

# ***Staff Report***

Community Services Department



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**REPORT TO:** Community and Infrastructure Services Committee

**DATE OF MEETING:** June 19, 2023

**SUBMITTED BY:** Mark Hildebrand, Director, Neighbourhood Programs & Services, 519-741-2200 ext. 7687

**PREPARED BY:** Elin Moorlag Silk, Interim Manager, Service Coordination & Improvement, 519-741-2200 ext. 7193

**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** All Wards

**DATE OF REPORT:** June 8, 2023

**REPORT NO.:** CSD-2023-125

**SUBJECT:** Modernizing the City's Community Centre Operating Model and Related Guiding Policies

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. That, starting in 2024, the city's Leisure Access fee assistance program be expanded to cover programs offered by all Neighbourhood Associations at a city-owned community centre, and staff be directed to build the financial impact of that program expansion into the 2024 operating budget.
2. That, as a condition of affiliation with the City, all Neighbourhood Associations offering programs out of a city-owned community centre, be required to use the City's Inclusion Support Worker program for all program participants who request such support/accommodation.
3. That, starting in 2024, the City fund the cost of residents utilizing its Inclusion Support Worker program when participating in programs offered by a Neighbourhood Association at a City-owned community centre, and staff be directed to build the financial impact of this change into the 2024 operating budget.
4. That, the City's Facility Booking Guidelines for Non-Profit Groups (MUN-FAC-415) be updated and clarified to reflect the following key elements:
  - a. It is vital to have a variety of programs, supports and services offered out of a community centre that meet the diverse needs of residents living in the surrounding neighbourhoods.
  - b. Neighbourhood Associations are one of the City's important partners in the delivery of programs offered at city-owned community centres. When

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making decisions about the allocation of space at a city-owned community centre, the space needs of Neighbourhood Association programs should be considered alongside the space needs of other diverse programming provided by other organizations and the City.

- c. Leveraging community organizations that have specific skills, expertise and experience to offer a variety of programs and supports out of a community centre is key to the success of the centre, and the health and wellbeing of residents living in the surrounding neighbourhoods.
  - d. City staff have the final decision-making authority on the allocation and booking of space in a city-owned community centre.
- 5. That, the City's Neighbourhood Affiliation Policy (MUN-FAC-324) be amended to add a condition of affiliation requiring Neighbourhood Associations that provide programming out of a City-owned community centre to:
  - a. Establish and publish online an equity, diversity and inclusion policy for the Association which, at a minimum, commits to providing a variety of programs at city-owned community centres that meet the diverse needs of the residents.
  - b. Have all Neighbourhood Association Board members participate in city-organized and funded EDI training every two years.
- 6. That, staff undertake a comprehensive review of the City's current program registration processes (including potential improvements to ActiveNet), with a focus on improving the user experience for members of the public registering for programs and members of Neighbourhood Associations running programs.
- 7. That an issue paper be prepared for Council's consideration as part of the 2024 budget process that would outline the staffing and financial implications of opening city-owned centres on weekends – potentially through a phased, multi-year approach.
- 8. That, the City work with a representative group of Neighbourhood Associations to develop and launch a comprehensive, ongoing, city-wide promotional campaign to educate residents on the existence of the community centres and Neighbourhood Associations, as well as programs, services and supports that can be accessed at those centres.
- 9. That the City test the creation of a multi-year partnership agreement between the City and one of the larger, more complex NAs providing programs and other services out of a city-owned community centre and make a determination as to whether or not there is value in extending such agreements to other large NAs in the future.

- 10. That, the City's Neighbourhood Affiliation Policy (MUN-FAC-324) be amended to add a condition of affiliation requiring Neighbourhood Associations that provide programming out of a City-owned community centre, and have generated more than \$20,000 in revenue during the previous fiscal year, to:**
- a. Provide the following financial information to the City on an annual basis: (1) total revenue generated during their previous fiscal year, (2) total expenses in their previous fiscal year, and (3) total funding held in reserves/savings.**
  - b. Establish and publish online a reinvestment policy that will outline how the Association will reinvest revenues generated through programming offered at City-owned community centres into the community.**
- 11. That, as a condition of affiliation, to support ongoing two-way sharing of information and collaboration between the City and NAs providing programs out of a City-owned community centre, the Ward Councillor and a City staff person be invited to all Board meetings and the Association's Annual General Meeting.**
- 12. That, as a condition of affiliation, Neighbourhood Associations providing programming out of a city-owned community centre, agree to turn over any unspent funding to the City prior to ceasing to operate; and that the City provide that funding to a future Neighbourhood Association in the area or invest it into the community centre and/or surrounding neighbourhoods previously served by that NA.**

#### **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:**

- Over many years the City has built, and now operates, 14 community centres located in neighbourhoods across the City.
- The City's current community centre operating model was created more than two decades ago and has not been significantly updated since then.
- The City is fortunate to have volunteer-run Neighbourhood Associations (NAs) who are interested and skilled in providing programming out of some of the City's community centres.
- Of the 26 Neighbourhood Associations affiliated with the City, 13 offered programming at a community centre over the past year. Of those 13, four Associations accounted for 70% of all NA programming offered out of city-owned community centres. Several other community centres had no Neighbourhood Association programming during that time period.
- The City's outdated community centre operating model and guiding policies have created a situation where significantly different levels of programming are now offered out of the City's 14 community centres.
- Analysis of the programs currently being offered at city-owned community centres indicates that lower levels of programming tend to be offered in community centres located in lower-income neighbourhoods and higher levels of programming are being offered out of community centres located in higher-income neighbourhoods (with a few exceptions).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City's community centre operating model, including how space within the centres is booked and utilized, are guided largely by two City policies.<sup>1</sup> These policies were created over 20 years ago and since that time the operating model has grown outdated. As a result, the current operating model is now inadvertently contributing to a situation where program offerings and residents' usage vary widely between centres. Levels of program delivery are not meeting the needs of some of the City's most under-served and lower-income neighbourhoods. In an effort to begin to address some of these challenges, on March 20, 2023, Council unanimously approved a motion directing staff to prepare a report outlining options for Council's consideration that would modernize the City's community centre model and related guiding principals.

The City's current community centre operating model is founded on a shared responsibility between City staff, Neighbourhood Association (NA) volunteers and other community partners. The model relies very heavily (much more than other municipalities of similar size across Canada) on volunteers to provide crucial recreation, leisure and other forms of programming to Kitchener residents. Yet, since the creation of the City's Neighbourhood Association Affiliation Policy, the nature of NAs has changed and evolved significantly; some NAs have flourished under the current model and evolved into large, complex organizations who make programming out of a community centre a priority, whereas other NAs are smaller and choose to focus on other important priorities within their neighbourhoods such as advocacy, planning initiatives, and/or events, and are not providing programs out of a community centre. Further, many of the NAs currently affiliated with the City struggle to recruit and retain volunteers, a situation mirrored by many organizations across Waterloo Region and beyond as volunteer rates have been in steep decline post pandemic across the country.

