

A Community Centre for LGTB communities in Vancouver

**A Feasibility Study
December, 2006**

**Interim Report – Phase 1
Community consultation**

**Submitted by:
Betty Baxter
1697 Lockyer Road
Roberts Creek, B.C. V0N 2W1
Phone/Fax: 604-740-8034
Email: bettybaxter@dccnet.com**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After discussion in the summer of 2006, the community consultation - Phase 1- of the Feasibility Study was officially launched with the orientation meeting of the Project Steering Group on September 21, 2006. The method was approved on October 4 and between October 12 and Dec 20, 885 people participated in 13 focus groups, two town hall meetings, an online survey or a paper survey to make their views known regarding the development of a new community centre for LGTB communities in Vancouver.

Those participating were more than 95% in favour of the creation of a new centre. They want it to be clean, welcoming and inclusive with something for everyone. They want programs and activities to include health and educational workshops, social gatherings as well as art and cultural celebrations for all ages. Some specific populations such as the youth and the transgender communities have additional needs regarding housing and employment. Additional outreach will assist in making the proposed centre more welcoming to people of colour. A housing component and home support programs for LGTB elders were suggested.

Most respondents want a centre to be located in the West End of Vancouver but many also want a presence in other neighbourhoods, particularly the Eastside. Some want programs linked with existing city community centres throughout various neighbourhoods. Over 70% or 545 people are willing to volunteer their time at a new centre. Over 70% said they would contribute to the development of a new centre, 58% specifically offered to help fundraise and over 50% said they would contribute financially to the on-going operations of a new centre.

Participants had ideas for partnerships to help a centre become a reality. Many see a natural link with Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver Public Library, BC Housing and Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Vancouver. They outlined private and non-profit groups who could benefit from partnering or co-locating with the project. They see a need for all three levels of government to support the vision developed here.

The challenges identified were marketing, corporate and business support, a wide variety of needs versus availability of sustainable funding, stable and reliable government support, leadership, unity within the LGTB communities and location opportunities.

Two models are presented here: 1) Purchase or build a new centre 2) Develop a new central hub space with several satellite spaces.

Regardless of the model chosen, after specifications are developed in Phase 2, the communities involved want to see this project through to completion and proudly open a new LGTB centre in Vancouver in the future.

TIMEFRAME AND PROCESS

In early June 2006 I was contacted by Donna Wilson, Executive Director of The Centre about submitting a proposal to conduct Phase 1 of a Feasibility Study regarding the creation of a new community centre for Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Bisexual (LGTB) communities in Vancouver. I met with Donna and Craig Maynard, Co-Chair of the Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Minority Equality (PFAME) Board of Directors on June 19 and subsequently submitted a proposal to them the following week.

In July, Craig contacted me, due to Donna's absence while on vacation, and informed me that the board had accepted my proposal. PFAME would be inviting members of the community to join the Project Steering Group (PSG) over the summer and the project would kick off in September with the first meeting of the Project Steering Group. That first "Orientation" meeting for the PSG was held on September 21. The following rationale for the project was distributed and discussed:

- *recognition of the history related to the quest for a new centre and the work that has been done in the past*
- *to have community involvement and input before fundraising so that the vision is clear*
- *recognition that government and corporate funders have asked us to go beyond the obvious understanding that we want and need a new centre and get specific about content and costs and capacity to successfully develop a new centre*
- *test of what funding resources are available and the capacity of the LGTB communities to support the development of a new centre and sustain it over time*
- *clarify that there is no plan set up by The Centre's Board or elsewhere for a particular outcome. The process is open. Various models of governance may also be a part of the analysis*
- *Phase 1 – outreach, Project Steering Group (PSG) input, focus group and town hall meeting input, research and analysis. Report due December 31*
- *Phase 2 – costs, capacity of community and sustainability, resources*

The role for the PSG in the project was outlined (below) and distributed to members:

- *to assist with defining the focus for the public consultation and help define questions for focus groups*
- *to connect with various constituent groups within the LGTB communities and promote participation in the consultation process (largely focus groups)*
- *to assist with identifying potential models for a new community centre (based on analysis of research data and consultation)*
- *to assist with public involvement to determine the capacity of the LGTB communities to support any or all models (and the identification of opportunities and challenges related to government and corporate support for a new centre)*
- *The facilitator will conduct the meetings*
- *PSG members will promote the process and help connect with groups, in phase 2 – assist with outreach and with building public capacity*

The PSG met again on October 4 to confirm the questions for focus groups and the calendar of activities for Phase 1 of the project. As a result of the October 4th meeting, 3 more focus groups were added for specific populations (bisexuals, two spirited people and allies) and two town hall meetings were added to the calendar. The group was updated on the potential for an online survey to add to focus group input. All members were asked to share the calendar throughout their networks to help with public awareness and attendance at the events of the project. The PSG also met on November 9 to review the progress of the project and on December 11 to review input and model suggestions.

