



# Beyond the Lake

Kelowna's Path to Becoming  
a National Event Destination

## CONFERENCE CENTRE

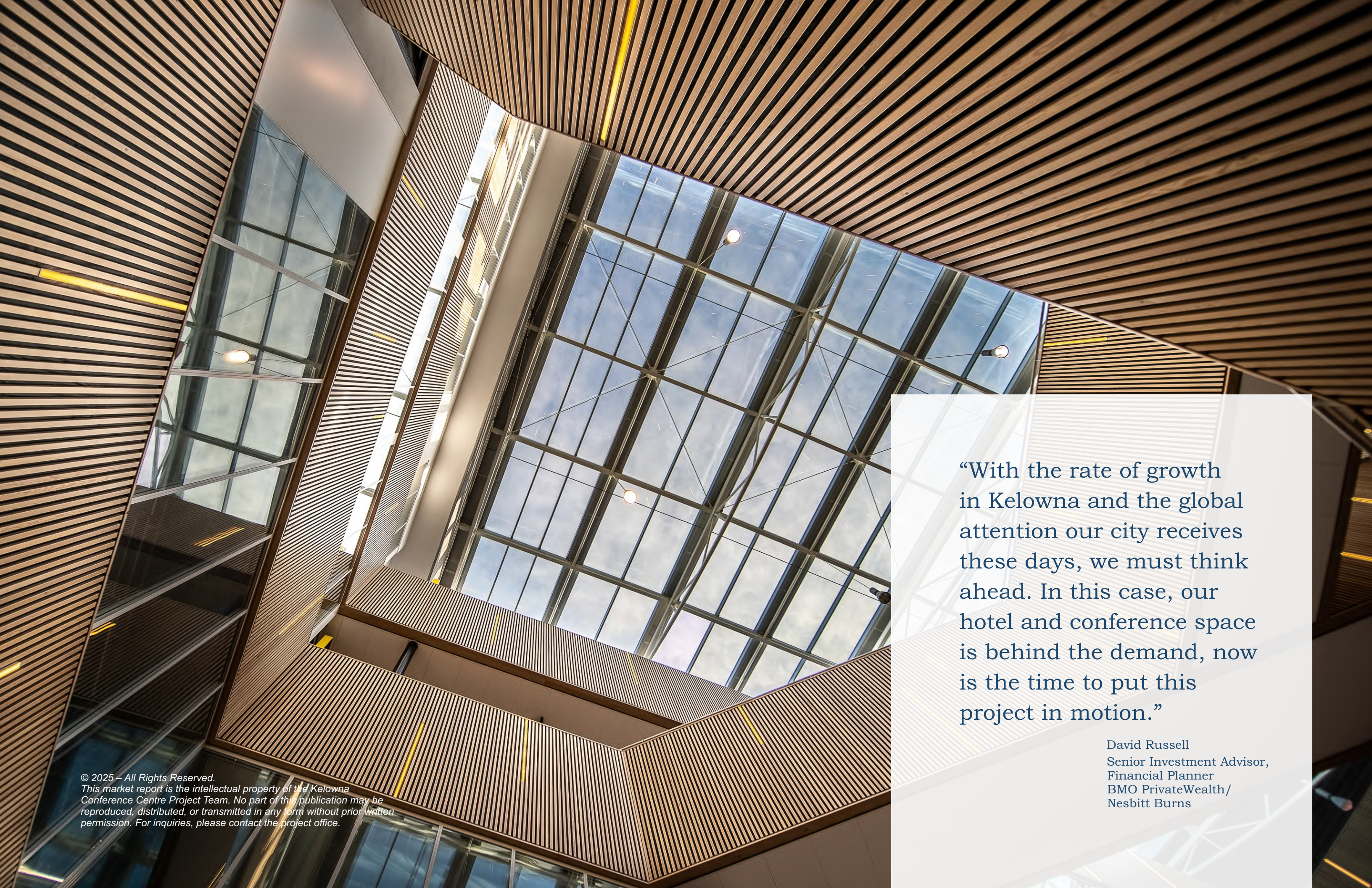
Market Report

Planning Charrette

Session 1

Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada





“With the rate of growth in Kelowna and the global attention our city receives these days, we must think ahead. In this case, our hotel and conference space is behind the demand, now is the time to put this project in motion.”

David Russell  
Senior Investment Advisor,  
Financial Planner  
BMO PrivateWealth/  
Nesbitt Burns



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# Section 1:

## Market Overview & Strategic Context

# Editorial

The Central Okanagan continues to distinguish itself as one of Canada's most dynamic and fastest-growing metropolitan regions. Between 2016 and 2021, the population surged at a rate nearly triple the national average, driven by a vibrant entrepreneurial culture, strong workforce growth, and an unmatched quality of life that consistently draws talent and investment from national and international audiences.

Four-season tourism plays a vital role in sustaining this momentum. While summer offers iconic lakefront experiences and celebrated wine touring, the region's winter season brings world-class skiing and outdoor adventure. Year-round cultural, sport, and culinary events round out a tourism landscape that increasingly supports extended stays and diverse visitor experiences. Tourism generates approximately \$1.6 billion in annual economic output across the Central Okanagan.

**Expanding the region's capacity to host business events and conferences will further drive off-peak visitation – encouraging multi-day engagements and creating valuable ripple effects across hospitality and local business communities.**

To support these efforts, the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission (COEDC) – alongside partners Tourism Kelowna and Accelerate Okanagan – developed the OKGo Campaign. This initiative positions the Kelowna area as a standout destination for business

expansion, industry collaboration, and professional gatherings. By highlighting local leaders and sector strengths, OKGo has helped shape a compelling story about innovation, talent, and opportunity in the Central Okanagan. Infrastructure that supports national and international events strengthens this narrative and opens new doors for economic development.

In addition to tourism, the region's economy is diversifying at pace. Kelowna's technology sector now employs over 12,000 professionals and has attracted significant attention from startups and scaleups. Growing activity in aerospace, advanced manufacturing, agriculture, health sciences, and creative industries adds balance and resiliency to the regional economy, helping guard against global market volatility and long-term labour pressures.

The Central Okanagan remains well-positioned for continued growth. The COEDC remains focused on fostering an environment that supports sustainable growth through economic diversity, talent attraction, and community-focused investment.



# Forward



Dear Readers,

We are pleased to present this Market Report as the next step in the journey to bring a national-scale conference centre to the heart of Kelowna.

On June 26th, 2025, we had the honour of hosting an extraordinary group of leaders, innovators, and community builders at the Kelowna Conference Centre Planning Charrette [aka *workshop*]. Their participation, insight, and enthusiasm made the event an overwhelming success – far exceeding expectations and setting a bold, collaborative tone for what lies ahead.

**This project represents more than just a building. It is a legacy opportunity to position Kelowna as a leading Canadian destination for conferences, tourism, and economic growth.** With its unmatched natural beauty, vibrant culture, and growing population, Kelowna is ready to meet the moment. But to do so, we must build the infrastructure that reflects our ambition and unlocks year-round benefits for businesses, residents, and visitors alike. A world-class conference centre will serve as both a civic anchor and an economic engine—one that drives innovation, attracts investment, and strengthens our community's connection to the national stage.

We share this report with deep appreciation for everyone who has contributed so far, and with a clear call to action: we cannot do this alone. This is a project that demands partnership—between industry, government, and the community.

As we move forward into design development, funding discussions, and public engagement, we invite you to join us. With continued collaboration, we believe this vision can become one of the most impactful civic projects in Kelowna's history.

With gratitude and optimism,

Al & Irene Hildebrandt  
Andrew Bowerbank  
Co-Hosts, Kelowna Conference Centre  
Planning Charrette



"A world-class conference centre for Kelowna won't be just a venue - it will be a catalyst for economic growth, community connection, and positioning our city on the global stage."

Gary Collinge  
Principal  
Unique Hospitality Solutions  
Former General Manager  
Pan Pacific Vancouver

## Executive Summary

### Project Vision

- A proposed national-scale conference centre and upscale hotel located at 2041 Harvey Avenue, Kelowna.
- Designed to strengthen Kelowna's position as a premier year-round destination for tourism, business, and cultural events.
- Emphasizes architectural excellence, sustainability (mass timber construction), and community relevance.

### Market Opportunity

- Kelowna lacks dedicated large-scale conference infrastructure despite strong tourism growth and rising event demand.
- Regional and provincial reports highlight unmet demand in shoulder seasons (Oct–Apr), which a conference centre would help address.
- Benchmark cities (e.g., Penticton, Kamloops, Vancouver, Victoria) show strong ROI from event-based infrastructure investments.

### Site Advantages

- Centrally located on a high-profile 2.76 acre site with excellent visibility and transit access.
- Zoned for high-density, mixed-use development under Kelowna's Urban Centre designation.
- Adjacent to major commercial, retail, and hospitality hubs.

### Economic Impact

- Proven potential to generate year-round tourism, support local businesses, and catalyze new investment.
- Opportunity to create hundreds of jobs and expand Kelowna's event hosting capabilities.
- Supported by alignment with BC's tourism and economic development strategies.

### Integrated Design & Community Input

- A planning charrette brought together architects, industry leaders, and community stakeholders to co-develop the vision.
- The project will follow an Integrated Design Process to ensure collaboration, efficiency, and performance-driven outcomes.

### Recommended Next Steps

- Engage investors for LP equity participation and explore the formation of a community aligned Real Estate Investment Trust
- Advance architectural design and technical planning beyond concept.
- Continue engagement with municipal, provincial, and federal partners.
- Align with hotel groups, tourism agencies, industry associations, and the building construction sector for market positioning design excellence, and operational success.