In order to properly assess the current community centre operating model, staff undertook an analysis of program offerings at all 14 community centres for a one-year period. Some key findings of that analysis include:

- Approximately 2200 programs were offered out of the City's 14 community centres during the one-year time period under review.
- Of the 26 NAs currently affiliated with the City, in the one-year period being reviewed, 13 (50%) offered programming out of a city-owned community centre, and of those 13, four accounted for 70% of all NA programming offered across the city.
- 55% of all community centre programming is happening at four centres (Stanley Park, Huron, Doon Pioneer Park, Forest Heights). The remaining 45% of programming is unequally distributed amongst the remaining 11 centres.
- Over 50% of all programs offered across all centres fall into the category of *Physical Health & Fitness*. Programs focused on *Mental Health and Wellbeing* and *Services for Vulnerable Populations* (the top two rec & leisure program priorities identified in a recent resident survey), are not being adequately addressed and account for less than 4% of all City-run programming and 1% of all NA-run programming.
- 68% of all community centre programming is happening at the seven community centres located in mid to higher-income neighbourhoods, and just 32% of all programming is happening at the seven community centres located in neighbourhoods with a reported median household income below the City of Kitchener median.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MUN-FAC-415: Facility Booking Guidelines for Non-Profit Groups Policy & MUN-FAC-324: Affiliation – Neighbourhood Associations Policy

<sup>2</sup> Median Household income for the City of Kitchener is \$87K (Stats Canada 2021, [Census Profile](#))

- Community centres located in mid to higher income neighbourhoods have an average ratio of programs per person of one program for every 106 residents (1:106), whereas community centres located in lower income neighbourhoods have an average program to person ratio of 1 program for every 190 residents (1:190).

What the programming analysis indicates is a tendency for community centres in middle and upper-income neighbourhoods to have higher programming numbers, particularly NA-run programming numbers, than those in lower income neighbourhoods. From an equity perspective, this kind of disparity in programs and services being offered between higher and lower income neighbourhoods demonstrates systemic inequities through the (unintentional) creation of systemic barriers for particular groups – in this case, those living in lower-income neighbourhoods.

It is important to stress that the City and the community are fortunate to have volunteer-run Neighbourhood Associations who are interested and skilled in providing programming out of some of the City's community centres. It is also important to stress that the City and the community are fortunate to have dedicated and highly skilled municipal employees who work in the City's community centres and want to do more to activate their centres and support the surrounding neighbourhoods – but they are constrained by existing policies and procedures.

The challenge before Council is not with the hard-working Neighbourhood Association volunteers, nor the dedicated staff that work in the City's community centres, but with the City's outdated community centre operating model. In order to begin to rectify this situation, staff have put forward a series of recommendations in this report related to the following actions:

- Expand the City's Leisure Access Program to cover Neighbourhood Association programs
- Require Neighbourhood Associations to use the City's Support Worker Program and fund the use of that program
- Modernize the City's Facility Booking Guidelines Policy
- Change the City's Neighbourhood Affiliation Policy to include EDI and Transparency requirements
- Conduct a review of program registration processes with a focus on user experience
- Expand community centre hours of operation on weekends
- Launch a comprehensive awareness campaign promoting community centres and NAs
- Create multi-year partnership agreements with larger NAs

City staff recognize that implementation of these actions, if approved by Council, will require additional work by staff, and the volunteers who run Neighbourhood Associations. Staff are strongly committed to supporting NAs in completing this work, phased in over time, with plenty of transparent communication.

Many of the recommendations made in this report will not require new funding to complete. However, there are three recommendations that will require additional funding to implement and, if approved, should be considered as part of the 2024 budget process. These three recommendations include expanding the Leisure Access Program, expanding use of the City's Support Worker Program, and expanding community centre hours on weekends.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Over many years the City of Kitchener has built, and now operates, 14 community centres across the City. The City's approach to building and operating smaller 'neighbourhood-based' community centres vs. larger 'regional' recreation centres that are often built by other municipalities was deliberate. This model can have many benefits, such as: fostering a closer connection between surrounding residents and the centres, providing greater ability to adapt programs/supports to reflect very local needs of surrounding neighbourhoods, and encouraging residents to walk/roll to their centre to attend programs and events.

The City's community centre operating model, including how space within the centres is booked and utilized, and the type of programs and other supports that are offered to residents from in the centre are guided largely by two City policies:

- 1) *MUN-FAC-415: Facility Booking Guidelines for Non-Profit Groups Policy*
- 2) *MUN-FAC-324: Affiliation – Neighbourhood Associations Policy.*

These policies, and the overall community centre operating model, were created over 20 years ago. Given the substantial changes and significant shifts in social and economic norms that have happened over the past 20 years, the city's current community centre operating model has grown outdated and is now inadvertently contributing to a situation where program offerings and residents' usage vary widely between centres – and in some cases is not meeting the needs of local residents.

**It is important to stress that the City, and the community as a whole, are very fortunate to have volunteer-run Neighbourhood Associations who are interested and skilled in providing programming out of some of the City's community centres.** Programming requires a significant amount of effort and volunteer hours, and many of those Associations are doing great work to help fill some of the City's community centres.

**It is also important to stress that the City, and the community as a whole, are very fortunate to have dedicated and highly skilled municipal employees that work in the City's community centres and want to do more to activate their centres and support the surrounding neighbourhoods** – but they are constrained by existing policies and procedures.

The challenge before Council is not with the hard-working Neighbourhood Association volunteers, nor the dedicated staff that work in the City's community centres, but with the City's outdated community centre operating model.

The City's current operating model relies heavily on volunteers to provide crucial recreation, leisure and other forms of programming that are important to creating a healthy and connected community. Unfortunately, over the years that model of relying so heavily on volunteers who have the interest and time to run programs has created "have" and "have not" community centres where residents receive significantly different levels of programming, services and other supports depending on which centre they live near. Some centres offer a high-level of programming to surrounding neighbourhoods (and beyond) while other centres do not. This approach to program delivery is not meeting the needs of some of the City's most under-served and lower-income neighbourhoods and it is inconsistent with the City's commitment to equity as outlined in its Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism policy ([GOV-COR-2025](#)).