Thirteen Focus groups were held from October 12 to November 30. The following population groups were identified for focus groups: lesbians, LGTB business, LGTB arts, sports and cultural groups, LGTB youth, LGTB health and social service providers, gay men, LGTB people living with disabilities and chronic conditions, transgender communities, ageing and older LGTB people, bisexuals, two-spirited people, LGTB people of colour, and allies of LGTB people.

An online survey was launched on surveymonkey.com on October 16 and remained active for public input until December 20.

Two town hall meetings were held (Nov 2 in the West End and on November 23 in East Vancouver). On November 24, after suggestions at the town hall meeting, 250 paper surveys were made available to volunteers to distribute and a public paper survey was included in the December 6 issue of Xtra West newspaper (circulation 30,000) to encourage more participation. In response to a follow-up email to participants of the November 23 meeting, some participants initiated further distribution of the paper survey through personal networks and 250 additional copies were printed and distributed.

In addition to the community responses, 3 people were interviewed in depth by telephone and one via email response. These were leaders in agencies who had completed or attempted similar projects. They were:

James Bromilow – Board chair for the group seeking to build an LGTBQQ Centre in Ottawa

Cathy Makihara – CEO of Nikkei Place in Burnaby, BC, opened in 2000

Karen Larcombe – Executive director of the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House, renovated facility re-opened in 2004.

Sue Harvey of the City of Vancouver was also contacted regarding the Coal Harbour Arts Centre, but that venue has not had a community consultation process so no further information was gathered for this phase of this study.

Two people sent unsolicited emails with suggestions directly to the facilitator. A letter of support for a new centre was also received from the Rainbow Refugee Committee signed by 13 participants.

Responses:

The number of participants in the various information gatherings is summarised below:

Focus groups – a total of 60 people attended 13 focus groups (highest participation: service providers 10, people with disabilities 9, transgender 6, lesbians 6)

Town hall meetings – 6 people (Nov 2), 45 people (Nov 23)

On line survey – a total of 738 responses (Demographics voluntarily given: 199 women =40.5%, 241 men=49.1%, 23 trans= 4.7%, 19 two-spirit=3.9%, other 9=1.8%, Age: U18=6, 1.2%; 19-29=78, 16%; 30-39=138, 28.2%; 40-49=124, 25.4%; 50-59=86, 17.6%; 60plus=57, 11.7%)

Paper survey – a total of 17 responses

Email contributions and telephone interviews –6 people

Letter of support from Rainbow Refugee Committee – 13 people

Total participants involved in phase 1 = 885

This report was prepared in the latter part of December for review by the PFAME Board and submission to the City of Vancouver on January 8, 2007 (extended from original proposal due to office closures over the holidays).

BACKGROUND TO THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

For well over twenty years, members of the LGTB communities have dreamt about a community centre that would serve the needs of all their members. The concern for safety is still foremost in the minds of the LGTB communities but there is also a need for pride and visibility. To be integrated with the larger community requires access to resources that can easily be located in the community and are visible from the street.

The space that The Centre currently operates from is crowded on the second floor of an older building with no access at all for people with disabilities or any who have difficulty with steep stairs. There is no elevator access. This means that some community members are excluded from accessing the resources they need. The existing space is inadequate for any large gatherings: there is insufficient space and limited washroom facilities. The building is old and uninviting.

As more and more people require the resources offered by The Centre, there is a need for a space where programs can be offered and larger gatherings can be held in a safe and accessible location. Many LGTB organisations have difficulty finding space that is affordable and yet accessible. The resources offered by LGTB organisations, including The Centre, help some of the most marginalised communities in Vancouver and contribute to the health of the entire community. These communities need a new facility that reflects healthy self-esteem and is an expression of the value of the LGTB communities to their neighbouring communities within the city and province.

These needs have existed for some time and there have been many attempts at finding an appropriate building and relocating the existing services in the 23-year history of PFAME. Many Board members have worked hard and “burned out” in the attempt to realise a space for collective community resources that would make the community proud. Below are excerpts from two specific examples in the last decade:

1. There was an attempt in March of 1996 to buy a three-story building at 339 West Pender. The relocation committee of PFAME put together a proposal and offered 1.1 million dollars for the building with the vision of a full service community centre and co-location of many public service providers and businesses friendly to the LGTB community. Even at that time the location of the resources offered in approximately 4200 square feet at 1170 Bute Street was seen as overcrowded and inadequate. The proposal was unsuccessful in obtaining financing for the project. Some quotes from that 1996 proposal tell the story of some of the community concerns:

On the need: “the lesbian and gay community, unlike the more usual concept of community or neighbourhood, does not have geographical boundaries. As an invisible minority, it becomes more important that a focal point be provided for our community to ensure our health and well being.”

On the historical lack of public sector funding: “We have existed for twenty years because of need and commitment. Our community organizations have never received significant financial support from the mainstream.”

On the lack of adequate paid staff to provide service: “With only one three-quarter time staff person to manage the GLC, on a daily basis, it is impossible to insure a high degree of professionalism or to adequately meet community need. With almost 200 volunteers, it is nearly impossible for the GLC to insure sufficient training and development of its volunteers.”

