

8. Recreation

The City of Winnipeg budget needs to support the City's stated goal to "provide equitable opportunities to participate in recreation programs and services;" to "[p]rovide community development and recreation opportunities for vulnerable youth as an integral component of crime prevention efforts;" and to "provide meaningful and relevant recreation opportunities to increase the participation of Aboriginal youth in City of Winnipeg services" (City of Winnipeg, 2014 p. 146). The AMB Safety and Policing Section agrees that recreation is an effective way to prevent some high risk youth from getting involved in crime.

Operational spending has gone up by 5.8 per cent from 2013, a positive move. However, Winnipeg's program operating cost per person is well below the comparable cities' average of \$58.69, at \$32.20 (Preliminary Operating Budget 2014, 150), indicating that spending could still increase somewhat to ensure that everyone has access to programs. Small increases in city spending could help keep fee increases to a minimum.

Increasing Recreation Fees

In the 2014 Fees and Charges Schedule there are more than 144 fees that are all seeing increases this year with a total increase in all fees of \$418.69. There are some who suggest recreation programs and facilities should be more self-sustaining and generate enough fees to cover their costs. Although there may have to be moderate increases to cover inflation, if the goal is to improve access to recreation, as stated on page 146 of the 2014 City Budget, fee increases are counterproductive, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods. Any increase in revenue from fees should come from greater numbers of people using facilities and paying fees. Targeted community and recreation centres in the Inner City and other low income areas should receive extra supports.

Reduced Programming

City of Winnipeg youth programming varies across the city. At certain sites leisure guide programs are offered for a charge, and in some neighbourhoods free programs are offered. While there is a process to waive fees for registration for low-income families, this can be arduous. Families who experience economic stress need access to free programs.

The 2014 budget shows that there was reduced programming time in many areas, such as access to free program hours. Similarly, there are reduced hours at drop in centres and youth action centres. There are reduced hours at wading pools from 31,479 to 26,698 hours comparing the last two years. Opening wading pools from the heat waves of June past Labour Day continues to be an expectation of Winnipeg families that the City is hard pressed to fulfill. The City Lives SAFE strategy and other goals support recreation for social development. Research shows a long-term, holistic approach is needed when working with youth to address many issues simultaneously, such as education, employment, housing, and crime prevention (Mistry and Wadsworth, 2010). Stable and adequate funds must be available to take full advantage of the potential benefits of recreation.

There have also been odd and frustrating developments like using 311 to register for swimming and other leisure guide classes rather than being able to talk to a recreation professional at a facility. This centralization has caused delays for families of swimmers as 311 often not able to answer questions about the program. Similarly the recreation facilities have been moved to Property Development, leaving only the programming side with Community Services and recreation professionals. This divorce of facilities from programming leads to a lack of coordination.

Funding For Community Centres

There is just over \$4.97 million going to 64 Winnipeg community centres for operating funds.

This is up slightly from 2013 when community centres received \$4.82 million. There is also \$470,000 in programming funds that community centres can apply for. This money pays for staff particularly in inner-city neighbourhoods where other funds are not raised. Community centres also count on \$150,000.00 per year from the Province in capital grants. Ninety per cent of community centres have paid staff, however community centres still have to rely largely on volunteers. Having a community centre structure that relies on volunteer efforts does not work well in lower-income and more transient neighbourhoods.

Facility Decline and Disrepair

Just as the City of Winnipeg budget consultations excluded the Inner City, there also seems to be a disparity in how the City's recreation budget is allocated. Some communities enjoy investment and others are forced to put up with aging facilities with limited access times. Aging City facilities and have had their maintenance budgets cut to the point where they fall behind the recommended standards of repair. The worst example of this is Sherbrook Pool—the first Winnipeg facility to be allowed to deteriorate to the point of closure. Even though funds were raised from other levels of government to improve heating and ventilation systems the money was not spent on the pool in the nineties so now the same work costs hundreds of thousand dollars more. Were it not for the generosity of a private donor, the pool's destiny would have remained in limbo.

