Smithers
Parks & Recreation Master Plan

SMITHERS PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

"WHAT WE HEARD" COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS REPORT

MAY 2024

Town of Smithers

ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY FINDINGS

Most residents participate in outdoor recreation activities on a regular basis. 86% of household survey respondents indicated they hike/walk/ or run on a regular basis. 95% of household survey respondents indicated that they used a trail in Smithers at least a few times a year, with approximately two-thirds indicating that they used a trail at least weekly. Additionally, when asked about what motivates them to participated in parks and recreation activities 71% indicated that they participate to enjoy nature.

The Bulkley Valley Pool & Recreation Centre is the most popular indoor recreation amenity in the community. Almost half of household survey respondents indicated that their household uses the pool for drop-in swimming and over one-quarter use the pool for programming. When asked about future priorities for facility investment, the pool was identified as the top amenity amongst survey respondents.

The biggest barrier to participating in recreation and parks activities for residents is poor or inadequate facilities. When asked about barriers to their participation in parks and recreation activities, the most prevalent response from household survey respondents was poor/inadequate facilities. The need for improved or more accessible facilities and program space was also commonly identified through the community group and stakeholder engagement.

There is a growing demand for large span indoor multipurpose space. The resident, user group, and youth engagement all reflect a desire for a large span (e.g. community gymnasium or flexi-hall) type of space that can accommodate a variety of programs and unstructured activity.

Spontaneous and unstructured recreation is an important aspect of the parks and recreation landscape in Smithers. Findings from the various survey's and other engagement validated that a significant proportion of recreation activity occurs in casual and unstructured ways. While it is important to continue supporting organized programs, there is a clear need to ensure that informal opportunities exist for residents of all ages and interests.

Communication about parks and recreation opportunities could be improved in Smithers. Approximately one-third of household survey respondents indicated that they do not feel adequately informed about parks and recreation opportunities or aware of available programming. Findings from the engagement also reflect the need to use a variety of traditional and newer communication platforms to reach both tenured and newer residents. Additionally, a number of community groups also expressed that opportunities exist to enhance dialogue and collaborations between groups and the Town.

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1. THE ENGAGEMENT CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

1.1. PROJECT OVERVIEW AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGEMENT

The Town of Smithers is developing a Parks and Recreation Master Plan that will provide a long-term strategic plan for parks and recreation service delivery. The plan provides Town Council, staff, and partners with a resource that can help inform decision making by identifying priorities and focus areas for capital and operational investment. The plan will create vision and action plan for key spaces, facilities, and guide other important areas of service delivery.

Community engagement is an important aspect of developing the Master Plan. The insights generated through engagement and other research conducted by the project team provides a basis of information that will inform the Master Plan by assessing the current state of services and identifying gaps, barriers to participation, opportunities, and priority needs. The project engagement was guided by an engagement plan developed at the outset of the project which outlined objectives, tactics to be used, and alignment with the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation - a best practice within engagement that creates alignment between engagement methodology, process, and decision making (project outcomes).

1.2. ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

Engaging with residents, user groups, and community partners was critical to understanding the state of recreation and parks in Smithers. To ensure a diverse array of perspectives were heard through the engagement process, multiple engagement methods and tactics were used. The icons to the right summarize the engagement tactics and levels of participation in each. **In total, the engagement process garnered over 600 different touch points using the various tactics.**

Information on the public engagement opportunities, overall project objectives, and timelines was made available through a project landing page via Smithers's engagement platform *(www.engagesmithersrecplan.ca)*.

THE TASK FORCE

A Task Force was also created at the outset of the project, comprising 11 individuals representing a number of key community organizations and interests. The role of the Task Force is to support the project team with interpreting the research and engagement findings, providing input on the Master Plan, and helping promote community engagement opportunities.

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY (CODED VERSION)

276 Responses

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY (NON-CODED VERSION)

95 Responses

YOUTH SURVEY

127 Responses

GROUP SURVEY

24 Responses

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSIONS

22 Discussions with 38 Participants.

PROJECT WEB PLATFORM TOOLS

(www.engagesmithersrecplan.ca)

Mapping Tool – 65 'pins' from 26 contributors

Recreation Interest Quick Polls - 23 responses from 17 contributors

2. PUBLIC SURVEY

2.1. OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

A survey was fielded to households in Smithers to gather their perspectives on the current state of and future needs for parks and recreation in Smithers. Two duplicate versions of the survey were made available:

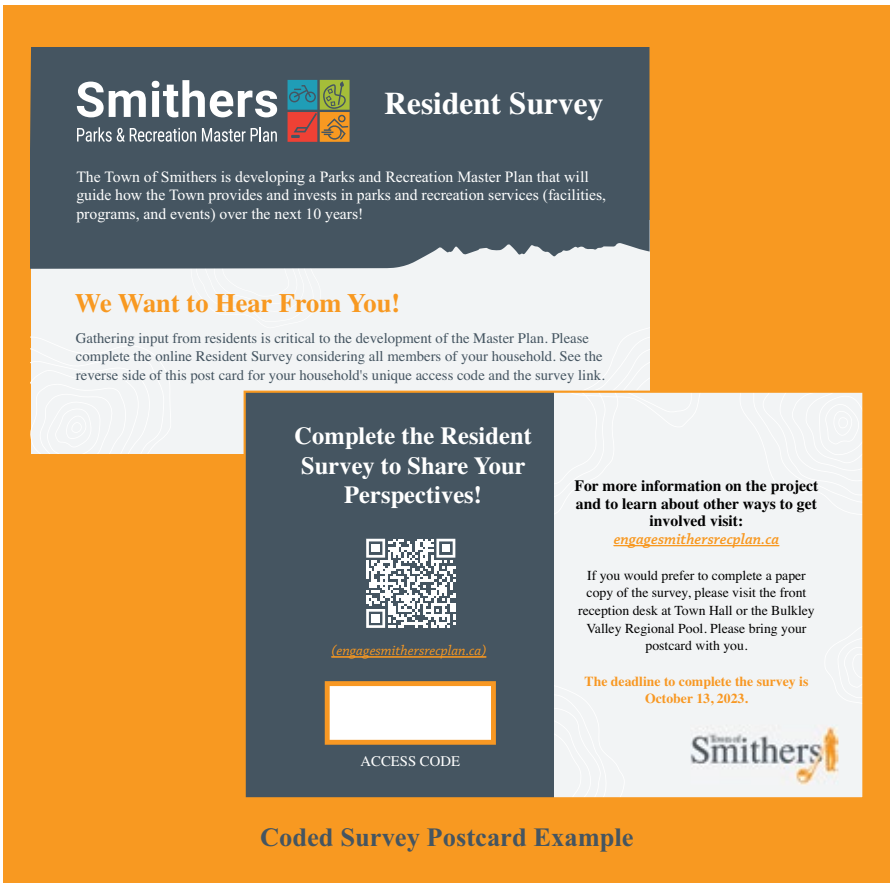
Coded Access Version: Postcards with a unique access code were distributed to households in Smithers using Canada Post's neighbourhood mail. Respondents were asked to complete one survey on behalf of all household members.

Open Access Version (Non-Coded): This version of the survey was made available for individuals that misplaced their code , live outside of the Smithers town boundaries, or preferred to have multiple household members provide responses.

The survey was primarily fielded through the project landing page, however residents were able to request paper copies of the questionnaire. The survey was made available for approximately 6 weeks from September 4 to October 13. The 276 responses to the coded survey reflects a margin of error of +/- 5.5%[1]. The open access survey had 95 responses.

PROMOTION TACTICS

A variety of tactics were utilized to promote the survey. Aside from the distributed postcards, other promotional methods included use of the Town website, social media feeds, and the local newspaper.



Coded Survey Postcard Example

Promotion on the Town of Smithers website

Promotion on the Towns social media

An advertisement in the local newspaper

1 The margin of error indicates that if the survey was fielded again under the same parameters, the responses would be within +/- 5.6% 19 times out of 20. It is important to note that this margin of error is valid only when looking at the full sample (all of Area B) and not sub-segments (e.g. only residents from a specific area or household characteristics).

2.2. SURVEY FINDINGS

The following findings focus on the responses from the coded resident survey. The open access survey findings are presented in call-out boxes alongside the graphs.

The findings were also analyzed by some subsegments (specific survey cohorts such as age or household composition). Notable findings from the sub-segment analysis are identified where pertinent.

YOUR HOUSEHOLDS PARKS AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES

The survey began by exploring motivators for participation in parks and recreation activities. As reflected in the graph, a variety of personal and social reasons motivate participation. The top three motivators identified by respondents were physical health and exercise (90%), to enjoy nature (71%), and to be with family and friends (69%).

OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

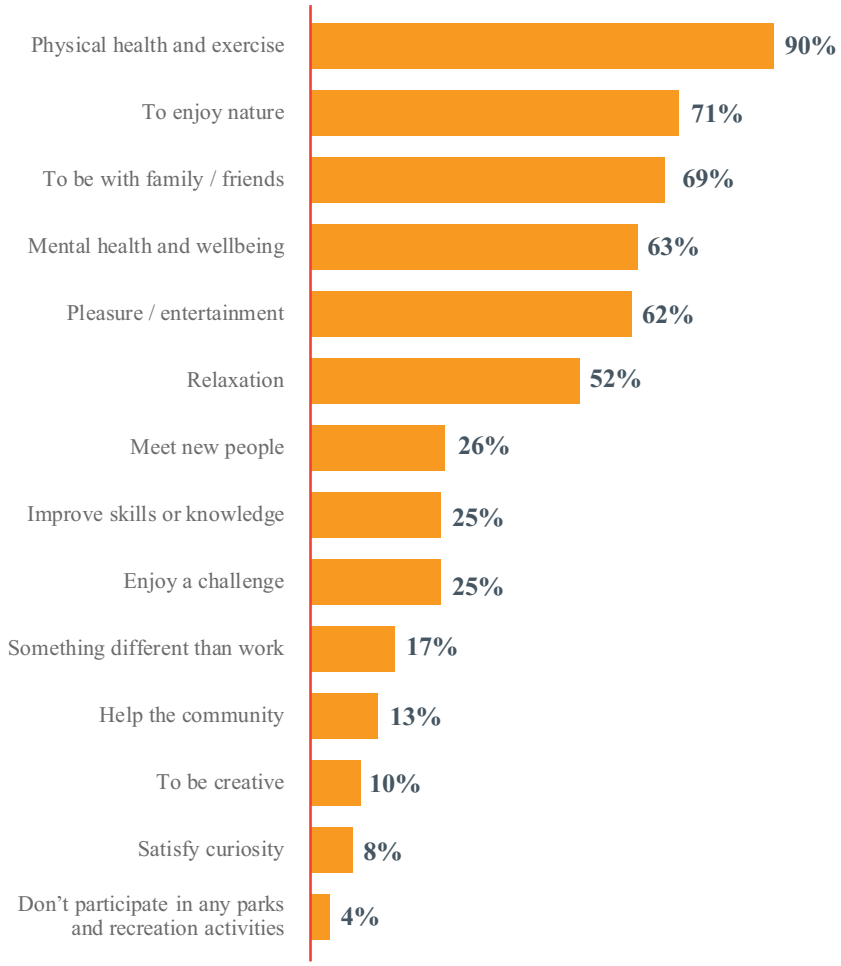
Motivation for Participation in Parks and Recreation Activities

- Physical health and exercise (93%)
- Mental health and wellbeing (76%)
- To enjoy nature (68%)
- To be with family and friends (67%)

SUBSEGMENT ANALYSIS

- Those who have lived in Smithers for 1-5 years are more likely to say they participate in parks and recreation activities to meet new people (49%) than those who have lived in Smithers for over 10 years (22%).
- Those who have lived in Smithers for 6-10 years are more likely to say they participate in parks and recreation activities to do something other than work (32%) than those who have lived in Smithers for 1-5 years (12%).

Motivation for Participation in Parks and Recreation Activities



Next, to gain a sense of activity participation in Smithers, respondents were provided with a list of indoor and outdoor activity types and were asked to identify those that members of their household participate in on a regular basis (approximately 2 or more times per month during their normal seasons of availability). Notably, these findings reflect the importance of the different types of programs and activities offered, including structured (program-based) and unstructured (casual, drop-in and spontaneous) programming options for residents.

Approximately half of respondents participate in swimming pool drop-in (47%) and library activities (42%) on a regular basis while in lower proportions, approximately one-third participate in fitness training at the gym (32%). Approximately one-third (30%) of respondents visit art galleries and spaces in Smithers on a regular basis.

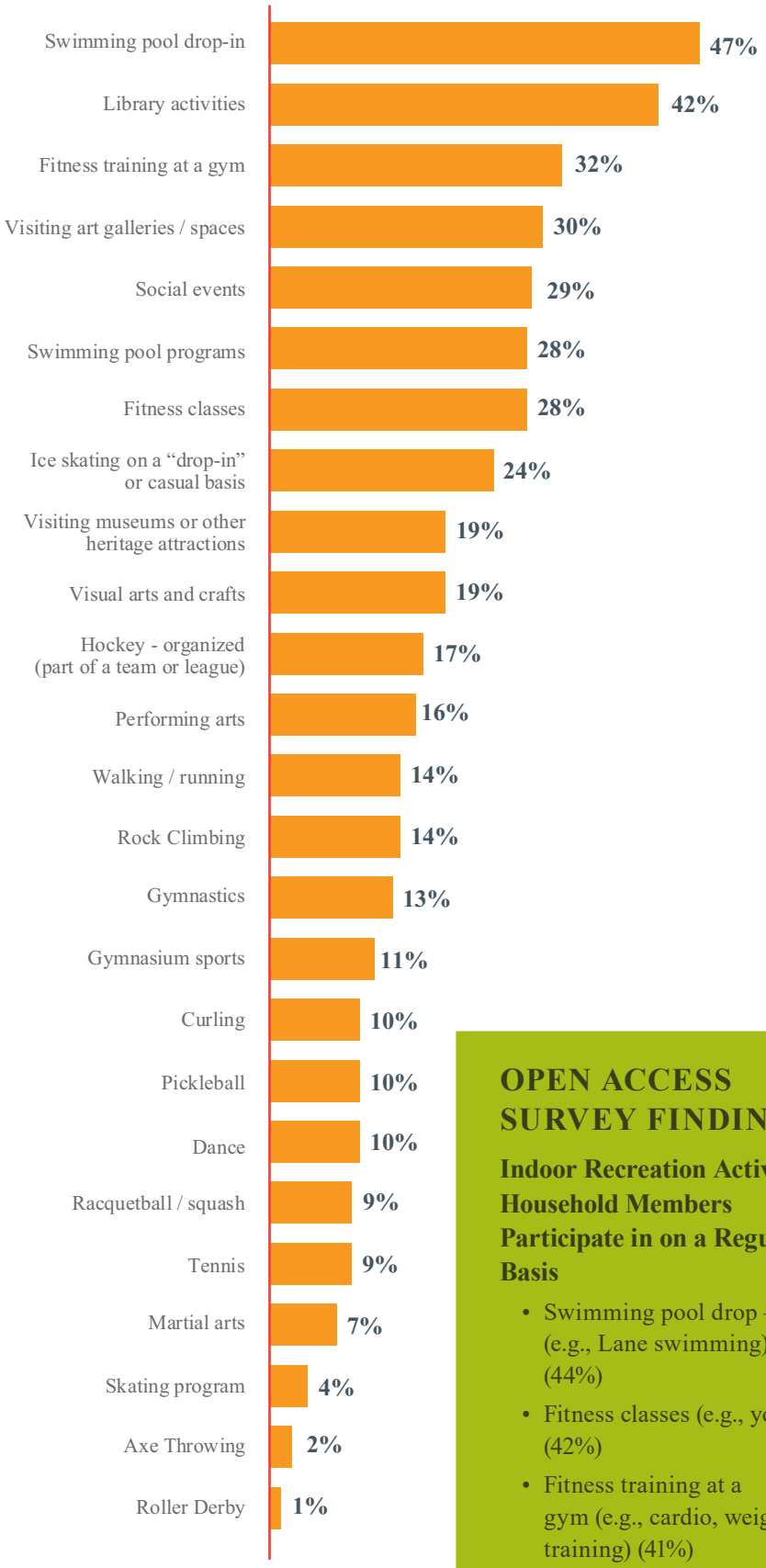
SUBSEGMENT ANALYSIS

- Households with children are more likely to participate in swimming pool programs on a regular basis (42%) than households without children (28%).

Respondents were able to share additional indoor activities they participate in on a regular basis. The following activities were some of the most common activities noted from the responses.

- Visiting the senior's centre
- Infant and tot programming
- Roller skating
- Tai Chi
- Volleyball
- Indoor soccer
- Tennis

Indoor Recreation Activities Household Members Participate in on a Regular Basis



OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Indoor Recreation Activities Household Members Participate in on a Regular Basis

- Swimming pool drop – in (e.g., Lane swimming) (44%)
- Fitness classes (e.g., yoga) (42%)
- Fitness training at a gym (e.g., cardio, weight training) (41%)

Regarding outdoor activity participation, almost all respondents participate in hiking, walking and running (86%). Other top outdoor activities include camping (60%), cycling and mountain biking (59%), and cross-country skiing (57%).

