

Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Event Centre/Arena Site Options and Public Engagement

ISSUE

The development of the Downtown Event and Entertainment District project, anchored by a new Downtown event centre/arena and a new or expanded convention centre, made accessible through a future 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 event centre/arena. What are the feasible sites that may be considered as the future location of the Downtown event centre/arena, and how will the City of Saskatoon (City) complete public engagement on the site options prior to City Council approving the future location for the event centre/arena?

RECOMMENDATION

That the Administration proceed with public engagement to solicit feedback on the opportunities and challenges associated with the two feasible site options for a future Downtown event centre/arena, and report back with a decision report to City Council for a final decision on the site location.

BACKGROUND

At its November 19, 2018 meeting, City Council considered a report entitled "[Considerations for TCU Place and SaskTel Centre Project](#)," and resolved, in part:

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."

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 May 24, 2022, City Council considered a report entitled "[Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Arena Site Options Evaluation Criteria](#)," and resolved:

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

Planning for the development of a Downtown Event and Entertainment District, anchored by a new Downtown event centre/arena and a new or expanded convention centre has been ongoing since late 2018. To gain a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the key factors that are intrinsic in the site selection process for a Downtown Event and Entertainment District, and the proposed improvements that are being considered, a number of investigations and studies have been completed including:

- Researching Best Practices and reviewing experiences of other cities in developing similar Downtown entertainment districts;
- Touring the Ice District and Rogers Centre in Edmonton, in coordination with Downtown Saskatoon Business Improvement District membership, including meetings with officials from the City of Edmonton, Stantec, and members of the Oilers Entertainment Group that provided valuable insights into the recent success of the partnership approach taken to develop the Ice District entertainment area;
- SaskTel Centre staff touring four U.S. cities with similarities to Saskatoon (Lincoln, NE; Omaha, NE; Des Moines, IA; and Kansas City, MO) to meet key contacts and hear the successes and lessons learned in each of their respective projects; and
- The Administration engaging the services of two external advisory firms with experience in the development of arena/convention centre/entertainment districts to gain insight from their experience in siting and developing facilities of these types, including aspects such as site design, patron access, site access (loading/unloading, etc.) and other technical considerations. The two advisory firms were Bob Black (Katz Group) / Michael Shugarman (Shugarman Architecture) and Oak View Group.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Event Centre/Arena Site Options

Five potential site options were originally identified when planning commenced in late 2018. These included:

- Site A – Midtown Shopping Centre North Parking Lot;
- Site B – North Downtown/City Yards;
- Site C – 22nd Street and Idylwyld Drive (southeast corner);
- Site D – Toys ‘R’ Us/Midtown Shopping Centre South Parking Lot; and
- Site E – River Landing.

Appendix 1 provides a map illustrating the location of each site option. Appendix 2 provides a comparison chart of each site option in consideration of the approved evaluation criteria. Appendix 3 provides additional detail on the evaluation of each site.

In accordance with the assessment process outlined in the “[Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Arena Site Options Evaluation Criteria](#)” report, Site C – 22nd Street and Idylwyld Drive and Site D – Toys ‘R’ Us Parking Lot have been determined to be too small to accommodate the event centre/arena and are proposed to be removed from further consideration. Site E – River Landing is also being proposed

to be removed from further consideration due to its poor ranking in relation to most of the approved technical evaluation criteria.

Therefore, Site A – Midtown Shopping Centre North Parking Lot and Site B – North Downtown/City Yards are the two sites proposed to be carried forward for feedback through public engagement. The Administration views both sites as viable for development of a new event centre/arena within a Downtown Event and Entertainment District. Artist's illustrations of both site options will be shared as part of the presentation of this report to City Council.

Based on the approved technical evaluation criteria, Site A – Midtown Shopping Centre North Parking Lot ranks favourably in nearly every category. Site B – North Downtown/City Yards does not rank as high across all categories, largely due to the distance from existing businesses and amenities in the Downtown and high costs related to relocating operations from the existing City Yards. Based on the approved criteria, Site A – Midtown Shopping Centre North Parking Lot is the highest scoring site, which was affirmed by the two external consultants. The Administration is not making a recommendation at this point, as that will occur following public consultation. The criteria and scoring will be included in the public engagement process so that stakeholders and the public have all information available to the City. This will help ensure that their feedback is fully informed.

Public Engagement

As the Administration explored ways to engage with the public on site options, it became clear that conducting public engagement activities prior to the conclusion of land negotiations would not be in the best interest of the City. Engaging during or prior to negotiations would significantly reduce the opportunity for the City to secure conditional purchase agreements within a competitive market price range.

