



Service Level Discussion

Discussion on Civic Building Survey and next steps for a civic centre.

CAO Comments:

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Overview

Council is considering the possibility of building a new civic building for the Town of Rocky Mountain House.

The existing Town Office, built in 1973, is beyond its life expectancy.

After reviewing a [2011 building evaluation report](#) and a [2022 feasibility study](#) that examined the existing condition of the Town Office and the current and projected spatial requirements of Town administrative functions, Council is considering leveraging the Town's strong financial position to plan for a civic building we can all be proud of.

View the reports:

[2022 Town of Rocky Mountain House Town Hall Feasibility Study by JMAA Architecture](#)

[2021 Town Hall Building Assessment Update](#)

[2011 Building Evaluation by Scott Builders Inc.](#)

If Council chooses to move ahead with the planning and construction of a new civic building, it could serve as more than just a town hall. Many communities use their civic buildings to host other services or share public spaces with other organizations. Before moving further ahead in the planning process, Council asked residents to weigh in about their visions and priorities.

On July 4, Council approved the preliminary public engagement plan and survey, which included the following components:

1. Coffee with a Councillor.
 - a. Speaking notes to assist Council in answering questions from the public.
 - b. Direct conversations with members of the public.
 - c. Invite members of the public to complete online survey
2. Marketplace on Main (during Coffee with a Councillor sessions)
 - a. Direct conversations with members of the public
 - b. Invite members of the public to complete online survey using tablet.
3. Online survey published on the Town's website, including town hall assessment and feasibility studies.
4. As per #3, shared via social media channels.
5. As per #3, shared via website registrants and in utilities newsletter.
6. Engagement board in Town Office.
 - a. Easel with information bulletin and comment cards to reach members of the public who visit the Town Office.

The plan was carried out between July 11 and September 30, 2023.

Civic Building preliminary engagement – speaking notes for Council

We are checking in with residents about the possibility of building a new civic building for the Town of Rocky Mountain House.

Q: Why?

The existing Town Office, built in 1973, is beyond its life expectancy. Council recently reviewed a 2011 building assessment report and a 2022 feasibility study that examined the existing condition of the Town Office and the current and projected spatial requirements of Town administrative functions. ***These reports can be viewed in their entirety at www.rockymtnhouse.com/p/civic-building.***

Q: What's wrong with the existing Town Office?

- The building is non-compliant with the building code regarding handicapped accessibility to the lower floor, washrooms, reception counters and doorways.
- The mechanical system is operationally deficient or marginal and individual components of both the HVAC and plumbing system are non-code compliant. Mechanical upgrades are required for code compliance with ducting, fresh air returns, plumbing, lighting, and electrical outlets.
- Asbestos and other hazardous building materials exist throughout the facility.
- The fire rating in the floor between the two levels is inadequate, and the lower level has a dead-end corridor without proper fire egress.
- Insulation in the exterior walls is insufficient causing offices to be too cold or hot in different seasons.
- The space allocation for Council chambers, offices and workspaces are below current standards for office buildings.

Since the completion of the 2011 building assessment, the Town Office has further deteriorated and recently experienced a significant roof leak and water damage.

What do you think about a new ...
CIVIC BUILDING?



www.rockymtnhouse.com/p/civic-building

Q: Why now?

Council believes a new civic building is essential; it can either spend significant money on a 50-year-old facility with a laundry list of problems, or leverage the Town’s strong financial position to plan for a civic building we can all be proud of.

Q: How will we pay for this?

The Town of Rocky Mountain House is in a strong financial position to plan for and budget a capital project of this magnitude.

A new administrative building has been included in the 10-year capital plan and 10-year debenture schedule since 2020 as a placeholder project.

A new civic building would be financed through a combination of debenture and reserves. The 10-year capital and debenture plans are part of the Town’s annual budget. View the 2023 budget at www.rockymtnhouse.com/p/budget

Basically, the project is already budgeted for – we just need to decide *if* and *when* to go ahead.

