

H. G. R. Mews Community Centre Replacement



Results of Public Engagement
“What We Heard”
July 2018



ST. JOHN'S

The project:

- The City's Recreation and Parks Master Plan called for a replacement of the H.G.R Mews Community Centre;
- Budget for replacement is currently in the 10-year capital plan and set at \$24 million;
- The replacement facility is proposed to be in the same general area and be of similar size and scope;
- A proposed location was put forward as part of the consultation process.

Purpose of engagement

A public engagement process was designed to seek input on:

- Programming for a new facility;
- Features and amenities needed;
- Accessibility;
- Neighbourhood specific needs/community hub;
- Public transit and parking impacts;
- Impact on immediate neighbours, residents and businesses, during and after the build;
- Potential partnership opportunities.

Level of engagement and promise

Given the decision to build a replacement facility has already been made, the engagement focused on how the facility could best meet the needs of the community it serves. Therefore, the level of engagement was **INVOLVE**:

- We will work with the stakeholders throughout the process to ensure concerns related to the build and expectations for what the facility will become are consistently understood and considered as the project evolves.

Promise to the public: We will work with stakeholders to ensure their concerns are heard within the scope of the project and their needs and expectations are reflected in the options being considered.

Proposed location



Current facility

Proposed site

St. Teresa's Elementary

St. Teresa's Catholic Church

Salvation Army St. John's West

MUNDY POND

Mundy Pond

Tools, tactics, and timelines

Date	Tool/Tactic	Stakeholder(s)	# of participants
Mid-May	Two In-person by invitation meetings	Immediate neighbours – residents and businesses	16-20
Mid-Late May	Online Survey and two in-person by invitation stakeholder sessions	Recreation groups and potential users/partners	37 groups/participants
Late May - Late June	Engage portal page launched and promotion of in-person sessions	Residents/users generally	1700 visits to the project page 123 visitors actively engaged (left comments) 643 visitors were informed (visited multiple pages, documents but did not leave comments)
Late May/early June	Drop in “kiosk” style sessions at Mews Centre	Users and Residents	100 people
June	Focus group	Newcomers	30-35 people
June	Meetings	Seniors and Inclusion Advisory Committees	25 people

What we heard from immediate neighbours & adjacent businesses

Immediate neighbours are those people who live or operate businesses adjacent to the Mews. Addressed mail was sent to this group inviting them to attend a session designed specifically for them. A number of concerns brought up are summarized below:

- The proposed location and its proximity to the adjacent homes;
- Traffic and noise increase in the area including issues with cars driving the wrong way down Pearce Avenue;
- Look at option to realign Mundy Pond Road;
- There is too much parking on the proposed drawings, this may negatively impact the green space;
- Some residents currently park in the parking lot who don't have driveways, this is challenging in the winter;
- The status of the parking lot as a flood plain;
- There may be rodents during and post construction;
- Safety and security concerns with new building and potential for increase of unwanted activity in the area;
- Concern about lighting of the parking area, the building itself as well as its impact on the adjacent homes;
- Look at the option to 'Build up, not out' (in terms of the new building footprint) and how this will affect neighbours;
- Ensure the current building is not left vacant once construction of a new centre is complete;
- Concern about negative impact on property value for homes in the immediate area;
- As an alternative, the City should investigate the purchase of the adjacent Murray Building and use the existing Mews building as a parking lot;
- Ensure the new facility has a steam and sauna.

User groups we heard from

Over 150 user groups were invited to provide feedback in person or through an online survey.

The following user groups provided feedback:

- Eastern Health;
- Special Olympics;
- Canadian Hard of Hearing Association;
- Canadian Handball Association;
- Racquetball Canada;
- Recreational Ball Hockey;
- Recreational Water Polo;
- St. John's Legends Swim Club;
- Sea Stars Synchronized Swimming.

What we heard from user groups

This list includes items specific to the needs of those groups mentioned. Items heard from user groups that were similar to those from regular/future users are included later in the document.

General Comments:

- Gym space should be divisible by wall so it can be used by multiple sports/activities;
- Keep the Boys and Girls Club in the area.

