

Glen Allan Recreation Complex Revitalization Visioning Session 2013



Executive Summary

Toward the end of May, 2013, the Recreation, Park and Culture Department contracted Emerge Solutions, Inc. to develop a public engagement process to envision the revitalization of the Glen Allan Recreation Complex.


The Department approached Emerge Solutions, Inc. seeking a face-to-face public engagement session for mid to late June and recommendations on how to stay engaged with the public through the revitalization process.

The Department hosted and Emerge Solutions, Inc. facilitated a conversation-based public engagement session at the Glen Allan Recreation Complex on June 25, 2013. The session was attended by 38 thoughtful, respectful and active members of the public who brainstormed ideas to improve the Complex and worked together to prioritize their ideas. Toward the end of the session, Emerge Solutions, Inc. identified 11 categories that came out of participants' prioritization work. Out of the 11 categories, there were four categories that received an overwhelming degree of support from participants: More Space, Accessibility, Modernization and Sustainability. There are also two over-arching themes noted by Emerge Solutions, Inc. – openness and integration.



Contact information:

18 Harvest Bay
Stony Plain, AB
T7Z 2A7
T: 780.718.7328
emergesolutions.ca



Overall, the June 25 public engagement session provided some focused priorities to guide the Recreation, Park and Culture Department as it leads the revitalization of the Glen Allan Recreation Complex.

“Relationship-building”

The session also pointed to two opportunities to undertake further engagement. First, participants noted it will be important to get input on the revitalization vision from the Complex staff. Second, participants identified that scooter and wheelchair users and young parents were either missing or under-represented at the June 25 session.

While Emerge Solutions, Inc. feels the June 25 session was an exceptional opportunity to affirm the value of the Glen Allan Recreation Complex and develop a vision for the revitalization of the facility, it will be important for the Recreation, Parks and Culture Department to invest in an internal conversation about the revitalization and reach out to the public once more through a focused, three-question survey made available online and at the front desk of the Complex. Emerge Solutions, Inc. is also recommending that the Department followup the session with regular communication to its public, starting with releasing the findings from the June 25 session.

Lastly, we are recommending that the Department begin planning for a second conversation-based engagement session with the public in anticipation of a proposed facility design.

Findings

Emerge Solutions, Inc. captured all of the input, ideas and priorities brought forward in the Glen Allan Recreation Complex Revitalization Visioning Session; they are presented in Appendices B through G. It is worth noting that Appendix E captures the information brought forward in the priority-setting exercise and Appendix F captures EmERGE Solutions, Inc.'s work to categorize the priorities.

One critical aspect of EmERGE Solution, Inc.'s facilitation work is capturing and making sense of information as it is brought forward in engagement sessions. This is real-time data analysis that allows us, as facilitators, to ensure we are accurately capturing and interpreting the information brought forward by participants. While this is challenging work, it ensures that Strathcona County's Recreation, Parks and Culture Department has accurate information to work with and that there are no surprises for participants after the session.

The four categories that received overwhelming support from the participants are:

1. More space

This category focused on seeking opportunities to transform empty or under-utilized space into the facility into functional space for fitness, wellness and social activities.

There were expressions of interest for an "open space" concept to create better flow by removing some of the physical barriers, the opportunity to make better use of the front end of the facility (e.g. move the reception desk toward the front of the building and use the current

Reception desk space for fitness and wellness space), and make use of the lofty ceiling in the lobby area to create second floor space.

2. Accessibility

This category focused on design features that will improve accessibility for all ages and all levels of mobility. It was noted that accessibility aligns closely with functional design and participants are looking for functional features, including wider doors, larger change rooms, an over-sized elevator, viewing areas for the weight rooms and courts, a main floor social gathering space and, from a programming perspective, activities for senior citizens.

3. Modernization

This category focuses on the look and feel of the facility. While some participants felt strongly that the available funding should *not* be directed toward aesthetics, there were several aesthetic ideas that made the list of commonly held priorities. These ideas included enhancing the natural light in the facility, choosing brighter and warmer colours, using more glass to create viewing areas and create a more "open concept" design, and create better flow in the facility to eliminate the feeling that each space is a separate area.

4. Sustainability

The category of sustainability was created separate from modernization because it focused on some of the engineering concepts to create a comfortable facility for the long-term. The ideas brought forward as priorities included better air flow throughout the facility, central and open features that support people's wellness and help build community, a design that is

scalable over the long-term, and a design that contributes to sustainable wellness by incorporating natural light and splashes of colour.

While these four categories garnered the most attention and support from the public engagement session participants, there were also multiple tables that put forward the concepts of a central social space, the creation of at least six courts so that Strathcona County has the space required to formally host competitions and tournaments, a walking track (with a particular emphasis on a concrete floor in the off-season curling space), and a better designed fitness space.

There were also a couple of one-off concepts that tables put forward as priorities. These included changes to programming (dedicated space for programs that are closed to drop-in activities), more parking if the centre revitalization attracts more guests, and a commitment to keep the centre accessible to all ages (and not just seniors).

Notes:

- While participants were encouraged to think of the revitalization in terms of building design, they were invited to present ideas relating to all aspects of the Glen Allan Recreation Complex. The number one area of interest outside of design concepts was facility programming. While participants were supportive of the diversity of the existing programs, they requested additional programming options.
- Participants acknowledged that some of their priorities are outside of the scope of the revitalization project and align better with long-term planning considerations. The most obvious contribution being the creation of a concrete floor in the current curling space to support a walking track in the curling off-season.



Discussion

Emerge Solutions, Inc. is extremely pleased with and impressed by the thoughtful ideas and input shared by the 38 community members who participated in the public engagement session.