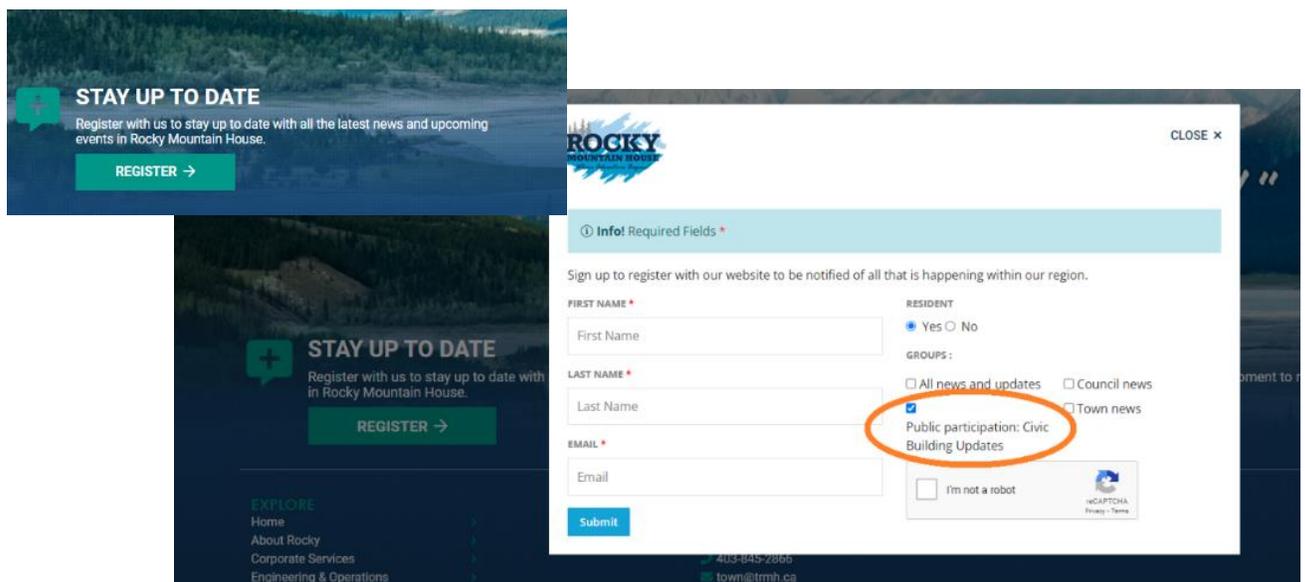
Q: What will the building look like?

We don’t know yet! But we know the possibilities are endless. A civic building can be more than just a place of municipal administration.

Many communities host other services at their civic building or share public spaces with other organizations. We want to hear from residents if they have specific request, wish lists or ideas for the design and function of a new building.

Q: How can I stay informed?

This is only the very first step in a long process. You can sign up for email updates from Council on our website. Scroll to the bottom of the homepage (www.rockymtnhouse.com) and click “register.” Select “Public Participation: Civic Building” to receive email updates about the project.



Survey questions

1. Which of the following describes you? (Please choose all that apply)

I live in Town and own my home

I live in Town and rent my home

I own or manage a business in Town

I own property in Town but live elsewhere

I live in a nearby municipality or First Nation

I live greater than 100 km away

2. Consider the civic/community identity of Rocky Mountain House. Are there any themes you would like to see incorporated into the design of a new civic building? Some examples could be: Topography Canoeing/paddling/river Industry e.g.: forestry, energy Outdoor adventure/exploring Or something else entirely Please enter your ideas below.

3. Some town halls share space with other services and organizations. If Council chooses this model, what service or facility do you think would benefit from co-locating with the Town of Rocky Mountain House administrative building? Is this a service or facility compatible with sharing a space with public administration? Some examples are listed, but please enter any other ideas you may have.

Some examples could be:

Art gallery

Sitting area

Library

Continuing education

Community rental space

Non-profit meeting space

Or something else

4. Please describe an existing civic building or public facility you have visited in another municipality that you like, and why.

5. Please place the following civic building features/aspects in order of priority to you:

Design of the civic building

Cost of the building

Planning for future growth

Public seating space in Council Chambers

Community access to the building

6. Is there anything else you would like Council to consider as part of its civic building planning process?

7. Thank you for your input! If you would like to receive emailed updates about this project, enter your email address here.

Survey responses

Number and quality of responses

- a.** The survey yielded 290 responses, collected from the website, newsletter and e-news links as well as hard copies (available at the Town Office and Coffee with a Councillor sessions).
- b.** The survey had a 92% completion rate. Compared to previous surveys conducted around the same time of year, these are good results – previous budget engagement surveys yielded an average of 131 respondents, with a 75% completion rate.
 - i.** The only engagement that has out-performed the civic building survey is the 2021 recreation survey which received 418 responses.

