

Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Arena Site Options Evaluation Criteria

ISSUE

The development of the Downtown Event and Entertainment District project, centred on a new Downtown arena and convention centre, as well as the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, is ongoing. Of critical importance at this stage of the project is the selection of the future location of the Downtown arena. What evaluation criteria will be used to define the feasibility and ranking of the arena site options?

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the arena site option evaluation criteria outlined in this report be approved; and
2. That the Administration report back on the arena site options and public engagement approach.

BACKGROUND

At its November 19, 2018 Regular Business Meeting, City Council considered the report entitled "[TCU Place / SaskTel Centre Market Analysis](#)". Attached to this was a report from Administration entitled "[Financing Options – New or Renovated Arena and Convention Centre](#)," which outlined several financing options that may support the funding strategy for the Downtown Event and Entertainment District. In considering this item, City Council 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."

At its April 29, 2019 Regular Business Meeting, City Council considered the report entitled "[Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Next Steps](#)," which outlined the proposed process with respect to planning for a future Downtown event and entertainment district.

At its meeting held on September 23, 2019, the Governance and Priorities Committee received a report entitled “[Downtown Event and Entertainment District Public Engagement Plan](#),” which outlined a high-level communications and engagement plan for the site selection process.

At its meeting held on January 27, 2020, the Governance and Priorities Committee received a report entitled “[Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Update](#),” which provided an update regarding the site selection process.

At its meeting held on June 21, 2021, the Governance and Priorities Committee received a report entitled “[Downtown Event and Entertainment District and Bus Rapid Transit – Sequencing of Upcoming Reports and Decision Milestones](#),” which outlined that the evaluation criteria for ranking the arena sites would be brought forward in advance of the site options being brought forward publicly.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

As described in the “[Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Update](#)” report, the Administration engaged the services of two external advisory firms, 1) Oak View Group and 2) 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.

From this consultation, multiple evaluation criteria were identified to define the ranking of the arena site options. The criteria proposed is as follows:

1. Available land area to support a new arena and supporting infrastructure (e.g. public realm, parking facilities);
2. Strength of the transportation network to support an arena facility (includes road access to the site for both people parking near the site and multiple and large vehicle access to the staging area);
3. Opportunity for influencing adjacent development/infill and alignment with current city plans and long-term vision for the Downtown;
4. Distance from an updated convention centre or potential new convention centre adjacent to the existing site (TCU Place);
5. Proximity to existing hotels, entertainment establishments and businesses;
6. Potential effect on residential areas and properties;
7. Proximity to future BRT stations;
8. Proximity to existing parking facilities; and
9. Projected site servicing and development costs.

Each arena site option will be assessed on whether or not it would be of suitable size for a modern 15,000 seat bowl capacity arena. Those determined to be too small would be eliminated from further consideration. The remaining sites will be ranked in accordance with the evaluation criteria defined above. The results of this evaluation process will be

included in the information presented to the public as part of the engagement process. When City Council makes the final decision on location, the information presented will include both the technical evaluation as well as the comprehensive feedback obtained through public engagement .

The development of an animated event and entertainment district, anchored by a new arena and convention centre, and linked to the rest of the city by the future BRT system, will stimulate the economy and bring renewed energy and life to Saskatoon's Downtown. Therefore, the selection of the site of the future Downtown arena should consider an array of factors that will have a real influence, not only on the physical location of a new arena, but also support animation of an event and entertainment district, and be a shared public space where residents feel welcome and have a sense of belonging.

The multiple factor evaluation criteria highlight the importance of the arena site having sufficient adjoining area to foster supporting infrastructure development, transportation connections, access to existing parking to support people being able to move to and from the arena and the district efficiently, proximity to existing businesses that are complementary to the district, and other key considerations. Of note, new parking facilities will need to be constructed regardless of which site option is ultimately selected by City Council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no communications, Triple Bottom Line, policy, privacy, or CPTED implications or considerations at this time. These will be considered in future reports as required.

NEXT STEPS

The arena site options and updated engagement plan will be reported publicly to City Council as soon as possible. Once this has been completed, public engagement on the site options will commence following which the Administration will report back with a report to City Council for a decision on the arena site location.

Report Approval

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