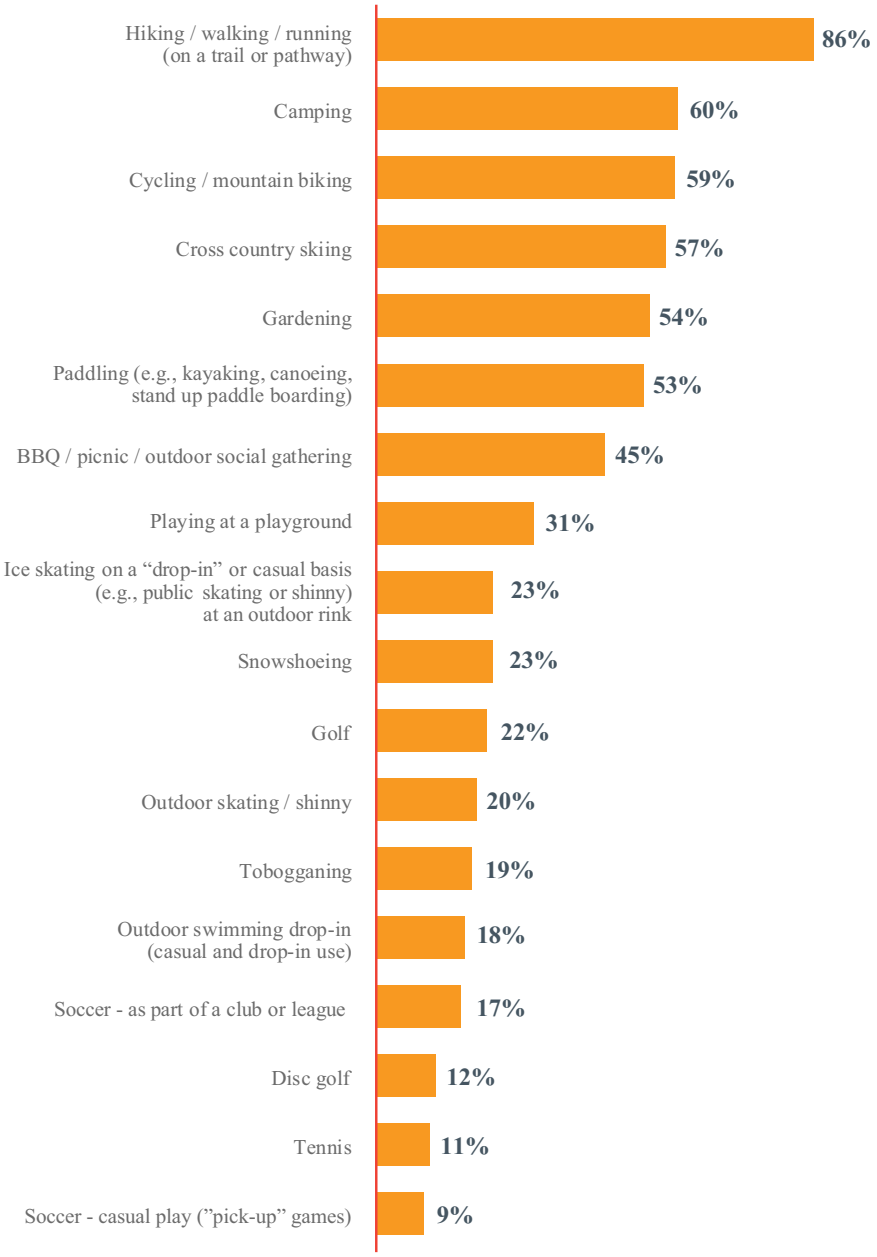
SUBSEGMENT ANALYSIS

- Those who have lived in Smithers for 1-5 years are more likely to play at a playground on a regular basis (42%) than those who have lived in Smithers for 6-10 years (29%).
- Households without children are more likely to participate in snowshoeing on a regular basis (25%) than households with children (15%).

Respondents were able to share additional outdoor activities they participate in on a regular basis. The following activities were some of the most common activities noted from the responses.

- Downhill skiing and snowboarding
- Snowmobiling
- ATV and off roading
- Fishing
- Musical performances around the fire
- Outdoor climbing
- Unstructured play in parks
- Water skiing and wake boarding

Outdoor Recreation Activities Household Member Participate in on a Regular Basis



OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Outdoor Recreation Activities Household Members Participate in on a Regular Basis

- Hiking/walking/running on a trail or pathway (84%)
- Camping (69%)
- Cycling / mountain biking (64%)
- Gardening (63%)

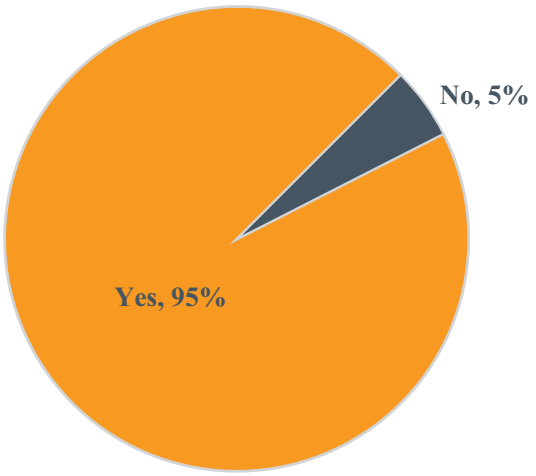
Almost all respondent households (95%) in Smithers participate in parks and recreation activities in the Town.

OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Do the Majority of Your Households Parks and Recreation Activities Take Place in Smithers?

- Yes (88%)
- No (12%)

Do the Majority of Your Households Parks and Recreation Activities Take Place in Smithers?



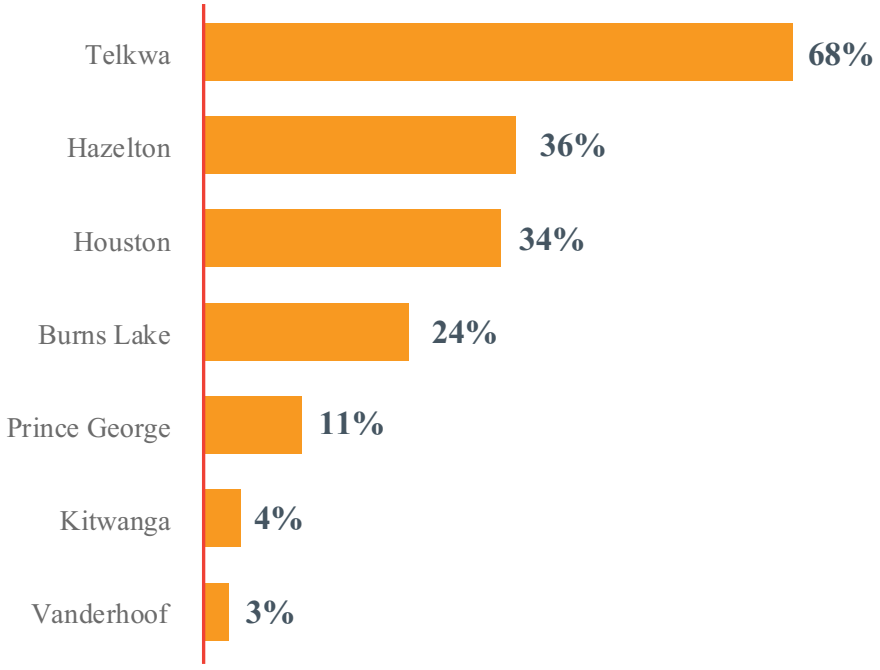
Respondents were then asked to identify where else in the region their household participates in parks and recreation activities. Approximately two-thirds (68%) indicated their activities take place in Telkwa, while approximately one-third indicated their households activities take place in Hazelton (36%) and Houston (34%).

OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Where Else Do Your Households Parks and Recreation Activities Take Place?

- Telkwa (71%)
- Hazelton (41%)
- Houston (35%)
- Burns Lake (25%)
- Prince George (20%)
- Kitwanga (4%)
- Vanderhoof (4%)

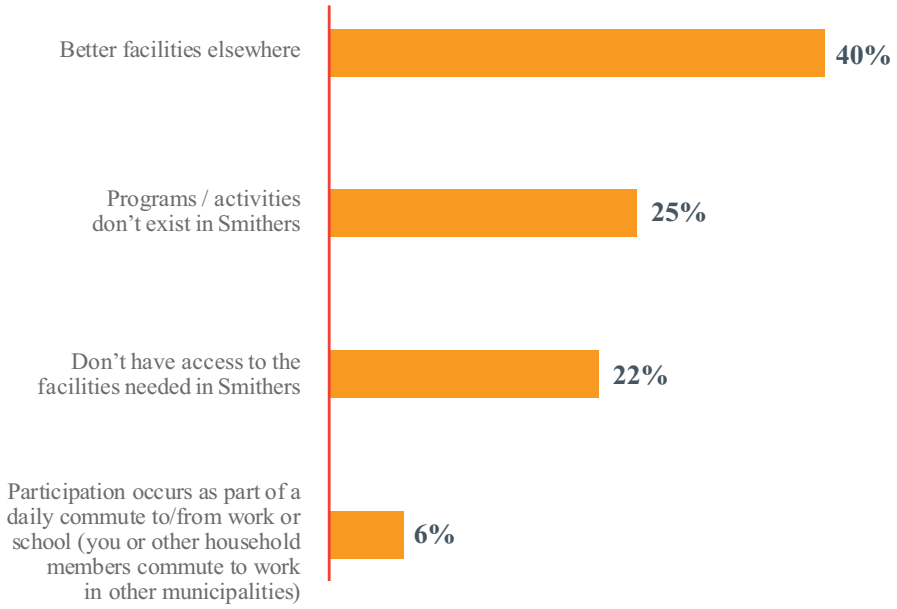
Where Else Do Your Households Parks and Recreation Activities Take Place?



As illustrated by the graph to the right, better facilities existing in other communities was the top identified reason why some respondents need to leave the community for parks and recreation activities. Respondents were also able to share additional reasons as to why they participate in parks and recreation activities outside of Smithers.

- More access and variety of walking trails
- To camp at new places
- Sports activities occur outside of Smithers
- Travel for work
- Enjoy exploring other communities and their recreational opportunities
- To play pickleball
- To play disc golf
- To sail my boat
- Playgrounds in Smithers are not appropriate for children
- Programs and opportunities are cheaper outside of Smithers
- For a diversity of programs and events
- To hunt
- The pump track in Terrace is better
- To explore bike trails outside of Smithers

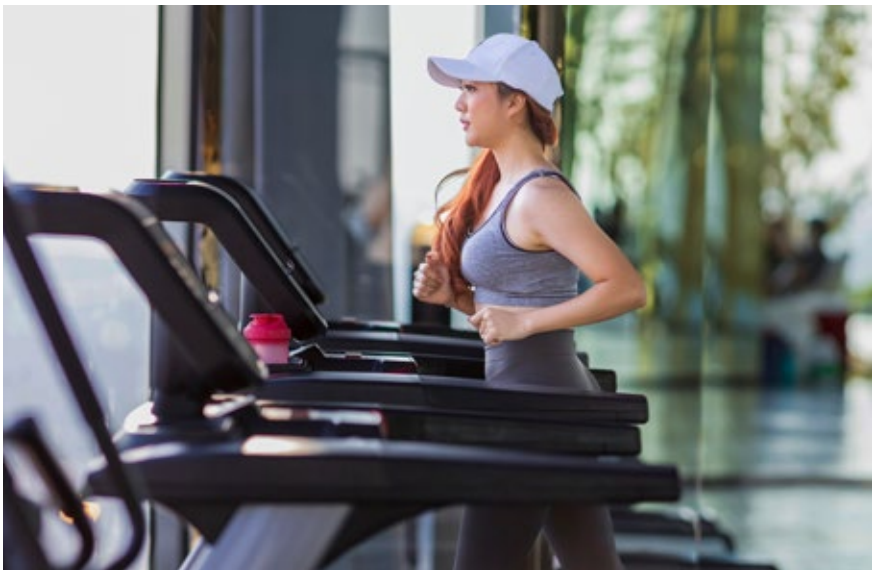
Reasons Household's Parks and Recreation Activities Take Place Outside of Smithers



OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Reasons Households Parks and Recreation Activities Take Place Outside of Smithers

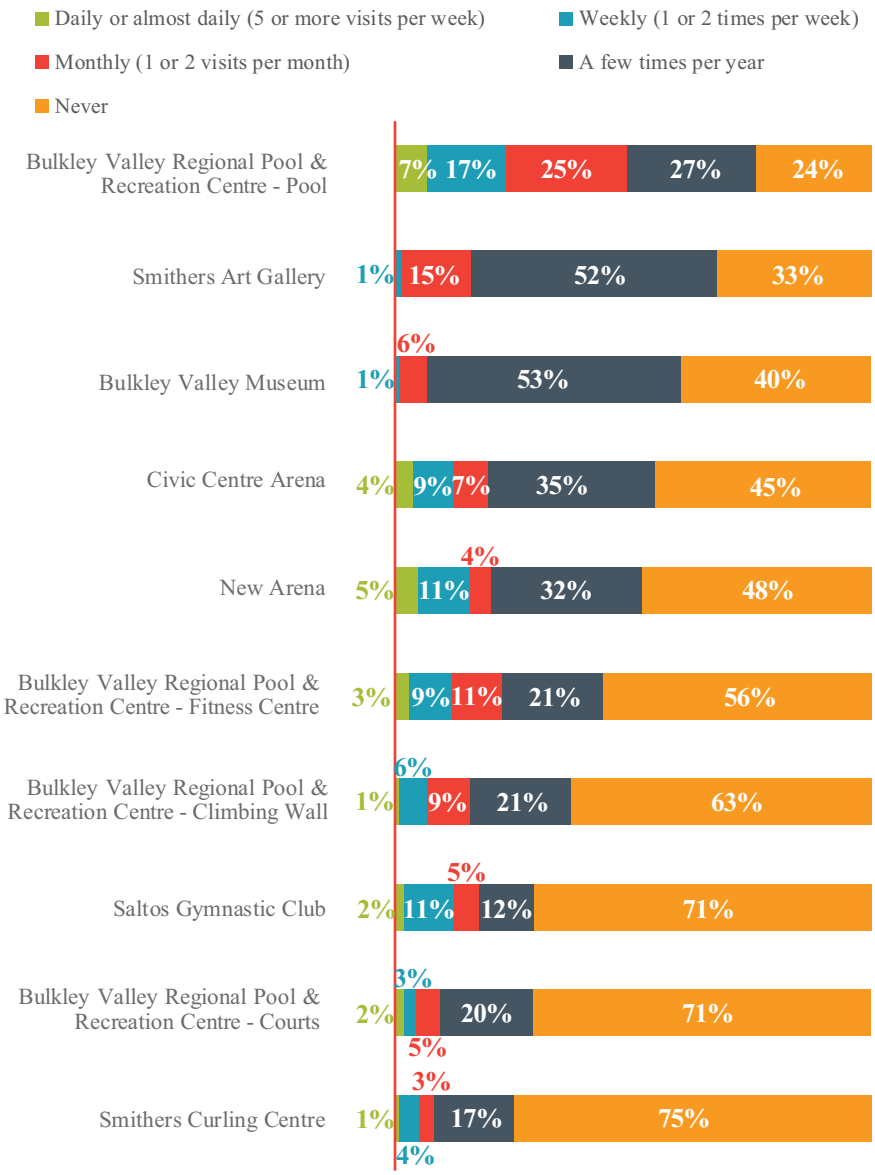
- Better facilities elsewhere (49%)
- Programs / activities don't exist in Smithers (33%)
- Don't have access to the facilities needed in Smithers (30%)



Smithers residents utilize a variety of facilities with varying frequencies of utilization. As illustrated by the accompanying graph, one-quarter (25%) of respondents visit the Buckley Valley Regional Pool on a monthly basis (1 or 2 times per month). Approximately half of respondents visit the Smithers Art Gallery (52%) and the Bulkley Valley Museum (53%) a few times per year. The findings reiterate the high levels of participation in varying recreation activity types.

Frequency of Use

Indoor Facilities and Amenities



OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Frequency of Use (Indoor Facilities)

Daily

- New Arena (12%)
- Bulkley Valley Regional Pool and Recreation Centre Pool (11%)

Weekly

- Bulkley Valley Regional Pool and Recreation Centre Pool (27%)
- Bulkley Valley Regional Pool and Recreation Centre Fitness Centre (13%)

Monthly

- Bulkley Valley Regional Pool and Recreation Centre Pool (23%)
- Bulkley Valley Regional Pool and Recreation Centre Climbing Wall (13%)

OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Frequency of Use (Outdoor Facilities)

Daily

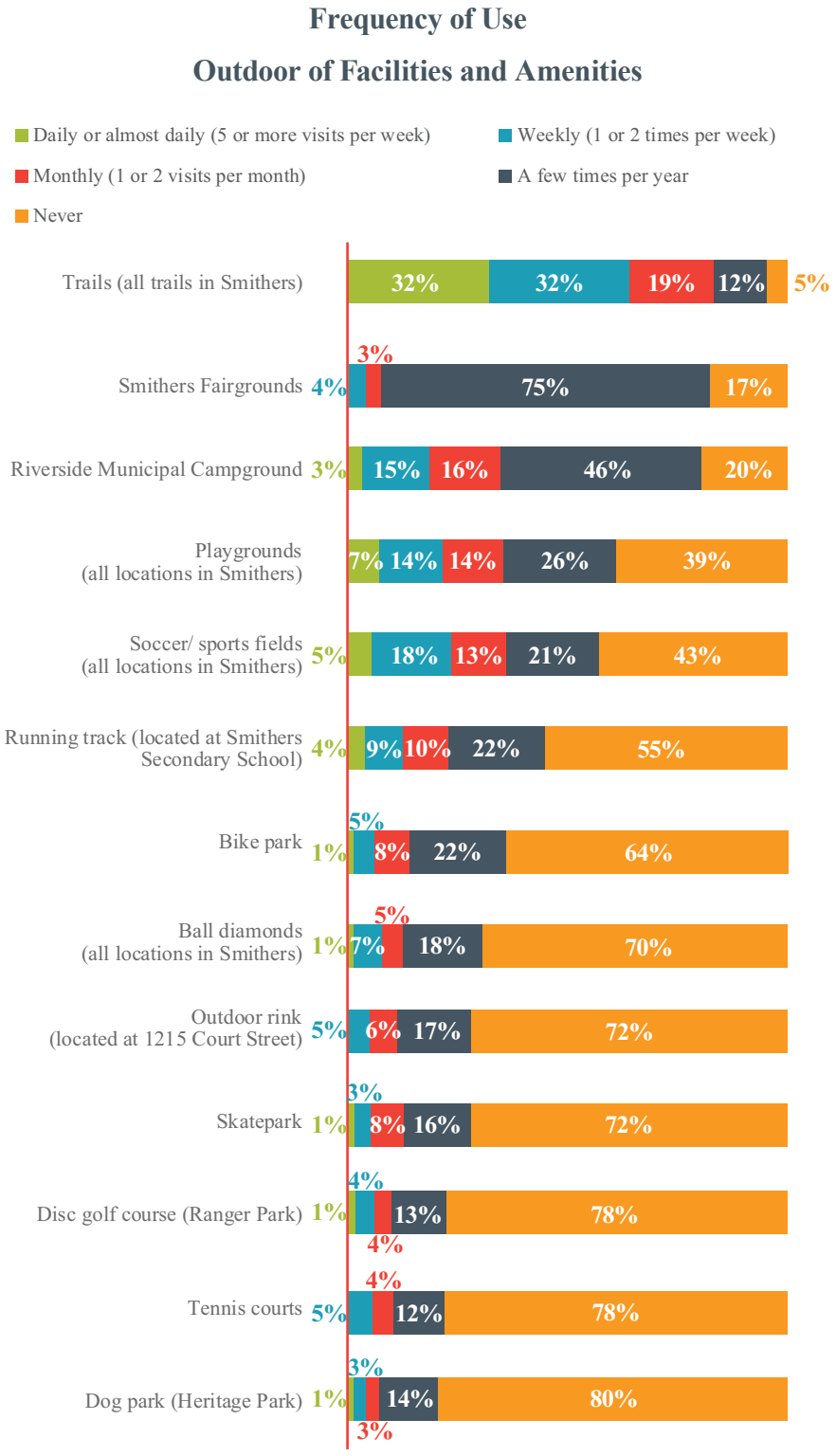
- Trails in Smithers (21%)
- Soccer / Sport Fields in Smithers (8%)