2. The proposal in 2004 for the VanCity Award. PFAME was invited to submit a full proposal for the award but unsuccessful once again in obtaining major funds. The proposal highlights growth in the need and certainly the professionalism in service delivery, but woefully The Centre is still currently housed the same outdated facilities of the previous 20 years. The principal activities outlined in that proposal remain similar to those of The Centre today:

Mission Statement

“The Centre is a community resource providing support, health and social services and public education for the well being of lesbians, gay men, transgender and bisexual people and their allies in Vancouver and throughout BC.

The Centre is committed to building pride and acceptance of diversity and to mitigating the impact of homophobia, heterosexism, trans-phobia and bi-phobia

The Centre welcomes and values all people regardless of race, religion, sex, national or ethnic origin, marital status family status, colour, age disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and the source of income”

“The Centre is one of the oldest LGTB community organisations in BC. It is built on thirty years of service, education, community development and the celebration of LGTB cultures. The history of The Centre reflects a vibrant and dynamic community that has contributed to human rights, economic/social development, and diversity within Vancouver and throughout the province. The mandate of The Centre is to be inclusive and to reach out beyond the bounds of any one neighbourhood or geographic location to celebrate and serve broad diversity within the LGTB communities”

In spite of the above efforts and the lack of success, in 2006 the communities remain optimistic about achieving a new community centre for Vancouver’s LGTB communities. In the past twenty years, community members have seen success in other cities. In many American cities, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, San Jose and others, stand-alone community centres, some in shiny new buildings, some in historic older buildings, are now open to serve the LGTB communities in those areas.

In Canada the picture is not as positive. Centres providing resources for LGTB populations exist in every major Canadian city but with a very few exceptions they are overcrowded, run by minimal staff with many volunteers and sharing space or renting space from other agencies. They survive year to year on specific community projects and fundraising through the generosity of their communities. One exception is 519 Church Street in Toronto - a full service community centre funded within the budget of the City of Toronto’s parks board. But even with an entire building, Toronto is facing overcrowding and a need for expansion as the organisations at “519” provide services to LGTB people from far outside their city neighbourhood.

Ottawa’s LGTB community and their city government recognised the need for a community centre in 2002 and completed a feasibility study to demonstrate the commitment and kick off a business plan and capital fund to create a new centre. Unfortunately, that city’s dream to open such a centre is delayed due to lack of funds and support from public sector funders. In the fall of 2006, James Bromilow, the Chair of the Board of the Ottawa organisation says they are starting with a new revised business plan to attempt again to reach their goal of creating a new building.

Vancouver has a thriving and diverse population, where LGTB individuals represent and enhance the cultural and social fabric of this metropolis. Hence, the City of Vancouver wisely funded a feasibility study for a new community centre that would support and enhance the vibrancy of this city. Phase 1 documents the vision and needs as provided by members of the LGTB communities and their allies in the fall of 2006. This report also outlines two models, including factors such as potential facility size, programming, co-location and partnership ideas as well as specific concerns raised by specific populations. Phase 2 will address the feasibility of these models in today's climate and within the capacity of the LGTB communities.

To avoid confusion in the remainder of the report, the term "The Centre" refers to the existing resource centre at 1170 Bute Street in Vancouver and the term "community centre" or "new centre" refers to a community centre proposed for the future.

THE COMMUNITY VISION OF A NEW CENTRE

There is incredible harmony of vision among all community members who contributed to this phase of the feasibility study. This section summarises the input and highlights population specific concerns that were raised within focus groups. The town hall meetings and survey responses were not analysed with any specific demographics attached although some basic demographic information was collected by the online survey, which represented the vast majority of participation.

In conducting the focus groups and gaining input from the online and paper surveys, the following template of questions was used as a basis in every case:

Question 1a – Do you support the creation of a centre for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people?

*Question 1b – What does a thriving community centre look like?
Physically? Culturally? Socially?*

Question 1c – Where should such a centre be located?

Question 2 – How would you use such a centre?

Question 3 – What kind of programming would you like to see?

Question 4 – Would you volunteer at a new centre?

Question 5 – Would you contribute to a new centre financially (including fundraising)?

Question 6 – What is needed to support a community centre for the LGTB communities in Vancouver?

Question 7 – What kind of centre would best serve your community?

Question 8 – How do you see a centre being operated and sustained on a daily/monthly basis?

Question 9 – What kind of funding and support do you believe there is available for a centre in our communities?

Question 10 – What partnerships are possible to help the centre become a reality?

Question 11 – What other issues/concerns do you have regarding the creation of a new centre?

To give as clear a representation as possible, quotes from participants have been used in this summary as well as a few paragraphs of synopsis of the input. The summary is separated in to the following areas:

- Vision – what will a new centre look like?
- What kinds of programming will take place
- Where should a new centre be located?
- Who will volunteer at a new centre?
- Financing and support for a new centre
- Population specific needs
- Opportunities and Challenges

Vision - What will a new centre look like?

