



Town of Aurora

**Pricing Policy & Financial Assistance Policy
BACKGROUND SUMMARY REPORT**

October 5, 2020



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Appendix A: Terms of Reference for the Project Reference Group

1.0 Introduction

Project Purpose & Context

The Town of Aurora provides recreation facilities and programs to enable residents to be physically active and connected with others. The Community Services Department, by way of its Recreation Division, oversees the delivery of recreation services that reflect the needs of Aurora residents and do so in a fiscally-responsible manner.

In 2009, the Town of Aurora prepared a 'Pricing Policy for Recreation Services' that involved a comprehensive review of the municipal fee structure for recreation services. The Town of Aurora has decided to refresh the Pricing Policy and concurrently update its framework for subsidy/financial assistance for low-income participants of recreation programs. The Town has retained Monteith Brown Planning Consultants Ltd. and Tucker-Reid & Associates to undertake the current scope of work.

Specifically, the Terms of Reference for this project indicates the following goals:

- Review the **existing rates and fees structure** for recreation programs and services and provide an updated framework to rationalize rates, subsidy/cost recovery levels and future trends based on projected demographics.
- Review **financial assistance frameworks** (program subsidy) based on a person's ability to pay and provide an updated framework to identify a sustainable funding source, a means test to determine who qualifies, and to ensure that there is affordable access, fairness, transparency, and an ease of implementation and administration.

The outcome of this work will be an updated Pricing Policy for Recreation and a Financial Assistance Policy (collectively referred to herein as the "Policies"). It bears noting that these policies will set the stage for future work on the part of the Town, including the implementation of a financial assistance program to assist low-income residents as part of subsequent implementation after the Policies have been approved by Council.

The scope of the Pricing Policy is relegated to recreation services offered through the Town of Aurora Community Services Department, and will generally guide rates and fees for:

- Recreation facility rentals including arenas, auditoriums, sports fields, outdoor tennis courts, gymnasiums, and meeting/program rooms;
- Aquatics programs including selected learn-to-swim programs and public swimming
- Recreation programs for different age categories (children, youth, adults and seniors) and families;
- Registered and drop-in programs including basketball, public skating, day camps, dance, introductory arts/cultural programs, and general interest activities;
- Fitness memberships and selected group fitness programs; and
- Rates applied to non-residents, non-profit and commercial organizations.

Excluded from the scope of work are arts and culture programs, festivals and special events, park-based facilities (e.g. picnic pavilions), and other services not offered by the Community Services Department.

Study Process

The development of the Policy and Program are characterized by the following steps, undertaken between project initiation in January 2020 and its targeted completion by August 2020:

1. Meetings with the Town of Aurora Project Team
2. Meetings with the Reference Group
3. Review of the existing policy and demographic context
4. Community survey
5. Access to Affordable Recreation Focus Group
6. Review of direct and indirect costs for facilities and programs
7. Draft and final frameworks for pricing and financial assistance policies
8. Presentation to Town Council

Purpose of this Background Summary Report

This Background Summary Report contains information considered to be relevant and required to formulate meaningful user fee and financial access policies for the Town of Aurora. This Report provides an 'environmental scan' documenting the legislative context, demographics and applicable trends, and input from consultations carried out to date for the Policy work. **This Report is NOT intended to make recommendations or establish fees, as this work will be carried out in subsequent project phases.**

2.0 The Town's Role in Delivering Recreation Services

The Town of Aurora's vision, as stated through its corporate Strategic Plan, is to be "An innovative and sustainable community where neighbours and businesses thrive."¹ As part of achieving this vision, the Town delivers recreation facilities, programs and services to the community. Recreation has direct benefits in improving the quality of life for residents, contributes to the economic health of the community, and is a means through which people are connected to one another.

The Community Services Department's actions are also guided by the Town of Aurora Parks & Recreation Master Plan, and the Sport Plan. The Department strives to provide/enable services that are needed to engage residents in healthy lifestyles, and strives to do so in a manner that is cost-effective and complementary to services available through community providers. The Pricing Policy and Ability-to-Pay Program support the "Invest in sustainable infrastructure" and "Encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle" objectives articulated under the Town of Aurora Strategic Plan's Community Pillar.

The Department partially offsets the financial costs of providing recreation services through a number of revenue streams, most notably user fees, taxation and – to a lesser extent – sponsorships, grants and partnerships. The Department also accepts that there are non-financial and intangible benefits that offset fiscal expenditures by way of increased physical and social health among residents (which may reduce health-care spending for instance), contributions to community vibrancy and cohesion, environmental sustainability, etc. Therefore, the degree to which quantifiable costs are "recovered" is dictated by Town's prevailing philosophy surrounding the "value" of the service that it provides to individuals and the community as a whole.

The Community Services Department also recognizes that certain populations face barriers to accessing its recreation facilities and services, and thus strives to be inclusive in support of its mandate to involve as many residents in recreation as possible. One element of inclusion that can be managed through pricing relates to financial assistance for low-income participants. As discussed in Section 10.0, the Department currently provides an in-house subsidy that offsets program registration fees using contributions from an annual fundraising effort; it bears noting, however, that this subsidy is not administered or funded in the same way as formalized Financial Assistance Policies found in a number of other communities.

¹ Town of Aurora 2011-2031 Strategic Plan. p.1.

3.0 Legislative Context

Ontario Municipal Act

Specific to Fees and Charges, Part XII the *Ontario Municipal Act, 2001* grants a municipality the broad authority to impose a fee or charge for any activity or service that it provides, as well as for the use of property under its control. The costs included in a fee or charge may include costs incurred by the municipality or local board related to administration, enforcement, and the establishment, acquisition and replacement of capital assets. Furthermore, the municipality may impose a charge or fee “for capital costs related to services or activities...on persons not receiving an immediate benefit from the services or activities but who will receive a benefit at some later point in time.”

These provisions in the *Municipal Act* mean that rates and fees are permitted by, and set at the discretion of the municipality whereby fees can be below, at the same level, or exceed the direct operating costs of providing an activity or service. Part XII does not define a methodology in which to calculate a user fee, however, Sections 393 and 394 of the *Municipal Act* identify certain restrictions that are to be considered. Further, Part XII does not require a public process to pass a fee or charge by-law, however, it is considered a best practice to develop recreation rates in consultation with the public and stakeholders of the recreation system to validate core principles that will assist in the setting of fees.

The specific provisions of the *Municipal Act* are documented in the pages that follow.

Ontario Regulation 584/06

Ontario Regulation 584/06 is issued under the authority of the *Municipal Act* to specifically govern the imposition of fees and charges. More specifically, the Regulation establishes a number of limitations through which a charge or fee can be imposed. One notable provision for recreation is under Section 2(1) of the *Regulation* which prohibits a municipality from imposing “fees or charges to obtain revenue to pay capital costs, if as a result of development charges by-laws or front-ending agreements under the *Development Charges Act*.”

Municipal Act, 2001 – Part XII Fees and Charges

By-laws re: fees and charges

- 391** (1) Without limiting sections 9, 10 and 11, those sections authorize a municipality to impose fees or charges on persons,
- (a) for services or activities provided or done by or on behalf of it;
 - (b) for costs payable by it for services or activities provided or done by or on behalf of any other municipality or any local board; and
 - (c) for the use of its property including property under its control. 2006, c. 32, Sched. A, s. 163 (1).

Local board

- (1.1) A local board may impose fees or charges on persons,
- (a) for services or activities provided or done by or on behalf of it;
 - (b) for costs payable by it for services or activities provided or done by or on behalf of any municipality or other local board; and
 - (c) for the use of its property including property under its control. 2006, c. 32, Sched. A, s. 163 (1).

Deferred benefit

- (2) A fee or charge imposed for capital costs related to services or activities may be imposed on persons not receiving an immediate benefit from the services or activities but who will receive a benefit at some later point in time. 2006, c. 32, Sched. A, s. 163 (2).

Costs related to administration, etc.

- (3) The costs included in a fee or charge may include costs incurred by the municipality or local board related to administration, enforcement and the establishment, acquisition and replacement of capital assets. 2006, c. 32, Sched. A, s. 163 (3).