There are 140 tennis courts in Winnipeg and 116 are in such deplorable condition they are a community hazard rather than an asset. Trails in Assiniboine Park are cracked and hazardous for biking or roller blading, There are wish lists of improvements that far out step budgets across the board from lighting on trails, to lines painted on hop scotch, four square and basketball courts.

Offload Responsibility to Community Agencies

While City facilities are in decline there is a new \$140 million proposal to build three YMCA's in west, north and south east Winnipeg, with the City paying a third (\$46.6 million) over 5 to 7 years. The City will not have any responsibility for facility maintenance or staffing after the initial capital investment. While it is better to have the YMCA involved than the previous plan to give millions to a private hotel to build a water park, there are still concerns about the City being able to fulfill the public mandate for equal access, staff standards and fair remuneration.

This offloading of public responsibility to the private/community sector is a going concern in several departments besides recreation, and is exacerbated by outright cuts to services. The recreation budget has eliminated five positions: two Community Development Workers (CDWs); and three Community Resource Coordinators (CRCs).

Youth-serving organizations would like to see a review of staffing of City facilities and to build on partnership with community-based organizations that are working well. A new collaborative approach to planning programs and booking facilities is needed to ensure effective facility use, supervision of staff and program delivery, in particular when City staff is hired to work jointly with community based programs.

When City staff is expected to do work for the community-based organization, challenges arise. Workplace culture and training is different between the two groups. City staff is often transferred between facilities, even if the community-based organization has invested in staff training and develops a rapport with the City recreation worker. Variability in City staffing of recreational programs affects the quality of program delivery and is concerning to not-for-profit youth-serving organizations because many of the benefits from recreation are about the relationships that youth have with recreation leaders and coaches.

Over the last three years the CDWs and CRCs, while not directly delivering recreation programming, have been integrated into the geographic recreation delivery areas and have been closely working with a variety of organizations delivering programs in neighbourhoods. Ongoing cuts mean that these programs are now only available in a small area of the Inner City. The City has a responsibility for leadership in coordinating recreation; this is not possible without the staff paid to do it. Community agencies are forced to raise funds to fill this role.

City grants for an array of community-based youth recreation are stagnant and are not being increased with inflation. For example, seven community-based inner-city youth programs serve thousands of children and youth (Andrews Street Family Centre, Art City, Just TV, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM), Rossbrook House, Spence Neighbourhood Association and the Winnipeg Boys and Girls Club) however their municipal funding is flat at \$830,147 (City of Winnipeg Operating Budget 2014).

One of these organizations, IRCOM, which works with newcomer youth, faces resistance from the City on increased funding because the City claims that funding for newcomer programs is the responsibility of the provincial and federal governments. However IRCOM's mandate is to provide programming to newcomers, regardless of the citizenship status. The nine community organizations in the Aboriginal Youth Strategy receive \$713,849 annually have not seen an increase in funding for inflation, despite increases in the Aboriginal Youth Strategy overall (City of Winnipeg Operating Budget 2014). These community-based organizations face increased demands on services.

Some Positive Initiatives

There are positive measures under way. The Community Sport Policy committee created a new guide Everyone Can Play: A Guide to Recreation

and Sport Subsidies. It includes step by step instructions to apply for seven sport and recreation subsidies and will be promoted with another new resource, Winnipeg Youth Recreation Guide. Developed by the Social Planning Council, in concert with the Access and Engagement Committee, it is a comprehensive overview of programs and facilities available in a variety of sectors to meet even the most reluctant recreation participant. These guides can be used as part of a strategy to improve access and participation for youth, families and other groups as well. The City will now have more exposure to its fee waiver program and should be recognized for producing the Priceless Fun Guide for free programming.

Alternative choices for recreation and a more active Winnipeg

Plan to Increase Recreation Participation

The City of Winnipeg has to view itself as a collaborator and partner with other levels of government in terms of the health and wellbeing of Winnipeg citizens. With only a 10 per cent increase in the number of active people, there are cost savings to be had. A health-savvy city would ensure there are programs that share these cost savings into new revenue sharing programs to get even more people healthy and active.

There is a cross-Canada effort coming to Manitoba called *Exercise is Medicine*. This program will ensure that medical professionals have better local information about recreation options, opportunities and partners in order to prescribe recreation for many health problems. These funds will be used to better promote programs and facilities in local neighbourhoods in partnership with other organizations.

