



## Report to Council

Department: Community Services  
Division: Recreation and Culture  
Date: November 3, 2025  
Prepared by: Zak Kolasa, Acting Assistant Manager, Programs  
Report Number: Recreation and Culture-2025-03  
Subject: 2025 Update on Recreation and Culture Programs  
Number of Pages: 14

### **Recommendation(s)**

**That** Recreation and Culture Report-2025-03 entitled Update on Recreation and Culture programming, prepared by Zak Kolasa, Acting Assistant Manager, Programs dated November 3, 2025, be received.

### **Purpose**

Advise council on the Community Services Recreation and Culture Division's status, growth, and development.

### **Background and Discussion**

The Town of Essex is proud to be recognized at the municipal level for the quality and diversity of its recreation programs and events. Since the introduction of the Assistant Manager – Programs position in 2010, the Community Services Department has experienced significant growth in both the number and variety of

programs offered. To support this expansion, an additional part-time Program Coordinator position was added in 2018, allowing the department to continue meeting increasing demand.

Today, the department employs an average of 50 part-time student staff who are responsible for instructing, leading, and supervising a wide range of programs, events, and facility rentals.

The following report highlights the substantial growth in recreation programming that has taken place over the past 15 years. It includes data from all registered programs, including drop-in programs (e.g., pickleball), facility rentals, and the Clubhouse Day Camp program. Please note that this data does not include aquatic programs.

Facility	Participants 2010	Participants to date 2025	Revenue 2010	Revenue to date 2025	% Growth in Revenue
Maedel Community Centre	332	1,866	\$11,814.13	\$208,902.50	1,668%
		2,120 (Membership Attendance)			
Essex Recreation Complex	332	1,832	\$8,769.84	\$279,257.40	3,084%
McGregor/ Colchester	0	140	\$0.00	\$2,417.00	-

Harrow	0	109	\$0.00	\$5,748.75	-
--------	---	-----	--------	------------	---

Since 2010, the Clubhouse Day Camp program at the Essex Recreation Complex has seen significant growth, becoming a cornerstone of the Town of Essex’s recreation offerings. Designed to provide affordable and accessible childcare when schools are not in session, the program operates during PA Days, March Break, Christmas Break, and summer holidays.

To enhance the experience and generate additional revenue, the camp offers weekly field trips within the community and optional hot lunch services. Recent years have seen the successful introduction of swimming and piano lessons during camp hours, providing added convenience for parents and further enriching the camp experience for participants.

In 2024, the program expanded with the launch of a new section: Squad Camp. This innovative addition focuses on getting participants more actively engaged in the community and supports their personal development. Squad Camp includes:

- Skill-building courses such as Babysitter Training, Home Alone Safety, and First Aid
- Life skills programming including cooking, bicycling, and mental health and self-wellness sessions
- Community engagement experiences featuring visits from local organizations such as:
  - Windsor-Essex EMS paramedics and dispatch,
  - Essex Fire, and
  - Bike Windsor-Essex.

This new offering has not only broadened the scope of our camp programming but has also strengthened connections between youth and their community, while supporting key developmental skills in a fun and interactive environment.

The following table depicts the rising changes in participation and revenue. The participation numbers show the average per day:

Camp	Participants 2010	Participants To Date 2025	Revenue 2010	Revenue to date 2025	% Growth in Revenue
Summer Camp	281	822	\$44,933.74	\$240,997.30	436%
March Break Camp	35	60			
Holiday Camp	-	25			

The Town of Essex, through its Recreation and Culture Division, offers a wide variety of programming for residents of all ages. Program offerings are continually evaluated and updated based on seasonal demand, public feedback, program success, and instructor availability, ensuring that our services remain responsive and relevant to community needs.

Essex stands out in the region for offering unique and innovative recreation programs that are not available in neighboring municipalities. As a result, our

programs consistently attract participants from across Essex County, drawn by the variety, quality, and affordability of the offerings.

The table below outlines the diverse range of recreation programs provided by the Town of Essex.

Creative, Art, Music, Science	Sport	General and Leadership	Adult
Art Attack	All Sorts of Sports	Kids Night Out	Adult Barre
Get Messy	Badminton Level 1-2	Standard First Aid and CPR	Adult Skate Development
Parent & Tot Picasso's	Basketball Level 1-4	Chess Club	Private Harp Lessons
Parent & Tot / Preschool Music & Me	Dancing Tots & Fairy Tale Dancers	HIGH FIVE – Principles of Healthy Child Development	Private Piano Lessons
Circle Time (English & French)	Dancing Kids Levels 1-4	High Five – Quest 2	Zoomer Fit
Kids in the Kitchen workshops	Dancing Kids – Jazz, Ballet & Hip Hop	PA Day Home Alone (French & English)	Drum Fit
Private Piano Lessons	Dodgeball & Nerf Warriors	PA Day Babysitter Training (French & English)	Dance Fusion
Private Harp Lessons	Flag football	PA Day My Safe Life	Sip and Paint
Coding	Floor Hockey Level 1-3	Nintendo Switch League	Stroller Fit
Cooking Kids: Bakers	Totnastics Jr and Sr	Magic the Gathering	Crochet Club
Cooking Kids: Brunch	Gymnastics Level 1-4 (1:4 & 1:8 Ratios)	Dungeons & Dragons	Pickleball (Drop in & Workshops)
Cooking Kids: Lil' Chefs	Private Gymnastics	Pokémon Draft League	Drop-in Roller Skating

