

## Downtown Event and Entertainment District Phase I Targeted Engagement Report (2023)

### Background

From April 27, 2023 to May 18, 2023, the City conducted *Phase I: Engaging on Ideas*. Targeted engagement was conducted with the public and key stakeholders to better understand what is important to community members when developing the Downtown Event and Entertainment District, including the arena/event centre, convention centre and outdoor public spaces.

In this phase, the City asked broad, high-level questions about the Downtown Event and Entertainment District and its facilities, so that the input received from community members can inform the early concept designs that will be presented to City Council.

In addition to engagement with the general public, targeted engagement focused on specific impacts and interests that will be considered in the development of the concept designs.

### What We Did

The purpose of the Phase I engagement for this project was to ask community members about their ideas for the future Downtown Event and Entertainment District.

To be sure unique perspectives, interests and needs of particular community groups are understood and considered, targeted engagement meetings were held. For community groups who may experience systemic barriers to participation in civic engagement, consultants who better represent those communities were contracted to facilitate those meetings.

### Who we engaged with in Phase 1

- Arts, Heritage, and Culture Organizations and Professionals
- Ethnocultural leaders
- LGBTQI2S+ communities
- Young people
- People with disabilities
- Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership
- Bus Riders of Saskatoon
- First Nations and Métis Elders and Knowledge Keepers

### How we gathered input

- Online survey
- Circulating booklets
- Engagement kits
- Workshops
- Meetings

### Meetings and Workshops

10 targeted group meetings were held with a total number of 102 participants took part in the engagement.

Meetings included City staff briefing on the project background and providing the project progress to the participants. Meetings provided opportunities for community organizations, and key stakeholders to provide early input on behalf of their business/organizations.

Not all input received through the targeted meetings are within the scope of this project. Some input will be more applicable to the operations within the Downtown District following implementation, and some input received is not within the authority of the City of Saskatoon. For transparency, the summary of input received through each targeted meeting is included below.

## Meeting / Workshop Notes

### *Arts, Heritage, and Culture Organizations and Professionals*

- Bring arts and culture to public spaces, electric signs to show visitors which events are scheduled.
- Design places for children.
- Work with young generation.
- The District should have areas that are winter-friendly as well as all-season spaces - indoor public spaces with all year-round access and activation.
- City pass system (one ticket to visit multiple venues – package price).
- Bring public art element onto public transit/BRT.
- Downtown community gardens, it should be used at no cost particularly for marginalized group (i.e. Vancouver downtown community garden).
- The District should be a cultural-inclusive place where a cultural centre for newcomers and a public gathering place for all kinds of cultures should be included.
- Downtown is absent of green – pocket parks infrastructure in District (all four seasons) and have indoor green spaces for winter.
- Capture the current culture in the area – revitalization not gentrification. Ensure community resources and support are in places in the district and honor those that already call this area home.
- Offer free or low-cost art programs in the District.

### *People with Disabilities*

- Consider disability factors at the early design stage, and have designs reviewed by people with living experiences of various disabilities to confirm designs. Standard codes are often not good enough when implemented.
- The City should do a Rick Hansen review / certification to meet more stringent standards than basic standards.
- Consider the intersection of various disabilities when designing accessible spaces so that accessibility for one form of accessibility does not negatively impact the accessibility of another form of disability.
- Input on accessible parking.
  - Nearby spaces that can accommodate vans with wheelchair lifts.
  - Accessible parking near the facilities is especially necessary in winter months.
  - Accessible on-street parking in the Downtown needs to be improved – there are no spaces that accommodate a van with wheelchair lifts and so currently need to block

- traffic when entering or exiting, though even that is not an option for independent drivers who use wheelchairs – look to Costco for examples of accessible stalls that accommodate vans with lifts.
- Both on-street and lot accessible parking need to be placed near sidewalk curb cuts. This is especially necessary in the winter.
  - Input on venue seating:
    - Venues typically have one companion seat for one wheelchair accessible seat – there need to be options for more than one companion seat so people in wheelchairs can sit with their family or friend group and not be isolated from the group.
    - There need to be seats on different levels and from different vantage points and in VIP areas so people with mobility disabilities have more options.
  - Input on venue design:
    - Venues need to be designed to accommodate sign language interpreters, which may involve design and equipment considerations.
    - Wheelchair ramps need to be a shallower slope to be accessible – even when ramps meet accessibility standards, they can still feel too steep to use.
    - Multiple elevators to different levels, with braille / tactile buttons.
    - Automatic doors using motion sensors – pads that trigger the door at City Hall’s main entrance an example of good accessibility for an entrance.
  - Input on washrooms:
    - Accessible stalls need to be larger to accommodate a person in a wheelchair (maneuverability) as well as accommodate a helper.
    - Accessible stalls need door buttons to open.
    - Sinks, paper towels and hand-dryers, etc. are often not placed at an accessible height.
    - Need for gender inclusivity as well.
  - Input on sensory considerations:
    - Noise and light can be challenging for those with sensory issues.
    - There needs to be quiet and relaxing spaces to balance out intense sensory spaces.
    - Toronto’s Roger’s Centre has a sensory room for those with developmental disabilities who need a break from light and noise.
  - Input on Access Transit and taxis:
    - Access Transit requires advance booking and may be strained for capacity if the City hosts more events in the Downtown.
    - Drop-off and pick-up locations for people with accessibility needs must be adjacent to the facilities / near entrances.
  - Input on sidewalks and curb cuts:
    - Wider sidewalks.
    - Timely snow clearance on sidewalks, curb cuts and street crossings is essential for using the Downtown in winter months, or well-designed spaces will still not be accessible.
    - Would heated sidewalks to melt the snow be an option in the Downtown District?
    - Maintenance of sidewalks and curb cuts is crucial – many sidewalks and curb cuts in Downtown are in disrepair or offset with the street and are therefore not accessible.

