreation opportunities in rural communities across the municipality. The 2017 *Community Facilities Master Plan 2 (CFMP2)* updated strategic guidance regarding renewal and enhancement of infrastructure through to 2025. Regardless of where residents live in the municipality and as envisioned in the *CFMP2*, the municipality will:

- Strive to deliver excellent customer service;
- Seek to meet the needs of the unique communities across the Halifax region;
- Remain committed to sustainability and fiscal responsibility;
- Engage the public to seek input and value open dialogue, teamwork and a supportive, respectful, ethical and diverse environment;
- Value the contribution and support of partnerships;
- Seek to provide universal access to recreation services to address barriers from geography, gender, race, income, ability and otherwise;
- Focus on entry- or introductory-level programs to engage residents in healthy and active lifestyles;
- Create an opportunity for every resident to walk, run, bike, wheel, skate, hike and participate in water-based activities.



Rural communities have an abundance of outdoor wilderness areas, beaches, coastlines, long-standing cultural traditions and events, community-led programming and local stewardship of community facilities and outdoor sites. They have fewer purpose-built recreation facilities than urban and suburban areas and, in some cases, less infrastructure. For instance, there are no indoor pools within the rural areas of the municipality, three ice rinks, located in the commuter rural regions, and three municipally operated recreation centres. Recreation programming requires an approach that uses a rural lens, supporting volunteer-run facilities and recreation services, valuing and enhancing local existing assets, and building collaboration and partnerships with others providing or affecting recreation service delivery in rural parts of our region.

1.1 The strategy's purpose and role

In 2017, Regional Council approved the *CFMP2* as the framework for community facility planning. The *CFMP2* recommended that a Rural Recreation Strategy (RRS) be developed to inform the provision of community-supported recreation facilities and increase recreational opportunities in outlying areas.

The *RRS* provides an analysis on the future needs for Parks & Recreation's services and assets in the rural areas of the municipality. The strategy has been developed through a collaborative approach that encompasses the recreation needs of rural residents, including opportunities for innovative service delivery and equitable access to indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, for lifelong participation in vibrant and healthy communities.

It is important to distinguish between equality and equity in the analysis. Although both address fairness, equality achieves this through treating everyone the same, regardless of need, opportunity or circumstances. Equity achieves fairness by treating people differently based on a context of need, opportunity, circumstance, and consideration of historic and structural inequities. This strategy will strive to support rural recreation in an equitable manner recognizing that service provision by community centres and parks is continually evolving and aims to recommend actions that support the rural recreation service delivery model.

2 | Background

2.1 Rural municipal demographics

The *Rural Recreation Strategy* considers all areas outside the urban and suburban tax boundaries as rural. Furthermore, rural parts of the region are divided into four distinct areas: Commuter West, Commuter East, Musquodoboit Valley and Eastern Shore:

- Commuter West** Tantallon • Hubbards • Peggy's Cove • Sambro
- Commuter East** Middle Beaver Bank • Grand Lake Goffs • Oldham • Devon • Dutch Settlement • East Preston • Porters Lake • Lake Echo • Musquodoboit Harbour • Oyster Pond
- Musquodoboit Valley** Meagher's Grant • Carroll's Corner • Middle Musquodoboit • Upper Musquodoboit • Dean
- Eastern Shore** East Jeddore • Lake Charlotte • Sheet Harbour • Malay Falls • Ecum Secum

Based on census 2021, the Commuter West area has a population of 35,377 and the Commuter East area has a population of 27,044. The commuter areas are characterized by younger residents and relatively more children than the more rural areas. The commuter areas include relatively densely developed exurban¹ subdivisions as well as concentrated communities of significant size. Rural residents in the commuter areas generally have higher household incomes than residents in the urban and suburban tax boundary and those in the further rural areas.² The total population of the Musquodoboit Valley and Eastern Shore region is approximately 7,150. The population of the Musquodoboit Valley is 3,222, while the population of the Eastern Shore is 3,924. Musquodoboit Valley

and Eastern Shore are characterized by an aging and declining population and some of the highest rates of economic dependence and situational vulnerability³ in the Halifax Regional Municipalities (HRM).⁴ Furthermore, the Musquodoboit Valley region from Middle Musquodoboit and eastward, all the Eastern Shore and the community of Terence Bay have larger proportions of households in the lowest income groups^{5,6}, when compared to the commuter regions and urban and suburban tax boundaries (central Halifax) where about 17 per cent or more of residents are calculated to be low income. The low-income rate among children under five years is notably high in Musquodoboit Valley and Eastern Shore (32.3 per cent) as is the rate for seniors (22.6 per cent).

¹ An exurb (or alternately: exurban area) is an area outside the typically denser inner suburban area, at the edge of a metropolitan area, which has some economic and commuting connection to the metro area, low housing density and growth. (Wikipedia)

² Rural Recreation Strategy DRAFT Interim Report, Stantec Consulting Ltd., 2021

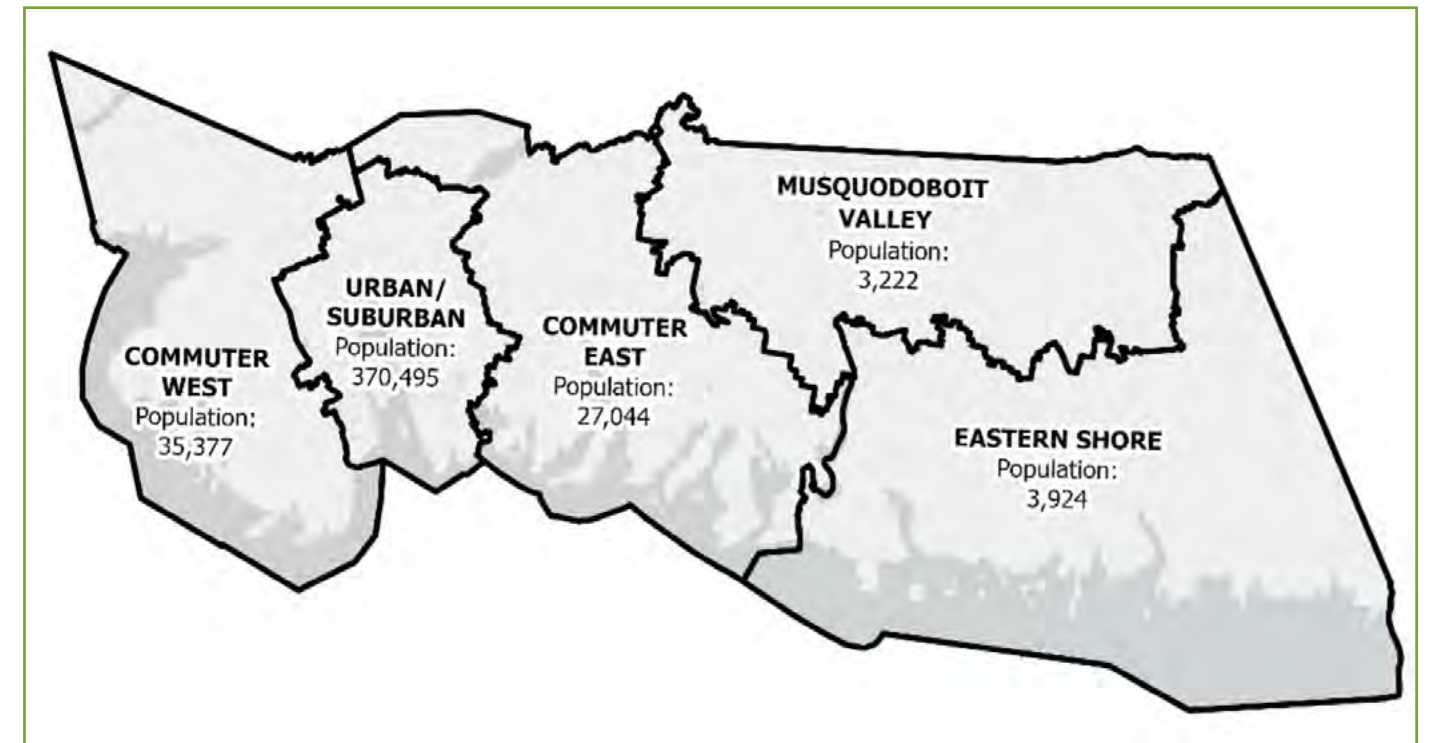
³ Economic dependence and situational vulnerability are two of the four dimensions of multiple deprivation in Canada. The corresponding indicators of economic dependence are: proportion of population aged 65 and older; proportion of population participating in the labour force (aged 15 and older); ratio of employment to population; dependency ratio (population aged 0-14 and older divided by population aged 15-64); and proportion of population receiving government transfer payments. The corresponding indicators of situational vulnerability are: proportion of population that identified as Aboriginal; proportion of dwellings needing major repairs; and proportion of population aged 25-64 without a high school diploma (The Canadian Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2016).

⁴ Canadian Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2016

⁵ Stantec, Halifax Regional Municipality Rural Recreation Strategy DRAFT Interim Report, 2021

⁶ Canada Census, 2021

Population of the Halifax Regional Municipality's Rural Areas



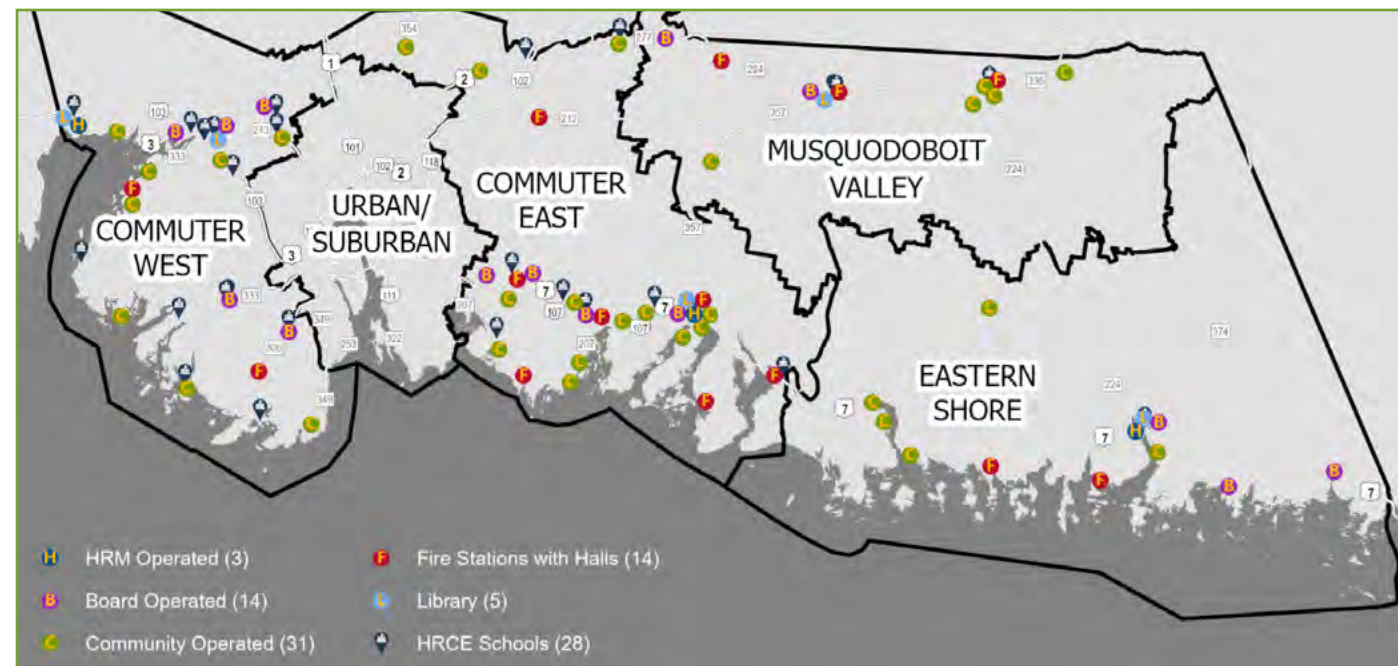
2.2 Current state of rural recreation

Rural recreation includes a range of organized, unstructured, and self-directed activities such as sports, fitness classes, civic events, social gatherings, walking, using a playground, swimming, hiking, biking, arts and crafts, music, culture and heritage clubs, fishing, boating, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use, gardening and more. Rural recreation takes place in fewer municipally operated facilities and relies heavily on community-operated facilities. Rural recreation also takes place outdoors at parks, trails, beaches, sidewalks, roadways, rivers, and wilderness areas. There are 93 publicly owned indoor facilities outside of the urban/suburban tax boundaries that are used or could be used for recreation and leisure, three of which are municipally operated. While not regularly programmed, there are 14 municipally owned fire halls with community space that groups may rent. There are 14 municipally owned facilities which are operated through *Facility Operating Agreements (FOAs)* governed and managed by volunteer-operated boards. The remaining 31 recreation centres and community halls have no affiliation to the municipality and are operated by not-for-profit societies. Additionally, there are the Tantallon Library, the Shatford Memorial Library in Hubbards, the Musquodoboit Harbour Library and the Sheet Harbour Library, which offer recreation and leisure programs, services and spaces. Although there are 27 schools from the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) across the rural areas of the municipality, access ranges from standard to non-existent, which is a barrier to providing recreation activities in these facilities. Fourteen schools have full evening access, four schools have one hour of access per week and seven schools have no access. See Appendix A for further information.

Type of indoor facility	# in the rural area	% of total rural facilities
Municipally operated	3	3%
Board-operated	14	15%
Community-operated	31	33%
Fire halls with rental space	14	15%
Libraries	4	4%
Schools*	27	29%
Total facilities	93	100%

*Not all schools have the right amenities for recreation programming and agreements must be made ahead of requesting use of the spaces.