Demographics (Question 1)

- a.** Respondents were asked to identify as residents, business-owners/managers, or property-owners.
- b.** 86% of respondents live in Town. (90% of them own their own home while 10% rent.)
- c.** There was a low rate of responses from business owners/managers: 34 in total, representing fewer than 12% of all respondents. However, the majority of business owners/managers who responded also indicated they live in Town (26 of 34).
- d.** Less than 2% indicated they own property in Town but live elsewhere, while 12% live in a nearby municipality or First Nation (less than 100km away).

Follow-up (Question 7)

- a.** Respondents were asked to provide an email address if they would like to receive updates about this project. Members of the public could also register for these updates on our website.
- b.** 84 individual respondents did so, and will receive an e-mailed copy of this report once it has been presented to Council.
- c.** This report will also be posted to the Civic Building Engagement page on the Town's website (<https://rockymtnhouse.com/p/civic-building>).

Main themes:

The survey asked respondents for ideas on building design, shared space opportunities, or anything else they would like Council to consider as it plans for a new civic building. Certain themes were repeated frequently in the comments received. These are summarized below:

Showcasing Rocky's Identity: Respondents feel that any new endeavor should represent and highlight Rocky's unique position, heritage, and natural beauty. Outdoor, Adventure and Community were repeated often.

Cost-consciousness: There was an emphasis on being financially prudent, with some respondents suggesting low-cost upgrades rather than new construction.

Forward-thinking: Respondents stress the importance of envisioning the future needs of the community, considering long-term implications and changes.

Environmental building practices: Respondents in support of the project consistently advocated for green building practices and renewable energy embedded in the design.

Uniqueness and Iconic Features: A desire for any new infrastructure to be distinctive, iconic, and a point of pride for the community.

Financial Prudence: Respondents mentioned the importance of being financially prudent, cost-effective, and respecting taxpayers. There's a recurrent theme of concerns about the cost, with respondents suggesting that the building should be functional rather than extravagant, or that funds could be better spent elsewhere.

Timing and Economic Concerns: Some respondents feel that now is not the right time for a new building, especially given economic challenges and stagnant town population.

Prioritization of Functionality: Some responses indicate that themes and aesthetics are secondary to the building's functionality and accessibility.

Direct Disagreement: Some responses simply state opposition without providing reasons.

Use of Existing Facilities: A few respondents emphasized utilizing and improving existing facilities to be cost-effective.

- "Using the existing facilities would be good. Spend this money in places the people actually want to see it spent."
- "...using existing infrastructure already built. We have county, town, and provincial buildings... Seems like we can consolidate and save money to build attractions to bring families to town and increase our property values."

Indoor Recreational Options: Some individuals highlighted the desire for indoor recreational options like sports fields, a running track, playgrounds and a performing arts space.

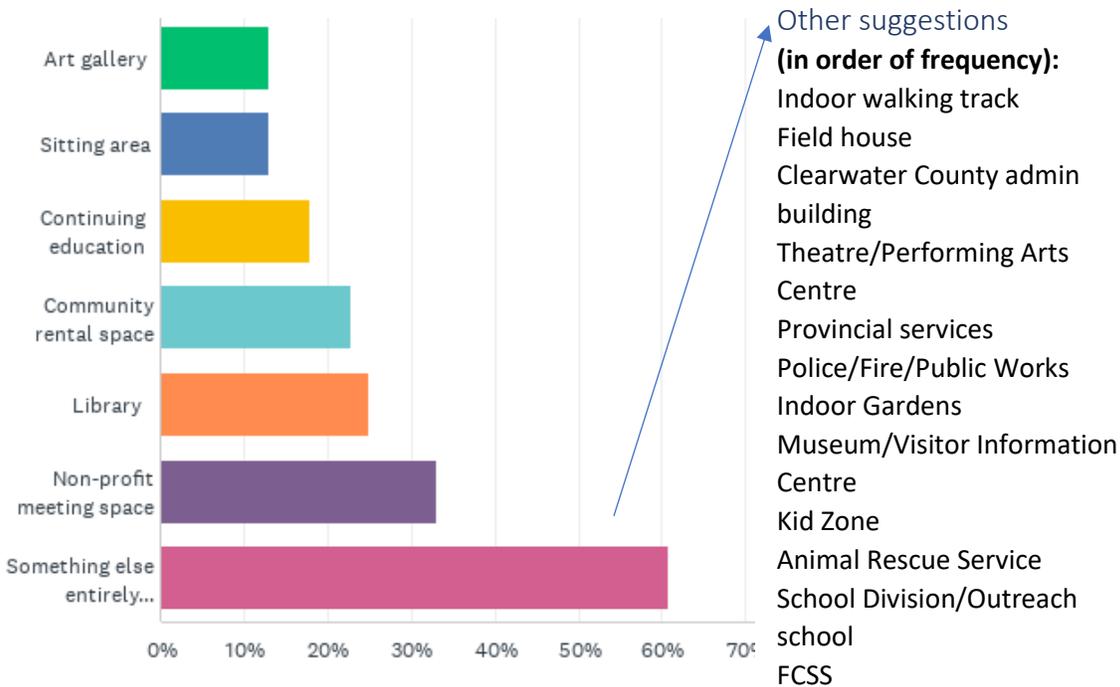
- "Fine arts and culture. I would love to see the town incorporate more than just 'outdoors' or 'forestry'."
- "Including an indoor walking path"
- "Improve the Rec center first like adding a walking track for our seniors."

