

*Merritt*

# City of Merritt Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Merritt is comprised of a diverse mix of urban and rural land uses; there is strong support to retain the open space, rural character and unique heritage features of the region. Merritt is a vibrant small community, and a healthy and active place to live. It is located in a semi-arid desert, with a climate that provides a significant amount of annual sunshine. Merritt offers a large variety of entertainment and tourism opportunities, including sports and outdoor recreation opportunities to its residents and visitors.

Merritt has numerous parks and open spaces including passive parks, sports fields, nature parks and green belts, which provide opportunities for active and passive recreation and leisure activities. There is also a thriving culture and arts sector championed by groups such as the Nicola Valley Museum and Archives Association and the Nicola Valley Community Arts Council. The City is a recreation hub for Lower Nicola – Electoral Area N of the Regional District providing opportunities for formal and informal programming at the Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre, the Nicola Valley Memorial Arena and Merritt Civic Centre.

The Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan will provide strategic direction to the City regarding park use, facilities and services over the next five to ten years. Developed collaboratively through ongoing consultation with City Staff, Council, stakeholders and the public, the Master Plan sets clear directives to guide policy development and decision making. The Master Plan also contributes to Merritt's vision of being a great place to live "*Merritt is seen by its residents as a great place to live from all perspectives – employment, housing community services, natural amenities, safety, quality, accessibility and community pride*" (Merritt OCP, 2011).

## VISION AND PRINCIPLES

### Vision

*Provide a system of inclusive, accessible, and diverse parks, trails, recreation and cultural opportunities, which promote a healthy and active lifestyle for residents and attract visitors.*

### Principles

- Park, recreation and cultural facilities are accessible and affordable to people of all ages, abilities and income levels.
- Efforts are focussed on individual health, family togetherness and community well-being.
- A healthy and active lifestyle is encouraged and is an integral part of daily life.
- All leisure facilities are linked through a network of greenways, walkways and trails.
- Park, trail, recreation and cultural facilities and programs attract visitors, encourage tourism and stimulate the economy.
- City infrastructure is clean, safe, affordable and energy efficient.
- Diversity, mix of cultures and community heritage are celebrated.

- The community is a partner in both the ongoing assessment and delivery of services and programs.
- Residents have pride in the community and a strong sense of belonging.
- The environment is respected, protected, enhanced and contributes to the quality of life in the community.
- Staff, volunteers, visitors and partners are valued.
- Inter-agency partnerships are encouraged.

## PARKS

Merritt's parks, established across 31.94 hectares of parkland, help the City to foster opportunities for a healthy and active lifestyle for residents and visitors. The many natural features within Merritt such as the Nicola and Coldwater Rivers, plentiful vegetation and undulating topography all contribute to beautiful and picturesque parks. The Master Plan classifies parks as City, Community, Neighbourhood Parks or Public Plazas.

Parks provide not only spaces for active recreation, but also passive recreation opportunities within neighbourhoods to allow for contemplation, access to green space and increased opportunities for informal socializing. This is important for all residents, but especially for those with limited mobility, those without inclination for strenuous physical activity, or those who work very physical jobs. In addition to organizations and user groups who rely on active parks space, others, including nature walk groups, rely on more passive space. This further highlights the importance of retaining a diversity of park types.

### Park Key Findings:

- Based off a benchmarking comparison, Merritt is well served in quantity of parkland compared to other BC communities. Merritt has **more parkland per capita** than the BC average - 4.5ha/1000 (Merritt) vs. 3.18ha/1000 residents (Provincial). In the next ten years, Merritt is still anticipated to have more parkland per capita (4.4ha/1000) than the Provincial average.
- City, community and neighbourhood park averages per capita were exceeded when compared to the Provincial average.
- The majority of residents in the north-west sector are within a 10, if not 5, minute walk of a park. School grounds further supplement the provision.
- There are no parks in the Diamond Vale or East Merritt neighbourhood, however there are two schools, whose grounds help to supplement the lack of City parks. The Diamond Vale neighbourhood is zoned as primarily residential, with a few sections zoned as service commercial and as future development. This indicates that there is future opportunity for the development of new parks.
- 74% of survey respondents believe that the number of parks is sufficient.

## **CORNERSTONE PARKS**

The planning process facilitated an inventory, analysis and the gathering of feedback on all of Merritt's parks. The following section highlights key findings associated with Merritt's three largest parks and the community square, referred to here as "cornerstone" parks.

- Central park is the City's largest park and the second most used park, with 39% of survey respondents using the park. Central park is enjoyed by residents for both active sports and passive recreation with several trails running through the park. The park has recently had new features added, such as a lacrosse box and new washroom/concession building.
- Voght Park is the oldest park in Merritt and is used by 32% of survey respondents. The primary park amenity is a sports field that is used for rugby, soccer, football and an annual dog show. A track runs around the perimeter of the field.
- Rotary Park is Merritt's most used park, used by 63% of residents. It is a community park consisting of 3.75 hectares and is used for a variety of events such as Canada Day and First Nations events.

## **Playgrounds**

- Bench, City Centre, Collettville, North Nicola, Voght Street and West Merritt are well served by playground locations.
- East Merritt (Diamond Vale) neighbourhood, which does not include any formal parkland, includes residential areas that are not within walking distance of a playground. Two school sites, help to supplement playground access to many of the residences in the Diamond Vale neighbourhood.

## **Sports Courts, Ball Diamonds and Sports Fields**

- Generally the usage of the one year old multi-use sports court/lacrosse box at Central Park has been low (also used for basketball and ball hockey), current usage as tennis courts that double as pickleball courts has significantly increased the use of this amenity.
- Residents believe that the tennis courts (by Bench) are in disrepair and would like these courts to be updated. The privately owned tennis courts are considered in better condition by residents, however still require a variety of updates and the Tennis Club has requested support from the City.
- In comparison to other communities Merritt is at a deficit when it comes to soccer fields, with only one City run soccer field at Voght Park. There are two fields at public schools. However, these are not currently maintained to a level that supports league play, and therefore are not being counted as supplementing City soccer fields.
- Stakeholders expressed that slo-pitch fields are not being maintained effectively, organizational members are currently aiding with the maintenance of fields. Effective communication between slo-pitch stakeholders and City maintenance crews is necessary.



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations around parks are made, ranging from overarching policy directions to detailed recommendations relating to park amenities. Capital cost estimates and prioritization of all recommendations is included in the body of the master plan. Key recommendations include:

### *New Parks*

- Develop two neighbourhood parks in the Future Residential Developments in Diamond Vale.
- Develop a neighbourhood park north of Central Park.
- Create a Parkland Acquisition By-Law / Policy – using the Park Acquisition Guidelines (Appendix D) to create the framework – that ensures a focus on the acquisition of “useable” parkland.

### *Overall Park System*

- Ensure a map of Merritt parks is available on the City website in the recreation brochure and in key community locations.
- Adopt a Parks Management Policy that ensures consideration of biodiversity, connectivity and habitat objectives in the establishment of horticultural palettes and patterns within parks and public spaces.
- Adopt a Parks Management Policy that considers the conservation of sensitive ecosystems and green infrastructure using the best management practices available.

### *Existing Park Improvements*

- Facilitate collaboration between community organizations and City park maintenance staff.
- Ensure that effective maintenance of ball diamonds occurs at Central Park, in order to facilitate use by both slo-pitch and fast-pitch organizations.
- Update the skatepark to include advanced skate park elements. Assess the skate park for safety and undertake upgrades to ensure a broad range of skill levels and ages are served.
- Develop additional trails in Central Park to provide improved access to Rotary Park.
- Reassess the Central Park multi-use sports box, should usage remain low and isolated to only a few user groups, examine alternative operating models and the development of business plans for each model.
- Work with fellow community stakeholders – SD58 and NVIT – to identify the best strategy to combine resources to develop two regulation sized soccer fields at Voght Park to facilitate local and tournament play. Please refer to Appendix E for a design concept of sports fields at Voght Park.

- Redevelop the playground at Rotary Park, ensure that a variety of age ranges and skill levels are provided for. Choose an appropriate design theme for this playground, consider utilizing the Indigenous culture of Merritt as an inspiration.
- Install an additional shade structure at Spirit Square. Ensure the aesthetic of the structure is in keeping with the Square's character. Consider using an Indigenous/First Nations culture theme for the shade structure.
- Install skate stoppers on benches at Spirit Square.
- Develop an interpretive signage program in Merritt's park and trails identifying locations and possible themes.

#### *Park Amenities*

- Work with Mountain Bike Association (MBA) to ensure a range of mountain biking and BMX opportunities are available, to encourage a range of ages and abilities.
- Develop a new playground in the Diamond Vale neighbourhood, ensuring that a variety of age ranges and skill levels are provided for.
- Update and repair the tennis courts at Bench.
- Continue working with Tennis Club organization to maintain Tennis Club facility.
- Develop a community garden at the proposed/future Quilchena Avenue site (former Canadian Pacific (CP) Railway land), referencing the Quilchena Avenue Site Concepts.

#### *Natural Areas*

- Initiate working with wildlife agencies and local natural history clubs to undertake the following studies on all natural areas:
  - Inventory and Analysis of natural features
  - Wildlife Assessment & Management Plan
- Update and repair the tennis courts at Bench.
- Undertake a Hazard Tree Assessment of the newly acquired natural site (near the Nicola Meadows retirement residence and off Garcia Street).
  - Remove trees as recommended.
- Encourage local natural history club to become 'stewards' of newly acquired natural area site off Garcia Street.

## TRAILS

Trails within the City of Merritt are well used and appreciated by residents. The majority of residents are satisfied with the trails and many use them at least once a week. The most used trails are those connecting Central and Rotary Park, Coldwater River Trail, as well as trails in outlying natural areas within City boundaries. Users include walkers, hikers, dog walkers, joggers, runners, mountain bikers, those with mobility aids and cyclists.

The scope of trails within this Master Plan focuses on off-road trails within City boundaries and includes reference to pathways and specific sidewalk connections in order to complete recreational loops and enhance the off-road trails system, primarily for pedestrians (walkers, dog walkers, joggers, runners of all ages, those with mobility aids) and casual recreation cyclists. Where possible, connections also consider commuting by foot or bike, but do not include reference to on-road cycling facilities.

### Trail Key Findings:

- Trails were considered a priority across all community engagement efforts.
- The telephone survey reveals that walking for exercise is the most popular recreational activity for residents within Merritt, with 24% of residents walking for exercise and leisure. 19% of residents also enjoy hiking. Others report taking part in cross-country skiing, mountain biking, on and off-road cycling and running/jogging.
- 23% of children/youth under the age of 18 enjoy hiking as a recreational activity.
- The most popular trail in Merritt is the Rotary and Central Park trail, with 56% of survey respondents using this trail. Survey respondents also listed using the following trails:
  - Coldwater River trail - 53%
  - Outlying areas within City boundaries - 52%
- Trails were identified as the recreation facilities survey respondents would most like to further develop. 39% of survey respondents would most like to develop walking trails and 35% would like to develop biking trails.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Collaborate with regional stakeholders (i.e. MBA, TNRD, hiking clubs, BC Parks) to ensure to connect City trails to trails in the Fringe Area such as the Kettle Valley Railway (KVR) Trail, and to key recreation destinations such as Monck Provincial Park and Nicola Lake.
- Develop and provide a trail map and detailed trail information on the City website and in the Leisure Guide.
- Incorporate a consistent signage system. Post a trail map at all major trailheads.
- Provide a well-marked trail connection from Voght Street to Central Park, and to Rotary Parks.
- Continue Voght Street trail to create a Coldwater River trail loop (through Diamond Vale neighbourhood).
- Develop trail starting along River Ranch Road to Nicola Avenue.

- Work with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to develop a safe pedestrian and cycling route on Voght Street to cross the Coquihalla Highway.

## **RECREATION AND CULTURE FACILITIES**

Merritt currently has 11 indoor leisure facilities. The city directly manages 3 major indoor facilities:

- Merritt Civic Centre
- Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre
- Nicola Valley Memorial Arena

### **Recreation and Culture Facilities Key Findings:**

- Merritt is providing a comparable type and amount of indoor leisure facilities when compared to other cities of similar population.
- The type and amount of indoor facilities is sufficient to meet future demand within the 10 year time horizon.
- There is significant underutilization of many of the city's indoor facilities.
- The fitness room is small but meets the needs for basic introductory fitness programs
- Lawn bowling is a specialized activity not provided in many other towns of similar size.
- The convention centre is combined with a recreation centre, This places limitations on the use of the facility as a recreation centre and often impacts recreation programming and scheduling.
- The current interim use of the closed Coquihalla Middle School gym and several classrooms will either need to become a long term arrangement or, development of a separate gym facility with multi-purpose rooms is required to meet future community demand.
- Merritt is adequately meeting current community demand for core indoor leisure facilities.
- Private health and wellness facilities, institutions and other organizations are contributing to meet the overall leisure needs of the community.
- There is community interest in a movie theatre and a performing arts venue.
- Rather than expansion, the community focus is on maintenance and upgrades of existing facilities.

### **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Maintain the status quo on the number of major civic indoor facilities (other than a possible long term agreement for use of the Coquihalla Middle School) and focus resources on facility maintenance and upgrades.



- Conduct a facility audit of all major facilities and develop a capital funding program for infrastructure improvements.
- Complete an accessibility audit of all facilities for compliance with provincial regulations, municipal by-laws and to address recommendations from the Age-Friendly Action Plan.
- Consult with user groups annually prior to capital budgeting process to determine user's requests for upgrades.
- Encourage greater use of city leisure facilities by advertising and promoting rental opportunities to community groups and local businesses.

*Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre*

- Install a UV system in the pool to improve water quality, reduce corrosion, lower operating costs and water use.
- Experiment with increasing the hours of afternoon operation and programming, decrease the annual shut-down period and monitor change in usage, costs and revenues.

*Nicola Valley Memorial Arena*

- Consider user requested improvements during audit; lights, sound system, better spectator heating, improved washrooms, safety improvements of the timekeepers bench.
- Determine feasibility of offering skate rentals for community programs or partner with other foundations to support free/low cost skate ownerships.

*Merritt Civic Centre*

- As part of a joint-use agreement, pursue a long-term lease of the Coquihalla Middle School gymnasium, upper mezzanine and several classrooms to support recreation programs. If unsuccessful, explore two possible options: Assess design and costing for a new gymnasium with several multi-purpose rooms, adjoining the aquatic centre and ice arena, or assess design and costs for covering the outdoor multipurpose courts at Central Park for year round use.

*Merritt Curling Centre*

- Continue the agreement with the Curling Club and support their efforts to repair the roof, at a short-term, low cost level and monitor club membership to ensure it stays viable for future funding support.

*Merritt Lawn Bowling Club*

- Consult with all community groups interested in jointly using the facility – lawn bowling, pickleball, croquet, cricket and city programming staff, to determine the most diversified and cost effective use of the grounds and building.
- If a suitable use agreement cannot be established with the community groups, seek expressions of interest for recreation and tourism-related businesses such as pitch and putt, mini-golf or adventure theme park with the potential to include N'Kwala Park.

## **SERVICE DELIVERY**

This section provides an assessment of the city's overall effectiveness and efficiency of its leisure service delivery through a financial review combined with an examination of its policies, procedures, approaches to leadership, partnerships and volunteers and an overview of recreation programs.

### **Financial Review Key Findings:**

- While the Recovery Rate gives an overall indication of departmental finances, there is a need for closer scrutiny of departmental revenues and expenses to determine the true costs of providing services to the community.
- The community survey indicates that overall, cost is not a barrier to participation in recreation or culture programs or the reason residents use other private facilities.
- The city's per capita expenditures on parks recreation and cultural services is lower than comparators; the recovery rate for parks, recreation and culture services is in the higher range than comparators.
- Many of the city's fees and charges rates are lower than comparators.
- The city's policy sets lower subsidies for children, youth and seniors.
- There appears to be support for increases in user fees and taxes for increased services.
- Cost is an issue for a small percentage of the population and there are requests for more free/ low cost programs.

### **Review of Policies and Procedures**

Overall, city residents appear satisfied with parks and recreation facilities and programs. The city has developed a number of key policies and procedures to guide successful operation including:

- Ice booking policy;
- Ice booking procedure;
- Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre Regulation and Rental Rates;
- Civic centre use regulation and rental rates;
- Schedule of fees and charges;
- Cultural Mapping project;
- Arts and Culture Policy;
- Parks Regulation Bylaw;
- Leisure Guide;
- Aquatic Centre Code of Conduct;
- Adopting the Canada Sport for Life physical literacy program, and
- Annual report to Council to track accomplishments.

### *Areas to Improve Service Delivery*

1. Develop a Departmental Business Plan
2. Develop a Sport Tourism Program
3. Expand Communications and Marketing

### **Leadership**

The City of Merritt presents a largely traditional approach to Leisure Service delivery in which the City assumes the principle role of service provider. This approach creates a large expectation on the City to continue to provide quality resources and services to all users, creating increased competition amongst user groups for equal support and polarization when funds are limited. It also creates a large dependency on the city, removing the incentives for use groups to become independent and seek out their own solutions to meet their recreational needs.

Many Cities are moving away from this approach driven by two forces; (1) the financial need to reduce operating costs and, (2) recognition that joint-partnerships coupled with volunteer efforts engage the community and lead to an overall more efficient, effective and diverse service delivery. Working together helps to build community capacity and skills, broadens leadership in the community, taps into new expertise creates new connections with people and leverages resources not funded by taxpayers.

In this more contemporary **Community Development Model**, the city must assess the needs of the community, determine the core services it must provide and then help guide the community towards filling the gap to meet those broader objectives.

### **Recreation Programming**

Merritt offers a variety of recreation programs delivered collectively by the City, its community partners, non-profit agencies, the school district and private businesses. The City directly delivers swimming lessons and approximately 30 recreation classes through contract instructors, and has partnered with Pacific Sport to assist and promote the development of sports in the region.

Providing effective programming is an ongoing process of assessing changing community needs, removing barriers, motivating participation with varied forms of communication. Merritt certainly has sufficient facilities, a diversity of community groups and an attractive outdoor environment for successful programming.

While overall public satisfaction levels with programming are 66%, this breaks down to 23% Very Satisfied and 43% Somewhat Satisfied, suggesting room for improvement. The community is looking for more programs for youth, an expansion of programming opportunities and increased information.

## **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### *Financial Review*

- Adopt a Capital Reserves Funding Policy for ongoing major improvements to aging infrastructure, and for eventual facility replacement.
- Calculate the true break-even rate using actual revenues and rental hours, for both parks and facilities to determine more accurately the rental rates needed to capture appropriate revenues and reflect the desired level of subsidy.
- Restructure the subsidy levels with higher subsidy rates to seniors, children and youth.
- Increase the fee schedule for non-resident tournaments.
- Explore options for all advertising, sponsorship and naming right opportunities for facilities and sports fields.
- Annually set cost recovery performance standards for the department.
- Explore the role and opportunities for the city's parks and facilities to become stronger economic drivers in the community.

### *Review of Policies and Procedures*

- Annually set priorities, goals and objectives for meeting the needs of the community and ensure that they are in-line with staff resources, funding and community support. Track performance and report the results at year end to Council.
- Develop a Departmental Business Plan that describes the purpose, operational structure goals, expected outcomes and community benefits of providing parks and recreation services. Monitor progress and report to Council annually.
- Develop a sport tourism strategy, largely around field sports and mountain biking.
- Continue to explore new ways of advertising programs and events including weekly newspaper articles and weekly radio information updates on programs and events.

### *Leadership*

- Continue to move towards the Community Development Model.
- Advertise and promote the desire for new business opportunities, joint ventures and partnerships with private enterprise.
- Develop Terms of Reference for, and establish a Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee.
  - Annually track the progress of the recommendations in this plan with the committee and report the results to Council.

### *Recreation Programming*

- Work with community partners to expand programming for teens.
- Offer more programs for seniors.



- Advertise free/low cost community-wide programs in the leisure guide.
- Explore more drop-in and flexible scheduling for programs particularly for adults.
- Partner with the Lower Nicola Indian Band to offer programs that increase cultural awareness and appreciation.
- Ensure programs are offered with the theme of nature appreciation to help people connect with nature.
- Work with Arts and Culture groups to expand programming.

*-End of Executive Summary-*

## INTRODUCTION

Home to approximately 7,200 residents, the City of Merritt is situated at the confluence of the Nicola and Coldwater rivers and in the heart of the picturesque Nicola Valley. Located approximately forty-five minutes south of Kamloops, an hour and a half north-west of Kelowna and about three hours away from Vancouver, Merritt is located in the Thompson Okanagan Region in south-central British Columbia.

Historically, community economic development in the area was based on ranching, mining and forestry. Today, the main economic development activities within Merritt also include transportation and tourism. The City of Merritt is branded as the Country Music Capital of Canada and is home to annual music festivals, which draw large crowds from around the Province.

The City of Merritt is comprised of a diverse mix of urban and rural land uses; there is strong support to retain the open space, rural character and unique heritage features of the region. Merritt is a vibrant small community, and a healthy and active place to live. It is located in a semi-arid desert, with a climate that provides a significant amount of annual sunshine. Merritt offers a large variety of entertainment and tourism opportunities, including sports and outdoor recreation opportunities to its residents and visitors.

Merritt has numerous parks and open spaces including passive parks, sports fields, nature parks and green belts, which provide opportunities for active and passive recreation and leisure activities. There is also a thriving culture and arts sector championed by groups such as the Nicola Valley Museum and Archives Association and the Nicola Valley Community Arts Council. The City is a recreation hub for Lower Nicola – Electoral Area N of the Regional District providing opportunities for formal and informal programming at the Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre, the Nicola Valley Memorial Arena and Merritt Civic Centre.

The City's Official Community Plan (OCP) sets some effective goals for parks, recreation, trails and culture. While the City has the foundation of a robust parks and recreation system, developing better linkages between parks, expanding the trail system and determining the need for upgrades to cultural and arts facilities are key opportunities for the new Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan. Building on these and other items in the OCP, the Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan identifies priorities from a long term sustainability perspective.

The Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan will provide strategic direction to the City regarding park use, facilities and services over the next five to ten years. Developed collaboratively through ongoing consultation with City Staff, Council, stakeholders and the public, the Master Plan sets clear directives to guide policy development and decision making. The Master Plan also contributes to Merritt's vision of being a great place to live *"Merritt is seen by its residents as a great place to live from all perspectives – employment, housing community services, natural amenities, safety, quality, accessibility and community pride"* (Merritt OCP, 2011).



This Master Plan takes Merritt's unique character into consideration, utilizing planning lenses that ensure the recommendations promote healthy and sustainable living for all residents. This 10-year planning document includes:

- An inventory of City parks, trails, recreation and cultural facilities.
- An overview of best practices and trends.
- Identification of key issues, needs, opportunities, and constraints.
- High level review of arts and facility needs.
- Recommendations for improvements and additions to parks, trails and facilities.
- Recommendations for more efficient use of existing parks.
- An implementation and phasing plan.

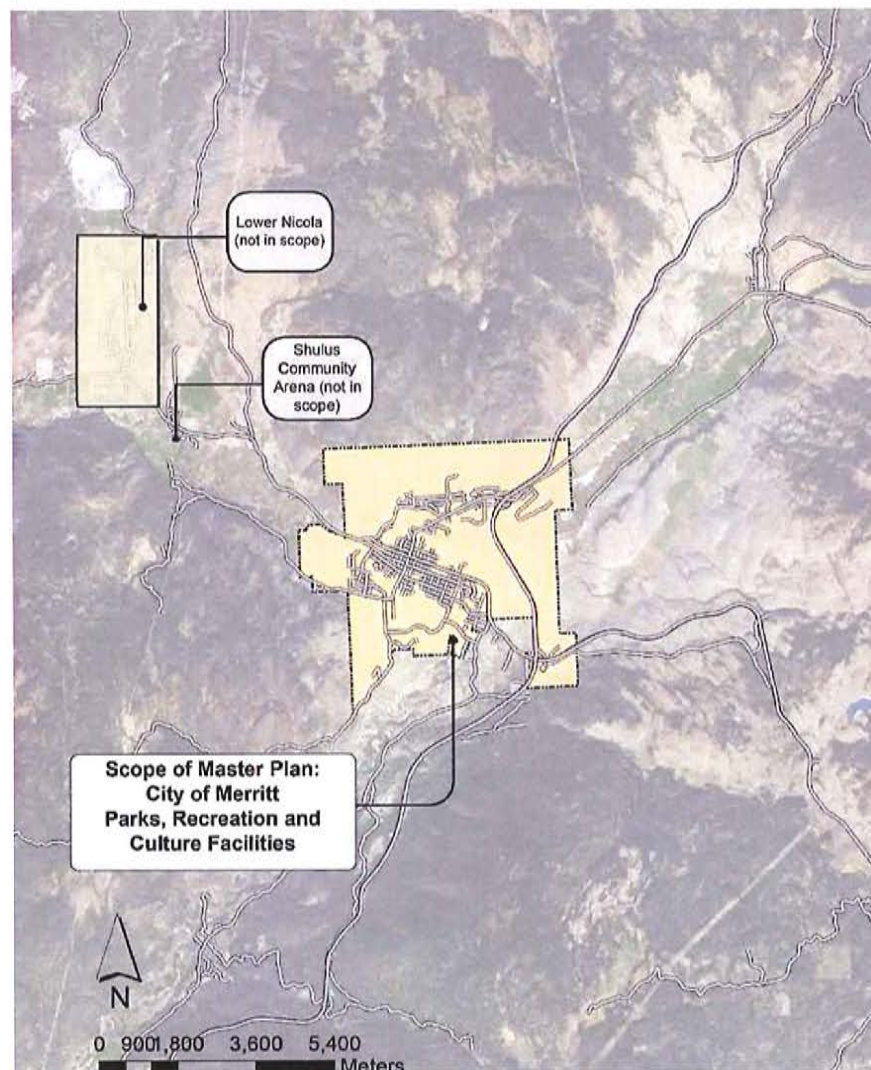


Figure 1: Context Map



## THE PURPOSE

In 1998, City Council adopted the Parks and Recreation Resource Document. This plan outlined priorities for parks, trails and the supply of recreation facilities. Although some of these recommendations were implemented, many were not. Eighteen years later, the City has determined that the 1998 Resource Document's relevance is diminishing, requiring an updated Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan to provide direction for the next ten years, as well as providing an overview of current parks, recreation, trail and culture facilities.

## THE PROCESS

The Master Plan was completed in 6 phases:

- The first entailed the compilation and analysis of relevant reports and data.
- Spatial data was used in the second phase to assess the distribution and connectivity of the parks and to assemble an inventory of each park.
- The third phase focused on preliminary engagement through consultation with Council, Staff, stakeholder groups and the general public through a series of in person meetings, a public open house event, and a statistically valid phone and online survey (see Appendices A & B).
- Following the development of a Draft Master Plan in Phase 4, a subsequent open house was held to enable the public to comment on the draft recommendations (see Appendix C).

Following revisions based off Staff, stakeholder and public feedback, the Final Master Plan was presented to City Council.

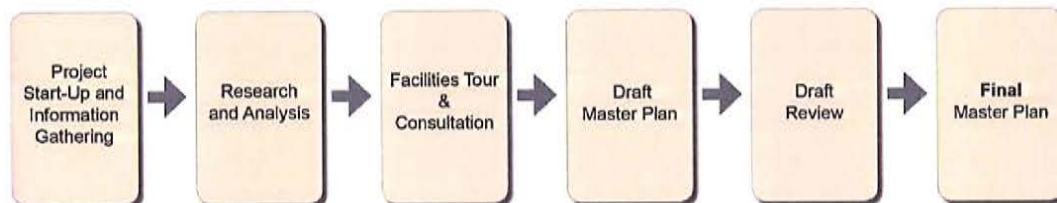


Figure 2: Project Process



## COMMUNITY PROFILE

The following section outlines the current demographics in Merritt and provides a synopsis of residents. According to Statistics Canada (2011), Merritt's population has remained static between 2006 and 2011, with a population of 7,113 in 2011<sup>1</sup>. The following graph shows a distribution by age group. The age distribution of Merritt residents is similar to BC averages. Key findings include:

- Seniors (over 65) comprise 19% of the population, versus 16% provincially.
- Children and youth comprise 25% of the population, versus 22% provincially.
- Adults between 20 and 40 comprise of only 20%, versus 26% provincially.
- The City's median age of 43.9 is comparable to BC's median age of 41.9.

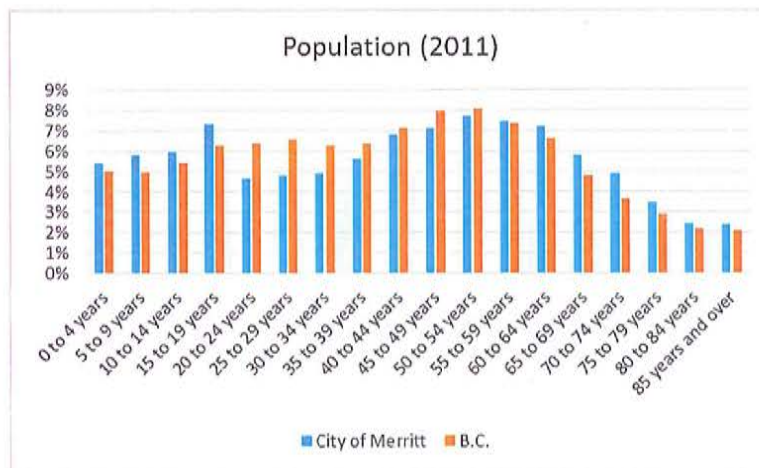


Figure 3: Demographic Profile (Information Source: Statistics Canada (2011))

The current projected growth rate for the City of Merritt is 1.1%, reflecting the City's belief that community economic development initiatives would result in future population growth. The OCP expressed a Council desire to increase Merritt's population to 15,000. Historically, community economic development in the area was based on ranching, mining and forestry. Today, the main economic development activities in Merritt also include transportation and tourism.

<sup>1</sup> Merritt's 2006 population count of 6,998 was initially misreported. The revised 2006 population was increased to 7,170.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The development of the Master Plan included direction from City Council and ongoing consultation with City Staff. The consulting team also met with stakeholder groups and the general public. This information was used to inform and support the key findings, analysis and recommendations.

### Council

On October 28, the consultants hosted a workshop with City Council. Identified priorities included:

- An understanding of the parks and recreation system and how the public uses it: a snapshot with which to compare in the future.
- A focus on facilities that are accessible and affordable to people of all ages and income levels.
- Renewing park, trail, recreation and cultural facilities to attract visitors and encourage tourism.
- Inexpensive enhancements to modernize the system and increase activity levels in the community, year round.
- Pragmatic spending and investment in tune with community needs.



### Staff

Staff were engaged throughout the development of the plan through the provision of information, an interactive workshop and ongoing consultation through the development of the Master Plan.

### Stakeholder Groups

Approximately 25 stakeholder organizations were invited to attend group interviews. Information was summarized and used to help inform the recommendations. A list of invited stakeholder groups is found in Appendix B.

Stakeholders were also invited to attend a presentation to review and comment on the draft in order to provide feedback for consideration in the finalization of the Master Plan.

### Public Open Houses

Two open houses which engaged the general public were hosted throughout the course of Master Plan development. These open houses provided the opportunity for residents to collaborate on and contribute to the Master Plan content. The first open house, on October 29, 2015, provided an

engagement opportunity for residents to provide initial input. The second open house, on May 18, 2016, provided residents with the possibility to comment on preliminary recommendations and master plan concept options.

### **Statistically Valid Phone Survey**

In collaboration with Mustel Group Market Research, we conducted a statistically valid phone survey to better understand community parks, recreation and cultural facility use, needs and desires. A total of 200 interviews were conducted by telephone with a random selection of adults, 18 years of age or over. The margin of error on the sample is  $\pm 6.9\%$  at the 95% confidence level. This indicates the statistical reliability of the survey and that this survey is an accurate illustration of community usage habits and opinions as they relate to parks, recreation and culture facilities. Results have been referenced and incorporated in the key findings and recommendations throughout the Master Plan.

Highlights and full results from the survey are included in Appendix A.



## TRENDS AND A RECREATION FRAMEWORK

In May, 2015, the British Columbia Association of Parks and Recreation approved *A Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015: Pathways to Wellbeing*, a joint initiative of the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association.