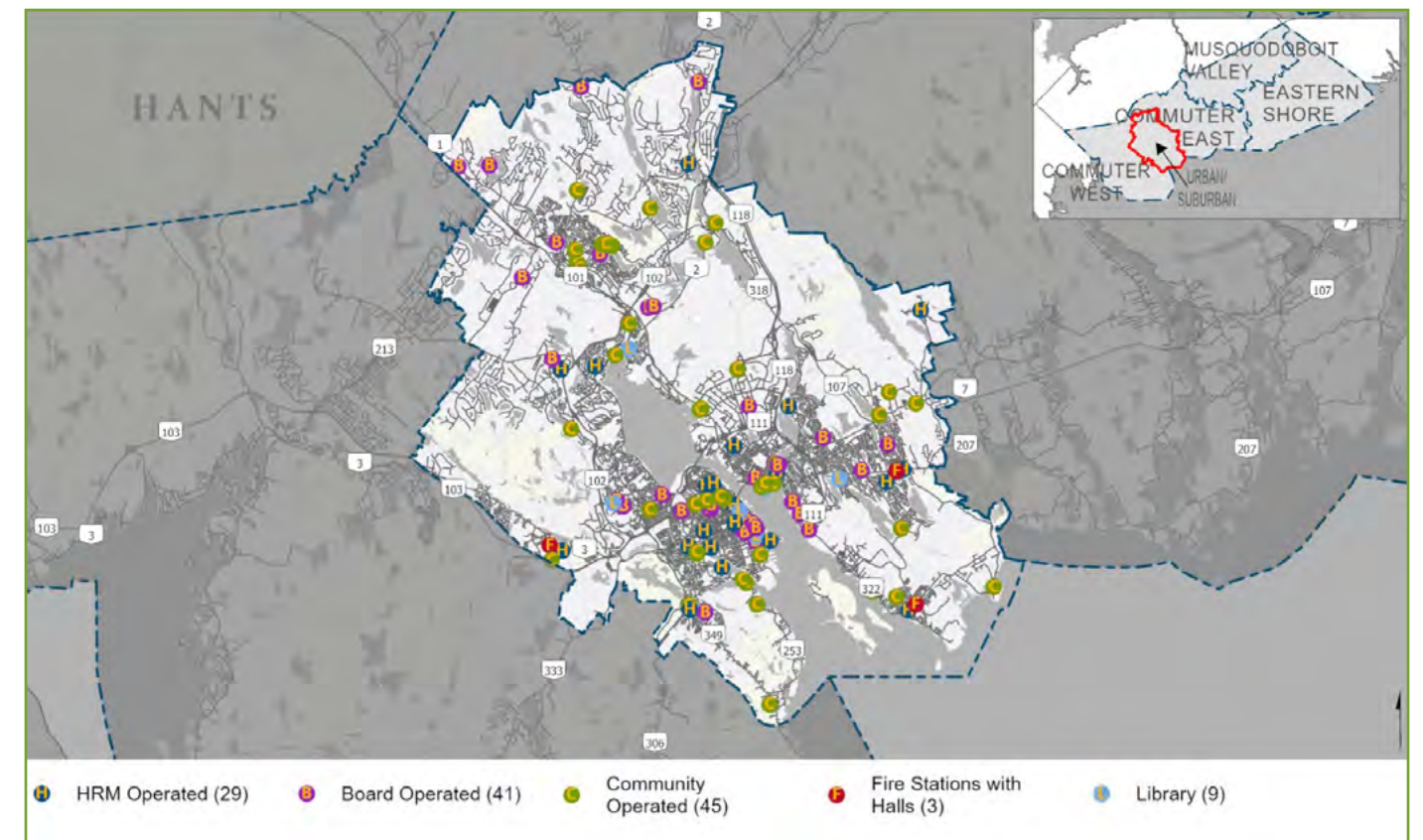
Rural Recreation Facilities



Rural recreation facilities offer a variety of public and private programming, which includes, but is not limited to:

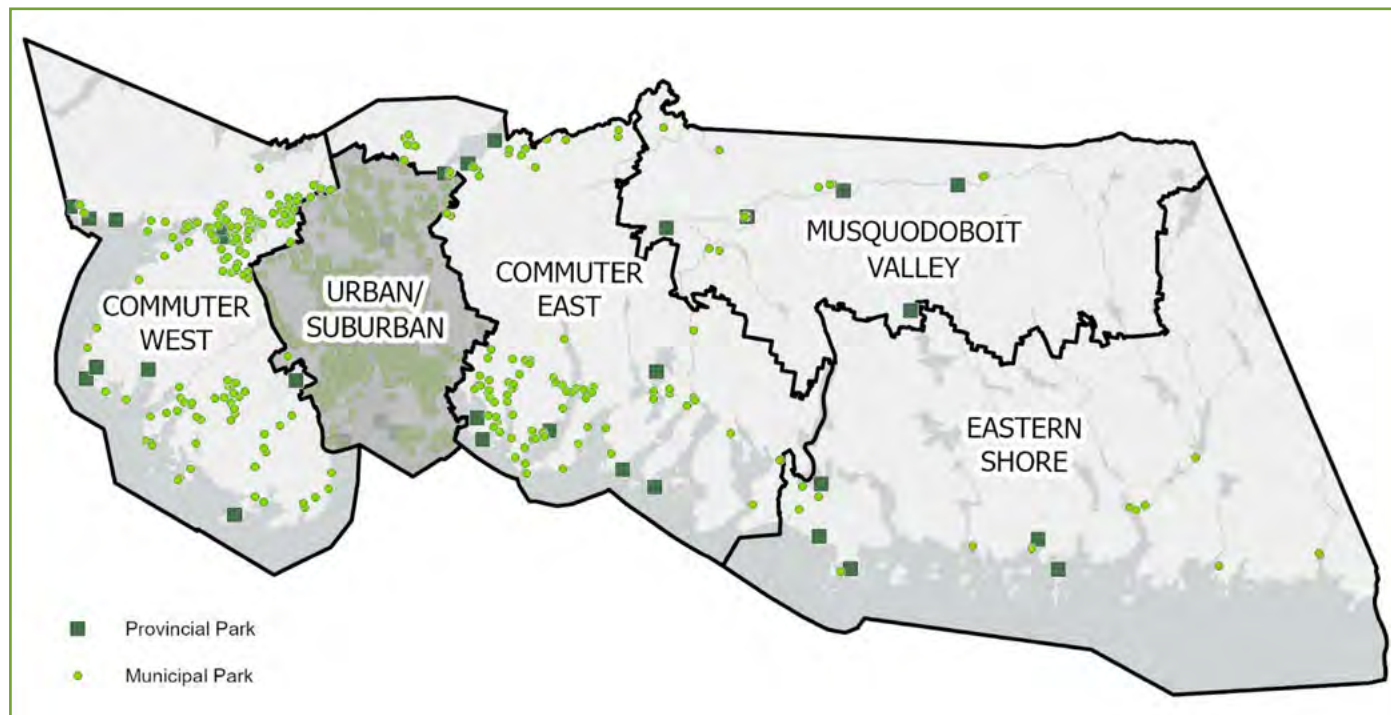
- fitness classes
- children's camps
- arts and crafts
- workshops
- social events
- private fitness classes
- private golf courses
- family farms
- private event venues
- church rental spaces that can be used for recreation

Rural recreation facilities | urban suburban



Survey results demonstrate that rural residents recreate informally using natural assets substantially more than they recreate using indoor structured programming. Residents' outdoor recreation takes place in parks, wilderness areas, waterways, trails, and roadways. Facilities within the urban and suburban tax boundary (U/S) provide various services locally and across regions, making a positive impact to the quality of life for its residents. These facilities are often within walking distance or a short bike or bus ride away and are more often purpose built for recreation, sport, and leisure activities than facilities in rural areas. A higher inventory of indoor facilities for U/S areas exist for residents to access, although these facilities do serve a larger catchment area with a high population density compared to their rural counterparts. It is important for this strategy to show the U/S and rural comparisons and to consider how, with limited resources, efforts can be prioritized, and investments can be made where they will have the biggest impact to communities and address service gaps. Additional maps of facilities can be found in Appendix B.

Provincial and municipal parks



*Some parks straddle boundaries and were counted for each rural recreation boundary they fall in.

There are 255 municipal parks and 29 provincial parks throughout the rural parts of the municipality*. These parks include a variety of amenities and assets such as trails, playground equipment, sport fields, ball diamonds, sport courts, beaches, picnic areas, and seating areas. Additionally, there are Crown lands that residents use for backcountry hiking and camping, and roadways that are used for walking, running, and cycling.

2.3 Related plans

Provincial plans, strategies and acts

There are many provincial plans regarding recreation, natural resource management, provincial parks, and trails. These include, but are not limited to:



The goals of these strategies and plans are to provide guidance and informative context for the municipality's parks and recreation planning. The full list of relevant plans can be found in Appendix C.

The *HRM Charter* is the primary provincial legislation under which the municipality operates. As stated in Section 7A of the Charter:

The purposes of the municipality are to:

1. provide good government;
2. provide services, facilities, and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the municipality;
3. develop and maintain safe and viable communities as outlined in the *People. Planet. Prosperity - Halifax's Inclusive Economic Strategy*

Municipal plans, strategies, by-laws, and administrative orders

The municipality has many relevant plans, strategies, administrative orders, and policies that impact the planning and delivery of parks and recreation in rural areas. The *Community Facilities Master Plan 2 (CFMP2)* provides direction for the renewal and enhancement of the municipality's recreation infrastructure through to 2025 and recommends the creation of a rural recreation strategy (RRS).

The proposed RRS aligns with the *2021-2025 Regional Council Strategic Priorities* as they relate to:

- involved communities – residents are actively involved in their communities and enjoy participating and volunteering in a wide range of leisure, learning, social, recreational, and civic opportunities;
- inclusive communities – residents are empowered as stewards and advocates for their communities and work with the municipality and others to remove systemic barriers.

The *Long-Term Aquatic Strategy* informs decisions and provides guidance regarding the provision of aquatic facilities/assets and programming. The scope of the

Long-Term Aquatic Strategy includes municipal indoor and outdoor pools, training, and competition aquatic sport facilities, municipally supervised beaches, and splash pads. The *Recreation Fee By-law and Administrative Order* standardizes and modernizes the fees for amenities and services across municipal facilities and programs. Other relevant strategies are the *Community Access Plan*, the *Playing Field Strategy* as well as the *Youth Services Plan 2*.

There are many by-laws and administrative orders (AOs) that impact rural recreation such as the *Community Garden AO*, *Community Grants AO*, *Special Events AO*, *Off-Leash Dog Areas AO*, *Fee AO and By-law*, *Social Policy AO*, *Area Rates to Fund Sidewalks Outside of the Urban Tax Area AO*, and *Community Rink AO*. The social policy vision is: "HRM is a safe, healthy and welcoming community where everyone is able to participate fully in their community." Regional Council has endorsed the following social policy goals:

- 1) Strengthen community health and well-being;
- 2) Enhance equity and inclusion, and build on social assets;

- 3) Enhance community capacity, which means
 - i. HRM residents have access to facilities and natural assets that enable a range of choices for structured and unstructured leisure and recreation activities;
 - ii. HRM communities, families, youth and seniors have access to social infrastructure that enables them to participate fully in their community; and
 - iii. HRM will implement an integrated mobility strategy that supports growth, development and the transportation of goods and people of all ages and abilities, using all modes including walking, cycling, transit and motor vehicles, consistent with the Regional Plan.

There are several plans and land-use by-laws that impact the future of development and growth in rural parts of the Halifax region. The *Regional Municipal Planning Strategy*, the *Regional Subdivision By-law*, and the *Community Municipal Planning strategies* and corresponding land-use by-laws are examples of plans that impact land-use development, parkland, the protection of natural, agricultural and resource lands, transportation, and community design. The regional plan encourages development towards defined geographic centres where services can be provided more economically and sustainably.

Other relevant plans that may be considered are:

- *Halifax Green Network Plan*
- *Integrated Mobility Plan*
- *People. Planet. Prosperity - Halifax's Inclusive Economic Strategy Rural Active Transportation Framework*
- *HalifACT 2050: Acting on Climate Together*
- *Sharing Our Stories: Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan (in development)*
- *Halifax Playing Field Strategy*
- *Accessibility Strategy*
- *Tourism Master Plan*

2.4 Jurisdictional scans and best practices research

Jurisdictional scans and best practices research were conducted to find models for rural recreation and frameworks for rural equity. This included:

- Reviews of 30 recreation strategies in rural municipalities across Canada:
 - Recreation Master Plan - Brandon, Ontario
 - Canmore 2016 Recreation Master Plan
 - CBRM Recreation Master Plan
 - East Hants PRC - Recreation Services Master Plan
 - Breathe – Edmonton – Green Network Plan
 - 2014-2024 Fraser Valley Strategic Parks Plan
 - Recreation Master Plan – Kamloops, 2019
 - TOK Physical Activity Strategy 2018-2022
 - Kings Municipality Planning Strategy
 - Kingston Parks & Recreation Master Plan
 - Township of Mapleton Rural Community Parks, creation and Culture,
 - Economic Benefits of Recreation 2015 Greenville Ontario
 - Pictou County Recreation Plan
 - Planning and Design Strategies for Healthy Living, Parks and Recreation in the Pottstown Area, 2010
 - Recreation and Sports Strategy – Richmond, 2019
 - Active Voice for Rural and Northern Ontario, 2015
 - Selkirk Recreation Master Strategy
 - Recreation Strategic Plan, Municipality of the District of Shelburne, 2019-2021

- Physical Activity Strategy, 2020-2022, Town of Shelburne, Town of Lockport, Municipality of the District of Shelburne
- Economic Benefits of Recreation, Rural Recreation Association
- Recreation Master Plan, Town of Taber, 2020
- Municipal Planning Strategy, Town of Truro
- Outdoor Recreation Plan, Moreton Bay, Australia, 2019-2031
- Rocky view Alberta Recreation and Parks Master Plan, 2021

- Reviews of 10 rural equity and access strategies and papers
- Review of the National Recreation Framework
- Research regarding the benefits and challenges of rural parks and recreation
- The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable Rural Economic Development Toolkit, USA
- Rural Active Living: A Call to Action, J Public Health Management Practice, 2016
- Rural Park and Recreation Agencies Struggle to Find Funding, NRPA Magazine 2016



2.5 Public and stakeholder engagement

As part of the overall analysis, a key component of the strategy's approach was community engagement⁷. Staff used a combination of engagement approaches to obtain feedback from the following:

- Relevant municipal staff and rural councillors;
- Governmental and arms-length organizations;
- Volunteer-based organizations;
- Rural residents.

 **2,247**
surveys

A public survey was open from April 1, 2021, until June 13, 2021, for all rural residents of the municipality. Significant efforts were made to provide physical surveys to residents from the most rural and underserved rural areas of the Halifax region through direct mailouts and by working with local community centres to distribute and collect surveys. A total of 2,247 surveys were completed by residents within rural areas of the municipality.

 **41**
completed questionnaires

Staff created a targeted long-form questionnaire for recreation and park-based volunteer groups. Staff asked 154 groups to complete the questionnaire, with 41 completed questionnaires returned.

 **10**
governmental organizations meetings

Between May and November 2021, staff arranged and held 10 meetings with departments from other levels of government and arms-length organizations that impact rural parks and recreation.

 **12**
pop-up engagements

During late fall 2021, staff held 12 pop-up engagements to share major themes arising from the feedback collected from engagements to date. The purpose of these pop-ups was to reach residents in person, which was not permitted earlier in the engagement process due to COVID-19 restrictions. Staff spoke to 154 residents through the pop-up sessions.

The municipality's Youth Services section was simultaneously conducting engagement for the Youth Services Plan 2 update. Youth Services staff provided additional survey results from 236 rural youth.

Common feedback topics arose from the engagement results and were divided into the following six theme areas:

Equitable access to indoor facilities	Access to outdoor recreation opportunities	Volunteer support
Programming that meets rural needs	Interdepartmental and inter-governmental partnerships	Advertising and communications that reflect rural communities

⁷ Rural Recreation Strategy - public consultation results, March 15, 2022, <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/standing-committees/220421cpedinfo2.pdf>.

Results from community engagement helped identify the existing rural recreation service delivery model in the municipality, as shown in the following graphic.