New Expenditure:

- Allocate new spending to *Exercise is Medicine* to increase participation by 10 per cent: \$100,000

Community Recreation Planning Boards

Budget 2014 sites more community groups offering free programs for kids as the reason for a decline in the amount of free programming the City offered last year. That decline points to an emerging requirement for joint planning in the use and programming in City Facilities. A precedent was set at the newly renovated North Centennial Recreation Centre where community groups participate in program, booking and scheduling plans for the centre. There are many neighbourhoods that have active networks where organizations meet regularly: recreation planning should become part of the agenda.

New Expenditure:

- Support implementation of eight new planning boards: \$100,000

Reinstate Community Development Workers and Community Resource Coordinators.

These are the staff that will be instrumental in community outreach for both recommendations above. The City has a leadership role in bringing recreation partners together, pooling resources and planning as a sector. Staff is needed to do this. The success of other similar initiatives by the Youth Agencies Alliance to ensure that low-income youth participate in recreation provides examples of what can be achieved.

New Expenditure:

- Rehire 3 community development staff: \$200,000

Funds to Bridge Infrastructure Deficit

The monumental challenge for the recreation budget is the infrastructure deficit. According to the 2014 City Budget, \$319.3M needs to be invested over the next 10 years in order to bring all recreation, leisure, community centres, arenas and pools to a reasonable Facility Condition Index ratio (104). The 6-year capital investment plan invests \$61.8M in these facilities

(29), indicating a shortfall in required spending of approximately \$22M/year. The AMB increases capital spending for recreation facilities by this amount.

The City must forge a new partnership with Manitoba Health, Regional Health Authorities, and the Federal Government for an infrastructure fund that will prevent the closure of more facilities due to disrepair. CCPA Alternative Budget 2008 recommended the Winnipeg Facilities Development Authority to work with other levels of government and community organizations in the field to finance a five year plan for facility renewal. Instead the City has separated all recreation facilities into a new Municipal Accommodations department. This separation of the recreation facilities from the recreation professionals that program for the facilities does not bode well for the future of recreation facilities.

New Expenditure:

- Capital spending on recreation facilities: \$22M
- Debt servicing cost for capital borrowing (operating budget expenditure): \$1.6M

Reallocate \$1.75 million from the YMCA Preparation Phase to a community-driven City Infrastructure Needs Assessment and Plan

A document from the Ontario Ministry of Culture outlines a process to engage community in planning facilities (2002). An approach like this document recommends is required in Winnipeg to ensure facilities are built wisely and maintained to an acceptable standard.

It is recommended this approach be used to consider the plan to contribute \$46.7 million to the YMCA to build three new pool and recreation complexes. Given that the City recreation infrastructure deficit raises the question of whether this money would not be better spent repairing existing facilities, the AMB's new Planning and Infrastructure Economic Analysis Unit

would be tasked with this study. Whether it is this YMCA initiative, or the \$3.4 million to the Youth for Christ complex in 2010, the approach seems to be to build new bigger facilities and ignore the costs for upgrading our older and smaller facilities.

Change in Expenditure:

- Reallocate funds from YMCA preparation phase to a City Infrastructure Needs Assessment Plan: \$1.75M

Boost Inner City youth program spending and then index to inflation

Grants to seven community—based organizations have been stagnant at \$830,147 and grants to the nine programs receiving funding from the Aboriginal Youth Strategy have been stagnant at \$713,849 for over three years. This should be increased 10 per cent and then indexed to inflation.

New Expenditure:

- Increase spending to community-based organizations: \$154,398

Total New Expenditures — Operating

- Exercise is Medicine program: \$100,000
- Community Recreation Planning Boards: \$100,000
- Community Development Workers and Community Resource Coordinators: \$200,000
- Change allocation of funds from YMCA: (\$1.75M)
- To City Infrastructure Needs Assessment Plan: \$1.75M
- Boost to Inner City and Aboriginal programs: \$154,398
- Cost of capital spending increase: \$1.6M

Total: \$2.1M

Capital Expenditure Increase: \$22M