The Framework notes that recreation and society have changed substantially over the past 50 years. While recreation was historically viewed as a public good, focusing on outreach to vulnerable people within a community, there has been a shift towards *an individual, facility focused, user pay model*. This shift, combined with a need to reaffirm historical values while meeting needs arising from rapid technological changes, economic, environmental, demographic and social changes, has resulted in a new shared definition of recreation:

*Spending on recreation creates jobs, fosters tourism, and makes communities more attractive places in which to live, learn, work, play and visit. "Upstream" investments in recreation can lead to improvements in individual and community wellbeing, which helps to reduce costs in health care, social services and justice. (ISRC & CPRA, 2015)*

*Recreation is the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing.*

This encourages an approach which allows recreation to reaffirm historic values, while simultaneously adopting new ways of working that meet emerging needs. Emphasizing this revitalization is a community development approach that empowers people and communities to work together to enhance well-being. Building on past research and agency collaboration, the Framework highlights a number of interrelated challenges and current trends for consideration across Canadian communities, as shown below.

### Demographic Changes

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Canadian communities are faced with an increase in older adults and decline in children. This, coupled with an increase in cultural diversity, decreased access to nature and decreased place making due to rapid urbanization all impact the face of recreation. Rural communities are facing increasing pressure due to limited funds and infrastructure, threats to the environment and traditional ways of life, limited numbers of volunteers to lead, and challenges in transportation and distance.

### Challenges to Health

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Increased sedentary living and risk factors for disease (obesity, chronic diseases) and increased mental health concerns are impacting communities

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### **Economic Inequities**

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Family after tax income inequality rose by 41% between 1995 and 2011, with economic gains going primarily to higher income families. Those with lower incomes have fewer opportunities for recreation.

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### **Social Challenges**

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Changes associated with increasing inequities, unemployment, use of social media instead of face-to-face interaction and loss of traditional supports have compounded feelings of isolation for many, has impacted civic involvement, social connectedness, engagement and social cohesion.

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### **New and Emerging Technologies**

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The parks and recreation field is challenged to keep up with changing technologies, which offer opportunities for innovation, communication, improved efficiency, and enhanced connections, especially in young people. This same technology is resulting in greater time spent in sedentary pursuits, instead of active and unstructured play.

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### **Infrastructure Deficit**

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Most communities in Canada face infrastructure deficits. These include the need for additional walking and cycling routes, and green spaces, as well as the need to upgrade existing facilities to make them more functional and energy efficient. Maintenance is an ongoing concern. Strengthening this infrastructure is key to enhancing community health, vitality and the economies of local communities.

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### **Threats to the Natural Environment**

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Growing threats, including extreme weather, decreasing biodiversity and new destructive species such as mountain pine beetle have made the role of environmental stewardship increasingly important to the recreation field.

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The Framework sets 5 priority goals, reflecting these national trends and challenges.



Figure 4: A Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015: Pathways to Wellbeing

The 'made for Merritt' recommendations in this Master Plan respond to these high level goals and priorities.

## VISION AND PRINCIPLES

The following vision and principles, developed with City Council, set the stage for the Master Plan by establishing a framework to provide a clear set of high-level goals that will be the touchstone for evaluation of departmental plans and priorities in the coming years.

### Vision

*Provide a system of inclusive, accessible, and diverse parks, trails, recreation and cultural opportunities, which promote a healthy and active lifestyle for residents and attract visitors.*

### Principles

- Park, recreation and cultural facilities are accessible and affordable to people of all ages, abilities and income levels.
- Efforts are focused on individual health, family togetherness and community well-being.
- A healthy and active lifestyle is encouraged and is an integral part of daily life.
- All leisure facilities are linked through a network of greenways, walkways and trails.
- Park, trail, recreation and cultural facilities and programs attract visitors, encourage tourism and stimulate the economy.
- City infrastructure is clean, safe, affordable and energy efficient.
- Diversity, mix of cultures and community heritage are celebrated.
- The community is a partner in both the ongoing assessment and delivery of services and programs.
- Residents have pride in the community and a strong sense of belonging.
- The environment is respected, protected, enhanced and contributes to the quality of life in the community.
- Staff, volunteers, visitors and partners are valued.
- Inter-agency partnerships are encouraged.



# PARKS

## PARK SYSTEM

Merritt's parks, established across 31.94 hectares of parkland, help the City to foster opportunities for a healthy and active lifestyle for residents and visitors. The many natural features within Merritt such as the Nicola and Coldwater Rivers, plentiful vegetation and undulating topography all contribute to beautiful and picturesque parks. Merritt's parks also provide a variety of amenities, this section will discuss these in detail.

Parks provide not only spaces for active recreation, but also passive recreation opportunities within neighbourhoods to allow for contemplation, access to green space and increased opportunities for informal socializing. This is important for all residents, but especially for those with limited mobility, those without inclination for strenuous physical activity, or those who work very physical jobs. In addition to organizations and user groups who rely on active parks space, others, including nature walk groups, rely on more passive space. This further highlights the importance of retaining a diversity of park types.



### Park Classification

The following table provides a classification system for the City's municipal parkland. Beyond City boundaries, additional parkland, including Provincial Parks and Crown Land, offer further access to nature and outdoor recreation opportunities.



Table 1: Parkland Classification System

Category	Purpose	Typical Size	Typical Amenities
City Parks	Destination parks	Typically greater than 12 hectares.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Special event sites for fairs, festivals.</li> <li>▪ Gardens.</li> <li>▪ Natural features /natural areas.</li> <li>▪ Outdoor sports facilities.</li> <li>▪ Trails.</li> </ul>
Community Parks	Provide opportunities at the community or multi-neighbourhood level for play and recreation.	<p>Typically greater than 2 hectares.</p> <p>In some cases, they may be smaller than 2 hectares but provide a destination amenity, i.e. skateboard park.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Open space area.</li> <li>▪ Large picnic and shade shelters.</li> <li>▪ Washrooms.</li> <li>▪ Large scale play areas.</li> <li>▪ Sports amenities i.e. tennis courts, skateboard park.</li> </ul>
Neighbourhood Parks	Provide small play and gathering spaces, ideally within a maximum 10 minute walk from each residence.	Typically 0.5 – 4 hectares.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Playground or informal open space.</li> <li>▪ Seating.</li> </ul>
Public Plazas	Public space, often urban, which provides space for informal gathering and community events. Often contain a combination of hardscape and softscape design elements.	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Seating.</li> <li>▪ Shade structures.</li> <li>▪ Trees.</li> <li>▪ Gardens.</li> <li>▪ Public Art.</li> <li>▪ Performance /Community Event Area.</li> <li>▪ Water Feature.</li> </ul>

<b>Natural Areas</b>	Un-programmed open spaces with a variety of flora and fauna. May also contain environmentally significant features.	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Trees.</li> <li>▪ Vegetation.</li> <li>▪ Riparian areas.</li> <li>▪ Trails.</li> <li>▪ Wildlife.</li> </ul>
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## PARKLAND ADEQUACY

### Provision of Parks

Merritt's parkland supply was compared to other similarly sized BC communities<sup>2</sup>. Although useful in terms of a rough comparison, it should be noted that each community has different needs for parkland, depending on demographics, history of recreation, current participation rates and interest in various sports and activities. The following table illustrates the amount of parkland per capita at present, and as projected for the future, assuming no new parkland is acquired.

Table 2: Current and projected parkland per capita.

Year	Population	Basis of Parkland	Parkland (ha)	Ha of Parkland per 1000 residents
2016	7,113	2015 Inventory	31.94	4.49
2026	7,241	2015 Inventory	31.94	4.41

The above parkland quantities do not include land for indoor recreation facilities, such as the arena, aquatic centre, civic centre and curling rink. The population estimates used here are extrapolated from the 2011 Census data and projections, included in the Context Chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Based on 2014 data from CivicInfo BC, which conducts annual municipal surveys. It should be noted that this data has not been verified in the field and is provided only for municipalities that responded to the survey request.

*Table 3: Comparison of hectares of park space in Merritt to Provincial Average. Note that Merritt' parks are not classified purely on park size; this does not include school grounds.*

Hectares of park space per 1000 residents	Provincial Average	City of Merritt
City Park (typ. >12 ha)	1.55	2.2
Community Park (typ. 4-12 ha)	.98	1.5
Neighbourhood Park/Playlots (typ. 0-4 ha)	.71	.83
Total Parks	3.18	4.5





## Spatial Analysis

The distribution of municipal parkland is nearly as important as the quantity of parkland when it comes to providing equal access to open space, daily opportunities for outdoor activities, enhancing the character of the community, and contributing to quality of life through positive place making. One of the most commonly used metrics for assessing park distribution and possible barriers to park use is to assess the City's walkability in terms of resident proximity to park space. For the purposes of this analysis, a 10 minute walking distance was set at 800 meters—as a radius from parkland or “as the crow flies<sup>3</sup>.” The type and quality of the park was not included in this assessment, nor was the presence of safe pedestrian or cycling routes. The park service areas are shown in Figure 5.

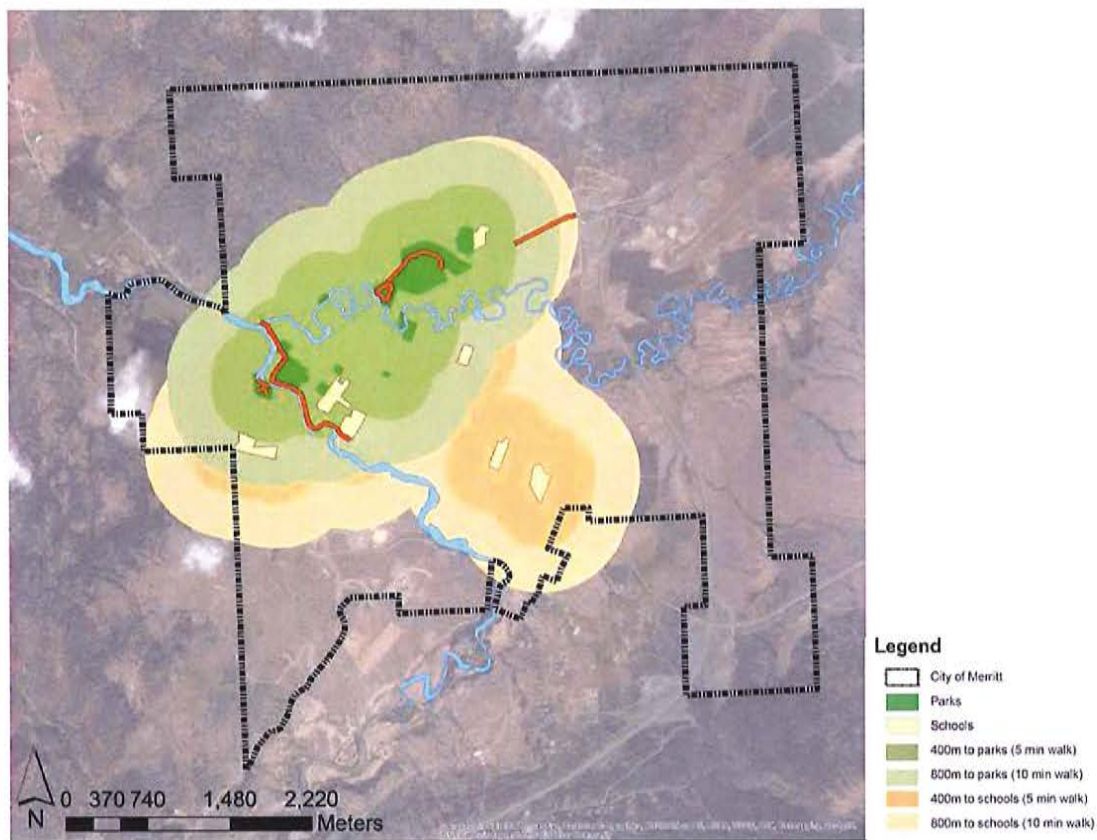


Figure 5: Park Service Areas and Walkability

<sup>3</sup> i.e. a straight line, not considering road and trail networks. More rural areas are often assessed with a ten minute driving distance to park space.

Key Findings:

- Based off a benchmarking comparison, Merritt is well served in quantity of parkland compared to other BC communities. Merritt has **more parkland per capita** than the BC average - 4.5ha/1000 (Merritt) vs. 3.18ha/1000 residents (Provincial). In the next ten years, Merritt is still anticipated to have more parkland per capita (4.4ha/1000) than the Provincial average.
- City, community and neighbourhood park averages per capita were exceeded when compared to the Provincial average.
- The majority of residents in the north-west sector are within a 10, if not 5, minute walk of a park. School grounds further supplement the provision.
- There are no parks in the Diamond Vale or East Merritt neighbourhood, however there are two schools, whose grounds help to supplement the lack of City parks. The Diamond Vale neighbourhood is zoned as primarily residential, with a few sections zoned as service commercial and as future development. This indicates that there is future opportunity for the development of new parks.
- 74% of survey respondents believe that the number of parks is sufficient.

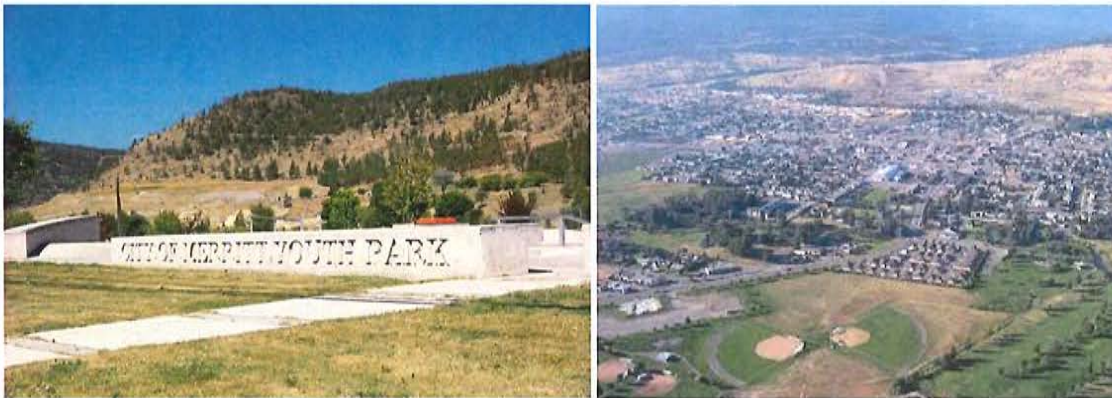
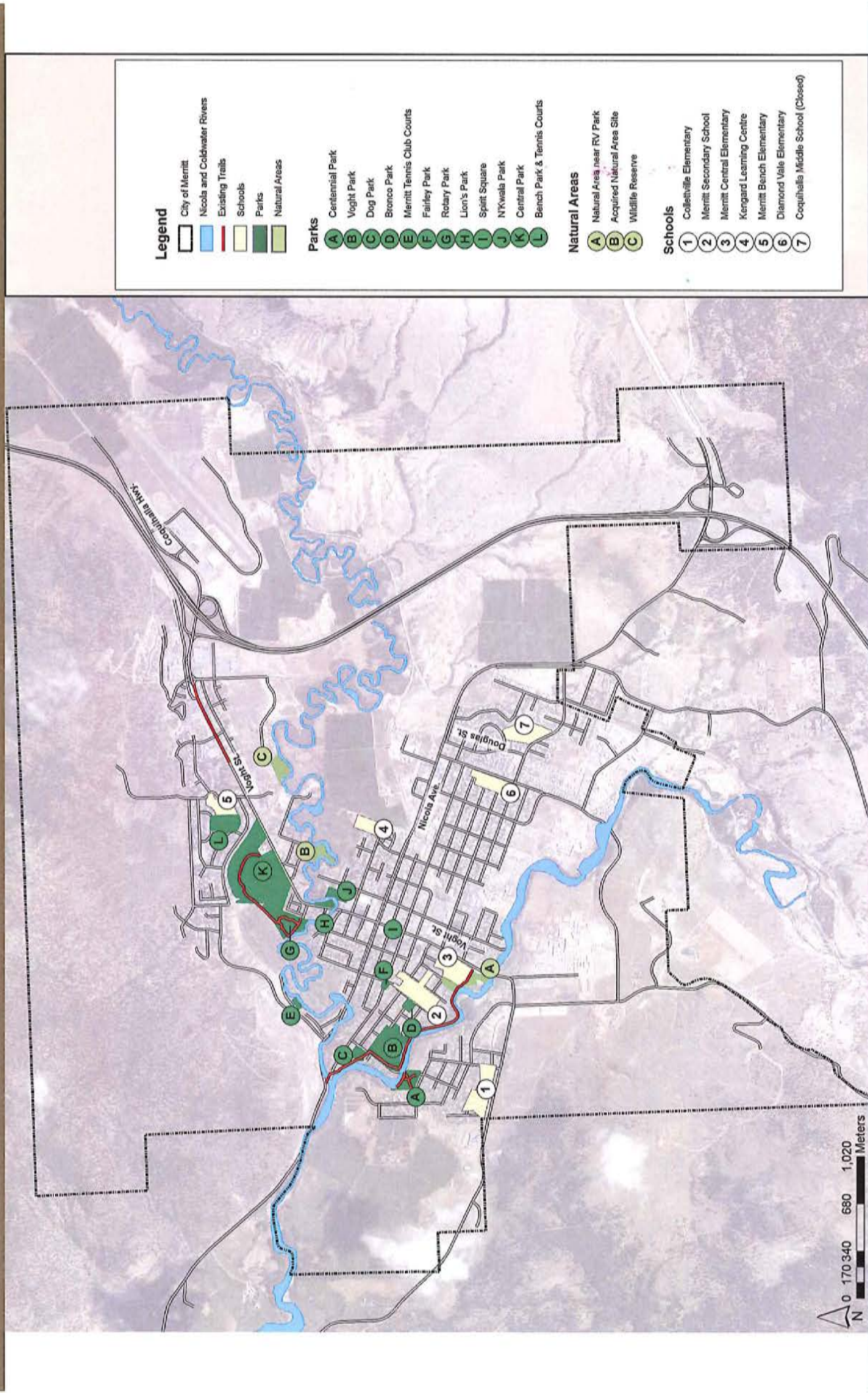




FIGURE 6: EXISTING PARKS



## Park Acquisition

After a thorough review of future parkland requirements and a land use analysis, several areas have been identified as potential future parks. These are already owned by the City or recommended for future parkland acquisition in the Official Community Plan (OCP).

Those most suitable for developed parkland in the next ten years are reviewed below. Other sites are discussed in the Natural Areas section.

*Table 4: Proposed Park Acquisition*

Name	Future Purpose
<b>Vacant Land North of Central Park</b>	Neighbourhood Park
<b>Future Residential Development (1) in Diamond Vale</b>	Neighbourhood Park
<b>Future Residential Development (2) in Diamond Vale</b>	Neighbourhood Park
<b>Quilchena Avenue Site</b>	Neighbourhood Park

Acquisition of additional parkland, especially in the Diamond Vale (East Merritt) neighbourhood, would be beneficial to residents. A series of acquisition guidelines are included in Appendix D, in order to assist the City, land owners and developers in determining appropriate land for transfer and development through Development Cost Charges (DCCs).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The table below outlines overall park system and new park related recommendations, by category. Cost estimates are high level only, and do not include cost estimates for low cost items, or initiatives solely covered with staff time.

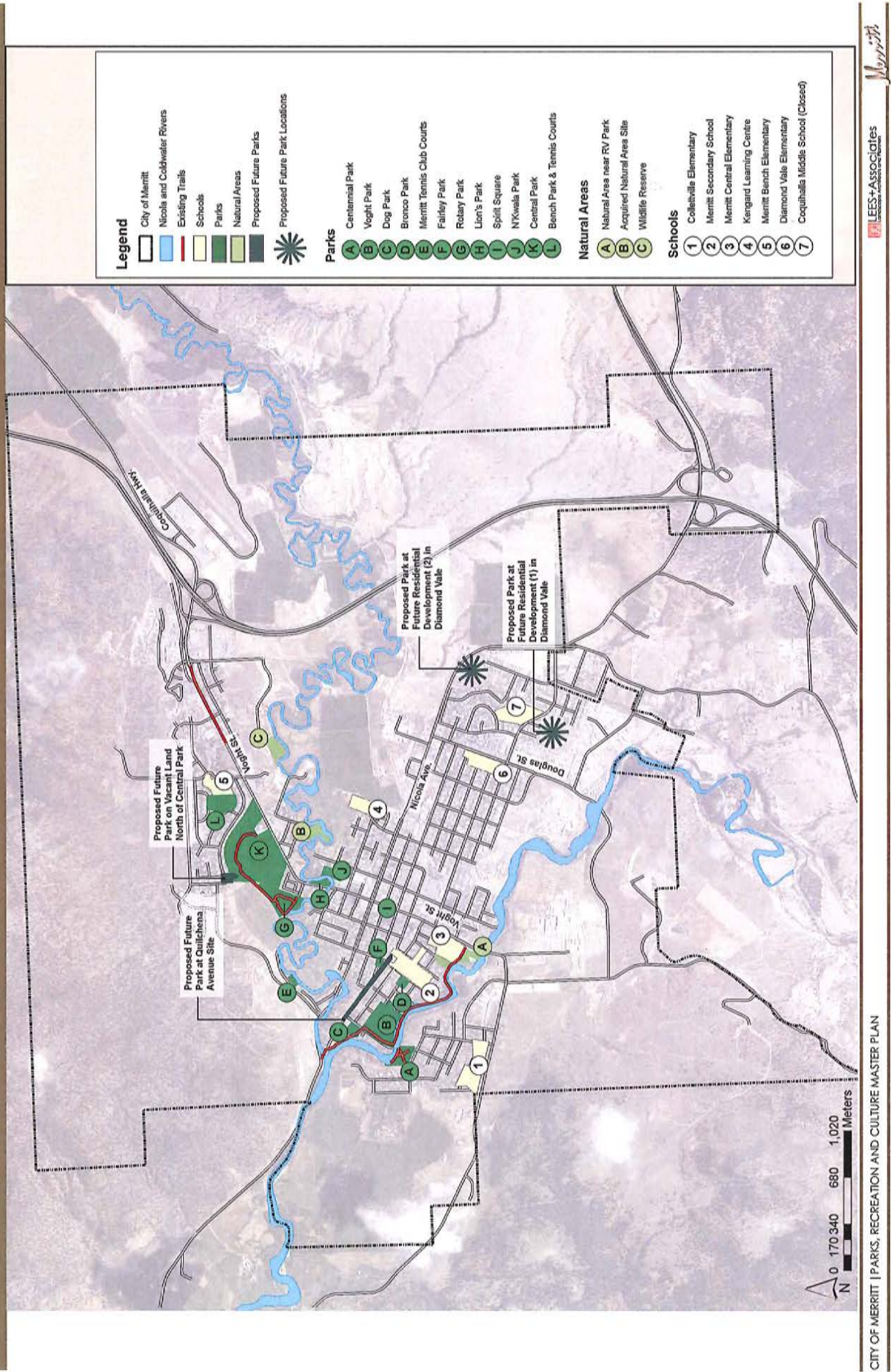
Recommendations are shown as a 1 – 3 timeframe, and rated as a High, Medium or Low importance or are indicated as "ongoing policy" measures.



Timeframe			
1 = short term (1-3 years) 2 = medium term (3-7 years) 3 = long term (7+ plus years)			
Recommendations	Importance	Timeframe (1-3)	Resources
<b>New Parks</b>			
1. Develop two neighbourhood parks in the Future Residential Developments in Diamond Vale. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure one park has a new playground for a variety of age ranges and skill levels.</li> <li>- Incorporate an off-leash dog area in one park.</li> </ul>	Medium	3	\$200,000 capital
2. Develop a neighbourhood park north of Central Park. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure this park includes passive park amenities such as benches, a gazebo/shade structure, a loop trail, trees etc.</li> </ul>	Medium	2	\$100,000 capital
3. Develop a neighbourhood park on the Quilchena Avenue Site with consideration to already developed planning concepts for the site.	Medium	1 - 2	\$100,000 capital
4. Create a Parkland Acquisition By-Law / Policy – using the Park Acquisition Guidelines (Appendix D) to create the framework – that ensures a focus on the acquisition of “useable” parkland.	High	1	Staff or Consultant Time



FIGURE 7: APPROXIMATE LOCATIONS OF PROPOSED PARKS



## EXISTING PARKS

Utilizing the parkland categories described earlier, the City's existing parkland is inventoried below. This section provides a detailed assessment of key parks, as well as amenities, culture and heritage in parks.

Table 5: Existing Parkland Classification System and Inventory

Classification	Park Name	Amenities	Area (ha)	Total Hectares
City Parks	Central Park	Multi-use sports box (with two basketball courts), pickleball, ball diamonds, playground, washrooms, storage room, concessions, skateboard park, trails, sand volleyball court, bike park, gazebo	15.52	15.52
Community Parks	Voght Park	Sports field, running track, washrooms	5.92	10.52
	Rotary Park	Water park, playground, band shell (shelter), trails and open space area, washrooms, picnic tables	3.75	
	Merritt Tennis Club Courts (1)	Tennis courts, picnic tables, benches, covered shelter and storage building	0.24	
	Dog Park	Green space area, picnic tables, water fountain for humans and dogs	0.61	
Neighbourhood Parks	Bench Tennis Courts and Park (2)	Tennis courts/pickleball courts, multi-use asphalt pad, trail	2.25	5.90
	Centennial Park	Benches, trails, open space	1.82	



	Fairley Park	Playground, benches, open space area	0.15	
	Bronco Park	Open space area, informal ball diamond	0.38	
	N'Kwala Park	Open space area, walking bridge access to Lions Park, adjacent to Nicola River,	0.81	
	Lions Park	Picnic tables, washrooms, walking bridge access to N'Kwala Park, adjacent to Nicola River	0.45	
Public Plazas	Spirit Square	Benches, hardscape plaza, planting beds, mural, shade structure	0.05	0.05
Natural Areas	Wildlife Reserve	Vegetation, riparian area, wildlife	1.53	7.21
	Natural Area near RV Park	Trees, open space area	1.95	
	Acquired Natural Area Site (near Nicola Meadows retirement residence)	Trees, grassland, riparian area, wildlife	1.18	

The City's park inventory meets the needs of a variety of users.

**Key Findings:**

- Responses from the telephone survey indicate that 89% of residents believe that parks are being sufficiently maintained.
- 78% of residents believe that parks are physically accessible to those with mobility issues.
- Rotary, Central and Voght Parks are the most frequently used.
- 27% survey respondents have indicated that park facilities are lacking or needing improvement in the following areas: better playground equipment, washrooms, better lighting, usage in the winter, more shade, dog parks, maintenance, skate parks and concession stands.

## CORNERSTONE PARKS

The planning process facilitated an inventory, analysis and the gathering of feedback on all of Merritt's parks. The following section highlights key findings associated with Merritt's three largest parks and the community square, referred to here as "cornerstone" parks. Detailed park inventories are found in *Table 4: Existing Parkland Classification System and Inventory*.

### Central Park

Central park is the City's largest park and the second most used park, with 39% of survey respondents using the park. Central park is enjoyed by residents for both active sports and passive recreation with several trails running through the park. The park has recently had new features added, such as a multi-use sports box and new washroom/concession building.



Figure 8: Central Park

#### Key Findings:

- 63% of survey respondents report using the ball diamonds, suggesting a high level of use. Key users include the Merritt Mixed Slo-Pitch and the Minor League Fast Pitch organizations.
- The current maintenance of the ball diamonds is not suitable for both slo-pitch and fast-pitch teams. Improved maintenance of ball diamonds is desired by both stakeholders and survey respondents.
- The skateboard park is well used year round. Primary users are children/youth aged 6 and up. It is considered more suitable for entry level skateboarders and more challenging park elements would benefit advanced users.
- The playground is in good condition and well used by residents.
- The park contains both formal and informal trails, which highlight desired trail connections within Central Park.



### Voght Park

Voght Park is the oldest park in Merritt and is used by 32% of survey respondents. The primary park amenity is a sports field that is used for rugby, soccer, football and an annual dog show. A track runs around the perimeter of the field.

#### Key Findings:

- The oval shaped sports field is not regulation size and is not suitable for hosting tournaments.
- The Merritt Youth Soccer Association is a key user group.
- The sports field works well for younger children. However, not older children and youth.
- Improved maintenance of the sports field is required.
- The track around the sports field requires updating or removal.
- Washroom building is in good condition.
- Concession building is aging and in need of upgrades.
- Residents also use the park for passive purposes, as the Coldwater River trail runs through the park.
- Overall, the park is underutilized.



Figure 9: Voght Park

### Rotary Park

Rotary Park is Merritt's most used park, used by 63% of residents. It is a community park consisting of 3.75 hectares and is used for a variety of events such as Canada Day and First Nations events.



Figure 10: Rotary Park

#### Key Findings:

- The park contains Merritt's most frequently used playground, with 73% of survey respondents utilizing the playground. It is outdated and in need of upgrades. It has been inspected and deemed safe for current use.
- The water park will require updating in the near future. Although the rubberized surface is in good condition, water feature elements require updating.
- The amenity washroom building in the park requires updating.



### Spirit Square

Spirit Square is centrally located within the downtown and consists of a hardscape surface, formal landscaping and seating. The Square provides a passive space for residents, and includes a shade structure.

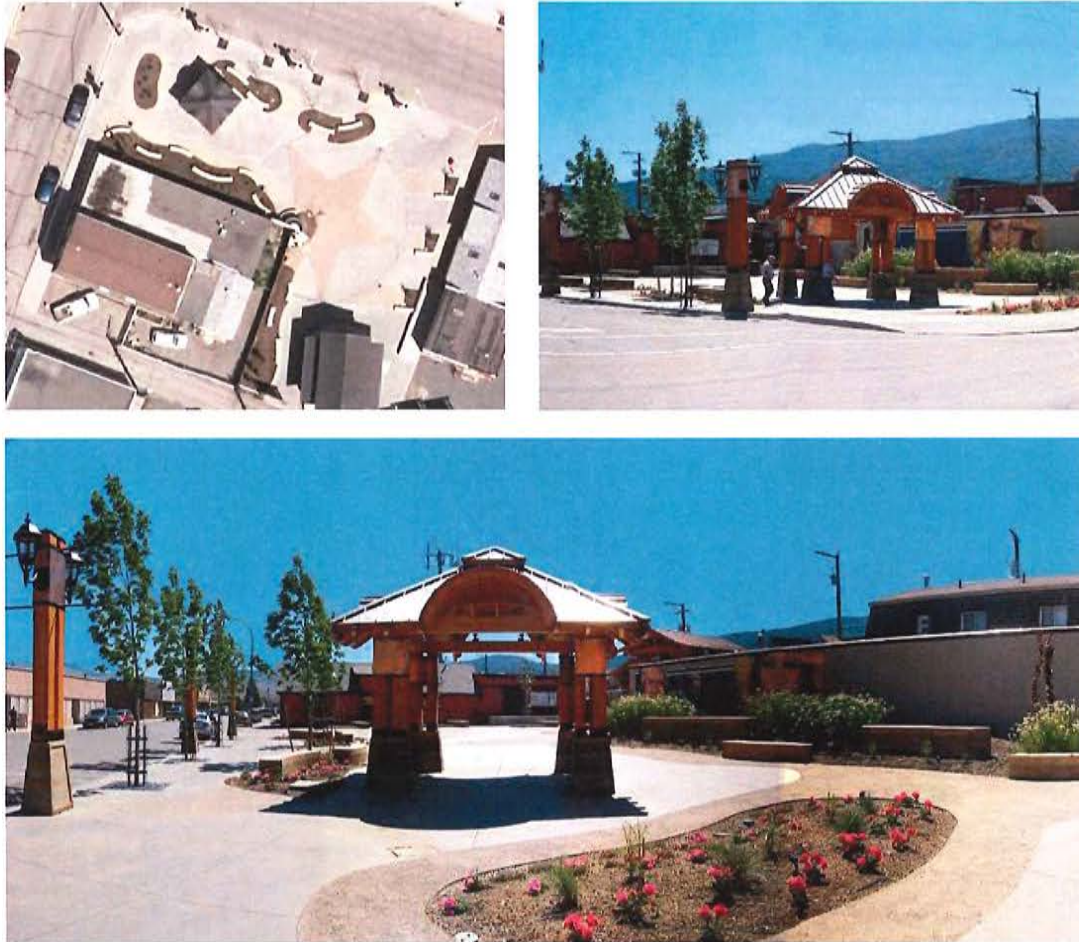


Figure 11: Spirit Square

#### Key Findings:

- The Square receives a large amount of sun in summer months and is uncomfortable to use on days with higher temperatures. The single shade structure limits the Square's summer use.
- There is significant use of the Square by skateboarders. Spirit Square was not designed for skateboarding and as a result this activity causes damage to the amenities in this space.