Municipally-led and supported recreation

- Equipment loans
- Clam Harbour Sandcastle Competition
- Fitness classes
- Provide courts, playing fields, parks, and playgrounds
- Camps
- Renting to groups
- Outdoor swimming lessons or beach supervision

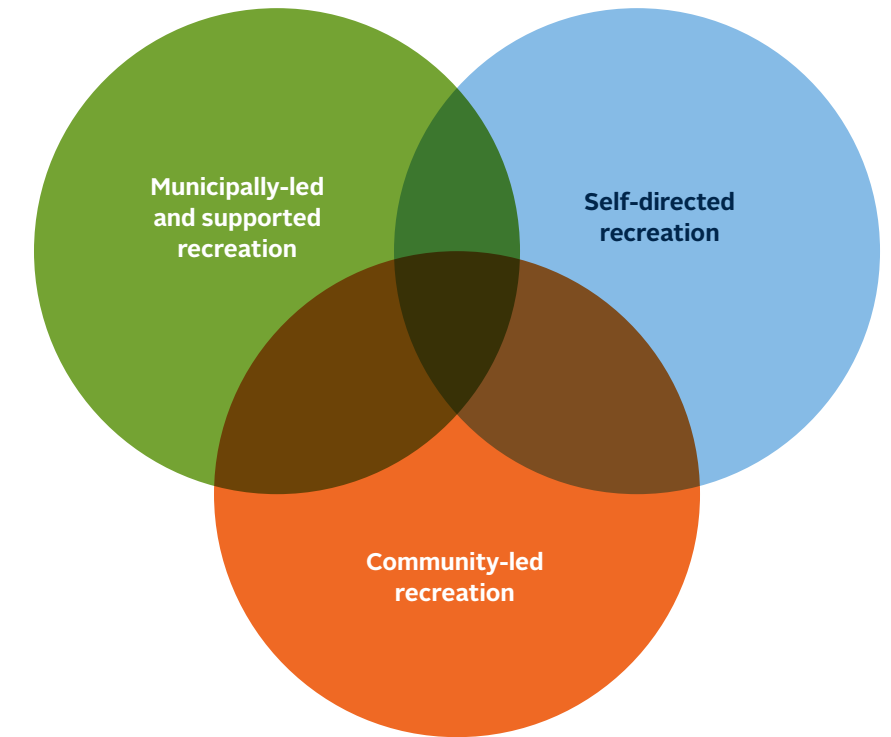
Self-directed recreation

- Swimming
- Cycling
- Walking/hiking
- Hobbies
- Playing at the park
- ATVing / skiing / snowshoeing

Community-led recreation

- Open-mics
- Theatres & concerts
- Card nights at the local hall
- Community meals
- Cultural opportunities
- Walking clubs
- Rental group activities
- Community festivals

Rural recreation service delivery model




3 | Vision and principles

3.1 Vision for rural recreation


The vision for rural recreation distills and defines rural residents' and organizations' aspirations for the future. It represents what the Municipality would like to achieve through the objectives and actions of the *Rural Recreation Strategy*.

The Halifax Regional Municipality's rural recreation vision aims:



For rural residents to have equitable and ample access to recreation services and assets;

For volunteer-based organizations that provide leisure, recreation, and sport opportunities to have the supports needed to be sustainable, relevant, and vibrant;



To work with partners regularly, collaborating on programming, venues, cross-promotion and future plans that will impact recreation in rural areas of the municipality.

3.2 Guiding principles

Rural lens for recreation service delivery

The vision for this strategy aims “for rural residents to have equitable and ample access to recreation services and assets.” Furthermore, *CFMP2* recommended a rural recreation strategy be developed to “govern the provision of community-supported recreation facilities and to increase recreational opportunities in outlying areas” (*CFMP2*).

Parks & Recreation staff may consider using the rural lens for service delivery to ensure a rural-sensitive context is applied to decision making.



Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery

What does this tool do?

1. Considers the unique rural recreation context.

- This lens encourages the municipality to consider the unique circumstances that impact rural residents' ability to participate in lifelong recreation.

2. Identifies high priority communities based on distance and economic barriers to recreation.

- This lens demonstrates how some rural communities have better access to major facilities and greater economic ability to participate in recreation than other rural communities. These findings are used to identify high-, medium-, and low-priority areas where extra support and investments are needed to ensure lifelong participation in parks and recreation.

3. Considers innovative approaches to rural recreation service delivery.

- This lens outlines context-sensitive approaches based on community engagement findings that recreation service delivery providers should use when planning, designing, and providing all aspects of recreation (programming, parks, facilities, and partnerships).

What is the unique rural recreation context?

- Low population density may result in an additional cost to the delivery of services, which needs to be considered upfront in the design of initiatives.
- Low population density may also mean that satellite locations need to be created to reach residents on the edges of the region or those far from population centres.

- Due to the long distances that rural residents must travel and the general lack of transportation alternatives, rural residents are almost completely dependent on personal vehicles to meet their transportation needs.
- It is important to consider that high-speed internet access is not uniform across the rural regions and not everyone is equally comfortable with online services.
- Lakes, the ocean, woodlands, and general landscapes make important contributions to the economy and overall well-being, which results in high participation rates in outdoor recreation such as walking, hiking, cycling, outdoor swimming, boating, ATVing and snow sports.
- Many programs and services are delivered and maintained by volunteers of community and recreation associations and groups.
- The use of conventional methods for communication may not reach the intended rural audience.
- Parks & Recreation planning and policy decisions may currently have an urban orientation.



Where are the inequities in rural areas of the municipality?

The two greatest barriers to recreation opportunities identified through community engagement and analysis are travel times to major recreation facilities and economic barriers.

During community engagement, residents were asked how far they would travel to recreation opportunities. Out of 2,247 survey responses, 831 of survey respondents stated that they are not willing to drive more than 15-30 minutes to their recreation activity, while 696 of respondents are not willing to drive more than 15 minutes. Meanwhile, several rural communities are more than 30 minutes to multi-district facilities with amenities residents are looking for such as indoor pools, rinks, and purpose-built fitness spaces. This results in communities such as the Eastern Shore region, the further reaches of Commuter East (East Petpeswick and Middle Musquodoboit) and the communities of Peggy's Cove and Hubbards using major facilities in neighbouring municipalities such as East Hants.

The Eastern Shore region, parts of Musquodoboit Valley and small sections of the commuter

regions are identified as having greater economic dependence (reliance on sources of income other than employment income)⁸ than other rural parts of the municipality. Furthermore, the Musquodoboit Valley region from Middle Musquodoboit and eastwards, the Eastern Shore, and the community of Terence Bay have larger proportions of households in the lowest income groups^{9,10} when compared to the commuter regions and urban and suburban tax boundaries (central Halifax). Overall, 17 per cent or more of households in these communities are calculated to be low income, while the average proportion of low-income residents in the municipality is 14 per cent and much of the commuter areas (particularly Commuter West) are less than 10 per cent low income. The low-income rate among children under five years is notably high in Musquodoboit Valley and Eastern Shore (32.3 per cent) as is the rate for seniors (22.6 per cent). Notably high is the census tract covering Musquodoboit Valley and Eastern Shore east of Moose River Road to the edge of the municipality with 22 per cent of households being low income.

Priority areas

High priority <i>Distance + economic barriers</i>	Medium priority <i>Distance barrier</i>	Medium priority <i>Economic barrier</i>	Low priority <i>No distance or economic barriers at the community scale</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middle Musquodoboit, Elderbank, Meagher's Grant and further east all of the Eastern Shore region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> East Petpeswick and further east community of Peggy's Cove community of Hubbards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> community of Terence Bay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> remaining rural communities

⁸ Canadian Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2016

⁹ Stantec, Halifax Regional Municipality Rural Recreation Strategy DRAFT Interim Report, 2021

¹⁰ Canada Census, 2021

What are more appropriate approaches to rural recreation service delivery?

When making decisions that impact rural recreation, acknowledge the following:

To lessen the barriers residents in the High Priority Areas face when trying to access recreation opportunities, the municipality may consider allocating parks and recreation funding, planning, programming, and maintenance to these areas first, before considering allocating these supports to Low Priority Areas.

When developing programs, policies and plans, the municipality may:

Consider the cost associated with reducing barriers while preparing budgets;

Examine local demographics (up-to-date population numbers, age groups and barriers);

Consider travel time, means, and availability of transportation for participants and instructors;

Acknowledge the availability of resources, existing services, and partnerships;

Recognize limited internet access;

Engage residents to identify local recreation interests and knowledge;

Recognize that participation rates and revenue alone do not define success in rural programming, especially in communities facing the greatest barriers to participation.

Rural-sensitive communications

Marketing and community engagement should be easily accessible and reflect each community's unique rural culture:

- Do not solely rely on web-based communications;
- Use local branding and photos on communications materials;
- Recognize the importance of local social media when using web-based communications.

Flexibility

Streamline "red tape" that makes pursuing innovative service delivery and partnerships difficult.

Collaboration

Respect, support, and collaborate with local community groups and partners. Recognize that recreation opportunities would not exist without community groups in many rural regions.

Rural value

Celebrate and appreciate the significant contributions of rural communities, including natural assets, volunteerism, culture, and rural experiences.

Asset-based community development "is an approach that recognizes the strengths, gifts, talents and resources of individuals and communities and helps communities to mobilize and build on these for sustainable development".¹¹ Communities that collaborate and move forward with an asset-based approach are more successful at addressing issues because they can harness the talents, knowledge, and strengths of diverse perspectives to solve problems.

¹¹ Coady International Institute

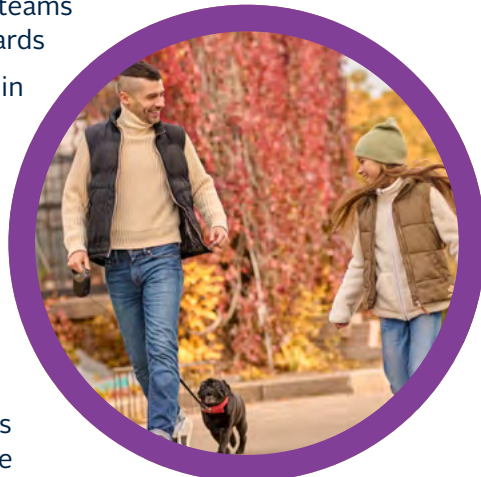
Instead of focusing on the challenges of providing enhanced recreation assets and services in rural areas, this strategy focuses on the existing community assets and how they can be harnessed to improve recreation opportunities in even the most remote communities. This approach ultimately leads to enhanced civic participation and democracy, and greater longevity of excellent recreation opportunities.



3.3 Building partnerships

Through consultation, it was learned that there are several municipal and provincial departments and arms-length organizations working to support the creation, preservation, and programming of rural recreation in the municipality.

- Libraries host an array of free programs
- Halifax Regional Centre of Education (HRCE) provides access to schools for recreation opportunities
- Provincial departments play a role in shaping recreation infrastructure through:
 - Provincial park maintenance and programming
 - Active transportation infrastructure
 - Support for trails development, maintenance and volunteer capacity building
 - Funding community-led recreation initiatives
- Nova Scotia Health provides programming through the community health teams and a local voice to health and wellness through the community health boards
- Other municipal business units outside of Parks & Recreation play a role in shaping recreation infrastructure and opportunities through:
 - community special events grants
 - active transportation and recreation trail planning
 - land use planning
 - facility design and construction



Each of these organizations is working towards the common goal of providing more recreation opportunities to residents. To ensure each of these organizations are making the best use of resources, cross-sector coalitions for recreation will be important. Going forward, municipal business units, provincial departments, and arms-length organizations should initiate regular meetings and updates to coordinate work plans and programs, as well as to establish future goals. Beyond filling gaps, this will ensure less repetition of services, the best use of resources, and stronger and better used programs, services, and amenities.

4 | Key themes and actions

The strategy's key themes are derived from an analysis of jurisdictional scans of similar municipalities across Canada, best practices research, spatial and socioeconomic analysis of rural areas of the region, and public consultation, which included surveys, stakeholder interviews, pop-up in-person engagements, and questionnaires with leisure and recreation service providers. This analysis and public consultation provided valuable information which was required to understand the existing context when it comes to rural residents' experiences and barriers with accessing recreation opportunities.



Theme 1: Equitable access to indoor facilities

Rural facilities

Rural parts of the region have a wide array of indoor recreation and leisure spaces that are available to rural residents; however, three out of 93 indoor facilities throughout the region are operated by the municipality, allowing ongoing opportunities for programming and access to recreation staff covering these areas. Therefore, it is essential that this strategy sustains and supports community-run facilities that fill the gaps in the most rural communities, and builds trusting and workable partnerships with the HRCE to access their gymnasiums, and Halifax Public Libraries to access its recreation spaces.

Access in the rural areas: number and type of indoor recreation & leisure facilities across the rural municipality									
Rural region	Approx. 2021 population	Municipally operated	Board operated	Community operated	Fire stations with halls	Libraries	Schools*	Total	Facilities per population
Commuter West	35,377	1	5	8	2	2	14	32 (34%)	1 facility per 1,105 people
Commuter East	27,044	1	4	13	7	1	9	35 (38%)	1 facility per 773 people
Musquodoboit Valley	3,222	0	2	5	3	0	3	13 (14%)	1 facility per 301 people
Eastern Shore	3,924	1	3	7	2	1	1	13 (14%)	1 facility per 301 people
All Rural HRM	69,567	3	14	31	14	4	27	93 (100%)	1 facility per 748 people

While many rural communities have access to community-operated halls and smaller recreation spaces, some rural communities face higher proportions of low-income households and drive times that are over 30 minutes to reach larger facilities (including major facilities in East Hants). These situations can create barriers for rural residents to fully participate in their preferred activities and to access skill building in communities closer to urban multi-district facilities. Access to the facilities in the rural areas may be difficult due to the lack of safe walking paths or sidewalks or due to limited or no public transit.

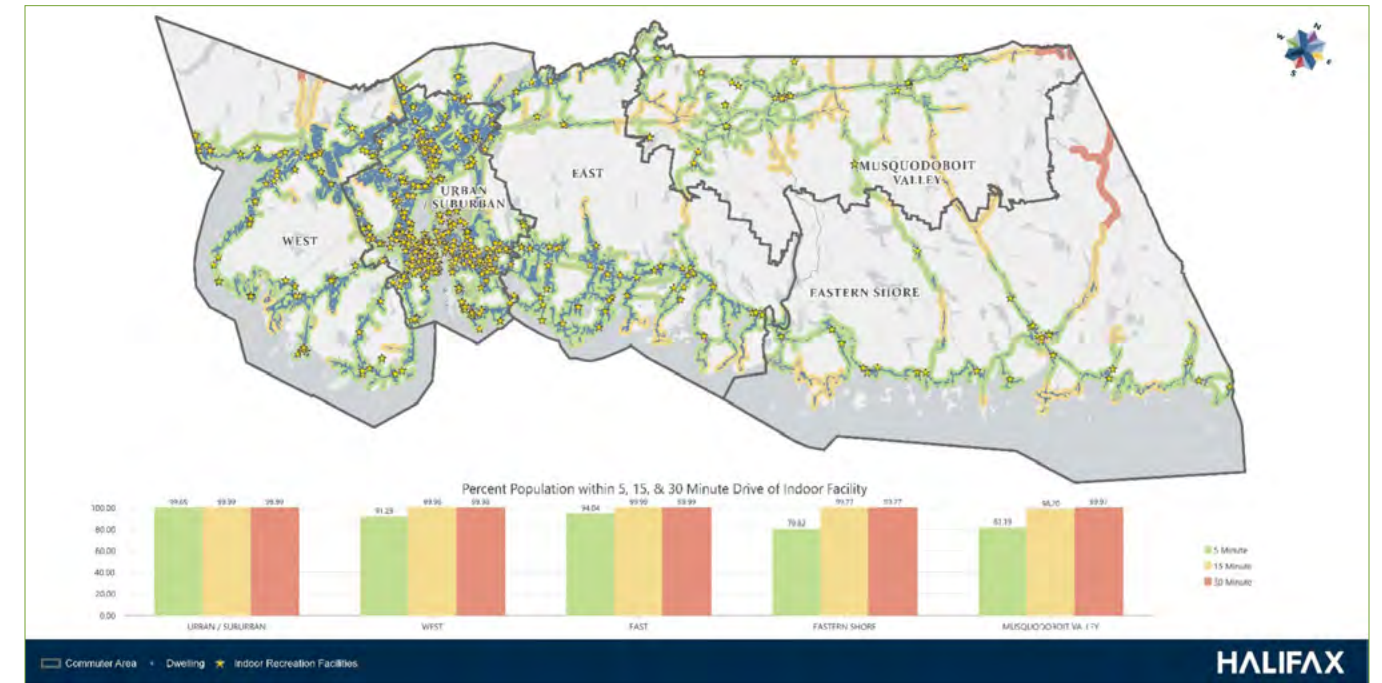


Urban and suburban facilities

Indoor facilities that can be used for recreation within the U/S areas are varied and numerous compared to the rural regions. Although, as seen in the access in the U/S areas (table below), the ratio of facility per person is lower than the four rural regions at 1,603 persons to one facility, which does reduce to 1,327 per person once you include private indoor facilities. Many universities and colleges are open for public use as well as the YMCA, Boys & Girls Club and Waegwoltic Club who offer recreation and fitness programs, swimming, and camps. This adds 10 facilities to the U/S area's recreation and facilities inventory. There are also the following private fitness centres: seven Goodlife Fitness Centres, five Fit4Less, two Orangetheory fitness centres, as well as 25 specialized training gyms. These private fitness centres offer memberships and access to two Planet Fitness gyms, as well as, high-end fitness equipment and advanced fitness training, and provide 39 additional fitness facilities in the U/S core. There are many other types of indoor facilities not accounted for in this strategy in both U/S and rural areas such as golf clubs, churches, mini golf, axe throwing, and bouldering, to name a few.

