

Rockway Centre Redevelopment Community Engagement

Data Report - January 2025



Executive Summary

Rockway Centre is Kitchener's only dedicated older adult community centre where residents can come together and participate in a wide variety of programs designed specifically for them.

Situated on a 1.89-acres, Rockway Centre includes a 17,750 square foot facility with 11 program rooms, a café, outdoor patio, billiards room, pottery shed, and commercial kitchen. In 2023, the centre recorded 30,747 visits for various programs, including fitness classes (Chair Pilates, Zumba), learning programs (technology, cooking, pottery), social groups (cards, billiards, crafts), wellness programs (yoga, meditation), and community events (Rockin' it at Rockway, holiday bazaars).

Rockway Centre was originally constructed as a transit terminal in 1950 and has been operating as an older adult centre for 50 years. The existing building is in need of many repairs; and does not provide residents with the amenities they deserve. As a result, the facility no longer meets the diverse needs of our older adult population. While the City has done its best to make the building work, the current layout and structure simply don't serve the community well. If we want to truly meet the current and future needs of older adults, we need a new centre.

In 2024, staff conducted a comprehensive community engagement campaign to better understand residents' interests, needs and desires for a new older adult centre.

Next, the City will conduct a transparent and competitive bidding process to seek out a development partner build a new older adult centre either on the existing site at 1405 King St. E. or at a location nearby. The information collected through the engagement campaign will be instrumental in the decision-making process to select the right development partner.

The enclosed report includes the results of the 2024 Rockway Redevelopment: Your Centre, Your Say campaign. As the City continues the process of redeveloping Rockway Centre into a new, purpose-built facility that better meets residents' needs, we are committed to collaborating with the centre's current users and older adults from across the city.

Project Background

The idea of a more modern and functional older adult recreation facility was first presented to Council in 2013. At that time, the decision to build a new centre on the existing site (1405 King St. E.) or at a location nearby was deferred to a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. Further, the City decided to maintain the existing Rockway Centre until a new facility could be built at a later date.

The redevelopment of Rockway Centre was noted again in 2019 when Council received the Leisure Facilities Master Plan which included a recommendation to pursue a partnership with the private sector to redevelop Rockway Centre.

City Council allocated \$6 million starting in the 2024/2025 capital budget to fund the City’s portion of the redevelopment partnership, which could also include the value of the Rockway Centre current site/land.

Public Engagement

Throughout 2023, staff talked with more than 140 residents from a variety of stakeholder groups to get their initial thoughts on how best to develop a new, modern older adult centre.

In 2024, staff led a broader community engagement effort to better understand the atmosphere, site features, and program offerings residents would like to see in a new older adult centre. The results of this engagement, which gathered input from 721 residents, are outlined in the enclosed report and will be used as a decision-making tool to develop criteria for the Request for Proposal.

Development Process

The redevelopment of Rockway Centre is a complex and lengthy project. The first step involves finding an appropriate development partner interested in building a mixed-use facility that could include an older adult recreation centre on the ground floor with possible ancillary medical/dental/retail/office or residential types uses above. Staff have identified four phases (below) that will result in a Request for Proposal with the goal of finding a development partner for a new older adult centre.



Engagement Overview

The purpose of this engagement initiative was to gather input from older adults across the City of Kitchener to better understand the type of atmosphere, site features and programs/services they would like to see in a new older adult centre.

While many efforts focused on current Rockway Centre patrons, staff also sought feedback from residents citywide, including those who use other recreation facilities or have never visited Rockway. Broadening the outreach ensures the new facility will meet the diverse needs of the community, recognizing that a dedicated older adult centre will attract individuals from across the city.

Further, the age demographic was expanded to adults 45+ to better understand what the next generation of older adults would like to see in a new older adult centre. The City hopes to build a modern and innovative facility that will serve Kitchener's older adults for many generations.

Recognizing the emotional investment of Rockway patrons, relationship-building and trust were essential components of this engagement plan. Understanding and reflecting the community's needs through engagement efforts will be paramount in shaping the future of the Rockway Centre.

This document provides an overview of community engagement, methods, metrics and results, and summarizes key themes.

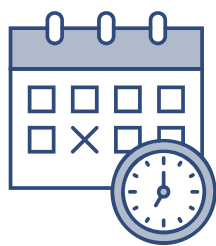
Ways We Engaged

Engagement spanned approximately eight weeks and included a variety of options for participation, both online and in-person, including a public survey. The survey consisted of several multiple-choice options, with opportunities for written and verbal feedback.



