

CHIPPAWA ARENA & LIBRARY REDEVELOPMENT STUDY





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHERIE NG ARCHITECT INC. (CNA) was retained by the City of Niagara Falls to complete a Feasibility and Needs Assessment Study for the Chippawa Willoughby Arena. The study explored three conceptual redevelopment options: constructing a new facility adjacent to the existing arena, undertaking a major renovation with a small addition, or replacing the existing ice rink.



A comprehensive and inclusive community engagement process was conducted to ensure the proposed redevelopment aligns with the needs, values, and aspirations of the local community. Over 1,000 residents participated through open houses, an online survey, and the City’s “Let’s Talk” platform. Participants represented a wide range of stakeholders, including families, youth sports organizations, seniors, cultural groups, and library users.



Feedback revealed a clear community vision for a vibrant, inclusive, and multi-functional hub that fosters health, connection, and year-round activity. Residents overwhelmingly supported Option 1, a full redevelopment with continuous operation during construction, citing its long-term value and alignment with expected growth in the Chippawa area.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

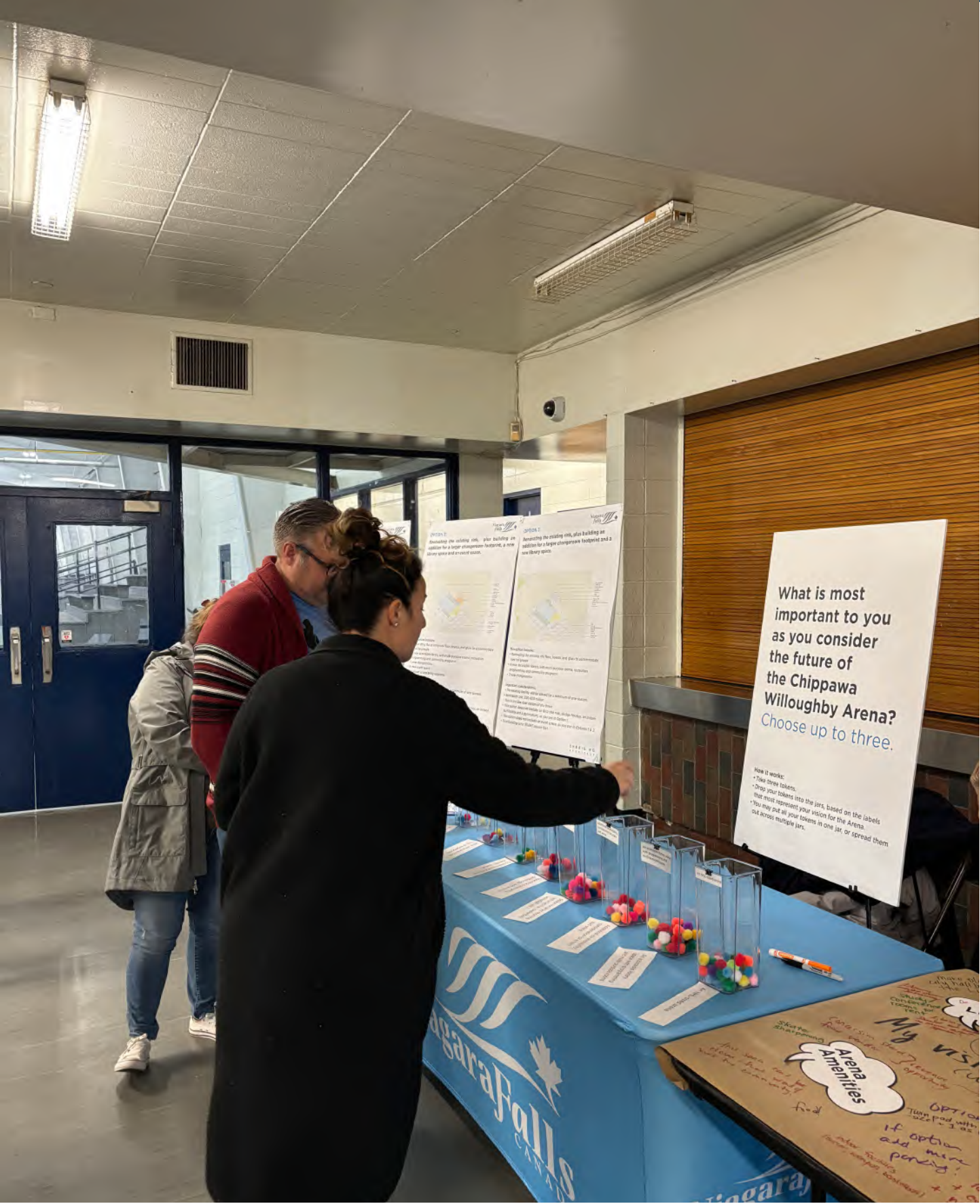


Key community priorities included:

- A new arena facility and space for various indoor sports with support for sledge hockey and dry-floor sports
- Multi-purpose courts for basketball, volleyball, pickleball, and lacrosse
- An indoor walking track and expanded recreational offerings
- Community hub, accessible library with multi-generational programming space
- Amenities for children and families, including licensed childcare and indoor play areas
- Improved changerooms, EV charging, Wi-Fi, and seating/viewing areas

Design considerations emphasized operational continuity, enhanced parking and transit access, fully accessible and inclusive facilities, and financial transparency. There was also strong support for incorporating local identity and heritage into the architecture and programming of the future facility.

The study findings clearly demonstrate a community mandate for a bold, inclusive redevelopment that will serve current and future generations. These insights will directly inform the final recommendations, guiding strategic investment and planning for a facility that reflects the evolving needs of the Niagara Falls community.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Community feedback highlights a clear preference for a versatile, year-round facility that serves as both a recreational and community hub. Residents support a modern, multi-use design that prioritizes health, well-being, and broad accessibility—aligning strongly with Option 1. The proposed co-location of a modern library further reinforces this vision, adding to a dynamic, multi-generational space.



