

Saskatoon's City Centre & Downtown Event and Entertainment District Plan

Interim Strategic Directions Report
February 2024

Summary

The Downtown Event and Entertainment District (District) is a key component of the Downtown, within the City Centre. This interim report presents the Strategic Directions for Saskatoon's City Centre and Downtown Event and Entertainment District Plan. It outlines the strategic directions that the City of Saskatoon (City) is currently pursuing through an update to the City Centre Plan that integrates a plan for the Downtown Event and Entertainment District.

The focus of this report includes the potential establishment of a Downtown Event and Entertainment District within Saskatoon's broader City Centre. City staff, in consultation with technical consultants and incorporating input from the community, aim to update the City Centre Plan, incorporating decisions that have been made and changes in policy and context since its approval in 2013.

This report serves as a roadmap, offering a vision and strategies to facilitate the finalization of the City Centre and District Plan. The intended outcome is the development of the strategic moves, directions and actions to achieve the identified outcomes for the City Centre and District.

Land Acknowledgment

As we work together on city-building projects, we acknowledge our ancestors and future generations. We honour Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis, by sharing this land under Treaty with the Cree, Saulteaux, Dakota, Métis, Dene, and Non-Indigenous peoples. We commit to Truth and Reconciliation and the Calls to Action.

Indigenous Peoples of primarily Cree, Dakota and Saulteaux have called the area known as Saskatoon home for thousands of years. Today, Saskatoon is home to Indigenous peoples from a diversity of cultures and language groups.

The City of Saskatoon (City) recognizes the distinct order of government of First Nations and Métis and is committed to maintaining strong relationships through meaningful dialogue with Indigenous communities and organizations.

Strengthening cooperation and mutual support by working in partnership with Indigenous communities towards respective community goals and objectives is vital to fostering more inclusive communities.





1 Introduction

Downtown serves as both the geographical and metaphorical heart of Saskatoon. To unlock its full potential, we must wholeheartedly embrace and invest in Downtown, recognizing its pivotal role as the vibrant heart of our city.

Downtown is...

A Place to Work

Highest Concentration of jobs in the city

An Economic Force

Over 10% of the city's total municipal property tax, less than 1% of its area

A Place connected with Nature

60% of Downtown is within a 5 minute walk of river trails

A Place to Connect

Saskatoon's transportation and social hub

A Public Service Hub

The city's administrative hub easily accessible to residents

A Place for Inspiration

Remai Modern, Remai Arts Centre, Sid Buckwold Theatre, Central Library and several art galleries

An Emblem

Saskatoon's image to the world

A Place to Discover

The primary destination for visitors

About the Plan

Saskatoon's City Centre and Downtown Event and Entertainment District Plan (the Plan) will be a non-statutory plan outlining the vision and strategic initiatives to support the Downtown, District and broader City Centre. Achieving the Plan's vision will require building on momentum, strategic investment, multi-party collaboration and adaptability.



The Downtown Event and Entertainment District

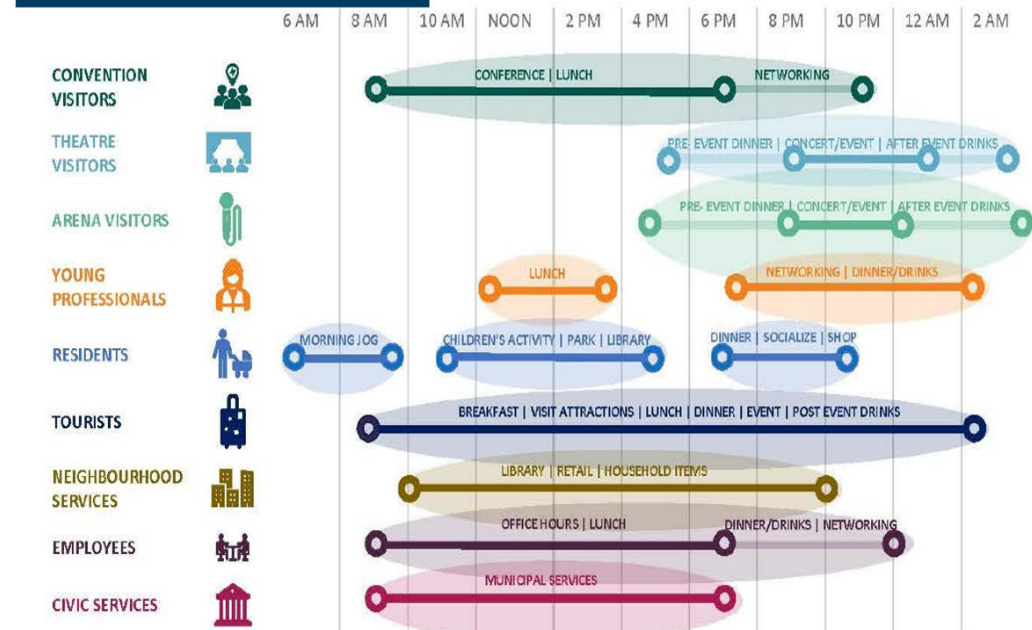
A Downtown Event and Entertainment District (District) will create a place for people to come together from the city and surrounding area. The District positions Downtown as the centre of commercial, tourism, services and entertainment.

