

# Staff Report



Community Services Department

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**REPORT TO:** Community and Infrastructure Services Committee

**DATE OF MEETING:** April 22, 2024

**SUBMITTED BY:** Mark Hildebrand, Director, Neighbourhood Programs & Services  
519-741-2200 ext. 7687

**PREPARED BY:** Helena Foulds, Manager, Service Coordination & Improvement,  
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**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** ALL

**DATE OF REPORT:** April 12, 2024

**REPORT NO.:** CSD-2024-191

**SUBJECT:** Rockway Centre Redevelopment Strategy Update

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## RECOMMENDATION:

***That staff proceed with the three phased Rockway Centre Redevelopment Strategy as outlined in CSD-2024-191.***

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- Rockway Centre is Kitchener's only dedicated older adult facility and has been delivering a wide range of programs and services for almost 50 years.
- There are significant challenges with the current Rockway building and site. The three-storey building is poorly configured to accommodate the range of programs, activities and events expected in a modern older adult centre. Some of the challenges with the current building include poor traffic flow, lack of accessible washrooms, visual and auditory challenges, an insufficient elevator system, lack of storage and change rooms, kitchen deficiencies, no gymnasium space, and more. The lack of these basic amenities, which are common in other community facilities, severely limits older adult programming at Rockway Centre.
- In 2013, City Council unanimously directed staff to "*begin the Request for Proposals (RFP) process for the redevelopment of the Rockway Centre (736 Charles Street East / 1405 King Street East) into a medium-to-high density residential building that includes a ground floor older adult/community centre (to be operated by the municipality with the option to own), as well as possible ancillary medical/dental, retail or office type uses.*"
- The three-phased strategy outlined in the enclosed report is the first step of the Rockway redevelopment process. Constructing a new older adult centre will include many phases and steps which will be refined as additional information becomes available through the Request for Proposal process.

\*\*\* This information is available in accessible formats upon request. \*\*\*  
Please call 519-741-2345 or TTY 1-866-969-9994 for assistance.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Rockway Centre provides a place for older adults from across the city to participate in a wide variety of programs and clubs. Originally constructed in 1950 as a transit terminal, the building is now 74 years old. The Centre sits on a 1.89-acre triangular site bordered by King St. East, Charles Street East, and Preston Street (Map 1, Appendix A). The site includes a 17,750 square foot community centre and two small ancillary buildings located at the corner of Charles and Preston Streets.

The Centre includes 11 program rooms, plus a café, outdoor patio, lobby, billiards room, pottery shed and commercial kitchen. In 2023, the Rockway Centre had more than 30,000 visits for programs and services like fitness classes (Chair Pilates, Zumba), learning programs (technology, cooking, pottery), social groups (cards, billiards, crafts); wellness programs (yoga, meditation); community events (Rockin' it at Rockway, holiday bazars), and more.

### **Challenges with the current Rockway Centre Building & Site**

In 2010, a facility audit was completed which identified building and site challenges largely related to the age of the facility. The audit revealed issues like poor foundation drainage, limited barrier-free access, and a need to replace the existing elevator.

In 2013, staff report CSD-13-051 was presented to Council which identified significant challenges with the Rockway building and site, as well as limitations with the facility's design given the facility was not built for older adult programming. The three-storey building was deemed poorly configured to accommodate the range of programs, activities and events expected in an older adult centre. Some of the challenges with the current building include poor traffic flow, lack of accessible washrooms, visual and auditory challenges, an insufficient elevator system, lack of storage and change rooms, kitchen deficiencies, no gymnasium space, and more. The lack of these basic amenities, which are common in other community facilities, severely limits older adult programming at Rockway Centre.

Based on previous direction from City Council, staff have not made any significant renovations or upgrades to the facility since 2013; however, the building has been maintained to a standard that is in line with other City facilities.

### **Previous City Council Consideration/Direction re: Rockway Centre Redevelopment**

#### **2010**

- Given the challenges with the building, in 2010 City Council directed staff to prepare a feasibility study and business case analysis (including public consultation) to look at the long-term use of the Rockway Centre site for the provision of older adult programs.

#### **2013**

- In May 2013, staff presented Council with the completed Feasibility Study and Business Case. At that time City Council unanimously directed staff to consider the

findings of the Feasibility Study and Business Case as part of the City's next Leisure Facilities Master Plan and Development Charges review for prioritization against other indoor recreation needs within the city.

