



At-A-Glance: Polytechnic University Facilities Master Plan

Overview:

As part of the Aurora College transformation, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and Aurora College worked with leading technical experts in the fields of architecture, university design and community engagement to develop the Polytechnic University Facilities Master Plan (FMP).

The transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university will expand and enhance opportunities for post-secondary education in the Northwest Territories (NWT). The FMP supports this initiative by recommending how each of the institution's physical locations should be enhanced to offer an elevated experience of learning, research, innovation and community-building. It is intended to provide a clear picture of proposed facilities at the Thebacha, Aurora and Yellowknife North Slave campuses, as well as across the network of community learning centres (CLCs).

Facility Master Plans are common tools used by universities across Canada and is a requirement of the quality assurance review being conducted by the Campus Alberta Quality Council as part of the transformation of Aurora College.

Facilities Master Plan Key Themes (full details found on pg. 19 of FMP):

An extensive engagement process informed the development of the FMP. Key themes emerged that formed the basis for the development of the document. Those are:

- Indigenization of the polytechnic university
- Sufficient support for Northern students
- Community connections
- Family supportive
- Unique place for research
- Learning-in-place
- Relevant programming
- Animated student spaces
- Amenities and recreation
- Teaching and learning spaces
- Leveraging partnerships
- Student housing

Polytechnic University Guiding Vision (full vision and additional details start on pg. 23 of FMP):

The polytechnic university will establish a place of higher learning by Northerners, for Northerners, and express Northern values and aspirations. The institution will create new opportunities for study and research in an environment that uniquely serves the contexts of the NWT. The quality of education and student experience on offer will meet or exceed the standard set by post-secondary institutions across Canada. The FMP envisions the polytechnic university as a strongly-interconnected network of spaces throughout the territory.

The polytechnic university will be an inclusive, vibrant and supportive community. Northern and Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing will be celebrated by the campus environments. Design of indoor and outdoor spaces will be informed by the diverse cultural and physical landscapes of the NWT.



As a driving intent of the planning approach, facilities will be responsive to their surroundings, including both the natural environment and the community setting.

Thebacha Campus – Master Planning Vision (full vision and additional details start on pg. 26):

Thebacha Campus is the largest and longest-standing purpose-built campus of Aurora College. The established facilities have a strong and meaningful presence in the Town of Fort Smith, which will be both leveraged and enhanced through the transformation. The campus will remain the administrative centre for the polytechnic university and the immediate upgrades proposed for this campus will significantly augment the existing assets and elevate the quality of student experience.

One hundred new student beds are proposed for this location: high-quality residential facilities in a variety of configurations designed specifically to meet the needs of this student population. A new student services centre is being proposed, offering access to additional amenities and supports.

The proposed development patterns aim to strengthen connectivity and integration of the campus within the larger community. New residences and amenity spaces will establish welcoming, comfortable and vibrant student spaces placed strategically to improve access to the academic spaces and to further activate this area of Fort Smith. Outdoor gathering spaces will be established at each new cluster of housing, and at the academic site.

Breynat Hall, formerly a residential school hostel, is to be disposed of. The functions currently housed in that building will be replaced in new, appropriate facilities. Future engagement about the use of this site will provide space for reflection on the history and future of both the site and the broader polytechnic university.

In addition to residential and student support facilities, reorganization of the Works Yard is recommended, and new construction to better support heavy equipment operations.

A framework for long-term expansion is proposed, with the aim to enhance the mutually-beneficial relationship between the polytechnic university and the community. Investment in this campus will augment its existing strengths, while meaningfully supporting transformation of housing, amenities and the student experience.

Yellowknife North Slave Campus (full vision and additional details start on pg. 45):

In this location, where there are no College-owned facilities as a foundation for the polytechnic university, the development of a new campus offers a blank slate for establishing and embodying the values of the transformed institution. This campus offers an opportunity to realize, and also actualize, a vision for an educational community environment, specific to the unique context of the NWT.

The Yellowknife North Slave Campus will welcome students, staff and researchers from across the territory and from elsewhere. The campus is envisioned as a vibrant, supportive community, built with a dual focus on student safety and an inspiring learning environment. Its grounds and facilities will be designed to celebrate Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing. The campus environment will be



integrated with the natural landscape, supportive of land-based learning, and centred around cultural safety and diversified supports.

