

Understanding Community Investment in Recreation Spaces: Follow-up Findings from Strathcona County Focus Groups



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Introduction

Researchers from the Centre for Health Promotion Studies, School of Public Health at the University of Alberta worked with community partners from Strathcona County Recreation, Parks and Culture to explore the potential impact of the Strathcona County Open Spaces and Recreation Facility Strategy (OSRFS) on health and health equity. As part of this project, a two part telephone survey of Strathcona County residents was conducted. The pre-test was conducted in the Fall of 2011¹ prior to the revitalized facilities opening and the post-test was completed in the Fall of 2013² after the initial revitalizations were completed and open to the public. Results from Strathcona County are being compared to the results of the telephone survey (one pre-test and one post-test survey) carried out with community members in the Town of Stony Plain, City of Spruce Grove, and Parkland County (comparison community; referred to as Tri-Region).

In addition to the telephone surveys, focus groups were conducted with community members in November 2011 and 2013 to gain a deeper understanding of the use of indoor recreation facilities and outdoor spaces within both Strathcona County and Tri-Region. In November of 2011, five focus groups were conducted: two Adult Regular User groups, two Adult Non-Regular User groups, and one Youth group³. In November of 2013, a total of six focus groups were held with: two Adult Regular User groups, two Adult Non-Regular User groups, and two Youth groups. This report summarizes the major findings from the focus groups conducted in 2013 with Strathcona County residents about their use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces.

¹ Nykiforuk, C.I.J., Berry, T., Vallianatos, H., & Nieuwendyk, L.M. (2011). Understanding Community Investment in Recreation Spaces: Strathcona County Baseline Survey Results (General). Edmonton, AB: School of Public Health, University of Alberta.

² Nykiforuk, C.I.J., Berry, T., Vallianatos, H., Nieuwendyk, L.M. & McGetrick, J.A. (2014). Understanding Community Investment in Recreation Spaces: Strathcona County Follow-up Survey Results (General). Edmonton, AB: School of Public Health, University of Alberta.

³ Nykiforuk, C.I.J., Vallianatos, H., Berry, T., Nieuwendyk, L., Somerville, C., Montemurro, G. & McLeod, N. (2012). Understanding Community Investment in Recreation Spaces: Baseline Findings from Strathcona County Focus Groups. Edmonton, AB: School of Public Health, University of Alberta.

Methods

Recruitment of Participants

Focus group participants were selected from a list of telephone survey² respondents who indicated a willingness to be involved in future projects related to this study. Trained members of the research team contacted these individuals by telephone to recruit participants for the focus groups (approximately 5-8 weeks after they had participated in the survey). Potential participants were called up to a total of 3 times, at which point 'no-answers' were removed from the list. Our aim was to obtain a representative sample from the population, so tracking sheets were maintained during the recruitment process to track socio-demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, income level, and facility usage). Individuals who agreed to participate in one of the focus group sessions were contacted a few days before their scheduled session as a reminder. Messages were left for those who were not available at the time of our reminder calls, and voice mails were left at numbers with no answer.

Data Collection

Two focus groups were conducted with adult participants categorized as *Adult Regular Users* (i.e., those who personally use indoor recreation facilities and/or outdoor spaces in Strathcona County one or more time(s) per week). Two additional focus groups were conducted with adult participants categorized as *Adult Non-Regular Users* (i.e., those who personally use public recreation facilities and/or outdoor spaces in Strathcona County fewer than once per week). Two focus groups were also conducted with youth, aged 13-17; this group was comprised of both *Regular* and *Non-Regular Users*. **Table 1** displays the number of participants recruited for each focus group session and the number of participants who attended.

Table 1. Focus Group Attendance

Focus Group	Number of Participants Recruited n	Number of Participants in Attendance n (%)
Regular Users (Group A)	17	14 (82%)
Regular Users (Group B)	10	6 (60%)
Non-Regular Users (Group A)	9	5 (56%)
Non-Regular Users (Group B)	10	5 (50%)
Youth (Regular and Non-Regular Users – Group A)	7	2 (29%)
Youth (Regular and Non-Regular Users – Group B)	5	2 (40%)

Focus groups took place in meeting rooms in the Strathcona County Community Centre. Participants filled out a brief 8-item questionnaire to provide basic socio-demographic information (e.g., age, income, and ethnicity). The focus group discussions were led by a member of the University of Alberta research team and two research assistants were present to take notes. Refreshments and light snacks were provided to participants at each session. The focus group facilitator followed a semi-structured question guide to lead each session. A single use drop-in pass for use at either Millennium Place, Kinsmen Leisure Centre, Strathcona Wilderness Centre, Ardrossan Recreation Complex or Glenn Allan Recreation Complex was given to each participant as compensation for his/her time.

The focus groups were scheduled to last a maximum of an hour and a half, and varied in duration (63 minutes on average). The focus group discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed *verbatim*.

Data Analysis

Using a thematic analysis approach, the research team analyzed transcripts of focus group discussions separately for (1) *Adult Regular Users*, (2) *Adult Non-Regular Users*, and (3) *Youth*. The emergent themes for each group were then organized into (a) facilitators, (b) barriers, and (c) recommendations for improving the use of both indoor recreation facilities and outdoor spaces.

Demographics of Participants

The following figures display demographic information about the *Adult Regular User* (**Figure 1**) and *Non-Regular User* (**Figure 2**) focus group participants, including age, gender, family income, as well as area of the community where they reside. Four *Youth* participated in the focus group. Three were female and one was male and ranged in age from 14 to 17. Three participants resided in Sherwood Park, and the fourth participant was from rural Strathcona County.

Figure 1. Demographic Profile of *Adult Regular User Focus Group* Participants.

