

A group of children are walking away from the camera on a dirt path through a lush green forest. The children are wearing various casual clothing like t-shirts and shorts. The path is surrounded by tall trees and dense undergrowth. The scene is bright and sunny.

# Recreation Master Plan

Municipality of the District of St. Mary's

December 2022

UPLAND

REConsulting Group



Final Report  
**Recreation Master Plan**

December 2022

This report was prepared by  
UPLAND Planning + Design Inc.,  
in association with REConsulting Group,  
for the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's.

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The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's



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Chapter 1

# Introduction

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# 1 Purpose

Located in the heart of Nova Scotia's Eastern Shore, the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's has experienced many changes in the past years, alongside other Canadian municipalities. Rapid technological, economic, environmental, demographic and social changes have impacted how people today engage in their communities. Through this Recreation Master Plan, the Municipality has recognized the potential of recreation to address the socio-demographic inequities that limit the participation and engagement of all citizens.

By developing a Recreation Master Plan, the Municipality is seizing the opportunity to bolster recreation participation and embrace its arts, culture, and tourism potential, all while capitalizing on its natural setting, and rural identity. Residents are able to enjoy the programs and services that the Municipality provides in partnership with community groups. The natural landscape in St. Mary's is a defining feature of the area, and the many trails, parks, and wilderness areas provide residents and visitors immersive outdoor experiences at every turn. As well, the St. Mary's River welcomes people of all ages to participate in a wide variety of activities in the longest river in the province.

The Municipality has already started to take important steps towards improving the health and wellbeing of its residents through the creation of the 2016 Active Sherbrooke Plan and the 2017 St. Mary's Active Living Strategy. This Recreation Master Plan will exist in the context of the aforementioned plans, as well as the relevant provincial recreation plans and strategies.

This Recreation Master Plan is a roadmap and framework for the Municipality to guide its recreation activities for the future. By accomplishing the recommendations contained within this Plan, the Municipality can aspire to reflect the community's vision for recreation in St. Mary's with recreational assets and opportunities that ensure sustainability, attachment to, and engagement within the broader community.

## 2 Methodology

The recommendations contained within this Recreation Master Plan were developed through the following three-phase approach:

1. Discovery + Analysis
2. Community Consultation
3. Planning

The results of the Discovery + Analysis phase can be found in the Current State of Recreation report summary on page 5. That background work served as the foundation for the recommendations contained in this Recreation Master Plan, and included a review of relevant plans and policies in St. Mary's, as well as an analysis of municipal, provincial, and national recreation trends and best practices. It also involved conducting an inventory of the existing recreation facilities in the Municipality, as well as an analysis of the gaps and opportunities concerning facilities, programs, services, and events.

The findings from the Community Consultation phase of the project are summarized on page 6, and the "What We Heard" report included as Appendix 2. This phase provided a deeper understanding of community preferences, building upon the work from the first phase of the project.

The Community Consultation phase provided residents, community members, and other stakeholders in St. Mary's the opportunity to provide their feedback regarding recreation in the Municipality. Engagement opportunities were held virtually due to ongoing public health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two public surveys were conducted: one general survey and one specific to youth. The surveys gathered input from residents with respect to existing recreation opportunities, barriers to participation in recreation, and the community's desires for the future. About 40 people provided their input through this method.

Additionally, 20 interviews were conducted with Municipal staff, Council, and recreation and community groups, and a virtual community consultation was held over Zoom.

The results from the interviews, public consultation, and survey were grouped into themes, and organized by the frequency that they were mentioned across methods. Acknowledging the impacts of COVID-19, there is a separate section that addresses the pandemic and its impacts on recreation opportunities.

Ultimately, the results from the first and second phases of the project resulted in the development of the Recreation Master Plan and its recommendations. The Plan establishes a set of actions for the parks, trails, and recreation facilities in St. Mary's, in addition to an operational action plan for Municipal Council and the Recreation Department.

### 3 State of Recreation in St. Mary's

The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's hosts a wide range of recreation facilities, opportunities, and programs, especially given the size and density of its population. As of 2021, St. Mary's was home to 2,161 residents, and its geography spans approximately 1,909 square kilometers. The Municipality owns and operates the St. Mary's Recplex, a multi-use facility featuring a rink and multi-use spaces. The Municipality also utilizes a number of facilities throughout the district including several community halls, a fitness centre, a meeting/program space attached to the local school, as well as various sports fields, playgrounds, and paddling opportunities.

The stunning scenery of St. Mary's is enjoyed by visitors and residents alike through its extensive network of parks and trails, which offer opportunities for a range of experience levels. Some trails are located within Municipal and Provincial parks, while others cross private land. Many are maintained by local community trail groups. Sherbrooke Village is a unique attraction in St. Mary's; a late 1800's live-action historical reenactment experience that provides cultural and recreational opportunities not available in most communities.

The Municipality currently supports the delivery of recreation programming through three mechanisms: direct, indirect, and community and/or private sector initiated. This mixed approach allows the Municipality to build relationships in the community to provide a wider range of recreation opportunities. This is not only an efficient use of the Municipality's human and fiscal resources, but also an effective strategy to engage the community.

While the Municipality provides a range of programs at little to no cost to its residents, there are still access barriers to recreation. Distance was cited as one of the most common barriers to access, which relates to the population in St. Mary's being spread out across a vast geography without a large concentration of people in any one area.

The population in St. Mary's has been declining over the last 25 years, although the rate of decline has been slowing for the last 10 years. The working-age (20-64 years) and youth (under 20 years of age) populations have remained in decline, and it is projected that this trend will continue. However, the senior population (65+) has been increasing. This trend is projected to continue, with a general shift towards an older population overall.

Another demographic trend impacting recreation provision is household income. The median income in St. Mary's is \$49,920, which is lower than that of Nova Scotia. Close to 54% of households in St. Mary's earn less than \$30,000 a year, a percentage that is higher than the rate across the province as a whole. A larger proportion of residents in St. Mary's receive government transfer when compared to the rest of the province. However, shelter costs and home values in St. Mary's are relatively low when compared to the rest of Nova Scotia.

In planning for recreation, the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's must take into consideration wider demographic trends occurring within the community and beyond. This includes the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its related restrictions. Furthermore, the dispersed nature of the population in St. Mary's also has direct implications on the ways the Municipality will be able to provide recreation programs, services, and amenities in a sustainable manner.

## 4 Engagement Summary

Throughout the engagement phase of this project a number of key themes emerged:

### Impacts of COVID-19

Many participants pointed to COVID-19 restrictions as playing a key part in changing their access to recreation. The engagement found the pandemic had also affected program registration and the recruitment of recreation staff and volunteers, limiting program offerings.

### Access and Inclusion

Distance, lack of program/classes, and lack of facilities were all cited as key barriers to participation in recreation opportunities. There was a desire expressed for program offerings to be spread across the Municipality, as well as for support with transportation.

### Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

Participants cherish the natural environment in St. Mary's, but noted that there is potential for the Municipality to do more to encourage people to recreate outside. Two key areas for improvement were existing trail facilities and access to the St. Mary's River.

### Collaboration and Partnerships

Coordination with other organizations was raised as a way to allow for a wider variety of recreational opportunities in St. Mary's. Participants identified Liscomb Lodge, Sherbrooke Village, and St. Francis Xavier University as good candidates.

### Capacity to Run Recreation Programs

It was noted that the Municipality is dependent on volunteers to facilitate programs, but has struggled with their recruitment and retention.

### Facilities and Amenities

Participants flagged the need for new or enhanced facilities, and the Recplex was identified as not being used to its full potential. It was noted that outdoor spaces could also be improved, for both structured and unstructured activities.

### Improving Communication

Most participants were aware of recreation opportunities in the Municipality, but identified a need to better communicate program offerings to reach a wider demographic.

### Trails

A majority of participants access trails, but it was noted that maps and signage would help to identify trail locations and level of difficulty.

### Age-based Program Offerings

Participants pointed to a gap in program offerings for youth and young adults, and a need for multi-generational and intergenerational recreation programs.



Merissa  
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JULY 6, 2016

Epic Canadian  
RACE BIB

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DUSTIN  
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KIEARA  
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VICTORIA  
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Chapter 2

# Planning

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## 5 Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles

### 5.1 Vision Statement

The Vision Statement for recreation in St. Mary's establishes the long-term ambitions and aspirations for the community. The Vision Statement helps to answer the question "where do we want to be in 2028?" This Recreation Master Plan, and the vision that guides the recommendations it contains, was established through an extensive public engagement process where residents, community members, and other stakeholders came together and shared their thoughts and experiences. The Vision Statement that Council has adopted to guide recreation in St. Mary's is:

*St. Mary's has thriving, connected, and engaged communities where residents and visitors have access to diverse opportunities, experiences, and pursuits that foster active living, creative enrichment, and community vitality.*

### 5.2 Mission Statement

Although it will be the responsibility of Council to make the high-level decisions regarding recreation in St. Mary's, this Recreation Master Plan will be primarily implemented and administered by the Community Development and Recreation Department. A Mission Statement provides high-level direction to the Department concerning the administration and implementation of the Recreation Master Plan in St. Mary's, and will help to ensure positive success and outcomes over the long-term. The Mission Statement established for the Community Development and Recreation Department is:

*The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's Community Development and Recreation Department provides leadership, support, and guidance for the development and delivery of sustainable public recreation and community development services. It does this in cooperation with communities and partners to enhance the quality of life of residents, and to support safe and livable communities. The department achieves this through providing:*

- + Residents and visitors with the knowledge, tools, and resources for self-directed recreation pursuits;*
- + Safe and welcoming facilities and outdoor spaces; and*
- + Quality service delivery leadership.*

### 5.3 Guiding Principles

A series of guiding principles and goals have been established that will provide the philosophical foundation to the recommendations within this Recreation Master Plan.

