

Co-op Centre: Meadow Lake Recreation Centre

CONTACT

Municipality: City of Meadow Lake

Phone number: (306) 236-0206

Email: citymanager@meadowlake.ca

Year awarded: 2025

Project timeline: September 7, 2023 – June 24, 2025

Project video: <https://youtu.be/ORkhCAtDtcU>

THE PRACTICE

What was the issue?

The nominated project was inspired by a significant loss to the community. On June 6, 2021, a fire destroyed the Meadow Lake and District Arena, a facility that had served as a central community hub for over 45 years. The event created an urgent need for a new space for recreation, sports, and community gatherings.

What was the project?

Rather than simply rebuilding a new arena, the City of Meadow Lake saw an opportunity to address a wider range of community needs. The Co-op Centre project was initiated to develop a multi-purpose facility that would provide enhanced programming and services, serving a growing and diverse regional population. This new facility would become the central gathering space for a variety of recreational, cultural, and civic uses; a modern solution to a long-standing need that was made critical by the fire.

The Co-op Centre includes:

- A new NHL sized arena
- A state-of-the-art fieldhouse (InnovationPlex)
 - InnovationPlex provides a dedicated space for a wide range of year-round sports and activities
- A versatile events centre (Legacy Hall) to host gatherings and civic events
- A new City Hall

The initiative both replaced the original structure and created a venue that is designed to host a wider variety of events, from hockey games and graduation ceremonies to tradeshow and concerts, driving economic growth and fostering community cohesion.

THE PROCESS

Who was involved:

- Municipal council
- Municipal administration
- Government partners
- Community members
- Private donors

The roles of Meadow Lake City Council and the City of Meadow Lake Staff and Administration were distinct yet critically intertwined in the successful delivery of the Co-op Centre. City Council provided strategic leadership and governance for the project. In the wake of the original arena fire, Council's foresight went beyond a simple replacement, opting instead for an expanded, multi-purpose facility. They were instrumental in the project's financial strategy and made key decisions to shape its scope. City Administration, in turn, were responsible for the hands-on, day-to-day management of the project's complexities. They ensured the initiative remained on time and on budget, a testament to their effective management. Their role also encompassed widespread public engagement, as they actively worked with a dedicated advisory committee, community user groups, and other stakeholders, to inform the projects design and ensure it met diverse community needs.

Several other groups were deeply involved in the Co-op Centre project, demonstrating a strong spirit of collaboration. Financially, the initiative was built on a foundation of multi-level partnerships. Both the federal and provincial governments provided crucial funding through a \$37.3 million grant, which was instrumental in making the project a reality. Additionally, the RM of Meadow Lake No. 588 made a significant financial contribution, highlighting an important example of regional cooperation.

The project was also a testament to community power, with the "Co-op Community Builder Campaign" raising an additional \$5.7 million from a diverse range of private donors, local businesses, and agricultural stakeholders. The money raised from this campaign has been allocated for the operation costs of running the facility, ensuring its long-term financial sustainability and supporting enhanced programming. The Meadow Lake Co-op led this effort with a generous \$3 million donation.

On the operational side, the City of Meadow Lake partnered with a professional project management firm, Colliers Project Leaders, who aided city staff in planning and managing the project's complex scope. Finally, extensive public input was gathered through consultation with community user groups and a dedicated advisory committee, ensuring the facility's design truly reflected the needs and desires of the people it was built to serve.

The Co-op Centre project, totaling approximately \$52 million, involved a complex layering of resources primarily focused on construction financing. Financially, it was anchored by a major \$27.3 million grant secured from the federal and provincial governments through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP). This was supplemented by significant municipal commitments from the City of Meadow Lake, including essential insurance proceeds from the arena fire. The City Hall portion of the complex was funded entirely by the City's municipal commitment, separating that element from the external grant and regional funding. Human resources involved dedicated City Administration staff overseeing the process, expert external support from Colliers Project Leaders for professional project management, and the crucial work of the design and construction teams.

The development of the Co-op Centre was a fast-tracked, strategic project driven by the emotional loss felt by the entire community after the arena fire in June 2021. City Council knew immediately that a replacement was needed and used the disaster to brainstorm a wish list for an expanded, multi-

purpose facility that could bring more to the community. The City quickly began the demolition tender process while simultaneously researching similar facilities and beginning crucial conversations with insurance adjusters. Seeing a timely opportunity with the fall intake for the ICIP community culture and recreation grant, the then City Manager, Diana Burton, and Parks and Recreation Manager, Regan Beck, began researching other newly built facilities like the one we were considering. A small committee was formed, consisting of two Council members, the City Manager and the Parks and Recreation Manager. The City applied for the ICIP grant that fall and continued conversations with insurance, recognizing that securing this funding was critical to achieving the new, expanded scope.

Recognizing the lack of in-house capacity and experience for a project this large, the City made the crucial decision to seek external professional help. By leveraging a group purchasing contract through Kinetic GPO, the City was able to quickly sign an agreement with Colliers Project Leaders in February 2022, securing their expertise for project management, quality control, and procurement months earlier than a standard tender process would have allowed. Council then authorized the use of a Design-Build Construction Methodology and hired SEPW Architecture (now &Architecture) as the Bridging Compliance Consultant to ensure quality over the final design. The entire process was validated on October 7, 2022, when the City received the formal announcement that its \$27.3 million ICIP grant application was fully successful.

