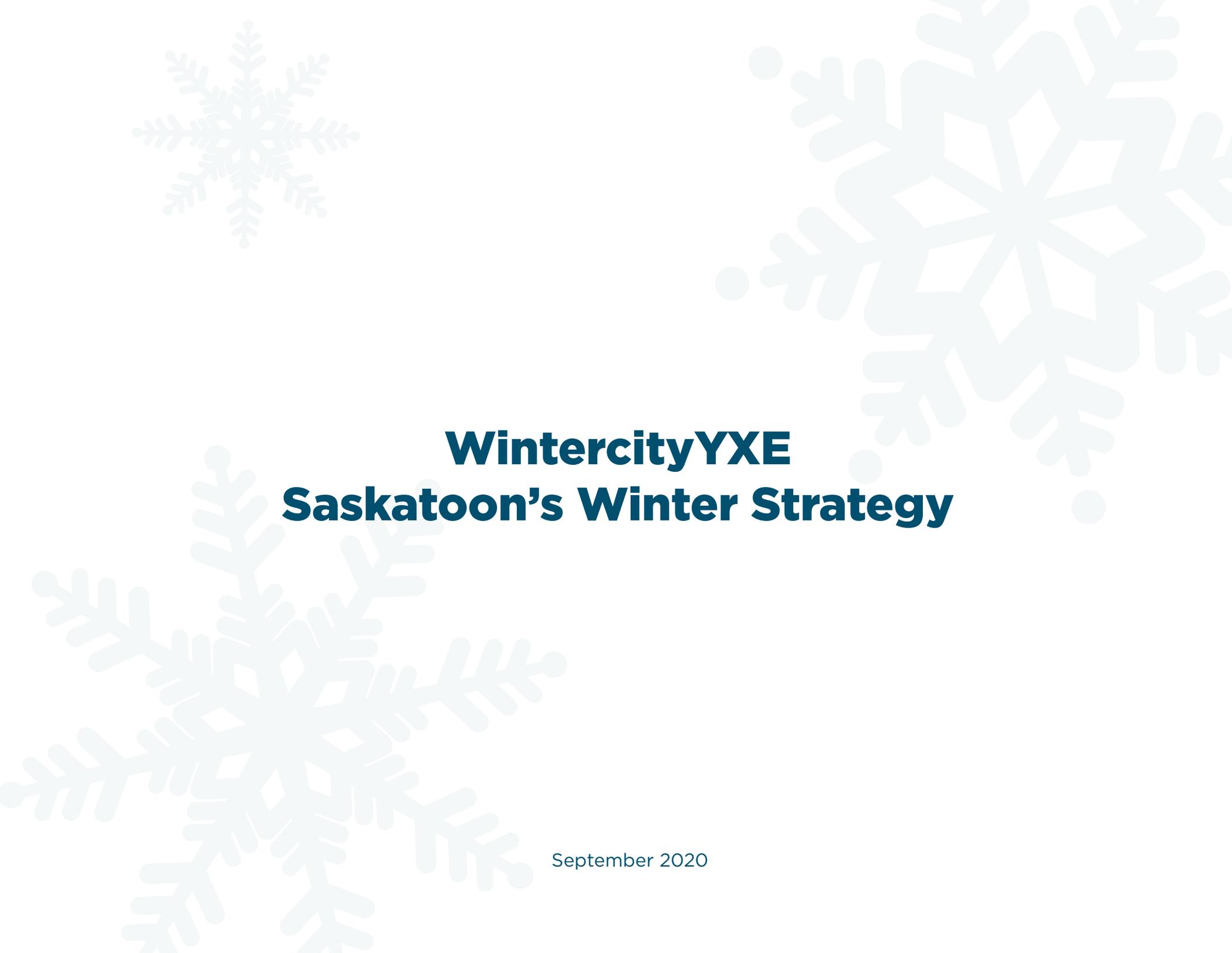




Wintercity  
YXE

**SASKATOON'S WINTER STRATEGY**





# **WintercityYXE** **Saskatoon's Winter Strategy**

September 2020





# A Message from the Mayor

Saskatoon is embracing its identity as a winter city. Throughout the year, we want Saskatoon to be vibrant with activity, accessible to get around, rich with economic opportunity, and strengthened with a sense of community safety.

By working together with the community and being creative and innovative, we can transform Saskatoon into a thriving winter city that promotes accessibility, inclusion, and a high quality of life.

The WintercityYXE Strategy will serve as a roadmap to turn this vision into a reality. This is a plan to support activities and events in the winter, to have our public spaces work for residents in all seasons, and to have unique business opportunities and experiences in our colder months. It is also a plan that recognizes that not all winter experiences are positive ones, so it specifically addresses safety concerns and lighting, accessibility of getting around, and supporting vulnerable populations and those facing homelessness.

This strategy responds to the needs and aspirations of our community, and it is a direct result of community discussions about winter—the good, the bad, and the ugly. This engagement has captured the enthusiasm about what is working and also the hopes that the community has for improvements. The WintercityYXE Strategy celebrates and builds on what makes Saskatoon inviting and vibrant and works to make improvements that will serve Saskatoon.

Thank you to everyone for helping to build and provide input into this strategy, and I'm very excited about where this will lead our city.