The guiding principles are intended to provide direction over the life of the Plan, regardless of any change in municipal leadership, policy or programs. They were established based on the public engagement that was completed throughout the planning process. The goals for this Plan have been established from, and reinforce, the National Framework for Recreation in Canada. The guiding principles and goals for this Plan are:



#### ***Quality Recreation Service Delivery***

All interactions and experiences with St. Mary's citizens and participants are of the highest quality, citizen and customer oriented and evaluated for continual improvement.



#### ***Community Engagement***

St. Mary's recreation service delivery engages citizens, Council and other district departments in ensuring its citizens can volunteer, gather, celebrate, and participate in activities that promote individual and community wellbeing.



#### ***Sustainability***

St. Mary's recreation service delivery meets the needs of its citizens while respecting fiscal, community and environmental resources and ensures the ability of future generations to fulfil their recreation needs.



#### ***Environmental Stewardship***

St. Mary's respects, protects and preserves its green spaces and places to ensure its citizens have continued access and connections to nature.



#### ***Equity***

Access and inclusion underscore all aspects of St. Mary's recreation service delivery.



#### ***Collaboration***

St. Mary's values and nurtures mutually beneficial partnerships with the private sector and all levels of government.



#### ***Rural Identity***

Residents enjoy and celebrate the rural way of life in St. Mary's.

## 6 Outline of Recommendations

The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's hosts a significant number of recreation facilities given its population size. However, the Municipality faces challenges with respect to service delivery due to its population being so spread out, and without a large concentration of people in any one area. At the same time, many residents have expressed a desire for recreation opportunities near their homes.

The following recommendations were developed in response to the challenges faced by the Municipality. The recommendations focus largely on policy development, programming, and service provision, while facility improvements and new development opportunities are also included. The list of recommendations also includes suggestions for strategic planning and partnerships that would improve the Municipality's ability to meet the community development and recreation expectations of the community.

The recommendations within this Plan are categorized into the following four sections:

- + Places and Spaces,
- + Community Collaboration,
- + Enhancing Department Capacity, and
- + Program Delivery

Some of the recommendations established in this Plan include associated actions that the Municipality may wish to complete in accomplishing the recommendation. These are included as bullets within the text of the recommendation.

In order to assist with implementation, each recommendation is accompanied by timing and a priority indicator. These are explained in Table 1.

Table 1. Recommendation timing and priority indicators.

Timing		
	Now	This recommendation should be implemented in the first 1 to 2 years following the Plan's adoption.
	Next	This recommendation should be implemented 3 to 5 years following the Plan's adoption.
	Future	This recommendation should be implemented 6 to 10 years following the Plan's adoption.
	Ongoing	This recommendation should be implemented on an ongoing basis.
Priority		
	High	This recommendation has a high degree of importance.
	Medium	This recommendation should be implemented following the high priority recommendations.
	Low	This recommendation is not as pressing as the medium and high priority recommendations, but is important nonetheless.

## 7 Places and Spaces

Regardless of the activity, sports, recreation, arts, and culture happen somewhere. It can be in large multipurpose facilities, small community halls, within other spaces such as libraries or businesses, in someone's home, and outdoors. The options of what St. Mary's residents and visitors can do to recreate are driven by the spaces available and how accessible they are. St. Mary's is fortunate to have abundant outdoor recreation opportunities that provide a place for self-directed and group activities. There are also indoor facilities in the community that can host various programs and services.

While residents of St. Mary's love their outdoor resources, they generally feel that they are not being used to their full potential. To overcome this, residents think access to these resources needs to be easier. This includes improved signage and maps, more introductory programs for novice participants, and better features, including access to washrooms or improved boat launch options on the river. The community also recognizes that a significant eco-tourism opportunity exists in their region, and enhanced outdoor facilities will lead to greater prosperity for all.

While residents would like more facilities in their community, they also realize that there are financial limitations to what the Municipality can do. Residents believe there needs to be a focus on maintaining and enhancing what the Municipality has. Several people noted that they felt some indoor facilities were not being used to their full potential either.

People also recognize that some resources are available from businesses, community organizations, or neighbouring communities. The Municipality should pursue partnership opportunities to create the broadest base of recreation opportunities possible. One core element of recreation in Nova Scotia is swimming. While people generally recognize a year-round aquatic facility is not something the Municipality can support, opportunities for children to learn to swim are critical.

### Recommended Municipal Roles

The Municipality has a number of core roles concerning recreation places and spaces:

- + The Municipality should acquire, maintain, and promote natural spaces to ensure residents and visitors have a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities in their community.
- + The Municipality should encourage and support community-managed recreation places and spaces.
- + The Municipality should build and maintain recreation infrastructure that could not exist without their ownership.
- + The Municipality should promote recreation and all opportunities to recreate to residents and visitors.

### Actions for Consideration

The Places and Spaces category is organized by the following topics:

- + Accessibility;
- + Existing Facility Infrastructure Needs; and
- + Facility Development Opportunities.

## 7.1

## Accessibility

Recommendation:

*As per the 2017 Provincial Accessibility Act and the Municipality's Accessibility Plan, each municipally-operated recreation facility, and facility regularly used by the Municipality, should be audited for accessibility, and a plan developed to increase access to persons with disabilities.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 7.3

## Accessibility

Recommendation:

*Seek funding opportunities to assist community partners in updating a waterway access site to be fully accessible, including parking, water access, washrooms, and other associated facilities. Once completed consider another water access site.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 7.2

## Accessibility

Recommendation:

*Working with community partners, upgrade a trail site to be fully accessible, including parking, the trail, washrooms and other associated facilities. Once completed consider other trails.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 7.4

## Accessibility

Recommendation:

*Support community organizations to have their facilities audited for accessibility. Future requests for funding from community organizations should require a commitment to accessibility, and action plans must address it.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.5

## Accessibility

Recommendation:

*Future Recreation Facility upgrades or construction should follow the Municipality’s Accessibility Plan and project managers should consult with the St. Mary’s Accessibility Advisory Committee.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.6

## Accessibility

Recommendation:

*There are existing grant funding programs from the Government of Nova Scotia to support recreation accessibility work. The Municipality should explore these opportunities to help fund identified accessibility projects related to the Community Development and Recreation Department.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.7

## Existing Facility Infrastructure

Recommendation:

*Enhance existing park spaces within St. Mary’s through site improvements.*

- + *Dedicate resources to regular maintenance of path surfaces throughout the District’s parks.*
- + *Provide additional seating opportunities and other amenities within parks.*
- + *Explore appropriate areas for solid waste receptacles at parks based on capacity to maintain.*
- + *Provide bicycle parking racks and a bicycle pump at each park or trailhead parking area.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.8

## Existing Facility Infrastructure

Recommendation:

*There are trail systems located within St. Mary’s that are not owned by the Municipality. Meet with trail owners/operators and determine ways in which the Municipality can support organizations to perform upgrades or maintenance. Example: co-hosting trail clean up days or applying for funding to support hiring trail maintenance employee.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.9

## Existing Facility Infrastructure

Recommendation:

*The St. Mary’s Fitness Centre is located at St. Mary’s Education Centre and Academy. The facility’s hours are limited due to restrictions placed on access by the school. This facility area has its own entrance and is secure from the rest of the school. The Municipality should implement a key card system for access to increase the centre’s availability to residents. This would increase usage, increase general levels of activities, and improve general revenues, which could be used to support other activities or services.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.10

## Existing Facility Infrastructure

Recommendation:

*Explore and implement year-round, intergenerational, and universally accessible hiking programs, especially for novices.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.11

## Existing Facility Infrastructure

Recommendation:

*Complete a life cycle planning exercise on the Recplex, sport fields, playgrounds, and other Municipally-owned facilities to develop long-term capital plans to ensure their sustainability and longevity. This process should include reviewing facility energy audit completed in 2021 and a heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) review of the Recplex.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.12

## Existing Facility Infrastructure

Recommendation:

*Support organizations in the development of a shared waterway development, usage, and maintenance plan with outdoor community stakeholders to guide community and public investment in waterways and their access points. This work should include the river, lakes, and ocean access.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.13

Existing Facility Infrastructure

Recommendation:

*There is a desire to increase the usage of and net revenue generated by the Recplex. The Municipality should develop a business case to review the following opportunities:*

- + *Modify the seating area to create sufficient space for a horseshoe-style walking track;*
- + *Off-ice seasonal programming such as pickleball, padel, floor hockey, carpet bowling, dance, indoor archery, lacrosse, private rentals, and community events;*
- + *New programming opportunities such as non-competitive hockey or ringette programs for children, youth, and families.*
- + *Explore the potential of renting space to not for profit and private sector physical activity, sport and recreation, and arts and culture organizations to allow them to run more programs in the community.*
- + *Promote the Recplex as a gathering place for community events and festivals.*
- + *The purchase of a thermal ice cover to allow for dry surface events during the ice season.*
- + *Review the facility’s air handling, humidity and temperature controls.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.14

Existing Facility Infrastructure

Recommendation:

*Support the various community halls and associated features such as playgrounds in the community to complete their own facility reviews and maintenance plans.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.15

Existing Facility Infrastructure

Recommendation:

*Review standard operating procedures used at Municipal facilities to ensure best practices are followed. Utilize training offered by Recreation Facilities Association of Nova Scotia (RFANS). RFANS provides such training, tools, and support. These tools and resources should also be made available to community organizations.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.16