Fees for mandatory services, etc.

- (4) A fee or charge may be imposed whether or not it is mandatory for the municipality or local board imposing the fee or charge to provide or do the service or activity, pay the costs or allow the use of its property. 2006, c. 32, Sched. A, s. 163 (3).

Restriction, poll tax

393 No fee or charge by-law shall impose a poll tax or similar fee or charge, including a fee or charge which is imposed on an individual by reason only of his or her presence or residence in the municipality or part of it. 2001, c. 25, s. 393; 2006, c. 32, Sched. A, s. 165.

Restriction, fees and charges

- 394** (1) No fee or charge by-law shall impose a fee or charge that is based on, is in respect of or is computed by reference to,
- (a) the income of a person, however it is earned or received, except that a municipality or local board may exempt, in whole or in part, any class of persons from all or part of a fee or charge on the basis of inability to pay;
 - (b) the use, purchase or consumption by a person of property other than property belonging to or under the control of the municipality or local board that passes the by-law;
 - (c) the use, consumption or purchase by a person of a service other than a service provided or performed by or on behalf of or paid for by the municipality or local board that passes the by-law;
 - (d) the benefit received by a person from a service other than a service provided or performed by or on behalf of or paid for by the municipality or local board that passes the by-law; or
 - (e) the generation, exploitation, extraction, harvesting, processing, renewal or transportation of natural resources. 2001, c. 25, s. 394 (1); 2006, c. 32, Sched. A, s. 166.

Ontario Regulation 584/06**Capital costs**

- 2.** (1) A municipality and a local board do not have power under the Act to impose fees or charges to obtain revenue to pay capital costs, if as a result of development charges by-laws or front-ending agreements under the *Development Charges Act, 1997* or a predecessor of that Act that was passed or entered into before the imposition of the fees or charges, payments have been, will be or could be made to the municipality or local board to pay those costs.

4.0 Rationale for Pricing & Fee Assistance Policies

Benefits of Participating in Recreation

As noted in Section 2.0, the Town prices its recreation services in a way that reflects the benefits that are provided to residents, both in financially quantifiable terms but also to acknowledge non-financial or intrinsic benefits that are accrued. The Canadian Parks & Recreation Association, the Canadian Sport For Life (CS4L) movement, along with various other planning bodies and sport representatives, have documented a host of physical health, psychological, economic and environmental benefits that are derived from the recreation and sport system including (but not limited to):

- Strengthening social, motor, creativity and intellectual capabilities
- Combating chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer and respiratory illnesses
- Reducing stress, depression and contributes to emotional/psychological well being
- Providing safe, developmental opportunities for children and youth who are unsupervised before and after school
- Building self-esteem, social skills, positive self-image and stimulating participation in community life
- Producing leaders who support their communities in many ways
- Strengthening community engagement
- Nurturing growth, acquisition of life skills for those with a disability
- Reducing self-destructive behaviours and negative social activities, particularly among youth
- Building understanding between diverse cultures
- Reducing social isolation, loneliness and alienation
- Reducing the costs of healthcare, social services, social interventions and foster care

Involvement in various forms of recreation and sport contribute to many of the above-noted benefits and to the overall health of Aurora's communities and individuals. The Town of Aurora supports participation in recreation and sport, in part through the provision and/or subsidization of services, as the municipality recognizes its role in promoting healthy lifestyles and facilitating positive choices.

Consistency & Transparency in Setting Fees

A Pricing Policy for recreation allows the Town to implement a clear, consistent, open, and transparent process for establishing user fees for the facilities and programs it delivers. A Pricing Policy can support the cost-effective delivery of services and encourages accessibility, participation and equity. A Policy provides guidelines for annual Council approved fees while allowing recreation/sport organizations to understand, anticipate and plan for fees in future years.

Specifically, a Pricing Policy can assist Town staff in:

- establishing a transparent, defensible, and replicable methodology for setting rental rates for municipal arenas (ice, floor) and outdoor sports fields (soccer, football, baseball, other field sports);
- evaluating the existing fee structure and identifying potential areas of concern and opportunity;

- reporting on the true costs of delivering services and identifying cost recovery targets for arena and outdoor sports field rentals;
- engaging local stakeholders in understanding the basis for this study, the cost of service delivery, strategies for setting and applying rates, and proposed rate changes; and
- making recommendations on the phasing in of fee changes and improvement of pricing structures and related policies.

Asset Management & Fiscally Sustainable Delivery of Services

Although full cost recovery of facility operations is not the core objective for the Town of Aurora and most municipalities, there is a fine balance in subsidization given that recreation facilities are multi-million dollar assets that place a degree of pressure on the local tax base. The imposition of user fees and rental charges helps to offset capital and operational expenditures, and are considered to be an important tool to ensure that facilities and programs are provided to a desirable level of quality, and most importantly in longevity. User fees typically cover a percentage of the direct costs to offer a program or time used at a recreation facility.

Best Practices in the Development of a Pricing Policy

Transparency in municipal governance is a requirement and must be demonstrated in all Council, staff and volunteer actions. The development of a Pricing Policy follows an industry standard of openness and the equitable provision of programs and services. The preferred process to develop Pricing Policies utilizing industry standard best practices is as follows.

1) Understand the True Cost to Provide Recreation Programs and Services

Services have traditionally been priced solely considering on what the market will bear. In recreation, service practitioners have tried to keep pricing as low as possible to encourage greater participation levels. While this approach is worthy, it does not tell the full story and does not divulge the costs involved with offering a program or service. For more fulsome approaches in developing defensible pricing, a municipality must know what its true costs are to provide the service.

The costing process is arduous as not all budgets are based on the cost to provide varying services. Further unit costs come into consideration and must include:

- *direct costs* such as expenditures on staff, mandatory employment-related costs and equipment/program supplies;
- *indirect costs* including supervision and facility expenses; as well as
- *overhead costs* such as registration, communications, and other corporate costs associated with delivering the program and service.

There are a number of assumptions that need to be applied and considered equitably between a municipality's operating divisions and staff units. Developing a formula that can be replicated in subsequent pricing cycles is paramount, as well as ensuring that similar formulas are utilized

throughout the corporation to provide the consistency and transparency that is required. Most importantly, defining the true cost to provide services encourages municipalities to explore the most efficient ways to provide the service. Efficiencies must be considered in developing the most cost-effective way to provide a program or service.

2) Engage the Public in Discussing Guiding Principles

Engaging the public in discussions about costing and pricing various services helps to establish a pricing structure that is meaningful and reflects the community's unique demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Concepts and principles that are typically explored with the public include:

- a) Pricing based on general ability to pay by age cohort;
- b) The type of service provided, whether it be a general interest or specialized;
- c) The benefits that the service provides to the whole population or to individuals;
- d) Comparing the prices of services and programs to surrounding jurisdictions and other local service providers; and
- e) The impact of pricing in terms of participation levels.

The engagement of a **Reference Group** that is representative of the community it serves provides a lens and an ability to interpret the results of community surveys and focus groups. This input serves to develop a fair-minded policy, serves to defend a certain approach, and helps to develop a policy that is meaningful within a community. A Reference Group has been formed for this project and will be engaged at strategic points in the policy development process.

5.0 Rationale for Fee Assistance Policies

Making the Case for Affordability in Recreation

Access to Affordable Recreation Provides a Range of Choices for All Residents

It is the aim of most recreation departments to engage as many citizens as possible in program offerings and use of facilities. Doing so requires an understanding that the resident base is highly diverse in terms of age, gender, cultural background, economic status, and level of ability to name only a few. The Ontario Human Rights Code requires that many such factors are protected grounds through which services cannot be denied to individuals.

By subsidizing recreation to encourage greater participation, all or a portion of these costs can be offset through the benefits provided to the community (as discussed in Section 4.0). In the context of individuals and households receiving social assistance, the “payback” or “recovery” of costs associated with recreational subsidies can be attained through savings that would otherwise be spent on social services and health services.

