

**Community Services Report to
Community Development Committee
2025 February 06**

GamePLAN: Reimagining Public Recreation

PURPOSE

Present GamePLAN, a vision and strategy for public recreation in Calgary, for Council's adoption, including establishing the *Making Waves* service level scenario to guide investment as Calgary's facilities age out of service, the population continues to experience unprecedented growth and to improve individual, family and community resilience and well-being.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION

GamePLAN is a new initiative that builds on previous work from the Facility Development and Enhancement Study. GamePLAN extends analysis to include emerging communities and partner-operated facilities (PFC2019-1330). Attachment 1 highlights recent decisions that show how the public recreation system in Calgary is struggling. Issues include aging infrastructure, a growing population and unpredictable funding. GamePLAN aims to take a more strategic approach to service and facility planning to better meet the public's needs and expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Committee recommend that Council:

1. Adopt the vision and principles in *GamePLAN: Reimagining Public Recreation*,
2. Establish the *Making Waves* service level scenario (Attachment 2) as the standard for public recreation facilities and amenities,
3. Direct Administration to return to Committee in 2026 Q1 with a Capital Project Prioritization List, including recommendations for the next budget cycle and
4. Direct the development of an implementation plan to be executed through future Service Plans and Budgets.

GENERAL MANAGER COMMENTS

Access to quality, affordable recreation opportunities is important for health and well-being, the quality of life and economy in our city and the resilience of our diverse communities. The Executive Leadership team is confident that GamePLAN will support Calgary's growing and changing recreation needs.

HIGHLIGHTS

- GamePLAN declares a vision and establishes a strategic framework to guide investment as the city approaches a population of two million. Without consistent, additional investment to address aging infrastructure and population growth, Calgary will experience a rapid decline in recreation services.
- Calgarians are already experiencing the impacts of underinvestment in public recreation. In the past five years, several facilities have permanently closed while others are operating at or near capacity. We continue to experience service shortages, such as constrained registrations for swim lessons and soccer leagues.
- Aging recreation facilities will inevitably close. Without sustainable investment, services will not be replaced or added elsewhere, leaving many people without access to sport, recreation and community.
- Calgarians see public recreation as an important public service that generates significant social and economic value. It promotes health and wellness, fosters connections among friends, families and communities, and helps children grow and thrive.

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- GamePLAN recommends establishing a service level scenario (*Making Waves*) to allow Administration to scope a Capital Project Prioritization List for future budget deliberations.

DISCUSSION

What is the public recreation system?

In Calgary, the public recreation system is made up of publicly accessible facilities, amenities and programs that support and encourage active living, health, well-being and community. The City owns, operates and delivers programs from over 50 publicly accessible recreation facilities and partners operate another 200+ facilities or amenities on City-owned land.

Partnerships involving City land, operating funds and/or capital funding represent significant investment by The City to extend services to communities. For example, The City is the major capital funder of large regional recreation facilities like Rocky Ridge, Quarry Park and Seton YMCAs. The City also provides land at nominal lease rates and a lifecycle grant to support community associations and social recreation organizations. Partners contribute substantial financial and volunteer resources and possess extensive recreation sector knowledge.

Facilities in the private recreation sector receive neither public land, capital nor operating funds and are reliant on membership fees, which can be prohibitive for some. Private providers typically cater to more niche or 'boutique' fitness and wellness experiences while public recreation strives to be more broadly accessible.

The issue

Funding, including from other orders of government, is inconsistent and insufficient to address aging infrastructure, population growth and evolving needs (Attachment 3, Appendix 1). More than 70 per cent of public recreation facilities were built over 35 years ago. These facilities have reached or are nearing the end of their useful life and are costly to maintain and operate. An insurmountable increase in lifecycle funding is required to keep aging facilities open until they can no longer be maintained. Recent examples include the closure of the YMCA's Eau Claire facility in 2021, Beltline Aquatic and Fitness Centre in 2021 and Vecova in 2025.

The deterioration of older facilities is compounded by their limited functionality. They do not have the amenities people living in Calgary need and want (e.g., leisure pools, lazy rivers, indoor fields, cricket pitches, court spaces, fitness rooms, community gathering spaces, etc.). Newer facilities in growth areas are limited in number and variety and are already facing capacity constraints exacerbated during unplanned closures of facilities in established areas.

Critical barriers to accessing public recreation exist for many people living in Calgary. These barriers can only be addressed through applying an equity lens to public recreation service and infrastructure planning. Services, programs and policies must be updated to reflect public expectations for recreation in terms of program and service availability, affordability and accessibility.