721

Public Surveys
Completed



8

Engagement
Events Held



10

City Facilities
Visited



130

Idea Board
Comments

Through the survey, the community had significant influence over three key areas of this project: atmosphere, programming, and site features:

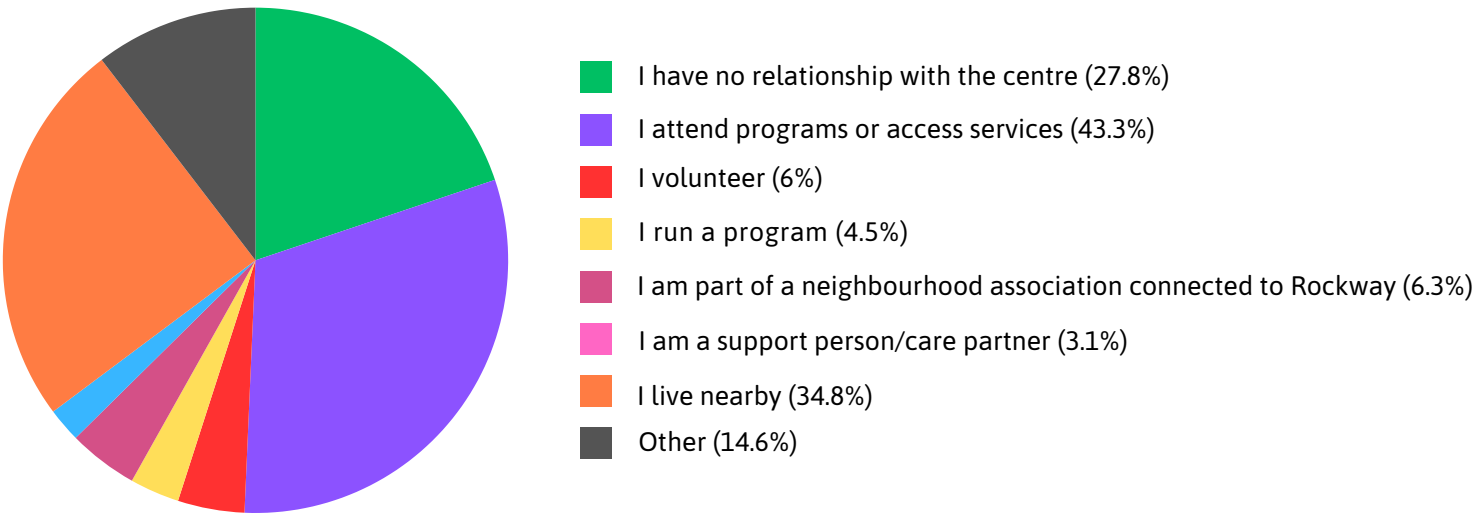
Atmosphere	The feedback collected from this category will help determine the overall atmosphere (look/feel) of the new centre.
Site Features	The feedback collected from this category will help prioritize the features like outdoor spaces, recreational areas, accessibility, etc.
Programming	The feedback collected from this category will help guide the types of programs and services offered at this new centre, which will have an impact on the overall design/layout. Out of scope: Swimming, ice sports, walking track (these will be included in the new Kitchener Recreation Indoor Complex).



Who We Heard From

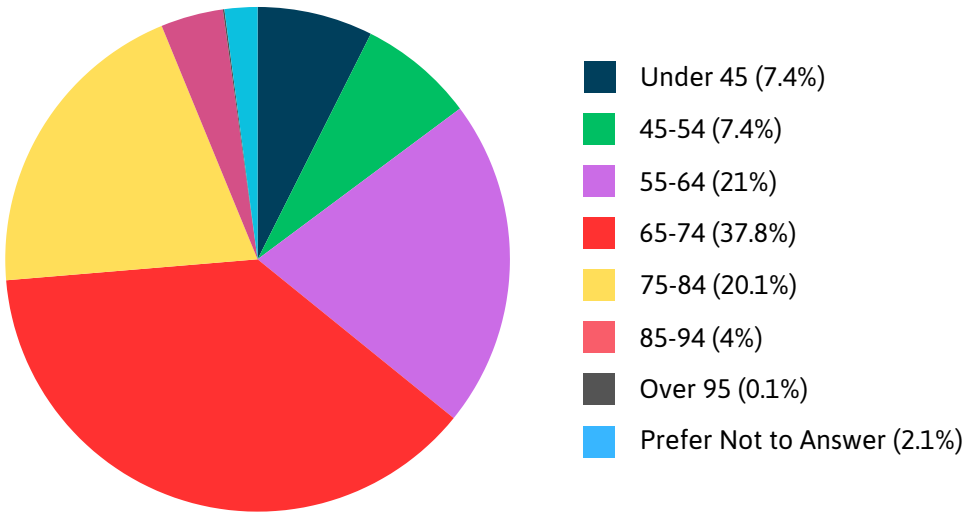
What is your relationship to Rockway Centre?