Competitive Aquatics:

- Ensure consideration is given to run activities such as lifesaving sport, speed swim training & competitions, synchronized swimming, water-polo, diving, adequate shared space, etc;
- Swimming pool dimensions should be considered; Eight or ten lanes would be great (10 lanes would give you a 25m square site which would allow different sports/activities to co-exist easily);
- Consider pool depth, number of lanes, starting blocks, pace clocks, & standards set by [FINA](#) and Canadian specific regulations;
- Viewing area with retractable bleacher suitable for a swim meet/competition;
- Synchronized swimming could use a retractable shallow end to make the full pool deep; Consider space for athletes to participate in dryland training; Include mirrors (like a dance studio); Removable starting blocks are preferred, ensure adequate viewing space is important;
- Change rooms should include more bench seating/& men's and women's are both too small;
- Ensure good quality lockers are used;
- Expand the footprint of the total building.

What we heard from user groups (cont'd):

Racquet Sports:

- Handball & racquetball can be played in the same sized space, and if you have a sliding back wall it could also be used for squash and other activities;
- Senior National level athletes play in St. John's and children's and youth leagues; these sports are increasing in popularity (example: Boys & Girls Club play at current Mews);
- Courts require hardwood floors, concrete walls, good HVAC system, recessed lighting & glass sidewall; include viewing space with seating for use during competitions;
- Could host tournaments if viewing and refereeing spots are suitable;
- Ideally courts should be side by side not back to back as they are in existing site;
- Number of courts should increase; Preference would be up to 10 courts; However, even increase to 4 courts would be allow better/bigger events; At absolute minimum maintain the current two courts;
- Option for outdoor handball wall; Materials (concrete or asphalt, level playing surface, lighting, etc.);
- The option to live stream games during tournaments would be of benefit.

Eastern Health:

- Concerns if current space is closed for a time before a new centre opens; clients have transportation issues and may lose interest;
- Clients prefer to have more privacy in change rooms; Include more/larger stalls;
- Access for different city leagues to play basketball;
- Swimming Pool should be at least as big as the current site and could include features for recreation/therapeutic use including a beach front entry and warm water options.

What we heard from newcomers

The Local Immigration Partnership and Association for New Canadians participated in a session for newcomers. A summary of what we heard follows:

- Access to public transit to and from the Mews Centre is important;
- Access to a community kitchen allows newcomers to cook and sell at Farmers' market; Would give newcomers the option to offer or participate in cooking classes;
- A small café would be good;
- Space to deliver community driven programs and services that are unique to various cultures/groups would be great; Large, open spaces for events/activities that enhance sense of belonging;
- Childminding service for parents to be able to participate in programs;
- Keep Racquetball courts, consider a bigger gymnasium, consider workout equipment;
- Ensure diversity of art work that creates inclusion and welcoming feel for people of different cultures;
- Separate swim times and adult swimming lessons for people who need privacy due to cultural sensitivity;
- Space for a community garden.

Overall, newcomers would like to see a more diverse and welcoming space that respects all cultures, creates space for community building, that is easy to access.

What we heard from the Inclusion Community

Members of the inclusion community met with City staff at drop in engagement sessions, city staff attended the Inclusion Advisory Committee, and we received feedback from the general public. Please note the City is committed to ensuring a focus on Universal design is incorporated whenever possible.

- Accessible centre (as captured in the universal design document completed by the Inclusion Advisory Committee);
- Push button doors throughout the facility;
- Parking that is close to the building;
- Front desk and change rooms that are not too far from the main entrance;
- Good signage wayfinding (consider braille, colour, location, font, etc.);
- Accessible changerooms suitable for bariatric clients;
- Accessible entrance to the pool like beachfront entry and a pool pod/lift;
- Any aquatic activities/waterslides should be accessible to all.

