

ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE TO EQUITABLE RECREATION PROGRAMMING AUDIT

Recommendation

That the June 25, 2024, Community Services report CS02349, be received for information.

Requested Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	ACCESS		
City Plan Big City Move	Inclusive and compassionate	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Conditions for service success
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the August 29, 2022, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That the City Auditor, include as part of the proposed 2023 Office of the City Auditor Work plan, an audit of the City of Edmonton specialized recreation programming and accommodations for equity seeking groups including at a minimum:

1. an assessment of accessibility to City-run programs for all Edmontonians, incorporating the diverse needs associated with age (youth, seniors, etc.), gender, identity, ability, family status, ethnicity, race, religion and income level,

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2. an assessment of equitable access in City policies and processes related to recreation programming.

Executive Summary

- The Office of the City Auditor completed an audit of the Community Recreation and Culture (CRC) Branch's equitable recreation programming.
- The Office of the City Auditor has provided four recommendations that will improve the Branch's approach to both planning and providing equitable recreation programming through the development of an integrated plan that will align and coordinate goals for programming, track performance, provide guidance, and improve communication to address equity concerns.
- Administration accepts the auditor's findings and recommendations.

REPORT

The Office of the City Auditor completed an audit of the Community Recreation and Culture (CRC) branch's equitable recreation programming. The objectives of the audit were to determine if CRC has an effective approach to providing equitable recreation programming for all Edmontonians.

Equity refers to fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement for everyone, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some individuals and groups.

Overall, it was found that the City in general, and CRC in particular, have demonstrated a commitment to equitable recreation programming in various guiding documents and through various initiatives. However, the auditors claim that CRC lacks an effective approach to planning and providing equitable recreation. To enhance a commitment to creating an effective approach, and assist with the support on decisions of prioritization of programming development, the Office of the City Auditor provided the following four recommendations within their report. The four recommendations, along with the CRC's implementation plan are discussed below.

Administrative Response

The CRC branch provides a wide range of services across over 60 facilities, 23 river valley parks, serving close to 8.5 million people each year. Spanning from people to animals to the natural world, the branch's programs and community spaces are purposefully animated to create a sense of connection and livability. The branch has advanced a community hub concept which entails free access to open spaces within facilities for people to congregate and connect with each other to make spaces vibrant and welcoming to all.

The CRC branch has put considerable effort into establishing recreation programming that is diverse, accessible and welcoming for all community members. The branch has created around 40 unique and successful recreation programs and services centered around diversity, equity and inclusion, that have made a profound difference in the lives of Edmontonians. Examples include: Nîkânîw Program, which combines the cultural teachings and guidance of Indigenous Elders and Leaders with aquatic pre-employment opportunities, adapted recreation programming, seniors programming, youth programming, newcomer-focused programming, free programming,

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accessible communications programming and inclusive play spaces. For a full list see Attachment 1.

CRC has also largely focused on reducing barriers for low-income residents to access and enjoy community recreation facilities and attractions by providing the Leisure Access Program since 1995. The program provides eligible Edmontonians free access to recreation facilities and programming at a reduced rate. Administered alongside the Ride Transit Program since 2017, together these programs reduce financial barriers for recreation and transportation services for community members across the city. The Leisure Access Program advances the Healthy City goal in ConnectEdmonton of a city with community and personal wellness that embodies and promotes equity for all Edmontonians. It also supports the City Plan values of Belong and Access that calls for an Edmonton that fosters wellness and mental health by providing opportunities for all people to engage in community life while supporting those who are marginalized by advancing equity through access to universally accessible spaces, services and facilities.

In January 2024, the Leisure Access and Ride Transit Program surpassed 100,000 participants, which is an increase of more than 50 per cent since 2019 when participation was at 68,518. In 2023, the program included about 1.5 million visits, which is nearly 17 per cent of the total visits to the City's recreation, leisure and attraction facilities.

