



LOCATION
244 Northland Drive, Conklin, Alberta

OWNER/DEVELOPER
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo

ARCHITECT
Stantec Architecture Ltd.

GENERAL CONTRACTOR
Bird Construction

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT
RJC Engineers

MECHANICAL CONSULTANT
Arrow Engineering Inc.

ELECTRICAL/CIVIL CONSULTANT
AECOM

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
O2 Planning + Design Inc.

TOTAL SIZE
85,000 square feet

TOTAL COST
\$43.8 million

Conklin Multiplex

by ROBIN BRUNET



Undeniably, the Conklin Multiplex project has faced more than its fair share of challenges since 2012 – from unexpected site conditions to devastating wildfires that delayed construction and threatened the continuation of this multi-use facility.

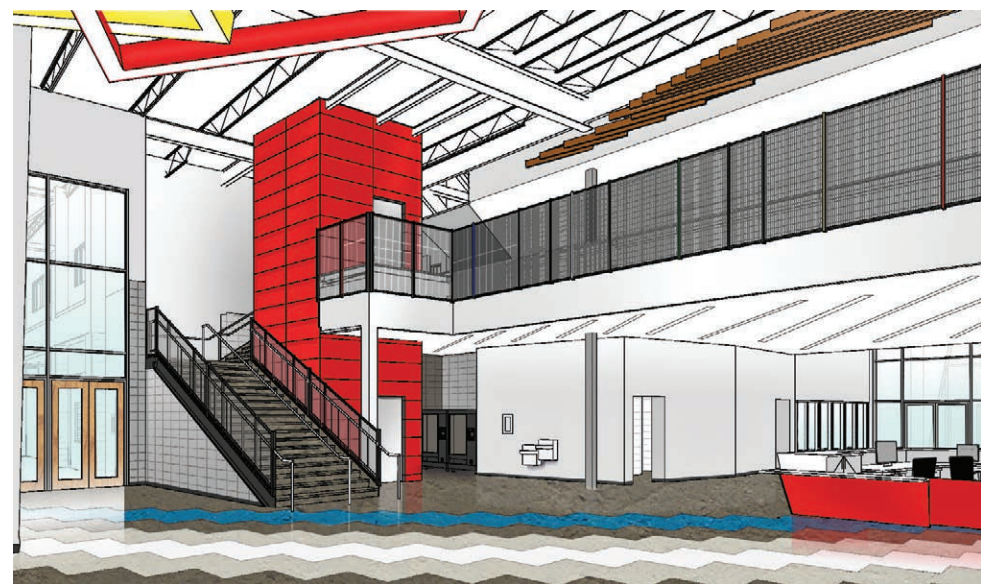
But it's also undeniable that thanks to the perseverance of its owners and a strong alliance of architects, builders, and other trades, that the facility (as of July 2018) is almost complete. Once finished, it will serve a variety of vital resident needs in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB), four hours north of Edmonton.

The building was designed by Stantec Architecture Ltd. as a holistic community hub with space to accommodate a gymnasium, arena, fitness centre, commercial community kitchen, administrative offices, community hall, lease spaces, an RCMP detachment, classrooms/multi-purpose rooms, maintenance garage, nurse's office, and daycare/child-minding. To meet outdoor recreational needs, the facility also includes sports fields, recreation areas, a playground, baseball diamond, and horseshoe pits.

Brian Bengert, senior principal for Stantec Architecture Ltd., notes that the design process was initiated by Architecture | Tkalci Bengert, which became part of Stantec in 2016. The project is located "on a selected site in the core of Conklin, on a decommissioned airstrip," Bengert says. "The building and site design were based upon providing an excellent social hub for the community of Conklin and surrounding areas, while facilitating the current and future programs of the various partners and stakeholders."

Bengert goes on to note that the final design was "comprised of a preferred option that resulted from studies of the site, the community's needs, and the program required by Conklin. The design established an exciting, interesting siting and building solution, which enhances the neighbourhood. The project also serves as an example of the RMWB's ongoing commitment to sustainability and best urban design practices."

While fulfilling a multitude of program needs, Stantec Architecture Ltd. provided many architectural flourishes to the 85,000-square-foot facility.