**Charlie Clark**  
Mayor

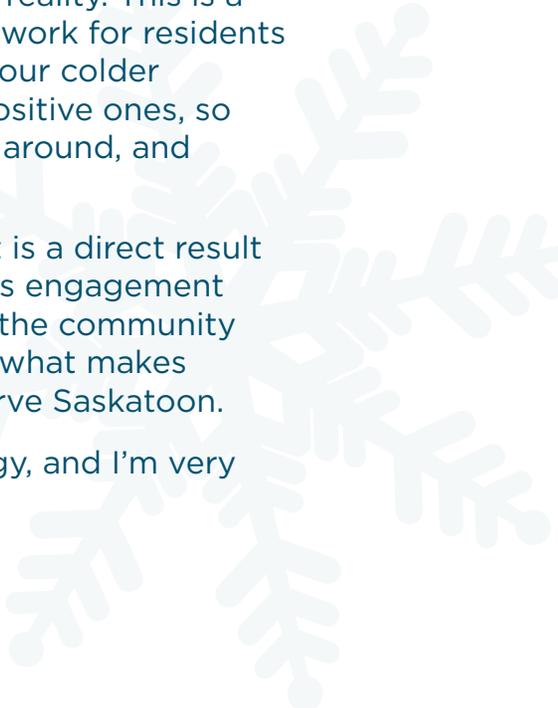




photo credit: Tourism Saskatoon

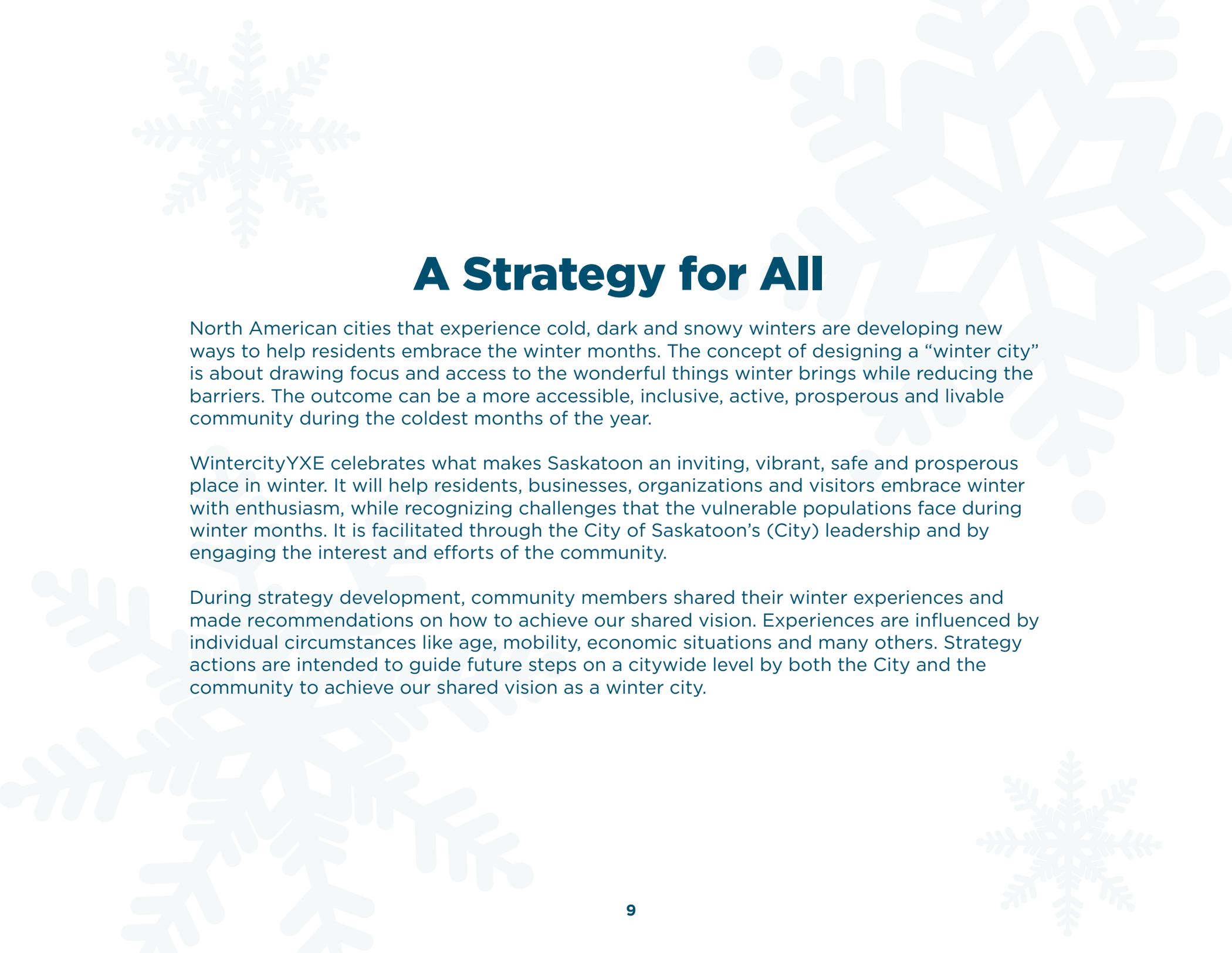


# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction - A Strategy for All.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The Process.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Building on Existing Strengths .....	12
Engage with the Community.....	12
Quick Wins.....	14
Development of the Strategy.....	15
City of Saskatoon Strategies, Plans & Policies .....	15
<b>WintercityYXE Vision .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>WintercityYXE Strategy .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Theme: Winter Economy.....	21
Theme: Winter Culture & Life.....	23
Theme: Winter Design.....	26
<b>How to Make the WintercityYXE Strategy a Reality.....</b>	<b>29</b>







## A Strategy for All

North American cities that experience cold, dark and snowy winters are developing new ways to help residents embrace the winter months. The concept of designing a “winter city” is about drawing focus and access to the wonderful things winter brings while reducing the barriers. The outcome can be a more accessible, inclusive, active, prosperous and livable community during the coldest months of the year.

WintercityYXE celebrates what makes Saskatoon an inviting, vibrant, safe and prosperous place in winter. It will help residents, businesses, organizations and visitors embrace winter with enthusiasm, while recognizing challenges that the vulnerable populations face during winter months. It is facilitated through the City of Saskatoon’s (City) leadership and by engaging the interest and efforts of the community.

During strategy development, community members shared their winter experiences and made recommendations on how to achieve our shared vision. Experiences are influenced by individual circumstances like age, mobility, economic situations and many others. Strategy actions are intended to guide future steps on a citywide level by both the City and the community to achieve our shared vision as a winter city.



# The Process

WintercityYXE was developed using the following four steps.



