



Township of Whitewater Region Adaptive Re-use of Community Centres

“What We Heard” Summary Report

April 2024

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1.0 Introduction

Dillon Consulting Limited (Dillon) was previously retained by the Township of Whitewater Region to conduct a service delivery review of Parks and Recreation. One of the recommendations in the 2021 report "Parks and Recreation Operation Review" was to move one arena to adaptive reuse, removing it from ice production to non-ice recreation services.

Since 2021, Whitewater Region has experienced even lower usage of the three arenas, primarily due to the restrictions and regulations implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and Council decided in Spring 2023 to fund only one arena. After consultation with the community groups, Council made a one-time investment of \$40,000 to a recreational association to operate one of the arenas. The third arena was operated by volunteers.

Going into budgets for 2024, Council was considering the one arena scenario. The goal of this project phase and consultation is to determine the feasibility of a one arena scenario, the community appetite for adaptive re-use, and the existing and future needs of the community that may be served by the arena spaces as community centres.

1.1 Scope of Work

The purpose of this phase is to engage key stakeholders and existing and potential users of the facilities to identify in-demand services the facilities could support as well as the level of modifications potentially required. This phase also included engagement with local stakeholders to identify their concerns to the levels of modification.

The scope of work in this phase included:

- Development of a consultation strategy and agenda;
- Development of consultation materials for Public Information Centres, online survey, stakeholder interview questions, and public notices;
- Virtual Public Information Centre;
- In-person Public Information Centres;
- Online Survey;
- Targeted stakeholder interviews; and
- "What We Heard" Summary Report.

1.2 Consultation Process

The engagement process was designed to collect input from the community and stakeholders at the onset of the pilot project, to be used to advise any physical modifications to the spaces or changes in programming.



The Consultation was guided by overarching engagement goals and objectives:

- ❖ **Increase awareness** of the consultation activities and get the public interested in the project;
- ❖ Ensure engagement is **inclusive of stakeholder groups**, and representative across the arenas;
- ❖ **Provide multiple ways for the community to engage** and participate throughout the projects; and
- ❖ Provide communication that is **clear and accessible**.

2.0 Consultation Activities

A series of activities to support community and stakeholder engagement were held throughout the project process. The activities were designed to provide multiple opportunities to gather feedback, including both in-person and online methods. The following section provides a synopsis of the approaches used to gather input.

2.1 Project Website

A dedicated webpage for the Adaptive Re-use of Community Centres project was hosted on the Township of Whitewater Region website (<https://www.whitewaterregion.ca/projects/current-projects/adaptive-reuse-community-centres/>). This project page served as the main hub and one-stop location for project information and communications, including details on upcoming consultation events, project updates, and it is where the public could access the online survey. The page was updated following each stage of the process.



2.2 Stakeholder Interviews

The Township of Whitewater Region identified key stakeholders for interview by the project team. Stakeholders were a valued component of the consultation process, helping to provide a local lens and understanding of the arenas and community needs and offered detailed breakdowns of arena history and usage. The intent of interview was to gain insight into financial implications, potential and expected future developments, and discover local or community-led initiatives that align with the project goals.

The following is a list of the stakeholders contacted for interview:

- Beachburg Recreation Association
- Westmeath and District Recreation Association
- Cobden Recreation Association
- Beachburg Agricultural Society
- Whitewater Library Board
- Muskrat Minor Hockey Association
- Cobden Seniors
- Mayor Neil Nicholson
- Councillor Mark Bell

In total, seven stakeholder interviews were held throughout the duration of the consultation and an eighth stakeholder group provided information via e-mail.

Common themes across interviews and stakeholder groups included:

- Hockey programming in Whitewater is facing challenges to scheduling due to physical and temporal constraints across the three arenas.
- A need for central library space that can support public events and gatherings and serve as a social centre.
- A need for central and accessible storage space for community organizations and recreational supplies.
- Light recreation and social activities that bring together generations are needed to attract and retain residents to the Township.
- Township support is needed to bring the villages together and reduce barriers in collaboration.
- Volunteer organizations are the lifeblood of the community and are leaders of change.

Suggestions from stakeholders regarding adaptive re-use of the arenas indicated a preference for ice facilities and operation to remain for as long as physically and fiscally possible, with interest in including additional recreation opportunities in the hockey off-season. Stakeholders indicated that they have heard from users that there is a desire

for greater space to host net sport activities (basketball, pickleball, badminton), a desire to use indoor spaces for walking, and an urgent need for childcare and parent support programs in areas of the Township with growing under-10 population.

Suggestions beyond the adaptive re-use of arenas included the development of a community calendar and library of templates to assist local associations and organizations in maintaining their institutional knowledge and avoiding duplication of events and conflicting scheduling.

