

Applicant Outreach Summary



CLOSER TO HOME NEW FACILITY PROJECT

What We Heard Report May 2021

For Calgary Planning Commission

Background

Closer to Home Community Services (CTH) is a charitable organization that, for the last quarter century, has been providing services to families and their children in Calgary and Airdrie. Our people and programs are here to help families grow stronger together because we know that strong relationships and supports are critical to people's success and wellbeing. Whether helping parents and caregivers build capacity, supporting families in coming back together after they have had to be apart, or working with young people to build the skills needed to maintain positive familial relationships, we help make sure families are safe and supported. We help families and individuals build meaningful relationships and cultural and community connections. We help parents and caregivers, youth, and children develop the skills and access the supports they need to succeed. We partner with families, organizations, and governments to create lasting change at home and in the community. Our goal has always been to bring services "closer to home" by providing community outreach services in west central Calgary.

We are funded by the Government of Alberta Children's Ministry, Community and Social Services, the City of Calgary, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, and the United Way. The Calgary Foundation is a financial partner in our building Project and a strong supporter of our work.

Closer to Home offers:

- Family and Community Support: Early Intervention programs designed to *prevent* stress, crisis, and family breakdown such as a Family Resource Centre, Family Support and Parent Education programs, a Community Connections program focused on mental health, Intergenerational trauma and healing program, youth programs and home visitation services for new mothers.
- Preservation: In-Home Family Support programs designed to assist families to preserve the family unit and build new positive skills for the future. These include CTH's continuum of Indigenous-focused programs, the Home Again program for homeless families, and the intensive home-based Family Matters program.
- Reunification: In-Care Programs that help care for and bring resolution to children and their families after experiencing severe challenges, when a family's situation has grown dangerous, or beyond their ability to manage and social services is involved. This includes foster care homes, group care homes and an intensive mental health facility for youth.

Closer to Home operates across the city, with our headquarters currently located in leased space in Sunalta. Until very recently, we were located above Greco's Pizza on 17th Avenue SW, a few blocks away from our new home where we had provided community support services for the past 25 years.

Our New Facility

Closer to Home has been working for over five years on a purpose-built facility that will house a publicly accessible and highly visible vibrant Community Hub to serve over 30 communities in West-Central Calgary. Located in the heart of west central Calgary, our new site is located at 3404 – Bow Trail SW in a community that we have been working in for over 25 years. The site is on the edge of the Spruce Cliff community, close to public transit (Westbrook LRT Station and Buses) and local amenities (Nicholls Family Library, grocery stores, restaurants, and pharmacies), has a high degree of accessibility, and is easily visible to community members. We are looking forward to returning to the community to serve the many families that currently access our services and to the new families that we will ultimately serve with this location.



Figure 1 View as a pedestrian from the SE corner of the Site

Our new home will be a place accessible to all Calgarians, providing opportunities for people of all ages, background, identities, orientations, and abilities to connect and forge meaningful relationships. Our new facility will allow us to:

- Expand the West-Central Community Resource Centre's prevention, early intervention and early childhood learning programs, youth social-emotional and mental health programs,

parent education classes, and emergency resource services to over 30 West Calgary communities and in particular, newcomers, Indigenous families, and vulnerable children and youth.

- Create a culturally safe space for Indigenous people and groups to engage in healing circles, ceremonies and have access to Elders and Knowledge Keepers.
- Engage community members with resources to develop relationships with community members without resources and social supports and build capacity into the social network.
- Provide new opportunities for family housing and contribute to solving Calgary's shortage of housing that is affordable for families. We are **not** providing emergency or transitional housing on this site.
- Develop a sustainable business model using a social enterprise framework that invests in the work of the organization, aligns retail tenants with our mission and values and applies a non-traditional and innovative approach to social investment.

Owning our own facility is the way for us to control and manage our operational costs while significantly enhancing our services to the community and expanding our reach.



