

# Best Practice

## Churchbridge Community Campground

### CONTACT

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Project Date: **Spring, 1987 – on going**

Project video: <https://youtu.be/03bhycAmNt8>

### THE PRACTICE

#### ***What was the issue?***

In 1987, the provincial Department of Tourism and Renewable Resources put various facilities throughout Saskatchewan up for sale, and a 40-acre roadside campground in the Town of Churchbridge was one of those facilities. When no one stepped forward to take it on as a private enterprise, the park was offered to the Town of Churchbridge for \$1. While it was an appealing offer, the town had no experience running a campground or financing its operations. The alternative was that the campground would be permanently closed, so the town stepped forward and took a gamble on the campground.

#### ***What was the project?***

While Churchbridge Campground is, at its core, a major benefit for tourism, in recent years it has taken on an entirely new role as a focal point for programs to support wellness and physical fitness among the town's residents. In 2019, a 12-hole disc golf course was developed and utilized the natural features of the park to create one of the area's most challenging disc golf courses.

The town is currently developing an extensive walking path network around the campground, which will span approximately 1.3 kilometers when completed. The path was groomed through the winter for cross-country skiers to enjoy and remains open to winter hikers and snowshoers.

To make the campground more amenable, Churchbridge constructed a small activity building in the center of the campground. It houses a wood stove and benches, with a firepit nearby. In the summer, the town plants floral displays around the building, and in the winter, removes the windows to create a large space for outdoor gatherings at no cost.

The Churchbridge Public School uses the trails regularly and provided several pieces of playground equipment to the campground in exchange for a \$5000 grant from the town. The Towns Parkland Library branch has also made extensive use of the campground and set up events like story walks and scavenger hunts. These activities helped encourage community members of all ages to enjoy the campground, get some exercise, and keep reading.

Together, summer students and local volunteers, including town councillors and local business staff, implemented a major tree planning program. SaskPower and Assiniboine Watershed Authority donated 210 trees to the project. There are plans to continue planting in the spring of 2022. The Churchbridge Lions Club also spent several afternoons cutting down and trimming older, dead trees, along the campground fence line. These efforts have helped create an eco-appealing space for all guests at the campground.

## THE PROCESS

Initially when the council and staff took on the responsibilities of operating the municipal campground, almost immediately, the community stepped forward to get involved and formed the Churchbridge Campground Committee. A major part of the park's success is due to the Churchbridge Campground Committee, a group of around 20 volunteers who visit the campground every evening to collect camping fees and ensure the parks facilities are in good order. During the 34 years that the park has been owned and operated by the town, the role of the town has been primarily to provide the facility and the location for the programs which have been put forward by the community's residents.

The participating groups include:

- Churchbridge Campground Committee
- Churchbridge Disc Golf Course Group
- Walking Path Group
- Churchbridge Players Theatre Group
- Churchbridge Public School
- Cross-country Skiers Group
- Churchbridge Library
- Churchbridge Lions Club

Each group saw a need for providing more physical activities for town residents. Using their own interest and knowledge they created a developmental plan for their chosen activity, including costing, and then presented it to the town council. Council would ensure that the plan was do-able and feasible during all stages of the project and would not create a substantial increase to the campground operating budget.

Each of these groups have been instrumental in creating and fulfilling programs that make use of the campground. Their enthusiasm is a resource that continues to bring success to the campground. Each group has used their specific interests to create plans and raise the necessary funds to make those plans a reality.

## THE RESULTS

The Churchbridge Campground continues to be a source of pride for the community. It offers the town a place to warmly welcome visitors and create a positive and lasting impression. The campground is fortunate enough to see visitors from around the world and serves as home to contractors during the summer construction season.

The campground now hosts 27 tent and RV sites, most of which have electrical services, and has been well used by both seasonal and overnight guests. In the 34 years since purchasing the campground, the decision has proven to be a profitable one. In 2021 the projected income from the campground was \$32,5000 which helps balance the towns continuing upgrades to the park.

The Campground also continues to provide opportunities for new physical fitness initiatives. Walkers and joggers are on the path from the early hours of the morning, until late into the evening. The disc golf course has proven to be a popular new activity and the course hosts an annual tournament which brings in participants from across the province.

Churchbridge Public School hosts students from Pre-K to Grade 12 and makes use of the park for a variety of purposes throughout the year.

The campground was the site of the first Halloween family fun day that the town has hosted. The event drew in an estimated 500 participants from the Town of Churchbridge and the surrounding communities. The space is often used by the community for birthday parties and other social events.

There was not a formal evaluation for this project. At the end of each tourist season the Campground Committee meets with appointed town councillors to discuss the past summers camping activities and plan for the next year. Council receives regular updates on the other programs taking place in the park.

From the town's perspective, the biggest challenge was supporting and encouraging the enthusiastic and committed groups bringing their ideas forward, while still ensuring that all practical aspects of owning and operating the campground were maintained.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

Keep an open mind. When dealing with requests from the public, you have no idea what may be presented next, by who, or in what ways it will address the needs of the community. Sometimes allowing a program to naturally develop is more feasible than bogging it down with studies, reports, and evaluations.