While the diversity of programs offered by CRC and, in particular, the success of the Leisure Access Program should be acknowledged and celebrated, programming decisions also must consider the financial realities of providing recreation, parks and attractions program services. In the City's current fiscal reality, a balance must be struck between the provision of programming with the consideration of operational costs, revenue offset and ensuring the utmost is done to minimize tax levy increases so as not to further impact known structural budget challenges. In a post COVID-19 pandemic environment, the branch is cognizant of the increase in Edmontonians requiring subsidized access to recreation facilities and programming and how important this access is to maintaining strong and healthy communities. At the same time, the branch continues to navigate rising operating costs including utilities, maintenance and most notably, safety and security.

Along with other areas of the City, CRC is focused on improving safety and security, and drives the following outcomes of the Community Safety and Well-being (CSWB) Strategy's well-being pillar:

- Increased support for and coordination of collaborations/partnerships to remove barriers to well-being and recreation opportunities.
- Increased support for opportunities that improve child and youth well-being.
- Increased animation and promotion of spaces for the purpose of connection across lines of difference (such as socioeconomic status, age, race, ethnicity, ability and housing status) and well-being.
- Increased involvement of Indigenous, racialized and equity-deserving perspectives in the development of City programs, services, and initiatives related to well-being.
- Increased opportunities for Edmontonians to feel more connected to body and self, friends, family and community, land, culture and feelings of purpose.

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While the value and importance of equitable programming is well understood, equity is one of many complex objectives the branch is accountable to achieve in the context of its operation and how its success is measured. While focused on providing equitable opportunities for Edmontonians, the branch must also be thoughtful of the 12 guiding principles within the Approach to Recreation Facility Planning in Edmonton (the Approach), along with the five council priorities, targets set out in the Corporate Business Plan, and the strategic goals set out in ConnectEdmonton and The City Plan.

The branch continuously strives to improve access to recreational programming for all Edmontonians and advances universally accessible spaces, services, facilities and transportation networks. The branch recognizes the gaps that currently exist and appreciates the opportunity to take a thoughtful approach to implementing the Auditor's recommendations. The branch will create an approach that will:

- consistently assess community needs;
- measure progress and evaluate the impact made on the community to inform decision making;
- maximize the use of facilities through allocation planning and the implementation of an overarching plan;
- provide guidance to coordinate the development and continuation of programming within the branch;
- find new ways to communicate programming so that more segments of the community are reached;
- continue to work with the community and social organizations to support the provision of equitable programming; and
- work towards delivery of these objectives within the context of fiscal restraint.

The branch accepts the four recommendations from the City Auditor. The branch's approach to implementing the recommendations will include the following:

Recommendation 1: We recommend that CRC, in collaboration with the Community Services Department's communications area, improve how it obtains information on recreation programming needs from the broader community to identify access barriers and inform equitable recreation program planning.

- The branch will develop a multi-disciplinary approach to improving how the branch obtains information on recreation programming needs that includes qualitative and quantitative survey methodologies that will provide a foundation to guide both short-term and longer-term plans including budget requirements (insight, targeted surveys, community engagement, jurisdictional scans).
- The branch will reference the approach as it outlines a comprehensive process to broadly assess recreation and sport demand indicators, along with other existing mechanisms, to effectively assess program needs.

Implementation Date: March 31, 2025

Recommendation 2: We recommend that CRC develop and implement an integrated plan to assist with the development and delivery of equitable recreation programming. The plan should include: a defined vision and goals; performance measures and targets; an allocation model for rental of recreation facilities; and a communications plan to increase awareness of recreation programming

- The branch will develop an Integrated Equity Plan aligned to corporate equity objectives, and CRC's Integrated Branch Plan, that will demonstrate progress on the branch's equity objectives and identify opportunities to improve upon them. The branch's plan will include:
 - A vision and equitable programming goals that align with corporate equity goals and corporate strategic direction.
 - Equitable programming objectives for recreation programming.
 - Performance measures, targets and a corresponding data collection plan for programming.
 - A communications plan to increase awareness within diverse communities of City recreation programming opportunities.
 - A review of the current allocation processes and practices to identify opportunities for improvement that consider the unique needs of community members and user groups. Options will include an implementation approach that reflects anticipated community member and user group impacts as well as budget and revenue impacts. Options considered will align to the established equity objectives for programming and consider the unique needs of over 600 user groups.
- It is important to note that currently, there are not well-defined corporate equity goals and objectives, therefore, to properly align, corporate goals will need to be established before the development of the branch's Integrated Equity Plan.