In an effort to begin to address some of these challenges and inequities in the City's current community centre operating model, on March 20, 2023, Council unanimously approved the following motion:

***“That, before City Council’s summer recess, staff prepare a report outlining options for Council’s consideration that would support the following objectives:***

- 1. Strengthen, and modernize, collaborative partnerships between the City and community partners – including affiliated Neighbourhood Associations – operating out of City-owned community centres.***
- 2. Increase resident’s usage of City-owned community centres, where and when centres are not already being fully utilized (eg. Expanding hours of operations, attracting additional partners).***
- 3. Diversify programs, services and supports offered out of City-owned community centres (either directly, or through partnerships) to reflect the increasingly diverse needs of Kitchener residents (e.g. mental health and wellness, supports for vulnerable populations, food distribution).”***

In response to this motion, staff have prepared this report which includes information about the current community centre operating model (using data to illustrate some of the challenges and inequities) and provides a series of recommendations for Council to consider.

## **REPORT:**

### **Programming City-owned Community Centres**

The City's operating model currently used to provide programming to residents in its community centres, is founded on a shared responsibility between City staff, Neighbourhood Association (NA) volunteers and other community partners. Under the current model, programming at city-owned centres can generally be broken down as follows:

- 1) **Indirect Programs (Neighbourhood Associations)** – These programs are organized and run by Neighbourhood Association (NA) volunteers who choose to provide programming out of a city-owned community centre. It is important to note that not all NAs choose, or have the capacity or time, to run programs at a centre. NAs are arms-length organizations from the City that are approved for affiliation by City Council on an annual basis. An Association must be formally affiliated by the City in order to run programs out of a City-owned community centre. Affiliated NAs keep the revenue they generate through programs they offer out of city-owned community centres. They also receive a number of benefits and supports from the City as a result of affiliation, including: free access to community centre space; 3<sup>rd</sup> party liability coverage for their volunteers while acting in their duties, use of the city's online registration system; access to city staff who support their work and their programs, and funding for their NA newsletter to residents. Examples of indirect programs provided by NAs include Kids in the Kitchen, piano lessons for all ages, pickleball drop-in, country line dancing, Zumba and ballet.

- 2) **Direct City-run Programs** – These programs are planned and run by City staff. Funding for these programs is contained within the City’s operating budget and revenues generated through these programs are returned to the City (although not all programs are run on a cost-recovery basis). Examples of direct programming offered at community centres include fitness classes for seniors, Kitchener Tech Connects, summer day camps for children, youth drop-in services and various drop-in sports for all ages.
- 3) **Indirect Programs (Community Partners)** – These programs are offered through a partnership between the City and external community partners. Community Partners are often separate non-profit organizations, with their own structure and staff, who may or may not be partially funded by the City of Kitchener to provide a specific service in a neighbourhood. These community partners bring to the table specific experience and expertise and leverage the community centre to provide specific supports needed in the surrounding neighbourhoods. Examples of indirect community partner programming include food security programming (e.g. food distribution, cooking classes) with House of Friendship, Newcomer programming with Reception House, Let’s Chat with the Coalition of Muslim Women, and various other programming with organizations like YMCA, AFRO, EarlyON, Extend a Family and Camino.

### **The Evolution of Neighbourhood Association Programming:**

Since the creation of the City’s Neighbourhood Association Affiliation Policy, the nature of Neighbourhood Associations has changed and evolved. While the City’s operating model relies heavily on volunteer-run NAs to provide a significant amount of programming out of city-owned community centres:

- Many affiliated NAs (13 of 26 choose not to run programs in community centres, but rather focus on other important priorities such as advocacy, planning initiatives, and/or events. As independent organizations it is their prerogative to pick their priorities and determine the work they will do within the community – all of which is valuable.
- Some NAs do not have the volunteer capacity to do the significant amount of work required to provide programs at a community centre due to the increasing challenge of recruiting and maintaining volunteers interested in this type of work, a situation mirrored by many organizations across Waterloo Region and beyond as volunteer rates have been in steep decline post pandemic across the country<sup>3</sup>.
- Other NAs have ceased to exist for a variety of reasons, leaving a void in community centre programming while staff work to support the development of new Associations (e.g. Kingsdale, Bridgeport)
- Still, other NAs have flourished under the current model and evolved into large, complex organizations that recruit and manage many volunteers, hire and manage multiple staff, are responsible large budgets, and offer many programs to residents from across Kitchener and beyond.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://kitchener.citynews.ca/2023/02/07/organizations-across-region-see-steep-drop-in-volunteers-post-pandemic-6494457/>



## **NA Revenue Generated through Community Centre Programming (2022)**

Neighbourhood Associations that provide programming out of a City-owned community centre keep the revenue they generate through those programs to fund their operating costs and other expenses, or investments in the community they serve. Over the years there have been several examples of Associations reinvesting their funding into significant community amenities such as playgrounds and parks and establishing community gardens and food forests.

To begin to understand the distribution of revenues that are being generated between Associations, staff completed some analysis of the revenues tracked through the City's registration program (ActiveNet). While this source of information is not fully inclusive of all NA revenues (some NAs may generate revenues outside of ActiveNet) and it does not consider the costs Associations incur throughout a year, it does provide a general understanding of the levels of gross revenue being generated. Based on that analysis, in 2022<sup>4</sup>:

- 1 NA committed to offering programming at a community centres made \$0.
- 2 NAs that offer some programming at a centre made between \$1 - \$20,000.
- 1 NA that offers some programming at a centres made between \$20,001 - \$50,000.
- 4 NAs that offer programming at a centre made between \$50,001 - \$100,000.
- 1 NA that offers programming at a centre made between \$101,000 - \$250,000.
- 1 NA that offers programming at a centre made over \$250,000.

Staff also looked at gross revenue generated by NAs in each year between 2018 – 2021. Revenue generated by the NAs were generally consistent with the trends outlined above, although in 2020 and 2021 the amounts were understandably lower due to COVID.

Staff have used this information to establish a benchmark of \$20,000 for some of the recommendations contained in this report. It should be noted that, while affiliated NAs can generate substantial revenue through programming (as shown above), the current affiliation policy does not require disclosing financial information to the City and the public for transparency purposes, although some NAs voluntarily provide this on their own. In contrast, City affiliated sport groups and Tier I and II community grant recipients are required to provide yearly financial statements to the City as a condition of minor sport affiliation and receiving Tier 1 funding.

### **Community Centre Programming Data Analysis:**

In order to properly understand and assess the current operating model within City-owned community centres, staff undertook an analysis of program offerings at all 14 community centres for a one-year period (April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023). The full analysis of community centre programming is attached to this report as Appendix A.