4.2 Number and type of indoor recreation & leisure facilities in the HRM urban & suburban tax boundary									
Urban and suburban region	Approx. 2021 population	Municipally operated	Board operated	Community operated	Fire stations with halls	Libraries	Schools*	Total	Facilities per population
Urban and Suburban	370,495	28	38	44	4	10	107	231	1 facility per 1,603 people

HRM Indoor Facility Service Areas



Note regarding the Indoor Facility Services Areas map: due to lack of some data, service area calculations may not represent an accurate picture of accessibility to assets. Data improvements will enable a more thorough review of municipal assets in the commuter areas in future analysis. Please be advised that churches are not within the scope of this review in the urban suburban areas.

Objective: to make indoor recreation facilities available to all rural residents regardless of location, population, or socioeconomic factors.

Municipally operated facilities

There are three municipally operated recreation centres in the rural parts of the region:

- Musquodoboit Harbour Recreation Centre, which has a multi-purpose room, kitchen, meeting room (shared with the library) and a medium-sized fitness centre.
- Sheet Harbour Recreation Office, which has a small fitness centre and a small multi-purpose room. A new lifestyle centre has been identified as part of the 10-Year Capital Plan which will replace this centre.
- Hubbards Area Recreation Centre is a small house with limited to no capacity for programming.

HRM provides a variety of programming at these facilities as well as renting the remaining available time slots to community groups. The development of the Eastern Shore Lifestyle Centre will better meet the recreation needs of the Sheet Harbour community. While the Musquodoboit Harbour Recreation Centre recently underwent recapitalization, the new space is not large enough to accommodate all required recreation programs. Therefore, some programming requires renting nearby satellite facilities such as the Eastern Shore Community Centre and the Petpeswick Yacht Club. The Hubbards Area Recreation Centre is near the end of its life, with most of the activity taking place on the surrounding parkland, which has recreation features.



1.1 Continue to implement Regional Council's direction related to the Eastern Shore Lifestyles Centre

1.2 Determine the future use of the Hubbards Area Recreation Centre facility

Board-operated facilities

There are 14 municipally owned and board-operated recreation centres across the rural areas of the municipality. These facilities, known as partnership facilities, are operated through *Facility Operating Agreements (FOAs)* and leases with the municipality. Most of these facilities have a multi-purpose room or hall space, usually with an accompanying kitchen facility and washrooms. A few partnership facilities have a fitness centre, gymnasium and/or board rooms, with one facility operating a community ice rink and two facilities operating community theatres. The volunteer board of directors determines how to operate the facility. Some facilities hire recreation coordinators, while other facilities mainly rely on rental groups to provide programming for the community. The St. Margaret's Centre is a multi-district facility, as it houses two arenas, fitness rooms, meeting rooms and a seasonal outdoor pool. St. Margaret's Centre is managed through a *Multi-District Facility (MDF) Agreement* between the municipality and a volunteer board of directors.



The 38 board-operated facilities in the U/S boundary provide recreation, sport and leisure opportunities in communities where municipally operated facilities have no presence. This includes four large MDFs and a variety of community centres and sports clubs.

Volunteer-based organizations operating these facilities expressed challenges, including the need to renovate their facilities for accessibility and modernization. These organizations also expressed the requirement for training to support their volunteers.

1.3 Update the Facility Condition Index evaluations for the 14 rural municipally owned and board-operated facilities

1.4 Require municipally owned and board-operated facilities to collect rental and participant usage data on an annual basis to leverage funding and other supports.

1.5 Develop user-friendly facility evaluation toolkits to assist in collecting information needed for funding and grant applications, such as participation rates, program offerings, state of good repair, future plans, and financial statements. Provide educational training to municipally owned and board-operated facilities on how to use the facility evaluation toolkit.



Community-operated facilities

Some of the most remote communities in the municipality do not have municipally owned facilities, therefore, residents rely on community-operated facilities to provide recreation services. These facilities tend to have hall space, an accompanying kitchen, and washrooms, with some operating licensed bars for community events. These facilities are often used for special events like holiday and fundraiser dinners and dances, weddings, anniversaries, and memorials. Some community-operated facilities have boards or associations that run regular programming for the community such as weekly music jams, community dinners, dart nights, youth nights, fitness classes, craft clubs and games nights, while other boards focus primarily on special events and rentals.

Based on the public consultation, the volunteers that operate indoor community recreation and leisure facilities are struggling with finances and volunteer recruitment. Many volunteer-operated halls and community centres require facility improvements and modern renovations so that more groups will want to rent from them and to ensure they are accessible and energy efficient.

1.6

Encourage and support community-operated facilities to collect rental and participant usage data on an annual basis to leverage funding and other supports. Develop user-friendly facility evaluation toolkits to assist in collecting information needed for funding and grant applications such as participation rates, program offerings, state of good repair, future plans, and financial statements. Provide educational training to community-operated facilities on how to use the facility evaluation toolkit.

1.7

Develop future parks and recreation strategies that consider the value of not-for-profit community-operated facilities in the delivery of rural recreation.



Municipal corporate grants

The municipality provides financial supports to a variety of community groups through corporate grant programs, tax relief and less-than-market-value leases. In addition, there are outdoor amenities such as sports fields, playgrounds, wharves, community gardens and outdoor skating rinks that are supported by the municipality.

1.8

Conduct an interdepartmental analysis of current grant programs and identify funding gaps, including grants, tax relief, and less-than-market-value leases, for not-for-profit societies operating community centres, halls, and recreation societies. Start with the high priority communities identified in the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery*.

Fire stations with halls

Throughout the rural communities, there are 14 municipally owned fire stations that have a useable multi-purpose room or hall-style space. Community groups can rent fire halls for community events and programs.



Libraries

Four out of 14 libraries throughout the rural parts of the municipality have indoor programming such as arts and craft, reading, cooking, and camps to name a few, and have meeting spaces available to the public.

- Shatford Memorial Library in Hubbards
- The Tantallon Library
- Sheet Harbour Public Library
- The Musquodoboit Harbour Library



Schools

There are 27 public schools throughout the rural communities. Through a service exchange agreement (SEA) with the HRCE, the municipality has some ability to use school gymnasiums for recreation programming in areas where public gymnasiums do not exist. However, gaining access to the schools that work best for rural residents can be difficult and access tends to be limited. Public consultation further demonstrated that residents and staff are seeking improved access to HRCE schools, as often schools are the only indoor facilities available in rural areas.

1.9

Engage with the HRCE on how to improve the municipality's community access to HRCE schools in the most rural areas to provide better community access to gymnasiums for evening, weekend, and summer use.

1.10

Establish relationships with local school principals and custodians to collaborate on the use of schools for rural community recreation programming.

1.11

Investigate the possibility of creating an after-hours building monitor program in collaboration with HRCE.

Communities with the greatest barriers to accessing indoor facilities

While there are three municipally operated recreation facilities (Sheet Harbour, Hubbards and Musquodoboit Harbour), these spaces tend to be too small for the required recreation programming in these communities, therefore, staff must rent larger halls and arenas or collaborate with local schools to provide recreation programs. Accessing these external facilities requires extra time spent on logistics, can have significant facility rental costs and can be unpredictable.

Through consultation, rural residents explained they do not want to drive more than 30 minutes to parks and recreation amenities and programs. This is particularly a problem for communities on the Eastern Shore and further reaches of the Musquodoboit Valley, where the nearest pool or rink can be more than 45 minutes away and transportation options are limited. Residents of Sheet Harbour to Ecum Secum must travel over an hour to the nearest indoor ice surface or indoor pool. The most rural regions of the municipality (the Musquodoboit Valley and Eastern Shore) expressed frustration and disappointment with their level of access to amenities like recreation centres, indoor swimming pools, indoor ice surfaces and fitness spaces. While rural public schools provide some space for recreation programming, they are not accessible some evenings and have limited weekend and summer use. Residents want to see more municipal Parks & Recreation staff, resources, and facilities in their communities. Rural residents want more structured programs, like fitness classes, arts and crafts, seniors' programming, and children's programming in local physical spaces. Through consultation, it was learned that other municipalities across Nova Scotia use innovative transportation models to bring rural residents to major facilities as a way of reducing barriers.

831 (37 per cent) survey respondents are not willing to drive more than 15-30 minutes to their recreation activity, while 696 (31 per cent) of respondents are not willing to drive more than 15 minutes.

416 (19 per cent) survey respondents, across rural parts of the municipality, want to be able to swim year-round in a pool, however, feel it is not possible due to travel time.

Based on the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery*, the entire Eastern Shore region and the eastern half of Musquodoboit Valley (communities of Middle Musquodoboit, Elderbank, Meagher's Grant and further east) face the greatest barriers to recreation. These major barriers include the ability to pay for recreation opportunities and the long distances to major facilities to access swimming lessons, ice sports and a large array of recreation and leisure programming, or any purpose-built recreation facility in or near these communities.

1.12

Recognizing the unique circumstances of rural communities, explore opportunities for repurposing existing indoor spaces in the most underserved areas to better meet the recreation space needs for additional programming and improved service delivery. Consider partnering with related service providers.

1.13

Consider opportunities to maximize the use of the current Parks & Recreation 15-seater bus and the use of local transportation services to support residents of all ages in accessing recreation opportunities, including:

- Indoor pools
- Indoor ice surfaces
- Purpose-built recreation and fitness facilities

1.14

Explore additional transportation options to meet the needs of rural residents.





Theme 2: Access to outdoor recreation opportunities

Rural recreation takes place in a variety of outdoor locations, including municipal and provincial parks, wilderness areas, roadways, and waterways. Outdoor recreation is an essential part of living a healthy lifestyle and is accessible in the rural communities. The most popular forms of recreation, as expressed by rural residents, are walking, and cycling on roadways in their communities and water activities at local lakes, rivers, and beaches. However, consultation and analysis reveal that outdoor recreation opportunities are not as accessible as may be assumed. There are several challenges associated with achieving access to outdoor recreation opportunities, including:

- Lack of safe walking and cycling infrastructure;
- Barriers to access outdoor aquatics assets;
- Low winter access to provincial parks;
- Unclear rules regarding the access to Crown wilderness areas.

Objective: to provide functional, safe, accessible, programmable, and clearly identified access to the variety of outdoor recreation assets throughout rural communities.

Updated systematic approaches to park decision making

The first step to understanding the possibilities for outdoor recreation in rural municipal parks is having a clear inventory of where parks exist, their assets, their current state of repair and usership rates. Parks staff are currently working on updating and streamlining park data, including implementing and sustaining quality-assurance processes, tracking initiatives and asset inspections. This initiative will assist park assets to reach their maximum life expectancy and allow staff to forecast which assets require capital replacement. Through municipal website updates to the Parks & Recreation page, available services and more detailed maintenance tasks for municipally owned fields can be more clearly communicated. Staff are working on updating their current technologies and introducing innovative solutions to increase process efficiencies across their services, including a new smartphone app, which will help streamline the team's approach to continually update the ArcGIS Asset Registry.

There are 255 municipal parks in rural areas of the region: 149 in Commuter West, 90 in Commuter East, 13 in Musquodoboit Valley, and 13 in the Eastern Shore. These include playgrounds, sport courts, sport fields, ball diamonds, green spaces, beaches, and trails. There are 30 provincial parks across rural communities that are more evenly dispersed throughout the rural regions. There is one park for every 270 residents of the Commuter East region, and one park for every 237 residents of Commuter West. Musquodoboit Valley and Eastern Shore have a rate of one park for approximately every 218 and 179 residents respectively, however, the travel time is much greater than for residents who live in the U/S and commuter areas.

Total Municipal and Provincial Parks Across HRM								
Rural region	Approx. 2021 population	# of Municipal Parks	# of Provincial Parks	Total Parks	Municipal Hectares	Provincial Hectares	Total Hectares	People to Hectares
Urban/Suburban	370,495	671	8	679	3359.4	1575.5	4934.9	75
Commuter West	35,377	139	10	149	1805.6	3203.7	5009.3	7
Commuter East	27,044	90	10	100	200.4	1378.9	1579.3	17
Musquodoboit Valley	3,222	13	5	18	58.5	1215.1	1273.6	3
Eastern Shore	3,924	13	5	18	28.7	2227.0	2255.7	2
All Areas	440,062	926	38	964	5452.7	9600.1	15052.8	29

Some parks straddle boundaries and were counted for each rural recreation boundary they fall in.

As shown in the table above, when comparing U/S hectares to total municipal hectares, 62 per cent of the municipal park hectares are found within the urban/suburban tax boundary with two per cent located in the Musquodoboit Valley and Eastern Shore. These parks tend to have a playground feature and some other amenities. Although the commuter regions along with the Eastern Shore and Musquodoboit Valley areas have access to 84 per cent of provincial park hectares, many of these locations are open spaces with few amenities to support activities.

Local parks offer a reprieve from the busy nature of everyday life and offer a place for rest, rejuvenation and socialization. Rural residents are less able to walk to a park due to the dispersed geography of the rural areas, safety issues associated with the lack of pedestrian and biking infrastructure and other factors.

140
surveys
respondents

explained that simple amenities like providing portable toilets in the summer months, picnic tables or benches and storage would make the outdoor assets more usable for the public

12

community
groups

Residents want to see existing parks, sport fields, sport courts, ball diamonds and playgrounds better maintained to ensure usability. Residents also want to see increased and improved amenities at parks and trails such as increased parking, vault toilets, garbage cans, seating areas, picnic tables, signage, and general maintenance. Groups who use sport fields and ball diamonds would like to have storage facilities on site. Rural residents would also like to see municipal staff and services in local parks more often.

2.1

Continue to update the inventory of all rural parks, park assets, park amenities, inspections, and maintenance. Using this inventory:

- Maintain the publicly accessible Find a Park interactive map on an ongoing basis
- Produce an analysis of the park inventory identifying:
 - High-level strengths and challenges of maintaining existing parks
 - A high-level summary of trends, gaps, risks and lifespan of park assets, amenities, and services for each rural region
 - Reproduce this analysis every five years

2.2

HRM to consider the rural parks inventory analysis (as directed by action 2.1), community engagement, demographic profiles of communities and the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery* when determining recreation service delivery in the rural areas. Use this data to leverage decision making regarding maintenance or replacement of existing parks for future park planning, capital projects and amenities.

2.3

Develop an evaluation framework to determine where new or improved amenities, such as picnic shelters, storage sheds, garbage cans and parking, should be allocated in existing rural parks using future parks usage data, rural recreation programming and the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery*.

2.4

When undertaking a review of the *Washrooms & Drinking Fountains Strategy*, using the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery*, consider the inclusion of vault toilet facilities in rural parks to enhance overall park use and experience.

2.5

Parks & Recreation to consider the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery* to guide future decision making regarding adaptable and accessible recreation equipment and inclusive services.

2.7

Pilot the creation of rural depots for staff use and equipment storage starting in the high priority areas as identified in the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery* to enhance service delivery of parks and trail maintenance.

