

SECTION 5: ACTIVITY TRENDS AND BEST PRACTICES

This section summarizes the major trends and best practices affecting parks, recreation and library facilities in Vaughan. The identification and monitoring of existing and emerging trends is essential for effective planning of Vaughan's community services and facilities. To its credit, Vaughan is a leading edge municipality and is already implementing many of the best practices identified herein.

5.1 TRENDS IN PARTICIPATION

Lack of Free Time

A lack of free time has traditionally been the number one barrier to participation for both youth and adults, largely due to busy lifestyles and a number of socio-economic circumstances such as dual-income households, commuting, lone-parent families, and low income households. In the household survey conducted for the 2013 Active Together Master Plan, 28% of households identified that the lack of personal time as the number one barrier to participating in recreation activities. Statistics Canada (2006) also revealed that 54% of Vaughan's workforce is employed other municipalities in York Region or beyond. Coupling cross-municipal commuting with shift and weekend work bolsters the need to enhance access community facilities, services, and programs by providing extended or flexible operating hours and promoting drop-in or unstructured opportunities.

Similarly, the changing face of the 'traditional' Canadian family, with more lone-parent families, is putting significant time pressures and constraints on community services. This is an important consideration as the 2011 Statistics Canada Census reports that 12% of all census families in Vaughan are lone-parent families, an increase of one percent from the 2006 Census.

Communities across the GTA and beyond are often faced with the challenge of overcoming this barrier from a service delivery perspective by evolving programs to provide more convenient and flexible opportunities to participate. Communities are extending hours of operation to allow people to participate at times that are most suited to their needs. Providing more unstructured and self-scheduled opportunities may also bolster participation as people are generally more likely to participate if activities are of a casual or drop-in nature.

Physical Inactivity

While physical inactivity is closely linked to the lack of free time, today's digital age is filled with sedentary activities, resulting in continued concerns regarding physical inactivity. Physical inactivity is most prevalent among youth and children and can lead to significantly increased risk of threatening cardiac events and obesity. The latest research reveals that the average adult can spend approximately 80% of their daily lives sitting and sleeping, particularly those who sit all day at work.¹ According to a Canadian Health Measures Survey, children and youth spend an average of nearly 9 hours a day in sedentary pursuits, a majority of which is dedicated to screen time. Adults have been reported to spend

¹ Picard, A. [Why the sedentary life is killing us. 2012](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health/why-the-sedentary-life-is-killing-us/article4613704/). Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health/why-the-sedentary-life-is-killing-us/article4613704/>

an average of 10 hours per day in sedentary pursuits, suggesting that the level of physical inactivity increases with age.²

Between 2000 and 2010, the Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute found that participation declined in outdoor play, unorganized and organized physical activities and sports among children.³ The World Health Organization suggests that children and youth should spend a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to rigorous activity per day; however less than 10% attain this level of activity⁴, suggesting infrequent levels of physical activity.^{5,6}

As of 2011, 52% of York Region residents age 12 years and older were classified as physically inactive; this level has fluctuated between 47% in 2003 and 55% in 2010. Inactivity levels are traditionally highest amongst the 35 to 44 age group, although the 65+ and 45 to 64 age groups are not far behind.⁷ One of the goals of Vaughan's Physical Activity Strategy (2008) was to increase the physical activity levels of Vaughan residents by 10% by the year 2020 – optimism remains, but the community still has considerable work to do to reach this goal.

Other cases of physical inactivity among youth are linked to physically inactive parents. The role of the parent is an influential factor in determining a child's level of physical activity as they are typically the decision maker and guide for their child's daily lives, including how much time is spent in sedentary activities.⁸ As a result, children and youth are more likely to participate in physical activities if they are encouraged by their parents, suggesting that opportunities exist to engage the entire family to being more physically active.

Providing additional parks and recreation opportunities and incentives to encourage physical activities may help address these issues among physical inactivity across all age groups. Incentives and opportunities provided by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care such as the Active 2010 Strategy may assist in stimulating a variety of physical activities. Coupling initiatives such as this with the parks and recreation programs and services offered by the City, which endeavour to bolster physical activity levels, could be effective in promoting healthy lifestyles. The following are just some of the initiatives that Vaughan has undertaken as part of its 'Active Together' Physical Activity Strategy:

- School partnerships – Healthy schools program, Walk to School, etc.
- Live Right Now – Vaughan residents to lose 100,000 lbs
- "On Your Mark" – youth physical activity and health program
- "Pause To Play Week" – turn off the screens
- Vaughan Mills "Healthy Strides" walking program

² Rachel C., Didier G., Ian J., Cora C., Janine Clarke, & Mark T. Physical activity of Canadian children and youth: Accelerometer results from the 2007 and 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey. 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2011001/article/11397-eng.htm>

³ Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute. Children's active pursuits during the after school period. 2010 Physical Activity Monitor: Facts and Figures. 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.cflri.ca/media/node/922/files/PAM%202010%20Bulletin%204%20-%20Active%20Pursuits%20EN.pdf>

⁴ World Health Organization. Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health. 2010. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/factsheet_recommendations/en/

⁵ Rachel C. & Didier G. Daily patterns of physical activity among Canadians. 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2012002/article/11649-eng.htm>

⁶ Picard, A. Why the sedentary life is killing us. 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health/why-the-sedentary-life-is-killing-us/article4613704/>

⁷ Statistics Canada. Canadian Community Health Survey. Table 105-0501.

⁸ Zecevic et al. Parental influence on young children's physical activity. 2010.

Aging Population

Many members of the 'Baby Boomer' demographic (generally between the ages of 48 and 66) are reaching retirement age, contributing to a significant 'greying' of the population and placing greater demand for activities aimed at older adults and seniors. Similar to other municipalities throughout Ontario, Vaughan's population is aging with 16% of the City's population being over the age of 60 (as of 2011), an increase from 14% recorded in the 2006 Census. These generations are shifting away from traditional seniors' activities towards more active recreation, seeking quality wellness and healthy living opportunities. The 'new senior' will typically be wealthier and more physically active than those in previous generations.

The 'New Retirement Survey' of older adults prepared by Merrill Lynch contained findings that impact the facilitation and provision of services to older adults in the future. Findings of the survey indicate changing expectations and perspectives of aging that remain relevant today.

- Many baby boomers intend to keep working after retirement age, possibly through part-time work or launching new careers.
- Older adults will live longer and continue to pursue active activities.
- There will be a strong balance between work and personal time, and only a small percentage never plans to work again.
- Boomers are moving to put others first (e.g., family, community, etc.) instead of themselves (they were previously coined as the 'ME' generation). This change in attitude may be tapped for an increase in volunteerism.
- Men want to relax more and spend more time with their spouse.
- Women see retirement as providing more time for career development, community involvement, and personal growth.⁹

Today's baby boomers are more prepared for retirement from a financial perspective than previous generations. Vaughan's community profile indicates that residents are generally wealthier compared to the Provincial median; however, at the same time, the cost of living in Vaughan is considerably higher as evidenced by the average cost of home ownership.¹⁰ As a result, affordable drop-in programs and discounts/subsidies for those who have an inability to pay due to lower income levels ensures that these groups (some of which may be older adults) have access to parks and recreation programs and services.