While Downtown generally attracts residents and visitors, the District itself does not currently meet its potential. The District is presently characterized by surface parking lots and a lack of quality public space and connections with the rest of Downtown and adjacent neighbourhoods. An enhanced District will bring more people and activity to the Downtown both on event days, and throughout the year, welcoming visitors and enhancing the overall appeal of Downtown and Saskatoon.

Current User Groups



Potential User Groups



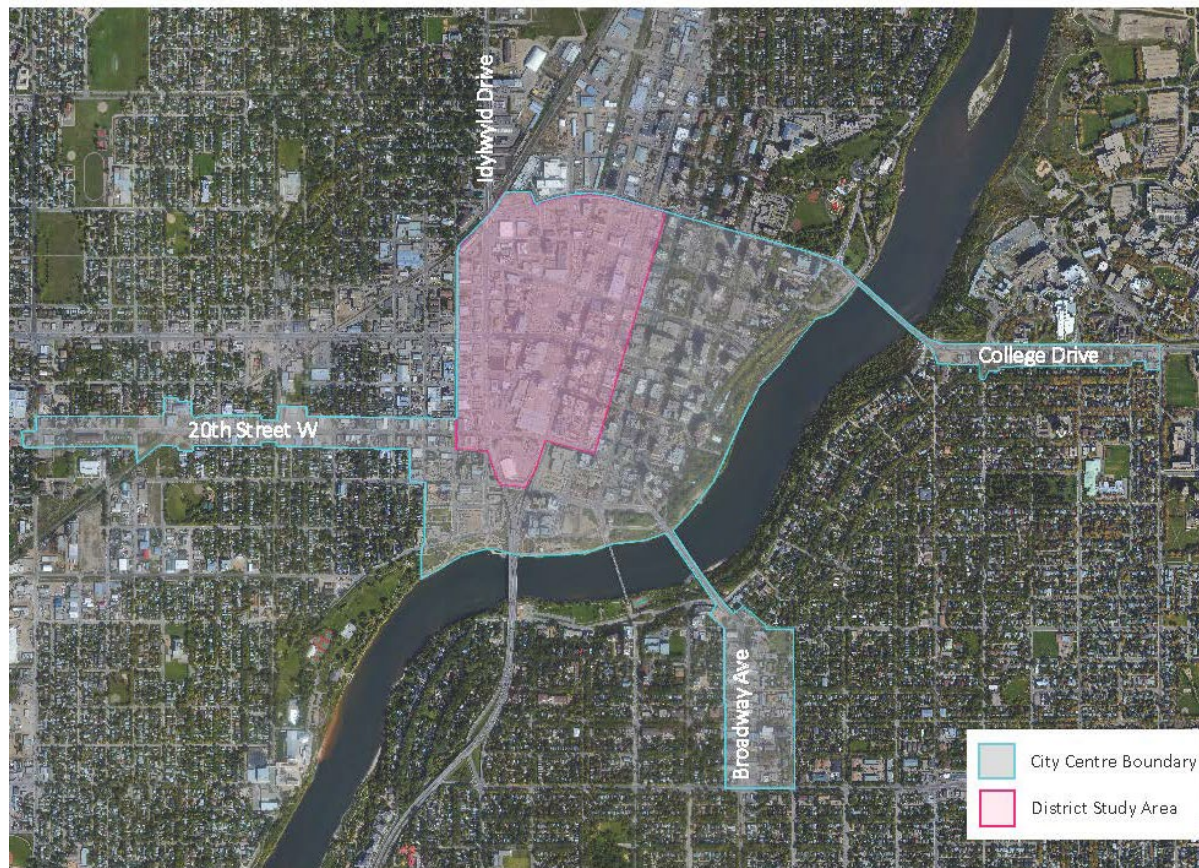


2 Context & Analysis

Plan Area

Established in the 2013 City Centre Plan, the City Centre encompasses approximately 246 hectares (608 acres). The City Centre includes the Downtown, the District study area and recognizes the pivotal role of Broadway Avenue, 20th Street West and College Drive as contributing to the overall City Centre.

While Broadway Avenue, 20th Street West and College Drive significantly contribute to the Downtown and City Centre, detailed plans tailored specifically to those areas will be addressed through the Corridor Planning Program. This Plan will primarily focus on the Downtown and the District.





A safe and vibrant Downtown is a welcoming and inclusive place for all people to come together in cooperative spirit. The Downtown and District supports a strong economy, strengthens our diverse community and attracts people to live, work, play and learn in the Downtown

3 Vision & Principles

Source: Sik Pics, Discover Saskatoon

Guiding Principles

The development of the City Centre and District Plan have been guided by the following principles:



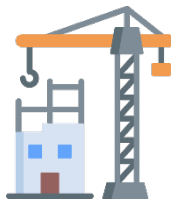
Reconciliation by honouring Indigenous Peoples, histories, languages and culture.