#### **Methodology**

All program offerings included in the analysis are pulled from the City's online registration system, ActiveNet, which tracks both direct City-run and indirect NA-run programs offered out of City-owned community centres. The criteria used for all programs included in the analysis was the following: a start date of April 1, 2022 or after, AND an end date on or before March 31,

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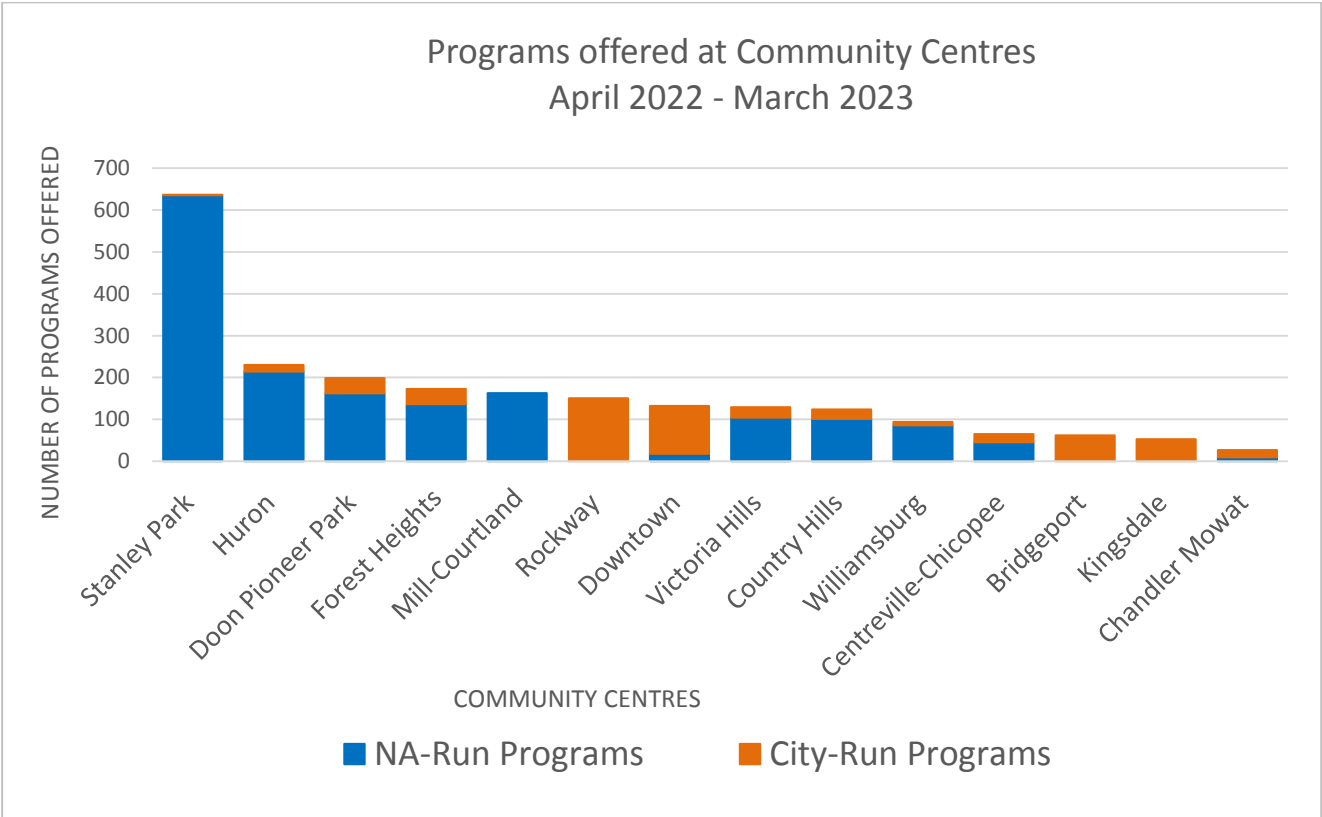
<sup>4</sup> Three Neighbourhood Associations who offer programming out of the Mill-Courtland community centre are not included in this analysis as they do not use ActiveNet for program registration.

2023. Thus, programs that *started and finished* within this one-year period are included in the analysis for all community centres, with the exception of a few programs that run from September to June, which were also included. Program stats for Mill-Courtland community centre are unavailable on ActiveNet and were obtained directly from community centre staff using the same criteria outlined above. Programs out of scope for this analysis are any drop-in programs not tracked through ActiveNet, and programs that are run through partner organizations such as the House of Friendship, YMCA, AFRO and Camino. There will be some margin of error due to this imperfect tracking system, though it is not likely to significantly impact the overall trends reported.

In this analysis staff were looking specifically at the number and types of both direct and indirect programs offered out of community centres, the number of affiliated Neighbourhood Associations offering programs out of centres, and the overall level of use across community centres. Population size and median income of the surrounding neighbourhoods was also included in the analysis; these demographics were pulled from the publicly available [City of Kitchener Demographics GeoHub 2021](#).

Between April 2022 and April 2023, approximately 2000 programs were offered out of the City’s 14 community centres. As illustrated in Figure 1, distribution of program frequency across the 14 community centres is widely divergent, ranging from numbers in the hundreds for some centres, to less than 50 for others.

**Figure 1: City-Run and NA Programming offered at Community Centres 2022/23**



A summary of the findings of staff’s analysis of current program is included below.

## ***Highlights from the Data Analysis***

- Of the 26 NAs affiliated with the City with 2022/2023, in the one-year period being reviewed, 13 (50%) chose to offer programming out of a city-owned community centre, and of those 13, four accounted for 70% of all NA programming offered across the city
- One Neighbourhood Association is responsible for providing 36% of all NA-run programming across all community centres; 13 affiliated Neighbourhood Associations do not offer programming and were focused on other priorities
- 52% of all community centre programming is happening at three community centres (Stanley Park, Huron, Doon Pioneer Park, Forest Heights); the remaining 48% of programming is unequally distributed amongst the remaining 11 centres.
- Over 50% of all programs offered across all centres fall into the category of Physical Health & Fitness. Programs focused on Mental Health and Wellbeing and Services for Vulnerable Populations (the top two rec & leisure program priorities identified in a recent resident survey), are not being adequately addressed and account for less than 4% of all City-run programming and 1% of all NA-run programming.
- 68% of all community centre programming is happening at the seven community centres located in mid to higher-income neighbourhoods, and just 32% of all programming is happening at the seven community centres located in neighbourhoods with a reported median household income below the City of Kitchener median<sup>5</sup>
- Further inconsistencies are seen when looking at the ratio of number of programs per person by population size of the neighbourhoods surrounding the community centre. Community centres located in mid to higher income neighbourhoods have an average ratio of programs per person of one program for every 106 residents (1:106), whereas community centres located in lower income neighbourhoods have an average program to person ratio of 1 program for every 190 residents (1:190)

The results of this data analysis indicate that the operating model currently being used at the city works very well for some community centres and Neighbourhood Associations, while it is leaving other community centres underutilized and thus the surrounding populations underserved. Further, despite the fact only 50% of affiliated Neighbourhood Associations choose to provide programming, the City's current operating model continues to rely heavily on NAs to utilize space at city-owned community centres. While this model is likely the least expensive for the municipality, it is creating inequities between community centres and the neighbourhoods they serve by putting too much onus on volunteer-run Neighbourhood Associations.