Functionality and Multipurpose Use: Respondents stress the importance of the building serving multiple purposes and being forward-thinking in design and utility.

- "Create a functional and accessible building, it does not need to be a 'show piece' as the 'bling' just adds costs to the building. It is needed, create a cost-effective building that could incorporate a library/continuing education area easily accessible to the public."
- "Do not miss opportunity to make this building functional for more than 1 purpose. This building can be quite a statement and forward thinking. We need to progress this town and its facilities. Thank you."
- "Common areas for gathering."
- "Council chambers is often given the most attention in civic buildings and yet it's only important to Council and only used once per week - while an important function of the building, more thought/space/resources should be given to those working in the building all day every day as well as community members using the facility than to council chambers."

Question 3: shared use space

What service or facility do you think would benefit from co-locating with the Town of Rocky Mountain House administrative building?



Most responses emphasized the desire for an indoor walking track and field house, and closely matched the community’s recreation priorities as outlined in the Recreation Master Plan and corroborated by the 2021 public survey.

- “Green space/atrium either in the entrance or linking the library/council chambers/civic offices.”
- “Police, Fire and Public Works – all-encompassing municipal building.”
- “Area for families to gather with children.”
- “Culture/Native Friendship Centre, Next to New, Senior drop in center.”
- “Performing arts studio, amphitheater, seniors community center, work cooperative center”
- “A multi use space that can be used for community movie nights, arts and crafts evenings, games nights, crib tourneys, continuing Ed opportunities, space for elections, the possibilities are endless.”
- “Make a multi use facility for rec. indoor running, field house, ice surface (public only not teams for practice). Indoor rock climbing etc.”
- “Shared space with library, peace officers, fire hall/search & rescue, field house with indoor sports facilities.”
- “Arcade/recreation space for teens. FREE mental wellness clinic (therapists, programs, and information) for youth and adults.”

- “Rooms to rent for small businesses that can not afford whole buildings when just starting out. Like a mini mall of small stores. Or an animal pound or homeless support and safe sleep center”
- “A calm, quiet indoor area with a water feature and lots of plants, for people to exist quietly in.”
- “Should only share space with actual services and organizations, not build "empty rentable rooms" that need to be heated in the winter. There is already rentable space in the rec centre. Art gallery should be a local artist and should rotate. They should be responsible for set up and take down.”

Question 4: examples of other civic centres and public buildings

Respondents were asked to provide examples of other civic centres and public buildings they like. Facilities mentioned more than once are listed here in order of frequency, along with corresponding comments:

Where possible, links are provided to facility websites for further reading.

