

# NEW WESTMINSTER GYMNASIUM STRATEGY

## FINAL REPORT

FEBRUARY 2020



NEW WESTMINSTER

RC + P E R C  
strategies





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In September of 2019 the City of New Westminster retained the services of RC Strategies + PERC to investigate the current and future need for publicly accessible gymnasia in the City and prepare a long term strategy for provision of same. The City also has the opportunity to acquire the existing Massey Gymnasium and related support spaces from School District 40. The Gymnasium Strategy is intended to evaluate this opportunity and recommend a path forward regarding it.

Municipal parks and recreation delivery systems focus on fostering individual citizen health and wellbeing and community health and wellbeing. Public recreational uses of gymnasia constitute an excellent vehicle for delivering a variety of important public goods and benefits within those two areas of focus. Those benefits include:

- **Overall fitness and wellbeing** —most uses of a gym are quite active physically;
- **Skill development** —most uses of a gym involve the learning and improvement of leisure life skills;
- **Social connections** —most uses of a gym involve lots of people, often in a team or social setting;
- **Community connections** —gyms are used for special events and social events that bring people together and connect them to their communities of interest and geography;
- **Mixing and integrating subsets of the community** —by bringing people together, gyms help a community to break down barriers and celebrate diversity and inclusion;
- **Fostering community identity and spirit**—Spectators at sporting events help to bring a community together and celebrates the sense of community; and
- **Audiences at creative and performing arts** —exposing people to important aspects of their culture and interpreting important social themes connects citizens to each other and their community.

There are at least five reasons that gyms are such an ideal vehicle for delivering the above noted benefits.

- **Magnitude of public benefits** —Because they can be used for such a diverse set of activities and events, and because they are typically used by such a diverse cross section of the community in a given season, gymnasias deliver a very wide set of services that achieve a very high degree of benefit to the community.
- **Low Capital and operating costs** —When compared to other categories of indoor recreation and cultural spaces, gymnasias are extremely cost effective. They cost less to construct, sustain and operate per unit of capacity for use than other types of recreation spaces and are, therefore, very cost effective to provide.
- **Flexibility of use** —Because of their flexibility and adaptability of use, they are more able to accommodate currently unforeseen future changes in behaviour patterns. Many current uses of gyms did not exist a generation ago (e.g. pickleball).
- **Low risk of over supply** —Due to their flexibility, adaptability, low cost and diversity of offerings, there is very little risk associated with providing too much gym space. Unlike other facilities with much higher costs per hour of operation, the risk of overbuilding gymnasias is very low. Communities don't complain of having too much gym space.
- **All municipalities have them** —As newcomers to the region determine where to live and evaluate recreation opportunities, they will find that all communities have publicly accessible gymnasias. Not having enough exposes a community to a risk of not meeting current expectations for appropriate levels of public services.

And, there are a few additional reasons to acquire the Massey Gym now.

- **Existing gyms are and will be operating at or close to full capacity and there is outstanding need that can only be met if the Massey Gym is added to the inventory** —As changes to the availability of gymnasia continue to play out over the next three years, new gyms will open operating at or near full capacity. In fact, the addition of the Sportsplex, currently under construction, will simply ‘play catch up’ providing replacement spaces for what has been enjoyed, appreciated and fully used in the past. The new NWACC, which has recently been committed to, provides a modest increase in capacity and will likely be fully utilized with uses that could not be accommodated previously. Based on current need, the additional capacity within the Massey Gym will be used to accommodate growth in several program areas including gymnastics, trampoline, pickleball, various other gym sports, and fitness programming.
- **Population growth will fuel the need for more gyms** —With an additional 30,000 residents over the next 20 years or so, a large portion of them will need and use additional gym space.
- **Acquisition at a Discount** —The cost of a retrofitted 817.5M<sup>2</sup> Massey Gym facility is appropriate at the <\$6.6M price tag that is currently estimated to retrofit the existing gym in a fashion that would likely extend its life for decades. The price is comparable to the cost of building a new gym. As an added bonus, the Massey Gym comes with 1713.5M<sup>2</sup> of related activity spaces and support spaces that could deliver significant additional public benefits.
- **Very few opportunities to acquire land for public indoor recreation spaces** —Even if this weren’t the right time to invest in a gym, opportunities for level, publicly owned land, zoned for public recreation purposes, right next to an existing arena, don’t come up often in New Westminster. Taking advantage of limited available opportunity to expand that land base is a prudent investment.

