



PARKS AND RECREATION ONTARIO

## **Regulatory Impact Analysis:**

The Local Services Board of Pellatt, Pelican, Umbach, Gidley

Request for the Power of Recreation

Proposal Number: 23-ENDM021

Parks and Recreation Ontario Submission

September 20, 2023

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## About Parks and Recreation Ontario

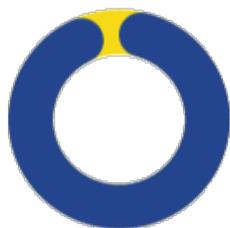
Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) is a non-profit association with over 6,500 members that delivers services to more than 85% of Ontario's population. We are devoted to advancing equitable access to quality parks and recreation services for all Ontarians. PRO champions the health, social, and environmental benefits of parks and recreation through evidence-based practices, advocacy, and collaborative cross-sectoral partnerships. Our work includes policy and research, education, training and professional development opportunities, and our flagship quality standards program, HIGH FIVE®. We envision a future for Ontario where every person has equitable access to vibrant communities, sustainable environments, and personal health.

## Introduction

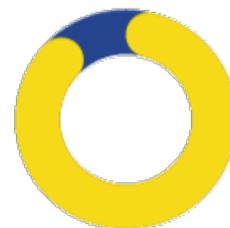
We are writing to express our support for access to quality parks and recreation services for all Ontarians. We believe that parks and recreation programs are more than just a fringe benefit; they are essential to the social, economic, and physical health of Ontario. Parks and recreation services create opportunities for active living, social inclusion, and connection with nature. These objectives are reflected in the [Framework for Recreation in Canada](#), a guiding document for service providers and local governments that helps ensure meaningful, accessible recreation experiences that foster the well-being of individuals and communities.

## Service Provision in Ontario

Parks and recreation is a municipal jurisdiction, however, it is supported by all three levels of government. It is represented at the provincial level by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport. At the local level, parks and recreation varies between community but can be broadly categorized into three areas: facilities and open spaces, programs and services, and special events. Parks and recreation are at the heart of every community in Ontario. It isn't just skating classes and playgrounds; it is life-saving swim lessons, community-building programs for older adults that fight isolation, and skills-building classes that contribute to physical, mental, and cognitive health. It fosters social inclusion, well-being, and most importantly, makes communities great places to live. [Ontarians know this](#). According to a 2021 value survey conducted by PRO:



**97% of Ontarians believe parks, green spaces, and community recreation are important to quality of life.**



**91% believe municipal investment in parks and green space make their communities a desirable place to live.**



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## The Power of Recreation

Recreation is more than just fun and games; it has the power to change lives through the individual and societal benefits that it provides. Recreation is essential to sustaining a high quality of life.

Recreation is a fundamental human need in all ages and stages of life. It is the pursuit of physical, social, intellectual, creative, and spiritual experiences that enhance individual and community wellbeing.

The benefits of recreation cannot be overstated; they can enhance mental, physical, and social wellbeing, help build strong families and communities, help connect people to nature, and provide economic benefits such as jobs and tourism.

Parks and recreation have the potential to address challenges and issues such as increases in sedentary living and obesity, decreased contact with nature, and inequities that limit opportunities for some population groups. The parks and recreation sector can be a collaborative leader in addressing major issues of the day.

All Ontarians benefit from parks and recreation services. The use of parks and recreation is spread almost equally across the age continuum. The notion that parks and recreation is intended for and serves mainly children is perhaps the biggest fallacy concerning these services in the mind of the public. Parks and recreation services are used by and benefit children, youth, and adults alike.

