

Edmonton Ski Club River Valley Outdoor Activity Centre

What We Heard Report - May 2024

SUMMARY

Edmonton Ski Club (ESC) has managed a vibrant ski centre in central Edmonton since 1911. ESC's original lodge reached the end of life and safe use and was demolished. The River Valley Outdoor Activity Centre (RVOAC) will replace the prior ESC lodge with a new CaGBC Net-Zero Carbon Building and highly energy efficient centre incorporating spaces for ESC's primary offerings (winter sports), as well as program space for community events, hospitality, and year-round sport activities.

ESC conducted initial engagement in 2021 and 2022 with community members, current user groups, and stakeholders to gain preliminary feedback on the direction of the project. Meetings were conducted, phone conversations had, and an Open House was held. Feedback from the engagement was very positive with excitement for a facility that expands the community's program offerings. Desire was expressed to continue engagement.

ESC proceeded with further engagement on the RVOAC project throughout 2023. ESC has continued public engagements through the design development phase of the project to gain a better understanding of the user groups' desires and concerns through meetings, online surveys, and open houses.

1) WHAT WAS DONE?

In 2021, a preliminary engagement was held to advise on initial perspectives, expectations, or opportunities to explore for the redevelopment project of the Edmonton Ski Club River Valley Outdoor Activity Centre.

The Edmonton Ski Club identified various community groups as crucial to meet with in the early stages of the project. With the help of architect, Dialog Design, the ESC contacted and met with members from the Edmonton Folk Music Festival (EFMF), the City of Edmonton / Gallagher Park, Cloverdale Community League, River Valley Alliance, and Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition in Spring 2021. Using feedback from these discussions, concept plans and renderings were created by Dialog Design in July 2021. Additionally, as part of ongoing relationships with current community user groups, the ESC expressed the vision of the redevelopment and sought their feedback which resulted in letters of support.

GEC Architecture was engaged in June 2023 via a Request for Proposal process followed shortly thereafter by the Clark Builders as Construction Manager in August 2023. Supported by the design developed by GEC, ESC conducted an Open House in October 2023 that was advertised on ESC's website, Cloverdale Community League's website, and a community mail drop to attract a diverse group of people with interest in the project. Mail drops were provided to the Cloverdale community south of 98 Avenue and between 92 Street and 96a Street, inviting members to the Open House and to participate in the survey. A total of approximately 50 community members attended the Open House.

Supplementing the Open House engagement opportunities, ESC has also conducted extensive in-person and virtual Indigenous engagement sessions organized and facilitated by pipikwan pêhtâkwan, an Indigenous-owned public relations agency based in Treaty 6. ESC has also continued engagement with EFMF through ongoing design

team interaction with the EFMF leadership team and a continued series of meetings / coordination efforts. The following engagements have been held to date:

