

Leading in the 21st Century – the P4 Phenomena City of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

P4 Public Partnership: The West Lethbridge Centre Project Project Description

In a City of 88,000 people in Lethbridge, Alberta, partnerships are a way of life. The West Lethbridge Centre Project – the planning and construction of a new neighborhood with a 45 acre parkland & sports fields site, new public library, and two high schools - is a collaborative effort between the City of Lethbridge, Lethbridge Public Library Board, and the Public and Private School Boards.

This collaboration of four public partners resulted from long standing goodwill through existing joint use of community and school facilities. As the parties initiated their partnership, they developed a charter outlining values and a shared goal to guide their way through construction of the \$62 million multi-use facility.

Today, this facility is home to more than 1200 high school students, multiple sport field users, community groups and library patrons. Working together and building on existing partnerships, the West Lethbridge Centre project created a partnership practice Lethbridge continues to use successfully on multiple projects.



The practice developed is a rigorous Public/Public/Public Partnering (P4) process sufficient to deliver a project with four partners and a \$62 million multi-use facility. The intent was threefold:

1. To create a platform for partnership and collaboration to aid in decision making on community projects
2. To construct West Lethbridge Centre
3. To meet the rapidly growing community needs in West Lethbridge

Although the partnership was established on a long standing agreement of joint use of community and school facilities, it was identified early that this project was far too complex to be established on goodwill alone.

The partnering process began a foundation of reciprocal obligations of good faith, loyalty and duty of full disclosure with respect to all matters in the joint project development. Funding at the time was difficult to access for schools and School District #51 sought to explore a P3 arrangement (Public/Private Partnership). This concept was quickly abandoned for a more community based approach of Public/Public/Public Partnership.

In 2005, the Government of Alberta approved this partnership practice creating a pledge of dollars but no neighborhood. Initiating a community core for West Lethbridge and developing a campus of a library, two high schools and sports fields became critical to the success for future development of commercial, residential and municipal facilities.

As all four parties initiated their partnership they developed a charter that put forth a standard of open communication, respect and shared vision. These values and a shared goal became known amongst the team as the *spirit of partnership*. Through the development of a successful, cooperative alliance the partners were able to see this project through to completion.

In creating the practice, the partners started by articulating their individual requirements. This led to a partnering charter exercise to move from individual goals to the collective, through collaboration and defining of the goal. It described the desired outcome and how the partners planned to work together to meet that goal. This led to the project partnership charter:

“We the partners of the West Lethbridge Multi-use Centre are committed to the ongoing operation of a community centered, visionary complex that will serve the educational, cultural, social, spiritual, emotional and recreational needs of our community far into the future. Through respect, innovation, cooperation, open communication and celebration of milestones.”

The legal framework of the joint venture came from creating the construction partnership agreement. Here the parties agreed to contribute money, property, skill and resources towards the completion of West Lethbridge Centre and the fulfillment of their stated common purpose. This was to be carried out on the foundation of reciprocal obligations of good faith and loyalty and full disclosure.

What the parties ended up with was not a partnership but a joint venture agreement between four partners.

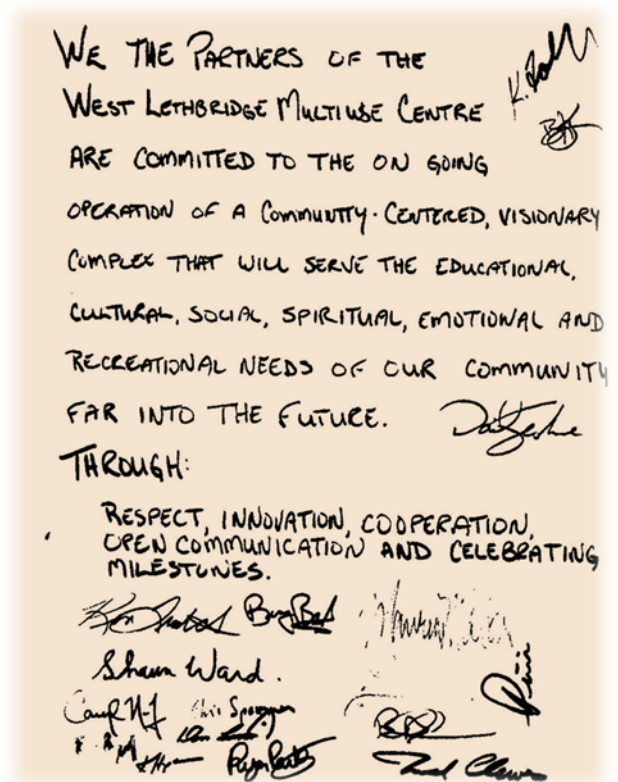
This project yielded varying significant outcomes. As this was the first experience in creating a P4 partnership with a project of this magnitude, key steps in the process were taken to share information. Maintaining the collaborative spirit was done through the Partnership Charter, Steering and Management Committees and the Construction Partnership Agreement.

With the intention to maximize communication and resources while maintaining project costs, most of the practice itself was facilitated by partner staff. This included the partnering charter exercise, communications planning and committee membership. Legal costs and operational costs associated to the practice/project were shared by each respective partner and the facility or land constructed.

Most importantly, shared resources were agreed to by each party. A collaborative extranet site was created and maintained by the City of Lethbridge project coordinator. This allowed for the sharing of project information in a centralized location. Documents included site plans, designs and construction plans.

The main benefit of the P4 Practice is that the foundation for Public/Public/Public Partnership projects has been set. A roadmap now exists for future partnering to assist in building a better community.

This foundation allows for a starting point that results in reduced research time, partnership guidance and allows groups to get to the same place quickly. Templates to start from are now available including agreements, terms of reference documents and reports. These will in turn save time and resources in future applications and build trust in the process.



Project goals were realized with the grand opening of the West Lethbridge Centre in September 2010. Looking back the partners learned:

- The collaborative approach reinforced to our community that partnership does work.
- Partnerships that have clear roles and responsibilities ensure projects goals are achieved.
- Communication and remaining true to an agreed upon partnership charter is critical to success.

The key goal of the P4 Practice remains embedded in the Partnership Charter. As partners we celebrate meeting our partnership goal and continue to work diligently as an operations committee to maintain this successful practice.

The desire to create something as large as the \$62 million West Lethbridge Centre project was held by all as a priority. The group just needed a way to get there.

The P4 practice laid this path.

