



**The Corporation of the Municipality of Wawa
Staff Report**

Office of the Director of Community Services and Tourism

Prepared For: Committee of the Whole	Report No.: AP 2025-02
Agenda Date: Feb 18, 2025	File No.: C 11

Subject

This report concerns the recent inclusion of the Upper Mission Park in the staff recommended budget to Council for 2025-26 under Subject to Funding.

Summary of the Recommendation


THAT staff have included a request for \$50,000 for an inclusive and accessible playground equipment at the Upper Mission Park in the 2025 Capital Budget upon the condition that the expense be funded wholly by a grant and/or donation;

THAT an inclusive and accessible playground structure is recommended to be installed at the Mission Park by staff in its report dated February 18, 2025, for the benefit of the community and those with accessibility challenges;

NOWTHEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council approve that staff make application to the Ontario Trillium Foundation Capital Funding Program for an inclusive and accessible playground structure for the Upper Mission Park at an upset limit of \$50,000 in March 2025 and if grant funding is received, purchase and install an accessible playground structure at the Upper Mission Park.

Summary of the Issues

There were several questions asked at two separate council meetings regarding the replacement of the Mission Park Play Structure. These included questions around the population and demographics of the Mission, what standards or benchmarks exist for park planning per population, what an appropriate budget would be for a project of this scale, among others. Staff seek to provide this data to Council for decision making purposes, and provide Council with a recommendation on the matter.

Respectfully Submitted By: 	Prepared By: Alex Patterson, Director, Community Services and Tourism
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List of Stakeholders

- Municipal Council
- Residents of the Mission
- Ratepayers
- Tourists and Visitors
- Municipal Staff

Purpose of Report

At the Operating Budget presentation meeting, staff included the Upper Mission Park (the Park) in the staff recommended portion of the Capital Budget for 2025 under Subject to Funding and in 2026 under Reserve Funds. Councillors had several questions about the project, and requested that a report from Staff be written to ask these questions. Each of these questions were researched by staff and are presented in the **Analysis** Section of the report.

Additionally, residents of the Mission made a deputation to Council where they submitted a letter, accompanying petition, and made a presentation to Councillors regarding the Park. From the deputation, additional questions arose concerning budget and funding, as well as the items presented in the park plan. Staff will also provide input on these additional questions in the **Analysis** and **Financial / Staffing Implications** sections of this report.

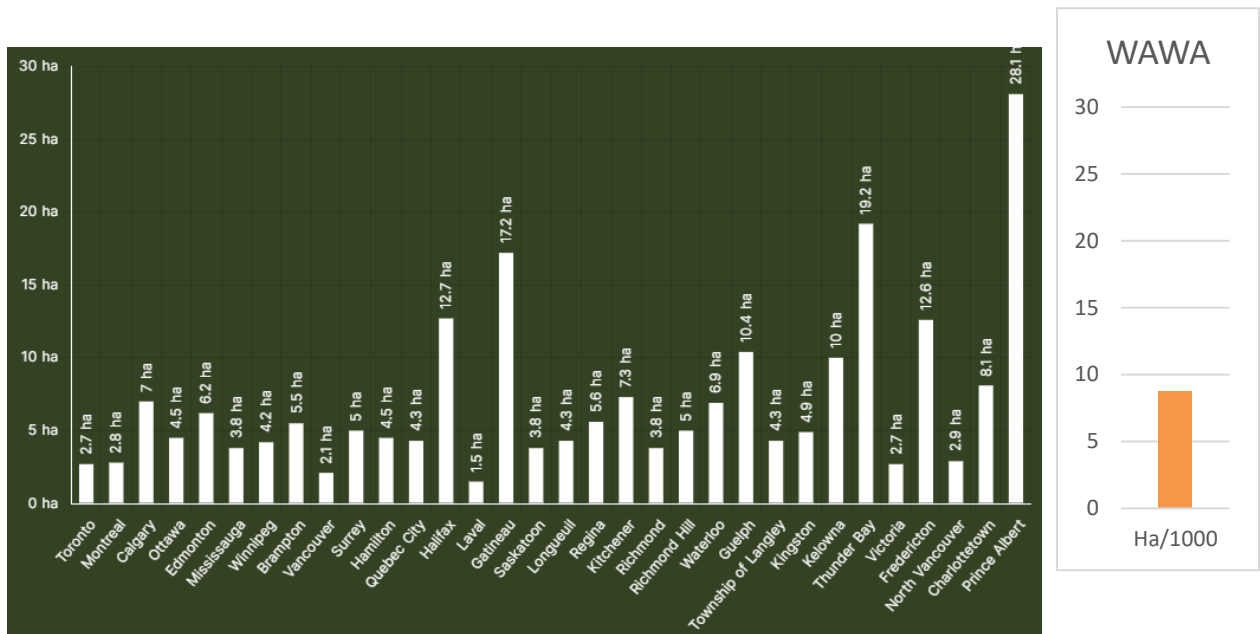
Finally, staff have reviewed a variety of Municipal plans and will provide links between this project and these plans in the **Policies affecting Proposal** section of the report.