Establish inclusive, respectful and reciprocal processes throughout the planning process that align with and support the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



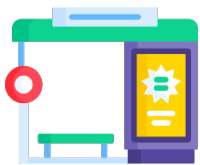
A distinctive identity through placemaking/placekeeping.

Recognize and enhance a Downtown that celebrates the land's heritage, city's history, community's culture and embraces our winter city to foster a year round hub for culture and entertainment.



Architectural and public realm design excellence.

Inspire a sense of place through high quality facility design, the use of environmental design principles in buildings and public space and embracing all-season design.



Reliable and efficient transportation options.

Enhance accessibility and connectivity of all modes of transportation to allow for enjoyable, safe and cost-effective movement of people in, to and around the Downtown and adjacent neighbourhoods.



Downtown density with a focus on housing.

Plan and encourage a mix of housing choices in the Downtown to attract a diversity of community members.



Leadership in sustainability and resiliency.

Demonstrate and exemplify leadership in sustainability through urban infill choices, economic development, climate resiliency and green infrastructure.



A robust and diverse economy.

Preserve the Downtown as the cultural, social and employment centre of the community, while encouraging a thriving, diverse economy that attracts local, regional and global employers that generate high quality jobs throughout the Downtown and city.



A healthy and safe community.

Support an authentic and welcoming community that promotes equitable opportunities for all to participate, fosters a safe and inclusive environment and cultivates a strong sense of belonging.



4 Supporting Strategies

The City Centre and District Plan will be built around a number of supporting strategies, each based on an understanding of the City Centre's strengths, impacts and opportunities.

4.1 Public Realm Strategy

Creates streets and public spaces that provide a safe, vibrant and comfortable environment.

4.2 Parks and Open Space Strategy

Focused on developing a system of connected, all-season green and open spaces designed with people and purpose in mind.

4.3 Economy and Land Use Strategy

Creates a range of development and land uses goals that contributes to the Downtown's economic growth and prosperity.

4.4 Connectivity and Mobility Strategy

Expanding on the Public Realm Strategy, this component concentrates on how people move and interact in the Downtown.

4.5 Inclusiveness and Vibrancy Strategy

Ensuring culture and heritage opportunities are integrated to honour Downtown's heritage, represent Saskatoon's diversity and showcase its creativity.

4.6 Resilient Infrastructure & Servicing Strategy

Providing a practical and future-focused lens on innovations that allow the Downtown to grow, reduce its environmental impact and become a more resilient place.

4.1 Public Realm Strategy

Strategic Directions

- Establish a framework of Downtown street typologies to inform design and guide decision-making around allocation of street space.
- Identify catalyst streetscape projects to directly support adjacent investments in the District and enhance key connections and gateways to the District and Downtown.
- Establish an approach to Placemaking/Placekeeping that reflects Indigenous presence, belonging and cultural continuity, and advances Reconciliation efforts.

Vibrant downtowns and districts are characterized by the presence of great streets, as these streets serve as the public realm where people move through and explore the area, whether by foot, mobility device, bike, scooter, transit or vehicle.

Great streets are designed for people. This involves creating safe, comfortable environments equipped with street furnishings, shade from trees and an inviting atmosphere. Incorporating transparent ground floor land uses, outdoor seating, pedestrian-scale details and aesthetic materials contribute to the vibrancy and activity of these streets.

By investing in the streets and public spaces of the Downtown and District, the City not only enhances civic assets but also lays the groundwork for increased private development investment.

Key Streetscaping Design Elements



Enhanced Urban Design: Design details and furnishings exhibit a higher level of design treatment and offers spaces that are comfortable for pedestrians.



Street Furniture: Components that augment the pedestrian experience including but not limited to benches, lighting, receptacles, planters and wayfinding.



Passive Gathering Space: Passive space in the public realm, such as plazas, seating areas or shared space in adjacent land uses, such as patios, are used for gathering.



Space for Movement: Active space in the public realm devoted to providing a comfortable through zone for large volumes of pedestrians.



Enhanced Landscaping: Intensified landscaping with features to capture rainfall, maximize water infiltration, improve the tree canopy and add park like features.



