

State of the Art of Strategic Planning for Parks and Recreation in Ontario Municipalities

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History in Ontario Municipalities

- Starting in the 1970s, the Province of Ontario encouraged municipalities to create Parks and Recreation Master Plans through:
 - Publication of guidelines;
 - Planning grants; and,
 - Construction grants.

History

- Even though the province has become much less proactive in this area, Parks and Recreation Planning is now a standard activity of Ontario municipalities.

History: Government Implications

- Harris government from 1995 to 2002.
- Massive change due to:
 - Reduced level of grants from the province to municipalities.
 - Decreased per capita operating expenditures.
 - Municipal amalgamations.
- This change in government resulted in a decreased planning capacity for many municipalities.

Purpose of this Study

- Two purposes for this study:
 - To develop an understanding of the parks and recreation planning process underway in Ontario municipalities in the 1995-2005 period.
 - To develop an understanding of the content of those plans.
 - To determine factors leading to success.

Methods

- The study is based on Grounded Theory
- 3 Phases:
 - Phase 1 – Selection of the 25 municipalities
 - Phase 2 – Content Analysis
 - Phase 3 – Interviews with Key Stakeholders



Municipality	2001 Population	1996 to 2001 Growth
City of Brantford	86,419	2.0%
City of Cambridge	110,392	8.8%
City of Guelph	108,170	10.8%
City of Ottawa	374,072	7.9%
City of Kitchener	192,389	6.7%
City of Mississauga	612,905	12.6%
City of Oshawa	139,061	3.6%
City of Pickering	87,139	10.3%
City of Quinte West	41,466	-0.6
City of Saint Ste. Marie	74,566	-6.9%
City of St. Catharines	129,170	-1.3%
City of Vaughan	180,022	37.5%
City of Stratford	29,676	2.3%
City of Waterloo	86,543	11.0%
City of Woodstock	33,061	2.6%
Town of Aurora	40,167	15.2%
Town of Brantford	13,751	4.0%
Town of Huntsville	17,388	8.9%
Town of Markham	208,615	20.3%
Town of Newmarket	65,788	15.2%
Town of Sauguen Shores	11,288	-5.8%
Town of Center Wellington	24,260	14.4%
Town of Le Sale	25,285	22.6%
Town of Lincoln	20,612	9.6%
Township of Springwater	16,104	8.9%
Ontario	11,410,046	6.1%

Methods

- Each case study analyzed reviewed the following subject areas:
 1. The location and size of the municipality.
 2. A brief history of the plan.
 3. The goals and objectives of the plan.
 4. The planning process used to develop the plan.
 5. The public participation approach used.
 6. The key recommendations of the plan.
 7. The fiscal costs incurred by plan implementation.
 8. The degree of plan implementation that has occurred.
 9. The methods used by the municipality to evaluate the success of the plan.
 10. The overall success of the plan.
 11. Recommendations for change for the next plan.

Planning Success

- Planning success was determined by *the degree of plan implementation.*
- This research found a wide range of success, from total implementation through to no implementation.
- **Why?**

Findings

- Three approaches to planning:
 - Outside consultants.
 - Parks and recreation agency staff.
 - Combination of consultants and staff.

Plan Success

- We found that those plans prepared by a combination of consultants and municipal staff were more likely to be successfully implemented.
- The involvement of municipal planning staff desirable.
- Most municipal P & R Departments do not have staff members with Planning education.

Findings

- Virtually all municipalities with a population over 10,000 people have parks and recreation master plans.
- There is a wide range of content in the plans.
- Most plans based on recreation-demand studies.

Public Involvement

- Public participation very important.
- No standard approach to public participation.
- Methods of public participation often poorly documented.
- Very challenging to determine how public input affected plan policies.

Planning Capability

- Small municipalities usually lack the administrative and financial capability to plan successfully.
- Many large municipal Parks and Recreation Departments also lack planning capability.
- Typically, little evidence that Parks and Recreation Planning involved the Planning Department.

Findings

- Most plans concentrate on the parks and recreation services provided by the parks and recreation department of the municipality.
- Partnerships with other providers, YMCA or private operations, sometimes documented.
- Virtually no reference to shared programs between municipalities.
- Virtually no reference to other parkland providers, i.e. provincial parks, conservation areas, national parks, etc.

