

Edmonton Communities' Deep Dive

**Joint Position to Edmonton City Council
From the Communities Surrounding**

**Scona Pool, Oliver Pool, Eastglen Pool
+
Tipton Arena, Oliver Arena**

Fall Supplemental Budget 2020

Respectfully Submitted November 30, 2020

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Introduction

Communities surrounding Scona Pool, Oliver Pool and Eastglen Pool, as well as Tipton Arena Oliver Arena have come together to work on the issue of yet another proposed closure to these facilities. We believe that there is a solution and that by working together, we can help Edmonton City Council see both a short and long term path forward.

This document was created by representatives from Queen Alexandra Community League, Oliver Community League, Bellevue Community League, and Highlands Community League. Edmonton Sport Council also contributed comments to the document and supports our message.

Please note that over the years several organizations have helped to keep these public amenities open and not all organizations who have been involved were able to confirm support of this document at time of publishing, 8:30 am on November 30, 2020. We will provide an updated list to Edmonton City Council at the December 3, 2020 public hearing on the budget.

Organizations and individuals that have confirmed support for the contents of this joint statement include:

- **Community Leagues**
 - Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues
 - Friends of Scona Rec (a committee of the Central Area Council of Community Leagues)
 - Bellevue Community League
 - Highlands Community League
 - Oliver Community League
 - Queen Alexandra Community League
 - Westmount Community League
- **School Organizations, Individuals**
 - Our Lady Mount Carmel School Fundraising Society
 - Michael Janz, Public School Trustee
 - Trisha Estabrooks, Public School Trustee
- **Area Businesses**
 - River City Recreation, Scona Pool Operator
 - Bryan McClean, co-owner of Bryan & Allison's No Frills
 - Dr. Joel Semeniuk, Chickadee Pediatrics and Dermatology
- **Other Organizations**
 - Edmonton Sport Council

Questions about the document can be directed to Julie Kusiek, President of Queen Alexandra Community League, at president@qacl.ca or via Twitter [@JulieKusiek](https://twitter.com/JulieKusiek).

Background

Scona Pool / Rollie Miles Rec Centre

Scona Pool has been threatened for closure several times throughout the last 30 years and was closed for a few months in 2009. Due to community pressure, it was re-opened. Closure was debated again in 2010, 2011 and in 2012 it was put back into the City's base operating budget.

During these years, community members ask that Scona Pool be rehabilitated. The city administration has confirmed that Scona Pool cannot be rehabilitated and one day it will close.

In 2013, the city began consultation on Rollie Miles District Park Renewal, which is the site of Strathcona High School and Scona Pool. This consultation initially excluded a replacement aquatic facility. The community rejected that work and asked that the city delay parkland renewal until a small scale recreation centre could be made part of the plan. Through much community effort and organizing, the Rollie Miles District Masterplan (approved in 2016) now includes a Functional Program and Business Case for Rollie Miles Rec Centre (approved in 2018).

From 2018-2020 community members have been working with city administration on alternative financing options that will propel Rollie Miles Rec Centre forward as a pilot for a new recreation model for Edmonton - both in terms of size, and also in terms of financing the construction, maintenance and operations of future recreation/leisure facilities throughout Edmonton's new 15-minute districts.

Design for Rollie Miles has not yet been approved (\$2.3 million) and construction is estimated at \$76 million. You can find more details on this journey [here](#), or by watching the [YouTube here](#).

Oliver

The Oliver community has almost 20,000 residents, and will grow to 40,000. Our community is already underserved by City amenities at the current population.

Recreation planning has not been completed in Oliver. The Reimagine Oliver Wellness (Oliver Spaces and Places) project is currently underway and the final report will not be available until 2021. Making any decisions about recreation facilities prior to delivery and acceptance of the recommendations from this project is not prudent.

The Oliver Community League recently started a recreation advocacy committee. We will be mapping recreation assets within and in the vicinity of the community, including non-profit facilities, commercial businesses, and residential building amenities. This information is critical to understand the real recreation deficit experienced by our residents.