- Meeting with Edmonton Folk Music Festival on May 10, 2021
- Meeting with the City of Edmonton on May 11, 2021
- Meeting with Cloverdale Community League on May 19, 2021
- Meeting with the River Valley Alliance on May 25, 2021
- Meeting with the Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition on June 3, 2021
- Open House on June 29, 2022
- Meeting with ESC Alpine on March 1, 2023
- Meeting with the Indigenous Sport Council (Alberta) on March 7, 2023 and October 24, 2023
- Meeting with Alpine Club of Canada on March 14, 2023
- Meeting with Crystal Kids on March 14, 2023
- Meeting with Jennifer Heil on March 14, 2023
- Meeting with the Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition on October 23, 2023
- Various meetings with the City of Edmonton
- Publicly advertised in-person Open House public engagement session on October 25, 2023:
 - Personalized invitations were extended to Edmonton Folk Music Festival (EFMF), Richard Goodswimmer of the Indigenous Sport Council, Kidsport Alberta, Jennifer Heil, Canadian Adaptive Snowsports, ESC Alpine Race Club, The River Valley Alliance, Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition, and the Cloverdale Community League which included a request to coordinate focused sessions with each of the groups in advance of the open house. The groups which responded to the request and participated in individual sessions were EFMF, the Indigenous Sport Council, and Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition.
 - Members from GEC Architecture (GEC), WSP Projects (WSP), ESC, and Clark Builders were in attendance for this session from 5:00 – 8:00pm at the Cloverdale Community League in Gallagher Park. Display boards included information on the project background, project goals, site information, building design, functional program, interaction with Edmonton Folk Music Festival, and project schedule. A blank display board was included that allowed attendees to leave comments via a “sticky note” suggestion board. Continuing conversations with the public were also had between design team members, ESC board members, and the public attendees.
- Online Public Survey from October 2023 – November 2023:
 - Online public survey with questions, accessed through the ESC website, advertised on social media, and through QR-Code located on the Open House printed/virtual invitations and display boards. The survey included 7 questions, with a mix of multiple choice, weighted category, and open response questions. Overall, 26 responses in the QR-Code survey were received from participants.
- Indigenous Engagement led by Indigenous engagement consultant, pipikwan pêhtâkwan:
 - Pipe Ceremony at the base of the Edmonton Ski Club hill on October 11, 2023.
 - GEC, ESC, Clark Builders, EFMF, pipikwan pêhtâkwan, and Indigenous elders in attendance.
 - Engagement session with Alexander First Nation, Cold Lake First Nation, and Enoch Cree Nation on October 14, 2023.
 - Initial discussion with the Confederacy of Treaty 6 on October 24, 2023.
 - Meeting with the City of Edmonton Indigenous Relations Office on October 27, 2023.
 - Engagement session (virtual) with Indigenous children and youth on November 4, 2023.
 - Elders Circle with Elders and Knowledge Keepers on November 6, 2023.
 - Meeting with Indigenous Tourism Alberta on November 8, 2023.
 - Session with Indigenous staff at pipikwan pêhtâkwan on November 9, 2023.

- Meeting with Indigenous artists on November 25, 2023.
- A total of 37 engagement participants contributed to the above sessions. pipikwan pêhtâkwan compiled the knowledge gained from these sessions into a comprehensive Indigenous Engagement report, which was distributed to the project team on December 7, 2023 and revised on April 30, 2024.
- Edmonton Folk Music Festival (EFMF) Engagements:
 - Operations Team engagement on-site between GEC, WSP, ESC and EFMF on July 24, 2023
 - This engagement primarily covered the operations of the ski hill and site in the winter, but also included an informative discussion on the EFMF takeover of the site during July and August for festival setup and take down.
 - EFMF, GEC, WSP, ESC tour occurred on the Saturday during the festival on August 13, 2023
 - Observed the fully operational festival grounds to gain insight into festival operations and logistics.
 - WSP, GEC, ESC, Clark Builders and EFMF site meeting during festival take-down on August 21, 2023.
 - Met on site with mechanical / electrical consultants to witness festival take-down activities. Team observed power, water, sanitary requirements of the festival.
 - Meeting with EFMF to review Design Development building design on October 20, 2023.
 - Gathered initial feedback on items directly relating to EFMF operations.
 - Meeting with EFMF to review the civil design on November 2, 2023.
 - Meeting with EFMF, WSP, and Clark Builders to review site logistics on January 10 and 24, 2024.
 - Reviewed construction and laydown areas with EFMF to coordinate site use.
 - Biweekly meetings ongoing.

2) ENGAGEMENT RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The ESC completed four significant engagements through the development of the RVOAC project including the public, the Indigenous community, and key stakeholders. The findings for each of those engagement efforts are presented distinctly below.

a) Public Engagement - Open House on June 29, 2022

What was said...

Results: At the 2022 Open House, members of the ESC Board and Dialog Design hosted participants to share the concept plans and describe the intent of the facility. The participants were asked to “Share Your Thoughts” using a comment board and sticky notes. Overall reactions were very supportive with excitement for the prospect of expanding offerings.