Specific considerations in addressing the delivery of leisure services for older adults may include:

- An increase in the use of adult opportunities and services by older adults.
- Continued input into program offerings through the use of a seniors program advisory committee and opportunities for input through focus groups.
- Actively engaging and including the older adult population in the delivery of services.
- Recognizing that the percentage of persons with disabilities will increase over time as the population ages and that physical accessibility for all programs and services will become more critical for older adults.
- Considering park amenities such as shade, water, seating, and accessible washrooms.
- Increased daytime use of community centres and other recreation facilities.

⁹ Merrill Lynch, Harris interactive, Dychtwald, K. PhD. The new retirement survey, 2005.

¹⁰ CMHC. Housing Now – Greater Toronto Area. 2011.

With evidence of an aging population observed in Vaughan, a greater demand for services for this age group is anticipated to occur. As a result, Vaughan will likely experience growing demand and requests for active activities (fitness and sports) and personal interest activities (day trips and education) for older adults. Since the growing older adult and senior segments of the population are generally wealthier and more mobile compared to the past, they will seek quality services and will be willing to travel further to access them. Demand is also likely to increase for passive and less rigorous recreation activities that promote socialization and community cohesiveness. Activities for Vaughan's older adults (ages 60 and over) range from active pursuits including, but not limited to, aquafit, badminton, and low-impact aerobics to less rigorous, passive activities such as painting and computer lessons. It is also important to recognize that neighbourhoods may "turn over" as younger households occupy areas vacated by seniors; thus monitoring neighbourhood demographics is critical in the long-term planning of parks and recreation facilities.

Focus on Youth

Youth between the ages 10 to 19 represent approximately 14% of Vaughan's population (2011). Youth are a key age group in the delivery of services and the City should continue to ensure that they are well served and have opportunities for physical activity and self development. In servicing and building capacity for youth, it must be realized that this age group has varied interests and engaging youth must use different resources and approaches. The most successful approaches result from face to face interaction with youth to form relationships of trust. Youth engagement has been shown to have positive effects on self-esteem; physical activity; school performance; and commitment to friends, families, and communities. These and other benefits were identified in the City's 2008 Youth in Action report.

Providing flexible opportunities to participate is also an increasing trend that is not only observed among youth. Recreation activities typically compete with other time commitments such as homework, part-time jobs, and socializing with friends, leaving limited availability for structured recreation activities. As a result, self-structured and drop-in programs provide recreation opportunities that fit their schedule. Vaughan provides these opportunities through a number of youth spaces at community centres throughout the City; these spaces provide a variety of drop-in programs and activities, or a place for youth to hang out. Vaughan Public Libraries also provide youth-oriented reading areas supported by reading materials and programs that promote literacy and social interaction.

Youth are commonly unable to participate in extracurricular activities due to financial barriers, particularly when it comes to participating in sports which require high financial commitment. As a result, municipalities are encouraged to provide affordable opportunities to engage youth in households with lower incomes. Time and again, participation levels are found to be lower among youth living in low income households. Some municipalities are responding to these needs through providing subsidized recreation programs, while it is recognized that some municipalities view their role as a 'provider' and others are the 'facilitator'. Communities, including Vaughan, have taken strides in providing affordable drop-in programs as well as through the RecAssist program, which provides financial assistance subsidies to those living under the Low Income Cut Off (LICO). Other assistance programs are also available through the Canadian Tire Jumpstart program or Ontario Works, to name a few.

Obesity among all Age Groups

As previously mentioned, today's digital age is filled with sedentary activities and physical inactivity – a growing trend notably prevalent among youth and children. A recent report on obesity completed by the Public Health Agency of Canada found that nearly 6% of children ages (2-5) and 9% of children (ages 6-17) in Canada are obese. The risk of obesity increases with age where nearly one in four Canadian adults are considered to be obese, while over 60% of all Canadians are obese or overweight.¹¹ As of 2011, 48% of York Region residents age 12 years and older were classified as overweight or obese; this level has been as low as 41% in 2008, but the 2011 level is the highest recorded since at least 2003. Of this amount, 32% were classified as overweight and 16% as obese in 2011.¹²

Obesity has come to be known as the “new smoking”, where many Canadians are leading unhealthy lifestyles, resulting in more cases of heart disease, stress on bones and joints, diabetes, blood clots, cancer, and other weight-related health problems. Encouraging local level governments to promote a healthy lifestyle and recreation opportunities and to provide parkland and programs are ways of combat obesity. Many communities have also been taking steps towards promoting healthy lifestyles, such as encouraging recreation and physical activities, as well as establishing trails to link destinations, encouraging the community to utilize alternative forms of transportation and reducing the reliance on automobiles.

Other widespread initiatives have recently been undertaken to promote and encourage healthy lifestyles and physical activity to reduce obesity.¹³ For example, the Province has been removing junk foods and vending machines in high school cafeterias to reduce the risk of obesity among youth, one of the most vulnerable age groups. Municipalities and communities such as Vaughan have been taking steps towards combating obesity and promoting healthy lifestyles. Such initiatives include encouraging parks and recreation activities through an abundant range of facilities, programs and services found in the Vaughan's Recreation Guides, as well as establishing a network of active transportation routes resulting from the City's Pedestrian and Cycling Master Plan to link destinations and promote alternative modes of transportation not only for recreation, but daily commuting. Other Vaughan-specific initiatives were listed earlier under “Physical Inactivity”.

Economic Influences on Participation

Past studies have shown that a household's level of income is proportional to participation in recreation activities, especially in organized team sports given the high cost to participate. Across Canada, 62% of individuals living in households with incomes of less than \$20,000 are considered inactive.¹⁴ The Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute found that nearly 40% of children among households earning over \$100,000 are involved in organized physical activities and sports, whereas only 21% of children are involved in these pursuits in households earning less than \$50,000. There are generally high participation levels in outdoor play across all income groups, the highest among households earning between \$50,000 and \$80,000 (71%).

¹¹ Public Health Agency of Canada. *Obesity in Canada*. 2011. Retrieved from http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/products/Obesity_in_canada_2011_en.pdf

¹² Statistics Canada. *Canadian Community Health Survey*. Table 105-0501.

¹³ Mario W, Michele H., and Emily M. *We are fat. So what's Ontario doing about it?* Toronto Star, Health Zone. June 17, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.healthzone.ca/health/dietfitness/diet/article/1010968--we-are-fat-so-what-s-ontario-doing-about-it>

¹⁴ Act Now BC. *Why don't people participate?* Physical activity strategy. 2011. Retrieved from http://www.physicalactivitystrategy.ca/pdfs/Why_Dont_People_Participate.pdf

Another survey on sport participation in relation to income finds that 68% of children from households with the highest income bracket are enrolled in sports, compared to 44% of children in the lowest income bracket.¹⁵ A household's level of income can become a significant barrier to participation in recreation pursuits due to the cost of participating in recreation activities. This is especially problematic among young, lone-parent, or economically disadvantaged households as older, established or high-earning households typically have more disposable income to spend on parks and recreation pursuits.

Statistics Canada identified that between 1980 and 2005, the top 20% of Canadian full-time earners saw median earnings rise by 16.4%, contrasted by the bottom 20% where median earnings fell by 20.6%, suggesting an increasing gap between the rich and the poor. Median earnings by the middle 20% remained constant.¹⁶ Communities are, therefore, facing increasing pressures to provide more affordable programs and subsidies to promote participation among all user groups as well as offering "no fee" opportunities.