Weekly

- Trails in Smithers (33%)
- Soccer / Sport Fields in Smithers (15%)

Monthly

- Trails in Smithers (29%)
- Bike Park (24%)



THE VALUE AND BENEFITS OF PARKS AND RECREATION

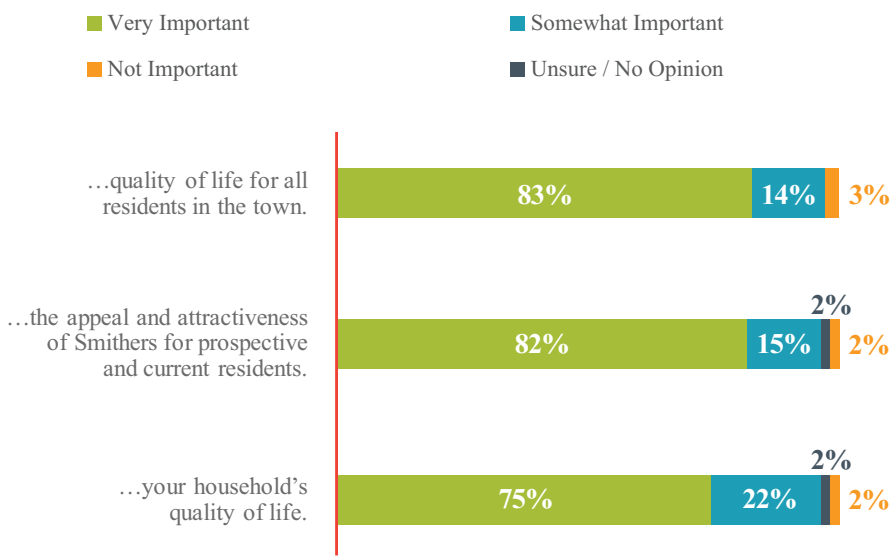
Respondents were presented with several value statements regarding the provision of parks and recreation services and opportunities. As reflected in the following graph, residents strongly believe that recreation and parks contribute to both their own and their community's quality of life. Respondents also strongly believe that parks and recreation are important in retaining and bringing in future Smithers residents.

OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Parks and Recreation opportunities in Smithers are very important to...

- … quality of life for all residents in the Township (90% selected "very important")
- … the appeal and attractiveness of Smithers for prospective and current residents (87% selected "very important")
- … your household's quality of life (80% selected "very important")

How Important are Parks and Recreation Opportunities in Smithers to...



Respondents were also provided with space to share their thoughts about the importance of parks and recreation to Smithers. Themes from the comments provided are noted below.

- While residents may not use all of the recreational opportunities, they understand the importance of these amenities and facilities to the community and to families in Smithers.
- There is inherent value in having access to natural surroundings without having to leave the Town.
- Individuals and families move to Smithers specifically for the array of recreation opportunities such as mountain biking, hiking, and skiing.
- There is a good variety of recreation opportunities for all seasons.
- Outdoor recreation opportunities are available via car, walking and biking which makes these opportunities very accessible.
- There are affordable recreation opportunities in Smithers, but not everyone is aware of where or how to access them.
- Recreation opportunities are crucial for the wellbeing and mental health of residents, specifically during the dark winters.
- It is important to have opportunities for all levels and the Town could do a better job at ensuring participants do not get discouraged when trying new activities.

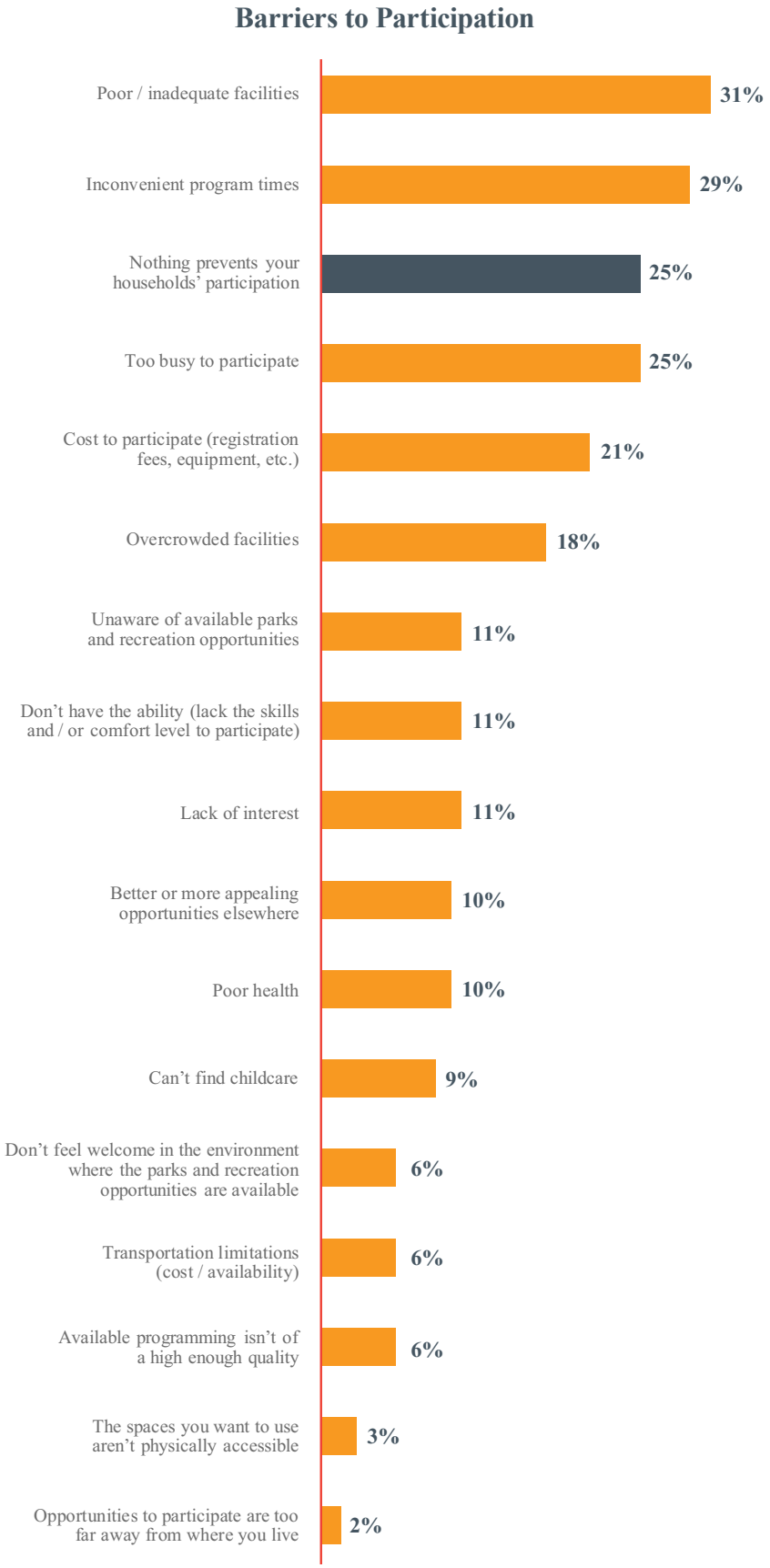
BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Exploring factors that limit or prevent participation in parks and recreation opportunities is an important aspect to fulsomely understanding the provision of parks and recreation in the Town. Respondents were presented with a list of barriers and were asked to identify if their household faces any when trying to access recreation opportunities in Smithers. Approximately one-third indicated that poor facilities (31%) and inconvenient program timing (29%) as barriers they face. Notably, one-quarter (25%) of respondents indicated that nothing prevents them from participating in parks and recreation opportunities.

OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Barriers to Participation

- Poor / inadequate facilities (48%)
- Inconvenient program times (39%)
- Cost to participate (26%)
- Overcrowded facilities (22%)
- Transportation limitations (12%)



SUBSEGMENT ANALYSIS

- Those who have lived in Smithers for 6-10 years are more likely to say that facilities being overcrowded is a barrier they face (43%) than those who have lived in Smithers for 1-5 years (7%).
- Those who have lived in Smithers for 1-5 years are more likely to say that a barrier they face is program times being inconvenient (44%) than those who have lived in Smithers for over 10 years (25%).
- Those who have lived in Smithers for over 10 years are more likely to say they do not face barriers when trying to access park and recreation opportunities (30%) than those who have lived in Smithers for 1-5 years (12%).
- 22% of households with children identified being unable to find childcare as a barrier to participation.

Respondents were able to share additional barriers they may face when trying to access parks and recreation activities and programs in Smithers. The following additional barriers were shared.

- Access to the perimeter trail is poor and hazardous at times.
- Adult ice time is difficult to attain at both the new and old arenas.
- Wildfire smoke.
- Library hours are limited.
- There is nowhere to walk inside during the winter.
- There is too much of a focus on competitive sports programs. There could be more options for recreational level players.
- Lack of accessible washrooms.

SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT PARKS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

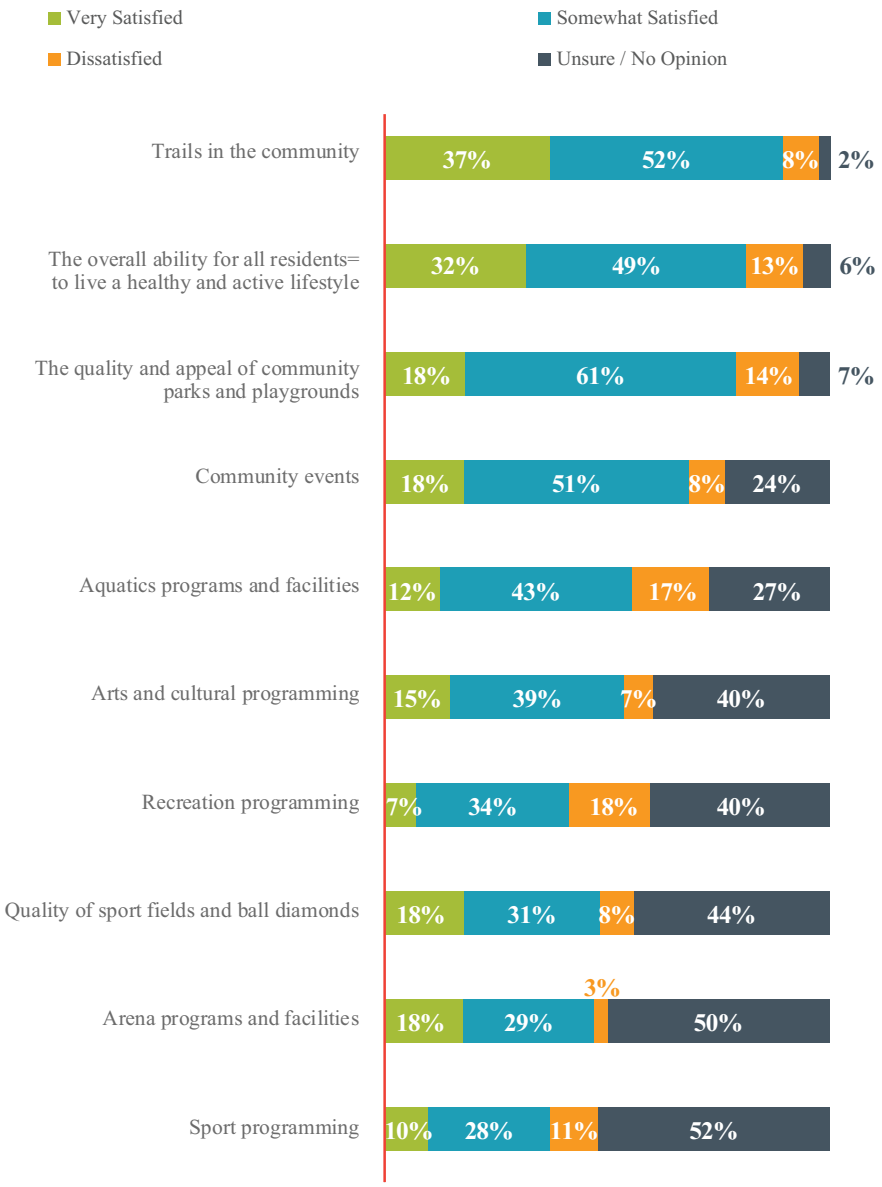
In terms of satisfaction levels with facilities and programs, respondents generally indicated strong levels of satisfaction with most aspects of parks and recreation services. Recreation programming (18%) and aquatics programs and facilities (17%) had the highest levels of dissatisfaction.

OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Respondents indicated that they were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the following aspects of parks and recreation services.

- Trails in the community (93%)
- Overall ability for all resident to live a healthy and active lifestyle (85%)
- The quality and appeal of community parks and playgrounds (79%)
- Community events (73%)

Satisfaction with Aspects of Parks and Recreation Services



Respondents were provided space to expand on their satisfaction levels. Themes from these comments are provided as follows.

SATISFIED COMMENT THEMES

- There are a lot of great opportunities to participate in recreation activities.
- The town is walkable which allows for lots of active transportation.
- The parks and outdoor spaces are beautiful and used often.

DISSATISFIED COMMENT THEMES

- Way findings signage on the trails could be improved.
- Access to fitness centres is too expensive.
- The sidewalks in the town are challenging to maneuver during the winter months.
- It is challenging to find what programming for youth is available in the Town.
- There are safety concerns with accessing parks and open spaces.
- Limited hours and lack of staff greatly affect opportunities at the pool.
- The soccer fields are uneven and could use more maintenance throughout the year.
- There needs to be more variety and funding available for arts programming in Smithers.
- The pool and fitness space are outdated and do not currently meet the needs of the community.
- There is a lack of pickleball courts.
- There is a need for more seniors recreation programming.

Photo: Town of Smithers

FUTURE PRIORITIES AND FOCUS AREAS

The next section of the survey shifted to asking respondents about future priorities for facility investment in Smithers. Respondents were provided with indoor and outdoor lists of facilities and were asked to identify up to five (5) indoor and five (5) outdoor facilities that should be priorities for capital investment (new or enhanced facilities).

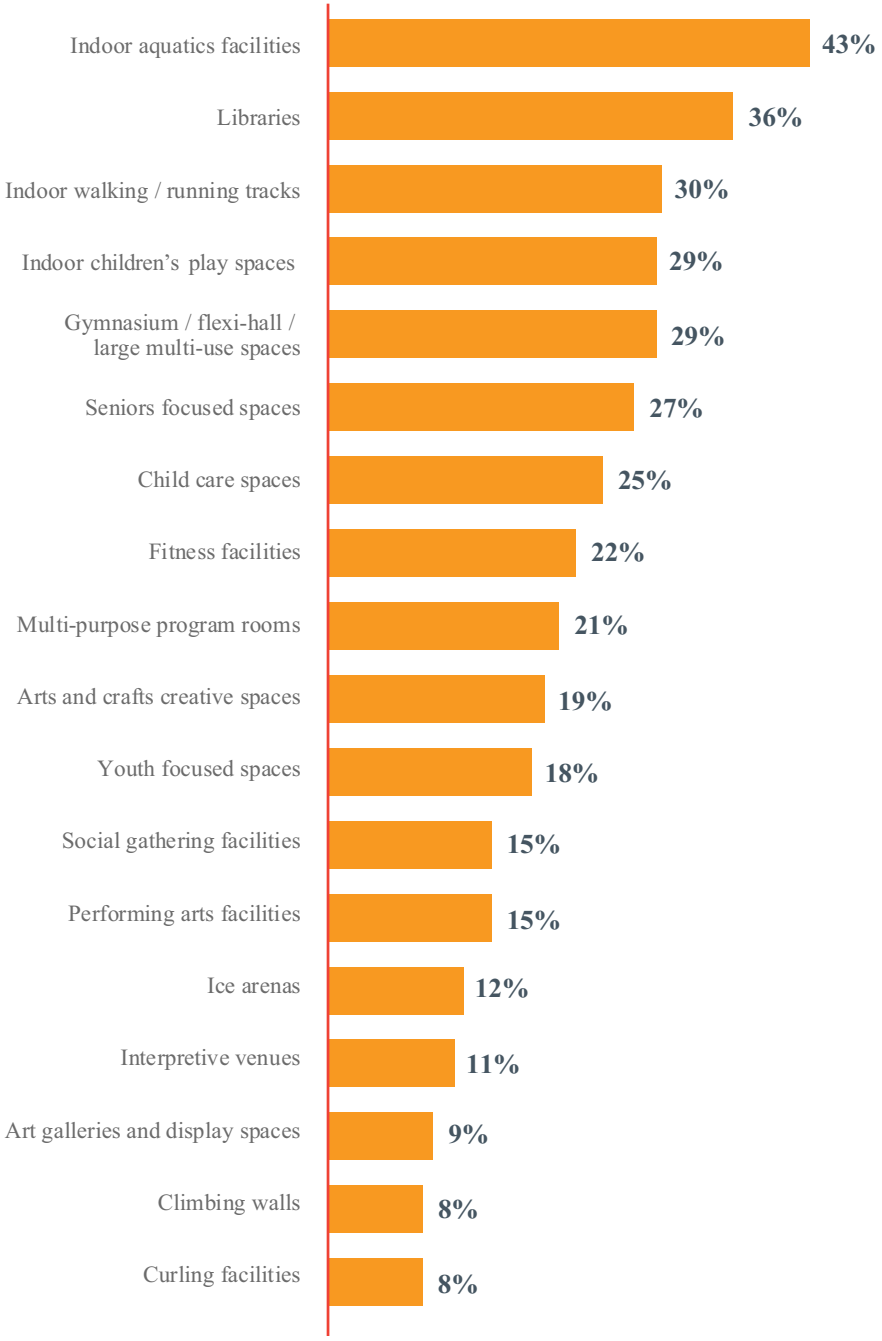
The top five (5) indoor facility priorities identified by respondents were indoor aquatics facilities (43%), libraries (36%), indoor walking and running tracks (30%), indoor children's play spaces (29%) and gymnasium, flexi-hall and large multi-use spaces (29%). Regarding outdoor facilities, playgrounds (36%), spray parks (35%), cross country skiing tracks (28%), community gardens (23%) and campgrounds (21%) were identified as the top five priorities by respondents.

OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Indoor Recreation Facilities and Amenities that Should be More Readily Available or Enhanced

- Indoor aquatic facilities (49%)
- Gymnasium / flexi-hall / large multi use spaces (38%)
- Indoor walking / running tracks (37%)
- Fitness facilities (32%)
- Libraries (31%)
- Youth focused spaces (29%)

Indoor Recreation Facilities and Amenities that Should be More Readily Available or Enhanced



SUBSEGMENT ANALYSIS

- Those who do not live in Smithers are more likely to say that multi-purpose program rooms (35%) should be a priority for investment than those who live in the Town (20%).
- Those who live in Smithers are more likely to say that indoor aquatic facilities should be a priority for investment (44%) than those who live outside of the Town (29%).
- Those who have lived in Smithers for 6-10 years are more likely to say that indoor aquatic facilities should be a priority for investment (71%) than those who have lived in Smithers for over 10 years (36%).

Respondents were able to share additional indoor facilities or amenities that should be considered for investment in the Town. The following facilities and amenities were suggested.

- Indoor soccer field / facility
- Multi purpose community recreation complex
- Indoor pickleball courts
- Indoor tennis courts
- Music venue

OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Outdoor Recreation Facilities and Amenities that Should be More Readily Available or Enhanced

- Trails (45%)
- Spray parks (37%)
- Playgrounds (33%)
- Community gardens (26%)
- Outdoor festival and community performance spaces (21%)
- Cross country skiing tracks (21%)

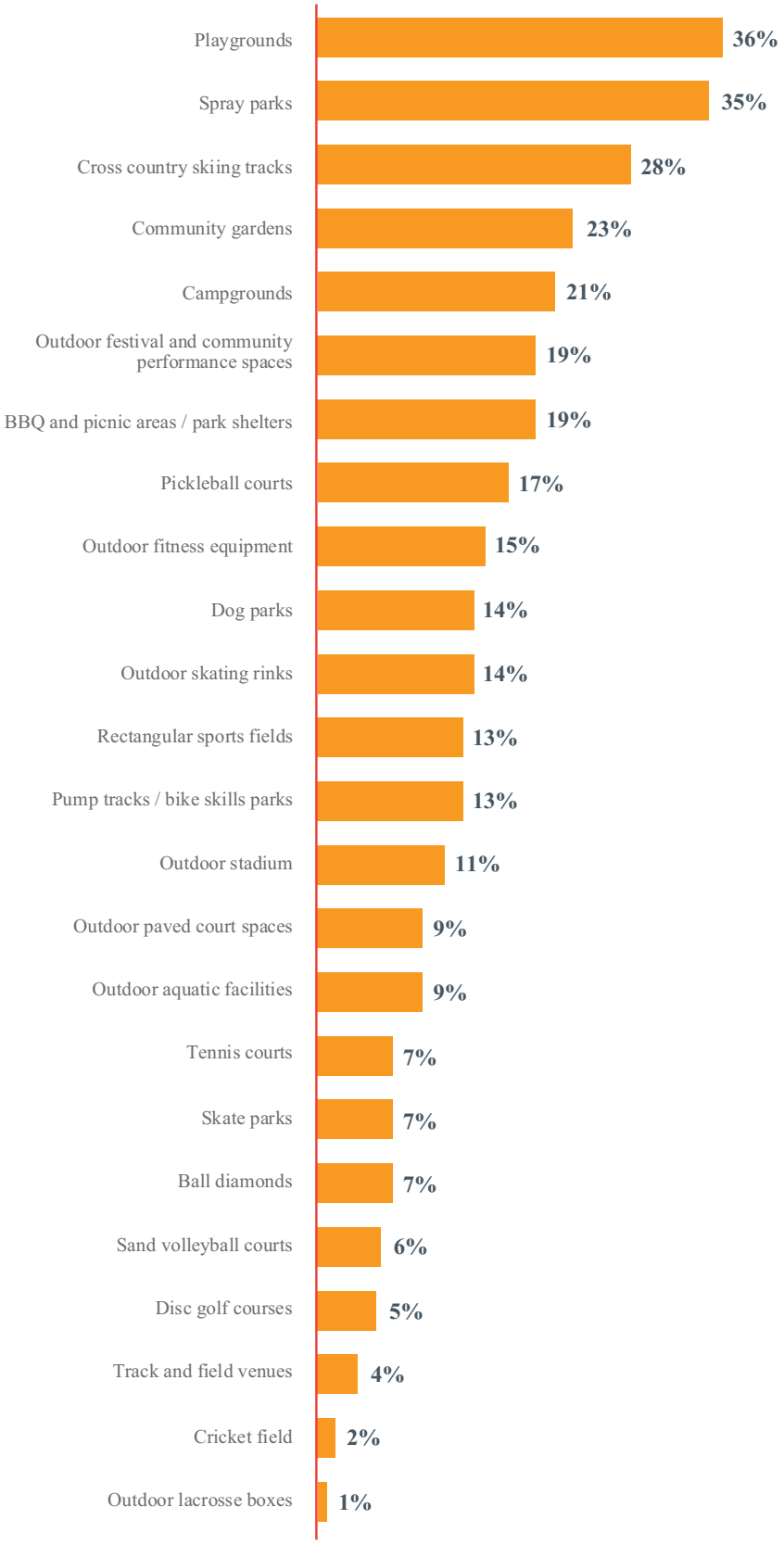
SUBSEGMENT ANALYSIS

- Those who live in the town are more likely to say that trails should be a priority for investment (56%) than those who live outside of the Town (31%).
- Households with children are more likely to say that spray parks should be a priority for investment (52%) than households without children (35%).

Respondents were able to share additional **outdoor** facilities or amenities that should be considered for investment in the town. The following facilities and amenities were suggested.

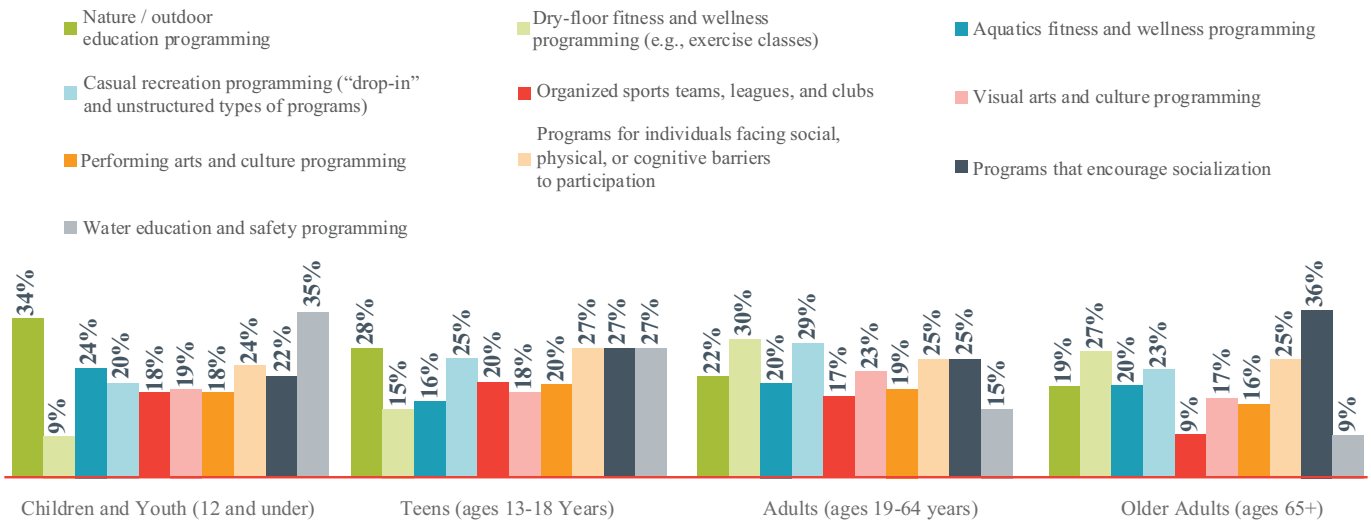
- Direct access from the town to the ski hill via a gondola
- Lakefront dog area
- Community trail (loop)
- A playground located in the Ambleside subdivision
- Covered outdoor meeting areas

Outdoor Recreation Facilities and Amenities that Should be More Readily Available or Enhanced



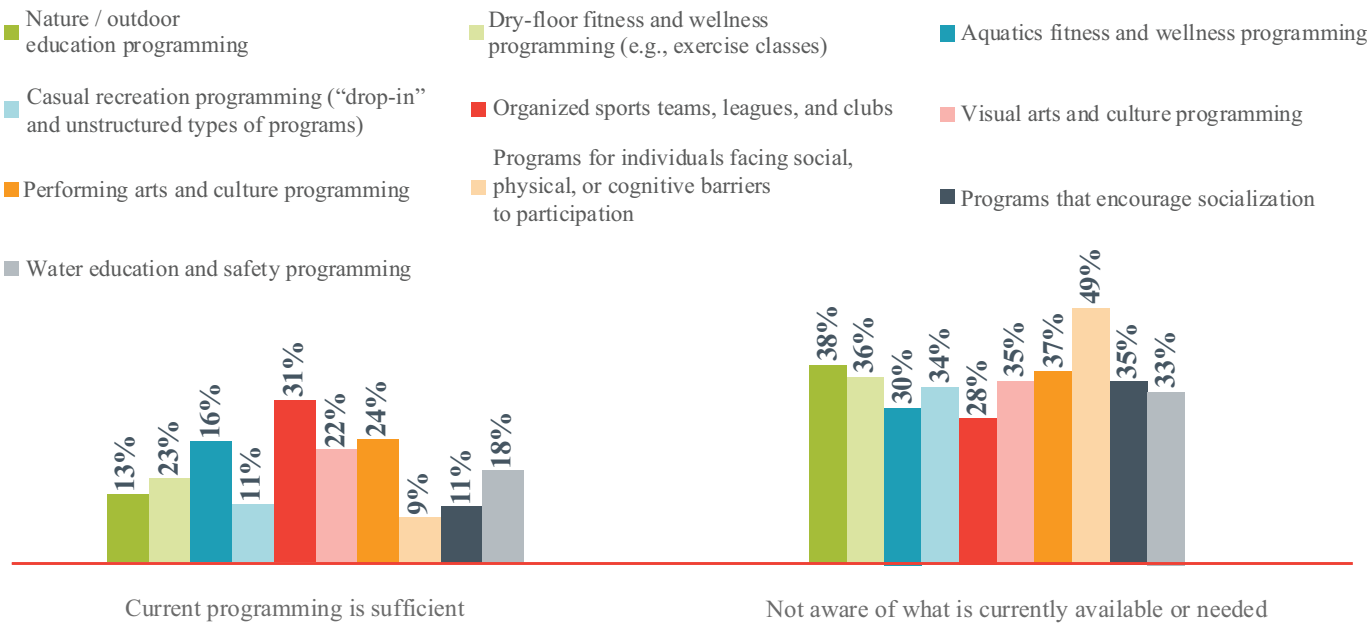
Next, respondents were presented with a list of programming types and were asked to identify programs that need to be enhanced or offered in greater supply by age segments. As illustrated in the accompanying graphs, there is some desire for additional nature and outdoor education programming (34%), and water education and safety programming (35%), for children and youth. For the senior population, there is a desire for more programs that encourage socialization (36%).

Programming Types By Age



Additionally, many respondents were unaware of what is currently available or needed in Smithers for programming. On average approximately 35% of respondents are unaware of programming opportunities available. 31% of respondents think that organized sports teams, leagues, and clubs are sufficient.

Programming (Sufficient & Not Aware)



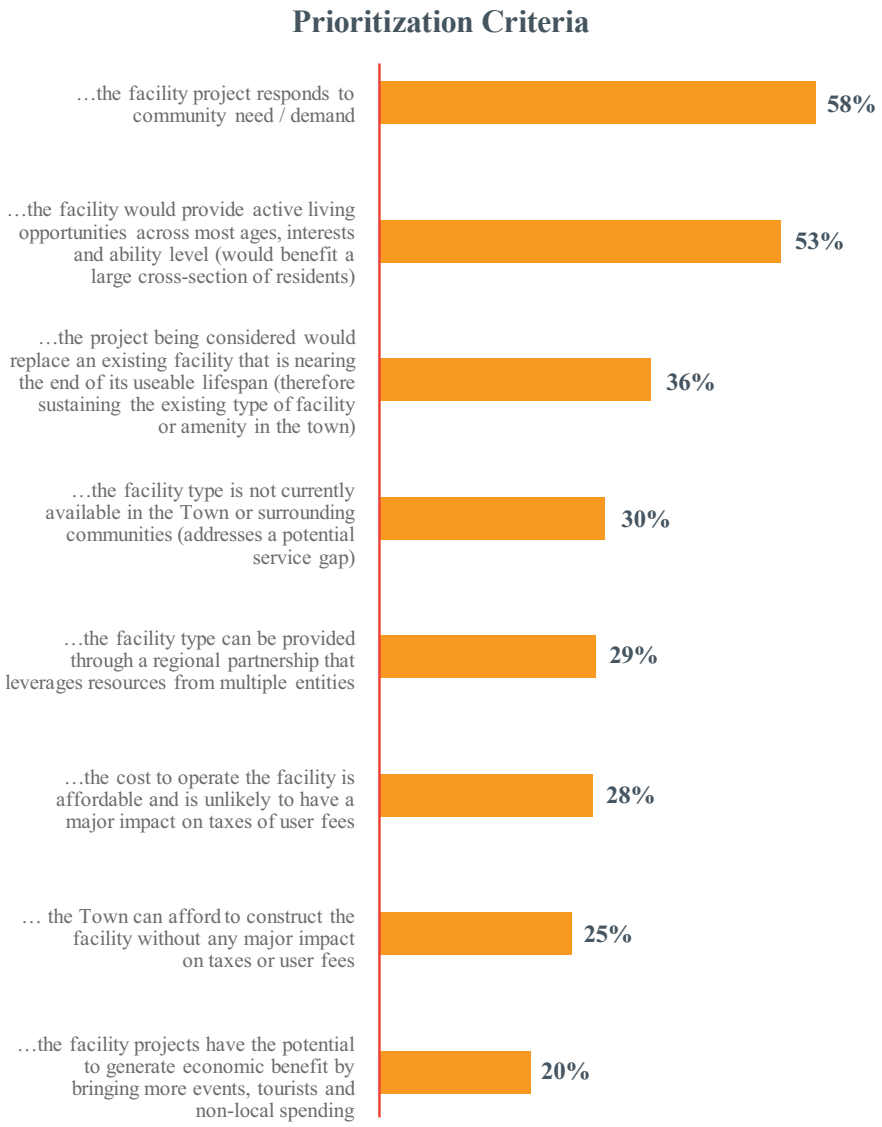
PRIORITY SETTING

Respondents were then presented with a list of potential prioritization criteria and were asked to identify those that should be more important when setting priorities for parks and recreation amenities and facilities in Smithers. As illustrated in the graph below, community need (58%), providing active living opportunities that would benefit a large cross section of residents (53%), and replacing a current facility to sustain service levels (36%) were top criteria that should be considered when making future decisions about parks and recreation in Smithers.

OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Top Prioritization Criteria

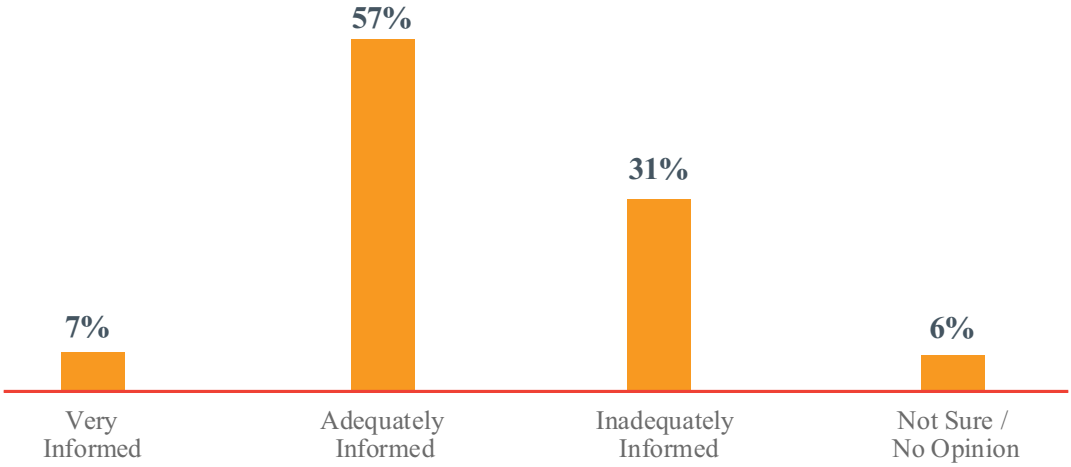
- … the facility would provide active living opportunities across most ages, interests and ability level (54%)
- … the facility project responds to community need / demand (53%)
- … the facility type is not currently available in the Town or surrounding communities (37%)
- … the project being considered would replace an existing facility that is nearing the end of its useable lifespan (37%)



COMMUNICATIONS

Respondents were then asked whether they feel adequately or inadequately informed about parks and recreation opportunities in Smithers. Approximately half (57%) indicated that they are adequately informed. However, approximately one-third (31%) indicated they feel inadequately informed about parks and recreation opportunities in Smithers.

How Informed Do you Feel About Parks and Recreation Opportunities in Smithers?



OPEN ACCESS SURVEY FINDINGS

Communication Preferences

- Social media feeds (65%)
- Program guides (37%)
- Posters and displays in facilities (35%)
- Town website (33%)
- Local newspapers / newsletters (28%)

SUBSEGMENT ANALYSIS

- Those who have lived in Smithers for over 10 years are more likely to say they prefer to learn about parks and recreation opportunities through the local newspapers (41%) than those who have lived in Smither for 6-10 years (14%).

OTHER COMMENTS

Respondents were able to share any other comments they had regarding the provision of parks and recreation in Smithers. Themes from the responses are presented below.