Even if the first bullet above is proven not to be realized, the remaining three apply. Even if acquiring the Massey Gym now results in a small degree of oversupply of gyms in the community, the City will grow into that capacity in the relatively near future, and there are so few opportunities to acquire land and a gym, especially at a discount, that the City will be glad that it has taken advantage of this one.

The big question is not so much whether an additional gym is needed in New Westminster. It is whether or not to dedicate one gym for a single set of uses. In this case there are many reasons to do so. Dedicating the new Sportsplex to gymnastics, trampoline and related uses makes sense on a number of levels, including:

- Savings in staff time, equipment lifespan and the opportunity costs of set up/take down time are substantial, almost offsetting the annualized cost of capital associated with building a new gym;
- Gymnastics and trampoline activities are one of the largest, most successful and most consistent of all the services offered through the City's Department of Parks and Recreation, and sufficient to more or less completely utilize the capacity of a single gym.
- Even if that situation changes in the future, the decision to dedicate can be easily reversed.

In summary, the City will need one additional gym over the short term future over and above the ones that are in the current inventory or in the planning/construction process. Acquiring the Massey Gym now is a prudent and low risk investment. Taking advantage of this opportunity now is appropriate, as opportunities to acquire and/or locate a gymnasium in the future will be scarce and the additional gym is needed sooner rather than later.

A decision to allocate gymnastics and trampoline activities as the primary use of the new Sportsplex should be coupled with the decision to acquire the Massey Gym.

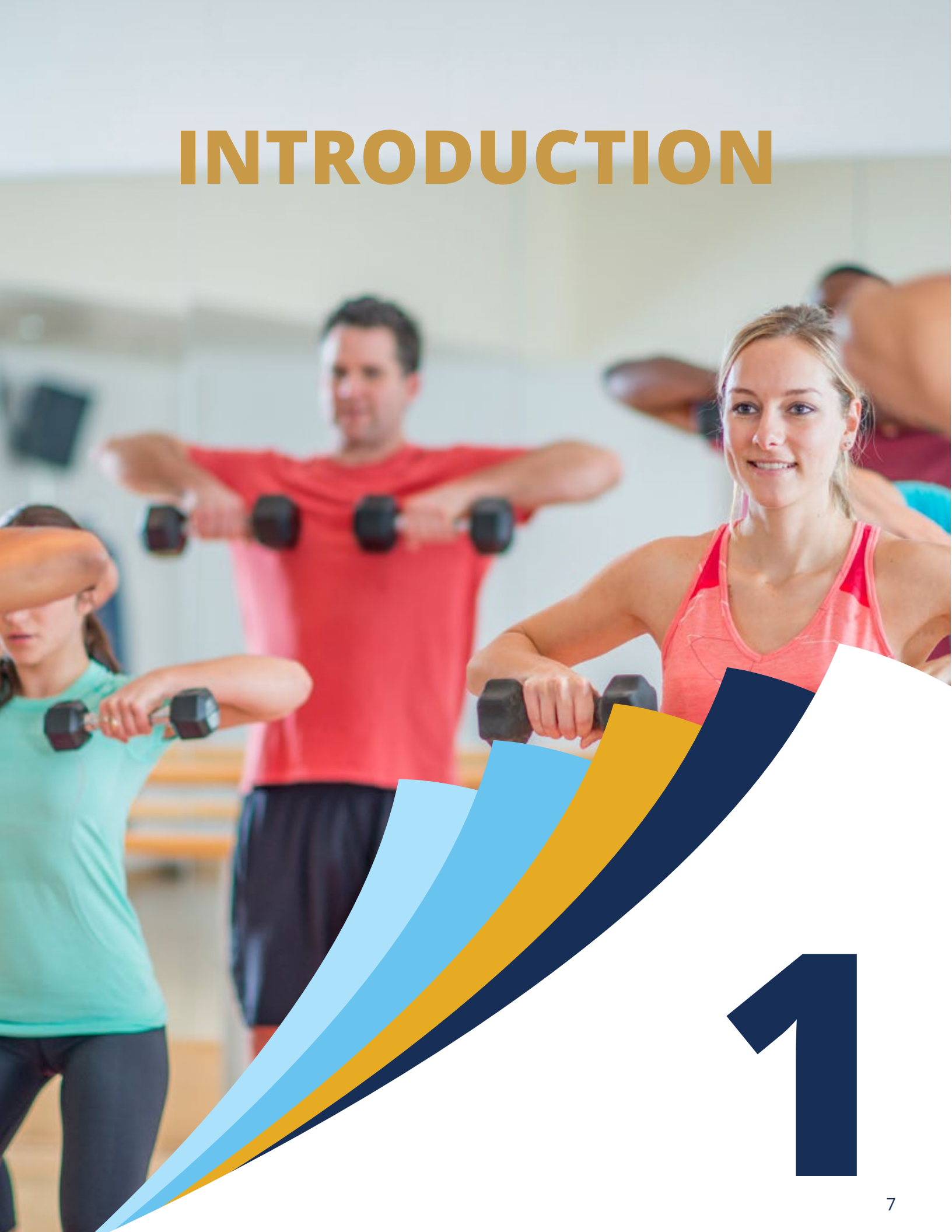
In the longer term future, it is likely that one additional gym will also be needed in the City, likely in the range of 10 to 20 years time. The greatest need for that facility will likely be in the most easterly portions of the City. But, a decision on that facility can wait for some time and be informed by the operation of gyms in the City's inventory over the next decade.