## Building on Existing Strengths

In this phase, we captured what we already do well in Saskatoon with an inventory of existing assets that support the winter experience. This foundation allowed the City and community stakeholders to promote what already exists, seek synergies through cooperative efforts and identify gaps to be filled by the strategy. The analysis results were presented in the [Winter City Strategy Update to City Council in November 2017](#).

## Engage with the Community

Broad community engagement was undertaken including:

- An interactive breakfast workshop to generate feasible short-term ideas was held in March of 2016 with 45 community members participating.
- City-hosted roundtable sessions with stakeholder groups, an online survey and kitchen-table talks held between January and April of 2017 with 770 community members participating.
- The International Winter Cities Shake-Up 2019 brought leaders and innovators from the winter city community together with guests from winter cities around the world. This conference was a way to shine a light on WintercityYXE and to gain momentum within the Saskatoon community. Held over three days in January 2019, the conference also included a WintercityYXE Café and a pop-up engagement event in the Nutrien Wintershines igloo.
- A strategy draft was shared with stakeholders through targeted workshops and with the public at pop-ups and online between January and March 2020.

Engagement event feedback can be found in council reports at [saskatoon.ca/wintercityYXE](https://saskatoon.ca/wintercityYXE). Engagement

activities highlighted the following opportunities:

- improve mobility
- improve facilities and infrastructure
- provide more support to existing activities
- introduce new events and things to do
- improve the promotion of events and activities

## WintercityYXE Working Group

Volunteers from a variety of community sectors and City divisions helped develop the strategy by guiding plans for community engagement and assessing the results. The WintercityYXE Community Working Group included representatives from:

- Broadway Theatre
- City of Saskatoon Facilities
- City of Saskatoon Planning & Development
- City of Saskatoon Recreation & Community Development
- Downtown Saskatoon Business Improvement District
- Fédération des Francophones de Saskatoon
- Meewasin
- On Purpose Events / Nutrien WinterShines
- Prairie Wild Consulting
- Saskatoon Council on Aging
- Saskatoon Nordic Ski Club
- Saskatoon Open Door Society
- Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan
- Tourism Saskatoon
- University of Saskatchewan
- Wanuskewin Heritage Park



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**“**  
*Saskatoon’s vibrancy is felt year-round and now is the time to share our passion for winter as residents and hosts. Our love for this city’s experiences extends far beyond warm summer festivals and events. Strategic support for the animation of our natural assets while creating depth and diversity in our economy with winter events and experiences, will naturally elevate the quality of life for our residents and provide compelling invitations for visitors in the future.*  
**”**

**Todd Brandt, President & CEO (retired)  
Tourism Saskatoon**

## 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. WintercityYXE quick wins were:

- Grant Program funding for local organizations and businesses for initiatives that support strategy goals:
  - 2017 - \$25,000
  - 2018 - \$50,000
  - 2019 - City Council approved \$25,000 annually in the operating budget
- Promotional support for local winter events and activities.
- Warming Huts borrowed from The Forks in Winnipeg were placed at various winter events and along the Meewasin Trail (2018).
- Lighting events - hosted Sabine De Schutter, a lighting designer from Berlin, to present on how light is used. Also hosted a community stakeholder workshop to discuss Saskatoon's approach to lighting in the winter.
- Lighting analysis of River Landing completed by Stantec Consulting (2018).
- One-time funding of the decorative lighting program for new seasonal decorations to be installed on street light poles (2019).
- Ten ice sculptures installed in the Business Improvement Districts (2019).
- Ice installation which interacted with the Western Peace Wall in the Broadway Business Improvement District (December 2019).

Previous grant recipients have included Community Associations, Business Improvement Districts, winter festivals and events. For a list of grant recipients, visit [saskatoon.ca/wintercityyxe/grants](https://saskatoon.ca/wintercityyxe/grants)



## Development of the Strategy

The strategy is intended to create a common vision and a shared knowledge of winter opportunities in Saskatoon. It is built on existing strengths, feedback from engagement activities, learning from quick wins and following other municipalities' winter city strategies. To ensure that the strategy captured the ideas of the community, the draft was shared with stakeholders through targeted workshops and with the public at pop-ups and online prior to finalization.

