



## Building a community hub: From concept plan to implementation

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YWCA Hamilton recently opened the doors of the Putman Family YWCA, a renewal of their location at 51 Ottawa Street North in Hamilton. The new facility is a dynamic community hub combining affordable housing, economic development infrastructure, and state-of-the-art green building technology. As is the case with many successful projects, planning was key right from the beginning. The challenge with this project was understanding the local context in order to facilitate the development of a community hub from concept to implementation.

The redevelopment site is located at the south end of an important commercial district in the east end of the lower city of Hamilton and is surrounded by a number of established neighbourhoods. The site is accessible from around the city, as it is in close proximity to a number of arterial roads, as well as a planned light rail transit line.



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Community engagement and strategic planning shaped the type of space, as well as determined how the development would fit into the surrounding neighbourhood.

### THE CONCEPT PLAN

In 2017, YWCA Hamilton commissioned Civicplan to develop a concept plan for renewal. Two key components were part of the redevelopment, specifically that the new building would be increasing density to five storeys, including 50 purpose-built affordable housing units for women and their families. Second, YWCA Hamilton wanted to develop a community hub, providing its core services, as well as expanded services related to women’s economic development.

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The concept plan was focused on developing the community hub and was guided by three important themes:

1. Who would it serve? Understand the needs of the local community and stakeholders through engagement to establish a vision for the community hub.
2. How will it integrate with the neighbourhood? Understand how the physical building is situated within an existing and transforming neighbourhood and business district, as well as how it fit within existing and future municipal plans and policies.
3. How will it advance important social and economic development goals? Identify opportunities for partnerships and funding to make the plan a reality.

What emerged from this work were two clear directions: first to create flexible space for core services, such as supporting seniors and childcare; and second, to develop a centre of innovation

supporting women’s entrepreneurship, employment, and training. The centre was proposed as key for building future partnerships with surrounding businesses and community leaders in education and industry, as well as being a draw for women in the Hamilton/Halton regions, more generally.

### IMPLEMENTATION

The concept plan provided a basis to pursue partnerships and funding, including from the Government of Canada. The fact this new facility would become a multi-dimensional community hub addressing a variety of issues, including affordable housing, training, and entrepreneurship, was of particular interest to Federal Economic Development Canada.

Despite bumps along the way due to the COVID pandemic, the new Putman Family YWCA on Ottawa Street, designed by Kearns Mancini Architects, has opened its doors. This active community hub will house women and their families, and it will serve seniors and provide needed childcare for those in the surrounding neighbourhoods. The centre of innovation is a leader in Ontario, providing training and supports for women’s economic development both in Hamilton and beyond. ♻️



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