Homework: Help	Indoor Soccer Level 1-3	Bites with the bunny	Downton Tea Party
STEM: Explorers	Private Skating	Teddy Bear Picnic	ZEALL
Lil Scientists	Learn to Skate	Halloween Spooktacular	Basketball League
Lego Builders	Youth Baseball & T-Ball	Breakfast with Santa	Pickleball League
Crochet Club	Youth Fit Club	Noon Years Eve Party	Volleyball League
Drop in Stay & Play	Youth Pickleball & Tennis	Bike Safety Training	Yoga
Escape Artists	Youth Volleyball		
	Drop in Open Gym		

The Recreation and Culture Division continues to experience increased demand for its diverse and engaging birthday party packages. These themed parties have become a popular option for families seeking memorable, well-organized celebrations, supported by our staff and facility amenities.

We currently offer a wide variety of themed party options, including:

- **Aquatic Themes:** Private Swimmer, Recreation Swimmer
- **Ice Theme:** Recreation Skater
- **Collaborative Theme:** Firefighter (in partnership with Essex Fire)
- **Action Themes:** Nerf, Gamer, Sport, Escape Room
- **Creative & Educational Themes:** Arty Party, Little Scientists, Wizards and Wonders, Lego
- **Imaginative Play Themes:** Pirate, Princess, Superhero, Moana Luau, Spa, Lil Chefs

- **Early Childhood Themes:** Totnastics, Soft Play Activity

The department has also strengthened partnerships with other Town divisions and local suppliers, which has allowed us to expand both the variety and quality of our offerings. These parties are now available across eight different Town facilities, making them accessible and convenient for families across the community:

- Ward 1 – Essex Recreation Complex/Maedel Community Centre/Essex Centre Sports Complex/Essex Fire Station #1
- Ward 2 - McGregor Community Centre/Fire Station #2
- Ward 3- Harrow and Colchester South Recreation Centre
- Ward 4 - Colchester Community Centre

The table below highlights the year-over-year growth in birthday party bookings, demonstrating the continued success and appeal of this program area.

	2017 Bookings	Booked To Date 2025	% Growth in Revenue
Party Bookings	57	107	88%

Since 2017, the Town of Essex has seen a significant increase in facility rentals across all available locations. This growth reflects the community’s increasing demand for accessible, well-managed spaces for events, meetings, and recreational activities.

All facility rentals are fully staffed by Recreation personnel, ensuring smooth operations, high service standards, and a positive user experience for all rental clients.

The table below outlines the year-over-year growth in both bookings and associated revenue, showcasing the vital role facility rentals play in supporting the department’s operations and community engagement.

Facility	Revenue 2017	Revenue To date 2025	% Growth in Revenue
Maedel Community Centre	\$9,365.58	\$53,194.78	486%
Essex Recreation Complex	\$20,949.54	\$38,103.40	82%
McGregor Community Centre	\$2,214.59	\$9,738.26	340%
Colchester Community Centre	\$3,590.13*	\$9,943.75	177%

\*2018 was first year of reporting available

Community events have become a key area of growth and engagement for the Recreation and Culture Division. Each year, we continue to expand our offerings by exploring new event opportunities—either independently or in collaboration with

community partners—while also enhancing our ongoing annual events and celebrations.

All events are offered free of charge or at a significantly reduced cost to ensure accessibility for all residents. This is made possible through strong partnerships and sponsorships from organizations such as the Essex BIA, ACT Committee, Pathway to Potential, In Motion, SWARG, and others.

The table below outlines the various events and celebrations that are led by, or hosted in collaboration with, the Recreation and Culture Division. These events help foster a sense of community, encourage active living, and promote local pride.

Outdoor Movie Nights	Tiny Tots Halloween Parade	Legacy Tree Planting	Breakfast with Santa
Essex Street fest	Communities in Bloom	Parades (Christmas, Fun Fest, Harrow Fair)	Family Day Celebrations
Explore the Shore	Inauguration	Essex Fire Appreciation Dinner	Fun Fest Kids Zone
Volunteer Appreciation Dinner	June is Parks and Rec Month events	In Motion week events	Eclipse Viewing Event
Pumpkin Parade	Downtown Tea Party	Sidewalk Astronomy	Teddy Bear Picnic
Bites with the Bunny	Glow Ride	Cogeco Kids Bike Safety Event	Day Camp Kick Off

Halloween Family Night	Community Clean up	Staff Christmas Event	Tune up the Parks
Mural Unveilings	Essex Holiday Lights	Soap Box Derby	Community Bike Rides

The Town of Essex employs a multi-faceted promotional strategy to ensure residents are well-informed about available programs and events. A combination of print, digital, and community-based outreach is used to reach residents of all ages and demographics.