Analysis

Mission Demographics and Parkland Allocation

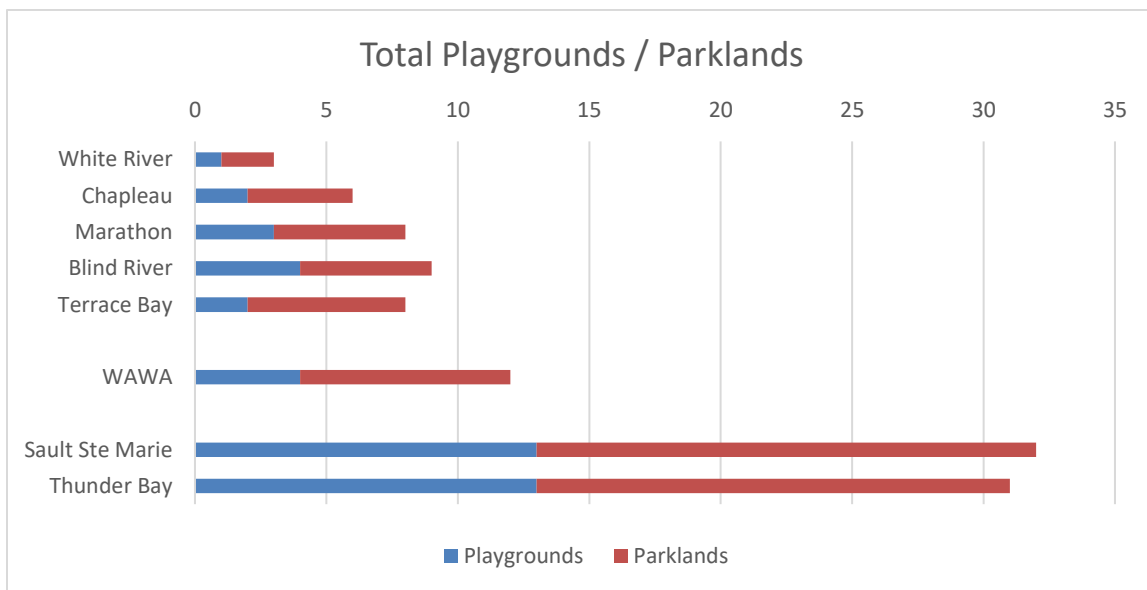
Staff have completed an analysis of demographics and parkland sizes per area and per population. It is important to note that there is not one universal accepted standard for rural or northern Municipalities, and even cities have a large variance in parks allocations. While cities typically rely on planning units of hectares (Ha) per 1000 population and density maps when planning parklands, smaller and rural municipalities with more even densities rely on a combination of population per park and land availability, with less formal planning benchmarks.