- Indoor recreation opportunities, specifically in the winter months are much needed in Smithers.
- Maintenance of the playgrounds and trails are needed in Smithers.
- Increased availability of seniors and teen programming is needed in the town.
- Maintaining the current facilities should be a priority over investing in new.
- The perimeter trail section should have better connection.
- The Town should look to provide more support for non/profit and volunteer organizations that provide many recreation services to residents.
- Investigate additional marketing avenues to ensure more residents are being informed about programs and events in the town.
- More funding for arts and culture programs should be considered.
- An indoor soccer field and track is needed for the winter months.
- As a small town, there is a diverse amount of opportunity and options available.
- Upgrade the parks and playgrounds so they are more accessible.
- Outdoor pickleball courts would be a great asset to the community.
- Improvements to the pool and arena are needed.
- A space for dance would be great as the dance studio in the town has closed down.

HOUSEHOLD PROFILE

Respondents were asked several questions about their household. Percentages in parenthesis are representative of the 2021 census. The responses are presented in the following table.

Do You Live in the Town of Smithers?	
Yes	93%
No	7%
How Long Have You Lived in Smithers?	
1-5 years	19%
6-10 years	13%
More than 10 years	68%
Household Composition by Age (Figures in parenthesis represent the 2021 census.)	
0-4 years	6% (6%)
5-9 years	8% (6%)
10-19 years	12% (12%)
20-29 years	9% (12%)
30-39 years	15% (15%)
40-49 years	15% (13%)
50-59 years	11% (11%)
60-69 years	14% (12%)
70-79 years	7% (8%)
80+ years	3% (8%)
Household Composition	
Couple with children	37%
Couple without children	33%
Lone parent family	4%
One-person household	14%
Multi-generational household	2%
Two or more adults not a couple	7%
Prefer not to answer	4%

3. COMMUNITY GROUP SURVEY

3.1 OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

Representatives from community organizations in Smithers were sent a link to an online Community Group Questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to learn more about the various programming opportunities that groups in the town provide as well as to better understand their current and anticipated future needs.

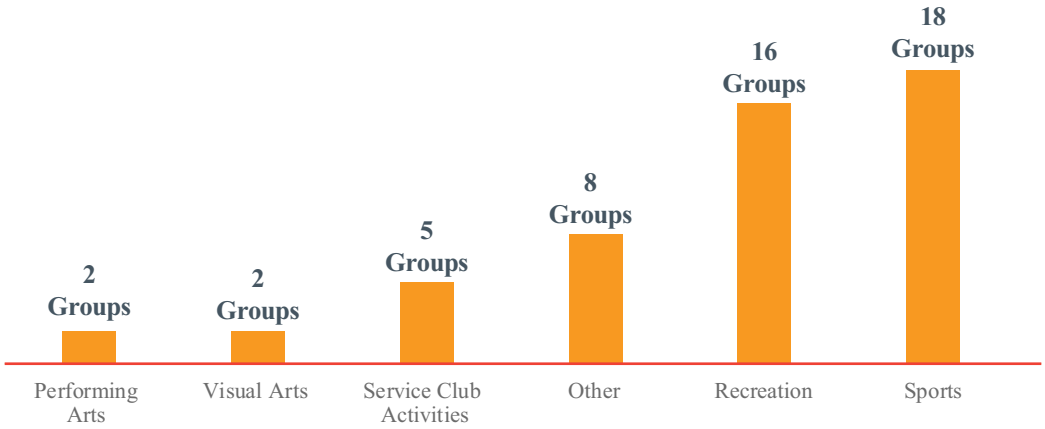
In total 24 organizations provided a response, representing a range of sport and recreation activity types. Please refer to Appendix A for a list of participating organizations.

3.2. SURVEY FINDINGS

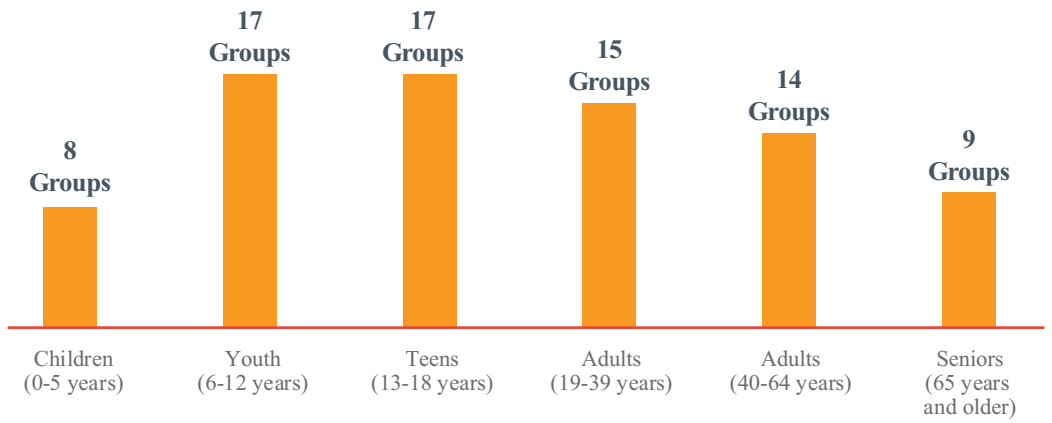
ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION

Community organizations and groups in Smithers offer a variety of opportunities to residents. The accompanying graph illustrates the types of activities offered by groups that responded to the survey.

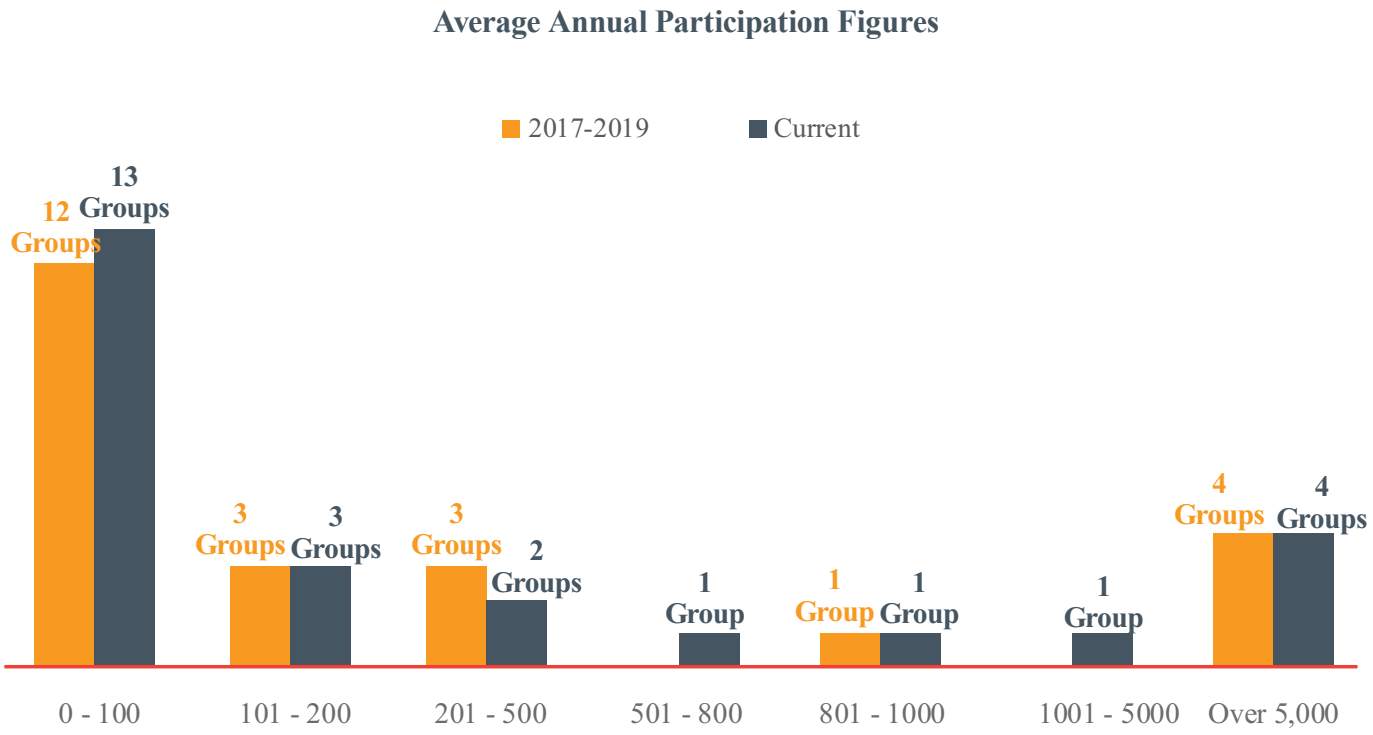
Types of Programming / Activities that Groups Provide



Respondents were then asked to identify which age group(s) best describe their primary participants or members. As illustrated in the graph, groups provide programs and services to a variety of ages with the most age groups served being teens aged 13-18 (18 of 24 groups), youth aged 6-12 years (17 of 24 groups) and adults aged 19-39 years (16 of 24 groups).

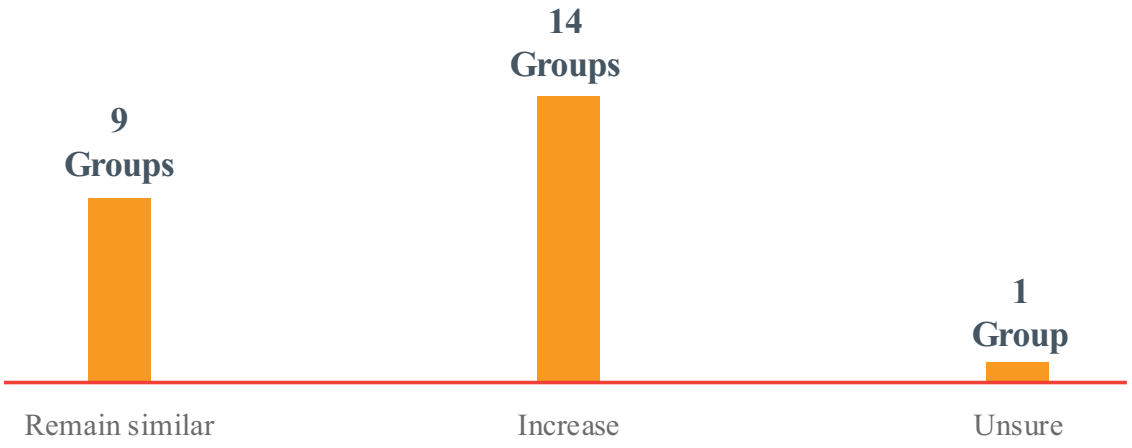


Considering participation figures, respondents were asked to identify how many participants or members belonged to their organization prior to the COVID 19 pandemic and were also asked to identify how many participants they currently have enrolled in their organization. While the organizations vary in size, the majority of responding groups were smaller in size with under 100 participants.



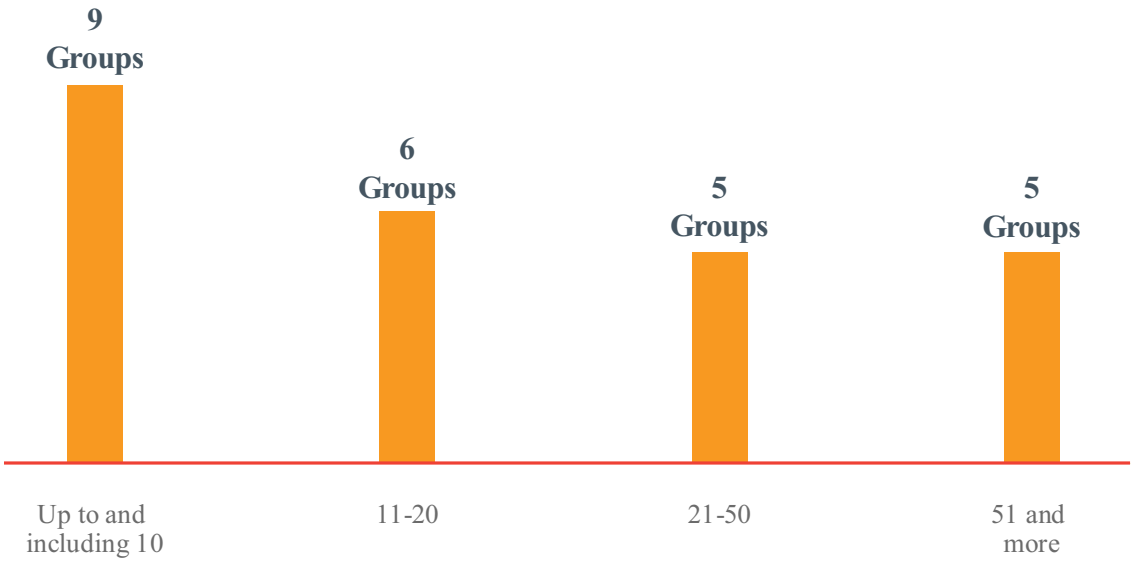
Next, respondents were asked to identify their expectation for participation over the next few years. As illustrated by the graph, most responding organizations indicated they expect to grow over the next few years.

Expected Participation / Member Growth Over the Next Few Years



Organizations and community groups rely heavily on volunteer support for the operation of their organization. As illustrated in the accompanying graph, groups have different levels of volunteer support with most groups having up to 10 volunteers (9 of 24 groups). Notably, 5 of 24 groups have 51 or more volunteers supporting their organization.

How Many Volunteers Regularly Support Your Organizations

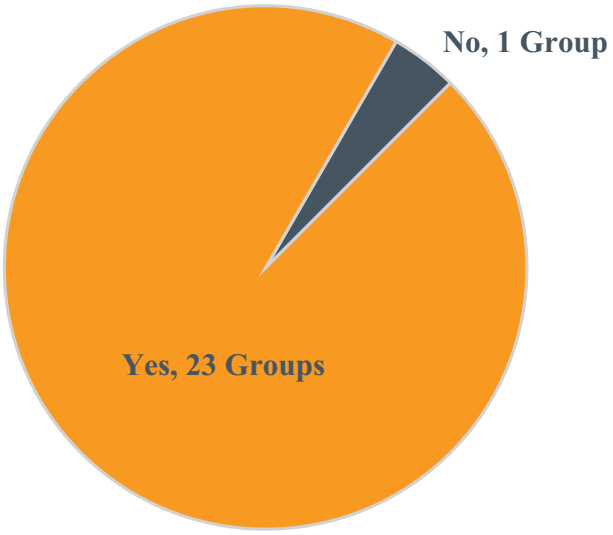


FACILITY UTILIZATION

Groups were next asked to indicate if they use facilities or spaces in Smithers for their programming. Almost all responding groups indicated that they use spaces in Smithers (23 of 24 groups).

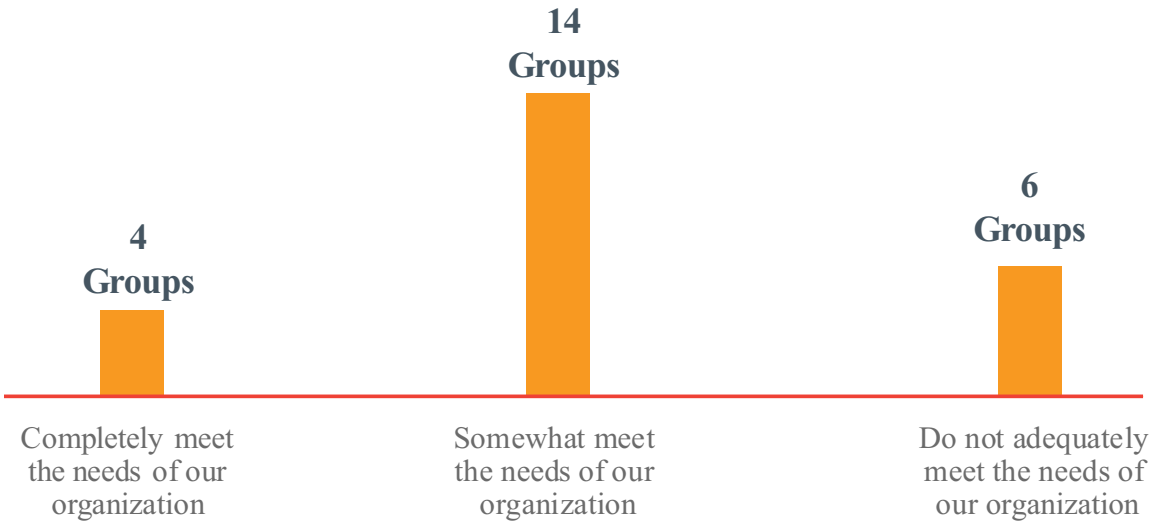
Responding groups were asked to indicate the facilities, amenities and spaces their organization uses and the amount of weekly, monthly or annual hours they book in these spaces. Groups in Smithers use a variety of spaces to provide their programming, including the Civic Centre Arena, Bulkley Valley Christian School Gym, Northern Edge Sport and Recreation Centre, parks, playgrounds, sport fields, the pool, the Museum, Central Park Building, Heritage Rugby Park, Chandler Park Field, the Ranger Park Building, Davidson Hall, Smithers Fairgrounds. These facilities are used between 1 – 50 hours per week.

Does Your Organization Use Any Facilities or Spaces in Smithers for Programming?



Groups were asked if the current facilities meet the needs of their organization. As reflected in the graph, approximately half (14 of 24 groups) provided a positive response stating the facilities somewhat meet their needs. However, 6 of 24 groups indicated that the spaces do not adequately meet the needs of their organization.

To What Degree Do the Facilities and Spaces in Smithers Meet the Needs of Your Organization?



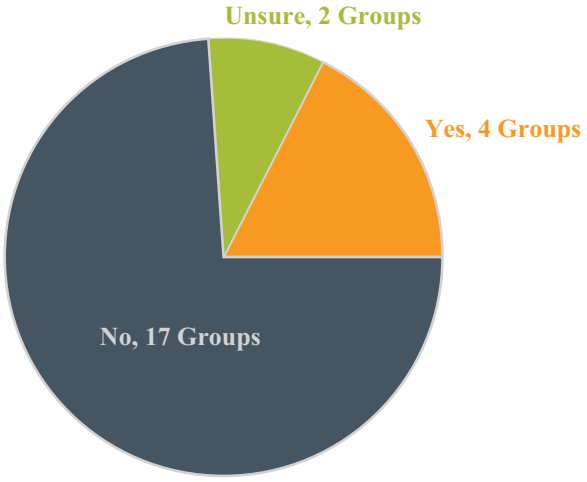
Respondents were able to explain their response to the previous question. The following comments were provided.

