



# The Corporation of the Town of Milton

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Report To: Council

From: Doug Sampano, Commissioner, Community Services

Date: June 23, 2025

Report No: COMS-007-25

Subject: Community Use of School Gymnasium Space

**Recommendation:** THAT COMS-007-25 be received for information.

AND THAT Council authorize staff to proceed with the steps necessary to implement a pilot project of Town programs in school gyms as described in this report.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- As a result of a Notice of Motion - Resolution 189-24 at the December 9, 2024 Council Meeting, staff were asked to review the following and report back to Council by June 2025:
  - Identification of any potential underutilized gym times and consideration for the demand for space by various user types (community groups, leagues, individual users, etc.).
  - Review of various incentive and discount options (off-peak, bulk booking, etc.).
  - Consideration for Town subsidization of School Board Fees, including eligibility requirements and the potential for varying levels of financial support.
  - Identification of any potential sponsorship programs via private business or grant programs via the Provincial or Federal governments that may be available to reduce costs for residents.
  - Consideration of the administrative and operational implications of the alternatives assessed, including identification of any opportunities that may promote expanded gym space utilization (example - booking system enhancements).
  - Review of peer municipalities, including identification of any similar existing programs.
  - Consideration for utilizing a pilot program to introduce any changes.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- School gymnasiums are well-utilized on weeknights but are generally underutilized on weekends due to the cost recovery model, which is necessary for school boards to meet their financial responsibilities but can be cost-prohibitive to some user groups.
- As directed by the Notice of Motion, staff have met with school board officials to identify opportunities for the Town and school boards to increase utilization of school gym space.
- Staff recommend a nine (9) month pilot project beginning in the fall of 2025 on a weekend day in one (1) high school gymnasium for high demand Town drop-in and registered programs. The pilot will assess both the financial feasibility of these programs in schools and the impact on overall participation in recreational sport opportunities for the community.
- The total cost of offering the program in one high school for a nine-month period is approximately \$51,000 which is expected to be recovered through registration fees such that the program will be financially net neutral throughout the pilot.
- If financial and participation targets are achieved during the pilot, staff will explore opportunities to expand the program into additional school gymnasiums on weekends.
- Staff do not recommend subsidizing school board rental fees due to the potential for significant cost impacts and to ensure a fair and equitable approach across all facility types.

## REPORT

### Background

As Milton's population continues to grow, so too does the demand for access to recreational spaces, with gymnasiums being one of the largest current supply and demand challenges for indoor space.

While the Town's gymnasium inventory has not changed since 2015, there have been 12 gymnasiums added to Milton's overall inventory through the development of new schools between 2015 and 2025. Use of school gym spaces is well-utilized by community groups and organizations on weekday evenings but generally remains available on weekends as there are additional charges associated with weekend use at schools that are cost-prohibitive to many user groups.

## Background

The Town's registered children and youth sports programs continue to see high demand for registration, with the largest limiting factor to adding additional programs being gym availability at times that are conducive for children and youth to participate in programs (e.g. weeknights and weekends). Table 1, below, demonstrates the current unmet demand that exists for registered children and youth sports programs in the fall and winter months.

**Table 1 - Registered Children and Youth Sports Programs Demand**

Session	Registered Total	Waitlisted Total
Fall 2023	291	282
Winter 2024	332	415
Fall 2024	355	231
Winter 2025	382	228
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,360</b>	<b>1,156</b>

Similarly, the Town's drop-in sports programs also face high demand on evenings and weekends. Table 2, below, represents the total number of drop-in sports programs offered on weekends in the fall and winter months and the total weekend participation in those programs. While waitlists are not maintained for drop-in programs, the high demand is demonstrated in a variety of ways, including the speed at which drop-in programs "sell-out" (e.g. often within minutes of the pre-registration window opening).

**Table 2 - Drop-in Sports Programs and Participation (Saturdays and Sundays)**

Session	Programs	Participants
Fall 2023	353	7,151
Winter 2024	217	4,798
Fall 2024	417	7,864
Winter 2025	275	5,791
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,262</b>	<b>25,604</b>

## Discussion

School gymnasiums represent a significant portion of available indoor recreation space in Milton. Both the Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) and the Halton District School Board (HDSB) collectively maintain the largest inventory of gymnasiums in the community. These spaces are in high demand during weeknights, with rental rates closely aligned with the Town's own fees—making them an accessible and well-utilized option for community groups.

