

Downtown Event and Entertainment District - Update

ISSUE

Planning for the development of a Downtown event and entertainment district, centred on a new Downtown arena and convention centre, is in the preliminary stages. An update regarding the site selection process is provided in this report.

BACKGROUND

City Council, at its meeting held on November 19, 2018, considered a report called, Considerations for the TCU Place and SaskTel Centre Project, and resolved:

- “1. That the Administration be directed to include a future Arena/convention centre when planning the future of Saskatoon’s Downtown;
2. That the focus of the planning work include consideration of an entertainment district, not just an arena and/or convention facility;
3. That the Administration report back on terms of reference for a process for identifying the best location for a future entertainment district and how it would fit into a wider vision for a strong downtown for the future;
4. That one of the overall principles be to seek approaches that minimize the reliance on Property taxes to pay for this arena; and
5. That the approach also recognize that while the City of Saskatoon has a leadership role, it will take collaboration with stakeholders and the community as a whole to come up with the best solution.”

City Council, at its meeting held on April 29, 2019, considered a report called, Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Next Steps, which outlined the proposed process with respect to planning for a future Downtown event and entertainment district.

Governance and Priorities Committee, at its meeting held on September 23, 2019, received a report called, Downtown Event and Entertainment District Public Engagement Plan, which outlined the communications and engagement plan that will guide the site selection process.

CURRENT STATUS

The current phase of the project is limited to the selection of a site for a future Downtown event and entertainment district. There is tremendous value in knowing the location of the future arena, convention centre, and entertainment district. Knowing the location will ensure that all future decisions are made with an understanding of how the Downtown core will look in the future. For example, when infrastructure investments are made adjacent to the sites such as Bus Rapid Transit or underground utility work, the infrastructure will be designed and constructed to support the long-term vision.

Detailed designs, priority of the project relative to other civic priorities, funding models, and timing of construction have yet to be determined. Decisions about these items will be made in future years.

A Downtown event and entertainment district Project Committee, which includes City Administration, TCU Place, and SaskTel Centre, has been researching best practices and reviewing the experience of other cities in developing similar downtown entertainment districts.

A tour of Ice District and Rogers Centre in Edmonton in coordination with Downtown YXE membership, took place in October of 2019. Meetings held with officials from City of Edmonton, Stantec and members of the Oilers Entertainment Group provided valuable insight into the recent success of the partnership approach they took to develop the Ice District entertainment area.

In addition, SaskTel Centre staff have toured four U.S. cities with similarities to Saskatoon (Lincoln, Nebraska; Omaha, Nebraska; Des Moines, Iowa; and Kanas City, Missouri). The purpose of the tours was to meet key contacts and learn from the successes and mistakes in each of their respective recent downtown entertainment projects.

The Administration has also engaged the services of two external advisory firms (Oak View Group and Katz Group/Shugarman Architecture) with experience in the development of arena/convention centre/entertainment districts. The intent of engaging these advisors was to gain insight from qualified consultants with recent experience in siting and developing facilities of this type, including aspects such as site design, patron access, site access (loading/unloading, etc.) and other technical considerations.

These two advisory firms visited Saskatoon in December 2019 to tour the area, including the City's existing facilities and potential sites, and have conducted briefings with project staff. Both firms will be providing reports outlining their advice on the sites.

What has been learned to date from the preliminary research and tours is that a number of factors must be considered before determining the preferred site(s) for a Downtown event and entertainment district.

A summary of this research and that of the advisory firms will be made available as part of the site selection communication and engagement plan.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Based on the lessons learned from other cities, additional technical factors need further consideration before a site decision is made. Further to this, negotiations with owners of potential private sites have taken longer than expected. Although positive progress continues to be made, final agreements are not yet in place. In consideration of these issues, additional time will be required to finalize the site selection process.

As one of the most significant projects the City is likely to undertake in the next decade, the City must ensure appropriate pre-planning and site analysis is thoroughly completed.

As negotiations continue, the Administration will provide a further and more detailed update by March of 2020. At this time, the Administration is still optimistic that the sites considered, the technical merits of each site, and the perspectives of external experts can still be made available to the public at some point in 2020. Following that, the City will seek feedback from the public. The feedback gathered will be added to the technical advice in the final report and recommendation on site selection to City Council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

At this time there are no financial implications. These will be considered during future project stages as required.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

At this time there are no policy, privacy, environmental or Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) implications. Each of these will be considered during future project stages as required.

In conjunction with the engagement strategy, a communication plan will be developed with the goals of:

- Keeping the public and stakeholders informed about the project;
- Timing and steps in the process; and
- Targeted communications to drive awareness and participation in future engagement opportunities.

NEXT STEPS

Once negotiations with private site owners have progressed further, Administration will report back to City Council on the preferred site options.

Should any issues arise from negotiations that require input or approval from Committee and City Council, Administration will bring forward a report as required.

Report Approval

Written by Dan Willems, Interim Chief Strategy & Transformation Officer
Frank Long, Director of Saskatoon Land

Reviewed by: Kerry Tarasoff, Chief Financial Officer
Lynne Lacroix, General Manager, Community Services Department

Approved by: Jeff Jorgenson, City Manager