

Staff Report



Community Services Department

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REPORT TO: Community and Infrastructure Services Committee

DATE OF MEETING: June 16, 2025

SUBMITTED BY: Mark Hildebrand, Director, Neighbourhood Programs and Services, Community Services, 519-783-8583

PREPARED BY: Helena Foulds, Manager, Service Coordination o& Improvement (CSD), 519-904-5802

WARD(S) INVOLVED: ALL

DATE OF REPORT: June 10, 2025

REPORT NO.: CSD-2025-246

SUBJECT: Rockway Redevelopment – New Older Adult Centre Deliverables

RECOMMENDATION:

That staff be directed to proceed with Phase 3 of the Rockway Redevelopment Strategy (as approved by City Council on April 22, 2024), and that the following deliverables for the development of the new older adult facility be included within the Request for Proposal (RFP) document:

1. 21,000 – 26,000 square feet
2. 1,200 – 1,600 square feet of outdoor space
3. Minimum of 150 onsite surface parking spaces
4. A specific area near the building entrance for drop-off and pick-up
5. Close to LRT and/or bus routes
6. A double sport gymnasium
7. Dedicated multi-purpose space/rooms for fitness programming
8. Dedicated multi-purpose space/rooms for creative/craft-base programming
9. Dedicated billiards/games room
10. One large multi-purpose room for programs and events
11. One medium sized multi-purpose rooms for programs and meetings
12. A warming kitchen
13. Large lobby space with café/light refreshments and lots of comfortable and accessible seating
14. Staff workspace and welcoming service counter
15. Universal & accessible washrooms, hallways and corridors (London Accessibility Standard)

That, the RFP process consider proposals for developing the new older adult centre on properties that are located within 1.5 KM of the current Rockway Centre.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- In April 2024, Council approved a three-phase plan to redevelop Rockway Centre (CSD-2024-191). Phase One (Request for Information) and Phase Two (Community Engagement) are now complete.
- As part of Phase Two of this process, staff received 721 surveys through a city-wide community engagement process that focused on better understanding the atmosphere; site features and program offerings residents want to see in a new older adult centre.
- Based on community input, the top site features residents want to see in a new older adult centre include (1) a café, (2) fitness room, and (3) outdoor spaces.
- Other important considerations for a new older adult centre that were identified through public input include (1) accessibility, (2) onsite parking, and (3) diverse programs and services.
- Based on the results of the community engagement process, staff developed a list of deliverables to be included in the Request for Proposal for a new older adult centre. Those requirements include a 21,000 to 26,000 square foot facility; 1,200 to 1,600 square foot outdoor space; a minimum of 150 onsite parking spaces and specific indoor amenities that directly reflect community input.
- Constructing a new older adult centre at an alternate location offers significant benefits including continuity of programming, faster delivery of a new facility and funding opportunities to deliver a facility that will meet the community's needs.

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 75 years old. The Centre sits on a 1.89-acre triangular site bordered by King St. East, Charles Street East, and Preston Street. The site includes a 17,750 square foot community centre and two small ancillary buildings located at the corner of Charles and Preston Streets.

Staff have maintained Rockway Centre to a standard that is line with other City facilities and continues to make investments in the building to keep it operational; however, there have been no significant renovations or upgrades to the facility since 2013.

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.”*

2024

In April 2024, City Council approved a three-phase plan to redevelop Rockway Centre (CSD-2024-191):

- Phase one, completed in June 2024, involved a Request for Information (RFI) to assess interest from potential development partners to build a mixed-use facility with an older adult centre on the ground floor and residential and/or commercial uses above.
- Phase two, completed in September 2024, focused on community engagement to identify and prioritize requirements for the new older adult centre. Staff also committed to report back to Council with key engagement findings and seek direction on the deliverables for a new older adult centre prior to issuing a Request for Proposal.
- Phase three, issuing a Request for Proposal, will seek a development partner to build a mixed-use facility that includes an older adult centre within 1.5 KM of the existing Rockway Centre, and includes the deliverables outlined in CSD-2025-246.