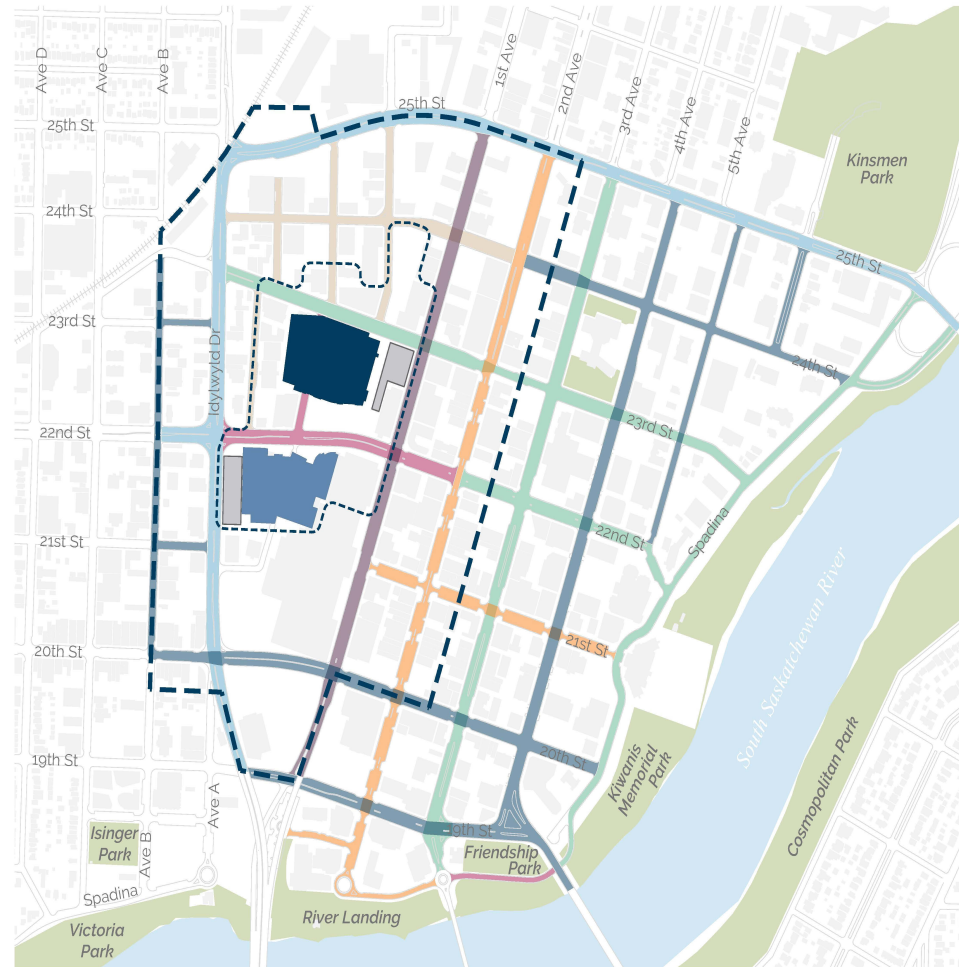
On-Street Parking: Allows vehicular parking access and provides a buffer between the pedestrian realm and vehicular traffic lanes.



Vehicular Movement: The primary function is the movement of vehicles, goods and services. Access management tactics are included to minimize conflict with pedestrians and crossings.

Street Types

Downtown streets are categorized into seven types based on their fundamental roles in street movement and placemaking/ placekeeping. Each type is described to convey their intended purpose and outline key elements prioritized in the public realm design



Street Typology

- Festival
- Downtown Mixed
- Major Transit
- Downtown Parkway
- Warehouse
- Signature
- Downtown Connector

Event Centre

Convention Centre

Development Opportunity

Study Area

District Core

Downtown Street Typology

Catalyst Streetscape Projects

The City Centre and District Plan prioritizes the enhancement of 22nd Street and 23rd Street in support of the District Core catalyst facilities. The City Centre and District Plan will support the Imagine Idylwyld concept for Idylwyld Drive, and integrate green elements, low-impact development, and active transportation routes into the 23rd Street Downtown Greenway.



22nd Street Rendering, | Source: DEED Conceptual Design Report, Stantec



Proposed 22nd Street Cross Section | Source: DEED Conceptual Design Report, Stantec

Placemaking/Placekeeping

The term 'placemaking' is often used to describe design and architecture strategies that can be used to make a space more meaningful and provide a closer connection between users and the land. While placemaking strategies are intended to be used in this Plan, the focus also emphasizes placekeeping.

Placekeeping goes beyond placemaking by recognizing that spaces have existed for Indigenous Peoples for millennia. Preserving the character and essence of what this land signifies for Indigenous people is the primary placekeeping priority for the Downtown and District. The emphasis is on recognizing that this place already exists, and measures must be taken to keep the culture and the narrative of the land alive.



Source Discover Saskatoon

Downtown Placekeeping Goals:

- **Create and design decolonized public spaces**
- **Design a public realm that reflects Indigenous presence, belonging and cultural continuity**
- **Create spaces where Indigenous Peoples feel safe, welcomed and that reflects their cultural identity and lived experience**
- **Advance Reconciliation efforts**

