Managing Leisure

Factors leading to the implementation of strategic plans for parks and recreation

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Strategic planning for parks and recreation (P & R) in municipalities occurs worldwide, but evaluation of the process and content of such planning is scarce. This study evaluated those factors that lead to success in P & R planning in a case study area, the Province of Ontario in Canada. Research revealed the factors required for successful implementation of P & R plans, including 23 factors in planning process; 26 in plan content, 10 in human/implementation, and 13 obstacles to implementation. The research concluded that some of the planning deficiencies found were due to the absence of a coherent provincial policy toward plan development and content. In addition, the research found weakness in the capability of many P & R agencies, and especially those of smaller municipalities to undertake and implement strategic planning. The 71 identified planning factors that play a role in improving plan implementation should be applicable wherever strategic planning for P & R is undertaken.

Keywords: parks, recreation, strategic planning, municipal, evaluation, tourism

INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it (Bryson, 1995). Strategic planning follows a series of steps, including mission, objectives, external analysis, internal analysis, development of alternatives, strategy selection, implementation, and control of the strategy (Bryson, Freeman, & Roering, 1986). It is similar to the rational-comprehensive model of planning, but with more emphasis on specific steps that can be taken immediately to produce desirable outcomes (Boyne, Gould-Williams, Law, & Walker, 2004).

Strategic planning occurs in many government and corporate organizations, including the military, manufacturing companies, and environmental agencies (Bickis, 2008).

Boyne's (2001) meta-analysis of public sector strategic planning studies found that 'a majority of the evidence shows that planning works' (p. 79). Boyne concluded that 'although planning is, on average, a contributor to organizational success, it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for high performance . . . ' (p. 85), implying that it would be worthwhile to understand the various factors that lead to success of planning and plan implementation.

The commonly defined characteristics of a good plan include

(1) the factual base (Berke, Backhurst, Laurian, Crawford, & Dixon, 2006; Berke & Godschalk, 2009; Brody, 2003a, 2003b; Norton, 2008);
(2) the goals (Berke & Godschalk, 2009; Brody, 2003a, 2003b);

(3) implementation (Berke & Godschalk, 2009; Brody, 2003b; Norton, 2008);

(4) policies (Berke & Godschalk, 2009; Brody, 2003a, 2003b);

(5) internal consistency (Berke & Godschalk, 2009; Berke et al., 2006; Norton, 2008);

(6) monitoring (Berke & Godschalk, 2009; Berke et al., 2006);

(7) interorganizational coordination (Berke & Godschalk, 2009; Brody, 2003b); and

(8) plan presentation (Berke & Godschalk, 2009; Norton, 2008).

Morckel (2010) and Talen (1996a) state that it is important to understand if the plan was successfully implemented, an important sign of success. Assessments of planning success require (1) a definition of success, (2) empirical knowledge of when and where success took place, and (3) a method for measurement of success (Talen, 2005). Success in planning can be defined as the degree of implementation that occurs (Talen, 1997). Empirical knowledge can be obtained by studies of existing plans. The measurement of the implementation of those plans can be done through the review of the plans themselves and interviews with key stakeholders.

Laurian et al. (2004, p. 556) state that 'Without an understanding of the degree to which plans are implemented and of the determinants of effective implementation, little improvement to plan implementation can be made.' It is therefore critically important for planners to understand the factors that lead to plan implementation, so that future planning processes can be designed for effective implementation. This can be done by evaluating the factors that lead to implementation or non-implementation of specific policies and recommendations.

Parks and recreation (P & R) planning, as envisaged by McLean, Bannon, and Gray (1999), is strategic in form and function. A review of P & R plans can be undertaken by policy analysis which is subdivided into two fields: analysis of policy, an analytical and descriptive attempt to understand the development of policy; and analysis for policy, a proscriptive attempt to create new policy. Analysis of policy attempts to explain policies and their development through analysis and description. The policy process approach puts its focal point on political processes and involved stakeholders. The scope is the intermediate scale and its problem interpretation is a political nature. It aims at determining what processes and means are used. It tries to explain the role and influence of stakeholders within the policy-making process (Nagel, 1999). The research for this paper is an analysis of policy.

There is a considerable literature providing guidance on the planning processes that should be used for the development of P & R strategic plans (Bannon, 1976; Burton, 1976; Gold, 1979, 1980, 1983; Harper, 2009; Hunt & Brooks, 1983; Kelsey & Gray, 1996; Kraus & Curtis, 1986; Ministry of Sport and Recreation Western Australia, 1999; Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, 1985; Reid 2007; Wolter, 1999). There is no single planning process for developing such plans, but several processes share similar components. The components common to four of these processes are outlined in Table 1. First, goals and objectives are developed in each of these four processes in the very beginning. Some authors state that goals should be formulated before data are gathered and analyzed, but about half felt that goals should be formulated after data were gathered and analyzed. A second similarity is the conduct of an analysis and review. All of the authors indicated the need to collect data to determine existing conditions and potential opportunities, to analyze the current and future population, and to determine the current and future needs of the citizens. This step was always conducted before alternatives to reach the

Table 1. The Planning Process for P & R Master Plans?

	Ministry of Sport and Recreation Australia ([1999](#))	Ministry of Tourism and Recreation ([1985](#))	Hunt and Brooks ([1983](#))	Harper ([2009](#))
Step 1	*Identifying values and establishing planning principles* • Equity and access • Cultural issues • Services and facilities	*Preplanning* • Determining if there is a need for the plan	*Development of the planning process strategy* • Identify desired end products of the plan • Identify resources to complete the plan • Results in a plan for the planning process	*Goals for the plan* • Setting goals of the plan • Determining what the planning process is intended to achieve
Step 2	*Research* • Assessment of need through standards, consultation, comparison, and analysis	*Terms of reference* • Determining objectives of planning process • Who will be involved in the process • How long the process will take (etc.)	*Development of the data information system* • Interacting with Step 3 • Store and retrieve data • Generate summaries • Generate alternatives • Evaluate and synthesize alternatives	*Terms of reference* • Determine how the plan will be used, how it will be developed, what information it needs to include, when it should be completed, and by whom • See Harper for more information on developing the terms of reference
Step 3	*Synthesizing the research* • Identifying trends and patterns • Assessing trends in relation to values and principles	*Data collection and analysis* • Existing recreation services • What will be needed in the future	*Establishment of goals* • Must include the public • Order by importance • Create objectives that can be measured	*Environmental assessment* • Collection of data on the internal operating environment of the agency and the exit journal environment affecting the operation of the agency