Community feedback points to a preference for uninterrupted access to the existing arena, and a willingness to invest in long-term, high-quality outcomes. Findings point to an opportunity to increase usage of the Chippawa Willoughby Arena through improved offerings that appeal to a broader range of uses, interests and demographics.

Needs & Visions

The community expressed a strong and forward-looking vision for the Chippawa Willoughby Arena redevelopment. Feedback highlights a desire for a multi-functional, inclusive, and accessible facility that supports health, wellness, and community connection through a broad range of year-round amenities and services. Key “needs and visions” identified include:

Strong Community Preference for Option 1

- Across all engagement channels, Option 1 emerged as the clear community preference, with 84.4% of survey respondents selecting it as their top choice.
- Community members value the comprehensive mix of amenities, year-round usability, and continuity of service during construction.
- Many expressed that Option 1 best reflects the future needs of a growing community.



**KEY
TAKEAWAYS**

Expanded and Enhanced Ice Facilities

- Support for a twin-pad facility, including an NHL-sized rink and inclusive access (e.g., sledge hockey).
- Calls for improved rink infrastructure like better heating and warm-up areas.
- Desire for more open and flexible ice time, as well as additional uses such as ball hockey and roller skating.



Indoor Recreation, Courts & Multi-Sport Use

- Broad demand for multi-purpose indoor sport spaces to accommodate basketball, volleyball, pickleball, lacrosse, and dry-floor uses.
- High interest in an indoor walking track, particularly for seniors and year-round use.
- Participants want facilities that meet provincial sports standards, such as Ontario Volleyball Association regulations.

Child & Family-Friendly Amenities

- Desire for licensed childcare, EarlyON programming, and safe indoor play areas.
- Comments emphasized a gap in child-specific services in Chippawa that a redeveloped facility could fill.

Library and Community Hub Features

- Community envisions the facility as a multi-generational hub with an accessible, modern library, multi-purpose programming rooms, and event/meeting spaces.
- Strong interest in after-school programming, adult programs (ages 18–35), and study/conference spaces.
- Suggestions to integrate cultural components, such as public art and community spaces for concerts.



