



## OKMAC | Sarsons Activity Centre - Public Engagement

What we heard: engaging with the Okanagan Mission Seniors Centre Society | Friends of OMAC

### Background:

The Okanagan Mission Activity Centre (OKMAC), located at 4398 Hobson Road was originally known as Dawe's House, and was purchased by the City in 1973. The Centre is nestled within Sarsons Beach Park along Kelowna's waterfront in a quiet neighbourhood, amongst tall shade trees and an open grass yard. As a multi-use facility, the building is used by residents of all ages, and has been operated by the City in collaboration with the Okanagan Mission Seniors Centre Society (OMSCS) for over 50 years. On weekends and evenings, it is used for community recreation and cultural programs or rentals.

The surrounding park, Sarsons Beach Park, features grassy areas, a playground, picnic tables and washrooms, and periodically hosts free summer concerts and activities.

Community members have expressed concern and hopes about the future of the nearly 75-year-old facility since 2019 upon hearing about City's vision through the 2040 Official Community Plan and 10-year Capital Plans to build a new all-ages activity centre at Mission Recreation Park.



OMSCS spearheaded *Friends of OMAC*, a community-based initiative created to protect and enhance the Okanagan Mission Activity Centre, stemming from fears the space would be demolished, stating on their website:

*"This new facility will be a great addition to our community, and we look forward to its completion. The Okanagan Mission Activity Centre is a completely different experience given its unique location and history. Decisions about its future should be a separate conversation."*

### Purpose of Engagement:

In May 2023, the Building a Stronger Kelowna initiative was endorsed by Council to move forward on the development of key community, sport and wellness facilities including new multi-age activity centres in Glenmore and Mission.

While these facilities are considered critical infrastructure in a fast-growing city like Kelowna as they provide vital, low-barrier spaces at a neighbourhood level, the advancement and funding of this initiative re-activated concerns within the *Friends of OMAC initiative* that the new Mission Activity Centre would be looked



at as a replacement facility to OKMAC.

City staff meet regularly with OMSCS, and a dedicated information session was organized for November 28, 2023, to help clarify information about facility planning intent in the Mission area, provide opportunity for input and feedback, and share updates specific to facility plans for OKMAC.

The main room features windows on three sides and hosts City and community programs such as art, music and yoga classes.

## What we Heard: November 28 information session & follow up

It was a full house at OKMAC on Nov 28, 2023, with a strong desire from attendees to better understand go-forward plans for the facility. Attendees were looking for clear decisions and answers about the future of the facility, especially with the recent approval to build a new all-ages activity centre with a similar name – Mission Activity Centre.



Over 100 Kelowna residents attended an information session organized by the Okanagan Mission Seniors Society to learn about facility plans for Mission area.

103

total attendees

To ensure questions could be answered as accurately and efficiently as possible, staff from the following departments attended the session:

- Parks & Buildings Planning
- Partnerships & Investments
- Active Living & Culture
- Communications

67% said the session was informative  
(27% 'unsure', 6% 'no')

### Recent and Next Steps:

Fall 2023 –

Preliminary Conditions Assessment  
OMSCS Update and Discussion

February 2024 –

Formal Conditions Assessment

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Dependent on formal assessment:

- Development of Sarsons Activity Centre Facility Plan

- Council support and endorsement of Sarsons Activity Centre Facility Plan

(Update Infrastructure Renewal Plan)

While a lack of definitive answer to the question “Is this facility safe from demolition?” frustrated some in attendance, sentiment from the group by the end of the session was positive and hopeful. The City’s Parks & Buildings Manager highlighted the larger scope of active facility infrastructure plans in the Mission area, how the Building a Stronger Kelowna projects fit in, and the value we see in shared community spaces. This included the reiteration that the two facility plans are considered separately, and that the new facility is not considered a ‘replacement’. The 60-minute session included a breakdown of next steps to be taken as staff form a recommendation specific to the facility, including the completion of a formal third-party building assessment.

In addition to the dedicated meeting and presentation, members were invited and encouraged to attend the Community Information Session specific to the new all-ages Mission Activity Centre on December 1, 2023, and were also provided with feedback forms and an email to provide any follow up feedback directly to staff.

Many attendees, plus members who were not able to attend the session, took good advantage of the opportunity to provide direct feedback about what they appreciate most about the facility at Sarsons Beach with 60 feedback forms and over 25 direct emails to staff sharing experiences and stories about the importance of the facility. In sharing what respondents love most about the facility a snapshot of characteristics is formed:



## Sentiment Analysis: a summary of what we heard through feedback

Below is just a sample of what was shared with staff from over 85 pieces of correspondence received following the information session on November 28, 2023. In addition to sharing experiences about what attendees appreciate most, here are some of the common themes we heard, along with excerpts lifted from responses below:

**Location:** the views, ambiance, and connection to Sarsons Beach Park.

- *Fun to watch all ages enjoying the park and water.*
- *The feeling of how lucky we are to come to a place on the lake that we can be a part of.*
- *The location is superb with the view of the lake and mountains.*
- *At night the lights from across the lake are so beautiful.*
- *Lovely, safe for children to play in the park.*
- *The views are spectacular, and it is such a well-loved place.*
- *Members are in the building year around. They have a positive impact on the security of the park and hence, to the surrounding neighbourhood.*

**Connection:** the accessibility to social opportunities the centre provides.

- *The welcoming setting inside and out. It is both a shared space and our space each week. We all look out for it and love it here.*
- *It is a wonderful gathering place for not only seniors but all members of the community.*
- *The kindness of the members, the social chit chat - it's just like home.*
- *Very calm for chair yoga for seniors.*
- *Having access to this fantastic community centre with a warm, welcoming group like the Mission Painters really helped my transition to Kelowna and made me feel at home and part of the community.*

**Uniqueness:** offers one-of-a-kind meeting space, connection to nature, and services for seniors.

- *It's one of only a few public buildings on the lake for rental.*
- *It's a house not a room, and it feels like family when we get together.*
- *After looking at four walls at home in apartment living it's so nice having a homey atmosphere and a lake view.*
- *The ability to be indoors and or outdoors for barbecue is amazing.*
- *This venue is a treasure to the area and is definitely worth the investment and savings.*
- *No other place caters to seniors to allow easy access to our lake.*
- *Social games attract the lonely, otherwise isolated and give mental stimulation as well as fun and laughter.*



Through engagement, staff also heard from several clubs, groups and organizations that expressed the value of this facility to them including the Okanagan Mission Painters Group, superannuated Teachers of Saskatchewan Okanagan and several singing groups including Sing for Your Life! and the Silver Singers.

- *Our chapter members are very fond of the surroundings. We enjoy that it is a small place with a beautiful view of the lake. It feels so calm and inviting.*
  - *Being inspired to paint when looking out the window.*
  - *There is no other place that the public can rent on the lakeshore in Kelowna.*
  - *I have just started a woman's group with now 630 members, usually do events of about 50 people. We'd love to be able to consider this as a venue year-round.*
- *With a decent kitchen and fantastic location complete with parking in a glorious location on the lake, it satisfies an urgent need for so many groups in Kelowna.*