What we heard from Seniors' Advisory Committee:

- Would like to see existing relationship with Boys and Girls Club continue; Would like to see adults engage with Boys and Girls club to foster intergenerational activities;
- Indoor walking track;
- Space for Line Dance programs that has a good sound system and flooring;
- More multi-purpose rooms;
- Re-visit feedback from engagement sessions from the Paul Reynolds Community Centre process;
- Lockers in changerooms can't be up too high;
- Accessibility considerations in all areas of the building;
- Air conditioning;
- Consideration for outdoor programming; potential for water sports in Mundy pond;
- Consider the site to be a warming centre much like Paul Reynolds (Generator);
- Will the name of the Centre stay as H.G.R. Mews Community Centre;
- Will the pool be bigger - 8 lanes or 10 lanes? More space for programs that have high demand such as Shallow Water Fitness.

Current and potential users were asked a series of questions online at engagestjohns.ca and in person

Respondents tended to be residents who currently use drop in and/or registration based programs or people who plan to use the space. Questions asked:

Q1: What do you currently do at the H.G.R. Mews Community Centre that you want to keep doing at a new facility?

Q2: What is not available to you now at the H.G.R. Mews Community Centre that you might like to see at the new facility?

Q3: When looking at the proposed location, what else should the City consider as it is planning for this new facility?

Q4: Any other comments?

Q1: What do you currently do at the H.G.R. Mews Community Centre that you want to keep doing at a new facility?

Feedback from in-person drop-in and online from engagestjohns.ca has been combined below:

- Keep the steam & sauna;
- Keep swimming and swimming lessons;
- Keep costs the same;
- Shallow & Deep Water Fitness, dryland adult Fitness;
- Keep swimming pool at least same size (6 lanes, 25m);
- Like the format of the changerooms at existing Mews, just need bigger and better (don't like the format at Paul Reynolds Community Centre);
- Multipurpose Rooms/meeting space with Not for Profit;
- Programs such as Yoga/Tai Chi/Arts & Crafts/Music/Dance;
- Jam Room (music) for groups to play together - not lessons;
- Birthday parties;
- Gymnasium;
- Access to handball & racquetball courts;
- Neighbourhood feel;

Overall users of the facility feel that current programs and services should continue in an updated and improved space.

**Suggestions for how to improve follow in the next section.*

Q2: What is not available to you now at the H.G.R. Mews Community Centre that you might like to see at the new facility?

Washrooms / Changerooms:

- Bring your own lock for lockers or coin return/better lockers than Paul Reynolds;
- Larger/modern changerrooms with proper stalls & showers, more washrooms in facility including lobby washrooms;
- Safer flooring, more/better benches in change stalls, higher toilets for seniors/mobility, accessible bariatric changerrooms (up to 4) with change table and lift/grab bars in shower stalls;
- Substantial water pressure in the showers;
- Lots of outlets in washrooms for hair dryers/ make sure they are in the right spaces;
- Control humidity in changerrooms.

Swimming Pool:

- Better sound system for swimming pool;
- Hot Tub, waterslides and/or kid friendly pool, lazy river;
- Keep seniors in mind when planning pool (not all kid stuff);
- Bigger swimming pool for shallow water fitness, lane swimming (wider lanes - 8 lane preferred) – able to be used for competition;
- No glass in pool area for privacy;
- Consider a salt water pool;
- Consider warmer pool water for arthritic patrons.

Q2 Cont'd: What is not available to you now at the H.G.R. Mews Community Centre that you might like to see at the new facility?

General:

- More security;
- Main desk near main entrance (not far away like Paul Reynolds Community Centre);
- Canteen/coffee shop;
- Less stairs in facility / put an elevator instead of a 'lift';
- Air conditioning;
- Better sound system;
- Viewing area for pool & racquetball courts;
- Need more opportunity to socialize (common space);
- Computer/library for seniors with a meeting space/a branch of the public library;
- Multipurpose space that is accessible for seniors/persons with a disability;
- Child minding.

Outside the building:

- Better and more parking;
- Connect site to bike and walking trails to ensure active living;
- Use the pond for water-based outside activities.