**KEY
TAKEAWAYS**

Amenities & Services to Support Activity

- Repeated calls for expanded food and retail options, including concessions, snack bars, restaurants, and equipment/sport stores.
- Improved and expanded change rooms were a key request throughout engagement initiatives.
- Desire for EV charging stations, Wi-Fi, bike repair stations, working heaters, and scoreboards.
- Requests for seating, weight rooms, and improved spectator amenities.



Outdoor Community Space

- Suggestions included walking trails, bike paths, playgrounds, picnic areas, and pump tracks. The community wants to see the site activated beyond seasonal use, with a vision for a year-round outdoor recreation environment.

Expanded Accessibility and Inclusion

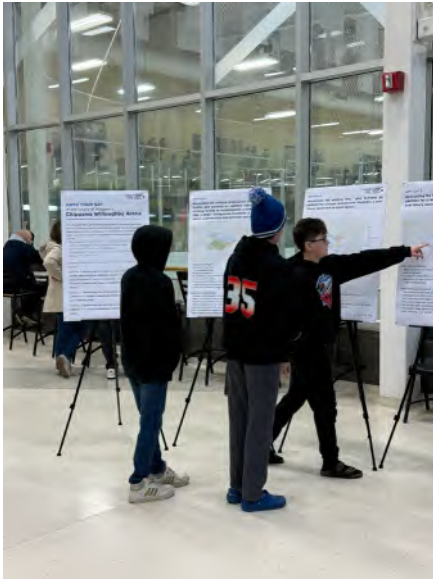
- Feedback consistently supported inclusive and accessible design, from facility layout to programming.
- Specific emphasis on access via public transit, features for seniors, and a welcoming space for all ages and backgrounds.

Considerations and Design Priorities

Community members also shared thoughtful concerns and important considerations for the City to weigh as part of this Feasibility Study. These include the financial impact, design and accessibility issues, operational continuity, and the long-term viability of the facility for current and future residents. More specifically:

Operational Continuity During Construction

- Maintaining current operations during construction is a top priority for residents, supporting the overall preference for Option 1.





**KEY
TAKEAWAYS**

- Parking Capacity**
- Many residents noted that the current facility struggles with parking.
 - Many participants suggest that expansion plans must include additional parking to match increased usage, especially if the City is to move ahead with Option 1.



- Changeroom and Washroom Conditions**
- There was consistent criticism of the current changerooms as small and outdated.

- Accessibility & Transit**
- Concerns were raised about the current location not being walkable for many users, particularly for demographics who may be primarily interested in using the library (i.e., kids, seniors)
 - Some suggested improving transit access by collaborating with the City and Transit to better serve children and seniors.

- Library Placement & Design**
- Overall, there are mixed views on the co-location of the library with other recreation facilities; however, having a library facility is important to the community.
 - There were suggestions for separate entrances, ideally in proximity to family-friendly outdoor features to ensure continuous access.
 - Some feel the library should have a stronger standalone presence to reflect its importance.

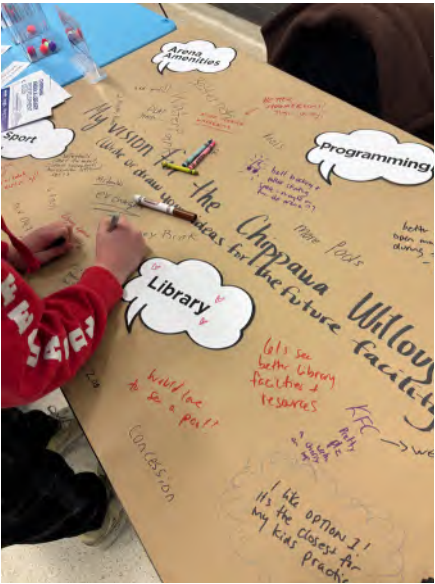


- Financial Feasibility**
- Residents want transparency on funding sources, with a strong preference for grants or partnerships over tax increases.
 - Some question if the project is a “want” vs. a “need” in the current economic climate, with many citing concerns regarding the US tariffs.