- There is a lack of dryland space for teams and organizations to additional training.
- Our organization is able to get access to sufficient facility time to run our program.
- It is a challenge to find early ice times in the evenings.
- The indoor gym space is not feasible for field groups to practice on when weather does not cooperate.
- The Central Park building is not sufficient for our group as participation has increased.
- There is a need for more outdoor field space.
- Rentals costs are too high.
- Additional visual arts spaces would be ideal.
- Additional lanes for lane swimming would be a great addition to the pool.
- There is a desire for more dry floor space in Smithers.
- The cost of renting facilities is too high for some groups.
- More space for visual arts, outdoor sports, and lane swimming is desired.
- Our group has recently outgrown our current programming space.

FUTURE PRIORITIES AND FOCUS AREAS

The next section of the survey shifted to asking groups to indicate if there are adequate parks and recreation facilities (indoor and outdoor) in Smithers. The majority of responding groups (17 of 24 groups) indicated that are not adequate facilities in Smithers.

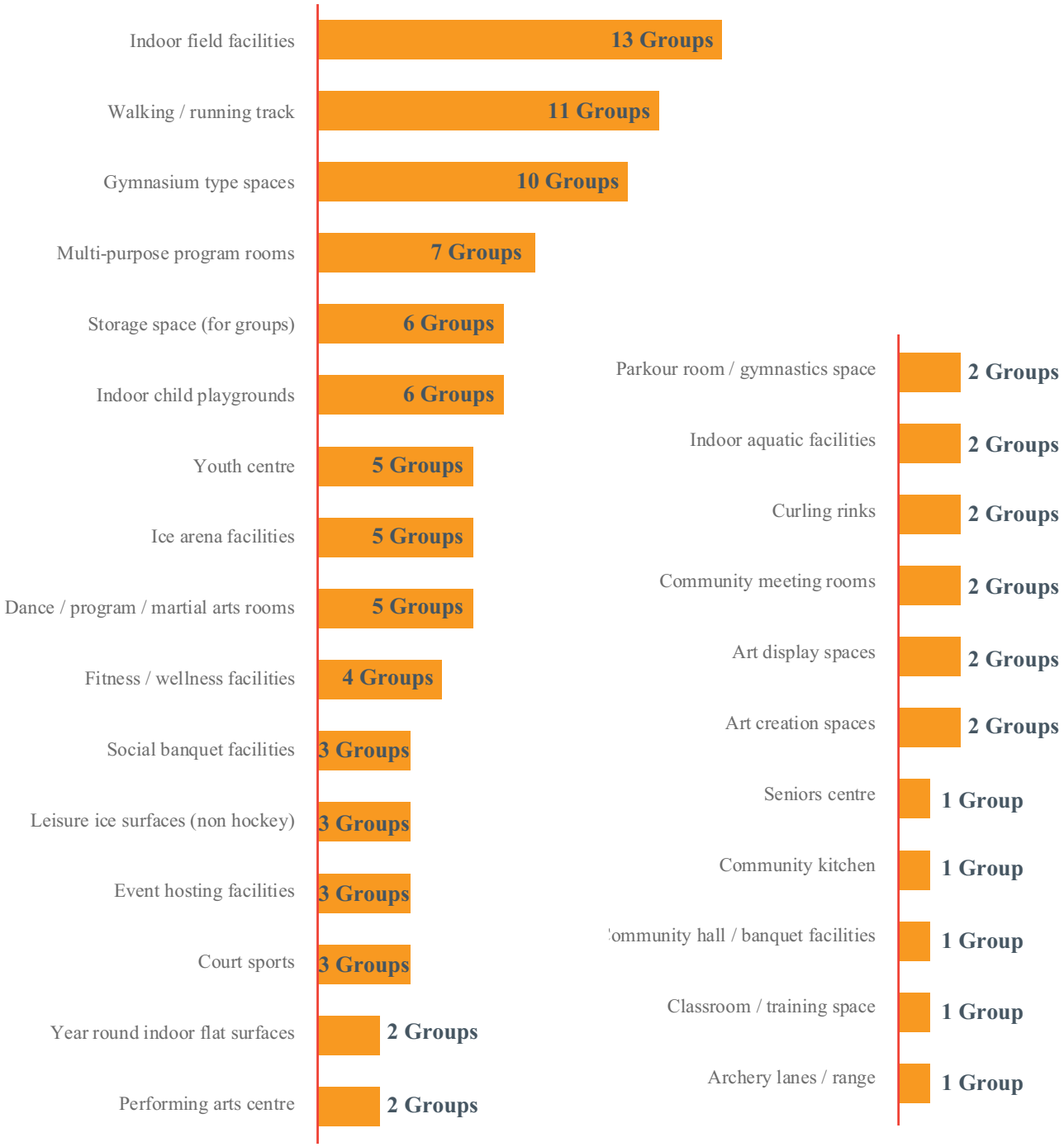
Do You Think There Are Adequate Parks and Recreation Facilities (Indoor and Outdoor) in Smithers?



Those who indicated that there are not adequate parks and recreation facilities in Smithers were presented with a list of indoor and outdoor facilities and amenities and were asked to identify which should be more readily available or enhanced in Smithers.

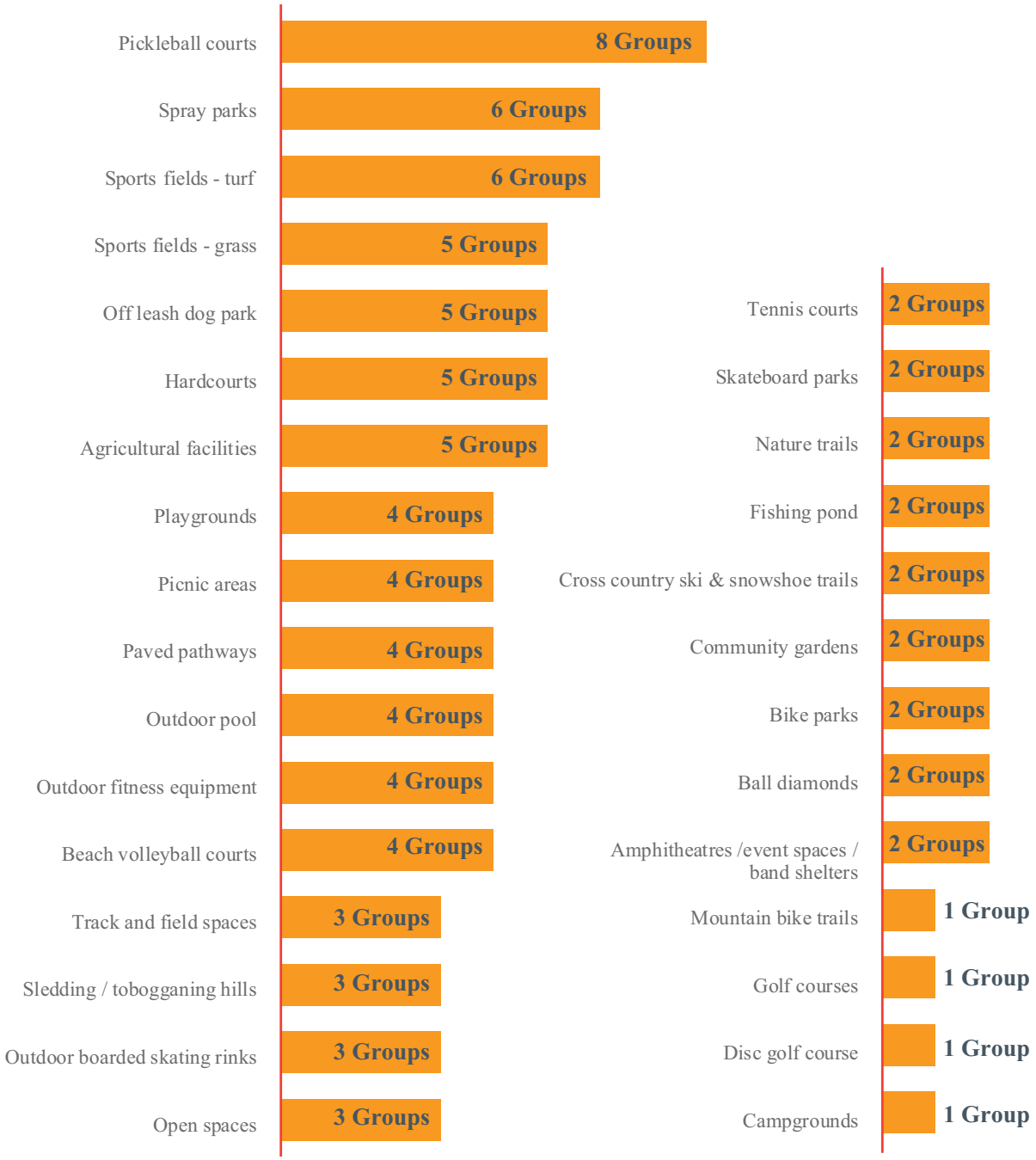
Regarding indoor facilities and amenities, indoor field facilities (13 of 24 groups), walking/running track (11 of 24 groups), gymnasium spaces (10 of 24 groups), multi-purpose program rooms (7 of 24 groups) and storage space for groups (6 of 24 groups) were identified as the top five (5) facilities and or amenities that the Town should invest in.

Indoor Facilities and Amenities for Investment



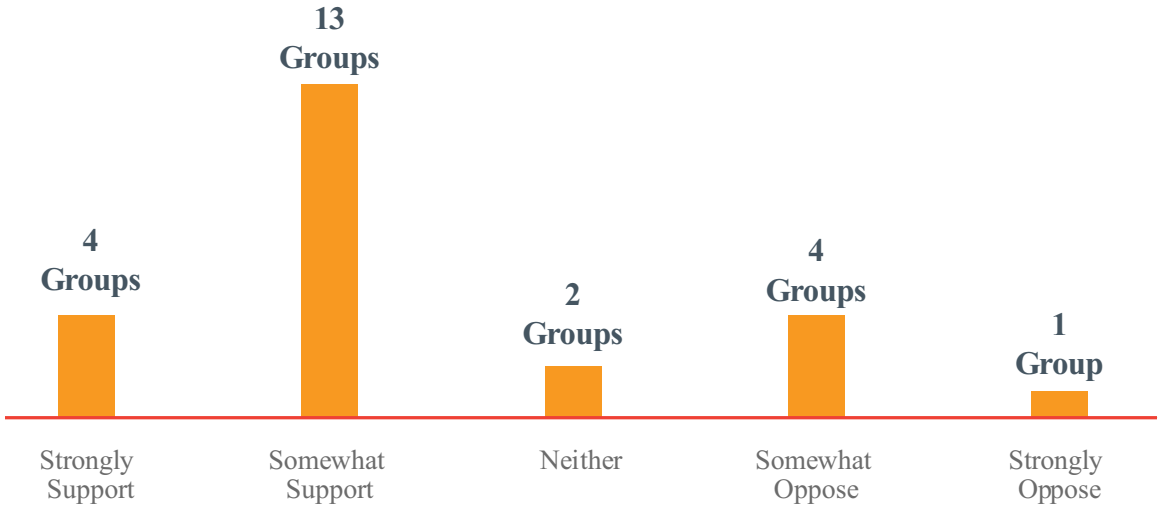
Considering outdoor facilities, pickleball courts (8 of 24 groups), spray parks (6 of 24 groups), turf sports fields (6 of 24 groups), grass sports fields (5 of 24 groups) and off leash dog parks (5 of 24 groups) were identified as top facilities and amenities for future investments desired in Smithers.

Outdoor Facilities and Amenities for Investment



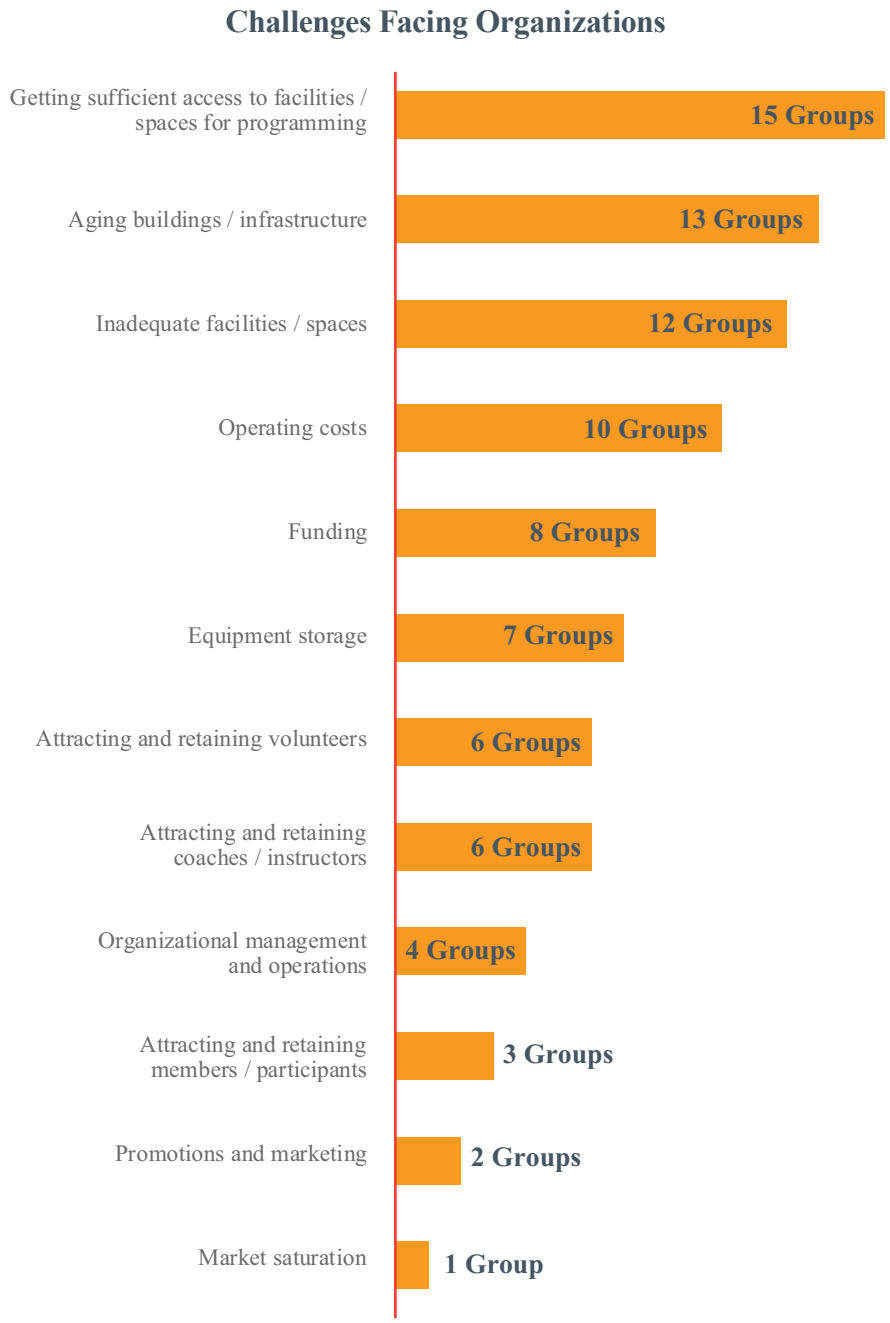
Organizations were next asked if they would support an increase in user and rental fees to ensure community need for parks and recreation are better met in the town. Approximately half of the groups (17 groups) indicated that they would support and increase while five (5) groups opposed an increase.

Support For An Increase In User Fees / Rental Fees to Ensure Community Needs for Parks and Recreation are Better Met

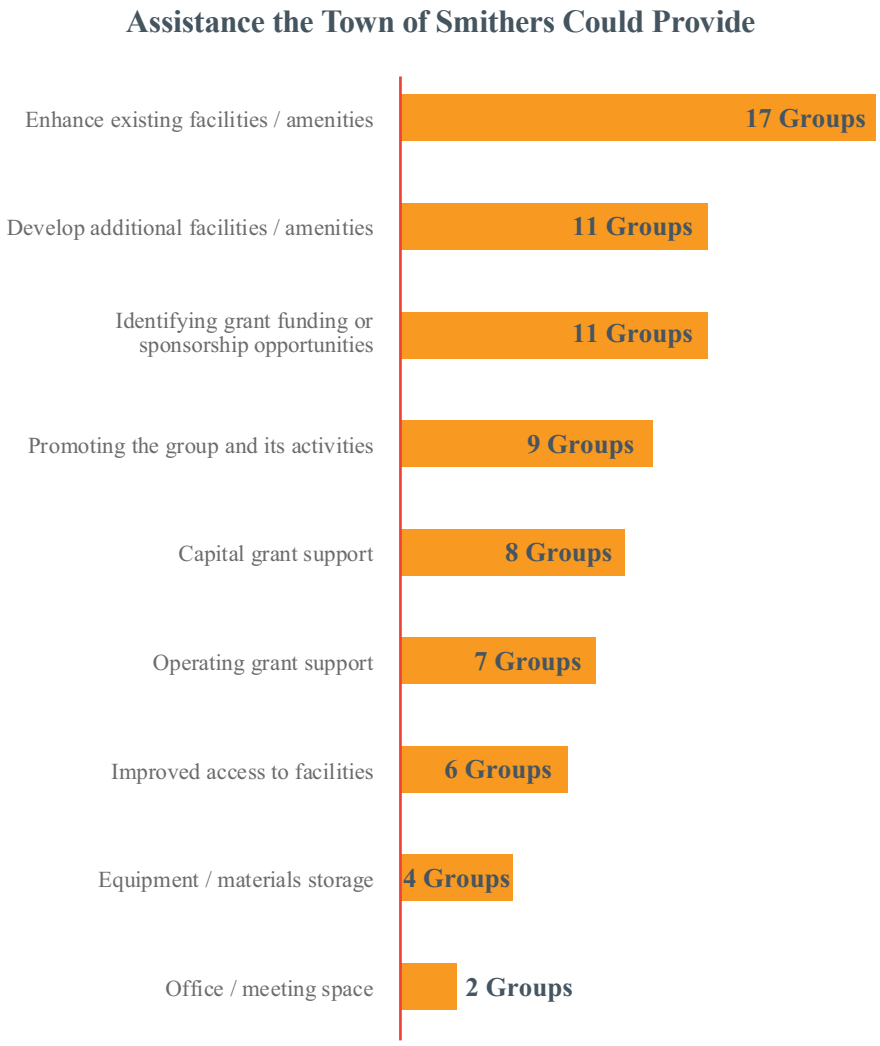


CHALLENGES

Groups were next asked to identify any challenges they are currently facing. As reflected in the graph, access to spaces (15 groups), aging buildings and infrastructure (13 groups) and inadequate facilities and spaces (12 groups) are the top three challenges organizations are facing.