The term 'working poor' has been put forward in recent years to describe the financial situation of many Canadians who have a job but do not have any additional funds beyond paying for life necessities. Cases of obesity are also more commonly found among residents with lower socio-economic status (14%), compared to residents with higher incomes (11%),¹⁷ reinforcing the need to provide opportunities for parks and recreation activities to lower-income households. An analysis of Vaughan's 2006 community profile indicates that Vaughan has a lower proportion of low income households (11%) compared to the Region (13%) and the Province (14%). Nevertheless, continuing to explore other partnership opportunities with the non-profit and private sectors will ensure that those with financial barriers are engaged and have access to various parks, recreation, and library opportunities.

To provide equal opportunities across all income groups, a number of policies, procedures, and programs have been established to remove income-related barriers to participation. In 2010, Parks and Recreation Ontario released a guide of best practices in delivering recreational opportunities to engage low-income families. This guide identifies a series of practices in communities throughout the GTA and surrounding area which focuses around five key themes:

1. Community partnerships and inter-sectoral collaboration help ensure a holistic approach that maximizes resources and increases access to recreational, social and educational programming.
2. Funding partnerships are key, as many practices are dependent on additional funding to ensure financial viability and long-term sustainability.
3. Fee subsidy programs that minimize or eliminate user fees, transportation costs and equipment costs enable low-income families to access recreational programs that they would otherwise not be able to afford.
4. A written access policy that is approved by a municipal council formalizes the commitment of the organization and helps ensure the viability and long-term sustainability of the policy.
5. Child and youth development programs foster leadership and self-esteem, which enhances physical and emotional health and increases social skills, resulting in healthier, more resilient adults who are able to effectively contribute to society.¹⁸

¹⁵ Warren, C. *Kid's Sports*. Statistics Canada. 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2008001/article/10573-eng.htm#a2>

¹⁶ Statistics Canada. 2006: Earnings, income, and shelter costs. 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080501/dq080501a-eng.htm>

¹⁷ Emily, M. *Obese youth in Canada tripled since 1981*. Toronto Star, HealthZone, June 21, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.healthzone.ca/health/dietfitness/article/1012053--obese-youth-in-canada-tripled-since-1981>

¹⁸ Parks and Recreation Ontario. *Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians*. 2010. Retrieved from http://www.prontario.org/index.php/ci_id/3721.htm

Participation in Organized and Unorganized Sports

The public is placing greater demands on spontaneous, non-programmed forms of activity due to evolving households, schedules, and lifestyles, prompting a transition of activities from organized to unorganized sports. In 2005, Statistics Canada reported that participation in organized sports declined from 57% in 1992 to 51%.¹⁹ 61% of children were found to be more likely to participate in unorganized physical activities, although this is a decline from a recorded 69% in 2000; suggesting an overall decline in physical activities.²⁰ This trend is largely driven by a lack of time, a general decline of many organized sports, socio-economic status, and the desire for self-scheduled, and accessible forms of activity.

Declining participation in organized sports, especially among younger generation, is also the result of an evolving demographic profile, translating into differing interests. As growth in many GTA communities occurs through immigration, many new residents are coming from areas where certain sports are not played. For example, participation in minor hockey, one of Canada's most popular sports, is expected to decline nearly one-third by 2021 due to a declining youth interest in the sport (according to Hockey Canada, there were 577,000 members for the 2010-2011 year, and it is expected that there will be 360,000 members by 2021).²¹

This trend is further supported by findings from the random household survey undertaken for the 2013 Active Together Master Plan. 31% of respondents reported to have participated in hockey and figure skating in the past 12 months, declining from 35% reported in the 2008 Active Together Master Plan household survey. While this difference may not be statistically significant, it is indicative of Vaughan's diverse community profile, where immigrants make up approximately 45% of the population who may be unaware of the sport or lack access or lack interest.

Parks and open spaces support a range of unstructured activities and are, for the most part, free to the public and generally represent a lower community investment relative to indoor recreation facilities. A simple open field which can facilitate pick-up sports (e.g., kicking a soccer ball, flying a kite, picnicking or tossing a Frisbee) provides low-barrier opportunities to participate in physical activities. Outdoor activities, particularly those that engage families and other social networks, tend to be highly popular amongst new Canadians.

Emerging Activities

The community profile of Vaughan continues to evolve, much like many communities in the GTA, which is creating needs that are different from those observed in the past. Evidence of an aging population generates demands for spaces and activities that may not have previously been considered. Today, however, older adults and seniors have been observed to be more physically active than past generations of the same age group, seeking opportunities for casual sports, active living, and a greater variety of choices. In addition, pressures continue to be placed on sports fields, non-programmed spaces for social activities, as well as accessible facilities supportive of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

¹⁹ Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute. [Children's active pursuits during the after school period](http://www.cflri.ca/media/node/922/files/PAM%202010%20Bulletin%204%20-%20Active%20Pursuits%20EN.pdf). 2010 Physical Activity Monitor: Facts and Figures. 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.cflri.ca/media/node/922/files/PAM%202010%20Bulletin%204%20-%20Active%20Pursuits%20EN.pdf>

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Kaufman, B. [Hockey losing numbers game](http://www.lfpress.com/sports/hockey/2011/10/31/18902646.html). London Free Press. 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.lfpress.com/sports/hockey/2011/10/31/18902646.html>

Increasing levels of ethnic diversity in Vaughan also facilitates the evolution of parks, recreation, and library needs. Many cultures view recreation as a family event and are more inclined to pursue activities together. This growing diversity creates the need for a wide range of activities as well as grouping services into multi-use facilities, providing opportunities for all members of a family to participate at the same time without travelling to multiple facilities or parks. Another example is Vaughan Public Libraries, which provides library materials in 16 different languages and in a variety of mediums in addition to other resources and programs to provide support for new immigrants.

Newcomers to Canada are frequent users of community spaces as these are ideal locations for social gatherings and interaction. The variety of passive and active pursuits between cultures is immense, with many activities serving to define cultures and how they interact. Social gathering spaces are perhaps the most sought after 'non-traditional' parkland use and these spaces serve as venues through which the City can offer special events such as festivals, concerts, and cultural celebrations.

The continued diversification of Vaughan has resulted in a growing emphasis on non-traditional and non-structured activities. Municipalities across the GTA have seen increasing popularity in a variety of active pursuits such as Ultimate Frisbee, cricket, and road racing (cycling). The popularity of emerging passive activities such as hiking, tai chi, community gardening, and casual cycling also generates demand for passive parks and open spaces. Extreme/non-traditional sports such as skateboarding and BMX biking are also expected to experience continued support and strong participation rates among youth and children. Incorporating flexible facility designs in the provision of parks, recreation, and libraries allow for multiple uses, as some activities may decline and others emerge.

Overcoming Challenges for Residents with Disabilities

The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 15% of the world's population lives with a disability, making this group the world's largest minority.²² In Canada, the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey conducted by Statistics Canada in 2006 estimated that approximately 4.4 million Canadians were challenged with a disability, with nearly one-quarter of those living in Ontario.²³ It is anticipated that this figure will continue to grow, increasing to 3.3 million Ontarians with a disability by 2025. As a result, the Province has been responsive to this growing segment through enacting the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*.

The intent of the AODA is to 'improve opportunities for persons with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province' (c.32, s.1). Barriers are defined to include anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including physical, architectural, informational, communicational, attitudinal, technological, or policy/practice barriers. For recreation and community services, this could include (but is not limited to) customer service practices, communications and signage, accessibility to facilities, ramps to entrances, proper lighting, removal of barriers for pedestrian paths and hand rails. Inclusive program opportunities may also be considered as a method of integration. The benefits of recreation can be especially important for persons with disabilities who may also be faced with issues of poverty, isolation, and secondary disabilities.