**KEY
TAKEAWAYS**

- Some participants expressed skepticism over whether renovation is the best long-term investment, suggesting rebuilding might be more cost-effective.
- There is some frustration that certain amenities are only included in Option 1, limiting choice and flexibility.



Scope and Identity of the Community Centre

- Some suggest that the current proposals don't fully reflect a modern, full-service community centre.
- Some communities are hoping for a more dynamic, inclusive vision, with multipurpose, cultural, and recreational uses reflective of other leading municipal hubs.

Alternative Revenue Streams

- There were several suggestions to integrate commercial lease opportunities to help make the facility financially sustainable, such as coffee shops, retail outlets and skate sharpening service.
- Many residents would like the City to consider funding models beyond user fees and taxes to financially support operations.



Heritage & Identity

- A few comments urged the City to honour the history and heritage of Chippawa in the redevelopment.
- Residents hope to see the character of the area preserved and celebrated.

Findings
OPEN HOUSE
EVENTS



OVERALL SUMMARY

Two Open House events were hosted as part of the Feasibility Study community engagement initiatives, as follows:

- March 25 at the Gale Centre Arena
- March 29 at the Chippawa Arena

Approximately +/- 100 people were actively engaged at each event.

Both events hosted the same activation, which included:

1. A “dotmocracy” exercise, which invited participants to select three options in response to the question, “What is most important to you as you consider the future of the Chippawa Willoughby Arena?” The options from which they could select included:

- An NHL-sized arena
- More arena amenities (i.e., changerooms)
- Additional ice availability, consideration for a twin pad arena
- An accessible library space with programming and multi-purpose rooms
- Space for community gatherings and events
- Space for other sporting activities (i.e., basketball, volleyball, etc.)
- A low-cost option
- No interruption to the current space

2. A vision board exercise, whereby participants were invited to write or draw ideas in response to the prompt, “My vision for the Chippawa Willoughby Arena includes....”

Findings from the Open House events reveal the following:

Strong Community Preference for Option 1

- There was repeated support for Option 1 as the preferred option due to its comprehensive offerings, which are seen to be essential for the growing community. Continued access during construction is another “plus” of Option 1, from the community’s perspective.

Findings
OPEN HOUSE
EVENTS



Expanded and Enhanced Ice Facilities

- There is an interest in features like varsity locker rooms, warm-up areas, better heating, and inclusive access (e.g., sledge hockey).
- Among hockey players/parents, there was a desire for two rinks. Having an NHL-sized pad is appealing to these particular groups.

Indoor Recreation, Courts & Multi-Sport Use

- An indoor walking track was among the top “wish list” items.
- There is a clear desire for multi-purpose gym spaces supporting basketball, volleyball, pickleball, and lacrosse.
- Some participants point to the opportunity for the City to have the facility’s assets meet association standards (e.g., Ontario Volleyball).
- There is a desire for kid-friendly facilities and activities.

Amenities & Services to Support Activity

- Requests for concessions, coffee shops, restaurants, and equipment stores.
- Mention of EV chargers, Wi-Fi, bike repair stations, and scoreboards.
- Calls for weight rooms and expanded seating areas.

Support for a New Library

- At both Open Houses, the accessible library option received consistent support in the dotmocracy exercise, indicating that the community was not opposed to the inclusion of improved library facilities in Chippawa.

CONSIDERATIONS & CONCERNS

Keeping the Facility Operational

There is a concern that closing the existing facility, even temporarily, would hurt the community. Option 1 is preferred, in part, because it allows the facility to remain open during construction.

Findings
OPEN HOUSE
EVENTS



Parking Capacity

There were numerous comments about the need for more parking if expansion occurs. Specific to Option 1, participants noted that parking expansion must be included.

Accessibility & Transit

The importance of public transit access to the facility was raised.

Accessible design for changerooms, facilities, and programming is a concern for some participants.