2.6

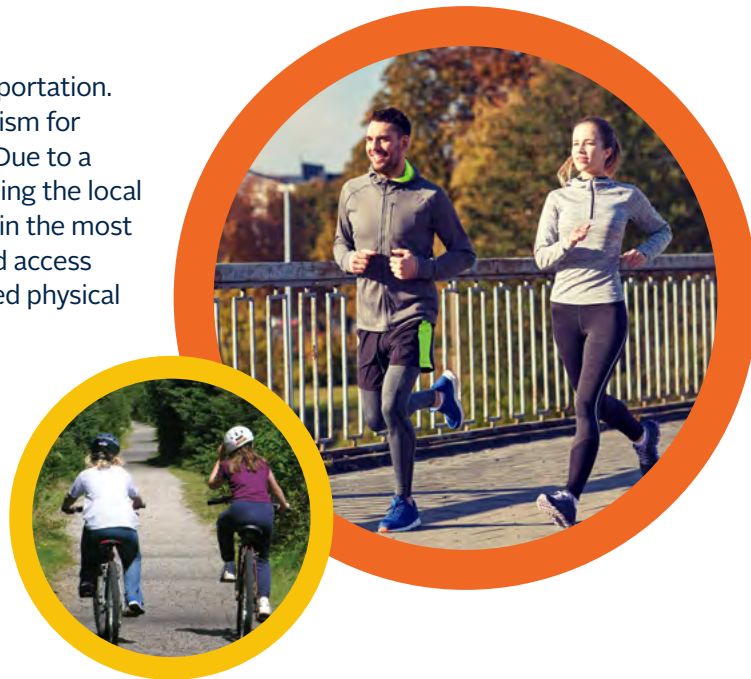
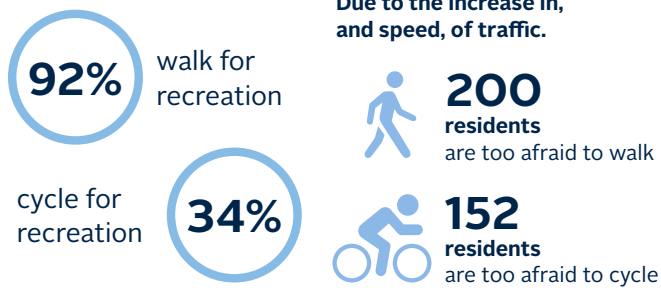
Evaluate the use of community-led parks maintenance in rural communities such as parks partnership agreements.

2.8

Investigate the feasibility of increasing opportunities for safe walking in rural areas in alignment with the Rural AT Framework.

Safe cycling and walking infrastructure

Rural residents rely on roadways for walking and active transportation. Until recently, the municipality has not had a funding mechanism for implementing sidewalks in the rural and suburban tax areas. Due to a lack of sidewalks, most residents expressed feeling unsafe using the local roadways for these activities. This is particularly problematic in the most rural regions of the municipality where there are no or limited access to sidewalks, narrow road shoulders, very few trails and limited physical recreation programs.



2.9

Collaborate with the Active Transportation Planning team regarding safe walking and cycling on rural roads. The Active Transportation Planning team may use the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery* to help inform active transportation investments in rural communities.

Improved access to outdoor aquatic assets

Waterways are also an important part of outdoor rural recreation. Residents use waterways for swimming, boating, skating, and fishing. Safe access to public waterways can be unclear or inadequate. There are five municipal beaches in rural areas, and 8 provincial beach parks, most of which are coastal. The municipality's *Long-Term Aquatic Strategy* states that public access to natural water bodies is a critical part of the provision of aquatics in rural areas. The municipality should ensure access to beaches and other natural water areas are provided and improved for recreational opportunities in the rural areas. Like parks, there is no strategy for locating water access amenities at municipal sites such as vault toilets, docks, picnic tables, changerooms and boat launches. Further, additional programming could take place if waterways could be safely accessed and there were more supervised rural swimming areas.



While all rural regions have water (ocean, lakes, rivers), many of the region's rural communities do not have ideal outdoor swimming locations due to water temperature and dangerous water conditions. There is one public lake (Dollar Lake Provincial Park) which is far from Middle Musquodoboit and beyond, and two boat launches in Musquodoboit Valley, which require upgrades. This is one area that is severely lacking swimming opportunities. There are creative examples of how similar communities across North America provide access to aquatic programming through temporary and/or mobile pools, residential pools and/or spray features. The *Long-Term*

Aquatics Strategy supports the use of smaller-scale neighbourhood splash pads in lower socioeconomic areas if there is access to municipal water. Further investigation of creative solutions is necessary to eliminate barriers to participation at aquatic facilities in rural areas.

2.10

Address the immediate gaps in outdoor aquatic inventory and programming in rural communities with consideration to:

- Using the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery* in tandem with Appendix D's municipal beach evaluation tool of the *Long-Term Aquatics Strategy* to guide decision making as it relates to the potential siting of new supervised beaches
- Establishing swimming lessons and lifeguarding in rural outdoor locations
- Pursue partnering with the province to offer swim lessons at provincial beaches.

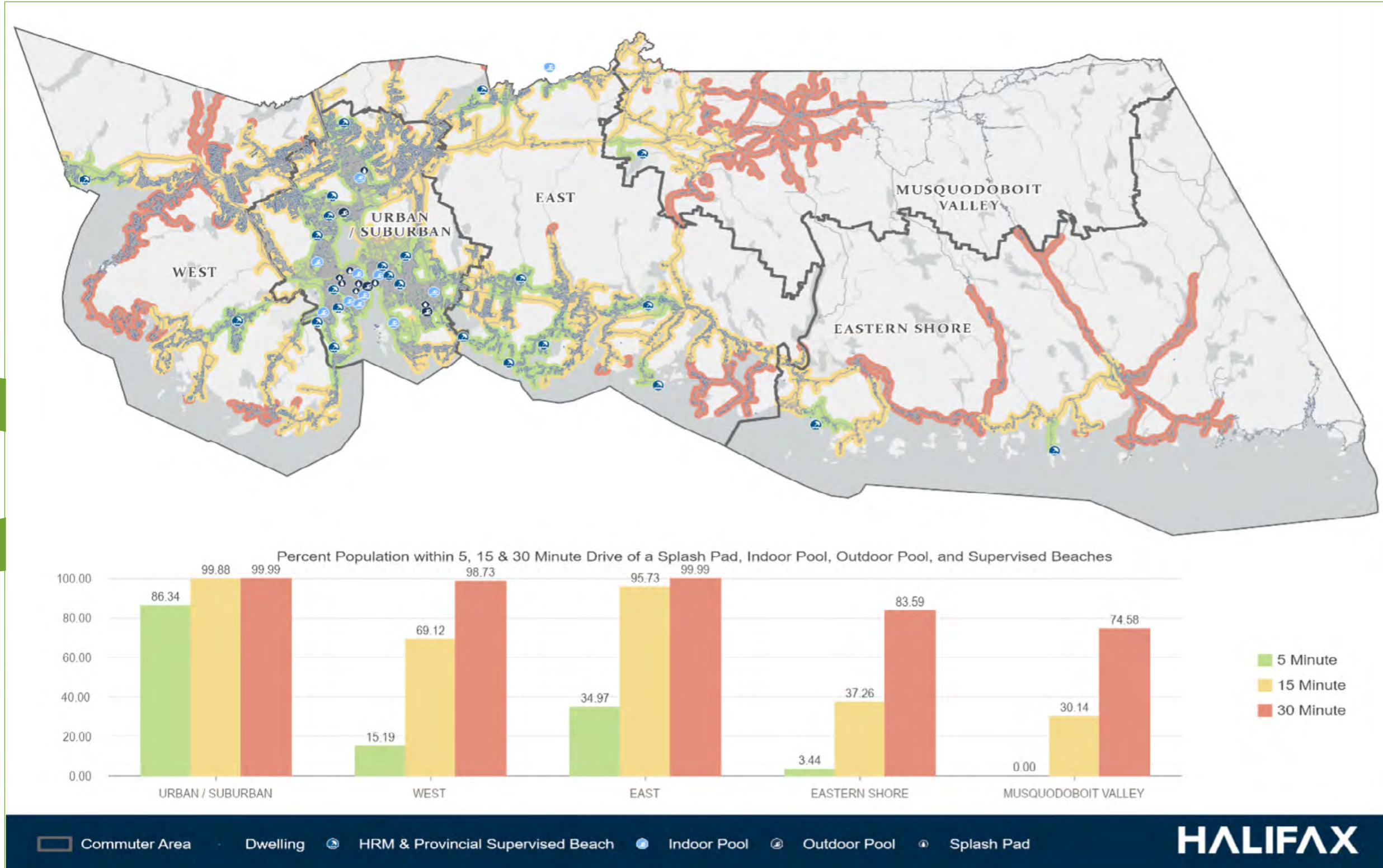
2.11

Continue to provide transportation and free lifeguard training for youth on the Eastern Shore to build the lifeguarding capacity in the area.

2.12

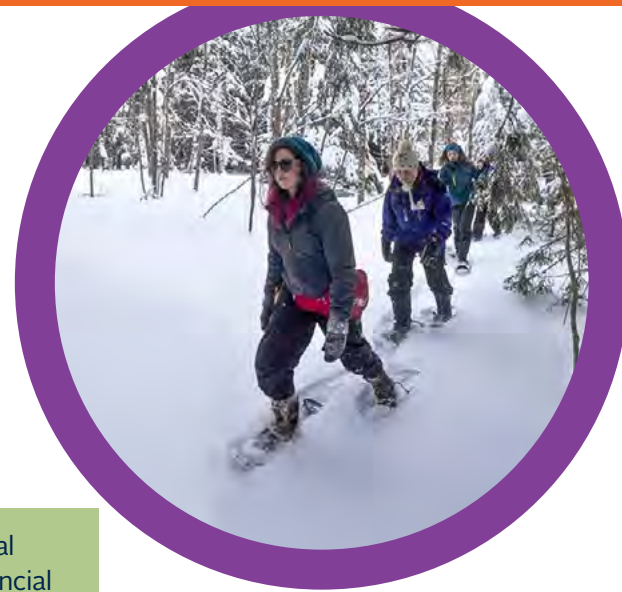
Continue the development of an evaluation framework to determine where new or improved amenities, such as vault toilets, change rooms, docks and boat launches, should be allocated in existing or new water access locations.

HRM Water Access Service Areas



Opportunities for improved access at provincial parks

Provincial parks and wilderness areas are used for a variety of recreation opportunities such as camping, hiking, four wheeling, cycling, fishing, nature viewing and educational programs. Residents indicated, however, that seasonal closures prevent them from recreating year-round, particularly for walking, snowshoeing, and skiing.



2.13

Advocate for the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Renewables to allow access to provincial parks for year-round recreation.

Clarify rules around the access to wilderness areas

Residents from inland areas want equitable public access to natural areas in their communities. This includes trails, parks, beaches, rivers, and lakes. However, residents and staff identified significant untapped wilderness areas (Crown lands and private properties) around the inland communities. Residents find many hikers and campers trespassing on private property due to unclear markings of public Crown lands. Additionally, residents are unsure as to whether they are permitted to use Crown lands for recreational purposes

2.14

Collaborate with the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Renewables to gather and share information on the use of Crown lands for low-impact and environmentally sustainable recreation opportunities.

Theme 3: Volunteer support

As shown in the rural indoor facilities table (page 18), 65 per cent of the publicly available indoor recreation and leisure facilities, including some fire halls, in rural communities can and do operate because of the commitment of community volunteers. In addition, there are over 100 other volunteer-operated leisure and recreation clubs across rural parts of the region who provide programming and events related to culture and heritage, agriculture, philanthropy, outdoor recreation, organized sports, residents' associations, seniors' activities, and environmental protection. Most of these organizations have long and storied histories in providing an important community service to the rural residents. They contribute to the culture and provide opportunities for connection within the communities that they serve.



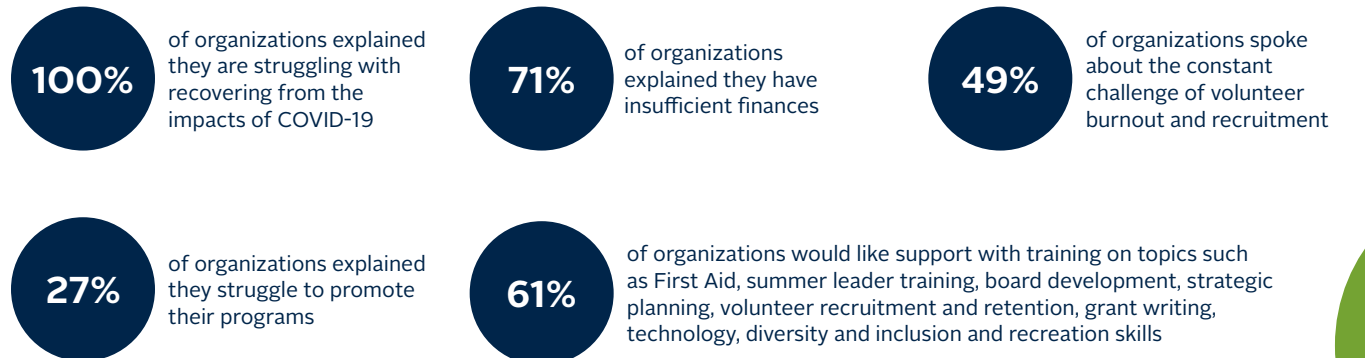
The volunteers of these organizations contribute a significant time commitment to maintaining facilities, engaging communities regarding programming and rentals, fundraising, and recruiting volunteers, while meeting the annual requirements for non-profit registration, including holding annual general meetings, electing directors, and providing annual reports.

These volunteer-based organizations are critical to the provision of leisure and recreation opportunities in the municipality, however, there are many factors affecting their sustainability. This theme aims to address the challenges that volunteer-operated organizations are facing.

Objective: to provide the supports needed for volunteer-based organizations providing recreation opportunities to rural communities to continue to strengthen and thrive.

Board development and training

COVID-19 exacerbated the ongoing sustainability of the organizations operating community facilities. Organizations require support with fundraising, volunteer recruitment, skills training, and outreach.



Municipal staff provide many of the supports that the volunteer groups are looking for, however, uptake of these services has been low. Therefore, it can be assumed that awareness of the services could be improved. There are also some opportunities to expand the existing training and supports.

- 3.1 Consider prioritizing the support of volunteer-operated organizations in the high and medium priority areas identified in the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery* to build capacity that leads to sustainable organizations that rely less on municipal resources.
- 3.2 Create a rural communication strategy to better market services provided by the municipality.
- 3.3 Consider prioritizing requests for training and support from community groups starting with the high priority areas identified in the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery*.
- 3.4 Create an annual catalog of available training opportunities for community-operated facilities and registered not-for-profit recreation organizations.

Decreasing municipal barriers to volunteer-based groups

Volunteer groups aim to provide valuable and creative small-scale and low-risk assets and activities for residents across rural communities. Unfortunately, some groups have difficulty satisfying permit requirements for events and activities on municipal property, which generally require legal agreements and proof of insurance. Although the municipality has taken steps to reduce insurance costs for municipally owned community-operated facilities, there are still situations where resident-based groups are having difficulty without in-house professional guidance or financial capacity. Volunteer groups want to see these barriers reduced or made simpler and less costly. However, this objective needs to be balanced against the municipality's responsibility to limit risk on municipal property.



- 3.5 Review the municipality's processes and procedures to identify opportunities to streamline or simplify permitting processes for volunteer groups proposing low-risk activities or events on municipal property.