Figure 2: Birdseye view from the SE corner of the site

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

The goal of our engagement plan was to provide information and seek feedback from the broader community regarding our new facility located on 3404-Bow Trail SW. The following activities were undertaken:

- Launched a comprehensive website for information and feedback (via survey) on March 26, 2021 - <http://closertohomeproject.com>
- Mailed via Canada Post an invitation card to 2,100 residents surrounding the site including Westgate Condominium complex starting March 29, 2021.
- Asked the Condo Board to send a specific email via Property Manager of Westgate Condominium Complex with an invitation to Virtual Open Houses and an FAQs document - April 5, 2021.
- Hosted Virtual Open Houses which consisted of an in-depth presentation and question and answer session:
 - April 14 (noon-1pm)
 - April 14 (7-8 pm)
 - April 15 (4-5 pm)
 - April 28 (7-8:30 pm) – Westgate sessions
 - April 29 (7-8 pm) – Westgate sessions
 - May 31 (7-8 pm) – Westgate sessions

CTH met with several stakeholders and community Groups over a three-month period from February to April 2021. In total, 55 people participated in our meetings and virtual open house sessions. Forty-six (46) individuals participated in our virtual open houses. Of the 46 individuals who attended the virtual open houses, comments came from 21 distinct participants. Of the 59 comments received over the course of the virtual open houses, 40 comments came from only five (5) individuals.

On May 31, another special session was held for Westgate Towers. At this meeting, City of Calgary representatives were present to answer questions related to city policy particularly around affordable housing and planning. Twenty-one (21) condo owners were present even though 50 had registered. Of the 21 individuals attending, most comments came from eight (8) individuals.

In addition to the general community who we met with during the virtual open house sessions, we met with the following formal groups:

- Representatives from the Shaganappi Community Association- February 4, 2021.
- A representative from the Spruce Cliff Community Association - February 2, 2021.
- A representative from the Rosscarrock Community Association - February 24, 2021.
- A representative from the Westgate Condo Corporation Board - March 24, 2021.
- Representatives from the Rosscarrock Community Association - March 31, 2021.
- Representatives from the Spruce Cliff Collaborative - April 27, 2021.
- Representatives from the Westgate Condo Corporation Board - April 28, 2021.

The following summary represents comments provided to Closer to Home between February 4 and May 31, 2021.

High Level Summary of Comments Received

There were many positive comments from the broader community with most concerns coming from residents of the Westgate Condominium Complex (the site directly next to ours). Most concerns were regarding security, crime, views, noise, and construction disruption.

The building design was well received even for those opposed to the project. Respondents thought that it is a “beautiful building”, “a lovely design; beautiful, respectful and functional” that really looks like it fits on the site. Many commented that the building does not look like an affordable housing building. Overall, many felt that much thought went into how to reduce the impact of the facility on the neighbouring community.

Many respondents also thought that CTH’s programs and services are much needed in the community and are glad to see the organization coming back to the community to provide services to west central Calgary. Closer to Home has been in the community for over 25 years (until April 2020) and now many of the families who need support must travel across the Bow River to Bowness to access services.

The community spaces are also particularly appealing to respondents from the community especially the community hub on the 1st floor and the Indigenous culture and learning space on the 3rd floor. Members of the community liked that they may use the space and that the proposed cafe and preschool will be open to members of the public.

The community also liked the idea of the building being a social enterprise to support CTH in the long-term. The programs for youth and the ability for youth to gather to do homework or particulate in training activities was supported. The feeling is that this will provide youth with something to do and a place to go.

In general, those that liked the project thought that CTH will be a significant part of the solution to the general issues facing the community and are very welcome in the community.

The most commonly recurring concern was around the type of families supported by Closer to Home. Those Owners within the Westgate Condominium Complex who participated in the open houses were mostly concerned about the overall security of the Westgate site and their properties. Some felt that the families served by Closer to Home would bring more crime and drugs to the neighbourhood. They were concerned that these families may trespass and lower property values. Some residents felt that their community had an over abundance of low-income housing and that Closer to Home should move downtown away from their complex as they worked hard to invest in condos and did not deserve to have their properties devalued.

There were a few privacy concerns for some residence of the Westgate townhomes just north of the proposed building and a few concerns over the potential for sun shadowing particularly during the summer months.



There were some concerns about the height of our building, particularly those in the lower levels of the two Westgate towers. Owners were concerned that our 6-story building would block views to the south overlooking the Westbrook Mall parking lot and to the east down Bow Trail SW.

