

What is public consultation?

In the words of the **Centre for Public Impact**: “Public consultation allows citizens to have a voice and provide feedback to inform policy design and decision-making.” “With all the good that can come with public consultation, it’s often seen as an afterthought, making consultations become merely symbolic, done solely for the appearance of public engagement –[which is] not great for genuine engagement.” (funded by Boston Consulting Group, Swiss registered.)

www.centreforpublicimpact.org/insights/a-brief-introduction-to-public-consultation

A true consultation should determine citizens’ needs and priorities and then integrate these into the project. There is the expectation that some of citizens’ input will be acted on, not just listened to. While it’s true that we elect people to make decisions on our behalf, they are also our representatives who should listen and enact what we want, not just what they want.

In the context of a municipal building project, a consultation to assess & prioritize community needs should occur before plans are drawn up, not after as we’ve done.

There is a great distinction between true consultations and simple presentations/information sessions that have no possibility of influencing decisions.

Did we have real public consultation about the rec center?

We never had an initial needs-survey, nor assessment of indicated priorities in view of participation rates.

The **February 2017 Mark Wilkins survey** was based on plans already developed in the December 2016 package, and mainly focused on acceptable thresholds of taxation with a few spaces for comments. And there was never any choice: it was an arena-centric project, take it or leave it, which barely squeaked through with only 52% support for a \$100 tax increase, and a modest 40% at \$200, and a very weak 27% at \$300. More importantly, a significant number of respondents commented that they wanted a project without an arena, which should have been a choice. Council was forcing its own view.

The **May 30th, 2022 report** was based on an online survey from May 11 to 18, and two virtual consultations held on April 7 & April 21, 2022. In addition, there were two closed sessions held for local community organizations and residents living close to the center. But, resident input was based on essentially immutable floor plans that had already been drawn up. True, respondents were asked to prioritize their favourite gym activities, but this was after the fact. And there never was an assessment of what activities might occur in the multipurpose rooms, which had been reduced from 4 rooms totalling 4,800 sq ft in 2016 to 2 rooms totalling 1,850 sq ft – **a 60% reduction.**

The May 30th report surveys were simply symbolic giving the illusion of consultation after the fact; the plans were already cast-in-stone. And the 2017 survey was concerned only with acceptable tax levels. These were not real consultations.

(Both survey reports can be found at: www.laos-village-project.com/montreal-west)
(View “consultation” activities on the Town rec center webpage in the menu to the right.)