Eastglen Leisure Centre

Four times in the last 5 years, the City of Edmonton has threatened to close Eastglen Leisure Centre. The first happened in 2015, then again in 2018, and again in 2019. In 2020, it's happening now during a pandemic and attached to a council agenda loaded with budget cuts.

The Eastglen pool offers health benefits unavailable to citizens if a closure occurred. Some examples are Saltwater Therapeutic Swimming, a sense of community for mental well being for patrons, with several examples of patrons who will require expensive knee surgery or other medical intervention if they are unable to access the facility for their health needs.

The relatively low cost to maintain the facility falls far below the cost of negative health implications that would burden both the City and Province if the community becomes neglected and the facility closes.

The City has a [long-term strategy](#) (p. 54) to make Edmonton more walkable, including having amenities and work available within a 15-minute walk from your home.

The City's recent proposal is perplexing, considering the City was consulting and engaging the community until September. Until now, the community has not been involved or consulted in this new closure proposal.

Tough Times Call for Creativity

Tough times call for creativity. It also calls for both short and long term thinking.

There is no doubt that Edmonton has been dealt a difficult hand with reduced municipal funding and the rise of COVID. However, Edmontonians need their City to be there for them now more than ever. These Fall 2020 budget adjustments are about how we will continue to make progress on our collective vision for the future of Edmonton as outlined in the City Plan, allowing us to emerge from COVID with strength, while being mindful of what's in front of us now. Here is how we'd like to see Edmonton City Council move forward on the Scona Pool, Oliver Outdoor Pool, Eastglen Pool, Rollie Miles Rec Centre files, as well as Tipton and Oliver arenas. It includes both short term and long term considerations.

Focus in short term:

- 1) **Continue to operate Scona Pool, Oliver Pool and Eastglen Pool. These pools are important to maintain the vibrancy in their communities and support the goal of 15 minute communities in the City Plan.**
- 2) **Communities need transparency in City decision-making. We need access to user numbers to build support these community assets.**
- 3) **Core neighbourhoods need reinvestment as populations increase with densification.**
- 4) **The City requires a new recreation model and moving Rollie Miles Rec Centre to next steps represents an opportunity to test that change in philosophy - from large mega centres to smaller locally focused facilities, funded through a variety of alternative mechanisms.**
- 5) **While all facilities are important, our priority is to keep pools open.**

Short Term 1: Continue to operate Scona Pool, Oliver Outdoor Pool and Eastglen Pool. These pools are important to maintain the vibrancy in their communities and support the goal of 15 minute communities in the City Plan.

- The Oliver community is in the early stages of recreation planning. Decisions on recreation facilities in Oliver should not be made until recreation planning is complete.
- Scona Pool continues to serve as an important community meeting space and safe, welcoming place for those with special needs. It should remain open until Rollie Miles Rec Centre is fully in operation.
- Eastglen Pool serves a unique population in Edmonton looking for a salt water pool. This facility serves not only the local population, but also those with this special health request.
- Several area businesses rely on the local neighbourhood residents. It is a huge asset to have a recreation centre nearby in walkable neighbourhoods.

Short Term 2: Communities need transparency in City decision-making. We need access to user numbers to support these community assets.

- Communities have repeatedly asked for transparency around the threshold of acceptable user numbers and access to user data. We require this information on an ongoing basis so that we can be clear about what the expectations are and can monitor any issues related to decreased attendance.
- Pool use data should be calibrated by hours of operation and capacity.
 - Oliver - On nice weather days, the outdoor pool is at full capacity.

- Scona - User numbers have been reported and interpreted differently, depending on the report on hand (see Appendix 1). How user data is collected and reported should be clarified and consistent.
- All - An adjustment factor should be considered when comparing user numbers at these older facilities to newer “comparable” facilities.
- Whittling this decision down to usage numbers results in the City making decisions that work in direct contradiction to larger strategic goals and against the needs of those in our society who should be afforded more support.

Short Term 3: Core neighbourhoods need reinvestment as populations increase with densification.