## Existing Facility Infrastructure

Recommendation:

***Consider grants from organizations such as Clean Nova Scotia or Efficiency Nova Scotia when seeking opportunities to reduce energy costs.***

Timing:



Priority:



7.17

## Facility Development

Recommendation:

***Examine low-cost facility development options that would create opportunities for youth (and adults). A bicycle pump track has proven exceptionally popular with youth in other communities. A climbing wall would also add another dimension to the recreation opportunities in the community. Finally, disc golf has proven popular with these target groups.***

Timing:



Priority:



7.18

## Facility Development

Recommendation:

***The Municipality should continue to support the development of community gardens.***

Timing:



Priority:



## 7.19

## Facility Development

Recommendation:

*Develop an Active Transportation and Trails Strategy for the Municipality, focusing on network hierarchies, future trail and active transportation additions, trail improvements and maintenance, and trail programming. Some recommended components include:*

- + *Strategies for ensuring that trail and waterway maps and information is available from multiple sources, both on and off-line;*
- + *A Parks Wayfinding Signage Plan including recommended improvements to trailhead maps and wayfinding signage for parks, trails and, waterways in the community;*
- + *A Shared Trail Development, Usage, and Maintenance Plan developed with outdoor community stakeholders to guide community and public investment in trails;*
- + *A Motorized Vehicle Plan for enhancing wilderness access while managing environmental impacts, developed in partnership with local ATV, UTV, and snowmobile groups;*
- + *Strategies for formalizing online promotion and access to motorized areas in the Municipality;*
- + *Identifying a formal year-round staging area for ATVs, UTVs, and snowmobiles;*
- + *Identifying opportunities to establish 'Braille Trails' that use braille markers on or near features to describe the surroundings for persons with visual impairments.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 7.20

## Facility Development

Recommendation:

*Work with community partners to design and create dedicated picnic areas with accessible seating options in spaces throughout the Municipality. Explore covered seating options.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 7.21

## Facility Development

Recommendation:

*Develop a conceptual design for improvements to Pioneer Park including:*

- + *Exploring non-motorized boat launch along the St. Mary's River.*

Timing:



Priority:



7.22

## Facility Development

Recommendation:

***Explore public art installations in Municipal Parks.***

Timing:



Priority:



7.23

## Facility Development

Recommendation:

***Advocate for the development of a provincial or federal camping site within St. Mary's.***

Timing:



Priority:



## 8 Community Collaboration

The United Nations defines community development as “a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems.” Community development has also been described as a system of change by the people for the people. Recreation and sport activities and services are people-oriented experiences that create many opportunities to improve the community we live, work, and play in. As such, the Municipality of the District of St. Mary’s has a significant role to play in community development.

The community relies heavily on volunteers to support local organizations and causes. All of the community organizations consulted through this process highlighted that they struggle with finding and keeping volunteers, who have the skills and the time, to support their activities. Without an active volunteer base many of the programs and services in the community would not be available.

Residents felt that there were opportunities for cooperation among various community organizations and see the Municipality as a facilitator. Between the general recreation

opportunities in St. Mary’s, the Whale Sanctuary, Liscomb Lodge, Sherbrooke Village, and other organizations, the Municipality is a growing tourist destination. Eco-tourism is a growing market segment, and St. Mary’s offers many features to those visitors.

Several families in the community go to facilities in other municipalities to access recreation opportunities not available in St. Mary’s. Residents also noted that there are times when the various organizations in the community offering or supporting recreation compete against each other.

### Recommended Municipal Roles

The Municipality has several core roles in supporting community development:

- + The Municipality should help community organizations coordinate their efforts and maximize the effectiveness of their work.
- + The Municipality should support community organizations in the recruitment and retention of volunteers.
- + The Municipality should offer support to help community organizations remain sustainable.
- + The Municipality should develop a shared marketing and promotion strategy for related or mutually supportive programs and services.

### Actions for Consideration

The Community Collaboration category of recommendations is organized by the following topics:

- + Community Engagement;
- + Community Partnerships; and
- + Volunteerism.

## 8.1 Community Engagement

Recommendation:

*Design an annual or biannual engagement process that provide opportunities for organizations, residents, and visitors to provide meaningful input into the future decisions of the Municipality’s Community Development and Recreation Department. This process should be part of the annual planning process. This includes a yearly survey process to measure resident satisfaction with recreation programs and services.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 8.2 Community Engagement

Recommendation:

*In partnership with the Municipality’s Land Development Committee, conduct comprehensive engagement with the community to gather ideas and recommendations for the acquisition, expansion, or development of new parks and public spaces.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 8.3 Community Partnerships

Recommendation:

*Establish a committee or similar structure of community organizations that meet regularly to explore opportunities for inter-agency cooperation, promotion, and referrals.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 8.4 Community Partnerships

Recommendation:

*Develop tool to help promote grant opportunities available to community organization. Host training opportunities on grant writing and provide assistance where needed.*

Timing:




Priority:



## 8.5 Community Partnerships

Recommendation:

*Develop a marketing and promotion strategy to include recreation services run by the Municipality and community organizations. This strategy must include off-line tactics as not all residents have satisfactory internet service. This strategy should also include opportunities outside the municipality that are either more advanced than current offerings or simply unavailable within the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's.*


Timing: 

Priority: 

## 8.7 Community Partnerships

Recommendation:

*Align the principles of the recreation master plan with the General Government Grants program when assessing funding requests for recreation projects.*

Timing: 

Priority: 

## 8.6 Community Partnerships

Recommendation:

*The recruitment, training and development of program leaders is a challenge for the Municipality and community groups. The Municipality should support training and development opportunities for community organizations to increase the number of qualified program leaders generally available in the community. This would include supporting access to resources such as Volunteer Nova Scotia, Volunteer Canada, or Charity Village and offering workshops and coaching around key topics.*


Timing: 

Priority: 

## 8.8 Community Partnerships

Recommendation:

*Work with municipal economic development initiatives to include recreational opportunities and events in any tourism marketing efforts for the Municipality.*

Timing: 

Priority: 

## 8.9

## Community Partnerships

Recommendation:

*The Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) and Provincial Recreation Organizations (PROs) provide a wide range of program services and supports. Expand upon existing partnerships with organizations and develop new partnerships to take advantage of their opportunities to support the organization of volunteer recruitment, retention and training workshops, seminars, and volunteer training.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 8.10

## Volunteerism

Recommendation:

*Explore the opportunity to provide access to a group liability insurance policy to community organizations to help reduce their operating costs.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 8.11

## Volunteerism

Recommendation:

*Help groups and organizations review and update their governance and operational structures as requested.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 9 Enhancing Department Capacity

As revealed through the citizen engagement surveys and consultations, there is a high level of satisfaction with the Community Development and Recreation Department. However, concerns were voiced that the capacity of the department may not be sufficient to meet the expectations of citizens, Municipal Council, and staff regarding recreation service delivery.

While the department does attempt to balance its provision of direct programs with assisting communities and their groups in organizing their own opportunities, there is a need to align the department's human and fiscal resource capacity to the roles that are designed to meet the recreational needs of the Municipality.

There are no specific policies to guide the department staff in administering the Municipality's recreation service delivery. The master plan suggests a number of potential policy actions that could be developed and implemented over time.

### Recommended Municipal Roles

The Municipality has a number of core roles concerning enhancing the department's organizational capacity:

- + The Municipality should ensure that municipal recreation operations have sufficient resources (human, fiscal, and administrative) to support the delivery of quality, safe, and inclusive recreation opportunities;
- + The Municipality should develop policies and procedures that define and guide the delivery of recreation services.
- + The Municipality should continue to enhance communication and promotion efforts related to recreation opportunities and benefits.
- + The Municipality should implement an ongoing process for data collection to inform decision making.

### Actions for Consideration

The Enhancing Department Capacity category of recommendations is organized by the following topics:

- + Communication;
- + Data Collection;
- + Partnerships;
- + Policies and Procedures;
- + Reducing Barriers;
- + Regional Collaboration;
- + Revenue Sources;
- + Staffing; and
- + Strategic Planning.

## 9.1

## Communication

Recommendation:

***Create a community engagement strategy to record, share, and celebrate recreation's positive impacts through a variety of mediums including press releases, newsletter, council meeting reports, and online methods.***

Timing:



Priority:



## 9.2

## Communication

Recommendation:

***Inventory all recreation communication tools and assess the consumption rates of those tools used by the public.***

Timing:



Priority:



## 9.3

## Communication

Recommendation:

***Strive to make communication materials used by the Community Development and Recreation Department accessible using the Municipality's Accessibility Plan (fonts, contrast, content and readability).***

Timing:



Priority:



## 9.4

## Data Collection

Recommendation:

***Improve the electronic registration and participant tracking system for recreation services.***

Timing:



Priority:



9.5

## Data Collection

Recommendation:

*Monitor ongoing and regular community, regional, provincial and national research initiatives relating the recreation and community development.*

Timing:



Priority:



9.7

## Partnerships

Recommendation:

*Develop a partnership framework that considers the goals and outcomes of the potential partner; the contribution of each partner; the tenure of the partnership; the benefits and costs to the Municipality; amount of nurturing required to ensure success; and the accountabilities of each partner including performance measures.*

Timing:



Priority:



9.6

## Partnerships

Recommendation:

*Update Community Use of Schools Agreement with the Centre of Education with the intention of improving access and coordination.*

Timing:



Priority:



9.8

## Policies and Procedures

Recommendation:

*Establish a Municipal Recreation Capital Assistance Fund for organizations that own or operate in facilities that provide recreational opportunities that benefit municipal residents.*

Timing:



