

Recreation Mapping

Somerset West Community Health Centre

June 2022



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1. Purpose

The Somerset West Community Health Centre (SWCHC) Recreation Mapping project was initiated from the Building Community Together (BCT) initiative that identified six needs for SWCHC's communities, which included: facilitated social connections and increased public space; and increased access to recreation and leisure. As large construction projects continue to populate the area, the need for indoor and outdoor recreation spaces increases while public space decreases. Within Eastern Ontario, the city of Ottawa is projected to have the fastest increase in population, growing from 1.04 million to 1.50 million across the next 25 years¹. Across the neighbourhoods of West Centretown, Hintonburg and Mechanicsville, Civic Hospital, and LeBreton Flats, which SWCHC serves, ongoing development is expected to significantly contribute to this population growth. The planned developments outlined in the Corso Italia Secondary Plan, including the 1010 Somerset Lands and Gladstone Village, alone will bring upwards of 14,000 more people to the area alone². **Considering all current development applications for the study area filed with the City of Ottawa, the number of households would double. Local recreation space does not meet the needs of the community now, meaning future changes to the neighbourhoods must make increasing recreation spaces a priority.**

Not only will the demand for recreation space increase, but who and how they are using the space will also change. New developments increase property values within the surrounding neighbourhoods, which decreases housing affordability, often causing low to modest income residents to move out of the area. Not only does the cost of living increase, but access to culturally-appropriate and public spaces becomes more difficult for marginalized groups. This can threaten the social cohesion and sense of belonging within a community. However, with thoughtful and collaborative planning, development can also bring increased community investments and amenities.³ Local community associations, housing advocates and city councillors along the LRT continue to pursue developers to include affordable housing units in order to retain a healthy mix of housing stock.

The objective of this recreation mapping project is to: create an inventory of existing and proposed recreational spaces that are or could be used by the community; identify barriers to community use; and propose best practices for overcoming those barriers.

¹ Government of Ontario. (2021). Ontario population projections. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-population-projections>

² P4X (Plouffe Park, Plant Pool Expansion Coalition). (2021). Statement of Intent

³ Somerset West Community Health Centre (2021). Building Community Together: Grassroots Planning in West Centretown. https://b5d1b5fc-48bd-4e5e-9e3e-fd7e878d12f4.usrfiles.com/ugd/b5d1b5_df82b54842b04cbeb3181815ef8b3c40.pdf

2. Approach

The recreation mapping project has been guided by the P4X (Plouffe Park, Plant Pool Expansion Coalition) Committee comprised of representatives from the Plant Pool Recreation Association (PPRA), Hintonburg Recreation Association (HRA), Dalhousie Community Association (DCA), Hintonburg Community Association (HCA) and Somerset West Community Health Centre (SWCHC).⁴ Through the members' local knowledge, P4X has contributed information on recreation spaces, helped identify the neighbourhoods' needs and advised on community engagement efforts.

The inventory of indoor and outdoor recreation spaces has been developed as a living document to be updated as more information is collected. It has so far been populated from the online data sources and City documents listed below, as well as neighbourhood tours and conversations with local residents.

Barriers to use and best practices for new or repurposed recreation spaces have been identified based on findings from City of Ottawa and City of Toronto reports and outreach to City representatives, local business owners, residents, and school board representatives.

Key Data sources

- City of Ottawa Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan
- City of Ottawa Open Data
- City of Ottawa Secondary Plans: Bayview Station District, Corso Italia Station District, Central Area, Preston-Champagne, Preston-Carling District, Scott Street
- Ottawa Neighbourhood Study
- Google satellite images
- City of Ottawa Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan: Consultation Summary Report
- P4X Statement of Intent
- Building Community Together: Grassroots Planning in West Centretown Outreach Participants
- Jennifer Shepherd, Program Manager, Parks and Facilities Planning, City of Ottawa
- Alexandra McDonough, Planner, Housing and Community Services & Facilities, City of Toronto

⁴ P4X was formed to influence the design of the expanded Plouffe Park and all abutting buildings: in order to maximize a) the Park's size; b) its value [air quality, physical activity, climate mitigation]; and c) its function as the living core and social and physical focus for the surrounding communities.