- With densification come smaller homes and loss of private backyards. This makes public amenities a critical component of liveable neighbourhoods.
 - Please see Appendix 1 for information on neighbourhood density changes, tax uplift, and changes in transportation around the Scona Pool/Rollie Miles area.
 - Oliver is the most populous community with the highest density (residences per square kilometre). It also has a significant commercial tax base. An annual subsidy of \$200,000 to operate Oliver Pool is minimal compared to property tax collection.
 - The City of Edmonton and the Oliver Community League have independently determined that the population of Oliver will grow to 40,000 residents in the next 20 years.
 - More than 99% of Oliver residents live in apartments, making access to recreation amenities and open spaces even more crucial.
- Closing recreation facilities in core neighbourhoods creates an unnecessary tension between neighbourhoods, which Edmonton City Council has the power to diffuse.
- Edmonton is getting to a place of maturity that it can no longer be assumed everyone has access to a private motor vehicle. This is especially the case for densely populated core communities. Amenities must be reasonably accessible in terms of time and effort by pedestrians, bikes and those taking public transit.
- Politicians need to do the difficult work in explaining to Edmontonians living in low density neighbourhoods that their community is, in part, subsidized by property taxes collected from those who live in the core. They need to explain that a minute property tax increase will keep the core neighbourhoods liveable and vibrant. And through this small increase, they are ensuring that their own suburban neighbourhoods’ amenities are well-supported by the density, vibrancy, and efficiency of the core. Or they need to explain that this cut needs to come from elsewhere, if we really are tied to a 0% increase.

Short Term 4: The City requires a new recreation model that reflects the city's commitment to building 15-minute communities. For example, Rollie Miles Rec Centre represents an opportunity to pilot both a small scale model for local recreation in addition to alternative financing for construction, operations and maintenance.

- The City of Edmonton needs a new model for recreation centres. Rollie Miles Recreation Centre will pilot that model in several important ways:
 - Small scale (size), reducing cost and overall footprint,
 - Alternative financing for construction, maintenance and operations,
 - Fits with City Plan, 15 minute district idea,
 - Fits with active transportation model - smaller facilities closer to where people live mean they can walk, bike, roll or bus to where they need to go more easily, and
 - Fits with Energy Transition Strategy - building a new facility that is smaller can be energy efficient and encourage zero emissions ways for users to travel to/from the facility.
- Although there will need to be more of these recreation facilities built across the core, once developed they will support denser communities that are more sustainable from a servicing and infrastructure perspective.
 - The limitations placed on city finances require us to think differently about how we provide recreation services.
 - We need to be thinking strategically about how we set ourselves up for easier budget decisions in the future. Closing these facilities in the core works against us redeveloping our city to be more efficient, sustainable, and less expensive for the taxpayer. Supporting facilities like these helps to ensure we become a city that will provide more equitable opportunities for recreation.

Short Term 5: While all facilities are important, our priority is to keep pools open.

- It is our position that no facilities, including the three aquatic centres and Tipton and Oliver arenas, should be slated for closure until after it is determined that either:
 - a) They will be repurposed for community use with capital funding attached to that conversion, or
 - b) That they will be demolished with capital funding attached to completing that task.
- Oliver Arena mainly serves groups coming from outside the community.
 - Community skate time for Oliver residents is only provided at the Downtown Community Arena.
- If closed, the footprint of the Oliver Arena should be reserved to accommodate a new community hub for Oliver residents.
- Public skating and skating lessons offered at Tipton Arena remain important to the community, and in particular those with special needs (ex: families that include a child with some forms of autism).

- Larger arenas are unsuitable for some of these families due to noise and other factors. The single sheet of ice at Tipton Arena allows for a calmer experience and more personal help from staff when required.
- Should Tipton Arena be closed, we request the following valuable programs be added to George S. Hughes Southside Arena, also located within the Queen Alexandra neighbourhood.
 - Additional public skating time
 - Public skating lessons
- Almost \$4 million in capital cost savings is identified for renewal of Oliver Arena. The Oliver Community League was told more than 10 years ago that the Oliver Arena would be closed, demolished, and not replaced once the equipment (ice plant) fails. What renewal is being proposed for Oliver Arena?