## CULTURE AND HERITAGE IN PARKS

Merritt's parks and open spaces provide an opportunity to showcase the rich local cultural and natural history of the City through the use of interpretive signage, improved landscaping to reflect the "small town and rural" character of Merritt and by using locally-sourced materials (i.e. wood from local forests). Merritt's significant characteristics include a rich First Nations history, a background in ranching and agriculture, rodeo events, and a country music tradition. These historic and cultural characteristics coupled with significant natural features, such as an arid desert landscape, two rivers, and an undulating topography with many surrounding mountains, make for a unique community which has a lot to offer both residents and visitors.



Interpretive signage in parks and along trails can help to educate, inspire and interest individuals. It could also have additional co-benefits such as improved community economic development through an increased number of visitors utilizing trails, a healthier and more active population, and an increased interest in environmental stewardship.



## PARK AMENITIES

Merritt's park and amenity supply was compared to other similarly sized BC communities<sup>4</sup>. Although useful in terms of a rough comparison, it should be noted that each community has different needs for park amenities, depending on participation rates and interest in various sports and activities. Along with the Master Plan engagement process, trends and best practices, these metrics informed the key findings and recommendations outlined further in the Master Plan.

### Playgrounds

As a general metric, all residents should be within a ten minute walk (about 800m) of a public playground in urban areas, and a ten minute drive in rural areas.

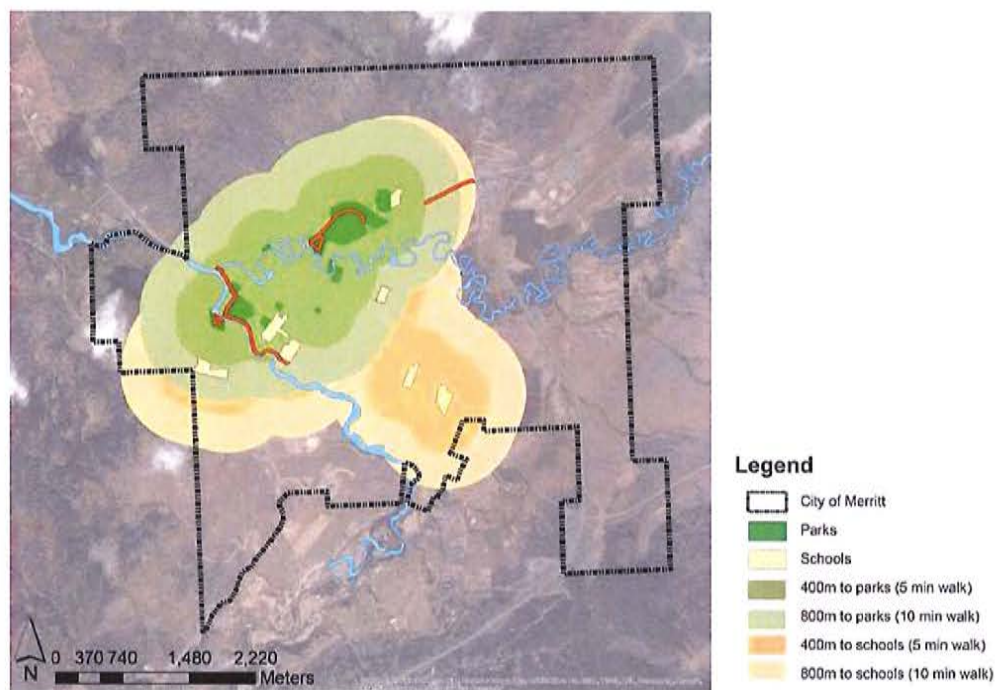


Figure 12: Playground Spatial Analysis

<sup>4</sup> Based on 2014 data from CivicInfo BC, which conducts annual municipal surveys. It should be noted that this data has not been verified in the field and is provided only for municipalities that responded to the survey request.

Key Findings:

- Bench, City Centre, Collettville, North Nicola, Voght Street and West Merritt are well served by playground locations.
- East Merritt (Diamond Vale) neighbourhood, which does not include any formal parkland, includes residential areas that are not within walking distance of a playground. Two school sites, help to supplement playground access to many of the residences in the Diamond Vale neighbourhood.
- The survey shows that of all park amenities used, approximately one-third of survey respondents or their children use playgrounds. The most popular playground is at Rotary Park: 73% of residents using playgrounds report using this playground.
- Survey respondents requested updates to existing playground equipment and a greater variety of equipment for children of all ages, especially toddlers (specifically at Rotary Park and Fairley Park).
- Upgrades to the existing skateboard park at Central Park were requested.



### Sports Courts, Baseball Diamonds and Sports Fields

Merritt was compared to 14 BC communities of comparable size (populations between 4000 and 10,000). It should be noted that these metrics do not relate to the quality of park amenities, which should be a significant consideration in assessing the performance of the parks system.

#### Sports Courts

Based off other communities of a comparable size, Merritt is doing well in terms of outdoor sports courts.

Amenity/Facility	Standard based off other communities	City of Merritt
<b>Outdoor Basketball Courts</b>	1	4
<b>Outdoor Tennis Courts</b>	2.5	6

It should be noted that two City owned tennis courts are currently providing dual use as pickleball and tennis courts. The newly developed multi-use sports box at Central Park, houses two of the basketball courts mentioned above.

#### Key Findings:

- Generally the usage of the multi-use sports court has been low (also used for basketball and ball hockey), current usage as pickleball courts has significantly increased the use of this amenity.
- The newly developed multi-use sports box is approximately one year old and is also used for ball hockey and lacrosse games.
- A multi-use asphalt pad at Bench is outdated and possibly underprogrammed.
- The phone survey indicates that 5% of respondents felt that tennis courts required updating and improvements.
- Residents believe that the tennis courts (by Bench) are in disrepair and would like these courts to be updated. The privately owned tennis courts are considered in better condition by residents, however still require a variety of updates and the Tennis Club has requested support from the City.
- An increased number of and updated pickleball courts were also desired by stakeholders, there are approximately 40 members in the pickleball club. The desire for a separate pickleball facility was also mentioned. The Recreation and Culture Facilities section of this Master Plan discusses options for pickleball.

Pickleball participation is rapidly growing across North America, including in small to mid-size BC communities. Most commonly played by older adults, it is developing as an accessible, social, dynamic activity across the spectrum of ages. Courts are often integrated within existing tennis, basketball or multi-use courts with removable nets, however, with growing popularity many communities are moving towards stand-alone pickleball courts.



### Sports Fields and Ball Diamonds

Based on analysis of other communities of a comparable size, Merritt is well served in terms of ball diamonds, however has a shortage of sports fields.

Amenity/Facility	Standard based off other communities	City of Merritt
<b>Baseball and Softball Fields</b>	6	5
<b>Outdoor Soccer / Rugby Fields</b>	3	1

*The above table does not include sports fields and ball diamonds found at schools. Some of the communities used for comparison included Fernie, Ladysmith, Lake Country, Osoyoos and Quesnel, among others.*

#### Key Findings:

- In comparison to other communities Merritt is at a deficit when it comes to soccer fields, with only one City run soccer field at Voght Park. There are two fields at public schools. However, these are not currently maintained to a level that supports league play, and therefore are not being counted as supplementing City soccer fields.
- Survey respondents indicate that 35% of children under 18 play soccer and 4% of children play baseball.
- In addition, survey responses show that 3% of adults play soccer and 2% play baseball.
- Approximately 11% of respondents believe that sports fields, baseball diamonds, and the running track are lacking or needing improvement in terms of lighting, maintenance and further expansion.
- There are currently 450 members in the Merritt Youth Soccer Association. The Voght Park sports field is adequate for younger children, however not older children and youth.
- Stakeholders mentioned challenges with maintenance of sports fields, for both City and school fields. It was also confirmed that there is a deficit in the number of soccer fields within the City and that there is a desire for an increased number of (two additional) dedicated and well maintained soccer fields.
- The girls high school rugby team members have expressed concern regarding any re-development of the Voght Park sports field. Practice and games for this user group would still be possible with a re-design of the sports field at Voght Park and the addition of another field.
- Merritt Mixed Slo-Pitch membership varies between 200 and 315 members. There are approximately 17 to 21 slo-pitch teams that play during spring-time.

The key findings are consistent with overall Canadian trends. Soccer is one of the most popular sports for children and youth. Soccer has grown in popularity since the 1990s and is currently still highly popular. Across Canada, municipalities are struggling to provide high quality soccer pitches, along with an increased demand for ancillary amenities such as washrooms, concessions, recycling stations and sitting areas.

- Stakeholders expressed that slo-pitch fields are not being maintained effectively, organizational members are currently aiding with the maintenance of fields. Effective communication between slo-pitch stakeholders and City maintenance crews is necessary.

### **Places for Dogs**

Demand has grown for the establishment of “dog parks” and/or off-leash dog areas within parks, where residents can take their dogs to socialize and get exercise. The City of Merritt currently has one designated off-leash dog park, a fenced in green space area with a few deciduous trees, picnic tables and a water fountain, close to Coldwater River on Canford Avenue.

#### **Key Findings:**

- 13% of respondents use the off-leash dog park.
- Survey respondents mentioned the desire for a water facility dedicated for dogs, such as a dog beach or pool area, as many residents are dog owners.
- Improved etiquette around picking up and disposing of dog waste was referenced as a concern.

Many communities around North America have established size classifications in order to appropriately plan and design their community's dog parks. Most view 0.4ha as a minimum size. Support for specialized dog-friendly public venues is strong, but controls and safeguards need to exist to minimize use conflicts. Locating off-leash dog areas in less-sensitive areas can help keep off-leash dog activity out of more sensitive natural areas.

Recognizing that some people do not like dogs or are uncomfortable when dogs are permitted to run loose in public parks, it is important that dog-friendly parks and off-leash areas be properly designed, constructed, signed and maintained. Where dog-friendly parks have low levels of infrastructure (i.e. are not fenced) proper segregation from other park uses is a consideration.

### **Community Gardens**

A number of positive benefits have been associated with community gardens including promoting community building, increasing opportunities for physical activity, reducing crime and of course providing healthy and local produce. Municipalities around BC are locating community gardens in city parks, school yards, and in some cases, on municipal hall lands. In the majority of cases, municipalities have little involvement in the operation of community gardens. Volunteer commitment and leadership is expected.

#### **Key findings:**

- Merritt currently has several community gardens, including one at the Crossroads Church on the church grounds, the Shulus First Nations Band community garden, a community garden adjacent to the Eldorado Trailer Park and another at the hospital.

- The garden located behind the hospital is used by residents of all ages. It was completed in 2013 and made possible through the New Horizons Seniors Project grant from the Federal Government. This grant is meant to help seniors through seniors' mentorship, as individuals are encouraged to share their gardening skills with younger members of the community and simultaneously encourage sustainability.
- All plots at the community garden behind the hospital are currently occupied and a few have been donated to the food bank.
- Participants report that the community garden allows sharing and socializing.
- Survey respondents indicate the desire for more opportunities to take part in gardening.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The table below outlines existing park and park amenity related recommendations, by category. Cost estimates are high level only, and do not include cost estimates for low cost items, or initiatives solely covered with staff time.

Recommendations are shown as a 1 – 3 timeframe, and rated as a High, Medium or Low importance or are indicated as “ongoing policy” measures.

Timeframe 1 = short term (1-3 years) 2 = medium term (3-7 years) 3 = long term (7+ plus years)			
Recommendations	Importance	Timeframe (1-3)	Resources
Overall Park System			
5. Ensure a map of Merritt parks is available on the City website in the recreation brochure and in key community locations.	High	1	Staff time Print costs \$10,000
6. Adopt a Parks Management Policy that ensures consideration of biodiversity, connectivity and habitat objectives in the establishment of horticultural palettes and patterns within parks and public spaces.  Ensure that the Parks Management Policy/Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Includes consultation with adjacent neighbourhoods when proposing new development, or re-design of existing parklands, playgrounds, sports fields, trails and natural areas.</li><li>- Ensures accessible playgrounds.</li><li>- Ensures adequate 'fall zones'.</li><li>- Adheres to Canadian Playground Safety Standards as per CAN/CSA Z614-14.</li><li>- Refers to the City's Age Friendly Action Plan for new park designs and developments.</li><li>- Provides maintenance standards for playing fields.</li><li>- Ensures CPTED principles are followed in new park developments and existing park re-designs.</li><li>- Reflects and respects the natural and cultural heritage of Merritt (including: a rich First Nations history, a background in ranching and agriculture, rodeo events, and a country</li></ul>	High	1	Staff time



music tradition) and highlights the preservation of cultural and natural sites of significance in parks and the use of local materials in parks. - Incorporates findings from the proposed Wildlife Management Plan (Recommendation #21).				
7. Adopt a Parks Management Policy that considers the conservation of sensitive ecosystems and green infrastructure using the best management practices available. <a href="http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/bmp/bmpintro.html">http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/bmp/bmpintro.html</a> or <a href="http://www.greenbylaws.ca/images/greenbylaws_web1207.pdf">http://www.greenbylaws.ca/images/greenbylaws_web1207.pdf</a>	High	1	Staff time	
8. Inventory then address existing deficiencies throughout current parks as they relate to age friendly amenities by referring to the City's Age Friendly Action Plan.	High	1	Staff or Consultant time	
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Importance</b>	<b>Timeframe (1-3)</b>	<b>Resources</b>	
<b>Improvements to Existing Parks</b>				
9. Facilitate collaboration between community organizations and City park maintenance staff. - Ensure that effective maintenance of ball diamonds occurs at Central Park, in order to facilitate use by both slo-pitch and fast-pitch organizations. - Conduct annual sport field user meetings in advance of the season to assign schedule, define joint maintenance responsibilities and review field user requests.	High	1	Staff time	

10. Update the skatepark to include advanced skate park elements. Assess the skate park for safety and undertake upgrades to ensure a broad range of skill levels and ages are served.  - Ensure the addition of a 'bowl' skate park element.	Low	2	\$200,000 capital
11. Develop additional trails in Central Park to provide improved access to Rotary Park.	Medium	1	\$30,000 capital
12. Redevelop the playground at Central Park to provide the dual function of a community and tourist play area, ensure that a variety of age ranges and skill levels are provided for. Choose an appropriate design theme for this playground, consider a ranch style theme.  - Ensure playground equipment includes a mix of traditional play equipment and "nature play" experiences.	Low	3	\$40,000 - \$60,000 capital
13. Reassess the Central Park multi-use sports box, should usage remain low and isolated to only a few user groups, examine alternative operating models and the development of business plans for each model.	Medium	3	Staff time
14. Work with fellow community stakeholders – SD58 and NVIT – to identify the best strategy to combine resources to develop two regulation sized soccer fields with a running track at Voght Park to facilitate local and tournament play. Please refer to Appendix E for a design concept of sports fields at Voght Park.	High	1	\$500,000 capital/ per soccer field
15. Following completion of the development of two regulation sized soccer fields and with its identified stakeholders, ensure a new track is built that at minimum meets the needs of SD #58.	Medium	2	\$750,000 capital

16. Redevelop the playground at Rotary Park, ensure that a variety of age ranges and skill levels are provided for. Choose an appropriate design theme for this playground, consider utilizing the Indigenous culture of Merritt as an inspiration.  - Ensure playground equipment includes a mix of traditional play equipment and "nature play" experiences.	Medium	2	\$40,000 - \$60,000 capital
17. Redevelop the water park at Rotary Park, for a variety of age ranges. Ensure to develop a local theme for the water park.	Low	3	\$50,000 - \$70,000 capital
18. Retrofit the washroom building at Rotary Park.	Medium	2	\$75,000 capital
19. Install an additional shade structure at Spirit Square. Ensure the aesthetic of the structure is in keeping with the Square's character. Consider using an Indigenous/First Nations culture theme for the shade structure.	High	1	\$10,000 capital
20. Install skate stoppers on benches at Spirit Square.	High	1	\$1,000 capital
21. Assess Spirit Square in terms of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to determine whether the design follows the crime prevention design guidelines. <a href="http://www.cpted.net/">http://www.cpted.net/</a>	Medium	2 - 3	Staff or Consultant time
22. Develop an interpretive signage program in Merritt's park and trails identifying locations and possible themes.  - Design, construct and install interpretive signage.	Medium	2	\$25,000 annually/ capital



Recommendations	Importance	Timeframe (1-3)	Resources
<b>Park Amenities</b>			
<p>23. Work with Mountain Bike Association to ensure a range of mountain biking and BMX opportunities are available, to encourage a range of ages and abilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with the Mountain Bike Association on the development of an educational trail building program for youth. Develop a program that would allow youth to take part in building mountain biking trails in and around Merritt. With the appropriate funding this could also grow into the building of interpretive signs.</li> <li>- Consider connecting this initiative to the existing 'Smart Step' program for youth in Merritt.</li> </ul>	Medium	1 - 2	<p>Staff time</p> <p>\$20,000 annually/ capital</p>
<p>24. Develop a new playground in the Diamond Vale neighbourhood, ensuring that a variety of age ranges and skill levels are provided for.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure playground equipment includes a mix of traditional play equipment and "nature play" experiences.</li> <li>- Consult with neighbourhoods within Diamond Vale at time of replacement, considering broader picture of diversity of play spaces in mind.</li> <li>- Ensure playgrounds provide accessible options. Ensure adequate "fall zones" around all playground equipment.</li> </ul>	Medium	2 - 3	<p>Capital budget has been considered in cost of new park, listed in recommendation #1.</p>
25. Update and repair the tennis courts at Bench.	Medium	2	\$25,000 capital

26. Continue working with Tennis Club organization to maintain Tennis Club facility.	Low	3	Staff time \$20,000 capital	
27. Develop a community garden at the proposed/future Quilchena Avenue site (former Canadian Pacific (CP) Railway land), referencing the Quilchena Avenue Site Concepts.	Medium	2	\$10,000 capital	

## NATURAL AREAS

Merritt is located within the Nicola Valley; in a unique semi-arid desert climate of grasslands, Ponderosa Pine, and Interior Douglas-fir, bisected by the Coldwater and Nicola rivers which run through the core of the City. There exists a wide range of environmentally significant areas, rare and endangered plants and wildlife habitats.

Merritt currently has 7.21 hectares of natural area lands containing environmentally significant features including natural forest, riparian and grassland areas, which provides habitat for a variety of bird species and animals. The two rivers provide both environmental and recreational opportunities.



The table below provides further information on the various natural areas within the City.

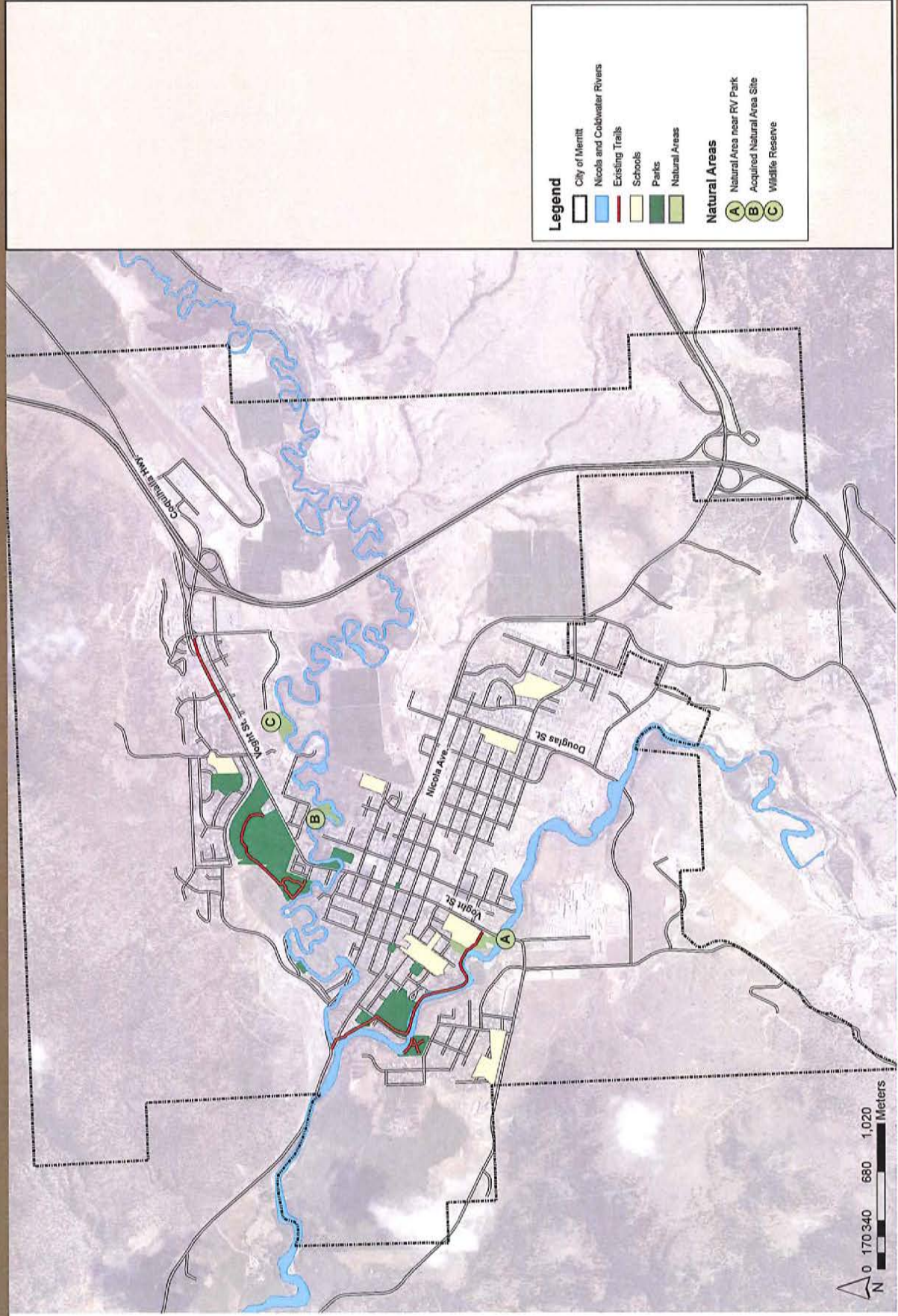
Table 6: Natural Areas Inventory

Name	Description	Key Opportunities / Constraints
<b>Wildlife Reserve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Currently considered dedicated parkland according to the OCP.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This area of land has the opportunity to provide habitat for a variety of species.</li> </ul>
<b>Natural Area near RV Park</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Natural area near the RV Park and adjacent to Voght Street.</li> <li>This woodlot site is adjacent to the Coldwater River and riparian area, it also contains an open space grass area that is currently used for overflow parking during large community events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is potential for future environmental preservation, as well as recreational and educational uses for the site.</li> </ul>
<b>Acquired Natural Area Site</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newly acquired natural area site near the Nicola Meadows retirement residence.</li> <li>Acquired as a new park, however, due to a variety of environmentally significant features is planned to be preserved as a natural area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There currently is no public access to this site.</li> <li>The existing informal trail running through the property allows the potential for future access and opportunities for residents to learn about the environmentally significant</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unique features include (riparian) trees such as white birch and black cottonwood, which provide ideal habitat for birds including owls, eagles, ravens and songbirds.</li> <li>▪ Also consists of an informal grassland and riparian area, the Nicola River runs on multiple sides of the site.</li> <li>▪ Provides important rainwater management functions for adjacent land uses.</li> </ul>	and natural features on this site.
<b>Natural Area, North of Bench Park</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Natural area currently used for walking, biking and strollers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Currently designated as Crown land (Provincial).</li> </ul>

FIGURE 13: NATURAL AREAS



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**


The table below outlines recommendations for natural areas. Cost estimates are high level only, and do not include cost estimates for low cost items, or initiatives solely covered with staff time.

Recommendations are shown as a 1 – 3 timeframe, and rated as a High, Medium or Low importance or are indicated as “ongoing policy” measure.



Timeframe 1 = short term (1-3 years) 2 = medium term (3-7 years) 3 = long term (7+ plus years)			
Recommendations	Importance	Timeframe (1-3)	Resources
<b>Natural Areas</b>			
28. Initiate working with wildlife agencies and local natural history clubs to undertake the following studies on all natural areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inventory and Analysis of natural features.</li> <li>Wildlife Assessment &amp; Management Plan.</li> </ul>	High	1 - 2	Staff time
29. Preserve the woodlot and riparian area in the Natural Area near the RV Park. Integrate a trail, seating and interpretive signage adjacent to the Coldwater River. Reserve the current open space turf area for future overflow parking as required.	Low	3	Staff time \$30,000 capital
30. Undertake a Hazard Tree Assessment of the newly acquired natural site (near the Nicola Meadows retirement residence and off Garcia Street). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove trees as recommended.</li> </ul>	High	1	\$2,500 capital
31. Encourage local natural history club to become 'stewards' of newly acquired natural area site off Garcia Street.	Medium	2	Staff time
32. Following the completion of environmental assessments and maintaining a minimal environmental footprint, consider the addition of	Low	3	\$30,000 capital



<p>the following outdoor recreation and educational amenities at the newly acquired natural area site:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure the development of public access to the site.</li> <li>- Use minimum impact construction techniques to upgrade the existing informal trail to a gravel trail and/or boardwalk.</li> <li>- Include interpretive signage to educate park visitors on the environmentally sensitive features and to encourage environmental stewardship.</li> </ul>			
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## TRAILS

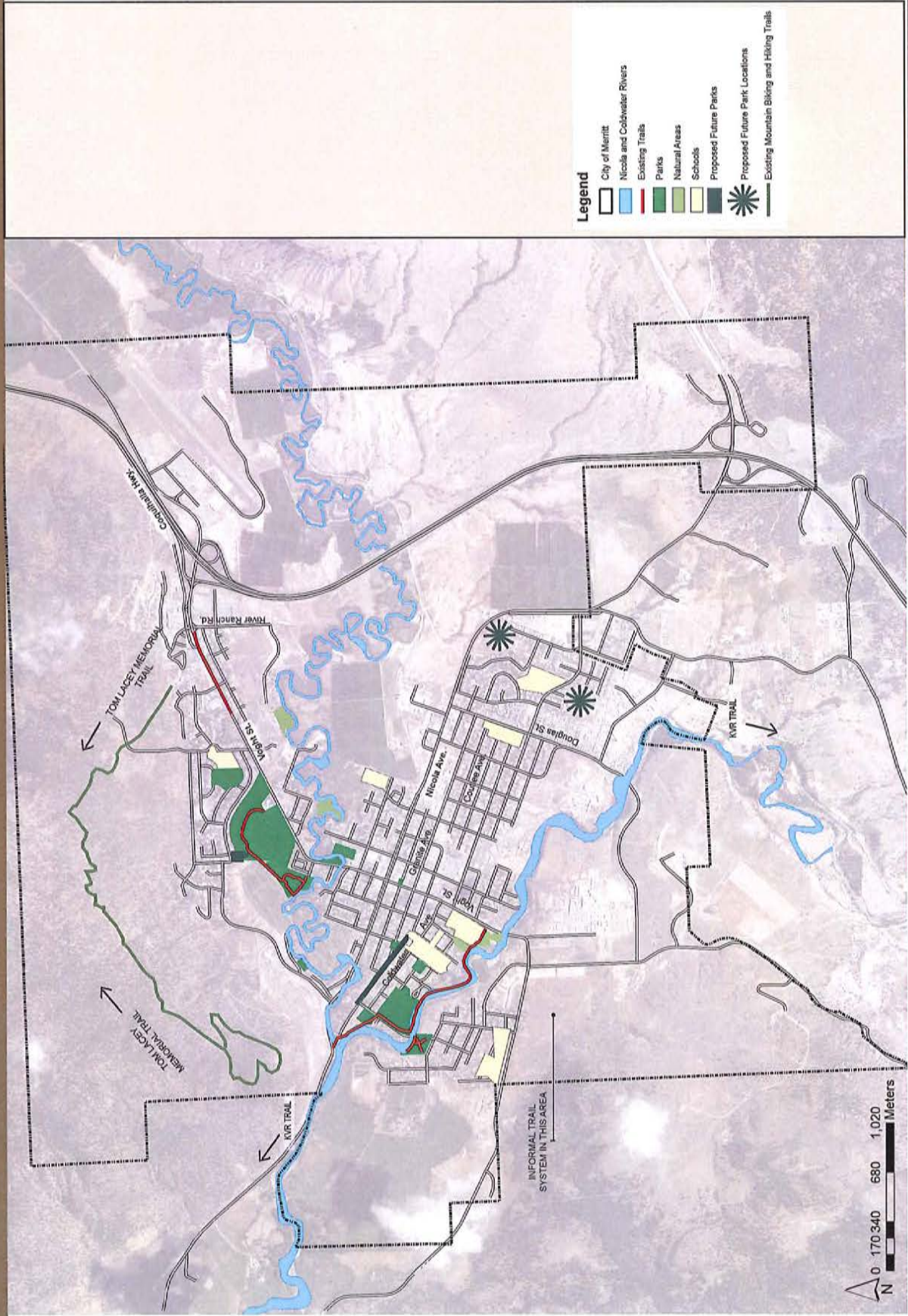
Trails within the City of Merritt are well used and appreciated by residents. The majority of residents are satisfied with the trails and many use them at least once a week. The most used trails are those connecting Central and Rotary Park, Coldwater River Trail, as well as trails in outlying natural areas within City boundaries. Users include walkers, hikers, dog walkers, joggers, runners, mountain bikers, those with mobility aids and cyclists.

The scope of trails within this Master Plan focuses on off-road trails within City boundaries and includes reference to pathways and specific sidewalk connections in order to complete recreational loops and enhance the off-road trails system, primarily for pedestrians (walkers, dog walkers, joggers, runners of all ages, those with mobility aids) and casual recreation cyclists. Where possible, connections also consider commuting by foot or bike, but do not include reference to on-road cycling facilities.

The Master Plan does not include a comprehensive trail system specifically for mountain biking, though it does consider riders within the context of trails that are being planned. The “8 to 80 Principle” is considered and while there is a need for some advanced trails in the system to provide challenges to more advanced users, there should be a base of connected trails that are suitable for all ages and abilities.



FIGURE 14: EXISTING TRAILS





**Key Findings:**

- Trails were considered a priority across all community engagement efforts.
- The telephone survey reveals that walking for exercise is the most popular recreational activity for residents within Merritt, with 24% of residents walking for exercise and leisure. 19% of residents also enjoy hiking. Others report taking part in cross-country skiing, mountain biking, on and off-road cycling and running/jogging.
- 23% of children/youth under the age of 18 enjoy hiking as a recreational activity.
- The most popular trail in Merritt is the Rotary and Central Park trail, with 56% of survey respondents using this trail. Survey respondents also listed using the following trails:
  - Coldwater River trail - 53%
  - Outlying areas within City boundaries - 52%
- Trails were identified as the recreation facilities survey respondents would most like to further develop. 39% of survey respondents would most like to develop walking trails and 35% would like to develop biking trails.
- Most residents are satisfied with trails. Some concerns were raised around a desire for improved trail lighting and maintenance. Trail connectivity between the north and south ends of the City and signage at Tom Lacey Trail were also identified.
- Residents also desire an increased number of trails in the south east (Diamond Vale) part of the City and along the river valley.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The table below outlines recommendations for trails. Cost estimates are high level only, and do not include cost estimates for low cost items, or initiatives solely covered with staff time.

Recommendations are shown as a 1-3 timeframe and rated as High, Medium or Low importance, or are indicated as “ongoing policy” measures.