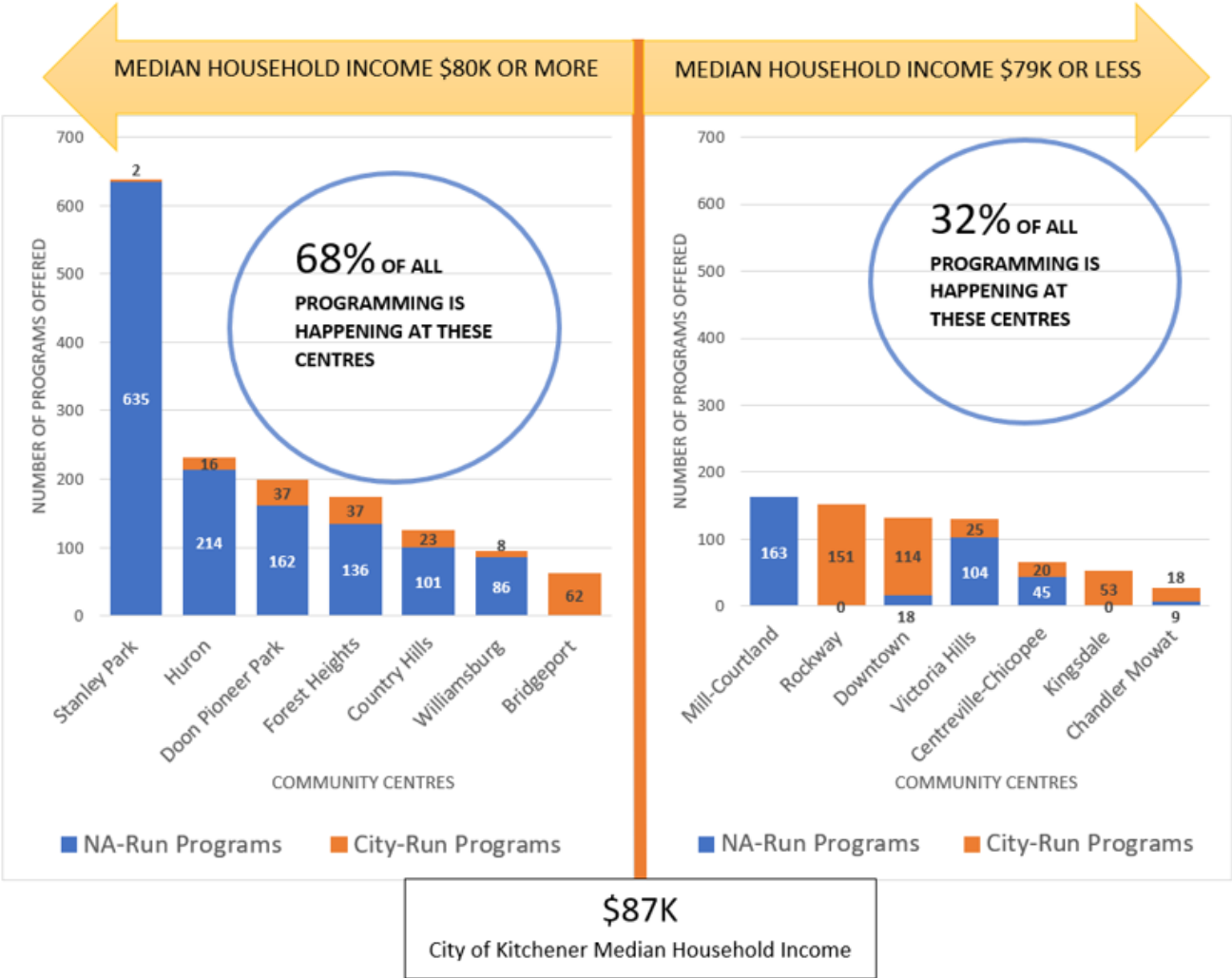
When looking at demographics of the neighbourhoods surrounding the community centres such as income and population size, the inequities are further illustrated, with a clear tendency for community centres in middle and upper-income neighbourhoods to have higher programming numbers, and in particular, higher NA-run programming numbers, than those in lower income neighbourhoods. From an equity perspective, this kind of disparity in programs and services being offered between higher and lower income neighbourhoods is the clear demonstration of systemic inequities through the (unintentional) creation of barriers for particular groups – in this case, those living in lower-income neighbourhoods.

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<sup>5</sup> Median Household income for the City of Kitchener is \$87K (Stats Canada 2021, [Census Profile](#))

In Figure 2 below, disparities in programming numbers are illustrated by median income levels of the surrounding neighbourhood.

**Figure 2: City-run and NA-run Programming offered at Community Centres 22/23 split by Median Household Income<sup>6</sup>**



<sup>6</sup> Due to limitations of the available data, creating an exact split above and below the \$87,000 median income for the City of Kitchener was not possible. As household income is reported in \$20,000 intervals, the closest split that could be done for neighbourhood demographics was above and below \$80,000. This minor adjustment does not significantly impact the results

## **Recommended Changes to Community Centre Operating Model & Related City Policies**

The following is a list of changes for City Council to consider making to the current community centre operating model. This list of potential changes has been organized according to the three main objectives included in the motion City Council passed unanimously on March 20, 2023.

In putting together these recommendations staff worked closely with management staff within the Neighbourhood Programs and Services (NPS) division (which includes responsibility for the City's community centres) who provided helpful suggestions and feedback throughout the process. Further, between May 1<sup>st</sup> and May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023, affiliated Neighbourhood Associations were surveyed to provide input on a number of these potential changes. Survey responses were received from 17 out of 26 Neighbourhood Associations, and several NAs engaged in discussions with NPS staff regarding the draft recommendations. All responses, suggestions and questions received from Associations were considered carefully by staff, and a number of changes were made to the recommendations and contents of this report based on their input. A summary of the feedback received from NAs is attached to this report as Appendix B.

**Objective #1:** Diversify programs, services and supports offered out of City-owned community centres (either directly, or through partnerships) to reflect the increasingly diverse needs of Kitchener residents (e.g. mental health and wellness, supports for vulnerable populations, food distribution)."