At that time Council unanimously directed staff to *“begin the Request for Proposals (RFP) process for the redevelopment of the Rockway Centre (736 Charles Street East / 1405 King Street East) into a medium-to-high density residential building that includes a ground floor older adult/community centre (to be operated by the municipality with the option to own), as well as possible ancillary medical/dental, retail or office type uses.”*

Council also added the Rockway Centre to the City's Municipal Heritage Register as a non-designated property; however, it took no action to designate the centre property, "until the completion of the RFP process."

## **2015**

- As a part of the 2015 budget process, City Council added \$6M to the City's capital forecast (2024/2025) to support the redevelopment of the Centre.

## **2019**

- The 2019 LFMP recognized that partnerships with school boards and private organizations are becoming increasingly important to municipalities as costs to build and operate stand-alone recreation facilities continue to rise. Nurturing strong partnerships and implementing mixed-use opportunities with school boards and the private sector is one way the City of Kitchener could deliver innovative recreation services and facilities.

The City's 2019 Leisure Facilities Master Plan Update included a recommendation to *“pursue a partnership with the private sector to redevelop Rockway Centre into a medium to high density residential building that addresses the heritage value of the property and includes a ground floor older adult community centre (to be operated by the municipality with the option to own), as well as possible ancillary medical/dental, retail and office type uses.”*

## **REPORT:**

It has been more than 10 years since Council directed staff to pursue a partnership to redevelop Rockway as an older adult centre. Now that funds are available within the City's capital forecast, staff have prepared a strategy to move forward with the redevelopment of the Centre. This strategy achieves Council's previous direction to pursue a development partner for a new building that would replace the Rockway Centre, while also ensuring the process is open and transparent.

## **Rockway building and site assessment update**

To ensure the building remains operational until a new building is constructed and opened, in 2023 staff completed another assessment of the Rockway Centre facility and site. That assessment identified a number of projects that will require action over the next five years should the centre continue to operate over that period of time (e.g., roofing maintenance, repairs to asphalt walkways, fire alarm and electrical upgrades).

All these projects are scheduled for completion within the next five years and will be funded through the Facilities Management capital budget. If, through the process of building a new older adult centre, the current facility can be closed within the next five years, staff will revisit whether to proceed with these projects before work commences.

One item that requires additional consideration is the sanitary system. The sanitary system that extends from the Rockway facility through the parking lot towards Charles Street E, needs to be replaced due to age and deterioration of some sections. Investigation has shown that isolated repairs are needed, but not feasible, as earth movement would exacerbate damage of the lines. Complete replacement is cost-prohibitive, considering the expected life cycle of the facility (5 years), with an estimated cost of 1 – 1.4 million dollars and a replacement timeline of 1.5 – 2 years. Instead, Facilities Management will monitor the system over the next 5 years and implement routine maintenance and flushing.

### **2023 Rockway Centre User Group Engagement**

Throughout 2023 staff spoke with over 140 individuals from several different user groups to get their initial thoughts on how best to develop a new, modern older adult centre that better meets the needs of residents in our community. These discussions included a series of in-person meetings with:

- Rockway Advisory Council
- Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC)
- Mayor's Advisory Council for Kitchener Seniors (MACKS)
- Neighbourhood Associations operating out of Rockway Centre (Eastwood, Auditorium)
- Key user groups (i.e., FRIENDS)
- Facilities management staff
- Community centre staff at Rockway Centre

In early 2024, staff once again engaged with many of these user groups to provide them with an update on the redevelopment strategy being considered (as outlined in this report). Through those discussions the user groups generally agreed with the strategy outlined in this report. Discussions and frequent communications with these key user groups will continue throughout the process of developing a new centre.

### **User Group Engagement Key Findings**

The following summarizes the main themes of feedback from these preliminary user groups discussions in 2023:

#### ***1. Increased trust and involvement:***

- User groups were more receptive to working with the City on a redeveloped Rockway Centre than in the past.
- All engagement was conducted in-person where staff were present to gather feedback and build trust.
- Ongoing communications with key user groups has helped build an open and transparent process.