REPORT:
Results of Phase 2 (Community Engagement):

In 2024, staff led a city-wide community engagement process to better understand the atmosphere, site features, and program offerings residents would like to see in a new older adult centre. The key objectives of the community engagement included building trust, generating interest and excitement about a new facility, and ensuring community voices are heard. The full community engagement results report is attached as Appendix A.

As part of the community engagement process, residents had an opportunity to influence three key areas of the new older adult centre:

Atmosphere	The feedback collected from this category helped determine the desired atmosphere (look/feel) of the new centre.
Site Features	The feedback collected from this category helped prioritize the most important features like outdoor spaces, recreational areas, accessibility, etc.
Programming	The feedback collected from this category provided insight into the types of programs and services residents would like to see at the new centre, which will have an impact on the overall design, layout and size of the building.

Staff reviewed the engagement results and used the information to develop deliverables.

Ways We Engaged

Engagement spanned approximately eight weeks and included online and in-person opportunities to participate. Staff received 721 survey responses and visited over 10 facilities (Rockway Centre, Breithaupt Centre, Victoria Hills, Doon Pioneer Park, Kingsdale, Huron, Downtown, Lyle Hallman, Forest Heights, Chandler Mowat, Bridgeport, Kitchener Market) during peak programming times to target the 55+ age group. Staff also hosted four informal coffee social workshops to provide residents an opportunity to ask questions and have open dialogue. Staff were present at larger events like Rockin’ it at Rockway and hosted a special Welcome Back BBQ in September to encourage feedback on the redevelopment project.



721

Public Surveys
Completed



8

Engagement
Events Held



10

City Facilities
Visited



130

Idea Board
Comments

Who We Heard From

- 43.3% of survey respondents said they currently use Rockway Centre, either by attending programs or accessing services, or through volunteering or instructing.
- 34.8% live nearby the centre
- 27.8% noted that they have no relationship or have never visited Rockway Centre which indicates the information collected reflects the views of existing Rockway users and non-users.
- Approximately 83% of respondents identified as being over the age of 55. The largest group (37.8%) of respondents were aged 65-74. 7.4% of respondents were between ages 45 and 54.
- There was no significant difference in survey responses between the 45-54 and 55+ age group. Both age groups indicated similar ideas and preferences.

What We Heard

- **Atmosphere:** overall respondents identified they want the new older adult centre to be a welcoming, comfortable, and social space.
- **Site Features:** Survey participants were asked to identify the most important site features in a variety of categories. Staff heard that over **60%** of respondents think it is very important for the facility to have areas for socializing and casual interactions and over **50%** think outdoor spaces are very important to the overall atmosphere of the centre.
- **Programs & Services:** Respondents were asked to share their ideas on the types of activities and services that would most enrich their experience in an older adult centre. The top five programs and services overall include strength training, café, special events, information about life transitions, computer and technology programs, and painting.
- **Open-ended comments:** In addition to the feedback collected through the survey, the following themes emerged through open-ended comments and conversations during in-person engagement sessions:
 - Welcome and inclusive atmosphere
 - Diverse programs and activities
 - Accessible design and amenities
 - Safety and security
 - Affordability
 - Staff support

Deliverables for a New Older Adult Centre

Based on the input collected through user group and community engagement, subject matter expertise and existing programming across the city, staff developed a list of “must-have” or deliverables for a new older adult centre.

The proposed deliverables strongly reflect the community input collected through the public engagement process. Taken together, these deliverables would result in a centre that is approximately 8,200 square feet larger than the existing Rockway Centre, features 800 additional square feet of outdoor space, and 50 additional parking spaces than the current facility. This would be the City's largest community centre.

Staff recommend the following deliverables for a new older adult centre be built in the Request for Proposals document:

1. 21,000 – 26,000 square feet
2. 1,200 – 1,600 square feet outdoor space
3. Minimum of 150 onsite surface parking spaces
4. A specific area near the building entrance for drop-off and pick-up
5. Close to LRT and/or bus routes
6. A double sport gymnasium
7. Dedicated multi-purpose space/rooms for fitness programming
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NOTE: Appendix B includes a detailed description and rationale for the deliverables outlined above.