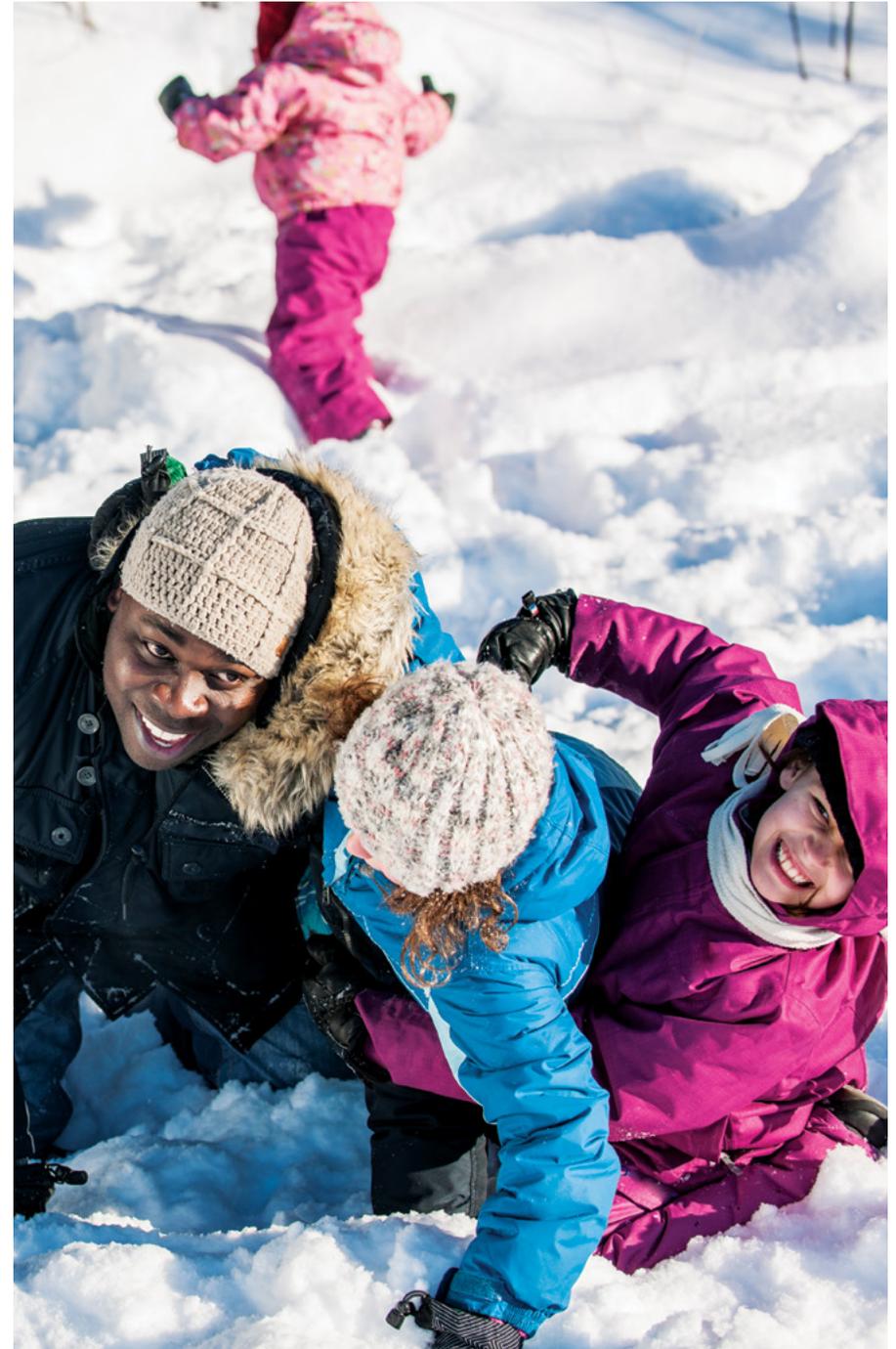
## City of Saskatoon Strategies, Plans and Policies

The City has a number of strategies, policies and plans that provide direction and guidance. While each of these has their own specific focus, collectively they contribute to accomplishing the City's goals and objectives. Achieving the actions in WintercityYXE will be done working in tandem with these strategies, policies and plans. A review of the City's policies will be undertaken to ensure that they have a winter city lens.

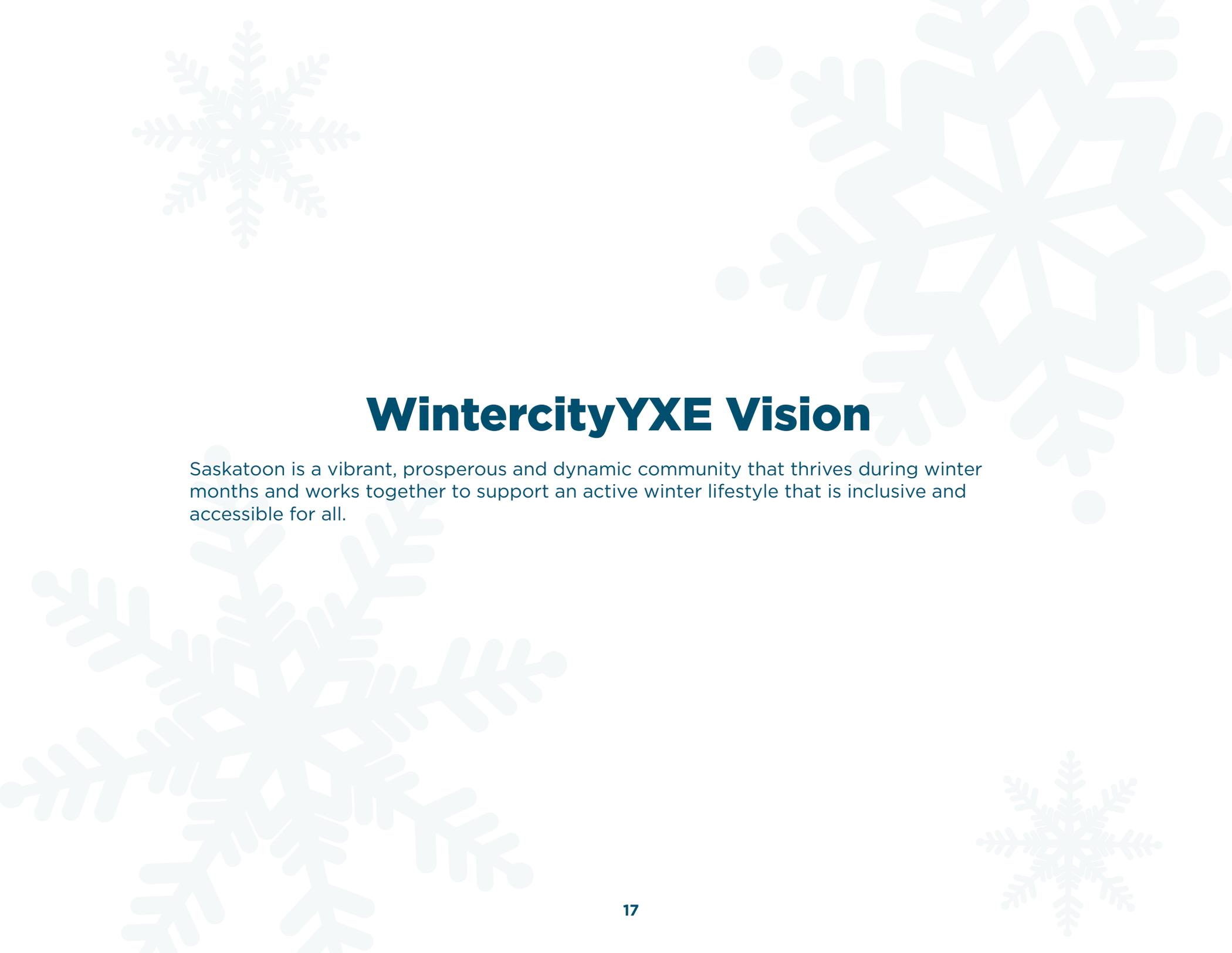
“

*Winterruption has been the happy recipient of some financial support from the Winter City grant program each year they have offered it – and this has always supported the free, family-focused programming we offer for 2 days.*”