Timeframe 1 = short term (1-3 years) 2 = medium term (3-7 years) 3 = long term (7+ plus years)			
Recommendation	Importance	Timeframe (1-3)	Resources
<b>Trails</b>			
33. Collaborate with regional stakeholders (i.e. MBA, TNRD, hiking clubs, BC Parks) to ensure to connect City trails to trails in the Fringe Area such as the Kettle Valley Railway (KVR) Trail, and to key recreation destinations such as Monck Provincial Park and Nicola Lake.	Medium	1 - 3	Staff time
34. Develop and provide a trail map and detailed trail information on the City website and in the Leisure Guide.	High	1	Staff time Print costs \$10,000
35. Incorporate a consistent signage system. Post a trail map at all major trailheads.	Medium	2	\$30,000 capital / over several years
36. Develop a Trails Planning Guide that ensures a range of steepness and abilities that provide a challenge for all users of various mobility abilities.	Medium	2	Staff time

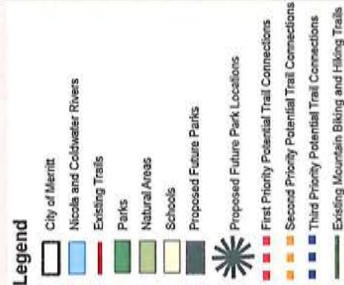
Improve Trail Connectivity as Shown in Figure 16. Details Below				
37. Provide a well-marked trail connection from Voght Street to Central Park, and to Rotary Parks.	High	1		\$15,000 capital
38. Continue Voght Street trail to create a Coldwater River trail loop (through Diamond Vale neighbourhood).	High	1		\$30,000 capital
39. Develop trail connection on Quilchena Avenue to future neighbourhood park on Quilchena Avenue Site.	Medium	2		Utilize existing sidewalk, add signage. Signage budget accounted for in recommendation #35.
40. Develop trail connection in south east (Diamond Vale) neighbourhood connecting from Douglas Street to Clapperton Avenue onto Coldwater Road.  - Potential link to the KVR Trail.	Medium	2		Utilize existing sidewalks and shoulders, add signage. Signage budget accounted for in recommendation #35.
41. Develop trail starting along River Ranch Road to Nicola Avenue.	Medium	3		\$40,000 capital

42. Extend Voght Street trail across bridge to create safe pedestrian route to Colletteville Elementary School.	Medium	2	\$15,000 capital
43. Work with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to develop a safe pedestrian and cycling route on Voght Street to cross the Coquihalla Highway.	Medium	3	\$20,000 capital



The map illustrates the informal trail system in Douglas, Arizona. Key features include:

- Trails:** Tom Lacey Memorial Trail, River Ranch Rd, Douglas St, and others.
- Scale:** 0 to 1,020 meters.
- North Arrow:** Indicated by an arrow pointing towards the top right.
- Map Labels:** Douglas St, River Ranch Rd, Tom Lacey Memorial Trail, and others.





## RECREATION AND CULTURE FACILITIES

The following section provides an inventory, evaluation and assessment of Merritt's primary indoor leisure facilities and their ability to meet current and future demand. A comparative analysis with towns of similar population size, a review of the facility's condition, an assessment of future capacity and, the results of community input have all informed the recommendations in this report.

### OVERVIEW

Merritt currently has 11 indoor leisure facilities. The city directly manages 3 major indoor facilities:

- Merritt Civic Centre
- Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre
- Nicola Valley Memorial Arena

Type of Facility	Facility Name	Additional Information
Indoor Recreation Facility – Directly Managed by the City	Merritt Civic Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Also functions as a community centre.</li> <li>▪ This provides some efficiency of operation, however, it places limitations on the use of the civic centre as a recreation centre and often impacts recreation programming and scheduling.</li> <li>▪ In response, the city currently rents the gymnasium in the closed Coquihalla Middle School.</li> </ul>
	Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Also contains a fitness room.</li> <li>▪ City owned and operated.</li> </ul>
	Nicola Valley Memorial Arena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Currently managed by private contract and under review.</li> </ul>
Indoor Recreation Facility – Providing Supplemental Activity Space	Coldwater Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Refurbished double trailer that can be booked by community groups and used for programs such as after-school day care, arts and craft programs.</li> </ul>

Indoor Recreation Facility – Owned by the City and Managed by Community Groups	Cadet Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leased to the Cadets with opportunities to sub-let to community groups like Taekwondo.</li> </ul>
	Curling Arena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Land owned by the City; building owned by the club.</li> </ul>
	Merritt Senior's Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operated by senior citizens' association.</li> <li>Owned by the City.</li> </ul>
	Merritt Lawn Bowling Field and Clubhouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recently relocated facility, in 2009.</li> <li>Operated by the lawn bowling club.</li> <li>Owned by the City.</li> </ul>
Arts and Culture Oriented Facilities - Operated by Community Groups	Nicola Valley Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Owned by the City.</li> <li>Operated by the Museum and Archives Society.</li> </ul>
	Historic Baillie Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Owned by the City.</li> <li>Operated by the Historical Society.</li> </ul>
	Courthouse Art Gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Privately owned.</li> <li>Operated by the Nicola Valley Arts Council.</li> </ul>

## INDOOR LEISURE FACILITY SUPPLY

The following section provides a comparison of the supply of indoor leisure facilities to other similar sized municipalities followed by an assessment of each key facility and its ability to meet current and future demand.

There are no nationally established guidelines in Canada for the provision of leisure facilities. Instead municipalities have adopted a more community-specific planning approach based on demand, level of use, financial capabilities, consideration of facilities available on a regional scale and facilities provided by the private sector. An examination of indoor facilities provided in other similar sized communities helps to determine the appropriate level of service. Tables 6 and 7 provide a comparison of indoor leisure facilities provided within BC interior communities of a similar size.<sup>5</sup>

Table 7: Comparison of Indoor Leisure Facility Supply by Population

	Merritt (7,285)	Hope (6,185)	Kimberley (7,616)	Peachland (6,200)	Revelstoke (7,230)	Trail (7,681)
<b>Community centre</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Curling arena</b>	1	1	1		1	1
<b>Ice arena</b>	1	1	2		1	2
<b>Indoor pool</b>	1	1	1		1	1
<b>Lawn bowling</b>	1		1			
<b>Museum</b>	1		2	1	2	1
<b>Seniors centre</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Arts centre</b>			1	1	1	1

Merritt functions as a regional recreation hub, with the local population of Lower Nicola – Electoral Area N at 1,291.<sup>6</sup> This does not significantly change the assessment of expected facility supply. Even by 2025, the population of Merritt is expected to increase by approximately 2,000 people to 9,353.<sup>7</sup> A review of indoor leisure facilities in five BC cities with populations around 10,000 showed little change in the overall supply of indoor facilities (Table 7). Notable changes include an increasing complexity in community centres with more multi-purpose spaces and gymnasium space which allow for a broader range of services and programs such as gymnastics, a dedicated youth centre and expansion of art and culture programming. Three of the five cities in this population

<sup>5</sup> Based on info accessed from CivicInfo website, city websites and Stats Canada

<sup>6</sup> Thompson Nicola Regional District website

<sup>7</sup> based on an average of 1.8 percent growth per year according to Merritt's OCP



range have doubled the ice arenas which matches Merritt's supply considering the opening of the Lower Nicola Indian Band's Shulus Arena in 2004.

Table 8: Comparison of indoor leisure facility supply by population near 10,000

	Nelson (10,320)	Quesnel (10,007)	Summerland (11,280)	Terrace (11,486)	Williams Lake (10,832)
<b>Community centre</b>	2	1		1	1
<b>Curling arena</b>	1	1	1		1
<b>Ice arena</b>	1	2	1	2	2
<b>Indoor pool</b>	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Indoor soccer</b>		1			
<b>Lawn bowling</b>	1				
<b>Museum</b>	1	1	1	1	2
<b>Seniors centre</b>	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Arts centre</b>	1		1	1	1
<b>Youth centre</b>	1		1	1	



## Community Use and Levels of Satisfaction

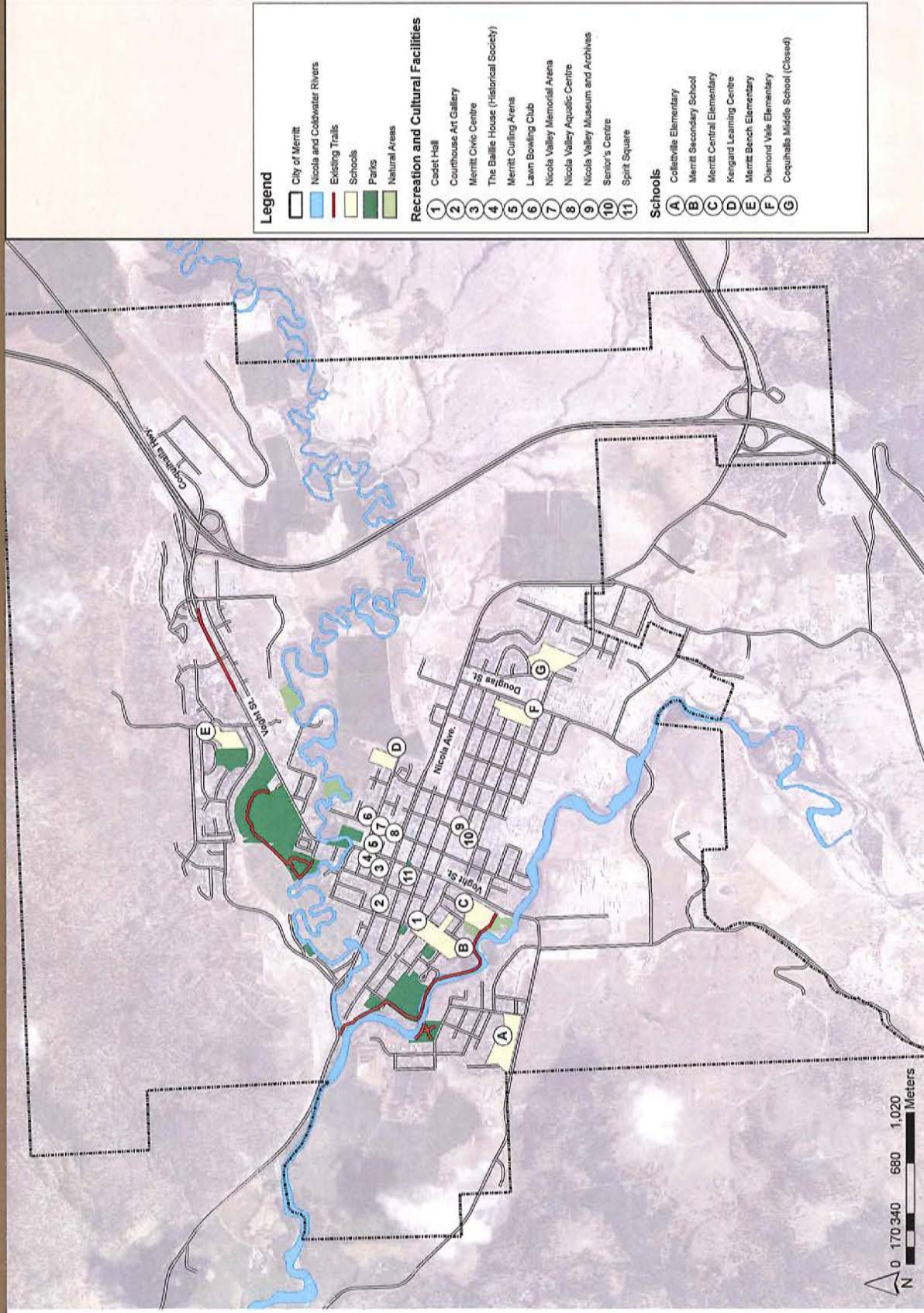
### Community Survey Results:

- Of all the indoor facilities, residents are most regular users of the Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre, followed by the Merritt Civic Centre.
- There are several facilities that residents report never utilizing including;
  - Arena 58%
  - Ballie House 75%
  - Museum 76%
  - Curling club 83%
  - Art Gallery 83%
  - Senior's Centre 89%
  - Cadet hall 95%
- Overall Satisfaction levels are quite high, in the range of 90% or more for most facilities when "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied" responses are combined
- When asked what indoor facilities were lacking or needing improvement, the following responses were received:
  - None 55%
  - Renovate/upgrade existing 29%
  - Movie theatre 10%
  - Live theatre 10%
  - Arena 8%
  - Gyms 7%
  - Aquatic centre 6%
- Approximately one-in-five residents use private recreation facilities.
- The "quality of the facility, and programming/facility not offered by the city" are the primary reasons for using private facilities.
- When considering the highest priority for facility development or upgrades only (not including parks), the community is split:
  - Arena 34%
  - Aquatic centre 33%
  - Arts and culture centre 32%

Key Findings:

- Merritt is providing a comparable type and amount of indoor leisure facilities when compared to other cities of similar population.
- The type and amount of indoor facilities is sufficient to meet future demand within the 10 year time horizon.
- There is significant underutilization of many of the city's indoor facilities.
- Lawn bowling is a specialized activity not provided in many other towns of similar size.
- The convention centre is combined with a recreation centre, this places limitations on the use of the civic centre as a recreation centre and often impacts recreation programming and scheduling.
- The current interim use of the closed Coquihalla Middle School gym and several classrooms will either need to become a long term arrangement or, development of a separate gym facility with multi-purpose rooms is required to meet future community demand.
- Merritt is adequately meeting current community demand for core indoor leisure facilities.
- Private health and wellness facilities, institutions and other organizations are contributing to meet the overall leisure needs of the community.
- There is community interest in a movie theatre and a performing arts venue.
- Rather than expansion, the community focus is on maintenance and upgrades of existing facilities.

FIGURE 16: EXISTING INDOOR RECREATION AND CULTURE FACILITIES





## DESCRIPTION AND ASSESSMENT OF INDOOR COMMUNITY FACILITIES

This section provides a detailed description and analysis of the City's 5 major indoor recreation facilities, programs and services to the community.

### NICOLA VALLEY AQUATIC CENTRE

#### Existing Conditions

DESCRIPTION AND AMENITIES	TYPICAL PROGRAMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Built in 1993</li> <li>▪ 70 sq. m fitness room</li> <li>▪ 6 lane 25 m pool with family leisure section</li> <li>▪ 2 hot tubs</li> <li>▪ 1 dry sauna</li> <li>▪ Separate and family change rooms, handicapped accessible changeroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aquatic and fitness programs</li> <li>▪ Learn to swim</li> <li>▪ Master's swim club, junior lifeguard club, Otters swim club</li> <li>▪ Swim competitions, special Olympics, youth triathlons</li> <li>▪ aquafit</li> <li>▪ Family movie nights</li> <li>▪ Teen nights</li> <li>▪ Special community events</li> </ul>

#### Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Well maintained and in good condition</li> <li>▪ Good location in city and close to other recreation amenities that could be further developed into a recreation complex</li> <li>▪ Highest used indoor facility</li> <li>▪ High level of community satisfaction reported (94%)</li> <li>▪ Both the pool and the fitness room have significant unused capacity to meet future demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Single use facility; no supporting multi-purpose recreation rooms</li> <li>▪ Small, very limited fitness room</li> <li>▪ Hot tubs not fully accessible</li> <li>▪ Requires infrastructure improvements including a new roof, electrical upgrades</li> <li>▪ Lack of an overall maintenance management system</li> <li>▪ No energy conservation program. Waste heat from the arena is being lost rather than recycled through the aquatic centre</li> <li>▪ Lacks a UV water treatment system</li> </ul>



### Summary of Attendance

Small communities tend to show an average of around 6-7 swims per person per year. Assuming a regional population of 8,404, Merritt's annual use of 53,228 visits falls within that typical average. A small leisure pool facility like Merritt has the capacity to provide in the range of 200,000 swim visits per year. Merritt's pool is currently underutilized and has the potential to meet future growth. The Merritt Otters swim club have indicated that their membership is increasing significantly and desires more pool time.

The adjoining weight room is a small facility suited for basic and introductory programs. It offers 20 exercise stations but with limited space, lacks a stretch and core strengthening area. At full use it has an annual capacity of 32,000. Its current level of use is well below capacity.

Table 9: 2014 Aquatic Centre Attendance

2014 Attendance	
Drop-in admissions	35,783
Rentals/ swim meet	6,706
Programs	10,739
TOTAL pool use	53,228
TOTAL Weight-room admissions	1,351
TOTAL FACILITY VISITATION	54,579

### Key Findings:

- The community will be well served into the future by the current aquatic facility.
- The fitness room is small but meets the needs for basic introductory fitness programs.
- At 23 years of age, the facility is at stage 3 of the BCRPA classification and will require increased capital and operating funds to ensure long-term serviceable life. <sup>8</sup>
- Lack of multi-purpose rooms limits use of the facility and opportunity to provide recreation programs.



<sup>8</sup> British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association. 2009. *A time for renewal: assessing the state of recreation facilities in British Columbia*.

## NICOLA VALLEY MEMORIAL ARENA

### Existing Conditions

DESCRIPTION AND AMENITIES	TYPICAL PROGRAMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ice arena 85X190ft. (not regulation size)</li> <li>5 changerooms</li> <li>Seating capacity of 960</li> <li>Mezzanine capacity of 120</li> <li>Chiller also supports the curling arena</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Junior A hockey club, minor hockey, tournaments</li> <li>Hockey school</li> <li>Public skating and learn to skate programs</li> <li>Figure skating</li> <li>Recreational hockey leagues</li> <li>Indoor lacrosse</li> </ul>

### Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Built in 1955 with a major retrofit in 1996. An aging facility but well maintained.</li> <li>Located adjacent to aquatic centre. Potential for expansion to join facilities for shared admin and admissions</li> <li>The facility has unused capacity during prime time, non-prime time ice seasons and also during summer dry floor season</li> <li>Third highest used community facility</li> <li>89% of users are satisfied with the facility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-regulation size arena</li> <li>Short 2 dressing rooms for full competitions</li> <li>Women's dressing rooms and washrooms need upgrades</li> <li>Users indicate improvements needed to lights, sound system, timekeepers booth, spectator heating</li> <li>Ice allocation schedule needs review to accommodate all users, especially figure skating</li> <li>No opportunity for indoor walking track</li> <li>Limited concession service and mezzanine space</li> <li>No facility audit to determine life span and future operating costs. The facility will require additional significant upgrades in the foreseeable future</li> <li>No energy conservation program</li> <li>No maintenance management program</li> <li>The facility competes with the Lower Nicola Indian Band's Shulus Arena for market share</li> <li>No skate rentals for drop-in skate programs</li> </ul>



Key Findings:

- The community is well served with 2 sheets of ice in the region.
- Built in 1955, and at 61 years of age, it is at stage 5 following the BCRPA infrastructure classification, indicating increasing operating costs, a need for significant capital upgrades, increasing energy costs and decreases in functionality to meet community needs<sup>9</sup>.
- The facility appears in good condition with many years of serviceable life, with upgrades. However, a detailed facility audit and costing of capital upgrades is needed to compare the cost of retrofitting to that of full facility replacement at approximately \$15 million.
- Consideration must also be given to future demands for ice as the community population is forecasted to age more than the provincial average and nationally, participation in ice sports is currently declining.



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<sup>9</sup> The City of Vernon is currently making a plan to replace its arena after 80 years of services. Replacement cost is estimated at \$13.8million

## MERRITT CIVIC CENTRE

### Existing Conditions

DESCRIPTION AND AMENITIES	TYPICAL PROGRAMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combined civic centre/ community centre</li> <li>2 auditoriums with seating capacity of 520</li> <li>4 meeting rooms 30-80 seating capacity</li> <li>Leisure services administration and Pacific Sport offices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conferences, public meetings</li> <li>Public rentals</li> <li>Recreation programs; children's, gymnastics, fitness</li> <li>Community events</li> </ul>

### Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Built in 1989 and with recent upgrades, it is in good condition with many years of serviceable life</li> <li>Combined civic centre/ community centre role has some efficiency in operation</li> <li>Is the second highest used indoor recreation facility in the city</li> <li>Has a high level of community satisfaction (90%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dual function as a civic centre and recreation centre causes user conflict and limits recreational use and more expensive set-up/take-down time. Recreation programs often get bumped</li> <li>Recreation facility is separate from the pool and arena which could offer support functions</li> <li>Does not fully fill need for proper community gym and multi-purpose rooms</li> <li>No maintenance management program</li> <li>No energy conservation program</li> </ul>

### Key Findings:

- The Civic Centre plays an important role in meeting the community's needs for leisure services.

However, because of the limitations on use for certain recreation activities, and the challenges of scheduling programs, supplemental facilities are required. Possible options would be either a long term lease of the now closed Coquihalla Middle School gym and classrooms or, construction of a gymnasium with multi-purpose recreation rooms at the aquatic centre or possible conversion of the outdoor multi-use sports box to a multi-purpose building.



## MERRITT CURLING CENTRE

### Existing Conditions

DESCRIPTION AND AMENITIES	TYPICAL PROGRAMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The chiller operates off the adjoining arena plant. Club pays the city \$1,000/month during operation to offset costs</li> <li>▪ Facility managed by the Curling Club</li> <li>▪ Re-built in 1972 by community volunteers</li> <li>▪ 4 sheets of regulation sized ice</li> <li>▪ Viewing lounge</li> <li>▪ Sponsorship and advertising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ League play, bonspiels, school programs</li> <li>▪ Facility rentals</li> </ul>

### Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Long-running club with successful history of activity and presence in the city</li> <li>▪ Club operation is self-sufficient</li> <li>▪ Overall satisfaction rating of 84% amongst users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ With only 4 sheets of ice the facility cannot host major competitions such as winter games</li> <li>▪ Aging facility but well maintained and in good condition</li> <li>▪ Facility is in need of a new roof with options ranging from \$60,000-\$500,000</li> <li>▪ Used by a small percentage of the residents. (83% do not use the building)</li> <li>▪ Membership is currently decreasing but seeing growth in young adults</li> <li>▪ No summer use of the facility</li> <li>▪ Relies on continued operation of Memorial Arena</li> </ul>

### Key Findings:

- Although the facility is owned by the club, it is built on city land and could default to the city.
- The club's ability to finance the repair of the roof and contribute to shared use of the arena chiller are critical to future operations.
- The facility is aging but has many years of serviceable life to continue to be an asset to the community as long as club membership can be maintained.

## MERRITT LAWN BOWLING CLUB

### Existing Conditions

DESCRIPTION AND AMENITIES	TYPICAL PROGRAMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Facility relocated to present site in 2009</li> <li>▪ Regulation -sized lawn bowling court maintained by the city at approximately \$20,000-\$25,000/year</li> <li>▪ 600 sq. ft. clubhouse with patio, storage, washrooms</li> <li>▪ Operated by the lawn bowling club with annual fees of \$75, which covers the insurance and utilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ League play from April – October</li> <li>▪ School program, Pacific sport program</li> <li>▪ Option for seasonal rental of the clubhouse (currently approx. \$1,000/year)</li> </ul>

### Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New facility in excellent condition</li> <li>▪ Beautiful location next to Coldwater River with opportunity for expansion</li> <li>▪ Parking available</li> <li>▪ Centrally located close to other recreation amenities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The club has only 8 members and is decreasing, even with membership drives and a trial school program</li> <li>▪ Low membership may mean that the club could become insolvent</li> <li>▪ Not hosting any large competitions that support tourism</li> <li>▪ Requires extensive irrigation in a semi-desert environment</li> <li>▪ Facility is vastly underutilized</li> </ul>

### Key Findings:

- Although the old facility had a strong and successful tradition in Merritt, the current club membership is extremely low, growth is uncertain and consequently, the facility will continue to be underutilized into the foreseeable future. Considering the community's annual financial subsidy, the facility is not being used to the greatest community good. A lawn bowling facility is available in Kamloops (Riverside Lawn Bowling Club) for drop-in members.
- Closure or adaptive reuse of the facility is justified. Possible uses include conversion to a pickleball facility, youth complex, youth soccer facility or site for an arts centre.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The table below outlines recommendations for recreation and culture facilities, by category. Cost estimates are high level only, and do not include cost estimates for low cost items, or initiatives solely covered with staff time.

Recommendations are shown as a 1 – 3 timeframe and rated as High, Medium or Low importance, or are indicated as “ongoing policy” measures.



Timeframe 1 = short term (1-3 years) 2 = medium term (3-7 years) 3 = long term (7+ plus years)			
Recommendations	Importance	Timeframe (1-3)	Resources
<b>Recreation and Culture Facilities</b>			
44. Maintain the status quo on a number of major civic indoor facilities (other than a long-term agreement for use of the Coquihalla Middle School) and focus resources on facility maintenance and upgrades.	High	1	Staff time to negotiate a joint-use agreement.
45. If the School Board announces its desire to sell the Coquihalla Middle School property, the City should explore the acquisition of this land for future indoor recreation facility use.	Medium	N/A	Dependent on land value.
46. Conduct a facility audit of all major facilities and develop a capital funding program for infrastructure improvements.	High	1	\$50,000 capital
47. Develop a Facility maintenance management plan for all major facilities.	High	2	\$30,000 capital
48. Complete an accessibility audit of all facilities for compliance with provincial regulations, municipal by-laws and to address recommendations from the Age-Friendly Action Plan.	High	1	\$20,000 capital
49. Initiate an energy audit for all recreation and culture facilities and develop an energy conservation plan to reduce operating costs.	Medium	2	\$40,000 capital Operating cost reduction

50. Conduct a water-use audit to identify possible water conservation measures.	Low	2	\$30,000 capital Operating cost reduction
51. Consult with user groups annually prior to capital budgeting process to determine user's requests for upgrades.	High	1	Staff time
52. Develop an asset lifecycle plan. Continue to support increased budgets for infrastructure improvements following the recommendations from the various infrastructure studies.	High	2	Staff or Consultant time
53. Implement a facility replacement reserve to support the long term replacement of major facilities beyond the 10 year time frame.	Medium	Ongoing policy	TBD after facility audits
54. Encourage greater use of city leisure facilities by advertising and promoting rental opportunities to community groups and local businesses.	Medium	1	Staff time Increased revenues
55. Encourage private business and organizations to evaluate the feasibility of developing a movie theatre and a performing arts centre.	Low	2	Staff time
<b>Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre</b>			
56. Install a UV system in the pool to improve water quality, reduce corrosion, lower operating costs and water use.	low	2	\$40,000 capital Operating cost reduction
57. Set a goal to reduce the annual pool maintenance closure from 4 to 3 weeks.	High	2	Staff time Increased revenues

58. Experiment with increasing the hours of afternoon operation and programming and monitor change in usage, costs and revenues.	Low	2		Staff time Increased revenues	
<b>Nicola Valley Memorial Arena</b>					
59. Due to its age, perform structural tests by a structural engineer every 5 years.	Medium	2		\$10,000 capital	
60. Consider user requested improvements during audit; lights, sound system, better spectator heating, improved washrooms, safety improvements of the timekeepers bench.	High	1		\$40,000 capital	
61. Undertake a building design study to determine the feasibility of adding two women's dressing rooms to the ice arena.	Medium	2		\$20,000 capital	
62. Determine feasibility of offering skate rentals for community programs or partner with other foundations to support free/low cost skate ownerships.	High	1		Staff time \$10,000 capital Potential revenue	
<b>Merritt Civic Centre</b>					
63. Pursue a long-term agreement with SD #58 for the use of the Coquihalla Middle School gymnasium, upper mezzanine and several classrooms to support recreation programs. If unsuccessful, explore two possible options: Assess design and costing for a new gymnasium with several multi-purpose rooms, adjoining the aquatic centre and ice arena, or assess designs and costing to cover and expand the outdoor multi-purpose court at Central Park for year-round use.	Medium	1		Staff time Operating budget increase for operation of the school gym	

Merritt Curling Centre			
64. Continue the agreement with the Curling Club and support their efforts to repair the roof, at a short-term, low cost level and monitor club membership to ensure it stays viable for future funding support.	Medium	2	Staff time
Merritt Lawn Bowling Club			
65. Consult with all community groups interested in jointly using the facility — lawn bowling, pickleball, croquet, cricket and city programming staff, to determine the most diversified and cost effective use of the grounds and building.	High	1	Staff time Potential reduction in operating budget
66. If a suitable use agreement cannot be established with the community groups, seek expressions of interest for recreation and tourism- related businesses such as pitch and putt, mini-golf or adventure theme park with the potential to include N'Kwala Park.	High	1	Staff or consultant time Potential revenue



## SERVICE DELIVERY

This section provides an assessment of the city's overall effectiveness and efficiency of its parks, recreation and culture service delivery through a financial review combined with an examination of its policies, procedures, approaches to leadership, partnerships and volunteers and an overview of recreation programs.

## FINANCIAL REVIEW

Community Survey Input:

- When asked "what are the barriers to participation in recreation", cost is a factor for 11% of residents and was the fourth reason after Time (41%), No Obstacles (18%) and Physical limitations (15%)
- When asked "what are the barriers to participation in cultural activities", cost is the fourth ranked reason for 7% of residents
- When asked why residents prefer to use private recreation facilities over city facilities, lower cost was the seventh ranked reason at (4%)
- When asked about possible improvements to recreation programs, providing free or lower cost programs was mentioned by 4% of residents
- When asked: "How would you prefer that Merritt pays for any new or improved parks, recreation, cultural services and facilities", residents indicated:
  - Combination of taxes and user fees 38%
  - Increased user fees 21%
  - Increase taxes 7%
  - Other 24%
  - Do not know/ no opinion 9%
- Ice and sport user groups tended to indicate that current user fees were appropriate.
- A few low-income families are chosen to be part of the Pacific Sport program annually.
- Many of Merritt's socio-economically disadvantaged youth are reportedly inactive.



## ANNUAL BUDGET

A summary of parks, recreation and cultural services annual budget information is shown below.

Table 10: Summary of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services budget 2015

Summary	
<b>Total Operating<sup>10</sup></b>	\$1,772,094
<b>Total Capital</b>	\$1,480,750
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$3,252,844
<b>Revenue</b>	-\$442,772
<b>Grants &amp; Reserves</b>	-\$270,795
<b>Total Revenues</b>	-\$713,567
<b>Operating Net 2015 funded by taxpayers</b>	\$1,058,527
<b>Overall Net 2015 funded by taxpayers</b>	\$2,539,277

Table 11: Summary of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services in 2015 by Facility<sup>11</sup>

	Aquatic Centre	Memorial Arena	Land- Based Programs	Parks and Playgrounds	Cultural Facilities	Administration
<b>Operating Costs</b>	\$947,889	\$395,127	\$281,017	\$287,210	\$313,807	\$132,646
<b>Revenue</b>	\$197,980	\$132,293	\$103,187	\$7,713	\$53,400	
<b>Grants</b>	\$141,453		\$69,843			
<b>Net Subsidy</b>	\$608,456	\$262,834	\$129,898	\$279,497	\$260,407	\$132,646
<b>Recovery Rate</b>	35.8%	33.5%	42.9%	2.7%	17.0%	

<sup>10</sup> Total Operating does not include amortization costs

<sup>11</sup> Excludes all non-recreation buildings.

The 2015 actual operating expenditures for parks, recreation and culture-related building maintenance and programs is \$1,480,750. With significant grants from the Regional District of \$201,796 and \$69,843 from other sources; plus all operating revenues from programming, recreational and cultural building and parks rentals of \$442,772, the city's net annual operating costs for parks, recreational and cultural services is \$1,058,527. This equates to the following costs per:

- Household: \$152.63 (residential taxes accounted for 44.8% of tax revenues, 3,107 private dwellings†)
- Capita: \$148.82 (2011 population of 7,113 from Stats Canada)
- Heavy Industrial: \$7,777.87 (heavy industrial taxes accounted for 16.9% of tax revenues, 23 heavy industries†)
- Light Industrial: \$3,410.81 (light industrial taxes accounted for 2.9% of tax revenues, 9 light industries†)
- Businesses: \$763.37 (business taxes accounted for 28.8% of tax revenues, 414 businesses†)
- Utilities: \$4,763.37 (utilities accounted for 6.3% of tax revenues, 14 utilities†)
- Farms: \$70.59 (farm taxes accounted for 0.2% of tax revenues, 30 farms†)

† Data from BC Assessment.

While comparison to other small cities is challenging as the calculations are not routinely reported, and the method of calculation may vary, Merritt's annual per capita expenditures on parks, recreation and cultural services of \$148.82 appears to be in the lower end of the range. For example, in 2013, The City of Trail had a 5 year average of \$275 - \$325 per capita expenditure. A 1999 BC study found an average expenditure for parks, recreation and cultural services in 10 small cities to be \$228/per capita (corrected for inflation to present day).

## RECOVERY RATE

The recovery rate is both a broad measure of the philosophy of an organization in relation to its fee policy, and a measure of the efficiency of its operations. It is a calculation of the total annual operating cost for the Departments compared to its total revenues generated.

With the total 2015 expenditures for all parks and recreation services at \$1,772,094 and total revenues at \$713,567, Merritt's overall net operating recovery rate is 40.3 %. This is at the higher end of the range of rates seen by the consultant team, which runs Recovery rates averages between 23 – 40% for smaller communities. For Merritt, this indicates an overall lower level of public subsidy for parks, recreation and cultural services. The recovery rate has to be considered within the city's overall objectives. Low rates may be adopted to ensure cost is not a limitation to participation in parks, recreation and cultural services.