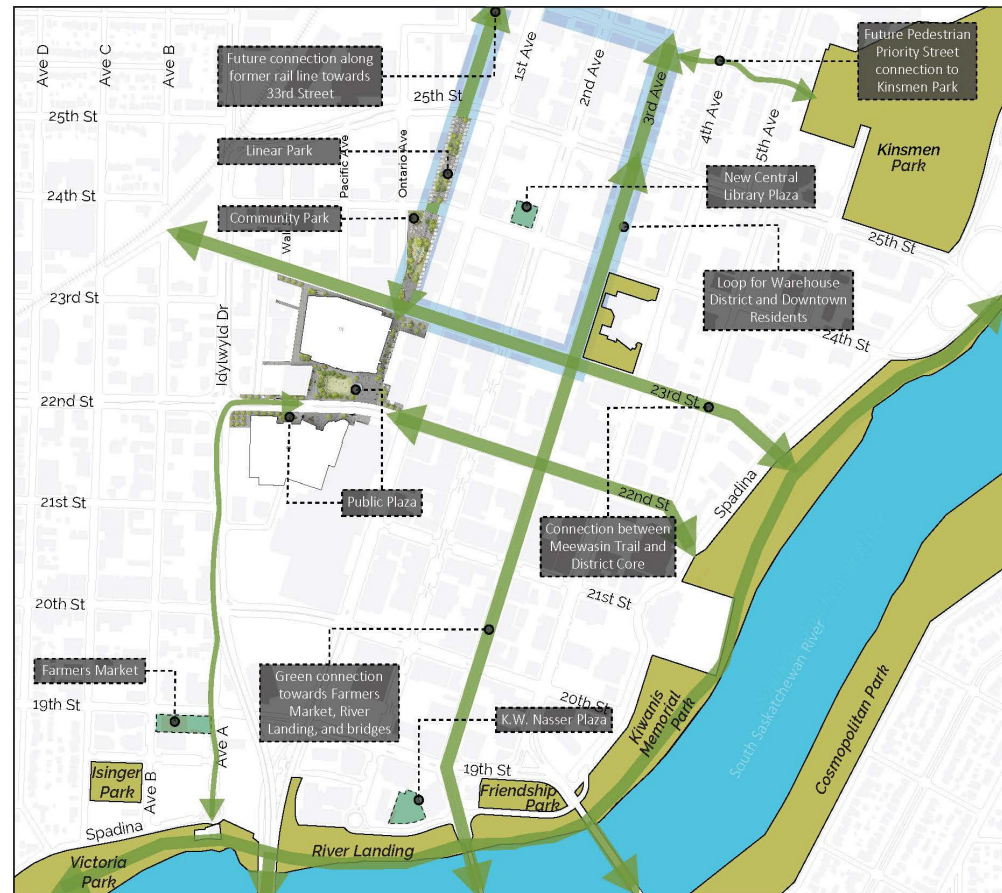
4.2 Parks and Open Space Strategy

Strategic Directions

- Identify opportunities to create a network of public parks and open spaces in the Downtown through enhancements to existing parks and establishment of new parks and green connections.
- Support residential development goals by introducing a community park in the Warehouse district that provides both active and passive recreation and leisure opportunities as well as an active transportation linkage to the District.

One of Saskatoon's greatest assets lies in its extensive river valley along the South Saskatchewan River and the accompanying Meewasin Trail network. Despite this extensive trail network, the Downtown area lacks sufficient green spaces and green connections to access the river from the heart of Downtown or District.

Strategically positioning new parks and open spaces to connect the river valley to other prominent Downtown locations will enhance the livability and experience of Downtown.



Proposed Parks and Open Space Connections

4.3 Economy and Land Use Strategy

Strategic Directions

- Identify opportunities to foster development in the Downtown
- Support development goals and the land use strategy through strategic place-based investments in amenities.
- Adopt new zoning regulations in the Downtown to encourage mid-rise form.

Saskatoon's future prosperity relies on Downtown becoming an attractive destination for living, visiting, establishing businesses and working.

Adapting to the changing economy is imperative for Downtown's success. A strategic approach is required to overcome the perception that Downtown is exclusively for the office market. Investors need to perceive the Downtown and District as forward-thinking and flourishing, presenting a substantial investment opportunity for the city and region.

Market Analysis & Trends

A market demand analysis was conducted for the District and the broader Downtown, incorporating insights from discussions with various stakeholders, including developers and retailers. The market analysis examined development in the residential, office, retail and hospitality markets. Key takeaways include:

- Invest in downtown amenities that act as a catalyst for development.
- Reduced development cost and risk can streamline land for development.
- Review and amend zoning regulations in the Downtown to encourage a mid-rise building form, diversifying the residential market Downtown.
- Focus investment on locations that strengthen connections to existing amenities to maximize impact.
- Encourage office moves from suburban locations to the Downtown.

Land Use

The Economy and Land Use Strategy aims to facilitate and support a dynamic mix of uses across Downtown and the District, aligning with key insights from the market analysis. It advocates for residential, commercial, institutional, recreational, cultural and community uses.

The Economy and Land Use Strategy will facilitate development by supporting residential development in the Warehouse District, revising the development standards along key gateways such as 22nd Street, and continuing to support mixed-use development along the east and south boundaries of the Downtown adjacent to the river valley. Guided by the market analysis, the land use direction will focus on these three key approaches:

1. Build on the strength of the river valley, which is identified as the single greatest asset for the Downtown and city in the market analysis.
2. Leveraging opportunities in the Warehouse District for a diverse urban residential community, such as lower land values compared to the riverbank areas.

3. Facilitate development that enhances and completes important connections in the Downtown, filling gaps in the urban form and reframing important gateway locations into Downtown.