For overall provincial parks statistics, the cities parks report has the following information about Ha of parkland / 1000 residents, and is compared with Wawa:

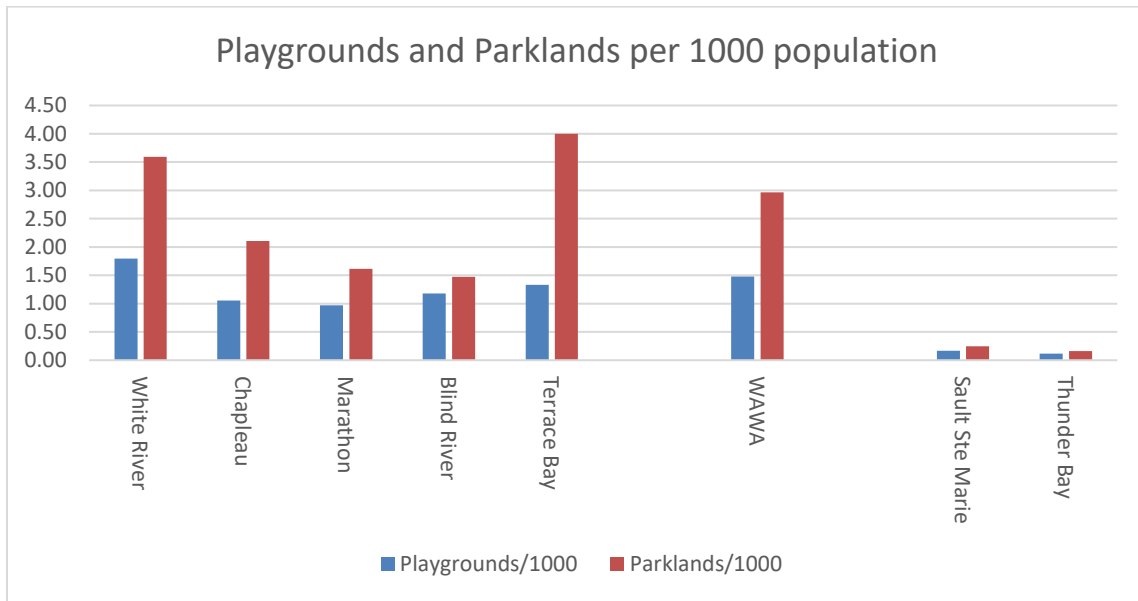


Wawa currently (including Upper Mission Park) has 8.75Ha/1000p, comparable to communities like Calgary, Waterloo, and Charlottetown. However, this data does not represent playgrounds vs parks, and only has data for large cities, so is therefore provided to illustrate the planning averages across the country, as well as show some inconsistencies and outliers. It is truly the Councils of each community that set their own goals for park space allocations.

The data that staff gathered indicates that Wawa currently has a number of playgrounds in line with our regional comparators, and additional parklands without playgrounds compared to comparable Municipalities. These are illustrated in the following charts:



The chart above illustrates the total number of parks in each Municipality. As displayed, Wawa has a similar number of playgrounds to comparators such as Blind River and Marathon, and a higher amount of parklands, bringing Wawa to a higher total than other communities. As expected, the cities have a much higher total amount of both playgrounds and parklands. Note the cities inconsistency as compared to their size.



This chart illustrates Wawa as compared to other communities’ populations. As you can see, Wawa is at the higher end of our comparators with 1.48 playgrounds per 1000 residents. We have a higher amount of parklands per 1000 population as well, but not the highest among the Northern municipalities. Notable are also the significant differences when compared to cities – the rural municipalities host a much higher set of parklands per 1000 population.