Implementation Date: March 31, 2026

Recommendation 3: We recommend that CRC identify and track minimum objectives for each programming type (registered program, spontaneous use, drop-in) and individual programs to assess if they are meeting their objectives.

- As part of Administration's development of an Integrated Equity Plan (noted in recommendation 2), the branch will develop equity objectives for each major programming area, including allocation models, to assess the performance of the programming.

Implementation Date: June 30, 2026

Recommendation 4: We recommend that CRC develop documented guidance for how to consider concepts of equity, inclusion, and accessibility when planning recreation programming.

- After the development of the Integrated Equity Plan, the branch will develop documented guidance for staff to build a shared understanding of the branch vision and goals established to support equitable programming.

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- Guidance will support staff across the branch to align program delivery with established objectives, measures and targets and ensure concepts of equity, inclusion, and accessibility are included when planning new and existing recreation programming.

Implementation Date: September 30, 2026

Administration agrees that the implementation of this approach will promote transparent, fair, evidence-based decision making on equitable recreation programming and will help the branch to prioritize program development and resource allocation. This work will be dynamic and complex. Equity is a continuous process, therefore, the branch will continue to adjust the goals, objectives and targets as gaps and opportunities are identified, and work within the context of its broader operation and aligned to the range of corporate goals, objectives and priorities to improve the overall delivery of equitable recreational programming.

It is important to note that there may need to be adjustments to existing programs or a reduction in programming in order to provide the space, staff, time and financial means to provide additional equitable recreation programming, to work within existing budgets.

Budget/Financial Implications

The completion of the development of the CRC branch's Integrated Equity Plan, corresponding communications approach, and guidance for planning recreation programming, will be extensive and will require a readjustment of current priorities to ensure the branch has the capacity required to complete this important work. Once complete, the branch will return with any required requests for additional financial resources or FTEs required to complete implementation of the plan, outside of current branch capacity.

Financial implications of new objectives will also need to be determined and understood prior to implementation.

Community Insight

The CRC branch will establish and implement a research plan, in 2025, as a part of the integrated plan to better understand the needs of our community.

Consideration will be given to pursuing a multi-disciplinary approach that includes qualitative and quantitative survey methodologies to guide both short-term and longer-term plans including budget requirements (Insight, targeted surveys, community engagement, jurisdictional scans).

The branch will reference the approach as it outlines a comprehensive process to broadly assess recreation and sport demand indicators, along with other existing mechanisms, to effectively assess program needs.

GBA+

The City of Edmonton strives to provide a variety of recreation programming to meet the diverse needs of the community and provide equitable access to Edmontonians regardless of age, gender, identity, ability, family status, ethnicity, race, religion or income level.

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The CRC branch's intent to develop an integrated plan aligning various activities and programming that address equity concerns will inform improvements to the delivery of service.

This work will include setting out a vision for equity within the branch; creating equitable programming goals that align with the corporate equity goals and strategic direction; improved research and connection with the community, and guidance for better decision making. This will further our understanding of the recreation needs of the community and identify opportunities to address gaps.

The branch will connect and collaborate with the appropriate City of Edmonton experts in this work to ensure the branch is in alignment with a corporate vision for equity within the city.

Environment and Climate Review

This report was reviewed for environment and climate risks. Based on the review completed no significant interactions with the City's environmental and climate goals were identified within the scope of this report.

Attachments

1. Community Recreation and Culture Branch Equity Programming