Changeroom and Washroom Conditions

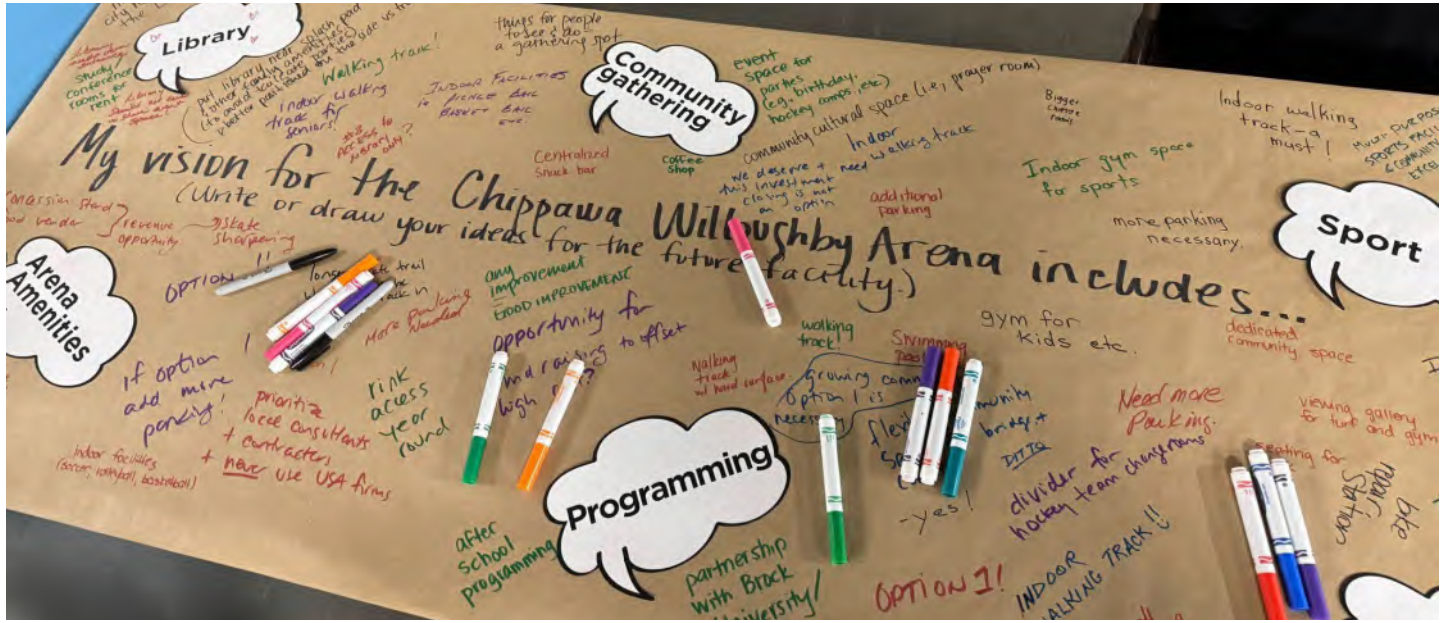
Current changerooms are described as small and “stinky,” prompting support for larger, cleaner, and better-designed changerooms and washrooms.

Library Placement & Design

There is a desire for a separate library entrance and thoughtful placement within the site (e.g., near splash pad/family zones).

Heritage & Identity

There were a few comments about the importance of preserving Chippawa’s heritage and integrating it into future plans.



ONLINE
SURVEY



The City received 942 survey responses. Results reveal:

Strong Preference for Comprehensive Redevelopment (Option 1)

- A majority of respondents ranked Option 1 as their top choice, with 84.4% of participants selecting it as their most preferred option of the 3.
- 16.92% of participants selected Option 2 as their first choice, and 12.54% selected Option 3 as their first choice.

Desire for Expanded and Flexible Facilities

When asked about the most important assets for the Chippawa Willoughby Arena:

- Respondents emphasized the need for additional arena amenities.
- 17.74% chose a twin pad option as their first choice as the asset that would best serve community needs.
- There was high support for spaces for other sports (e.g., basketball, volleyball), and a dynamic, accessible library.

Emphasis on Active Lifestyles and Community Wellness

- When asked what they valued most, the top-ranked choice was “expanded, versatile athletic facilities that support health and wellness” (selected by 40.4% as their first choice).