Focus in long term:

- 1) **Eastglen is rehabilitated and stays open for future generations.**
- 2) **Oliver has better pedestrian/bike/public transit connections to existing recreation + new community hub**
- 3) **Scona pool is replaced with Rollie Miles Rec Centre as a pilot for social & recreational community opportunities throughout Edmonton**

Long Term 1: Eastglen is rehabilitated and stays open for future generations.

Long Term 2: Oliver has better pedestrian/bike/public transit connections to existing recreation + new community hub

- Oliver residents would have more access to a variety of recreation opportunities if pedestrian, bike and transit opportunities were improved for all ages and abilities.
- Oliver residents would benefit from a new community hub that would be built and operated in partnership with Oliver Community League and other non-profit organizations.
 - The Oliver Community League believes the Oliver Arena footprint is the best location for this building
- Planning for a small scale community hub could be modeled off the Rollie Miles Rec Centre experience.

Long Term 3: Scona pool is replaced with Rollie Miles Rec Centre as a pilot for social & recreational community opportunities throughout Edmonton

- Rollie Miles Rec Centre is constructed as part of the 2023-2026 Capital Budget.
- It pilots two important components of a new model of social/recreation for Edmonton:
 - 1) small scale design
 - 2) alternative financing for the construction, maintenance and operations of such facilities
- What we learn from Rollie Miles can be adjusted to Oliver and other contexts in Edmonton.
- Rollie Miles District Park (parkland) renewal work is resurrected and completed, inclusive of the new recreation facility.

Conclusion

The communities around Scona Pool, Oliver Outdoor Pool and Eastglen Pool implore Edmonton City Council to view the decisions on these facilities within the lens of the City Plan and our collective aspiration as a city of walkable, liveable 15 minute communities. In addition, please keep in mind sustainability - that our community fabrics are stronger when neighbours may coincidentally bump into one another on their walk, bike or bus ride to the local public hub. Not only that, but keeping it small scale and local with renewed infrastructure supports work on Edmonton's Energy Transition Strategy, zero emissions transportation and reducing our carbon footprint.

This budget is a test. It is a test of how well Edmonton City Council can keep their eye focused on the long term city-building Edmontonians are counting on, being mindful of this year's constrained financial position while sending a signal that we are, in fact, committed to supporting community which in turn supports each of us as individuals - the individuals that work hard for Edmonton everyday. To pass this test, it will need to be clear to Edmontonians how this budget's decisions fit into the City Plan.

Appendix One: Scona Pool/Rollie Miles

Costs

- Savings from closing Scona Pool is about \$305,000 annually.
 - \$226,000 from Community Recreation Facilities
 - \$79,000 from Fleet and Facilities
- Over \$117,000 was spent in summer 2017 to update some pool components and extend the life of Scona Pool.
- \$16 million in renewal costs for Scona Pool is identified. In short, the City is expecting a major failure at some point. The community was told for years that Scona Pool cannot be rehabilitated and that one day it will close but that until a major failure happens the pool will remain operating. Given the context of those conversations, we ask what renewal expenditures the Administration is expecting in 2021?
- According to the Business Case, demolition of Scona Pool is \$1.2 million for demolition, about the same as to operate Scona Pool for 4 years. It makes sense to spend that money on a usable resource for community well-being than for demolition.
- \$3.2 million to design Rollie Miles Rec Centre; \$76 million to construct (estimated)
- Parkland renewal for Rollie Miles District Park is ~\$0.2 million for design and \$4.97 million for construction (2018 figure). This should be deferred until after Rollie Miles Rec Centre is completed.

Inconsistent Interpretation of User Numbers

- The Business Case for Rollie Miles Rec Centre and the Program Services Review (2018) cite different pool attendance numbers for 2016 (41,845 and 28,783 respectively) and present different interpretations.
 - Business Case presents a time series and concludes pool usage is relatively stable over time with 2010 being ignored as an outlier (87,403).
 - Program and Services Review used that outlier figure from 2010 as one of two data points to show a large decline in user numbers from 2010 - 2016 to justify closing the pool.