## **2. Open to relocating to a new location OR rebuilding on the existing site:**

- Staff can report that user groups indicated a willingness to redevelop the Rockway Centre in its current location, **or at a new location**, if the site was located close to the existing site.
- Initial conversations indicate that user groups are open to relocating Rockway Centre if it provides an opportunity to build a more modern and accessible facility that better meets the community's needs.
- Some user groups expressed an interest in building a new centre at an alternate location so that programming could continue at the current facility until a new centre is operational.

## **3. Accessibility and future proofing**

- User groups emphasized the need for a more accessible facility to meet the needs of an aging population. Some of the most important accessibility needs for the proposed rebuild as include:
  - Proximity/ accessible to public transit
  - Larger sized elevators
  - Ramps
  - Curb pick up and accessible pick up & drop off zones
  - Adult changing tables in washrooms
  - Visual wayfinding
- Users indicated the building should include features that will serve the community in the future with things like:
  - Electric car charging stations
  - Bike lockers
  - Parking spaces with accessible features
  - Patio and green spaces

## **Rockway Centre Redevelopment 3-Phased Strategy**

While the initial plan (back in 2013) was to redevelop the Rockway Centre on its existing site, the substantial current and planned growth in the Rockway area (Map 2, Appendix A) prompted staff to also explore the idea of building a new centre in a different location. Possible benefits of constructing the new older adult center at a different location include: the potential to build closer to the ION route, the possibility of getting the building built faster through a development partnership, and the ability to maintain programming at the current centre while a new centre is built – avoiding significant disruption to programming.

Staff are proposing to implement the following three-phased strategy for the redevelopment of Rockway Centre.

### ***Phase 1 – Implement a Request for Information Process***

A Request for Information (RFI) is a procurement tool used to gather information. An RFI is a public and non-binding document that is open for response over a predetermined amount of time. An RFI is much simpler and easier for potential partners to respond to than a Request for Proposal.

Staff plan to issue an RFI that will provide the City with a better understanding of options potential partners would be open to considering (i.e., long-term lease, capital investment, land transfer, etc.), including development opportunities on the existing site and/or other lands near the current location.

Staff intend to use the results of the RFI to provide further clarity on a number of issues that could include the following:

- Potential funding arrangements
- Location preferences/options (existing site or other location nearby)
- Timelines for construction
- High-level cost estimates
- Other considerations brought forward from respondent.

The information received through the RFI will provide further clarity on the detailed scope of the Request for Proposal (Phase 3) which will help the City achieve the intended vision of a redeveloped Rockway Centre.

### ***Phase 2 – Community Engagement***

Staff will develop a community engagement strategy focusing on Rockway Centre users, older adults using other community centres and older adults living in Kitchener. The engagement strategy will include specific approaches and tactics to reach a broad diversity of older adults within the community. The engagement process will focus on identifying and prioritizing the City's requirements for a potential development partnership which will then be included in the City's RFP (Phase 3).

### ***Phase 3 – Request for Proposal Process***

Utilizing information gathered through the RFI (Phase 1), and input gathered from community engagement (Phase 2), the City will develop and issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the redevelopment of the centre which would outline and prioritize the City's must have requirements for a new older adult centre and for a partnership agreement. Prior to issuing the RFP, staff will seek Council's input and direction on those must have requirements.

At a high-level, the RFP process would include the following:

- (1) Preparation of the scope of work (city requirements) and evaluation criteria
- (2) Request for Proposal released

- (3) Receipt of proposals
- (4) Evaluation and determination of top ranked proponent
- (5) Negotiation of agreement (e.g., shared services agreements, development agreement, agreement of purchase and sale,)
- (6) Award and notification of result of RFP

Staff believe all three phases of this strategy can be completed by the second quarter of 2025. If the City is unsuccessful in attracting a partner through the RFP process, staff will return to Council for new direction on alternate options to redevelop the Rockway Centre.

#### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

This report supports the delivery of core services.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The Council-approved 2024-2033 capital forecast includes \$6M in 2024/2025 for the City's contribution a partnership for the redevelopment of the Rockway Centre. This funding is flexible in that it could be used regardless of whether the decision is to rebuild on the existing site or build a senior's centre at an alternate location. In addition to this capital funding, there may be an opportunity for the City to contribute additional funds to a potential partnership through the value of the lands on which the current centre is located.