Municipality/Facility	Supporting comments
<p>Sylvan Lake Nexsource Centre</p> <p>www.sylvanlake.ca/en/explore-sylvan/nexsource-centre.aspx</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper change rooms. • Seating • Concession. • Designed for multi use in all seasons. • We love the mini indoor play place for small children. • Walking track. • Comfortable seating.
<p>Penhold Regional Multiplex</p> <p>www.townofpenhold.ca/p/penhold-regional-multiplex-1</p>	<p><i>“Library and municipal offices as well as rec facilities. One stop shop. There is a library, town office, gym, arena, walking track, campground. These facilities are used year-round. We ultimately utilize that Multiplex more than the one in Rocky Mountain House.”</i></p>
<p>Blackfalds Abbey Centre</p> <p>www.blackfalds.ca/m/abbey-centre</p>	<p><i>“Offers fun for kids that cannot be matched in Rocky”</i></p>
<p>Red Deer Collicutt Centre</p> <p>www.reddeer.ca/recreation-and-culture/recreation/recreation-facilities/collicutt-centre/</p> <p>Red Deer Dawe Centre</p> <p>www.reddeer.ca/recreation-and-culture/recreation/recreation-facilities/gh-dawe-community-centre/</p>	
<p>Lacombe Memorial Centre</p> <p>www.lacombe.ca/193/Lacombe-Memorial-Centre</p> <p>Mary C. Moore Public Library</p> <p>www.lacombelibrary.com/</p>	<p><i>“Facilities offer more than just the library thus increasing usage of the library due to the convenience of being located with other town facilities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Incorporating meeting rooms, library, cafe and other spaces.”</i></p>

Hinton www.hinton.ca/Facilities/Facility/Details/25	<i>"Combines multiple levels of government"</i>
Drayton Valley Omniplex www.draytonvalley.ca/things-to-do/omniplex/	
Medicine Hat Esplanade Centre www.esplanade.ca	<i>"A beautiful building and brings together a roof top restaurant, Museum, Art Gallery, Proscenium stage with seating for 180, various large rooms/dance studios and an industrial kitchen able to cater to all spaces. It provides space for summer camps, performances both local and touring, conferences, weddings, dance/yoga classes and recitals. The museum/art gallery also pulls in tourists into the down town area."</i>
St. Albert Place www.stalbert.ca/dev/construction/buildings/sap-construction/	<i>"Integration of many public services and resources."</i>
Canmore Elevation Place www.canmore.ca/your-community/recreation/indoor-recreation	<i>"Aesthetically pleasing design, incorporates eco friendly materials and building design, integrates many resources including public library."</i>
Bob Snodgrass Recreational Complex (Cargill Field House) High River www.highriver.ca/community/bob-snodgrass-recreational-complex-bsrc	<i>"That building was an add on from an existing rec center, and now with the addition of the field house, it has an indoor walking track and courts on the main floor, with offices on both the main and upper level."</i>
Coaldale Civic Square project www.coaldale.ca/CivicSquare	<i>"great multipurpose space."</i>

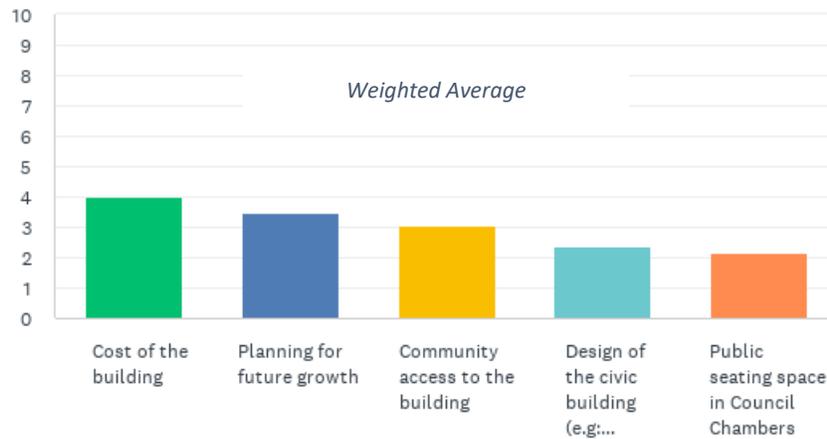
Examples of general comments received in support of shared-use/multipurpose facilities:

- "Spaces that promote people wanting to LIVE in these towns, because there are things to DO, not someplace for entitled government employees to do their job."
- "All have combined facilities in one (offices/civic center, recreation facilities, etc.)"
- "I like the concept of town rec facilities with other municipal services under 1 roof. I think this would also allow for cost savings instead of building a completely new structure."
- "Any multiuse sports facility in the province has a field house. Our town desperately needs it because school gyms are not always available or meet the community requirements."