Priority:



## 9.9

## Policies and Procedures

Recommendation:

***Develop a formal Inclusion Policy that ensures recreation facilities, programs and activities are accessible, welcoming and culturally inclusive.***

Timing:



Priority:



## 9.10

## Policies and Procedures

Recommendation:

***Develop a Fee and Subsidization Policy with cost recovery ratios and a revenue generation strategy to ensure fees and charges are appropriate, transparent, fair and inclusive.***

Timing:



Priority:



## 9.11

## Policies and Procedures

Recommendation:

***Develop a Facility Allocation Policy for municipal recreation facilities (Recplex and Fitness Centre). Procedures to be explored include:***

- + ***Allocating space based on the greatest possible benefit;***
- + ***Balancing historical use to space with demonstrated need for space;***
- + ***Ensuring that sufficient space is available for new and emerging groups;***
- + ***Ensuring gender equity;***
- + ***Ensuring user groups demonstrate alignment with appropriate standards of programming (including S4L and the Long-Term Athlete Development) guidelines set forth nationally by each sport's governing body.***
- + ***Develop a Community Events Support Policy to guide the Municipality's involvement in the organizing and staging of events. Particular to the Recplex and other municipally owned facilities, the policy should include booking policies, priorities for use of space, hosting capacity of facilities, commercial restrictions, fees and charges, applicable bylaws, alcohol restrictions, and potential sources of funding and sponsorship.***

Timing:



Priority:



9.12

## Reducing Barriers

Recommendation:

***Work with KidSport and Jumpstart to further identify opportunities to expand the reach of their programs and affordable recreational opportunities in the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's.***

Timing:



Priority:



9.14

## Reducing Barriers

Recommendation:

***Represent diversity and inclusion in promotional materials (i.e. photos, language, communities).***

Timing:



Priority:



9.13

## Reducing Barriers

Recommendation:

***Review and amend existing department procedures to contain objectives that contribute towards diversity and inclusion. Develop a policy that addresses cultural responsiveness.***

Timing:



Priority:



9.15

## Reducing Barriers

Recommendation:

***On an annual basis, review identified barriers (including financial, physical and social), develop mitigating efforts for each, and communicate these efforts to the public.***

Timing:



Priority:



9.16

## Regional Collaboration

Recommendation:

*Continue and/or enhance the department’s commitment to working with regional recreation partners in organizing regional networking and training opportunities for staff, program leaders, and volunteers; monitoring trends; conducting research; assessing opportunities for regional facility sharing and planning.*

Timing:



Priority:



9.18

## Revenue Sources

Recommendation:

*Develop a gifting and bequeath program by developing a “gifts catalogue” that identifies and promotes community gifting opportunities. It could be structured to include both a capital and operating portion.*

Timing:



Priority:



9.17

## Revenue Sources

Recommendation:

*Diversify Community Development and Recreation Department revenue sources by exploring opportunities for corporate sponsorship and consider naming rights, partnership, and leasing of municipal assets. Consider developing policy for corporate sponsorship.*

Timing:



Priority:



9.19

## Revenue Sources

Recommendation:

*Continue to seek external funding support, but only when a funding opportunity serves to address a priority or gap in service.*

Timing:



Priority:



9.20

## Staffing

Recommendation:

***Review and/or create Recreation and Community development Department staff job descriptions with new and/or emerging responsibilities. Engage expertise to assist in the process by identifying key competencies required to fulfill the departments responsibilities.***

Timing:



Priority:



9.22

## Strategic Planning

Recommendation:

***Work with internal and external stakeholders to clearly define the balance of capacity, resources and increasing operational demands of the Community Development and Recreation Department.***

Timing:



Priority:



9.21

## Staffing

Recommendation:

***Ensure that adequate resources (human and fiscal) are committed to staff training to ensure that the staff have the knowledge and skills to meet the master plan's enhanced community development and program work.***

Timing:



Priority:



9.23

## Strategic Planning

Recommendation:

***Engage in annual strategic planning to increase recreation opportunities for all residents utilizing recommendations and information from the Master Plan.***

Timing:



Priority:



9.24

## Revenue Sources

Recommendation:

***Implement an official park naming strategy to establish formal names for all new municipal parks within the District.***

Timing:



Priority:



9.26

## Strategic Planning

Recommendation:

***Prepare and provide to the public an annual report on progress of the Master Plan.***

Timing:



Priority:



9.25

## Strategic Planning

Recommendation:

***Conduct annual reviews which monitor progress of the master plan's recommendations with key consideration given to alignment to the Municipality's other strategic planning tools. Conduct an annual inventory of recreation opportunities in the Municipality to identify gaps. Use the findings from this inventory to guide program decisions.***

Timing:



Priority:



## 10 Program Delivery

Program delivery refers to the ways in which the St. Mary's Community Development and Recreation Department facilitates and supports recreation opportunities and the types of opportunities it focuses on. The combined factors of a large rural municipality, with sparsely populated small communities, and the changing nature of volunteerism reinforces the notion of embracing a community development focus in program delivery. Throughout the engagement process citizens strongly supported the provision of recreation services but also voiced a desire to access recreation opportunities close to home, at a time and place of their choosing. This plan suggests the Municipality continues its move towards a more collaborative role in the provision of recreation programming, infrastructure, and in building and sustaining a strong volunteer sector.

The population and geography of the municipality lends itself to prioritizing opportunities for self-directed, unstructured recreation and fostering an environment where citizens can manage their own recreation experiences.

However, there is work to be done in addressing programming gaps related to growth in arts and cultural programming for all ages, youth and

seniors physical activity, outdoor and nature-based skill development, program leadership, partnership development, supporting volunteers, and special event delivery and coordination.

### Recommended Municipal Roles

The Municipality has a number of roles concerning its level of service for programming:

- + The Municipality should become an enabler in creating an environment that makes accessing recreation easy, safe, inclusive and equitable for all its residents and visitors.
- + The Municipality should continue to support the provision of recreation opportunities through a combination of direct, indirect and third party private/public sector delivery methods.
- + The Municipality should optimize the unique natural assets of the municipality and connect residents and visitors to nature-based programming, skill development, and environmental education.
- + The Municipality should support the development of significant community-wide events.

### Actions for Consideration

The Program Delivery category of recommendations is organized by the following topics:

- + Arts and Cultural Program Assistance;
- + Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility;
- + Community Programming Assistance;
- + Community-wide Events;
- + Connecting to Nature;
- + Program Planning;
- + Seniors and Youth; and
- + Unstructured and Spontaneous Activity.

10.1

## Arts and Cultural Program Assistance

Recommendation:

*Enhance relationships with arts and cultural groups in St. Mary's and help support its volunteer and program capacity.*

Timing:



Priority:



10.3

## Arts and Cultural Program Assistance

Recommendation:

*Celebrate St. Mary's rural heritage and partner with organizations in supporting the recreation components of heritage events.*

Timing:



Priority:



10.2

## Arts and Cultural Program Assistance

Recommendation:

*Increase arts and cultural awareness, to both promote the arts and to display the arts (i.e. develop an art in public spaces strategy).*

Timing:



Priority:



10.4

## Community Programming Assistance

Recommendation:

*Mobilize communities and guide them through their own program planning and annual review process.*

Timing:



Priority:



10.5

## Community-wide Events

Recommendation:

*Inventory the community events and the groups putting them on throughout the municipality. This inventory will assist event organizers to network and coordinate the timing and promotion of events.*

Timing:



Priority:



10.7

## Community-wide Events

Recommendation:

*Leverage the area's indoor and outdoor assets to optimize opportunities related to sport and eco-tourism.*

Timing:



Priority:



10.6

## Community-wide Events

Recommendation:

*Utilize Partnership Framework to review requests from Community Organizations to partner in hosting large scale community events.*

Timing:



Priority:



10.8

## Connecting to Nature

Recommendation:

*Expand nature based programming across the full age range.*

Timing:



Priority:



10.9

## Connecting to Nature

Recommendation:

*Introduce outdoor skills training in activities such as wilderness canoeing, hiking, sea kayaking, archery, fishing and hunting.*

Timing:



Priority:



10.11

## Connecting to Nature

Recommendation:

*Utilizing the resources of outdoor recreation providers develop an outdoor recreation toolkit to include activity ideas and planning guides.*

Timing:



Priority:



10.10

## Connecting to Nature

Recommendation:

*Explore the feasibility of offering year-round, intergenerational, and universally accessible nature conservancy and outdoor education programming opportunities.*

Timing:



Priority:



10.12

## Connecting to Nature

Recommendation:

*Connect residents to resources and programs offered by Nova Scotia's outdoor recreation/education providers.*

Timing:



Priority:



10.13

## Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility

Recommendation:

***Ensure Department Staff are trained in the principals of cultural competency. Add relevant information into new employee orientation package.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.15

## Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility

Recommendation:

***Encourage cultural bridging by working with multi-cultural and aboriginal groups to expand the number of programs and events oriented to their cultures.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.14

## Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility

Recommendation:

***Build the leadership capacity of community leaders to facilitate the full participation of persons of diverse and racialized backgrounds in developing, leading and evaluating recreation activities.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.16

## Program Planning

Recommendation:

***Develop a decision-making framework to determine which opportunities are best provided directly (by the Municipality), indirectly (by community organizations with support from the Municipality), or left to the private sector.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.17

## Program Planning

Recommendation:

***Adopt a base level of service for programming that ensures all residents have access to unstructured programs, introductory skill development training, and recreation activity sampling at low or no cost.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.19

## Program Planning

Recommendation:

