



## Frequently Asked Questions Okotoks Arts and Learning Campus Project August 2021

### 1. What is the Arts and Learning Campus?

The Campus is a joint-venture partnership between the Town of Okotoks and Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools as well as a collaboration with stakeholders Bow Valley College, Community Futures Highwood, Foothills School Division and the Okotoks Public Library. The Campus will create a downtown anchor and consolidate Arts and Learning facilities in one area including post-secondary opportunities.

### 2. Why is this project important?

This is a transformational project for Okotoks that will increase vitality for the downtown and enhance our ability to offer post-secondary opportunities in the long-term. It will create a strong anchor for the downtown area and free up potential tax generating commercial space along Elizabeth Street, when these tenants relocate to the Campus.

This project reflects the foundations established in the Economic Development Master Plan and the Roger Brooks Action Plan to achieve a vibrant space that strengthens the downtown. Together with the future performing arts centre, this Campus can create a vital, shared asset for the community.

### Some background about the project and why it will create economic stimulus in the downtown:

- Council has been reviewing the prospect of an Arts and Learning Campus since 2014. The economic development committee had this as a key priority and the post-secondary education committee developed strategies to ensure when the appropriate time occurred, the opportunity could be seized.
- In 2018, Bow Valley College approached the Town about finding space in the downtown core. Conversations with five partners showed that they had the same need. In January 2019, Council directed Administration to explore the opportunity to see if a business case could be developed. At that time, Council also gave direction to explore this project as an Integrated Project Delivery Project (IPD) to ensure that costs between partners could be managed in such a way that the project would not exceed the allotted budget unless requested by the owner(s).
- In May 2019, the business case for the Arts and Learning Campus was approved and budget approval was granted. The project was approved at \$23.5M and development of a Request for Proposals (RFP) for construction activities commenced.
- In November 2019, the budget on the project was adjusted. It highlighted that Christ the Redeemer was going to become an owner of their space in the building and thus responsible for their own capital project. The Town's capital contribution was downwardly amended to the \$18.5M level.

The business case for this project focussed on the economic vitality of the downtown, taxable revenue, partnership and the need for a downtown anchor.

- i. The Arts and Learning Campus will create more taxable revenue for the town by consolidating non-taxable entities in one location.
- ii. By anchoring the downtown, the Arts and Learning Campus project responds to a number of Council's strategic directions, most notably fostering economic vitality, capitalizing on partnerships, building quality infrastructure and managing community growth.
- iii. This is a unique site that will provide enhanced four-season public space as well as provide space for the key stakeholders, including retail space in the current library building.

**3. Why doesn't the Town wait to move forward on this project until after the pandemic crisis has passed?**

The provincial government has declared that construction is an essential service. The Town feels it is important to support the Province in this critical move towards economic recovery. As business decisions by our partners have been made, our goal is to meet all contractual time commitments; any change to timelines would have negative cost implications. All AHS health regulations have been followed.

**4. What is the cost and who is paying for it?**

- On May 27, 2020, administration presented a report outlining the opportunities, risks and costs of the proposed Arts and Learning Campus and the impact on the 10-year Capital Plan forecast.
- Council approved Phase 1 of a multi-year project with the funding allocated as follows:

2020-2022 Multiyear Capital Project (Arts and Learning Campus Phase 1)

Budget Year	Approved Budget (\$Millions) May 27, 2019	Revised Budget (\$Millions) Post Validation
2019	1.0	1.0
2020	5.9	9.4
2021	10.1	7.9
2022	6.3	0
Total	23.3	18.3