2.3 Public Information Centres

Three Public Information Centres (PICs) were held during consultation, in both virtual and in-person formats. The meetings were designed to be interactive and encourage participation by offering activities to collect feedback and opportunities for participants to ask questions to the project team.

2.3.1 Virtual PIC

A virtual PIC was held on March 13th, 2024, from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM. A total of 11 people attended the PIC. A total of 11 guests attended the PIC. The PIC format included a brief presentation by Township staff and Dillon Consulting, followed by a facilitated discussion exercise using the online engagement program, Mural. Guests were asked to participate in three visioning exercises to encourage discussion on desired activities or spaces, community needs, and accessibility gaps or improvements to both Beachburg and Westmeath arenas. A summary of what was heard for each activity is summarized below.

2.3.1.1 Activity 1 - "I Wish This Was..."

Overall, participants indicated a preference that the arenas have multi-sport functionality and can host non-sport programming and workshop activities.

Comments requesting sports functionality included walking track, adaptive dodgeball, pickleball, playground facilities, and trampoline park.

Comments requesting light recreation and social functionalities included licensed childcare and before-/after-school care, library space, rental space for events, paramedicine programs, and space for seniors.

2.3.1.2 Activity 2 - "Our Community Needs More..."

Participants indicated a need for improved water access, swimming lessons and facilities, licensed childcare, a market garden and greenhouse, community kitchen, bowling, and dog park.

2.3.1.3 Activity 3 - "This Space Can Be Made More Accessible By..."

Participants highlighted a need for wayfinding signage to points of interest, barrier-free parking for those with wheelchairs or strollers, accessible washrooms with changing tables, benches, and improvements to walkways.

Social accessibility was requested, including free public wi-fi and the reduction of barriers to activities, including monetary or transportation barriers.

2.3.2 In-Person PICs

Two in-person PICs were held to discuss the specific usage and needs of the Beachburg and Westmeath arenas. The PIC formats included an open-house layout with a registration table and introductory boards to advise attendees on the background of the project to-date, followed by a world café-style activity area where project team members staffed tables with visioning exercises. Guests were asked to participate in three visioning exercises to encourage discussion on desired activities or spaces, community needs, and accessibility gaps or improvements. Feedback received at each event is summarized below.

2.3.2.1 Beachburg PIC - March 18th

Due to space needs, the Beachburg PIC was held at the Township administrative building from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM. Overall, 17 people attended.

2.3.2.1.1 ACTIVITY 1 - "I WISH THIS WAS..."

Overall, participants indicated a desire for new recreational opportunities including roller derby and roller skating, an indoor walking track, pickleball, a central library, and trampoline park.

Comments indicated a preference for the arena to remain an ice facility until no longer financially feasible by the Beachburg Recreation Association.

Additional comments questioned the metric used to determine the arena is underutilized and asked if there is an opportunity to re-assess the utilization and demand for ice facilities following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and an increase in demand for hockey-dedicated ice time.

Questions regarding the opportunity to reduce duplication of services across the Township and instead have dedicated facilities for activities across geographic areas were also received.

2.3.2.1.2 ACTIVITY 2 - "OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS MORE..."

A majority of comments indicated a need for dedicated, safe walking tracks (both indoor and outdoor). A desire for multi-sports/multi-functional spaces that could provide room for basketball, badminton, volleyball, pickleball, and gym space was shared across comments.

Community-focused needs including licensed childcare, seniors' activities and social spaces, and summer camp programming were noted.

2.3.2.1.3 ACTIVITY 3 - "THIS SPACE CAN BE MADE MORE ACCESSIBLE BY..."

Accessible public washrooms, ramps, and benches were the primary concerns noted by attendees, followed by community notice boards and advertising for the canteen to encourage the use of the space as a social hub.

2.3.2.2 Westmeath PIC – March 19th

The Westmeath PIC was held in the hall at the Westmeath Arena from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM. 53 people attended the PIC.

2.3.2.2.1 ACTIVITY 1 - "I WISH THIS WAS..."

Responses received indicated a majority of attendees prefer to maintain ice facilities. Suggestions included remaining an ice facility in the winter with multi-purpose recreation space provided in the downstairs arena in the summer.

A variety of other requests were received, including that the space host sports such as walking/running trail, soccer, badminton, roller skating, archery, pickleball, a fitness gym, basketball, curling, and swimming. Community social activity suggestions included summer programs, a rental space or entertainment venue for events, flea market, cooking classes, instructor-led workshops, movie theatre, and food vendors.

2.3.2.2.2 ACTIVITY 2 - "OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS MORE..."

A majority of comments indicated a continued need for ice facilities, particularly in the winter during hockey season.

Additional comments noted that the community needs improved water access, green space, multi-purpose sports facilities, green spaces, pickleball space, skateboard parks, arts facilities, and health-focused initiatives such as CPR and first-aid training and seniors housing.