The vision of the community was consistent regardless of how it came forward. A new community centre was supported by 95% of those who attended focus groups, 100% of those who completed input sheets at the town hall meetings, 97% from the on line survey and 100% from the paper survey respondents. The vision had the following themes: Access and Inclusiveness; Arts and Culture; Health and Educational Services; Safety and Support.

Access and Inclusiveness

Participants want a friendly, open, warm, clean space that is inclusive and reflective of diverse identities and where individuals experience pride and welcome. It will be accessible to all regardless of ability or age or culture. Statements to this effect were made in every focus group and in most of the survey responses. It may be a three or four story building but there will be accessibility to every part. It would have a street front access, with a coffee shop and potentially a commercial or public enterprise partner sharing the street space (e.g. a credit union branch or library branch or medical clinic). It will be in a safe friendly neighbourhood with very good access to rapid public transit.

Community members see a new centre as multicultural in its programming and design, with all ages and cultures represented and celebration space as well as quiet space. They see it as a place where people can meet socially at a café or in one of many meeting rooms. There will be formal and informal gathering spaces. Many recommended a café run by volunteers or as a training program or social enterprise and an idea that would help to sustain the centre financially. Some want fitness facilities and showers; most want it to be safe, with lots of light and flexible enough to be used for large events and small.

Here is a sample of responses: “Something open, inclusive and accessible to people, with space available for rental, activities for folks and communal areas for gathering”

“Combination service provider and recreation/community centre”

“Similar to Gordon Neighbourhood House but more space”

Arts and Culture

In the online survey, arts and cultural programs were the number one preference for activities, followed closely by social gatherings. A celebration of queer art decorating the space and cultural events were common in the descriptions of a new centre. Many respondents emphasised the need for a space where events are friendly, open and focussed on non-alcohol related activities. In addition to smaller meeting rooms, quiet spaces for reading, many would like a large space for dances, large public meetings, cultural events, rehearsals and performances to take place.

In virtually every focus group discussion and many survey responses the need for a library was emphasised. It is hoped that a library will house a place where our history can also be preserved perhaps via a section for archives in the library.

In essence the centre will be a vibrant place that reflects the diversity of all our communities through style, values, multiculturalism and inclusive programming. This will create a space that will be welcoming to women, men and transgender people from every walk of life.

Here is what some participants said:

“There is a need for a library, a health clinic, counselling services, legal as well as general, well-being and mental, a drop –in and gathering place, a coffee shop here would be ideal. A community centre that can house a fitness centre would also be ideal. And above all – wheelchair access is a must.”

“It should be a place that can house shows, films, dances as well as the regular centre programs. It needs to be a place where we can celebrate our identity, feel free to be ourselves and associate with others in our community with security and joy.”

Health and Educational Services

Many participants want a full service medical clinic, perhaps with separate waiting areas for the clinic away from regular program or meeting areas. Seventy percent want to see educational workshops and health and wellness programs and activities. There could be meeting or counselling spaces on the upper floors as well as health and wellness, legal, financial or other professionals in the building who offer services to LGTB community members and their allies.

One participant’s vision is: “A centre that is broad ranging and allows all LGTB people to participate and be active as well as being supportive to them as needed... [a] sponsor for sports, drama and creative arts, personal growth and development interests. A ‘must have’ will be a program of support to LBGT people of all ages as they struggle to be

healthy emotionally and spiritually in all stages of their lives. So counselling and experiential classes are a must as we still live in a homophobic society where much is inadvertently internalised. In keeping with current demographics, programs for seniors are a must as well.”

Another said, “Recreational and educational programs, support services, including a phone crisis line. Events that celebrate the diversity in the community. Alliances with other minority groups and other health and social services.”

Yet one more said: “it should be a centre with one-stop access to many resources and info, social and cultural enrichment, development of youth and support for the populations that have needs unmet by mainstream services. It should have satellite programs around the city using existing community centres and liaison with Pride etc. Hopefully it will develop from grassroots and remain responsive to the actual consumers.”

Safety and Support

Respondents want the new centre to be in a safe, friendly area with good lighting and easy access to public transportation. They want a building that is clean and secure with adequate staff, both paid and volunteer, for a seven day per week operation. This centre will serve those who need the support offered but also have programs and events for those who are comfortable in their life but join a new centre in pride and celebration. It will be a fully functioning community centre, perhaps even with a deck or outdoor garden on the roof or in a courtyard.

There will be a good kitchen in the building, both for programming (i.e. community kitchen) and for use at events and celebrations.

Some advocated for a dedicated space for short term housing for queer youth. In two focus groups and the online survey there was discussion about the vulnerability of queer youth and the need for a dedicated space for them for short-term shelter. Another housing issue brought up in focus groups as well as the survey is the need for a housing component for LGTB elders and for LGTB community members with disabilities. Some felt a home support service or dedicated housing complex and full service LGTB senior’s centre was part of their vision for a new community centre.

