

Town of Oxford Nova Scotia
Physical Activity and Recreation Strategic Plan
(2019 to 2024)

October 28th, 2019



Approved by Council:

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Mayor's Greeting

Greetings from the Town of Oxford,

I am very pleased to introduce our newly created Physical Activity and Recreation Strategic Plan for the Town. As a further development from the previous strategy, this document was created to consider and offer ways for all ages of people and abilities to engage in recreation and active living. It was also developed to regularly incorporate more active living into daily lives. Whether it is organized activities, or simply natural movement, we are excited to partner with existing stakeholders in the community to find ways that are meaningful for our residents. The overall goal is to find ways to create and maintain a healthier, more active lifestyle.

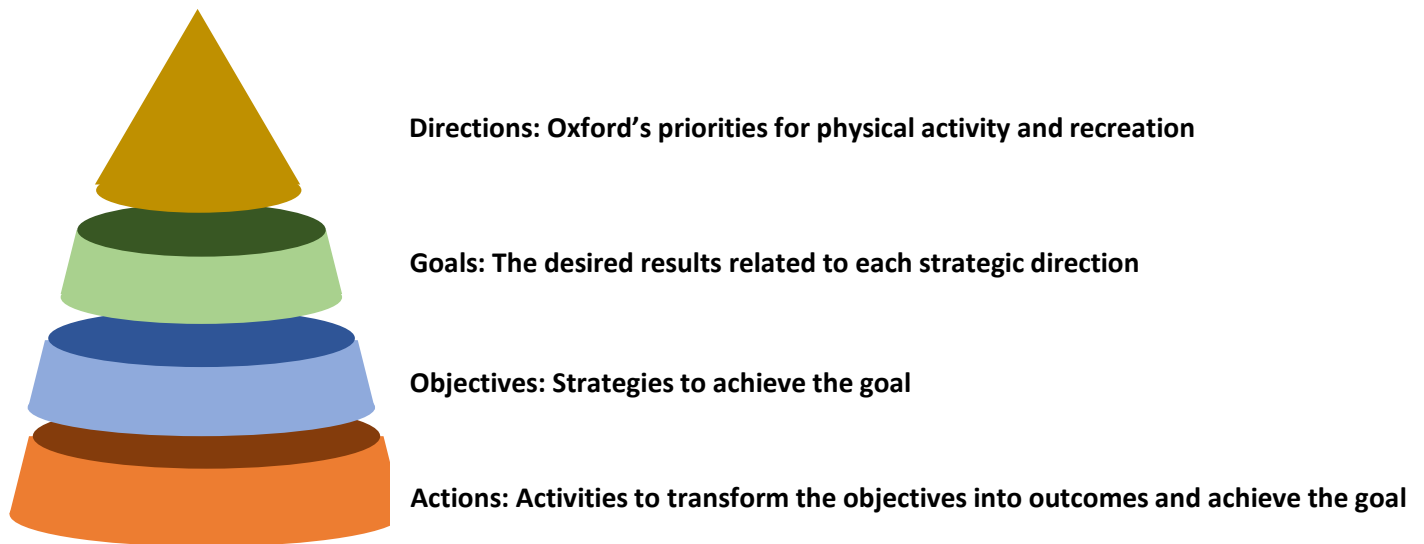
Please take a few moments to review the strategy and consider how incorporating activity into your day, and within the lives of your loved ones, will create a strong and resilient community, bring health and vigor to our lives, and set a positive example for our neighbours to see how creative and engaged our community is in recreation and active living!

Respectfully,

Trish Stewart
Mayor, Town of Oxford
"The Wild Blueberry Capital of Canada"

I. Introduction

The Framework



Strategy Development Process

The Town of Oxford developed a physical activity and recreation strategy in 2012 after the Recreation and Physical Activity Coordinator was hired through the Municipal Physical Activity Leadership (MPAL) program. Given that it has been over five years since the plan was developed, coupled with the fact that most of the strategies within the plan had been completed, the Town embarked on a second strategic planning process, supported through Communities, Culture and Heritage.