The paragraphs that follow speak to the importance of providing financial assistance policies and programs, as well as the role of recreation pricing in advancing social justice. In doing so, municipalities can help provide affordable participation options for all residents, thereby making the choice to lead healthier lives an easier decision.

Financial Assistance / Affordable Access to Recreation Policies and Programs

The cost to participate in organized forms of recreation and sport has generally increased over time and is placing greater financial pressures on persons wishing to participate. Depending on the socio-economic make-up of a community, broad trends indicate that a greater number of households are seeking financial assistance to cover some of the fees associated with recreation.

Fortunately, programs are in place to help those in need to access sports activities, providing financial alternatives to rental or program rates already subsidized by a municipality. Financial assistance can come from provincial sources, municipal programs and grants, corporate foundations and/or the sport organizations themselves. Lower-income households are amongst the most susceptible to miss out on the benefits that recreation and sport can bring, thus many municipalities have financial assistance policies and programs in place for qualifying individuals and households. As discussed in Section 6.0, the Recreation Division’s in-house subsidy program offers financial assistance to some individuals who are currently facing financial challenges and want to take part in Town-run recreation activities.

There is a wide range of financial assistance approaches across the municipal sector. For example, a number of municipalities have comprehensive Financial Assistance Policies guided by Council-approved policies and annual funding amounts, while others have built their fee assistance policies in a manner that allows users to access affiliated minor sports programs. Certain municipalities have partnered with third parties (e.g., YMCA, local service clubs and businesses, upper-tier municipalities, etc.) to provide funding for

those without the financial means to participate or specifically targeted to children and youth. Other municipalities have focused upon increasing free and/or universal programming by geographically targeting lower income areas within a community. As will be discussed in subsequent pages, municipalities also work with corporate sector and local community providers to access financial assistance programs such as Canadian Tire Jumpstart, sponsorships, and encouraging internal access/inclusion policies. It also bears noting that there are sometimes gaps in financial assistance programs for adults as most programs tend to focus upon families, children/youth, or seniors.

Pricing to Combat Social Injustice

Building upon the previous paragraphs, John Crompton's article recently published in the National Parks and Recreation Association's Parks & Recreation Magazine speaks to the role of pricing in relation to social justice. The article recognizes two concepts of fairness, being 1) "The Benefit Principle" that states fees should be reflective of the benefits received from a service; and 2) "The Ability to Pay Principle" that states pricing should reflect income-related differences so that no residents are excluded because of an inability to pay. The model argues that not only does exclusion of individuals on the basis of income inhibit fairness, it also forgoes revenues on services and could in fact require a greater degree of tax support since many municipal recreation services have fixed operational costs.

To reflect the Ability to Pay Principle yet ensure a degree of operational sustainability provided through the Benefit Principle, recreation departments could specifically target fee assistance to low-income residents, unemployed residents, children, and/or large households to ensure fairness. In addition, the use of pricing premiums to reflect value-added benefits or intentions of individuals to operate for-profit enterprises through the use of municipal infrastructure could redistribute resources in a manner that maximizes a municipality's objectives for social justice.²

Best Practices in Developing an Affordable Access to Recreation Policy

Municipalities must comply with the Ontario Human Rights Act which states that no one can be denied services due to their background or existing circumstances. This commitment to ensure that all residents can participate in recreation is embraced in a variety of ways. There are some impressive efforts in place that can inform the development of an Affordable Access to Recreation Policy.

The following is a sampling of additional Best Practices for consideration by the Town of Aurora.

Work as a Collective – Engage Low-income Support Organizations and Recipients in Policy Development

The Region of Durham, regional municipalities, and for-profit and not-for-profit organizations banded together around their commitment to engage residents with low-income backgrounds in recreation

² Crompton, John. January 2020. *Pricing Strategies that Combat Social Injustice: Using Price Premiums and Discounts for Optimizing Economic Equity*. Parks & Recreation Magazine. pp. 36-39. National Recreation & Park Association.

pursuits. The representatives clearly understand the benefits to the individual and community and wanted to seek ways as a collective to increase participation in recreation pursuits by these residents.

In Durham, the collective consisted of representatives from Libraries, Social Services, Public Health, Churches, as well as low-income residents themselves. The collective set up a session with Dr. Gina Browne from McMaster University to hear about her leading research and various studies culminating in a paper entitled “When the Bough Breaks”. A facilitated session followed the presentation to best understand what they could do as a collective of interested organizations. The results have been impressive in that the group commissioned a consultant to prepare a multi-year strategy “Advancing Affordable Access to Recreation in Durham (AARD)”. Working together resulted in receiving a one-time grant of \$550,000 from the Poverty Reduction Fund to replicate Dr. Browne’s work in Durham Region.

Committing to Affordable Access to Recreation (A Charter)

A lack of knowledge about the number of low-income residents and the benefits gained through their participation in recreational pursuits is one of the barriers to receiving commitments and dedicated funding from institutions. In their quest to gain commitment, the AARD working group developed a Charter and asked each lead politician, board chair, and president of the participating organizations and institutions to sign their organization’s commitment. A Charter speaks to the issue and benefits and to a longer-term commitment. The AARD Charter was signed at a press conference and gave the issue of access to recreation visibility and importance.

Inventory and Promote all Free and Low-Cost Opportunities

Findings from community engagement carried out in the development of financial assistance policies consistently show that low-income residents and respective service providers do not know what is available to them, nor are they always aware about the importance of being active. One of the first steps that communities should take is to inventory the number and types of free and low-cost recreational opportunities, and subsequently promote these opportunities. The benefits of participation are well documented and require promotion to encourage residents to be more active.

Consider the Cost of Transportation and Equipment

The cost of equipment and the cost of transportation is one the deterrents to participating in recreation, thus a proactive financial assistance/affordable recreation policy will take these barriers into account. A number of municipalities offer free transportation to youth in the summer months so that they can get to participate in recreational opportunities. One of the more proactive approaches is offered in Sault Ste. Marie where children, youth and an accompanying adult receive free transit access if they are going to a recreation or sport facility. Other municipalities are working with their transit providers to include major recreation facilities and sport fields along transit routes and near stops.

Work with Community Sports and Community Groups

Volunteer organizations providing sport and recreation opportunities often utilize municipal spaces and sport fields at a subsidized rate. Most of these organizations have internal policies and practices that provide some access to low-income residents. Working with community sport and recreation clubs may result in greater participation and better end results. Some municipalities are considering

including a requirement in their Affiliation/Allocation Policies or are developing ways to match the interests of low-income families with a group or a provider.

Provide Universal Programs that are Free to All (Sponsorships and Partnerships)

Some low-income residents may hesitate to apply for subsidies or ask for financial assistance out of embarrassment for oneself or family members. Providing universal access through no cost experiences for residents can eliminate that reticence and provides an equal playing field for all participants. These opportunities are often in the form of summertime playground programs in parks or after-school programs during the school year; the City of Mississauga is an example that proactively seeks sponsors for both these opportunity types, and attendance has been growing since inception of these programs.

Many other communities provide enhanced funding and additional recreation/sport opportunities in low-income areas of their municipality. This eliminates the cost of transportation and allows the design of programs and services to meet the needs of the residents. Working with like-minded partners has proven to be a successful approach to engage residents in meaningful experiences while sharing resources.

Dedicated Municipal Funding as an Investment

There are many partners that can share in funding oriented to offset costs for low-income participants. Canadian Tire Jumpstart has been an exemplary corporate partner for the last 20 years while many local service clubs sponsor camps and sport opportunities. In order to maximize participation and reap value of these endeavours, it is important that a municipality dedicate adequate funding to offset the direct costs of participation by low-income residents. Such a commitment can leverage other funders and increase access.

Set and Measure Penetration Targets

One of the queries that municipalities have pertains to what level of funding is considered to be fair, as well as how success of funding programs can be measured. One of the starting points would be to understand the participation rate of the general population within a municipality as well as the low-income population. Often these figures demonstrate significant gaps in participation by low-income residents. In the case of Durham's AARD project, approximately 15% of the general population regularly participated in registered programs and services but participation by low-income residents was less than 2%. The goal and measured target became 15% participation by low-income residents – this goal was reached with concerted effort in three years since the inception of the new policy.