Synopsis of general comments: All parties were generally supportive of the redevelopment; some specifics are shown below.

Supportive Comments:

- “Excited for expansion of community programming opportunities.”
- “Excited for hospitality, patios, and outdoor spaces.”
- “Excited for hospitality and gathering space. Excited to have a multi-functional facility.”

- "Looking forward to music and social activity."
- "Excited for full season activities."

Additional Considerations/Comments:

- Enquired if some members could store skiing equipment at ESC which would allow them to take LRT. Interesting space rental opportunity for operational consideration.

What we heard...

The main themes of input heard include:

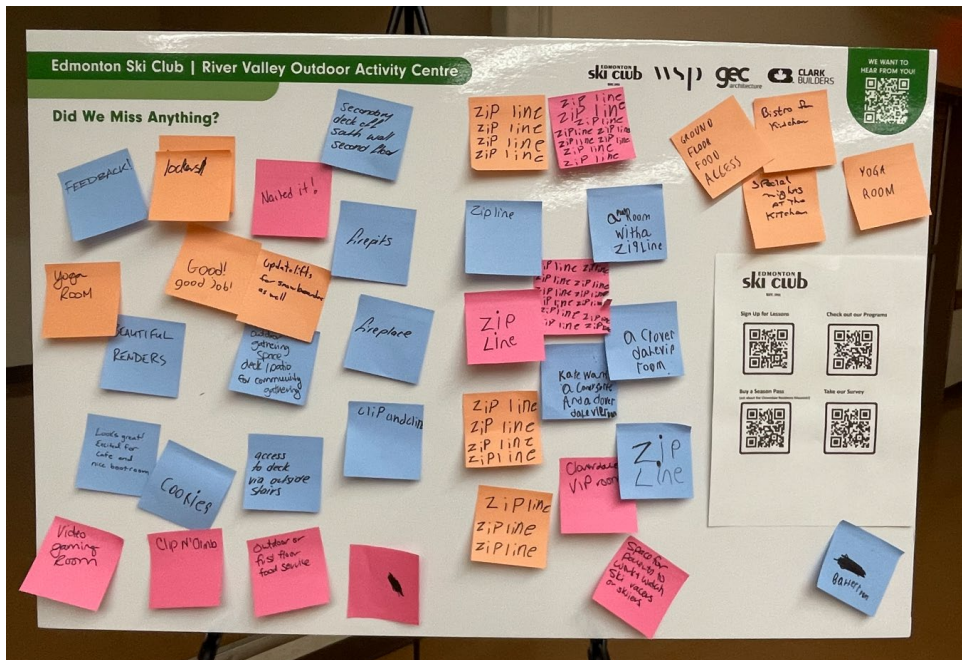
- Support the development of a new, sustainable facility for ESC and the community
- Excitement for expanding the programming and uses of the new facility

b) Public Engagement – Open House on October 25, 2023 and Public Survey

What was said...

Results: The team received generally positive feedback both from Cloverdale community members, and participants across the City of Edmonton on the proposed RVOAC design. The public emphasized this as a facility which would be expected to perform as an open community gathering space which serves both winter and summer (year-round) activities. Seamless integration of the facility with the EFMF was also recorded as a priority.

In-Person Open House:



Open House Feedback Board

Synopsis of general comments:

- Desire for secondary deck off south face – included in design
- Multi-purpose room – i.e. for yoga, video gaming – included in design
- Supportive comments, i.e. "Beautiful renders", "Nailed it!", "Looks great! Excited for café and nice boot room",