With the funding secured, the City established an Advisory Committee of volunteers, Council members, and regional representatives to ensure the project served the broader regional community. This committee provided crucial input via surveys and during a risk workshop that informed the design requirements. The high-stakes procurement process for the Design-Build contract began, starting with a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) in November 2022 to shortlist the best qualified proponents. From the three chosen firms, a detailed Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued in January 2023. The RFP demanded extensive submissions, asking proponents to provide not just a design that maximized value for money, but also a plan that showed an understanding of operational needs, growth support, and value-added innovations. Following proposal development meetings, final presentations, and interviews in April 2023, the Executive Committee, Advisory Committee, and Council made the decision to award the Design-Build contract to Quorex Construction Services Ltd. Two other submissions were formally disqualified as being substantially non-compliant with the strict RFP requirements. The five months between the contract award in April 2023 and the groundbreaking in September 2023 involved intensive work by the Executive and Advisory Committees, alongside Quorex, to finalize the detailed design and execute the formal Design-Build contract before construction could officially commence. This meticulous and accountable approach ensured the City secured an expert partner to deliver the project, moving to a groundbreaking ceremony in September 2023.

Challenges Faced:

By strategically utilizing a Design-Build contract, the City was largely insulated from the market volatility that affected other projects; most price increases were due to items being added to the project scope, not due to external inflation. The project remained on time and on budget for much of the construction period. The primary late-stage challenge was a minor schedule adjustment due to the late shipping of specialized fire suppression equipment. Overall, the City maintained strong momentum thanks to a very dedicated and effective team.

The primary challenges were administrative and operational and arose after the facility opened. The workload was immense, as the City's representatives on the Executive Committee were tasked with managing a project larger and more complicated than anything they had previously experienced. The sheer scale of the new multi-use space required significant time dedicated to learning entirely new operational procedures and systems. This complex transition meant the City had to manage

necessary staffing changes, including hiring and training personnel for specialized roles, all while diligently maintaining core municipal services throughout the rest of the city.

Evaluation:

The technical evaluation, including deficiency meetings and close out documentation was successfully completed, confirming the facility meets all design and contractual specifications.

Since the Co-op Centre officially opened in June 2025, a comprehensive formal evaluation of project outcomes is scheduled for the first year of operation. This review will assess operational efficiency and full economic impact.

The City is confident the project meets its expected outcomes as the vision was clearly shared by everyone from Council to contractors. There has already been immediate, positive feedback and high usage, confirming the project's success in meeting community demand and achieving regional goals ahead of the 2026 Saskatchewan Winter Games.

THE RESULTS

The Co-op Centre exceeded the public's expectations, providing Meadow Lake with essential facilities unlike anything it has ever had. The new, expanded space addresses a lack of core recreation and civic facilities across Meadow Lake and area and elevates the region's quality of life by dramatically increasing the year-round capacity for gatherings and activities. This project also provided a modern space for City Hall, greatly improving the physical facilities available for local governance and municipal service delivery. The Co-op Centre took the devastation of the arena fire and turned it into a historic achievement for the community, generating immense civic pride and anticipation for the future.

The new facility established Meadow Lake as a premier destination, leading to the city securing the 2026 Saskatchewan Winter Games, an event that will anchor significant economic activity within the city. The effect on Meadow Lake's economy is diverse with on-site retail and concession leases providing direct revenue to local businesses while major events drive growth opportunities across the wider community.

The Co-op Centre provides immediate and tangible support for all local groups, accelerating the growth of established clubs and supporting the creation of new ones. Ultimately, the multiple facilities within the Co-op Centre offer users and residents an exceptional amount of space with endless potential to utilize them in any way they can imagine.

This video, dedicated to the Meadow Lake Co-op for their contributions as naming rights sponsors, highlights the facility and its impact in the community:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLdJ8JE7WBE>

LESSONS LEARNED

There is power in a strong, aligned, unwavering vision, coupled with strategic execution. The core vision of the project did not shift throughout the entire process, which was critical to maintaining momentum, community trust, and funding support. The consistent vision was executed by utilizing the Design-Build contract model and securing external project management expertise early on via the Group Purchasing Contract. This strategy was essential to stabilizing the budget and timeline, successfully insulating the city from external market volatility. The city also gained invaluable experience regarding fundraising and developing successful partnerships with local businesses and private donors.

The most crucial recommendation would be to separate the construction oversight and operation preparation roles. The operational readiness plan should have been primarily completed by the time the 2025 budget needed to be submitted. Having the same contact on the Executive Committee responsible for both the construction timeline and the intensive pre-operational staffing and training phase created an immediate conflict of focus. The City would recommend appointing a dedicated Operations Readiness Manager supported by administrative staff prior to the pre-opening phase to ensure adequate time for staffing, training, and policy development before substantial completion.

It is also advised to allow a significant amount of time for the asset management and logistical planning of moving administrative offices, particularly the City Hall component. Coordinating with furniture buyers, tracking the cost of disposal, and managing the necessary manpower to move assets from one space to another was a major undertaking.

To overcome the challenge of creating operational documents for a unique facility it is recommended that municipalities consult with other municipalities that operate similar sized facilities to share their policies and procedures.