The recovery rate for the Aquatic Centre is 35.8% which again is typical of small communities. Larger centres tend to have recovery rates closer to 50%, because net revenues are directly related to population size. The majority (70%) of the operating cost of a pool are fixed costs. However, operating revenues are directly dependent on the level of use; higher attendance yields higher revenues. For these reasons, communities try to maximize the amount of pool use by minimizing

closures and promoting access. With a net annual subsidy of \$608,456 to provide service to approximately 55,906 00 annual visits, the net subsidy per visit is \$10.88.

The Memorial Arena has a recovery rate of 33.5% which is higher than average recovery rates for small towns that range from 29-35%. The arena is capturing higher than average revenues but has lower than average expenditures on operations, reflecting a concern that repairs and maintenance are not at the level needed, considering the age of the facility<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> CDC Changing Point Canada Inc. 2015. *Merritt Arena - Business Case. Report prepared for the City of Merritt.*



## FEES AND CHARGES POLICY

Merritt has an adopted Fees and Charges Policy for admission rates, program costs and facility rental charges. The rates were initially established by taking the average of 7 municipalities; Fernie, Hope, Kamloops, Kelowna, Penticton, Smithers and Vernon and then setting the Base Rate, or the adult rate, at 90% of that average to adjust for locally lower income levels. Of note, only 3 of these comparator cities have populations close to that of Merritt. By their nature, larger centres have higher use rates and thus, greater capacity to recoup their costs.

The policy also includes reductions for family admissions, those with demonstrated financial needs and special needs assistance. The rates have been reviewed and increased periodically.

This comparator approach to setting rates is easy to implement and useful if markets are competing. However, it does not allow the city to determine the true actual hourly cost of operating a facility. Actual costing would help the city set user rates that can improve overall cost recovery, and be more certain about actual subsidy rates.

Admission rates for seniors and youth are 75% of the base rate and 60% of the base rate for children. This policy, although not actually stated, reflects a traditional benefits-based approach to Leisure Services; minors and youth receive higher subsidies than adult programs to encourage their participation because of the broad social benefits gained by the community. However, in Merritt, the reductions are not that significant. Most comparable cities strive to recoup the full cost of adult programs and provide an even greater subsidy in the range of 50% of the base rate for youth and seniors and 25% of the base rate for children. These lower subsidies encourage young families to participate in activities which in turn help develop healthy habits early in life.

A comparison of the sports field booking rates, arena rental rates and admission rates at some of the comparative cities was undertaken and the results are presented in Appendix F.

The review indicates that Merritt's rates have not kept up with the comparators. A few key examples:

- Adult rate for skating drop-in is \$3.50 whereas the adjusted average is \$4.50.
- Adult drop-in swim rate is \$4.00 whereas the adjusted average is \$5.84.
- Adult ice time during the regular season is booked at \$105/hour whereas the adjusted average is \$144/hour.
- Adult sportsfield users are charged \$157 per season whereas the comparative adjusted average was \$294 per adult team. Sportsfield tournament play rate in Merritt is \$44/field/day on weekends but the comparative adjusted base rate is \$163.80.

Merritt's current rates are in the range of 30-70% below the comparators.

Furthermore, other comparable cities have more aggressively implemented additional measures to recoup the cost of providing services and generate additional revenues to help offset the costs of Leisure services, including:

- Charging for rentals of playcourts, spraypools, miscellaneous services such as extra field mowing, garbage pick-up, field lining, wedding bookings and extra staff time where needed.
- A two-tiered fee schedule for non-resident booking of facilities and sportsfields for tournaments that is often 2-3 times the adult base rate.
- Aggressive promotion of tournaments and commercial use of facilities.

- Renting space to private enterprise to provide services to visitors such as food vendors and sale of local products.
- Increased advertising in venues such as ball diamonds.

**Key Findings:**

- While the Recovery Rate gives an overall indication of departmental finances, there is a need for closer scrutiny of departmental revenues and expenses to determine the true costs of providing services to the community.
- The community survey indicates that overall, cost is not a barrier to participation in recreation or culture programs or the reason residents use other private facilities.
- The city's per capita expenditures on parks, recreation and cultural services is lower than comparators; the recovery rate for parks, recreation and culture services is in the higher range than comparators.
- Many of the city's fees and charges rates are lower than comparators.
- The city's policy sets lower subsidies for children, youth and seniors.
- There appears to be support for increases in user fees and taxes for increased services.
- Cost is an issue for a small percentage of the population and there are requests for more free/ low cost programs.

## **REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Overall, city residents appear satisfied with parks and recreation facilities and programs. The city has developed a number of key policies and procedures to guide successful operation including:

- Ice booking policy;
- Ice booking procedure;
- Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre Regulation and Rental Rates;
- Civic centre use regulation and rental rates;
- Schedule of fees and charges;
- Cultural Mapping project;
- Arts and Culture Policy;
- Parks Regulation Bylaw;
- Leisure Guide;
- Aquatic Centre Code of Conduct;
- Adopting the Canada Sport for Life physical literacy program, and
- Annual report to Council to track accomplishments.

## Areas to Improve Service Delivery

### 1. Develop a Departmental Business Plan.

The stated primary function of the Leisure Services department is to provide recreational related opportunities to the citizens of the Merritt area. The department is guided by the mission statement: "to provide programs services, educational opportunities and information to the public and to provide a safe, clean, healthy and friendly environment".

This Master Plan document further defines that role by providing an overall Vision and Guiding Principles. These are more focused on three fundamental outcomes;

- Wellbeing of individuals
- Wellbeing of communities
- Wellbeing of places and spaces

With these new Vision and Principles established, an essential exercise would be to develop a Departmental Business Plan. This plan would focus on clearly defining:

- the department's roles and responsibilities,
- the organizational structure,
- the service delivery model,
- goals, expected outcomes and desired community benefits
- the core programs and services that are of greatest benefit to the community
- principles to set fees and charges policy and cost recovery targets
- roles and relationships with volunteers, service clubs, related agencies and business partnerships
- performance standards for the department

A Business Plan will would help guide decision-making on services and programs to be offered with limited resources and serve as a way of communicating to the public about the departments roles. It would also serve as a vehicle for reporting annually to Council on the department's performance.

### 2. Develop a Sport Tourism Program

The Nicola Valley supports significant tourism opportunities such as hiking, fishing, cross-country skiing and nature appreciation. Merritt's country roots, music festival, rodeo and local history support increased visitation.

Merritt is also ideally situated to take advantage of growing demands for sport tourism. In particular, it has ideal terrain to support mountain biking and there is continued demand for sport tourism facilities especially slo-pitch, soccer, triathlons and GranFondo bike events.

Sport tourism has direct economic benefits to communities, it stimulates the development of new facilities, it can leave social and community legacies and helps expand community recognition which in turn can facilitate opportunities for further hosting of larger sporting events such as

summer and winter games and even into international competitions. Sport tourism also helps imbed a healthy living through active life philosophy within a community.

Many communities have launched successful sport tourism strategies including local cities; Kamloops, Kelowna and Penticton. Destination British Columbia has produced a very useful guide to developing a sports strategy.<sup>13</sup>

Developing a sport tourism strategy would be beneficial. Successful sport tourism initiatives require focused joint efforts between the city, tourism-oriented businesses and the local sport associations. The department's role in supporting tourism has not yet been clearly defined and its resources will have to expand as a plan is implemented.

### 3. Expand Communications and Marketing

The public survey, questionnaire and stakeholder meetings highlighted the need for better communications of existing programs, of other groups and of resources available within the community.

The Leisure Guide and city website are the main vehicles the city uses and its focus is on city run programs and facilities. The gap is that there are many valuable programs and events offered within the community that would be better attended with increased awareness and advertising. Some communities publish a directory or 'Active Living Guide' to raise community awareness of programs available such as at Interior Health, the local Arts Council, private health and wellness clinics, community group programs such as the Senior's Centre. It is within the department's role to help inform the community about health, wellness and recreational programs and services. Advertising may help increase participation and membership in clubs such as curling and lawn bowling.

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<sup>13</sup> Destination BC Corporation. 2013. *Tourism Business Essential. Sport Tourism. The essential Guide to Understanding and Developing Sport tourism in BC.* <http://www.destinationbc.ca/getattachment/Programs/Guides-Workshops-and-Webinars/Guides/Tourism-Business-Essentials-Guides/TBE-Guide-Sport-Tourism-Jun2013.pdf.aspx>



## LEADERSHIP

### THE ROLE OF THE CITY

The City of Merritt presents a largely traditional approach to Leisure Service delivery in which the City assumes the principle role of service provider. This approach creates a large expectation on the City to continue to provide quality resources and services to all users, creating increased competition amongst user groups for equal support and polarization when funds are limited. It also creates a large dependency on the city, removing the incentives for use groups to become independent and seek out their own solutions to meet their recreational needs.

Many Cities are moving away from this approach driven by two forces; (1) the financial need to reduce operating costs and, (2) recognition that joint-partnerships coupled with volunteer efforts engage the community and lead to an overall more efficient, effective and diverse service delivery. Working together helps to build community capacity and skills, broadens leadership in the community, taps into new expertise creates new connections with people and leverages resources not funded by taxpayers.

In this more contemporary **Community Development Model**, the city must assess the needs of the community, determine the core services it must provide and then help guide the community towards filling the gap to meet those broader objectives.

Engaging the broader community not only helps provide more services, but also creates new social interactions and networks that build strength, capacity and resiliency in the community, resulting in a greater sense of pride, accomplishment and appreciation for individuals.

A case in point; for a small town, Merritt has a tremendous number of community groups - there are 93 groups listed in the Leisure Guide's community directory. During public stakeholder meetings, many groups expressed a desire for the City to provide more assistance or support, which is simply beyond the city's capacity. Mixed groups began to be aware of each other and more importantly, begun discussions on how to support each other. The naturalist club and the hiking club found common ground; the mixed slo-pitch league found a new free venue for advertising their events through the Ballie House.

The Community Development Model requires a shift in focus and philosophy from "how can we provide this service" to, "how can we encourage and support the community to provide this service." The approach takes more time, effort and facilitation skills to reach out to the community, build trust and, to mobilize a diverse group of laypersons.



## **PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

One of the keys to success in the Community Development Model is to create an advisory committee. The committee should be viewed as a strong community resource, an advocate for parks and recreation and a vital link to the community. Their role is to represent broad community interests and assist Council in maximizing public input into community decision –making. For example, request for new parks and recreation facilities and programs, such as the recent request for pickleball courts would be referred to the committee for their analysis.

There are many successful models to follow in BC. Some of the common key points include:

- The committee is an advisory capacity and reports to City Council.
- All matters pertaining to parks and recreation, typically more long-term planning matters and requests for service, are referred to the committee for analysis.
- City staff retain overall responsibility for managing their budgets.
- Make –up consists of a diverse cross section of the community to get broad perspectives and stimulate synergy amongst the members. Representatives are chosen from groups that reflect the goals, values, issues and assets within the city. Typically there is representation from; sports field users, indoor recreation facility users, youth, seniors, arts & culture, tourism, outdoor/natural history club, someone bringing the perspective of family and children.
- A liaison from the school district is beneficial.

The committee should be given a high level of responsibility to support council and the Leisure Services Department in achieving the vision, goals and objectives for parks and recreation. A strong, mutual working relationship between Council, staff and the committee is important. As well, the residents should see the committee as an effective vehicle that represents them in community decision making. For staff, the committee should be seen as both a voice of the community and another vital link to networking and facilitating community engagement. Creating the committee will encourage and promote volunteerism in the community.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Implicit in the Community Development Model is the building of inter-agency partnerships, not only for economic efficiency but also the achievement of common community goals and objectives, especially those that integrate health, wellness and education. Partnerships help leverage shared commitment to community desired social outcomes and community – building roles to ensure that core outcomes are met. A successful partnership model is the agreement with Pacific Sport, which has teamed with the city to increase participation in sports and recreation.

Small communities such as Merritt need to maximize the use of facilities and resources in a shared, cooperative manner. Merritt has established a very successful partnership agreement with the Thompson-Nicola Regional District over the provision of regional leisure services. Three additional formal partnerships may also be beneficial, these are outlined in table 11.

## **PROPOSED FORMAL PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Nicola-Similkameen School District #58**

While both city and school district staff demonstrate good working relations, no formal agreement currently exists. An agreement should establish common goals, joint objectives and programs to meet community expectations for health and wellness, as well as formalize terms for shared use and maintenance standards of facilities. Agreement on the adaptive re-use of the Coquihalla Middle School should be included in the agreement. There are many examples of successful joint-use agreements in BC to model.

### **Nicola Valley Institute of Technology**

This public post-secondary institute, governed by the Aboriginal community also has some similar recreational needs and potential recreational facilities that could be offered to the community through a joint-use agreement with the city.

### **Interior Health Authority**

Both the City of Merritt and the BC Interior Health have roles to play in building healthy communities and encouraging healthy lifestyles. Partnerships and formal agreements between both parties can help achieve common goals. Interior health provides many programs of interest to the community. The city may assist by advertising programs and providing easy access to local facilities. The Public Health Institute and the American Public Health Association have developed tips for effective ways that Public Health Professionals and Municipalities can work together and establish partnerships. These tips are outlined in detail in Appendix G.

### **Lower Nicola Indian Band**

The First Nations are an integral part of Merritt history and culture and a growing segment of the population. Community to Community discussions may be fruitful in finding common ground and mutual benefits. First Nations are users of facilities and perhaps in need of improved access. First Nations can also offer cultural programs that would be of interest to residents and tourists.

One particular topic worth exploring is the future of the regions two arenas. Consider the following points:

- It is unlikely that the region can sustain two arenas
- The two arenas are currently competing against each other for market share
- Public have expressed concern over the level of maintenance of the Shulus arena
- The City's arena is aging and requires a long term plan
- The City's current operator has expressed a desire to retire.

Discussions around the role, future plans and possible combined facility operation by a single contractor may provide a long term solution for community ice service.

## Volunteers

Volunteers are vital to the provision of parks and recreation services. Without them, service delivery would decrease, costs would increase and the quality of City life would decline. Furthermore, volunteering helps build strong communities, increase City pride and is in itself, a highly desirable leisure time activity that deserves support. However, many communities, including Merritt are witnessing a shift as volunteers age and participation decreases. However, opportunities exist as volunteers are now more motivated to participate for personal growth and for programs and events where there is a personal attachment.

## RECREATION PROGRAMMING

Merritt offers a variety of recreation programs delivered collectively by the City, its community partners, non-profit agencies, the school district and private businesses. The City directly delivers swimming lessons and approximately 30 recreation classes through contract instructors, and has partnered with Pacific Sport to assist and promote the development of sports in the region. A list of typical programs is provided in the Indoor Facilities Section.

There are several private fitness centres offering classes in fitness, yoga, dance and pilates. There is a good range of sport and fitness clubs, music and arts associations, and a range of specialty clubs suited to a variety of interests. The city has rodeo grounds and leases land to the privately operated golf course. There are over 100 Community Events annually which shows an impressive level of community involvement for a small town.

### Community Survey Input:

- The top five recreational activities for adults are:
  - Walking for exercise 24%
  - Swimming 24%
  - Hiking 19%
  - Boating/fishing 19%
  - Hockey/ice skating 13%
- The top five recreational activities for teens are:
  - Swimming (78%)
  - Ice sports (40%)
  - Soccer (35%)
  - Hiking (23%)
  - Gymnastics (14%)
- The main barriers to participation are:
  - Time 41%
  - Physical limitations (15%)
  - Cost (11%)
  - Information (10%)
- Lack of opportunities is a barrier to cultural activities to 17% of the population
- Overall satisfaction with recreation programs is 66%



- Recreation programs lacking or needing improvement:
  - Programs for youth (15%)
  - Expand current programs (scheduling or availability) (8%)
  - Better advertising (8%)
  - Cultural programs (6%)

Providing effective programming is an ongoing process of assessing changing community needs, removing barriers, motivating participation with varied forms of communication. Merritt certainly has sufficient facilities, a diversity of community groups and an attractive outdoor environment for successful programming.

While overall public satisfaction levels with programming are 66%, this breaks down to 23% Very Satisfied and 43% Somewhat Satisfied, suggesting room for improvement. The community is looking for more programs for youth, an expansion of programming opportunities and increased information.

There are some significant barriers to participation; lack of time is a reflection of low motivation, ease of access and to a lesser extent, cost and information. These are key areas for the city to tackle.

The recommendations are designed to satisfy community needs while also achieving the 5 broad goals established by the National Framework for Recreation, mentioned above.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The table below outlines recommendations for service delivery, by category. Cost estimates are high level only, and do not include cost estimates for low cost items, or initiatives solely covered with staff time.

Recommendations are shown as a 1 – 3 timeframe, and rated as High, Medium or Low importance, or are indicated as “ongoing policy” measures.

Timeframe 1 = short term (1-3 years) 2 = medium term (3-7 years) 3 = long term (7+ plus years)			
Recommendations	Importance	Timeframe (1-3)	Resources
<b>Financial Review</b>			
67. Adopt a Capital Reserves Funding Policy for ongoing major improvements to aging infrastructure, and for eventual facility replacement.	High	Ongoing policy	Staff time
68. Calculate the true break-even rate using actual revenues and rental hours, for both parks and facilities to determine more accurately the rental rates needed to capture appropriate revenues and reflect the desired level of subsidy.	High	1	Staff time Potential revenue increases
69. At the beginning of Council's new term, set cost recovery rates and establish fees and charges necessary to meet targets	High	1	Staff time
70. Restructure the subsidy levels with higher subsidy rates to seniors, children and youth.	Medium	1	Staff time
71. Fees and charges should take into consideration expected inflationary increases.	High	1	Staff time Potential revenue increases
72. Increase the fee schedule for non-resident tournaments.	High	1	Staff time

				Potential revenue increases
73. Explore additional revenue generating initiatives for use of all city services and amenities.	Medium	2		Staff time Potential revenue increases
74. Explore options for all advertising, sponsorship and naming right opportunities for facilities and sports fields.	Medium	1		Staff time Potential revenue increases
75. Develop and deliver only core programs and services where the greatest demand is and where established cost recovery amounts can be achieved.	Medium	Ongoing policy		Staff time Potential reduction in operating
76. Explore with residents where more free/low cost programs are most needed.	Medium	Ongoing policy		Staff time Potential reduction in operating
77. Determine if there are current programs or services that can be more effectively delivered full or in part by the private sector.	Low	Ongoing policy		Staff time Potential reduction in operating
78. Annually set cost recovery performance standards for the department.	High	1		Staff time
79. Inform the public of the costs and benefits of providing leisure services.	Medium	2		Staff time
80. Redirect increased revenues to improvements in parks and leisure facilities.	High	Ongoing policy		Staff time

81. Explore the role and opportunities for the city's parks and facilities to become stronger economic drivers in the community.	Medium	1	Staff time Potential revenue
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Recommendations	Importance	Timeframe (1-3)	Timeframe	
			1 = short term (1-3 years)	2 = medium term (3-7 years) 3 = long term (7+ plus years)
Review of Policies and Procedures				
82. Annually set priorities, goals and objectives for meeting the needs of the community and ensure that they are in-line with staff resources, funding and community support. Track performance and report the results at year end to Council.	High	Ongoing policy	Staff time	
83. Develop a Departmental Business Plan that describes the purpose, operational structure goals, expected outcomes and community benefits of providing parks and recreation services. Monitor progress and report to Council annually.	High	1	Staff time	
84. Continuously evaluate service delivery through ongoing customer surveys and meetings with user groups and report annually to Council.	High	Ongoing policy	Staff time	
85. Develop a sport tourism strategy, largely around field sports and mountain biking.	High	1	Staff time	Potential revenues
86. Involve the Ballie House, Nicola Valley Tourism, the Chamber of Commerce and local sports groups in the development and marketing of a sport tourism program.	Medium	1	Staff time	Potential revenues

87. Host an annual community fair to showcase the range of health, wellness and leisure opportunities available in the community.	Medium	Ongoing policy	Volunteer effort
88. Continue to explore new ways of advertising programs and events including weekly newspaper articles and weekly radio information updates on programs and events.	Medium	1	Staff time Advertising costs Potential revenues
89. Expand the use of social marketing to provide information, publicize events and receive feedback.	Medium	1	Staff time Potential revenues
90. Work with Economic Development to develop parks and recreation oriented target marketing to the seasonal tourist.	Low	2	Staff time Potential revenues
91. Share advertising information with Tourism Merritt and the Merritt Visitor Information Centre.	Low	Ongoing policy	Staff time
<b>Leadership</b>			
92. Continue to move towards the Community Development Model.	High	Ongoing policy	Staff time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initiate staff training on facilitation.</li> <li>- Monitor staff capacity and outcomes to see if the transition is proceeding effectively. If not, consider adding staff depending on need.</li> <li>- Adopt new policies that require partnerships and increasing support from community organizations.</li> <li>- Foster a greater sense of community partnership through increased and ongoing communications on the needs and benefits.</li> </ul>			

93. Advertise and promote the desire for new business opportunities, joint ventures and partnerships with private enterprise.	High	1	Staff time Potential revenue
94. Develop Terms of Reference for, and establish a Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee. - Annually track the progress of the recommendations in this plan with the committee and report the results to Council.	Medium	1	Staff time
95. Continue to work with the Thompson-Nicola Regional District in a joint approach to regional recreation.	High	Ongoing policy	Staff time
96. Work with the School Board and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology to develop joint-use agreements to ensure shared and efficient use of facilities, programs and services that best meet community needs.	High	Ongoing policy	Staff time
97. Maintain a strong liaison with Interior Health Authority to monitor health and wellness issues and implement joint health and wellness programs.	High	Ongoing policy	Staff time
98. Continue to work cooperatively to strengthen relationships with Federal and Provincial governments and neighbouring municipalities.	High	Ongoing policy	Staff time
99. Host a community to community forum with the Lower Nicola Indian Band to establish common goals for leisure services.	High	1	Staff time
100. Continue to create opportunities for volunteerism: - Encourage the museum society to host outreach programs and implement changing displays - Work with community groups such as the mountain bike club, hiking club and naturalist clubs, arts council and heritage music	Medium	Ongoing policy	Staff time Potential revenue



society to participate in recreation programs and demonstration events for tourists				
101. Celebrate community volunteer efforts by hosting an annual volunteer recognition event.	High	Ongoing policy		
<b>Recreation Programming</b>				
102. Work with community partners to expand programming for teens. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tennis, horseback riding, music and arts, skateboarding, mountain biking appeal to youth</li> <li>- with the lease of the CMS gym, expand teen programming to include basketball, floor hockey, badminton and gymnastics</li> <li>- Support community efforts to establish a boys and girls club</li> <li>- Run an experimental teen drop –in program perhaps at the Coldwater Centre with an experienced programmer and track outcomes</li> </ul>	High	1		Staff and volunteer time
103. Offer more programs for seniors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive aging</li> <li>- Offer programs at the Senior's Centre</li> </ul>	Medium	1		Staff time Potential revenues
104. Develop more options for expanding low cost marketing and advertising of programs.	Low	1		Staff time
105. Advertise free/low cost community- wide programs in the leisure guide.	Low	1		Staff time
106. Advertise financial aid options in the leisure guide.	High	1		Staff time



107. Promote the benefits of recreation as a means to increase motivation and participation (Sponsor low cost community programs that raise awareness of facilities and programs such as 'try it for free' or 'bring a friend').	High	1	Staff time
108. Maintain ongoing dialogue with the community to assess changing community needs.	Medium	Ongoing policy	Staff time
109. Explore more drop-in and flexible scheduling for programs particularly for adults.	Medium	Ongoing policy	
110. Partner with the Lower Nicola Indian Band to offer programs that increase cultural awareness and appreciation.	Medium	1	Staff time Potential revenues
111. Ensure programs are offered with the theme of nature appreciation to help people connect with nature. Work with outdoor clubs to develop appropriate recreation programs (i.e. canoeing/kayaking, nature appreciation, photography, art) utilizing natural areas.	Medium	Ongoing policy	Staff time
112. Work with Arts and Culture groups to expand programming. - considering Merritt's country music culture, music-related programming may be successful, in addition programming that explores Merritt's First Nations and Rodeo heritage may also be an option	Medium	2	Staff time Potential revenues
113. Once the accessibility audit is completed, address what physical limitations are preventing community participation.	High	2	Staff time

## **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

An implementation plan, shown at the end of each chapter, prioritizes recommendations with associated provision of capital and ongoing operational and maintenance funding requirements where significant. The plan will provide direction for City Council and Staff over the next 10 years. This plan does not provide specific site plans or specific budget recommendations. All recommendations and plans outlined within this report will be vetted by Staff and Council in future planning processes, as well as evaluated relative to resource and budget requirements.

Each recommendation in this report has been assessed as a short (1-3 years), medium (3-7 years) or long term (7+ years) phase item. While short term projects will rely chiefly on existing infrastructure, focusing on user experience, long term projects may include major construction – considering needs, locations, schedules and financial strategies.

## **FUNDING STRATEGIES**

The capital and operating investment recommended in this Master Plan presents a challenge for municipal financing, and will require a range of different strategies. The City of Merritt, along with all other municipalities in BC, will have to use a combination of conventional and non-conventional methods to address its parks and recreation renewal challenges and to meet the needs of its population. The funding strategies below will be key components to implementing this plan.

It should be recognized that Staff require dedicated time to build partnerships and resource development, establish volunteer committees, as well as time for building new required skills. Many of the funding avenues described here will require ongoing attention to identify opportunities and establish and maintain productive partnerships.

Merritt is a small community with limited public resources. In order to provide quality park services and meet expectations, the City must harness all the energy and resources within and around the community. The role of the City is to be a facilitator and communicator, collectively drawing together the strengths, talents and resources of its residents, leveraging partnerships with multiple agencies and businesses, building connections with surrounding communities and continuing to work with all levels of governments.

## **ONGOING INVESTMENT GOALS**

Most municipalities fail to adequately provide for asset renewal, and the result of this shortfall is a progressive infrastructure deficit. Ideally, a municipality should invest enough annually in its facility and infrastructure assets to sustain them over the long term. Actual spending might be incremental, in the form of ongoing upgrades and major maintenance projects, or it might be all at once, in the form of end-of-life-cycle replacement.

As a rough rule of thumb, for example, this would mean committing about 2% of replacement value of buildings each year, given that the expected life cycle of buildings is approximately 50 years. Actual spending might be incremental, in the form of ongoing upgrades and major maintenance projects, or it might be all at once, in the form of end-of-life-cycle replacement.

Asset life cycles vary in length. Assets such as rinks, where moisture and chemicals inherent in their operation accelerate structural and mechanical wear and tear, may have only a 35 year functional lifespan. The calculation of required life cycle investment can be fine-tuned on this basis.

New facility development should always include consideration of ongoing operating costs with those of the initial capital outlay. When designing the facility, adding energy efficiencies, multifunctional features, and considering future expansion or retrofit options can achieve efficiencies that repay the original cost several times over the life of the facility. Pools and rinks in particular have high potential to deliver energy exchanges to heat/cool other components in a facility.

In relationship to parkland and park amenities achieved through local development the City should always be careful to only accept land which is desirable for park purposes and facilities built to a high standard to avoid an ongoing burden of maintenance responsibility with little benefit to the community.

### **CORE FUNDING**

Conventionally, the funds to create, sustain and renew park and recreation assets are drawn from the local property tax base, either within annual budgets or, for large ticket items, through capital plans. This core funding may be supplemented by user fees. While user fees are rarely enough to offset capital costs, they can cover a proportion of operating expenses.

Some external funding can be realized through such sources as senior government infrastructure renewal and economic stimulus programs, although such provision is intermittent and can rarely be anticipated. Plans should be developed in advance so that they are on hand when grant opportunities arise.

Finally, Development Cost Charges (DCCs) are an essential resource for providing municipal services to a community. These are likely to be limited in Merritt unless the community sees a significant increase in new development in the future. If this is the case, DCCs can be collected and applied to park acquisition and park improvement projects, including recreation buildings (i.e. washrooms, accessibility upgrades, change rooms, etc.) and outdoor recreation facilities (i.e. sport fields, playgrounds, trails, fencing, landscaping, drainage and irrigation).

### **GRANTS**

The City should continue to monitor for grant opportunities to assist with the development of recreation facilities, park and trail amenities. With the current economic climate, funding opportunities are limited; however, maintaining contact with local MLAs and MPs helps raise awareness and communicate the needs in the community. Health authorities are becoming increasingly instrumental in acquiring new grants for parks and recreation as stronger correlations are being made between active and healthy living.

Because grants can be quite beneficial, it is worth ensuring that staff are monitoring for grant opportunities and have the time and resources to develop applications, including those which support local associations and non-profit societies. Partnership grant applications either with another government agency or a non-profit group often gain more support. The best resource is the [CivicInfo BC](#) website. As well, membership to [Big Online](#) a privately owned on-line resource providing a comprehensive source of fundraising information, opportunities and resources for charities and non-profits may be beneficial if staff or volunteers have the time to monitor for relevant opportunities.

Community members should be encouraged to lead or assist with relevant grant applications such as community grants whose funds are only available to residents and not municipal governments. Examples of community grants include the Kraft celebration tour which makes available up to \$25,000 for awarded Community Projects, or the ParticipACTION Teen Challenge which provides resources for encouraging teens to be active, including equipment or other funding. In addition, the City should encourage community groups to offer in-kind contributions and volunteer hours, where appropriate.

Funding opportunities through other agencies and government programs should also be sought, including:

- The Federal Gas Tax Fund is a Federal program providing funding for Canadian municipalities to help build and revitalize public infrastructure.
- Age Friendly Communities Grant to assist local governments in BC to best support aging populations, develop and implement policies and plans, and/or develop projects that enable seniors to age in place and facilitate the creation of age-friendly communities.
- Infrastructure Planning Grant assists local governments in developing sustainable infrastructure that will improve public health and safety, protect the natural environment and strengthen local and regional economies.
- Bike BC Funding funds infrastructure which forms part of a bicycle network plan prepared and adopted by a municipality or regional district.
- ICBC for safety upgrades.
- Funding through the Tire Stewardship BC Community Grant Program. This grant program provides financial support to municipalities who have decided to utilize recycled tire products in their projects. This grant may be applied to projects including rubber tile surfacing for playgrounds, water parks or fitness areas, walkways, running tracks or playing fields. This program is offered as a matching grant, to a proposed maximum of \$30,000.
- Tourism grants.
- Partnership funding from regional government, and cost sharing from adjacent municipalities.
- BC Economic Development is a provincial government website specifically geared towards helping small communities with economic development. This website offers a wide variety of funding and grant opportunities, as well as research tools.
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities: Green Municipal Fund allocates funding through five sectors including transportation, focusing on modal shifts i.e. sidewalks and bike paths, pedestrian and cyclists crossings and other complete street improvements.
- Mountain Equipment Co-op sponsors a number of programs that help to conserve ecologically and recreationally important places, and inspire and enable Canadians to be active outside. The land acquisition program provides grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000, to organizations dedicated to conserving ecologically and/or recreationally significant landscapes both in cities and wilderness areas.



- PlanH: offers two types of new grants. Partnership development and collaboration between local governments, health authorities, and other community stakeholders is a priority, as is working upstream for greater impact in a number of areas: healthy eating and food security, tobacco reduction, physical activity, healthy early childhood development, positive mental health and well-being, culture of moderation for alcohol use, injury prevention, and planning for a healthy built environment. Stream One: Seeding Health Small, Rural and Remote Communities for grants up to \$5000, and Stream Two: Growing Impact – BC's Next Level of Healthy Communities Leadership for grants up to \$15,000.
- There are also grant opportunities with BC Active Communities.

Private funding programs, including TD Friends of the Environment Foundation who offer registered Canadian charities a Charitable Registration Number, as well as educational institutions (primary/secondary/post-secondary schools), Municipalities and Aboriginal groups with support for a wide range of environmental initiatives, with a primary focus on environmental education, urban greening and enhancing biodiversity, and energy conservation. The Vancouver Foundation contributes time, leadership and financial support to local initiatives, helping people give back where their communities need it most. Links to the above mentioned programs and funding opportunities can be found in Appendix H.

## **APPENDIX A – STATISTICALLY VALID PHONE SURVEY SUMMARY**

November 2015

# City of Merritt Parks, Recreation and Culture Community Survey

*Merritt*



MUSTEL GROUP  
MARKET RESEARCH





MUSTEL GROUP  
MARKET RESEARCH



LEES + Associates  
Landscape Architects

## ➤ Introduction

The following report summarizes the findings from a City of Merritt community survey regarding current usage habits and opinions of recreational and cultural services and facilities.