Geographic Location

- Rollie Miles District Park serves 11 communities in south central Edmonton. None of these 11 communities have a pool. Until Rollie Miles Rec Centre is built, Scona Pool remains an important amenity for all of these communities.

Population Density & Tax Uplift

- There is an increase in residential units within the catchment, resulting in an annual tax uplift.
 - There has been an increase of 2,861 residential units planned or underway in Garneau, Strathcona, McKernan, Queen Alexandra, Ritchie, Belgravia, Parkallen, Windsor Park and Hazeldean in a four year period from October 2014- October 2018.
 - This increase in residential units is expected to generate an estimated annual tax uplift of more than \$10 million at minimum (based on an average unit price of \$500,000).
 - This density increase does not count subdivision/skinny houses, secondary and garden suites, semi-detached or row house developments adding or replacing single detached homes.
 - Rollie Miles District Park is located within the RF3/RF7 neighbourhood of Queen Alexandra which is seeing accelerated smaller scale density since neighbourhood renewal was completed in 2017.
- Density increases are expected to continue in the Rollie Miles catchment:
 - PlanWhyte, the area redevelopment plan that replaces the Old Strathcona ARP, indicates density increases from 34 to 93 units/ha.
 - The Strathcona Junction ARP calls for 4-6 storey mixed use (commercial residential) buildings between Calgary Trail and Gateway Blvd from 79th Avenue to 63rd Avenue that will replace one-storey commercial buildings and empty industrial land.
 - The 109 St Corridor Plan envisions 4-storey residential or residential/commercial mixed use developments will be built between the High Level Bridge and 72 Ave.
 - The McKernan/Belgravia Station Area Plan continues to guide densification in the TOD (Transit Oriented Development) near the LRT station in those communities.
 - The Garneau Area Redevelopment Plan has guided densification in that community since the 1980s and continues to do so.

Changing Modes of Transportation

- Over 40% of Queen Alexandra residents do not travel by personal motor vehicle as their main mode of transportation to work. The story is similar for other nearby neighbourhoods.
 - Bike lanes on 106 Street, 83 Avenue, 76 Avenue and planned lanes for 110 Street make it easy to get to Scona Pool/Rollie Miles from around the catchment area.
 - Why make accessing a recreation facility the only reason these residents would need to drive? Almost all other needs of area residents can be met by

walking/biking/transit.

Residents Are Engaged

From November 20 - November 29, 2020 Queen Alexandra Community League invited residents from the Rollie Miles catchment area as well as Scona Pool user groups to fill in a survey about the proposed closure of Scona Pool and Tipton Arena, as well as funding for Rollie Miles Rec Centre. During this 9 day period we had 319 responses.

This survey will be open for a few more days and we will provide a summary of full survey results in advance of the December 3, 2020 public hearing.

Appendix Two: Oliver Pool

- Oliver Pool did not open for the 2019 season - the facility was closed for repairs all summer. Closing the pool now renders that investment wasteful.
- Outdoor pools are essential in a city with no waterfront amenities
 - Outdoor pools in Edmonton serve a key recreation need by providing relatively affordable access to social water recreation
 - Edmonton does not have other outdoor swimming options
 - Other cities in Canada recognize the value of outdoor pools

Municipality	# of Outdoor Pools	Population
Calgary	8	1,285,711
Regina	4	327,000
Saskatoon	4	278,000
Ottawa	9	934,000
Toronto	58	2,731,571