A working group consisting of representatives from the Town of Oxford, the MPAL program, Communities Culture and Heritage and Public Health, Nova Scotia Health Authority was formed in early 2019 to lead the development of the updated physical activity and recreation strategic plan. The strategic plan development process consisted of the following:

- A review of the previous strategic plan to identify strategies completed and opportunities for continued development.
- A review of other relevant strategies including *Let's Get Moving Nova Scotia* (a provincial action plan for increasing physical activity in Nova Scotia); and the *Shared Strategy for Advancing Recreation in Nova Scotia* to identify opportunities for alignment/synergy.
- A review of findings from a Physical Activity Community Survey completed in 2016 for the Town of Oxford.
- Development of draft strategic directions and associated objectives and actions for the physical activity and recreation strategy plan (2019 to 2024) by the working group based on the findings from the review of materials (bullets one to three).

- A consultation session with community organizations to obtain feedback into the draft strategic directions and associated objectives and actions, and develop a vision, mission and values for the strategic plan.

The feedback from the consultation session was compiled and used to create a strategic plan report which was reviewed and finalized by the working group. This report provides a brief summary of the evidence for a physical activity and recreation strategy; equity and inclusion; findings from the community survey; the strategy vision, mission and values; and the strategic directions and associated goals, objectives and actions.

The Need for a Physical Activity and Recreation Strategy

Physical activity, sport and recreation have significant benefits for both individuals and communities such as:

- Improves individual health through chronic disease prevention and management, enhanced growth and development, improved sleep, and improved mental health.
- Improves education outcomes and academic performance.
- Improves social connection by bringing people together and reducing isolation and encouraging civic engagement through volunteering.
- Supports the environment as there are fewer greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions when more people walk or bike as a mode of transportation.
- Economic development by creating walkable and bikeable communities and indoor and outdoor infrastructure which supports tourism and attracts new residents.



Despite these well-known benefits, the majority of Nova Scotians do not meet the recommended 150 minutes of heart pumping physical activity a week (Colley, RC et al, Physical activity of Canadian adults: accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey). Very few youth are meeting the recommended guidelines of 60 minutes a day of physical activity most days of the week, and as we age, we become less active (Thompson, A et al, Physical activity of children and youth in Nova Scotia from 2001-02 to 2005-06, Preventive Medicine, 2009 Nov;49(5): 407-9). Socially, volunteerism in Nova Scotia is declining, with fewer people carrying the load (2004 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating).

Challenges to physical activity are many including more sedentary work environments, community design focused around automobile use, changing family structures and busy lifestyles, and safety fears.

Despite these challenges, there is good news and opportunity! There are many assets in communities across Nova Scotia, including Oxford. For example, there is a mature sport, recreation and physical activity sector with innovative leaders. We are a small province where communities can pool resources and learn from one another.

The time is right to renew Oxford’s strategic plan for physical activity and recreation by building on what we have accomplished over the last five years and identifying opportunities to help us achieve our vision of: *In Oxford everyone is engaged and participating in physical activity and recreation opportunities.*

Equity and Inclusion

Equity is a notion that acknowledges equal treatment and opportunities do not lead to equal outcomes and recognizes that some populations have diverse needs. Health inequities are differences in health status between groups and populations that are socially and systemically produced by unequal distribution across the population, often linked to the social determinants of health- where we live, grown, learn, work, play and age.



Figure 1: Equality vs Equity (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation)

The unequal distribution of supports and resources make it more difficult for some individuals to participate in physical activity and recreation opportunities. For this reason, it is important to apply an equity and inclusion lens when planning, implementing and evaluating recreation programs, resources and policies. In order to ensure that equitable programs and services are offered, the following considerations are important to apply as necessary:

- Fair and just distribution of resources needed to participate
- Fair and just access to opportunities to participate
- Fair and appropriate supports and services offered for those with diverse needs

Inclusive recreation opportunities are a priority throughout Nova Scotia. The Shared Strategy for Advancing Recreation in NS and Let’s Get Moving NS both have goals to address inclusion and access. All individuals deserve to have a fair chance to participate, regardless of their physical abilities, socioeconomic status or ethnic background and municipalities can play a key leadership role to help break down barriers.