### Telephone Survey Methodology

- A total 200 interviews were conducted by telephone with a random selection of adults, 18 years of age or over;
- The margin of error on the sample is +/-6.9% at the 95% confidence level;
- Specific steps were taken to insure the sample is representative of the community at large including:
  - sample drawn at random from an up-to-date database of published residential listings;
  - next birthday method employed to randomize respondent selection within the household;
  - up to 6 calls made to each household/individual to reduce potential bias due to non-response;
  - final sample weighted by gender within age to match Statistics Canada Census data.

- Interviewing was conducted by Mustel Group interviewers weekday evenings and during the day on weekends from November 2-8, 2015;

- The questionnaire used is appended;

- Detailed computer tabulations are provided under separate cover.

### Open-Access On-line Survey

- In addition, an open access online survey was available to community and government members interested in expressing their views.
- The analysis in the report focuses on the random survey results but the findings from the on-line survey are displayed in this report. They should however be interpreted with caution as the findings may not be reflective of the broader community (in fact the sample is skewed to women and those with children).





## Overview

### Recreational and Cultural Activities

- Walking for exercise and swimming, followed by hiking, boating/fishing, ice sports and golf are the most popular recreational activities of City of Merritt residents.
- Among children under 18 years of age, swimming is the most popular activity, followed by ice sports, soccer, and hiking.
- Time followed by physical limitations, are the key barriers to recreational activities. Cost, lack of information and lack of opportunities are also barriers to some extent.
- Time is also a key barrier to participating in cultural activities more often along with lack of opportunities.

### Recreational and Cultural Facilities/ Programs

- Residents are most regular users of the Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre, followed by the Merritt Civic Centre.

Satisfaction levels are quite high with most recreation facilities, particularly among users of The Baillie House, and the Senior's Centre.

When asked what indoor facilities are lacking or in need of improvement, suggestions were made for a number of recreational facilities (particularly the arenas, gyms and aquatic centre) and for the movie and live theatres.

Approximately one-in-five use private recreation facilities, primarily Planet Fitness. The quality of the facilities, and programming/facility not offered by the city are the primary reasons for using private facilities.

The majority, 66%, are at least 'somewhat' satisfied with the opportunities for recreational programs offered by the City of Merritt. Only 10% in total are dissatisfied, with the following groups being slightly more critical than others: women (15% dissatisfied), those under 55 years of age (16%), and those with children (25%).

When asked what recreation programs are lacking or need improvement, programs for youth was the most frequent comment.





## Overview (cont.)

### Outdoor Recreation

- Satisfaction levels are even higher with Merritt's parks and trails, which is consistent with the extensive involvement of residents in outdoor recreation. A total of 80% are at least 'somewhat' satisfied, with findings relatively consistent by demographic segments.
- The majority of residents use Merritt parks or trails at least once every two to three weeks, with approximately half using them at least once a week.
- The majority of residents believe Merritt's open spaces and parks are sufficiently maintained, provide access to those with mobility issues, and are sufficient in numbers.
- In terms of trail systems, almost equal proportions, about half the population, use each of the three main areas.
- In terms of parks used most often, Rotary Park is the most popular, followed by Central Park and Voght Park.

- Approximately one-third use playgrounds and an equal proportion use sports fields. A total of 8% use the skate parks. For playgrounds, the Rotary Park is most popular, followed by the Central Park and Voght Park. For sports fields, Central Park is most popular, followed by the Rotary Park and Voght Park. Central Park is the favoured park among the small group of skateboarders.
- A variety of outdoor recreation facilities are listed when asked what is lacking or needing improvement, including parks (e.g., better playground equipment), outdoor courts, and sports fields.

### Future Priorities

- The facilities that residents are most inclined to rate as a high priority for further development or upgrade are walking trails (likely because they are so commonly used) followed closely by biking trails, the arena, aquatic centre, and arts and cultural centres.
- Residents tend to prefer a combination of taxes and user fees, and to a lesser extent, increased user fees to pay for new or improved facilities. Less than 10% prefer increased taxes.



MUSTEL GROUP  
MARKET RESEARCH

# Detailed Findings



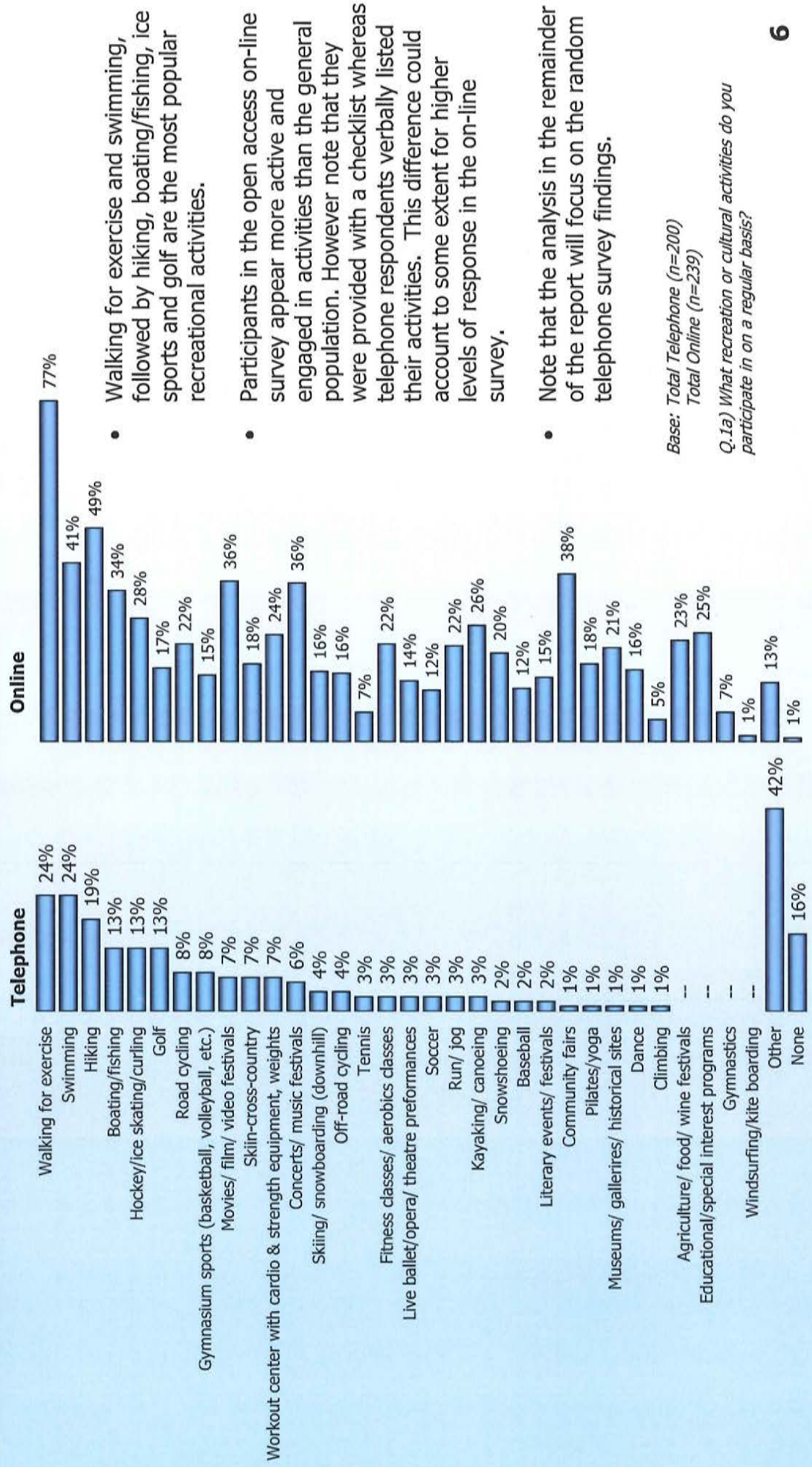


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## Regular Recreational and Cultural Activities





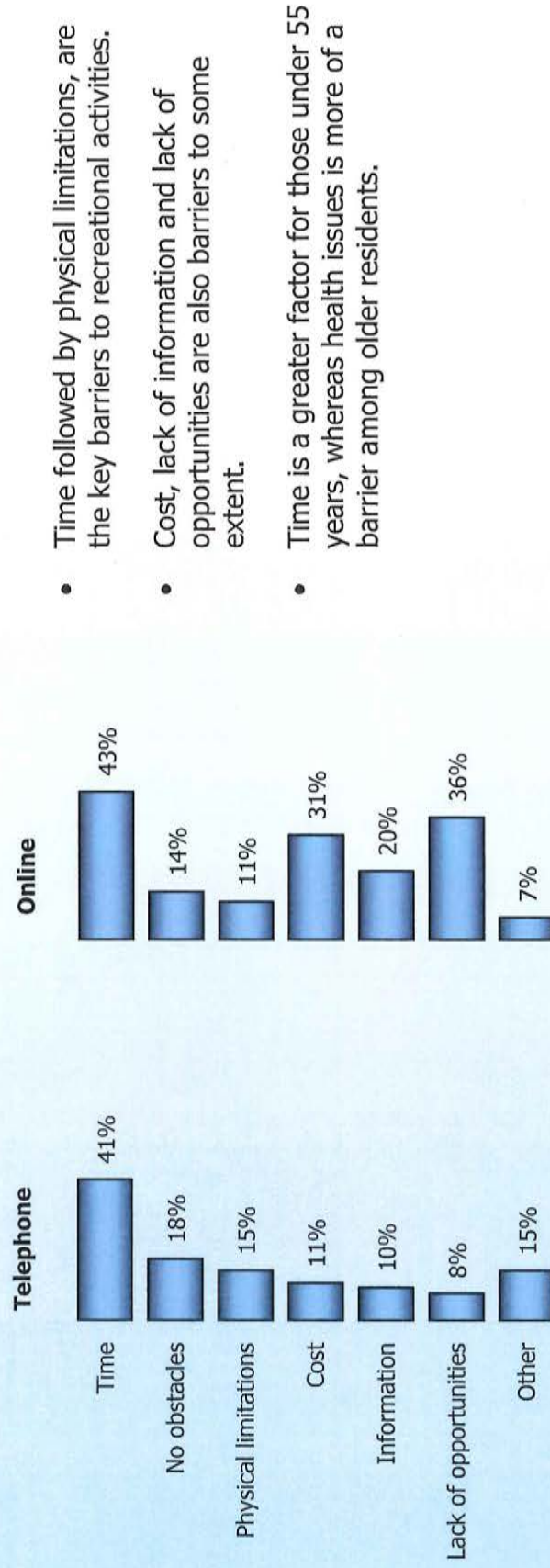


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## ➤ Barriers to Recreational Activities



Base: Total Telephone (n=200)  
Total Online (n=239)

Q.1b) What, if anything, prevents you from participating in recreational activities more often?

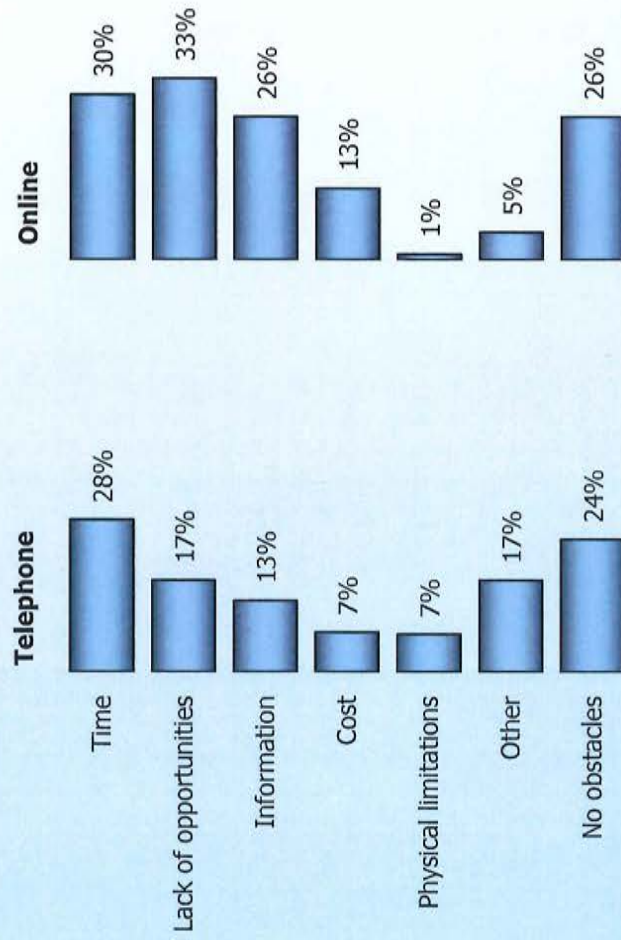


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## ➤ Barriers to Cultural Activities



- Time, followed by lack of opportunities are the key barriers to participating in cultural activities more often.
- Time and lack of information are greater barriers for those under 55 years of age than for their older counterparts.

Base: Total Telephone (n=200)  
Total Online (n=239)

Q.1c) What, if anything, prevents you from participating in cultural activities more often?



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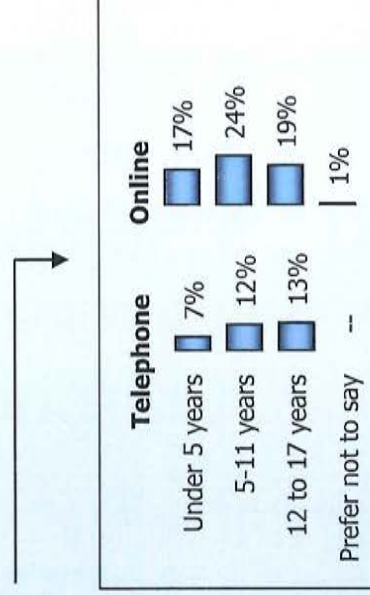


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## Children Under 18 Years



☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Prefer not to say



*Note: Results based on total population*

Base: Total Telephone (n=200)  
Total Online (n=238)

Q.2) Do you have children under the age of 18 years?

- Approximately one-quarter of adults have children under the age of 18 years.
- Note a higher proportion of on-line respondents report to have children.



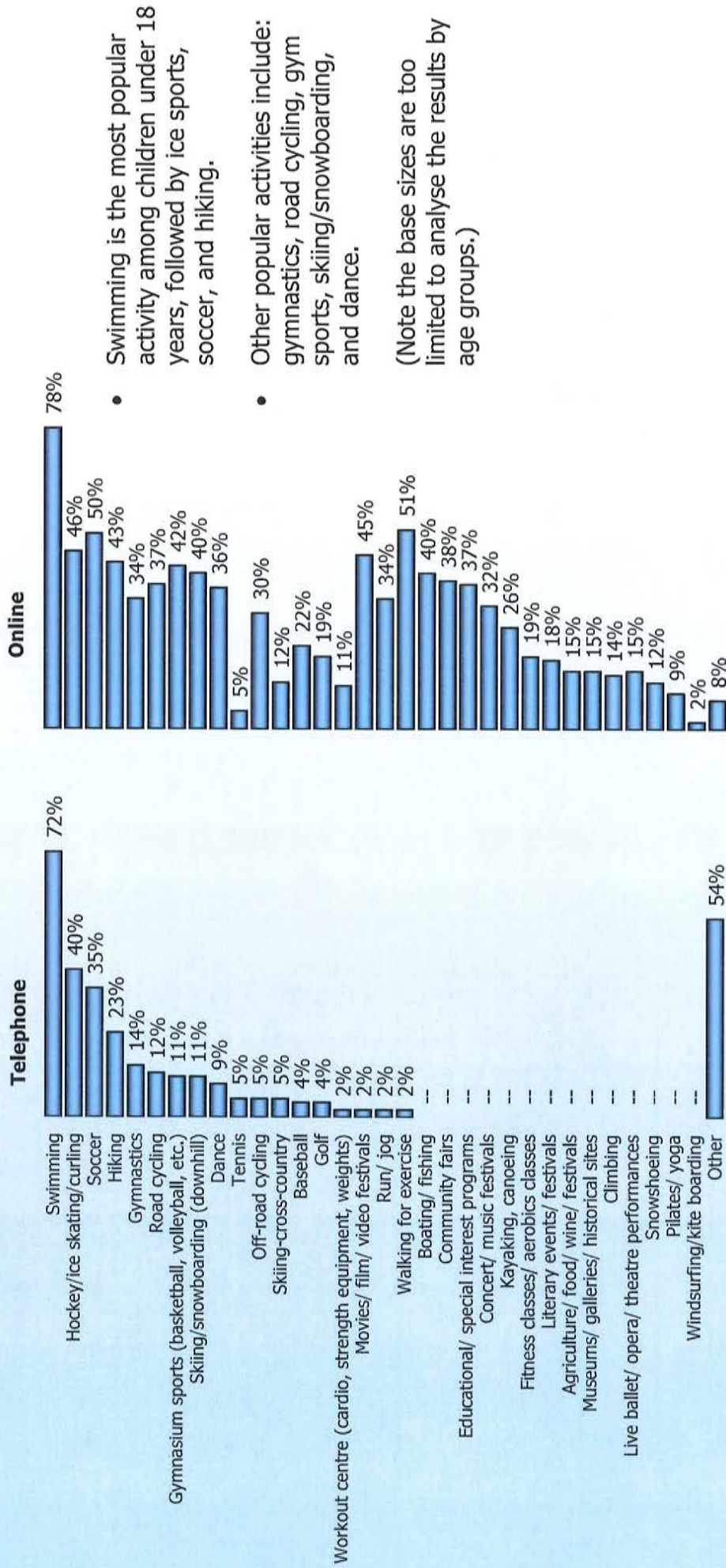


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## Recreational Activities of Children Under 18 Years



Base: Total children under 18:  
Telephone (n=36)  
Online (n=107)

Q.2) What type of recreation activities does your child or children under 18 years enjoy?





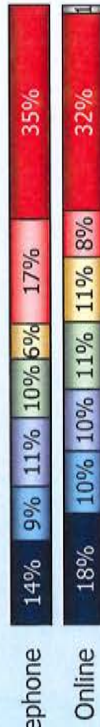
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## ➤ Frequency of Use of Public Recreation Facilities

**Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre**



**Nicola Valley Memorial Area**



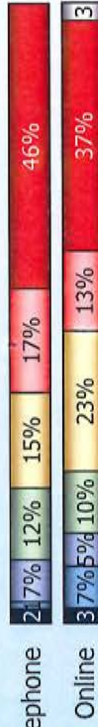
**School Gymnasiums**



**Merritt Curling Arena**



**Merritt Civic Centre**



*continued*



Base: Total telephone (n=200)  
Total online (n=239)

Q.3) How often do you use:

- Residents are most regular users of the Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre, followed by the Merritt Civic Centre.

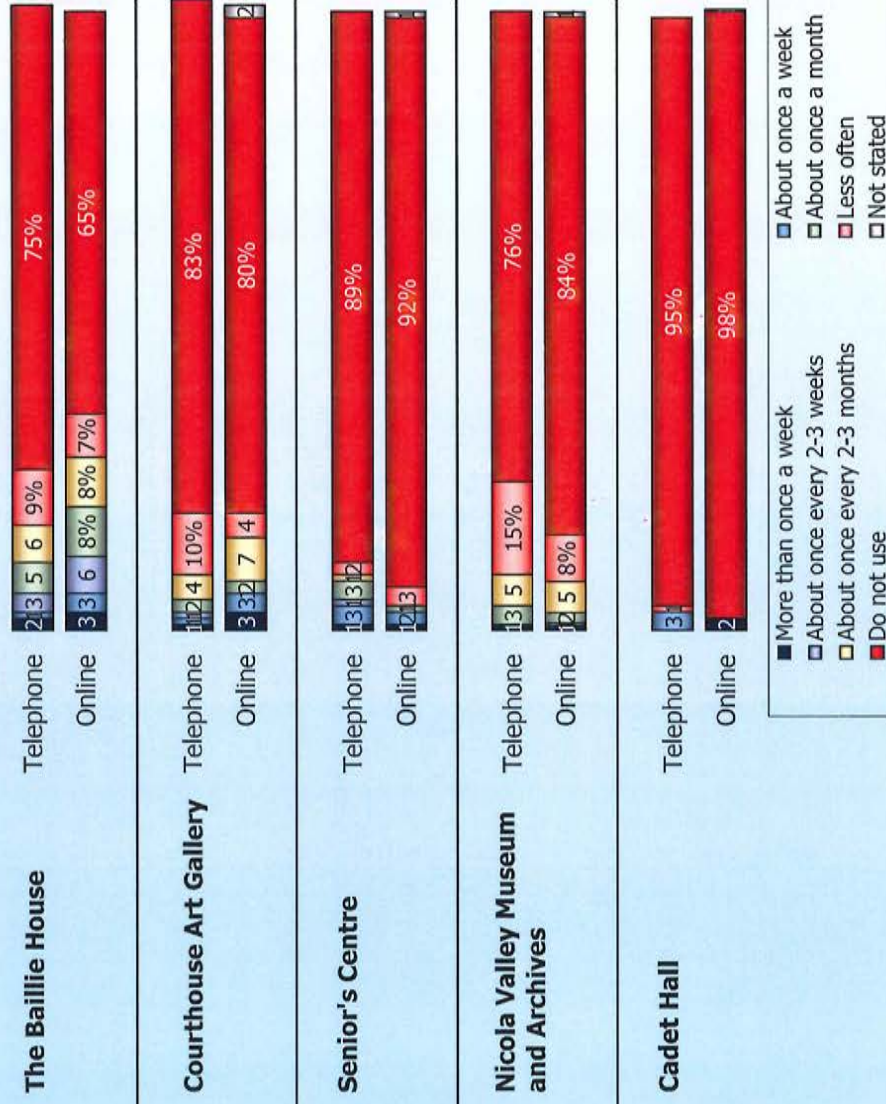


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## Frequency of Use of Public Recreation Facilities (cont.)



Base: Total telephone (n=200)  
Total online (n=239)

Q.3) How often do you use:



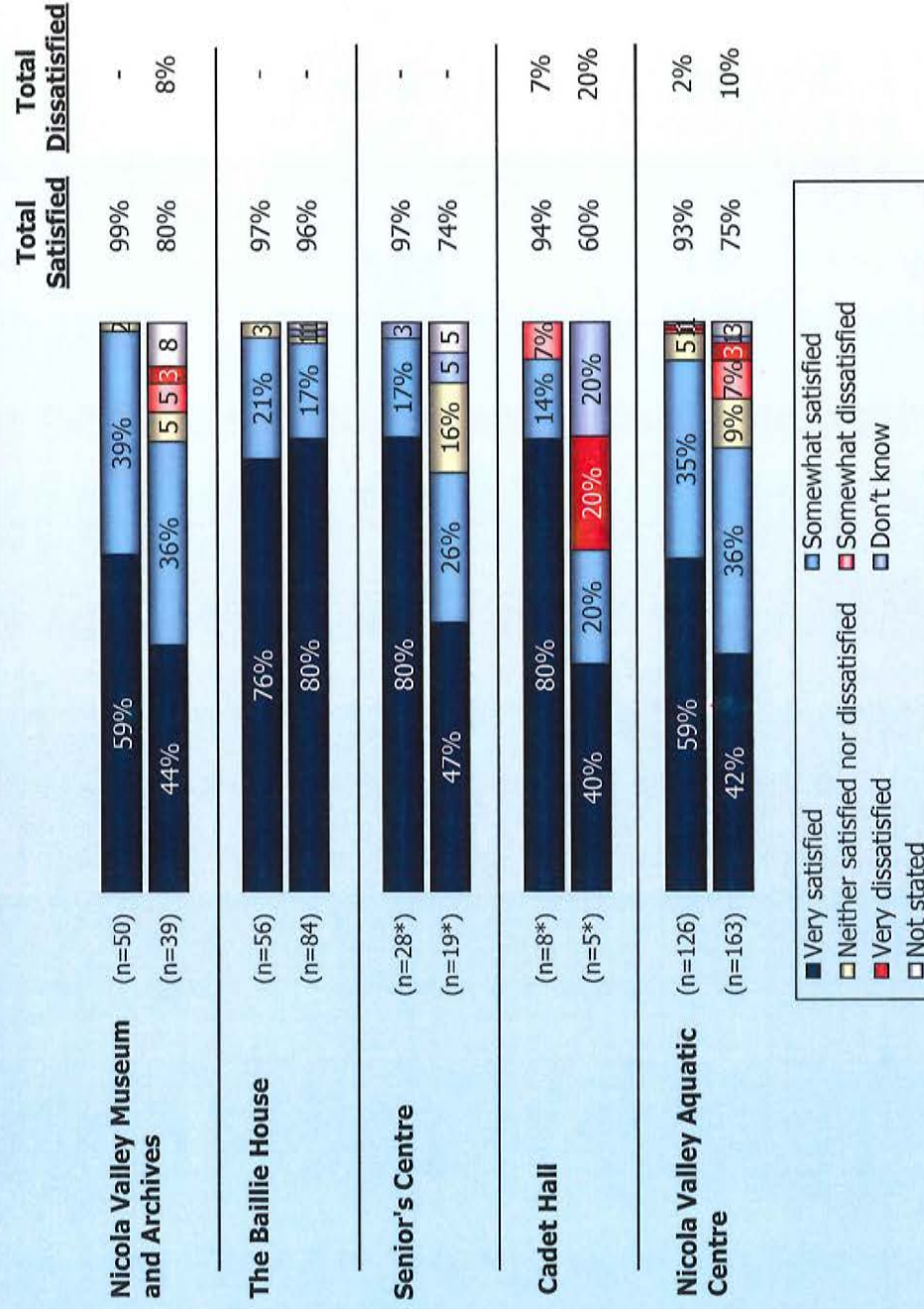


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## ► Satisfaction Levels with Public Recreation Facilities

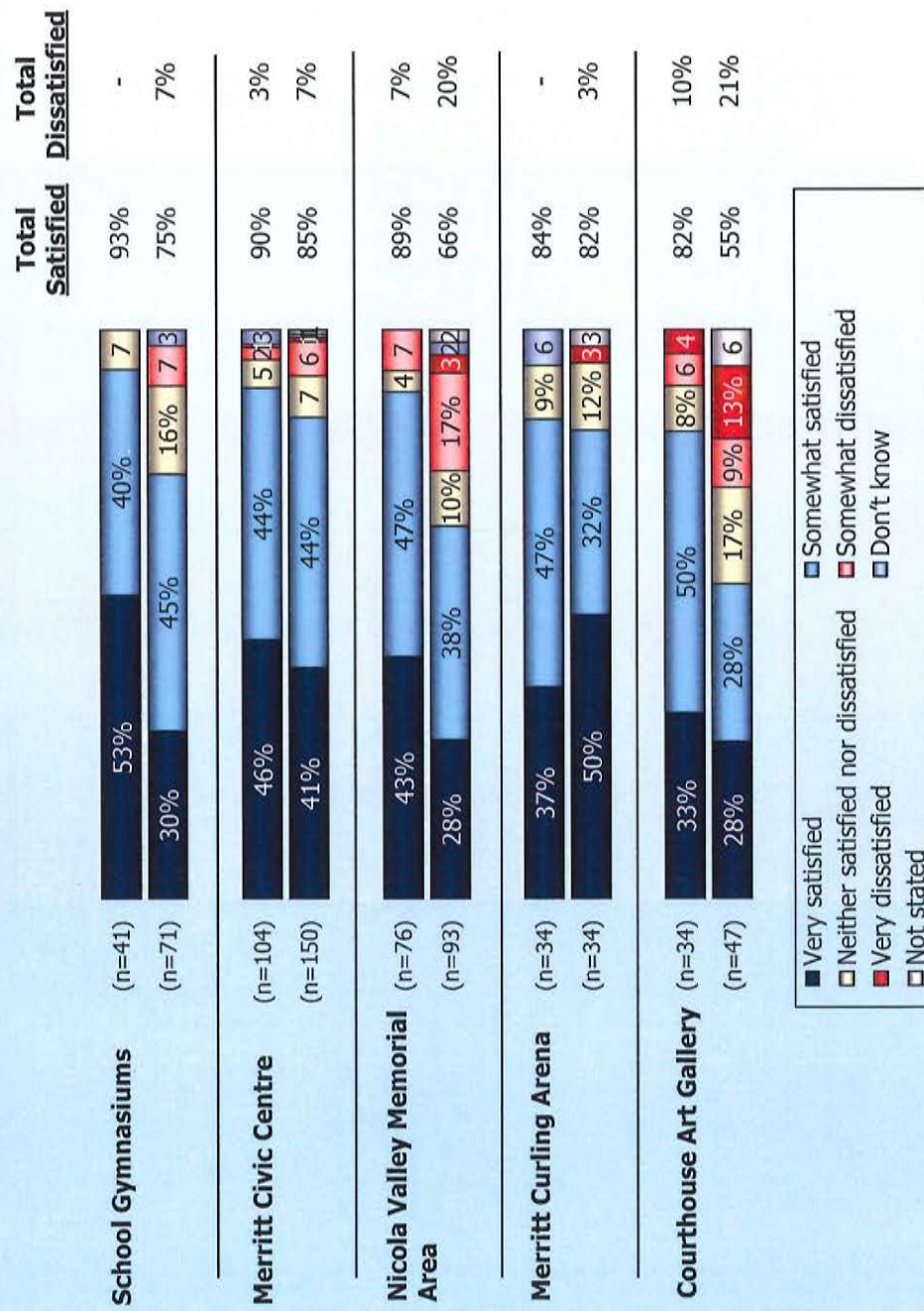


Base: Total Users

Q.3b) How satisfied are you with each of the following facilities?

\*Caution: Small base size

## ► Satisfaction Levels with Public Recreation Facilities (cont.)



Base: Total Users

*Q.3b) How satisfied are you with each of the following facilities?*

*\*Caution: Small base size*





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## ➤ Indoor Facilities Lacking or Needing Improvement

	Telephone (200) %	Online (239) %
Renovate/ upgrade facilities (i.e. heating, staffing, equipment):	29	38
Arena(s)	8	11
Gyms	7	9
Aquatic centre	6	9
Ice/ curling rinks	3	6
Upgrade all facilities	2	6
Facilities for children/ youth (i.e. play centre, laser tag)	4	4
Civic centre	4	3
Facilities for adults/ seniors	4	2
Walking/ running track	1	3
Climbing wall	-	2
Bowling alley	1	1
Movie theatres	10	9
Live theatres	10	7
Indoor courts (i.e. racquet ball, squash, basketball)	4	4
Extended hours of operation	1	3
Art galleries	1	2
Miscellaneous	<1	3
None	55	49

Q.4) What indoor facilities are lacking or needing improvement in Merritt?

- When asked what indoor facilities are lacking or in need of improvement, suggestions were made for a number of recreational facilities (particularly the arenas, gyms and aquatic centre) and for the movie and live theatres.



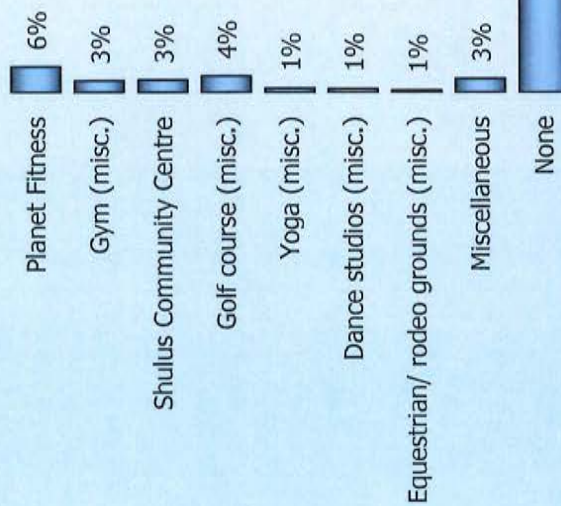
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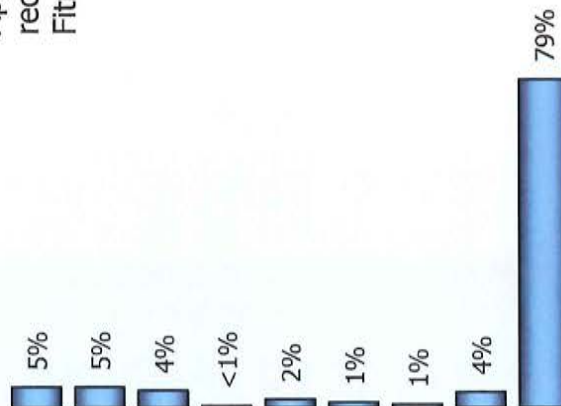
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## ➤ Private Recreation Facilities Use

### Telephone



### Online



- Approximately one-in-five use private recreation facilities, primarily Planet Fitness.