- Outdoor pools should be operated as a cohesive unit
 - Because outdoor pools are a unique asset and Edmonton only has five to serve the entire population, all outdoor pools should be operated cohesively. Removing one pool from the system puts more stress on the remaining pools (or, more realistically, means access will be restricted).
 - Oliver Pool should not be privatized separately from the other outdoor pools. A change to the delivery of these facilities should be done after Administration provides analysis that demonstrates the advantages to the community and the City.
- Need to optimize cost to access Outdoor Pools
 - Pricing outdoor pools at the same price point as fitness and leisure centres, which have more amenities available to users, is not appropriate.
 - In 2016, Oliver Pool had 8000 visits. This increased to over 19,000 in 2017, when outdoor pools were free to access.
 - Optimization of admission fees for outdoor pools will increase use.
- Key findings from OCL parks and recreation survey completed in 2019
 - Oliver Pool: most popular recreation asset in Oliver (50%); favourite asset in Oliver Park (39%)
 - Oliver Arena: least popular asset in Oliver Park (2%)
 - Personal vehicle: most common transport to access recreation outside of Oliver (75%)

Appendix Three: City Plan Analysis

The following information is directly from the City Plan and was collected in relation to supporting the local recreation opportunities represented in moving forward on Rollie Miles Rec Centre and continued operation of Scona, Oliver and Eastglen pools.

- Active Transportation Network – The Active Transportation Network creates critical connections using walking, rolling or biking that allow people to access destinations, amenities, daily needs and recreational opportunities.
 - Rollie Miles provides a much more proximate recreational opportunity that are accessible for all ages and abilities via AT Network than Kinsmen (in River Valley) and Confederation (on other side of a Freeway)
- Outcome 1.1 Edmonton fosters wellness and mental health by providing opportunities for all people to engage in community life and supporting those who are isolated, marginalized or at risk.
 - Intention 1.1.1 Promote personal and community wellness and connection through inclusive and welcoming places.
 - Direction 1.1.1.3 Collaborate with school boards to identify, allocate and deliver municipal and school reserves that will allow for educational spaces and community facilities that provide learning, recreation and gathering opportunities.
 - Rollie Miles Rec Centre, Scona, Oliver and Eastglen pools reflect this spirit of collaboration.
 - Direction 1.1.1.4 Encourage healthy and active living by supporting community-focused recreational, leisure, social and cultural programs.
 - Intention 1.3.2 Support Edmonton’s identity as a winter city through its infrastructure, design, events and economy.
 - Direction 1.3.2.1 Celebrate our winter identity through the arts, recreation, events, storytelling and inspired design.
 - Proximate recreation opportunities should be available to allow for access via active transportation in the Wintertime
- Outcome 2.3 Edmonton’s growth and development mutually benefit the city and region.
 - Intention 2.3.3 Promote gathering spaces for culture, sports, recreation and entertainment opportunities to support both formal and informal uses.
 - Direction 2.3.3.5 Collaborate with private developers, utility providers and communities on innovative and creative solutions for temporary and permanent infrastructure and amenities that support the public realm.
 - Rollie Miles is the project to trial run this idea so that we can continue to fulfill this policy direction
- Outcome 4.1 Edmonton advances equity through access to universally accessible spaces, services, facilities and transportation networks.
 - Intention 4.1.3 Ensure the equitable access of affordable services and amenities to all Edmontonians.

- Direction 4.1.3.2 Provide services and programs that reduce barriers for low income residents to community recreation facilities.
 - Rollie Miles is situated closely to diverse mix of housing, meaning that it provides services/programs to low income residents (reduces barriers imposed by distance/access)
 - Oliver outdoor pool, Eastglen Leisure Centre, Tipton and Oliver Arenas continue to support their local populations
- Primary Corridor: largest, most vibrant, and most prominent urban streets in the city and region serve as destinations in and of themselves, but also provide critical connections between nodes, the rest of the city, and the region.
 - Rollie Miles/Scona, Eastglen and Oliver function as a key destination and would support more urban street
- Major Recreation Park: Parks designed with multifunctional amenities and unique features, serving residents at the regional, city-wide and district level.
 - Rollie Miles is a major (district) park.
- Urban development patterns -> Redevelopment -> Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Upgrades -> identifies two options
 - 1. Like for like
 - 2. Additional capacity for growth (soft and hard infrastructure)
 - Closing facilities without a plan is not an option