Comments from participants: “it will be a place where I would be able to feel belonging to”.

“a safe haven”

“I would love to see some kind of emergency beds for queer youth”

“..centre needs to feel secure and not provide a target for bashers etc and should be somewhat low key and private”

“there are very few gay locations in Vancouver that do not focus on drinking, sex and partying all night long. The Centre offers an alternative in gay activities. Also support groups, materials and library are all essential elements to this community”

“A peaceful and safe place that offers inclusive and fun programs, services and events”

What kinds of Programming will take place?

In addition to the themes outlined above, there was a lot of input on the specific programming needed. Programming is needed in a 7 day/week operational calendar and will include:

- support groups, coming out groups, health related groups and services, outreach to specific populations groups in need (whether based on gender identity, race, ability, age or culture)
- referral and connection to other agencies offering services
- current support services will continue, including Prideline and GAB youth groups
- fully integrated health services and programs, including dental care
- mental health services and suicide prevention
- home care services
- Transgender programming, e.g. support groups for transitioning, counselling, a place to start Real Life Experience, FTM drop-in
- Housing support for youth and transgender, hostel facilities
- Lesbian health, lesbian moms, LGTB parent support groups
- Gay men's support groups

- inclusive volunteer training and multilevel support (physical, spiritual and emotional)
- kitchen will be used for catering, work experience programs and community kitchen events
- student practicum experiences in various areas
- exercise or yoga classes, martial arts, art classes, meditation or other educational and skill building workshops will be offered regularly
- book clubs, film and video nights and performing arts will be using the space for regular meetings and festivals
- anti-oppression workshops and educational events, violence prevention
- peer skill training programs and guest speakers
- job search, fax and internet services
- writing, painting, story-telling workshops and events, craft room and gallery
- ASL language lessons offered by trained peers and increased access for the deaf community

- programs for allies such as parents and families of LGTB community members
- queer media

- safe sex and sex positive workshops, sexual health workshops
- dating club
- Fundraisers and recreational activities
- Block prices on things, eg insurance, bus pass reduction with membership card, or discount with food co-ops
- Mailboxes for groups in the community
- Social gatherings, eg shoot pool, family outings and activities

One participant said “Showcase role models in the community – there are lots of them”

Where should a new Centre be located?

Location is a challenging issue for communities that are as geographically dispersed and unique in their needs as the LGTB communities. The only place where the input is unanimous is that the location must be accessible by public transit and preferably close to a skytrain station. In the words of one participant: “the type of configuration does not matter as long as it is central, accessible and safe both inside and in the neighbourhood”

There were a wide variety of locations suggested including:

West end, Davie Village, Downtown, Commercial Drive, Main and 16th Ave, Main and 25th ave, Denman Street, Broadway Corridor, East Side

Many suggested a central hub location and satellite locations for various programs, and many suggested the existing location or very close by. Here are some comments:

“...different locations in the Lower Mainland – one in each city? We don’t all live in the West End! Or want to travel there. It should be a place with staff and volunteers, many rooms for different sizes and kinds of events – we are an extremely diverse community in genders, cultures, interests etc.”

“Main site in the West End but a strong, well serviced site also on Commercial – I really think the east side is underserved because there is no local site for the mainly lesbian and transgender community”

A few suggested a focus on an increased web presence since some people cannot actually visit a new centre physically or may live in areas outside Vancouver. This would increase access and knowledge of programs via web-based communications and marketing.

On the online survey, the majority (approximately 60%) chose Davie Village as their first choice for location. 40% of respondents want the building to be a stand-alone structure.

Who will volunteer at a new centre?

73% of respondents (473 of 665 who answered this question) on line, 78% of the participants in focus groups and 76% of those who submitted paper surveys indicated that they would volunteer at a new centre. An additional 7 % of the focus groups indicated “maybe or ‘if it was fully accessible’” in response to this question. This was consistent across every population group.

Twenty-five people attending town hall meetings also indicated their willingness to volunteer at a new centre. This totals 545 participants indicating a willingness to volunteer for a new centre.

Financing and support for a new centre

Eighty percent of focus group participants said they would contribute financially, including fundraising to a new centre. Seventy-three percent of online survey respondents (486/665) and 64% of the paper survey respondents said they would contribute to the development and 57.7% (384/665) said they would help with fundraising efforts for a new centre. Fifty percent (334/665) of the online survey and two respondents from the paper survey said they would contribute financially to the on-going operations of the new centre. In concrete terms, there are 545 people stating that they will contribute to the development of a new centre and 336 stating that they will contribute to the on-going operations of a new centre.

Suggestions for support included: a major media campaign; make it easy to invest in or donate to a new centre; with fundraising and donation campaigns, some targeted at those who are able to give larger donations. A variety of tenants and rental opportunities in the new building would bring in income as well. A few suggested a business like a bar or cabaret directly supporting a new centre, although some had concerns about alcohol being part of the new centre activities. Many thought a membership fee should be applied but that it should be sliding scale to ensure accessibility to all. A PAC (pre-authorised chequing campaign) was seen as a way to help on-going operational expenses.