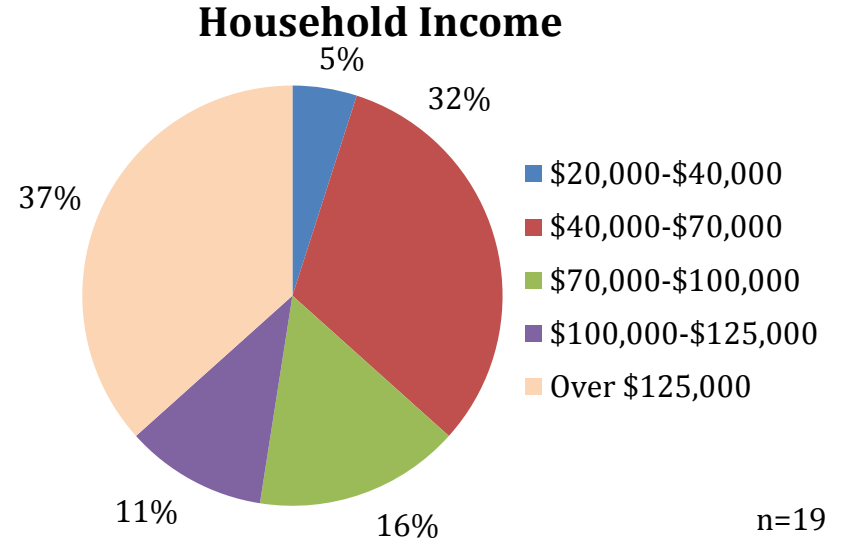
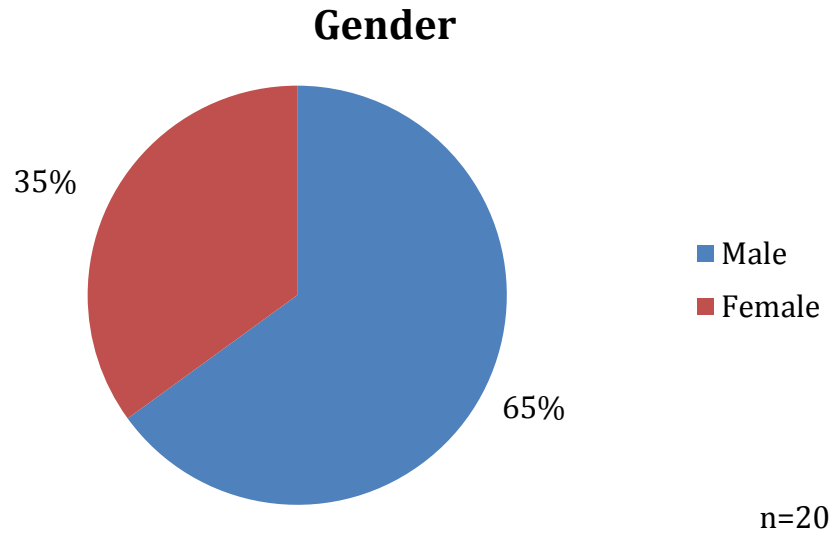
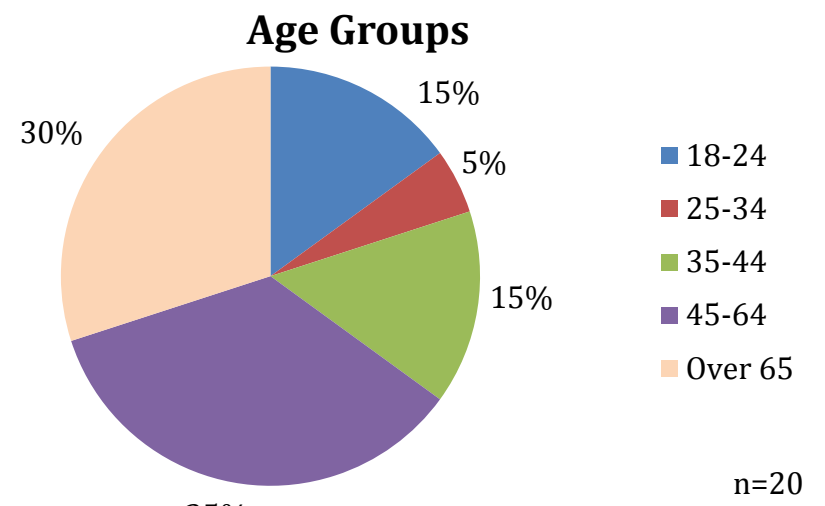
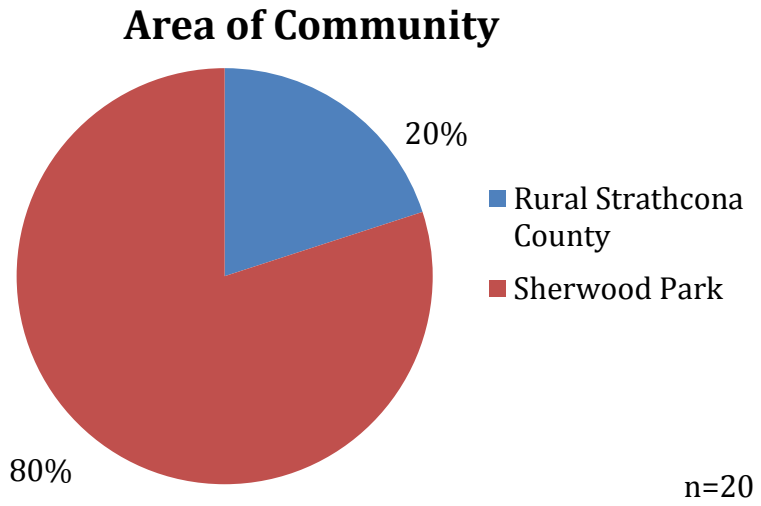
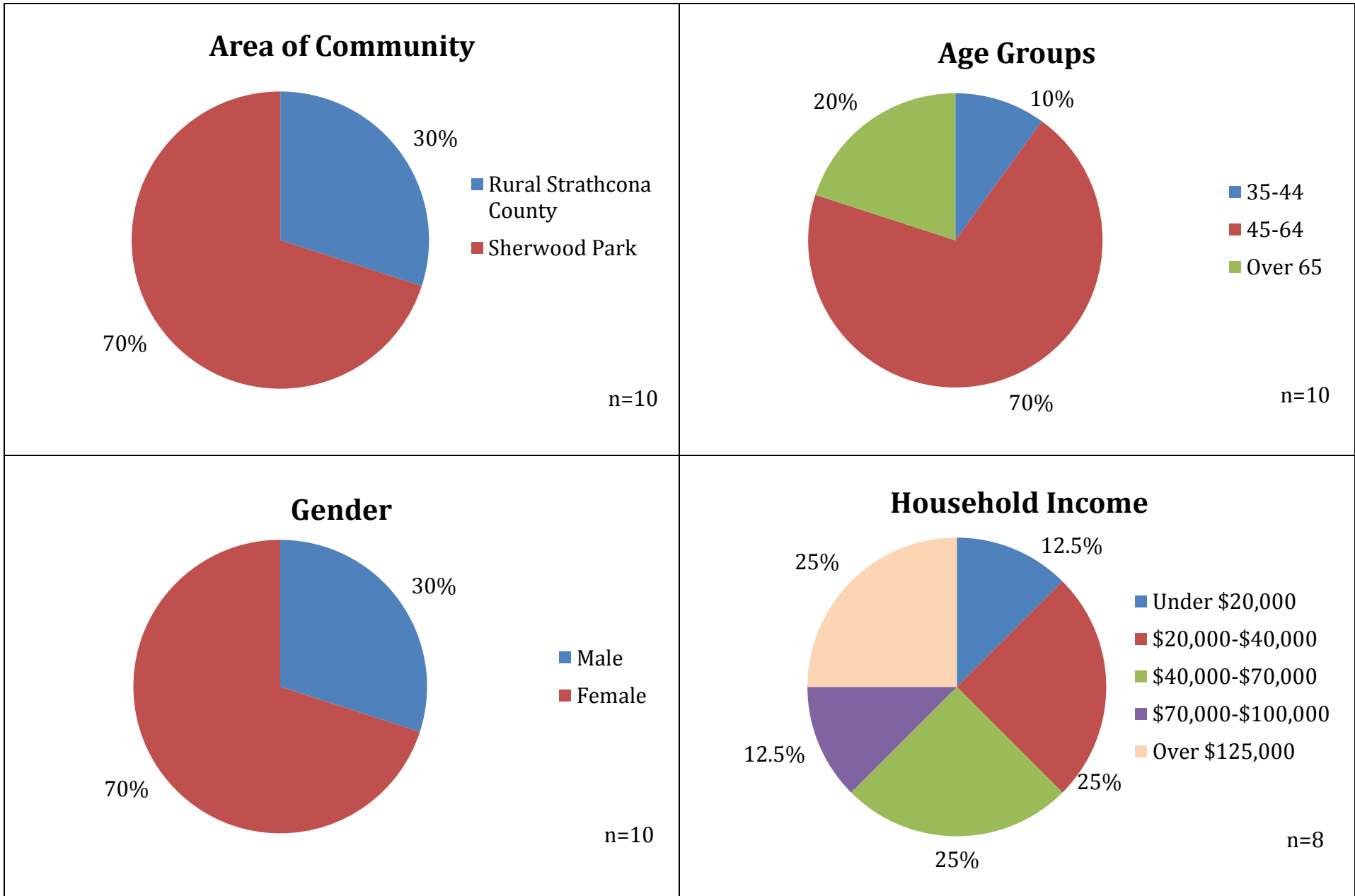