## Setting the Stage

The City of Kelowna is rapidly emerging as one of Canada's most dynamic and desirable cities. Nestled in the heart of British Columbia's Okanagan Valley, it is a region renowned for its natural beauty, four-season recreational lifestyle, thriving wine & agri-tourism industries, and growing innovation and technology sectors. **With a population that has surged in recent years, Kelowna consistently ranks among the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the country** – an urban centre on the rise, ready to take its place as a leader in tourism, business, and culture.

Despite these strengths, Kelowna lacks one critical piece of civic infrastructure: a national-scale conference and event

facility capable of hosting large conventions, trade shows, summits, and cultural gatherings. This absence has created a significant economic gap in the city's otherwise thriving tourism and hospitality sector. Currently, event planners and national organizations are bypassing Kelowna in favour of larger centres like Vancouver, Calgary, or Victoria – cities that have made strategic investments in event infrastructure and now reap the economic, reputational, and cultural rewards.

Kelowna already possesses many of the key ingredients that make for a successful host city. It is home to a vibrant downtown core, a robust hospitality industry, an expanding international airport set to accept more

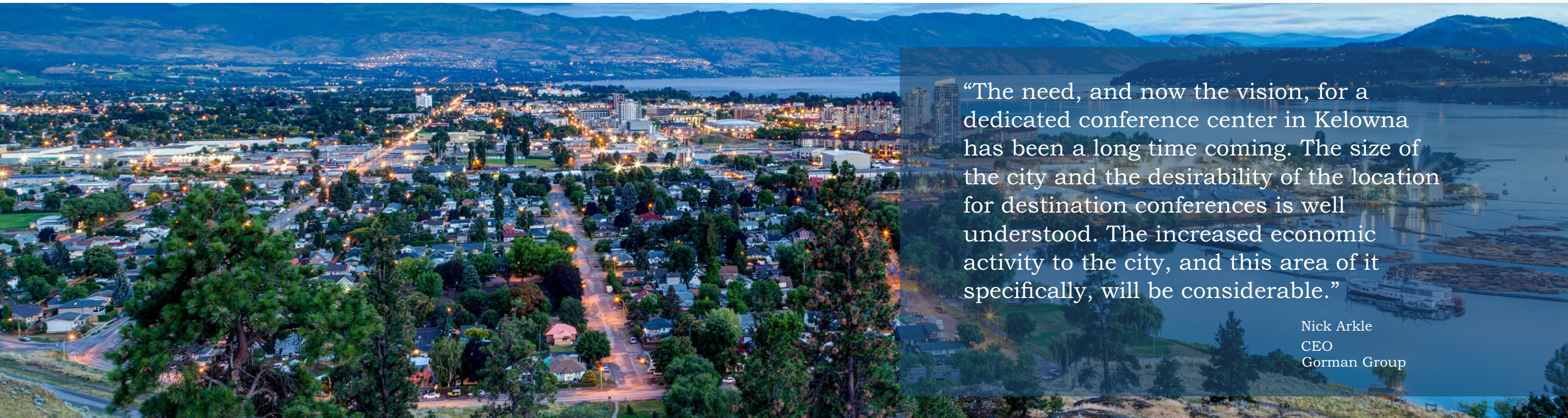
direct flights from major Canadian and international cities, and some of the most iconic landscapes and amenities in the country – From Lake Okanagan's waterfront to the region's rolling vineyards, and the ski slopes of Big White. Tourism is already a cornerstone of the local economy, but it remains heavily reliant on seasonal traffic. A year-round conference and events strategy would strengthen shoulder seasons, support local business stability, and diversify the visitor economy.

### **The opportunity is clear:**

a national-scale conference centre in Kelowna would immediately enhance the city's ability to attract regional, national, and international gatherings. It would amplify

tourism revenues, create hundreds of direct and indirect jobs, and establish Kelowna as a civic and business leader in Western Canada. Beyond economics, such a facility would also elevate the city's cultural capital – providing a venue for community gatherings, arts, education, and innovation, while reinforcing Kelowna's identity as a forward-thinking city with the infrastructure to match its ambition.

**The case for investment is not just about what Kelowna can gain – it's about what the city is currently missing.** With population growth, national visibility, and local energy all accelerating, now is the time to invest in a conference centre that can reflect and support Kelowna's full potential.



“The need, and now the vision, for a dedicated conference center in Kelowna has been a long time coming. The size of the city and the desirability of the location for destination conferences is well understood. The increased economic activity to the city, and this area of it specifically, will be considerable.”

Nick Arkle  
CEO  
Gorman Group



# Background & Site Details

2041 Harvey Avenue, Kelowna, BC

Located in Kelowna's growing Midtown corridor, 2041 Harvey Avenue presents a rare opportunity to create a showcase conference centre that anchors tourism, business, and community life. Its size, history, and central location make it ideal for a project that reflects the city's identity and positions it for national prominence.

## Historical

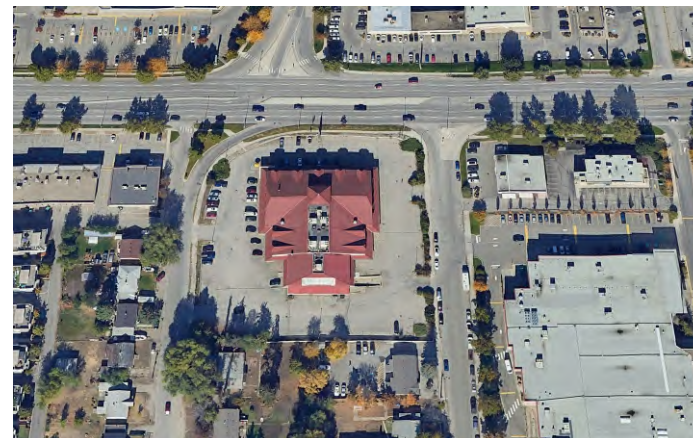
- Purchased by the Vasilee Ambrosi family in 1955
- Operated as the Valley Fruit Stand in the 1960/70s
- New building constructed in 1986 – then among Canada's largest wood buildings
- Previously housed Okanagan College, churches, and community groups
- Home to the renowned Woodfire Bakery since 1995
- Sold to Impact UPstream Ventures in May 2023.

## Civil & Infrastructure

- Lot size: 2.76 acres – 120,226 sqft
- Area designated as an "Urban Centre" in Kelowna's Official Community Plan
  - Zoned UC3 – allows high-density, mixed-use development
- Supports underground parking for large-scale infrastructure
- Located on Highway 97 with future transit related density potential.

## Quick Facts

- Next to Orchard Park Shopping Centre
  - Interior BC's retail hub
- Surrounded by shops, offices, hotels, and restaurants
- Central, high-traffic, and highly visible location
- 15 minutes to Kelowna Airport and UBC Okanagan
- Walkable to 50+ restaurants, retail, and transit
- One of only a few large commercial sites available now for development in Kelowna's urban core.



# Project Vision

From the Mind of Al Hildebrandt

In 2021, as the world emerged from the pandemic, I watched Kelowna experience a surge in high-rise proposals and urban growth. Amid this transformation, I saw something rare – **an opportunity to do something extraordinary for our city.**

A 2.76-acre parcel of land (2041 Harvey Ave) near Orchard Park Mall – long held by Apostolic Resource Centre Society since 1993 and home to the beloved Woodfire Bakery – became available and open to reimagination. After acquiring the property through my company, Impact UPstream Ventures Inc, I began asking a fundamental question: What does Kelowna truly need as it becomes one of the fastest-growing cities in Canada?

Having been involved in the community since 1981 – through business, philanthropy, and my time with the Chamber of Commerce – I recognized a critical gap: Kelowna has no large-scale, purpose-built conference centre to anchor its rapidly evolving identity. While cities like Penticton, Victoria, and Vancouver generate massive economic returns from their event infrastructure, we have not built any significant meeting space in over 30 years. The Delta Grand has served us well, but we've outgrown it. With our expanding population, booming tourism, thriving tech and wine sectors, world-class airport, and major public investments like the new Parkinson Recreation Centre, it's time to add the missing piece: a national-calibre conference centre that reflects the scale and ambition of Kelowna today.

From my perspective, the 2041 Harvey Avenue site is the only easily accessible location that can support a project of this

scale: with over 80,000 sqft. of indoor conference space, a 300 room hotel, and the necessary underground parking infrastructure – all in one location – to support long term success.

But more than just real estate and construction, this is a legacy opportunity. My goal is to ensure this project is built for the city – with the support of local, provincial, and federal partners, and with the participation of the wider community. We're exploring models that allow people to say, "I helped build that," whether through direct investment, collaboration, or civic pride.

At its core, this project is not about one developer or one building. **It's about creating something enduring that contributes to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Kelowna.** It's about turning a once-in-a-generation opportunity into a beacon of possibility for our city – one that invites people not just to visit, but to belong.

**"If we get this right, the Kelowna Conference Centre will not only change the skyline, it will change the trajectory of our region for decades to come."**

Al Hildebrandt  
President  
Impact UPstream  
Ventures Inc.



# The Business Case

Why a Conference Centre & Hotel in Kelowna? And Why now?

## Comparing Regional Markets

A growing body of research – from both British Columbia and peer markets – demonstrates a strong case for developing a national-scale conference centre & hotel in Kelowna. These studies highlight the economic impact of event infrastructure, regional tourism capacity, and competition from comparable cities with recent success.