- Yukang Li, Executive Director, Chinatown Business Improvement Area (BIA)
- Alexa Paz, Owner, Terra20 (local business)
- Local residents
- SWCHC Steward's Table
- Justine Bell, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), School Trustee, Zone 10 Somerset / Kitchissippi (waiting for response)
- Miro Vala, Superintendent of Planning and Facilities, Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB), (waiting for response)

3. Neighbourhood Profiles & Community Needs

For this project, we reviewed the neighbourhoods surrounding the 1010 Somerset and Gladstone Village developments for recreation spaces. The approximate geographic boundaries of the project's scope are outlined in Figure 1, with the understanding that these are not hard boundaries as residents in the outlined area will use recreation facilities that are outside these but nearby. The study area is part of the Kitchissippi and Somerset municipal wards. Following the Statistics Canada's classification of neighbourhoods through 'census tracts', this area includes the following seven neighbourhoods: Mechanicsville; Hintonburg; Parkdale-Civic Hospital; LeBreton Flats; Somerset-Chinatown; Dalhousie-Rochester Heights; and The Glebe Annex-Little Italy.

To understand the composition of these neighbourhoods and factors that impact the wellbeing of their residents, a review of neighbourhood studies was conducted, including the Ottawa Neighbourhood Equity Index (NEI) and the Building Community Together project by SWCHC.

NEI considers the following domains of equity:

Economic; Health; Social and Human Development; Physical Environment; and Community and

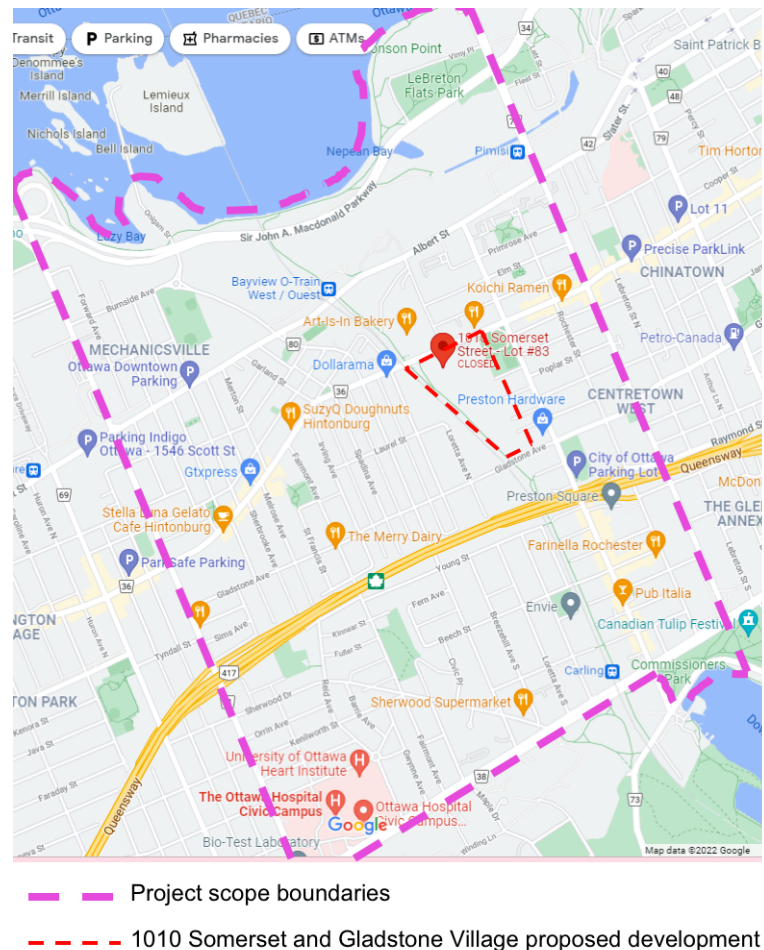


Figure 1: Recreation mapping study area.

