

# Permanent Outdoor Festival Site Study

## ISSUE

Festivals and events in Saskatoon continue to increase annually not only in number, but in size and complexity as well. The City of Saskatoon (City) has identified the need for a permanent outdoor festival site to assist festivals and events with their programming while also protecting existing green infrastructure from reoccurring damage.

## RECOMMENDATION

That the report of the General Manager, Community Services Division, dated February 16, 2021, be forwarded to City Council recommending:

1. That the final report from HTFC Planning & Design, and their partners Kindrachuk Agrey Architecture and Colliers International for the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site feasibility study be received as information;
2. That the Concept Plan for the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site be approved; and
3. That Supply Chain Management tender Phase One development of the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site.

## BACKGROUND

The Recreation and Parks Master Plan (Master Plan), completed in 2015 and approved by City Council, was developed to guide future decision-making and provide the overall framework for development, delivery and continuous improvement of recreation and parks programs, services and facilities. A festival venue/amphitheatre was ranked as the second highest priority (out of 23 identified outcomes) for facility spaces within outdoor recreation. The Master Plan also noted a feasibility study would be required to identify a potential location for a centrally-located, permanent outdoor festival site and the development of a concept plan.

At the March 23, 2017 meeting of City Council, Mr. Todd Brandt, President and CEO, Tourism Saskatoon, made a presentation to Council on Tourism's Event Hosting Strategy. The Strategy outlined many key elements required to help make Saskatoon a great event-hosting city. This Strategy was referred to Administration for consideration in future planning and was utilized in the recent work undertaken on the feasibility study for a permanent outdoor festival site.

On February 11, 2020, the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services received a report detailing usage of Kiwanis Memorial Park as it related to outdoor special events. The Vimy Memorial Band Shell in Kiwanis Memorial Park South was erected in approximately 1937 by the Kiwanis Club to commemorate the battle of Vimy Ridge. Kiwanis Memorial Park has since been extensively developed and is one of the most widely used parks in the city. It is a focal point for tourists with three major hotels in proximity and one of the busiest sections of Meewasin Trail running

through the park. It is enjoyed by passive users, is a popular location for weddings and photography and has a long history of hosting special events which vary in size and duration.

With the park being one of the most popular locations for downtown events, it has become evident the green infrastructure (grass and trees) in Kiwanis Memorial Park, as well as all other riverbank parks, were not designed or constructed to be able to withstand repetitive use by large scale events. Over the years, the large-scale events have resulted in soil compaction, turf wear and thinning of the tree canopy, a sign of declining health of the trees. After the 2019 outdoor event season, the Parks Department provided an extensive aeration and over-seeding to the most heavily damaged areas. With no events hosted in the park in 2020, the condition of the park improved significantly. During the consultations for this Study it was confirmed that to best protect the green infrastructure (in particular the heritage trees) within Kiwanis Memorial Park, continued implementation of protective measures in collaboration with event organizers, including limiting large-scale events within the park would be required.

As part of the 2020 Capital Budget approval, capital funding of \$75,000 was approved through Project No. 2114 - Riverbank Park Upgrades, to complete a feasibility study and concept plan for the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site. In June 2020, City Council approved \$2,000,000 to be submitted to the Province for an allocation from the Municipal Economic Enhancement Program, in order to start construction for this project. This request was subsequently approved by the Province in July 2020.

### **DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS**

#### Permanent Outdoor Festival Site Feasibility Study

The goal of the feasibility study was to articulate a vision for the future of hosting outdoor special events in Saskatoon, to identify a preferred site location and develop a functional concept plan which targeted the program features and criteria required for a permanent outdoor festival site. Criteria for the site include that it be:

- 1) centrally located and easily accessible (both geographically and physically);
- 2) a reflection of inclusive civic values;
- 3) respectful of community, strategic goals, accessibility and growth planning; and
- 4) hospitable for a wide range of festivals, gatherings and everyday urban living.

The contract for the Permanent Outdoor Feasibility Study was awarded to HTFC Planning & Design and their partners Kindrachuk Agrey Architecture and Colliers International (HTFC). They started in May 2020 and were asked to analyze nine centralized locations that currently host festivals or events annually.

Through research and analysis and the contribution of stakeholders for all nine locations, HTFC was able to assess the suitability of each location, prioritize important characteristics and identify the top three blended sites. Criteria included ease of access to the following amenities:

- 1) links to the future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines, as well as future transit stops;

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- 2) connection to the Meewasin Trails;
- 3) bridge crossings; and
- 4) public parking (on-street parking and pay-lots).