## Penticton

### Penticton Trade and Convention Centre – 2023/24

485 Meetings and events attracted  
18,495 Delegates hosted  
98.3 \$M total economic impact  
378 Jobs supported  
2 \$M in tax revenue for Penticton.

## Kamloops

### Kamloops Conference Centre Feasibility Initiative

The 2025 **Kamloops** Conference Centre Feasibility Initiative is an active municipal effort to assess demand, funding models, and community impact for a mid-sized conference venue, recognizing the city's potential to attract more meetings, sports events, and business tourism.

Similarly, **Kelowna** – already a larger tourism hub with unmet infrastructure needs – requires a purpose-driven conference centre to unlock year-round economic potential, meet national event standards, and remain competitive with peer cities investing in event capacity.

### By Definition:

- **Conference Centre**  
Private Sector owned & operated
  - Also public/private partnership (PPP)
- **Convention Centre**  
Municipally / Provincially owned & operated

## Key Findings Supporting a Kelowna Conference Centre

*Research and data supporting this segment can be found through publicly available reports from tourism, hospitality, and municipal sources across BC. Contact our project team if further reference details are needed.*

A conference centre and upscale hotel in Kelowna offer a strategic, high-impact investment opportunity aligned with tourism growth trends, and supported by industry research, with strong potential for economic and community return.

### Tourism Demand & Hotel Supply Gaps

Kelowna has experienced strong growth (airport expansion, tech, wineries, recreation) similar in scale to Vancouver, Victoria and Kamloops. But unlike these peer markets, Kelowna lacks the infrastructure necessary to fully capitalize on the business of conferences, exhibitions.

### Economic & Community Impact

- “Destination Vancouver” shows hotels & event venues generate billions in economic value
- Kamloops, Victoria, Nanaimo models reinforce that strategic investments in event spaces boost local spending and shoulder-season stability.

### Regional Peer Market Benchmarking

Kamloops and Penticton both invest in event infrastructure and see direct returns

Kamloops hosts multi-million-dollar athletic events while Penticton's centre expects to exceed \$100M annually in the coming years. This directly aligns with Kelowna's economic profile.

### Occupancy & Seasonal Opportunity

Provincial tourism data highlights consistent gaps in shoulder-season visitation and hotel occupancy, particularly from October to April – challenges that a year-round conference centre would directly address by attracting events, business travel, and off-peak group bookings that stabilize demand.

### Infrastructure as Economic Catalyst

The Vancouver Hotel Development Task Force emphasized that adding hotel rooms and event options isn't just development, but city enrichment. Kelowna can mirror that rationale to ensure long term return-on-investment.

### Strategic Regional Positioning

Without a dedicated conference facility, Kelowna is currently bypassed for major events looking for space to host over 500 people. Closing this infrastructure gap enables the city to compete with Vancouver, Victoria, Whistler, and others for higher-value group business.



# Location

Kelowna  
International  
Airport

Kelowna, BC, Canada

**58** % of Kelowna's current 3,000 hotel rooms are within 3km of the project site – including:

1. Holiday Inn Express & Suites
2. Fairfield Inn & Suites
3. Best Western Plus Kelowna Hotel & Suites
4. Hotel Kelowna & Conference Centre
5. Ramada by Wyndham Kelowna Hotel & Conference Centre
6. Sandman Hotel & Suites Kelowna
7. Hyatt Place Kelowna
8. Coast Capri Hotel & Conference Centre
9. Accent Inns Kelowna
10. Econo Lodge Inn & Suites
11. Prestige Beach House
12. Delta Hotels Grand Okanagan Resort

These hotel properties offer a mix of event capacity and hospitality services to support mid-sized event audiences. **Notably, there is strong existing supply in the 3 star range, but none are specifically geared to host national-scale conferences exceeding 80,000ft<sup>2</sup>.** Developing Kelowna's first national-scale conference centre would significantly complement and elevate this existing hospitality infrastructure in the mid-town area.

**12** full-service restaurants are within a 15-minute walking radius of the project site – well known include:

- A. Joey Kelowna
- B. Cactus Club Café
- C. Keg Steakhouse & Bar
- D. Milestones
- E. Moxies Kelowna
- F. Kasai Teppanyaki Steak & Sushi House

The area surrounding the project site is characterized by a concentration of established restaurants, cafés, casual dining venues, and retail that contribute to a well-developed food service corridor. This local dining infrastructure provides a solid foundation to support future conference and event activity.

Downtown  
Civic, Culture, Entertainment

2041 Harvey Ave  
(Hwy 97)  
**Project  
Site**

Orchard  
Park  
Shopping  
Centre

Hwy 97





## Section 2:

Planning & Design through  
Community Collaboration



The following pages of this report capture the presentations and roundtable discussions that took place during the June 26th 2025 design charrette, reflecting the ideas, expertise, and shared vision that emerged throughout the day.

We extend our sincere thanks to all presenters and participants for their time, insight, and energy in helping to shape the foundation of this project opportunity.

## From Ideas to Reality

### Applying the Integrated Design Process

The Integrated Design Process (IDP) is a **collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach that brings all stakeholders together** early and continuously to ensure a project's goals are aligned from the outset. Originally developed to address the inefficiencies of siloed design models, IDP emphasizes holistic problem-solving, sustainability, and shared vision. For a civic project like a conference centre, it enables informed decision-making, reduces risk, and uncovers innovative opportunities that support long-term performance and community impact. As the guiding framework for the project moving forward, IDP will align design, systems, and performance goals through inclusive, iterative collaboration – ensuring the project meets local needs while delivering long-term architectural and economic value.

### Benefits of Coordinating Efforts through the IDP Process

- Aligns all stakeholders early around shared goals
- Solves design and logistical issues before they escalate
- Inspires innovative, performance-focused solutions
- Optimizes sustainability and costs through life-cycle thinking
- Strengthens public support through inclusive input
- Minimizes delays and cost overruns via early coordination
- Simplifies adoption of new technologies and methods
- Supports funding and partnerships with a unified strategy.





# Perspective

## Building Momentum through Industry & Community Leadership

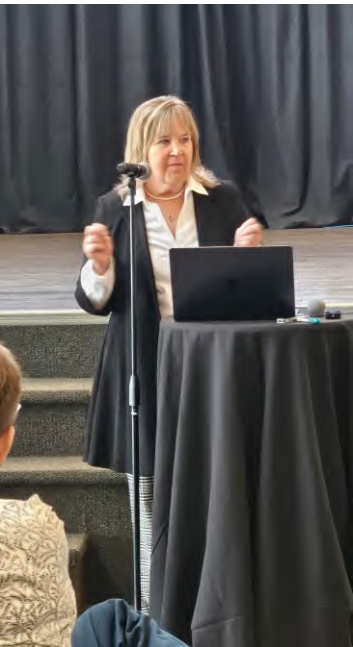
### Ingrid Jarrett

Principal, IJM Consulting  
Chair, Destinations BC

*Ingrid Jarrett is a distinguished leader in Canada's tourism and hospitality industry. Prior to her current role, Ingrid served as President & CEO of the British Columbia Hotel Association. With decades of executive experience, she has been instrumental in shaping hotel development strategy and advocating for sustainable tourism growth across British Columbia.*

As someone who has spent a lifetime in hospitality and tourism across British Columbia, I've had the opportunity to witness first-hand how transformative the right infrastructure, at the right time, can be for a community. Kelowna has grown into one of the most desirable destinations in Canada. Our airport is expanding, our reputation for wine, recreation, and culture is world-class, and **we are consistently flagged as a high-growth region. But we are missing a critical link: the ability to host large-scale conferences**, and group business. That limitation is costing us – not only in economic impact, but in lost opportunity to compete alongside cities like Vancouver, Victoria, Whistler, and even Penticton, which currently outperforms us in group and business travel simply because they have the space to host it.

That's why **I believe so strongly in the need for an internationally branded conference centre**, supported by a 300+ room upscale hotel. These facilities wouldn't just serve visitors – they'd empower our local



economy. They'd generate tax revenue, support jobs, create demand for all accommodations in the city, create stronger ties with institutions like the University of British Columbia – Okanagan, and Okanagan College, and deliver ripple effects throughout our community – from youth sports tournaments to major trade shows and international conferences. Corporate travel would increase, encouraging people to come for business and stay for leisure, supporting our shops, restaurants, wineries, and attractions throughout the year.

We are at a pivotal moment. **I see this as more than just a tourism investment – it's a city building opportunity.** Kelowna has the talent, the vision, unparalleled natural beauty, and access by road and air. Let's build this so we can grow into the next chapter of our hospitality story.

### Nikki Csek

CEO, Now Media Group/Chek Creative

*Nikki Csek has played a central role in shaping Kelowna's media, marketing, and business landscape for over two decades. A past President of the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, Nikki is widely recognized for her leadership in community building, civic engagement, and regional economic development.*

There's something about Kelowna that gets into your heart before you even realize it. For my husband Jim and I, it started with vacations – just a few summers here and there. But one day, as we were shovelling snow in Edmonton, we looked at each other and thought, "What if we could live differently?"

That one question led us here, and over 26 years later, Kelowna has become home, our business base, and the community we're proud to serve. **That's what this city does – it invites people in. And a national-scale conference centre will be the next door we open** for others to experience what we did: the possibility of building a life here.

Kelowna is no longer a city that's just "on the rise." We are here. We have a world class airport, a booming tech sector, award-winning wineries, and universities and colleges that are attracting talent from across the country. But the infrastructure to host large-scale events simply hasn't kept pace. Since the Delta Grand opened in 1992, we haven't added any significant conference capacity. **Other cities – smaller than ours – are generating over \$100 million annually from their conference centres.** We're missing out not because we don't have the audience or the amenities, but because we don't yet have the anchor.