- 3.6 Pilot lending community event kits to volunteer groups that lack funding and resources.
- 3.7 Use the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery* when reviewing community event applications.
- 3.8 Continue to support volunteer groups in rural areas throughout the year with logistical and permitting guidance, community events funding and the scheduling of the municipal float program through the Special Events Task Force.

Connecting youth with volunteer-based organizations

The municipality's Youth Services section was simultaneously conducting engagement for the *Youth Services Plan 2* update, when engagement for this strategy was underway. The *Youth Services Plan 2* identified relevant issues for youth, which will be used to support decision making around the delivery of programs and services. It also identified ways of working collectively with community partners. Surveys were received from 236 rural youth. The most prominent theme is that rural youth want opportunities to build leadership, volunteer, and job-readiness skills. Meanwhile, volunteer groups require more volunteers, which could be an excellent opportunity for a mutually beneficial partnership.

- 3.9 Explore opportunities to increase involvement of youth in volunteer opportunities in rural communities.
- 3.10 Support recreation organizations looking to attract youth volunteers with training on how to be youth friendly.
- 3.11 Work with community-operated facilities to create employment and volunteer placement programs for youth.

Theme 4: Programming that meets rural needs

Rural recreation programming is not one size fits all across rural communities. Commuter rural regions tend to want recreation programming like what is offered in the urban core, while impromptu events, drop-ins, workshop-style programs, and outdoors activities are preferred in more remote communities. There are unique challenges in delivering programs in rural communities, especially in the most remote communities with long travel times, fewer facilities, and small population sizes. Addressing these challenges requires a deep understanding of local needs and innovative and creative approaches to ensure there are more equitable recreation opportunities.

Objective: to provide residents with access to a variety of programs and opportunities that meet local needs and interests.

Evidence-based program development

Through consultation, one of the most prominent themes is that rural residents perceive a lack of programs in their communities. While there is a variety of programs in most rural communities, participation numbers can often be low. To increase these numbers, programs should be developed to better meet the interests and needs of each community.

4.1

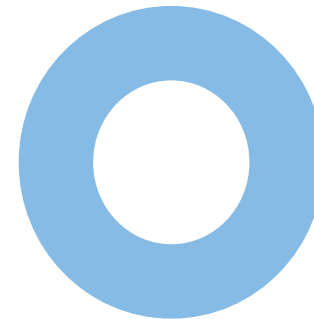
Create and regularly update community profiles for each community recreation service area every four years, using resident engagement, asset mapping, recreation trends, and Statistics Canada population data.

4.2

Hold free or low-cost community based programs in the high priority communities, as noted in the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery*.

4.3

Investigate incorporating the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery* as one of the criteria to be considered when determining the Parks & Recreation operating and capital budgets.



Allow for innovative service delivery

Municipal staff serving rural areas share unique challenges, including:

- Difficulty recruiting instructors for programs and retaining staff due to long travel times.
- Low registration numbers for programs, which may impact ability to continue programs.
- Long travel times for residents to get to facilities.

4.4

Continue to implement virtual municipal fitness classes where residents can participate as a group at local halls or individually from their homes

4.5

Create a rural instructor recruitment strategic plan, including:

- Building the capacity of rural residents to lead programs that meet the recreation demands of specific communities.
- Building an incentive program which would take into consideration the cost of mileage and travel time.
- Using contract instructors where necessary.

4.6

Assist staff in leading the implementation of the *Rural Recreation Strategy* action items.

4.7

Increase the Youth Section presence in the rural areas.

Residents demonstrated that outdoor activity is an integral part of their active lifestyles, but more servicing and programming of these assets would help residents take full advantage of the municipality's outdoor assets. Residents are looking for equipment-lending opportunities and more outdoor programming.

4.8 Explore expanding structured recreation programming and events in public parks and wilderness areas.

4.9 Operate the Recreation Van year-round in the most remote communities to provide programming and equipment.

4.10 Expand the equipment inventory of rural-oriented activities such as camping, fishing, Nordic poles, snowshoes, adaptive equipment, and play boxes.

4.11 Consider a pilot equipment-lending program for items like paddle boards, wet suits, small boats, and adaptive equipment through partnerships or vendor contracts at different water-access parks throughout rural communities.

Coordinate with partners on recreation offerings

There are many existing recreation service providers across rural parts of the region. Using the asset-based community development approach, the municipality does not need to duplicate existing services. Based on stakeholder feedback, there are many feasible opportunities to support and coordinate with these service providers. This would ultimately expand the recreation and leisure offerings available for rural residents.

4.12 Establish a Regional Round Table Committee of rural-based municipal staff as well as representatives from community-operated facilities and other community recreation groups and organizations. The group would meet quarterly to discuss and collaborate on forthcoming plans and programs affecting recreation opportunities in the rural areas of the region to enhance recreation program delivery and to avoid duplication or competition.



Theme 5: Interdepartmental and inter-governmental partnerships

There are 17 key internal and external governmental departments or agencies, some of which are arms-length, that significantly impact the provision of recreation opportunities in rural communities. These are:

Internal

- Parks & Recreation
- Corporate Communications
- Diversity & Inclusion
- Finance
- Planning & Development
- Property, Fleet & Environment
- Public Works
- Halifax Fire and Emergency Management
- Legal and Legislative Services
- Halifax Public Libraries

External

- Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE)
- Department of Natural Resources and Renewables
- Provincial Community Health Boards and Community Health Teams representing rural areas of the municipality
- Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH)
- Build Nova Scotia
- Municipal Physical Activity Leadership Program
- Discover Halifax

Many of these departments/agencies support and impact programmed, self-directed, or spontaneous recreation opportunities, and/or support not-for-profits and volunteer-based groups who provide recreation opportunities.

Objective: to provide assets and programming related to recreation in collaboration and coordination with other government entities.

Collaborative and strategic approach to reviewing service delivery

An opportunity exists for the municipality to better understand how and where spending has historically occurred in the delivery of rural recreation. A thorough review of previous budgets, work orders, participation numbers, programming, and other service indicators back to 2015 would provide an analysis of the level of service delivery in the rural regions. This analysis will inform future consideration of additional funding for implementation of the *Rural Recreation Strategy*.

5.1

Complete a more detailed review of Parks & Recreation's historical level of service delivery cost to provide service across all regions of the municipality back to 2015. Examine if the four rural regions are being provided equitable service delivery compared to each other and the urban and suburban regions through an analysis of the proportions of population to amenities as well the existing level of service to the high priority communities as outlined in the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery*. This analysis should include a review of all relevant service delivery indicators such as previous budgets, work orders, participation numbers, and programming.

Increase collaboration with governmental partners

The governmental and arms-length organizations interviewed agreed that regular planning meetings would be beneficial. It would be helpful for organizations to know what the municipality is planning so that they can determine how to successfully collaborate. For example, staff heard that:

- Nova Scotia Health teams would be interested in using municipal facilities to offer their programs.
- Halifax Public Libraries suggested that they may have more capacity to share their facilities and resources.
- Communities, Culture, Heritage, and Tourism (CCTH) would like to see the municipality use Nova Scotia Connect (a community recreation database for all of Nova Scotia).
- CCTH identified benefits to the municipality adopting the Municipal Physical Activity Leader (MPAL) program with a focus on the most rural regions of the municipality. They would assist the municipality to increase and promote self-directed physical activity.

5.2

Bring together staff from Active Transportation Planning, Corporate Facility Design & Construction, Regional Recreation, Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, Nova Scotia Health, Public Libraries, Department of Lands and Forestry, the Natural Resources Education Centre, and the Community Health boards and teams to create a biannual planning meeting to discuss and collaborate on forthcoming plans and programs affecting recreation opportunities in the rural areas of the region. Recommend attendance from advisors from Diversity & Inclusion, Planning & Development, Finance, Public Works, Corporate Communications, Discover Halifax, and Municipal Physical Activity Leadership Program when relevant topics arise.

5.3

Establish a Rural Recreation Advisory Committee of internal relevant staff to ensure regular alignment with the RRS.

The municipality will investigate the feasibility of a partnership with the province to participate in the recreation database called Nova Scotia Connect. Joining Nova Scotia Connect could support tourism and thus economic development, as all recreational opportunities in the region will be easy to find and navigate.

5.4

Consider entering into an agreement with the province to participate in Nova Scotia Connect to provide information on active living and recreation opportunities across Nova Scotia.

Theme 6: Advertising and communications that reflect rural communities

Communications for municipal recreation programming and services tend to have a greater prevalence of municipally run recreation opportunities in the urban core. Further, branding, imagery, photography and communication styles predominately reflect urban culture that rural residents may not relate to. As well, Corporate Communications relies heavily on digital platforms and some rural communities across the municipality do not have the infrastructure for reliable or high-speed internet, which is required to view digital communications

Objective: to reflect the culture and communication needs of rural communities in the municipality's marketing materials and communication strategies.

Reflect rural culture in communications

Residents want advertising for rural recreation to reflect the communities in which they live. Showing images of local places and people would invoke more interest in the municipality's programs and services. The increased enrollment in municipal recreation programs and services depends on impactful advertising that meets the clients' needs. Currently, rural residents expressed that they don't feel connected with the municipality's corporate standards for branding and the platform choice, and they are often unaware of the programs and services available in their communities. Surveyed adults want to see recreation activities promoted on local and community social media platforms. Second to Facebook, adults want to be able to use straightforward websites that list all the activities happening in their communities. Email lists are also a popular choice for receiving recreation promotions and information.

To be effective, communications to rural residents must be tailored to reflect the rural communities and residents that live, work, and enjoy the area. This includes recognizing and celebrating the unique characteristics of rural communities, as well as considering the communication opportunities and challenges that exist within a rural environment, such as the need for print communications due to unreliable internet access or for hyper-localized promotion for programs that exist only within specific rural areas.



Fall recreation programs in Musquodoboit Valley

SATURDAY MORNING ACTIVE
A mix of games, crafts, and sporting activities. This is a free drop-in program with no registration required.
When: Saturdays from 9:10-10:30 a.m. starting Oct. 29, 2022.
Where: Musquodoboit Valley Education Centre
Who: Ages 6-11

BEGINNER YOGA
When: Thursdays from 6:7 p.m. starting Nov. 3, 2022.
Where: Musquodoboit Valley Education Centre
Who: Ages 13+
Registration Code: 00062524
Cost: \$35.20 for five sessions

RECREATIONAL SOCCER
A little bit of skill development and a whole lot of fun!
When: Saturdays from 10:30-11:30 a.m. starting Oct. 29, 2022.
Where: Musquodoboit Valley Education Centre
Who: Ages 5-8
Registration Code: 00029592
Cost: \$30.00 for eight sessions

WALK ABOUT
Enjoy walking indoors as the weather gets cold and dark. Indoor sneakers required.
When: Mondays and Thursdays from 4:30-6 p.m.
Where: Musquodoboit Valley Education Centre

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PROGRAMS AND REGISTER BY VISITING:
halifax.ca/myREC or calling 902.384.3008

5 | Implementation and monitoring (IMP-MON)

6.1 Develop a rural communications strategy that reflects the municipality's unique rural communities, local culture and communication preferences and needs, including:

- Current evidence and best practices on communicating with rural communities.
- Strategic communications approaches tailored to rural communities.
- Guidelines on imagery, language, tactics, and tools for rural audiences.
- An action plan to operationalize the strategy, including new processes, protocols, budget, and resources.
- An evaluation plan to measure the success of the strategy.

6.2 Partner with Discover Halifax to add all municipal recreation facilities, community-operated halls and centres and municipal parks to their *Things to Do* page with a prominent link on halifax.ca.

6.3 Create and maintain an up-to-date listing of community and board-operated facilities' contact and location information on the halifax.ca website.



Reduce barriers to information

Consultation has demonstrated internet and data access are still not readily available in remote regions of the municipality. Build Nova Scotia is working towards bringing reliable, high-speed internet access to rural communities by 2023. While this will positively impact the reachability of communications to rural residents, it cannot be assumed that all residents will use it. Furthermore, youth want to find information on posters in their schools. Direct mail, print and in-person communications are still important in rural areas of the region.

6.4 Continue the use of print and other non-web-based communication methods when advertising Parks & Recreation programming, services, community engagements, and events, especially in communities lacking internet access.

6.5 Work collaboratively with HRCE and principals to facilitate the communication of recreation opportunities within the rural schools.

IMP-MON Action one: Staff will present a progress report to Regional Council within three years of the implementation of the strategy. Another rural recreation strategy survey will be conducted with rural residents to evaluate the strategy's impact and provide information for the Regional Council progress report

IMP-MON Action two: As new census data are released, staff will review and adjust which areas are considered high, medium, and low priority based on the proportion of low-income households and travel times, as currently demonstrated in the *Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery*. The municipal citizen survey data can be taken into consideration when revisiting the classification of high-, medium-, and low-priority communities experiencing economic and distance barriers.

The following tables organize each action by theme and includes the business unit and timeframe assigned to each action.

Theme 1: Equitable access to indoor facilities			
	Sub-Theme	Actions	Timeframe
Objective: To make indoor recreation facilities available to all rural residents regardless of location, population, or socio-economic factors.	Municipally operated	1.1 Continue to implement Regional Council's direction related to the Eastern Shore Lifestyles Centre.	0-1 years
	Board operated	1.2 Determine the future use of the Hubbards Area Recreation Centre facility.	2-3 years
		1.3 Update the Facility Condition Index evaluations for the 14 rural municipally owned and board-operated facilities.	2-3 years
		1.4 Require municipally owned and board-operated facilities to collect rental and participant usage data on an annual basis to leverage funding and other supports.	0-1 year
		1.5 Develop user-friendly facility evaluation toolkits to assist in collecting information needed for funding and grant applications, such as participation rates, program offerings, state of good repair, future plans and financial statements. Provide educational training to municipal owned and board-operated facilities on how to use the facility evaluation toolkit.	0-1 year

Objective: Access to indoor recreation services and assets will be available to all rural residents regardless of location, population, or socio-economic factors.	Community operated	1.6 Encourage and support community-operated facilities to collect rental and participant usage data on an annual basis to leverage funding and other supports. Develop user-friendly facility evaluation toolkits to assist in collecting information needed for funding and grant applications, such as participation rates, program offerings, state of good repair, future plans and financial statements. Provide educational training to community-owned facilities on how to use the facility evaluation toolkit.	0-1 year
		1.7 Develop future Parks & Recreation strategies that consider the value of not-for-profit community-operated facilities as assets in the delivery of rural recreation.	0-1 year
	Municipal corporate grants	1.8 Conduct an interdepartmental analysis of current grant programs and identify funding gaps, including grants, tax relief and less-than-market-value leases for not-for-profit societies operating community centres, halls and recreation societies. Start with the high priority communities identified in the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> .	2-3 years
	Schools	1.9 Engage with HRCE on how to improve HRM's community access to HRCE schools in the most rural areas to provide better community access to gymnasiums for evening, weekend and summer use.	0-1 year
		1.10 Establish relationships with local school principals and custodians in order to collaborate on the use of schools for rural community recreation programming.	0-1 year
		1.11 Investigate the possibility of creating an after-hours Building Monitor Program in collaboration with HRCE.	0-1 year
		1.12 Recognizing the unique circumstances of rural communities, explore opportunities for repurposing existing indoor spaces in the most underserved areas to better meet the recreation space needs for additional programming and improved service delivery. Consider partnering with related service providers.	0-1 year
	Communities with the greatest barriers to accessing indoor facilities	1.13 Consider opportunities to maximize the use of the current Parks & Recreation 15-seater bus to support residents of all ages in accessing recreation opportunities, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor pools • Indoor ice surfaces • Purpose-built recreation and fitness facilities 	2-3 years
		1.14 Explore additional transportation options to meet the needs of rural residents.	0-1 year

Theme 2: Access to outdoor recreation opportunities			
	Sub-theme	Actions	Timeframe
Objective: To provide functional, safe, accessible, programmable, and clearly identified access to the variety of outdoor recreation assets throughout rural communities.	Updated systematic approaches to park decision making	2.1 Continue to update the inventory of all rural parks, park assets, park amenities, inspections and maintenance. Using this inventory: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the publicly accessible Find a Park interactive map on an ongoing basis • Produce an analysis of the park inventory identifying: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ High-level strengths and challenges of maintaining existing parks ◦ A high-level summary of trends, gaps, risks and lifespan of park assets, amenities and services per rural region ◦ Reproduce this analysis every five years 	0-1 year
		2.2 HRM to consider the rural parks inventory analysis (as directed by action 2.1), community engagement, demographic profiles of communities and the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> when determining recreation service delivery in the rural areas. Use this data to leverage decision making regarding maintenance or replacement of existing parks, future park planning, capital projects and amenities.	2-3 years
		2.3 Develop an evaluation framework to determine where new or improved amenities such as picnic shelters, storage sheds, garbage cans and parking, should be allocated in existing rural parks, using future parks usage data, rural recreation programming and the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> .	2-3 years
		2.4 When undertaking a review of the <i>Washrooms & Drinking Fountains Strategy</i> , using the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> , consider the inclusion of vault toilet facilities in rural parks to enhance overall park use and experience.	2-3 years
		2.5 Parks & Recreation to consider the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> to guide future decision making regarding adaptable and accessible recreation equipment and inclusive services	0-1 year
		2.6 Evaluate the use of community-led parks maintenance in rural areas such as parks partnership agreements.	2-3 years
		2.7 Pilot the creation of rural depots for staff use and equipment storage starting in the high priority areas as identified in the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> to enhance service delivery of parks and trail maintenance.	2-3 years
		2.8 Investigate the feasibility of increasing opportunities for safe walking in rural areas	0-1 year
		Safe cycling and walking infrastructure	2.9 Collaborate with the Active Transportation Planning team regarding safe walking and cycling on rural roads. The Active Transportation Planning team may use the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> to help inform active transportation investments in rural communities.