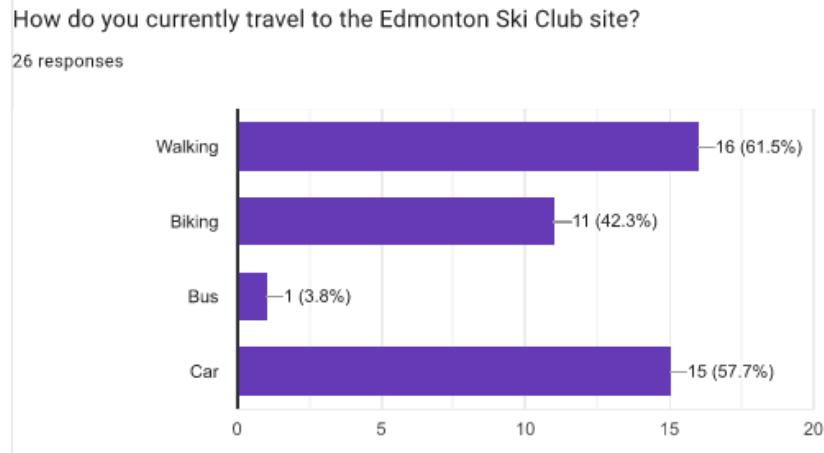
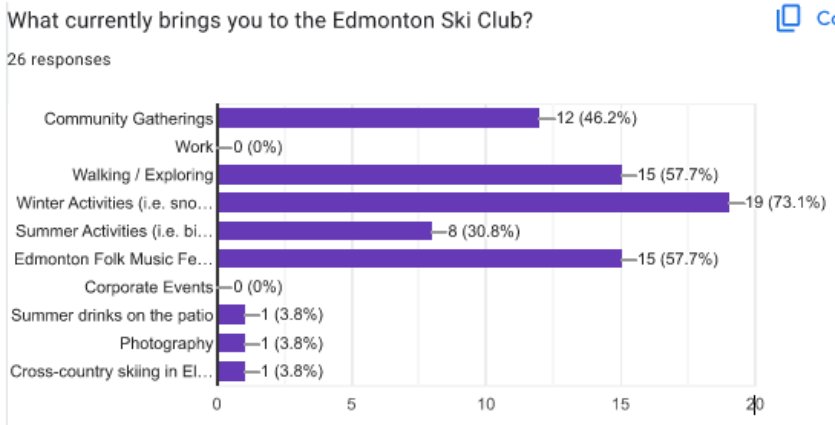
- Desire for outdoor gathering space with fire pits
- Food services on main and second floor – included in design
- Space for parents to watch skiers – included in design

What we heard...

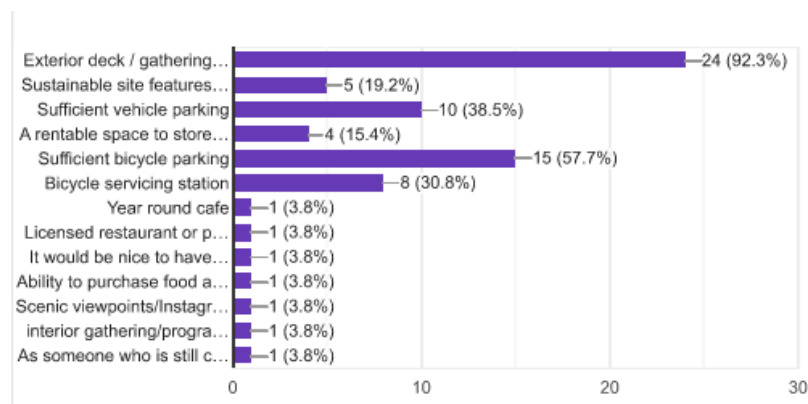
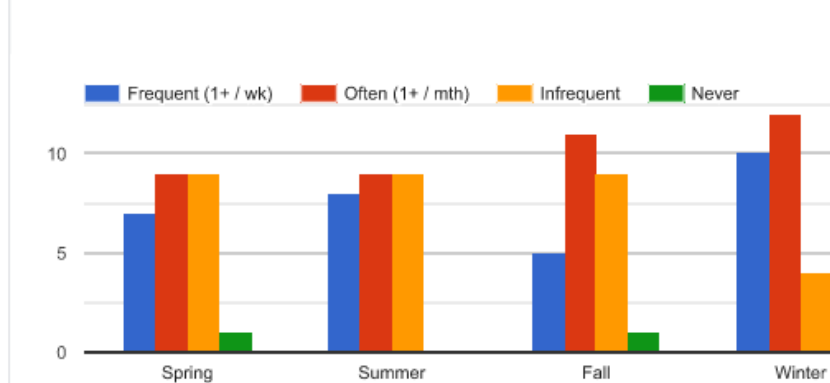
The main themes of input heard include:

- The general feedback was the need for a multi-use building allowing for a variety of activities.
- Places for community gathering (such as firepits, fireplace) were a common comment.
- Importance for an outdoor deck space.

Online Public Survey Results:



Please rank how often you travel to the Edmonton Ski Club site during each season.



Synopsis of general comments:

Public responses were received anonymously via a QR code survey – some filled out responses by scanning the QR code provided on the presentation boards, and others opted to fill out the online version of the survey at home.

- Responses to – “What do you like most about the current design” (14 responses received):

Notably, comments praised the proposed building for its open gathering space / open concept and increased capacity over the former ESC day lodge.

Comments on building aesthetics and form were recorded as generally positive, noting that the modern design emphasizing south and west facing glazing, along with a low profile in height were aligned with the neighborhood. Environmental impact comments also praised the minimal removal of trees and glazing oriented to appreciate the surrounding scenery / views.

- Responses to – “What did we miss” (10 responses received):

Suggestions from the public on what the design team missed included deck space facing the main hill, ground floor food service, and a balcony at the south face of the building overlooking the ski hill. Note that there is a deck space facing the main hill and there is some selection of food available on the main floor.

Selected Comment:

“Rather than add an unrelated art installation near the site (like the Talus balls near the Capilano Bridge), I hope artful elements will be part of the actual building: a spectacular staircase, elaborate wayfinding signage, a dramatic balcony, or some type of monumental structure. Something that locals and visitors will want to see and share.”

What we heard...

The main themes of input heard include:

- Outdoor exterior deck is highly valued by survey participants.
- Modern exterior design is well liked by survey participants.
- Minimal environmental impact implications are valued by the community.
- High importance is placed on the project being a facility which can be accessed year-round, with year-round programming.

c) Indigenous Engagement Results and Findings

What was said...

The following has been extracted and synthesized from the indigenous engagement report provided by pipikwan pêhtâkwan:

Results:

Indigenous participants in the engagement process emphasized several key themes for the design of a building and its surrounding area, going beyond the built infrastructure of the project – highlighted in the report as “More than a Building”. Economic prosperity through the involvement of Indigenous businesses in the development process was deemed important for relationship-building and reconciliation. Opportunities in the operation of the facility - including mentorship and hiring practices, were identified as ways for the facility to continue to contribute to reconciliation, this will require intentional participation by staff and the ESC board.

With respect to the built project, Indigenous site monitoring, respect for Mother Earth, and consideration of ventilation needs for cultural practices like smudging were highlighted. Traditional design elements, such as circular spaces, four entrances representing different themes, integration of the four elements, and representation of the four seasons, were also emphasized. Further to this, soft, warm lighting, and natural materials in the building construction were given priority.

Language integration and learning, while avoiding a pan-Indigenous approach, and incorporating traditional medicines and berries with proper signage relating to Indigenous teachings were also key considerations. The creation of adaptable, flexible, and transformational spaces that evolve with the seasons, and community needs were identified as crucial to the success of the project.

Synopsis of Recommendations from pipikwan pêhtâkwan:

The Indigenous engagement process facilitated by pipikwan pêhtâkwan involved diverse participants from various age groups, agencies, and roles. Ten key recommendations emerged from an emphasis on genuine intent and accountability, aiming to involve Indigenous people in the project's entirety:

1. Economic Inclusion:

- Ensure a portion of building contract work goes to Indigenous-owned organizations.
- Prioritize Indigenous contractors in the bidding process.
- Include Indigenous people in post-construction economic opportunities, such as food services and retail.