Base: Total Telephone (n=200)

Total Online (n=239)

Q.5) Which private recreation facilities do you use, if any?





## ➤ Reasons Use Private Facilities

Total use private facilities	Telephone (35) %	Online (50) %
Has better facilities	35	28
City does not offer programs	27	38
City does not offer facilities	18	12
Convenient (i.e. location, schedule)	17	20
Familiarity	9	2
Not aware of City facilities/ programs	5	4
Cheaper	4	8
No reason in particular	6	10
Q.5a) Why do you choose to use the private facilities instead of those offered by The City?		
Base: Total that use private facilities		

- The quality of the facility, and programming/facility not offered by the city are the primary reasons for using private facilities.
- Convenience is also a factor to some extent.

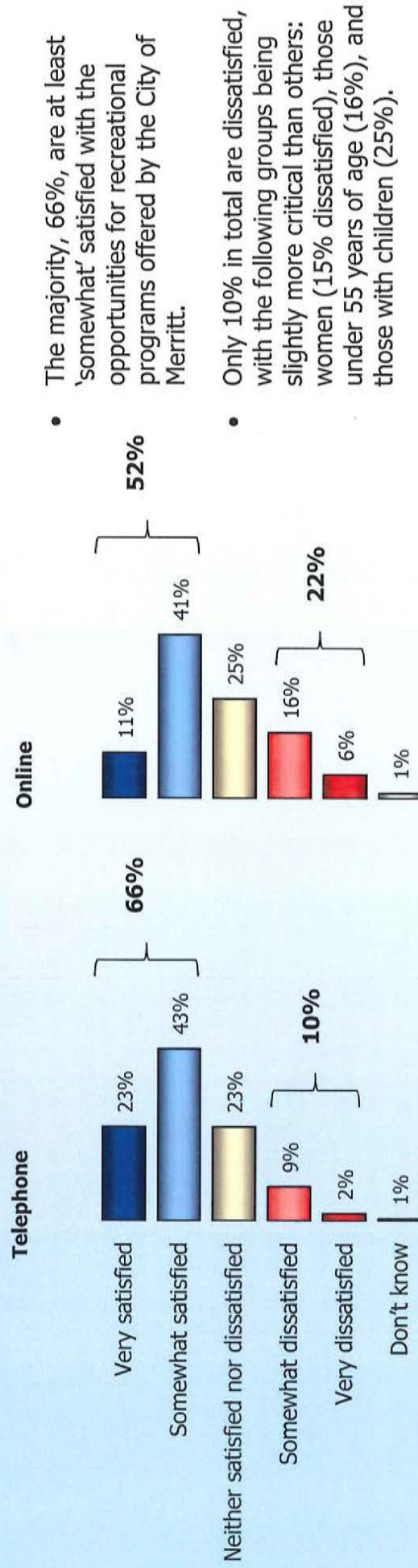


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## Overall Satisfaction with Recreation Programs Offered by City of Merritt



Base: Total Telephone (n=200)  
Total Online (n=239)

Q.6) Overall, how satisfied are you with the opportunities for recreation programs offered by the City of Merritt?





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## Recreation Programs Lacking or Needing Improvement (Unprompted)

	Telephone (200) %	Online (239) %
Programs for youth	15	14
Expand current programs (i.e. fill up quickly, inconvenient schedules)	8	9
Better advertising for programs/ facilities	8	2
Programs for adults/ seniors	8	8
Cultural activities/ programs	6	5
Targeted programs (i.e. skill level, special needs)	5	5
Gymnastics	4	4
Free/ cheaper options	4	1
Hiking/ walking trails (i.e. expand, connect, better maintained)	3	6
Sports fields (i.e. expansion, maintenance)	2	4
Fitness classes (i.e. yoga, tai chi)	2	9
Swimming (i.e. pool comments, lessons)	2	3
Biking/ quad/ mountain bike trails	2	3
Indoor sports (i.e. racquet ball, basketball)	2	1
Social activities	1	3
Dance classes	1	5
Cooking classes	1	3
Parks (i.e. better playground equipment, skate park, washrooms, maintenance)	1	3
Skiing (rentals, downhill, cross country)	1	2
Movie theatre	1	1
Outdoor (i.e. pickleball, basketball)	1	<1
Hockey	1	<1
Miscellaneous	8	3
None	57	54

Q.7) What recreation programs are lacking or needing improvement?

- When asked what recreation programs are lacking or need improvement, programs for youth was the most frequent comment.
- Others included: expand current programs in general and specifically for adults/seniors, advertise more, and provide more cultural activities/programs.

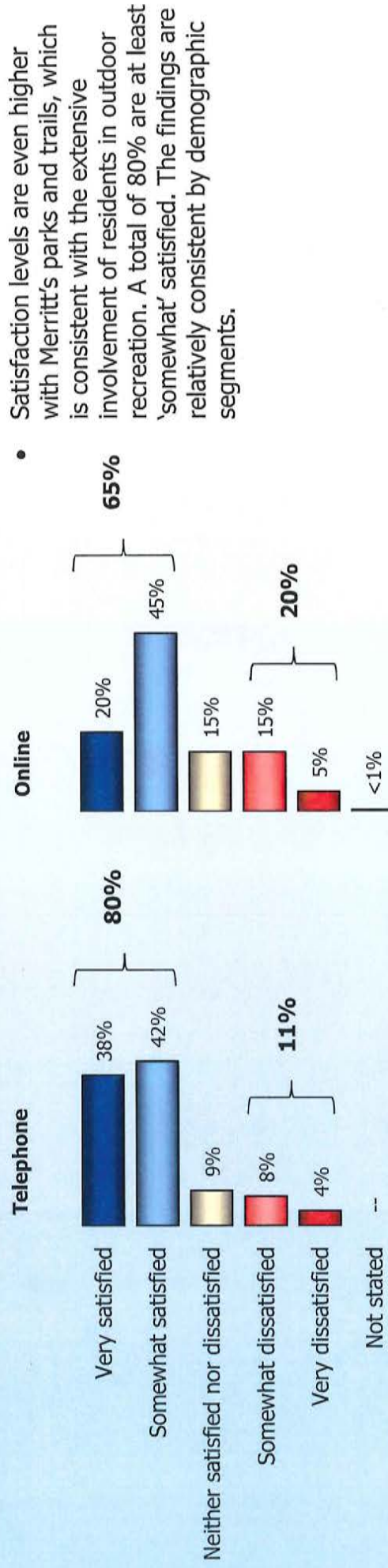


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## ➤ Overall Satisfaction with Parks and Trails in Merritt



Base: Total telephone (n=200)  
Total online (n=239)  
Q.8) Overall, how satisfied are you with the parks and trails in Merritt?



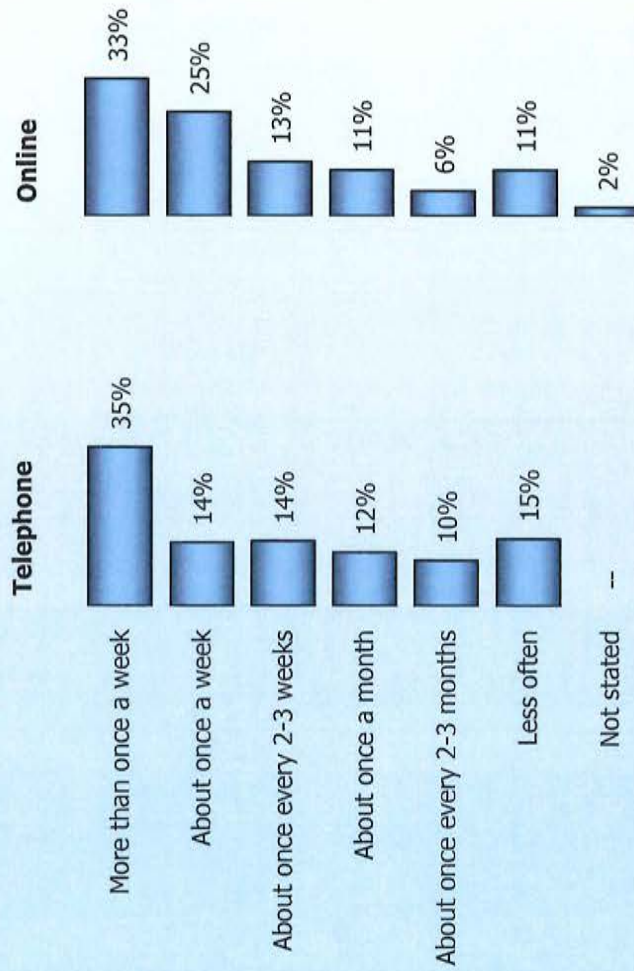


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## ➤ Frequency of Parks and Trail Use in Merritt



- The majority of residents use Merritt parks or trails at least once every two to three weeks, with approximately half using them at least once a week.
- Usage patterns are relatively consistent by demographic segments.

Base: Total telephone (n=200)  
Total online (n=239)

Q.8a) How often do you use parks/ trails in Merritt?

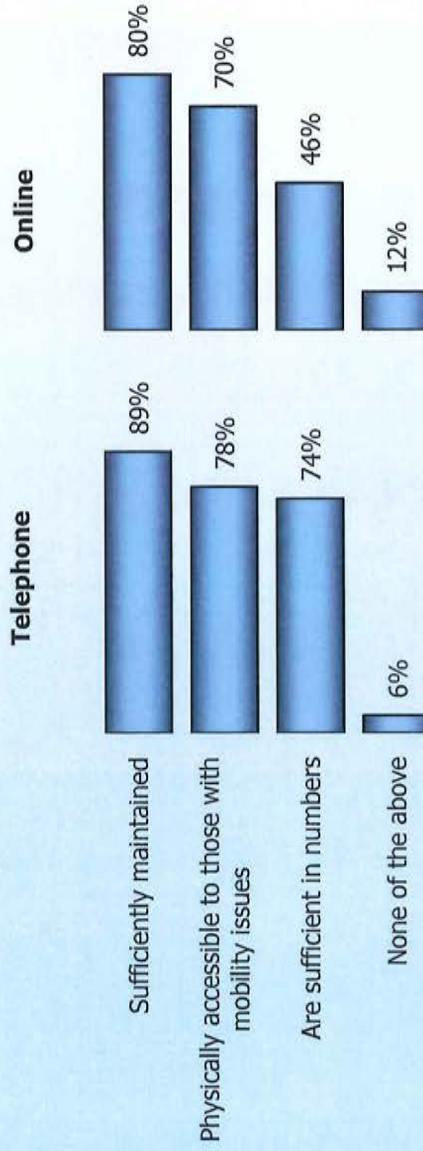


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## Opinions of Open Space and Parks



- The majority of residents believe Merritt's open spaces and parks are sufficiently maintained, provide access to those with mobility issues, and are sufficient in numbers.

Base: Total telephone (n=200)  
Total online (n=239)

Q.8b) Do you feel the trails, open space are:



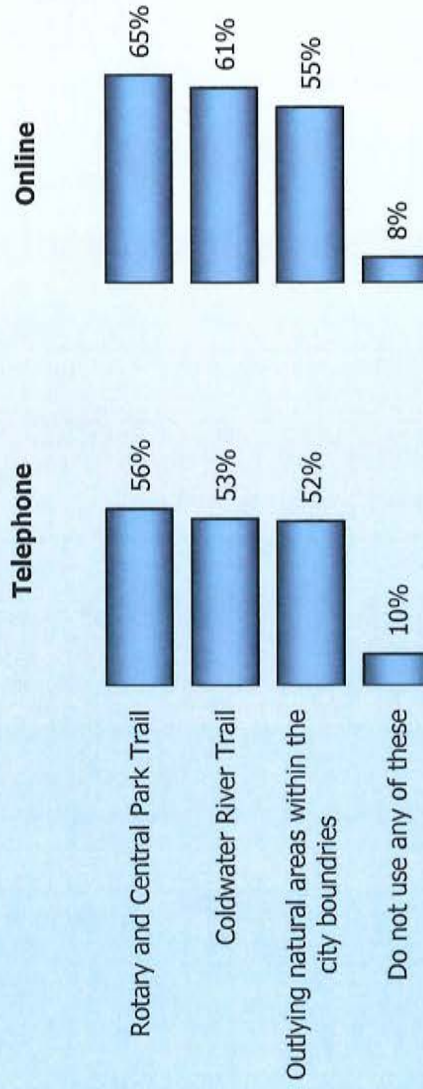


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## ➤ Trail Systems Use Most Often



- In terms of trail systems, almost equal proportions, about half the population, use each of the three main areas.

Base: Total telephone (n=200)  
Total online (n=239)

Q.8c) Which trail systems do you use most often?

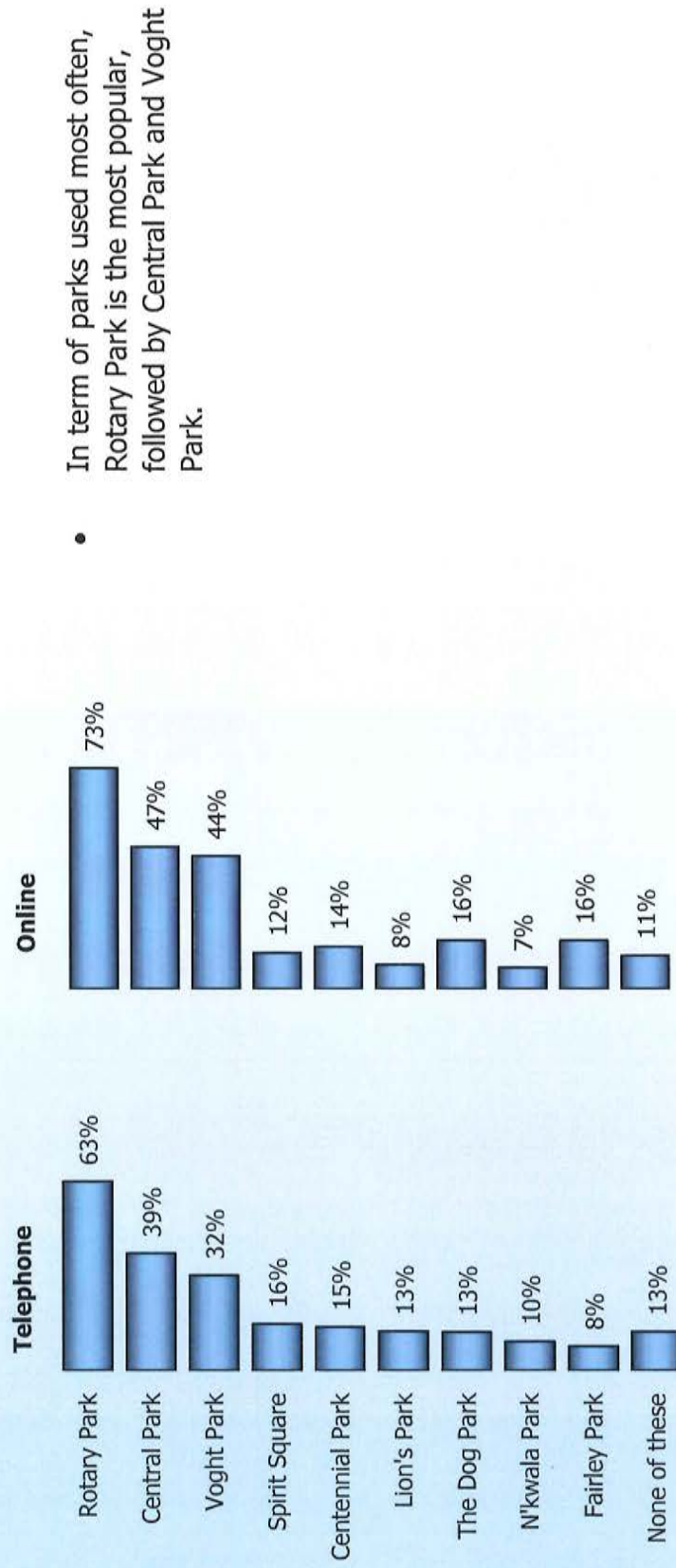


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## ➤ Parks Use Most Often



Base: Total telephone (n=200)  
Total online (n=239)

Q.9) Which parks do you and your children use most often?

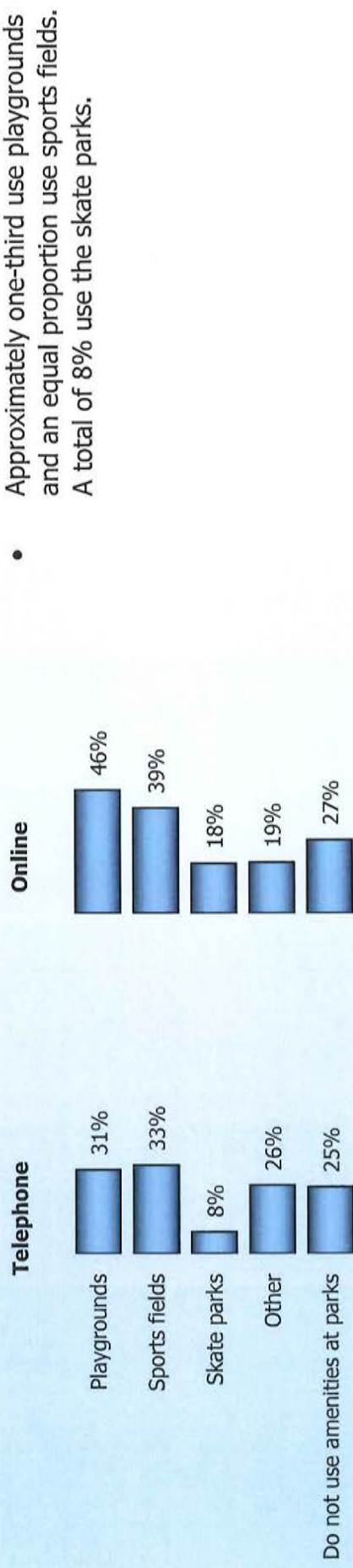


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## ➤ Park Amenities Use Most Often



Base: Total telephone (n=200)  
Total online (n=239)

Q.10) Which park amenities do you and your children use most often?



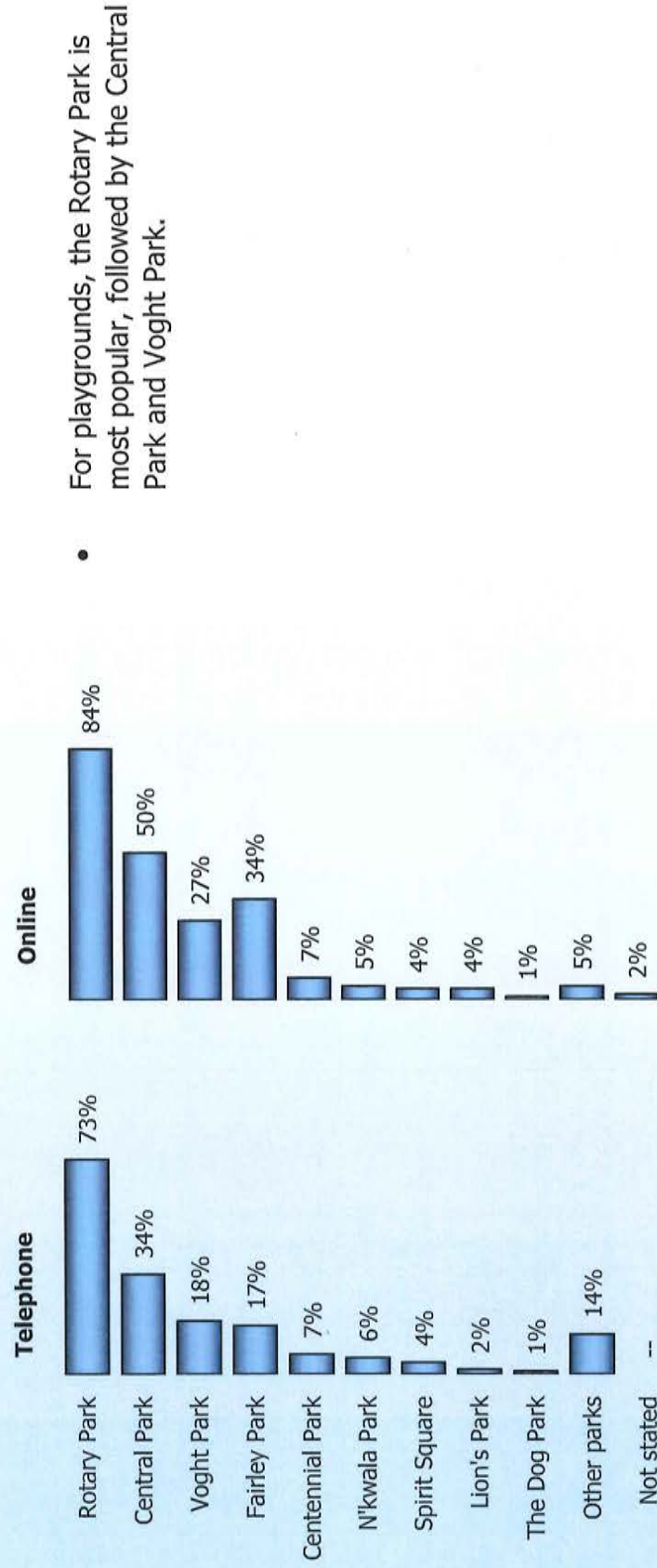


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## ➤ Park Use by Activity - Playgrounds



Base: Total used playgrounds:  
Telephone (n=57)  
Online (n=109)

Q.11a) At which park do you use: Playgrounds

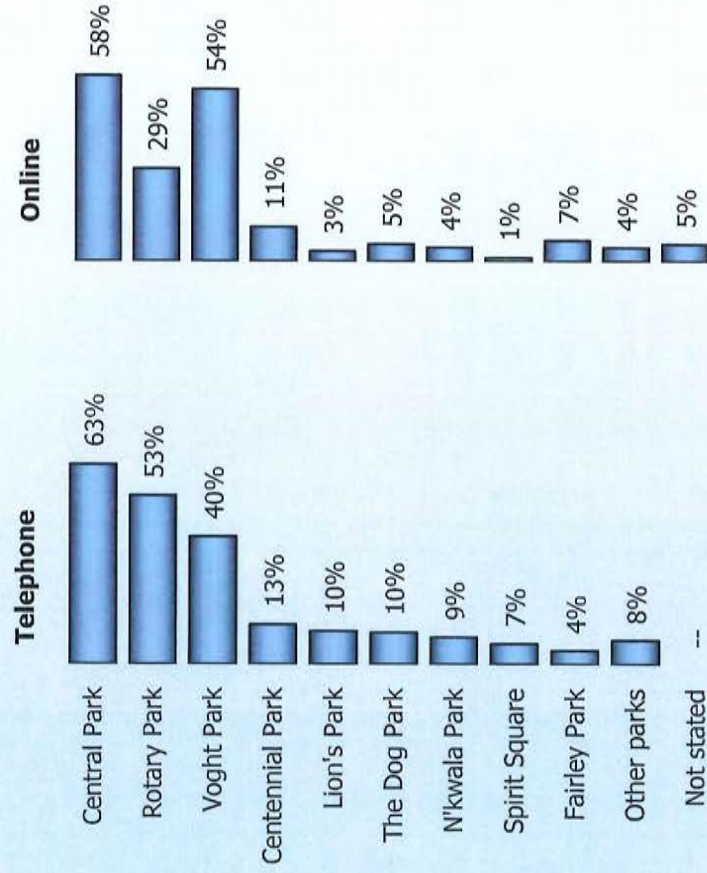


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## ➤ Park Use by Activity – Sports Fields



- For sports fields, Central Park is most popular, followed by the Rotary Park and Voght Park.

Base: Total used Sports Fields  
Telephone (n=50)  
Online (n=93)

Q.11b) At which park do you use: Sports Fields

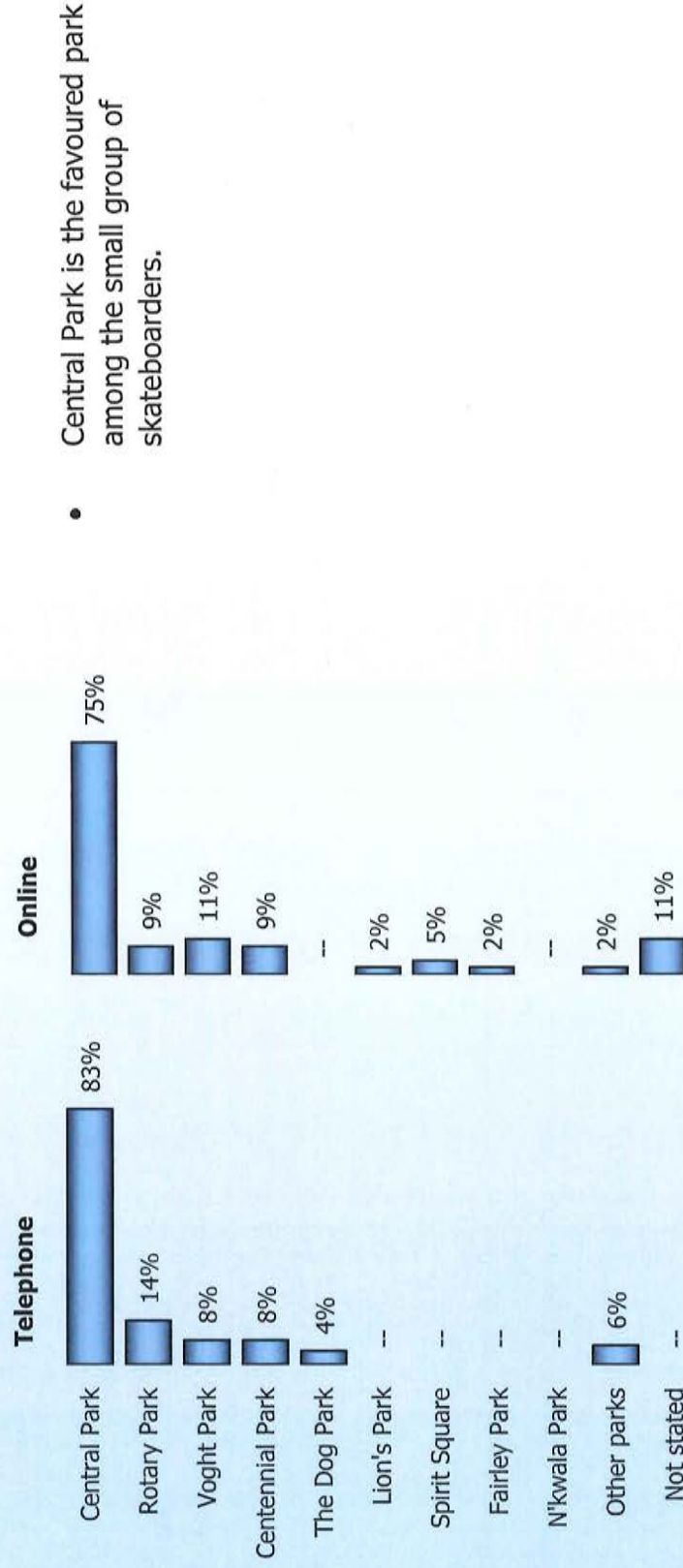


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## ➤ Park Use by Activity – Skate Park



Base: Total used Skate Park  
Telephone (n=12)  
Online (n=44)

Q.11c) At which park do you use: Skate Park

\*Caution: Small base size





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## Outdoor Recreation Facilities Lacking or Needing Improvement

	Telephone (200) %	Online (239) %
Outdoor courts (i.e. lighting, maintenance, facilities)	7	5
Tennis	5	2
Misc. courts (i.e. Basketball, Pickleball)	2	4
Sports fields (i.e. expansion, maintenance, better lighting)	11	13
Baseball	3	5
Soccer	2	2
Running track	2	2
Lacrosse	2	1
Misc. sports fields	2	3
Parks	27	43
Better playground equipment/ for all ages	3	7
Washrooms	1	5
Better lighting for evening/ winter usage/ more shade in the summer	1	3
Dog parks	1	2
Maintenance/ garbage bins	1	2
Skate parks	2	1
Concession stands	<1	1
Misc. park suggestions	3	8
Hiking/ walking trails (i.e. expanded, connect, better maintained)	7	25
Biking/ quad/ mountain bike trails	5	18
Ice rink	6	3
Waterpark/ pool	3	4
Miscellaneous	2	4
None	69	46
Q.12) What outdoor recreation facilities are lacking or needing improvement in Merritt?		

- A variety of recreation facilities are listed when asked what is lacking or needing improvement, including parks (e.g., better playground equipment), outdoor courts, and sports fields.

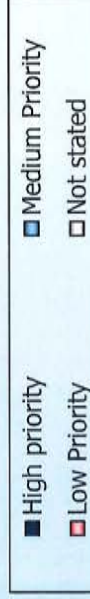


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## ➤ Priorities for Further Development



Base: Total telephone (n=200)  
Total online (n=239)

- The facilities that residents are most inclined to rate as a high priority for further development or upgrade are walking trails (likely because they are so commonly used) followed closely by biking trails, the arena, aquatic centre, and arts and cultural centres.

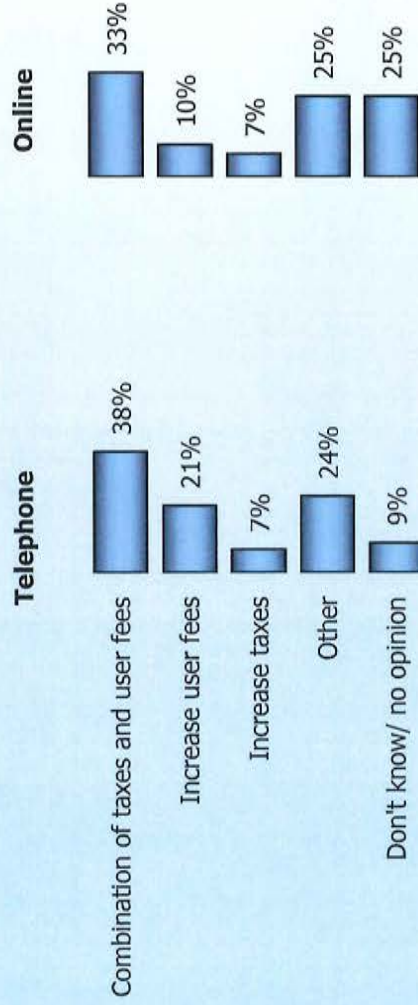
Q.13) Do you believe further development or upgrade of the following should be a high priority, medium priority or low priority for the City of Merritt?





## ➤ Preferred Ways to Pay for New or Improved Facilities

- Residents tend to prefer a combination of taxes and user fees, and to a lesser extent, increased user fees to pay for new or improved facilities. Less than 10% prefer increased taxes.



Base: Total telephone (n=200)  
Total online (n=239)

Q.14) How would you prefer that Merritt pays for any new or improved parks, recreation, cultural services and facilities?





## Demographic Characteristics

	Telephone (200) %	Online (239) %
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	48	22
Female	52	77
Not stated	-	1
<b>Age</b>		
18 to 34	22	25
35 to 44	16	21
45 to 54	19	18
55 to 64	19	21
65 years and over	25	15
Prefer not to say	-	2
<b>Current Family Situation</b>		
Person living alone	12	8
Person living with parents	13	2
Person living with friends	1	1
Spouse or partner, no children at home	42	35
Spouse or partner with children at home	28	46
Single parent with children at home	4	5
Prefer not to say	<1	4
<b>Home Tenure</b>		
Own	83	78
Rent	14	19
Prefer not to say	2	3

*continued*

- The sample was matched to the most recent Statistic Canada data on the basis of gender and age.
- Characteristics of the population include:
  - Almost half, 44%, are 55 years of age or over;
  - Approximately seven-in-ten live with a partner or spouse;
  - Eight-in-ten own their home.
- On-line respondents are skewed to women and those with children.



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## Demographics (cont'd)

	Telephone (200) %	Online (239) %
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Employed	61	64
Not working	42	34
Retired	31	22
Homemaker and not employed outside the home	5	8
Unemployed and looking for work	5	1
Student	1	3
Prefer not to say	1	3
<b>Years in Merritt</b>		
Less than 5 years	8	15
5-9	12	17
10-14	14	14
15-19	10	8
20-24	11	8
25-29	12	10
30-39	14	16
40+	21	11
AVERAGE	24	20
<b>Involvement in Community Events</b>		
<b>Total involved</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>75</b>
Very involved	14	24
Somewhat involved	41	51
<b>Total not involved</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>23</b>
Not very involved	31	18
Not at all involved	14	5
Not stated	-	2

- Approximately six-in-ten are employed;
- Approximately one-third are retired;
- Residents have lived on average 24 years in the community;
- Almost six-in-ten consider themselves at least somewhat involved in community events.