(*Continued*)

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Table 1. Continued

	Ministry of Sport and Recreation Australia (1999)	**Ministry of Tourism and Recreation (1985)**	**Hunt and Brooks (1983)**	**Harper (2009)**
Step 4	*Formulating policies that describe the preferred future* • Formulation of policies on sport and recreation services and facilities are created	*Goals and objectives* • Establish goals and objectives for recreation in the community	*Suboptimization of the means of goal achievement* • Generate alternatives	*Consultation* • Planners and proponents of the plan consult with the stakeholders as well as individuals affected by the plan
Step 5	*Preparing recommendations and strategies* • Recommendations are established to aid the municipality in achieving its policies	*Alternatives* • Determine options to meet goals • Determining costs of each option	*Synthesizing plan alternatives* • Synthesize of plan alternatives to create a single alternative to pursue	*Analysis and synthesis* • Analysis of data to identify problems, suggest solutions, identify priority, and determine the consequences of each approach
Step 6	*Implementation strategies* • Implement the plan	*Selection of alternatives* • Choose the best alternative to meet the goals	*Implementation* • Implement the plan • Continual evaluation and changes	*The plan* • A set of strategies designed to implement the preferred course of action
Step 7	*Evaluation* • Both quantitative and qualitative strategies should be used • Should be done on a regular basis	*Implementation plan* • How will the objectives be accomplished? • Who will be responsible? • When will they be accomplished by?	*Goal reassessment* • Periodic reassessment of goals	*Implementation* • Strategies, ideas, and actions recommended in the plan are carried out
Step 8		*Evaluation* • Review plan annually • Make necessary changes	*Begin process again* • Note: Evaluation is ongoing throughout the entire process	*Evaluation and review* • Review the plan to ensure predictions and assumptions are accurately valid • The planning process is continuing and circular; therefore, the planning process begins again

desired future conditions were determined. A third similarity was that after the analysis was completed, alternative approaches to achieve the desired goals were developed and one alternative was chosen. The planning process also always included an implementation stage that typically involved ranking priorities, assigning individuals to tasks, and creating timelines and budgets. Finally, authors noted that the process should end with an evaluation and that the process should then begin again. This would ensure that P & R planning is an iterative process and is therefore consistent with adaptive management. Therefore, a study which determines the factors that lead to planning success can assist with ongoing adaptive management.

The literature agrees that plan evaluation is necessary and valuable (Bannon, 1976; Burton, 1976; Gold, 1979, 1980, 1983; Harper, 2009; Hunt & Brooks, 1983; Kelsey & Gray, 1996; Kraus & Curtis, 1986; Ministry of Sport and Recreation Western Australia, 1999; Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, 1985; Reid 2007; Wolter, 1999). However, there is a paucity of research that outlines how the evaluation of plans provides information on how planning processes could improve future plans and enhance the degree of plan implementation. Accordingly, this paper assesses the factors that led to success in municipal P & R strategic planning, by studying such plans in the Province of Ontario in Canada.

Talen (1996a) noted that the evaluation of city plans typically focuses on the planning process or the effects of the plan, but not on implementation. Studies that focus on plan implementation tend to be subjective, intuitive, and non-empirical. Plan implementation is often assumed to be successful, if the desired outcomes are achieved. Many plans are redone or updated without consideration of the 'implementation status of the originally prepared plan' (Talen, 1996b, p. 248). When evaluating success in planning,

one must differentiate between plan success and planning success. Planning success indicates that the planning process is successful, whereas plan success refers to the extent to which the plan's recommendations were implemented.

Methods for evaluating plan implementation can be classified as non-quantitative or quantitative (Talen, 1996b). Non-quantitative methods may be subjective and evaluation criteria are often poorly defined. In Roeseler's (1982) book *Successful American urban plans*, for example, he indicated that 'The accounts are based on my personal experience in some capacity and are as accurate as my own memory.' Roeseler's conclusions about successful plans are based on his subjective judgments. Conclusions made from these types of studies are usually vague indicators of success (Talen, 1996b).

Quantitative methods in plan analyses were few in number (Talen, 1996b). Alterman and Hill (1978) used grid matrixes to determine 'accordances and deviations' between land use plans and actual use of land. Similarly, Talen (1996a) focused on the distribution of public facilities by examining patterns presented in the plans and actual patterns following implementation of the plan. Talen used univariate analysis, bivariate analysis, and spatial analysis to determine success or how convergent the plan and reality were. Laurian et al. (2004) used conformance-based plan implementation evaluation (PIE) methodology to determine successful implementation of city plans. The PIE methodology 'focuses on the land development permitting process and the use of appropriate development techniques' in order to determine success (p. 471). No studies were found that conducted quantitative analysis using the opinions of planners with professional experience in P & R planning.

The purpose of this research was to determine the factors that make P & R master plans more likely to be implemented, with

plan implementation being synonymous with plan success. The main research question was: What are the factors that lead to implementation of P & R Master Plans? More specifically, this study examined the processes of creating a P & R plan, the contents of these plans, and what aids and impedes the implementation of plan recommendations. Content analysis, interviews, and a panel of experts were used to determine these factors.

ONTARIO CASE STUDY BACKGROUND

It is important to understand the historical, legal, and political context in which P & R planning has and is currently taking place. Municipalities in Ontario have often received provincial funding for facilities and programs for P & R; as early as 1946–1947, the government of Ontario provided funding to 84 municipalities for P & R (Andrew, Harvey, & Dawson, 1994). From the 1940s to the 1970s, P & R planning in municipalities was ad hoc and oriented toward facility development. In the 1970s, the Province of Ontario began promoting strategic planning by municipalities in the area of P & R. This policy promoted a long-term view, focusing on a wide variety of activities, programs, and facilities. The first known P & R plan for a municipality in Ontario was created by a US-based consulting firm in 1972 for the City of Thunder Bay (Getz, Graham, Payne, & June, 1985a).