***Align strategic program planning and overall service provision with regional, provincial and national initiatives including the Shared Strategy for Advancing Recreation in Nova Scotia; Sport for Life; SHIFT: Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population; and Let's Get Moving.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.18

## Program Planning

Recommendation:

***Continue to implement the priorities of the Active Living Strategy and follow through in achieving its objectives.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.20

## Seniors and Youth

Recommendation:

***Foster more multi-generational recreation activities.***

Timing:

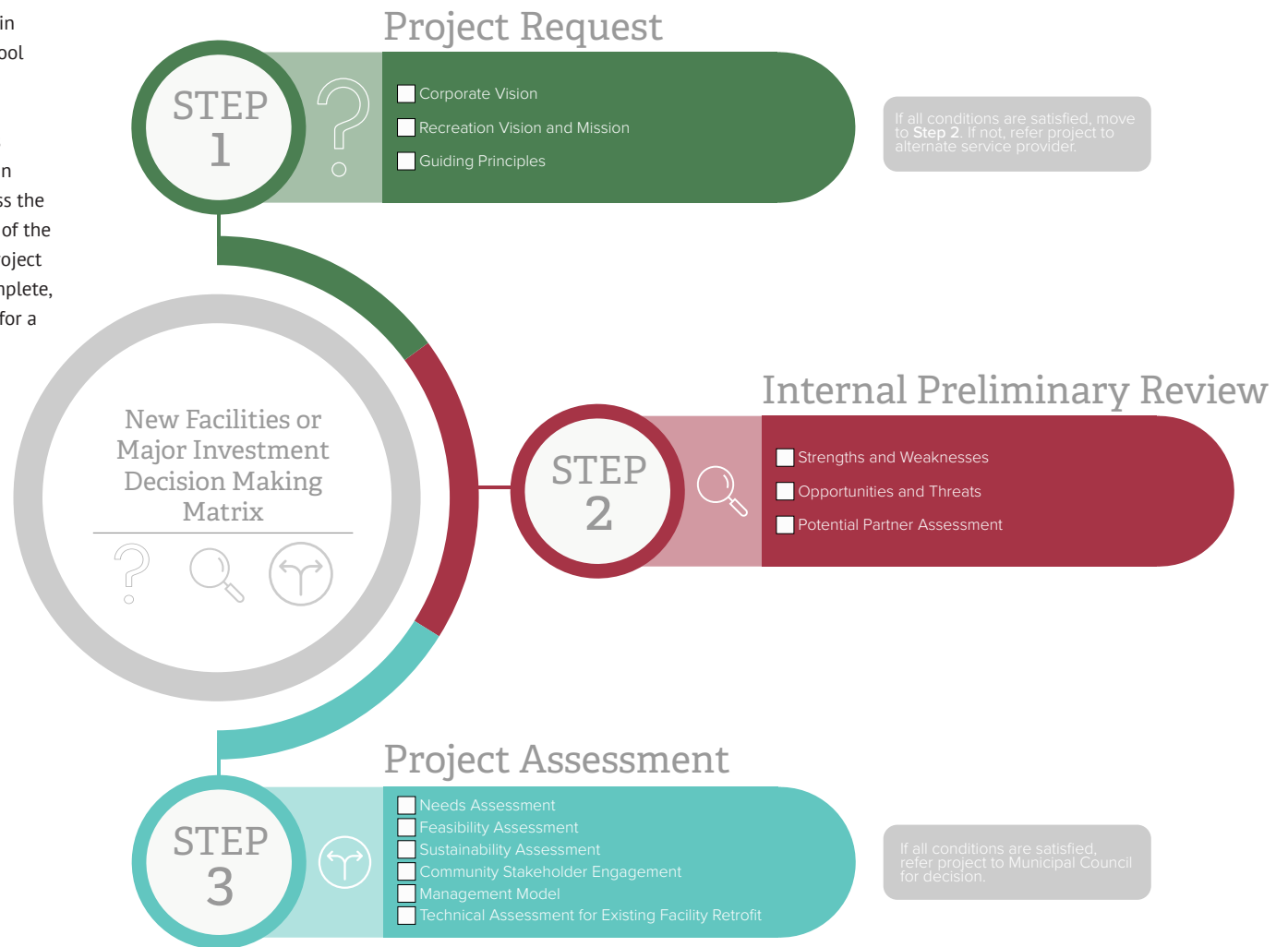


Priority:



Figure 1. New Facility and Major Investment Decision Making Tool

This tool was designed to assist the Municipality in evaluating major investments in recreation. The tool guides decision-makers through a 3-step process. First, a proposal is evaluated against the vision, mission, and guiding principles established in this Plan. If it is in alignment with those statements, an internal preliminary review is undertaken to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the proposal. Finally, a thorough assessment of the project must be completed. Once all assessments are complete, the proposal must be taken to Municipal Council for a decision.



10.21

## Seniors and Youth

Recommendation:

***Expand programming for seniors with a focus on physical activity and social recreation, ensuring that it remains affordable utilizing the concepts of age-friendly communities and partnering with any community stakeholders.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.23

## Seniors and Youth

Recommendation:

***Expand youth leadership opportunities by working more closely with the school and linking youth to sport, recreation and cultural organizations.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.22

## Seniors and Youth

Recommendation:

***Create a youth advisory committee to guide programming decisions.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.24

## Unstructured and Spontaneous Activity

Recommendation:

***Develop an inventory of “learn to” workshops/clinics, both in-person and online to introduce residents to new and emerging activities.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.25

## Unstructured and Spontaneous Activity

Recommendation:

***Add additional equipment loan program sites.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.27

## Unstructured and Spontaneous Activity

Recommendation:

***Partner with the library to create Play Packs for loan utilizing library cards.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.26

## Unstructured and Spontaneous Activity

Recommendation:

***Install “play boxes” at community halls and play spaces.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.28

## Unstructured and Spontaneous Activity

Recommendation:

***Utilize the resources of regional, provincial and national sport and recreation organizations to implement activity sampling opportunities.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.29

## Unstructured and Spontaneous Activity

Recommendation:

***Facilitate the development of “buddy” programs for walking/hiking/cycling and special events in parks and trails.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.31

## Unstructured and Spontaneous Activity

Recommendation:

***Explore using augmented reality technology (apps) to enhance the participant experience.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.30

## Unstructured and Spontaneous Activity

Recommendation:

***Research and explore the feasibility of initiating a mobile recreation activity vehicle that moves from community to community.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.32

## Unstructured and Spontaneous Activity

Recommendation:

***Continue the Municipality’s involvement with Highland Connect, a community recreation database.***

Timing:



Priority:



10.33

## Facility Development

Recommendation:

***Explore partnership opportunities with Liscombe Lodge to offer swimming lessons for children and youth.***

Timing:



Priority:



Opposite: Stonewall Park Look-off  
Photo credit: St. Mary's River Association





Chapter 3

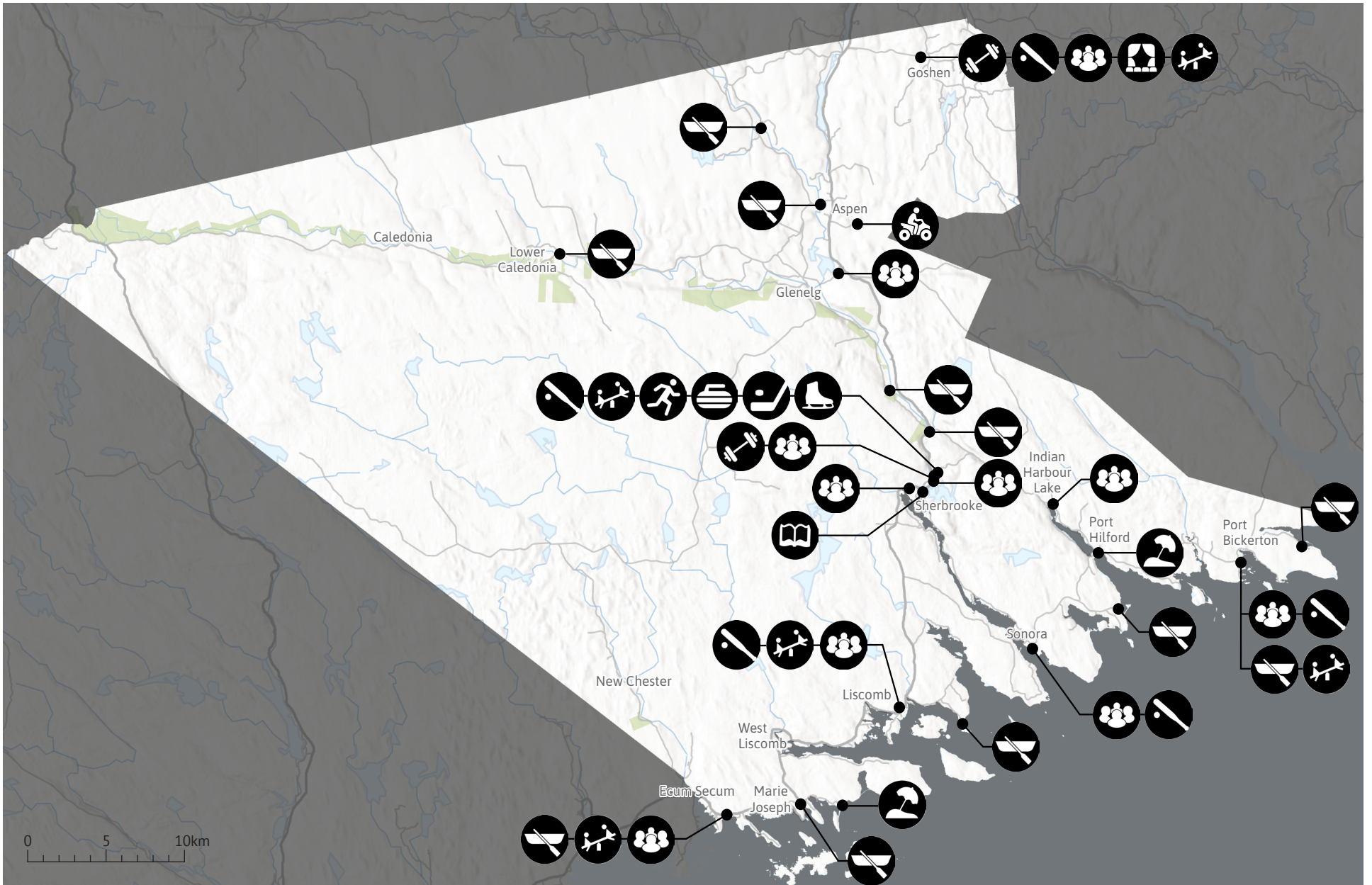
# Appendices

Opposite: Photo credit:  
The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's



## Appendix 1      Map of Recreation Facilities

The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's hosts an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities that provide a place for self-direct and group activities. There are also indoor facilities in the community that can host various programs and services.



