



# Winter Use

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan





*All photography and graphics by City of Kitchener staff unless otherwise noted.  
Cover and inside cover photo by Scott McQuarrie*



## Related sections

### **Places**

### **Spaces**

Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation

Park Amenities

Play

Signature & Feature Parks

Trails & Lighting

## Content

*Introduction* ..... 06

*Data Sources* ..... 16

*Findings* ..... 18

*Recommendations* ..... 22



A scenic view of a pond with reeds and a forest under a blue sky, seen from a wooden deck. The foreground shows the wooden planks of the deck and a railing. The middle ground is filled with tall reeds in the water. The background is a dense forest of green trees under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. The sun is shining brightly from the upper right, creating a lens flare effect.

# Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Peoples. We recognize our responsibility to serve as stewards for the land and honour the original caretakers who came before us. Our community is enriched by the enduring knowledge and deep-rooted traditions of the diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Kitchener today. The significance of this land to Indigenous communities is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.



A young person is sitting on a snow-covered ledge, looking towards the right. They are wearing a pink helmet with a face cage, a purple and blue jacket with a fur-lined hood, black pants, and pink gloves. The background shows a snowy landscape with a classical building featuring columns and a dome. A dark horizontal bar is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the word "Introduction" in white text.

# Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

---

## Background

Canadians experience four distinct seasons every year and our park amenities are built to withstand the impacts of the seasons.

However, not all amenities such as parks, trails, outdoor pools, splashpads, public washrooms, and community gardens are accessible during the colder months. These spaces cannot be used in the same way in the colder months due to snow and ice buildup, freezing conditions, and lack of winter maintenance.

Although a significant portion of parks and trails are neither maintained nor accessible, some are maintained to enable community members to enjoy activities in the winter when other amenities have reduced daylight hours.

This booklet will profile park activities specifically geared to winter use, and how Kitchener's parks can improve recreational opportunities during the winter months.

*Photo by Scott McQuarrie*



## Winter park programming and services

### Toboggan hills

Toboggan hills provide value for people of all ages. People use toboggan hills in various ways including sledding, tubing, and more. Although these activities can be very enjoyable, they also pose a safety risk when hills are used inappropriately or in certain conditions.







The City of Kitchener has a toboggan hill inspection program to confirm that hills are safe to use. Where hills are safe for tobogganing, they are listed on the City of Kitchener website. Hills safe for tobogganing have a sign posted with information regarding their use, closures, safety recommendations, staffing, and a “use at your own risk” message. In addition, approved toboggan hills are inspected daily when open. Where hills are not safe or suited for toboggan use, snow fencing may be installed, shrubs planted, and other barriers such as straw bales put in place to prevent use. In some cases, these hills are monitored for unsafe use.

There are currently three toboggan hills listed on the [City's website](#):

- McLennan Park
- Foxglove Park
- Hillside Park



## Winter park programming

-  Toboggan hills
-  Community centre rinks
-  Neighbourhood rinks
-  Arenas
-  Waterloo Region District School Board rinks
-  Cross country ski trails



### **Outdoor ice rinks**

Ice rinks are a popular amenity used by many during the colder months. The City of Kitchener has two types of ice rinks available: arenas and neighbourhood rinks.

Neighbourhood rinks are free to use, publicly available amenities located in outdoor spaces throughout Kitchener. They are almost exclusively volunteer-run, with only two exceptions - Victoria Park, a non-refrigerated outdoor pad, and Carl Zehr Square, a refrigerated outdoor pad, both operated by City of Kitchener staff.

Neighbourhood outdoor rinks are supported by the Neighbourhood Development Office where a Project Coordinator assists each rink's operation.





The neighbourhood outdoor ice rinks are not refrigerated, and use is dependent on weather and volunteer availability. These outdoor ice rinks need to be flooded at the beginning of each season and as needed, after freeze/thaw cycles during the winter months.