- Tactile paving (ridges) on curb cuts can be uncomfortable and difficult for those in wheelchairs.
- There are examples of good curb cuts around the Midtown that could be used as examples for implementation elsewhere.
- Shared e-scooters parked on sidewalks become an impassable obstacle for someone in a wheelchair.
- More of Saskatoon's Downtown businesses need accessible entrances (e.g., ramps, door buttons) - some are currently completely inaccessible.
- Information needs to be accessible (e.g., braille, audio information, large text, maps and visuals, etc.).
- Outdoor shelter from the rain, sun, wind, etc.
- Edmonton's Ice District implemented some good examples of accessibility that can be referenced.
- Park spaces also need to be fully accessible.
- Some buildings (e.g., Remai Modern) have good accessibility to get into the building but are less accessible when moving within the building.

### **Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership**

- Employment related to the Downtown Event & Entertainment District (e.g., the arena/event centre and convention centre) should be based on a living wage.
- What are ways the City could incorporate enhanced social value and not just economic value in the planning of the District?
- Questions about potential impacts to existing locations (e.g., 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, the YMCA facility, Saskatoon Open Door Society facilities).
- The City needs to be transparent with input received through engagement, positive and negative.
- Chokecherry Studios should be engaged with on projects such as this to get Indigenous youth input and feedback.
- What can the City do to address houselessness and safety in the Downtown area?
- The infrastructure should not be built in a way that purposely deters houseless people from being in the area.
- Public, accessible, well-lit, safe washrooms needed in the Downtown, as well as on west side of the District. Washrooms available 24 hours. Operations of maintenance and security of washrooms will be important.
- Maintenance of existing infrastructure in the Downtown is important, not just building new.
- The arena/event centre should not just be for events and sports but have a more frequent animation that provides community / social benefits.
- The lobby could be an opportunity for shelter during extreme weather. Would that be realistic if operations run by a private partner?
- Community benefit agreements can be a tool to incorporate community and social benefits into a major capital project.
- How much of the land within the District might be allocated to community benefit / social and health services?

- Want to be sure the project does not become a wealth transfer from the public to private interests – how does any of the wealth generation feed back into the community?
- Want to be sure increases to leases and rent does not drive out small businesses or discourage affordable housing in the area – risk of gentrification.
- SaskTel Centre events are not always well attended – is there an expectation that events would be better attended if the arena/event centre is Downtown?
- The railway is a barrier to people walking to the Downtown.
- Lots of bike racks needed.

### **Bus Riders of Saskatoon**

- How does the District concept impact other city centre plans, such as Imagine Idylwyld, the farmer's market, and River Landing? Will there be changes to these other plans to align with District plans?
- What impact will the Downtown District have on existing and new residential development?
- Input related to Transit:
  - Is BRT to be redesigned around the Downtown Event & Entertainment District, or is the Downtown District being designed around the approved BRT route and stations?
  - Current Transit does not accommodate the needs of those who work late, early, or need weekday scheduling on weekends. This will be even more important for employees of the Downtown arena/event centre and other Downtown employees through commercial development.
  - The Downtown District needs BRT to be successful, but the BRT does not need the Downtown District to be successful.
  - Transit service should be enhanced with the implementation of the Downtown District rather than the other way around. Schedules and frequency may require enhancement at times due to events.
  - Transit, pedestrian, and cycling lenses should precede that of motor vehicle traffic travelling *through* rather than *to* the Downtown District.
  - How do other city centres deal with the intersection of transit and big events?
- Visitors to Downtown currently do not feel safe. This will need to be addressed.
- Pedestrian realm needs to be accessible and pleasant. Attention should be paid to streetscaping and easy access – unlike the north end of the Broadway Bridge or south end of the Traffic Bridge. Anyone who gets off a bus, bike or vehicle is then a pedestrian.
- Cycling infrastructure needs to include a fully connected cycling network and plentiful bike parking.
- The Downtown District design should minimize negative impacts to residents in the Downtown or people will not want to live there.
- The arena/event centre façade should have shop windows and activity all the way around.
- Will the current bus mall location be an opportunity for District animation once it is removed with the implementation of BRT?