²² World Health Organization. *World Report on Disability*. 2011.

²³ Statistics Canada. *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey*. 2006. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-628-x/89-628-x2010015-eng.pdf>

Vaughan has undertaken a variety of measures to ensure the removal of barriers to participation and inclusivity of all members of the public. Since 2001, Vaughan has been developing annual accessibility plans in partnership with Department Staff, the Accessibility Advisory Committee and other committees, and the groups who serve those with disabilities. A variety of other documents exist which pertain to accessibility, including the City's 2012 Accessibility Policy, Accessible Customer Service Policy, Accessible Customer Service Compliance, training policies, and the AODA Accessibility Standards. The latter item refers to the AODA Built Environment Design Standards for recreational trails, play spaces, outdoor public use eating areas, etc., which were released in late 2012; these will affect amenities built in 2016 and beyond. Additional standards for the built environment are anticipated to be developed in the future. These new standards may have financial implications relative to the retrofit of existing amenities and facilities and design of future amenities and facilities.

5.2 TRENDS IN PARKS AND RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Parkland & Open Spaces

The role of parkland within communities is immense. Depending upon their size, location and function, parks have multiple applications and can act as:

- facilitators of “placemaking” and high quality urban designs;
- catalysts for community improvement and revitalization;
- hubs for special events and social interaction;
- venues for physical activity, whether for programmed or spontaneous usage;
- educators and stewards of the natural environment; and/or
- spaces for family gatherings and relaxation.

The increasing integration of “places” and “destinations” through urban design seeks to create comfortable, connected and sustainable streetscapes. The role of parkland is essentially tied to these objectives as parks function as hubs for social and physical activity, while increasing the overall attractiveness of any given area (provided they are designed with aesthetics and functionality in mind). While park development can increase the attractiveness and marketability of new areas, parkland redevelopment can act as a catalyst for improving quality of life and revitalizing existing areas.

As such, the importance of the parks and open spaces as an asset cannot be understated. Vaughan offers a number of parks and open spaces to encourage physical and social activity, wellness, and informal use opportunities.

Park Comfort and Safety

Ensuring that parks provide attractive and comfortable experiences to the user is paramount to ensuring successful utilization by a broad range of users. The presence of informative signage and attractive gateway features is the first impression that a user will have of the park and park system as a whole. The presence of consistent and effective signage is an important element in promoting recognition and stewardship in the community. Some signs can also provide interpretive information that connects a user to the park and may encourage the person to take further interest in their surroundings.

The provision of parking is a convenience that many residents look for in accessing parkland, though parking is best suited for parks which are more intensively used, such as those containing community centres or multiple sports fields. Once inside a park, patrons often look for a number of convenience and comfort-based features, depending upon their intended use. In non-programmed or passive parks where social activities such as picnicking, family gatherings, and cultural events are taking place, users might be looking for amenities such as treed areas and shade structures, picnic tables, pavilions, and washrooms. Such amenities are also beneficial in strategic locations along major trail routes and at trail heads. Similarly, users at active parks such as sports field may be looking for similar amenities as well as features such as designated seating, change rooms, and concessions.

Finally, parks are being designed with users' safety in mind through the application of CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) and other design principles. High volume areas should be well lit, low visibility areas should be limited, and neighbourhood level parks should be designed so that surrounding residents and streets have "eyes on the park", thus discouraging undesirable users and activities. Some of the parks in Vaughan's older areas have little to no street frontage, a design that has contributed to vandalism, property damage, and safety concerns. Maintenance of parks is now accepted in the industry as a key component of perceived "safety" in parks and in deterring inappropriate behavior. Considering CPTED principles in park design will achieve safer, user-friendly parks in Vaughan.

Aging Infrastructure

A 2006 study by Parks and Recreation Ontario identified that 30-50% of recreation facilities in Ontario are approaching the end of their useful life.²⁴ In fact, infrastructure province-wide is chronically underfunded,²⁵ though these pressures have been somewhat alleviated through the recent provincial and federal economic stimulus programs. In addition to job creation and stimulating economic growth, investment in recreation infrastructure renewal helps to stimulate higher levels of participation in physical and recreation activities. Provision of quality recreation infrastructure and facilities is a cost-effective, proactive solution to promoting healthy lifestyles through physical activity and participation.

Some communities have undertaken community facility master plans to identify the state of their recreation facilities and determine their suitability to accommodate future growth and the evolution of recreation trends. Single-purpose, older facilities have typically been unsuitable to support the needs of expanding communities, lack accessibility and appropriate space to meet the needs of user groups, or require costly maintenance. Older facilities are also typically single use facilities where opportunities may exist to expand or relocate multiple facility components to achieve economies of scale. Given Vaughan's rapid and recent growth, most of its recreational and library infrastructure is relatively new. Nevertheless, some older facilities remain and many others will require some form of renewal over the coming years.

Since 2009, the Canadian government has invested over \$12 billion in infrastructure projects and program. Recent initiatives include the Recreation Infrastructure Canada program, a stimulus program designed to renew, upgrade, and expand recreation facilities over a 2-year span. This initiative resulted in massive success, with over 1,600 applications and approved funding for 718. In Ontario, nearly \$200

²⁴ Parks and Recreation Ontario. [Ontario Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Study](http://216.13.76.142/PROntario/index.htm). 2006. Retrieved from <http://216.13.76.142/PROntario/index.htm>

²⁵ Parks and Recreation Ontario. [Investing in healthy and active Ontarians through recreation and parks infrastructure](http://www.prontario.org/index.php/ci_id/3542.htm). 2007. Retrieved from http://www.prontario.org/index.php/ci_id/3542.htm

million was invested in the renewal and upgrading of recreation facilities and infrastructure, resulting in more than 750 projects funded with the assistance of the federal and provincial government.²⁶ Projects that have benefited from this program and/or the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund in Vaughan include renovations and improvements to Sonoma Heights Community Park, Memorial Hill, and Maple Nature Reserve.

Over the past three years, a number of renovations have also been undertaken at a number of Vaughan's public library branches including Pierre Berton, Bathurst Clark, Woodbridge, Kleinburg, and Dufferin Clark. These renovations were mainly to enhance the user's library experience, improve operational efficiencies, and to undertake necessary improvements to replace aging facility components and to ensure that the library branches are accessible to all residents, families, and abilities. Such accessible improvements include automated entrances and doors, accessible bathrooms, and an elevator.

Multi-use Parks & Facilities

There is growing demand for parks and facilities that contain something for everybody, rather than those designed solely for singular uses. While single use parks have merit in appropriate locations (e.g., sports field complexes), parks that provide opportunities for a range of ages, family types, and abilities are viewed as spaces for inclusive recreational activity. Furthermore, there has been a considerable trend towards participation in non-programmed (spontaneous) outdoor activities such as pick-up sports, picnicking, family gatherings, special events, etc. In this sense, parks can be viewed as "outdoor community centres" that combine a number of programmed and non-programmed uses – this is a foundational element in the philosophy being placemaking.

The provision of high quality, multi-field parks and open spaces in larger complexes or parks (such as those found at North Thornhill Community Centre and Vellore Village Community Centre) not only encourage physical activities among all age groups, but high quality facilities also provide opportunities for attracting tourists and tournaments at a regional scale or beyond. When developing new or existing parks with sports fields, municipalities are considering the needs of local users and spectators through supplementary amenities such as washroom facilities and covered shelters. Incorporating more non-programmed spaces and natural areas, as well as linkages to the trail network, will also become increasingly important in serving local needs.

