

Public Engagement Overview

Public engagement for the Sports and Entertainment Centre project has been extensive and multi-phased, spanning from late 2023 through 2025. The City employed a combination of digital and in-person engagement opportunities to ensure residents and stakeholders had numerous opportunities to learn about, comment on, and influence the project. Engagement began with an initial Let's Talk Brantford campaign from December 2023 to January 2024, including a Public Town Hall and multiple Council meetings with open delegation opportunities throughout 2024 and early 2025. These sessions provided residents with updates on financing, partnerships, and site recommendations, culminating in Council's endorsement of a Progressive Design-Build approach in February 2025.

The most recent engagement phase, running from September 17 to October 24, 2025, focused on initial venue design concepts and gathered community input through the Let's Talk Brantford platform, social media, and three in-person open houses held on October 1, 8, and 16.

Design Survey Results

1,927 people visited the Let's Talk Brantford project page, while 461 participants completed the survey. Quantitatively, results indicate general support for the project's intent with mixed opinions regarding its proposed location, parking availability, and exterior architectural design.

Most respondents, nearly **71 percent** indicated they would attend events at the new facility either frequently or occasionally, suggesting a high likelihood of community use. More than half of participants (55 percent) described their overall impression of the designs as positive or very positive, while approximately one in five were neutral, and roughly a quarter expressed a negative or very negative impression. Across all responses, parking and transportation access ranked as the most important design consideration, followed by seating capacity, flexibility for multiple event types, and accessibility. Sustainability features, while valued, were rated as a lower priority in comparison.

Qualitative feedback provided greater depth to these findings. The most frequently cited concern involved parking and traffic flow and congestion. Even among supporters, the need for additional and safer parking options was a common theme. Several

participants suggested exploring solutions such as using Earl Haig Park for overflow parking, improving pedestrian routes, and incorporating a transit hub to reduce vehicle dependency.

Supporters emphasized the opportunity to revitalize the downtown core, create new linkages to the Grand River and trail system, and draw people into the city's centre. Conversely, others viewed the site as too congested and currently lacking in surrounding amenities such as hotels and restaurants.

Feedback on the building's design highlighted a desire for a more distinctive and vibrant architectural presence. Some residents praised the proposed interior layout and functionality, while others described the exterior as too plain or industrial, encouraging the inclusion of colour, public art, or river-facing features to give the structure stronger civic identity. Several respondents also recommended that the design incorporate tributes or heritage spaces honouring local history, first responders, or the Bulldogs franchise.

Accessibility and inclusivity were well supported in the concept designs, though several participants requested more universal washrooms, multiple entry points, and accessible parking near entrances.

While most participants expressed optimism, a smaller minority opposed the project on economic or social grounds, suggesting that City resources should instead prioritize healthcare, housing, or infrastructure improvements. Others questioned the long-term financial viability of the centre, expressing concern regarding potential cost overruns or future deficits.

In summary, survey findings suggest that the community values the concept of a new facility and recognizes its potential to strengthen Brantford's cultural and economic landscape. Many also expressed that the facility would be more successful if perceived traffic congestion and parking concerns are addressed.

Community and Open Houses Engagement Summary

In addition to the formal survey, feedback was gathered through social media channels, the online Questions Tool on Let's Talk Brantford, and three in-person open houses held throughout October. These channels provided valuable qualitative insights that complemented the survey data and helped clarify recurring themes and priorities expressed by the community.

Across digital engagement platforms, the most common comments and questions focused on financial responsibility, parking availability, and overall community priorities.

Many participants asked why funding was being directed toward a Sports and Entertainment Centre given other pressing social issues, particularly the opioid crisis and healthcare needs. Others raised practical questions regarding parking capacity, traffic congestion, and the future of the Earl Haig Family Fun Park, which several residents hoped can be reimaged alongside the new facility.

Constructive suggestions included introducing shuttle services from other parts of the city to reduce parking pressures, incorporating restaurants or food services into the venue design, and making better use of the Grand River views as part of the facility's aesthetic and experiential appeal. There were also requests for transparency regarding operational costs, long-term financial planning, and the business model for maintaining the centre. While a few commenters disagreed with the proposed downtown location, the majority expressed comfort or agreement with it, particularly when linked to broader downtown revitalization goals.

The three in-person open houses attracted a combined attendance of 180 residents. The first session at the Wayne Gretzky Sports Centre drew 55 participants, with discussions primarily centred on parking logistics and the project's financial plan. The second session at the Walter Gretzky Golf Course engaged 50 attendees and reinforced similar questions regarding access and funding. The third and largest event, held at the Bulldogs Lounge in the TD Civic Centre, welcomed approximately 75 participants. Notably, about 95% of attendees at this session expressed support or enthusiasm for the project, offering suggestions for exterior design improvements and reiterating interest in ensuring that parking and fiscal transparency remain key priorities.

These results indicate a majority view welcoming investment in a new community venue, provided that practical concerns and design refinements are addressed. Overall, the combined public engagement through surveys, online channels, and open houses shows optimism for a well-planned, transparent, and inclusive development process.