Objective: To provide functional, safe, accessible, programmable and clearly identified access to the variety of outdoor recreation assets throughout rural communities.	Improved access to outdoor aquatic assets	2.10 Address the immediate gaps in outdoor aquatic inventory and programming in rural communities with consideration to:	2-3 years
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> in tandem with Appendix D's municipal beach evaluation tool of the <i>Long-Term Aquatics Strategy</i> to guide decision making as it relates to the potential siting of new supervised beaches. 	0-1 year
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing swimming lessons and lifeguards in rural outdoor locations. 	0-1 year
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue partnering with the province to offer swim lessons at provincial beaches. 	0-1 year
		2.11 Continue to provide transportation and free lifeguard training for youth on the Eastern Shore to build the lifeguarding capacity in the area.	Ongoing
		2.12 Continue the development of an evaluation framework to determine where new or improved amenities, such as vault toilets, change rooms, docks and boat launches, should be allocated in existing or new water access locations,	2-3 years
	Opportunities for improved access at provincial parks	2.13 Advocate for the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Renewables to allow access to provincial parks for year-round recreation.	0-1 year
Clarify rules and access to wilderness areas	2.14 Collaborate with the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Renewables to gather and share information on the use of Crown lands for low-impact and environmentally sustainable recreation opportunities.	2-3 years	

Theme 3: Volunteer support			
	Sub-theme	Actions	Timeframe
Objective: To provide the supports needs for volunteer-based organizations providing recreation opportunities to rural communities to continue to strengthen and thrive.	Board development and training	3.1 Consider prioritizing the support of volunteer-operated organizations in the high and medium priority areas identified in the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> to build capacity that leads to sustainable organizations that rely less on municipal resources.	0-1 year
		3.2 Create a rural communication strategy to better market services provided by HRM.	0-1 year
		3.3 Consider prioritizing requests for training and support from community groups starting with the high priority areas identified in the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> .	0-1 year
		3.4 Create an annual catalog of available training opportunities for community-operated facilities and registered not-for-profit recreation organizations.	0-1 year
	Decreasing municipal barriers to volunteer-based groups	3.5 Review the municipality's processes and procedures to identify opportunities to streamline or simplify permitting processes for volunteer groups proposing low-risk activities or events on municipal property.	0-1 year
		3.6 Pilot lending community event kits to volunteer groups that lack funding and resources.	0-1 year
		3.7 Use the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> when reviewing community event applications.	Implemented
	Connecting youth with volunteer-based organizations	3.8 Continue to support volunteer groups in rural areas throughout the year with logistical and permitting guidance, community events funding and the scheduling of the municipal float program through the Special Events Task Force.	0-1 year
		3.9 Explore opportunities to increase involvement of youth in volunteer opportunities in rural communities.	0-1 year
		3.10 Support recreation organizations looking to attract youth volunteers with training on how to be youth friendly.	2-3 years
		3.11 Work with community-operated facilities to create employment and volunteer placement programs for youth.	2-3 years



Theme 4: Programming that meets rural needs			
	Sub-theme	Actions	Timeframe
Objective: To provide residents with access to a wide variety of programs and opportunities that meet local needs and interests	Evidence-based program development	4.1 Create and regularly update community profiles for each community recreation service area every four years, using resident engagement, asset mapping, recreation trends and Statistics Canada population data.	0-1 year
		4.2 Hold free or low-cost community-based programs in the high priority communities, as noted in the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> .	0-1 year
		4.3 Investigate incorporating the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> as one of the criteria to be considered when determining the Parks & Recreation operating and capital budgets.	2-3 years
	Allow for innovative service delivery	4.4 Continue to implement virtual municipal fitness classes where residents can participate as a group at local halls or individually from their homes.	Ongoing
		4.5 Create a rural instructor recruitment strategic plan, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building the capacity of rural residents to lead programs that meet the recreation demands of specific communities. • Building an incentive program which would take into consideration the cost of mileage and travel time. • Using contract instructors where necessary. 	0-1 year
		4.6 Assist staff in leading the implementation of the <i>Rural Recreation Strategy</i> action items.	0-1 year
		4.7 Increase the Youth Section presence in the rural areas.	2-3 years
		4.8 Explore expanding structured recreation programming and events in public parks and wilderness areas.	0-1 year
		4.9 Operate the Recreation Van year-round in the most remote communities to provide programming and equipment.	2-3 years
		4.10 Expand the equipment inventory of rural-oriented activities such as camping, fishing, Nordic poles, snowshoes, adaptive equipment and play boxes.	2-3 years
		4.11 Consider a pilot equipment-lending program for items like paddle boards, wet suits, small boats and adaptive equipment through partnerships or vendor contracts at different water-access parks throughout rural communities.	2-3 years
		4.12 Establish a Regional Round Table Committee of rural-based HRM staff, as well as representatives from community-operated facilities and other community recreation groups and organizations. The group would meet quarterly to discuss and collaborate on forthcoming plans and programs affecting recreation opportunities in the rural areas of the region to enhance recreation program delivery and to avoid duplication or competition.	0-1 year
Coordinate with partners on recreation offerings			

Theme 5: Interdepartmental and inter-governmental partnerships			
	Sub-theme	Actions	Timeframe
Objective: To provide assets and programming related to recreation in collaboration and coordination with other government.	Increase collaboration with governmental partners	5.1 Complete a more detailed review of Parks & Recreation's historical level of service delivery cost to provide service across all regions of the municipality back to 2015. Examine if the four rural regions are being provided equitable service delivery compared to each other and the urban and suburban regions through an analysis of the proportions of population to amenities as well the existing level of service to the high priority communities as outlined in the <i>Rural Lens for Recreation Service Delivery</i> . This analysis should include a review of all relevant service delivery indicators such as previous budgets, work orders, participation numbers and programming.	0-1 year
		5.2 Work with staff from Active Transportation Planning, Corporate Facility Design & Construction, Regional Recreation, Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, Nova Scotia Health, Halifax Public Libraries, Department of Lands and Forestry, the Natural Resources Education Centre and the Community Health boards to create a biannual planning meeting to discuss and collaborate on forthcoming plans and programs affecting recreation opportunities in the rural areas of the region. Recommend attendance from advisors from Diversity & Inclusion, Planning & Development, Finance, Public Works, Corporate Communications, Discover Halifax and the Municipal Physical Activity Leadership Program when relevant topics arise.	0-1 year
		5.3 Establish a Rural Recreation Advisory Committee of internal relevant staff, to ensure regular alignment with the RRS.	0-1 year
		5.4 Consider entering into an agreement with the province to participate in Nova Scotia Connect to provide information on active living and recreation opportunities across Nova Scotia.	3-5 years



Theme 6: Advertising and communications that reflect rural communities			
	Sub-theme	Actions	Timeframe
Objective: To reflect the culture and communication needs of rural communities in the municipality's marketing materials and communication strategies.	Reflect rural culture in communications and promotions	6.1 Develop a rural communications strategy that reflects the municipality's unique rural communities, local culture and communication preferences and needs, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current evidence and best practices on communicating with rural communities. • Strategic communications approaches tailored to rural communities. • Guidelines on imagery, language, tactics and tools for rural audiences. • An action plan to operationalize the strategy, including new processes, protocols, budget and resources. • An evaluation plan to measure the success of the strategy. 	0-1 year
		6.2 Partner with Discover Halifax to add all municipal recreation facilities, community-operated halls and centres, and municipal parks to their Things to Do page with a prominent link on halifax.ca.	0-1 year
		6.3 Create and maintain an up-to-date listing of community and board-operated facilities' contact and location information on the halifax.ca website.	0-1 year
	Reduce barriers to information access	6.4 Continue the use of print and other non-web-based communication methods when advertising Parks & Recreation programming, services, community engagements and events, especially in communities lacking internet access.	0-1 year
		6.5 Work collaboratively with HRCE and principals to facilitate the communication of recreation opportunities within the rural schools.	0-1 year

Appendix A: access to Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) schools

The municipality's Parks & Recreation division and community access to HRCE School facilities is provided in accordance with the *Service Exchange Agreement (SEA)* between the municipality and HRCE. The SEA was approved by Council on July 17, 2018, and covers a 10-year term, however, there is opportunity for both parties to make amendments to the agreement through a formalized process.

The SEA sets out a detailed process and allocation parameters on how Parks & Recreation will be provided access to most schools across the Halifax Regional Municipality, including those within rural communities. Level of access to HRCE schools is dependent upon several factors, including custodial schedules for each facility, the time of year and type of school (grade level) being requested. Recreation programs are scheduled anywhere from eight- to 12-week blocks between September and June, depending upon the season. Summers are per-week bookings in July and/or August.

Custodial

Each year, the HRCE provides the municipality with a detailed schedule of its intended custodial assignments for each school by June 1, indicating the dates and times when custodians and door monitors will be present during the upcoming school year. Most schools have custodial coverage during weekday evenings and some on weekends, however, many smaller schools are only staffed during school hours and are not available or have limited access for municipal recreation or community use.

Current access to HRCE schools

Designated Saturday access

HRM submits an annual request for their preferred schools to HRCE to provide the municipality, at no cost, with exclusive access to six schools on Saturdays, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., from September 1 to June 30.

HRM staff continue to inquire about Saturday access to Dutch Settlement, Shatford Memorial, Sambro Elementary, Harrietsfield, and Eastern Shore schools, but HRCE has not been able to provide access. If the HRCE was amenable to allowing the municipality to use nine schools on Saturdays for four hours versus six schools at eight hours, it would equate to fewer overall hours and would help to better serve those in rural communities.

March Break access

During March Break, municipal recreation is provided, at no cost, with access to four schools from 8:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.

Summer access

From the first Monday in July to the Friday at the end of the second full week in August, the HRCE provides exclusive access to 12 (up to a possible 13) schools, from 8:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Elementary, Junior High, and P-9 schools

During the school year, municipal recreation is provided access, at no cost, from 6 - 10 p.m., Monday to Friday, from September 1 to June 30. Access is also provided 8:30 a.m. - 8 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, although there would be an associated cost unless designated as a Saturday access school. Elementary and Junior High schools can designate up to 18 dates for evening and weekend usage for school events. The municipality only pays for custodial services if one is not already scheduled to be on site

High Schools

During the school year, the HRCE provides the municipality with access at no cost, from 6 - 10 p.m., to gymnasiums on Fridays, and non-gymnasium access, Monday to Friday, from September 1 to June 30. As part of the SEA agreement, access is provided 8:30 a.m. - 8 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, although there is an associated cost unless designated as a Saturday access school. High schools have first right of refusal to book their gymnasiums for school events on weekends provided they provide the municipality with notice and details of their specific requirements no later than June 1. High schools have more activities and sports which require greater use of the gymnasiums when compared with elementary or junior high schools.

Having access to Marine Drive and/or Bayview High schools on Saturdays and Sundays would assist Parks & Recreation to expand its programming, however, currently these schools are not available. If HRM Recreation requests to use the above-mentioned schools and they are above the six schools provided at no cost (SEA agreement), HRM would be required to pay for the use of the schools (gymnasiums) and this would be cost prohibitive.

High schools in rural communities typically do not use the gymnasium during their Monday to Thursday designated weekdays. In these situations, Parks & Recreation/community may, through a collaborative approach, gain permission from HRCE to access the facilities on unused weekday evenings.



Of the 29 schools available to the municipality, all schools are available for use, with the exception of the French school (not HRCE) and one that is a Joint Use Agreement programmed by an FOA, for a total of 27 schools.

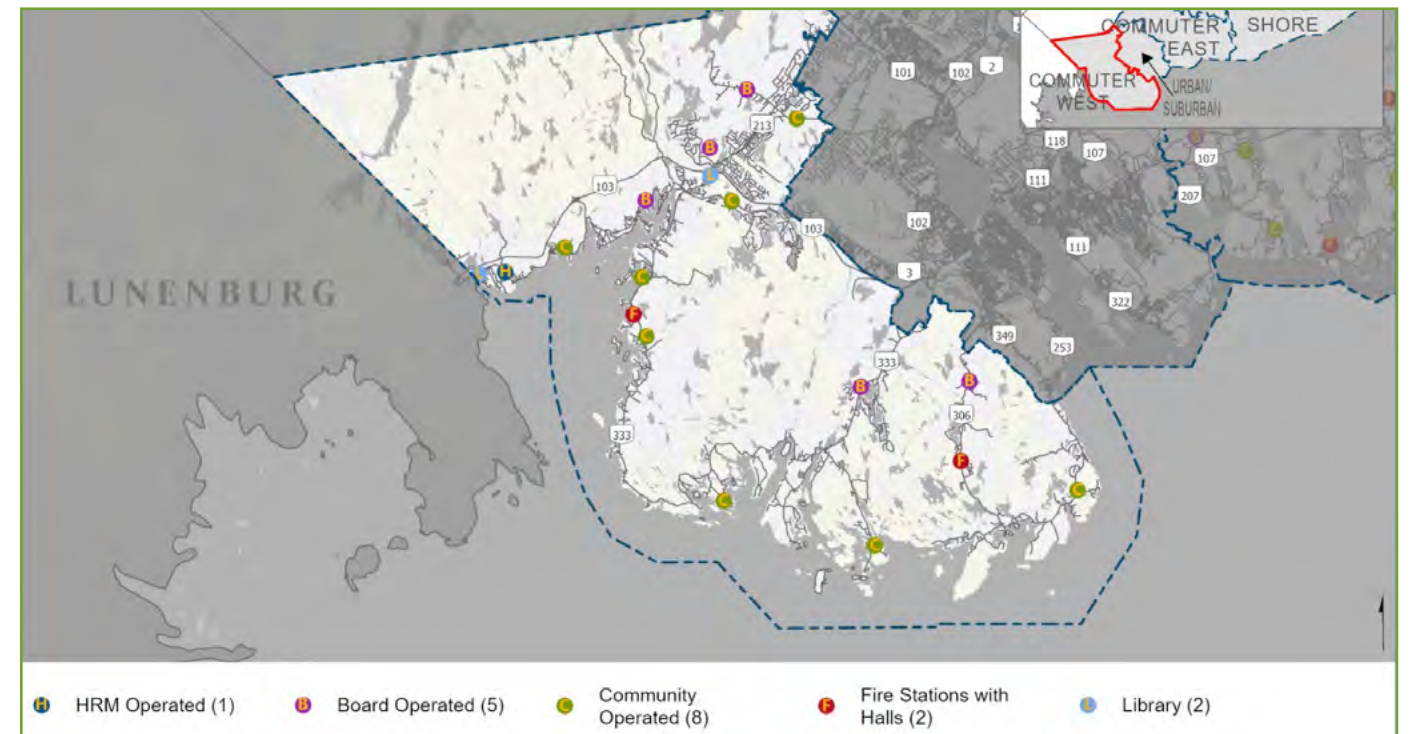
- 18 of 27 HRCE schools (66 per cent) are not used for recreation programming
- Four of 27 schools (14.8 per cent) have 1 to 1.5 hrs/week of access
- Two of 27 schools (7.4 per cent) have 3.5 hrs/week of access
- Two of 27 schools (7.4 per cent) have 4.5-6 hrs/week of access
- Five of 27 schools (18.5 per cent) have summer access, Monday to Friday, 30 to 40 hrs./week, various number of weeks

In the Musquodoboit Valley and Eastern Shore, the only option for accessing larger infrastructure resources (for use of gymnasiums, cafeterias and classrooms) is within the schools.