The only caveat to this recommendation relates to the Opportunity Cost of doing something else. Alternative ways of investing the \$6M required to retrofit the Massey Gym that might yield as much or more benefit are not evident and have not been identified. Nor have alternative uses of the site on which the Massey Gym currently sits been investigated to determine if more effective ways of utilizing this high-profile important location within New Westminster exist.

## Recommendations

1. The City of New Westminster should set a long term service level for the provision of indoor publicly available gymnasia of .03M<sup>2</sup> per capita, and, that this standard would apply net of tenuous access to school gyms.
2. To maintain the above recommended service level, the City should acquire the Massey Gym and retrofit it as needed to render it usable as a fully publicly accessible recreation facility.
3. In the longer term future, it is likely that one additional gym will also be needed in the City, likely in the range of 10 to 20 years time. The greatest need for that facility will likely be in the most easterly portions of the City which is least well served by the existing inventory. But, a decision on that facility can wait for some time and be informed by the operation of gyms in the City's inventory over the next decade.
4. When the new Sportsplex becomes available, the City should assign gymnastics and trampoline programs and services as the primary use for this space and consider the overall assignment of uses as summarized in **Figure Three** on a trial basis for at least one year.

# INTRODUCTION



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In September of 2019 the City of New Westminster retained the services of RC Strategies + PERC to investigate the current and future need for publicly accessible gymnasias spaces in the City and prepare a long term strategy for provision of same. The City also has the opportunity to acquire an existing gymnasium from School District 40. The Gymnasium Strategy is intended to shed light on and recommend a path forward with regard to this specific opportunity.

In preparing this Strategy, the consultants interviewed municipal staff and collected a great deal of background data from local, regional, provincial and national sources; many of which are listed in the footnotes.

This report begins with some background and context, continues with some analysis of current gymnasium use, makes some projections of use and then lays out some recommendations for responding to long term need for gymnasias in New Westminster.



## Benefits Realized from Recreational Uses of a Gymnasium

Gymnasias are typically used for a wide range of possible sport, recreation and cultural services including the following:

- Sport league play and practices for youth and adults (e.g. roller hockey, pickleball, basketball, volleyball, badminton);
- Drop in and “pickup” opportunities for many of the above noted sports (e.g. basketball, badminton);
- Physical literacy and sports skills training in sports such as gymnastics, trampoline, and the above-mentioned sports;
- Special events (e.g. community carnivals and festivals or sports tournaments);
- Social occasions;
- Summer camps for children and youth;
- Performing arts presentations;
- Exhibition and interpretation of visual arts.

The above noted activities can be achieved through a combination of drop in opportunities (e.g. pickup basketball), programs (gymnastics classes) and rentals to groups (e.g. a roller hockey league). The sport uses of a gymnasium can be positioned at virtually all levels of the Sport4Life continuum shown at right.

Some of the main benefits of accommodating the above listed activities in

publicly accessible gymnasias are listed below.