Groups were then asked what (if any) supports or resources the Town could provide to help with the challenges they had identified above. Enhancing existing facilities/amenities (17 groups), developing additional facilities/ amenities (11 groups), and identifying grant funding or sponsorship opportunities (11 groups) were identified the most often by groups as ways that the Town could provide support.



OTHER COMMENTS

Groups were able to provide additional comments regarding the provision of parks and recreation in Smithers. The following comments were provided.

- A facility with a focus on youth and senior programming would be a great addition to the community.
- Having access to additional amenities such as tennis courts, basketball courts and fitness equipment in the off season would benefit our organization.
- Rates and fees should be reviewed as adults are paying disproportionately higher rates than other users.
- Assistance with the marketing of arts and culture programs would increase attendance and awareness of these programs in the community.
- Continue to maintain and upgrade the facilities and amenities that the Town currently has.
- Proper pickleball courts in Smithers is needed as the courts in Telkwa are cement and cause some safety concerns with participants.
- Additional aquatic space is needed to accommodate the growth of the sport in Smithers.

Photo: Town of Smithers

4. COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION SESSIONS

4.1. OVERVIEW

A series of meetings were convened with groups in Smithers who provided their perspectives on parks and recreation programs, facilities and services. Please refer to Appendix A for a list of the participating organizations.

Meetings were held both in person and virtually. While the discussions were wide-ranging and unique to every type of group, some common themes emerged. These themes and other notable points of interest are summarized as follows.

4.2. KEY THEMES

CURRENT STATE OF SPORT, RECREATION AND CULTURE GROUPS IN SMITHERS

- Many sports are growing in the community.
  - Club volleyball, pickleball, gymnastics, soccer, softball all indicated that they are experiencing significant growth or are at capacity due to space and time limitations.
- Some groups have ambitious goals for infrastructure.
  - Several groups working on similar projects / initiatives could be better coordinated amongst each other and the Town.
- There is sense of volunteer fatigue among some groups.
  - The pandemic, changes with Town staff, and the evolving nature of volunteerism are all contributing factors.
- Schools are critical to the sports and recreation system.
  - Updates to Joint Use Agreements could be beneficial.

FACILITY INSIGHTS AND PERCEIVED NEEDS

- There are some challenges with the new arena, specifically the music system, lack of wifi, minimal spectator space, and cleanliness.
- The need for indoor multi-purpose space was reiterated by many groups in the community.
- Trail use has grown significantly since the pandemic, increasing the maintenance that volunteer organizations are completing.
- There is lots of interest in additions and enhancements to Heritage Park. A spray park, pickleball courts and a better-connected trail system were noted as outdoor space priorities.
- There are a number of aging facilities (e.g., the visitor centre, the pool, etc.) that are in need of some upgrades. Some of these facilities are a touch point in the community for residents and tourists.

GENERAL PERSPECTIVES ON PARKS AND RECREATION IN THE COMMUNITY

- Riverside Campground is touted as being a gem of the community.
- Outdoor recreation is huge in Smithers and could be further leveraged.
- There is demand for more accessible and low-cost opportunities to stay active throughout the winter.
- The library is a spot where many people come for services beyond books.
  - There is a successful youth volunteer program. The space is seen as safe space for youth to hang out.
  - Accessibility challenges exist for people with disabilities.
  - The space does not properly accommodate current and popular programming such as exam proctoring, and children's programming.

TOWN RELATIONSHIP AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- High staff turnover has had an impact on Town relationships with community organizations.
- Additional clarity on the Town's role and limitations in providing parks and recreation services would be beneficial.
- Groups would benefit from better understanding facility costs and the reasoning behind decisions.
- Opportunities exist for the Town to more frequently communicate the value of parks and recreation.
- The Town could play a role in communicating to the public what groups in the community are offering so that there is less confusion/ duplication of services and programs.
- The Council decision to no longer provide the permissive tax exemption for some recreation facilities has negatively impacted some groups.

Photo: Town of Smithers

5. YOUTH SURVEY

5.1. OVERVIEW

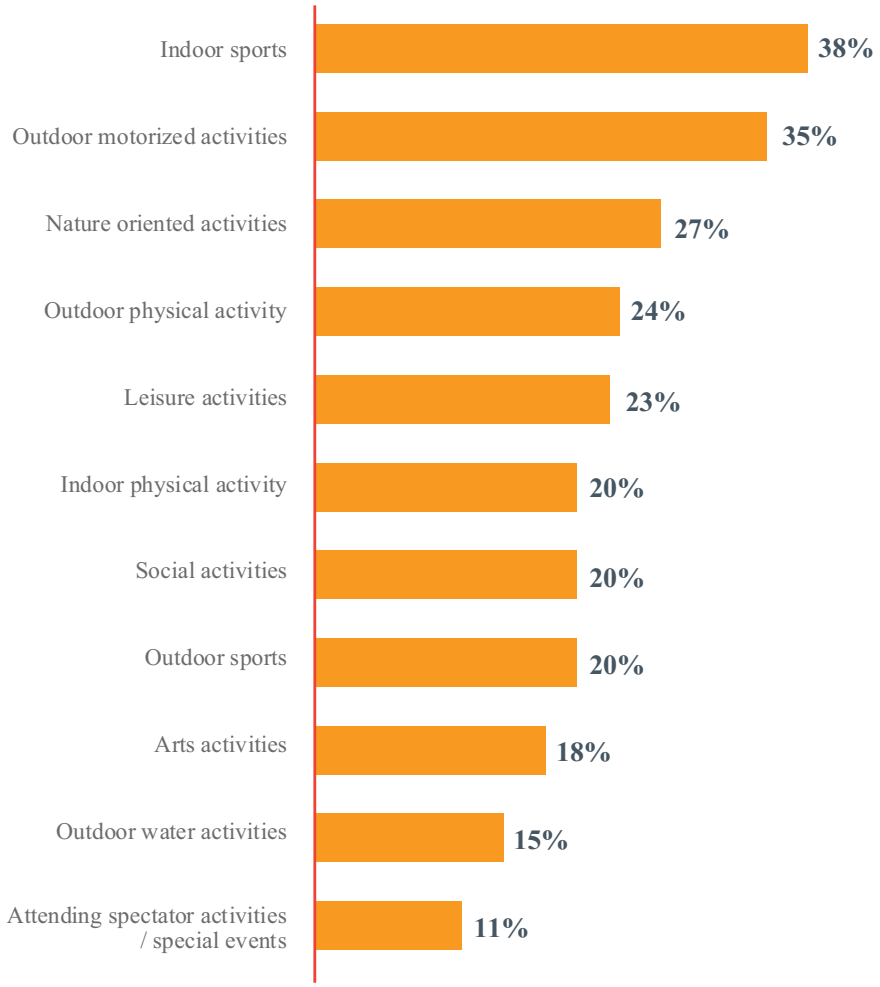
The youth survey was fielded to better understand youth perspectives on current parks and recreation opportunities as well as potential activity and facility gaps for their demographic. The survey was available through most of the fall months (September to November) and 127 responses were provided, offering a good sampling of youth perspectives on parks and recreation in Smithers.

5.2. SURVEY FINDINGS

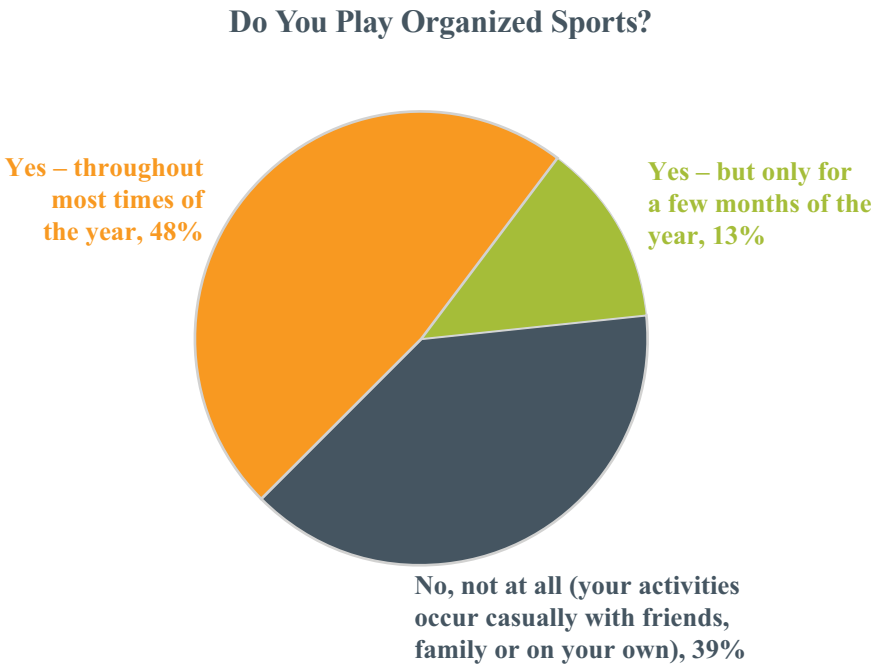
PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS AND RECREATION

The survey began by asking about the types of activities that youth are interested in. The findings reflect that youth participate in a variety of indoor and outdoor activities. Indoor sports (38%), outdoor motorized sports (35%), and nature oriented activities (27%) were indicated the most often as respondents favourite activities. Skiing and snowmobiling and nature-oriented activities such as fishing and wildlife watching as the most frequent pursuits.

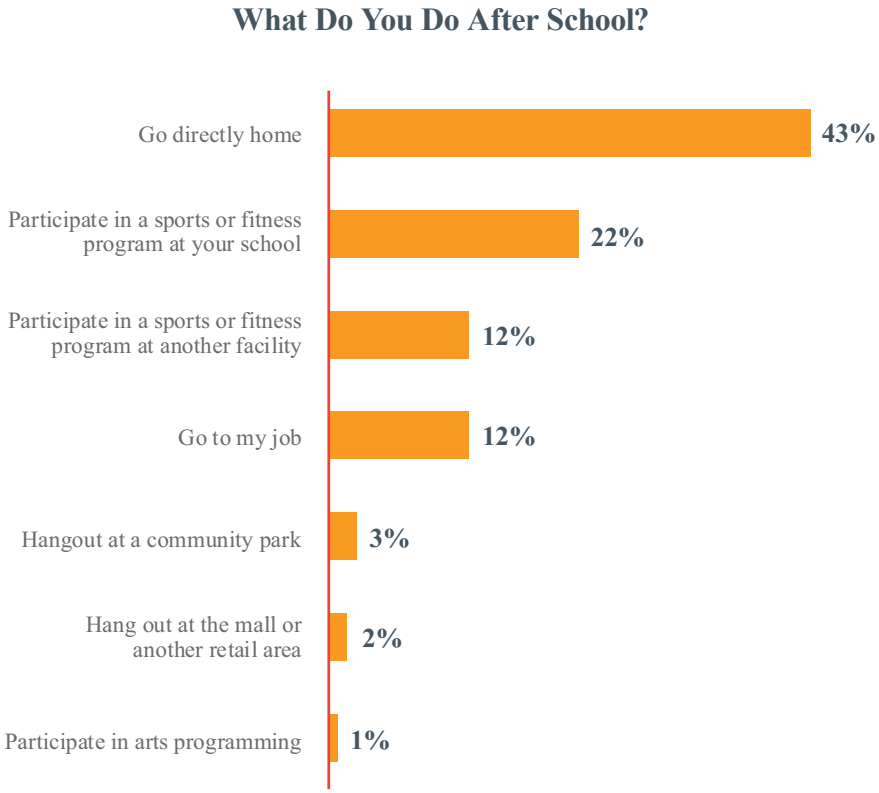
Favourite Sport and Recreation Activities



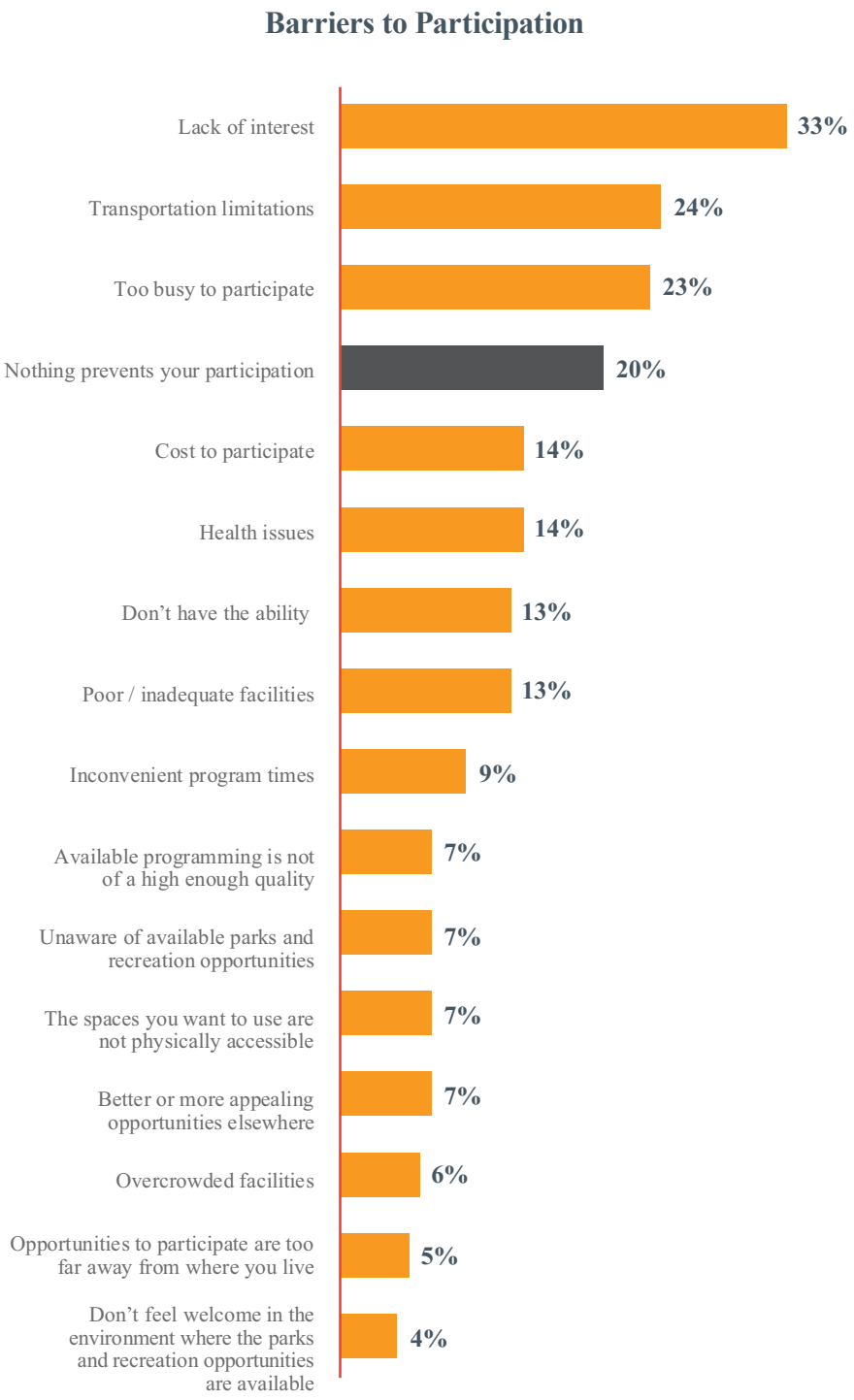
Next, youth were asked to identify the types of activities they are participating in. Approximately half (48%), indicated that they participate in organized sports through most times of the year, while approximately one-third (39%) indicated their activities occur casually with friends and family.



Youth were asked about what they do after school. 43% indicated that they go directly home, while 22% indicated that they participate in some form of sport or fitness program.

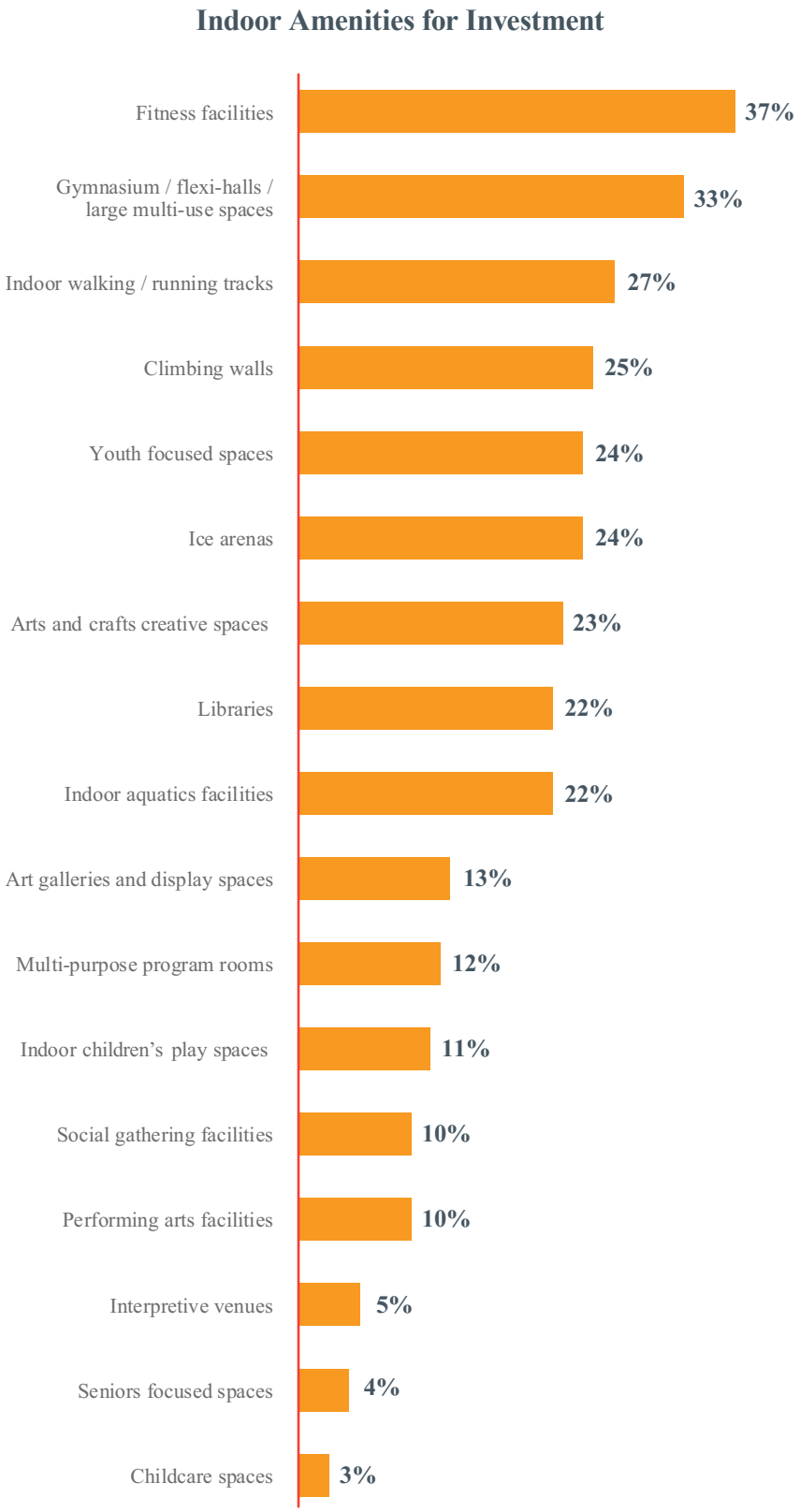


When asked about barriers to participating in parks and recreation activities, one third of youth identified that they have a lack of interest in recreation activities (33%). Almost one-quarter said they experience difficulties getting to and from recreation activities (24%), and 23% indicated that they were too busy to participate. Interestingly, 20% of respondents indicated that nothing prevents their participation.