Figure 2. Demographic Profile of Adult Non-Regular User Focus Group Participants.



Findings

To begin the conversation regarding the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces within the community, participants were asked the question: “What does being physically active mean to you?” Example responses to this question were shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Responses to “What does being physically active mean to you?”

Adult Regular Users	Adult Non-Regular Users	Youth
<p>“My philosophy is if you don’t use it you lose it. And I believe in 10,000 steps a day. I can’t always get to the gym but I think if you’re always walking around, and you know, you spend more time on your feet than you do on the couch, then it’s being physically active.” (male, 22 years old)</p>	<p>“Moving around and getting your heart rate up.” (female, 47 years old)</p> <p>“Just being out moving... As long as you’re not kind of sedentary and just moving along.” (male, 60 years old)</p>	<p>“Anything from just going on a walk with your friend or taking your dog to the off-leash park, to like actually doing workout programs.” (youth*, 15 years old)</p>
<p>“Well some mornings you’ve got to push yourself.” (female, 81 years old)</p>	<p>“Exercising.” (female, 49 years old)</p> <p>“Moving of any kind.” (female, 70 years old)</p>	<p>“I’d qualify physically active as more than 20 minutes... to get like your cardio and heart, and stuff going, ‘cause that way it, you’re actually working out and you’re getting your blood flowing to all your important body parts.” (youth*, 14 years old)</p>

* To keep youth participants’ identities confidential, the information about sex is not included.

The focus groups continued with the facilitator encouraging participants to reflect and discuss issues regarding access to and use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces within their community. The following section outlines the key themes that emerged from focus group discussions.

Indoor recreational facilities

Participants mentioned a number of factors that influence their use of indoor facilities, which were organized into facilitators, barriers and recommendations. The following sections present the major themes for *Adult Regular User*, *Adult Non-Regular User*, and *Youth*.

Adult Regular Users

Key themes related to the use of indoor facilities accompanied by representative quotes are presented in **Table 3a**, **Table 3b**, and **Table 3c**.

Table 3a. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “facilitators to use” for indoor recreational facilities. *Adult Regular Users*.