Community Survey

The purpose of the Physical Activity Community Survey was to inform the development, implementation, and continued evaluation of physical activity strategies in the Town of Oxford. The full report is available through the MPAL Coordinator in the Town of Oxford with key findings and conclusions presented below.

The following graphic presents a summary of the top activities desired by respondents (wish list), most common challenges to participation in physical activity, potential opportunities, and motivators for active transportation (AT).



The following conclusions were presented within the report of the survey findings:

1. With walking as the most popular activity for future participation in general as well as for Active Transportation, there is a significant opportunity to increase activity in this community by prioritizing support for walking.
2. Some outdoor, seasonal activities are also mentioned as wish list items for increased participation—canoeing/kayaking, bicycling.

3. Infrastructure for walking and cycling is a clear need based on identified physical activity challenges in general and Active Transportation facilitators.
4. Interventions to support social connections are important. They address significant barriers and garner significant interest among programming concepts.
5. Creating programming of interest to community members emerges as an opportunity to address an important barrier.
6. There may be a role for health care providers in supporting participation in physical activity given the proportion who perceive their current health status as a challenge.

More community members may be engaged by improving accessibility of community-based physical activity opportunities by offering flexible, non-competitive, activities that incorporate social interactions.



II. Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

In Oxford everyone is engaged and participating in physical activity and recreation opportunities.

Mission

By working collectively, we are dedicated to creating environments and providing access to meaningful recreation and physical activity opportunities for all residents of Oxford with the aim of improving overall health and quality of life of the community.

Values

- **Accessibility and Affordability:** seek to provide fair, accessible and affordable recreation and leisure opportunity that encourage participation by a diverse community.
- **Quality of Service:** strive to provide the highest quality of services to residents.
- **Quality Infrastructure:** (built facilities and green space): a strategic and sustainable system of parks and recreation infrastructure for the delivery of services and programs.
- **Adaptability and Flexibility:** strive to be continually relevant and flexible in meeting the needs of the current and future populations.
- **Inclusion and Accessibility:** Ensure each resident has access to recreation and physical activity programs as well as facilities.
- **Accountability:** open and accountable government to be accessible to residents, asking for and listening to their needs, and reporting regularly on progress.



III. Strategic Directions

1. Strategic Direction: Recreation Facilities, Trails and Parks

Goal: Supportive physical environments for physical activity and recreation including quality facilities.

Objectives

- Continue to support trail development and use
- Support continued development and improvements to other outdoor spaces
- Improve the arena for physical activity and recreation
- Partner with the school to increase physical activity and recreation and support continued community use of schools



Objectives	High Level Actions ¹
A) Continue to support trail development and use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop trails maps and signage to brand and connect trails • Promote multiuse trails for all modes of active transportation • Promote existing trails located behind the Oxford Regional Education Centre (OREC) that are underused • Work with local landowners to help to promote trails • Engage community members to use the trails through existing groups such as walking groups, the library, etc. • Assess feasibility of trail development to help ensure connectivity of the community (for example connecting the downtown to the ball field) • Develop a plan to ensure trail maintenance
B) Support continued development and improvements to other outdoor spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a needs assessment to identify improvements for the ballfield to ensure future use • Partner to identify and develop a new park space • Support canoeing, kayaking, skate park and other activities through equipment loan programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promote existing equipment loan programs (e.g., through the library) • Maintain and improve skate park and soccer field <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Explore development of a track around the soccer field to help support walking

¹ For each objective, actions have been identified which will be further refined and developed as the Town moves forward with operational planning.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess required improvements to sidewalks and develop a 5 to 10-year improvement plan to promote usage and accessibility for all • Explore opportunities for indoor walking spaces (e.g. use rink in the summer for walking, firehall space, hallways in the schools, etc.) • Implement play boxes in strategic outdoor locations to encourage unstructured play for children and families/ sponsorship • Identify space for community gardens and support development through community engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Align edible landscapes with walking plans/walkability trail
C) Improve the arena for physical activity and recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to improve the arena to support increased usages by exploring funding opportunities/ fundraising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Explore opportunities to enhance use of the arena for physical activity and recreation • Promote the arena and potential opportunities for use to existing groups such as walking clubs/groups, the schools
D) Partner with the school to increase physical activity and recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with OREC to improve the school track and promote its use by the community as a safe walking space • Partner with schools to support physical activity and recreation for all children and youth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop and implement walking school buses ○ Engage parents and identify champions to support development of physical activity initiatives • Use the school facility (space and equipment) to offer physical activity and recreation programs for seniors (e.g., chair exercises, walking, etc.)