In 1975, the Government of Ontario established the Ministry of Culture and Recreation, the first time that culture and recreation had full department status in this province (Skerrett, 1992). This agency immediately set about preparing guidelines for P & R planning and began using the revenue from the WINTARIO Lottery program to fund the construction of recreational and cultural facilities (Wilkinson, 1984). In 1976, the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation published guidelines for public recreation facility standards

(Ontario, 1976a). In the same year, the Ontario Ministry of Housing published a document outlining community-specific open space standards (Ontario, 1976b). In 1977, the Canadian Ministry of State for Urban Affairs provided guidelines for urban open space standards (Burton, Ellis, & Homenuck, 1977). In 1979, a government document gave directions on the preparation of culture and recreation master plans (Ontario, 1979). In 1985, the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation outlined the principles and practices for municipal recreation planning (Ontario, 1985). In this period, grant programs provided funds for plan development and implementation. The majority of the grant money was aimed at capital facilities 'with only a small amount being devoted to matching grants to municipalities for master plan studies' (Wilkinson, 1985, p. 8). After reviewing the grant program in 1980, the Ministry of Culture and Recreation created the WINTARIO Planning Grants Program to support the development of master plans by municipalities (Wilkinson, 1985). The program provided up to 40% of the cost of creating a master plan in communities with a population over 5000 and up to 75% for communities with a population under 5000. This program promoted planning by municipalities; however, many of the master plans created focused on facilities with low emphasis on programs. This granting program stimulated strategic planning for P & R in municipalities.

Jaakson (1985) reported that most municipalities had a P & R department and that 'It is common for such departments to have a P & R master plan which identifies the recreation needs in the community, predicts future demand, and states policies for physical and social planning' (p. 275). Therefore, relatively quickly over a 10-year period from 1975 to 1985, municipal P & R planning flowered in Ontario and moved from a standards approach to a more holistic, recreation-demand focus.

A change in the provincial government in 1995 resulted in grant and funding changes for municipalities, which affected their ability to create P & R plans. Siegel (2003, p. 2) reported that the election of the Harris government in 1995 started the most 'comprehensive reform of municipal government since 1849'. That reform also reduced the levels of provincial grants to municipalities. In 1995, Ontario municipalities saw 31.9% of their budgets coming from provincial grants. This was reduced to 24.2% by 2000 (Siegel, 2003). However, municipalities saw an overall increase in their budgets because of increased access to property tax. Even with this overall income increase, there was a relative decrease in the operating budgets for recreation and culture, from 10% of municipal budgets in 1990 to 7.6% in 1999 (Slack, 2003). There was a small proportional change in capital budgets, down from 12% in 1990 to 11% in 1999 (Slack, 2003). Per capita operating expenditures in constant dollars declined over the 1990s from $151 per capita in 1990 to $133 per capita in 1999. This revealed that municipal operating expenditures on recreation and culture did not keep pace with population growth and inflation over the time from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s (Slack, 2003). As might be expected, the percentage of income from user fees and charges increased from 23% to 26% (Slack, 2003). Recognizing these problems, the Government of Ontario in 2000 established a two-year, $600 million fund for the capital development of small towns and rural areas. These capital funds were for 'economic development and quality of life' (Slack, Bourne, & Gertler, 2003, p.18).

Another major change brought about by the Harris government was municipal amalgamation. Amalgamation reduced the number of municipalities from 815 in 1996 to 445 by 2004 (AMO, 2006; Sancton, 2000). The amalgamation program was designed to reduce provincial funding of municipalities, reduce provincial tax load, and create municipalities with larger populations, greater tax bases, and higher levels of administrative capability (Siegel, 2003). The passing of a new Municipal Act in 2001 gave municipalities explicit authority in 'culture, parks, recreation and heritage' (Siegel, 2003, p. 14). This legislative change provided increased authority to this lower tier of government. However, the increased legal authority did not necessarily increase municipal capability in long-term P & R planning.

This literature revealed that the context for P & R planning changed over time. The initial 1975–1985 period saw aggressive provincial government policies toward encouragement of strategic planning, through the provision of guidelines and grants. After 1985 the province progressively reduced its role, by stopping the production of P & R planning guidelines and reducing or eliminating targeted grants. In the 1995–2005 period, the municipalities' actions in P & R planning occurred without provincial encouragement or direction during a time of tumultuous change caused by amalgamations.

Though the research is somewhat limited, four studies examined recreation planning in Ontario. Three of these studies were conducted in the 1980s when planning was booming and funding was readily available, the other is more recent.

Wilkinson (1984, 1985) examined 20 P & R master plans in Ontario to review current planning processes. Interviews with recreation staff and consultants revealed that the WINTARIO Planning Grant Program with the Community Programs Consultants were perceived as very beneficial to the municipality and should be continued. Also, despite the challenges involved in creating a plan, there was an anticipation of continued demand; therefore, the report recommended that the government should continue providing informational, personnel, and financial assistance. Though plans tended to focus on

facilities and land rather than the people and process, the author felt that most plans were being implemented and were making a positive impact on many municipalities.

Getz et al. (1985a, 1985b) examined 46 plans to determine the planning process used, key issues, implementation, and plan scope and comprehensiveness. The content analysis revealed that financial matters, organizational matters, culture, and historical concerns were typically neglected, though supply and inventory analysis, public input, and implementation were more the primary foci. The authors concluded that plans needed to be more comprehensive, needed to focus more on creating a permanent planning process, and should be less reliant on planning consultants.

Jaakson (1985) examined the process of master planning and the philosophy of the P & R department in two very different communities in Ontario to determine if the process of creating the plan was appropriate. He concluded that planning should shift from a standards approach to a recreation-demand approach.

More recently, Leone (2008) studied three municipalities to determine what factors aided in plan implementation. She found that a plan was more likely to be implemented when it reflected community needs, was realistic, provided adequate resources for implementation, and received widespread public support. Leone concluded that three things needed to be accomplished in order to improve plan implementation: (1) building the power of the P & R department; (2) building support from the community; and (3) building the political and organizational capacity of the recreation department. Leone's work is unique in that, rather than simply describing plan content, it explored the factors that led to improved plan implementation.

There is a research gap whereby planning professionals have not been given an opportunity to comment on the factors that lead to improved implementation of P & R plans, based on their professional planning experience.

In Ontario, all municipalities are required by law to have an Official Plan, which is an overall statement of policy for municipal land use. This is a legally competent document that must be followed by all citizens, corporations, and the municipality itself. There is no legal requirement that municipalities undertake subsidiary plans, such as those for P & R, transportation, water management, etc. However, many find it useful to undertake such subsidiary planning as a basis for the creation of the overall Official Plan.

METHODS

The research was conducted in four phases. Each phase was completed before the next began, with the data building from one stage to the next. Phase 1 involved selecting municipalities for the study. Phase 2 involved a quantitative content analysis of P & R master plans. Phase 3 involved interviews with recreation staff involved with the plans utilized for content analysis. Phase 4 involved a panel of experts in the field of recreation planning confirming planning factors identified from the previous three phases.