Providing Recreation Leadership Opportunities at No Cost in Low-income Areas

Recreation departments are facing challenges with training and retaining part-time staff members, particularly in the aquatics discipline. The requirement for training and qualifications is costly and recent increases to the provincial minimum wage allows staff to find part-time employment requiring fewer effort and qualifications. This has been an ongoing issue for recreation departments across Ontario. One of the remedies for this situation has been to provide free leadership training in low-income neighbourhoods. The cost barrier is remedied and potential staff members have gained new competencies including leadership skills that are transferrable to other careers.

Seamless Means Testing through Social Services, Children's Aid and Similar Agencies

Municipal staff frequently indicate that full means testing requires specialized training and added resources to identify persons that qualify for subsidies. Partnerships with Social Services/Ontario Works, Public Health, Children's Aid Societies, and other similar organizations that work with low-income clients can provide means testing and promote access to affordable recreation. The benefits of recreation are promoted to families, with seamless access to programs and services providing strong benefits to both the participant and the municipality.

How Much is Adequate Funding Per Low-Income Resident and Family?

The question of adequate funding is thoughtfully considered during the development of a financial assistance/affordable recreation policy. Municipal organizations are limited in funding and would not want to be in a position to deny access to recreation when the benefits are so significant. One of the starting points in creating a realistic budget amount is to look at the types of programs that a typical family would participate in a year, and to determine the value of those programs and services.

For the purposes of illustration, consider a scenario where an average family was to spend \$250.00 for one child to participate in swimming lessons, a general interest program and a camp. Using this as a baseline, an allotment per child from a low-income household could be calculated. As discussed in Section 7.0, there are approximately 1,000 children and youth living below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) in Aurora, of whom 300 are under the age of 6. Assuming that the Town wished to target a 15% take-up/participation rate among children/youth living below the LICO, the budgeted calculation would hypothetically be 15% of 1,000 children/youth (150 persons) at \$250.00 per child per year or \$37,500.

The same calculation could be applied to specific age groups based on available data. Of the \$37,500 identified in the above noted scenario, \$11,500 could be dedicated for children under the age of 6 (15% of 300 children at \$250). The same methodology could be applied to adults or seniors, or applying an average rate could be used to arrive at a subsidy amount per resident living with a low income. This is only one example of how projecting a fair subsidy amount might be completed and may be considered as a starting point, since all efforts to increase participation among low income families may surpass the participation rate of the overall population in recreation programs (which would be an indicator of success). The participation rates should be monitored annually and budgets and contributions from other sponsors/partnerships adjusted accordingly.

6.0 Review of Local Policies and Practices

Pricing Policy for Recreation Services

The Community Services Department's Pricing Policy for Recreation Services was prepared in 2009 and has been loosely used as a guide for Town Staff to assist in rate-setting, more so using its philosophical basis rather than cost calculation parameters. This process to update the Pricing Policy is being undertaken with a stated intent of defining how the Town can calculate its direct and indirect costs of delivery, along with ensuring consistency with current best practices and principles as it relates to fee setting.

The 2009 Policy articulates a number of definitions, guiding principles, and categorizes recreation services according to four levels of cost recovery. **Town staff have indicated that they will look at the definitions developed in 2009 and advise the Consulting Team whether these remain appropriate, and whether any adjustments are required.** These definitions are currently as follows:

Capital Cost means the cost to replace the Town's recreation/leisure service facilities over the next 50 years.

Cost Recovery means the amount/proportion of total operating costs (direct and indirect) paid for by the user of a program, facility or service rather than by the municipality through its tax base.

Direct Facility Operating Cost means the costs of facility union and part-time wage costs/benefits, light, heat, water, and maintenance, operating supplies and any costs to provide the space for the activity to take place.

Direct Program Operating Cost means the costs of part-time wages/benefits or contract fees, materials, supplies and rental costs associated with the provision of a program.

Indirect Facility Operating Cost means the costs of full-time staff salary/benefits and overhead costs for directors, managers, operations supervisors, booking clerks, and carpenters associated with the provision of space for recreational activities to take place.

Indirect Program Operating Cost means full-time staff salary/benefits and overhead costs for director, manager, complex administration and department administration associated with the provision of a program.

Low-income Household means the threshold, as determined by Statistics Canada, at which a household devotes a larger share of income to the necessities of food, shelter and clothing than the average family.

Public Good Characteristics means a good or service that is available for everyone to consume and provides community-wide benefits (e.g. education, transit, recreation). While there is a cost associated with the provision of public goods, the cost is shared by all members of the community. One person's participation/consumption does not preclude another person from participating or consuming that same good.

Target Group means a subset of the Town of Aurora's population intended to be the main beneficiaries of a recreational service or a subset of the population with specific physical, social and/or financial needs (e.g. children, youth, seniors, low-income households, special needs groups, new or emerging groups).

Total Operating Costs means the total direct and indirect program and facility costs.

User Fee means a fee paid directly by a user to gain access to a program, facility or service (e.g. admission or membership fees, program registration fees, facility or equipment rental/permit fees, special service charges, etc.).

The 2009 Pricing Policy's four cost recovery categories consist of the following:

Level 0 No cost recovery through user fees

Level 1 A minimum of 30% cost recovery

Level 2 A minimum of 55% cost recovery

Level 3 A minimum of 75% cost recovery

Figure 1. Town of Aurora Recreational Service Categorization and Minimum Cost Recovery Targets

0% Cost Recovery of total operating costs	Minimum of 30% Cost Recovery of total operating costs – with exceptions*	Minimum of 55% Cost Recovery of total operating costs – with exceptions*	Minimum of 75% Cost Recovery of total operating costs – with exceptions*
Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Public Parks	Introductory/General Preschool Programs	Intermediate Preschool Programs or Holiday Events	Advanced/Specialty Preschool Programs
Public Trails	Introductory/General Children's Programs	Intermediate Children's Programs or Holiday Events	Advanced/Specialty Children's Programs
Playgrounds	Introductory/General Youth Programs	Intermediate Youth Programs or Holiday Events	Advanced/Specialty Youth Programs
Water Play Spashpads	Introductory/General Senior's Programs	Intermediate Senior's Programs or Holiday Events	Advanced/Specialty Senior's Programs
Skateboard and BMX Facilities	Introductory/General Activity Camps	Intermediate Camps and Daycare/Babysitting Services	Advanced/Specialty Camps
Outdoor skating rinks	Red Cross Swimming Programs	General Adult Programs	Advanced/Specialty Adult Programs
Outdoor tennis courts	Recreational Swimming and Aqua Fitness (all ages)	Semi-Private Swimming Lessons	Private Swimming Lessons
Certain community events	Public Skating (all ages)	Intermediate Adult Swimming Programs	Private Fitness Training/Lessons
Certain programs for special target groups	Parks, Trails and other Public Open Space	Ice Rental (all ages)	Birthday Party Packages
Sponsored Facility Access (e.g. Tim Horton's Public Skate)	Ball Diamond and Soccer Field Rental (all ages)	Swimming Pool Rental (all ages)	Non-resident Fitness Memberships
	Community Space Rental (all ages)	Resident Fitness Memberships	Non-resident Artificial Turf Rental

*Notes:

The minimum cost recovery targets do not include an allocation for Capital Conservation/ Facility Replacement costs.

The Policy recognizes there are circumstances where the minimum cost recovery targets cannot be met in the short to medium-term. Examples include situations where existing fees would have to be increased by more than 50% in order to reach the minimum target, fee increases are shown to result in loss of participants and consistent pricing is required within a program series (e.g. swimming lessons).

Source: Pricing Policy for Recreation Services, 2009. p.5.

Community Services Department In-House Subsidy Parameters

The Community Services Department presently does not have a comprehensive fee assistance policy or program in place. Through the Community Services Department, however, the Town provides an in-house subsidy for eligible participants in seasonal programs offered through the Recreation Division. The funding formula is to share costs with the eligible participant where the Town bears 56% of the program cost and the remainder (44%) is borne by the participant.

