

Dedicated Outdoor Space – Wellness Centre 145 1st Avenue North

ISSUE

This report contains information to consider a dedicated outdoor space concept to support a whole-community approach to safety and well-being related to the Saskatoon Tribal Council's (STC) Wellness Centre (Wellness Centre), neighbouring area, and the Central Business District.

BACKGROUND

City Council, at its [Regular Business Meeting on May 24, 2022](#), considered a report on a whole-community approach to safety and well-being, including the development of a plan specifically related to improve the public realm around the exterior of the Wellness Centre.

A letter from the Street Activity Subcommittee (SAS) dated June 7, 2022, was received by the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services at its [Special Meeting held on June 16, 2022](#), recognizing that service providers are often located in core business improvement districts and that as such, these locations have limited outdoor spaces. The letter requested that service providers monitor the exterior situation of their building and be accountable on loitering, waste, and safety. The SAS recommended a good neighbour policy that ensures the public spaces adjacent to service providers be observed and surveyed regularly to be kept free of tripping hazards and garbage.

At that same meeting the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services resolved:

“That Administration report back on the City's potential role in dedicating outdoor space in support of the tenant at 145 1st Ave N, for Wellness Centre Relatives/service users, including consideration of sustainable public access and use of the right of way.”

CURRENT STATUS

The Safety/Maintenance Committee (Committee), led by the City, meets regularly to ensure a collaborative approach to improving downtown safety and well-being is taken. Further to the resolution noted above, the Committee and the STC have discussed a potential approach to creating a dedicated outdoor space, at the Wellness Centre, that would improve upon both the well-being of the relatives and the public realm around the exterior of Wellness Centre, as a means to lessen the impact of loitering and nuisance activities.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Access to outdoor spaces is important for all people. As noted in earlier reports, there have been several nuisance complaints from some downtown businesses and residents regarding the Wellness Centre with respect to the activities exterior to the building, often related to the use of sidewalks and lanes. Relatives utilizing the services of the Wellness Centre currently only have close access to those areas for outside gathering, as opposed to space designed and dedicated for sitting and being outdoors. Dedicated outdoor gathering space in close proximity to the Wellness Centre could have a positive impact on both users of the space as well as the general public using the sidewalk in this area for conveyance.

The Committee has reviewed possible locations for an outdoor space around the Wellness Centre and has identified some options and considerations for each as follows:

1. Midtown parking lot located west of the Wellness Centre
 - concern for access from the Wellness Centre
 - concern for relatives crossing a parking lot vehicle exit route
 - the Wellness Centre doors that would access the outdoor space are emergency exits off a stairwell and are not designed for regular use
 - consultation and approval would be required from Midtown Plaza as the property owner
2. An undetermined offsite location
 - logistics with transportation
 - supervision/ security of site
 - not being directly connected to the Wellness Centre, particularly for relatives making efforts to stabilize and needing that direct connection
3. Use of the 1st Avenue public right-of-way
 - currently under review and requiring further conversations with STC
 - direct connection to Wellness Centre
 - line of site from front of Wellness Centre
 - loss of parking spaces

With respect to use of the right-of-way or parking stalls for a dedicated outdoor space, this was raised through discussions between the Committee and the City of Vancouver where such spaces have been established. These spaces are typically operated by adjacent service providers and are each unique, based on the location and need of the neighbourhood. Operators of the spaces are responsible for managing and operating the space, cleaning and maintaining the space, and ensuring a positive experience for the users of the space, pedestrians, and for traffic passing by.

At present, the City does not have a specific policy that would address the development of a dedicated outdoor space for the Wellness Centre within City right-of-way as is occurring in Vancouver. The City does, however, have policies and bylaws that contemplate similar uses related to parking patios.

Parking patios are allowed under the Zoning Bylaw and administered through Council Policy C09-013 – Use of Sidewalks, Boulevards and Parking Stalls – Vending Policy, which are then subject to further regulations under the Sidewalk Cafe and Parking Patio Guidelines. These involve the construction of a deck within the City right-of-way that would either serve as a pedestrian pathway with a seating area on the sidewalk, or serve as a seating area, with the sidewalk being utilized as a pedestrian pathway. However, these provisions directly apply to parking patios that are accessory to restaurants, lounges and taverns and are associated with a licensed commercial business as contained in the Zoning Bylaw. Given this, a Zoning Bylaw amendment would be required to allow for this approach in circumstances not contained in the Zoning Bylaw, which may then be used by other similar organizations. This would require an adequate assessment of all potential impacts and a report being presented to Council for consideration.