Belonging. Descriptions of each domain are outlined in Appendix A. The NEI study found that overall there are significant equity issues in the study area, as shown in Figure 2 where yellow and red indicate neighbourhoods of concern⁵. The study also indicated disparity within the five domains, with differing severity between neighbourhoods, as shown in Appendix A. The domains of Health and Community and Belonging ranked particularly low. Social cohesion and a sense of belonging within a community is highly dependent on accessible spaces to congregate and visit, such as public recreation space and open green space⁶, indicating that these neighbourhoods are deficient in such amenities facilities. The average floor area of new developments is also decreasing, while density is increasing and amenity space located on private properties is decreasing, creating greater need for public recreation space for mental and physical health benefits. Furthermore, in Canada, people with strong social networks and a sense of community belonging have a higher likelihood of reporting good mental health⁷. Therefore, it is not surprising that the NEI found a high presence of mental health issues in the study area. Under the Health domain, four of the study neighbourhoods have a strong equity concern related to the mental health of residents.

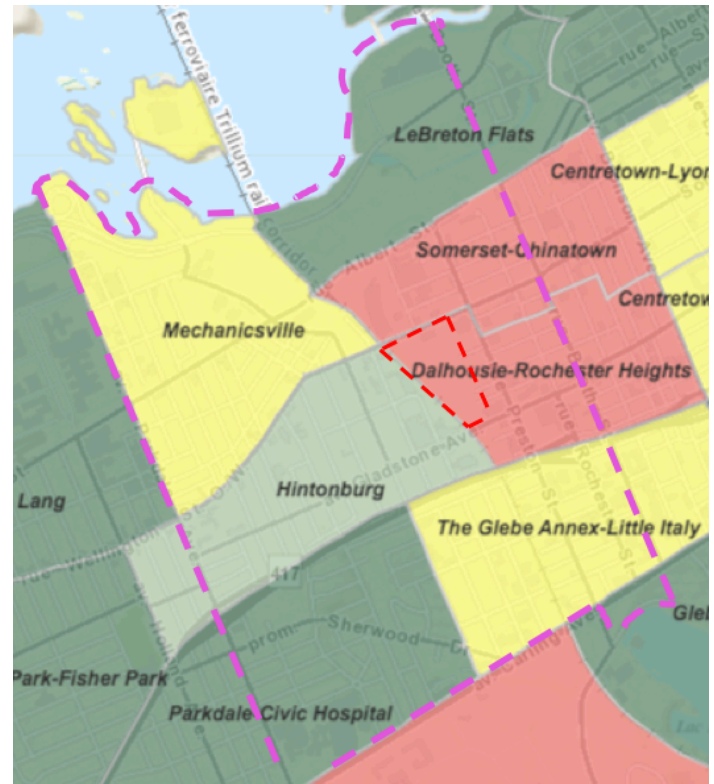


Figure 2: Neighbourhood equity rankings of the neighbourhoods within the study area.

When the NEI evaluated usable green space within the physical environment domain, it was found that almost half of the neighbourhoods are in poor standing to provide adequate outdoor space to help improve the health and community and belonging of the area. Overall, the NEI indicates that there is a need for more accessible public spaces that the community can use for social activities, meetings, emergency preparedness and recreation.

The City of Ottawa uses resources like the NEI and similar methodologies to inform policy. However, the broad definitions of, for example, “community places for meeting” and “useable green space” fail

⁵ Ottawa Neighbourhood Equity Index. <https://neighbourhoodequity.ca/mapping-2/>

⁶ Gruebner, Rapp, M. A., Adli, M., Kluge, U., Galea, S., & Heinz, A. (2017). Cities and Mental Health. *Deutsches Ärzteblatt International*, 114(8), 121–127. <https://doi.org/10.3238/arztebl.2017.0121>

⁷ Public Health Agency of Canada (2018)

to capture the lack of such resources for the purposes required by specific communities, as discussed below. The current housing crisis, particularly affecting affordable rental units, also does not appear to be adequately captured by the NEI.

What the community is saying

In conversation with local residents of the study area, as well as findings from a larger engagement effort for the Building Communities Together project, the following themes on neighbourhood recreation space emerged.

1. Communities are seeing an increasing loss of accessible and affordable recreation spaces and programs.
2. Existing recreation facilities are at capacity and will not be able to support the population growth from new developments.
3. It is not uncommon for residents to have to travel outside of their community to access recreation spaces and programs that fit their needs.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of outdoor community space, particularly outdoor space that can be used during the winter.
5. There is a significant need for more public green space and parks, including tree canopy.