- **Cost Effective to Provide**—Gymnasias have very low capital costs and operating costs when compared to many other types of public recreation spaces (e.g. pools, arenas, theatres). Because they don't require the heating or freezing of water, nor a legislated high staffing ratio, the net cost of providing each unit of service is one of the lowest in the indoor recreation delivery system.
- **An accessible learning curve**—Gym activities can be provided at all levels of skill and ability from exposure to an activity through opportunities for beginners, intermediate and advanced players.
- **Easy economic entry**—Most uses of a gymnasium require very little in the way of specialized equipment or clothing. Therefore, they typically have a very low "threshold cost" (i.e. the cost of specialized personal equipment or clothing that must be incurred before one can play) and a very low participation cost when compared to many other activities.
- **Culturally embedded in communities**—There are gymnasias in almost all schools across Canada and across the world. In fact, there are very few countries that don't provide gymnasias to help residents become active and to develop skills. Therefore, existing and new residents of New Westminster are very likely very aware of and comfortable using gymnasias and are culturally accustomed to doing so.
- **Very inclusive**—Gymnasias are enjoyed by all age groups, levels of ability, areas of interest, levels of fitness and genders in Canada.
- **Fitness**—Gymnasium uses provide excellent levels of exercise at all levels.
- **Social connections**—Many users of gymnasias become involved to develop or further social connections, before, during and after the activity itself.
- **Special events**—Gyms are often used for special events which celebrate community and help to bring people together.
- **Spectator Sport**—Many gym uses involve watching sports and this also helps to reduce isolation and foster a sense of community identity, spirit, pride and culture.

In short, gymnasias are a very cost-effective vehicle to use in delivering a wide range of public goods and benefits within a diverse public cultural and recreational delivery system.

# Population Demographics

New Westminster is one of BC's oldest cities. The area within its boundaries has virtually all been developed. So, its growth comes from infill redevelopment of land. Additional flat land for indoor and outdoor sports amenities is quite scarce and has already been used for another purpose. Any new sites for parks or recreation amenities required to serve a growing population has to be carved out of and repurposed from some existing use. The City's population is quite stable, but projections call for slow and consistent growth over the next 20 years. The current and anticipated population can be characterized as follows.

- Consistent Growth—The population in 2019 is estimated to be 77,000.<sup>1</sup> By 2041 that total is projected to be 110,000. That represents just over 1% growth per year cumulatively.
- Relative affluence—17.3% of residents of New Westminster are in Low Income Households. This is somewhat lower than the BC provincial average of 18.5%.<sup>2</sup>
- Aging adult population—There are currently about 23,0031 residents over 55 years of age. By 2041 it is projected that there will be another 20,251 adults in this age group representing a growth of 88%. Residents in this age group currently comprise 29% of the total population. By 2041 they will comprise 39% of the population.
- More children—There will likely be about 5100 more children and youth (0–19 years old) in the City by 2041. That segment of the population will remain stable at about 15.7% of the total<sup>1</sup> which is about 3% lower than the BC average.
- Older adult females outnumber males—In the 40–44 age group there are 1.1 females for every male . By the time residents get to the 95–99 age group there are 4.4 females for each male.
- Growth in immigration and ethnic diversity—While by many measures New Westminster is less diverse than the average in Metro Vancouver, diversity appears to be increasing. Residents of the City are more likely in 2016 than in 2011 to be members of a visible minority,<sup>3</sup> speak a language at home other than an official language, and be an immigrant. The vast majority of all immigrants in our City are from Asia.

The implications for future recreation behaviour associated with the above population profile would be as follows:

- Significant increases in elderly residents suggests growth in some low intensity fitness, therapy and rehab activities as well as some indoor sports like pickleball and a variety of aquatics activities. It also suggests growth in use of Century House and the Douglas Fir hall and Multipurpose Room within that facility.
- Some increase in children and youth suggests growth in minor team sports, drop in gym activities, gymnastics and trampoline uses, most categories of aquatic services and ice use. It will also require more schools.
- Increasing diversity indicates growth in core activities that are international in nature, such as soccer, aquatics, and gymnastics.

# AN OVERVIEW AND SOME CONTEXT



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Some background is required to better understand the availability of gymnasia in the New Westminster area and the use thereof.

## Inventory of Currently Available Gymnasia

After a long period of relative stability, the availability of gymnasia for recreational uses in New Westminster has recently gone through some significant change as summarized below.