#### **PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:**

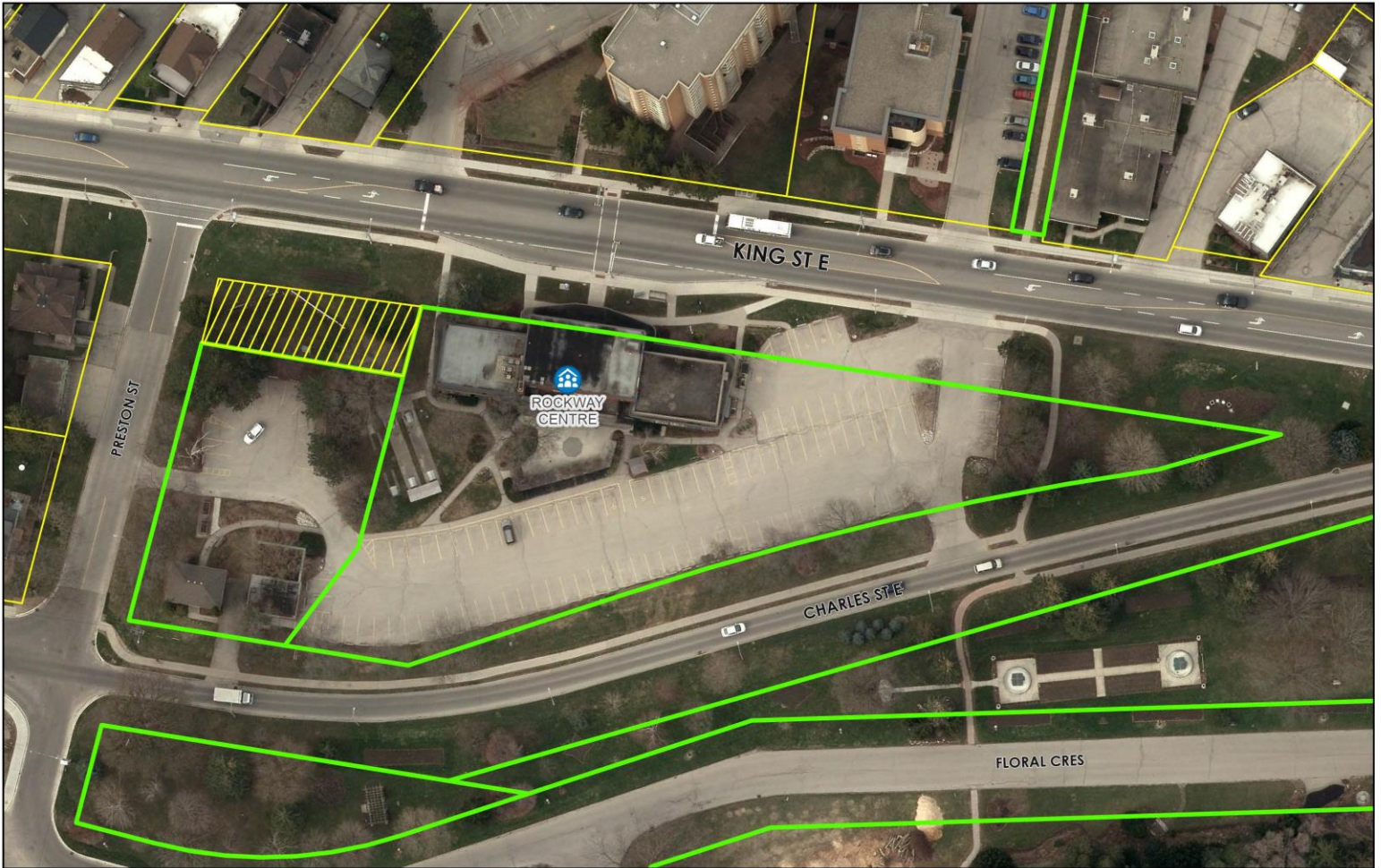
- CSD-013-047
- CSD-013-051





**APPROVED BY:** Michael May, DCAO & General Manager, Community Services

## Appendix A

Map 1 (below) shows the property lines of the 1.89-acre Rockway Centre property, including City-owned vs. non-City-owned lands.