### **Expand the City's Leisure Access Program to Cover NA Programs**

#### ***Recommendation***

1. **That, starting in 2024, the city's Leisure Access fee assistance program be expanded to cover programs offered by all Neighbourhood Associations at a city-owned community centre, and staff be directed to build the financial impact of that program expansion into the 2024 operating budget.**

#### ***Explanation***

The City's current Leisure Access program is an annual financial subsidy provided to City of Kitchener residents in order to access recreation and leisure programming at City of Kitchener facilities. Currently, this fee assistance only applies to City-run direct programs and does not cover residents looking to participate in a NA-run program. Having said that, there are 7 NAs who offer their own fee assistance program for residents who need financial support to access their programs. While some NAs have the financial means to provide this type of fee assistance to residents, other Associations have limited funding which can be drawn down quickly when they offer fee assistance to users accessing their programs. This means that those Associations with limited funds who offer fee assistance have less money to invest into the neighbourhoods they serve in other ways.

Staff considered two options for expanding the Leisure Access program to include NA programs:

1. Expand Leisure Access to NAs that generate less than \$20,000 in annual revenue, OR
2. Expand to all NAs who offer programs in community centers regardless of annual revenue.

The recommended option is to expand the Leisure Access program to all NAs offering programming at city-owned community centres. This option will be much easier to promote and communicate to users and will provide consistency across the city and all of its community centres. This option was overwhelmingly supported in the responses received by NAs to the online survey asking for feedback. NAs that currently offer fee subsidies would be encouraged to continue to do so, which would provide even more opportunities for residents to access financial support once the City's annual Leisure Access amount has been exhausted. Staff have conducted a financial analysis and estimate the annual cost of expanding Leisure Access to cover all NA programming would be approximately \$30,000.

### **Require Neighbourhood Associations to Use the City's Support Worker Program:**

#### ***Recommendations***

- 2. That, as a condition of affiliation with the City, all Neighbourhood Associations offering programs out of a city-owned community centre, be required to use the City's Inclusion Support Worker program for all program participants who request such support/accommodation.**
- 3. That, starting in 2024, the City fund the cost of residents utilizing its Inclusion Support Worker program when participating in programs offered by a Neighbourhood Association at a City-owned community centre, and staff be directed to build the financial impact of this change into the 2024 operating budget.**

#### ***Explanation***

To fully participate in recreation and leisure programs, some residents with a disability require individual supports, accommodation plans, program adaptations and/or equipment. These supports often come in the form of intensive, one to one staff support from a qualified Inclusion Support Worker (a city staff person). This city service is currently available for all City and NA programs. However, when required to support an individual enrolled in an NA program, the NA is required to pay the City for the wages of the Inclusion Support Worker. While some NAs have the financial capacity to (and do) participate in this service, other Associations do not have the financial capacity to pay these wages, and therefore do not provide this support to a potential participant of their programs. This means that some residents experience barriers to participating in certain NA programs and receive inconsistent forms of support.

In order to increase access and usage of the City's Inclusion Support Workers program, staff believe NAs should be required (through the City's Affiliation policy) to direct participants to use the program, and the City should cover all related costs. This recommendation was strongly supported by NAs who offer programming out of community centres, many of whom mentioned the need for consistency and barrier-free access to all programs at community centres.

Staff estimates the financial impact to the City of making this change would be approximately \$30,000 – however, some additional analysis is required to determine if there would be a need for an additional part-time staff member to meet the demand for these supports. This analysis would be done through piloting this change in 2024 to assess if additional staff supports are needed.

### **Modernize the City's Facility Booking Guidelines Policy**

## ***Recommendation***

- 4. That, the City's Facility Booking Guidelines for Non-Profit Groups (MUN-FAC-415) be updated and clarified to reflect the following key elements:**
- a. It is vital to have a variety of programs, supports and services offered out of a community centre that meet the diverse needs of residents living in the surrounding neighbourhoods.**
  - b. Neighbourhood Associations are one of the City's important partners in the delivery of programs offered at city-owned community centres. When making decisions about the allocation of space at a city-owned community centre, the space needs of Neighbourhood Association programs should be considered alongside the space needs of other diverse programming provided by other organizations and the City.**
  - c. Leveraging community organizations that have specific skills, expertise and experience to offer a variety of programs and supports out of a community centre is key to the success of the centre, and the health and wellbeing of residents living in the surrounding neighbourhoods.**
  - d. City staff have the final decision-making authority on the allocation and booking of space in a city-owned community centre.**

## ***Explanation***

The City's Facility Booking Guidelines for Non-Profit Groups - Policy (MUN-FAC-415) was first approved by City Council in 1994. Given the increasing diversity of our city's population, programming needs are changing and becoming much more complex than they were almost 30 years ago. This policy is vague and even confusing in some sections and should be clarified to reflect the realities of space booking in today's environment.

For example, although the policy already addresses staff's role in determining community centre space use, as well as how groups will be considered in the allocation of space, over the years the vague language in the policy, and resulting lack of clarity, has led to different interpretations. While the existing policy indicates "primary" NAs will be given first consideration to facility space, over the years this has been misinterpreted (and verbalized by some) to mean that the NA has first right of refusal to all space within the City owned community centre. This misinterpretation has made it challenging for staff to balance new space requests from other partners that meet emerging needs within the community with the interests of NA. At some centres, it has also created challenges and disagreements with NAs when staff have attempted to bring a broader diversity of programs and supports into a centre (e.g. food distribution).

This policy is also vague when it comes to the City's ability to utilize its own community centre space for specialized programs which have been identified as priorities by the City (e.g. youth programming, summer camps, food distribution). This should be corrected to promote a greater diversity of programs at City-owned community centres.

## **Changes to the City's Neighbourhood Affiliation Policy – Equity, Diversity & Inclusion**

## ***Recommendation***

5. That, the City's Neighbourhood Affiliation Policy (MUN-FAC-324 ) be amended to add a condition of affiliation requiring Neighbourhood Associations that provide programming out of a City-owned community centre to:
- c. Establish and publish online an equity, diversity and inclusion policy for the Association which, at a minimum, commits to providing a variety of programs at city-owned community centres that meet the diverse needs of the residents.
  - d. Have all Neighbourhood Association Board members participate in city-organized and funded EDI training every two years.

## ***Explanation***

The City's affiliation policy, which was approved in 2002, does not include a significant amount of guidance and direction that would be included if the policy were written today – including guidance around priorities such as transparency and accountability, or equity, diversity and inclusion. Over the past twenty years, since that policy was written, the community has become much more diverse and the needs of residents living here are also more complex. In an effort to modernize the affiliation policy, staff recommend the above conditions of affiliation be added to the policy.