Communities are also moving away from single-purpose, stand-alone facilities in favour of multi-use facilities that integrate numerous activities and offer economies of scale with respect to construction, maintenance, staffing, and scheduling. Multi-use facilities are often designed with flexible spaces (e.g., activity rooms, gymnasiums, etc.) that have the potential to expand and easily respond to changing trends and demands of future users. Multi-use parks can also achieve efficiencies through having common infrastructure such as irrigation, lighting and drainage systems, and common parking areas. In addition, the ability to offer cross-programming opportunities and their responsiveness to the 'time crunch' make them attractive 'one-stop shopping' destinations, particularly among households with wide ranges of interests. The recently completed North Thornhill Community Centre is an excellent example of this model.

²⁶ Recreation Infrastructure Ontario. Recreation Infrastructure Canada Program – Ontario. 2011. 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/708.nsf/eng/home>

Despite the benefits of larger multi-use parks and facilities, increasing land scarcity will present challenges in accruing the land mass required to accommodate large multi-use facilities. Public feedback indicates there is a growing appetite for a more localized, neighbourhood-based facility model. There are two main drivers behind this: (1) to celebrate and respond to the unique needs and strengths of each community; and (2) to improve convenience by enabling residents to access parks, recreation, culture, and library services without having to drive. To achieve this, alternative facility provision approaches may be required, particularly in higher density areas.

Multi-Season Usage

While the majority of park usage occurs in the summer months, many communities are creating formal and informal year-round opportunities within their park systems, such as Vaughan's Uplands Golf and Ski Club. Multi-season trail developments may facilitate hiking opportunities during the summer and cross-country skiing during the winter. Similarly, the provision of outdoor ice in parks and open spaces can be provided as seasonal recreational infrastructure through partnering with communities. A number of these outdoor ice opportunities exist throughout Vaughan, including at York Hill District Park, Dufferin District Park, Chancellor District Park, Fr. Ermanno Park, and Matthew Park.

Positioning parks to be year-round destinations is a way to maximize physical activity goals. Strategic tree planting and landscaping can create wind buffers to offset the winter wind chill and blowing, while ensuring that major trailways and internal park walking circuits are free of snow and can facilitate greater use. While there are inherent costs associated with winter maintenance (even if it is limited to plowing of parking lots), the availability of no-to-low cost activities throughout the year is a benefit to Vaughan residents that may have financial challenges.

Rise of Urban Parks

In many communities, it is evident that there is a shifting focus from greenfield development to the intensification of urban centres and corridors, resulting in multi-unit, high rise dwellings. Increased population densities further drive the need for high quality amenities. Between the 1980s and '90s, sports facilities and other major venues have been the solution for boosting local economic development, urban renewal, and revitalization.²⁷ Today, the demand for urban spaces and public squares in highly urbanized areas has become increasingly popular, particularly in areas where the availability of traditional parkland, open spaces, and amenities within walking distance are limited. Not only do these urban spaces provide a wealth of outdoor opportunities and variety of uses, urban park projects can stimulate economic development and regeneration and have been found to support highly populated, livable, urban areas.²⁸ Nevertheless, urban parks are considerably more expensive than traditional park development projects due to the amount of hardscape and need for robust materials.

Urban spaces are dynamic by nature and function as a focal point to facilitate passive recreational opportunities and also play a supporting role in complementing surrounding land uses, providing places for people to meet, gather, and socialize. Community groups and other stakeholders often desire public spaces as the location to hold community programs and special events. Integrating parks and open spaces into higher density areas is critical to providing livable urban spaces for community gatherings, while also softening the streetscape with green features.

²⁷ JoAnn Greco. City parks, bringing urban centres back to life. Washington Post. July 30, 2010

²⁸ Project for Public Spaces. The Re-Emergence of Public Squares. Retrieved from <http://www.pps.org/reference/the-re-emergence-of-the-public-square/>

Redeveloping underutilized brownfields (including buildings and surface parking lots) in urbanized areas to public open spaces has also been an increasing trend. Repurposing these areas provides opportunities to turn underutilized lands into public open spaces. Green amenities in urban areas can strengthen the surrounding community, promoting quality of life and trickle-down redevelopment and rejuvenation in surrounding areas through private investment.²⁹

The Vaughan Official Plan (2010) contains a parkland classification typology for these types of spaces called “Public Squares”. These parks serve as spaces for users to gather and socialize, supporting both neighbourhood and city-wide events. These spaces provide opportunities for public art, outdoor game areas, formal gardens, fountains (which can be designed for multi-functionality; e.g., waterplay, winter ice skating, etc.), and seating. This type of parkland is typically suitable in highly visible locations within intensification areas where opportunities to provide traditional forms of parkland is limited due to land scarcity or difficulty in acquiring parcels of sufficient size.

Increased Environmental Awareness & Stewardship

Since the 1980s, the importance of environmental protection has been increasingly recognized by society; the environment is often ranked as the number one priority in Canadian public opinion polls.³⁰ The ban on the use of pesticides in 2009 provides further supporting evidence of the Province’s commitment to a healthier environment, encouraging chemical-free and alternative options to lawn maintenance. As people become more aware of the benefits of environmental protection, demand for passive settings that connect people to nature is increasing. Communities are placing a greater emphasis on the development of passive park space (e.g., woodlots, prairie grasslands, flower gardens, civic gathering spaces, etc.), often times ensuring that a portion of new active parks remains in a more natural state.

Naturalized park spaces (whether by ‘maintaining’ a site in its natural state or ‘returning’ a site to its natural state) are becoming more popular and are consistent with many of the principles related to environmental stewardship. Naturalization typically involves reduced grass cutting, planting of native species, and public education to create awareness in the community. Interpretative signage can also help in appropriate areas to help park patrons understand the significance of indigenous or significant plants and habitats. By facilitating education, interests, and understanding of natural processes through stewardship opportunities, many municipalities promote a philosophy that is aligned with overall sustainable development and shifting thinking away from the way communities are traditionally built through sprawl.

The Stewardship Network of Ontario defines stewardship as *‘an ethic by which citizens care for our land and water as part of a natural life-support system and collectively act to sustain and enhance it for generations to come.’*³¹ Stewardship initiatives are not only intended to educate the public at large, but also to improve the ecological functions at a macro-scale by maximizing ecological contributions found in naturalized parks, as well as the traditional active/manicured parks often found in more urban areas. It is estimated that there are thousands of environmental stewardship organizations throughout

²⁹ Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. [A Practical Guide to Brownfield Redevelopment in Ontario](http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=4995). 2007. Retrieved from <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=4995>

³⁰ The Centre of Environmental Stewardship and Conservation Inc. [The State of Stewardship in Canada](http://www.stewardshipcanada.ca/files/scn/State_of_Stewardship_in_Canada_April_20.pdf). 2009. Retrieved from http://www.stewardshipcanada.ca/files/scn/State_of_Stewardship_in_Canada_April_20.pdf

³¹ The Centre for Environmental Stewardship and Conservation Inc. [A Review of Stewardship Programs and Activities in Canada’s Provinces and Territories](http://www.stewardshipcanada.ca/files/scn/Final_Prov_Territorial_April_20.pdf). 2009. Retrieved from http://www.stewardshipcanada.ca/files/scn/Final_Prov_Territorial_April_20.pdf

Canada, bringing together those who share a common interest in restoring the natural ecosystem and enhancing biodiversity.³²

Stewardship programs are generally established locally by a municipality or community group to engage the community, often being supported through partnerships such as Ontario Stewardship and Evergreen, non-profit environmental organizations that promote green community initiatives and provide funding opportunities (a common barrier found among many stewardship programs). Such stewardship initiatives include enhancing wildlife habitats, tree plantings, and education to share ideas about the environment. Stewardship programs provide opportunities to combine outdoor physical activities with education and restoring the local ecosystem with native plant species, combating harmful invasive species. On a local and regional level, particular attention has been given to educating the community and raising awareness on the Emerald Ash Borer, an invasive species introduced to York Region in 2008 (and previously the Asian Long-Horned Beetle in 2003).