I've been part of committees before. I've seen how hard it is to get something like this off the ground when the timing isn't right. But this moment feels different. Kelowna is ready. People come here for a visit, but they stay for a feeling. We need a conference centre that captures that feeling and makes Kelowna part of their story. Because once they're here—whether for a trade show, an AGM, or a global summit—they'll start to imagine what it would be like to build something of their own here too.





Lauren Macaulay, Principal  
Jarrid Hrupp, Associate  
Arcadis Architects (Canada) Inc.  
[www.arcadis.com](http://www.arcadis.com)



Lauren and Jarrid at Arcadis delivered a compelling presentation outlining the preliminary design direction for the Kelowna Conference Centre.

**Their approach emphasized architectural excellence rooted in functionality, beauty, and a strong connection to place.** Central to their vision was the concept of way finding – ensuring visitors intuitively navigate the space through clear visual cues and spatial flow. Drawing from Kelowna’s natural landscape and community character, the architects introduced early ideas that celebrate the region’s identity while meeting the technical demands of a national-scale conference facility.

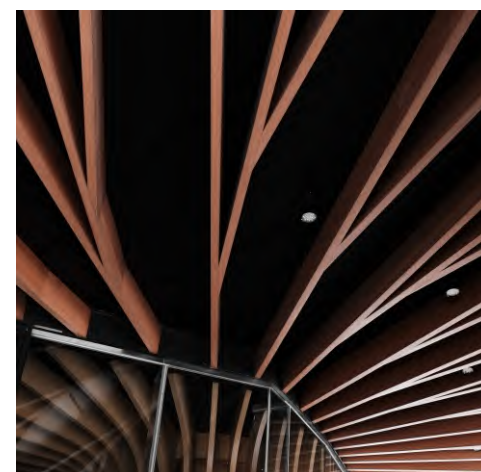
The presentation also stressed the importance of community integration and visual impact. Rather than designing in isolation, the team at Arcadis is focused on creating a showpiece that is open, welcoming, and reflective of Kelowna’s aspirations. Key themes included the use of natural materials, indoor-outdoor transitions, and creating public spaces that invite both visitors and residents to engage. With an eye toward sustainability, innovation, and long-term adaptability, Macaulay and Hrupp set the stage for a conference centre that not only performs, but also inspires.

An  
Architect's  
Viewpoint  
– inspired

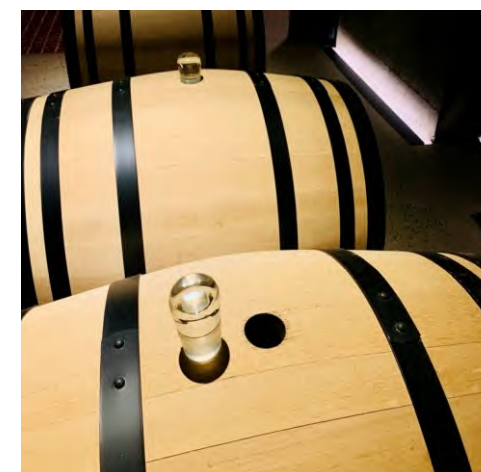
AGRICULTURE



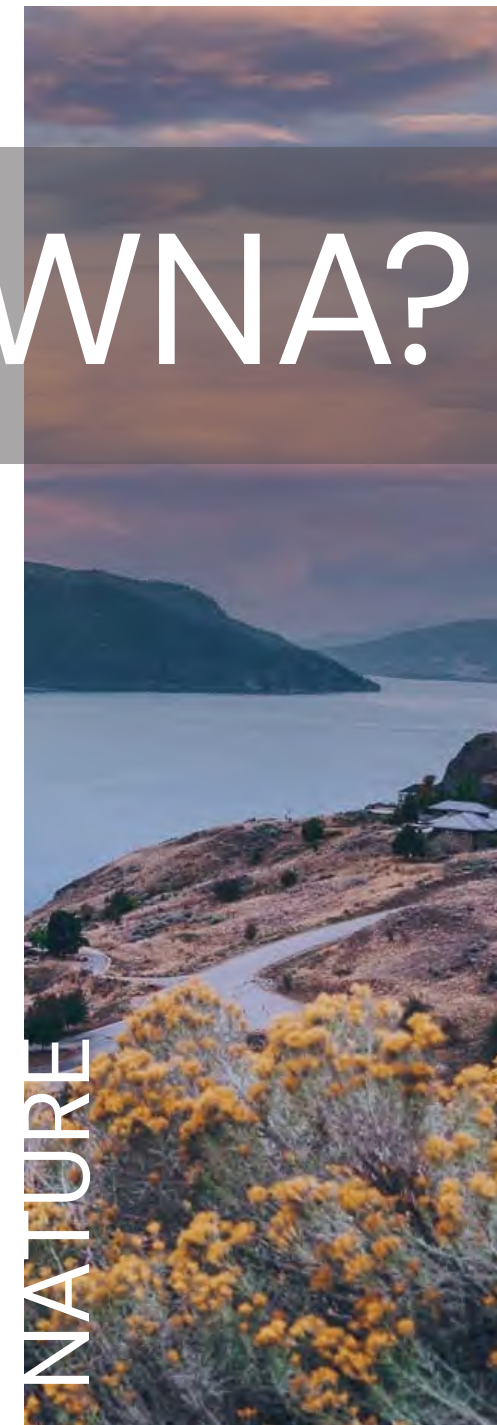
FORESTRY



VITICULTURE



NATURE



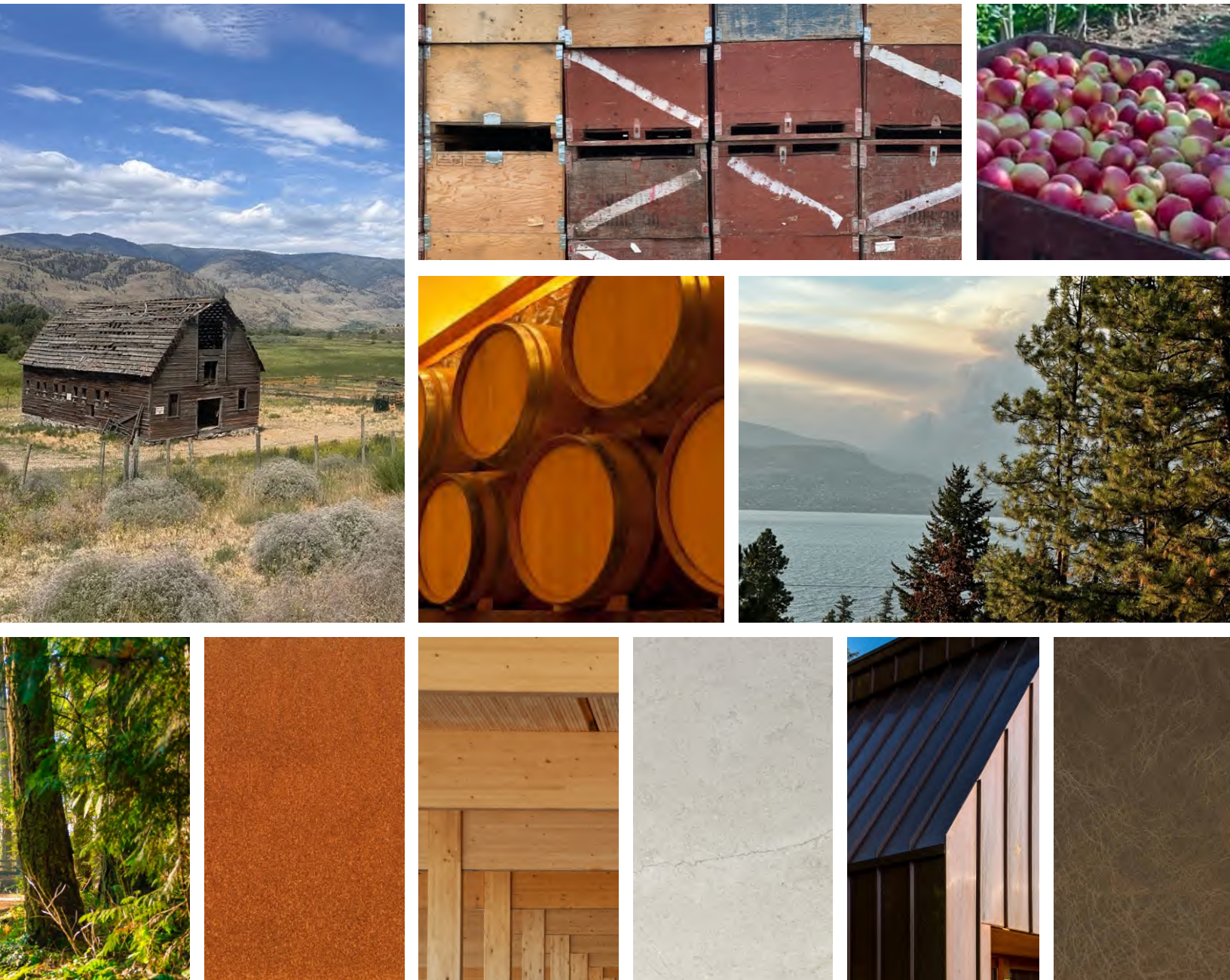
# WHY KELOWNA?