- **TOTAL Phase 1: \$23.3M** - the anticipated funding sources were \$5.0M from Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools (CTRCS). The Town's contribution of \$18.3M was to come from Grants and the General Recapitalization Reserve for any amount not covered by the grants.
- Here are the facts on the grant information for the Arts and Learning Campus:
  1. The funding source for the municipal portion (\$18.3M) of the ALC is the Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI).
  2. The MSI is a provincial capital grant program given on an annual basis to municipalities.
  3. The Town currently receives about \$6M annually for MSI.
  4. We currently have an available grant balance at the end of 2019 of \$20.6M.
  5. The Town has requested the 2020 MSI grant funding from the Province for the Arts and Learning Campus and this allocation has already been transferred to the Town.
  6. The Province's budget confirms that the current MSI program will be replaced by the Local Government Fiscal Framework (LGFF). The program allocation and methodology for the new LGFF has not yet been provided by the Province.
  7. To respond to the risk of the potential reduction in funding, Council directed we only use 50% allocation for future years reducing the anticipated amount to \$3M per year.
  8. Even with this 50% reduction, we are still forecasting an available grant of \$14M at the end of 2023. We have enough grants now, even if the province were to cancel the LGFF, to fund the project.

**5. How much of the provincial grant is earmarked directly for the build? Was it a block fund or was it a gradual roll out? If so, why can you remove \$ 6 million out of the total cost?**

The entire Town portion is intended to be grant funded. The \$6 million that was removed, is funding contributed to the project by Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools, who will own a portion of the new building.

**6. Beyond taxes, is the downtown business community contributing directly to this project?**

No.

**7. Why are you removing Ethel Tucker Centennial Park?**

- Ethel Tucker Centennial Park (Ethel Tucker Park) is **not** being removed. The total green space will be maintained but will be reconfigured, and Ethel Tucker's memorial will continue to be recognized. Ethel Tucker Park will continue to co-exist with the Arts and Learning Campus.
- Ethel Tucker Park currently is about 1.5 acres in size. The new Arts and Learning Campus will include 1.5 acres of greenspace and just over 0.5 acres of plaza space.
- The park was used by minor baseball teams and for events. Space will be maintained for events, and sports activities will be accommodated on other sport field sites in town.
- The playground equipment and other park amenities will be removed. Council directed administration to prepare a new play structure behind the former public library; it will be constructed in 2022.
- Pedestrian connections to the river valley will be maintained.

**8. What about the trees in Ethel Tucker Park?**

Ethel Tucker Park will be impacted by the removal of 22 trees. Trees being removed are approximately 60 years old. Some of the willows and Manitoba maple are showing signs of decline in the form of canopy dieback and are approaching the end of their lifecycle;

- The smaller trees that are located in the parking lot area may be transplanted and planted elsewhere in Town; this decision will be based on location, size and construction timing and on site conditions.
- The trees being removed are not the native old growth cottonwoods in the riparian area, but rather the non-native trees planted at the front of the site adjacent the street.

**9. What is happening with the wood from the removed trees?**

The wood from the trees is being safely stored by the Town; we are looking at using the wood for memorial benches and park features. Any tree that is over 50cm in diameter is being saved by the Town. We have asked the team to work this into the landscape design so that the trees can be repurposed as a priority within Ethel Tucker Park and then throughout the balance of Town parks. Removed trees that do not have a diameter of 50 cm will be made into firewood and used at Town events or will be chipped for use in Town flowerbeds.

**10. How was the Town able to move forward on tree removal without a development permit?**

A development permit is not required to remove trees. The Town owns the land and is therefore able to remove trees and maintain landscaping as appropriate. It was important to remove the trees in this early-spring time window before there was increased bird nesting in the area. This was required in order to meet the tight timelines for the project partners. It is close to nesting season and it is important that there is minimal impact to any birds who may want to nest here. By removing the trees now, we will not disrupt any nests and be compliant with regulations.

**11. How was information publically shared about the project and where is it at today?**

**April 12 & 13, 2019** – information session at Chamber Trade & Lifestyle Show

**October 3, 2019** – Information session at Recreation Centre

**February 7, 2020** – information session at Okotoks Public Library

Session information was advertised on the website, social media feeds, Western Wheel and the Eagle 100.9FM. All information at these sessions, including display boards, site plans, renderings, the ability to provide comment and more were also available on the webpage. Site plans, renderings and more details are available at [www.okotoks.ca/OALC](http://www.okotoks.ca/OALC).