4. Inventory of Recreation Spaces

The Recreation Inventory is maintained as a living document in Google spreadsheets. It outlines green spaces, outdoor facilities, and indoor facilities that already exist, are proposed through new developments, or could exist through shared-use of other existing space that has not typically been used by the community. A summary of the inventory is outlined below. The record of 'proposed' and 'potential' spaces will be expanded as more information is collected from a research project by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and from further conversations with the City and school boards.

Existing Spaces

Within the study area, there are 21 parks and 2 multi-use open spaces. Fourteen of these spaces are under 1 ha and 10 of those are smaller than 0.5 ha. All together there is approximately 19.51 ha of parkland. The City of Ottawa's Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan recommends the citywide provision rate of active parkland be decreased from the current rate of 2.35 ha per 1,000 residents to 2.0 ha per 1,000 residents. **Even at the lower rate, there is currently not sufficient parkland to**

serve the approximately 28,000 residents of the study area⁸, let alone the additional 14,000 people expected to move in with the new developments.

For outdoor recreation facilities, there are:

- 6 basketball courts (4 full, 2 half)
- 6 seasonal ice rinks, 4 with puddle rinks
- 5 splash pads
- 5 wading pools
- 2 baseball diamonds
- 1 tennis and pickleball court
- 1 volleyball sand court
- 1 soccer field
- 1 ultimate frisbee field
- 1 skateboard park

For indoor facilities, there are 2 community centres, 3 public community buildings and 1 recreation complex. The recreation complex is the only facility with an aquatic centre, which consists of one children's pool and one adult pool.

Proposed Spaces

Through secondary plans and the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan, the City is planning to add, at minimum, 6 public parks and 4 splash pads to the study area. However, there is no funding allocated for implementing these amenities and, at the time of this report, the Province of Ontario has delayed its approve of the City's Official Plan which includes this Master Plan. There also appears to be no plans for any additional indoor recreation spaces.

Potential Spaces

Schools and places of worship were found to have the greatest potential for indoor and outdoor recreation facilities that could be shared with the community however the cost of insurance, liability and available hours of operation continue to be a hindrance to use of these potential spaces. In the study area, there are:

- 6 public schools (3 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, 1 adult school)
- 2 catholic elementary schools
- 17 places of worship

⁸ Ottawa Neighbourhood Study (2020)

Somerset West Community Health Centre also has three facilities that may have space for community use.

5. Barriers to Access

Through a review of City and community reports, community engagement findings, and discussions with City representatives at Ottawa and Toronto, common barriers to community access of recreation spaces are identified.

1. Existing facilities are at, if not over, capacity.
2. Indoor spaces have been closed during the COVID-19 pandemic or used for respite purposes.
3. Outdoor spaces are largely not comfortably accessible during winter months.
4. Residents have indicated that some outdoor rinks are poorly maintained and present health and safety risks for inexperienced skaters.
5. The single aquatic centre does not meet the needs of the surrounding communities.
6. City-wide permitting for community use of public space limits the opportunity for local groups to use local space. There is no lottery system and bookings are carried over for decades which do not allow other groups an opportunity to book space.
7. The current, dated Parkland Dedication Bylaw is not tied to population (and thus to park demand). This means that the quantity of parkland (or cash-in-lieu equivalent) should be calculated by the number of dwelling units created, not to the area of the lot on which development occurs. This means abandoning the current cap applied to multi-unit buildings limiting the calculation to 10% of lot land area.
8. The current, dated Parkland Dedication Bylaw provides for a split of funds raised with 60% to the Ward (where the development was undertaken) and 40% to City-wide parks. A Secondary Plan identifying a park-deficient area may indicate that the area should receive 100% of these parkland funds. However proposed recreation spaces identified on secondary plans are not always committed because the plans can be amended based on the requests of large developments.
9. School facilities are closed and not staffed on weekends and public holidays. The use of school facilities are needed the most on weekends and public holidays.
10. Who can use public school space is restricted to incorporated groups with the appropriate liability insurance and have prior permitted use.

6. Best Practices: New or Repurposed Spaces

Below is a summary of best practices when considering how to implement new or repurposed recreation spaces, based on findings from local and regional reports, as well as discussions with community members, local business owners, and subject matter experts.