2. Strategic Direction: Accessibility and Inclusivity

Goal: Individuals are participating in physical activity and recreation to the best of their ability.

Objectives

- Explore strategies to improve accessibility of facilities and outdoor spaces
- Develop and implement equipment loan programs
- Explore strategies to ensure programming supports inclusivity and reduces barriers to participation



Objectives	High Level Actions
A) Explore strategies to improve accessibility of facilities and outdoor spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and conduct an accessibility audit as part of the 2030 commitment to an accessible province <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure audit includes both the physical and social environment (e.g., gender neutral washrooms, sense of belonging, language, etc.) ○ Ensure audit includes a comprehensive range of facilities including libraries
B) Develop and implement equipment loan programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote adaptive equipment available through the YMCA, IWK and Cumberland County • Explore development of lending programs (e.g. skates, helmets, pickleball paddles, etc.)
C) Explore strategies to ensure programming supports inclusivity and reduces barriers to participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review intake process and adapt to ensure it meets diverse needs (e.g., gender neutral, etc.) • Develop and implement training for staff to build awareness and understanding about inclusivity and reducing barriers to participation • Review and adapt communication to ensure gender neutral • Develop and implement low or no cost programs

3. Strategic Direction: Promotion and Marketing/Communications

Goal: Residents are aware of physical activity and recreation opportunities and the benefits of participation.

Objectives

- Promote use of indoor and outdoor facilities and spaces
- Promote physical activity and recreation as part of daily living



Objectives	High Level Actions
A) Promote use of indoor and outdoor facilities and spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate messaging to promote use of indoor and outdoor spaces into municipal website • Promote indoor and outdoor spaces through other mechanisms such as flyers, bulletin boards, Facebook pages, partners, etc. • Continue to support and update Fundy Connect (the online recreation guide) • Explore use of 211 for promotion

<p>B) Promote physical activity and recreation as part of daily living</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use social media to promote the benefits of physical activity and connect messaging to other elements of the plan (e.g., trails, facilities) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Celebrate successful programs and partnerships ○ Share stories from community members ○ Develop a hashtag to help ensure consistency in messaging • Support the provincial social marketing campaign that encourages people to include small sessions of movement into their daily routines. • Incorporate messaging promoting physical activity and recreation within existing mediums (e.g., newsletter, programming materials, etc.) • Promote free and low-cost recreation and physical activity opportunities • Promote Kids Sport and Jumpstart to those who face financial barriers to accessing sport and recreation • Ensure diversity is visible in promotional materials and websites
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4. Strategic Direction: Partnerships and Engagement

Goal: Strengthened alignment with community partners to support physical activity and recreation where citizens work, live and play.

Objectives

- Work with the health sector to increase physical activity
- Facilitate incorporation of physical activity within workplaces
- Facilitate incorporation of physical activity into settings to reach children and youth
- Facilitate connections with partners that help make stronger links between physical activity and overall health and well-being



Objectives	High Level Actions
<p>A) Work with the health sector to increase physical activity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with community health care providers to implement physical activity prescriptions • Provide resources such as the monthly community calendar to health care providers to share with patients • Explore implementation of the Walk with a Doc program
<p>B) Facilitate incorporation of physical activity within workplaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with Oxford Frozen Foods to incorporate physical activity into the workplace • Pilot workplace wellness tools developed through LGM NS in partnership with other community groups • Explore development and implementation of a physical activity and walking challenge with local businesses