- The Arenex, which had been a well used facility that had served City and regional residents for eight decades, collapsed near the end of 2016. Its uses had to be suspended or relocated to other spaces for the short term until it could be replaced. A replacement facility, to be called the Sportsplex, is scheduled to be open in 2020.
- Also, the situation with respect to the New Westminster Senior Secondary School changed in 2018 with the commencement of a construction project to replace the school and its two gyms with one new triple gym. The conversion to new spaces should be complete by the end of 2020.
- Thirdly, there is a plan to replace the Centennial Community Centre and the gym within it with two new gymnasia, scheduled to open early in 2023. This will add one gym to the existing inventory of publicly available gyms in the City.
- And, the relationship between the City of New Westminster and School District 40 changed with respect to school gymnasium use for public recreation purposes. The City's Department of Parks and Recreation used to book all out-of-school hour public uses of the SD40 gyms. Several years ago that changed when the School District took back control of public uses of its gyms and attached a rental fee so that the City now rents the gyms from SD40 and allocates them to recreational uses and is charged a fee for all adult uses thereof.

**Figure One** summarizes the secured availability of gyms in New Westminster in the near future once the above noted changes have been implemented. It shows that unless further changes are made, the City will have four large clear span indoor activity spaces and two smaller ones within its purview on a full-time basis to provide City sponsored programs, drop in opportunities and rental spaces to community groups. That is one more than it had prior to the Arenex collapse in 2016. It will also have some access to six additional school owned and operated gymnasias on a part time rental basis. This represents one more than in the past. While there are also eight elementary school gyms in New Westminster, each with a small gym, they have not generally been used in the past for public recreational uses.

**Figure One: Inventory of Publicly Accessible Gymnasias in New Westminster**

Facility	Owner Operator	Size	Availability for Public Recreational Access	Current and Anticipated Uses
New Sportsplex	City of New Westminster	808M <sup>2</sup> and 9.8M high	Year round for up to 100 hours per week	Lots of demand for City sponsored programs and group rentals
New NWACC Facility —West Gym	City of New Westminster	631M <sup>2</sup> and 10M high	Year round for up to 100 hours per week	Lots of demand for City sponsored programs, drop in opportunities and group rentals
New NWACC Facility —East Gym	City of New Westminster	420M <sup>2</sup> and 10M high	Year round for up to 100 hours per week	Current plan is to focus on fitness class uses and youth services
Queensborough Community Centre Gym	City of New Westminster	344 M <sup>2</sup> and 7.9M high	Year round for up to 100 hours per week	Variety of City programs, drop in opportunities and group rentals
Century House Douglas Fir Room	City of New Westminster	369.5M <sup>2</sup> and 3.1M high	Year round for up to 100 hours per week	Most uses during weekdays are seniors activities and social events —available evenings and weekends for other uses
Century House Multipurpose Room	City of New Westminster	127.7M <sup>2</sup> and 6.7M high	Year round for up to 100 hours per week	Typically used during weekdays for seniors activities and during other times for youth activities
New NWSS Triple Gym	School District 40	1750M <sup>2</sup> and 7M high	Some evenings and weekends during the school year when not required by the School District	City will rent this space for some sports leagues, but some rentals could be pre-empted due to the school needing the space
Queensborough Middle School	School District 40	695M <sup>2</sup> and 9.14M high	Some evenings and weekends during the school year when not required by the School District	City will rent this space for some sports leagues, but some rentals could be pre-empted due to the school needing the space

Facility	Owner Operator	Size	Availability for Public Recreational Access	Current and Anticipated Uses
Fraser River Middle School	School District 40	643M <sup>2</sup> and 9.14M high	Some evenings and weekends during the school year when not required by the school district	City will rent this space for some sports leagues, but some rentals could be pre-empted due to the school needing the space
École Glenbrook Middle School	School District 40	706M <sup>2</sup> and 9.14M high	Some evenings and weekends during the school year when not required by the school district	City will rent this space for some sports leagues, but some rentals could be pre-empted due to the school needing the space

There are two further points to note in the understanding of gym availability in New Westminster. Firstly, because the school aged population in the City is projected to grow, extra curricular uses of school gyms by SD 40 will also likely increase. That will mean less time for public recreational uses. Secondly, if one of the City’s own gyms were to be dedicated to gymnastics and trampoline uses, it could have the effect of adding usable time. That is because several hours had been spent each week at the Arenex in setting up and taking down gymnastics equipment and that time was taken out of total available hours for public use.

In **Figure One**, the four large City owned gyms (listed first) have a total of about 2203M<sup>2</sup> of full-sized gym space for a population of about 77,000 residents. That equates to about .03 M<sup>2</sup> per resident. If that rate of provision were applied to the 33,000 projected new residents over the next 21 years, it would trigger the need for an additional 990 M<sup>2</sup> of gym space.