Theme	Quotes
Facilitators to Use	
Diversity of recreational opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I go predominantly just to Millennium... [I] like the fact that there’s so much diversity there.” (female, 39 years old) • “There [are] really good facilities, and there [are] lots of opportunity, and I think that um, the County’s done a really good job.” (male, 43 years old)
Flexibility of passes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I love the drop in schedule... [included] with the Millennium Pass. Having that option without having to commit to a class. ‘Cause if you’re schedules change and you also have the variety.” (female, 47 years old) • “Yeah that’s a bonus about being able to suspend your membership for the – for whatever period you’re not going to use it.” (male, 60 years old)
Friendly staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “When I go into Millennium it is like super friendly.” (male, 35 years old) • “The [staff at Millennium Place are] all – they’re always smiling, they always got a smile on their face.” (male, 64 years old)

Table 3b. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “barriers to use” for indoor recreational facilities. *Adult Regular Users.*

Theme	Quotes
Barriers to Use	
Unwelcoming atmosphere/ Cleanliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “And I stopped using [Millennium Place] for the gym and everything else, just because of the crowds, and because of the kids, and because you want to use the upstairs workout room and the sauna downstairs, and people are – it used to drive me crazy, people would abuse it... there’d be stuff all over the floor, kids’ underwear hanging over everything. You know, the place was just a mess.” (male, 53 years old) • “Well you have to definitely have always slap the sandals on, you can’t walk barefoot. Cause in no time flat you’ve got planters warts.” (female, 75 years old)
Limited hours of access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would prefer access 24 hours... it seems like there’s a demand for that [for night shift workers].” (female, 39 years old)
Poor quality of infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I know one thing they did wrong at Millennium Place, is the showers are terrible. They’re small... And because they’re so small, the water’s shoots right out into the dressing room.” (male, 60 years old) • “Also just the repair bit, like some of the spin bikes are out in the public area and are getting a little bit – a little bit worn.” (female, 47 years old) • “I agree with [participant’s name] about the heat in the water of the pool [at Millennium Place]. Because it is cold, we go into ACT [ACT Aquatic Recreation Centre] in Edmonton, most times when we chose – when we choose to go swimming... The pool is like bath water, so it’s nice. You’re, kids aren’t – lips aren’t blue when you’re done swimming... so we go there quite often because of the temperature of the pool. (female, 30 years old)

Table 3c. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “recommendations” for indoor recreational facilities. *Adult Regular Users.*

Theme	Quotes
Recommendations	
Infrastructure improvements and expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I sort of think Millennium missed the boat when they didn’t put some squash courts in there.” (male, 55 years old) • “A 50 meter pool ...would be, definitely be a benefit.” (male, 64 years old)
Financial disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would like to know a little bit more about where the money’s going.” (male, 22 years old)
Partnership improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We should have some kind of a partnership [with local schools], like even in Ardrossan, we have that big beautiful gym and I don’t see it being used very much.” (male, 67 years old)

Adult Non-Regular Users

Table 4a, Table 4b, and Table 4c show the main themes followed by illustrative quotes that emerged from the focus groups with non-regular users.

Table 4a. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “facilitators to use” for indoor recreational facilities. Adult Non-Regular Users.

Theme	Quotes
Facilitators to Use	
Diversity of recreational opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “They have an enormous amount, actually in Sherwood Park to do.” (female, 70 years old) • “They had an amazing array of programs, you know, we’re really blessed that way.” (female, 44 years old)
Friendly staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Oh I think the staff is really good [at Millennium Place].” (female, 44 years old) • “I think the staff is wonderful [at Millennium Place].” (female, 70 years old)
Quality of infrastructure and programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think this is the Cadillac of suburbia. I mean you know there are a few – few places in North America that have the facilities or the infrastructure that this place has. It is well maintained, and you know they do keep it up to date.” (male, 60 years old) • “I have signed up in the past for the exercise classes at GARC [Glen Allan Recreation Complex]. There are some offered there that are geared to seniors. And they’re excellent.” (female, 70 years old)

Table 4b. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “barriers to use” for indoor recreational facilities. *Adult Non-Regular Users.*

Theme	Quotes
Barriers to Use	
Unwelcoming atmosphere/ Cleanliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There is a lack of respect. People don’t respect other people, they don’t teach their kids to respect.” (female, 53 years old) • “I don’t know why the schools go to the gym [wellness space] ... But there’s usually one teacher there with 25 kids, who go into the men’s locker room and the lady’s locker room, change and just completely destroy the place. Like there’s garbage and stuff all over the floor after they leave, and you know you complain about it, and I have many times too... and really nothing gets done about it.” (male, 60 years old) • “We find it [Millennium Place] very large, and sort of um, not very – it’s not very comfortable for seniors... The whole thing that it’s often very crowded.” (female, 48 years old) • “I’m not a huge fan of mega facilities... I think they are too big, and too impersonal. And easy to lose your kids, and noisy and busy, and kind of impractical, and all of that.” (female, 44 years old)
High costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “[It costs] ten bucks or something to go for a visit for an hour, that’s – that’s out there. So I think cost is an issue.” (male, 53 years old) • “My kids and I, and often when we go to Millennium, they don’t feel like skating, they don’t feel like swimming. So we just use the gym and then you’re still paying, whatever it is, 20 dollars. Just to go use the kids’ gym, and fool around. And shoot hoops and that kind of thing. Yeah that’s, it just seems like too much to me. Even 20 bucks for an hour and a half in the pool is a lot.” (female, 44 years old)
Emphasis on hockey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It’s not just Sherwood Park, but it’s all of Alberta, when it comes to hockey... I hate it all, because it’s the domineering thing. You got loud kids, again the language, the hustle, the bustle, the pushing, just to get through those areas... Like when I go to Millennium, um, I avoid the hockey area completely... I just prefer to stay right away from it.” (female, 47 years old) • “Every arena has shinny. Shinny, shinny, shinny! My kids never played hockey... So to find a place to just go skate. For more than an hour, was very – was difficult.” (female, 49 years old)

Table 4c. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “recommendations” for indoor recreational facilities. *Adult Non-Regular Users.*