With a conditional purchase agreement for Site A – Midtown Shopping Centre North Parking Lot now in place, engagement on the two feasible sites can proceed. The conditional purchase agreement with the Midtown Shopping Centre is subject to City Council's approval by the end of November 2022. The results of engagement, data analysis, and the final report will be available for City Council's consideration when approving a final site selection, at a City Council meeting in November 2022.

Public engagement is being conducted to provide City Council with feedback from the community on the perceived opportunities and challenges of each site. The feedback from engagement will be shared with City Council to then make the final decision on the event centre/arena location.

As outlined in Appendix 4, Downtown Event Centre/Arena Site Options Engagement Plan, public engagement for this stage of the project will include surveys and be at the consult level of the [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\) Spectrum](#). This means the City will be asking for feedback using a qualitative approach to collect

opinions on the opportunities and challenges of the two feasible site location options. Demographic and survey evaluation questions will also be included.

The engagement includes five major components:

- Robust ongoing communications (that will include News Releases, social media, targeted emails and mailouts, digital screens and billboards, print ads, radio, website information and other promotional material);
- Representative sample survey (that includes a telephone and online panel survey) for Saskatoon residents;
- Opt-in online public survey (Saskatoon residents as well as those from other communities can self-select to participate);
- Opt-in survey for local businesses and organizations; and
- Intercept surveys to hear from residents across Saskatoon. Anticipated areas include the Downtown/Surrounding Neighbourhoods, various shopping malls located around the city, as well as events at SaskTel Centre and TCU Place.

The Administration is prepared to launch the representative sample survey after receiving City Council's approval to proceed. The representative sample survey is anticipated to start immediately. The opt-in surveys are anticipated to open mid-September for three weeks. Engagement results will be shared publicly and presented to City Council at a November meeting to be considered as part of its final decision on the location for the future event centre/arena site.

Downtown Event and Entertainment District Advisory Group Consultation

The Administration has consulted with the Advisory Group on the site options assessment and public engagement approach outlined in this report and has incorporated their feedback.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Currently, Capital Project P.02627 – Event Venue Business Plan has a total approved budget of \$6.562M. Approximately \$130,000 of this budget has been set aside for internal communications, marketing, and public engagement costs in addition to external communication and engagement consulting costs throughout the project development phase of the Downtown Event and Entertainment District. Inshtrix was awarded a contract to assist the Administration in the public engagement on the site options.

Communications and marketing materials have been developed using internal staff resources. Additional costs associated with third party services will be incurred such as print, digital, and paid ad placements.

The conditional agreement for the purchase of Site A – Midtown Shopping Centre North Parking Lot will be brought forward for City Council's approval at a November meeting. At the same time, the Administration will be providing a decision report for a final decision on the event centre/arena site selection. A conditional agreement of purchase for the above property has been secured with terms considered reasonable by the

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Administration, and includes conditions around relocating existing parkade and loading dock access ramps, and establishing new parking facilities equal to what will be lost to the development of an arena/event centre at this location. The specific terms of the agreement are required to be kept confidential between the parties until the date of approval by City Council. While the costs of these obligations to the City under this agreement will not be fully understood until designs for the new facilities and infrastructure can be developed, it is expected that these additional costs will exceed \$10M. Should City Council not select this site, the City is not required to approve the conditional agreement to complete the purchase of this site.

Site B – North Downtown/City Yards is wholly owned by the City. City Yards is the current hub, point of origin, and storage for staff, equipment, and materials that the City relies on for maintaining roads (summer and winter functionality), water and sewer infrastructure, garbage collection, fleet maintenance services, traffic signals, pavement marking, and traffic signing. Long-term planning has been completed for future relocation of the City Yards to new satellite facilities and it is estimated that costs could exceed \$200M to relocate the City Yards, depending on the extent of the City Yards area that is displaced by new development in North Downtown.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

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

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval, public engagement on the site options will commence, following which, the Administration will report back with a decision report to City Council at a November meeting for a final decision on the event centre/arena site location.

APPENDICES

1. Site Options Map
2. Site Comparison Chart
3. Site Evaluation
4. Downtown Event Centre/Arena Site Options Engagement Plan

Report Approval

Written by: Dan Willems, Director of Technical Services
Reviewed by: Terry Schmidt, General Manager, Transportation and Construction
Lynne Lacroix, General Manager, Community Services
Clae Hack, Chief Financial Officer and General Manager,
Corporate Financial Services
Approved by: Jeff Jorgenson, City Manager

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