

**W**aterloo is bursting with active, healthy people who make good use of the City's existing recreational facilities.

The City of Waterloo's new Outdoor Sports Field Strategy is a long-term plan that will help ensure residents have access to quality fields on an ongoing basis and will also help city staff balance today's needs with changing demands over the next 20 years.

The strategy paints a picture of an ideal future and a path moving forward. The goal of the strategy, when implemented, is for Waterloo to become a community where everyone who wants to play field sports can do so, regardless of their sport of choice, their age, their ability, or their gender. The City will be a recognized leader in outdoor sports field development, management, maintenance and programming. Waterloo will be seen as one of the best communities in which to play, compete, coach, officiate or be a spectator of outdoor field sports. The City of Waterloo developed this ambitious strategy in response to a number of community needs and pressures.

Development of this Outdoor Sports Field Strategy involved best practice

research, data analysis and collaboration between staff from the Public Works Department and the Community, Culture and Recreation Services Department. It also involved a public engagement process that included an online survey, public open houses and stakeholder meetings.

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What emerged through the strategy development process was the following vision statement:

"The residents of Waterloo have equitable access to quality outdoor sports

fields throughout the City, thereby fostering improved individual and community health and increased capacity for sport and play."

It is hoped that this vision statement will provide direction not only to city staff but also to the sport organizations that use the fields and to the community at large. Seven strategic goals have been identified to form the core of the overall strategy. These goals speak to areas of greatest need where high impact changes can be made within available resources. They have been placed in order of priority based on public input.

**Goal 1:** To improve the safety and long-term quality of outdoor sports fields.

**Goal 2:** To maximize use and expand the amount of programmable time at existing fields to maximize the use of these fields prior to new development.

**Goal 3:** To develop new outdoor sports fields, within available resources while recognizing competing pressures, based on population growth and field need projections.

**Goal 4:** To enable participation in physical fitness activities in Waterloo through improved outdoor sports field access for neighbourhood, recreation,



# Developing a Long Term Plan for Sports Fields in Waterloo

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and competitive use for the full range of outdoor sports of public interest in Waterloo.

**Goal 5:** To increase capacity throughout the sport and recreation services system in Waterloo to allow for continuous improvement in field maintenance, allocation, and management.

**Goal 6:** To pursue, facilitate and encourage innovative partnerships for the provision of access to outdoor sports fields.

**Goal 7:** To invest in enhanced communication, relationship building and collaboration between city staff and outdoor sport organizations.

As part of the general movement to make cities more livable, municipalities face public pressure to deliver increasingly sophisticated, higher quality sports fields. There are also an increasing number of community groups wanting access to recreation facilities for a broader range of activities than in the past. Opportunities

for informal, recreational and competitive sport are desired by local residents.

Meeting the demand for outdoor sports fields today and in the future is important because these fields contribute to opportunities for an active lifestyle. They also contribute to the social, cultural and economic vitality of the City. Sports fields make cities great places to live, thereby attracting employers to the area, who in turn attract and retain high quality talent. Additionally, sports fields can increase tourism to the City, as teams and their families come to the City to compete, contributing to our local economy by staying in local hotels, eating in local restaurants, shopping at local retailers and visiting other local cultural sites and attractions.

Land for development is scarce in the City of Waterloo. All remaining green field land within city boundaries has been allocated for development. There is also

high demand for other lands available for redevelopment. While it was anticipated that additional sports fields would be needed to support population growth, a strategy that demonstrated through data that additional sports fields were needed in the future, and predicted when those fields would be needed, would not only help with long term planning, but would also support planning for acquisition of land to enable construction of additional sports fields.

In addition to land constraints, like many municipalities Waterloo is facing financial constraints. The City has identified the importance of focusing on maximizing the use of existing facilities prior to constructing any new facilities. A significant part of the strategy work analyzed the existing fields to determine if they were being well used and to determine where and how that use could be improved.

Central to the development of the strategy was understanding the City's current assets. A comprehensive inventory of the existing sports fields in Waterloo was established. This involved looking at all of the multi-purpose fields, diamonds and cricket pitches in the City that sport groups can book through the City's central booking system.

For 2011, the City of Waterloo offered access to 92 facilities across the City. There are 44 diamonds that can accommodate baseball, softball, slow-pitch, fastball and t-ball, and two pitches for cricket. The remaining 46 fields are rectangular, multi-purpose fields for sports such as soccer, football, rugby, field lacrosse, field hockey and ultimate frisbee.