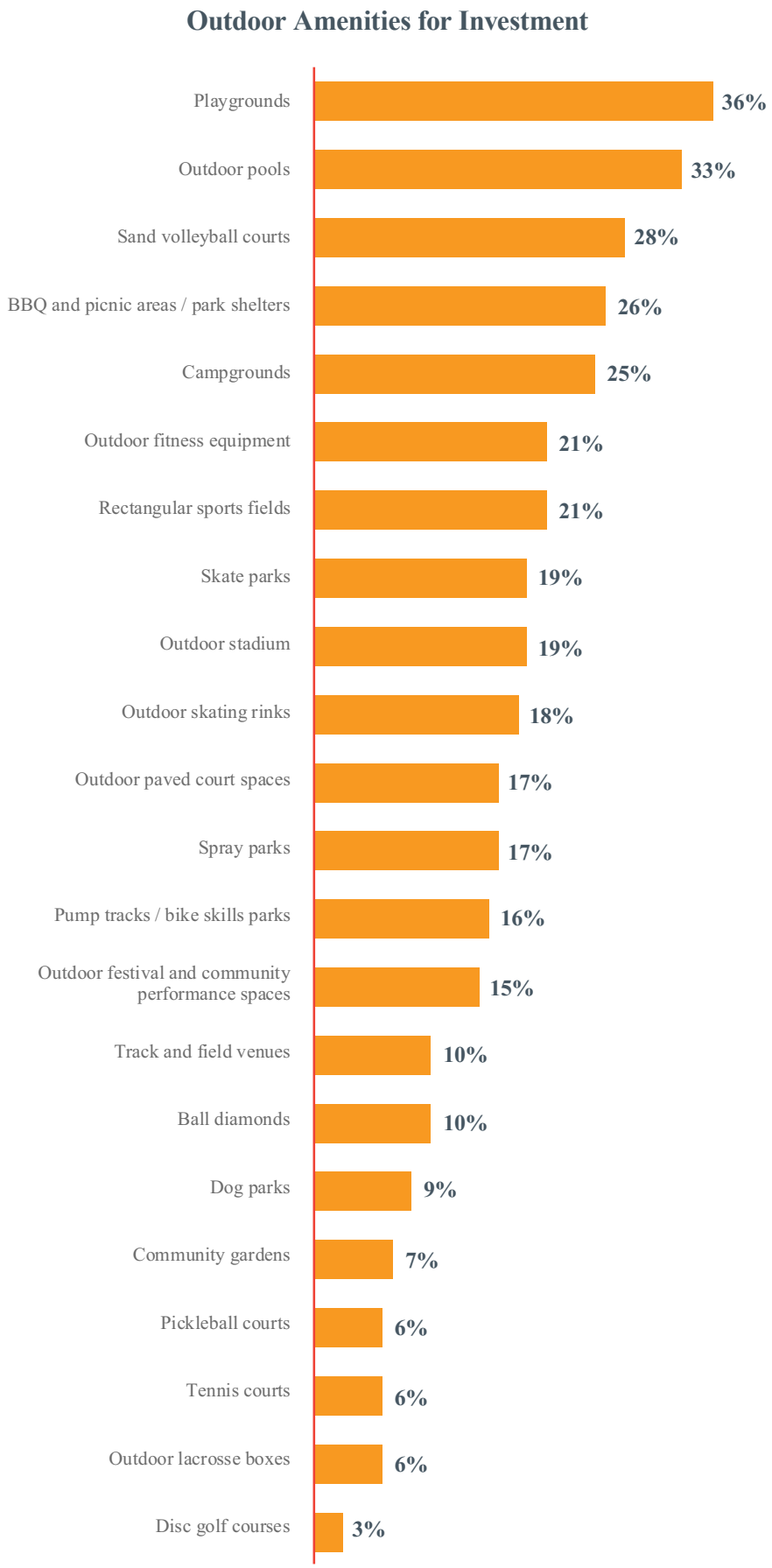


PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES AND SPACES

Youth were asked to identify up to five (5) indoor amenities that they think should be developed in Smithers. Fitness facilities (37%), large multi-use spaces (33%), indoor walking and running track (27%), climbing walls (25%) and youth focused spaces (24%) were identified as top indoor facility and amenity priorities for youth in Smithers.



Subsequently youth were asked about outdoor amenities that should be developed in Smithers. Outdoor priorities for youth included playgrounds (36%), outdoor pools (33%), sand volleyball courts (28%), BBQ and picnic areas / park shelters (26%) and campgrounds (25%).



OTHER COMMENTS

Youth respondents were able to share any other types of recreation or parks programs and or events that they would like to see more of or improved in Smithers. The following ideas / suggestions were provided.

6. PROJECT WEB PLATFORM TOOLS

6.1. OVERVIEW

The project landing page **(www.engagesmithersrecplan.ca)** hosts information on public engagement opportunities, overall project objectives, and provides status updates on the timeline for the development of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Additionally, the platform provided two engagement tools during the initial engagement phase of the project (late summer and early fall 2023); a quick polls tool and a mapping tool. Summarized below are the key findings from both tools and the spatial overview (map) of the feedback provided using the mapping tool.

6.2. RECREATION INTEREST QUICK POLLS

Four quick poll questions were posted on the project landing page:

- What season are you most engaged in recreation activities,
- Where do you most like to spend your recreation time in the summer,
- Where do you most like to spend your recreation time in the winter, and
- What do you like to most on the trails in and around Smithers in the summer.

The 23 responses provided to the quick polls reiterated the importance of recreation activity during all seasons, including use of trails, outdoor spaces, and major indoor facilities like the pool.

6.3. MAPPING TOOL

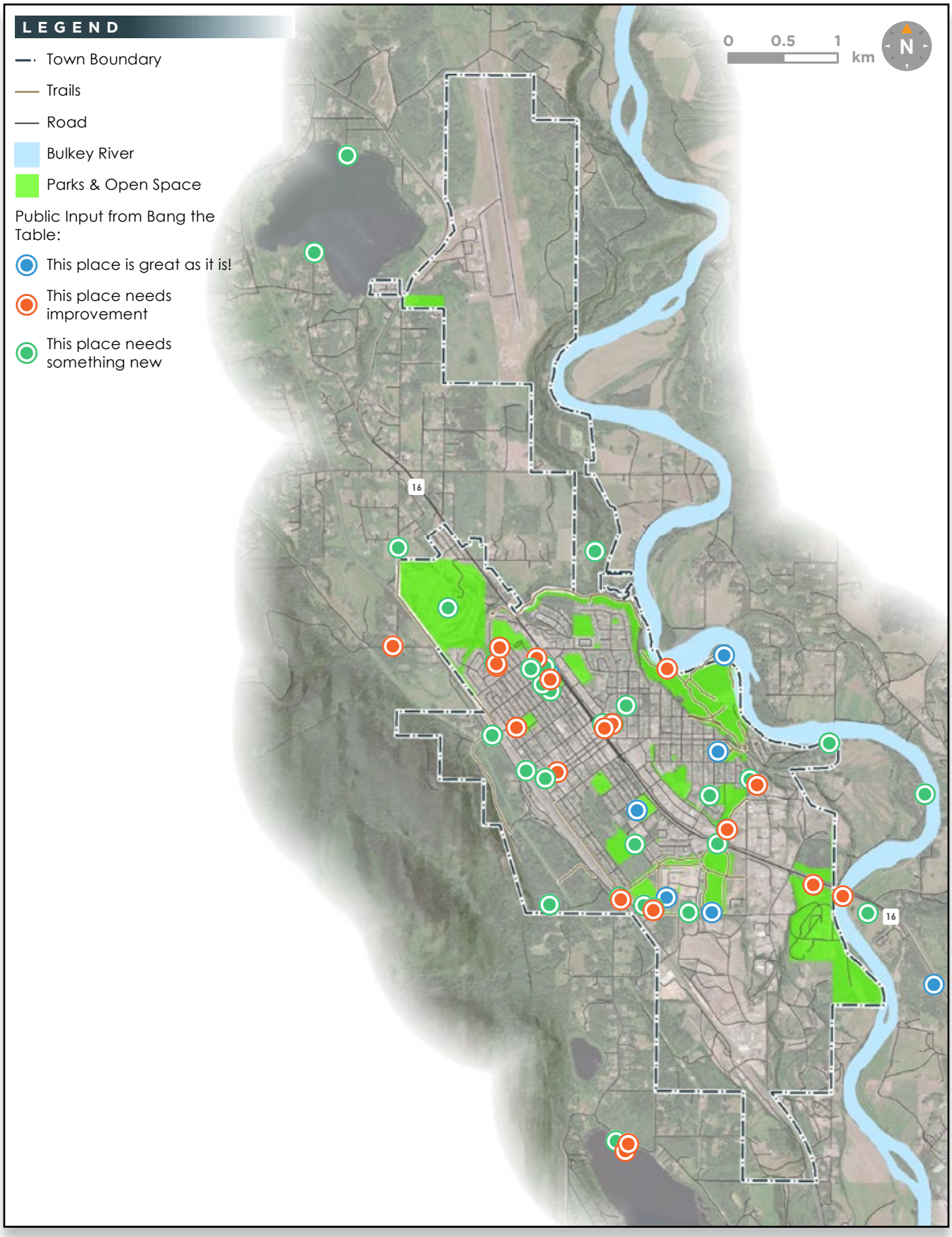
The online mapping tool was utilized to provide respondents with the opportunity to identify specific areas of interest on an interactive online map. Users were able to drop 'pins' on specific points on the map and then provide comments and suggestions for that location. 'Pins' could be dropped on the map for one of three topic areas: "This place is great as it is!", "This place needs improvement.", and "This place needs something new.". Individuals could also see comments that others had provided.

A total of 65 'pins' were dropped on the map; 8 'pins' were dropped for "This place is great as it is!", 20 'pins' were dropped for "This place needs improvement.", and 37 'pins' were dropped for "This place needs something new." Key themes from the comments provided are summarized below.

- Respondents expressed their desire to keep some green spaces green, and for the City to not cut all of the big trees down while creating a new subdivision.
- The Nordic Centre, Cycle 16, and Perimeter Trail are important community assets, and desire was expressed to keep expanding and improving on these places. A connector trail is desired for parts of both Perimeter Trail and Cycle 16 and a non-motorized bridge is needed over the railway to access Perimeter Trail more easily.
- Dogwood Park needs improvement; it is a popular park for families and is in close proximity to the school, the Perimeter Trail, and nearby neighbourhoods. Some safety concerns that were noted is the lack of lighting at the park and the presence trees that are in need of removal or trimming.
- Many of the hard surface outdoor amenities need resurfacing. The outdoor rink and tennis courts could have lines painted for pickleball.
- There is a desire for more safe and paved walking paths throughout the community. A few specific trails were noted as needing some work to be more connected.
- Several locations were suggested as potential spots for new and dedicated pickleball courts.
- More parking, public access and a dock is desired at both Kathlyn and Seymour Lake.
- A number of respondents expressed desire for Heritage Park to include a spray park, pickleball courts, and/or basketball courts.
- The bike park needs maintenance and safety improvements; some would like to see an expansion as well.

MAPPING TOOL RESULTS

The following map illustrates where the 'pins' were dropped.



APPENDICES

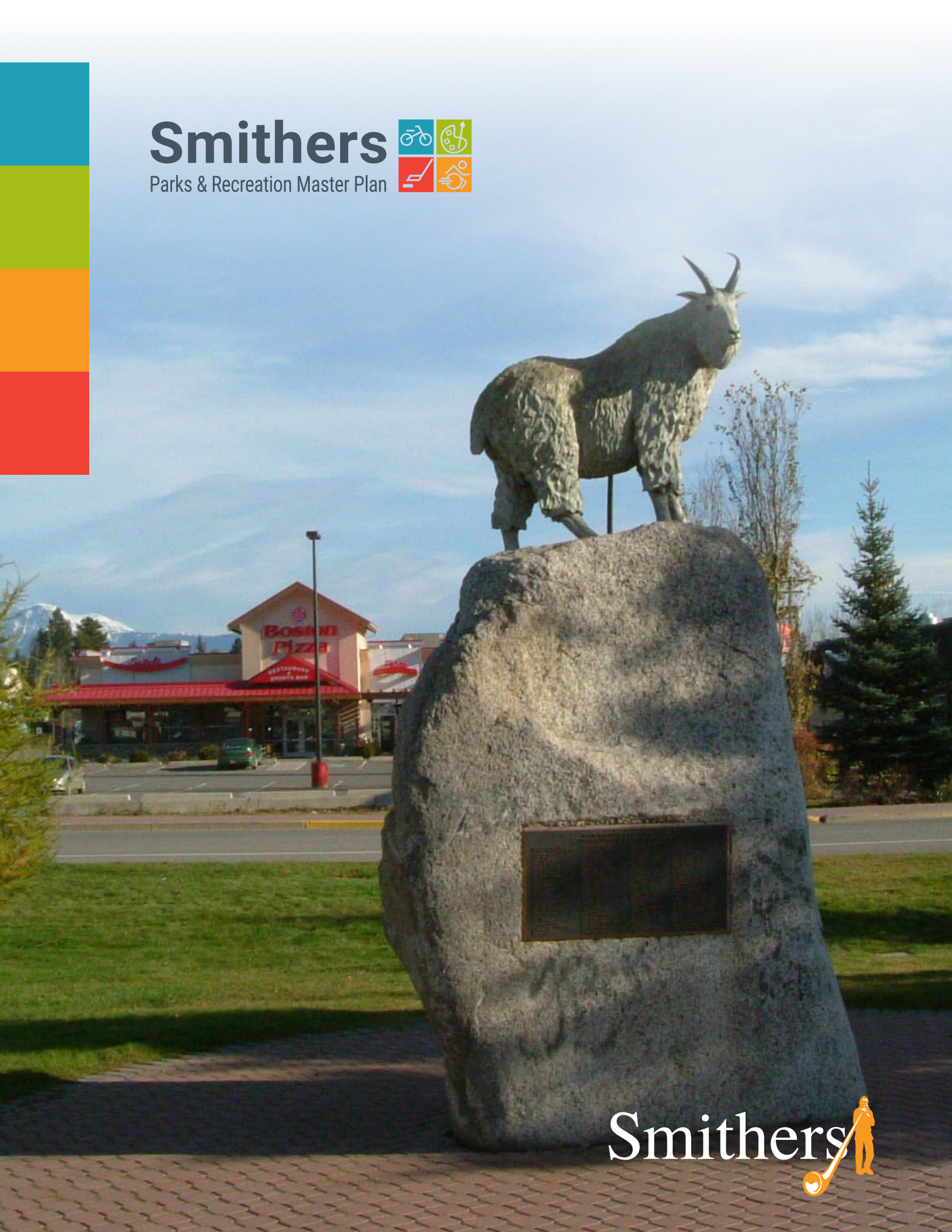
APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY GROUP / ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGEMENT PARTICIPANTS

Group	Interview	Survey
Bulkley Valley Soccer Society	✔	✔
Bulkley Valley Agricultural and Industrial Association	✔	✔
Bulkley Valley Christian School	✔	
Bulkley Valley Collaborative Learning Society (Edge)	✔	✔
Bulkley Valley Community Arts Council	✔	
Bulkley Valley Disc Golf Association	✔	
Bulkley Valley Museum		✔
Bulkley Valley Otters Swim Club		✔
Bulkley Valley Pickleball Club	✔	✔
Bulkley Valley Pony Club		✔
Bulkley Valley Regional Pool & Recreation Centre	✔	✔
Bulkley Valley Roller Derby League		✔
Bulkley Vally Youth Sport Foundation	✔	
Central Park Building Society	✔	
Chamber of Commerce	✔	
Christian Kids Hockey		✔
Coast Mountain College	✔	
Cycle 16	✔	
Ebeneezer Canadian Reformed School		✔
Morning Hockey		✔
Norther Summit Volleyball	✔	✔
Northern Edge Sport Association	✔	✔
SD 54	✔	
Smithers 7's Rugby		✔

Group	Interview	Survey
Smithers Art Gallery	✓	✓
Smithers Couples Hockey League		✓
Smithers Curling Club	✓	
Smithers Figure Skating Club	✓	✓
Smithers football Association		✓
Smithers Golf Club	✓	
Smithers Junior Softball	✓	
Smithers Minor Hockey Association	✓	
Smithers Mountain Biking Association	✓	
Smithers Oldtimers Hockey Association	✓	✓
Smithers Public Library	✓	
Smithers Rec Hockey League	✓	
Smithers Skatepark Society	✓	✓
Smithers Ultimate	✓	
Smithers Women's Hockey	✓	✓

Smithers

Parks & Recreation Master Plan



Smithers