During the 2023-2024 winter season, 12 of 32 neighbourhood rinks did not run due to park reconstruction or poor weather conditions. Eight rinks out of 32 did not have enough volunteer support during the 2023-2024 season. On average, rinks were open for only 9 days during 2023-2024 season.

Due to inconsistent weather, the number of successful skate days needs to be monitored by City staff and volunteer teams. This will help determine the best practices required for current successful ice formation and also when the climate will no longer support natural ice surfaces.

The Waterloo Region District School Board has removed its support for adding more rinks on its properties. With only a few school board rinks still in use, and no plans for new ones, this approach to neighbourhood rink expansion is no longer moving forward.



## Winter maintenance

### Park maintenance

Although parks and playgrounds are not maintained throughout the colder months, certain amenities such as trails and waste receptacles are winter maintained which allows for limited park use. In November of 2023, Council members approved an increase of waste collection in the winter months. All waste receptacles, both above ground and subterranean, are now maintained all year round, while only select trails are kept up in the winter. Certain types of trails are not maintained in the winter, such as stone dust, while others such as asphalt and concrete trails are maintained. Above-ground waste receptacles are moved closer to maintenance routes in the winter months to allow for access.

### Trail maintenance

The [Cycling and Trails Masterplan](#) (CTMP) describes winter trail maintenance standards, and short- and long-term maintenance goals. The City strives to eventually maintain all trails on the Spine Network over the long term in the winter. The Spine Network is defined as the cycling routes that connect the city's major destinations to existing neighbourhoods within the city. Major destinations include high activity areas, future population and employment areas.

Short-term winter maintenance identified in the CTMP includes:

- All cycling routes and trails that are currently part of the existing winter maintenance network;
- All cycling routes and trails that will be implemented as part of the short-term implementation plan;
- An additional five kilometres of existing cycling routes and trails.

The short-term winter maintenance plan does not include Region of Waterloo infrastructure such as Regionally owned trails. The time range for short-term is within 3-10 years and will happen sometime between 2023 and 2030.

Through the CTMP, all significant trails, boulevard multi-use trails, and multi-use trails are proposed to be monitored and maintained accordingly (e.g., ice removal) within 48 hours. Major trails and minor trails will not be maintained during colder months. Lack of trail maintenance reduces active transportation opportunities and greatly impacts a resident's ability to access necessary infrastructure and services.





## Climate considerations

### Winter maintenance impacts

Winter maintenance practices within parks include:

- Plowing and salting trails;
- Relocation of above-ground waste receptacles to prepare for winter waste collection where applicable
- Removal of waste from waste receptacles;
- Ensuring ski trails, ice rinks and toboggan hills are fit for use;
- Removal of shade sails.

These maintenance practices ensure that certain park and open space locations are accessible to the public. However, specific maintenance practices such as the plowing and salting of trails negatively impact the environment. Salting trails and roads in the winter can contaminate drinking water, kill or endanger wildlife, increase soil erosion and over time, can cause damage to infrastructure.

The Region of Waterloo has a [dedicated web page](#) on their website which highlights the impacts of salting, includes more environmentally friendly alternatives to salt, snow clearing tips and other helpful resources for both residences and businesses.

### Climate impacts

As climate change intensifies, weather is becoming more volatile and events such as more intense storms, freeze-thaw cycles, and increasing temperatures are becoming more frequent. This directly impacts outdoor winter programming as outdoor ice rinks are not able to withstand the constant weather fluctuations.









# Data Sources



This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

---



**Legislation**



**Equitable engagement**



**Engagement with the broader community**



**Engagement with City of Kitchener departments**



**Engagement with partner organizations**



**Comparative analysis**



**External research**



**Policy**



**City of Kitchener strategies**



**Region of Waterloo strategies**



**Best practices**



**City of Kitchener staff experience**



# Findings



Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Please note that findings regarding trail and lighting are addressed in the Trails & Lighting booklet. The Park Amenities booklet shares information and recommendations specific to waste receptacles and winter maintenance of waste receptacles. Please refer to these booklets for more information and for associated recommendations.