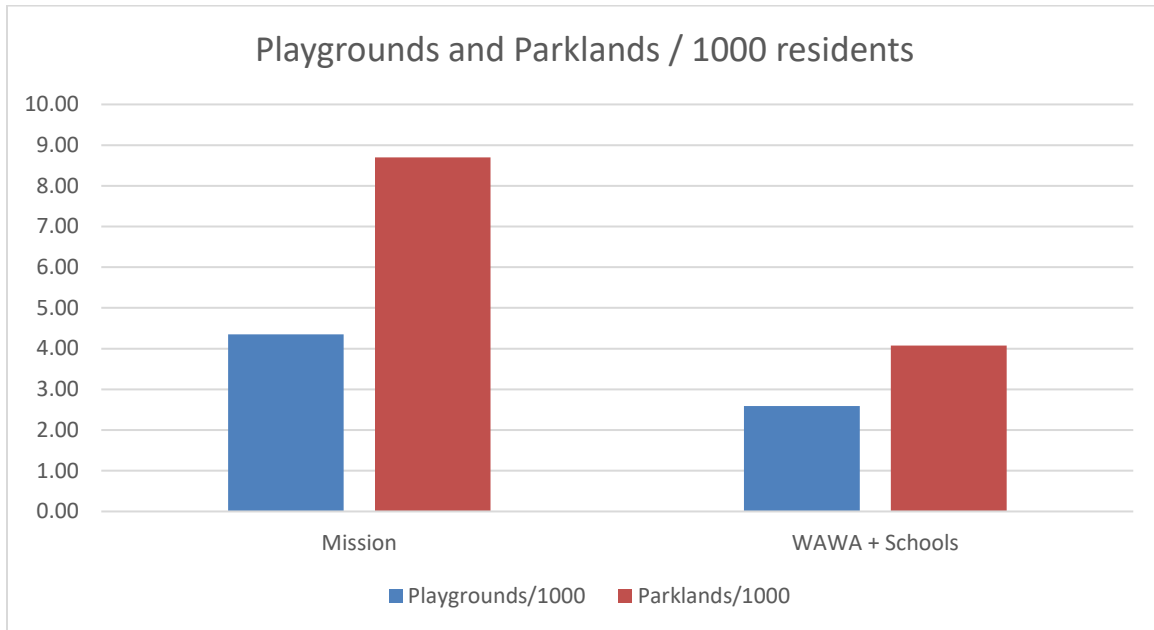
Also, important to note is the non-Municipal playgrounds available to the community. There are three additional playgrounds located at schools in the community that are open to residents, doubling the parks in Wawa proper. This does put the Mission at a disadvantage in relation to total playgrounds available.

Based on a reasonable assumption that 74 people live in areas outside the Mission it is assumed there are approximately 200 people in Mission x 14.8% = 30 youth aged 0 to 14 in the Mission.

Another data set that could be used is that there are about 70 houses in the Mission and the average household size is 2.2 (2021 Census) so 154 people live in the Mission. 154 x 14.8% = 23.

So, staff concludes that there are likely between 23 to 30 youth aged 0-14 in the Mission, and a likely population of 180.

Within this calculation, if we look at the Mission as a subset of Wawa, we find that it has one playground with approx. 180 population. Therefore, it has a higher per capita amount of both playgrounds and parklands, with the following comparison:



Therefore, the data shows that per capita, the mission as a community has more parkland and playgrounds per capita than the Wawa average.

Tourism Traffic – Mission Park

The mission is also a major pass through for tourists travelling to several of our tourism resources, including Silver Falls, Sandy Beach, Government Dock, and the Lake Superior Lookout. It also sees traffic from locals recreating in these areas as well as travelling to Michipicoten First Nation. The location of the Upper Mission Park sees disproportionately high vehicle traffic compared to other parklands located in residential neighbourhoods, and has the potential to serve much more than the community of the Mission. Only looking at the park with a per-capita lens does not represent the remainder of the community who travel to the mission for recreation, nor does it represent the tourism potential of that area. However, without road/parking lot counters, it is impossible to quantify that data accurately. Staff estimate, based on experience with the tourism resources, that the peak summertime sees upwards of 500 daily visits to locations on this path of travel, whereas in the shoulder seasons this could be reduced to as little as 100 daily visits to locations past the Mission.