A wide variety of partnerships were proposed to assist with development and ongoing sustainability of a new centre. Most who commented on this aspect believed that there should be support from all three levels of government. The majority were clear that a new centre should be governed by members of the LGTB communities. A few felt it should be a part of the city’s system of community centres. Corporate funding or private enterprise was suggested but only with a policy outlining guidelines of the partnership. The suggested partners are listed here:

- VanCity, CCEC
- Vancouver Coastal Health, Fraser Health, AIDS Vancouver, ASIA, BC Women’s Hospital, Transgender Health Program

- Vancouver Public Library, arts organisations
- Immigration lawyers, doctors, dentists
- Vancouver Parks board for operational support– ie models like Strathcona and Britannia with VPL involvement as well
- Support from other city community centres
- In kind donations from a variety of companies or organizations, LGTB business support
- YMCA, St. Paul’s Hospital
- Performing Arts League (PAL housing)
- Various Unions, Police, Churches
- Vancouver Foundation, Greater Vancouver Association for the Deaf (support for programming), Canada Council for Arts programming, Arts Groups ie Eastside Cultural Crawl, Pride In Art, Out on Screen
- Help from other LGBT organisations, organisational mentoring
- Xtra West, Friends for Life, BCPWA, BCCPD
- First Nations groups, UNYA, Healing our Spirit, Vancouver Native Health

Population Specific Needs

There were a few areas where it was clear that specific populations had needs that were somewhat distinct. These were:

1. Employment training and support – these were emphatically raised by the focus groups for youth and the focus group for transgendered people. It is understandable that youth and those among the most marginalized of the LGTB communities are in need of greater support in this area. Among the suggestions in programming were job counselling, fax/internet services for free, resume support, work experience programs and specialised practicums to enhance opportunities for these groups.
2. Safe housing – this need was raised both in the youth focus group and also in the focus group of service providers. Both identified the particular needs of queer street youth for a safe, short-term housing option that was welcoming for all LGTB youth. This issue was also raised a few times in the online survey.
3. Home Support – this need was raised in both the gay men’s focus group, particularly in reference to elder care, and in the focus group for people with disabilities. LGTB communities that have specific needs because of age or disability have unique challenges finding adequate support for personal care needs and housing.
4. Outreach to two-spirit and people of colour – in the online survey there were some references to the lack of participation and welcome to people of colour and aboriginal, two-spirit LGTB people. Some suggestions included hiring an outreach worker and holding cultural celebrations specific to these populations.

Opportunities and Challenges

These are issues raised in the process and are in no particular order.

Marketing – many people raised the need for much greater awareness of the services and programs offered by The Centre and the potential for much greater access to programs and services in a new centre. They felt that people will be more inclined to support a new centre in the community and financially if they are aware of the activities and service.

Corporate and Business support – every focus group felt the need for strong support from the LGTB business community, yet there was very little participation from that sector in the community consultations so far. Some businesses may be willing to co-locate or partner in some way to realise a new centre. There will need to be a concerted effort to bring in the business community for input in Phase 2 and beyond for a new centre to succeed.

There are indications that corporations want to appeal to the consumer dollars within the LGTB communities. This may present an opportunity for considerable sponsorship or partnering in a new centre. Many felt corporate partnership was a possibility but were very concerned that the operations of a new centre remain within the community and accountable to the community.

Wide Variety of Needs versus Availability of Sustainable Funding – one of the unique challenges outlined in the interviews with other agencies was the fact that the people who most need a cultural community centre are the ones who are least able to pay for it. In both the Nikkei House and the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House examples, the board worked 5 to 7 years to raise the capital funds to complete their respective projects but they are in a constant funding struggle to meet operational costs. “People don’t want to pay to rent a room for events when they have contributed as much as they could for years to pay for the place to start with” said Cathy Makihara, CEO of Nikkei House in Burnaby.

In the case of South Vancouver Neighbourhood House, the maintenance of a better building, with elevators, air conditioning etc is much more expensive than the original estimates. Even with a contingency fund included in the fundraising efforts, operational costs are higher than anticipated.

Government support – Every focus group and a large majority of survey respondents voiced expectations of strong financial support from three levels of government for this project. Certainly the need for reliable, stable and long term, committed funds is essential. Thus, some participants in this study suggested the diversification of funding, including corporate partnerships and community support based on the belief that there is some affluence in the LGTB communities that can be tapped for the project.

In 2002, when a feasibility study was done regarding an LGTB Centre in Ottawa, there was a municipal government that was favourable to LGTB needs and supportive of the study. In November 2006, the political leadership in Ottawa changed and now the project faces a considerable period with uncertain support at City Hall. This emphasises the need to have stable and long term government funding.

