

# Residents 'thrilled' as four long-awaited recreation centres move forward in Calgary

BY RICHARD CUTHBERTSON, CALGARY HERALD FEBRUARY 8, 2012

Presented By:



An angry Mayor Naheed Nenshi holds a letter from Public Private Partnerships Canada last November saying the federal agency will not be funding four recreation centres in the city. Council has found funding for the rec centres from the GST rebate and elsewhere.

**Photograph by:** Gavin Young, Calgary Herald

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Two suburban corners of the city are in line for more swimming pools, gyms and ice rinks as some fancy financial skating endorsed by city council has saved plans for four new recreation centres imperilled last year when Ottawa nixed federal help.

It is a major step forward in the roughly \$400-million plan, but comes with a significant caveat: the project debt could rise as high as \$250 million, with GST rebate funds and community investment money tapped to pay it off.

But the decision offers the long-sought assurance that mega rec complexes are in store for Seton and just north of Royal Oak, while Quarry Park will receive its swimming pool and library, and Great Plains

its rinks and banquet hall.

All four are expected to open within the next five years.

"We are absolutely thrilled that the city found a financing structure that would let these projects continue," said Stephanie Campbell, with the South East Calgary Recreation Society.

The new course ends a tumultuous couple of months for the project, which suffered a serious blow when the federal government ruled in November that rec centres were ineligible for help from federal funder PPP Canada Inc.

The move stunned council, left a gaping \$100-million hole and led to speculation that just two or three of the complexes would go ahead, or pieces of each would be shed to make ends meet.

On Tuesday, council plugged that hole, as the mayor and aldermen unanimously backed a new money plan crafted by city officials that won't raise property taxes.

"We know that our existing swimming pools and ice rinks and soccer fields are fully at capacity now," Mayor Naheed Nenshi said.

"They have to be built and they have to be built before the kids for whom we're building them graduate from high school."

Backers have long argued the facilities are needed to serve an ever expanding city.

Aldermen say there are 84,000 people with no nearby recreation amenities in the deep southeast and northwest.

But the debt load now gets heavier - up to \$250 million in total, although about half of that had already been eyed under last year's scuttled plan, according to city recreation officials.

The money owed will be paid off over the next two decades with the help of up to \$4 million annually from the GST refund.

The bulk will be financed from a previously approved yearly injection of \$13 million from the community investment fund, a pot that draws in \$42 million annually of property tax room "vacated" by the province.

None of the money had been approved for any other project.

The rest of the project will be paid for through \$150 million approved some years ago, and by reaching into money collected from suburban developers and destined for recreation and community infrastructure.

The mayor acknowledged the work of officials in developing the new formula, giving a nod to recreation director Kurt Hanson and manager Karen Young.

The facilities in Seton and the northwest will be on the scale of the newly opened Genesis Centre in northeast Calgary and are tentatively scheduled for late 2016 completion.

The Rocky Ridge Road site will be equipped with a pool, indoor field house, a recreational skating rink, squash and racquetball courts, along with outdoor fields.

Seton will have much the same, but with a larger pool and two ice arenas, although it won't have the same outdoor field space as its northwest cousin.

The smaller Quarry Park (pool, gym, fitness centre) and Great Plains (two ice rinks, two lacrosse pads, fitness centre) are tentatively slated for the end of 2014.

"In some cases, a couple generations have grown up without facilities in their communities and they had to travel all over the city," Ald. Shane Keating said.

Council's decision will mean fewer families will have to travel long distances, according to Tim Bjornson, executive director of Sport Calgary.

"Pretty excited that we're going to go forward and build what Calgarians need," he said. "We are in that facility deficit, especially in those new areas."

It's been a long haul.

Four years ago, Campbell was drawn into an organizing effort to get rec facilities in the southeast.

Her reason was simple: the McKenzie Lake woman was taking her two children all the way to Okotoks for swimming lessons.

Now, in just a couple years, her 10-year-old daughter and seven year old son will be enjoying a pool and summer camp close to home.

## PROPOSED FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

### Northwest

11300 Rocky Ridge Rd. N.W. Size: 350,000 to 400,000 sq. ft.

Amenities: Aquatics centre with lazy river and waterslides. Two ice surfaces, four indoor fields, gymnasiums, running track, squash and racquetball courts, library, theatre space, daycare, fitness centre and skateboard park. Calgary West Soccer Centre would relocate to the facility.

### Seton

18150 56 th Street S.E. Size: 300,000 to 350,000 sq. ft.

Amenities: Aquatics centre, two arenas, two indoor fields, gymnasiums, squash and racquetball courts, daycare, library, theatre space, fitness centre and skateboard park.

## Quarry Park

108 Quarry Park Rd. S.E. Size: 75,000 to 100,000 sq. ft.

Amenities: Aquatics centre, gymnasium, fitness centre and library.

## Great Plains

5749 76 th Ave. S.E. Size: 150,000 to 200,000 sq. ft.

Amenities: Two hockey rinks, lacrosse pads, fitness centre and banquet facilities.

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