For Phase 1, a stratified random sample was chosen of nine municipalities, three from each of three different sizes: (1) larger municipalities with a population greater than 100,000; (2) medium-sized municipalities with a population of 10,001 to 100,000, and (3) small municipalities with a population of less than 10,000 people. All municipalities in Ontario were included in the overall population. Municipalities that were randomly selected were contacted by phone and asked if they were willing to be a part of this study. If they agreed, they were added to the list of participating

municipalities. If they were unwilling to participate, another name was drawn and contacted. This process continued until all size categories had three municipalities willing to be a part of the study.

For inclusion in the study, the municipalities must have a comprehensive recreation plan approved before November 2007. This date ensured that the municipality had at least two years to implement the plan before plan evaluation was done for this research starting in November 2009. Each municipality had to provide a copy of the P & R plan. There also needed to be one person in the P & R department who helped create the plan who was willing to be interviewed, and one person responsible for implementing plan recommendations and who was willing to be interviewed.

Forty-seven small municipalities were contacted, but only four fulfilled all the criteria listed above. The typical reason for exclusion was the lack of a plan. One did not agree to participate and another subsequently dropped out after refusing the request for a staff interview. Of the seven medium-sized municipalities contacted, four had plans and three agreed to participate in this study. Another 16 municipalities were contacted to find the three participants in the large municipality category. Therefore, nine municipalities agreed to participate and all wished to remain anonymous.

Phase 2 involved a content analysis on the nine plans provided by the chosen municipalities. The content analysis of the plans was quantitative in nature. Since the literature on best practices for P & R master plans is limited, Phase 2 used a conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) where the researchers used a checklist based on Getz et al. (1985a, 1985b) refined through literature review, especially Baer (1997), and a pretest on one P & R master plan. The checklist allowed the researchers to determine the items that are present or absent in each plan and to compare plans.

Though it was planned to use NVIVO software for the content analysis, electronic copies were available for less than half of the plans. The other plans had only paper copies. Therefore, pen and paper analysis occurred in the place of NVIVO software. Once all of the plans were analyzed, the results were compiled. First, the number of plans that included each section listed on the checklist was determined for each municipality size group and added to the findings table. The second part of the checklist was a measure of quality of each item. In order to measure the quality of each plan, three dimensions were examined: complexity, replicability, and accuracy. Complexity measures how detailed each section was. Replicability measures the extent to which the researcher could replicate the methods used and findings. Accuracy measures the extent to which the information was correct. Each of these was scored on a scale from 1 to 4. Using this scoring system, the researchers determined the modal score for each of the quality indices for each item for each of the municipality size groups. When no major differences were found amongst the different size municipalities, a combined modal score was placed in the findings table. This process created a list of factors that appeared to lead to plan implementation and success. This type of evaluation, after the plan has been created and implemented, is known in the planning literature as evaluating *post hoc* plan outcomes (Baer, 1997).

Phase 3 involved interviews with P & R staff who had been involved in creating the plan and others who were responsible for implementing the plan. The purpose of these interviews was to determine what parts of the process and content of the master plan identified in the content analysis facilitated implementation. The interview questions were semi-standardized (Berg, 2004), which means that the wording and order of questions were flexible, probes

were added or deleted, and the researcher answered questions and clarified questions. Before the interview, the interviewee was sent a copy of the questions to be asked for their consideration. They were also sent a list of all the recommendations from their plan and asked to indicate on a level from 1 to 5 the stage of implementation for each item. One indicates not at all implemented and 5 completely implemented.

The analysis process for the interview data, as described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), began with the researcher reading the entire interview to get a sense of the whole document. Next, the text was read word by word and codes were created to describe words or phrases. Then, codes were sorted into relevant categories, and then refined further into clusters. Finally, relationships between categories and clusters were identified. This process was repeated for each interview.

The findings from Phase 2 (quantitative analysis of plans) and Phase 3 (interviews of staff) were combined into a list of best practices and presented to a panel of nine P & R planning experts for Phase 4, through a panel technique. The expert panel recruited for Phase 4 contained two academics, six planning consultants, and one municipal recreation staff member with expertise in planning. Each expert was presented with a document that contained 72 items. This document had four sections: (1) Process; (2) Content; (3) Human/Implementation Factors; and (4) Major Obstacles. The experts were asked to rate each of the items on a five-point scale of agreement (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and also asked to make comments.

RESULTS

This paper presents the findings largely from Phase 4 of the study. These findings from the expert panel are a summary whereby the experts agree or disagree with the items

derived from Phases 2 plan analysis and Phase 3 interviews of municipal park staff. However, reference is sometimes made to Phases 1, 2, and 3 in order to provide context and explanation of the panel outcomes.

A total of 72 items were presented to the experts. For the results section of this paper, the 23 items dealing with planning process will be outlined first, followed by the 26 items dealing with plan content. Finally, the 10 human and implementation factors and 13 major obstacles will be outlined. Given the complexity of the 72 items listed in Tables 2–5, only the most important are outlined in the sections following.

Planning Process

With regard to the planning process, all 23 items had a mean score between neutral (3) and strongly agree (5) (Table 2). The vast majority (16 items) had a mean score between agree (4) and strongly agree (5). The highest scored items, those over 4.5, included staff understanding the rationale behind the plan and having a commitment to the plan ($M = 5.00$, SD = 0.00), consulting both the general public and special interest groups ($M = 4.86$, SD = 0.38), having a positive consultant–staff working relationship ($M = 4.86$, SD = 0.38), public consultation through all planning states ($M = 4.71$, SD = 0.49), involvement of staff responsible for implementation ($M = 4.71$, SD = 0.49), much time and effort in creating terms of reference ($M = 4.57$, SD = 0.53), committees to aid in plan implementation ($M = 4.57$, SD = 0.79), use of a consultant ($M = 4.57$, SD = 0.79), and staff having the confidence to challenge draft recommendations ($M = 4.57$, SD = 0.79). These highly ranked plan process factors reveal the importance of three areas. One is the very important role of involving the agency staff in planning and implementation. The second is the importance of involving the public in plan