Stakeholders were clear that each individual location limited the capacity for large scale events and combining or blending locations could provide greater opportunities for future planning and growth in event size, duration and frequency. Stakeholders also listed several operational challenges experienced through the provision of festivals and events:

- 1) access to public washrooms;
- 2) inadequate parking;
- 3) limited access to power/utilities;
- 4) damages and repairs to greenspace, pathways, vegetation, soil and turf;
- 5) noise and light pollution; and
- 6) waste and recycling management; etc.

The three blended locations were analysed further and presented within a public engagement survey which targeted responses relating to site criteria, amenities for festivals and public, as well as preferred site location. From the general criteria, respondents identified the following as being of most importance:

- 1) ability to accommodate medium festivals (1,000 to 10,000 people per day);
- 2) special considerations for transit, BRT;
- 3) ability to accommodate small festivals (1,000 or less people per day);
- 4) be usable by general public and informal activities when not in use for special events;
- 5) ability to accommodate large festivals (10,000 or more people per day); and
- 6) ability to accommodate multiple (2-3) small or medium festivals and events at the same time with distance and shared amenities.

From the festival amenities, respondents identified the following as being of most importance:

- 1) permanent utility hook-ups;
- 2) zones for temporary concessions, food trucks and merchandise;
- 3) permanent washrooms for use only during events;
- 4) permanent location for additional temporary washrooms;
- 5) temporary spectator seating around stage;
- 6) large stage with cover/canopy/partial cover;
- 7) on-site loading;
- 8) headquarters building for festival/event use (fee for service);
- 9) permanent smaller performance areas in addition to main stage area;
- 10) backstage area; and

11) permanent ticket booth (fee for service).

Respondents also identified the most important public amenities:

- 1) pedestrian trails throughout the site;
- 2) on-site bicycle parking (permanent or temporary);
- 3) permanent, year-round public washrooms;
- 4) scenic Saskatoon views and backdrops;
- 5) children's activity/play area for use during and outside events;
- 6) areas for public recreation use during an event; and
- 7) publicly available boat docks for use during and outside of events.

### Permanent Outdoor Festival Site Concept Plan

Of the 805 participants in the survey, 43% of the respondents chose the river central location as the preferred site. This was the highest percentage of the three sites (for a completed summary of the Public Engagement and more details on engagement data, please refer to Appendix 2). HTFC used the survey data to create a visionary concept plan for the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site (see Appendix 1, Section 6.3, Page 28). The concept plan showcases responsive improvements which address the top priorities provided through stakeholder and public engagement data, such as public accessible washrooms, provision of utility services and redesigning Friendship Park to allow for increased capacity of up to 7,500 spectators for an event. In addition, changes to slopes and surfaces provide optimization and efficiency for event operation as the Main Stage Plaza allows for various sizes of staging to be accommodated. It will also provide physical accessibility to the area and significantly reduce the impact on green infrastructure.

The final report from HTFC stated (see Appendix 1, Section 8, page 55):

“The amount, variety and scale of festivals and events is impressive and is foundational to Saskatoon’s attractions and offerings. Encouraging and supporting festivals will continue to play a significant role in the cultural, social, and economic life of the city. The creation of a designated permanent festival site and the associated amenities detailed in Section 6 of this report, will provide diverse range of benefits for the city, the event organizers, visiting friends and relatives and the citizens of Saskatoon. The setting of the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site capitalizes on Saskatoon’s much cherished and desired riverbank green spaces with the iconic South Saskatchewan River as the backdrop.”

The concept plan for the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site aligns with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan:

“Recommendation 24: the City will consider providing both spontaneous and structured recreation, culture, and parks spaces in the expansion/enhancement of existing or the development of new infrastructure.”

### Phase One Development

Should Council approve the concept plan for the Permanent Downtown Festival Site, development of the full vision for the Site would need to be completed in phases. This approach will allow the project to utilize the \$2M in funding Council allocated to this project from the province's Municipal Economic Enhancement Program. Funding was approved in June 2020, with a spending deadline of March 31, 2022. The remaining phases can be constructed over time in future years.

Phase One will include the development of the Entry Bosque area (see Appendix 1, Section 6.3, page 28, No .9), the Headquarters Building (see Appendix 1, Section 6.3, page 28, No. 5), as well as completion of prerequisite studies to aid in the development of the detailed design. The Entry Bosque area is a park/event access point and will provide a gathering space for festival goers, events or the park for passive recreation. The area will include utility nodes to support event organizers with the provision of ticket, merchandise or food vendors within this area. Hard surface enhancements in the area will minimize turf damage and preserve the heritage trees within parks. Through engagement with stakeholders and the public, utility nodes and zones for vendors were identified as key amenities for the provision of festivals and events.