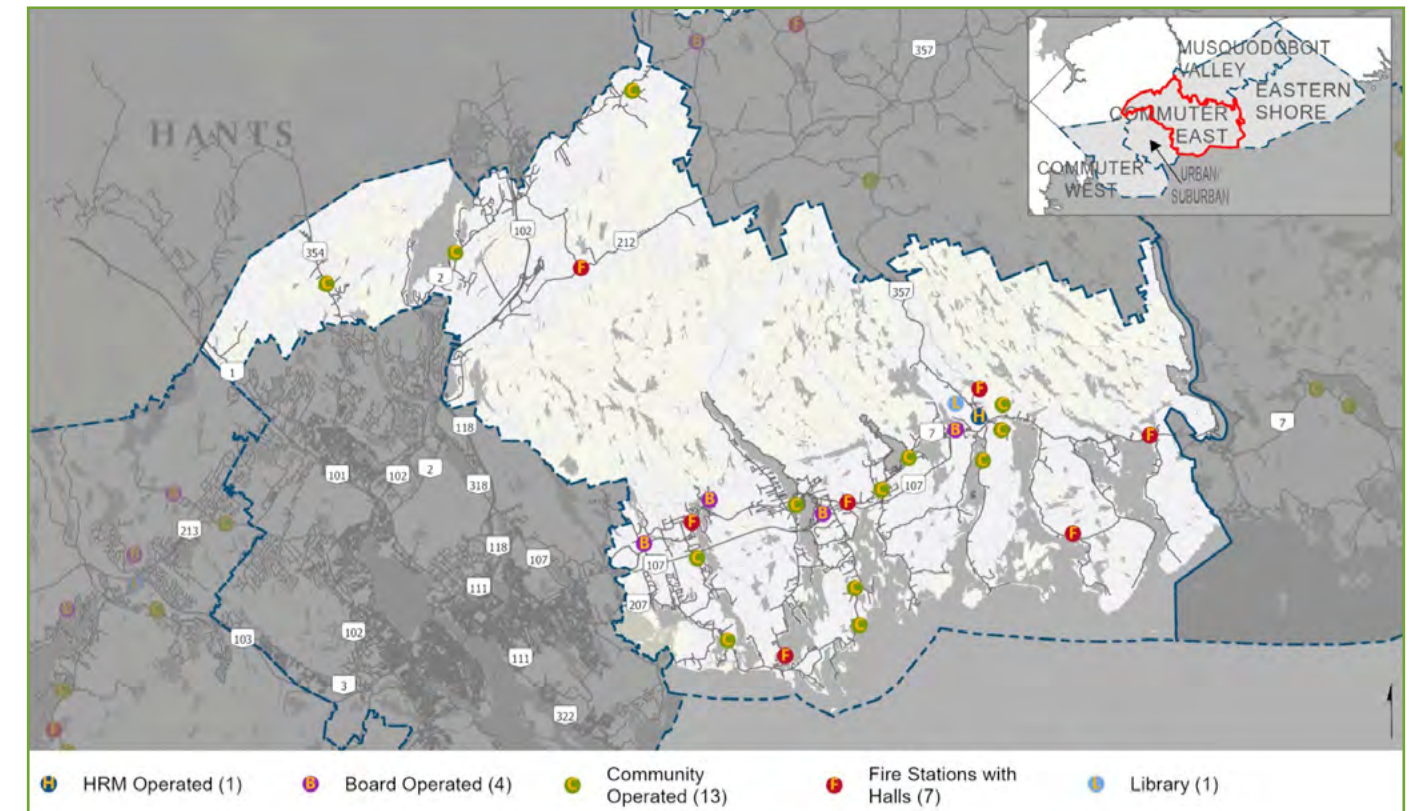


Appendix B: rural regions indoor facilities maps

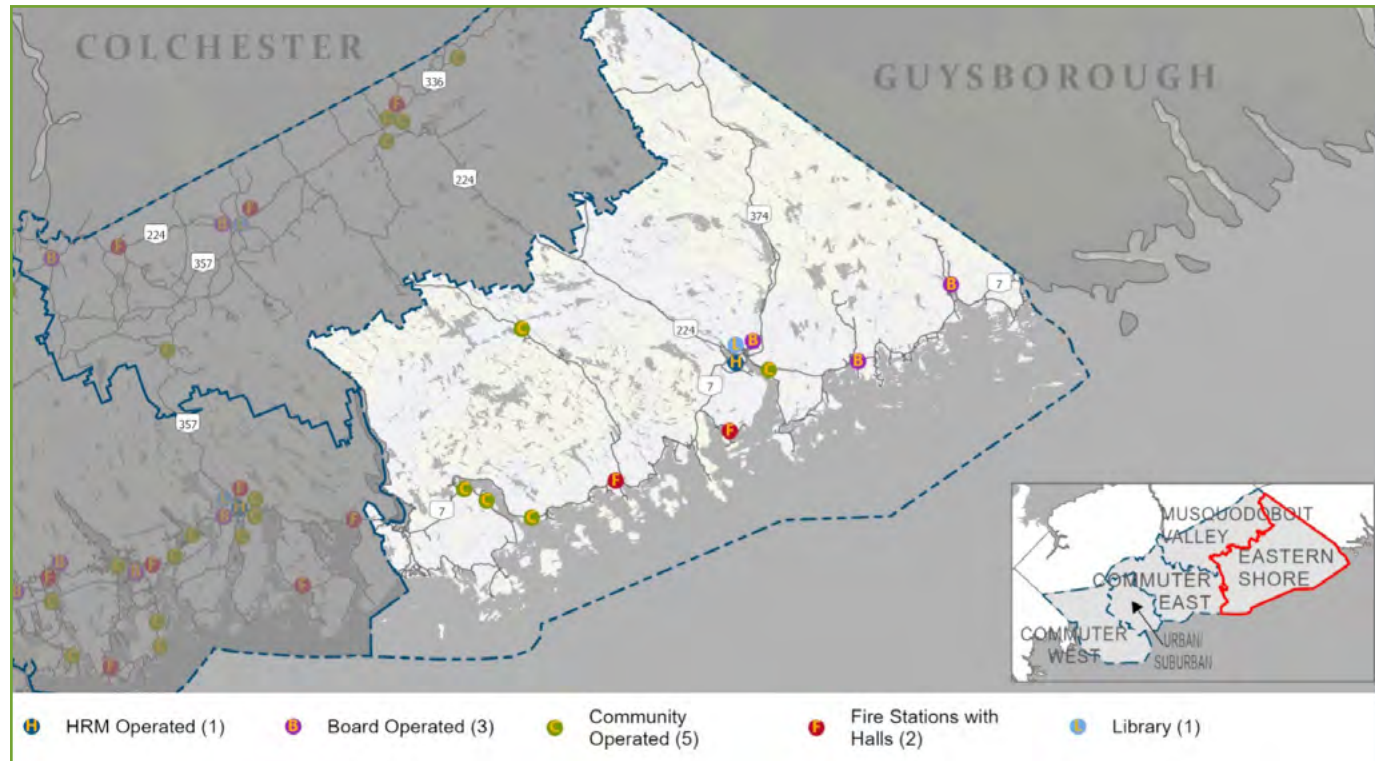
Rural recreation facilities | Commuter West



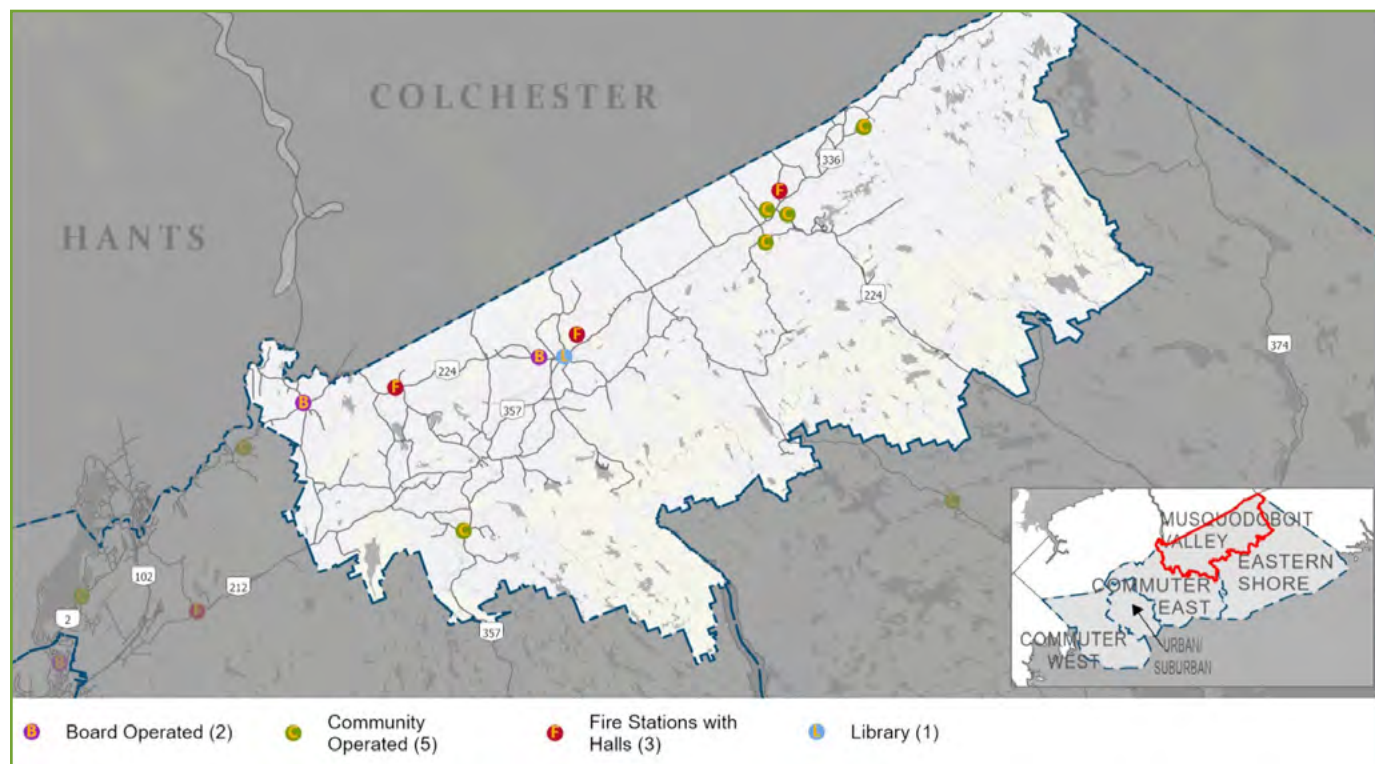
Rural recreation facilities | Commuter East



Rural recreation facilities | Eastern Shore



Rural recreation facilities | Muquodoboit Valley



Appendix C: Relevant municipal and provincial plans and strategies reviewed

- *The Path We Share: A Natural Resources Strategy for Nova Scotia 2011–2020*
- *Our Parks and Protected Areas*
- *Shared Strategy for Recreation in NS*
- *Shared Strategy for Trails in Nova Scotia: A Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015 – Pathways to Wellbeing*
- *Develop NS Internet for Nova Scotia Initiative*
- *The Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*
- *Halifax Regional Municipality Planning Strategy and Regional Subdivision By-law and Themes and Directions Report Rural Paper*
- *Community Facilities Master Plan 2*
- *Long-term Aquatic Strategy*
- *Regional Mountain Biking Strategy*
- *Recreation Fee Review – By-law and Administrative Order*
- *Playing Field Strategy*
- *Parks Washroom and Drinking Fountain Strategy*
- *Halifax Green Network Plan*
- *Integrated Mobility Plan*
- *People. Planet. Prosperity - Halifax's Inclusive Economic Strategy*
- *Rural AT Plan*
- *Making Connections (AT)*
- *HalifACT 2050: Acting on Climate Together*
- *Sharing our Stories: Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan (in development)*
- *Public Safety Strategy*
- *Accessibility Strategy*
- *Youth Services Plan II*
- *Community Engagement Strategy*
- *Social Policy Administrative Order*
- *Discover Halifax Master Tourism Plan*

Appendix D: Municipal beach evaluation tool from the *Long-term Aquatic Strategy*

The purpose of the evaluation tool is to guide decision making as it relates to the potential siting of new supervised beaches.

Criteria	Description
Service gap	Proximity to low-cost outdoor aquatic opportunities, including other beaches, splash pads and outdoor pools.
Site suitability	A review of site opportunities and constraints such as slopes, access, operational and emergency servicing access, vegetation and wildlife habitat, shade, drainage, adjacent uses, water quality results, hazards and obstructions, shoreline condition, cell phone service, visibility for supervision and evaluation of site safety.
Infrastructure, equipment and supporting amenities	A review of the site to determine if it can support the infrastructure and amenities required for a supervised beach (e.g., washroom facility, garbage/recycling bins, equipment storage and lifeguarding chairs).
Compatibility	Identification of other uses within the site and potential conflicts.
Land ownership and zoning	Description of site ownership or access potential. A review of planning policy to determine if the usage is permitted.
Access to public and active transportation	Proximity to transit and active transportation routes.
Parking	Availability of bicycle parking on site and vehicle parking, on or off site.
Potential users	A demographic breakdown of the population catchment expected to be served.
Socioeconomics	Median household income of the population catchment expected to be served.
Community engagement	Description of the community engagement undertaken.
Financial implications	Estimation of project cost and identification of other sources of funding (e.g., grants, donations and the municipality's capital budget).
Suitability of other sites	Identification of other sites evaluated.
Environmental implications ¹	Identification of potential sources of contamination or other hazards (e.g., fecal, chemical, cyanobacteria blooms, large numbers of aquatic plants). Examples may include stormwater drains, adjacent septic systems, dog parks (off leash or otherwise), areas receiving sewage sludge, inflow from streams, common waterfowl (bird) gathering areas, water circulation in proposed swimming area, commercial or industrial discharges and motorized watercraft.

¹ Reference to *Guidelines for Canadian Recreational Water Quality: Third Edition*



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