Stewardship objectives can be achieved through the incorporation of sustainable design features into parkland developments. Green infrastructure such as onsite stormwater ponds, bioswales, pervious trails and parking areas can enhance ecological functions. Increasing tree cover and canopies (12% of Vaughan is woodlands), as well as creating ‘urban forests’ and engineered wetlands through parkland, can also be effective design tools which create carbon sinks, offer shading to park users and surrounding residences, provide habitat opportunities for select wildlife, and contribute to naturalization or reforestation objectives. Furthermore, incorporating energy efficiency (e.g., LEED certification) and water conservation measures into park and facility designs can contribute to the overall greening of the community and showcase leadership in addressing environmental issues.

The City of Vaughan provides a number of opportunities through the *B’Leaves* initiative, which encourages environmental stewardship to make Vaughan a more vibrant and healthy place to live. This initiative provides educational information on the Emerald Ash Borer, the benefits of trees; notable achievements in environmental protection and awareness such as the 5-year tree planting strategy and tree protection by-law, and Vaughan’s Green Directions Plan. The *B’Leaves* initiative also promotes a wealth of environmental stewardship programs such as the Tree Dedication Program, Adopt-a-Park, ‘Dazzle Me!’ Neighbourhood Challenge, ‘My Vaughan Blooms’ Curb Appeal, and community events such as Greening Vaughan Environmental Days, Earth Day Tree Planting, and local community clean-up.

5.3 TRENDS IN THE TRAIL SYSTEM

Multi-Use Pathways

Providing an interconnected system of parks and open spaces is an important component of human health and ecological function. As many parks are considered to be “destinations”, ensuring that they are accessible can go a long way in encouraging people to visit them. Linking parks with trails, sidewalks, bicycle paths and roads provides choices for people to travel to these areas while creating infrastructure for commuter, utilitarian and recreational uses.

³² The Centre for Environmental Stewardship and Conservation Inc. *A Review of Stewardship Programs and Activities in Canada’s Provinces and Territories*. 2009. Retrieved from http://www.stewardshipcanada.ca/files/scn/Final_Prov_Territorial_April_20.pdf

A survey conducted by the American National Association of Homebuilders found that trails are the most desired feature in a community, especially in new subdivisions.³³ Respondents indicated that they would choose a new community based on the type and extent of the pathway system. Multi-use pathways are also a cost-effective method to increase physical activity levels, of particular importance to Vaughan given its goal of reducing inactivity levels. Not only do pathways support positive interaction between the community and the natural environment to facilitate recreation activities, they provide links between destinations and in many cases, provide alternative commuting means if strategically linked to schools and key employment areas. Unfortunately, 88% of Vaughan's elementary schools are not within 400-metres of trails or paths.³⁴

Throughout Ontario, walking is often cited as the most popular recreation activity, while pathways are often identified as some of the most pressing recreational infrastructure needs. In the household survey conducted for this Plan, 88% of Vaughan households reported that they participated in walking and hiking for leisure in the past 12 months. As age increases, so too does the propensity to identify walking as a favourite recreation time activity. This bodes well for future demand in Vaughan given that the older adult population is expected to grow throughout the study period. Vaughan's network of off and on-street trails and its active transportation initiatives provide evidence of the City's commitment to developing multi-use trails, but more work is needed.

Multi-use pathway development has been shown to promote physical activity, healthy lifestyles, encourage social gatherings and community development, and provide open spaces for members of the community to enjoy the natural environment while preserving natural heritage features. In addition, the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* maintains that persons of all ages and abilities should have equal opportunities to participate. As a result, municipalities are required to design trails that can be used by all abilities through universal design of pathways, incorporating design considerations such as grade, surface material, width, and cross-slopes.³⁵ While it may be unreasonable to ensure all trails are accessible, the development of accessible multi-use pathways can be focused in locations where the terrain and environment can sustain higher levels of utilization. In addition to universal design of pathways, experiences in other communities suggests that the development of supporting amenities (such as the provision of accessibility, washrooms, rest areas, and wayfinding signage) may also encourage greater usage of pathways and trails.

Active Transportation

'Active transportation' refers to human-powered modes of travel which are intended for recreational or utilitarian purposes (i.e., non-motorized travel for the purposes of accessing all aspects of daily life). While the most common forms of active transportation are walking and cycling, other examples include running, skateboarding, skating, snowshoeing or cross-country skiing, and use of non-mechanized wheelchairs. Support for active transportation is an identified priority and outcome of a number of governmental and non-governmental agencies not only for recreational purposes, but also active commuting.

Active transportation forms a critically important part of an efficient and sustainable transportation system by reducing the number of motorized vehicles on the road, a concern for a number of

³³ National Association of Homebuilders. [Home Buyers Survey](http://www.nahb.org). 2002. Retrieved from <http://www.nahb.org>.

³⁴ Healthyork. [York Region Community Picture](#). February 2011.

³⁵ Mike P. Accessible Trails. [National Trails Training Partnership](http://www.americantrails.org/resources/accessible/SustainPasso.html). 2007. Retrieved from <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/accessible/SustainPasso.html>

communities in the GTA, which in turn reducing road congestion and greenhouse gas emissions (particularly during rush hour), consumption of land required for road-based infrastructure, as well as the amount of capital expended on road construction and maintenance. The provision of active transportation choices brings a number of benefits to individuals and their environment, notably by shifting travel from automobiles to non-motorized modes of transport, thereby improving elements of human health pertaining to:

- Air and water quality by minimizing vehicular emissions such as carbon dioxide and ground level ozone, which positively contributes to ecological and human health;
- Increasing physical activity, which has positive health effects such as reducing levels of obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease;
- Community and social vibrancy by encouraging compact developments and more liveable communities where people are more likely to have personal contact with each other; and
- Financial well-being by reducing expenditures on gasoline and certain vehicular costs (such as parking, less frequent oil changes), as well as health care (which benefits society as a whole through lower taxes).

A recent study on active transportation found that nearly one quarter of Canadians walk six or more hours per week to school, work, or for errands. For the same purposes, 10% of Canadians are likely to cycle. Individuals in lower income groups are more likely to walk while young adults are more likely to cycle, and students are more likely to walk and cycle as a means of transportation, similar to people who are generally physically active on a daily basis.³⁶

Opportunities for active transportation are largely dependent on the proximity between destinations from residential areas to commercial, recreational, institutional and employment areas. Residents are more likely to choose non-motorized forms of transportation in highly urbanized areas where driving and parking may be more difficult. Other considerations include the presence of pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks and cycle lanes, traffic patterns, destination routes, topography and walkable neighbourhoods. According to Statistics Canada, Vaughan is predominantly a commuter population with only 2% of commuters traveling on foot or bicycle. A large commuter population coupled with dispersed community facilities generally leave residents reserved to their vehicles, although public transit options in Vaughan are improving every year.