### *First Nations and Métis Elders and Knowledge Keepers*

- An initial meeting with First Nations and Metis Elders and Knowledge Keepers was held to discuss the process for Indigenous engagement on placemaking and placekeeping in the Downtown Event & Entertainment District.
- This will be an ongoing engagement process throughout the project.
- Engagement with Indigenous peoples must be authentic; knowledge and stories shared with the City must be respected.
- Education will be a crucial component of placemaking and placekeeping. (E.g., people do not understand the meaning of the statue in front of the Saskatoon Police Service Building because it lacks an educational component.)
- There is great diversity within Indigenous communities in Saskatoon and area. This diversity is to be reflected in the placemaking and placekeeping.
- A pipe ceremony was held on June 9 at the northwest corner of the future arena/event centre site to honour the land and what will be done on the land, and to acknowledge the importance of working together in a good way.

### *Ethnocultural Leaders*

- Even with other transportation options, this will bring a lot of cars to the Downtown area. Needs to be adequate parking.
- Will there also be government funding to address houselessness? People do not feel safe going Downtown.
  - Houselessness is not just a provincial matter. Concern that not enough funding from the City goes towards this issue. Concern that we are prioritizing future buildings over issues people are facing now.
- Projects like this can generate employment opportunities.
- Is there a way that the addition of a grocery store could be part of the District Plan?
- Would like to see a cultural hub / co-working space where folks can rent space for free / affordably. It is hard to find space to host get-togethers or community events (e.g., for a few hundred attendees). Would also like to see the arena/event centre and convention centre as options for free or affordable community gatherings. Also needs to accommodate ethnic foods without charging a premium.
  - When designing the kitchen spaces at the new facilities, cultural groups should be consulted to better understand their needs (e.g., clay oven needed to cook naan bread, outdoor BBQ spaces, etc.).
- Parking for people who work Downtown or surrounding areas (e.g., St. Paul's Hospital) will need to be considered.
- Space for live performances / artists (e.g., a stage).
- Transit connections to the future BRT line will need to be convenient for those who do not live along a BRT route.
- Information (e.g., on buses, wayfinding) needs to be provided in other languages / translation options through technology.

- How do we get people to visit the City from other places when airlines are cancelling flight options to and from Saskatoon?
  - Expensive to fly here which can make us less competitive at drawing in conventions / visitors.
- When talking about entertainment, is there consideration for amenities like a theme park idea or casino?
- A centralized location for newcomers to access services rather than needing to go to different facilities would be welcome.
- This project needs to connect with young people as well, who are more interested in nightlife.
- Washrooms need to be child/baby friendly.
- Right now, downtown has much more flat parking spaces than green spaces. Not currently family friendly.
- Security and lighting will be important for people to feel safe leaving after events.
- Concern at how much of the input from diverse and minority being provided will actually be incorporated into the design and operations.
- How will the District be connected to the new central library?
- How will the YMCA building be impacted?
- Is Downtown expanding with all these plans?
- The District could be an opportunity to connect cultural leaders with cultural communities / raise cultural awareness / multi-cultural and multi-faith centre / spaces that are free and in which we can bring food.
- Shared bikes (like the shared e-scooter program) would be very helpful for people traveling in and around the Downtown area.
- Underground parking connected to the facilities would be an important accessibility consideration considering Saskatoon's winters.
- The Downtown and rest of the city needs more colour. It is currently very bland in many areas and not appealing.
- Providing our surveys in other languages would be helpful for engaging with newcomer communities.

### **LGBTQI2S+ communities**

What are the potential impacts?

- Attendees provided input from an intersectional understanding of marginalization; as such, not all input received was solely related to living experience from an LGBTQI2S+ focus.
- Making changes to Downtown has the potential to remove negative stigma of the Downtown area/event centre, or the stigma could still be there / existing problems could be exacerbated if unaddressed.
- This could be a signature project on how to create more equitable and sustainable urban places (e.g., increasing active transportation and reducing vehicle use in the downtown area).
- Potential mismatch between big city plans and prairie culture. Needs to appeal to people who live and visit here.

- Potential impacts to this kind of growth of additional strain on already strained services such as health and social services.
- How can harm reduction (e.g., STI and addictions awareness) be incorporated into the Downtown District planning and implementation? There are potential risk increases related to a) transient workers during construction of the Downtown District facilities and infrastructure, and b) events, parties and gatherings connected to the District post-implementation.
- What will be the impact to smaller venues and event organizers who compete for the same dollars as larger venues and events?