Gymnasium/Fitness/Racquet sports:

- Squash court;
- Indoor walking track;
- Better space/floor for dance;
- Exercise equipment (free access like at Paul Reynolds Community Centre);
- Consider better natural light in gymnasium;
- Climbing wall.

Q3: When looking at the proposed location, what else should the City consider as it is planning for a new facility?

There is general support and recognition of the need for a new facility and its importance to the area. However, many expressed concerns and comments about the proposed site and impact.

Neighbourhood:

- Make it a true neighbourhood centre; people can walk safely; cohesion with the neighbourhood; variety of services for a centre that serves a varied community; better accessibility for those with physical limitations.

Proposed Location:

- Consider all impacts to properties in area;
- Don't shut current building down until replacement is operational; some said build on existing site;
- Like the idea of everything being on the same side of the street, fine with proposed location;
- Consider realignment of Mundy Pond Road;
- Look at other locations: Move the depot, or Grace Hospital site or build on the existing site, build on Ropewalk Lane;
- Worry about what becomes of the current building if it is left vacant;
- There are viable alternatives to this current proposal.

General:

- Need bike racks;
- The site would need good lighting;
- No big windows like Paul Reynolds; viewing area to watch children but separate from public area;
- St. John's is getting older, existing site used by a large seniors base with fewer children; consider in design;
- Consider controlled access when in building.

Q3 (cont'd): When looking at the proposed location, what else should the City consider as it is planning for the new facility?

Parking/Crossing the Street:

- Minimize parking footprint; keep parking available in existing site while build new site;
- Consider an underground tunnel or pedway (some felt these options would not work for all);
- Some residents park in the gravel lot in winter time due to the parking ban as they are a one-way street with limited parking choices and living in accessible houses;
- The safety of users crossing Mundy Pond Road should be considered as part of general effort to improve pedestrian safety; traffic calming on Mundy Pond Road;
- Parking space for Go Bus / Turn around for full bus;
- Can't reach the Crosswalk button on the pole, make it 'on demand.'

Environment:

- Don't put the building next to the pond; the pond should be kept for walking/bike trails; do not remove green space;
- Walking trails and green spaces are an important part of the community and promote a sense of place as well as support healthy living;
- Use a location that is sustainable, from both an environmental and urban planning perspective;
- Use vegetation to separate the building from the road; Mullin's Brook - try to recover part of it;
- Mundy Pond, along with its embankments, open spaces and walking trails, comprises a valuable, self-contained and much-needed ecosystem in central St. John's;
- Need environmental assessment;
- Add no idling especially in blue zone.

Q4: Any other comments?

Any comments that were not captured through a previous questions are included here:

- Consider acquiring the Murray Building (provincial government/drycleaner) adjacent to the current Mews Centre and using that space;
- What about other areas of the city that would like to see recreation facilities? When will they be getting something?
- Paul Reynolds is a great example of what not to do; do the opposite for Mews;
- This discussion has brought other issues to light, consider them: public transit, healthy communities, urban planning, etc..; it's good to hear so many voices in support of a different approach to life in our city, for everyone; I hope our city leaders take note;
- What happens to snow in winter? Will it be plowed onto the trail? Will this impede the public who want to use the trail in the winter?
- Provide a good bus shelter on the site and reduce the parking to discourage people from driving to it and preserve more green space;
- If you're going to build a new facility, make it large enough to meet the needs;
- Continue engagement through whole process.

Key takeaways

- There is a desire in the community for a new building that meets the needs and has parking.
- The proposed location of the building and impact on green space are concerns for some people.
- Ensure the building is accessible.
- There are many users who have specific needs/wants, some of which may conflict with other user groups.
- It's important to continue to engage with the community throughout the project.

What this means and next steps

- This document reflects what was heard through the public engagement process. What was heard will be considered in the context of the scope of the project (size and budget) and operational requirements.
- Next steps
 - Geotechnical review of proposed site to be concluded
 - Update of the Mundy Pond flood plain to take into account recently published rainfall information, no development will take place in the flood plain.
 - Determine usability of proposed site
- To stay up-to-date on this project, visit engagestjohns.ca, register as a user and/or follow the project.