The majority of the highest quality facilities are located on the east side, with some in the central part of the City. There are no facilities on the west side, an area that has seen significant growth and expansion of residential communities in recent years. This lack of higher quality facilities on the west side of the City indicates a geographic disparity in field distribution and points to an opportunity for new, high quality, field development to allow residents access to facilities closer to home.

**Table 1.** All fields by type and ownership, estimated 2011 inventory

	Number	City Owned	School	Leased
Rectangular	46	29	13	4
Diamonds	44	23	21	0
Cricket	2	1	0	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>5</b>

**Table 2.** All fields by type, characteristics and amenities, estimated 2011 inventory

	Artificial Turf	Lights	Irrigation	Parking	Washrooms
Rectangular	2	9	9	39	23
Diamonds	0	8	5	37	18
Cricket	0	0	0	2	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>41</b>

**Table 3.** Rectangular multi-purpose sports fields – bookings in 2009/2010

Maximum Weekly Capacity	Number of Fields	Total Hours Used (Average of 09/10 Bookings)	Maximum Use Capacity Per Season (All Fields)	% Use of 100% (Max) Capacity	% Use of 80% (Goal) Capacity
High (26 hours)	4	1,698.0 hrs	1,768 hrs	96.0%	120.05%
Medium (18 hours)	28	6,702.0 hrs	8,568 hrs	78.2%	97.78%
Low (10 hours)	7	862.9 hrs	1,190 hrs	72.5%	90.64%

*Note: The length of a season for these fields was estimated at 17 weeks (May to August). This is an average season length.*



New artificial turf fields at RIM Park with public art in the foreground



Land on Westmount Road where the City of Waterloo is currently in the process of developing three new fields. It is anticipated they will be available for use in 2016.

The inventory also examined ownership of fields booked through the City.

Of all the outdoor sports fields in the City of Waterloo’s inventory, 58% are on city land, 37% are on school lands and the remaining 5% are on leased lands. The inventory also included details about the fields such as surface type and whether or not they had irrigation or lights, as well as associated amenities such as washrooms and parking.

Amenities vary greatly from field to field. Two of the City’s multi-purpose rectangular fields have artificial turf. Only 18% of all fields have lights. There is in-ground irrigation at nine fields. Washrooms are available at 45% of fields and parking is available at 85% of fields. Local residents indicated that washrooms are the most important amenity to have at sports fields, followed in priority order by off-street parking, player seating, lights, shaded areas and spectator seating. These features improve player and spectator comfort, whereas turf type, lights and irrigation increase the amount of time the field can be used.

Maximizing utilization of existing fields is a priority of the strategy. To understand how field use can be improved, it is necessary to look at how the fields are currently being used.

To do this, planning staff drew from the Sports Turf Association’s classification system, the expertise of city staff responsible for field maintenance, and booking data. Based on this information a maximum field usage capacity was

assigned to each field in the City. The assigned maximum capacity is based on current field conditions and assumes that existing maintenance practices continue. Maximum field use capacity can be defined as the maximum hours of use allowed per week before turf quality begins to decline in a significant way. However, achieving 100% of the maximum capacity for each

## THERE ARE PLANS TO REDEVELOP LAND CURRENTLY OCCUPIED BY SPORTS FIELDS IN TWO LOCAL PARKS.

field is not a realistic or appropriate goal. While it is desirable and cost effective to use the fields as much as possible, the complexities of field use scheduling need to be considered. Time is needed for breaks between games, for weather related cancellations and to allow for unexpected field maintenance. Since this is also the first time staff has assigned use capacities to each field, staff suggest 80% of the maximum use as a reasonable target.

By assigning a goal use (80% of maximum capacity) to each field and comparing actual use in 2009 and 2010 to that benchmark, it was possible to get a sense of which fields were being efficiently used and which could accommodate more use.

Data analysis suggests that low capacity fields are under-utilized, medium capacity fields are used appropriately and high capacity fields are over-utilized. Based on the goal use, usage results indicate 90.64%, 97.78%, and 120.05% respectively.

Diamonds were classified into two categories: high capacity (those with lights) and medium capacity (those without lights). High capacity diamonds are close to goal use capacity at 98.91%. On the other hand, medium capacity diamonds are used only 67.98%, suggesting they could be used more. The two cricket pitches in Waterloo were both ranked medium capacity and are used at 96.98% of goal use, suggesting there is little additional capacity for more use.