## Appendix 2    What We Heard Report

An aerial photograph of a large, calm lake. The left side of the lake is bordered by a dense, green forest that extends to the water's edge. In the middle distance, a small, rounded island covered in trees is visible. The water is a deep blue-green color. The sky is light blue with a few wispy white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

Municipality of the District of St. Mary's

Recreation Master Plan

# What We Heard Report

June 2022

**UPLAND**

**REC**onsulting Group

# 1 Overview

Two public surveys were conducted between April 11 and May 4, 2022, with one being specific to youth. The surveys were virtual, and printed copies were made available through the Municipality. The surveys gathered residents' input and experiences with the existing recreation opportunities, their barriers to participation, and their desires for the future. About 40 people provided their input through this method.

Between April 14 and May 2, 2022, 20 interviews were conducted with Municipal staff, Council, and recreation and community groups, with the opportunity to provide additional comments in writing. These interviews helped provide a better understanding of the experiences of community representatives and service providers. The interviews also helped shape the expectations for the Recreation Master Plan. Those who were not able to participate in a group interview were given the opportunity to answer the questions in writing.

A virtual community consultation over Zoom took place on May 2. While it drew only four participants, it was an insightful conversation with residents. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide additional feedback via email, for which one did.

The results from the interviews, public consultation and survey have been grouped into themes, and organized by the frequency that they were mentioned across methods. Acknowledging the impacts of COVID-19, there is a separate section that addresses the pandemic and its impacts on recreation opportunities.

## 2 Themes

### 2.1 Impacts of COVID-19

Across all methods, it was found that COVID-19 has impacted recreation programs in the Municipality. One in four survey respondents indicated that COVID had impacted their participation in recreation activities. Many respondents pointed to COVID-19 restrictions as playing a key part in changing their access to programs and/or facilities, although many were understanding of the situation.

Even though restrictions have been lifting in the province, it is important to understand that not everyone is ready to “go back to normal.” Many respondents cited health and safety, and their level of comfort in groups and indoors as their main reason for changing activities. A few survey respondents pivoted to virtual programs at home, a new means of program delivery which allowed for recreation program access to some respondents for the first time.

The pandemic has affected both participant registration and the recruitment of recreation staff and volunteers, which limits program offerings. Despite these limitations, some stakeholders pointed to the ability of some programs and facilities to pivot and modify their offerings.

### 2.2 Access and Inclusion

Access to recreation programs in the rural municipality is challenging, and program availability is limited. Stakeholders pointed to a number of possible reasons why. These include: Low participation numbers, unavailability of instructors and volunteers to lead programs, and feelings of exclusivity in team sports.

In terms of accessing the programs, more than half of survey respondents identified these three key barriers to participation in recreation opportunities:

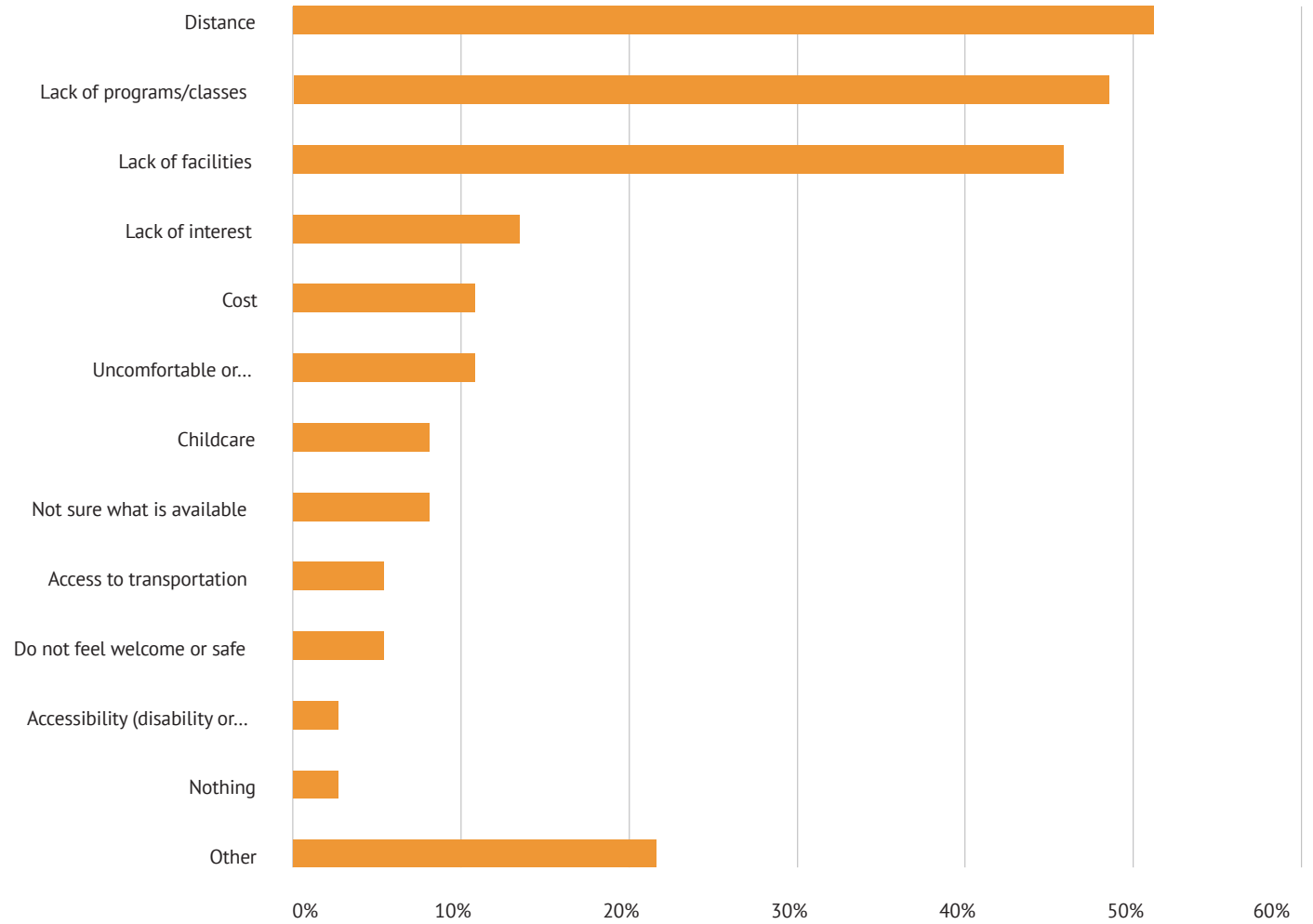
- + Distance
- + Lack of program/classes
- + Lack of facilities

Travelling to other municipalities such as Antigonish, Guysborough and Halifax Regional Municipality to access recreation programs is not uncommon amongst participants. Some stakeholders cited more consistent and diverse program options as their reason for travelling, while others mentioned the quality of the programs in other municipalities. There is also a need to balance program

offerings in more rural areas, and the desire to have support with transportation.

The scheduled timing of recreational programs was also cited as a barrier. This included overlapping programs, and scheduling conflicts for individuals working.

Figure 2. Barriers to Participation in Recreational Opportunities



## 2.3 Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

The natural environment is a key attraction in St. Mary's, and it is a resource that residents value quite highly. However, many stakeholders felt that the outdoors are not being utilized to their full potential. They also expressed this as a missed opportunity for eco-tourism for the Municipality. Two key areas for improvement were repeated throughout in the interviews and the survey: the existing trails and the St. Mary's River.

The trails in St. Mary's are being used by residents, but improvements could be made in order to cater more people, especially novice hikers. The use of trails is an activity that survey respondents switched to during the COVID-19 pandemic. Suggested improvements to hiking trails include:

- + Creation of trail maps
- + Improved signage on the trails
- + Outdoor education programs
- + Hiking programs, especially for novices

Although ATV trails are appreciated, some survey respondents did not want to use them for hiking. Along with improving trails, some stakeholders and survey respondents wished to see more camping sites available.

The second area of improvement is the St. Mary's River, with many stakeholders and respondents pointing to how underutilized this resource is. Some respondents felt the river is not ideal for swimming, but have been using it for other activities like canoeing and kayaking. While it was noted that there are opportunities for equipment rental, survey respondents indicated that there are not enough launching points for non-motorized equipment along the river, and that the accessibility of existing paddling access points could be improved.