Existing vs Modifying Service Standards

The question of service standards and levels of service in the Mission was brought to Council from both members of Council as well as residents. The Mission Park was established many years ago, long enough that Municipal records do not show a specific date. In 2018 Council approved the park to be removed as it was unsafe, alongside several other play structures in the community. Included in that staff recommendation at the time was the replacement of the upper mission park in the 2019 Capital budget.

In 2018 and 2019, Council approved the removal of this park but no budget was allocated to their replacement. As the primary mechanism of Council to set service levels are the annual budgets, this was a change in the service level. Therefore, based on past council decisions, the current service level for the Park is for it to be a parkland, not a playground.

Council has the ability to modify service levels in the community at any time. The direction of Council over the past several years has been to maintain service levels across the community, with maximising the use of grants a critical component to this direction. The replacement of this park may or may not represent the maintenance of this service based on the comparison of service levels pre and post 2019.

Wawa Parks – Current Inventory

Currently, the Municipality maintains and operates 4 playgrounds and 8 parklands total, not including parklands considered as tourism resources such as the TIC and Sandy Beach. Of this inventory, three of the four parklands have been replaced since 2015, with the Upper Mission Park being the only parkland that had a playground before 2019 to have not been replaced. The final playground, at Queens Park, is not expected to be replaced until 2030 based on the state of that infrastructure and the expected lifespan of the equipment. Therefore, no current capital investment is required for our play structure assets for the next 5 years.

Of the Municipal playgrounds, we operate three “Traditional” structures that are composed of a structure and swings. The fourth is a “Adventure/Nature Play” structure located at Rose’s Beach. The Municipal inventory lacks some diversity in both accessibility, sensory elements, and climbers.

Accessibility & Sensory Parks

Current AODA standards require all new construction to feature accessible areas. Additionally, an important development in play equipment has been the inclusion of sensory elements to support children on the autism spectrum. The current inventory of Municipal parks does not support either of these populations, and therefore there is room within the Municipal parks inventory for parks with these features. Some examples of these are provided to Council as part of the accompanying presentation.

The importance of having representative parks within a Municipal playground inventory cannot be understated. There are many studies linking diverse outdoor play equipment

and its accessibility to the community with many other metrics of community health. Importantly, according to the CCPR report in 2021:

of nearly 3,500 Canadians, only 9% cited a lack of parks nearby as a barrier to park use. Instead, the top three barriers identified were a lack of amenities (37%), a lack of plantings and natural spaces (31%), and inadequate maintenance (22%).

A key takeaway is the amenities a park offers are more important than its location. The barrier – particularly in Wawa where vehicle use is much higher than in urban areas – is the equipment available to residents. The Wawa parks system as a whole would benefit significantly by the inclusion of a park targeted specifically to disabilities across the spectrum of mental and physical to remove barriers in our community.

Funding Availability – Programs and Grants

There are several programs and grants available for playgrounds, and some that specifically target accessible and sensory playgrounds. These are identified throughout industry resources as well as in the websites of several manufacturers offering this type of equipment. Staff have identified an upcoming Trillium fund as a prime candidate for this infrastructure upgrade, and have weighed this project against other Municipal priorities and the funding program's eligibility criteria to recommend this project as the priority for funding within the Capital budget. In this process we have compared this project to the many other funding demands of the Municipality's infrastructure, and concluded that this project is the best fit for the specific grant criteria.

Community-Based Park Infrastructure

A group of residents from the Mission have come forward and approached both Council and Staff with a willingness to work with the Municipality for the betterment of this parkland. This includes volunteer help with infrastructure construction and maintenance, as well as sourcing funding for aspects of the project.

When community volunteers come forward and express interest in a project, it has been a long-standing best practice of the Municipality to work with these volunteers and achieve goals together as a community. Therefore, staff are recommending an approach that works with this neighbourhood towards the mutual goals of the Municipality and community. This includes the principles of financial sustainability and improving outdoor amenities and the quality of life of all residents.