Leadership and Unity within in the LGTB communities – LGTB communities are extremely diverse in their interests, issues and priorities. Although harmonious in their vision of a new centre, there are a variety of opinions of how it should come to be and who should operate such a centre. Most believe it will be best if operated by members of the LGTB community. Some are very satisfied with the current leadership in PFAME and at The Centre and stated that this group should develop and operate a new centre. Some believe a new group elected from the LGTB communities should manage a new centre. Others believe it should be integrated in to the public municipal system of community centres and run by the Parks board, although this opinion was not widespread. A few believe that a centre in the West End will only serve the West End.

Although there were many willing to volunteer and some specifically stating their desire to immediately become more involved, the predominate view throughout the input phase was –“good luck – this is important, we hope you will succeed”. The challenge will be to create a core of committed people to lead the project through the various stages.

Some are concerned that being truly inclusive will be a challenge and that a new centre will need to respect that some LGTB community members and some cultural influences will inhibit being “out” in public. A balance between safety and pride and celebration may be difficult to attain.

It was clear at the November 23 Town Hall Meeting that some felt the process of gathering community input should be done much differently and on a much longer timeframe than was done for this study. It was also clear that some within the LGTB communities continue to be and feel marginalised by other groups. Although all groups feel the need for an inclusive community centre, these are divisions that will take effort and patience to ensure it can truly be a centre as expressed in the vision – one where all can feel welcome!

Location Opportunities – There may be factors totally outside the process of this feasibility study or of the communities involved that influence the realisation of a new centre. A friendly developer looking for concessions from city planners, a philanthropist individual or organization wishing to donate space or land – these are the type of opportunities that may occur and give the new centre a chance to become a reality. The challenge will be to take advantage of any opportunity and still honour the diverse needs and opinions brought forward by the communities in terms of location and programming.

Participants in the community consultation *want this to happen* yet raised these issues and expressed that some compromises may have to be made.

MODELS TO EXPLORE

Two (2) models are presented here to explore in Phase 2 of this study. Participants in phase 1 raised the aspects presented in these two models except specifics as to size. The specific square footage required in each model is an estimate by the facilitator based on past proposals, programming suggestions and expansion related to current facilities.

Model One – Purchase or Build a new centre

This model is very similar to one outlined by PFAME in the past. It requires a completely new building at 1170 Bute Street site or a purchase or building project at a comparable site. At the Bute Street location, it would require agreement from the landlord and a long-term lease. It would also require waiting-out or buying out the existing leases of other tenants in the building. In 2004 the owners of the building expressed interest in partnering on this project. The design at that time included street level access as suggested by many participants in this phase as well as a building of 20,000 sq ft and 4 floors.

The specifics outlined in the 2004 proposal certainly fit the needs expressed by many participants who would like to see a new centre in the same location but in a much improved and expanded building. Here are the physical highlights of the previous proposal

- 40 feet fronting Bute Street Plaza, 125 feet fronting Davie Street
- increase the size of the building to four stories, totalling approximately 20,000sq feet, including green space or deck access.

Main floor- space for open bright reception, credit union or retail business tenant (café?) or partner, reception area could be large enough for small gallery space as well.

Second floor- multi purpose activity space/meeting space, deck, roof access, open areas showcasing art and culture.

Third floor – community centre space, library, multi-use meeting/film room, medical clinic, program space for other LGTB groups, e.g. employment program or counselling

Fourth floor – community centre offices, and tenant offices for LGTB organizations willing to co-locate, common administrative support services.

This model allows for flexibility with a minimum of 10, 000 sq. ft available for offices for a new centre and increased program delivery. There is flexibility for shared space with other organizations with 5000-10,000 sq. ft. available for rental or partner organizations such as a health clinic, credit union, or public library branch. It meets the criteria raised by specific populations from focus groups for the arts and cultural events and the accessibility to all parts of the building. There are a variety of opportunities for a social enterprise, such as a café or employment practicums with partners or tenants in the building. A further characteristic of this model is the discussion about it in recent years by potential partner groups.

Many in the community want the building to be owned and controlled by the community for the community. If built to suit the needs, it could be enhanced further to incorporate some of the following features as well:

- a full exercise, training, yoga space with showers (could be a private partner renting the space to run a fitness club)
- hostel wing or attached building with home care support for seniors
- ballroom or event space
- a full medical/dental clinic

A large multipurpose space that could be configured in a variety of ways would allow for cultural performances, art exhibits and community gatherings and events. It could be the one-stop full service community centre that many have included in the vision where those in need can live, socialise and get services in one location.

Certainly adding a housing component to the building will add extensive square footage requirements and increase the need for many full time staff and much larger operational budget. On the positive side, there may be partnerships via housing funding and healthcare funding that may make such a building possible to meet the needs of these communities. This kind of funding may not be as accessible for a model without the housing or healthcare service.

This model could be built anywhere near public transit should the opportunity and resources arise. It has flexibility with respect to location and size. These present both a benefit and a challenge.

Here are the words of survey respondents enthusiastic about this model-

“ We need a new building which is accessible by all! Wheelchair friendly, scooter friendly and yet does not have to be on prime retail levels.”