However, weekend rental rates for school gymnasiums are higher due to added custodial costs since overtime rates apply on weekends for scheduled board staff. This places a financial strain on groups delivering low-cost, recreational programming. As a result, weekend access to school facilities is not always a viable option.

To support affordable and consistent community access to public facilities, the four municipalities within Halton Region—Milton, Oakville, Burlington, and Halton Hills—participate in a Reciprocal Agreement (RA) with both school boards. This agreement is designed to minimize user fees for recognized groups, including municipal departments, affiliated sports clubs, and nonprofit community organizations. Rates under the RA are partially subsidized by the provincial Community Use of Schools grant, ensuring a base level of affordability.

While all four municipalities are subject to the same posted rates, the City of Burlington has implemented a “blended rate” model—charging more for weeknight rentals and less on weekends. This approach improves weekend accessibility but shifts the cost burden to groups booking during the week. In contrast, Milton, Oakville, and Halton Hills apply the board set RA rates for both weeknight and weekend use.

Milton staff do not recommend adopting a blended rate model, as most community groups rely heavily on weeknight bookings. Introducing higher weekday fees would present a financial hardship to many organizations.

Staff also do not recommend further subsidization of weekend gymnasium fees. Depending on the amount of gym time that would be subject to subsidization, initial analysis shows the potential for significant cost implications to the tax rate. Consideration would also need to be given to ensure a fair and equitable approach across all facility types (Town owned or third party) where excess capacity may exist, if any further subsidization were considered.

Many community groups independently pursue sponsorships, fundraising, and grant opportunities to offset rental costs. The Town regularly supports these efforts by providing

## Discussion

letters of endorsement for grant applications or partnering on initiatives that enhance facility access. The Town's Community Fund grant program is one such avenue available to eligible organizations seeking user fee support. Staff are not aware of additional funding programs currently but remain committed to working collaboratively with groups that bring forward innovative access or enhancement proposals.

To address current barriers and explore new opportunities for access, Town staff have engaged in discussions with school board representatives. These conversations have yielded positive outcomes—most notably, a commitment from the HCDSB to continue offering a bulk rate discount for qualifying weekend rentals. Under this arrangement, groups that book at least 250 hours of gym time across 34 weeks (with each rental date spanning a minimum of 9 hours) can benefit from a reduced custodial rate and the elimination of the standard three-hour weekend charge.

While this bulk rate presents a significant cost-saving opportunity, the high minimum hours threshold makes it unattainable for many user groups offering single-sport or seasonal programming. However, the Town, with its diverse program offerings, scheduling flexibility, and detailed participation and waitlist data, is well-positioned to take advantage of this model.

In response, staff have developed a pilot program plan to utilize a high school double gymnasium on weekends. The proposed offerings include a blend of children and youth development programs (e.g. Move More Sports, Skills and Drills Volleyball) and adult drop-in opportunities (e.g. badminton, pickleball, volleyball). This initiative aims to expand capacity in high-demand programs, particularly those focused on building physical literacy and movement skills in children and youth.

Staff recommend launching a nine-month pilot project to evaluate the demand and financial sustainability of delivering Town-run recreational programming in school facilities on weekends. If the pilot demonstrates positive results, staff will explore options to scale up the initiative.



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## Financial Impact

The cost to operate this program for the next nine months is approximately \$51,000. Given the current demand it is reasonable to assume maximum participation in the program, in which case the registration fees are expected to fully offset the cost of the program during the pilot phase.

Respectfully submitted,

Doug Sampano  
Commissioner, Community Services

For questions, please contact: Christina Frizzell  
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## Attachments

None

Approved by CAO  
Andrew M. Siltala  
Chief Administrative Officer

## Recognition of Traditional Lands

The Town of Milton resides on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. We also recognize the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee people. The Town of Milton shares this land and the responsibility for the water, food and resources. We stand as allies with the First Nations as stewards of these lands.