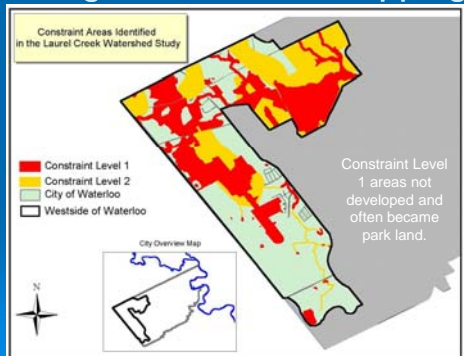
Findings

- In rapidly developing areas, the development industry sometimes dictated the range, type, and location of parkland and recreation facilities.
- Often a lack of reference to other plans, i.e. transportation plans.
- Usually, little financial information on plan implementation.
- Typically, a lack of reference to ecological constraint mapping occurring in urban planning, even though this is a major source of park land.



Typical watershed constraint mapping on an aerial photo base

Ecological Constraint Mapping



Waterloo Case Study

- The parkland in West Waterloo came about through Subwatershed Planning and the associated landscape conservation planning.
- It did not come about through Parks and Recreation Planning.
- The parkland in East Waterloo did come about from Parks and Recreation Planning.

RIM Park

- The large 500 acre RIM Park in Waterloo, opened in 2001, came about as the result of a comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan.



Findings

- Plans repeatedly focused on facilities, often with insufficient reference to programs.
- Plans sometimes prepared to leverage capital monies from the municipal council or the provincial government.

Findings:

- Most plans usually do not include a historical, cultural, or ecological component.
- The elderly, University students, and high school students had low priority.
- Varying use of standards.
- Sometimes include tourism.
- Usually lack reference to the private, profit-making, and non-profit services available.

Non Plan Development

- We found parks and recreation development that was not mentioned or anticipated in the Parks and Recreation Plan.
- This plan can be and often is ignored by subsequent P & R staff and councils.
- This can occur because of the lack of legal standing of the P & R Plan.

Plan Life

- We found a few plans that were moribund only 2 years after development. Others had some degree of use 10 years later.
- A major factor limiting plan life was a lack of legal standing and a lack of connection to the full municipal planning processes.
- We found surprisingly high levels of staff turnover, leading to a lack of institutional memory.

Outcomes

- Reviews of the plans, the planning processes used and the degree of implementation found, provide directions to improve Parks and Recreation Planning in municipalities.

Increasing the Likelihood of Plan Success

1. The preparation of plans by specialized planning consultants with experience in the field, with involvement of staff.
2. The support of the Mayor, Council, and the Director of the Parks and Recreation Department.
3. Widespread public participation with special attention paid to the policy leaders in parks, recreation, sport, culture and tourism.
4. Having the plan written with implementation in mind.

Increasing the Likelihood of Plan Success

5. The formal approval of the plan by the municipal Council.
6. The direction by Council that plan recommendations be followed by all municipal departments, not just the Parks and Recreation Department.
7. The widespread distribution of the plan for easy availability, including: the public library, all staff members, and the municipality's Web site.
8. The strategic placement of copies of the plan document with policy leaders in the local community.

Increasing the Likelihood of Plan Success

9. The assignment of plan implementation tasks to named individuals, such as municipal staff and public volunteers.
10. Incorporation of key goals, objectives, standards, and recommendations into the municipal Official Plan.
11. Yearly plan evaluation with annual reports made widely available.
12. Financial considerations given a high priority within the plans.

Provincial Involvement

- The Province of Ontario needs to once again become proactive in encouraging Parks and Recreation Planning.
- This can assist in all aspects of planning, especially with smaller municipalities with weak Parks and Recreation management and planning capability.

Reference

- Eagles, Paul F. J. and Amber Gebhardt. 2008. The State of the Art of Parks and Recreation Planning in Ontario Municipalities. *Leisure/Loisir* (In Press).

Comment

- We encourage your questions and comments on these ideas.
- Thanks for your attention.