Funding for the in-house subsidy program is understood to be primarily derived from inconsistent and non-sustainable funding sources, limited to \$2,000 per year.³ The Town's parameters do not presently establish or require verification of criteria to determine eligibility of individuals to access the subsidy.

As shown in the table below, the total amount distributed has been in excess of the \$2,000 cap funded by a temporary surplus in an expense account but the important take-away is that the number of families relying on this assistance is growing and more than double the Town's annual allocation target, indicating a need.

Table 1: In-House Subsidy Distributions, 2017-2020 (YTD)

Fiscal Year	Number of Families Supported	Total Funds Distributed
2017	32	\$3,913
2018	44	\$5,664
2019	45	\$4,853
2020 (YTD)	6	\$1,320

Note: Total funds represent the Town of Aurora's share of program fees (56%)

Source: Town of Aurora, April 2020

This nominal in-house subsidy is not a Council-approved item in the Town's budget and is thus used by Town staff as a guideline. As a result, it is not heavily advertised/promoted nor is it understood to have an expansive reach due to the lack of formal guidelines (e.g. per family caps), and the variable/limited amount of funding set aside.

Supplementing the Town's subsidy program are community-led assistance initiatives including Canadian Tire Jumpstart, Sport Aurora's "All Kids Can Play" fund, membership assistance offered through the Aurora Seniors Centre, and other informal programs offered by certain recreation and sport providers. The Region of York also offers subsidies to certain individuals that are eligible to be used towards for recreation (as discussed in Section 10 of this Report). The Town of Aurora is not responsible for administering these programs, but helps to spread awareness when possible.

³ Town of Aurora. Department of Parks and Recreation. In-House Subsidy Parameters. Updated October 2014.

7.0 Review of Demographic & Socio-Economic Trends

A summary of pertinent demographic and socio-economic trends is presented in the pages that follow. The Town's demographics are part of the considerations required in setting fees, particularly in relation to establishing objectives relating to cost-recovery and affordability.

Historical Population Trends

- The Town's population grew from approximately 40,000 to over 55,400 persons between the 2001 and 2016 Census periods, representing an average annualized growth rate of 2.5%. By comparison, York Region grew by an average of 3.5% per year over the same period meaning that Aurora's population has grown at a lower rate than the Regional average.
- Aurora's Census median age was recorded at 41.5 years in 2016, an increase of over 5.5 years compared to 2001. The population of older adults (55+) has grown by over 145% over this time, amounting to an average annual growth rate of nearly 10%. By comparison, the population of children and teens under the age of 20 has grown by less than 0.5% per year while the numbers of people between the ages of 20 and 54 grew by slightly more than 1.5% per year.

145%

Percentage increase in the number of Aurora residents ages 55+ between 2001 and 2016 (an average growth rate of 10% per year).

Future Population Growth Forecasts

- The most recent population estimate for the Town of Aurora is 61,320 persons. The population is forecasted to reach 74,900 residents by 2031, representing an average annualized growth rate of 1.8%, which is slightly less than past Census recorded growth levels articulated above.⁴
- The number of children/youth (0-19) and adults between the ages of 20 and 54 are each projected to grow by an average of 1% per year by 2031. Strong growth continues to be forecast for the 55+ population at 3.5% per year.⁵

⁴ Town of Aurora. 2019. Development Charges Background Study.

⁵ Adapted from Environics Analytics data. 2019 population estimate is based on applying 23% (for children and youth), 47% (for adults) and 30% (for older adults and seniors) to the total projected population; 2031 population estimate is based on applying 22% (for children and youth), 44% (for adults) and 34% (for older adults and seniors) to the total projected population.

Socio-Economic Trends

- The number of Aurora residents born outside of Canada has more than doubled with a 130% increase (adding 9,300 persons) between the 2001 and 2016 Census periods. Whereas immigrants to Canada accounted for 18% of the population in 2001, newcomers now comprise 30% of all Aurora residents.
- Visible minority rates have increased from 13% in 2001 to 27% in 2016.
- The Town's Census median household income of \$106,700 in 2015 is 11.5% higher than the York Region median and 44% above the provincial median.
- There was a slightly greater percentage of Aurora residents living below the Low Income Cut-Off, after-tax (LICO-AT) in 2015 compared to 2005. The 2016 Census recorded 7.1% of Aurora residents living below the LICO (3,870 persons) compared to 6.1% recorded through the 2016 Census. Proportionally speaking, fewer Aurora residents lived below the LICO-AT in 2015 compared to York Region (9.2%) and the province (9.8%) in 2015.
- There is also a growing number of Aurora's children and youth living in LICO-AT households. In 2015, there were more than 1,000 children and youth living below the LICO, amounting to over 8% of all persons under the age of 18; by comparison 7% of all children and youth lived below the LICO-AT in 2005. Of the 1,000 children and youth living below LICO-AT, nearly 300 are below the age of 6.

8.0 Input from Community Consultations

Reference Group Meetings

In February 2020, the Town of Aurora recruited prospective members to form a Reference Group to provide feedback for the Policies and act as a sounding board to test whether outcomes of the work are reflective of community needs. Reference Group members were selected from a pool of existing Town of Aurora Advisory Committee and agency partner representatives involved in the delivery of civic services. A Terms of Reference articulated the roles and responsibilities of those involved in this capacity (see Appendix A).

The Reference Group will be asked to attend two project meetings as well as one Town Council meeting, with their term concluding at the end of the project. The first Reference Group meeting was held on May 25, 2020 to introduce the project and discuss key objectives/principles that would influence the two policies; with the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing at time of writing, convening an in-person meeting was not possible.

The Reference Group will be asked to review the draft policies prior their finalization and presentation to Town Council. It is envisioned that a virtual meeting will be convened once again due to the pandemic.

Community Survey

A community survey has been drafted, however, launch of the survey coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, the community survey has been deferred to occur later in the policy development process, potentially to test the Draft Pricing and Financial Assistance Policies with the public.

Affordable Recreation Focus Group

A focus group with residents, stakeholders and agency partners that provide funding and assistance to low-income residents was held on September 17, 2020 to discuss fee assistance / ability to pay for recreation services. Representatives from Jumpstart, the Region of York, the Aurora Seniors Centre, and recipients of recreation fee assistance participated in the discussion. The purpose of the focus group was to assess the opportunities and challenges that clients have in accessing recreation and the respective subsidies, and to garner suggestions as to how the current system might be improved. A summary of the key points emerging from the conversation is as follows.

Participants agree that the intent of undertaking such a policy stems from the principle that as many Aurora residents as possible should be able to attain the various benefits of recreation related to health, social and development potential of individuals. To truly be **inclusive**, the focus group shared the view that the rate of participation in recreation among persons experiencing low income should ideally reflect the rate of participation among the general population. There was a sentiment that people with less choice (due to any factors prohibiting their ability to participate) are the most vulnerable to being left behind, and thus a policy would ideally have a way to track and measure its effectiveness in reaching such populations.

Conversations also focused upon the need for policies to be developed and manner that is **easy to understand and simple to navigate** for the average person. Groups such as seniors and newcomers to Canada were identified as groups that benefit from plain language, ease of use, and the ability to access help from the Town if needed.

A substantial part of the conversation was spent discussing who might qualify for fee assistance in recreation. Agency partners indicated that they base their **means testing** using factors such as an individual or household's status under the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) or other income thresholds, whether the potential recipient has qualified for other social supports such as Ontario Works or disability programs, or persons receiving rent subsidies.

Some limitations of this approach that were noted included that individual circumstances are highly variable and certain persons experiencing low income may not qualify for programs based upon a rigid application of eligibility criteria, while other potential recipients may be embarrassed to reach out for help or discuss their personal situations. One example that was provided highlighted the challenges that individuals that have recently experienced low income (due to job loss, disability, etc.) may not qualify for programs if their previous year's earnings were considered. Jumpstart noted that while they work with local partners and consider eligibility criteria, they have an 'exceptional circumstance' provision that allows them to evaluate applications with a greater degree of flexibility provided certain information is provided such as (but not relegated to) a letter of recommendation.