In addition to the secured availability of gymnasium space noted in **Figure One**, there is an opportunity for the City to acquire the Massey Gym and the land on which it sits from the School District. The gym is about 817.5M<sup>2</sup> with ceiling height of 7.62M. It was built in 1949. The facility includes some support spaces which comprise an additional 1713.5M<sup>2</sup> of single storey space for a total of 2531M<sup>2</sup>. The additional spaces are comprised of dressing rooms, activity rooms, bleacher seating, storage areas and some mechanical and electrical spaces. They would be suitable to support a wide variety of public recreation uses, and more specifically, some of these spaces would ideally suit the option of dedicating the gym for gymnastics uses. However, the ceiling height would not be ideal for trampoline uses. The City has estimated that an investment of up to \$6.6M would be required to retrofit the entire 2,531M<sup>2</sup> Massey Gym Wing to render it sustainable for another four or five decades as a publicly accessible gym. It would also be the largest of the gyms that the City controls, making it somewhat unique in the City; and the only one with significant spectator capacity.

# Uses of Available Gymnasias

There are a number of issues around use of gymnasias which need to be understood, as they will drive decision making about how much gym capacity is needed.

## Gymnastics and Trampoline Uses

Gymnastics and Trampoline programs and sport group rentals had been a large part of the use of the Arenex before it collapsed in 2016. For more than five decades the gymnastics program had been successfully run concurrently with other uses of that facility. It is one of the most successful programs within the City's recreation delivery system with registrations for ten week programs peaking in 2016 at an average of 1226 children per session and a waiting list averaging 186 participants. In addition to this program there are associated uses of the gymnastics equipment including:

- Weekly adult and youth drop in programs;
- 400 pre-school participants in an average week;
- 24 hours per week rentals to the Shasta Trampoline Club.

The gymnastics and trampoline programs suffered a significant setback with the collapse of the Arenex. It is now operating at about half the registration numbers it did before 2016. However, there is no reason that it could not grow again quickly to previous levels, and if sufficiently appropriate capacity were to be made available, it will likely grow well beyond its previous levels even at current population levels. With population growth in the City, it could conceivably increase by 50% to 75% in the long term (10 –15 year) future.

## Fitness Uses

The current plan is to designate the smaller of the two gyms in the replacement for the Centennial Community Centre for primarily fitness uses. That doesn't mean that it won't be able to accommodate other uses, but that fitness classes and youth services will predominate. They become the default use of this space with other uses filling in when it isn't required for its two primary target uses.

## Other Gym Uses

Except for the fitness and gymnastics/trampoline uses mentioned above, most other gym uses don't require significant fixed equipment, specialized surfaces or supports, or substantial set up time. Therefore, they can and do share gym spaces that can be scheduled for sequential uses without any delay between them. This is the case for most gym use in New Westminster which is characterized as follows:

- Ball hockey —24 teams of adults had recently used gyms for weekly league games.
- Badminton —Currently a drop-in activity, primarily for seniors, accommodated at Century House Multipurpose Room, this sport could have an adult league, but one does not currently exist. There used to be drop in adult badminton opportunities, but they cannot be accommodated presently.
- Basketball —Currently accommodated as a program primarily at Queensborough Community Centre, there are no youth or adult leagues due to lack of available capacity.
- Volleyball —This stable activity is currently accommodated at middle school gyms two evenings each week with the City picking up the rental costs thereof.
- Pickleball —one of the fastest growing of all gym court sports, this activity is currently accommodated in a variety of large and small spaces around the City including Century House Multipurpose Room, Queensborough Community Centre gym and some middle schools.
- Table Tennis —This sport is currently accommodated at Queensborough Community Centre and at Century House. It has several hours per week of gym/hall use and there is more demand than can easily be accommodated.
- Soccer and other outdoor sports —Many outdoor sports, like soccer, need to practice indoors during inclement weather. Very little of that need is currently met in New Westminster due to lack of capacity, but there are many outstanding requests for space.

In addition to the above noted sports, gymnasiums are used occasionally for general activities including day camps, children's play programs, special events, some large meetings, cadet drill practices, speeches and rallies, a few performances and a few displays of art.

# Current Use in Relation to Capacity for Use

It is reasonably clear that almost all available capacity for public uses of gym spaces is being utilized, and that there is excess demand for use that isn't currently being accommodated in existing facilities, as evidenced by waitlists and sport league requests that go unfulfilled. Experience before 2016 shows clearly that the gymnastics and trampoline uses of gyms could easily be restored to their previous levels if appropriate spaces were added to the inventory. It is also clear that uses such as ball hockey would be restored to pre-2016 levels if appropriate capacity becomes available.