Table 2. Results from the Expert Panel: Planning Process

Statement	Mean	SD	Comments
Plans are more successful when recreation staff understand the rationale behind recommendations and feel a stronger commitment to implement the plan	5.00	0.00	Total agreement
Plans are more successful when time was taken to consult the general public as well as groups with special interests in recreation	4.86	0.38	Essential to understanding need
Plans are more successful when the consultant has a positive working relationship with municipal staff members	4.86	0.38	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when public consultation continues throughout the stages of planning	4.71	0.49	Creates the best plans but can be costly and unrealistic
Plans are more successful when recreation staff members who are responsible for implementing the plan were involved in the planning process	4.71	0.49	High level of agreement
Plan processes and content are structured by the terms of reference; therefore, much time and effort needs to be spent at this stage of the process	4.57	0.53	Should not be copied from another municipality, they need to be unique
Plans are more successful when the staff or public committees were formed to aid in implementation of plan recommendations	4.57	0.79	Need to work together
Plans are more successful when municipalities used the knowledge and experience of a consultant	4.57	0.79	More impartial and builds better community support
Poor consultants exist so it all depends on the skills of the department and the consultant			
Plans were more successful when the planning processes involved recreation staff who felt comfortable enough with the consultant to challenge draft recommendations in the plan	4.57	0.79	Really important yet sometimes the reverse is true
Plans are more successful when the plan gained council support by including council in the process from start to finish	4.43	0.98	Increases likelihood of approval, yet very political
Plans are more successful when the plans indicated in detail how the plan would be reviewed and updated, and whose is responsible for this task	4.43	0.79	May be tied to funding therefore may not be able to be conducted as planned
Plans are more successful when criteria for measuring success were included in the plan	4.33	0.82	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when public consultation continues into implementation	4.29	1.11	High level of agreement

(*Continued*)

Table 2. Continued

Statement	Mean	SD	Comments
Plans are more successful when the plans indicated in detail when and how evaluation of implementation should take place	4.29	0.76	High level of agreement
The planning process is more successful when a steering committee aids in the process	4.14	0.69	Most important part if formed in the correct manner
Plans are more successful when the plans indicated a method for communicating implementation levels to the public and council	4.14	1.07	High level of agreement
Because many municipal staff are not trained in recreation planning or in general planning principles, recreation staff needs to work with the planning department when going through the planning process	3.86	0.69	More so in small municipalities
Each community is different and therefore the planning process for creating the plan must be unique	3.71	1.25	Very important to pull unique qualities of community. Though a general process that is always followed, there are elements that are unique
Because many municipal staff are not trained in recreation planning or in general planning principles, recreation staff members need to work with the planning department when writing the terms of reference	3.71	0.76	More so in small municipalities
Future plan evaluation is often overlooked when the plans are written	3.71	1.38	High level of agreement
There is a need for more information to be made available to municipalities to aid in writing terms of reference	3.57	1.13	Need for municipalities to share their own experiences, sharing may be enough. Large municipalities have planning departments to turn to
Plans are more successful when public consultation begins before developing the terms of reference	3.43	1.13	P & R staff should already have a good perspective of their community needs. Depends on the role the public plays. Most public do not have necessary knowledge
Writing successful terms of reference involves the public, council, and recreation staff to ensure that everyone is clear as to the direction of the plan and has realistic expectations about its outcomes	3.29	1.11	Good in theory, difficult in reality. Technical documents that need to be developed by a professional

Note: 1, Strongly Disagree; 2, Disagree; 3, Neutral, 4, Agree; and 5, Strongly Agree.

formulation and within committees that aid in plan implementation. The third is the important roles of the terms of reference and consultants.

There were 7 items that scored between 4 and 4.5 and 7 between neutral (3) and agree (4). We will outline those that had larger standard deviations, indicating some

Table 3. Results from the Expert Panel: Plan Content

Statement	Mean	SD	Comments
Plans are more successful when the plans clearly define the goals of the municipal department who operates the programs	4.71	0.49	Helps keep people focused. Forms basis for assessment
Successful public consultation processes involve a variety of methods (surveys, interviews, public meetings, and/or focus groups)	4.71	0.49	High level of agreement
Whether the municipalities decides to include culture in the recreation plan or create a separate culture plan, the two plans should be linked and work together	4.71	0.49	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when they indicate priorities and the criteria for determining priorities	4.71	0.49	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when the goals for the plans are clearly linked to the goals of the municipality as laid out in the municipalities' Official Plan or other similar documents	4.57	0.53	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when the plans contain a detailed inventory of all facilities belonging to the municipality	4.57	0.53	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when they contain the findings from the public consultation process and indicate how these findings are incorporated into the recommendations	4.57	0.79	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when they contain background information on the municipality including where the municipality is located, trends effecting recreation and the municipality as a whole, population analysis, demographic analysis, and an analysis of the organizational structure	4.43	0.53	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when they use the community consultation findings as a guide for recommendations	4.43	0.79	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when they indicate the timing for the implementation of each recommendation	4.43	0.79	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when they are flexible in their timing of implementation to allow for unforeseen circumstances	4.43	0.79	Need for flexibility; but there must be firm deadlines to ensure commitment
An analysis of cost of each recommendation must be conducted	4.43	0.53	Makes plan more realistic
Plans are more successful when a detailed inventory of all programs offered by the municipality is completed	4.17	1.17	High level of agreement

(*Continued*)

Table 3. Continued

Statement	Mean	SD	Comments
Plans are more successful when they chart out staff responsibility to implement plan recommendations to ensure one staff member is not being overloaded in any one year	4.14	0.90	High level of agreement
The implementation section of the plan document must be sufficiently detailed so that the reader can take the recommendation and know all the steps necessary to implement it	4.14	1.21	Very useful
Plans are more successful when an inventory of all other available recreation facilities not owed by the municipality is completed	4.00	0.82	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when they indicate individual staff positions that are responsible for each recommendation	4.00	1.15	More so in larger municipalities
All cost estimates should include a statement of potential funding sources	4.00	0.58	High level of agreement
Each agency staff person's job description should include their plan implementation responsibility	3.86	0.90	Good idea in theory but there is a need for flexibility as circumstances change
Action steps allow the municipality to use volunteer committees to implement some of the plan	3.86	0.90	High level of agreement
Successful public consultation processes focused on a SWOT analysis of the current recreation delivery system	3.43	1.27	Many other tools and a good consultant should use many of them
Tourism needs to be considered in the plan	3.43	1.27	Only if deemed to be locally relevant
Idea 1: The plan should include the recommendations and action steps for the future. Background information should be in a separate document	3.29	1.25	Depends on municipality
Plans are more successful when a detailed inventory of recreation programs offered by other agencies is completed	3.29	0.76	Useful, yet difficult
Culture and history are areas of increasing importance in a recreation department; however, knowledge and expertise in the area is typically limited within the recreation department	3.14	0.90	Depends on the municipality
Idea 2: Background provides justification for the recommendations and therefore should be in the main document along with all the recommendations	2.86	1.21	Depends on municipality

Note: 1, Strongly Disagree; 2, Disagree; 3, Neutral; 4, Agree; and 5, Strongly Agree.

disagreement. There was strong support of the concept that public consultation should continue into implementation ($M = 4.29$), but with disagreement ($SD = 1.11$). This disagreement may occur due to the fact that an ongoing public consultation process during the many years of plan implementation could be expensive and difficult.