The Headquarters Building, which is situated between Friendship Park and Kiwanis Memorial Park, will provide event organizers with support space to gather, coordinate staff/volunteer activities and storage to collect/transport materials outside the event setting. The Headquarters Building will become the epicentre for coordination of the event while providing easy access from either Kiwanis Memorial Park or Friendship Park. The Headquarters Building could also serve to provide additional functionality as a maintenance satellite location for City of Saskatoon Parks operations that work within these park settings.

Accessible universal washrooms will be included within the building, an important amenity which event organizers will no longer need to supply through rental services (with the exception of large-scale events where additional portable washrooms would be required). In addition, these washrooms can also be utilized throughout the year by the general public, adding capacity for nearby users of Meewasin Trail and park space. Through engagement, accessible washrooms were identified by the both organizers and the public for year-round access as a leading amenity for importance in the provision of events.

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Planning for the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site Concept Plan has identified the following capital costs to complete the project and separates out phase one:

	<u>Total Project</u>	<u>Phase One Only</u>
Sitewide Prerequisite, Permits and Utility Work	\$1,713,000	\$ 349,000
Festival Headquarters and Washrooms	\$1,748,000	\$1,310,000
Friendship Park	\$6,114,000	\$ 341,000
Kiwanis Memorial Park (South)	\$2,735,000	\$ 0
River Landing 1	<u>\$ 546,000</u>	<u>\$ 0</u>
Total Capital Costs (including design & contingency):	\$12,856,000	\$2,000,000

Phase One of implementation is budgeted at \$2M. Based on available funding, Phase One will include site-wide requirements such as topographic survey, site assessments, permits, design and construction of the Headquarters Building and contingency funding. This level of funding was approved by City Council in June 2020, through the Municipal Economic Enhancement Program. Subject to City Council approval, Phase One will be tendered and awarded for construction in 2021. If any residual funding is remaining after Phase One, design work on providing utilities, electrical and water connections, to the site would begin.

To ultimately achieve the full scope of the permanent festival site vision, the remaining phases of the concept plan are estimated to cost \$10,856,000 in 2021 dollars.

The estimated annual operating impact of the Phase 1 work, including the contribution to Civic Buildings Comprehensive Maintenance program is estimated at \$48,550, which is 5% of new replacement value of the Headquarters Building, projected to cost \$971,000. This estimated operating impact will be included within the Business Planning and Budget process for 2022. If through detailed design there are any significant changes to the estimated operating impacts, Administration will report back in advance of the 2022 Budget.

### OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The Triple Bottom Line Assessment Matrix was utilized to review the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site Concept Plan. The project supports initiatives and infrastructure that enable active transportation as site selection placed a priority on active transportation, transit and using existing parking supply. This included the accommodation of BRT planning, transit connections and bike valet services.

The project supports the reduction of environmental nuisances such as noise and pollutant generators by developing utility nodes, a stage plaza designed to minimize sound reverberation and proposed odor mitigation from the lift station.

Civic participation through the support of community-driven organizations is the cornerstone of social and cultural well-being. Providing space and infrastructure for

community-driven events and for public usage creates efficiencies for programming, along with utilizing stakeholders and engagement to build capacity for the future of Saskatoon.

The Permanent Outdoor Festival Site will remain adaptive, flexible, iterative and responsive to the needs of event organizers, emergency preparedness and the public as a benefit to the community and good governance. There are no privacy or legal implications identified.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Should Council approve the proposed Concept Plan, it will then be processed through Meewasin Development Review, as well as the City of Saskatoon Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design processes. The detailed design process will respond to any identified issues.

The future implementation plan for the remaining phasing of the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site, including the identification of funding, will be submitted for consideration through the Capital Budget process.

### **APPENDICES**

1. City of Saskatoon Permanent Outdoor Festival Site - Feasibility Report
2. Permanent Outdoor Festival Site - Final Comprehensive Engagement Report

### **REPORT APPROVAL**

Written by: Mark Campbell, Open Space Consultant  
Reviewed by: Andrew Roberts, Director of Recreation and Community Development  
Lynne Lacroix, General Manager, Community Services  
Approved by: Jeff Jorgenson, City Manager

SP/2021/RCD/PDCS/Permanent Outdoor Festival Site Study/gs/mh