To support NAs in meeting these conditions of affiliation (in particular the development of an EDI policy for the Association), the City will provide templates, guidelines and staff support as this work is completed. A policy template will be drafted by City staff and provided to all NAs to use in the development of their own policy if they so chose. This draft policy may be used as is, or may be significantly revised in order to reflect the unique needs and perspectives of the NA. This is a similar approach to how the City supported NAs when the Accessibility for Ontarians with a Disability Act (AODA) became law. To assist NAs in meeting compliance to the associated standards and regulations, staff provided supports such as training materials, policy templates, compliance schedules and reference materials.

**Objective #2:** Increase resident's usage of City-owned community centres, where and when centres are not already being fully utilized (eg. expanding hours of operations, attracting additional partners).

## **Conduct a Review of Program Registration**

## ***Recommendation***

6. That, staff undertake a comprehensive review of the City's current program registration processes (including potential improvements to ActiveNet), with a focus on improving the user experience for members of the public registering for programs and members of Neighbourhood Associations running programs.



### ***Explanation***

The platform used by members of the public, city staff, and members of most Neighbourhood Associations to set up and register for most direct and indirect programs at community centres is ActiveNet. ActiveNet serves not only as the online registration system for programs, but is also used for booking facility rentals and Kitchener Market vendor contracts. For many residents ActiveNet is the primary form of contact with the City as they register themselves, or a family member, for programs. We have heard from members of the public that ActiveNet is difficult to navigate, and this sentiment was echoed in the responses from NAs to the online survey.

In December 2022, responsibility for ActiveNet (including existing dedicated staff) was moved to report into the City's Customer Experience and Solutions team as a recognition of the significant opportunities to improve the user experience with this system. Between March and May of 2023 staff completed an initial internal review and needs assessment of ActiveNet. This limited initial review was focused on the use of ActiveNet for program offerings, program registrations and facility rentals, with a particular focus on customer experience, staff experience, equity, and accessibility of the program. Initial results from this study indicate a need for a much more comprehensive review of ActiveNet, and all other accompanying methods currently used for program offerings and registrations, in order to optimize processes and improve the overall customer experience. In particular, this review will focus on making the process more user friendly for all groups involved (including Neighbourhood Associations). Staff recommend that this review be launched in 2024, which will include engagement with members of the public, Neighbourhood Associations, members of City Council and city staff to ensure comprehensive stakeholder input.

### **Expand Community Centre Hours of Operation on Weekends**

#### ***Recommendation:***

- 7. That, an issue paper be prepared for Council's consideration as part of the 2024 budget process that would outline the staffing and financial implications of opening centres on weekends – potentially through a phased, multi-year approach.**

### ***Explanation***

The hours of operation for each community centre varies greatly on weekends with some open on Saturday mornings, a small number open Saturday afternoons and only one open 9am-1pm Sunday (and in this instance the NA is charged to cover staffing costs associated with operating the building). No other centres are currently open on Sunday except when a group has booked the facility to rent. Expanding the hours that community centres are open on weekends has significant potential to increase programming available to residents (likely with a specific focus on youth programming, mental health and wellbeing and supports for vulnerable populations), provide a safe space for residents to gather on weekends, and bring users into the centre who may not be able to attend during the week.

Staff believe there is a lot of potential associated with this idea but need more time to fully understand the financial implications. Several NAs who responded to the online survey about this potential changes were also supportive, but suggested the City take a pilot strategy to this, starting with a few centres in order to test out the interest of residents. One approach to this change could be to phase it in over several years instead of having all 14 centres open on weekends starting next year.

## **Launch a Comprehensive Awareness Campaign Promoting Community Centres**

### ***Recommendation:***

- 8. That, the City work with a representative group of Neighbourhood Associations to develop and launch a comprehensive, ongoing, city-wide promotional campaign to educate residents on the existence of the community centres and Neighbourhood Associations, as well as programs, services and supports that can be accessed at those centres.**

### ***Explanation***

Through decades of investment in neighbourhood-based community centres, Kitchener residents benefit greatly from a network of community centres that is almost certainly unparalleled for a municipality of our size. Unfortunately, too many Kitchener residents still do not know the centres exist or what programs, supports and services they are able to access at their local centre. While the City has, from time to time, run some brief promotional campaigns, much more can be done to make residents aware of their community centres and to promote the programs, services and supports provided at the centres. Funding already exists within the community centre section budget that would be prioritized to support this work.

Many of the Neighbourhood Associations who responded to the online survey about these potential changes were very much in favor of this recommendation and in particular stressed the importance of utilizing a wide variety of tactics that do not rely on internet access. Other Associations suggested a committee of staff and NA representatives be established to build the promotional campaign together – staff agree and are recommending this approach.

## **Increase City-run Programming in Centres with Space Capacity**

As highlighted in the data provided in Appendix A, given the current community centre operating model, and the City's heavy reliance on volunteer-run NAs to provide programming at its community centres, there are several city-owned community centres that are offering levels of programming well below the overall average across all centres. The data also demonstrates that the centres offering the lowest levels of programming are generally located in neighbourhoods where the residents already find themselves with limited access to resources due to their financial position or other reasons.

As part of the City's 2023 budget process, City Council approved the creation of two new programmer staff positions who will target their efforts on increasing programming in centres where current programming levels are low.

No further recommendation is required to move forward on this idea as Council has already approved the FTEs and funding to increase City-run programming.

**Objective #3:** Strengthen, and modernize, collaborative partnerships between the City and community partners – including affiliated Neighbourhood Associations – operating out of City-owned community centres.

## **Create Multi-Year Partnership Agreements with Larger NAs**

### ***Recommendation***

- 9. That the City test the creation of a multi-year partnership agreement between the City and one of the larger, more complex NAs providing programs and other services out of a city-owned community centre and make a determination as to whether or not there is value in extending such agreements to other complex NAs in the future.**

### ***Explanation***

One of the changes that has occurred over the past 20 years is the emergence of larger, more complex NAs that recruit and manage many volunteers, hire and manage multiple staff, are responsible large budgets, offer many programs to residents from across Kitchener and beyond, and sometimes provide a variety of supports to the community beyond traditional programming (e.g. events, food distribution, capital projects). The size, scale and complexity of these larger NAs was not anticipated when the city's community centre operating model and supporting policies were first established over two decades ago, and as a result, the City may not be set up to provide them with appropriate supports.

Given the complexity and scale of these larger Associations, staff are interested in testing the creation of a multi-year partnership agreement with these Associations. These agreements would be created through the support of a third-party facilitator. Through that facilitator, the City and the NA would work together to reach agreements and document those agreements on important issues that could include: the core responsibilities of each partner, communication and collaboration approaches, respect in the workplace protocols, dispute resolution mechanisms, and the specific supports the City would provide to the NA in exchange for their services/supports within city-owned community centres. Staff have already had some preliminary discussions with the Stanley Park Neighbourhood Association about this opportunity and believe these agreements have the potential to be mutually beneficial to the City and the NAs.