Theme	Quotes
Recommendations	
Infrastructure improvements and expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “So I found that why can’t they have a microwave in Millennium, and have it friendly. They have little high chairs, they have tables, they have little tiny tables for the children. It’s really geared for the family, except um, they don’t acknowledge that some families can’t – cannot afford to buy the hot food all the time.” (female, 70 years old) • “One idea I had ... was that it might be nice to have sort of a – a smaller, multi-generational room... there’s really no one spot where you can go, as a family, if you’ve got various ages.” (female, 44 years old) • “[A] seniors’ area really would be nice. Just seniors in there.” (female, 48 years old)
Financial disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I just wonder if – if they’re being utilized? If the money’s being spent wisely for the future use expectation.” (male, 53 years old) • “It kind of annoyed me that they spent all that money on Millennium and nothing on – on GARC.” (male, 60 years old)
Partnership improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The reciprocal thing is a big one... I really think there is a – is an opportunity for both the County and the, you know, Leduc and Edmonton, all to benefit.” (male, 60 years old) • “You know if [schools] had been integrated [with community centres] like they are out in some of the newer communities here, you know in the city. Um, it makes more sense.” (male, 60 years old)
More payment options and subsidies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I was thinking okay well the County should maybe gear an access window for seniors when it’s not so busy. Like maybe between nine and three, I would have thought that it wouldn’t be so busy... So have a senior pass that’s available, a discounted rate, you go between nine and three.” (male, 53 years old) • “[They should have] a preferred rate for Strathcona County residents, and non-preferred rate for City of Edmonton residents. ‘Cause you go to Millennium and there’s a lot of Edmontonians who use that facility, at the same cost that I do.” (male, 60 years old) • “I wonder if on a municipal level and property tax basis, where they gave – gave us some [tax rebate] for being active, for being healthy, for being responsible for their own wellbeing... if the municipality could bring in something like, you know what even if I got \$20 back, or off my tax statement for having a Millennium membership or something like that.” (male, 60 years old)

Youth

Main themes and representative quotes that emerged from the Youth focus groups were presented in **Table 5a**, **Table 5b**, and **Table 5c**.

Table 5a. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “facilitators to use” for indoor recreational facilities. Youth.

Theme	Quotes
Facilitators to Use	
Diversity of recreational opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I do like that there’s variety there [at Millennium Place and GARC].” (youth, 15 years old) • “[Millennium Place and GARC], they’ve got, you know the things you need there” (youth, 16 years old) • “[My siblings and I use Millennium Place] for like soccer and um, hockey and then my little sister, she does fencing.” (youth, 17 years old)
Friendly staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The [staff are] really nice, like they’re all really friendly and occasionally you get someone that’s kind of grumpy, but not normally. Normally they’re all pretty friendly and happy, cause that’s their job, they’re supposed to work with people, so you’re hopeful they’re friendly.” (youth, 14 years old)
Role models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If you go to the gym and you see like a really fit person, and you’re a youth and that – that person’s an adult. It kind of, it almost motivates you, ‘cause it’s like I want to look like that when I’m older, too.” (youth, 14 years old) • “Even have somebody that’s even like an athlete or something, like have like a specific time where they can come and teach people actually how to be active.” (youth, 15 years old) • “For those people that come in and do fitness on Friday actually, the Oilers came in and trained at Millennium Place for the day... It’s cool just seeing them, how like professional hockey athletes train...They were like running really fast on the treadmill and stuff, and that’s cool to see them do that and show how hard you actually have to train to become like fit for your whole life.” (youth, 14 years old)

Table 5b. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “barriers to use” for indoor recreational facilities. Youth.

Theme	Quotes
Barriers to Use	
Unwelcoming atmosphere/ Cleanliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Oh I like GARC better than Millennium Place, ‘cause Millennium’s so big and I can almost say like over-rated... And so it’s always way busier than GARC.” (youth, 14 years old) • “I think that cleanliness is an issue too. Like I know that they do have those wipe things. But nobody really uses them, and when they do use them it becomes like trash, because they leave them everywhere. So I think that there should be like, every two hours, it like closed for like ten minutes and then a staff just like quickly goes and like sprays everything down or something, and then you can go back in.” (youth, 15 years old) • “Well GARC is nicer, ‘cause they keep it colder. At Millennium it’s extremely hot... And Millennium it’s icky, it’s too – that’s – that’s another deterrent from going to Millennium. ‘Cause it gets too muggy.” (youth, 16 years old)
High costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think the price [can be a barrier]... I know that they’re a bit pricey, like my yoga class was like originally \$250 or something, for like 3 weeks.” (youth, 15 years old) • “It is a little bit expensive... Like because I don’t have a job and like usually I would have to pay for something like that, if I just want to go out and do something.” (youth, 17 years old)
Limited youth programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I know that there is a teen yoga, but it’s only the same yoga every time, so it’s not offered for different types of yoga. So if you took it twice, you’ll be doing the exact same thing you did before. So there’s not really any levels where you can grow.” (youth, 15 years old) • “I haven’t really done any actual set activities, like an actual class or anything [at Millennium Place]. Um, cause all the ones that I want to do aren’t available for my age group. Like I want to do the cycling one.” (youth, 15 years old) • “I think [the youth lounge at Millennium Place is] really awesome, but if you don’t have anybody there to go with, it’s kind of pointless. Like I think there should be, either people that come and have set activities that you can do.” (youth, 15 years old)
Limited public transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I know that there’s a bus that goes to Millennium Place, but I – it’s hard to get back on it, like they drop you off, but then like you have to plan your work out, comparing to like – like how long you want to work out, and then the bus schedule. And then if you don’t want to work out for an hour, you have to cut it in half and then it’s not effective. And then you have to jump on the bus after, and then it takes you a long time, because Millennium Place is like at the end of most of the buses routes.” (youth, 15 years old)

Table 5c. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “recommendations” for indoor recreational facilities. Youth.

Theme	Quotes
Recommendations	
Partnership improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Our school hands out Nitzza’s Pizza coupons. But maybe they could also hand out like the Millennium Place coupons. Like you get a free admission for a day or whatever.” (youth, 15 years old)
Awareness and communication improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Maybe even [advertisements] in schools too. ‘Cause if we’re trying to get the youth to go to them... So maybe if they had like a couple of slides of like come to Millennium Place, work out, get active. Maybe that would encourage more people to go there.” (youth, 14 years old) • “I think that they should have like the little instructional things, ‘cause even when you’re there, you’ll get older people who were still using them quite wrong.” (youth, 16 years old)
Youth programming improvements and expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “They could do like a drop-in teen yoga, ‘cause I know they do a drop-in adult yoga, because my parents go to that... They could do something like that for teens or just combine the two classes, so it’s adult and if youth want to go, they can.” (youth, 14 years old)

Summary of Main Thematic Findings

Table 6 summarizes the major thematic findings related to indoor recreational facilities that emerged through the focus groups with *Adult Regular Users*, *Adult Non-Regular Users*, and *Youth* in Strathcona County (Note: this is not an exhaustive list).