# Trends in Use of Gymnasia

Over the next ten to twenty years, there will be growing need for public uses of gymnasia for some recreational purposes. This growing need is summarized in **Figure Two**.

**Figure Two: Summary of Projected Trends for Existing Uses of Gyms in New Westminster**

Category of Gym Use	Projected Trend	Indicators Supporting the Trend
Gymnastics and Trampoline	Moderate growth or better	With growth in the number of children in the City, there is room to grow these activities further.
Activities related to gymnastics and trampoline	Moderate growth or better	Activities such as Motoring Munchkins and circus programs, have been growing and have not been fully exploited due to lack of space to accommodate them. With growth in the number of children, there is room to grow these activities further.
Summer Camps for Children	Moderate growth or better	With growth in the number of children, there is room to grow these activities further.
Ball Hockey	Moderate growth in the short term to pre-2016 levels; modest growth thereafter	It is reasonable to anticipate that if appropriate facilities are made available for this sport, it will grow to at least the level of participation experienced prior to 2016. Because it was growing at that time, there is likely room to continue to grow at least moderately.
Basketball	Stable	This sport has been quite stable over the past five years. It will likely continue to be stable in the future, with limited opportunity for growth.
Volleyball	Stable	This sport has been quite stable over the past five years. It will likely continue to be stable in the future, with limited opportunity for growth.
Badminton	Stable until the collapse of the Arenex	Once new Sportsplex opens, the drop in badminton activity is expected to return and remain stable.

Category of Gym Use	Projected Trend	Indicators Supporting the Trend
Table Tennis	Stable	This sport has been quite stable over the past five years. It will likely continue to be stable in the future, with limited opportunity for growth.
Indoor Soccer	Moderate growth or better	The proportion of young people playing soccer in the winter and needing to use a warm, dry indoor practice space has been high and stable for several years. With anticipated growth in this age group, there will be more need in the future almost none of which has been accommodated in the past.
Lacrosse	Moderate growth or better	The proportion of young people playing lacrosse in the City and needing indoor practice space has been stable for several years. With anticipated growth in this age group, there will be more need in the future.
Fitness Classes	Stable or moderate growth	There has been strong demand for adult and youth fitness programming for the last two decades. This is likely to be a relatively stable level of activity for the foreseeable future, although growth in seniors focused fitness will likely grow.
Pickleball	Significant growth	Interest in pickleball is growing in most communities and will continue to be supported with an increase in older adults. However, there is often resistance to pay for use of gymnasias that can moderate actual use.

As **Figure Two** suggests, there will be sufficient growth over the next ten years in activities such as gymnastics that additional gymnasias will be required over and above what is already in the planning and construction stages.

A photograph of a female gymnast in a pink leotard performing a backflip in a gymnasium. She is upside down, with her hair in a ponytail. The background shows blue mats and other gym equipment.

# SETTING A LONG-TERM SERVICE LEVEL



# 3

The current level of service is approximately .03 M<sup>2</sup> of publicly accessible gymnasium space per capita in New Westminster. While there are no clear statistics with respect to provision of gymnasia which can be used to compare New Westminster with other Metro Vancouver municipalities, there is some anecdotal information that suggests this service level is consistent with other communities in Metro Vancouver.

### Recommendations

1. The City of New Westminster should set a long term service level for the provision of indoor publicly available gymnasia of .03M<sup>2</sup> per capita, and, that this standard would apply net of tenuous access to school gyms.
2. To maintain the above recommended service level, the City should acquire the Massey Gym and retrofit it as needed to render it usable as a fully publicly accessible recreation facility.
3. In the longer term future, it is likely that one additional gym will also be needed in the City, likely in the range of 10 to 20 years time. The greatest need for that facility will likely be in the most easterly portions of the City which is least well served by the existing inventory. But, a decision on that facility can wait for some time and be informed by the operation of gyms in the City's inventory over the next decade.

If the Massey Gym were acquired in the short term, it would satisfy the above service level for at least the next decade and possibly beyond, and would serve to accommodate the growth needs shown in **Figure Two**.