Further, there are a number of challenges with encouraging active transportation choices, not the least of which is Ontario's highly varied climatic and weather conditions. Whether in the form of rain, snow, or extreme heat or cold, people's choices will differ particularly if active transportation routes are not designed for multiple seasons or are not adequately shielded from the elements. Other barriers include the convenience factor of using a car and a lack of pedestrian/cyclist connectivity and infrastructure. It is also important to recognize that persons with health issues or disabilities might not choose active transportation due to their physical limitations, thus accessibility must be a central consideration in design.

Active transportation opportunities can be maximized by providing the necessary infrastructure that facilitates safe, comfortable, and convenient usage. As such, the Region and its municipalities benefit from increasing their emphasis on active transportation choices and highlighting the importance of sidewalks, pathways, and cycling routes. A number of urban municipalities, such as Vaughan, have

³⁶ Butler G. Orpana, H. Wiens, A. By Your Own Two Feet: Factors Associated with Active Transportation in Canada. Canada Journal of Public Health. 2007. 98(4).

undertaken Pedestrian and Cycling/Active Transportation Master Plans. Encouraging non-motorized forms of transport has also been articulated through the Region's Pedestrian and Cycling Master Plan (2008) and the City's Transportation Master Plan (2012). Both these Master Plans contain a series of actions for facilitating supportive infrastructure and a sustainable transportation network that connect residents within Vaughan and throughout the Region. More recently, York Region's community indicators identified that 42% of the streets in Vaughan have sidewalks, slightly lower than the Regional average. Vaughan also has 36 kilometres of cycling lanes, making up 6% of York Region's overall cycling routes.³⁷ These figures indicate that there are many opportunities to improve Vaughan's active transportation infrastructure to be more competitive on a regional level. Vaughan's 2007 Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan made a number of recommendations regarding the provision of trails, sidewalks, cycle routes and bike lanes, reinforcing Vaughan's commitment to active transportation solutions.³⁸

5.4 TRENDS IN THE LIBRARY SYSTEM

Libraries Matter

Strong library systems are the cornerstones of strong communities and, across Canada, libraries are growing in importance and use. There is a great deal of research that highlights the importance of public libraries as an accessible, universal and primarily free benefit to the residents of a community. *Long Overdue* (Public Agenda, 2006), *Realizing Our Full Potential* (Association Resource Centre Inc., 2003), and *Ontario Public Libraries Market Survey* (Market Probe Canada, 2010) and a variety of other sources support the following benefit statements:

- Libraries are at the heart of a strong, well-informed community.
- Libraries continue to be highly valued.
- Libraries are accessible and welcoming to all.
- Libraries provide free, universal and unlimited access to knowledge, culture, and information.
- Libraries are more important now than ever before as the power of knowledge translates into greater socio-economic benefits.

In a survey of Ontario residents, 37% of respondents ranked libraries as the most important tax-supported service. The household survey for this 2013 ATMP also revealed that 72% of households visited one of Vaughan's public libraries in the past 12 months and 77% of households support additional funding for new or improved library facilities. Across Ontario, membership levels at libraries have remained consistent over the last ten years despite the prevalence of near-universal internet access; while the number of in-person library visits has not been adversely affected, these technological changes seem to have affected *how* people use the library rather than *if* they use it. Borrowing materials, collecting information, and reading/studying continue to be the main reasons to visit the library.³⁹

On a national scale, overall library use has increased over the past decade, with electronic transactions accounting for a large part of the growth. Electronic resources are not replacing physical resources, as the number of in-person library visits has remained stable, while internet visits have increased

³⁷ York Region. *Living in York Region: Our Community Check-up*. 2011

³⁸ City of Vaughan. *Pedestrian and Bicycling Master Plan*. 2007

³⁹ Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. *Federation of Ontario Public Libraries Research*. 2010

substantially over the last ten years.⁴⁰ Between 2007 and 2011, visits to Vaughan Public Libraries have increased by 29% (exceeding 2.0 million visits in 2011) and borrowing has increased by 27% (exceeding 2.8 million items in 2011), despite the number of locations remaining the same. Canadian and Ontario libraries are remaining an important municipal service, which is expected to continue in coming years.

Libraries are Evolving

Public libraries are increasingly being recognized as a community destination and an attractive public space with an enjoyable atmosphere. Many libraries are recognizing their role as a community hub and work to service groups of collective citizens as well as individuals.⁴¹ Additionally, libraries are becoming more of a civic integrator, particularly through a focus of providing information on health, education, government and other local services.⁴² New library facilities are being internally and externally designed and built to be noticed in the community as a symbol of community pride. A library can represent a community at its best, and function as a civic landmark.

Further, libraries are being designed as flexible spaces that can be reconfigured according to changing needs. These library spaces have an increased focus on people and less on collections space.^{43,44} As a result, libraries are also being increasingly seen as a “third space” – an essential venue, not unlike home or work/school. They provide critical supports to the self-employed, under-employed, students, and the general public. They are valued for their comfortable, free, inclusive, and welcoming environment.

Libraries Are Utilizing Emerging Technologies

With the increased integration and utilization of technology in services, libraries are experiencing greater demand for eBooks, online services, digital reference services, and other technological innovations. Increasing demand for technology has not led to a decrease in demand for books and other library formats; as measured by borrowing rates, demand for library collections increases steadily year over year. These resources have become an added level of service, rather than a replacement for print material. As a result, the continuing need for space for collections, along with the increasing need for space for public technology services, means that overall library space needs have increased.

Current and future libraries are expected to be knowledgeable in the availability and use of technological resources available through the library.⁴⁵ With technology integrated into the library system, many users can now search the library catalogue, check out materials, and place holds without assistance. Staff are “unchained” from the reference and circulation desk and are free to focus on additional tasks or programming.⁴⁶

Vaughan Public Libraries offer a variety of eBooks, which can be digitally loaned to members. The library also loans eBook readers to promote accessibility to digital resources. An issue facing libraries with eBooks is that one book can be theoretically loaned to an unlimited number of users; however, publishers place restrictions on their use. Most publishers have restricted licensed eBooks to one user at a time, and others have limited the number of times a book can be lent (e.g., 26 times). It is recognized

⁴⁰ Lumos Research. *An Analysis of Public Library Trends*. 2011

⁴¹ Southern Ontario Library Service. *Library Development Guide: Creating the Future You've Imagined: A Guide to Essential Planning*. 2007

⁴² Benton Foundation. *Buildings, books, and bytes*. 1996

⁴³ Southern Ontario Library Service. *Library Development Guide: Creating the Future You've Imagined: A Guide to Essential Planning*. 2007

⁴⁴ Southern Ontario Library Service. *Environmental Scan for Ontario Public Libraries*. 2011

⁴⁵ Southern Ontario Library Service. *Library Development Guide: Creating the Future You've Imagined: A Guide to Essential Planning*. 2007

⁴⁶ Southern Ontario Library Service. *Environmental Scan for Ontario Public Libraries*. 2011

that Vaughan Public Libraries are experiencing issues with limited access to eBook titles. While eBooks do not face the same physical limitations as paper books, they often face the same lending restrictions.⁴⁷

Library Development Trends

Libraries are also being progressively more integrated with other civic spaces, such as within multi-use community facilities – a model that Vaughan has long-embraced – in order to attain operating efficiencies and cost savings through sharing common areas, storage space, programming rooms, and facility management services. If effectively designed and managed, this model has the potential to offer considerable benefits to residents, who appreciate the one-stop shopping experience that it provides.