2.3.2.2.3 ACTIVITY 3 - "THIS SPACE CAN BE MADE MORE ACCESSIBLE BY..."

Respondents indicated that Westmeath is the most accessible out of the three arenas, and that improvements to accessibility are best targeted to improved outdoor lighting, parking and sidewalk improvements, transit connections, and benches.

2.4 Online Survey

The Township of Whitewater Region - Adaptive Re-use of Community Centres survey was hosted on SurveyMonkey and ran from March 11th to 29th, 2024. The Survey solicited feedback from users of the community centres in Whitewater on how they use the facilities, how often they use them, potential alternative uses, and opportunities to make the community centres more sustainable and accessible. Overall, the survey had 322 responses. Overall, survey participants indicated a strong desire to maintain the existing arena facilities for hockey, skating and on-ice activity, noting the arenas are a staple in the community and serve as social and cultural foundations for residents.

Survey participants emphasized the importance of the community centres themselves as a gathering space, and offered a variety of alternative uses that could occur moving forward, provided ice facilities are scaled back or removed. Ideas included space for indoor sports, providing fitness amenities such as a walking track, to hosting local markets for food and goods, and serving as a flexible venue for both office rentals and events. Additionally, participants expressed interest in incorporating dedicated spaces for classes, including arts and crafts, workshops, and activities like archery instruction.

There is also a strong desire for the facility to foster intergenerational connections by offering gathering spaces for seniors, teenagers, and families, and potentially including a registered daycare facility for babies and toddlers. Further analysis is broken down by individual question below.

Question 1: Which of the following best describes you?

The majority of the 322 survey respondents (90%) are Whitewater residents. An additional 8% of respondents identified as visitors to the Township or owners/representatives of businesses in the area. Responses for "other" (2%) included a former resident, cottage owner and a neighbouring township resident.

Question 2: Which age range applies to you?

The largest representation of survey respondents came from those aged 35-44 (32%). The next largest percentage of respondents indicated that they were over 65 years of age (20%), followed by 45-54 years of age (18%), and then 55-64 years of age (17%). 11% of respondents indicated that they were between 25-34 years of age and just 2% of respondents reported being between 18-24 years of age.

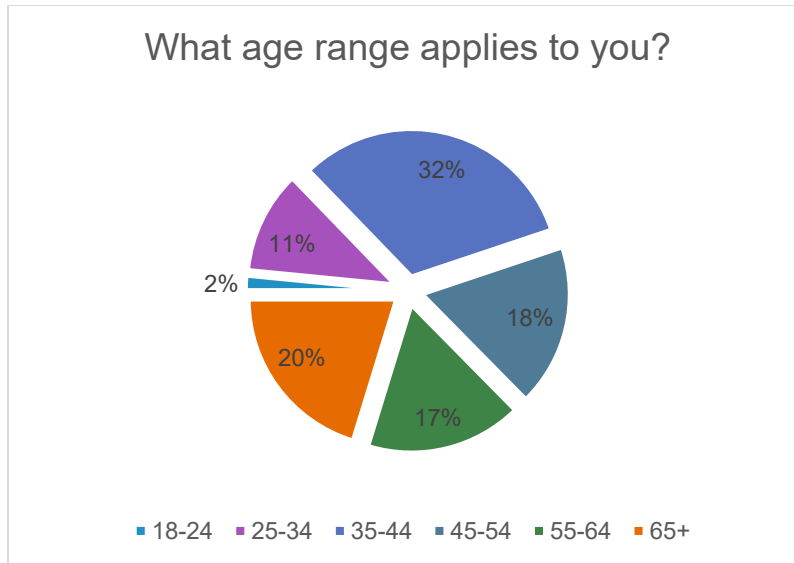


Figure 1: Age ranges of survey respondents

Question 3: Did you know that the Township took over the Beachburg and Westmeath arenas in 2017?

The majority of survey respondents knew that the township took over ownership of the Beachburg and Westmeath arenas (87%).

Question 4: Did you know that the recreation associations previously operated and maintained the arena facilities prior to 2017?

The majority of survey respondents were also aware that recreation associations previously operated and maintained the arena facilities prior to 2017 (85%).

Question 5: Do you or a family member currently use one of the ice rinks at the arenas?

The majority of survey respondents use the rinks or have family members that use the ice rinks at Cobden, Westmeath, and/or Beachburg (77%).

Question 6: Which arena's ice rink do you or your family member use? (select all that apply)

Overall, the Beachburg arena had the most selections with 195, followed by Westmeath (131) and Cobden (116).

Question 7: How often do you or the family member use the arena rink/ice?

The majority of survey respondents selected that they use the ice multiple times per week (61%), indicating that the ice is very well used among those who responded to the survey.