Table 6. Summary of main themes related to the indoor recreational facilities discussed in the focus groups.

Theme	Adult Regular Users	Adult Non-Regular Users	Youth
Facilitators to Use			
Diversity of recreational opportunities	✓	✓	✓
Flexibility of passes	✓		
Friendly staff	✓	✓	✓
Quality of infrastructure and programming		✓	
Role models			✓
Barriers to Use			
Unwelcoming atmosphere/ Cleanliness	✓	✓	✓
High costs		✓	✓
Limited hours of access	✓		
Poor quality of infrastructure	✓		
Emphasis on hockey		✓	
Limited youth programs			✓
Limited public transportation			✓
Recommendations			
Infrastructure improvements and expansion	✓	✓	
Financial disclosure	✓	✓	
Partnership improvements	✓	✓	✓
More payment options and subsidies		✓	
Awareness and communication improvements			✓
Youth programming improvements and expansion			✓

Outdoor Spaces

With respect to outdoor spaces, participants indicated a number of facilitators, barriers and recommendations to improve the use of these areas within the Strathcona County. These themes are presented in the following sections, along with quotations shared by *Adult Regular User*, *Adult Non-Regular User*, and *Youth*.

Adult Regular Users

Quotes representing the main themes that emerged from the focus groups with adult regular users were shown in **Table 7a**, **Table 7b**, and **Table 7c**.

Table 7a. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “facilitators of use” for outdoor spaces. Adult Regular Users.

Theme	Quotes
Facilitators of Use	
Diversity of recreational opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I use the...trails for biking and running, usually in summer. And running in the winter, and then we use Wilderness Centre for, in the winter for cross country skiing.” (male, 60 years old) • “Speaking for the bike paths. I use them quite – quite often just for transportation.” (male, 23 years old)
Well maintained and clean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Well the walking places are great.” (female, 81 years old)

Table 7b. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “barriers of use” for outdoor spaces. Adult Regular Users.

Theme	Quotes
Barriers to Use	
Lack of Awareness and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A lot of people have no idea what’s out there.” (male, 60 years old) • “You’re kind of relying on word of mouth or people telling other people. And that’s – that’s okay, but you know, it’s not going to be the most effective way of marketing things that are happening in the community.” (male, 22 years old)
Limited infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I wouldn’t [ride my bike]. There is no way to ride your bike on those roads [Baseline Road and Wye Road].” (female, 47 years old)
Limited hours of access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “On the Wilderness Center, I find it strange that they don’t have longer hours in the summer... If they made it kind of one day or two days a week, that they said okay, Tuesday, Thursday’s we’re open till nine.” (male, 50 years old)

Table 7c. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “recommendations” for outdoor spaces. *Adult Regular Users.*

Theme	Quotes
Recommendations	
Awareness and communication improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It would be nicer to have [updated] maps.” (female, 47 years old) • “We need proper signage out there to lead people to those facilities so that it’s easier to get there.” (male, 60 years old) • “[We need] more information. Like more accessible information [for seniors], without going online.” (female, 75 years old)
Maintenance improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The [trails are] just not kept clean enough.” (female, 75 years old) • “[The city] used to clear at the one end [of the frozen lake to make a rink]... You know it was um, seemed to be it wouldn’t take a whole lot of effort, like they had the equipment going around the city to clear the other rinks.” (male, 52 years old)
Infrastructure improvements and expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “[On Wye Road] there’s only a shoulder on one side, but there’s no like bike paths.” (female, 21 years old) • “It is so dangerous, they have no shoulders on [Baseline Road] at all... There [are] no paths out there for bicycles.” (male, 67 years)

Adult Non-Regular Users

Table 8a, Table 8b, and **Table 8c** summarize the main themes shared by participants who do not frequently use the recreation spaces in Strathcona County. Selected quotes represent participants' opinions.

Table 8a. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “facilitators of use” for outdoor spaces. Adult Non-Regular Users.

Theme	Quotes
Facilitators of Use	
Diversity of recreational opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In Sherwood Park there are a lot of public areas, like parks and ball diamonds, and walking trails and the outdoor rinks.” (male, 60 years old) • “They also have a neighbourhood um, park that’s just off of Jim Common, down there. I can’t remember the name. That’s a wonderful place. It has water features. I took my grandson there, everything is free. It’s all outdoors. Huge big sandbox, with you know to play, and then you can play – run around with that water feature.” (female, 70 years old) • “There’s a park near Bev Facey, across that – is it Granada, and you go in between those houses and there’s an island. And it’s like circuit training. And they have individual stations.” (female, 49 years old)
Well maintained and clean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’m relatively happy with – with what’s available to me. You know they’re well maintained, clean, there’s garbage cans and everything there.” (male, 60 years old)

Table 8b. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “barriers to use” for outdoor spaces. Adult Non-Regular Users.

Theme	Quotes
Barriers to Use	
Lack of Awareness and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I know there a lot of natural areas around where I live. But I’m not aware of where they are.” (female, 48 years old) • “Like anything towards money they’ll tell you where to get there, here’s a map. You know, all that, but the – the free hiking trails out in the country and stuff like that, or even in the city – a map of where the walking paths are.” (female, 49 years old)
Limited infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There are no community lakes, there’s no – or any of that sort of stuff.” (male, 60 years old)
Safety issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The trails are – I must say, I don’t see a lot of policing on them, like we live in Craigavon and I know that there’s drug sales and stuff that go on behind our house, on the path... so that is an issue.” (female, 49 years old) • “There [are] coyotes [in rural Sherwood Park].” (female, 48 years old)

Table 8c. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “recommendations” for outdoor spaces. *Adult Non-Regular Users.*