The majority of survey respondents (43.3%) said they use Rockway Centre today, either by attending programs or accessing services, or through volunteering or running programs. The second largest group (34.8%) noted they live nearby the centre. The third largest group of respondents (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. It is important to note that respondents had the option to select multiple answers, resulting in some overlap among the categories.



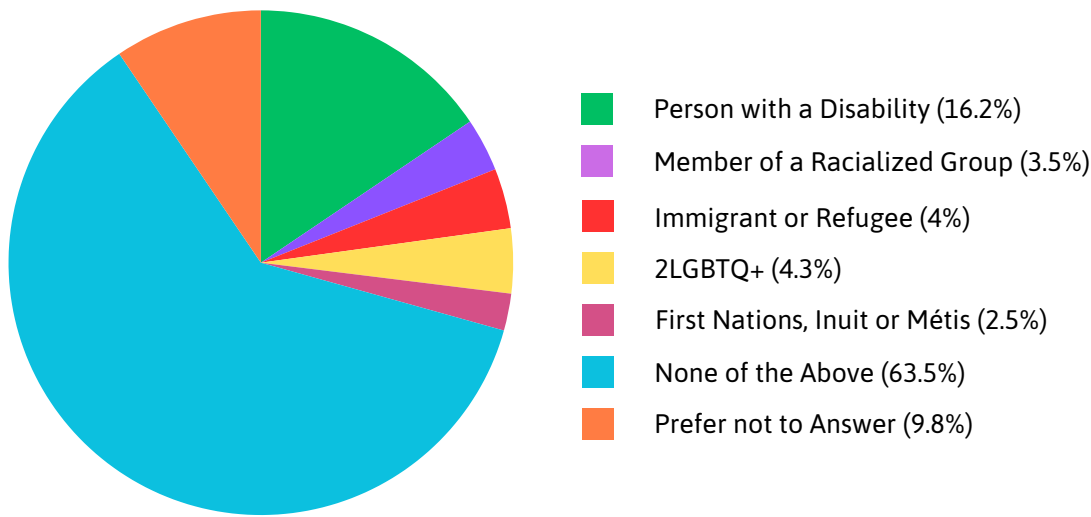
What is your age?

Approximately **83% of respondents identified as being over the age of 55**. The largest group (37.8%) of respondents were aged 65-74 and 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.



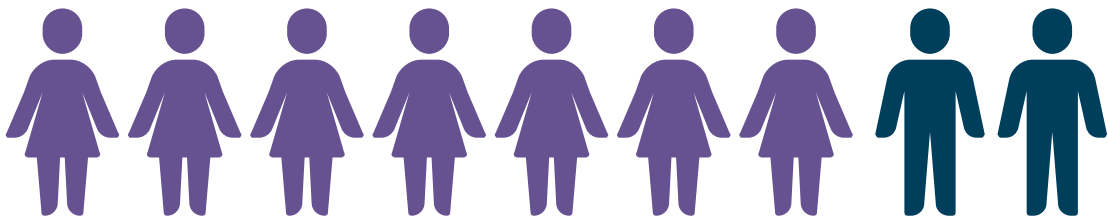
Which group do you identify as a member of?

The majority of respondents (63.5%) did not identify as a member of a specific group listed below.



Which of the following best describes your gender identity?

Approximately 73% of respondents identified as women, while 21% identified as men. The remaining 6% identified as other or did not respond. This trend aligns with the demographics of existing Rockway patrons. In 2024, 73% of Rockway program participants identified as women and 27% identified as men.



What We Heard

Atmosphere

Overall, respondents have identified that they want the new older adult centre to be a welcoming, comfortable and social space.

The top three descriptions for the ideal atmosphere of the space were:



Through an open-ended question, survey participants were asked to identify particular elements they think would create a pleasant atmosphere. The most common themes included:



Site Features

Survey participants were asked to identify the most important site features for the new older adult centre. Through the survey, we heard that over **60%** of respondents think it is very important for the new centre to have areas for socializing and casual interactions and over **50%** think outdoor spaces, such as gardens or patios, are very important to the overall atmosphere of the centre.

Survey participants were asked which site features they would use if they were included in the new older adults. The top three site features that were selected were:



The most common responses received through the “other” category for site features included “Dance Studio” and “Lawn and/or Carpet Bowling.”

Outdoor Features

Survey participants where asked which outdoor features they would use if they were included in the new older adult centre. The top three outdoor site features selected by respondents were:



Transportation Features

Survey participants were asked which features would make it easier for them to get to Rockway Centre. The top three transportation features selected by respondents were:



Accessibility Features

The new centre will be built with all standard modern accessibility features such as ramps, elevators, wide hallways and accessible washrooms. However, survey participants were asked which features would make the new older adult centre more accessible to them. These are features that would go above and beyond legislation. The top three accessibility features selected by respondents were:



Common responses received through the “other” category, open-ended conversations and idea boxes pertaining to accessibility included an emphasis on making washrooms accessible for individuals, including features like wider doorways or door-free entries, raised toilets, grab bars and handles at accessible heights.

