

Downtown Event and Entertainment District Plan

ISSUE

The vision for a Downtown Event and Entertainment District (District) is anchored around a new event centre/arena and a new or expanded convention centre, made more accessible through a future Bus Rapid Transit System (BRT). The development of a comprehensive plan aims to establish the District as a hub for entertainment and cultural activities, with vibrant public spaces that are welcoming and accessible for everyone.

The District Plan will guide public realm design for streets, plazas and other public spaces. It will develop a complementary land use plan for surrounding properties, a plan for transportation network components and facilities, a plan for any required underground and surface utilities/upgrades, as well as any recommendations related to components which may impact, or be impacted by, funding, legislation or policy.

Administration will be seeking City Council input and direction on the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles, which is a foundational element of the City of Saskatoon's (City) approach to this initiative, as well as Council's feedback on the approach outlined in this report. Prior to obtaining City Council approval of the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles in March 2023, Administration proposes routing this report through City Council's Advisory Committees and incorporating their advice.

BACKGROUND

City Council, at its Regular Business meeting held on November 19, 2018, 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;
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..."

City Council, at its Regular Business meeting held on April 26, 2021, considered a report entitled "A Vibrant Future for Saskatoon's Downtown – An Exploration of Potential Funding Opportunities", and [resolved](#):

1. That Council confirm pursuit of a downtown entertainment district/BRT, including necessary transit and parking improvements, as a priority for the City of Saskatoon;

2. That the Administration be directed to work with stakeholders and other levels of government on achieving a detailed funding plan based on Administration's presentation of April 19, 2021, (investigating all funding opportunities that include information on potential bonds for the arena) with the goal of constructing the entertainment district with no contributions from property taxes;
3. That a key objective of the entertainment district be to provide public benefit to all residents of Saskatoon;
4. That the Administration provide a report including a public process map outlining the anticipated reports and decision-making milestones related to a downtown entertainment district/BRT;
5. That as a component of ongoing engagement with stakeholders, the Administration lead an analysis of industry forecasts related to events and tourism that would be relevant to the planning of a downtown entertainment district/BRT;
6. That the Administration report on options for incorporating Indigenous placemaking and partnerships in the development of the downtown entertainment district; and
7. That as considerations are made for planning and design of the downtown entertainment district, the Administration report on opportunities to align these projects with the City's High Performance Building Policy and provide leadership by pursuing carbon neutrality in the district."

The Standing Policy Committee on Transportation, at its meeting on March 7, 2022, considered a report entitled "Connecting Downtown – Project Roadmap", and [resolved](#):

1. That the Connecting Downtown – Project Roadmap initiative be delayed, until such time as the City has further developed the extensive planning work related to the downtown entertainment district and Bus Rapid Transit integration; and,
2. That the Administration report back further once the planning work related to the downtown entertainment district and Bus Rapid Transit has advanced to a point where the Connecting Downtown – Project Roadmap initiative can be considered in the context of that work."

City Council, at its Special meeting held on November 16, 2022, considered a report entitled "Arena/Event Centre Site Selection and Public Engagement Results", and [resolved](#):

"That Option 1 be approved with the future event centre/arena to be located on Site A – Midtown Shopping Centre North Parking Lot."

CURRENT STATUS

Administration has initiated the District Plan project, which includes determining the scope, process, project deliverables, a timeline for completion, the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles and a high-level engagement strategy. Throughout the process, the City of Saskatoon (City) will work with stakeholders and community partners to determine how to maximize the benefit of the District for all residents of Saskatoon.

Vision Statement and Guiding Principles

The Vision Statement and Guiding Principles of the District Plan (see Appendix 1) describes aspirations for the District as being the centre of commerce, tourism, services and entertainment, which is inclusive and welcoming to everyone. The guiding principles form the foundation upon which the project will be developed and will guide development of the District Plan throughout the life of the project.

In addition to feedback from other Downtown Saskatoon initiatives and input received from Downtown businesses, residents and stakeholder groups, the basis for the District Plan's Vision Statement and Guiding Principles was formed collectively by the City's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, City Centre Plan, Imagine Idylwyld, Warehouse District Local Area Plan, as well as [Bylaw No. 9700 - Official Community Plan Bylaw, 2020](#). The principles incorporate priorities, policies and strategic initiatives from these approved documents.

Prior to this report, the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles were presented to the Downtown Event and Entertainment District Advisory Group (DEED Advisory Group) for consideration and feedback. Input and perspectives from the DEED Advisory Group were considered during development of the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles attached to this report.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Process/Scope

The scope of work for the District Plan will examine conditions in the geographic study area (see Appendix 2). A greater focus will be placed on the District Core, the area for planned facilities, with greater level of design detail for the public realm and more directive land use policy.

The draft District Plan report is expected to be completed by the first quarter of 2024. The preferred strategy and design will be finalized, in alignment with the conceptual design of the new arena/event centre and new or expanded convention centre facility, as well as financing options. The District Plan will be refined and presented to City Council in coordination with Council decisions on other aspects of the overall Downtown Event and Entertainment District project.

The District Plan will be developed through five phases (see Appendix 3). Phases 1 and 2 form the preparation phases of the process, in which the process and scope are determined. Other deliverables of these phases include a baseline context, existing plan and policy integration, observational analysis and identification of opportunities and constraints. Phases 3, 4 and 5 step through the design process. Phase 3 presents new ideas and design concepts. Further analysis and testing will be undertaken to check if new options and concepts function in the District, as well as part of a distinct Saskatoon identity.