2. Curved Design:

- Develop spaces with curvature lines instead of sharp angles.
- Round out complete spaces like the multipurpose room and second-floor deck.

- Incorporate circular artwork for balance.
- Landscape outdoor spaces, including fire pits and circular teaching spaces.

3. Smudging Spaces:

- Maximize allowable space for smudging.
- Upgrade HVAC systems to enable smudging throughout the building.
- Educate visitors about the welcoming attitude toward Indigenous practices.

4. Transformational Spaces:

- Develop spaces adaptable to different needs and timing for knowledge sharing.
- Use digital art displays that rotate with the seasons and teachings.
- Foster flexibility in food and retail services for diverse Indigenous opportunities.

5. Play and Learning Spaces:

- Include designed Indigenous playgrounds both inside and outside.
- Incorporate interactive learning elements like QR codes and audio playback.
- Install touchdown stations in various building areas.

6. Land Respect:

- Obtain Indigenous consent and involve them in site monitoring.
- Consult with Elders for appropriate ceremonies before land development.

7. Continuous Engagement:

- Provide a revised plan reflecting participant feedback to demonstrate ongoing commitment to elders and community.

8. Warm Design Elements:

- Apply warmth to exterior and lighting design.
- Use alternative light sources to fluorescent lighting.
- Balance natural stone with wood and include natural landscaping inside.

9. Knowledge of Four:

- Integrate the four elements (wind, water, fire, earth) into the design.
- Represent the four directions and colors of the medicine wheel.
- Recognize and apply the four seasons at different times in the year.

10. Highlight Indigenous Languages:

- Conduct a naming Ceremony with Elders.
- Incorporate wayfinding symbols by a local Indigenous artist.

d) Key Stakeholders

What was said...

Results:

In the meetings and conversations held in May and June of 2021 with the community user groups, ESC explained the vision of the facility, what functions it would provide, and the proposed use of the space. Feedback was then received by the groups sharing their thoughts on the project, the current or future anticipated use of the space that could align or conflict with the project, and helpful ideas that could benefit the project. The overall feedback was positive with no major conflicts raised and the groups want to be engaged further.

Synopsis of general comments

- Letters of support from 13 community groups as attached in the Strategy Business Case.
- Edmonton Folk Music Festival: Supportive of new building, potential to align funding or cost share on projects, some priorities align i.e. site drainage, site beautification, electrical infrastructure upgrade, solar power use. Looking to further build relationship.
- Cloverdale Community League: Support idea of cafe / restaurant space. Looking to further build relationship with ESC and collaborate.
- River Valley Alliance: Looking forward to hearing more about the project and potential for summer uses. Offered use of their blog and podcast for social media promotion of the project.

Neutral Comments:

- Edmonton Folk Music Festival: Interested in enhancing the existing transparent and positive relationship with ESC and excited about the intention of following through with construction of the new lodge.
- City of Edmonton: Gallagher Park Concept Plan shows value in ESC. No major roadblocks, public engagement process to be robust.
- Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition: Current building does not have heritage value and cannot be restored, suggested to speak with a heritage architect in consultation of design.

Additional Considerations / Comments:

- Edmonton Folk Music Festival: Enquired on potential to include a 400-500 person performance space but this was deemed as not feasible; open to using kitchen space (can feed 2000-2500 people a day).
- Cloverdale Community League ongoing concern about traffic and parking management as part of the planning for the expansion of services and programming.
- Enquired if some members could store skiing equipment at ESC which would allow them to take LRT. Interesting space rental opportunity for operational consideration.

In 2023, additional engagement was conducted with key stakeholders as noted above. Most of the community groups using the space noted a desire for storage space, a need for a space to host meetings, classes (i.e. ribbon skirt making, dryland training), and a place to rest and eat.

The Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition (ERVCC) were generally supportive of the project. The current schematic design was reviewed with them. They provided information on suggested bioswale plantings and design, invested interest in Indigenous engagement, and on maintaining safety for wildlife i.e. birds. Follow up will be occurring to show how the design has been affected.