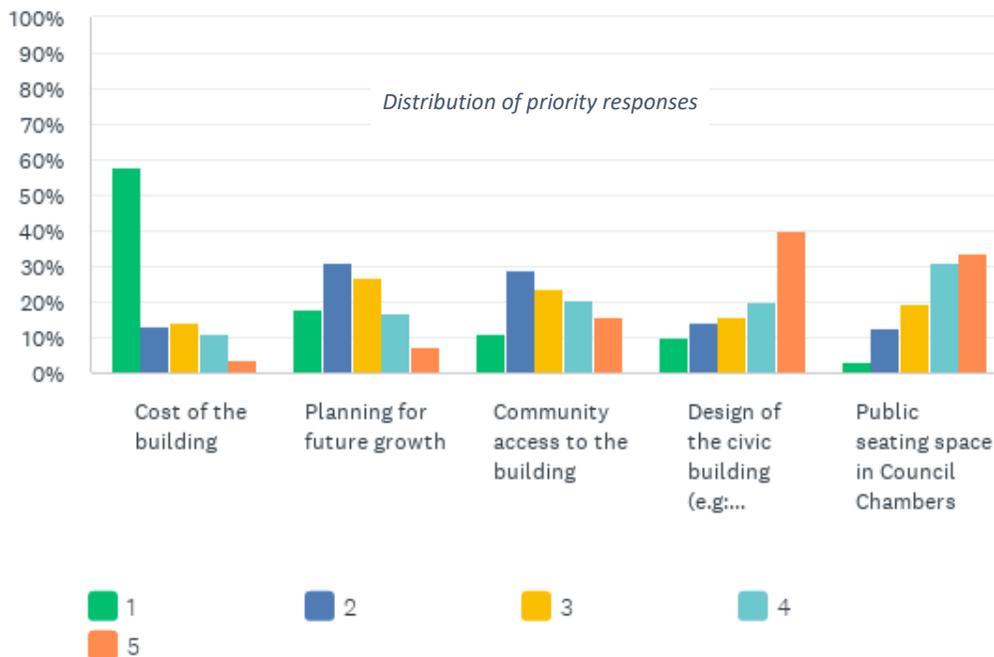
Question 5: priorities

While all aspects were chosen as most important by some people, there is a clear frontrunner among the majority of respondents: cost.

Q5 Please place the following in order of priority to you:



In absolute numbers and weighted average, respondents consistently ranked *cost of the building* as their first priority when considering a new civic building.



Planning for future growth and *community access* shared equal billing in second place, while *design of the building* and *public seating in council chambers* ranked consistently at the bottom.

Question 6: other considerations

This open-ended question invited respondents to submit any other thoughts, comments or ideas for Council's Consideration. The following are Q7 responses, grouped by Q5 priorities and Main Themes:

Cost of the Building

Financial Prudence:

- "If you can find a way to provide an appropriate workspace for municipal staff without building a new, expensive building, that would be great. I feel like this is an opportunity to leverage the new municipal government requirements and update/improve the recreation facility."
- "This needs to be completed in a fiscally responsible manner. I understand that the current building needs to be replaced, however we cannot go over the moon on what we are building outside of considering future growth (we do not want to be re-doing this in 15 years because the town has grown and there is space left for the expanded staff). The town should be considering the lifespan of other town owned building (public works, fire hall/library, etc) and considering if they are close to the end of their life, constructing one "mega-complex" putting all employees under one roof. I do not agree with some comments around the town hall needing to be in the centre of town. If another location makes more sense, and is cost effective look at that. It is not like the town hall is currently a gathering space."
- "A 1970s building is not outdated. If there isn't enough room for employees, introduce working from home."
- "Look at the amount of empty buildings in this town, perhaps splitting up some of the services to some of the empty buildings."
- "Multi use building or incorporated into an existing building to keep costs down and keep things together rather than scattered around the town."
- "Consider joining with another organization for example the county. Or consider building with the doctors who want a new town facility as well."

Timing and Economic Concerns:

- "I think it's a bad time for a new building as many residents are struggling to put food on the table and pay utility bills."
- "Now is not the time for a new building, taxes are suppressing property values & hindering local economics. Town population has been shrinking."
- "We don't need a new building. There is a lot of other things we could use this money for. Like lowering town taxes."