The campus grounds will be a defining feature, populated by outdoor learning and gathering spaces, and animated by community use. The Yellowknife North Slave campus will benefit from access to the nearby city amenities and services, while being grounded in the quiet expanse of the surrounding natural environment, bridging both.

Welcoming and supportive to students from remote Northern communities and from elsewhere, this campus environment will be designed to bring people together and to excite possibilities, while celebrating the character of the sub-arctic landscape, waters and skies.

Aurora Campus (full vision and details start on pg. 65):

The vision for Aurora Campus in Inuvik is to support increasingly active hubs for both education and research, in a centralized capacity for the Beaufort Delta Region. This plan focuses on activating the full potential of existing facilities by first improving the supportiveness and accessibility of the on-campus experience.

Aurora Campus has two distinct and important elements. The main academic building, centrally located among community infrastructure, serves as a post-secondary and education upgrading facility for the Beaufort Delta Region. The Western Arctic Research Centre (WARC) occupies a nearby, but distinct, site and facilitates a variety of research activities and research partnerships in the High Arctic. At both of these locations, short-term investments are being recommended to lay the groundwork for incremental and sustainable growth. Expansion of facilities at the WARC site is already underway; new all-season storage space is being constructed to improve the centre's functionality for field research.

At the main academic site, an increase in student enrolment will activate the existing facility, which is not currently operating at full capacity. As an immediate first step, appropriate housing for students with families should be constructed, to better serve the prospective student population. As enrolment increases, a new student services centre and amenity building is recommended.

An increasingly animated Aurora Campus is envisioned through strategic step-by-step improvements. The site surrounding the academic building will be landscaped for use as outdoor gathering space. In doing so, space will be actively delineated and protected for the purpose of future expansion. As a long-term vision, additional place-based programming and community partnerships will help create an integrated and activated polytechnic university campus.

Community Learning Centres (vision and additional details start on pg. 79):

Through the engagement process, a strong vision for highly flexible and community-driven community learning centres (CLCs) emerged. These CLCs will be administered regionally, becoming extensions of the nearest main campus (in Fort Smith, Inuvik or Yellowknife). They will maintain a focus on adult literacy, academic upgrading and professional development, while also developing into active nodes for teaching, learning and research. Through flexible design and strong partnerships, CLCs can become



vibrant and community-accessible spaces, which will enable both the polytechnic university's and the community's goals related to post-secondary education.

A key aspect of the transformed vision is the potential for a two-way exchange of learning and knowledge to develop between each campus and its respective CLCs. Several opportunities exist to activate, strengthen and enhance these potential education networks. For example, CLCs can support community-based work placements for students in programs like Nursing or Early Childhood Education. The facilities can also serve as launching points for fieldwork, facilitating travel by students, researchers and faculty. Further to this, they might support community-based teaching, through virtual courses in which community members can be learners or instructors. Each of these functions can offer new benefits to communities – in the form of improved services, programming and economic activity – and, also, to the polytechnic university, via the enhancement of training and research opportunities available through the institution.

CLCs can become collaboration hubs, fostering partnerships among secondary, post-secondary, community, government, and co-management organizations and strengthening community pathways to post-secondary education. By building on community priorities and potentially investments by other partners, CLC facilities may be designed to offer, for example trades training in communities, or launching points for field-based work in environmental stewardship and leadership.

Over time, as there are opportunities for re-investment in CLCs, strong regional and community engagement processes will bring together potential partners to determine the specifics of facility usage and design. At this point in the planning process, a base concept is presented, with the intention that the vision for CLCs will be further developed in collaboration with individual communities, other government departments, secondary school boards, and other potential co-investment partners.

Next Steps:

The release of the FMP does not commit the GNWT or Aurora College to fund or move forward with any particular infrastructure project. Rather, it will help to ensure informed and strategic decision making during the establishment of annual capital budgets.

This FMP will become a key planning tool of the Aurora College Board of Governors, who are responsible for financial and capital planning decisions and will support co-investment efforts by the GNWT and Aurora College moving forward.

The FMP has a 20-year outlook and is intended to be renewed every 10 years.