Zoning Strategy

In order to achieve and nurture the right mix of uses in the Downtown, the following zoning strategy is under consideration:

Introduction of a new zoning district for the District Core

A new zoning district is being developed for lands within the District Core. The zoning will implement standards to ensure appropriate land use and facilitate high quality building design that integrates with the public realm.

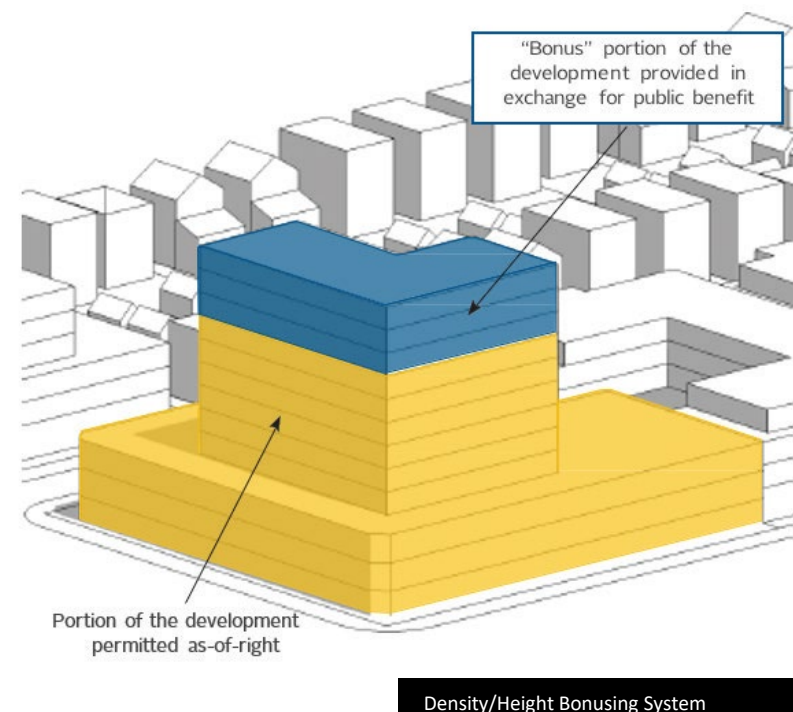
Amendments to the B6 – Downtown Commercial District Over the past year, a comprehensive review has been conducted to identify potential amendments to the B6 District. Proposed amendments aim to improve the open volume regulations, design guidelines and adaptive reuse, while also addressing the regulation of surface parking lots.

Amendments to the MX2 – Downtown Warehouse Mixed Use Proposed amendments to the MX2 District are intended to encourage greater residential development. These amendments to reframe the height and scale of development, will promote a

mid-rise form that complements the existing Warehouse District character. Additionally, amendments to the scale of commercial uses will be explored, emphasizing the significance of household commercial and retail functions to support a growing community.

Amendments to the Density Bonus Provisions

Density bonus provisions allow the City to require public benefits tied to proposed developments, contributing to the public realm and overall livability of the area. These public benefits are provided in exchange for predetermined ‘bonus’ development rights, which are granted in addition to what is permitted as-of-right.



4.4 Connectivity & Mobility Strategy

Strategic Directions

- **Establish a mobility network that focuses on prioritization of active modes, organization around the BRT network and universal accessibility.**
- **Ensure the Downtown street network maintains connectivity and permeability for all modes of travel, while accounting for priority modes that align with the Public Realm Strategy.**
- **Pursue a model for parking management that encourages information sharing and incentivizes parking operators to participate.**

The historic street networks within the city shapes transportation dynamics in the area. The City Centre and District Plan is dedicated to optimizing accessibility and permeability for all modes of transportation, aiming to create a well-connected and efficient urban environment.

Pedestrian Network

The Plan envisions a comprehensive pedestrian network, where all streets incorporate fundamental elements of walkable design. Expanding on the streetscape types in the Public Realm Strategy, the Plan proposes pedestrian priority streets. These streets serve as catalysts for economic development, placemaking/placekeeping and reinforcement of neighbourhood identity.

The pedestrian network encompasses designated pedestrian priority streets and the Meewasin trail network, connecting pedestrians along the river through Downtown and beyond.

Accessibility

The vision for the Downtown and District prioritizes inclusivity, striving to create a welcoming community for individuals of all abilities, including those with visual and/or physical disabilities. To ensure comfort and functionality for people of all ages and abilities, various design considerations will be actively encouraged.