## 2.4 Collaboration and Partnerships

Partnerships, collaboration, and coordination with other organizations would allow for a wider variety of recreational opportunities in St. Mary's.

A potential partnership with the Liscombe Lodge was brought forward several times, especially for the use of its swimming pool and rental equipment. Stakeholders pointed to the interest in swimming as a recreational activity, but that the river and lakes are unsuitable for this. Some stakeholders also pointed at the need to coordinate program offerings to avoid overlaps in opportunities.

It was also suggested that there is potential for further collaboration with Sherbrooke Village for special events that feature actors recounting

historical details in a fun atmosphere for all ages. One suggestion was to offer evening ghost walk trail tours which could finish in the graveyard if it's around Halloween. It was also noted that there are opportunities to partner with Sherbrooke Village on other holiday themes with multi-faceted events that include physical activities, music, theatre, and food trucks.

Partnering with St. Francis Xavier University was brought forward as a way to increase volunteer participation and staffing, especially during the summer months.

## 2.5 Capacity to Run Recreation Programs

While the Municipality is heavily dependent on volunteers to facilitate programs, stakeholders have struggled with their recruitment and retention. This, in turn, affects the availability of recreation opportunities in St. Mary's. The impact of COVID-19 was cited as one of the main reasons for this, as many are still wary of in-person activities. In the case of contracted staff, insurance requirements for third-party contractors might play a role in people's decision to lead programs.

## 2.6 Facilities and Amenities

While the majority of survey respondents were at least somewhat satisfied with the access to existing facilities, there is a desire to improve and optimize their use. An overwhelming majority of survey respondents saw the need for new or enhanced recreation facilities in the Municipality.

The RecPlex in particular was seen as an existing facility that is currently not being used to its full potential, and that could have multiple uses in non-Winter months. Some stakeholders preferred having a single, centralized multi-use recreation hub. However, concerns were raised by those in more rural areas in the Municipality. Across methods, it was found that there is a need for maintenance of the existing facilities.

Outdoor spaces could also be improved. When asked to select the outdoor spaces and facilities that the Municipality should prioritize, 74% of respondents chose Trails. Other outdoor facilities that respondents indicated should be prioritized include:

- + Community park spaces
- + Boat launches and water access areas
- + Community gardens
- + Outdoor swimming pool
- + Day use areas, like picnic tables

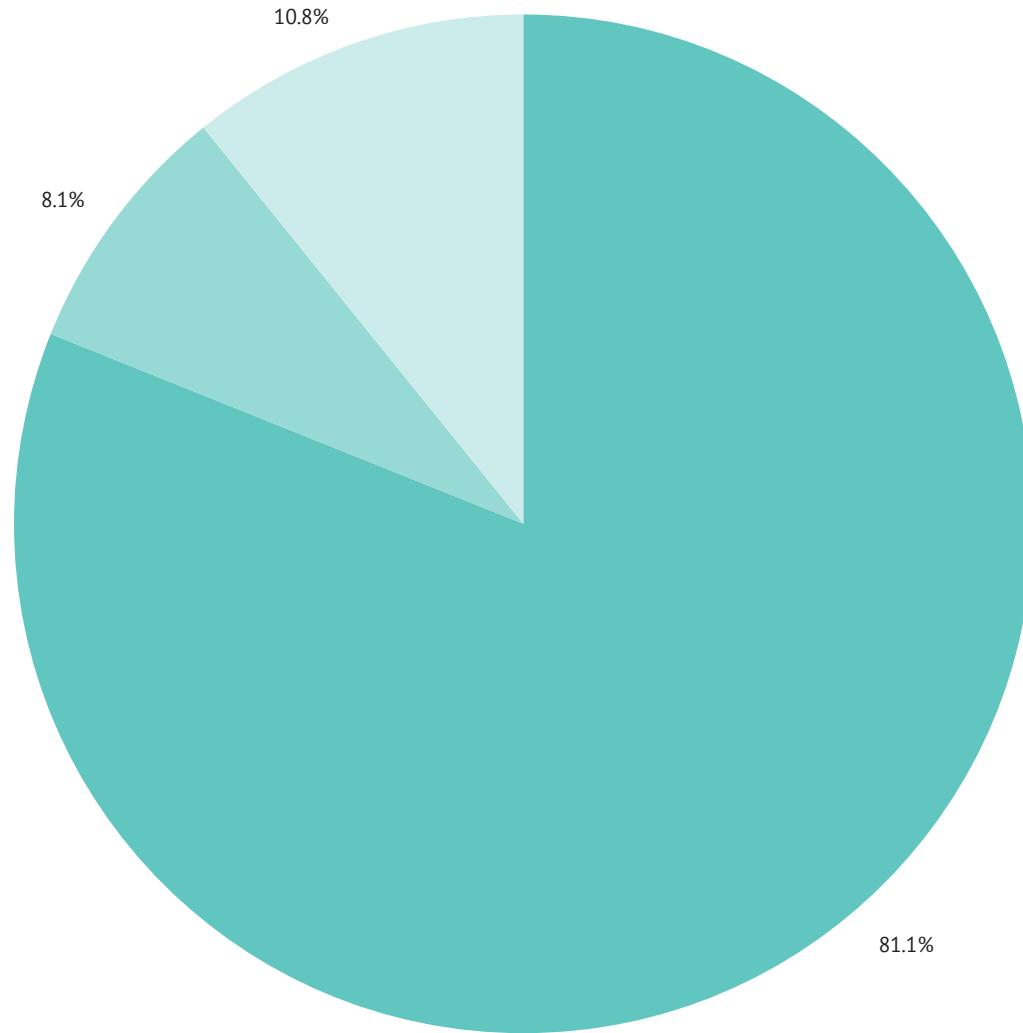
Accessible washrooms in outdoor spaces were something that respondents felt was also missing. Some stakeholders echoed the need for outdoor facilities for unstructured activities, like sitting areas, and picnic tables.

A swimming pool was brought forward by a few survey respondents. While youth wished to see this outdoors, adults preferred an indoor facility.

Despite the need for enhanced or new recreation facilities, a few stakeholders pointed to the financial constraints that the Municipality faces. This restricts possibilities of capital investments.

Figure 3. Do you think there is a need for new and/or enhanced recreation facilities to be developed in the Municipality?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure



## 2.7 Improving Communication

Communication is key to accessing recreation opportunities. When asked about how residents find out about activities, the majority of survey respondents were at least aware of the recreation opportunities available in the Municipality. Only 5% indicated not being aware, and none of the respondents indicated not being aware at all. The top three ways in which residents found out about recreation activities were through the municipal newsletter, by word of mouth, and through social media.

Stakeholders indicated the need to diversify the methods of communication about program offerings to reach wider demographics. There's a perception of heavy reliance on social media for engagement and promotions by the Municipality, while it was felt that the municipal newsletter is likely not being read by youth and younger adults.

Various stakeholders and survey respondents demonstrated a desire for better promotions of the existing natural environment in St. Mary's, like the different local trails and the river. This was as a result of some residents not knowing about them.

## 2.8 Trails

The use of trails increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, as respondents pivoted to outdoor activities. 66% of survey respondents indicated accessing local trails, with the Stonewall Park and Port Bickerton Lighthouse trails being the most frequented. For those who did not use the trails, they indicated that not knowing where they are and being unsure of their difficulty as the main reasons for not accessing them. This aligned with stakeholders' desire to create maps of the trails, to improve signage on them, and to have lessons on trails.

## 2.9 Age-based Program Offerings

There is an overall sense that the Municipality has done very well in programming for young children and seniors. However, many stakeholders pointed to gaps in the program offerings for all other age groups, especially for youth and younger adults. Improvements to different age-based programs include:

- + More physical activity opportunities for seniors
- + Understanding that youth programming differs from children's

Survey respondents were specifically asked to select the types of recreational programming that should be available for children, youth, adults, and older adults. A key point that came out of this question was that most of the program types listed in the survey are actually suitable for a wide range of age groups, with the exception of parent and tot programs.

Across all methods it was found that there is a need for multi-generational and intergenerational recreation programs where all or several age groups can participate together.

### 3 Context

To see how the survey is representative of the actual community, the demographics of the survey respondents are compared against statistics from the 2021 Census. This step is important because it allows for the identification of groups that might not have been represented in the survey, but that are important to the fabric of St. Mary's.

At the time of writing this report, statistics from the 2021 Census were not available for factors related to income and household. In these instances, we have used statistics from the 2016 Census. This will be indicated in each respective section.



Photo credit: St. Mary's River Association

## 4 Demographics

### 4.1 Age

According to the 2021 Census, the 40-64 years age group is the largest in the Municipality, followed by older adults (65+ years of age), individuals under 19 years of age and younger adults (20-39 years of age).

The majority of residents who responded to the survey were between the ages of 40-64 years old, at more than 50% of survey respondents, but this group represents less than 40% of the actual population. Older adults (65+) were significantly underrepresented in the survey, as only 16% of respondents identified as such. In comparison, data from the 2021 census indicates that this age group comprises 39% of the population in the Municipality.