Financial/Staffing Implications

Insurance Costs

The insurance for the Municipality is not broken down by parkland or play structure. To answer the question of how the addition of a structure to an existing parkland would affect rates, staff contacted our company directly. Our company representative, Graham Lidstone, reported that the addition or subtraction of individual equipment does in no way affect premiums. The calculation of our rates is determined by overall liabilities, claim rates, and many other factors. There will be no additional cost if a playground or other equipment is installed. Staff continue to be required to ensure that all structures meet the CSA Z614 Standards to meet insurance requirements.

Maintenance Costs and Staff Time – Current and Additional

Currently without any play equipment, the park maintenance for the Upper Mission location is limited to servicing the garbage can in front of the park, litter removal, and mowing. With the addition of a play structure, this would add a monthly and weekly inspection requirement.

Staff follow our service standards for this location, according to the following chart:

Traditional Parks Maintenance Standard								
	Frequency / Month							
Maintenance Item	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	
Garbage Removal	1/w	2/w	3/w	3/w	3/w	2/w	1/w	
Litter Pick Up	1/m	2/m	1/w	1/w	1/w	2/m	1/m	
Mowing and Trimming	0/m	1/m	2/m	2/m	1/m	1/m	0/m	
Path Sweeping	1/m	1/m	2/m	2/m	1/m	1/m	1/m	
Gardening / Plant Upkeep	0/m	2/m	1/w	1/w	1/w	1/m	0/m	
Playground Inspection	1/m	1/m	1/w	1/w	1/w	1/m	1/m	
Tree Maintenance	0/m	2/m	AN	AN	AN	AN	AN	

The additional staff time to maintain a small structure would be 1/2 hour per month for the monthly inspection during the operating season, 15 minutes for the weekly inspection, and likely some additional litter pickup of another 1/2 hour per occurrence during the operating season. Staff are already attending other tourism resources on a route as well as the garbage can currently at that location and those costs are not factored into this calculation.

Therefore, the hours breakdown for this park is as follows:

Maintenance Item	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	Total
Garbage Removal	1.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	1.00	15.00
Litter Pick Up*	2.00	4.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	4.00	2.00	30.00
Mowing and Trimming	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00
Path Sweeping	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gardening	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Playground Inspection	0.00	0.50	1.50	1.50	1.50	0.50	0.00	5.50
Tree Maintenance	0/m	2/m	AN	AN	AN	AN	AN	0.00
*NOTE litter pickup is halved without a playground					Total - Without Playground			32.00
					Total - With Playground			52.50

The total annual additional staff time to implement an additional playground into the existing parkland would be approx. 5.5hrs of inspection for a full-time staff and 15hrs of litter pickup for full time staff or students, for a total of 20.5 hours per season. The hours for this addition would not require an additional staff member or student, and work schedules would be adjusted accordingly.

Park Budget

Currently the Municipal budget is setup in such a way that parklands are one cost centre, and there are only breakdowns for those parks that also have facilities attached to them, such as the Marina or Lions’ Beach. The overall budget for all parklands and tourism resources is proposed to be \$29,400. This covers all maintenance for play structures, benches, and furnishings, as well as a small allowance for annual projects such as replacements or improvements. From past experience, each play structure requires approximately \$500 annually in materials and upkeep towards the end of its lifecycle, with the exception of the Adventure playground at Rose’s beach which requires significantly more maintenance due to the natural materials used. A new structure, such as the one installed at Centennial park in 2015, has to date only required the replacement of a few swing parts with a total cost over the past 10 years of less than \$1,000. Queens park, the oldest in the playground assets, has required some new hardware every 2-3 years including bolt replacements, swing replacements, and sand additions. Over the past 10 years the total cost of maintenance of that playground has been approximately \$2,500. This excludes capital replacements such as the swing set.

Future costs include the replacement of the structures at the end of their life. The expected lifespan of a composite (metal/plastic) structure can be expected to last 20 years with regular maintenance. With a project budget of \$50,000, amortized over 20 years is a simple cost of \$2,500 per year to save for replacement value should grants not be accessed.