Theme	Quotes
Recommendations	
Awareness and communication improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I know there’s a set of trails out there... [but] stuff could be signed, or could be set up. Could be mapped in a wider area.” (male, 60 years old) • “You have to know where they [outdoor spaces] are, and – and sell um, seniors to – to go. Really emphasize if you’ve got arthritis in the back, where can you get – go swimming? ... We have enormous amount of seniors now, enormous amount. So a real push towards getting seniors more active, or even getting to know the facilities.” (female, 70 years old)
Maintenance improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think they could do a little bit better job of after a snowfall, getting the – the whatever they use, little bobcat or whatever, and get out there and clear it quicker, so that it’s – it’s, can be used more – more efficiently. ‘Cause sometimes it does snow on trails, we might have to wait two days. So it’s a good snowfall there’s just like a one lane footstep.” (male, 53 years old) • “And I think [the trails are] well maintained. In the winter I think they could be plowed better, not necessarily more, but better.” (female, 49 years old)
Infrastructure improvements and expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There’s been a lot of discussion and it goes nowhere, about developing a trail between the Fort Saskatchewan trail system and Monist. So there’s a corridor, yet it goes nowhere... And the County just, they never act on it, and I know it’s a contentious point, but – but it, it’s a win/win situation... So the County needs to do a better job.” (male, 53 years old) • “When we were in Radium this summer, we discovered in the village, they had an outdoor exercise park with outdoor exercise equipment. And some of the equipment is unique, like it does different things. And they had a – a ball on that. Yeah so that was really fun. Yeah, it could be- it was free and accessible to anybody.” (female, 44 years old) • “I think we’re really lucky to have a bike path system that we have. And I hope that the County continues to support that in its new developments. And I think that we should make it a focus to make Sherwood Park more bicycle friendly. ‘Cause although there’s lots of bike paths, it’s not necessarily easy to use your bike – say to get to the mall... yeah no place to park your bike, so we need to kind of get out that message.” (female, 44 years old)

Youth

The main themes discussed in the focus groups with youth were presented in **Table 9a**, **Table 9b**, and **Table 9c**. Examples of their thoughts were illustrated with representative quotes.

Table 9a. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “facilitators of use” for outdoor spaces. Youth.

Theme	Quotes
Facilitators of Use	
Diversity of outdoor spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Strathcona Wilderness Center for example, you get to like see nature as nature, ‘cause they try and keep it like don’t pick flowers. Don’t feed the wildlife, keep it natural.” (youth, 14 years old) • “I like that [the dog parks are] so natural, like the one in Sherwood Park isn’t the best, but I know that the one by the Edmonton Zoo is really good. And I like it because there’s a river there and it’s all natural. So I think that Sherwood Park it is pretty good, but it’s mostly like a field.” (youth, 15 years old) • “I like SAP (Strathcona Athletic Park). It’s not the – it has like that hill, but it’s not the biggest hill in the world, but it’s like the biggest hill in Sherwood Park. So that gets used a lot during the winter times, cause people like to toboggan down that.” (youth, 14 years old)
Recreational Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “My mom brings [the Recreational Guide] home, so like I’ll read it. If she brings it home. And she usually has like a copy, so yeah I read them. And usually I know that GARC always has a copy there that you can grab.” (youth, 15 years old)

Table 9b. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “barriers to use” for outdoor spaces. Youth.

Theme	Quotes
Barriers to Use	
Safety issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I know that there is safety issues sometimes in the off leash parks. Um, so I think that, I’m not saying that people have to go and watch people’s dogs, cause you should be responsible for your own dog, but maybe have signs or something to like make sure that your dog is actually allowed to go there... my friend she brought her dog and it actually got killed, because it was like this little dog and like this big Bouvier, like snapped it’s neck. So I think that it should have certain criteria that you have to meet, to be able to go there, ‘cause nobody wants to like go with their dog and not come back with it.” (youth, 15 years old) • “The only safety issue, is sometimes you see people [students] like smoking [on the] bridge by F. R. Haythorne... Yeah you always see people like smoking there and stuff. And it’s kind of sketchy, ‘cause you like shuffle by them and stuff like that and that’s my way home.” (youth, 14 years old) • “I don’t go out alone [on the trails]. Unless I’ve got like a big dog or something. Just safety reasons.” (youth, 16 years old)
Cleanliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I know that lots of [students] use [Strathcona Athletic Park] and I think that um, I think that it’s not well taken care of either, so. And I know that it’s pretty trashed too, like there’ll be like cigarettes everywhere. And yeah okay teens use it, but I think there should be at least like rules. Like how do people know that they’re not supposed to smoke if there’s not signs?” (youth, 15 years old) • “Lots of people [students] also smoke behind [F. R. Haythorne School]... And so there’s obviously lots of cigarettes and all that kind of other drugs and stuff over there, and it’s nasty when you walk by it ‘cause it just reeks.” (youth, 14 years old)
Lack of trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think that Sherwood Park it is pretty good, but it’s mostly like a field. Like I think they could either expand it or move it, so that it’s in like a bushy areas with all these trees and paths, ‘cause that’s where my dog likes to go.” (youth, 15 years old)

Table 9c. Illustrative quotes for the major thematic findings related to “recommendations” for outdoor spaces. Youth.

Theme	Quotes
Recommendations	
Awareness and communication improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I don’t know if there’s a Facebook page, but if there was a Facebook page I think me and my friends would definitely look on that.” (youth, 15 years old) • “Cause once you get close to the off leash dog park, there’s a picture of a dog, and it’s like dog park this way. But maybe if they had more of those closer in to Sherwood Park.” (youth, 14 years old) • “I didn’t even know that they had that [BMX park].” (youth, 17 years old)
Maintenance improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The paths um, to get to F. R. Haythorne where the bridge is, like it’s not shoveled very often. It’s never shoveled. Yeah and lots of people use it... And I live close, so I go there with my dog all the time, and I go there with friends all the time, and like I think it needs to be taken care of better.” (youth, 15 years old)
Community meet-ups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I don’t really know any places that say like hey we’re going to meet in this field somewhere and do like an organized activity, or an organized workout. Like I think there needs to be more of that. Like the only ones I know is indoor.” (youth, 15 years old) • “I think there should be like maybe a group of recreational people that like go and will have like an afternoon where they have all these activities set out, that youth can just go and like run in a field, or play games or like – like Capture the Flag, or something. And I think that would be a really good idea to get people more involved with outdoor, cause then once they see that there’s actual outdoor things where you can actually go and do, then they would probably go with their families and other friends.” (youth, 15 years old)

Summary of Main Thematic Findings

Table 10 summarizes the major thematic findings related to outdoor recreational facilities and spaces that emerged through the focus groups with *Adult Regular Users, Adult Non-Regular Users, and Youth* in Strathcona County (Note: this is not an exhaustive list).