Recipients of fee assistance from the Town of Aurora were **extremely appreciative of the respect and help provided by Department Staff**. Recipients mentioned that Staff made them feel welcome, safe and had a genuine concern for their well-being. They also appreciated the trust that Staff had since there are presently no eligibility requirements or proof required, allowing recipients to maintain a sense of dignity. They did recognize that there is the potential for the odd applicant to be dishonest and receive funding at the expense of an individual that truly needs fee assistance; however, the point was raised that the Town is in a good position to know its residents by being able to have discussions with them; this interpersonal relationship allows Town staff to use discretion and flag potential areas of concern.

Other topics of conversation included the need to promote the policy so that residents are aware of it (and make use of it if necessary), continuing to encourage Department Staff to build relationships with all residents, and having service/funding providers continue to collaborate with each other. Measuring the effectiveness of fee assistance programs was also emphasized in terms of helping funders determine the extent a program's success but also to ensure that recipients are using the programs after the fee assistance has been granted; performance measurement is seen as a way to separate extenuating circumstances from patterns, thereby allowing decision-makers chart an appropriate course moving forward..

9.0 Rates & Fees Benchmarking

A comparison of facility rental and program registration rates was undertaken to understand how Aurora's fees compare with the following area municipalities:

- Bradford West Gwillimbury;
- East Gwillimbury;
- Georgina;
- Newmarket;
- Richmond Hill; and
- Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Benchmarking data is one of several inputs that will be used in the fee setting analysis, and must be considered as part of a locally-derived framework (i.e. a rate set for another municipality does not mean that the same rate must be applied in Aurora). It is important to exercise caution when directly comparing individual rates between each municipality. While every effort is made to be consistent through the benchmarking, municipalities employ different criteria to their pricing that reflect the unique nuances of their facilities and programs. For example, facilities are designed and maintained to different standards, programs may be offered in different lengths or formats, certain services may be delivered using agreements or partnerships with others, and there may be other factors that affect costs and ultimately the fee charged to recover them.

As a result, rental rates may vary substantially from municipality to municipality. Where possible, certain assumptions were made to identify common comparators such as: an hourly rate for a basic meeting room; daily rate for a community hall; or an hourly rate for a sports field booking.

Recreation Facility Rental Rates

Residents

A comparison of facility rental rates is summarized in Table 3. The Town's rates are below the benchmark average for prime time and dry pad arena rentals, as well as for natural and artificial turf soccer fields, ball diamonds, and meeting rooms. Aurora's rates are currently higher for minor ice rentals, gymnasiums, and community hall rentals, and on par with the benchmark average for non-prime time ice.

Non-Resident Fees

With the exception of Bradford West Gwillimbury, the other comparative municipalities charge non-resident fees for the use of their facilities, although it is not consistently applied across all facility types. For example, Richmond Hill has established non-resident rates for indoor facility rentals such as arenas, gymnasiums, pools and multi-purpose rooms, but not for outdoor sports fields. By contrast, a non-resident fee is applied to sports field rentals in Georgina, but not for indoor facilities. As the Town of Aurora does not impose non-resident rates, direct comparisons cannot be made. Broadly speaking, non-resident rates were found to be between 10% and 50% higher compared to residents.

Recreation Program Fees

Residents

Table 4 contains a summary of recreation program fees for comparative municipalities. Recognizing that each community provides numerous recreation programs, a scan of selected programs that are commonly provided was undertaken. Program areas that were included in this review were: aquatic lessons and leadership, registered ballet, basketball and leadership programs; day camps; public swimming and skating, pilates classes, and older adult fitness. An average was taken in situations where there was a variation in fees for the same program. Program fees that are reflected in this comparison are based on per class or session.

The Town of Aurora's recreation program fees are generally lower than the comparators in most areas, particularly for aquatics, children's basketball, youth leadership, adult public swimming and skating, and fitness. The Town's recreation program fees are higher for pre-school ballet, day camps, child and senior public swimming, and child and family skating.

Non-Residents

With the exception of the Town of Aurora and East Gwillimbury, benchmarked municipalities apply a separate non-resident fee for program registration. In each of these communities, non-resident program registration is delayed by one week to ensure that local residents are prioritized. The municipalities generally utilize the same approach in applying non-resident fees. A fixed amount is applied over and above the fee paid by residents across all program areas. Bradford West Gwillimbury applies a 15% non-resident surcharge, while Richmond Hill, Georgina and Newmarket charge an additional \$10, \$19 and \$30, respectively. Whitchurch-Stouffville charges an additional \$25 for non-resident registration in programs that cost \$50 or more for local residents.

Table 2: Non-Resident Surcharge Comparison

	Bradford West Gwillimbury	East Gwillimbury	Georgina	Whitchurch- Stouffville	Newmarket	Richmond Hill	Aurora
Non-Resident Surcharge	15%	-	\$19*	\$25**	\$30	\$10	-

* Georgina non-resident rate applies to aquatics programs only

** Whitchurch-Stouffville non-resident rate applied to programs that are \$50 or more for residents

Table 3: Facility Rental Rate Comparison (price per hour, rounded to the nearest dollar)

	Bradford West Gwillimbury	East Gwillimbury	Georgina	Newmarket	Richmond Hill	Whitchurch- Stouffville	Aurora	Benchmark Average	Above / Below Average
Arenas									
Prime	\$220	\$177	\$243	\$200	\$287	\$250	\$213	\$227	Below
Non-Prime	\$145	\$127	\$147	\$130	\$120	\$160	\$138	\$138	On Par
Affiliate / Minor	\$175	n/a	\$153	\$170	\$205	\$205	\$200	\$185	Above
Dry Pad	\$90	\$76	\$119	\$76	\$102	\$81	\$61	\$86	Below
Prime Non-Res. / Commercial	n/a	\$295	n/a	\$218	\$311	\$438	n/a	\$316	n/a
Soccer Field									
Artificial Turf	n/a	n/a	\$27	\$28	\$29	n/a	\$9	\$23	Below
Natural – Lit	\$55	\$42	\$49	\$37	\$11	\$51	n/a	\$41	n/a
Natural – Unlit	\$35	\$14	\$28	\$31	\$10	\$39	\$9	\$24	Below
Non-Res. Adult	n/a	\$48	\$129	\$42	n/a	\$129	n/a	\$66	n/a
Ball Diamond									
Lit	\$55	\$42	\$76	\$37	\$10	\$51	n/a	\$45	n/a
Unlit	\$35	\$14	\$55	\$31	\$7	\$39	\$11	\$27	Below
Non-Res. Adult	n/a	\$48	\$129	\$42	n/a	\$129	n/a		n/a
Gymnasium									
Full	\$105	\$66	\$52	\$121	\$65	\$60	\$82	\$79	Above
Half	\$62	\$32	n/a	n/a	\$35	n/a	n/a	\$43	n/a
Non-Resident	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$155	\$98	n/a	n/a	\$127	n/a

	Bradford West Gwillimbury	East Gwillimbury	Georgina	Newmarket	Richmond Hill	Whitchurch- Stouffville	Aurora	Benchmark Average	Above / Below Average
Multi-Purpose Room									
Meeting Room	\$185	\$131	\$15	\$60	\$23	\$41	\$32	\$88	Below
Non-Resident	n/a	n/a	\$46	\$100	\$34	n/a	n/a	\$60	n/a
Hall	\$200	\$283	\$436	\$200	n/a	\$369	\$361	\$308	Above
Non-Resident	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$400	\$350	n/a	n/a	\$375	n/a
Indoor Pool									
Full Pool	\$187	n/a	\$86	\$109	\$114	\$135	n/a	\$126	n/a
Non-Resident	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$153	\$171	\$171	n/a	\$165	n/a

Note: pricing for natural turf soccer fields and ball diamonds is shown in 2 hour rental blocks

Table 4: Recreation Program Fee Comparison (price per class)