Key promotional methods include:

- **Program Postcards:** Distributed to every household in the Town of Essex approximately six times per year, these postcards provide a full listing of seasonal programs and events.
- **Digital Promotion:**
  - Daily social media updates to engage the community and highlight upcoming offerings
  - Regular updates on the Town of Essex website
- **On-site Promotion:**
  - Print materials displayed throughout recreation facilities
  - Use of indoor and outdoor LED signage to promote upcoming events and registration dates
- **Community Partnerships:**
  - Information is shared through local school boards, Essex County Libraries, and EarlyON Centres to reach families and students
- **Direct Participant Engagement:**

- Program participants receive printed handouts, promotional materials, and occasionally free passes to encourage continued participation

This comprehensive and proactive approach to promotion ensures that residents are aware of and able to access the diverse recreation opportunities available throughout the year.

The Town of Essex's recreation programs and events continue to receive consistently positive feedback from participants. Much of the growing popularity of our programs can be attributed to the high-quality experiences delivered by our trained staff, as well as our commitment to continuous improvement.

To ensure our offerings remain responsive to community needs, we regularly seek input through in-session feedback. These comments help us identify strengths, areas for improvement, and new opportunities for programming that align with resident interests and preferences.

- *“Instructor demonstrates expertise in the information he is teaching; delivers genuine praise and encouragement of students' efforts; and is a kind and considerate coach!”*
- *“The piano lessons are our first experience with piano, and our son really looks forward to classes every week and practices to show his skills. Structure is very conducive to his experience level and appropriately challenges him as he progresses.”*
- *“Everything we have done in Essex has been amazing for our children. The instructors are always great with children. “*
- *“Both of these girls are compassionate with their participants. They use everyone's names and always remind us about important information. The Totnastics class is a great opportunity to explore movement.”*

As the Town of Essex's recreation programming continues to grow, several challenges have emerged—particularly in the areas of staff development, retention, mentorship, and maintaining consistency in program quality.

Most of our program and event staff are youth and student employees, whose average tenure ranges from 1 to 3 years. This high turnover necessitates triannual hiring cycles to ensure we maintain a trained and capable workforce to meet ongoing program needs. These staff members require extensive onboarding, ongoing mentorship, and regular performance evaluation to meet departmental service standards.

All program leaders participate in sessional training sessions and are evaluated using the HIGH FIVE® QUEST 2 tool, a recognized standard for assessing program quality and staff performance. However, as programming and staffing demands have grown, we have observed a decline in overall quality metrics as captured through QUEST 2 evaluations, which are primarily conducted by the Program Coordinator.

We've reached a point where our programs have continued to grow, but our resources have remained the same. Each year, we've demonstrated increases in revenue, program options, more part time staffing at more locations, all without additional support. As noted above, we have expanded programming in Harrow to three days per week in two locations, we have expanded birthday party options from two facilities to eight, and we have expanded seasonal special events to three centres with multiple sittings.

At this stage, our capacity is fully utilized, and it will be challenging to take on more without new resources to allow us to:

- Support consistent mentorship and development of youth staff
- Ensure regular and thorough program evaluations
- Maintain quality benchmarks as set by HIGH FIVE® standards
- Sustain the growth trajectory of our programs without compromising service quality

The Recreation and Culture Division strives to deliver safe, high-quality, and engaging programs while meeting the expanding needs of our growing community. Should Council wish to see the services expanded upon, additional resources would be required.

### **Financial Impact**

All costs related to Culture and Recreation programs, activities, and special events are included and approved within the 2025 budget.

### **Consultations**

Jake Morassut, Director, Community Services

Kate Giurissevich, Chief Administrative Officer

## **Link to Strategic Priorities**

- Embrace asset management best practices to build, maintain, and continuously improve our municipally owned infrastructure.
- Leverage our Town's competitive advantages to promote jobs and economic investment.
- Take care of our natural environment and strengthen the sense of belonging to everyone who makes Essex "home".
- Deliver friendly customer service in an efficient, effective, and transparent manner while providing an exceptional working environment for our employees.
- Build corporate-level and community-level climate resilience through community engagement and partnership and corporate objectives.

## Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Update on Recreation and Culture Programs - Recreation and Culture-2025-03.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Oct 29, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:



**Jake Morassut, Director, Community Services - Oct 28, 2025 - 2:32 PM**



**Kate Giurissevich, Chief Administrative Officer - Oct 29, 2025 - 9:59 AM**