Table 4. Results from the Expert Panel: Human/Implementation Factors

Statement	Mean	SD	Comments
Plans are more successful if council adopts the plan	4.71	0.76	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when key policy leaders in the local community continue to lobby on behalf of plan implementation	4.71	0.76	High level of agreement
Plan implementation is stronger when recreation staff members agree with the recommendations of the plan and have a strong commitment to implementing the plan	4.57	0.79	High level of agreement
Plans are successfully implemented if plan policies fit with the priorities of council	4.57	0.53	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when recreation staff updates council on the progress of plan implementation	4.57	0.79	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when citizens understand and agree with the recommendations	4.57	0.79	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful if council incorporates plan recommendations into the municipality's Official Plan	4.43	0.53	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when everyone in the department is well aware of the plan	4.29	0.76	High level of agreement
Every new staff member should be provided with a copy of the plan and be provided with training in plan development and implementation	4.29	0.95	High level of agreement
Plans are more successful when the citizens of a community bring recommendations to council	3.71	1.38	Issues with this idea

Note: 1, Strongly Disagree; 2, Disagree; 3, Neutral; 4, Agree; and 5, Strongly Agree.

There was strong support for the concept of having plans recommend a method for ongoing communication of plan implementation levels to the public and council ($M = 4.14$), but with some level of disagreement ($SD = 1.07$). First, there was support for the statement that each community is different and therefore each requires a unique plan process ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.25$), but with some disagreement. The comments from the experts clarified that a standard process should be used; however, the planners should adapt the plan process if unique community qualities in the area are identified.

Each of the statements regarding terms of reference in the plan process had support, but with high levels of disagreement. There was support for the statement that there is a need for more information to be made available to municipalities in writing the terms of reference ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.13$) which outline the planning to be undertaken. There was support with regard to involving the public, council, and the recreation staff in writing the terms of reference ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.11$). There was also support for beginning public consultation before writing the terms of reference ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.13$). The experts commented that writing technical terms of reference is a complex task and the involvement of many groups is difficult. Some commented that the public does not have the knowledge to do this task and therefore it should be conducted by experienced professionals.

The experts generally felt that plan evaluation was often overlooked in the planning process ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.38$). The high standard deviation for this item suggests that some of the experts disagreed that plan evaluation was overlooked. The experts agreed that a plan is more likely to be

Table 5. Results from the Expert Panel: Obstacles to Implementation

Statement	Mean	SD	Comments
Almost all of the municipalities indicated that a lack of resources was a huge obstacle to implementing plan recommendations. Plan recommendations should be created with financial reality in mind	5.00	0.00	High level of agreement
Plans were less successful when agency staff members held negative feelings toward the plan	4.83	0.41	High level of agreement
Changeover in council composition often reduces plan implementation	4.33	0.52	High level of agreement
Successful plan implementation is dependent upon council approval	4.33	0.82	High level of agreement
Plans were less successful when there was a lack of sufficient involvement from recreation staff	4.33	0.82	High level of agreement
Plans were less successful when recreation staff had insufficient knowledge of plan recommendations	4.33	0.52	High level of agreement
Competing planning projects in the municipality may cause a recreation plan to fail	4.33	0.82	High level of agreement
Plans were less successful when agency staff members lack commitment to the plan	4.17	0.75	High level of agreement
Some members of the public sometimes oppose the plan in principle and influence council not to adopt the plan	4.17	0.41	High level of agreement
Staff turnover is often a problem that reduces plan implementation	4.14	0.90	High level of agreement
Municipal amalgamation is a major problem	3.67	0.82	Issues with this idea
The plan typically calls for some sort of change in the way services are delivered or the types of services that are delivered. Many citizens oppose these changes out of fear	3.57	1.27	Advisory committees can aid in communicating these changes
After amalgamation, a common problem is that older communities often block attempts to create a new, overall plan and program	3.17	0.41	Issues with this idea

Note: 1, Strongly Disagree; 2, Disagree; 3, Neutral; 4, Agree; and 5, Strongly Agree.

successful when it includes details on how the evaluation of implementation should take place ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.76$). Therefore, the experts agreed that plan evaluation is important. Plan evaluation details should be outlined in the plan. However, some note that plan evaluation is often overlooked.

Plan Content

With regard to the items on plan content, all 26 items had a mean score between neutral (3) and strongly agree (5) (Table 3). Eighteen items had a mean score between agree (4) and strongly agree (5) with a fairly low

standard deviation, indicating a strong level of agreement.

The seven highest ranked items, above 4.5, include clearly defined goals ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 0.49$); variety of methods for public consultation ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 0.49$); culture plans should be linked to the P & R plan ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 0.49$); criteria for determining priorities ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 0.49$); plans must be linked to Official Plans ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 0.53$); plans contain a detailed inventory of facilities ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 0.53$); and public consultation is linked to recommendations ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 0.79$). These highly

ranked plan content factors reveal the importance of four areas. The goals for the municipal department that operates the plans must be clearly defined. The P & R plans should be linked to other important plans; the culture plans and to the Official Plan for the municipality. Third, it is important to show how public consultation findings were incorporated into recommendations. Fourth, plans should contain detailed inventory of all current P & R facilities.

There were 11 items between 4 and 4.5, and 6 items that had mean score between neutral (3) and agree (4). Some of the experts felt that creating an inventory of other agency's programs was too difficult and not as important as an internal inventory ($M = 3.29$, SD $= 0.76$). Second, experts indicated that strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis was useful, but only one method was used for obtaining information from the public ($M = 3.43$, SD $= 1.27$). The experts indicated that multiple methods should be used to gain the public's perspective. Third, there was disagreement with regard to whether or not tourism ($M = 3.43$, SD $= 1.27$) and culture ($M = 3.14$, SD $= 0.90$) should be a part of the recreation plan. Many experts felt that tourism and culture belong in separate plans that can be cross-referenced to the P & R plan if necessary. Fourth, the experts felt that it was not necessarily essential to change individual job descriptions when the plan has been created ($M = 3.86$, SD $= 0.90$). The experts noted that changing job descriptions can be difficult in a unionized municipality and by not changing job descriptions there is more flexibility on who can implement plan recommendations. Finally, not all of the experts agreed that having citizen groups implement the plan is a good idea ($M = 3.86$, SD $= 0.90$). The experts may not have seen this approach in action or have seen it fail in the past. Some experts may have misunderstood the statement and felt that citizen groups alone

cannot adequately implement plan recommendations. However, the statement was intended to state that citizen groups would be working with the recreation department to implement plan recommendations.