**April 27, 2020** – The development permit application for the project was approved by Okotoks Town Council.

**12. When will project construction start?**

Upon Council approving the development permit, construction will begin.

**13. What are the definitions of flood fringe and floodway?**

The definitions for both are as follows, from the Province of Alberta:

**Flood Fringe** – The portion of the flood hazard area outside of the floodway. Water in the flood fringe is generally shallower and flows more slowly than in the floodway. New development in the flood fringe may be permitted in some communities and should be flood-mitigated.

**Floodway** – The portion of the flood hazard area where flows are deepest, fastest and most destructive. The floodway typically includes the main channel of a stream and a portion of the adjacent overbank area. New development is prohibited in the floodway.

**14. Are we building in the floodway?**

We are not building in the floodway; building in the floodway is prohibited.

**15. What are the requirements to build in the flood fringe and how did the Town meet these requirements?**

- A portion of the development is in the flood fringe
- The Campus will include flood mitigation strategies in accordance with provincial and local policies.
- The project will meet all of the requirements of the Land Use Bylaw with regards to flood protection and mitigation
- The first floor was raised an additional 600 mm to meet close to the 1/200 standard and the main floor is being constructed with waterproof materials
- All heating, cooling and mechanical equipment will be installed above the first floor to minimize potential flood damage should an event occur

**16. Were local First Nations consulted regarding use of the land?**

Consultation with First Nations is required if the project meets two thresholds. The first threshold is if the project requires provincial regulatory approval and the second threshold is in relation to defined triggers that are deemed to have adverse impacts on the exercise of treaty rights or traditional uses. This project does not require provincial regulatory approval therefore consultation with first Nations/Metis Settlements was not required. To honour the principles contained in the agreement, the Town further explored the defined triggers in relation to the development of the Arts and Learning Campus. Consultation triggers such as regulation, policy and strategic initiatives; changes to public access; fish and wildlife management and land use planning were reviewed. The decision subsequently reached was that no adverse impacts were found. The Town, in compliance with the Government of Alberta's Guidelines on Consultations with First Nations on Land and Natural Resource Management, was therefore not required to have specific First Nations consultation.

**17. Have environmental and economic studies and assessments been done?**

To ensure regulatory compliance, professionals were hired to assess the land to ensure the Town can complete the project. Further, a Phase 1 environmental assessment was conducted at the beginning of the project. A business case was developed that outlined building costs and expected revenues from tenants informing Council's decision to proceed.

**18. Will the Arts and Learning Campus be fully accessible?**

Yes, the campus will meet all Alberta Building Code accessibility requirements. This includes a ramp at the front entrance and an elevator inside to accommodate wheelchairs, as well as accessible parking stalls provided in front of the new library building. Ethel Tucker Park and the plaza will also be fully accessible.

**19. Where is the parking?**

In the configuration for the Arts and Learning Campus, the majority of the parking for the new building is located to the west of the site at the former Creamery site and has approximately 81 stalls. With the property at 31 Riverside Drive becoming vacant, there is opportunity to expand the parking lot by another 40-50 stalls. Other downtown parking options are currently being investigated.

**20. What will happen to the house on Riverside Drive?**

Recognizing the importance of this parcel to the future phases of the Arts and Learning Campus, the Town acquired the land and had been leasing it back to the tenant since October 2019. The current tenant has decided to move and will be leaving the property in September, 2021.

**21. What is happening with performing arts centre that is part of this project?**

The performing arts centre is part of Phase 2 of the project. This portion of the project is not yet funded, but is tentatively planned for the former Creamery site. Funding will be determined as part of future budgets.

**22. How do the arts factor into the first phase of this project?**

By ensuring there are features such as a plaza and maker spaces included in the first phase, the Town is ensuring that we can provide opportunities for a variety of arts and cultural events and activities. This strategy lays a framework for the second phase of the project.