---

## Accessibility

Respondents requested more seating, warm-up, and rest areas. Additionally, the lack of washrooms in winter was noted as a barrier to park visitation during the colder months. Respondents also requested a thorough clearing of parks and trails to push strollers, drive wheelchairs, and walk through trails including in parks and trails themselves, around amenities such as benches, and between park spaces and roadways.

“  
*My husband is in a wheelchair and would like to go for walks in winter but cannot because the paths are usually covered with snow or ice.*  
”

## Inclusion

Respondents requested more rinks and posted hours for hockey versus family skate outdoor ice rinks times. In addition, respondents suggested family-friendly winter events, such as festivals and carnivals to help them enjoy parks during the colder months.

Survey respondents also mentioned the lack of garbage cans on trails and in parks during the winter.

“  
*Removal of garbage cans during the winter leads to increased litter – we live near Tecumseh Park and regularly notice the problem when two of the three cans are taken away until the spring.*  
”



## Environmental sustainability

Respondents expressed the need for improved snow and ice removal practices to ensure the ice removal process is friendly for pets and the environment. Protection of natural land to ensure there is enough park space was a point of interest as well.



## Safety

Respondents requested better lighting, specifically when the days are short, to increase the feeling of safety on trails. For more information on lighting in parks and on trails, visit the Trails & Lighting booklet. Lack of snow and ice clearing from trails arose as a safety concern. Respondents noted slipping, falling and not being able to walk on trails if they aren't adequately maintained.

“

*The disability community is largely left out of park design. It is improving with new parks, but accessibility needs to be prioritized/ properly funded. Lack of city-wide sidewalk snow clearing escalates this as people with physical disabilities are largely prevented from accessing anything in the winter. Parks need to be accessible year round, and the only way to make that truly happen is if the city is accessible year round.*

”





*Photo by Scott McQuarrie*





# Recommendations



This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

---

## 26: Refrigerated skating area

### **Conduct a feasibility study for a public outdoor refrigerated skating area in a park space with city-wide access.**

As the climate crisis intensifies, community centres and volunteers are struggling to open and maintain their outdoor ice rinks in the winter months. The process of creating an ice rink that measures 27.6 metres by 17 metres includes flooding the area with approximately 12,600 gallons of water. If the weather does not allow for the water to freeze, the rink must be flooded again. This is quite wasteful, especially when considering the skating season has shortened significantly over the last few years. A refrigerated skating area is the more efficient solution to allow regular winter skating and requires less maintenance than outdoor neighbourhood rinks.

The proposed skating area must be refrigerated to ensure adequate ice time for rink visitors throughout the winter months. The skating area could be in the form of a trail, loop path, or an open skating area and must be located to provide city-wide access. The skating area will ideally be free to use and open to any individual or groups. Based on best practices and engagement findings, the following criteria must be met:

- Ability to hold many visitors
- Ample seating areas
- Available parking
- Enough land to construct a skating area
- Public transportation within 500 metres
- Area must be flat at a maximum slope of 1% - 1.5%

To determine whether a refrigerated skating area is a good investment, a feasibility study should be conducted. The feasibility study will consider the following costs: installation, maintenance, and repairs for a refrigerated skating area, compared to the cost of running unrefrigerated neighbourhood ice rinks. Analyzing other outdoor skating rink programs can help inform cost, infrastructure, and maintenance requirements. In addition to cost, the study will assess which solution is the best fit. The study will also examine the environmental impacts of current skating rinks compared to a refrigerated skating area.

Parks that meet the criteria above will be highlighted as suitable locations if the feasibility study results are in support of a refrigerated skating area. Capital investment will be required to install, operate, and maintain the skating area.





*Photo by Scott McQuarrie*

# Recommendations summary

## **27: Refrigerated skating area**

Conduct a feasibility study for a public outdoor refrigerated skating area in a park space with city-wide access.









*Photo by Scott McQuarrie*