There were also a few concerns about garbage collection and odours that may emanate from the facility such as garbage and food smells from the community kitchen.

Finally, there were some concerns about access into the site and any additional traffic that may be generated by visitors to the site.

Our Response

Traffic and Parking

With 50 parking stalls, our new facility will have enough parking onsite through underground and surface parking. Short term surface parking has been allocated to support both pre-school and commercial/retail spaces on the ground floor.

The proposed traffic circulation provides a right in and right out on Spruce Drive and is designed to keep traffic out of the community. A right in off Bow Trail SW into the site allows for easy access to the site. The proposed traffic circulation does not allow a right out on to Bow Trail. This will also stop traffic from cutting through the site to access westbound Bow Trail SW. As per

our Transportation Impact Assessment, the traffic created by our new facility will be marginal. The emergency access is maintained through our site from Bow Trail to ensure access to the Westgate Complex.

Security and Affordable Housing

It is acknowledged that there are many affordable housing units within the Spruce Cliff community. Closer to Home will add only eighteen (18) 2-and 3-bedroom units for vulnerable families. Our new facility does not incorporate a group home, an emergency shelter or transitional housing, only permanent housing for families. Many of the families we serve already live and work in west central Calgary. We therefore do not believe that these families will be a security concern or increasing crime in the neighbourhood. These families are looking for stable homes within a community close to schools and amenities such as transit. Closer to Home will offer programs and services and will be a part of the solution.

The City's website reports that "a Canadian study of 146 supportive housing sites concluded there was no statistically significant evidence that such developments led to increased crime."¹ The City's research also confirms that most often those accessing affordable housing already live in the neighbourhood or near the neighbourhoods.

We have designed culturally appropriate spaces. Families will have access to wraparound support services within our multi-cultural Community and Indigenous Hubs helping families build skills and resilience. Families will also have safe access to outdoor amenities (seating and play equipment) on the fourth floor. Housing will incorporate Juliet balconies rather than traditional balconies to allow families with fresh access to fresh air within their living space and to minimize any "overlook" onto the townhomes directly north of the facility.

There were a few concerns about the long-term durability of our new facility and whether the building would fall into disrepair as their felt so many other low-income housing projects do. We have planned for very durable exterior cladding to maintain the visual aesthetic over time

¹ [Affordable Housing Facts \(calgary.ca\)](https://www.calgary.ca/affordablehousingfacts)

and to reduce maintenance costs for the organization. It should be noted that affordable housing must comply with the same building restrictions and design standards as market-rate housing, which includes fitting the character of the neighbourhood. One of the many positive comments received is that the building does not look like an affordable housing facility.

Why this Site?

Closer to Home did look at 11 different sites in the area, assessing their viability, before purchasing our current site from the City of Calgary in 2019.



Current conditions

Many of the other sites were larger, offered more opportunity for green/play space and were not located on a busy corner, but we either lost out through multiple competitive bid processes or the land was just too expensive. One site met all our criteria but was contaminated and too risky for our charitable organization to purchase.

Moving to a downtown location as suggested by many residents of the Westgate Complex is not an option for Closer to Home for many reasons. It is not where our families live and work. The most important is that we have been providing services in the community for over 25 years and want to continue to provide support for families in the neighbourhood for the next 25 years.

The City has made affordable housing, particularly for families, a priority. There is a significant lack of affordable housing units within the City and though the City of Calgary is committed to

and working towards meeting the need, existing proposals still fall short. We support the City's plan to convert office space to housing as it will bring a vibrancy downtown that currently does not exist, but this arrangement does not work for CTH. We believe that a range of housing provides a diversity that is good for the community and for everyone.

Community Amenities for Public Use

Closer to Home's multi-cultural Community Hub is an intentionally designed 3,400 square foot space within our new building that will facilitate and increase connections with our community - a public space for community to access programs and services. In addition, a play space for young children, tech access for youth to support their education, and a social enterprise Café for all community members to enjoy. The space will also support community events and gathers for example, outdoor markets, art show, and youth events. Our Community Hub will have significant impact on several important social outcomes.



