

WintercityYXE Strategy

ISSUE

The WintercityYXE Strategy (Strategy) is an intentional effort by the City of Saskatoon (City) and the community to celebrate what makes Saskatoon an inviting, vibrant, safe and prosperous place during the winter months while recognizing the challenges that the winter months present for those who are vulnerable. This report presents the Strategy and relevant background, describes upcoming refinements to the WintercityYXE Grant Program and explains next steps for the Strategy's implementation.

BACKGROUND

The concept of designing a Winter City is about capitalizing on opportunities to alleviate the real and perceived negative effects of the winter season and reinforce positive ones. In 2016, the City, in partnership with the community, began developing the Strategy to celebrate Saskatoon as a Winter City. As part of the development of the Strategy, community members were asked to share their experiences during winter and make recommendations on how we can work together to achieve a shared vision as a Winter City.

A number of steps have been undertaken to build the Strategy:

1. Building on Existing Strengths - In this phase, we captured what the City and community already do well, with an inventory of existing assets that support the winter experience.
2. Engage with the Community - Broad community engagement was undertaken to understand community perspectives and determine what should be included in the Strategy.
3. Quick Wins - Funding was set aside early in the project to support quick wins. These initiatives were tackled to generate interest and momentum, advance learning and move core strategy concepts forward.
4. Development of the Strategy - The Strategy is built on existing strengths, community input, learning from quick wins and following winter city strategies from other municipalities.

Early in the process, a WintercityYXE Community Working Group (Working Group) was formed. Working group members are listed in the Strategy (Appendix 1). They were critical in the development of the engagement activities and provided feedback and guidance on the development of the Strategy. The Working Group also provided feedback for the implementation of quick wins during the development of the Strategy.

CURRENT STATUS

The Strategy (Appendix 1) is the culmination of the community and administrative input received through the course of strategy development. It articulates the actions necessary to help residents, businesses, organizations and visitors embrace winter with as much

enthusiasm as they have for the summer season while recognizing the challenges that the winter months present for some residents of Saskatoon.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Strategy Overview

The Strategy has been informed by the input received from the engagement activities through the course of the project and has three themes:

1. Winter Economy
 - a. How can we address challenges associated with winter to create a more vibrant economy in the winter?
2. Winter Life and Culture
 - a. How can we celebrate the inviting and fun quality of life we have in Saskatoon, even in the coldest months of the year?
 - b. How can we build enthusiasm for winter, take advantage of opportunities and tell the story of our winter city?
 - c. How can we support vulnerable populations during the winter months?
3. Winter Design
 - a. How can we improve community comfort and accessibility for everyone, even with the ice and snow?

Each theme includes:

- 1) objectives supporting the theme.
- 2) desired outcomes outline what will be accomplished by achieving each objective.
- 3) actions identify what is required in order to achieve the objective and desired outcomes.

The actions are not intended to be a list of specific events or activities and are generalized to provide for flexibility with the understanding that there are varied and diverse ways to approach each identified action. Furthermore, for each action, there may be infrastructure or programs already in place that help the City and community achieve the action.

Engagement Activities

In Q1 of 2020, the draft Strategy was shared with the Working Group, Administration, stakeholders and the public through workshops, an online survey or at pop-up engagement events to ensure the Strategy captured the concepts and ideas brought forward through the course of the Project. Appendix 2 outlines the results of the external engagement activities.

Triple Bottom Line Review

To align with the City's sustainability priorities, the Triple Bottom Line Decision Making Tool was used to conduct a high level evaluation of the Strategy. Overall, the results of the review indicate the Strategy aligns with the City's environmental, social, economic and governance priorities. Benefits are highest in the Social Equity and Cultural Wellbeing principle, followed by Good Governance and Environmental Health and Integrity, then

Economic Prosperity and Fiscal Responsibility. Further Triple Bottom Line analysis may be conducted as the actions are implemented.

WintercityYXE Grant Program

Starting in 2017, the WintercityYXE grant program provided funding to organizations for initiatives that support the goals of WintercityYXE. Capital project funding provided \$25,000 in 2017 and \$50,000 in 2018. In 2019, City Council approved the WintercityYXE grant funding as part of the operating budget in the amount of \$25,000.

Grants have been available in the following categories:

1. Winter Comfort and Access - Projects that improve comfort and accessibility in the winter (eg. winterizing outdoor patios, grooming trails or walking paths and adding wind breaks).
2. Winter Design - Urban design installations which celebrate winter.
3. Winter Activities - Events, festivals and activities that build enthusiasm for winter by taking advantage of winter opportunities and celebrate the fun quality of life.

Administration has evaluated the success of the grant in terms of its impact, support for the Strategy's themes, as well as how best to administer it. The grant currently has multiple categories with relatively limited available dollars spread across them. This limits the impact of the grant in supporting the Strategy's themes. Winter City related projects, initiatives and programs are also already eligible for City funding through existing grant programs such as the Community Grant and Sports Project Grant. Past grant adjudication committees have recommended that WintercityYXE grant funding be refocused in the future by either combining the grant with other larger existing grant programs or limiting the grant program to one specific category where there is an identified need. This will best ensure the grant is targeted where it can be most impactful while meeting the intent of the WintercityYXE initiative.

A review of past grant applications has identified a need for winter recreation infrastructure; therefore, starting in 2021, the full WintercityYXE Grant funding amount of \$25,000 will be allocated for winter recreation infrastructure projects. Non-profit organizations, ad hoc groups, businesses or for-profit organizations will be eligible to apply. Projects must support outdoor winter recreation for public use and enjoyment. Winter recreation infrastructure includes, but is not limited to, rink and ice skating upgrades (boards, hockey nets), ski trail grooming, winter bike trails and lighting. A communications plan will be developed to reflect the change in the grant program.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Since 2016, the WintercityYXE project has received \$685,000 in capital funding through various budget requests. In 2019, City Council approved \$25,000 from the operating budget toward the WintercityYXE Grant program.

The Project funding has been used for the following:

- 1) to support the implementation of quick wins;
- 2) communications and engagement for the development of the Strategy;
- 3) the WintercityYXE Grant program prior to 2019;
- 4) to support lighting initiatives; and
- 5) staffing resources allocated to the project.

Approximately \$240,000 of the Project Budget is remaining. These funds will be used toward:

- 1) developing an implementation plan for the Strategy;
- 2) developing a background document detailing the process to develop the Strategy and input received during the development of the Strategy;
- 3) development and initial implementation of a comprehensive Communications Strategy to support the Strategy and Implementation Plan;
- 4) review of City policies to ensure they have a winter city lens; and
- 5) support for short-term implementation actions.

For the actions identified in the Strategy that require funding and for required staffing resources, funding requirements will be brought forward through the budget process.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The Strategy is intended to provide guidance for both the City and the community. Implementation of the actions will require collaboration from community partners and the City.

COVID-19 related implications will be addressed during the implementation phase for each action.

NEXT STEPS

Following adoption of the Strategy, an implementation plan will be developed. The implementation plan will be presented to the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services in Q1 of 2021. The implementation plan will outline the following for each action:

- 1) a timeline to complete the Action;
- 2) anticipated budget required for implementation; and
- 3) who will lead implementation of the action as well as potential City and/or community partners.

During implementation of individual actions, approval by Committee and/or Council will be sought as required to allocate funding through the budget process or for policy/program implementation.

APPENDICES

1. WintercityYXE Saskatoon's Winter Strategy
2. WintercityYXE – Closing the Loop – Comprehensive Engagement Report

REPORT APPROVAL

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SP/2020/PL/PDCS - /WintercityYXE Strategy/gs