The lowest ranked item and the only one between disagree (2) and neutral (3) dealt with the inclusion of background information in the overall plan ($M = 2.85$, SD $= 1.21$). Three experts felt the background information should be in a separate document, one felt it should be in the plan, and three did not have a preference. The inclusion of background statistics on trends, demographics, and many other variables adds considerable length to the plan and makes it more challenging to read. The differences of opinion dealt with the location of the information, not whether it should be made available. This low-ranked item dealing with the inclusion of background information in the P & R plan was the only item with a mean below 3, indicating that the experts disagreed with its content. The importance of this item would have decreased in recent years as electronic publication of plans and background information, rather than paper documents, results in less concern about the volume of published plans.

Human and Implementation Factors

With regard to the 10 human and implementation factors, 9 were ranked higher than agree, a score of 4.0 (Table 4). The six highest ranked items, above 4.5, were having council adopt the plan ($M = 4.71$, SD $= 0.76$); having key policy leaders continue to lobby in behalf of the plan ($M = 4.71$, SD $= 0.76$), staff should agree with recommendations ($M = 4.57$, SD $= 0.79$), plan policies are priorities of council ($M = 4.57$, SD $= 0.53$), staff update council on plan implementation ($M = 4.57$, SD $= 0.79$), and citizens agree with recommendations ($M = 4.57$, SD $= 0.79$) (Table 4). These

highly ranked human implementation factors reveal the importance of three areas. First, council must adopt the plan which signals that the plan policies are a priority. Second, the agency staff, citizens, and the key public policy leaders should support the plan for it to be successfully implemented. Third, staff should return to council with an update on plan implementation. These updates would remind council of the earlier approval and then reinforce the importance of the plan policies. This ongoing update is particularly important when elections occur and new council members are elected, often with no background in previously approved plans.

The lowest ranked item concerned the idea of having citizen groups bringing recommendations to council ($M = 3.71$, SD $= 1.38$). This finding may be a result of the experts not seeing this approach in action or seeing it fail; however, some may have felt it is better to have professional planners bring the plan to council for approval.

Obstacles to Implementation

With regard to the 13 listed obstacles faced by municipalities when creating and implementing a plan, there were 10 items with a mean score between agree (4) and strongly agree (5) (Table 5). The two most highly scored items, over 4.5, included a lack of resources and the need to create a plan that is financially capable ($M = 5.00$, SD $= 0.00$). This reveals that the plans must be fiscally realistic. There is a lack of success with regard to plan implementation when staff have negative feelings toward the plan ($M = 4.83$, SD $= 0.41$). There were several other identified constraints revealing agency staff as an obstacle to implementation: a lack of staff involvement lowers plan success ($M = 4.33$, SD $= 0.82$), a lack of staff knowledge of plan recommendations ($M = 4.33$, SD $= 0.52$), a lack of staff commitment to

the plan ($M = 4.17$, SD $= 0.75$), and high staff turnover affecting plan implementation ($M = 4.14$, SD $= 0.90$). These five factors reveal that for staff to be major contributor to plan implementation, the following must be in place: staff involvement leading to commitment to the plan, staff knowledge of plan recommendations, and low levels of staff turnover.

There were 8 factors scored between 4 and 4.5. All of these scores had lowered levels of disagreement. There were three items between neutral (3) and agree (4). The experts felt that a good P & R director or consultant should be able to deal with resistance to change ($M = 3.57$, SD $= 1.27$). The experts indicated support for the concept, but when such problems occur, public advisory committees can assist in communication and overcoming resistance.

The experts felt that municipal amalgamations are not always major problems, and that sometimes they work well and do not cause planning problems ($M = 3.67$, SD $= 0.82$). The experts felt that amalgamated communities are not always resistant to giving up individual facilities for better more centralized facilities ($M = 3.17$, SD $= 0.41$).

OVERALL RESULTS

Of the 72 items presented to the experts, 53 (73.6%) were scored between 4 and 5, indicating strong agreement with the factors identified. Of the remaining 19 items, 18 were scored between 3 and 3.9 expressing feelings between neutral and agreement. Only 1 item had a disagree score, with a mean below 3. These scores indicate that the vast majority of the items developed from the content analysis of the 9 municipal plans in Phase 2 and the 16 staff interviews in Phase 3 were scored highly by the P & R planning experts (Table 6). This suggests that the findings from the content analysis and staff interviews produced a list of

Table 6. Overall Scores from Expert Panel

	Number of factors	Factors scored 4–5	Percent of total factors	Factors scored 3–3.9	Percent of total factors
Plan process	23	16	69.6	7	30.4
Plan content	26	18	69.2	7	26.9
Human/implementation	10	9	90.0	1	10.0
Obstacles	13	10	76.9	3	23.1
Total	72	53	73.6	18	25.0

factors that were well accepted by the professional planners.

The expert panel was unanimous in the response that a lack of resources was a huge obstacle to P & R plan implementation ($M = 5.0$). Given the difficulty in finding small municipalities with a plan, in Phase 1 of the study, it is probable that a lack of resources was an obstacle in the creation of a P & R plan. These findings suggest that one of the highest priorities of any P & R plan process should be the creation of a political process and financial plan that ensures sufficient resources for planning, including implementation.

The expert panel was unanimous in the response that P & R staff members must understand the rationale for plan recommendations and have a strong commitment to plan implementation ($M = 5.0$). Therefore, one of the key elements of a P & R plan process is the development of understanding of the recommendations and strong commitment within the P & R department staff members.

Five statements dealt with the terms of reference that precede P & R plans. There was strong agreement that since plan processes and content are structured by the terms of reference, much time and effort need to be spent at this stage of the process ($M = 4.57$, SD = 0.53). There was moderate agreement that the planning department should be brought in to help the P & R staff prepare the terms of reference ($M = 3.71$, SD = 0.76). There was also moderate agreement that more information needs to be provided to municipalities to aid in writing terms of reference ($M = 3.57$, SD = 1.13). However, the large standard deviation shows disagreement on this issue. Similarly, there was moderate agreement of doing public consultation before developing the terms of reference, but with disagreement ($M = 3.43$, SD = 1.13).