# Rockway Community Centre

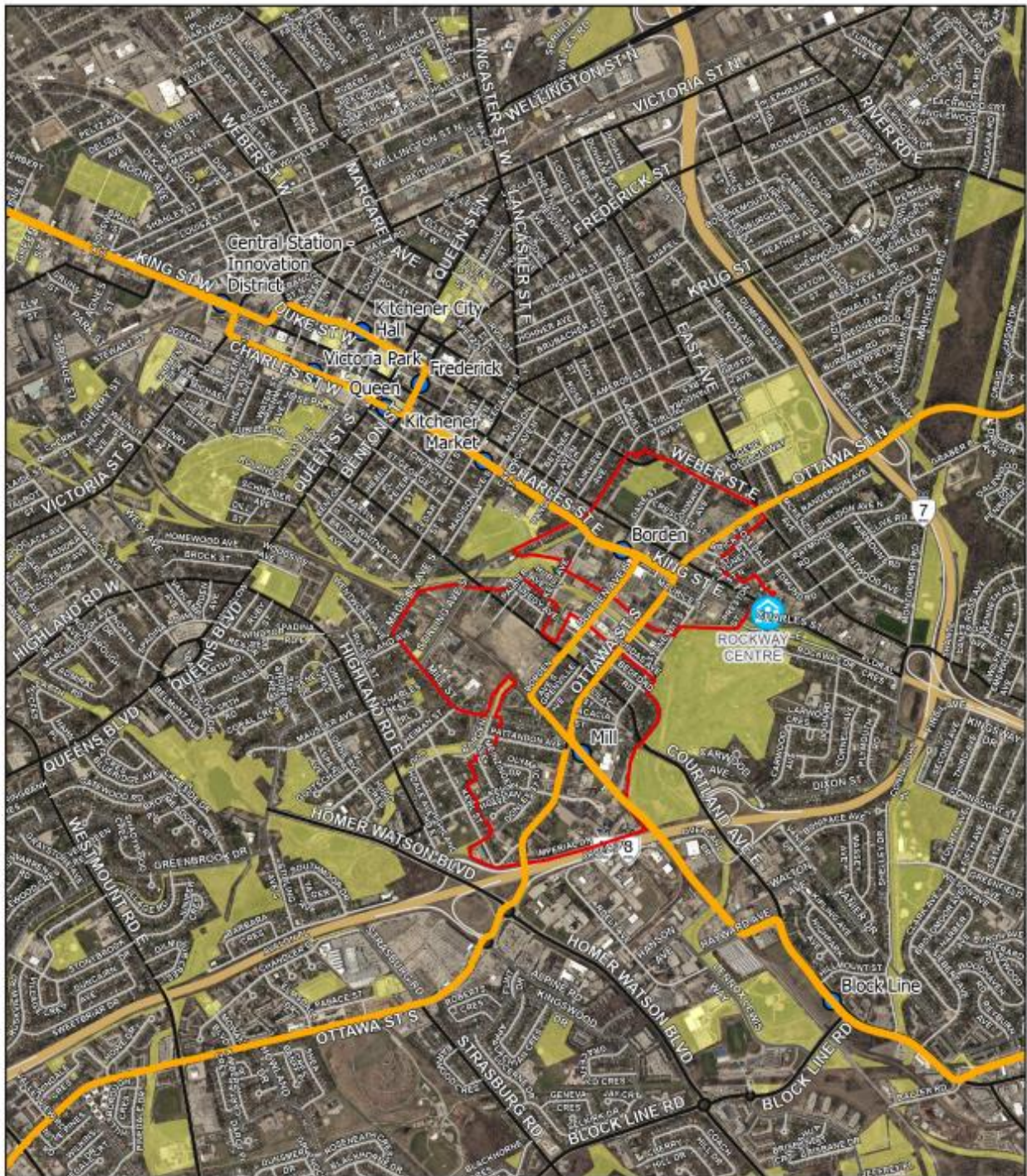


-  Rockway Community Centre - 1405 King St. E
-  City owned land
-  Not City-owned
-  Land parcel boundary



Map 2 (below) shows the major transit station areas near Rockway Centre and the projected Regional Intensification Corridor which intersects at King St. E and extends north and south on Ottawa Street. The orange line represents areas of future growth and expansion of the LRT route.

## Rockway Community Centre



Rockway Community Centre - 1405 King St E



LRT Station



Proposed Protected Major Transit Station



City owned land



Regional Intensification Corridor