*Kirby Wirchenko, Executive and Artistic Director Broadway Theatre*



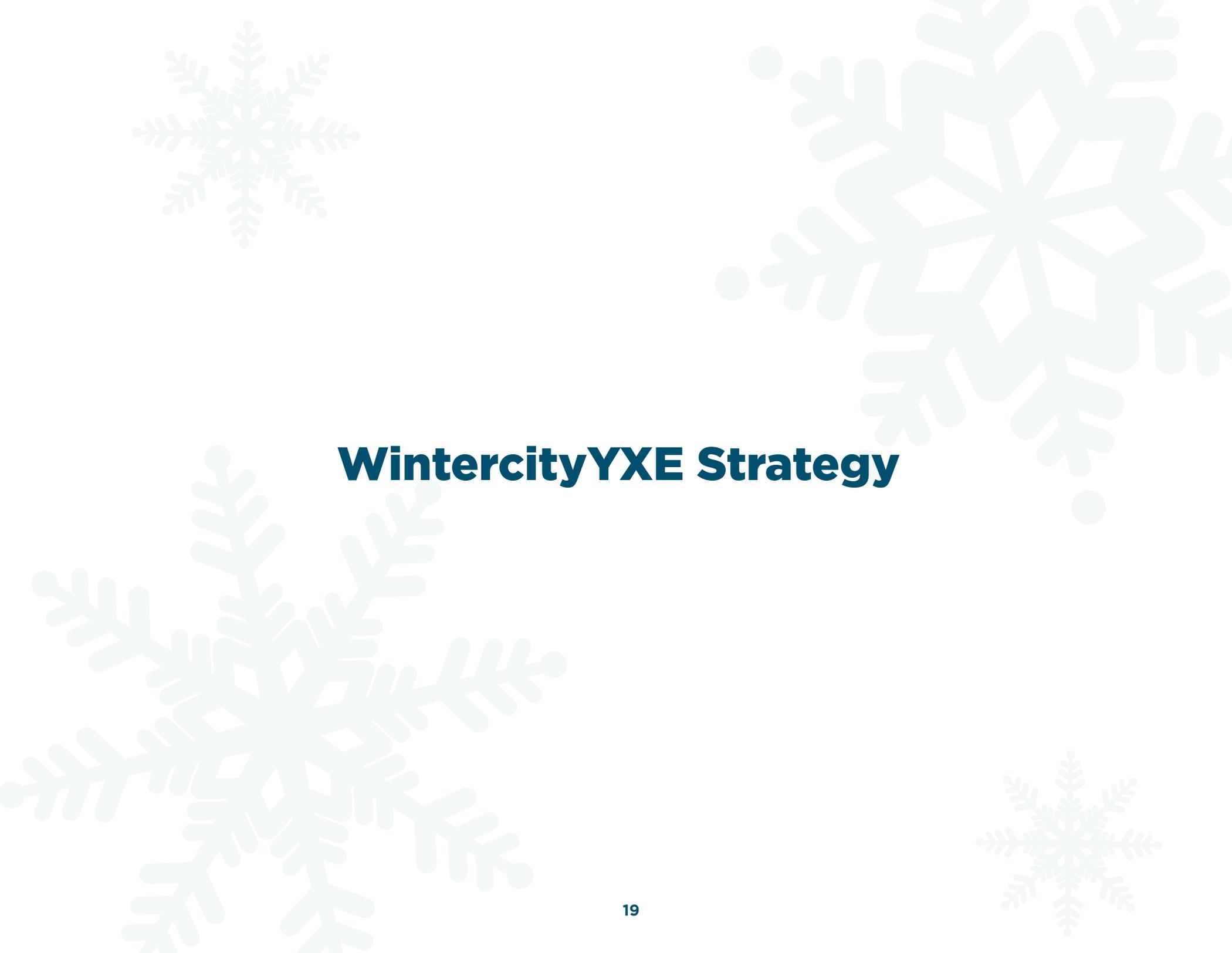


The background features several stylized snowflake graphics in a light blue color. One large snowflake is in the top right corner, another large one is in the bottom left, and two smaller ones are in the top left and bottom right corners. The snowflakes have a hexagonal base with various branch-like structures extending from them.

## **WintercityYXE Vision**

Saskatoon is a vibrant, prosperous and dynamic community that thrives during winter months and works together to support an active winter lifestyle that is inclusive and accessible for all.



The background features several stylized snowflake graphics in a light blue color. One large snowflake is in the top right corner, another large one is in the bottom left corner, and two smaller ones are in the top left and bottom right corners. The central text is positioned between the top and bottom snowflakes.

# **WintercityYXE Strategy**

The strategy's three themes are Winter Economy, Winter Life & Culture and Winter Design. Specific objectives, desired outcomes and actions are identified for each theme.



The actions are not intended to be a list of specific events or activities. They are generalized to provide for flexibility, with the understanding that there are many ways to approach each action. Furthermore, for each action, there may be infrastructure or programs currently in place that help accomplish the action.