With Elder guidance, we designed a space that will provide safety for Indigenous clients and appropriate spaces for ceremony and gatherings. We are dedicating our entire third floor (9,000 square feet) to Indigenous cultural exploration and programming.

This area will house a Circle Room for cultural teachings, smudging and gatherings, feasts, sharing circles, drumming, specific programs for intergenerational trauma and healing, mother programs, and youth initiatives. Programs within the spaces will provide access to Elders and Knowledge Keepers and outdoor amenities for medicine gardens, gatherings, hide preparation, outdoor cooking and feasts, and beehives will support programming. Views to east overlooking the golf course and downtown Calgary create a wonderful gathering space for outdoor

activities. Families living in the building as well as Indigenous families across Calgary will have access to the programs within this important space.



Sun Shadowing

There will be no sun shadows at anytime of the year for the two Westgate Towers. There will be no sun shadowing for the townhomes during the summer months as per the current design. There will be some shadowing of the sun in the fall during the midday for the townhomes just north of the building.

Property Values and Westgate Complex

As stated, residents of the Westgate Complex were concerned that our new facility would significantly impact their property values. This seemed to be based primarily on the fact that the facility would have 18 units of low-income housing and that the development was very close to the townhomes. There was a belief that this area was to be designated as a park and that the park would be developed at some point in the future.

The City of Calgary reported that in more than 100 studies conducted in the US and Canada during the past 30 years, there is no evidence that property values are impacted by affordable housing developments. And in fact, the City of Calgary does not consider the proximity of affordable housing in property tax assessments.² We do not believe that property values will be impacted as a result of our new facility and believe that we will add value to the community by providing amenity and community spaces for use by everyone.

² [Affordable Housing Facts \(calgary.ca\)](https://www.calgary.ca/affordablehousingfacts)

Many, particularly those living in the townhomes felt that our new facility would impede their personal enjoyment given that the site is small, and the building is perceived to be large. The site is indeed constrained by many factors. However, we pushed our building as far away from the existing development to the north and have been able to keep a 20-m buffer from the edge of the north property to our building edge.

We have intentionally designed the area between our building and the Townhomes to ensure the existing sidewalk buffer remains, a large setback is maintained from the face of the townhouses to the face of the new building (20 meters), and all faces of the building are treated as a 'front face' - textured, articulated and more aesthetically pleasing. Through our design, we created a more urban streetscape – wider sidewalks, better pedestrian connection to the Condominium complex, Spruce Drive, and the Shaganappi Golf Course.

The residential units on our site are setback from the commercial face of the building in respect to the condominium units at that level. In addition, residential units do not have balconies, and the common amenity space is located on the south side of the building away from the existing residences.

We will maintain the existing trees and add new ones if allowed by the City which will provide more privacy to townhome residents. We also enclosed the mechanical equipment in a penthouse and are exploring options that will create an interesting pattern on the roof. Both will be more visually appealing to those with a bird's eye view of our facility. Our new home when the design is finished will be between 27-28 meters (total 6 storeys).

The current views of condo owners are south overlooking the Westbrook Mall parking lot and to the east down Bow Trail SW. Views to the east of Bow Trail from some of the lower floors of Encore may be obscured but not directly in all view planes. Views to the south of Westbrook Mall maybe obscured for some of the lower floors of Ovation again not directly in all view planes. We are not able to complete an accurate assessment as we do not have the "as built" drawings of the two towers.

Currently the Townhomes face onto a gravelled area and Bow Trail SW. The Townhomes will be directly facing the new building, and their views to the south will be obscured. This would also be the case if a 2-3 story building were built based under the current zoning.

Web Traffic

There was traffic on the web site at the beginning of the project, after the Westgate Condo Board sent out the email to all 479 owners in early April 2021 and then again May 9/10 when a second email was sent to the condo owners. It should be noted that out of the almost 887 unique visitors to the site, only 67 individuals attended a virtual open house and only 5 individuals provided comments to the website. Of the 67 individuals who participated, the majority of comments came from 25 individuals.

A summary of the web statistics follows for the time between March 29 to May 31, 2021. The website is now closed for comments.