The City also has a Temporary Asphalt Parking Patio Program which was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide businesses with expanded seating and retail areas. Unlike the conventional Parking Patio Program discussed above, which requires a deck or boardwalk constructed flush with the sidewalk, the pedestrian area could be provided directly on the asphalt surface with access ramps and concrete jersey barriers, provided by the business, placed to protect the pathway. This temporary program is in effect until October 31, 2022 and regulated in the same way as parking patios identified above. The Policy states that public Sidewalks, Boulevards and on-street Parking Stalls may be temporarily used for the purposes of Vending Carts, Sidewalk Cafes, and Parking Patios” while the Temporary Asphalt Parking Patio Program expands these uses to include outdoor seating options, retail space or other extension of a licensed commercial business. The Policy and Guidelines also refer to various approvals from departments and organizations. However, since this is a policy and not a Bylaw, Council could direct the Administration to make an exception to the policy in this specific circumstance.

Adaptation of general policy conditions will be required since the existing policy speaks to commercial businesses rather than non-profit organizations but could include provisions for general liability insurance, waste, storage and maintenance considerations, fencing, pedestrian access and barrier free mobility considerations, and any other appropriate considerations to ensure that the space will fit with the public realm. The expectation would be that the space be maintained similar to that for commercial businesses. In the event that a more permanent policy solution is desired, amendments to the above-noted policy documents would be required along with potential Zoning Bylaw amendments.

From discussions with Vancouver, some of the benefits to creating a dedicated outdoor space include potential organized and programming space, increased stewardship and appreciation for the public realm while providing a sense of comfort to the relatives of the Wellness Centre and providing a supervised area that is more secure and contained through the use of CPTED strategies. The current temporary location and operation of the Wellness Centre was an answer to a critical demand in the community with the needs of the Wellness Centre and residents evolving. Adding a temporary public outdoor space would enable the STC the ability to evaluate and develop how it could use outdoor space in a more permanent location, while also providing immediate benefits to users of the facility.

Construction of a temporary patio would result in the loss of parking spaces. Challenges with enforcement may continue to exist, and the City and the STC would need to continue to work collaboratively to ensure adequate oversight and security were in place, including control over who may use the space and during what hours when not tied to a business license; as well as costs of installation, maintenance and removal.

In general, there must be a balance between the needs and risks to the downtown with the needs and risks of the Wellness Centre and the relatives who reside there.

Currently the Saskatoon Police Service (SPS) and SFD have coordinated a Focused Attention Task Force Operational Plan which was written by SPS. Public Safety Personnel will provide consistent and regular presence around the 100 block of 1st Ave N. SPS and the SFD have actioned a coordinated schedule that operates from 8 am until 5 pm and started on June 16, 2022. The schedule is set up with five phases or shifts each day. The uniformed public safety personnel include:

- SFD Bylaw Inspectors
- SPS Beat Officers
- SPS Alternative Response Officers
- SPS Bike Unit
- Community Support Program

An initial review will take place following the first two weeks related to the operational plan. Data collection and review will include:

- Time and date of attendance at the Wellness Centre with any notable incidents/ events
- Outcomes related to qualitative and quantitative information

Stakeholder meetings with neighbouring properties have occurred and will continue. From this, a Safety Plan is being written with a focus on providing information related to:

- Focused Attention Task Force Operational Plan
- Cleanliness and Maintenance
- Outreach Services
- Outdoor Gathering Spaces
- Future Wellness Centre (permanent location planning updates)
- Communication Schedule

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The development of a dedicated outdoor space area within a paid parking area would be subject to Temporary Reserved Parking (TRP) Program fees. The total cost would depend on the number of parking stalls being occupied and the length of time the outdoor space is operational. As an example, TRP costs associated with an outdoor space area which occupies five parking stalls are estimated at \$2,200/month.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

At this time, there are no additional legal, social, or environmental implications.

NEXT STEPS

Should Council decide that a temporary dedicated outdoor space for the Wellness Centre be developed, the Administration will proceed as directed.

Report Approval

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