In Kind Donations – Secured and Pending

Residents of the Mission have also approached staff with several in-kind donations for the project. These include sand, gravel, and crusher fines for site servicing, as well as lumber and labour for some of the additional requests presented to Council. Some of these donations have been secured and others are pending. These partnerships contribute heavily to the success of funding applications as well as reduce the financial and labour burden on the Municipality.

Municipal Costs – Funding vs Reserves

To reduce costs to Municipal ratepayers, grants have funded the past 2 play structure projects. The playground at Roses beach was funded 90%, and the structure at the Marina was funded 100% with the Municipality completing site surfacing.

The upcoming Ontario Trillium Fund grant covers up to 100% of eligible project costs. In past experience, staff have been unsuccessful asking for the full cost of a project without showing our own contributions. For this project, a more successful approach would be combining Municipal operating capacity with resident and business contributions to show our contribution and those of the project partners with in-kind costs. The items that are most possible through the Municipality include site surfacing and preparation, which include material and labour costs. As residents have already come forward with donations of some materials and labour, these can be combined to show a significant contribution to the funding application at low cost to the Municipality.

Draft Budget for Funding Application

With all of the considerations above, a draft budget has been created with 3 categories: Funding, Donations, and Municipal costs. Staff have further divided these costs into Core and Additional costs. The core costs represent the minimums for replacement of a structure, whereas the Additional costs represent the requests from Mission residents.

Project Budget					
Class D cost estimate					
Item	Amount	Unit	Cost - Funding	Cost -Donation	Cost - Municipal
Playground		1 Structure	45,000.00		
Swings		1 2 Bay swing	5,000.00		
Surface - Sand	120	Tonnes		2,160.00	
Surface - Crush	96	Tonnes		2,112.00	
Surface - Gravel	96	Tonnes		1,920.00	
Surface - Lumber	32	6"X6"X16'			3,400.00
Labour	80	FT Staff Hr			3,640.00
	160	Student Hr			3,588.00
Total			50,000.00	6,192.00	10,628.00
Additional					
Volleyball		1 Net & Lines		1,500.00	
Rink - Crush	120	Tonnes		2,400.00	
Rink - Lumber	24	2"x12"x16"		1,920.00	
Community Garden	3	Acc Beds.		1,500.00	
Pavilion	1	10x20 Gazebo		15,000.00	
Streetlights	2	Incl Poles		5,000.00	
Total			0.00	27,320.00	0.00

NOTES:

This is a Class D cost estimate – final costs can be expected to be within 20% of this draft budget.

Donations include both confirmed and pending donations.

The core budget represents a strong funding application as we can show that for the \$50,000 ask from Trillium the Municipality and partners are providing \$15,000 in in-kind costs. As staffing is included, the only funds required from the Municipality are \$3,400, which is well within the Municipal Parklands operating budget for “Projects”.

There has been some debate on getting an accessible structure within a \$50,000 budget. Staff and residents alike have reached out to several playground companies to receive quotes. These are included in **Appendix A** as well as the presentation.

Some of the budget options to fit the \$50,000 include:

Playground Budgets	
Option 1 - Access focus	
FIT Structure	28,750.00
See Saw	9,218.00
Swingset	4,573.00
Accessible Swing	3,595.00
Sensory Panel	4,573.00
Total	50,709.00
Option 2 - Sensory focus	
FIT Structure	16,883.00
Sensory Panel	4,573.00
Sound Station	13,259.00
Pod Swing	7,963.00
Swingset	4,573.00
Accessible Swing	3,595.00
Total	50,846.00

There are many options for smaller, budget friendly and accessible features. These include easy to install sensory panels, as well as single level, low play structures with a small footprint. While the playgrounds are not very large due to the budget limitation, they will meet both accessibility requirements as well as sensory needs of the target demographics. Small structures also have the advantage of reduced maintenance costs and require less site preparation and surfacing.