Playing the long game: a strategic direction for public recreation

GamePLAN responds to current and future demand in the context of rapid population growth, changing participation patterns, emerging and evolving sports and public needs and expectations. Combining research and analysis (Attachment 3, Appendix 2) and engagement

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(Attachment 3, Appendix 3), GamePLAN declares the first system-wide vision for public recreation in Calgary:

Calgary is where people of all backgrounds play, connect and create. Public recreation is a collection of active, affordable and safe spaces that breathe life into our city.

The vision is supported by a set of principles that will aid implementation:

- **Level the Playing Field:** GamePLAN seeks to remove barriers to participation, especially for children and youth.
- **It Takes a Team:** Ensuring the health, growth and long-term sustainability of the sector is a team effort. GamePLAN leverages a network of service providers, programmers, facilities and amenities to continue Calgary's legacy as one of the most livable cities in the world.
- **Change the Game:** GamePLAN challenges historical definitions of recreation and promotes new ways of thinking about the role of public recreation in civic life.

A closer look at recreation infrastructure: service level scenarios (for Council decision)

GamePLAN presents three service level scenarios for Council's consideration (Attachment 2). Service levels for four main facility types (aquatics, arenas, athletic parks and fieldhouses) are aimed at improving access to facilities that respond to demand based on three primary indicators:

- facilities per capita,
- travel distance to facilities and
- facility age and quality.

Guided by the vision and principles, and accounting for current and future projected population growth, service levels guide investment over the next 25 years. Administration recommends the *Making Waves* service level scenario to keep pace with population growth, provide equitable service in both established and new communities and provide all people living in Calgary with affordable access to quality health and wellness opportunities.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public engagement was undertaken | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dialogue with interested parties was undertaken |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public/interested parties were informed | <input type="checkbox"/> Public communication or engagement was not required |

Research and engagement were conducted from November 2022 to October 2024 and included diverse tactics with multiples audiences, including partners and the public (See Attachment 3, Appendix 3).

IMPLICATIONS

Social

GamePLAN explores ways to remove barriers and enhance equity to allow all people living in Calgary to access the benefits of recreation.

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Environmental

The renewal or replacement of aging facilities will comply with the most current energy efficiency standards to achieve Calgary's Climate Action Strategy objectives. GamePLAN considers program adaptations and policy to safeguard recreation programs and services (and participants) against climate impacts.

Economic

Access to recreation shapes neighbourhood choices, supports employee attraction and retention, drives investment and diversifies the economy, boosting resilience. GamePLAN ensures capital investments are targeted for the greatest impact. Facilities will optimize operational efficiency and pursue revenue opportunities wherever possible while maintaining affordability.

Service and Financial Implications

Other:

Strategic Plan – no immediate financial impacts

The required investment will vary based on the chosen scenario. The capital investment for *Making Waves* is estimated to be between \$200 and \$250 million per year (in 2024 dollars), utilizing multiple financial tools (e.g., government grants, municipal taxes, debt, private investments, sponsorships, etc.).

Over the past 15 years, Council has approved an average of \$65 million annually for capital investments that respond to acute needs. Strategically planning for the renewal of facilities requires consistent and predictable funding. If adopted, an implementation plan will be developed to identify capital and operating requirements. Future Council budget decisions will impact the ability to achieve the approved service level.

RISKS

Risks of not approving

- If GamePLAN is not approved, public recreation will continue to operate in a reactive state and Calgary will experience rapid service decline. Facilities will close without replacing or adding services elsewhere. Aging facilities will continue to put pressure on lifecycle funding without adding or improving service.
- With an inventory of outdated facilities, The City's climate goals will not be realized (i.e., net-zero emissions by 2050 will not be achieved).
- Without adapting our current services to better align with the needs and expectations of the public, people living in Calgary will have reduced access to the benefits of recreation and The City's reputation as a public service provider could be at risk.

Risks of approving

- Available funding may be insufficient to support implementation of GamePLAN.
- Some established communities where there is high value placed on smaller, community-based facilities may not welcome an approach that involves building fewer, larger and more efficient multi-use facilities to replace older, single-use facilities.

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ATTACHMENTS

1. Background and Previous Council Direction
2. Service Level Scenarios Summary
3. GamePLAN: Reimagining Public Recreation
4. Presentation

Department Circulation

General Manager	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Katie Black	Community Services	Approve
Michael Thompson	Infrastructure Services	Consult
Stuart Dalgleish	Chief Operating Office	Consult
Chris Arthurs	People, Innovation & Collaboration Services	Inform
Jill Floen	Law, Legislative Services & Security	Inform
Debra Hamilton	Planning & Development Services	Inform
Les Tochor	Corporate Planning & Financial Services	Inform
Doug Morgan	Operational Services	Inform

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