## PRO'S Core Belief:

*All people and communities deserve equitable access to recreational experiences. Parks and recreation must be available, accessible and welcoming to all.*

## Quick Facts

**Parks and recreation contribute to a strong local economy.**

Parks, recreation programs, facilities, and community sporting and cultural events attract and retain businesses and families, drive tourism, and increase property values. **Ontarians spend \$4 billion every year on recreation, sport and fitness and the economic benefits of recreation are estimated to be \$48.3 billion.**

**Parks and recreation help create vibrant, engaged communities.**

Parks and recreation as a positive impact on people at all stages of life. For young people, recreation can prevent stress, petty crime, alcohol and drug consumption. For older adults, it provides opportunities for socialization and community building. **87% of Ontarians believe recreation programs, parks and community facilities make it easier for people to socialize and feel included.**

**Parks and recreation keep communities healthy.**

Only 28% of children and youth and 51% of adults in Canada meet national physical activity guidelines. Participation in recreation at an early age builds healthy lifestyle skills that last a lifetime. For older adults, recreation provides opportunities for socializing, learning new skills, and can contribute to improved physical and mental well-being, allowing them to age in place and stay in their communities longer.



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**Recreation needs to be accessible to everyone.** The fundamental rationale for public recreation is to ensure equity and the availability of service to those who would otherwise go without. Data indicates that not everyone in a community share equally in the benefits associated with parks use and recreation participation. People with a disability and those living below the poverty line are examples of sub-groups in the population that are significantly less likely to use or report a benefit from recreation and parks services or are underserved by the system. More needs to be done through partnership and local community networks to coordinate services and maximize opportunities to ensure that everyone has equitable access to recreation.

**Most people are willing to pay for public recreation and parks.** Data suggests that the public is willing to pay as much or more than they now pay through taxes to support public recreation and parks. Furthermore, they support a combination of user pay policies and tax subsidies for these services. People will seek out recreation opportunities from a variety of sources, which highlights the importance of providing opportunities for both indoor and outdoor recreation.

**Participating in recreation is a key determinant of health status and quality of life.** The public believes recreation and parks have a positive impact on health, well-being and quality of life. It is also evident that people who report poor health, lower life satisfaction and are unhappy are less likely to use parks or participate in recreation activities. Other research suggests that causation flows in both directions in this regard. That is, those with poorer health, lower life satisfaction and who are unhappy are less likely to use recreation and parks services and those who use such services are likely experiencing an increase in health status, life satisfaction and happiness.

### Services in Rural and Remote Ontario

Rural and Remote Ontario residents are far less likely than their urban counterparts to have a park within walking distance. More than one-quarter of Ontario's rural and remote residents have no park or playground within walking distance, compared to just 8% in Ontario's largest cities. Even rural and remote residents who have facilities within walking distance report lower use and appreciation of parks. An even greater need for investment in parks and recreation services in rural and remote Ontario. Overall, residents in rural and remote Ontario, households living in poverty, those challenged by disabilities and those with less education report reduced access and less benefit from public recreation and parks services.

### Ontarians Value Quality of Life

**95%** believe the prevalence of parks and green spaces makes communities more livable.

**94%** believe investments in parks and recreation services make their communities a great place to live.

**87%** believe recreation programs, parks and community facilities make it easier for people to socialize and feel included.

**94%** believe access to parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities is important to their family and community.

**90%** believe participation in recreation programs or consistent usage of recreation amenities contributes to health and well-being and make people less reliant on the health care system.

The personal, social, economic and environmental benefits of parks and recreation have been well-documented in Canada and abroad. Sport and recreation events, festivals and the visual and performing arts provide opportunities for self-expression, social interaction, and are a source of civic pride. They contribute to human happiness, and to the resiliency and adaptive capacity of our communities. All Ontarians should be afforded access to parks and recreation services that contribute to their quality of life and create meaningful personal experiences.

## Conclusion

High quality, accessible recreation opportunities are integral to a well-functioning society. Recreation is for everyone; all people and communities deserve equitable access to recreational experiences. Provided for the benefit of both individuals and communities, recreation is a public good, in the same way as education or healthcare. Quality recreation services need to be available to all, sustainable, and supported at all levels of government, to enable lifelong participation.

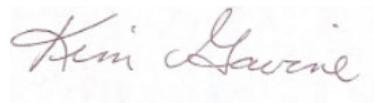
PRO supports all Ontario communities in the pursuit of developing and furthering service provision to address systemic access inequities that exist. We are pleased to discuss our comments further with the Ministry, should any clarity be required. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this important proposal.

Sincerely,



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