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Incorporate walkability signage (e.g., Big Block Walk idea from Amherst) ○ Include maps that provide distance and progress made
C) Facilitate incorporation of physical activity into settings to reach children and youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partner with schools to incorporate physical activity messaging into school communication ● Partner with Health Promoting Schools and UpLift initiatives to connect the town’s strategic plan and its actions ● Partner with early years groups (e.g., pre-primary programming, library, day cares) to support networking and sharing of resources with a focus on unstructured outdoor play ● Continue to offer physical activity, sport and recreation opportunities for children and youth in partnership with community groups and organizations (schools, sports clubs, YMCA, etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promote YMCA swimming ○ Promote youth programming through churches ○ Develop and promote family friendly activities
D) Facilitate connections with partners to foster stronger links between physical activity and overall health and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partner with community organizations to link people and build social support networks that support healthy living (e.g., physical activity, healthy eating, mental health) ● Develop a resource about how to incorporate physical activity into recreational activities ● Work with seniors’ groups (e.g., Oxford Pioneer Heritage Club, Meadow Vista, Shady Residents) to identify needs of older adults related to physical activity and partner to develop and implement initiatives based on the needs ● Partner to develop a municipal wellness and healthy eating policy for events and facilities (e.g., Public Health, Waste Management) ● Continue to participate in Gettin’ Healthy partnership to strengthen the tie between supportive community food environments and recreation ● Partner to support initiatives that address food security (e.g., Community Gardening Network, partner with Food Bank, etc.)

5. Strategic Direction: Community Leadership and Capacity Building

Goal: Quality and sustainable recreation and physical activity opportunities with the support of leaders.

Objectives

- Develop and support existing and aspiring leaders to support physical activity and recreation in the community
- Support volunteers to facilitate community physical activity and recreation opportunities

Objectives	High Level Actions
<p>A) Develop and support existing and aspiring leaders to support physical activity and recreation in the community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement workshops to strengthen leadership within the volunteer sport and recreation sector • Build knowledge and skills of existing leaders such as Councilors, Community Health Board members, school principals to support physical activity and recreation • Provide training for community leaders to develop knowledge and skills in access and inclusion (e.g., creating safe spaces, cultural inclusion) and to support advocacy for groups and individuals that may have diverse needs • Develop and implement learning opportunities to support youth leadership in physical activity and recreation (e.g., summer staff training, youth as coaches, etc.)
<p>B) Support volunteers to facilitate community physical activity and recreation opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a database of volunteers who support physical activity and recreation in the community • Develop and implement volunteer recognition to celebrate volunteers who support physical activity and recreation in the community • Partner to recruit and support volunteers (e.g., NSCC, schools, etc.)



IV. Moving Forward

Moving forward, the Town of Oxford will continue to work with the many partners who have contributed to the development of the strategic plan to support its implementation. A more detailed operational plan will be developed to identify timelines, accountability, responsibility and indicators of success for the objectives and actions.

To help ensure successful implementation of the strategic plan, key enablers have been identified including:

- **Leadership** from the Town of Oxford and partner organizations. While the MPAL coordinator has an important role to play in guiding the work, Council and partners need to champion the actions within the strategic plan. The strategic plan was developed through a collaborative process that engaged stakeholders from within the community and the actions reflect the shared work. Shared responsibility to support implementation of the strategic plan will help to ensure success. The working group established to support the creation of the strategic plan will continue to support the development of the operational plan and guide the implementation process.
- **Resources** including human, financial and physical are key enablers for the implementation of the strategic plan. Based on the actions and priorities identified, resources will be dedicated and sought to support implementation of the plan.
- **Accountability** is another key enabler to support implementation of the strategic plan. As noted above, an operational plan will identify indicators of success, which are the foundation for monitoring implementation of the actions and success of the strategic plan. Through ongoing tracking of the actions, adjustments can be made to continually improve the implementation process. Annual reports will be produced to track progress and share success.
- **Regular Reports** to Town Council will be important to maintain Council support of the plan, understand the goals and work to accomplish them and maintain progress on implementation of the plan in public record.
- **Communication** with our partners and community will be critical as the strategic plan is implemented. Effective communication will help to build shared responsibility for the strategic plan and to celebrate and build on achievements.

Many people contributed to developing this strategic plan. The contributions made by partners in the community have been invaluable. The Town recognizes that community partners play a major role in the success of physical activity and recreation programs. To support the rollout of the strategic plan, commitment to engaging citizens and community partners is integral. The Town will seek further input and advice as action plans are developed to support the overall strategic plan.