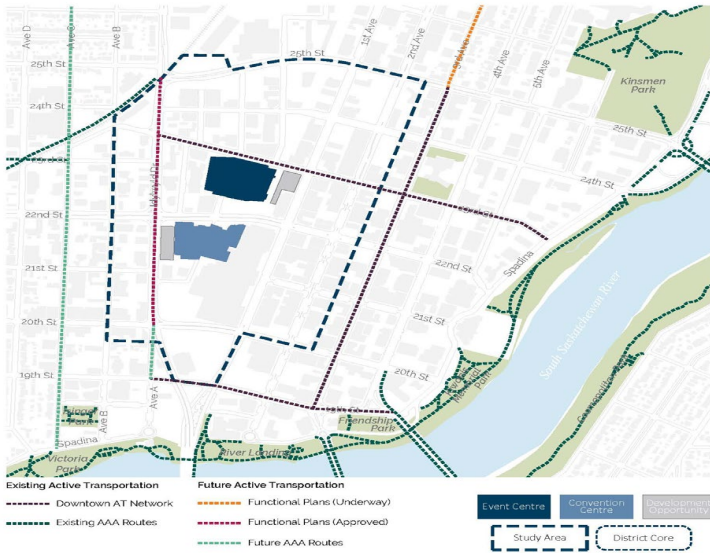
Active Transportation Network

The active transportation network in Downtown is envisioned to capitalize on its proximity to the Meewasin Trail multi-use pathway and future BRT stations. The network will feature cycle lanes and supporting infrastructure and facilities.

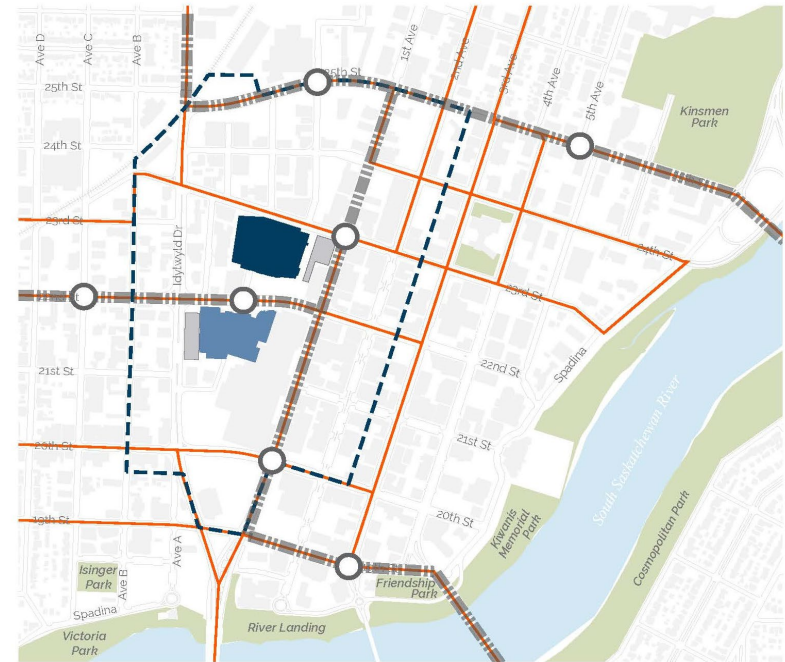
Bicycle facilities (bike racks and potential bike-share stations) are planned for strategic locations through the District Core to accommodate expected event traffic and where transitions on and off bike may occur.

Accessibility Design Considerations:

- **Accessible entrances:** Implementation of accessible entrances to facilitate easy entry for everyone.
- **Provision for access transit vehicles and disability permits:** Accommodations for access transit vehicles and vehicles with disability permits.
- **Curb ramps at intersections:** Integration of curb ramps at intersections and public spaces to enhance accessibility.
- **Regularly placed seating:** Strategic placement of seating at regular intervals to provide rest spots.
- **Level hardscaped materials:** utilization of level hardscaped materials to minimize tripping hazards.
- **Service animal relief areas:** Areas available for service animal relief.
- **Universal symbols and audible signals:** use of universal symbols and audible signals for wayfinding and crossings.



Future Downtown AT Network



Downtown Transit Network

Transit

The proposed Transit framework places a primary focus on establishing the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, to facilitate high-frequency, direct service along major corridors.

Leveraging BRT stations in the Downtown as focal points, the Plan not only enhances density but also positions these stations as vital arrival points for the broader city.

The District Core will be well-served with a station on 22nd Street on the event plaza serving the Red and Green line and a station on 1st Avenue at 23rd Street serving all three BRT lines.

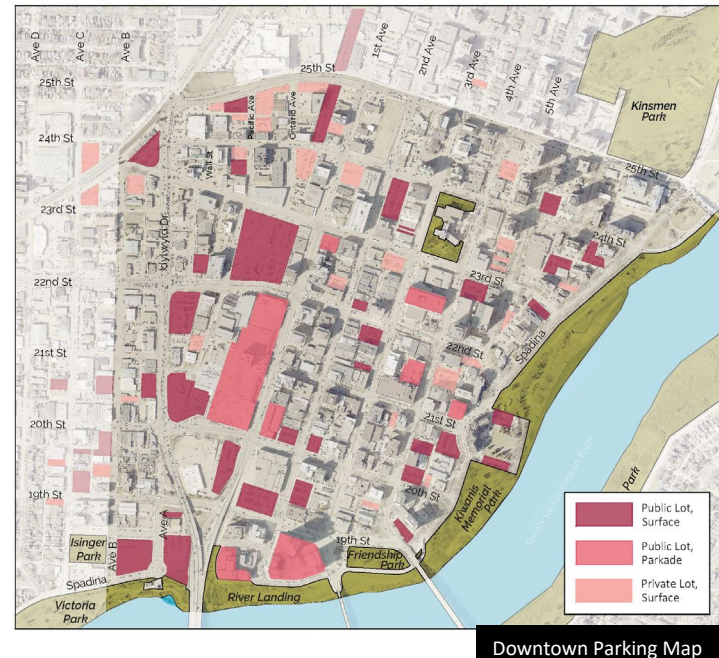
Key enhancements include the introduction of dedicated running lanes for transit along 1st Avenue, strategically positioned stations on 22nd Street and 1st Avenue/23rd Street (near the Gateway Plaza) will serve the District well.