1. Develop community partnerships and shared-use opportunities.

Partnerships can be developed between the community and the City, places of worship, school boards and/or local businesses. Encourage knowledge-sharing and collaboration with all providers of recreation space. The City of Ottawa is already in conversation with select OCDSB and OCSB schools in the Vanier South-Overbrook neighbourhoods to promote public access of outdoor school spaces⁹.

2. Reinvest in existing facilities to maximize their use.

To respond to growth pressures and demographic changes, the upgrade and expansion of existing indoor and outdoor recreation facilities should be prioritized, especially for local urban communities, and address their recreation and greenspace needs.

3. When making decisions about recreation spaces, survey community members to identify the greatest needs.

Planning for recreation facilities requires an in depth understanding of the values, needs, and characteristics of community members who live, work and play in the area.

4. Advocate to the City of Ottawa for increased free and low-cost recreation space during normal operating hours (not 9pm at night) in the community, including requiring recreation space as part of new developments.

Using resources produced by SWCHC, P4X and the SSHRC, lobby the City to ensure urban communities are provided with recreation space that, at minimum, meet the City's own provision rates outlined in the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan.

5. Leverage the interest of local businesses to connect with their customers and promote exposure through shared-use.

Businesses are looking for innovative ways to reach their customers. Exposure to their products and retail space can be achieved through community use of space. Businesses may need to retain insurance coverage to cover community use.

⁹City of Ottawa. (2020). Better Revitalized Neighbourhoods.
https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/bbrn_strategicareas_en.pdf

7. Recommended Next Steps

Below are recommended next steps that can follow this preliminary work on recreation mapping.

1. Follow up with school board trustees.
2. Obtain details on the existing indoor facilities, for example the size and number of meeting rooms, available equipment, and the type of activities the spaces allow.
3. Obtain details on the available facilities in public schools and places of worship.
4. Initiate transparent and collaborative consultations between the City, school boards and surrounding communities.
5. Identify the management teams of recreation facilities.
6. Investigate the accessibility of recreation spaces.
7. Identify the user groups of different recreation spaces.
8. Advocate for local community groups to have priority use during prime time of local recreation spaces and facilities.
9. Add to the proposed recreation inventory based on the SSHRC research project.
10. Engage the City Ward councilors of Somerset and Kitchissippi in a discussion relating to the recreation mapping findings.
11. Leverage the findings of this study to inform future community work of SWCHC and P4X, including developing a Community Benefits Framework for West Centretown.

Appendix A – Neighbourhood Equity Index

Descriptions of the Neighbourhood Equity Index (NEI) domains are provided below along with how they rank across the neighbourhoods within the Recreation Mapping study areal.

Table 1: Descriptions of the Neighbourhood Equity Index domains¹⁰

Domain	NEI Description
Economic	Access to credit and capital, job opportunities, potential for generating income, and other factors important to living a poverty-free life.
Health	Access to primary care health services, emergency room visits for mental health and addiction services, and emergency room visits linked to falls among seniors.
Social & Human Development	How well-prepared children are to learn, pursue post-secondary studies, and access employment opportunities that can facilitate a poverty-free life. Through empirically mapping inequity.
Physical Environment	Access to transit, services (walkability score), and amenities including rental stock, community places for meeting and usable green space.
Community & Belonging	Exposure to crime, the proportion of the population that has moved in the last five years; and the proportion of seniors living alone.

A summary of the rankings for each NEI domain of the seven neighbourhoods included in the study area is presented in Table 2 below, where:

- **Red** = strong equity concern
- **Yellow** = possible equity concern
- **Green** = normal to no equity concern

¹⁰ Descriptions taken from: <https://neighbourhoodequity.ca/#domains>

Table 2: Neighbourhood Equity Index rankings of the study area neighbourhoods¹¹

Neighbourhood	Economic	Health	Social & Human Development	Physical Environment (Usable Green Space)	Community & Belonging
Mechanicsville					
Hintonburg					
Parkdale-Civic Hospital					
LeBreton Flats					
Somerset-Chinatown					
Dalhousie-Rochester Heights					
The Glebe Annex-Little Italy					

Table 2 shows that there are significant equity issues in the study area across most of the NEI domains.

¹¹ Ibid