Policies Affecting Proposal

Municipal Strategic Plan

In the Strategic plan, INF-6 prioritizes upgrading amenities at outside recreational areas, subject to funding. This project matches this key priority by replacing a structure removed previously, and upgrading to a structure that has both accessible and sensory features.

Asset Management Plan

The asset management lists the current 4 playgrounds only. The playground up for replacement next is Queens Park, with a slated replacement date of 2028. Staff believe that this can be pushed to 2030 as the playground is in good condition. All other playgrounds have been replaced within the past 10 years and have 10 – 19 years of expected lifespan remaining.

Comments from Relevant Departments/Community and Corporate Partners

Comments have been received residents of the Mission and Wawa, and a petition has expanded to the rest of the community. It is included in the Council agenda.

Alternatives

Option 1: Do Nothing

This option would see the Municipality do nothing with the proposed addition of a playground to the Upper Mission Park. Within this report, we have seen that while the mission as a standalone area does not have the population to support an additional structure, Wawa as a community would benefit from the inclusion of an accessible and sensory playground. Therefore, this option is **Not Recommended**.

Option 2: Follow the Residents' proposal in Full

This option would see the Municipality make an application to Trillium and other funding sources for the full project as proposed in the Residents' letter to Council presented on February 4th. This would significantly expand the funding application and budget over the \$50,000 and increase the amenities available in the park above the traditional Municipal offerings. This option is also **Not Recommended**.

Option 3: Apply for an accessible Playground, work with residents for other amenities

This option would see the Municipality move this project into subject to funding and make an application to OTF within the proposed project budget of \$50,000. This project would remain contingent on receiving funding before moving forward.

Staff also recommend that this project, like many other recreation focused projects, remains contingent on receipt of funding in the future. Almost all of the Department's projects to date have relied heavily or exclusively on funding, excepting critical community infrastructure. This reliance on funding contributes significantly to the financial sustainability of the Department and community.

The additional requests of the residents can be approached in a collaborative manner. The Municipality would work with residents to achieve some of these goals in a way that would limit the impact on the Municipal budget. We would ask residents to source the donations and labour for all amenities that were not related to the playground and site surfacing. As this option meets residents service level expectations and encourages collaborative, community driven parks, this option is **Recommended**.

Conclusion

By accepting this recommendation, Council is providing residents of our community with safe, barrier free, and accessible recreation spaces in alignment with our strategic plan. The Municipality is working with residents in a collaborative way to provide services to their neighbourhoods. And we are doing so in a fiscally responsible manner that respects taxpayer's funds by budgeting this project as subject to funding, and making applications to recreation-based infrastructure funding programs. This results in the replacement of a play structure that can meet the needs of the entire community using existing municipal staff and working within a small budget allocation.

Recommendation

WHEREAS a Resident Petition and Delegation was presented to Council at its meeting on Tuesday, February 4, 2025, requesting that an accessible playground structure and additional park features be added to the Upper Mission Park on Blue Crescent;

AND WHEREAS staff have included a request for \$50,000 for an inclusive and accessible playground equipment at the Upper Mission Park in the 2025 Capital Budget upon the condition that the expense be funded wholly by a grant and/or donation;

AND WHEREAS an inclusive and accessible playground structure is recommended to be installed at the Mission Park by staff in its report dated February 18, 2025, for the benefit of the community and those with accessibility challenges;

AND FURTHER THAT should funding not be raised to install the playground structure in 2025, Council will consider inclusion of the playground in the 2026 capital budget as part of its budget deliberations.

NOWHEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council approve that staff make application to the Ontario Trillium Foundation Capital Funding Program for an inclusive and accessible playground structure for the Upper Mission Park at an upset limit of \$50,000 in March 2025 and if grant funding is received, purchase and install an accessible playground structure at the Upper Mission Park.

Attachments

Presentation – Upper Mission Park

Appendix A – Quotes

End of Report.