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



**“**  
*Having a WintercityYXE Strategy helps to support Meewasin’s goal to offer nature experiences and learning in every season.*  
**”**

**Andrea Lafond, CEO  
 Meewasin**

# Theme: Winter Economy

**Objective: To develop a strong winter economy**

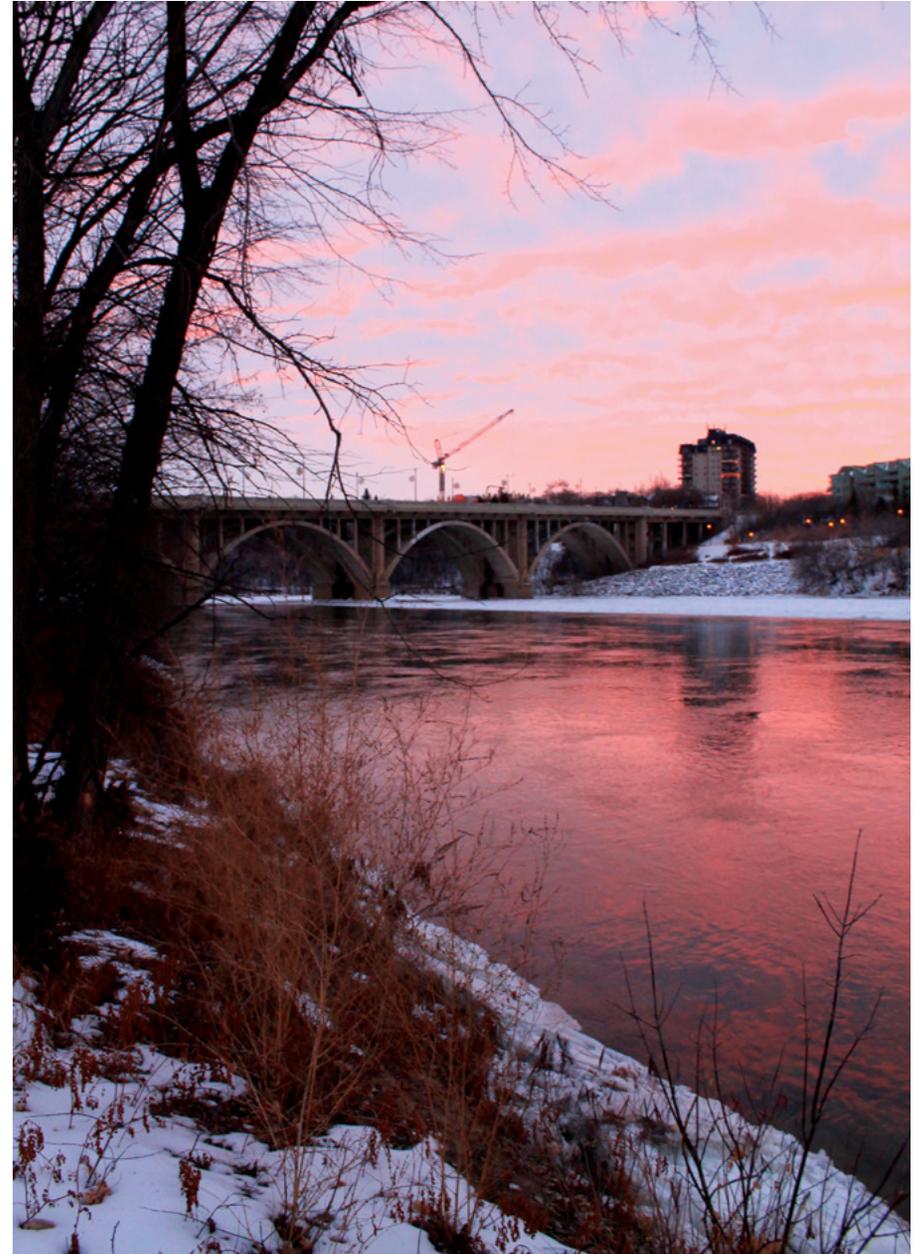
## Desired Outcomes:

- 1) Street activation in the public realm.
- 2) A variety of activities bring people outside in the winter.
- 3) Increased economic activity during the winter months.

## Actions:

- 1) Develop and support winter/shoulder-season outdoor cafés.
- 2) Develop and support seasonal/pop-up winter business opportunities.
- 3) Research best practices for winter economic opportunities.
- 4) Support activities that animate winter street life.

Did you know that outdoor cafés are permitted even in winter? For more information, visit [saskatoon.ca/wintercityYXE](http://saskatoon.ca/wintercityYXE)



## Objective: Sustainable approach to how we manage snow

### Desired Outcome:

1) Use snow as a resource.