Planning for Future growth

- "Think long term. Invest now for a facility that will meet our needs in the future. Also something architecturally impressive. Do not listen to the short-sighted naysayers that would save a dollar to provide us with a tacky seat of government. The most impressive city halls and town halls have utilized impressive architects. It costs more initially, but the building is timeless, not archaic and ugly. We invested heavily in design for our

business. At first I regretted the huge outlay. Now, I see the building is as impressive as ever and the huge outlay spread over twenty to thirty years means nothing now. But the building is always beautiful.”

- “Build with plans of growth while being financially responsible. Having a fancy new building that needs additions within 5 years is not beneficial. Lots of windows, employees and visitors able to see outside, have sunlight come in are often happier and/or work harder.”

Community Access to the Building

- “New lot should have ample parking, building should have clear signage and direction, lot/building should be completely wheelchair accessible.”
- “It should become a space for residents to be welcomed. Becoming involved in your community and creating strong roots are the cornerstone of a healthy community.”
- “Having a facility that could accommodate special ceremonies, celebrations or outdoor festivals, and implementing a plan to host more activities and events that bring the community together.”

Design of the building

Showcasing Rocky's Identity:

- “A Japanese garden. I love Japanese gardens and it would tie into our 40th anniversary with Kamikawa, Japan.”
- “Include Indigenous groups.”

Environmental building practices:

- “Think about the future needs of the community in a changing climate (evacuation spaces, emergency services, energy efficiency, renewable energy).”
- “let's not bulldoze a ton of trees to build this, without planting the same number destroyed. let's make our building truly reflective of our area, which is largely tree filled, not over manicured lawns.”
- “Sustainability, green energy, and using advanced technology to be a role model for the residents in Rocky Mountain House. With the fast changes happening in the environment, the building should be ready for climate change, use less resources and energy overall. It should integrate with nature and show that town cares about the beautiful area we live in.”

Uniqueness and Iconic Features:

- “I think our town hall should be a statement piece in the community. Maybe a place for outdoor markets or concerts.”
- “Can't remember the town but it had sunny roof windows when you walked in and it had such an airy welcoming feel as you entered.”
- “Something the town can be proud of. Take advantage of the opportunity to have all you can. Indoor and outdoor play areas for kids (treehouse style or big outdoor like Sylvan).”
- “Green space outside for sitting/picnics.”
- “Moat and drawbridge.”

Multi-purpose

- “A performance arts centre with rehearsal space, studios and art gallery has been on the wish list for decades and it has been very difficult to watch it overlooked for so long. As well it has led to community members moving on from Rocky as it could not provide enough entertainment opportunities/facilities. The con of a performance space is that they struggle to create synergy for daily use. If we bring in the Library, Town offices along with performance/rehearsal spaces under one roof we will daily be bringing the community into contact with resources and opportunities to create relationships with their town and each other.”
- “Approach the county, friendship centre, community services and actual plan a community centre.”
- “Combine the build with other existing town needs; a central gathering place suitable for all ages; year round indoor/outdoor options; splash park/football/skating oval proper changing and restroom facilities; mental health of its citizens -indoor garden and walking path; job creation: -indoor botanical garden -gardeners - coffee house (possibly licensed) - baristas, food prep, musicians, artists - washrooms and change facilities - janitors – security - an on-site police or peace officer - art gallery - artists, attendant/liaison-could also offer arts and craft classes.
Rocky has a wealth of talented and hardworking individuals who would love to see a cooperative and inclusive community built. If town council wants the blessings of the people, then the people need to feel heard. There is no reason why these above suggestions cannot be accepted and achieved, if they are built where not only the town council but also the residents and tourists will benefit. Therefore, I propose that the new facility be built near the existing splash park, football field, oval, community centre and museum.”
- “Indoor golf simulator, indoor sports simulator, the 'it' space to snap a selfie (like the red chairs used by Parks Canada) indoor climbing wall, indoor track to support health and wellness for all ages during our long winter (exceptional for seniors and youth) If an excellent space is created, tourism will also increase.”
- “There is land available next to the arena to kill two birds with one stone. Civic building with field house and additional ice surface. A true multi use facility. Including concession on the main floor that can be utilized.”
- “Indoor and outdoor fields, rock climbing, archery range, indoor shooting range, enough that keeps the public engaged with coming for multiple uses.”
- “Make the town & council offices part of a larger facility that house town services and sporting facilities (aka field house).”