## **Make Changes to the City's Neighbourhood Affiliation Policy – Transparency**

### ***Recommendations:***

- 10. That, the City's Neighbourhood Affiliation Policy (MUN-FAC-324) be amended to add a condition of affiliation requiring Neighbourhood Associations that provide programming out of a City-owned community centre, and have generated more than \$20,000 in revenue during the previous fiscal year, to:**
  - a. Provide the following information to the City on an annual basis – (1) total revenue generated during their previous fiscal year, (2) total expenses in their previous fiscal year, and (3) total funding held in reserves/savings.**
  - b. Establish and publish online a reinvestment policy that will outline how Associations will reinvest revenues generated through programming offered at City-owned community centres into the community.**

- 11. That, as a condition of affiliation, to support ongoing two-way sharing of information and collaboration between the City and NAs providing programs out of a City-owned community centre, the Ward Councillor and a City staff person be invited to all Board meetings and the Association's Annual General Meeting.**
- 12. That, as a condition of affiliation, Neighbourhood Associations providing programming out of a city-owned community centre, agree to turn over any unspent funding to the City prior to ceasing to operate; and that the City provide that funding to a future Neighbourhood Association in the area or invest it into the community centre and/or surrounding neighbourhoods previously served by that NA.**

### ***Explanation***

The City's affiliation policy was first approved by City Council back in 2002 and has not been substantially updated since that time. The policy includes: (1) the eligibility requirements for an NA to be affiliated by the City, (2) the process for an NA to become affiliated and (3) the benefits an affiliated NA receives from the City (e.g. free space in community centres).

This minimalist approach to the content of the affiliation policy does not include a significant amount of guidance and direction that would be included if the policy were written today. For example, the policy does not provide guidance on several important issues such as: how NAs will operate in a municipally-owned facility, what NAs will do in exchange for the benefits of being affiliated, how an NA will collaborate with City staff and other community partners within a City-owned community centre, or how funds collected by an NA from programs run in a taxpayer funded facility will be spent and reported to the public in the interest of transparency.

Between 2019 and 2021 the City attempted to work with all Neighbourhood Associations to fully rewrite the City's affiliation policy but were unable to gain a consensus amongst the many different Associations given the many different ideas, perspective, interests and priorities. That work was paused without a conclusion and had not been restarted by the time Council moved their March 20, 2023 motion to examine the operations of the City's community centres. In retrospect, it was likely overly ambitious to try and rewrite the entire affiliation policy and gain consensus amongst the City and so many different Associations. Staff believe a more achievable approach would be to look at smaller, specific changes that can be made to the policy, some of which are outlined in this report for Council's consideration.

To begin to modernize the City's affiliation policy, and to promote greater transparency and accountability of activities occurring in City-owned, tax-payer funded community centres, staff recommend the additions to the policy outlined above.

## **Implementation Schedule**

Staff recognize that implementation of any of these ideas, if approved, will require some additional work by Neighbourhood Associations that provide programming at a City-owned community centre (e.g. policy development). Staff are committed to supporting NAs in completing this work and heard from many of the Neighbourhood Associations through the online survey that the changes should be phased in over time, with plenty of staff support and transparent communication along the way. Staff agree.

The following chart outlines a schedule for the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report which balances the need for these changes to be made with the capacity of staff and the Neighbourhood Associations to implement them effectively:

<b>Action</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Primary Responsibility</b>
Expand Leisure Access to cover NA Programs	Q1 2024	City staff
Fund residents use of Support Worker Program for NA programs	Q1 2024	City staff
Amend the City's Neighbourhood Association affiliation policy, as per CSD-2023-125.	Revised policy approved by Council by end of 2023	City staff
Amend the City's Use of Space policy as per recommendation contained in CSD-2023-125.	Revised policy approved by Council by end of 2023	City staff
Comprehensive review of program registration (including ActiveNet)	2024	City staff
Budget issue paper re: expansion of community centre hours on weekends	Budget 2024	City staff / Council
Comprehensive awareness campaign promoting centres	Q1 2024 – develop plan Q4 2024 – begin plan	City staff/ Some NAs
Pilot multi-year partnership agreement with Neighbourhood Association	Begin in 2023	City staff / Stanley Park Community Association

## **Timeline for New Conditions of Affiliation**

A number of the recommendations in this report, if approved, would add conditions to the City's Neighbourhood Affiliation policy. Neighbourhood Associations will be supported by staff in meeting those new conditions, however, it will still take time for NAs to come into compliance.

Staff would look to implement these new conditions on the following timeline:

Condition of Affiliation	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NAs offering programs out of a city-owned community centre are required to use the City's Support Worker Program</li> <li>NAs to provide the City with financial information about previous fiscal year</li> <li>Ward Councillor &amp; City staff invited to NA meetings and AGM</li> <li>Commitment to turn funding to the City prior to ceasing operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2024 Re-affiliation process (estimated to be approx. March 2024)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish and publish an EDI policy</li> <li>Participation in EDI training</li> <li>Revenue reinvestment policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop training program (City) – 2023/24</li> <li>Develop EDI policy (NAs) – 2023/24</li> <li>Condition implemented as part of 2025 re-affiliation process</li> </ul>

## STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports the delivery of core services. Further, this report is in alignment with the public consultations that have been underway to define the City's next Strategy Plan for 2023-2026. As outlined in [CAO-2023-217](#), presented to Council on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023, key priorities identified for the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan include *Connection & Belonging*, *Newcomer Experience*, and *Physical & Mental Health*.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Many of the recommendations made in this report will not require new funding to complete. However, there are three recommendations in this report that will require additional funding to implement and should be considered as part of the 2024 budget process:

#	Recommendation	Estimated Financial Impact
1	Expand Leisure Access fee assistance program to cover Neighbourhood Association programs	\$30,000
3	Fund residents use of Support Worker program when participating in NA programs	\$30,000
7	Expand community centre hours on weekends	TBD (2024 budget issue paper)

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

**INFORM** – This report has been posted to the City's website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

**COLLABORATE** – Between May 1<sup>st</sup> and May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023, affiliated Neighbourhood Associations were surveyed to provide input on a number of recommendations presented in this report. Survey responses were received from 17 of 26 Associations, and several NAs engaged in ongoing discussions with staff regarding the draft recommendations. All responses, suggestions and questions received from Neighbourhood Associations were considered carefully by staff, and a number of changes were made to the recommendations and contents of this report based on the input. A summary of the feedback received from NAs is attached to this report as Appendix B.

**APPROVED BY:** MICHAEL MAY, DEPUTY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

**Appendix A – Community Centre Programming Review – Data Report**

**Appendix B – Summary of Neighbourhood Association Survey Responses**