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Through technical analysis and broad stakeholder engagement, the ideas and design concepts identified in Phase 3 will be further refined to form the preferred strategy and design concept. Finally, through further analysis and engagement, a final District Plan will be refined and consolidated with a phasing and implementation plan.

The District Plan includes four broad components in the planning process as design considerations move from ideas and concepts towards a more detailed plan. These main components are listed below and include the following items in their scope:

Land Use	Public Realm	Connectivity	Infrastructure
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Zoning analysis• Built form• Land use policy• Design guidelines• Supporting infill• Sustainable building practices• Facility integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Streetscaping• Indigenous placemaking• Design elements• All-weather design• Public art• District Core Plaza• Public space (event and non-event)• Heritage resources• Activation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pedestrian network/comfort• Active Transportation integration• BRT/transit integration• Circulation (including loading, deliveries, ride share)• Gateways (all modes)• Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water system• Sanitary system• Storm system• Shallow utilities• Needs assessment• Green infrastructure• District energy opportunities

Connecting Downtown – Active Transportation and Micro-mobility Network

With the site of the future event centre now selected, the project needs to consider the Connecting Downtown active transportation network in the context of the District Plan. Specifically, the City Council approved network includes 23rd Street as one identified active transportation corridor. The 23rd Street corridor is an important input into the design of the District, in support of providing public benefit for all since it will provide an active transportation and micro-mobility connection between the District and the Meewasin trail in the east and the West Central Multi-Use Corridor and Blairmore Bikeway in the west. In addition to the expected design work that will be part of the District Plan near the event centre, the BRT project will be removing and replacing the 23rd Street transit mall, which will require redesign.

Administration will commence with design for the 23rd Street portion of the Connecting Downtown initiative in parallel with the District Plan as it is required to provide suitable input into the District Plan and to address the BRT project's planned replacement of the transit mall. Administration will provide a report, at the appropriate time, to identify when additional corridors of the Connecting Downtown initiative should be considered.

Technical Advisor

At the timing of report drafting, Administration was in the process of securing a Technical Advisor who possesses expertise in design and construction of event and entertainment facilities and conference centres. Administration may be able to provide a verbal update on the status of the Technical Advisor at the time this report is presented.

The Technical Advisor will assist the City in developing the conceptual design for the new arena/event centre, a new or expanded convention centre, a new parking facility and associated infrastructure requirements. The Technical Advisor is expected to provide the following for the District Plan:

- 1) Act as a technical and strategic advisor on the planning and design of the event and entertainment district in conjunction with the event and entertainment centre and the convention centre;
- 2) Conceptual design for the District Core including plaza area(s) and surrounding public realm/streetscaping;
- 3) Cost estimates for design items as part of the District Plan;
- 4) Specific technical support on transportation, circulation and parking; and
- 5) Work with Administration to develop an engagement plan that adheres to the Policy on Public Engagement and Administrative procedures, as well as provide technical expertise for engagement activities.

Engagement Strategy

The District Plan will be developed through several phases of engagement with rights holders, stakeholder organizations, community partners and other organizations, business owners and groups, residents and the broader community. Specific engagement with Indigenous peoples, and those who have living experiences of systemic barriers, will be included throughout the project.

The engagement strategy (Strategy) for the Downtown Event and Entertainment District is outlined (see Appendix 4). The purpose of the Strategy is to outline the City's goals and processes for working with community members throughout the project. The District Plan is a significant component of the engagement strategy, but, where possible, Administration will take a one-City approach to engage on the larger project, incorporating conference and event centre activities, as appropriate. The Engagement Strategy will be updated as more details evolve on other components of the larger project, such as but not limited to, the work being completed with the Technical Advisor.

The Strategy takes a multi-phased approach, which includes both opportunities for broad public engagement, as well as targeted and issue-focused engagement. Each engagement phase will involve a variety of opportunities for community members to participate, a range of tactics, online and in-person options, events in the Downtown and in other areas of the city, etc. Specific activities and tactics will be developed through pre-engagement, where Administration works with specific stakeholders, rights holders and partners to co-design aspects of the engagement strategy to make it more inclusive and accessible. The Strategy will be updated based on what is learned during pre-engagement, regularly reviewed and updated throughout the project. More specific engagement and communication plans will be developed for each phase.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications

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

Administration will present the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles to the applicable Council Advisory Committees, at their February or March meetings, to gather their perspectives and input. Specifically, the following committees will be consulted:

- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee;
- Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee;
- Municipal Planning Commission;
- Public Art Advisory Committee;
- Saskatoon Accessibility Advisory Committee; and
- Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee.

Any input from these committees and any further input from the DEED Advisory Group will be communicated when the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles report is presented for approval to City Council in March 2023.

Administration will prepare District Plan-related reports to the Governance and Priorities Committee and City Council at major milestones throughout the District Plan process.

Administration intends to present future District Plan information on an as needed basis to the above-mentioned committees at suitable intervals throughout the project timeline. Feedback from these committees will be incorporated into reports, engagement summaries, etc. and will be shared with Governance and Priorities Committee and City Council in line with other project reporting.

APPENDICES

1. Downtown Event & Entertainment District - Vision Statement and Guiding Principles
2. Downtown Event & Entertainment District Plan Study Area
3. Downtown Event & Entertainment District – District Plan Project Activities
4. Downtown Event and Entertainment District Engagement Strategy

REPORT APPROVAL

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