	Bradford West Gwillimbury	East Gwillimbury	Georgina	Newmarket	Richmond Hill	Whitchurch-Stouffville	Aurora	Benchmark Average	Above / Below Average
Aquatics									
Swimmer 1	\$9.45	\$10.63	\$9.17	\$12.54	\$10.12	\$8.90	\$9.20	\$10.00	Below
Bronze Star	\$116.73	n/a	\$90.00	\$115.00	\$98.62	\$105.00	\$55.00	\$96.73	Below
Registered Programs / Learn to									
Pre-School Ballet	\$11.17	\$7.50	\$7.50	\$9.92	\$10.26	\$10.00	\$12.30	\$9.81	Above
Children's Basketball	\$13.90	\$14.00	\$7.50	\$8.00	\$9.42	\$10.00	\$9.60	\$10.35	Below
Youth Leadership	\$84.00	\$57.00	\$50.00	\$180.00	\$157.50	\$100.00	\$40.00	\$95.50	Below
Day Camps									
Full Week March Break Camps	\$156.00	\$185.00	\$160.00	\$225.00	\$202.84	\$180.00	\$235.00	\$191.98	Above
Single PA Day Camp	\$42.00	n/a	n/a	\$45.00	\$35.28	\$50.00	\$45.00	\$43.46	Above
Public Swimming									
Adult	\$5.00	Not Applicable	\$3.41	\$2.65	\$4.20	\$5.31	\$3.55	\$4.02	Below
Child	\$3.75		\$2.84	\$2.65	\$2.85	\$1.77	\$3.55	\$2.90	Above
Senior	\$4.25		\$2.84	\$2.65	\$2.94	\$3.54	\$3.55	\$3.30	Above
Family	\$10.00		\$9.96	n/a	\$11.55	\$9.73	n/a	\$10.31	-
Public Skating									
Adult	\$4.50	\$3.00	\$2.00	\$2.65	\$4.20	\$4.43	\$3.05	\$3.40	Below
Child	\$3.50	\$2.00	\$1.00	\$2.65	\$2.84	\$2.88	\$3.05	\$2.56	Above
Senior	\$3.75	n/a	Free	\$2.65	\$2.94	\$2.88	\$3.05	\$3.05	On Par
Family	\$9.75		n/a	\$6.42	\$11.55	\$9.75	\$31.35	\$13.76	Above

Note: refer to paragraph text for description of non-resident fees applied to programs

Personal Support for Recreation Programs

Each benchmark municipality strives to ensure that its recreation programs are inclusive of all participants, regardless of ability. To support this, all comparative municipalities permit participants to have a personal support worker to assist the individual in programs at no additional cost (Table 5). Bradford West Gwillimbury, Newmarket and Richmond Hill permit a personal support worker to assist an individual at no charge if one or more of the following criteria are met:

- A support person is required in school;
- A physical, medical, developmental, and/or learning disability exists that affects the safety of the participant or others;
- Extra support is needed at home for basic care;
- Participant is currently associated with a support agency or program;
- A participant has a safety plan with their educational institution; and
- There are behaviours to be managed.

The Town of Aurora provides support staff for one-on-one personal support, free of charge to Aurora residents for an unlimited number of hours/programs. For instance, if a family requires one-on-one support for a child attending a summer camp, they can have that at no charge for all nine weeks of summer camps (provided they apply before a certain deadline). Non-residents are subject to a fee that offsets the wage of the staff person.

Practices slightly vary among benchmarked municipalities where one-on-one personal support where services are typically available on a first come, first serve basis. In Bradford West Gwillimbury, East Gwillimbury and Whitchurch-Stouffville, summer camp staff are recruited specifically to provide personal assistance at no charge; personal support staff for summer camps is only available once per season per individual, unless staff is available to ensure that other participants have an opportunity for support if required.

In Georgina, Newmarket and Richmond Hill, program participants are able to access a municipal personal support staff at an additional cost. The approach to providing support staff varies in each community.

- Georgina: Participants may request the assistance of a personal support worker for summer camps or recreational programs. The Town will recruit dedicated camp staff to provide one-on-one personal support. Up to two weeks of personal support are provided at no charge, after which the fee for personal support varies depending upon the level of care (ranges between \$15 and \$20 per hour). For year-round recreation programs, the Town leverages its existing staff to provide one-on-one support as necessary, as experience has found that there is insufficient demand to justify dedicated staffing to provide support. For summer camps and recreation programs, staff providing one-on-one support are trained by the Town or by another organization.
- Newmarket: Persons requiring assistance may be paired with one of the Town's "Inclusion Facilitators" at a cost of \$17.40 per hour. Participants who require this service are eligible to receive 50% off the program registration fee.
- Richmond Hill: The Town of Richmond Hill may provide a personal support worker to assist with programs at an additional cost (subject to availability). At time of writing, messages have been left

with the Town to clarify program details including the cost and whether municipal or third-party workers assist as caregivers.

Table 5: Personal Support Worker Comparison

	B.W.G.	East Gwillimbury	Georgina	Newmarket	Richmond Hill	Whitchurch-Stouffville	Aurora
Personal Support Worker Permitted	Yes						
Arranged by Participant							
Provide Support Worker	Yes						
Applicable Fees	No charge						
Arranged by Municipality							
Provide Support Worker Upon Request	Summer camp only*		Yes	Yes**	Yes	Summer camp only*	Yes
Applicable Fees	No charge		\$15 to \$20 per hour	\$17.40 per hour			No Charge

*Limited space is available for 1:1 personal support staff for summer camps.

**Participants who require the Town of Newmarket to provide personal support staff at an additional cost receive 50% off the program fee.

Fitness Memberships and Passes

Bradford West Gwillimbury, Whitchurch-Stouffville, Newmarket, Richmond Hill and Aurora all operate full-service equipment-based fitness centres. These municipalities offer memberships and passes to access these facilities and fitness spaces. East Gwillimbury and Georgina do not operate full-service fitness centres and thus were not included in the benchmarking, though these municipalities offer group fitness programs in other facilities (e.g., program rooms and studios) and have group fitness passes available for purchase.

Fitness packages and rate structures are established to reflect market conditions and the type of service being offered. Membership rate structures in each benchmarked municipality reflected three common elements:

- age of the end user;
- duration of the membership; and
- services that are included in the package.

The comparison revealed similarities in memberships based on age and duration. All benchmarks had rates specific to youth or students, and adults (18+), while all but Newmarket have a seniors' rate. Further, all municipalities provide choice of monthly and annual memberships, while a few also had 3- and 6-month memberships as well.

The greatest variation among benchmarked membership structures pertained to the types of services that are included. Access to fitness equipment and fitness classes were commonly included, however, certain municipalities also include access to their indoor pools and aquafit programs as part of the membership. The number of membership types also vary. For example, the Town of Aurora offers five individual memberships types (e.g., equipment, group classes, aquafit, squash, and swimming), although some can be combined into a

reduced rate. Additional services such as locker rentals can also be applied to the membership. By contrast, Bradford West Gwillimbury and Newmarket offer the most simplified rate structures with one membership type (regardless of age or duration), which provides the end user with access to all fitness spaces.

In terms of price-points, the Town of Arora's annual adult membership was below the benchmark average and on par for older adults. Table 6 summarizes the type of fitness memberships offered in comparative municipalities.

Table 6: Fitness Membership Rate Structure Comparison

	Bradford West Gwillimbury	Whitchurch- Stouffville	Newmarket	Richmond Hill	Aurora	Benchmark Average
Typical Annual Membership						
Adult	\$465.00	\$440.00	\$390.00	\$484.70	\$436.80	\$443.30
Older Adult	\$371.00	\$330.00	n/a	\$339.29	\$349.25	\$347.39
Duration						
Daily Drop-in	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes	
Monthly	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
3 Month	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes	Yes	
6 Month	Yes	n/a	n/a	Yes	Yes	
Annual	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Age Group						
Youth / Student	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Adult	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Senior	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes	
Family	Yes	n/a	Yes	n/a	Yes	

Table continues on next page....