London Accessibility Standard

The City of London has become a leader in accessible design by delivering services and facilities that go above and beyond the standard requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Ontario Building Code. This exceptional level of service and investment to remove barriers to accessibility through dignity and accessibility planning is referred to as the "London Accessibility Standard". The City of Kitchener incorporated many elements of this higher accessibility standard for the Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex and will deliver the same level of accessible design in the new older adult centre.

Location of a New Older Adult Centre

Staff are seeking Council's direction to explore and evaluate proposals to build the new centre on alternate properties within 1.5 KM of the current Rockway Centre site. While the existing site holds significant community sentiment, relocating the facility nearby would enable the City to deliver and construct a modernized centre with enhanced amenities more efficiently. This approach would also minimize disruption to ongoing programs and users during construction at the current location.

Minimizes Program Disruptions

Constructing the new centre at an alternate site would enable uninterrupted operation of the existing Rockway Centre throughout the construction. Residents would maintain full access to programs and services until the new facility is completed and operational.

It might be possible to build a new older adult centre on the existing site while keeping the existing facility open; however, this option will likely result in higher costs, an extended timeline and significant inconvenience to people attempting to use the centre. The current Rockway site will require environmental remediation adding a further complication and to ongoing operations and any future construction.

Furthermore, retaining the existing building on-site would limit the City's ability to pursue strategic partnerships that may become available at other sites and limit the full redevelopment potential of the existing property (limiting potential land value). Unlocking the site's full value would require the removal of the current facility, which would require the relocation of existing programs during construction. While some programming could be relocated to other community centres, increasing demand on these facilities would likely limit availability and reduce the scope of programming.

Staff have examined alternatives, such as leasing nearby spaces, but this would result in increased operating costs and potential service reductions. Additionally, keeping the Rockway Centre operational while building on the same site would significantly disrupt access and likely require the complete closure of on-site parking – a major barrier to users' ability to access the building. Additionally, construction impacts may include dust, noise, vibration and other impacts to users and the current facility.

Faster Delivery of a New Older Adult Centre

Rockway Centre has been maintained to a standard that is consistent with other City-owned facilities. Given the age of the building and planned redevelopment, there have been no significant renovations. Based on a 2023 site and facility assessment, the Facilities Management team advised that Rockway Centre can continue to operate in its current state, with regular maintenance and some modest investments, for up to five years.

Given the site constraints and changing economic impacts of new large-scale developments, it is less likely that the City will secure a development partner for a mixed-use facility in the next five years. However, exploring alternate locations presents an opportunity to partner with an organization that has an active project or plans to build within the next five years on a site they already own.

Funding for a Facility that Meets Community Needs

In 2014, Council allocated \$6M in the 10-year capital forecast for the construction of a new older adult centre. However, due to rising construction costs and ongoing inflation, this initial allocation is no longer sufficient. To deliver a facility that meets the evolving needs of the community and

aligns with the priorities identified through public engagement, the City will need to secure additional funding.

Building the new older adult centre at an alternate location would allow the City to sell the existing Rockway Centre site and re-invest those funds into the development of the new facility at a different location. The funds generated through a land sale will significantly reduce the gap that exists between the allocated funds and the anticipated budget which has increased due to rising construction costs and inflation.

ENGAGEMENT:

The Rockway Advisory Committee reviewed and provided input into staff's recommendation contained in this report (including the detailed list of deliverable for a new older adult centre). The advisory committee was supportive of both recommendations in CSD-2025-246.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports the delivery of core services.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Funding from 2022-2026 for the City's contribution to a partnership for the redevelopment of the Rockway Centre is \$6,750,000. In addition to this capital funding, there may be an opportunity for the City to contribute additional funds through the value of the lands on which the current centre is located.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES: (add names of report)

- [CSD-013-047](#) – Rockway Centre Feasibility Study and Business Case Final Report
- [CSD-013-051](#) – Rockway Centre Recommendations
- [CSD-2024-191](#) – Rockway Centre Redevelopment Strategy Update

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

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Rockway Centre Redevelopment Engagement Results Report
Attachment B – Rockway Redevelopment RFP Deliverables