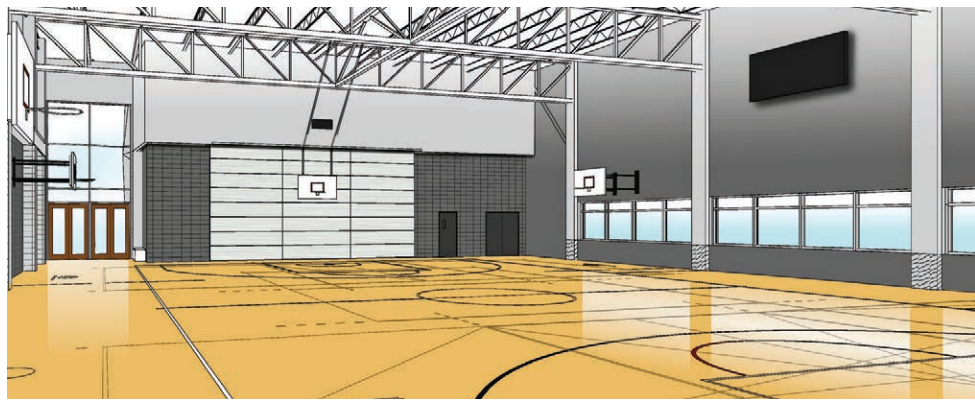
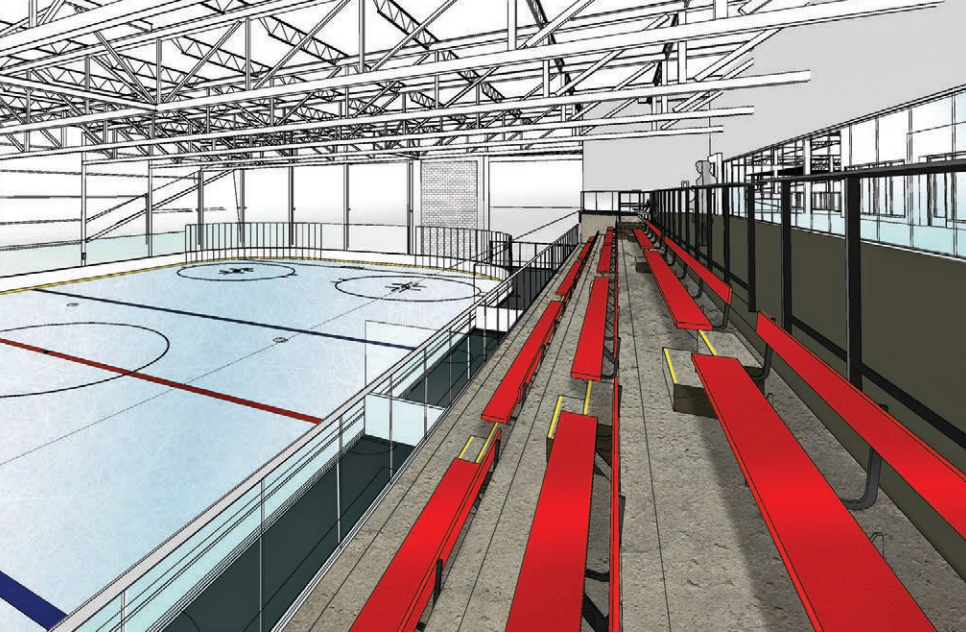


One of the most notable is a massive, nine-metre tall inverted semi-circular steel-framed cone with full glazing that is set into the building's face. The cone is flanked by a gently sloping wall that becomes a spectacular, indented steel-framed triangular arch, which runs the length of the face, providing more natural light through further glazing.

With form following function, the interiors were designed as a mix of

open spaces (such as the gym/fitness area) and various closed studio, classroom, and community multi-purpose spaces. While the second floor is slightly smaller, an abundance of outdoor balconies provides connections with the outdoors and additional usable space.

Partial delays were caused during site excavation (supervised by Bird Construction) due to the discovery of a forgotten landfill site. Once the



problem was clear and backfilled, continuous flight auger (CFA) piles were sunk for foundations to mediate the site's high watertable.

Chris Wallish, project engineer for RJC Engineers, explains, "This is an extremely fast way of putting in piles, as the concrete is poured while the auger is being withdrawn, after which the reinforcing cage is inserted in the concrete. With this method, one can complete about 15 to 20 piles in a day, and this project required a couple of hundred of them."

Unfortunately, in May of 2016 the disastrous Fort McMurray wildfires

caused many areas to be evacuated, and the project was temporarily delayed. "Shutting down a project in construction and re-starting is not a simple task," says Bengert. "The RMWB staff needed to undertake this process during an extremely complicated and delicate time within the region. Many people lost entire neighbourhoods, and much of RMWB sat empty for weeks. Despite the intense difficulty, Stantec, the RMWB project management team, municipal council, and Bird Construction remained task-focused and determined to complete the project."

By January of 2017, the structural steel for the building was 50 percent finished and 20 percent of the total project had been completed. "Even with an entire municipality to take care of, the RMWB staff was successful in getting the project back online," says Bengert.

Brendan Huber, project manager for Bird Construction, agrees that the wildfires "plus a really bad winter in 2016/17 caused delays, on top of having to excavate a lot deeper than intended and re-compact the soil due to the landfill. We had about 90 people at peak on site working at the top of their game, and by June of 2018 the facility was 98 percent complete, with the baseball diamond and other outdoor amenities expected to be finished by September."

Wallish points out that the steel structure was augmented by masonry for components such as the stairs and elevator shafts. "The idea was to keep the materials simple and minimize the number of different materials needed at this remote site, so masonry became a great alternative."

As the project winds down, all parties can take pride in having overcome numerous hardships to create a valuable resource for Conklin residents – as well as a remarkable facility in its own right. Bengert concludes, "The Conklin Multiplex now carries the legacy of the entire team who saved the project, the resiliency of the municipalities affected by the wildfire, and provides a fresh start for the community." **A**

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