### Action:

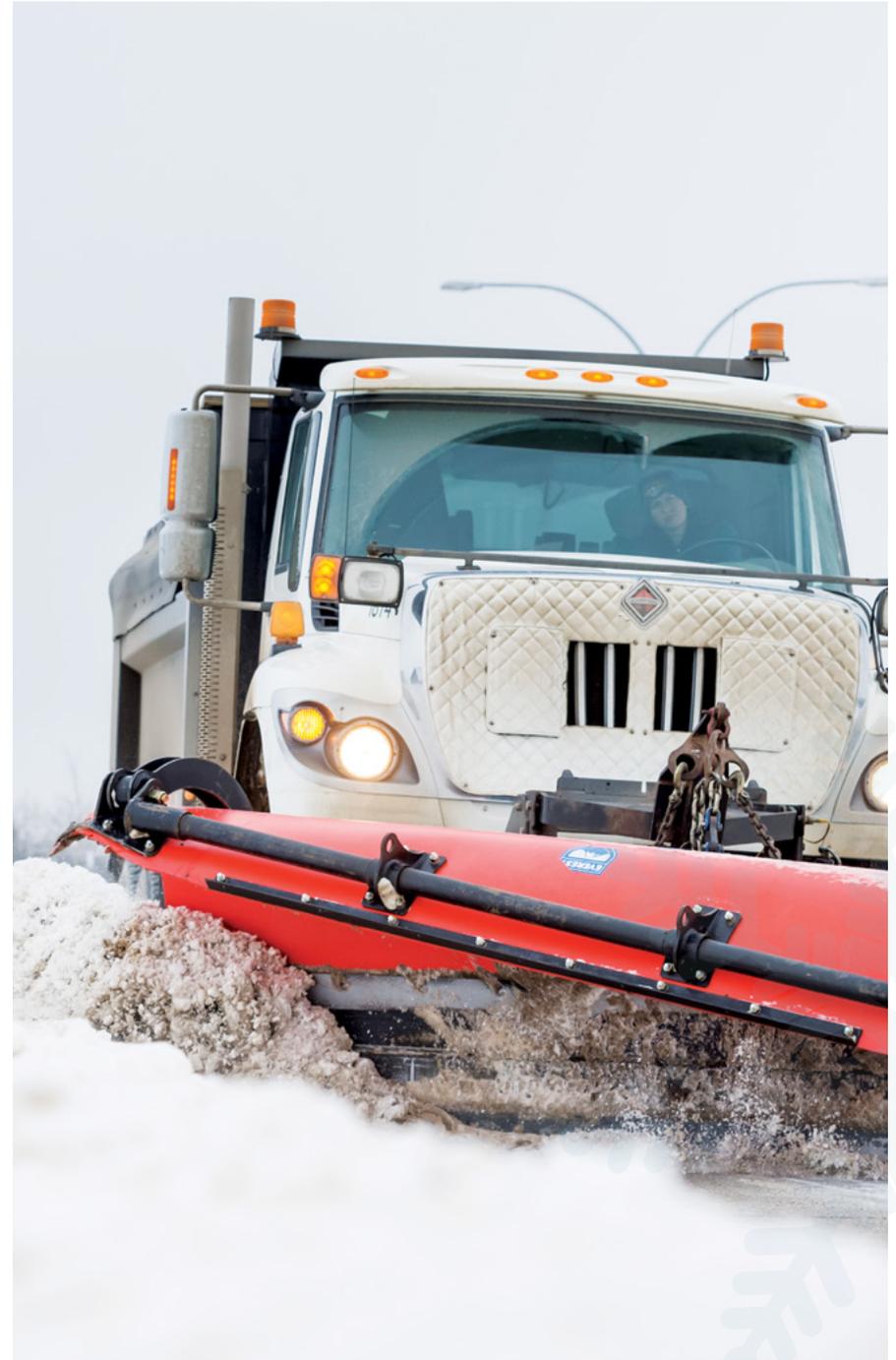
1) Research opportunities to use snow as a resource (eg. minimize the need to store snow in a snow management facility).

“

*Saskatoon is of course a winter city by nature of our climate, but in order for it to truly flourish the same way as it does in the warmer months, it needs to be more than that. The WintercityYXE Strategy is an intentional effort from our community to help make Saskatoon a thriving, inviting place during the colder months, and this strategy will help steer us in that direction. This is not only an important feat for the entire city, but especially for the Downtown - the heart and soul of our city! From mobility, to infrastructure, to new and exciting winter activities and events - we're excited to see our district continue to grow and evolve into one of Canada's best winter cities.*

”

*Tannis Miller, Social Media + Brand Specialist  
Downtown Saskatoon Business Improvement District*



# Theme: Winter Culture and Life

**Objective: To develop and support winter activities and events that encourage social activity in winter**

## Desired Outcomes:

- 1) Saskatoon has a variety of social and cultural events and festivals that spark interest and build community spirit throughout the winter.
- 2) Saskatoon has a variety of indoor and outdoor activities during winter months.



## Actions:

- 1) Promote indoor and outdoor winter activities and events.
- 2) Support a variety of existing and new winter activities and events for all ages and abilities including the development of new ideas and concepts.
- 3) Identify and work to reduce barriers to participating in indoor and outdoor activities and events.
- 4) Provide and promote a variety of transportation options for activities and events.
- 5) Develop mobile event supports to provide organizers for winter activities and events access to tools that can support their activity or event.

Partnerships are key to building strong event and activity programming.



## Objective: To provide information about winter safety and inclusion

### Desired Outcome:

Information about “how to winter” is accessible in various formats for all ages and abilities.

### Actions:

- 1) Build on Saskatoon’s [Cold Weather Strategy](#) to develop a Winter Emergency Response Guide.
- 2) Provide and promote information to residents on “how to winter”, such as:
  - how to support vulnerable populations during winter months
  - how to host a winter event outside
  - home maintenance
  - winter safety
  - winter gear

Saskatoon EMO uses NotifyNow to alert partner organizations when the Cold Weather Strategy has been activated.

“

*WintercityYXE inspired us to make Broadway Ave an all season destination with activities and installations to draw people to the area in the coldest months. We would not have attempted these large projects without the support of the City and the shared understanding of the goals encompassed in the WintercityYXE strategy. The beautification projects encouraged people to invest in their own properties. Businesses in the area thanked us for bringing people to the District in historically slower sales months. We built community and pride in the neighbourhood thanks to the investments made through the WintercityYXE grants.*

”

*DeeAnn Mercier, Executive Director  
Broadway Business Improvement District*

**Objective: To support the needs of vulnerable populations during the winter months**

**Desired Outcome:**

Support for the needs of vulnerable populations are in place.

**Actions:**

- 1) Develop partnerships with organizations that support vulnerable populations during winter months.
- 2) Identify and work to address the needs of vulnerable populations during the winter months.
- 3) Support newcomer settlement providers on winter preparedness initiatives.

Partnerships are important to provide information and orientation on winter gear, safety and activities for newcomers.



“

*The WinterCityYXE strategy enhances the age-friendliness of Saskatoon by providing older adults with opportunities for physical activities and social connections in colder months that contribute to their overall quality of life.* ”

*Candace Skrapek, Co-Chair  
Saskatoon Council on Aging*



# Theme: Winter Design

**Objective: Make it easier to move around the city in winter**

## Desired Outcome:

Moving around the city in the winter is easy and accessible.

## Actions:

- 1) Support actions identified in the [Active Transportation Plan](#).
  - a. Explore opportunities for winter-based active transportation including multi-modal transportation (bike/bus/walk).
  - b. Address the need for all season end-of-trip bicycle facilities.
  - c. Design, designate and prioritize a winter cycling network for snow removal.
- 2) Seek opportunities to expand the [Snow Angel Program](#).
- 3) Provide appropriate [winter maintenance of roadways](#), sidewalks next to City properties, pathways, trails, active transportation infrastructure and at civic sites.
- 4) Ensure access to transit during inclement weather and more comfortable transit shelters.
- 5) Identify and address accessibility barriers for all modes of transportation in winter.