Willingness to Prioritize Continuity Over Cost

- A majority (59.4%) of respondents stated it is most important that existing facility operations are not disrupted, even if it requires choosing the highest-cost option (versus the City being budget-conscious, even if it means the existing facility’s operations are closed for an extended period of time).

Let's Talk
PROJECT PAGE



Strategic Priorities Aligned with Community Values

The top three city goals ranked as priorities for the redevelopment were:

- 1. Bringing the community together through recreation, culture, and parks (65.2%)
- 2. Building and revitalizing facilities to reinvigorate neighbourhoods (52.2%)
- 3. Improving access to facilities and services across Niagara Falls (50.9%)

Community Usage and Aspirations

- Nearly half (47.2%) use the ice rink with their families; another third (33.2%) expressed a desire to use the facility in the future.
- 17.9% of respondents identified as 'frequent users' of the former Chippawa Branch.

Demographic Snapshot

- The largest responding age group was 35–44 years old (32%), followed by 45–54 (22.7%) and 25–34 (14.6%).
- Most respondents (92.5%) live in Niagara Falls, with 37.1% working there, indicating a highly local and engaged audience.

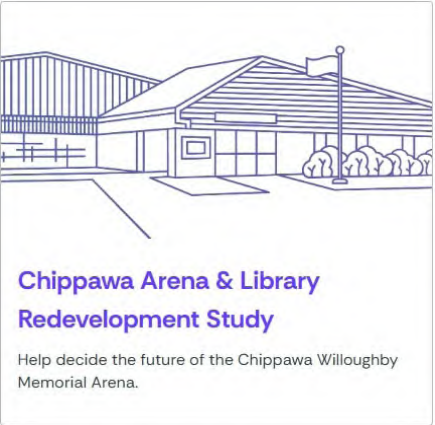
24 Questions and comments were submitted on the project's dedicated "Let's Talk" page. Areas of focus were as follows:

Needs & Visions

- A walking track, multi-use gym and indoor pool were frequently recurring demands.
- Some participants see this facility as a prospective place to address the gap in Licensed Childcare in Chippawa, and for indoor play areas and programming tailored for young children and families.
- Some requests were for walking trails, bicycle paths, playgrounds, picnic areas, and potentially a pump track to encourage outdoor, year-round use.
- There is a desire for a facility that supports year-round



Let's Talk
PROJECT PAGE



Timeline

- ✓ Community Partner Meeting
March 5, 2025
- ✓ Survey Opens
March 11, 2025
- ✓ Open House One
Gale Centre Arena
March 25, 2025
5:00 pm – 7:00 pm
- ✓ Open House Two
Chippawa Willoughby Memorial Arena
March 29, 2025
11:30 am – 1:30 pm
- ✓ Survey Closes
April 4, 2025
- ☆ Final Decision of Council
To be determined
- ☆ Development
To be determined

use (e.g., maintaining summer ice or alternative indoor activities during warm months).

- Interest in multi-purpose event/community spaces that can host celebrations, meetings, or concerts.
- There was a request that public art be included in the project for cultural and aesthetic enhancement.
- Comments advocate for inclusive programming, accessible design, and community-wide benefits from the redevelopment, especially for growing populations in Chippawa.

Considerations & Concerns

- Cost concerns dominate many comments:
 - Questions around total cost increases compared to past projects (e.g., McBain and Gale Centres).
 - Requests for transparency on funding models: grants vs. taxes.
 - Worries about the burden of cost on Niagara Falls taxpayers, especially if the facility serves a subset of residents.
 - Concern over affordability given economic pressures on households.
- Residents are worried about property tax increases and emphasize that recreational spending should be balanced with broader affordability issues.
- Some comments point to a debate between renovation vs. rebuilding, with questions about whether starting fresh would be more cost-effective long-term.
- There is some skepticism around certain amenities like the outdoor skating trail, based on past failures and climate change (milder winters).
- There are concerns that the arena location is not walkable or transit-accessible, especially for library users.
- There were requests for multi-functional, class-friendly, cultural and community space more typical of other municipalities.