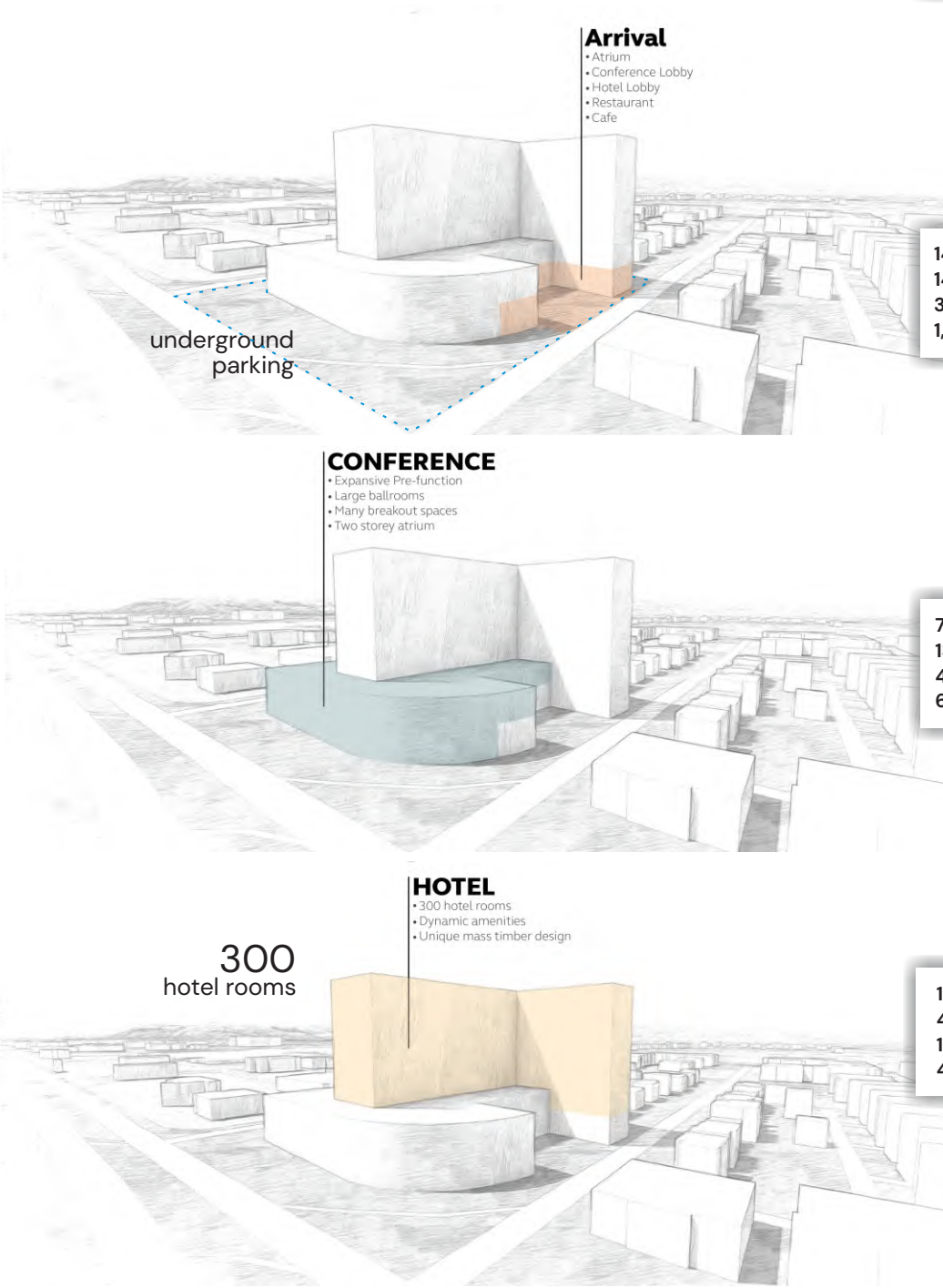


Experience by Design; Conference Space with Purpose

As the architectural team behind the Kelowna Conference Centre, **we drew inspiration from the defining elements of Kelowna’s identity – its agricultural roots, expansive vineyards, rich forestry legacy, and deep connection to the surrounding natural landscape.** The design pays homage to the orchards and fields that once defined the region, the structured rows of grapevines that ripple across the hillsides, and the strength and warmth of locally sourced mass timber. By weaving these threads into the architecture – through materiality, form, and spatial experience – **we aim to create a place that feels unmistakably Kelowna: grounded in the land, shaped by tradition, and open to the future.** This approach will deliver not only a high-performance civic building, but a one-of-a-kind national destination where nature, culture, and community converge.



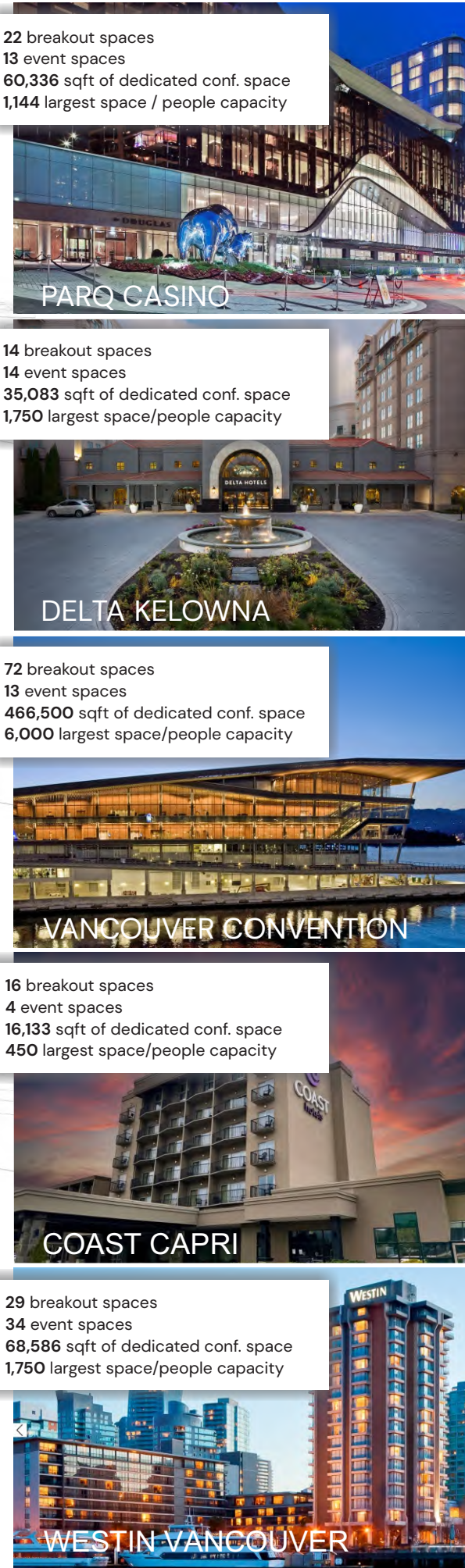
Kelowna Conference Centre  
Concept Sketches – Exploring Space



Project Targets & Aspirations

80,000 sqft dedicated conference space  
1,500 x2 largest space/people capacity  
8+ event spaces    20+ breakout spaces

For Reference...





# Planning Charrette

Kelowna Conference Centre

A **charrette** is a collaborative planning & design process that brings together a diverse group of stakeholders – architects, planners, community leaders, and industry experts – to rapidly generate ideas, align visions, and solve complex challenges.

Rooted in the principles of “integrated design”, a **charrette enables cross-disciplinary collaboration early in the project life-cycle**, helping to uncover creative opportunities, anticipate barriers, and ensure shared ownership of the final outcome. It is particularly effective in shaping large-scale civic or infrastructure projects, where input from multiple sectors and perspectives is critical to success.

The **June 26th 2025 planning charrette exemplified this process in action**, convening over 70 leaders from across Kelowna to explore the potential for a new national-scale conference centre in Kelowna. With double the expected registrations, the event demonstrated clear momentum and strong regional interest in advancing this bold civic vision. Participants worked through ten focused table discussions – ranging from design innovation and construction strategy to marketing, tourism, and community investment – setting the foundation for next steps in project development.

The charrette not only surfaced valuable insights and potential partnerships, it also signaled a defining moment of alignment for Kelowna’s future as a premier Canadian destination for national conferences and global events.



# Table Topics Overview

To ensure a comprehensive exploration of the Kelowna Conference Centre project, participants at the planning charrette were thoughtfully assigned to themed discussion tables aligned with their professional backgrounds and areas of expertise. **This structure enabled a focused yet wide-ranging exchange of ideas**, with each group contributing unique insights toward building a shared, actionable framework for moving the project forward.

The Following pages provide a detailed overview of each table’s discussion points.

- Table 1: Facility Design & Innovation
- Table 2: Construction Optimization
- Table 3: Partnerships & Collaboration
- Table 4: Tourism & Economic Development
- Table 5: Project Financing & Fundraising
- Table 6: Community & Industry Engagement
- Table 7: Heritage Planning & Adaptive Reuse
- Table 8: Operations, Programming & Event Strategy
- Table 9: Marketing, Branding & National Positioning
- Table 10: Planning & Participation in Development



## Table 1: Facility Design & Innovation

Participants explored how urban planning principles, architectural strategies, and market positioning can come together to create a meaningful and iconic conference centre in Kelowna. The conversation emphasized the importance of creating a "fit-for-function" facility that not only supports large-scale events but also reflects Kelowna's unique landscape, lifestyle, and growth potential. **Discussions addressed how to differentiate the centre from generic highway hotels, ensure strong local integration,** and overcome the physical and regulatory limitations of the site. A key focus was on leveraging new building legislation to use materials like mass timber and design for daylight and transparency, while remaining flexible to host a diverse range of events.