The [Active Transportation Plan](#) helps provide more choices for moving around Saskatoon by addressing our community and infrastructure needs for cycling, walking and other modes of active transportation. Cycling and walking infrastructure also supports the Low Emission Community Plan.



## Objective: Ensure public spaces and facilities are designed for winter comfort, safety and activity

### Desired Outcomes:

- 1) Public spaces and facilities are comfortable, safe and active during the winter months.
- 2) Amenities and facilities support winter activities.

### Actions:

- 1) Develop and implement Winter Design Guidelines.
- 2) Explore how outdoor spaces can be better used in the winter months.
- 3) Examine the need and benefit of a comprehensive winter lighting strategy and invest in projects that advance learning for the development of a lighting strategy.
- 4) Support the development of winter amenities and facilities.
- 5) Plan for and invest in winterized washroom facilities.

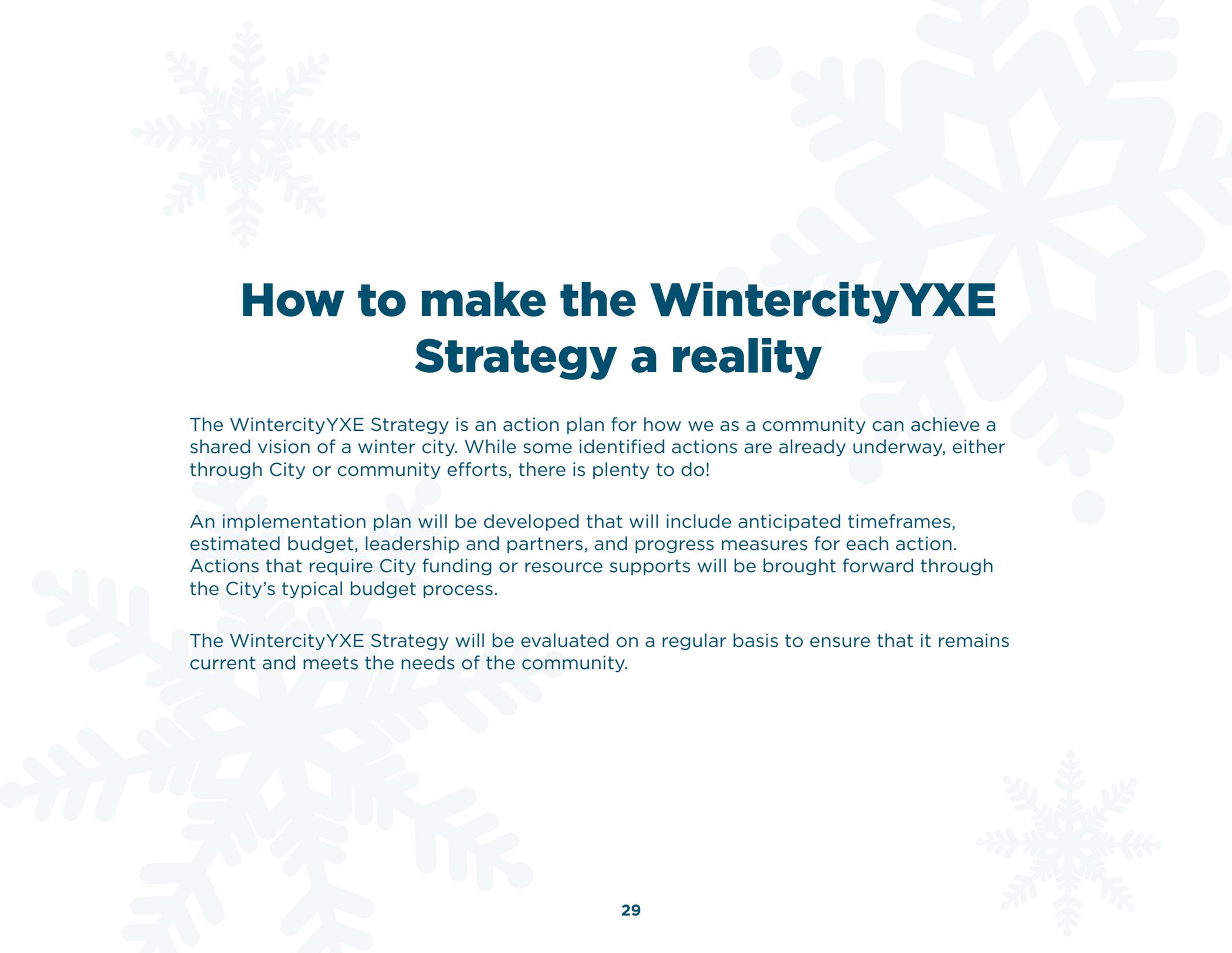
**Safe Bus** is a program designed to assist anyone, of any age, that needs immediate shelter or needs to contact emergency services. By simply and safely flagging down a bus or going to a parked bus, transit operators are required to immediately contact emergency services directly through the on-bus radio system and give the person in peril a safe place to wait.



**“**  
*WintercityYXE and Wanuskewin want us to rebuild our relationship with winter.*  
**”**

**Chris Standing, Visitor Services Manager  
Wanuskewin**





## **How to make the WintercityYXE Strategy a reality**

The WintercityYXE Strategy is an action plan for how we as a community can achieve a shared vision of a winter city. While some identified actions are already underway, either through City or community efforts, there is plenty to do!

An implementation plan will be developed that will include anticipated timeframes, estimated budget, leadership and partners, and progress measures for each action. Actions that require City funding or resource supports will be brought forward through the City's typical budget process.

The WintercityYXE Strategy will be evaluated on a regular basis to ensure that it remains current and meets the needs of the community.







[saskatoon.ca/wintercityyx](http://saskatoon.ca/wintercityyx)