“I see an open, bright, colourful and comfortable design with a coffee lounge that features gay artists’ art. A small theatre for the gay community is definitely needed as well”

“ I see the present building being demolished and a new 6 story building in its place. There would be office space for community organisations and support services, a large hall with community kitchen facilities, meeting rooms for gay

and lesbian groups and room to grow. To offset costs, a commercial space who's profits would go back to the centre."

"a separate building (or a building with other service organisations that are LGTB friendly); wheel-chair accessible; more meeting room spaces (or a large space for special functions)"

"It is a place to meet people, relax and improve the quality of life through programs and activities. The "Rainbow Room" would have a computer internet lounge, movie room, library, video/game/board game lounge, coffee/snack bar, craft room music studio/entertainment room, social activity office and tables outside on the sidewalk. This would be a place where people meet others in a healthy environment 24 hours a day, not just at night...social and recreation groups meet and best of all, it is run by volunteers and supported by local sponsorship to save costs."

Model Two - Develop a Central Hub space with Satellite spaces

This model provides smaller spaces but more flexibility than model one. Many participants struggled to make a concrete suggestion for an optimal location for a new centre. Most people suggested it be near good public transit or a sky train station. Some participants suggested one or two core locations and many satellites. The need for LGTB resources in a variety of neighbourhoods was raised in each focus group and by many of the survey respondents. Both types of spaces could be leased to allow for growth or relocation as demographics, economics and neighbourhoods change.

In terms of the hub space it would mean finding a new accessible space for the administrative operations of a new centre, including some programming and leasing or sharing several smaller spaces with other agencies to ensure the geographical distribution of programs and activities. The Centre does this to some degree now, with programs run in a variety of neighbourhoods throughout the city. Many participants were not aware of The Centre's dispersed programming level in 2006 so this model may require a publicity campaign to ensure its success.

This model may not facilitate co-location with other LGTB service providers, although it was suggested in the focus group that a common outreach office in the hub or a satellite could be used for service providers on a rotational or shared basis.

The characteristics of the Hub – central space would be:

- street level access, open, light, possibly gallery space and library attached
- reception, meeting room and administrative offices accessible to all
- LGTB partnerships possible to share retail/street access space
- Likely 3500-5000 sq ft needed
- Support programs delivered out of this space but less than currently, majority of programming to happen in satellite spaces

- A café nearby or run by partner willing to offer employment opportunities in conjunction with programming from a new centre
- Likely located in the West End or downtown area near skytrain

The characteristics of satellites would be:

- smaller social/meeting spaces used for formal and informal support groups, educational activities or cultural events, each space will likely be 1000-1200 sq ft
- spread throughout city but located near public transit and in friendly spaces
- could be rental of programming office and meeting room in business or healthcare building
- could be room shared in existing community centre throughout the city
- needs to be clearly identifiable as a space where programs are run by a centre for the LGTB communities
- one satellite could be a hostel space for queer youth
- a satellite could be developed for home support services for LGTB community members who need them
- a satellite could be a housing complex or part of existing housing complex with space dedicated to a home support program run by a new centre
- at least one visible satellite should be located in Commercial Drive or Broadway area and one should be located in Main Street area
- activities run out of a specific satellite will depend on the population in that neighbourhood
- programs could be run in several satellite locations concurrently or on a rotational basis once the publicity and depth of programming is widely known. as an example, a youth from the suburbs could access an employment program in the east side or downtown, whichever was more suitable.

Here is what participants said about this model:

“integration is the key word for me – while offering specific services to LGBT’s and referrals to other sites, an integration with neighbourhood and city and other communities are important”

“my highest priority is that is be on Davie and Commercial”

“while we work towards the creation of a new centre we should also promote the idea that existing community centres should have more gay friendly activities”

“having two spaces might be ideal – one for the west end and one for the Drive”

“what about two core spaces and lots of satellite programs”

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the messages of the 885 participants in this community consultation that the LGTB communities in Vancouver and environs are extremely diverse yet hold a dramatic harmony of vision regarding a new community centre for their communities.

There are specific needs that have been identified, particularly regarding employment for youth and transgender members, housing for youth and seniors and outreach to communities of LGTB people of colour.

In so diverse a community, it is not surprising that there will be challenges in meeting the needs to the satisfaction of the majority at least, and in conducting the development of such a centre in a way that is inclusive and draws people into the process. There are the expected challenges of resources, location, scope and leadership of the project. There is also a concrete commitment by the majority of participants in this phase of the feasibility study to contribute to the development, to volunteer at a new centre and to help sustain a centre with committed ongoing financial support.

To be successful the project will need support from all levels of government, and from business, corporate and community partners. There is still more to learn from other similar projects in other cities and other communities in Vancouver. Even given all the challenges and diverse needs, there is, in this phase of the feasibility study, a clear community desire to fulfil the vision and create a stand alone community centre for the LGTB communities and their allies in Vancouver.