P & R plans are much more likely to be successful if the elected council approves the plan ($M = 4.71$, SD = 0.76). Linking the P & R plan goals to the Official Plan goals was given a priority ($M = 4.57$, SD = 0.53) (Table 3), as was the incorporation of P & R plans recommendations into the Official Plan ($M = 4.43$, SD = 0.53) (Table 4). Therefore, the P & R plans should be approved by the council and efforts be made to link those plans to the Official Plan, including putting the recommendations into the Official Plan.

The role and placement of background information was contentious. The panel indicated that plans should contain background information (trends affecting recreation and the municipality as a whole, population analysis, demographic analysis, and an analysis of the organizational structure) ($M = 4.43$, SD = 0.79). However, there was a difference of opinion on where the background information should be located. There was a higher ranking for including the background information in a separate document ($M = 3.29$, SD = 1.21), and a lower ranking for including it in the main document

along with the recommendations ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.21$).

CONCLUSIONS

The panel of experts confirmed the importance of 71 of the 72 items identified from the Phase 2, the content analysis of plans, and Phase 3, the interviews of staff. This suggests that those 71 items correctly express the factors that assist with successful plan implementation.

There are highly ranked factors in the planning process used, the content of the plan, and the implementation elements and obstacles. Therefore, successful strategic planning involves a complicated set of planning process issues, as well as the content in the plan, and the factors that influence implementation. Those who design and operate this planning must be aware of all these items, which presumably is best done through education in P & R planning.

Given that 71 items were confirmed by the panel to have moderate to strong support, it is not possible in the space available in an academic paper to discuss all 71 in detail. Only the most important will be summarized herein.

Background information, such as trends, demographics, and population analysis, is important for P & R plans, but should be in a separate document from the main plan and recommendations.

The expert panel emphasized that the P & R plan must be approved by council and must be connected to and coherent with the municipal Official Plan. The Official Plan is the paramount document that directs all land use policy in a municipality. It is a legally competent document that must be followed by all citizens and by the municipal government, unless amended using a legally defined amendment process. The Official Plan outlives staff changes and council elections, whereas P & R plans are only policy recommendations that can be changed or ignored. Since the municipality's Official Plan is a 20-year document, the Recreation Master Plan should adopt a similar time horizon in order for the recreation planning to be coherent with the larger planning flows. In addition, P & R plans should be linked to other plans such as those for culture, tourism, and transportation.

The process used to collect the study municipalities in Phase 1 found that most of the medium-sized and larger municipalities contacted had P & R master plans. This contrasts with the virtual absence of such plans for the smallest municipalities. We conclude that there is a lack of P & R management capacity overall in the smaller municipalities, of which a lack of an overall strategic plan is one example. This finding echoes that of Siegel (2003), who reported that larger municipalities had much more money and were able to hire more highly trained staff. However, this contrasts with the older study by Getz et al. (1985a, 1985b) who found that about 65% of plans evaluated in Ontario were from smaller municipalities. The Getz et al. study was conducted in the era of the WINTARIO Grant Program where small municipalities could receive up to 75% of the funding for P & R planning. Slack et al. (2003) reported that most small towns and rural municipalities 'cannot be self-sustaining, economically, socially or fiscally' (p. 30). The paper goes on to state that 'There is, however, no feasible substitute for direct provincial involvement in the planning and financing of such communities and in the provision of services to their residents' (Slack et al., 2003, p. 36). At the time of our study, the Province of Ontario did not have a policy directing the preparation or the contents of municipal P & R strategic plans. Since some municipalities, and especially small municipalities, are working without a plan, the needs of those communities may not be adequately addressed. This research suggests that more provincial government activity in P & R policy is

desirable. These principles of upper level guidance and assistance to municipalities for P & R planning should be applicable elsewhere in Canada and internationally.

We suspect that internet publication of plans and background information will improve plan longevity and implementation success in the future.

The content and process of any plan is ultimately dictated by the terms of reference given to the planners and consultants. The expert panel gave strong support to the concept of the importance of the terms of reference. This panel indicated that since P & R department staff members in municipalities are generally not trained in planning, some assistance is needed, either from the planning department or from consultants. The importance of the terms of reference in directing the entire planning exercise has largely been ignored in the P & R planning literature to date, and our study is one of the first to highlight this issue.

The research found that planning consultants are often heavily involved in the creation of the P & R master plans and their involvement is strongly supported. This contradicts a much earlier recommendation that municipalities should reduce their use of consultants (Getz et al. 1985a, 1985b). The research suggests that the identified weakness in planning expertise in the staff complement of many recreation departments is being addressed by the use of specialized recreation planning consultants. However, once the plan is finalized and approved by the council, the consultants' involvement ends. Plan implementation is largely dependent upon agency staff. These findings reveal that the creation of the P & R plan must have as one of its key objectives the creation of a planning process that heavily involves the agency staff, so that a strong commitment to implementation is created within those staff. The implementation success is furthered if staff responsibilities are outlined in the plan and the job

descriptions include plan implementation activities. The plan can assist the staff by identifying action steps needed to implement each recommendation, such as naming job descriptions to carry out recommendations and identifying priorities, funding, costs, and resources needed to carry out the recommendations.

The research reveals that the public has an important role during plan development and also during plan implementation.

The study revealed that problems in municipal operations due to amalgamations of the mid-1990s (Slack, 2003; Siegel, 2003) were still occurring, but were disappearing.

Laurian et al. (2004) found that plan implementation is 'mainly driven by the resources of the planning agencies and by the quality of the plans' (p. 555). Presumably the use of professional planning consultants assures the creation of a quality P & R plan; however, the weaknesses found in small municipalities and in some larger ones in the management capability of the P & R departments may be problematic. The findings reveal that council must approve the plan and make it a government priority for fiscal resources to be made available and for the plan to be successfully implemented.

This study found 71 factors that lead to an increase in plan implementation. Our paper is the first attempt that these factors and their relative value have been outlined in the P & R literature. Planners can consider each of the items listed in Tables 2–5 for relevance in future planning processes.

Bryson (1995, p. 5) states that strategic planning is a 'disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organisation (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it'. This research utilized multiple sources of information, plan content, municipal staff interviews, and expert planner opinion, to derive and confirm a list of factors that can improve P & R plan implementation. Although this research was

conducted in just one province of Canada, the authors feel that the findings should have relevance broadly across Canada and internationally. To the knowledge of the authors, this is the first time that such an extensive and detailed list of factors leading to plan implementation has been confirmed by recreation planning experts and outlined in the P & R literature.

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