## **APPENDIX B – LIST OF INVITED STAKEHOLDER GROUPS**



## Stakeholder Groups

Group
<b>Group 1 - Music, Arts &amp; Culture</b>
Canadian Country Music Heritage Society
Court House Art Gallery / Gallery Committee
Nicola Valley Community Arts Council
Merritt Community Cinema Society
Merritt Live Theatre Society
Nicola Valley Film Society
Merritt Heritage Commission
Nicola Valley Museum & Archives Society
Nicola Valley Visual Artist
<b>Group 2 - Seniors Groups</b>
Merritt & District Senior Association
Merritt Lawn Bowling
<b>Group 3 - Sports (Fields)</b>
Merritt Minor Softball
Merritt Mixed Slow-Pitch
Merritt Youth Soccer Association
Nicola Valley Minor Lacrosse Association - (box lacrosse)
<b>Group 4 - Sports (Ice)</b>
Merritt Curling Club
Merritt Minor Hockey Association
Merritt Men's Recreational Hockey League
Old Timers Drop In Hockey
Nicola Valley Figure Skating Club (NVFSC)
Merritt Centennials Hockey Club Society
<b>Group 5 - Sports Other</b>
Merritt and District Tennis Club
Merritt Dance Society
Merritt Otters Swim Club
Merritt Volleyball Association
Nicola Valley Archery Club
Merritt Mountain Bike Association
Pickle Ball Group
Skateboarders Group
<b>Group 6 - Community Groups</b>
Conayt Friendship Society
Rotary Club
Rotary Club of Merritt Sunrise
<b>Group 7 - Environment</b>
Nicola Valley Community Garden Society
Nicola Naturalists Society
Nicola Valley Explorers
<b>Group 8 - Events &amp; Tourism</b>
Nicola Valley Fall Fair Association

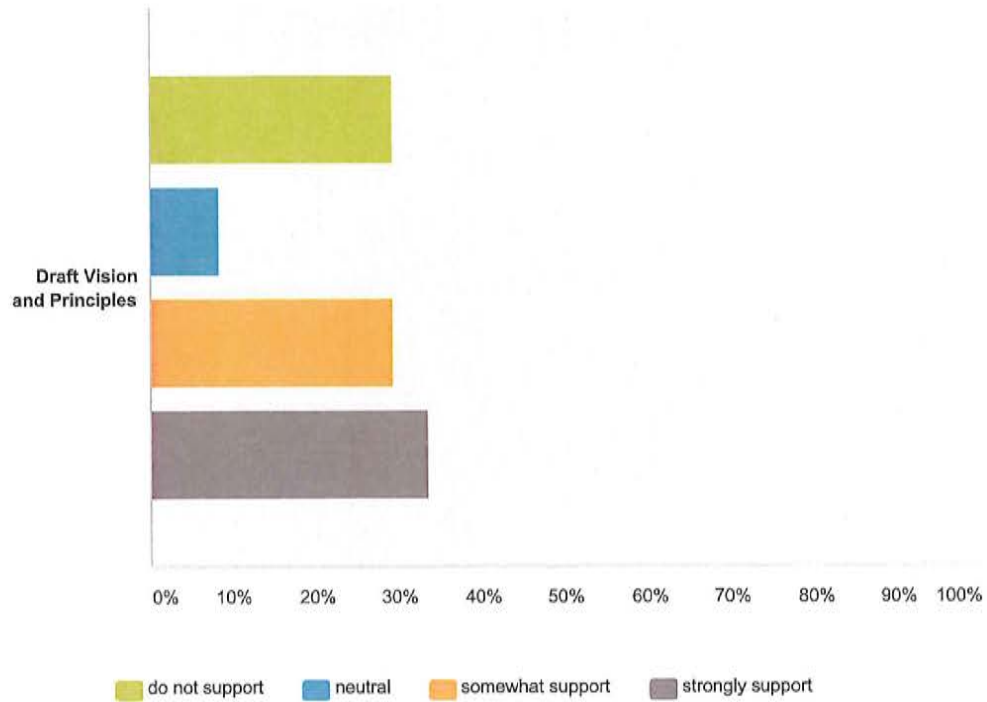
Special Olympics BC - Merritt Chapter
Tourism Nicola Valley
BC Visitor Centre at Merritt
Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce
The Baillie House
Merritt Country Run Society
Nicola Valley Rodeo Association
<b>Group 9 - External Groups</b>
School District 58: Nicola-Similkameen
<b>Group 10 - Youth &amp; Children Interest Groups</b>
Interior Community Services
Success by 6
Community Policing Office

## **APPENDIX C – PUBLIC QUESTIONNAIRE 2 FEEDBACK**



**Q1 Please tell us what you think of the draft vision and principles (Board 1):**

Answered: 24 Skipped: 0

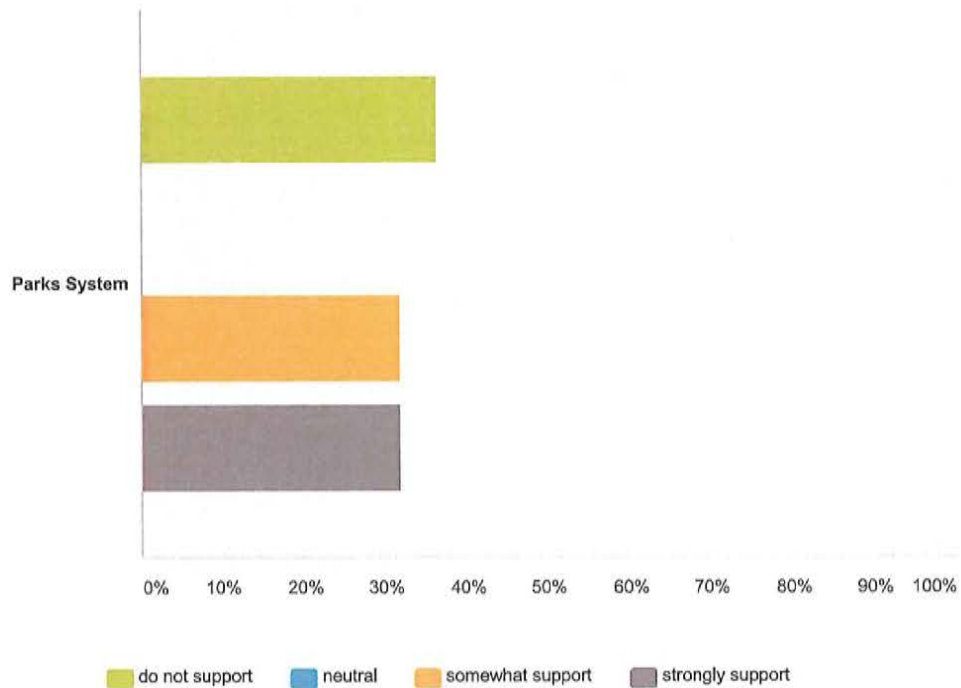


	do not support	neutral	somewhat support	strongly support	Total
Draft Vision and Principles	29.17% 7	8.33% 2	29.17% 7	33.33% 8	24

## Draft Review of City of Merritt Parks, Recreation and Culture Plan

### Q2 Please tell us what you think of the recommendations for the Parks System (Board 2):

Answered: 22 Skipped: 2

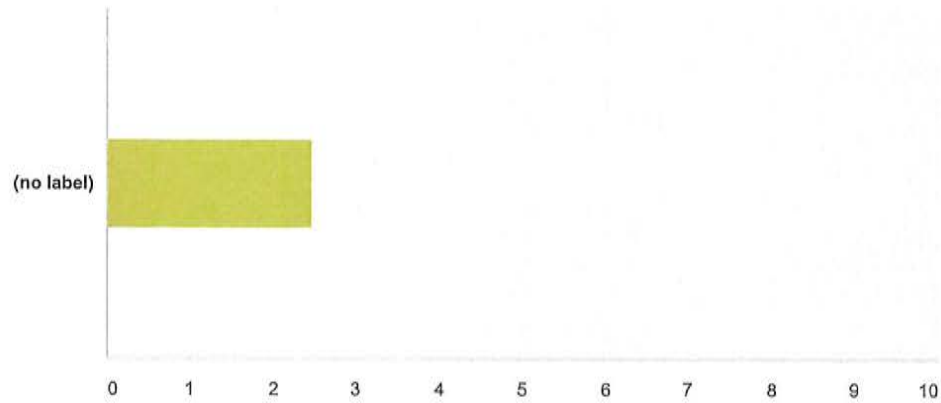


• Results skewed by Girls Youth Rugby Team

	do not support	neutral	somewhat support	strongly support	Total
Parks System	36.36% 8	0.00% 0	31.82% 7	31.82% 7	22

**Q3 If you are a dog owner/dog walker would you use a dog park in Diamond Vale?**

Answered: 13 Skipped: 11



	Yes	Maybe	No	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	15.38% 2	23.08% 3	61.54% 8	13	2.46



Q4 Please tell us what you think of the recommendations for Trails (Board 3):

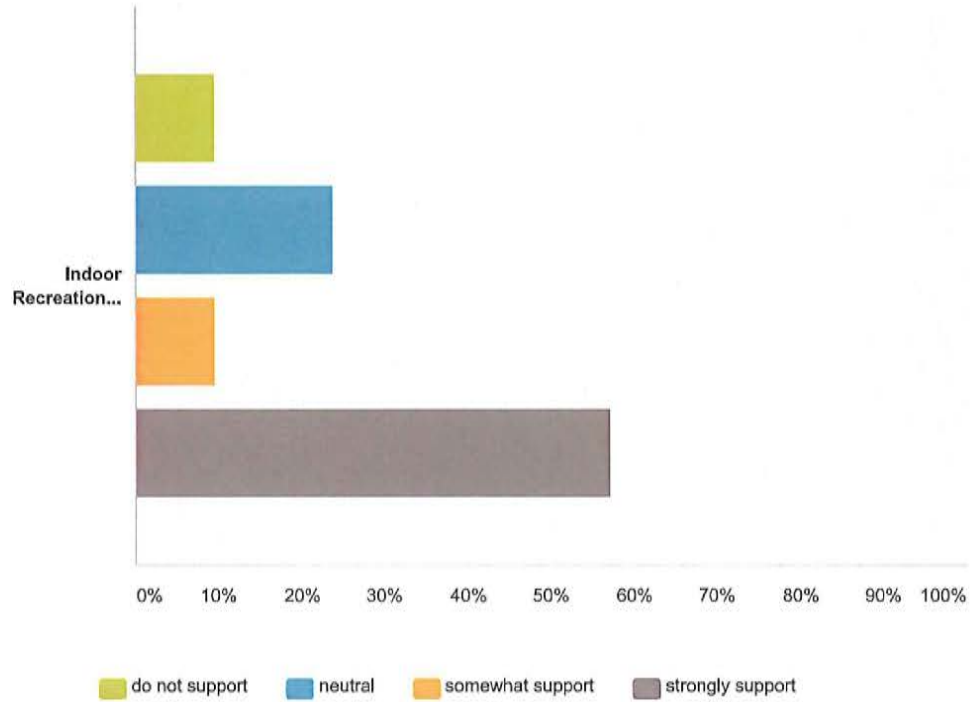
Answered: 23 Skipped: 1



	do not support	neutral	somewhat support	strongly support	Total	Weighted Average
Trails	17.39% 4	13.04% 3	21.74% 5	47.83% 11	23	3.83

**Q5 Please tell us what you think of the recommendations for Indoor Recreation and Culture Facilities (Board 4):**

Answered: 21 Skipped: 3

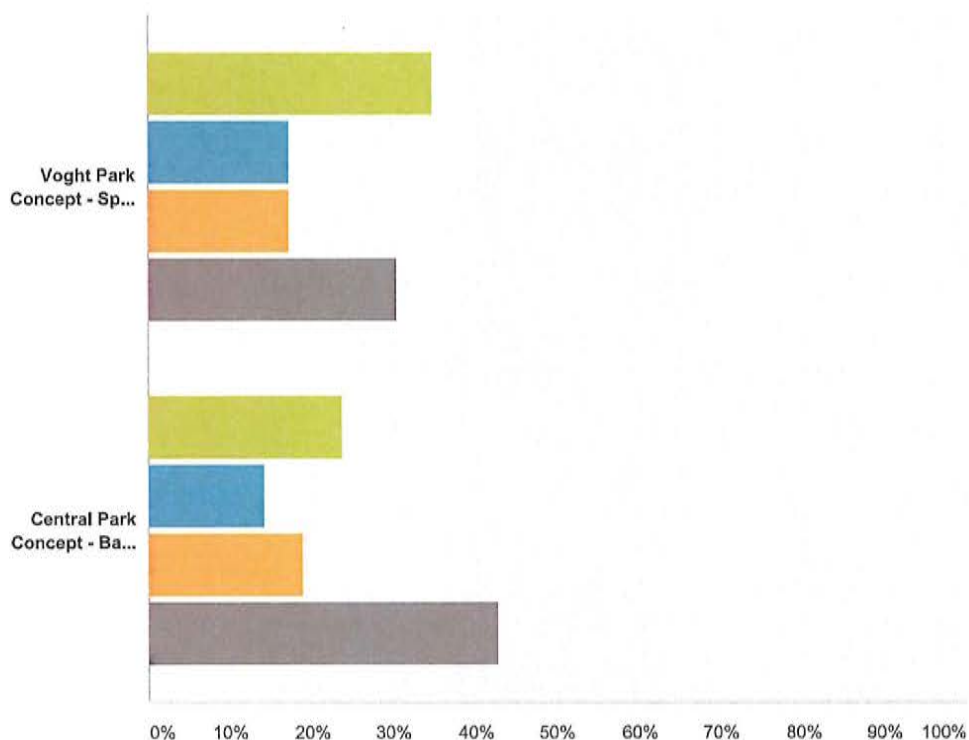


	do not support	neutral	somewhat support	strongly support	Total
Indoor Recreation Facilities and Culture Facilities	9.52% 2	23.81% 5	9.52% 2	57.14% 12	21

## Draft Review of City of Merritt Parks, Recreation and Culture Plan

### Q6 Please tell us what you think of the recommendations for Voght and Central Parks (Board 5):

Answered: 23 Skipped: 1



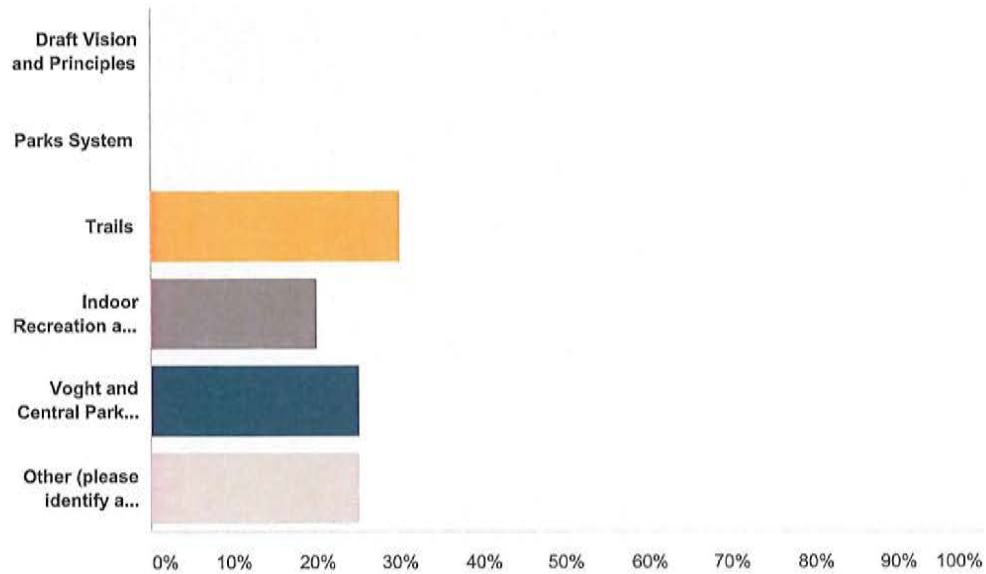
do not support neutral somewhat support strongly support

• Results skewed by Girls Youth Rugby Team

	do not support	neutral	somewhat support	strongly support	Total
Voght Park Concept - Sport Fields and Track	34.78% 8	17.39% 4	17.39% 4	30.43% 7	23
Central Park Concept - Ball Diamonds and Trails	23.81% 5	14.29% 3	19.05% 4	42.86% 9	21

## Q7 Which Master Plan recommendation topic is your top priority?

Answered: 20 Skipped: 4

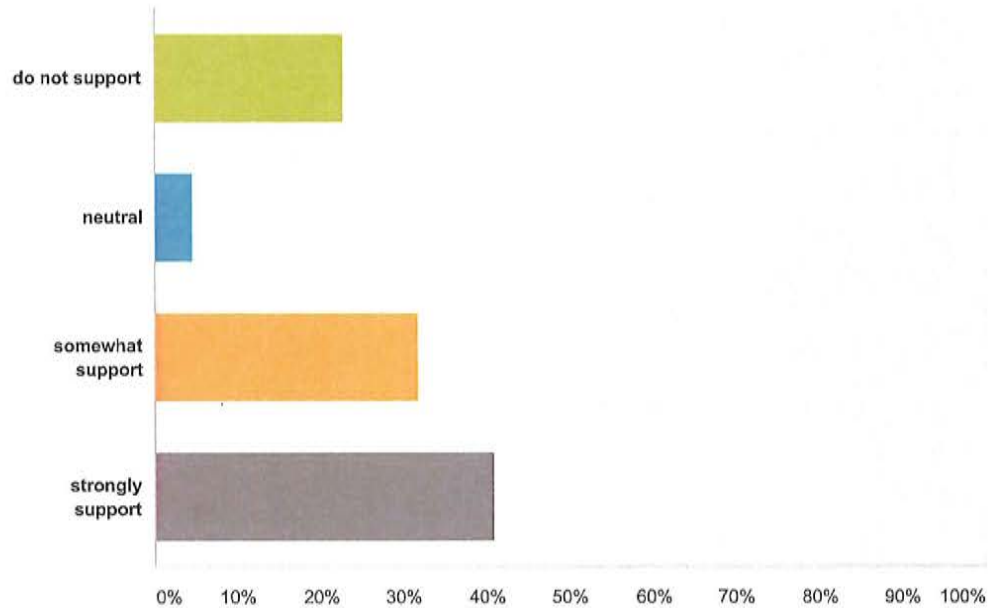


Answer Choices	Responses	
Draft Vision and Principles	0.00%	0
Parks System	0.00%	0
Trails	30.00%	6
Indoor Recreation and Culture Facilities	20.00%	4
Voght and Central Park Concepts	25.00%	5
Other (please identify a specific recommendation if applicable)	25.00%	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>20</b>



### Q8 Overall, to what extent do you support the Draft Master Plan?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 2



Answer Choices	Responses	
do not support	22.73%	5
neutral	4.55%	1
somewhat support	31.82%	7
strongly support	40.91%	9
<b>Total</b>		<b>22</b>

## **APPENDIX D – PARKLAND ACQUISITION GUIDELINES**

# APPENDIX D – PARKLAND ACQUISITION GUIDELINES

When the City is undertaking the acquisition of additional parkland through DCCs, the following is a resource for use:

**1. Topography and natural features suited to the intended uses**

- Where feasible, a desirable park gradient will be in the range of 0-5% for the majority of the site. Lands up to a 10% slope may be considered only if they can be graded to 5% to accommodate park uses. Consideration must be made on a park by park basis of natural geographic features (such as small hills, knolls) which may act as features of a park, but the majority of a park should be capable of accommodating a range of recreational activities.
- Undevelopable/unusable land should only be considered for parkland acquisition where it protects ecosystems not otherwise represented in the system.

*Note: environmentally sensitive areas NOT acquired as parkland are still protected under other policies and mechanisms, whether they fall on public or private land. Designation as an environmentally sensitive area is not enough of a rationale to acquire a site as parkland.<sup>1</sup>*

**2. Be convenient to the population it serves**

- Every resident in a residential area should be no further than a ten minute walk from a park. Within the City centre all residents should be within a five minute walk of a park where possible, and in more rural areas, all residents should be within a fifteen minute walk of a park where possible.
- Ensure that parkland is central to residences, and not at the edge of the City, unless explicitly providing an important trailhead that links to existing or planned trails of significance.

**3. Be compatible with adjoining land uses**

- Situate parks adjacent to larger natural features or linear green connectors. Examples of this are locating neighbourhood parks adjacent to pedestrian friendly streets.
- Create parks, where possible, adjacent to school sites.
- The location of proposed athletic fields or event sites should take into consideration the effect of lighting, parking and circulation on adjacent land uses and circulation patterns.

**4. Be safe and accessible**

- Parks should be located close to public streets, transit, bicycle paths and pedestrian routes.
- Parks should have as much street frontage as possible.
- Universal accessibility should be provided to and in parks where reasonably feasible and where doing so will not damage cultural or environmental integrity.

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<sup>1</sup> The BC Ministry of Community Services Development Cost Charge Best Practice Guide supports this rationale: "Note that through the use of development permits, open space is protected from development and thus preserved, although not necessarily dedicated as municipal parkland. This method of parkland "acquisition" is most appropriate for unusable or undevelopable open space, rather than for active parkland space. Therefore, this type of land should not be included in a DCC program, as it could be obtained through DPAs or some other mechanism." (p2.26)

**5. *Create connections***

- Parkland is preferred where it contributes directly to the community-wide system of trails and greenways, but also where indirect benefits can be provided such as access points and trailheads with amenities.

**6. *Provide varied programming***

- Sites should be as flexible as possible in their programming, incorporating opportunities for a variety of activities such as active structured play, un-programmed lawn areas, pathways, trails, lookouts, areas for dogs and quiet areas.
- Sites should incorporate desired park facilities for the specific neighbourhood requirements and demographics. Since this will change over time, it is critical that the space be of a size, shape and topography that will allow park elements to change over time.
- In general, a park smaller than 0.3ha should not be accepted, and preferably not smaller than 0.5ha.

**7. *Be sensitive to the environment***

- Parks should conserve, enhance and restore the natural physical character of the site.

**8. *Limited non-park infrastructure***

- Detention ponds typically preclude public use. These are not recommended as park space.
- Large constructed wetlands with multiple habitat and recreation benefits should be considered and should be designed through the integration of both parks and engineering criteria.
- Land acquired for parkland should not be used to store pump houses, booster stations or other utility infrastructure.

**9. *Consider opportunities for optimal parkland as they arise***

- If school sites are closed, existing playfields and amenities such as playgrounds should be considered for acquisition as parkland.
- Initiate parkland identification and boundary determination at, or prior to, road layout and preceding any lot layouts in new development areas.

Developers should be encouraged to provide and develop parkland over and above their statutory obligations and to work with the City in the development of parks and trails within their developments.

More information on parkland DCC and parkland acquisition best practices can be attained from:

[http://www.cscd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov\\_relations/library/DCC\\_Best\\_Practice\\_Guide\\_2005.pdf](http://www.cscd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov_relations/library/DCC_Best_Practice_Guide_2005.pdf)

[http://www.cscd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov\\_relations/library/Parkland\\_Acquisition\\_BPG.pdf](http://www.cscd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov_relations/library/Parkland_Acquisition_BPG.pdf)



## **APPENDIX E – VOGHT & CENTRAL PARK CONCEPTS**

VOGHT PARK SPORTS FIELD CONCEPT





# CENTRAL PARK CONCEPT



## **APPENDIX F – SPORTS FIELD BOOKING RATES, ARENA RENTALS & ADMISSION RATES**



# COMPARISON OF SPORT FIELD BOOKING RATES

CATEGORY	MERRITT (2015)			FERNIE (2009)			VERNON <sup>1</sup> (2016)		SMITHERS (2016)		KAMLOOPS <sup>2</sup> (2014)		PENTICTON <sup>3</sup> (2015)	
	Daily (\$)	Team per season (\$)	Tournament (daily weekend \$)	Daily	Team per season (\$)	Tour. (daily \$)	Res. (\$/hr)	Tour. (\$/day)	Per season (\$)	Tournament (\$/day)	Hourly (\$)	Tournament (Hourly \$)	Resident (\$/hr)	Non-res. (\$/hr)
Minor, youth seniors		100	44	37.75	55	85	9.56	41.45	115	92	16		30.53	35.26
Adult		157	44	53.75	215	268	19.15	82.91	440	295	23		10.58	16.60
Non-profit			225						214				14.11	35.47
Commercial	350							585	30/hr		45	55.20	24.37	41.34

CATEGORY	AVERAGE X90%		
	Daily (\$)	Team per season (\$)	Tournaments Residents (\$/day)
Minor, youth seniors		85	57
Adult		294	163.80
Non-profit			225
Commercial	396		

<sup>1</sup> Uses different rates for school fields

<sup>2</sup> For ball diamonds; different rates for soccer

<sup>3</sup> Uses non-resident fees

# COMPARISON OF ARENA RENTAL RATES

USE CATEGORY	MERRITT (2015)		FERNIE <sup>1</sup> (2009)		PENTICTON <sup>2</sup> (2015)		KAMLOOPS (2014) <sup>3</sup>		SMITHERS (2016)		VERNON (2016) <sup>4</sup>		AVERAGE X90%
	Regular season (\$/hr)	Off season	Prime	Non-Prime	Local	Non-local	Prime	Non prime	Prime	Non-prime	Prime	Non Prime	Regular season (\$/hr)
Minor			48.75	34.00					47	40	95.40	95.40	
Junior	60	85	54.50	40.75	79		107	74	84	40	126.56	126.56	81
Adult	105		97	68.00	152	151	171	137	185	67	194.71	97.34	144
Commercial	74		111.5	78.00	154	184	268		110				145
Jr. Hockey games	410								695	495			
Jr. Hockey games season	1750												
Figure skating									47				
Dry floor	42 <sup>5</sup>		27		33	53	1723/d		83		77.49		
Full facility	1045/d			907/d			2182/d		825			2061	1520/day

<sup>1</sup> Additional \$1.50 Facility Replacement Reserve to be added

<sup>2</sup> McLaren arena

<sup>3</sup> Interior savings centre

<sup>4</sup> Civic/priest valley arena

<sup>5</sup> Youth rate. Adult rate is \$79/hr

Comparison of Admission Rates

	MERRITT (2015)			FERNIE <sup>1</sup> (2009)			VERNON (2016)			PENTICTON (2015)			AVERAGE X90%		
	Child	Youth	Adult	Child	youth	Adult	Child	youth	adult	child	youth	adult	Child	Youth	adult
Swim drop-in	2.40	3.00	4.00	3.25	4.50	5.50	4.25	6.35	7.65	4.25	5.25	6.25	3.52	4.82	5.84
Fitness only			3					4.05	5.35		4.25	6.25			
Skating drop-in	2.50	2.75	3.50	3.25	4.50	5.50	1.50	4.00	5.25	2.25	3.25	4.25	2.09	3.52	4.50

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<sup>1</sup> Fernie also has non-resident rates that range from \$0.25 for children to \$0.75 for adults

## **APPENDIX G – PARTNERSHIP GUIDE FOR WORKING WITH PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**



## **Interior Health Authority Perspective**

The five priority goals identified within the Master Plan in the Framework for Recreation in Canada have clear connections to work that is being completed by Health Authorities across BC, and specifically, by the Interior Health Authority. Current research and collaborations are showing that local governments and health authorities have many compatible goals with priorities for creating healthy communities.

The Public Health Institute's Health in All Policies team in the United States has been a national and international leader in building the Health in All Policies movement, an innovative approach to addressing the social determinants of health, such as transportation, housing, and economic policy, which are key drivers of health outcomes and health inequities. It is founded in the acknowledgement that public health professionals must collaborate with partners outside of public health to address the root causes of poor health and inequities including community planners and parks and recreation professionals. As shown below, the Public Health Institute and the American Public Health Association have developed tips for effective ways that Public Health Professionals and Municipalities can work together and establish partnerships.

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### **Develop a Shared Vision**

You and your partners may have an easier time identifying shared goals if you have explicit conversations about vision and values early in your process.

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### **Pursue Mutuality and Practice Generosity**

Health in All Policies requires a cultural shift from individual agencies pursuing siloed, topic-based interests to embracing shared beliefs and pursuing mutual goals across all of government. Leaders can support broad, cross-cutting goals for all of government, such as promotion of health, environmental sustainability, and equity. Health in All Policies leaders and staff can model generosity by committing time and resources to partners' agendas and sharing credit with others whenever possible—which can go a long way in supporting your partners' ongoing participation and good will.

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### **Acknowledge What you Don't Know**

When we acknowledge that we don't have all the answers, others feel more willing to speak up. Remember to be open to learning from everyone you speak with and recognize the expertise of your partners. Approach differences of opinion with curiosity, and treat them as opportunities to learn.

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### **Understand your Partners' Goals and Context**

Ask your partners about their goals and priorities, and pay attention to the political and organizational context in which they work. This can include past inter-agency interactions, successes and failures, or other issues that may shape perspectives.

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### **Identify Win-Wins and Co-Benefits**

Inter-sectoral collaboration works best when all partners can see tangible gains for themselves. Potential partners may ask themselves, "What's in it for me or my organization?" Identifying win-win opportunities helps establish buy-in, allows partners to leverage resources, and increases efficiency by pursuing multiple goals.

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### **Be Thoughtful about Language**

Every discipline, including public health, has its own jargon and acronyms. Encourage all partners to avoid abbreviations, be mindful of language that is hard to understand, and be aware of situations where differences in use of terms may cause disagreement or confusion.

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**Assume Good Intentions**

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If a partner says or does something that seems insensitive or irrational, you may be missing key information. If you can assume good intentions and ask for more information, you can deepen your understanding of the issue, increase your ability to move collaborative solutions forward, build trust, and gain friends along the way.

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**Be Flexible**

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Health in All Policies requires tremendous flexibility, as it is a long-term strategy that takes place in an environment characterized by administration changes, staff turnover, continuously developing legislation, and funding that is often insecure or short-term. These changes also create relationship-building opportunities if you are ready to respond. For example, in cases where organizations have not worked well together, changes in administration or leadership can provide new partners for collaboration.

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**Collaboration Takes Time**

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Allow sufficient time to build relationships, learn about your partners' goals and priorities, and develop agreements. Be flexible and allow for delays when warranted, but also maintain momentum on slow-moving projects. The trust established through initial easy wins can lay the groundwork for sustained partnership as you navigate more difficult issues.

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Reference: [Health in All Policies: A Guide for State and Local Governments](#) (2013)

Key Links:

Interior Health Authority: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/Pages/default.aspx>

PlanH – Planning Healthy Communities: <http://planh.ca/>

## **APPENDIX H – GRANT FUNDING OPPORTUNITY LINKS**

## Grant Funding Opportunity Links

- CivicInfo BC: <http://www.civicinfo.bc.ca/>
- Kraft Celebration Tour: <http://kraftheinzprojectplay.com/en/>
- ParticipACTION Teen Challenge: <http://teen-challenge.participaction.com//how-to-get-involved/>
- Federal Gas Tax Fund: <http://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/plan/gtf-fte-eng.html>
- Age Friendly Community Grant:  
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/seniors/about-seniorshc/seniors-related-initiatives/age-friendly-bc>
- Infrastructure Planning Grant:  
<http://www.civicinfo.bc.ca/grants?grantid=723>
- Bike BC Funding: <http://www.civicinfo.bc.ca/grants?grantid=715>
- ICBC for safety upgrades: <http://www.icbc.com/Pages/default.aspx>
- Tire Stewardship BC: <http://www.tsbc.ca/grant.php>
- BC Economic Development:  
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/economic-development>
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities: Green Municipal Fund:  
<http://www.fcm.ca/home/programs/green-municipal-fund.htm>
- Mountain Equipment Co-op: <https://www.mec.ca/en/>
- PlanH Healthy Community Grants: <http://planh.ca/funding/roundthree>
- BC Active Communities:  
[http://www.bcrpa.bc.ca/recreation\\_parks/active\\_communities.htm](http://www.bcrpa.bc.ca/recreation_parks/active_communities.htm)
- TD Friends of the Environment Foundation:  
<https://fef.td.com/funding/#criteria>
- Vancouver Foundation: <https://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/>