In many communities, smaller, isolated library branches are gradually being succeeded by fewer but larger library branches in prominent central locations that are highly visible, accessible with public transportation, offer expansion capabilities, and barrier-free access to all members of the community. In Canada a branch library typically ranges from a minimum of 12,000 to a maximum of 30,000 ft². Some recent examples in Ontario include the Waterloo Public Library (which built a 17,000 ft² branch), the Mississauga Public Library (which has built their most recent branches in the range of 15,000 to 29,000 ft²), and the Markham Public Library (which just opened a 25,000 ft² branch).

The increasing size of library facilities is also a result of accessibility requirements, which create a demand for more floor space to house and circulate the same collection size (due to smaller stacks, wider aisles, larger washrooms, etc.). It is estimated that floor space will have to be increased by 8-10% to accommodate accessibility standards.

Library Design

Most recently, the design of public libraries has been influenced by big box bookstores, a transition that has already occurred in Vaughan. Facilities are being designed to offer large, comfortable reading and working areas, private and collaborative study rooms, homework centres, an ample supply of Internet workstations, wiring/outlets for personal computer use and/or wireless Internet access. In addition, libraries are moving towards flexible, multi-use library space with modular fixtures and ergonomic furniture, wide and uncluttered aisle ways with lower shelving, and a more “open” interior to accommodate changing technologies. As a result, the demand for library space is on the rise, as is the need to locate libraries within attractive buildings in prominent, central locations that are easily accessible to the community. Vaughan Public Libraries has embraced new design elements that incorporate many of these amenities, including welcoming atmospheres, attractive decor, meeting rooms, and designated areas for different age groups.

⁴⁷ Levien, R. [Confronting the Future, Strategic Visions for the 21st Century Public Library](#). 2011

5.5 TRENDS IN SERVICE DELIVERY

Volunteerism

Volunteers are essential to the operation and delivery of high quality parks, recreation, and library services and many communities rely heavily on their assistance; Vaughan is no exception to this rule. The 2007 *National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* indicated that volunteerism is rising slightly, but experience in several other communities suggest that many groups still struggle in finding volunteers. One key result of the national survey was that 18% of the volunteer hours in Canada are in the sports and recreation sector, which is the highest of all sectors. However, while 46% of Canadians (15 years or older) volunteered in 2007, it must be noted that the absolute average volunteer hours per year decreased slightly from 168 hours per year to 166. The rate of volunteerism by those between the ages of 15 and 24 has doubled from 29% in 2000 to 58% in 2007, perhaps largely due to the addition of mandatory volunteer hours for high school students as part of the high school curriculum.

At the same time, youth ages 15 and under represent the smallest proportion of volunteers, representing a need to engage this age group early to improve the likelihood of retaining volunteers in the future. One of the most common barriers to youth volunteering is the lack of free time. More youth lead structured lives with school, organized sports, and often part-time employment, resulting in the inability to make long-term commitments to volunteering. Today's digital age and increasing sedentary activities also limit youth's level of community involvement. Other research suggests that youth are unable to find opportunities or are unsure of how to get involved in volunteering, suggesting a gap in communication between organizations and the community. Lastly, youth may feel that their opinions are not valued by organizations. Youth volunteers need to be engaged with community service delivery as they may provide new skills and perceptions that may be overlooked by other age groups.

Seniors currently represent the most active volunteer group; however, greater pressures to attract new volunteers are anticipated as this volunteer group becomes less dominant; thus impacting the delivery of services and programming capacity. This gap in the volunteer base opens opportunities to attract new volunteers, particularly among youth but also the baby boomer generation as they move through the mature stage of their life cycle. As baby boomers enter into retirement, this age group will be seeking more opportunities to get involved in the community with less commitments, resulting in more available time and flexibility in schedules, although it is anticipated that many boomers will seek part-time work. Volunteers in this age group are also more likely to seek opportunities in new areas unrelated to their careers, allowing them to learn new skills, while others may seek volunteer opportunities where they can utilize their experience.

Research has shown that Canadian immigrants represent a large proportion of the volunteer pool.⁴⁸ This is significant in the context of Vaughan given that 45% of the population is represented by new Canadians, providing considerable opportunities to engage these groups. Immigrant volunteers provide a variety of benefits to organizations including multi-lingual assets, skill capacity, and providing a new outlook and perspective that may assist service delivery among organizations. Volunteering assists with self-development in social skills, confidence, and building community connections among immigrants.

Vaughan provides a wide variety of recreational volunteer opportunities for all ages, particularly for teenage students for fulfillment of their required volunteer hours. Opportunities range from year-round

⁴⁸ Volunteer Canada. [Bridging the Gap](#), 2011

pre-school, children's, youth, adult, and seniors' programs, in addition to City-run events and festivals such as Canada Day and Concerts in the Park.

Partnerships

In addition to the City, organizations such as conservation authorities, school boards, non-profit organizations, and private businesses offer access to parks, natural areas, recreation activities, and community facilities. The most successful partnerships are derived from common objectives (e.g., environmental conservation, community improvement, physical activity, trail development, etc.), utilizing the skills and strengths of each group in delivering access while sharing responsibilities and minimizing risks (e.g., costs and liabilities).

Maximizing the resources of each party is seen as a beneficial way to increase the amount of publicly accessible facilities provided, so long as the public interest is maximized and the partnerships fulfill the desired objectives of the City and its partners. For example, many communities provide facility space for programming, events, and activities while the staffing responsibilities are provided by a partnering community organization. Many other partnership opportunities exist with private sector businesses through sponsorships, project funding, and donations. These types of partnerships allow businesses to give back to the community while gaining market exposure. With the realization that municipalities cannot meet all needs by themselves, this trend towards an integrated provision approach is growing.

Promotion of Tourism

The provision of high quality community and library facilities are a way to draw visitors and participants from external markets through sport, tournaments, festivals and special events, nature-based and historical experiences, etc. Promoting tourism requires exploring ways to improve awareness of the local resources to visitors. Festivals and special events often generate "multiplier effects" from tourism spending but also create a sense of local pride and build community spirit.

Nearly 82% of Canadian tourists pursue outdoor activities as an out-of-town tourist.⁴⁹ Many of today's tourists are between the ages of 35-50 who are well-educated and generally have higher incomes, which in some cases, suggests more disposable incomes.⁵⁰ Communities are thus showcasing high quality park attractions and recreational facilities to draw participants and spectators from external markets to drive tourism dollars.

Vaughan is home to many tourist attractions, the largest of which is Canada's Wonderland. Other opportunities include an abundance of retail, fine arts, and recreation pursuits, such as the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, historic villages, and annual heritage celebrations.

⁴⁹ Ontario Canada. Canadian travel market – Outdoor activities while on trips of one or more nights. Travel Activities and Motivators Survey (TAMS). 2008. Retrieved from http://www.sse.gov.on.ca/medt/investinontario/en/Pages/tourism_tams_cdn_outdoor_activities.aspx

⁵⁰ York Region. Long Term Tourism Development Strategy (Draft). 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.york.ca/NR/rdonlyres/4csyzpaefhqkx25nkphwxpxyd5ohoio6kijatvbsgpp6xuja3apuadaqvnp2zsbledudbrfrb6k53zq6wl6ysulfh/Jan+7+Long+att+1.pdf>