Parking

Parking is a crucial component of Downtown transportation, serving local businesses and future development needs. The City Centre and District Plan will introduce an overarching parking strategy to address current conditions and facilitate further development Downtown.

To optimize parking resources, Downtown would benefit from a shared parking system. Rather than creating an excess of supply of parking, shared parking throughout the Downtown that incentivizes structured parking operators to participate in a coordinated mobility solution could enhance access, reduce traffic congestion and stimulate economic activity.

As Downtown grows and changes, opportunities for future adjustments to on-street parking configurations will be explored to align with the public realm envisioned for changing streets.



4.5 Inclusiveness & Vibrancy Strategy

Strategic Directions

- Establish spaces for activation that enables cultural participation with priority for Indigenous storytelling and cultural expression.
- Identify opportunities to expand and enhance activation and programming through a review of existing regulatory and policy frameworks for parklets, parking patios, outdoor dining, sidewalk cafes, food trucks and push carts.
- Encourage more events and programming in the Downtown and District.
- Identify opportunities to preserve heritage assets through enhancements to the heritage program focused on heritage assets in the Downtown.
- Establish supportive actions, policies and programs to ensure a Downtown that both feels safe and is safe.

Vibrant downtowns have activity at all times of day and throughout all seasons, with a healthy mix of development and amenities to support it. The Plan acknowledges the importance of heritage and culture assets, aiming to integrate them into the public realm for broader accessibility and participation in arts, culture and education.



Culture & Public Art

Saskatoon has a rich cultural landscape composed of many different cultures. Public art reflects the culture of our city and makes public spaces more inspiring and welcoming. The Plan provides opportunities to showcase public art and grow Saskatoon's cultural scene.

Emphasis will be given to equitable representation of Indigenous, ethno-cultural, persons with disabilities and LGBTQIA2S+ communities, and spaces for Indigenous storytelling and cultural expression.

Activation & Programming

A focus on creative programming and placemaking in the City Centre is an investment that will continue to enhance public space, engage citizens, and build on and celebrate the city's character and history. Strategies to promote activation in the Downtown and the District will include a review of outdoor dining regulations, sidewalk bumpouts and additional event programming.

Heritage

There are over eighty heritage buildings identified within the City Centre boundary as having architectural and/or cultural significance. Over sixty of those buildings are in the Downtown. Conservation of significant heritage assets in the Downtown is necessary to maintaining the area's historic character.

The proposed District also provides greater opportunities to incorporate both Saskatoon's heritage and story telling through interpretive features.

Inclusiveness

The vision for the Downtown and District is centered on inclusivity, welcoming people from all walks of life. Through education, awareness, policies and investment, the Downtown and the District can remain a place that is safe and welcoming to all and where the city's most vulnerable residents can make use of quality services.

Safety

Safety and perceptions of safety in the Downtown present challenges in the face of issues surrounding homelessness, mental health and addictions. While these issues are complex and are best addressed outside the scope of this Plan, there are improvements to the public realm to help reduce crime and improve perceptions of safety.

There are many supports that can come together to help ensure the Downtown is safe and feels safe.

4.6 Resilient Infrastructure & Servicing Strategy

Strategic Directions

- Enhance the existing tree canopy to provide shaded areas and enhance biodiversity.
- Aim to minimize the use of potable water and use a naturalized approach to water management to protect water resources.
- Empower residents and visitors to make sustainable decisions in how they work, live, play and learn in the Downtown.

The City Centre and District will develop over the coming decades. During this time, expectations of buildings and communities will change.

Responding to the need for climate adaptation and resiliency, the Plan advances the Downtown on a path to become more sustainable and resilient to our changing climate.



Source: Discover Saskatoon

Implementation & Next Steps

The City Centre and District Plan intends to be an action-oriented Plan that brings together the City and civic partners in a co-ordinated and collaborative effort to make life better every day for citizens, residents, workers and visitors. The final Plan intends to bring new energy and a comprehensive approach to align existing projects and initiatives, while also incorporating the potential Downtown Event and Entertainment District.

Over the coming months, building on the directions outlined in this report, the City Centre and District Plan will be developed with actions to achieve the vision for the Downtown and District. Civic Departments and Divisions responsible for delivering on the actions outlined in the Plan will be engaged to develop the implementation strategy to achieve the long term goals for the Downtown and District.