The participants who attended the session actively shared their ideas, approached the conversations with curiosity and respect for their fellow participants, provided valuable feedback on the questions presented by the facilitators, and worked together to help identify common priorities for the group and allow for unique perspectives and priorities to be heard.

We are also grateful to Strathcona County's Recreation, Parks and Culture Department for hosting the table discussions and harvesting the ideas brought forward at each table. The courtesy, compassion and active listening displayed by the table hosts contributed to the welcoming space that EmERGE Solutions, Inc. aimed to create. Successfully creating a space for 38 people to contribute their ideas,

The Glen Allan Recreation Complex revitalization visioning session was as much an **opportunity for participants to affirm their appreciation for the centre** as it was an opportunity to help **imagine and influence its revitalization.**

engage in conversation and, at the end of the evening, feel heard and respected required a team approach. More than this, it required that every member of the team lean into their role, make the role their own, and give fully.

Upon reflection, EmERGE Solutions, Inc.'s most prominent noticing is that the Glen Allan Recreation Complex revitalization visioning session was as much an opportunity for participants to affirm their appreciation for the centre as it was an opportunity to help imagine and influence its revitalization.

It was clear from people's contributions and ideas that the residents who attended the public engagement session hold the Glen Allan Recreation Complex close to their hearts and as a central part of their connection to the community. While the focus of the harvest was capturing ideas to improve the facility design, EmERGE Solutions, Inc. captured a number of comments from people who are extremely pleased with the central location of the facility, the variety of programming available to guests, the courtesy and kindness of Strathcona County's staff, and the availability of a fitness and wellness facility that is less family-

focused than Millennium Place.

Although the overall tone of the conversation was upbeat and participants indicated they felt appreciative of the opportunity to contribute ideas to the revitalization of the Complex, there were a small number of participants (three) who respectfully expressed concerns about next steps and the timeline for the construction to begin and be completed. The concerns were consistent in that they focused on urgency for their contributions to be considered and the work to move forward. The concerns were rooted in previous changes to both the budget and timeline to complete the revitalization of the Glen Allan Recreation Complex.

Overall, EmERGE Solutions, Inc. feels the public engagement session was well received by everyone in attendance and that it contributed a plethora of valuable ideas to guide the development of the Complex's revitalization design. While some of the ideas put forward are large-scale changes that either fall outside of the scope of the project or the available budget, some of the participants wanted to contribute to the longer-term planning for the facility.

Discussion cont'd...

Emerge Solutions, Inc. also feels it is important to note that the top four priority categories described in the findings are inter-related concepts. While it made sense to conceptualize the categories according to their unique identifiers, it was also clear that “openness” and “integration” are two over-arching themes that are important to the residents' views of More space, Accessibility, Modernization, and Sustainability.

Participants used the word “open” to refer to opportunities to create more space within the existing footprint of the facility and to create the “feel” of more space. In particular, there were participants who felt that simply removing physical barriers (i.e. walls) between fitness and wellness spaces would allow for more space. Participants also used the word “open” to refer to accessibility. In this sense they were referring to opening up space, and in particular the width of doors, the amount of space available in the change rooms and weight room, and the amount of space set aside around the fitness equipment. They also felt that “openness” would be a way to modernize the facility and that open-concept design is a more modern concept than hosting multiple, closed-off and partitioned off spaces. Finally, the word “open” was mentioned in reference to “opening up the facility” to allow for more sustainable design and, in particular, more natural light.

The concept of “integration” was less overt, although it was spoken by a few participants throughout the session. Integration is a theme that Emerge Solutions, Inc. noticed across the priority categories. At the root of integration is the concept of “wholeness”, and we believe that people are seeking the hidden wholeness that already exists within the Glen Allan Recreation Complex. By hidden wholeness, we are referring to the vision that people have to create, in the words of participants, “open”, “seamless” and “flowing” transitions between the valued spaces and activities that already exist in the Complex. The participants can already see the potential to create this wholeness in the facility and, despite some of the space and accessibility concerns, are working on their own to achieve it. They believe that the revitalization of the Glen Allan Recreation Complex can draw out the connections they are already see taking place in the facility.



Concluding Remarks

Emerge Solutions, Inc. values the opportunity to work with public agencies committed to serving the people in our communities and province. We believe that public engagement work done well is an investment in a foundation of trust and common ground in our communities. We are appreciative of the efforts being made by Strathcona County's Recreation, Parks and Culture Department to seek meaningful opportunities to host conversations with its residents.

The public engagement session on June 25 turned out to be an excellent example of how community members can come together to not only brainstorm ideas for a collective vision but also talk through difficult choices and land on a clear set of priorities to submit to its government. Eleven priority categories came out of the 2.5 hours of conversation with 38 diverse and active participants who submitted pages of ideas for the revitalization of the Glen Allan Recreation Centre. Out of these 11

categories, the participants went further to agree that there were four ideas that received overwhelming support, and Emerge Solutions, Inc. confirmed this with the participants, with no outliers, toward the end of the session.

With this public engagement session complete, the Recreation, Parks and Culture Department can now focus on an internal conversation with its staff and reaching out through a less resource-intensive means to gather additional input from the public. These two additional steps will complete the harvesting for creating the vision for the revitalization of the Glen Allan Recreation Complex. The Department will then be able to focus on leading the facility design for the revitalization, ongoing communication with its staff and public, and planning to host conversations about the forthcoming proposed design.

Prepared for:

Sue Hutton
Manager of Marketing, Programs & Partnerships
Strathcona County
Recreation, Parks and Culture
2025 Oak Street
Sherwood Park, AB
T8A 0W9