
Report To: Community Services Committee

Date of Meeting: October 2, 2006

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Ward(s) Involved: Ward 1

Date of Report: September 20, 2006

Report No.: CSD-06-102

Subject: Downtown Community Centre Update

RECOMMENDATION:

For information only.

BACKGROUND:

This report provides Council with an update on the first year of operations of the Downtown Community Centre.

In June 2003 the City of Kitchener, Council agreed to venture into a partnership with the Waterloo Catholic School Board to renovate the old St. Mary's High school building at 35 Weber St. This project would provide a new location for the WCDSB's Education Centre and the city a prime site for a downtown community centre. The Victoria School Centre patrons were approached to consider relocating to be a part of this project. This move was in line with the city's new direction for resource based community centres while revitalizing the downtown. It allowed the city to supply space for local neighbourhood associations, downtown youth and seniors in partnership with the local Catholic school board.

The Downtown Community Centre opened its doors on July 25th 2005 after a couple weeks delay due to construction set backs. Many months of consultation with the community, the seniors, city staff, the Catholic School Board, St. Mary's Parish and the staff of The Walter Fedy Partnership took place to create this beautiful downtown facility in the heart of Kitchener.

REPORT:

The Downtown Community Centre (DCC) has become home to the Victoria School Centre Seniors, including the Senior Day Program, the Downtown Neighbourhood Alliance (DNA), and local youth. We have a partnership agreement for half of the facility and to share some areas

for common use with the School Board and the St. Mary's Parish. This is very much a give and take arrangement that is working very well.

The DNA is a group of downtown neighbourhood associations that have come together to offer joint programming out of the DCC. Each of the neighbourhood associations is keeping its own identity by continuing to provide their individual events and deal with neighbourhood concerns/improvements. The seven associations that have aligned with the DNA are: Central Frederick NA, Civic Centre NA, Victoria Park NA (still does their own programming out of the centre), Auditorium NA, Mount Hope NA, King East, and Cedar Hills.

The groups from the DCC decided to host a community celebration on September 16, & 17, 2005 to announce their new home. This was a community Celebration of the Downtown Community Centre, as the official grand opening of the whole facility was Monday, Oct. 24, 2005 including all the partners, City of Kitchener, Waterloo Catholic District School Board, St. Mary's Parish, political dignitaries and the community.

The community celebration included the public art unveiling, displays and demonstrations of programs/services, youth activities, local musicians/dance, fun/games for all ages and a pancake breakfast. A shoe tree took donations of shoes and boots for the downtown needy. Truly a party for all ages. The volunteers that worked so hard over the past few years to make this centre become a reality were honoured and thanked as we looked forward to the beginning of bigger and better things. The dedication from all of the downtown community was a real reason to celebrate.

Facility Use

This facility is definitely a multi use facility. In consultation with all partners and users the facility was design to accommodate a variety of specific users keeping in mind that when they are not using the space it will be used for other activities. This co-operation by all parties has assisted us in maximizing the use of the space with only a few continuing challenges to accommodate everyone.

This increase in space, 10,000 sq ft to 30,000 sq ft, has allowed for many additions and expansions to existing programs and services that were at the Victoria School Centre:

- The Senior Day Program (frail elderly seniors) has expanded one additional day (from 5 to 6 days) and has 2-3 additional spaces per day --- this is a 20% increase in service;
- The Meal program is operating one additional day & able to do more catering with the added equipment;
- The Senior Direct Programs have increased approximately 20% averaging 1,000 more people per month;
- Neighbourhood Association programs increased 25% (to 95 programs);
- Our average monthly operational hours have increased approximately 20% (to 300 hrs/month);
- Youth Drop In and other various youth programs are provided both summer and year round;
- Numerous catering services are now offered
- A variety of rentals, both internal and external occur at the facility; and

- Operating hours have increased to allow more access to Connect KW computer users.

Partnerships

The city of Kitchener is operating the facility in partnership with the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, the Victoria School Centre Seniors, the Downtown Neighbourhood Alliance, Youth and the St. Mary's Parish.

Over the past year relationships have continued to be developed with the partners to gain co-operation and trust to effectively operate this multi-use facility. The DCC is a place that the whole community can call home.

Deficiencies:

The facility has had a few deficiencies but Facilities Management is working with the Walter Fedy Partnership and the WCDSB to resolve the issues as they arise.

Outstanding Challenges:

The main outstanding challenge the city has with the DCC is the parking issue. This site/downtown does not have adequate permanent parking for this facility both the community centre and the school board. The seniors take out a VIP membership to the centre and one of the benefits of membership is free on site parking. The WCDSB has very graciously agreed to a swap of additional parking spots for the DCC for parking in the Forsyth parking lot as long as they are available. This is a short term solution and a permanent one will need to be found at some point to ensure access to the facility.

The gym is in need of a permanent room divider so programs can run simultaneously without interfering with each other. This needs to be more of a sound/physical barrier between the two gyms. Due to the size and height of the gym it will need to be mechanically operated as well.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The total project budget for the Downtown Community Centre was projected at \$3,048,000 (CSD-04-033). The Ministry of Health contributed \$200,000 to help support the Senior Day Program's needs in the facility. The DNA and seniors groups raised approximately \$30,000 dollars to help furnish and equip many other areas of the facility. The final expenditure of the project was \$3,077,844. The budget difference will be covered out of existing 2005 provisions.

CONCLUSION:

The DCC is proving to be a very important focal point of Kitchener's Downtown. The Centre truly is a place for all ages and is a valuable addition to the downtown area. The neighbourhood volunteers have rallied around the centre and are continuing to see the potential to expand

programs and events. The seniors are continuing to take advantage of the programs and services offered here. Many Youth are feeling more comfortable coming into the centre and participating in a variety of activities. Volunteer opportunities are soaring at this facility as things continue to take off and reach new heights.

The staff team at the DCC is a dedicated group of individuals eager to support the activities and services of the Downtown Community Centre in all its aspects.

The facility will cultivate numerous opportunities as it grows to meet the needs of the Downtown Community and the City of Kitchener.

Mark Hildebrand
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