Question 8: What activity(s) do you or your family member use the arena's ice rink for? [open ended]

The majority of the 240 participant answers indicated that they use the arenas' ice rinks for hockey (72%). Other activities indicated include free and public skating, pickleball, ball hockey and community functions (e.g., kids crafts, birthday parties, dances, and carnival activities).

Question 9: The Township of Whitewater Region is considering changing the use of the ice rink to another use that meets the needs of the community. Other than an ice rink, what community uses would you like to see in the space? [open ended]

The majority of the 245 comments mentioned that the arenas should continue to be used as ice facilities for hockey, noting that the community is in need of multiple ice rinks. The prevailing thought from respondents is that the rinks should remain with additional activity space. Mentions for other activities included 27 mentions for pickleball facilities, 25 mentions for indoor soccer, 25 mentions for badminton, and 18 mentions for a pool or swimming area, which was noted multiple times as something respondents feel the Township is missing.

Other ideas included multipurpose space for indoor sports, a market for the town to sell food and goods, a fitness centre with a walking track, and a rental space for offices and events. A desire for a space more dedicated to classes was also shared by multiple participants. Ideas included arts and craft classes, instructor-led workshops, and activities like learning archery. A desire for the space to host intergenerational events to give seniors and teenagers a gathering space, as well as babies and toddlers as a registered daycare, was also expressed by respondents.

Question 10: Are there any businesses, services, or activities that you would like to see in the space, such as art lessons, yoga, or theater? [open ended]

219 participants provided a response to this question and provided a variety of ideas. Sentiment that the spaces should remain an ice-facility arena remained high, as there were 51 responses for 'No' aligning with previous comments that the arenas should remain as-is. Multiple participants replied 'yes' to all of the activities mentioned in the question (art lessons, yoga, or theater). A space for art and art lessons was a popular activity mentioned in responses, with 34 mentions of 'art'. Yoga was also a popular activity choice with 40 mentions. Other businesses, services and activities mentioned included: creative opportunities like woodworking, knitting, and sewing, fitness classes, open microphone and concert opportunities.

There were also mentions that there is a need for proper facilities or improvements to accommodate these activities, along with considerations for funding and community involvement in programming. Overall, the suggestions highlighted a desire to ensure the arena space remains a vibrant community hub catering to diverse interests and age

groups, but ensuring the community has adequate ice space for skating and hockey is a priority.

Question 11: How important is it to you that the buildings have sustainable design?

Overall, responses to the importance of sustainable design were varied, with a majority of respondents rating it as fairly important or very important (62%) compared to 38% of participants rating it as slightly important or not important at all.

Question 12: What sustainable design features do you think should be included? (select all that apply)

The majority of participants selected LED lighting as a design feature to be included throughout the arena. 23% of responses were for other suggestions. “Other” suggestions included ensuring that any upgrades are cost efficient, high efficiency heating and cooling, and ensuring the use of renewable materials, upgraded insulation (particularly for roofs of both arenas).

Question 13: The arena facilities are aging and need to be updated to be more accessible. Are there any features that would make the spaces more accessible?

Participant responses were spread nearly evenly across more accessible washrooms, automatic doors, and entrance ramps. 33% of responses were for other suggestions, which included ensuring seating areas are accessible with considerations for easy-to-use steps and dedicated viewing areas for wheelchair users.

Participants also noted in other responses that the Westmeath and Beachburg arenas have had accessibility upgrades and have the majority of the options listed in the question.

Questions 14 and 15 sought feedback from interested business who may be seeking partnerships with community spaces or recreation associations and their responses have been provided to the Township for management.

Question 16 sought to solicit interest in the PICs and to assist in projecting attendance for in-person events.

3.0 “What We Heard” Summary

Across engagement events and consultation styles, a common theme emerged - a vast majority of feedback indicated a community preference to continue to maintain the Beachburg and Westmeath Arenas as ice facilities until there is no longer the fiscal or physical ability to continue ice-rink operations.

The community provided multiple suggestions for indoor and outdoor improvements to the arena spaces; however, these are conditional upon the arenas ceasing operations

as ice facilities and transitioning funding towards re-use as opposed to ongoing maintenance of ice facilities.

4.0 Recommendations for Re-use

Provided there is an opportunity to progress with adaptive re-use in one or multiple arenas, the following recommendations are provided, in order of community importance:

- Multi-sport facility that supports a walking track and flexible space for net sport courts, yoga, and gym facilities.
- Library space that contains community gathering and event space for rentals.
- Community hub with programming to support all ages (youth programming, seniors socials, instructor-led cooking or crafting workshops) and incubator space for food vendors.

Within each of these recommendations, it is suggested that the construction period wherein arenas are modified be used to update all lighting to LED and seek grants and partnerships to implement efficient heating/cooling systems and insulated windows.

Improvements to the arena buildings will require the community centres to be brought up to accessible standards, with the opportunity to seek provincial funding and grants to support the required improvements and provide additional wayfinding support and benches.