# DEDICATING ONE GYM AS PRIMARILY FOR GYMNASTICS AND TRAMPOLINE



4

As new gymnasia become available over the next three years there are some options for how they are utilized. The most pivotal issue that drives the options is whether or not a space will be more or less dedicated for use for gymnastics and trampoline activities. In the past, at the Arenex, gymnastics and trampoline had shared the facility with other uses. That required a great deal of equipment set up and take down time and expense. If a gym were dedicated to these sports it would:

- Save an estimated \$87,000 per year (in 2019 dollars) in staff time to set up and take down heavy equipment;
- Add time for public use that would otherwise be allocated to set up and take down;
- Allow increased capacity for gymnastics and trampoline programming that would satisfy currently frustrated demand (i.e. serve waitlists and population growth);
- Allow increased capacity for activities such as Motoring Munchkins and Circus programs;
- Allow more rental time for the competitive trampoline club;
- Add to the life expectancy of the equipment that could be more permanently mounted;
- Increase the safety of the program due to more permanent mounting and enhanced safety supports (e.g. dedicated foam pits) and reduced risk of injury to anyone involved in set up or take down.

The most likely projection is that a dedicated gymnastics and trampoline facility could be fully utilized if all demand for drop in, program and rental uses were met at a single facility and the community continues to grow as projected.

One scenario for dedicating a facility for trampoline and gymnastics is outlined in **Figure Three**.

**Figure Three: Projected Optimal Use of Publicly Available Gymnasias in New Westminster**

Facility	Anticipated Use in Relation to Capacity
Acquisition of Massey Gym and retrofit for use	Lots of demand for City sponsored programs and group rentals for indoor hard surface sports like ball hockey, indoor soccer, badminton, basketball, lacrosse, volleyball, and pickleball
New Sportsplex	Dedicate primarily to gymnastics and trampoline programs, drop in opportunities and group rentals.
New NWACC Facility —West Gym	Lots of demand for City sponsored programs, drop in opportunities and group rentals
New NWACC Facility —East Gym	Primary uses would include fitness activities but other complementary uses (e.g. dance, martial arts) could also be accommodated
Century House Douglas Fir Room	Senior focussed activities and social events would continue to be a priority during weekdays with a broader variety of uses during the evenings.
Century House Multipurpose Room	Senior focussed active uses would continue to be a priority during weekdays with a broader variety of uses during the evenings including a focus on youth activities.
Queensborough Community Centre Gym	Variety of City sponsored drop in opportunities, programs and group rentals similar to what is currently available
New NWSS Gym	City could rent this for some sports leagues, but some rentals could be pre-empted due to the school needing the space
Queensborough Middle School	City could continue to rent space for some sports leagues or programs
Fraser River Middle School	City could continue to rent space for some sports leagues or programs
École Glenbrook Middle School	City Could continue to rent space for some sports leagues or programs

### Recommendation

4. When the new Sportsplex becomes available, the City should assign gymnastics and trampoline programs and services as the primary use for this space and consider the overall assignment of uses as summarized in **Figure Three** on a trial basis for at least one year.

# RISK ASSESSMENT



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In making any significant investment decision in a new public asset, council must also consider the magnitude of the risk associated with that investment. The biggest risk of acquiring the Massey Gym is the annual cost of operating and maintaining the facility. The portion of the building that will be assigned to the Parks and Recreation Department to operate as a recreation facility is currently estimated to incur a net annual operating cost of less than \$250,000<sup>1</sup>. If, for some reason, the facility is not well utilized, that cost might be incurred for a relatively smaller amount of benefit. Once the facility has been acquired and made available for public use, there is very little way of reducing this risk, short of mothballing the facility until need increases. This risk is considered to be quite modest.

The second most significant risk is the capital required to retrofit the facility, which is currently projected to be less than \$6.6M. If the facility is not as well utilized to meet real needs as anticipated in this report, this investment might not be as justified as it is believed to be. One means of reducing this risk is to phase the capital investment over time, investing only enough initially to bring the facility up to a safe and usable standard, and investing further once the high levels of use have been substantiated.

## Opportunity Costs

As part of its decision to make an investment in a public asset, council must also consider the opportunity cost of that investment. However, the scope of this review did not include consideration of the opportunity cost of doing something else. Alternative ways of investing the \$6M required to retrofit the Massey Gym that might yield as much or more benefit are not evident and have not been identified. Nor have alternative uses of the site on which the gym currently sits been investigated to determine if more effective ways of utilizing this high profile important location within New Westminster exist.

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<sup>1</sup> The cost of operating the Arenex in its last year of operation (net of operating revenues) was about \$470,000, which is of comparable size and complexity to the Massey Gym. This included about \$19,000 in utility costs.







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