### Key Discussion Points

- Urban design should ensure daylight access and mountain views, promoting shorter buildings and varied streetscapes over high-rise density
- Recent legislation supports the use of mass timber and daylight architecture, allowing for mid-rise wood construction up to 12 stories.
- Arrival experience and building identity should balance subtlety with visual distinction, avoiding generic "hotel-on-the-highway" aesthetics.
- The facility should prioritize fit-for-function design, with multipurpose conference and breakout spaces, including rooftop terraces and flexible lounges
- The project must clearly define its audience – targeting corporate and leisure travel, with potential to activate slower tourism seasons
- Integration with local industries (e.g., wine, agriculture) can reinforce a strong "sense of place" and differentiate Kelowna from other destinations.

### Conclusion

The group emphasized the need for a thoughtful, localized design that supports flexible event use while positioning the building as a visually iconic and economically strategic asset for Kelowna. Success will depend on harmonizing urban form, function, and regional identity to create a facility that is both purposeful and memorable.



## Table 2: Construction Optimization

Participants reviewed how to streamline the construction process for a complex and ambitious project, particularly in the face of labour shortages, rising costs, and ongoing supply chain instability. The conversation focused on the specific demands of mass timber and prefabrication, emphasizing that success will depend on early-stage planning, strong team coordination, and the use of digital tools. **It was agreed that this would not be a typical build – it must be approached with precision, accountability, and pride to create a lasting civic landmark.** Delivering on time and on budget without compromising long-term value will require a high-performance, collaborative construction strategy.

### Key Discussion Points

- Early-stage collaboration is essential, especially given the complexity of mass timber and the need for aligned expectations across cost, schedule, and aesthetics
- Specialized labour in mass timber is available in Kelowna but requires early coordination and focused hiring
- Prefabrication and smart construction technologies offer an opportunity to showcase innovation and reduce risk.
- Virtual design tools (e.g., BIM, AI, digital twins) are vital to identify gaps early and streamline preconstruction coordination
- Clarity in roles and responsibilities, with shared accountability across stakeholders, is critical to avoid costly mistakes.
- The project's structural systems will require close collaboration with the manufacturer, but the advantages of rapid assembly times and quality control will make for a very efficient build process.

### Conclusion

The group strongly endorsed a proactive, integrated approach to construction – emphasizing early team alignment, quality over shortcuts, and confidence in mass timber as a defining element. While challenges exist, the group was optimistic that with clear vision and strategic execution, the project will be iconic, setting a new standard for Kelowna. As one participant noted, "It will be a monument for the city of Kelowna" – a lasting symbol of innovation, collaboration, and architectural excellence.



# Table 3: Partnerships & Collaboration

The Partnerships & Collaboration table explored stakeholder engagement and investment strategies to support a national-scale conference centre in Kelowna. Participants emphasized the financial risks of standalone centres and the **potential for sustainable success through public-private partnerships, foundations, and regional support**. Broad community involvement – spanning business, tourism, First Nations, and government – was seen as essential to aligning the project with shared regional values and long-term goals.

## Key Discussion Points

- Collaboration models should involve a mix of private capital, foundation support, and government grants, with naming rights and co-investment strategies helping to minimize public financial exposure.
- Strong interest exists from regional and national foundations, economic development agencies, and First Nations tourism groups to participate and shape the project from its early stages.
- Engagement should extend to regional municipalities (Peachland, West Kelowna, Lake Country), the Chamber network, and youth and academic institutions to ensure broad alignment and long-term community integration.
- The project must integrate seamlessly with future transportation strategies – such as a downtown loop or potential LRT stop – to enhance accessibility and connect with airport, beach, and university zones.
- Concepts like "bleisure" (business + leisure) were explored, including amenity-rich hotel spaces, and additional spots for informal networking, entertainment, or relaxation.
- Social impact, Indigenous storytelling, local materials (like mass timber), and cultural identity should be incorporated into the project's physical design and community branding.

## Conclusion

Table 3's discussion made it clear that success lies in building a highly collaborative and community-rooted initiative that reflects the character and needs of Kelowna. A project of this scale must go beyond infrastructure – it must tell the story of the valley, invite wide participation, and offer long-term value across sectors. As participants noted, this is Kelowna's opportunity to "build the heart of the valley" – a physical and symbolic gathering place for generations to come.



# Table 4: Tourism & Economic Development

Participants discussed how the Kelowna Conference Centre can drive high-value tourism and support regional economic growth. They highlighted the opportunity to create a landmark destination at the centrally located, highway-visible site. Despite its distance from the downtown core, **the opportunity for better traffic flow and underground parking access make the site a great option**. Emphasis was placed on planning for future travel trends, addressing off-season demand, and aligning with local businesses, as well as regional industries and institutions.

## Key Discussion Points

- Kelowna's hospitality market is shifting, with strong potential for near-luxury brands; new development must be aligned with urban planning to avoid infrastructure mismatches.
- The conference centre should target the off-season (October–April) by supporting upscale tourism offerings and improving regional transportation and mobility.
- Economic development strategies should focus on talent attraction and industry-specific programming tied to sectors such as aerospace, agriculture, and advanced manufacturing.
- Community engagement is essential to address concerns of displacement and ensure economic benefits are shared with local businesses and residents.
- Partnerships with educational institutions (UBCO and Okanagan College) can position the centre as a hub for training, learning, and professional development.
- Indigenous collaboration, particularly with the Okanagan Indian Band, should be integrated early to reflect shared cultural values and identity in the project design.

## Conclusion

Conversations underscored the fact that the centre should become more than just a meeting venue – it must be a visible symbol of Kelowna's regional leadership in sustainability, culture, and innovation. Investing in bold, iconic architecture and thoughtful programming will position the centre as a key destination for both economic development and tourism. With a strong brand narrative, community involvement, and strategic partnerships, the project can meaningfully shape Kelowna's future as a national destination.





Table 6:  
Community & Industry Engagement

Table 6 discussions explored how the Kelowna Conference Centre can serve both national event needs and the local community. With size limitations at existing venues, the group stressed the need for a larger, more flexible space. They **emphasized balancing high-profile functionality with local relevance** through inclusive messaging, accessible design, and integration with regional culture and industries.

Key Discussion Points

- Demand & Missed Opportunities: Kelowna has outgrown existing venues like the Delta Grand, leading to lost bids for national events. A new, larger facility would unlock the ability to regularly host major conferences.
- Inclusive Access & Perception: Strong emphasis was placed on ensuring the facility does not feel exclusive to visitors. Locals must see themselves reflected in the space and its programming, supported by clear, inclusive storytelling.
- Local Usage: The centre could serve key community needs – graduations, galas, and awards ceremonies – many of which currently lack suitable venues in the region.
- Community Integration Strategies: Recommendations included offering local group discounts, prioritizing farm-to-table partnerships, and incorporating Kelowna’s food and wine culture into the event experience.
- Design, Location & Identity: The Midtown location’s current aesthetics are a challenge, but stakeholders saw potential for the centre to catalyze area revitalization through iconic, place-making design and a bold architectural vision.
- Cultural & Civic Partnerships: The centre must reflect Indigenous and settler histories and serve as a truly inclusive space. Engaging local philanthropists and visibly contributing to civic and cultural life were flagged as critical.

Conclusion

Community engagement must be embedded in every phase of the project – from design and operations to programming and outreach. If done with care and transparency, the centre could unify economic development goals with civic and cultural impact, becoming not just a facility, but a valued landmark for residents across the Okanagan region.



Table 5:  
Project Financing & Fundraising

Participants at this table explored the financial vision, capital strategies, and stakeholder models needed to realize the Kelowna Conference Centre project. Capital structuring options were reviewed including LPs, institutional financing, government grants, and public-private partnerships. Long-term risks – such as delayed revenue generation, market volatility, and operational complexity – were balanced by opportunities for tax optimization, investor engagement, and iconic, experience-driven placemaking. **The goal is to ensure financial feasibility while maximizing community benefit and investor confidence.**

Key Discussion Points

- Layered Financing Approach: Recommended a phased strategy beginning with limited partnerships (LP), followed by institutional capital (i.e. pension funds), public-sector contributions, and future refinancing through REITs or bank debt.
- Government Support & Incentives: Explored municipal, provincial, and federal support, with a focus on green building grants, mass timber subsidies, and possible tax concessions or forgivable loans.
- Market-Fit Architecture: Emphasized the importance of designing an iconic, right-sized facility that aligns with long-term regional demand and creates a lasting identity for Kelowna.
- Anchor Partnerships: Highlighted the need for early commitment from major hotel operators (i.e. Marriott, Hilton, Hyatt) to increase financing credibility and secure long-term revenue.
- Community Integration & Local Value: Advocated for partnerships with UBCO, Okanagan College, local businesses, and Indigenous communities to deepen regional alignment and enhance workforce development.
- Cash Flow Management: Identified a 5+ year revenue delay and stressed investor incentives via tax benefits in the early loss years, along with diversified income streams from retail, dining, and events.

Conclusion

The group agreed the project’s financial success hinges on strategic staging, transparency, and securing early anchor partners to mitigate investor risk. A bold, community-driven vision paired with thoughtful structuring can attract both capital and public trust. If executed correctly, the centre could become a regional economic catalyst and national example of public-private collaboration in placemaking.