The Edmonton Folk Music Festival engagement is viewed as an ongoing process of coordination between design team and the EFMF leadership. Yearly, during the months of July-August, the ESC site is taken over by the EFMF to set up, take down and host the festival. Throughout discussions with the EFMF, the design team deemed the following necessary to the integration of EFMF activities with the RVOAC:

- Ability for site to accommodate large semi-trailers (54' long).
- General durability of site finishes – EFMF is rough on the site.
- Possible sharing of the new kitchen space to feed festival volunteers (existing EFMF kitchen trailer would

- no longer need to be placed on site every year).
- EFMF has no interior storage requirements or requests.
- EFMF requires an open, durable multipurpose space for volunteer check-in and breaks, as well as temporary volunteer coordinator offices.
- Potential for performers break / eating area.

What we heard...

The main themes of input heard include:

- Minimal environmental impacts valued by community groups.
- Desire for café / restaurant space, space for meetings, resting, and holding classes.
- Maintaining site logistics for EFMF as much as possible.

3) AS A RESULT, WHAT HAS CHANGED IN THE PROJECT?

Based on the input from the community groups and ESC’s needs in 2021, the conceptual design was created. The feedback from the community groups validated the direction that Edmonton Ski Club had described with encouraging comments on proposed uses, and one comment to add a 400-500 person performance area which was deemed as not feasible for the budget and the area allotted.

Further thought on the kitchen space was considered based on the feedback from Edmonton Folk Music Festival and Cloverdale Community League. Preliminary cost and area estimates make a commercial kitchen with a capacity to serve 2000-2500 people a day prohibitive, especially for only 4 days of the year. Cini+Little performed a business case analysis on the ideal size of kitchen and its operations. It was determined that a smaller concession kitchen to feed the hill would suffice, with space for catering decanting and retherm for events. This falls in line with the Cloverdale Community League’s suggestion, the public’s desires, and for potential collaboration with EFMF.

The 2022 open house then further validated ESC’s proposed concept and functions of the space expressing community need for a multi-functional facility that can house hospitality and community programming.

From the October 2023 Open House and online survey results, the design evolved to include an elongated outdoor exterior deck along the West face of the 2nd floor for views of the hill. Based on the feedback from the Indigenous engagements and the resulting recommendations from the Indigenous Engagement report prepared by pipikwan pêhtâkwan, GEC provided recommendation to ESC for elements which could be integrated into the project. Those elements include capacity for smudging, circular shapes, language, fire pit(s), concession menu food offerings, building naming, materiality selections, lighting, and an Indigenous plantings. Many of these elements are already accommodated in the current design and ESC is pursuing incorporating the majority of recommendations.

From the ongoing coordination with EFMF the site design has evolved to recognize the needs of the festival logistics including site entry and main drive aisle to accommodate large semi-trailers, site durability in design and selection of site finishes (i.e. rolled face curbs around parking lot and bollards to protect the building), and the design of the RVOAC rental space as a dual-purpose space which EFMF staff / volunteers may use in the summer when rental equipment is moved out of the way.

4) WHAT’S NEXT

Engagement will continue for the RVOAC as the design continues to evolve through the design development phase

and into the development of contract documents for construction. As the design team progresses to implement Indigenous feedback and design recommendations, the team will keep the dialogue open with the Indigenous Engagement consultant to ensure appropriate implementation and communication to the Indigenous community on which recommendations will be implemented into the facility. This can be done by sharing updated plans and other design drawings with the assistance of the Indigenous Engagement consultant. The Confederacy of Treaty Six will also be further engaged.

The general public will keep apprised of project progress through updates of the Edmonton Ski Club website, which will provide the most up to date project information, allowing for ongoing transparency and continued dialog with ESC.

Ongoing coordination with the Indigenous communities, Edmonton Folk Music Festival, and the City of Edmonton will continue throughout the duration of the project.