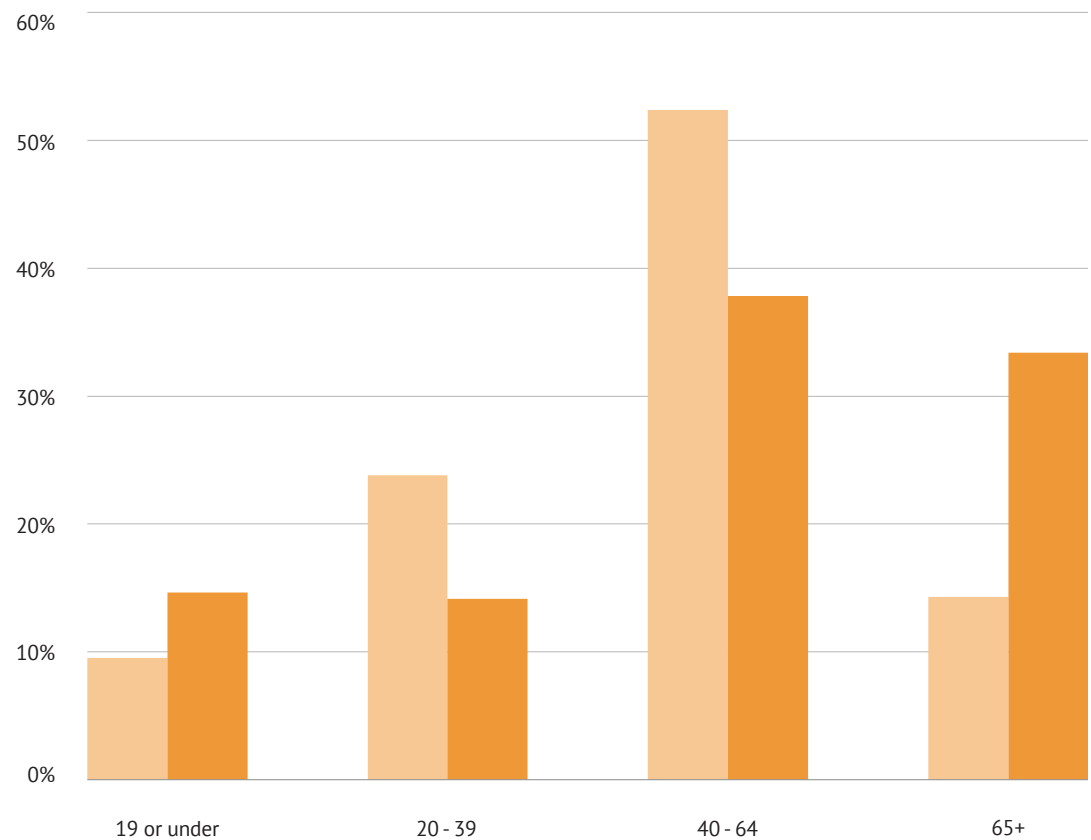


Figure 4. Age Distribution of Survey Respondents vs 2021 Census Population

Recreation Survey  
2021 Census

## 4.2 Income

When comparing household income, there is an over-representation of the top three income brackets, whereas the bottom three income brackets are underrepresented in the survey. In particular, the highest percentage of respondents were in the \$100,000 or more before-tax income bracket (36.67% of respondents). However, this income group is only 17.62% of the St. Mary's community. In comparison, households with income of less than \$50,000 had little to no representation in the survey. There were no responses from households earning less than \$20,000, even though they comprise 11.43% of the population.

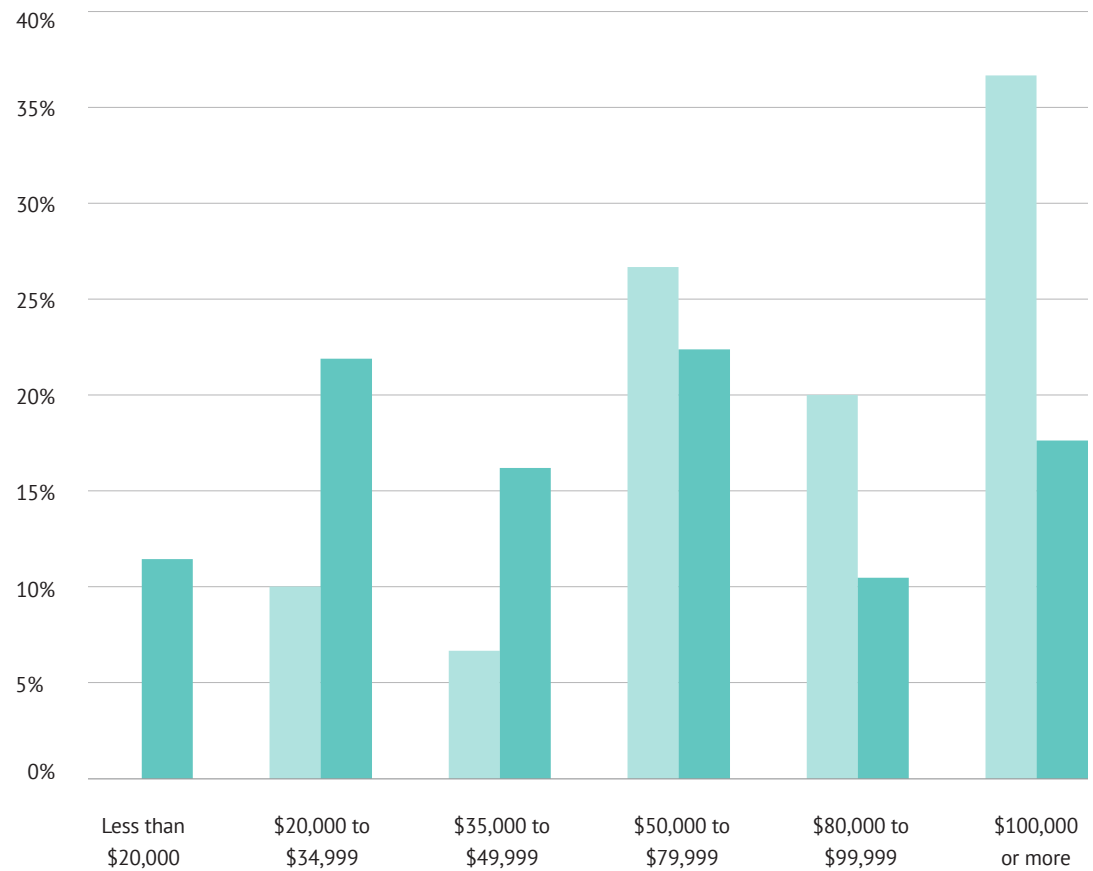


Figure 5. Household Income of Survey Respondents vs 2021 Census Population

Recreation Survey  
2021 Census

### 4.3 Gender

The 2021 Census saw the addition of the “Non-binary” category to the question on one’s gender. This adds to the “Men” (self-identifies as male, including cisgender and transgender men) and “Women” (self-identifies as female, including cisgender and transgender women) categories. Of note is that Statistics Canada aggregates certain categories where a population size is small enough to risk identifying respondents. Thus, in St. Mary’s, the classification of non-binary has been added to the “Men+” and “Women+” options to ensure confidentiality.

While the Census shows that Men+ and Women+ populations are almost proportional, this is not reflected in the survey respondents. Responses from female residents comprised 68% of the total number of surveys completed.

Figure 6. Gender identity of survey respondents

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to answer

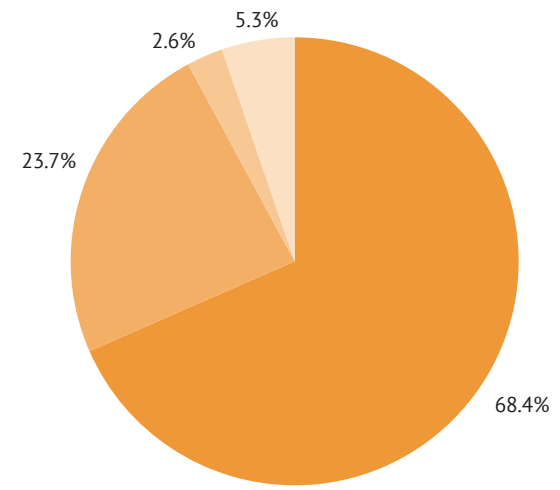
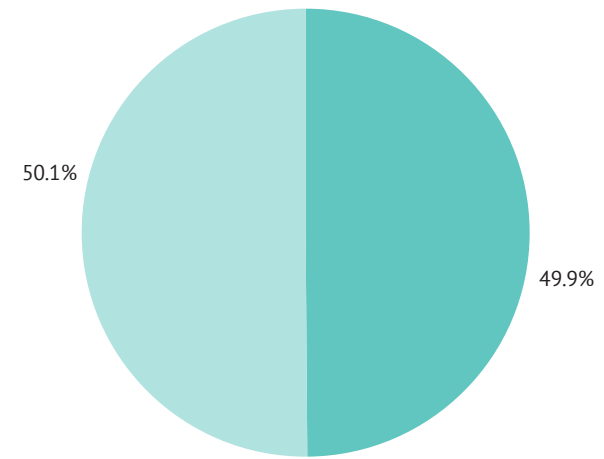


Figure 7. Gender identity of St. Mary’s residents. (2021 Census)

- Female+
- Male+



#### 4.4 Respondents' Community

The survey had responses from residents from 15 communities in the Municipality, with 27% of respondents indicating that they lived in Sherbrooke. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the communities that respondents indicated living in.

Table 2. Community of residence; results from the survey.

Community	Count	Percentage
Melrose	1	3.33%
Wine Harbour	1	3.33%
Ecum Secum	1	3.33%
Sherbrooke	8	26.67%
Port Bickerton	3	10.00%
Goshen	2	6.67%
Glenelg	1	3.33%
Country Harbour	1	3.33%
Stillwater	1	3.33%
Halifax	1	3.33%
Marie Joseph	1	3.33%
Aspen	4	13.33%
Lochiel Lake	1	3.33%
Work in Sherbrooke	1	3.33%
Jordanville	1	3.33%
Indian Harbour	1	3.33%
Waternish	1	3.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