	Bradford West Gwillimbury	Whitchurch- Stouffville	Newmarket	Richmond Hill	Aurora
Services					
Included	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fitness Centre – Walking Track – Fitness Classes – Aquafit Classes – Drop-in Gym – Public Swim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fitness Centre – Walking Track – Locker Room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fitness Centre – Walking Track – Fitness Classes – Aquafit Classes – Public Swim – Public Skate – Locker Room – Steam Room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fitness Centre – Walking Track – Fitness Classes – Aquafit Classes – Public Swim 	Individual plans can be purchased or combined at a reduced rate
Individual Plans or Add-ons at additional cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Adult locker room and steam room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fitness Classes – Aquafit Classes – Public Swim 	Not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fitness Classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Equipment – Fitness Classes – Aquafit Classes – Squash – Public Swim – Locker Rentals
Membership Transferability between locations	Applicable to 1 community centre	Applicable to 1 location for pool and fitness centre Group fitness at multiple Town facilities	Applicable to 1 fitness centre All other services available at multiple Town facilities	Applicable to 3 fitness centres	Applicable to 1 community centre

10.0 Regional Financial Assistance Programs

A comparison of financial assistance programs was undertaken to provide insight into how area municipalities included in the benchmarking exercise (Section 9.0) are minimizing financial barriers to participating in recreation programs. With the exception of Georgina – who refer their low-income participants to non-profit organizations such as Georgina Cares and Canadian Tire Jumpstart – all benchmarks have a municipal financial assistance program in place. Table 8 summarizes each of the regional financial assistance programs.

A commonality identified among the area municipalities that provide financial assistance for recreation opportunities is how applicants are assessed for eligibility. If applicants have a family income below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) threshold, they automatically qualify for assistance. Each municipality requires that applicants be a resident in a family household that has a total family income that is less than the LICO established by Statistics Canada. LICO thresholds vary based on the number of persons within a family household, as well as on population size. The 2018 LICO thresholds for communities with populations in the same range as the Town Aurora are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Low Income Cut-Off Before Tax (30,000 to 99,999 population), 2018

Family Size	LICO (before tax)
1 Person	\$22,186
2 Person	\$27,619
3 Person	\$33,953
4 Person	\$41,225
5 Person	\$46,757
6 Person	\$52,734
7 Persons or more	\$58,712

Source: Statistics Canada

The amount of financial assistance applicants are eligible for varies by community. Newmarket and East Gwillimbury provide eligible applicants with a discount of up to 50% off one recreation program per year, with the actual amount of discount indexed to the applicant's total household income. In Bradford West Gwillimbury, residents below the LICO are eligible for 50% off a fitness membership only, while children and youth are referred to other non-profit organizations for financial assistance such as Youth Reach or Canadian Tire Jumpstart for other recreation programs.

Eligible applicants in Whitchurch-Stouffville and Richmond Hill each receive a voucher that provides a discount of up to \$100 per program. The discount is available once per year in Whitchurch-Stouffville and twice per year in Richmond Hill.

In addition to municipal financial assistance programs and those offered by non-profit organizations, residents may also apply for grants through recreation subsidy programs available through Simcoe County and York Region; the latter specifically offers subsidies for recreation programs, day camps and youth leadership camps offered by the lower-tier municipal recreation departments for children from families with low income the ability to take part in programs. York Region's subsidy programs consist of:

- The Positive Leisure Activities for Youth (PLAY) for ages 4 to 18 and single parents;
- Summer Camp Funding for ages 4 to 13;
- Youth Leadership Camp Funding for ages 12 to 17; and
- Early Intervention Services subsidies for families with children having special needs.

Table 8: Regional Financial Assistance Programs

	Program Name	Eligibility Criteria	Level of Assistance
Bradford West Gwillimbury	Fee Assistance Program	Resident in a family household with a total income below the LICO	50% off fitness memberships
East Gwillimbury	Fair, Accessible, and Inclusive Recreation (FAIR)		Up to 50% off recreation programs (one per year)
Georgina	No municipal program; residents are referred to Georgina Cares or Canadian Tire Jumpstart		
Whitchurch-Stouffville	Join IN! Recreation Subsidy Fund	Resident in a family household with a total income below the LICO	Up to \$100 per program per year
Newmarket	Creating Accessible Recreation for Everyone (CARE) Fee Assistance Program		Up to 50% off recreation programs (one per year)
Richmond Hill	Community Services Fee Assistance Program		Up to \$100 per program, twice a year
Aurora	Recreation Division in-house subsidy to share participation costs		

11.0 Next Steps

This Background Summary Report has been prepared to inform the Town of Aurora's Pricing Policy & Financial Assistance Policy. Information contained herein will be used to establish the policy basis for user fees and financial assistance, and ultimately to assist in the preparation of Draft and Final reports.

Appendix A:

Reference Group Terms of Reference

January 29, 2020

Town of Aurora

Recreation Pricing Policy & Ability to Pay Program

REFERENCE GROUP - Terms of Reference

version 1.0

1. Project Overview / Background

The Town of Aurora is undertaking a review of policies used to guide the pricing of recreation programs and facility rentals offered through the Community Services Department. Also included in this work is a review of the Town's financial assistance practices for persons from low-income households that wish to participate in its recreation programs. The project will result in a new Pricing Policy and Ability-to-Pay Policy for the consideration of Town Council with the objective of providing frameworks for the Town to be fair-minded, equitable, fiscally responsible, inclusive and respectful of the privacy/dignity of Aurora residents.

The Town has retained Monteith Brown Planning Consultants Ltd. and Tucker-Reid & Associates to assist with the policy reviews. The community is being engaged by way of a Reference Group, a community survey, and focus groups with partners. Other tasks to be carried out include benchmarking costs and pricing in other municipalities, researching trends and best practices, analyzing Aurora-specific demographics and recreation data, and drafting the policies.

2. Reference Group Statement of Purpose

- 2.1** The Pricing and Ability-to-Pay Policies Reference Group (the "Reference Group") will be asked to provide feedback regarding the results of the community engagement process, benchmarking and other research, as well as the draft Policies. In doing so, the Reference Group will assist the Town in ensuring the outcomes of the work reflect the needs of the community.

3. Composition

- 3.1** The Reference Group will be selected from members that come from existing Town of Aurora Advisory Committees and agency partners involved in the delivery of civic services.
- 3.2** Members will be selected based on their interest or background in the recreation and sport delivery system in Aurora, and/or a background in working with or serving residents with low-incomes. An individual should be able to demonstrate their civic mindedness (i.e. past president of local stakeholder organization, former volunteer board member of a stakeholder organization, or representative of a stakeholder agency or organization).
- 3.3** The target size for the Reference Group is 10 to 15 persons.

4. Accountability

- 4.1 The Reference Group is accountable to Town of Aurora Council through the leadership of the Recreation Division. The Town's Project Lead is Lisa Warth, Manager of Recreation Services (lwarth@aurora.ca or 905-727-3123 ext. 4765).
- 4.2 The Reference Group is acting in an advisory capacity to the Project Team and is not responsible for the decisions made by the Project Team or Town Council. By participating in the Reference Group, members are not expected to waive their rights to participate in the democratic process and may continue to participate through other channels.

5. Term

- 5.1 The term of the Reference Group is anticipated to be from February 2020 to July 2020, coinciding with the anticipated timeframe for the project. The total time commitment will be approximately 10 to 15 hours of time, largely associated with attendance at meetings and review of draft project deliverables.

6. Meeting Frequency

- 6.1 The Reference Group will be asked to attend two (2) project meetings over the term of the project as well as one (1) Town Council meeting anticipated in June/July 2020. Through these meetings, the Reference Group will act as a sounding board to anticipate strengths, issues, opportunities and challenges associated with the Pricing Policy and Ability-to-Pay Policy for recreation services.

7. Conflict of Interest

- 7.1 In the event that a Reference Group member becomes aware of an actual or perceived conflict of interest, he/she must declare the conflict immediately to the Town's Project Lead.
- 7.2 A Reference Group member with an actual or perceived conflict shall not use their influence to affect the outcome of the Reference Group's advisory ability regarding the individual or organization that is the subject of the conflict.

8. Sunset Clause

- 8.1 The work of the Reference Group will be complete once Town of Aurora Council has considered the draft policies.