What do you like about our current Downtown?

- The river and river trails / River Landing
- Easy to get to by transit
- Local restaurants
- Clean and well-maintained
- Downtown is one of the more considerate areas of the city in terms of the needs of people experiencing houselessness
- You see a diversity of people in Downtown
- Street festivals
- Not that big / walkable
- There are options for places to live
- Community Support Officers rather than armed police as first response / focus on de-escalation / harm reduction programs being piloted
- Public art – paintings, sculptures, murals
- Trees
- Front-facing buildings

What would make our Downtown feel safe and welcoming at all times of the year?

- Spaces for cultural spaces, healing and ceremony
- Water bottle filling stations
- Free, public, private washrooms (full walls)/ gender neutral washrooms
- Places to shower for those who need access
- More all-ages spaces that don't centre around alcohol
- More medium-sized venue spaces for live music
- Warm spaces for when it's cool
- Cool down spaces for when it's hot
- Shelter for the houseless
- More sitting spaces that can enable conversation (i.e., not all side-by-side seating)
  - Not using benches designed to deter houseless people from using
- Lack of affirming or specific space for LGBTQI2s+ people
  - Can happen organically through public art or informational signage on queer and trans history.
- More ramps for entrances into places

- Lighting
- Emergency phones / public phones / free WiFi and connectivity
- Complete streets (designed to accommodate all modes of transport safely)
- Recognition of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-spirit
- Spaces for all types of families
- Spaces to make art and music
- Pedestrian-only streets (at least in the summer)

What should be considered when designing the new arena/event centre and/or the new/expanded convention centre?

- Spaces of different sizes for community events / different multi-purpose rooms
- Suggestions for sustainable design: low-flow toilets / using grey water, solar energy generation.
- A design that is not too modern feeling – should feel comfortable to different audiences / does not need to be ritzy / should feel ‘earthy’ / feel like it belongs in the prairies.
- The design should reflect that we are on Treaty 6 territory and homeland of the Métis.
- It is critical any new facilities that are built are not just designed to be inclusive of LGBTQI2S+ people, but that inclusivity needs to be reinforced with signage, staffing, and training to make sure queer and trans people are welcomed and safe.
- Bigger seating than what is currently at TCU Place and SaskTel Centre.
- Public art that tells LGBTQI2S+ stories.
- Green space outside the buildings.

What is uniquely Saskatoon that you would like to see in the Downtown Event & Entertainment District?

- Great art scene / local artists – adding a stage with shaded area for performances.
- Growing newcomer population.
- We’re generous as a city and as people / building in a pay as you can system for some events to make them affordable and accessible to anyone.
- Integrating water in the design (acknowledgement of the river).
- Integrating bridges (metaphorically) into the design.
- Street festivals and vendors

Closing comments

- Needs to activate the Downtown past regular working day hours.
- Be inclusive to everyone, honours Indigenous people, welcoming to queer and trans people, not creating another space that’s not welcoming to lower income or unhoused people – accessible and welcoming to everyone can often be lip service.
- Needs to be a safe space for vulnerable people, including going to and leaving (e.g., walking or while on public transit).
- Want engagement to be ongoing through future phases of the project.
- Tell queer and trans history in Saskatoon through public art / signage / imagery.
- There needs to be spaces for adults as well, not just spaces for families.

- Are the public space developments and community building ideas for the District possible without the arena/event centre?

### Young people

- A separate meeting was not held with youth representatives.
- Paper survey copies were made available at locations in which young people gather, such as public libraries, White Buffalo Youth Lodge, and EGADZ.

## What Went Well

- Working to build relationships with groups/individuals and trying to make sure there are benefits to them (i.e., their time and energy is worthwhile) for participating in this engagement.
- In-depth, specific input related to unique perspectives, needs and issues from various communities was received through this process, including from communities who experience systemic barriers to participating in public engagement.
- Using different engagement formats such as workshops or facilitated meetings.
- Having flexibility with our engagement process so that our tactic met the needs of participants. We offered meetings, presentations, surveys, email feedback and workshops.

## What We Can Do Better

- There are still other groups that need to be engaged with down the road. Future phases of engagement will continue working with the groups engaged with so far, as well as filling in gaps in perspectives from Phase I. (E.g., future disability-focused discussions will require more input on other forms of disability, such as blindness and visual impairment, hearing impairment, and intellectual disabilities.)
- Educating the community on the decision process, costs, and impacts of the project should be a priority for the future engagements.

## How is the Input Being Used?

Summaries of input received through all engagement methods are provided to City staff and external consultants working on the Downtown Event & Entertainment District for consideration when developing concept plans and designs. Input received will also be considered at future stages of the project.

Engagement summaries will also be provided to City Council for their consideration, as well as made available to the public.