Cultural and Religious Spaces

Respondents were asked which cultural or religious spaces they would use if they were included in the new older adult centre. The top three cultural and religious spaces selected by respondents were:



Programs & Services

Respondents were asked to share their ideas on the types of activities and services that would most enrich their experience and meet their needs through the development of a new older adult centre. The top five program and activities overall include strength training, cafe/coffee shop, special events, information about life transitions and painting. When considering the top three programs and services for each recreational category, staff were able to better understand the diverse interests among older adults.

Top 3 Programs & Activities by Category

Active Recreation	Life Skills Programming	Arts & Crafts Activities	Educational Activities	Social & Recreational Activities	Social Support
Strength Training (71.7%)	Life Transitions (60.6%)	Painting (57.2%)	Computer & Technology Classes (53.7%)	Special Events (63.4%)	Cafe or Coffee Shop (65.7%)
Yoga (46.5%)	Financial Literacy (54%)	Pottery (48.7%)	Gardening Workshops (44.5%)	Music or Movie Nights (55.7%)	Personal Care Services (36.6%)
Racquet Sports (25%)	Public Transit Guidance (31.9%)	Drawing (31.4%)	Book Clubs (41.2%)	Card and Board Games (43.7%)	Nutrition Clinics (35.1%)

The wide range of program offerings at Rockway Centre are highly valued by the community. Understanding the types of programs and services that older adults are interested in will help the City design multi-purpose spaces that can accommodate a wide range of recreational needs.

Open-Ended Feedback

Respondents had an opportunity to provide written comments throughout the survey. In addition, several in-person engagement sessions were hosted that led to meaningful conversations and ideas. The following themes emerged from written and verbal comments provided throughout the engagement campaign. Note, in addition to staff review, artificial intelligence was used to analyze the open-ended comments of the survey.



Welcome & Inclusive Atmosphere

Creating a welcoming, friendly, and inclusive environment was repeatedly highlighted. This includes having friendly and approachable staff at a reception desk, a comfortable and un-intimidating atmosphere, and spaces that encourage socialization. Many advocated for a multi-generational approach, opening the center to younger members of the community.



Diverse Programs & Activities

Respondents suggested activities ranging from fitness classes and sports (including indoor lawn bowling), arts and crafts, social events, educational workshops, and cultural opportunities. There was a strong desire for programs catering to different levels of mobility and health, as well as requests for activities that encourage mental stimulation and social interaction.



Accessible Design & Amenities

Respondents expressed preferences for a bright, clean, and comfortable space with natural light, appropriate acoustics, and well-designed spaces for various activities that meet accessibility standards. Many requested an outdoor area with seating, a café, and sufficient washrooms. Several comments specifically addressed the need for appropriate flooring and accessible washroom facilities.



Safety & Security

The importance of a safe and secure environment was repeatedly stressed. This included concerns about indoor air quality, adequate lighting, and security measures to prevent verbal abuse and ensure the overall safety of visitors.



Affordability

Respondents emphasized the need for affordable programs and services, including reasonably priced meals and exercise classes. Clear communication about programs and events through various channels (e.g., social media, newsletters) was also identified as crucial.



Staffing Support

The quality of staff and their role in creating a welcoming environment was consistently praised. Suggestions included having well-trained, patient, and friendly staff, as well as a designated senior connector to assist with linking to community services.

Next Steps

The next phase of this project will consist of workshops with subject matter experts comprised of City staff and members of the Rockway Advisory Committee. Based on a variety of information, including the engagement results detailed in this report, staff will develop recommended mandatory and secondary criteria to be included in the Request for Proposal (RFP).

The criteria for the Request for Proposal will be presented to Council in 2025. Once approved, the City will initiate the Request for Proposal seeking a development partner to build a mixed-use facility that includes an older adult centre.

Acknowledgement

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all individuals and groups who participated in the engagement efforts related to the Rockway Redevelopment project. Your time, feedback, and ideas play a crucial role in shaping the vision for a new older adult centre that will serve our community for many generations.

We especially thank the following groups for their contributions:

- Rockway Advisory Committee
- Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Mayor's Advisory Committee for Kitchener Seniors
- Eastwood Neighbourhood Association
- Auditorium Neighbourhood Association
- FRIENDS
- Chain Gang at Rockway Centre
- Morning Out Group (Rockway Centre)
- Rockway Adult Colouring Group
- Morning Out Group (Forest Heights Community Centre)
- Rockway Centre staff

Your engagement in this process has been essential, and we look forward to continuing our collaboration as we move forward with the redevelopment project.

Thank you,
City of Kitchener