Table 10. Summary of main themes related to the outdoor recreational spaces discussed in the focus groups.

Theme	Adult Regular Users	Adult Non-Regular Users	Youth
Facilitators of Use			
Diversity of recreational opportunities	✓	✓	✓
Well maintained and clean	✓	✓	
Recreational Guide			✓
Barriers to Use			
Lack of awareness and communication	✓	✓	
Limited infrastructure	✓	✓	
Safety issues		✓	✓
Limited hours of access	✓		
Cleanliness			✓
Lack of trees			✓
Recommendations			
Awareness and communication improvements	✓	✓	✓
Maintenance improvements	✓	✓	✓
Infrastructure improvements and expansion	✓	✓	
Community meet-ups			✓

Limitations and Considerations

The discussions with community members revealed a number of interesting points regarding the access to and use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces within Strathcona County. However, there are some considerations that should be taken into account when interpreting findings from focus groups. As with most focus groups, our discussions only involved a few individuals. This small sample of individuals may not represent the larger community in their thoughts about indoor facilities and outdoor recreation spaces, which must be taken into account when considering the findings.

It is also important to note that there were some differences in socio-demographic variables between the *Adult Regular User* and *Adult-Non Regular User* focus group participants. There was a higher proportion of males within the *Adult Regular User* focus groups (65%) compared to the *Adult Non-Regular User* focus groups (30%). Moreover, *Adult Regular Users* were younger and had higher household income than *Adult Non-Regular Users*. While 20% of the participants were aged 18-34 years in the first group, there was no representation in this age range in the second group. With respect to total household income, none of the participants in the *Adult Regular Users* focus group reported income lower than CAD \$20,000, whereas 12.5% of participants in the *Non-Regular Users* focus group fell within this category. Overall, and despite these considerations, the focus groups illuminated many factors that would not have been found through telephone survey data alone.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Focus group participants described a number of facilitators and barriers to the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces, as well as provided some suggestions for the future. Based on these findings, members of the research team formulated their main recommendations that could enhance use of and access to indoor facilities and outdoor spaces by all members of the community.

Note: some of the recommendations that emerged from the focus groups may overlap with initiatives already underway in or planned for Strathcona County. This may indicate that some residents may not be aware of these initiatives and may benefit from further communication tailored to this purpose.

The recommendations listed below are in no particular order.

1. Diversifying the advertising strategies about recreation spaces (e.g., posters at schools) and improving signage on the streets and roads may increase awareness of the recreation opportunities available in the community and foster physical activity engagement among residents.
2. Publicizing the squash courts available in the community might be a good strategy to promote these spaces and the sport itself.
3. Ensuring periodic maintenance and repair of the fitness equipment, as well as adequate temperature of swimming pool water (less cold) and atmosphere can help people have a good experience at Millennium Place.
4. Increasing the availability of public transportation through improved or special scheduling may promote the use of the recreation spaces, especially among youth who identified low quality public transportation as a barrier.
5. Reducing the price of drop-in passes may have a positive impact on the use of indoor recreation facilities among youth and people who currently do not have memberships. In

addition, focus group participants suggested lowering the price of drop-in passes during non-peak times.

6. Offering drop-in passes at a reduced cost for people who will only use the wellness centre at Millennium Place may increase usage rate.
7. Subsidizing the cost of drop-in passes and memberships for low income families may promote equitable access and may help non-regular users make their visit part of their routines.
8. Promoting activities and events in the youth lounge at Millennium Place may contribute to increase usage rate.
9. Providing more physical activity programs for youth (e.g., different levels of yoga classes, spin bike classes) may promote the use of the indoor recreational facilities. Youth also expressed an interest in participating in existing adult fitness classes. Reducing the 16+ age restrictions for the adult classes may provide a feasible solution to improve youth programming.
10. Adding amenities to indoor facilities and outdoor spaces (for example, benches and microwaves) and ensuring the cleanliness (for example, in the change rooms) in indoor recreation facilities seemed to be fundamental pieces to the creation of a welcoming atmosphere for families and for people from different generations.
11. Building a senior's area at indoor recreation facilities and offering specific programs for this age group may foster engagement in physical activity, contributing to healthy, active aging.
12. Increasing the hours of operation of recreation facilities would help the working population access these spaces and be physically active. Creating a survey to ask the users if they would come to the recreation facility if it is open early in the morning or late in the evening may help identify users' needs and inform them about the range of hours at different facilities.
13. Allocating more times for ice skating so that non-hockey skaters can also use the arenas.

14. Increasing the police presence in the parks may enhance people's perception of safety and encourage them to be physically active outdoors.
15. Installing exclusive, continuous bike lanes may encourage people to cycle either for transportation or for leisure-time on the streets of the community.
16. Ensuring regular snow removal, installing exercise equipment, and promoting events in outdoor spaces may be effective strategies for increasing engagement in outdoor physical activity.
17. Improving transparency on how municipal funds are being allocated towards physical activity opportunities in the community. This may be used as an advertising strategy to increase usage of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces for physical activity.
18. Partnering with schools may be an effective strategy to help teams practice sports at more convenient times. For that, it may be necessary to rethink the booking process of school gymnasiums, which was considered an obstacle by many participants.
19. Scheduling janitorial/cleaning right after when schools use the premises may keep the recreation facility tidy and attractive for regular and non-regular users. Many focus groups participants complained about the schools using recreation facilities because there is a perception that school children leave the premises untidy. A few participants also explained that they stopped using the facility due to the dirty, messy conditions. Given that the cleanliness issues seemed to play an important role in people's choice about where to do physical activity, maintaining the areas in a tidy and hygienic condition will certainly ensure people continue to enjoy the time they spend at the facilities.

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