## Table 7: Heritage Planning & Adaptive Reuse

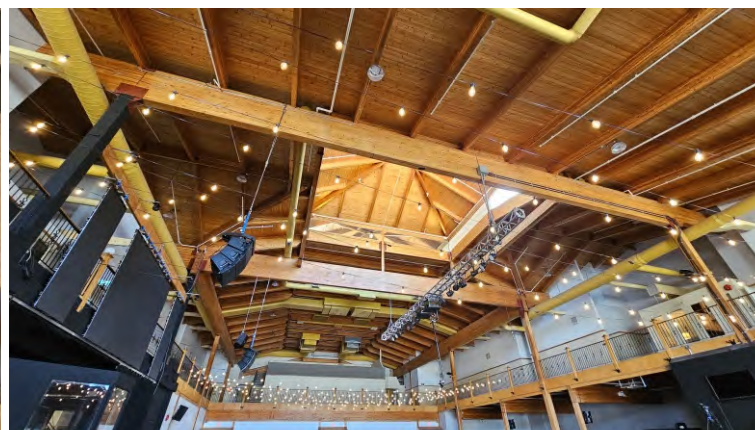
Participants explored how the salvaged timber from 2041 Harvey Avenue building can be repurposed to celebrate Kelowna's architectural heritage while promoting sustainable development. The existing building, constructed in 1986, was one of Canada's largest commercial wood buildings at the time. The discussion emphasized opportunities to meaningfully integrate some of the historical "LVL" beams and light-wood material into either the new Kelowna Conference Centre or other public-facing projects across the city. **Participants viewed the adaptive reuse of these components as a tangible way to connect past and future, reinforcing community identity and advancing a circular approach to construction materials.**

### Key Discussion Points

- Integrate salvaged timber into curtain wall mullions or non-structural architectural finishes after appropriate certification.
- Repurpose wood for expressive features such as front desk furniture, interior partitions, feature flooring, and hotel elements like benches or headboards.
- Use elements in highly visible locations such as a future event centre canopy to establish a symbolic link to the site's history.
- Donate timber for community amenities in local parks (e.g., benches, gazebos) or public spaces across the region.
- Share materials with wineries, breweries, or fruit stands to create storytelling opportunities rooted in Kelowna's past.
- Explore circular reuse by contributing timber to local manufacturers or applying it in solar canopy structures that merge heritage with innovation.

### Conclusion

The group agreed that the reclaimed timber holds both practical and symbolic value, offering a rare opportunity to embed local narrative and environmental stewardship directly into the built environment. By thoughtfully integrating this material, Kelowna can demonstrate leadership in heritage-informed, low-carbon development.



## Table 8: Operations, Programming & Event Strategy

Table 8 explored how the Kelowna Conference Centre (KCC) can deliver an inclusive, dynamic, and financially sustainable experience through strategic programming, design, and operations. Participants agreed the centre must prioritize both large-scale conferences and frequent community use to keep the space active year-round. Flexibility is key – event rooms should include movable partitions and breakout areas to accommodate everything from AGMs and student gatherings to high-end galas and industry trade shows. **Participants also emphasized that successful operation goes beyond programming;** it must offer a curated visitor experience that includes retail, expert-led concierge services, and integration with the region's identity – particularly through food, wine, and access to nature.

### Key Discussion Points

- Versatile Programming: Prioritize frequent, smaller events alongside large conferences – such as AGMs, corporate board meetings, student events, and nonprofit galas – to ensure the space stays busy and accessible.
- Flexible Design: Incorporate soundproof partitions and breakout spaces to allow for multiple simultaneous events and better acoustics.
- High-End Visitor Experience: Partner with a strong hotel brand, offer luxury amenities like local wine tastings, curated tours, and premium concierge services that reflect Kelowna's distinctiveness.
- Retail and Food Services: Include local artisan shops, quality food offerings, and co-working-friendly cafés that support both delegates and the broader community.
- Operational Independence: While hotel and conference components should collaborate, they can operate as distinct entities to optimize financial outcomes and user flexibility.
- Educational and Community Integration: Strengthen ties with institutions like UBCO and Okanagan College, offering shared space and collaborative programming to reinforce public value.

### Conclusion

Participants recognized that **a successful project of this nature must balance national appeal with local relevance** – offering both a premier event destination and a community gathering place. By combining thoughtful operations, flexible infrastructure, and regionally rooted experiences, the centre can achieve long-term economic impact and visitor satisfaction. The key is to “show, not tell” – designing a place that embodies the Kelowna story.



## Table 9

### Marketing, Branding & National Positioning



Participants discussed how the future conference centre can shape a compelling brand identity that positions Kelowna as a premier mid-market destination for national and international events. The core narrative – “our story is Kelowna” – centres on the beauty of Syilx/Okanagan land, cultural depth, and an outdoor-driven lifestyle. **To stand out, the brand must combine this sense of place with a clear value proposition: offering more affordability than Vancouver while still delivering premium amenities, access, and experience.**

Success will require close collaboration with partners across the tourism and hospitality eco-system, including hotels, wineries, golf courses, ski resorts, Indigenous tourism, and the airport to create integrated, memorable journeys for event delegates throughout the year.

#### Key Discussion Points

- **Core Story & Identity:** Ground the brand in Kelowna’s landscape, and inclusive community vibe; keep the message simple and authentic,
- **Iconic Yet Accessible Offer:** Pair striking architecture and generous space with “medium-city” affordability to attract national associations seeking value without sacrificing experience.
- **Partnership Network:** Leverage local and national tourism agencies, hotel chains, Big White Ski Resort, golf courses, wineries, academia and airport (YLW) to co-market bundled itineraries and loyalty programs.
- **Digital-First Marketing:** Use coordinated campaigns, ambassador programs, and storytelling content to reach planners, talent, and delegates.
- **Year-Round Market Focus:** Target shoulder-season conferences and “bleisure” travellers by promoting proximity to outdoor activities and the farm-to-table culture.
- **Community Alignment:** Communicate local benefits clearly – jobs, training, and cultural programming – to maintain civic support and reassure stakeholders about downstream impacts.

#### Conclusion

The group emphasized that Kelowna already has strong brand equity; the task is to sharpen and amplify it through a unified story, bold design, and coordinated partnerships. By balancing national appeal with local identity, the centre can become a signature destination that grows visitation, investment, and community pride without losing the region’s distinctive sense of place.

## Table 10

### Planning & Participation in Project Development

The table conversation focused on how to build city-wide ownership of the Kelowna Conference Centre by engaging business, philanthropic, and investment communities in the project’s planning and positioning. Discussions emphasized the framing of a story around a “legacy” project – with lasting social, cultural, and economic benefits – that can unify interest groups across diverse sectors and neighborhoods. **A strong, representative leadership team and meaningful business involvement will be essential** to demonstrating shared value, reinforcing community identity, and generating broad-based support. The group also explored how the project can **attract large-scale funding by aligning local priorities with national investment goals** around innovation, sustainability, and economic development.

#### Key Discussion Points

- **Unified Leadership:** Establish a leadership team with industry, provincial and federal representatives to drive credibility and cohesion.
- **City-wide Engagement:** Involve neighbourhood voices to ensure the project resonates across the community.
- **Business Participation:** Offer recognition and benefits to businesses that contribute to or support the project, fostering a sense of ownership.
- **Pre/Post Event Activation:** Plan activities around conferences that draw visitors into the broader community and showcase local culture and services.
- **Investment Positioning:** Use demonstrated demand for national events to show market viability and attract both public and private investment.
- **Alignment with Values:** Present the centre as a future-focused, sustainable, and inclusive asset aligned with Kelowna’s identity and long-term growth.

#### Conclusion

Table participants agreed that strong early leadership and visible community participation will be critical to the project’s long-term success. By anchoring the project in shared values and showcasing its city-wide impact, Kelowna can secure both local buy-in and significant outside investment.





## Next Steps

### Concluding Remarks

The June 26th charrette marked a pivotal milestone in shaping the foundational vision for the Kelowna Conference Centre, and now sets the stage for advancing into the next critical phases of development.

Key priorities moving forward include establishing a **General Partner/Limited Partner (GP/LP) investment structure to facilitate equity participation**, targeting long-term impact investors, institutional capital, and engaged local business leaders committed to positioning Kelowna as a premier national destination for business, tourism, and cultural events.

To expand public engagement and broaden the funding base, the project team is also exploring the formation of a dedicated Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT), which would allow individual and community-level contributions while offering a professionally managed, transparent investment vehicle.

Concurrently, detailed architectural and engineering design work will proceed in alignment with the insights gathered through the charrette's "Integrated Design Process". This includes refining building massing, programming, and technical systems to meet the project's operational goals and community expectations.

**Advisory groups** – comprised of local leaders, tourism and hospitality experts, sustainability professionals, and Indigenous representatives – **will be formalized to provide ongoing guidance** and ensure inclusive, balanced decision-making throughout the process.

**Collaboration with the City of Kelowna is also a top priority**, particularly to address zoning, traffic, and alignment with local planning policies. The project site at 2041 Harvey Avenue offers significant development potential under existing C4 zoning and the Urban Centre designation, but success will require close coordination with municipal departments to ensure timelines are met and community interests are upheld. Meanwhile, outreach to provincial and federal governments is already underway to secure funding support, identify infrastructure partnerships, and align the project with broader economic and tourism strategies.

Finally, the project team will work hand-in-hand with regional tourism associations, hotel/motel operators, the travel industry, and economic development offices to ensure the development integrates into the wider visitor economy. **We will also begin evaluating and engaging with leading hotel brands to identify the most suitable partner to represent the upscale hotel component of the project.**

The goal is to establish Kelowna as a competitive, year-round conference destination that enhances local business, cultural exchange, and international recognition. These next steps will form the foundation for a showcase project that not only reflects Kelowna's growth and ambition, but also generates long-term economic, social, and environmental value.