This analysis indicated not only which fields were well used and which were not, but also provided a starting point for discussion with local sport groups about why they used some fields and not others and what changes they might make to their scheduling practices to better use the existing fields.

Based on this analysis, staff also identified opportunities for policy and operational changes that would enable increased use of the fields. These include development of space allocation procedures to improve equity in access to fields and identifying or creating opportunities to use fields for alternate or multiple sports. The analysis also confirmed the importance of leased and school fields to meet community needs. Negotiating longer term leases for leased facilities and exploring the

development of shared use agreements with school boards will also contribute to better use of available fields and potentially delay the need for new fields.

While there is much that can be done to improve the use of the current field inventory to meet the needs of sports organizations in Waterloo today, consideration must also be given to future needs.

To project future field need, field demand projections (based on current booking trends and projected population growth in the City) were developed and then compared to the capacity of the anticipated field inventory at five year intervals between 2011 and 2031. There were several key factors involved in developing the projections. First, the projections were based on the assumption that usage of all of the existing fields could be improved before building any additional fields. It also assumed that maintenance standards would remain the same in the future as they are today. However, additional resources (human and financial) to improve maintenance may add new capacity to the field inventory. The projection also takes into account the removal of fields from the current inventory. For example, there are plans to redevelop land currently occupied by sports fields in two local parks. The loss of these fields had to be taken into account

in the projections. Finally, the projection methodology assumed that the demand for sports fields would grow at the same rate as the population.

Comparing projected demand to the anticipated field inventory capacity at five year intervals between 2011 and 2031 revealed when additional fields will be needed and the type of fields required. Based on this analysis, recommendations have been made on how many additional facilities of each type are needed over the next 20 years.

Even after meeting the target of using the fields to 80% capacity, results show there will be a need for additional multi-purpose rectangular fields over the next 20 years. By 2031, more artificial turf fields, 3 – 4 more high capacity rectangular fields and nine more medium capacity rectangular fields will be needed across the City.

The projections suggest that between 2011 and 2031 there will be a need for four more high capacity diamonds, although this need can largely be attributed to loss of diamonds within city parks to redevelopment. There will also be a need for another 1 – 2 cricket pitches within the City to accommodate redevelopment of one of the two existing cricket pitches and projected population growth.

The strategy identifies not only a need for additional fields, but also a need

to consider how the quality of existing fields can be maintained over the long term. Strategies identified include a long term plan for upgrades and renovations to existing fields in the inventory to improve facility quality, as well as development of a long term capital investment plan for infrastructure such as benches, backstops and goal posts. There will also be opportunities to change operating budgets and maintenance practices to improve turf quality and to better align with user expectations and industry best practices.

These are some of the highlights of the City of Waterloo's Outdoor Sports Field Strategy. Development of the strategy is just the first step. The upcoming implementation process will lead to improvements and take the City of Waterloo on its path towards the envisioned future.

The Outdoor Sports Field Strategy document can be found in its entirety at [www.waterloo.ca/outdoorsport](http://www.waterloo.ca/outdoorsport). Questions about the strategy and the planning process and methodology can be directed to [beth.rajnovich@waterloo.ca](mailto:beth.rajnovich@waterloo.ca).

*Editor's Note: Beth Rajnovich will be speaking at the Ontario Turfgrass Symposium, Thursday, February 21, 2013. For complete details visit [www.turfsymposium.ca](http://www.turfsymposium.ca).*



## Ontario Soccer Association Board of Directors Approves Mandated Changes for U12 & Below in 2014

The Ontario Soccer Association (OSA) Board of Directors met on the weekend of September 14 to 16, 2012 and strongly endorsed the ongoing phased-in implementation of Long-Term Player Development across the Province. In particular, the OSA Board formally approved the LTPD Recreation and Development Matrices for the 2014 season.

Highlights of the mandatory implementation for the 2014 season include the following:

- No promotion and relegation from U12 and below

- No league tables from U12 and below
- Small-sided games with fewer players on the field (5v5 at U7 and U8, 7v7 at U9 and U10 and 9v9 at U11 and U12)

**Ranges for field width and length have been provided at each development stage, together with goal sizes, in the Recreation Matrix.**

Visit [www.sportsturfassociation.com](http://www.sportsturfassociation.com) for a link to the entire news release and the Recreation Matrix.