

Transit Villages Plans

ISSUE

The Growth Plan to Half a Million (Growth Plan) established Corridor Growth as a key initiative to help balance future outward growth of the City of Saskatoon (City) with infill development opportunities. Specifically, the Growth Plan identifies a target of providing 15% of new residential development, or up to 22,000 new residential units, along Saskatoon's major corridors.

Transit Villages responds to objectives of the Growth Plan by outlining the long-term vision and principles for redevelopment of large, commercial centres on the corridors into compact, walkable, mixed-use communities that can leverage planned investments in Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). Transit Villages are large commercial sites re-imagined into future hubs of activity where transit, home, work and entertainment intersect.

This report presents the Transit Villages Report, a component of the Corridor Growth Initiative of the Growth Plan and an overview of the next steps for implementation.

BACKGROUND

The Growth Plan was approved, in principle, by City Council in April 2016, establishing a new approach to the growth and evolution of Saskatoon over the coming decades. It also outlined the vision for rebalancing future growth of Saskatoon through long-term targets of 50% infill and 50% greenfield development.

The Corridor Growth Portfolio was created as a major component of the Growth Plan to achieve infill targets, while also leveraging and supporting the BRT system. As part of the vision for corridor growth, key locations were identified at commercial centres throughout Saskatoon that offer high potential for major shopping centre redevelopment, adjacent to significant planned BRT stations. The Transit Village locations are Confederation Suburban Centre, The Centre Mall and University Heights Suburban Centre (see Appendix 1).

In addition, the Canadian retail landscape is changing rapidly, influenced by several factors. Key factors include the rise of online shopping and consumer preferences shifting away from static shopping malls to more experience-based commercial developments. By introducing a wider range of uses, including residential, restaurants, food stores and professional offices, mall owners are seeking to re-invigorate their holdings and broaden their customer base.

Significant opportunities exist to create new, vibrant, and attractive transit villages which incorporate a wide range of land uses at appropriate and financially-feasible densities while supporting the corridor growth objectives and use of the BRT system.

Transit Villages Plans

At its August 28, 2017 meeting, City Council approved the award of contract for the provisions of planning and design services for Transit Villages to a partnership led by DIALOG.

CURRENT STATUS

From September 2017 to present, the City and DIALOG have worked to collaborate with landowners of the selected Transit Village sites and other stakeholders to develop a framework for redevelopment of these sites. The attached Transit Villages Report (see [Appendix 2](#)) provides the project's findings and recommendations.

The Vision and Principles described below and in the Transit Villages Report have been incorporated into the Corridor Transformation Plan for consideration as part of the Implementation Framework outlined in that plan.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Stakeholder and Public Engagement

The Transit Villages Report was developed through a transparent and collaborative process that integrated the perspectives of landowners, multiple stakeholders and Saskatoon residents. All elements of the Transit Villages Report, including vision, principles and conceptual plans were developed in an iterative process with input from stakeholders and the public.

Engagement activities were held between November 2017 and May 2019. These events were targeted towards specific stakeholder groups, as well as the general public. A Transit Villages Engagement Summary has been included (see [Appendix 3](#)).

Vision Statement and Guiding Principles

Over the course of the project, and particularly through the engagement process, a clear vision for the project was established:

“Transit Villages will be known as active, lively, and vibrant hubs for community life, complementing Saskatoon’s character and enhancing the city’s quality of life. They will be places where you can live and work as well as shop, linger, and spend an afternoon. Transit Villages will integrate with surrounding neighbourhoods through a walkable and multimodal street network, which builds on the enhanced service and mobility of the Bus Rapid Transit system.”

To build off the Vision, and to help guide the design of each Transit Village, a number of Guiding Principles were created to shape long-term development:

1. Create vibrant community hubs and destinations by enabling a mix of land uses that include a range of commercial uses and medium density residential development to reinforce gateways to the site and establish a population base that can bring vibrancy to the site.

Transit Villages Plans

2. Plan for public parks and open spaces that cater to a wide range of needs for surrounding neighbourhoods by including spaces for social gathering and passive and active recreation opportunities.
3. Encourage design excellence and an animated and welcoming sense of place throughout the year, in the overall site design for each Transit Village.
4. Encourage use of renewable energy sources, sustainable building technologies, materials and practices to help reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions and to withstand extreme storm events and climate changes.
5. Design for a walkable, multimodal network by establishing connections to surrounding neighbourhoods through a new internal street network, including a central 'main street' with active, at-grade retail frontages, supported by office and residential uses above.

The Vision and Guiding Principles will help guide development projects within the Transit Villages, including design of new buildings, open spaces, streetscapes and the reconfiguration of streets and blocks.

Conceptual and Demonstration Plans

In order to help illustrate application of the Vision and Guiding Principles, a series of Conceptual and Demonstration Plans were created to represent an example of how development could take place. These plans illustrate many of the aspirations and key ideas that came forward during the engagement process, including: a mix of land uses, high-quality public realm, sustainable development, managing parking supply and demand and supporting a unique character of place.

These plans are an illustration to represent the application of the Vision and Guiding Principles. Development and review of these plans included a high-level analysis which identified elements of the transportation and access framework which will need to be resolved prior to any redevelopment of these sites. Therefore, these demonstration plans do not depict a final version of the transportation and access framework, or land use. These items will be subject to further development of these plans, and formal review processes when landowners are ready to proceed with redevelopment.

As part of the larger corridor growth portfolio, Administration will coordinate with landowners and stakeholders to also explore longer-term implementation tools to foster successful roll out of development, such as public realm and infrastructure investments.

IMPLICATIONS

From the outset of the project, the objective was to create development plans in collaboration with Transit Village land owners; however, feedback received from initial stakeholder workshops determined that while many landowners are interested in incorporating mixed-use, transit-oriented development into their future redevelopment, they are not ready at this time to commit to detailed development plans. The long-term nature of the commercial real estate industry means any significant redevelopment of these sites is likely more medium- to long-term in nature.

Transit Villages Plans

Consequently, the Project Team used this feedback to scale back on the level of detail provided for plans. Rather than developing detailed plans that not all land owners were ready to commit to, the project instead focused on developing a Vision and Guiding Principles to act as a foundation, anchoring the future decision-making process to shape redevelopment. Timing of development at the Transit Villages will be driven by the market and private interests.

NEXT STEPS

In coordination with the Corridor Planning Program, Administration is preparing to undertake appropriate policy and zoning amendments to formalize the status of Transit Villages through implementation of the Corridor Transformation Plan. These amendments entail creation of new Land Use Districts within the Official Community Plan (Bylaw No. 8769) and new Zoning Districts within the Zoning Bylaw (Bylaw No. 8770).

Administration will continue discussions with land owners towards creating development plans which align with the Vision and Guiding Principles. The Corridor Planning Program will also evaluate opportunities to introduce Transit Villages development at other potential commercial shopping centres.

APPENDICES

1. Transit Villages Locations
2. [Transit Villages Report](#)
3. [Transit Villages Engagement Summary](#)

REPORT APPROVAL

Written by: Jason Sick, Senior Planner, Planning and Development
Reviewed by: Chris Schulz, Manager, Planning Project Services, Planning and Development
David LeBoutillier, Engineering Manager, Transportation
Reviewed by: Lesley Anderson, Director of Planning and Development
Approved by: Lynne Lacroix, General Manager, Community Services Department

SP/2019/PL/PDCS – Transit Villages Plan/pg