Insurance plays a vital role in enabling the success of mass timber projects like the envisioned Kelowna Conference Centre. As a high-profile legacy initiative rooted in innovation, sustainability, and architectural ambition, this project requires thoughtful risk management from the outset of the recommissioning of the existing building and construction of the next. Mass timber, while proven and increasingly adopted, presents unique considerations, such as fire performance, moisture protection, and off-site prefabrication logistics, that insurers must address with precision and foresight.

Andrew Pecnik from our Axis Insurance Construction team and I had the pleasure to participate in the initial early discussions with community leaders, which offered a valuable opportunity to contribute to proactive planning and cross-sector collaboration. **It's deeply rewarding to help lay the foundations, both literally and figuratively for a structure that honours the forest, the land, and the communities who call it home.** This centre will stand as a symbol of Kelowna's future-forward vision, and we are proud to support a project that blends design excellence with long-term resilience.

**Connie Rowley**

Senior Vice President  
Manufacturing & Mass Timber Program  
Axis Insurance





# Project Leadership



## Al Hildebrandt

Al Hildebrandt is the property owner & developer of 2041 Harvey Ave. His vision for the project is rooted in sustainability, architectural excellence, and community inclusion. He has assembled a trusted team of partners and professionals with the expertise needed to deliver a project that reflects the best of Kelowna – its natural beauty, its entrepreneurial energy, and its capacity to host national and international gatherings.

Al is a seasoned entrepreneur, investor, and community builder whose career has been defined by innovation, long-term vision, and an unwavering commitment to the city of Kelowna. As the founder and CEO of QHR Technologies (TSX-V: QHR) – a Canadian leader in digital health software – Al helped pioneer one of the country’s most successful tech companies, culminating in its acquisition by Loblaw/Shoppers Drug Mart in 2016. Under his leadership, QHR grew from a local startup into a national enterprise, bringing high-quality jobs and economic momentum to Kelowna’s emerging tech sector.

Following this success, Al shifted his focus from technology to community impact, establishing Impact UPstream Ventures Inc. as a vehicle to invest in projects that drive long-term value for Kelowna and British Columbia. With a strong belief in the city’s potential as a destination for business, innovation, and tourism, Al has committed himself to the redevelopment of the 2041 Harvey Ave property into a world-class, mass timber conference centre and hotel – a legacy project that represents his enduring contribution to the region’s economic and civic life.

A long-time resident of Kelowna, Al continues to mentor local entrepreneurs, support regional economic development initiatives, and advocate for projects that leave a lasting positive impact. The proposed conference centre is not just a development – it is a personal mission to create a meaningful legacy for future generations in a city he has helped shape and believes in deeply.



## Andrew Bowerbank

This report was written, designed, and published by Andrew Bowerbank, who also served as the lead planner and facilitator for the June 26th Kelowna Conference Centre Charrette. Working closely with Al Hildebrandt, Andrew is collaborating with public and private sector leaders to help Al shape a long-term vision for the project that delivers both community and economic impact.

Andrew is a nationally recognized figure in Canada’s building and construction sector. His career has spanned leadership roles at prominent companies and agencies including CEO of the World Green Building Council, Vice President at WSP Canada, Vice President at the Canadian Wood Council, Special Advisor to Magna International, and Global Director at EllisDon Corp; he has also served as a Member Representative to the United Nations. Andrew is currently CEO at Cetana Group and Executive Director of the Prefab Buildings Initiative. He is a published author and sought-after international keynote speaker, known for advancing innovation, sustainability, and collaboration across the built environment.

# Acknowledgements

## Presenters

We extend our heartfelt thanks to each of the speakers who participated in the charrette for their time, expertise, and effort in preparing thoughtful and compelling presentations. Your insights set the tone for meaningful dialogue and helped shape the collaborative spirit of the day. Your contributions were essential to the success of the event, and we are grateful for your support.

Ingrid Jarrette   Nikki Csek   Lauren MacCaulay   Jarrid Hrupp

## Notetakers

This report would not have been possible without the generous volunteer efforts of the dedicated notetakers who supported each table discussion at the charrette. Their careful attention, thoughtful documentation, and commitment to capturing the voices and ideas shared throughout the day played a vital role in shaping this collective vision. We extend our sincere appreciation for their time, professionalism, and valuable contribution to this important project.

|                       |                |                  |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Renate Amadio Escodro | Sofia Cullen   | Jarrid Hrupp     |
| Andrea Cashol         | Dustin Doff    | Lindsay Marshall |
| Caroline Coudreau     | Isabelle Heard | Keala Morazain   |
|                       |                | Ronan Woodroffe  |

## Community Leadership

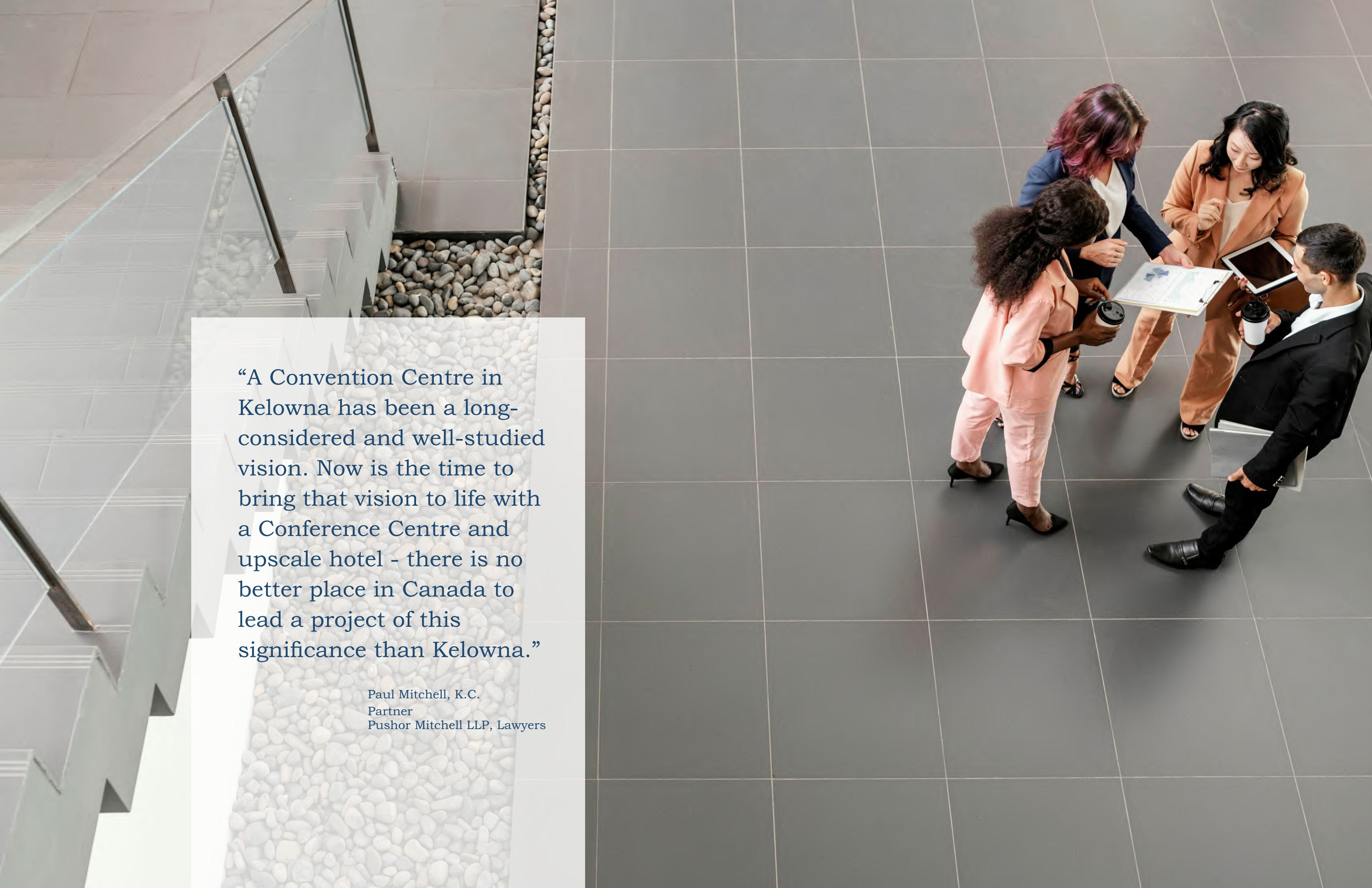
We extend our sincere thanks to the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission, the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, and the City of Kelowna for their ongoing interest and support. Their leadership and collaboration continue to play a vital role in advancing this important city-building initiative. And a personal thank you to Chuck Cullen for your thoughtful networking efforts.

## Charrette & Report Sponsors

We gratefully acknowledge the sponsors of the charrette and this report for their generous support and commitment to the vision behind this important initiative. Your contributions made it possible to bring together community leaders, professionals, and stakeholders in a meaningful way, helping to lay the foundation for Kelowna’s future as a destination for innovation and collaboration.







“A Convention Centre in Kelowna has been a long-considered and well-studied vision. Now is the time to bring that vision to life with a Conference Centre and upscale hotel - there is no better place in Canada to lead a project of this significance than Kelowna.”

Paul Mitchell, K.C.  
Partner  
Pushor Mitchell LLP, Lawyers





Kelowna  
Conference Centre

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Planning Charrette Market Report