



Shouldn't public space be available for community use?



There is a shortage of welcoming, accessible, and affordable spaces for community members to gather throughout Ontario. Public spaces like schools, community recreation centres, and parks serve as community hubs. Community groups rely on these spaces, but their access is decreasing as fees rise and facilities are closed. Community members face barriers accessing public space due to increasing costs, limited space, age, and/or language ability, limiting both recreational opportunities and those for community engagement. With rural school closures, many Oxford residents lack sufficient community spaces.

The Province's role in providing space for community use

In 2004, the Ontario government recognized the importance of community use of school spaces. It provided school boards with funding under the *Community Use of Schools* (CUS) program to open schools to communities and make space more affordable. By 2012, funding for this program was projected to be \$66 million. However, its investment has flat lined at \$48 million for the past three years, resulting in an increase in fees charged to the community to access space. More investment is needed to achieve the promised amount of \$66 million.

The provincial government also created the *Priority School Initiative* to offer free space for community use in 500 schools in high-need neighbourhoods across Ontario. Again, this program currently falls well short of the promise and is offered in only 220 schools. The Province also committed to providing community hubs as part of its *Poverty Reduction Strategy*. By creating community hubs and other spaces to provide safe places for the community to gather and play, the provincial government would help ensure that people remain active and engaged in their communities. We look forward to them delivering on this commitment.

Ask your candidates:

- How will your party encourage the development of community hubs?
- How will your party address the systemic underfunding of community space and the increasing fees charged to the public for accessing these spaces?
- Youth often experience difficulties accessing community space. What will your party do to ensure that youth have access to community space?

Resources:

SPACE Coalition, Public Space for Public Use: A Review of Community Access to School and Municipal Facilities in Ontario, Nov 2013: www.spacecoalition.ca
Ministry of Education Community Use of Schools: www.edu.gov.on.ca

