

City Centre and Downtown Event and Entertainment District Plan Targeted Engagement Report (Fall 2023)

Background

In October and November 2023, the City of Saskatoon (City) conducted targeted workshops and a public survey. Targeted engagement was conducted with the public, University students, and Downtown businesses to better understand what is important to community members when developing the Downtown Event and Entertainment District (District) and broader Downtown.

The City asked for feedback on specific topic areas for the Downtown, including green and open spaces, connectivity and mobility. The input received from community members signal priorities and considerations on these topic areas to be considered in the development of the City Centre and District Plan, and to be presented to City Council.

In addition to the targeted workshops on specific topics, the City also engaged with University students and Downtown residents and businesses to receive broad feedback on potential impacts for the Downtown and proposed District.

What We Did

The purpose of this engagement was to ask for feedback about green and open spaces, connectivity and mobility for the future District in the context of the broader Downtown. Workshops were advertised for the public and community groups and businesses were invited to attend.

How we Gathered Input

- Workshops
- Online mapping tools and surveys

Targeted Workshops

6 targeted workshops were held with a total number of 87 participants taking part in-person.

City staff provided information on the project background to participants. The workshops provided the opportunity for participants and business representatives to provide input on specific topics.

Not all input received through the targeted workshops are within the scope of this project. Some input is more applicable to the operations of the potential event centre/arena and convention centre. Additionally, some input received is not within the authority of the City of Saskatoon. For transparency, the summary of input received through each targeted workshop is included below.

Targeted Workshop Notes

Connectivity and Mobility (1 workshop)

- Considerations should be made for parking lots, pedestrian bridges and bike lanes.
- A master traffic study should be conducted for Midtown Plaza, the subject site and the future use of streets for local businesses around the site.
- Consideration for elevated pedestrian walkway from parkades to events.

- Prefer bike lanes at sidewalk level, not street level.
- Secure bike garages with e-bike charging stations.
- Have different modes of transportation approach from different locations.
- General questions received about single occupancy vehicle traffic flow and how the Bus Rapid Transit system will work.
- Concern about Downtown safety, whether the Downtown will be safe for people to park their cars, especially at night, ideally with electric vehicle charging outlets.
- Car sharing should be incentivized.
- Downtown needs multilevel parking structures or underground parking.
- Downtown is not a good location for an arena, people do not want to go out when it is cold. Maintaining the Midtown parking lot as is, would be a better use of space.
- We should build the community and businesses first, solve all parking problems, and then consider an event centre.
- The District should have things for visitors to do during the day, including green space and attractions for all age groups.

Green and Open Spaces (2 workshops)

- Green space near the Bessborough hotel is one of the nicest in the city, how can we reproduce this close to the event centre?
- We lack different types of trees. As a winter city we should have more evergreen trees.
- Art can be at different levels, including murals.
- The space around the event centre can be improved.
- An elevated pedestrian walkway including green space above 22nd Street should be considered.
- More lights can improve a space drastically, including making visitors feel safer.
- Downtown is lacking families, children, and interactive play areas.
- Consultation should be done with Indigenous and multicultural groups for art and landscaping around the event centre.
- There should be indoor green gathering space for when it is cold, like a conservatory.
- There should be a dedicated pedestrian street from the event centre that connects with the Meewasin trail.
- Walkability is very important.
- A grocery store along a transit line that is also pedestrian friendly is desired.
- Green space could be combined with underground parking.
- Green space along Avenue A and Avenue B, connecting to Victoria Park.
- Green space along 23rd Street and Pacific Avenue.
- Green spaces between Toys R Us and the Midtown.
- How the green space interacts with the winter will be key for the success of this project.
- Comfortable connections for pedestrians to get to the event centre and Midtown Plaza, indoor, underground or walkways above.
- Safety is a concern for the Downtown.
- Green spaces are like fingers on a map drawing connections to different areas.
- Linear parks can be pleasant ways to connect locations.

Downtown Businesses and Organizations (1 workshop)

- Parking can be improved in the Downtown. There is lots of parking, but it is not necessarily available for the users who need to use it, for example reserved parking that is unused at night.
- Traffic and parking can be improved – look to Edmonton and Phoenix for ways to handle it.
- The land use permitting process is expensive and time consuming.
- Safety is a concern for people in the Downtown.
- Property taxes are too high for businesses.
- Concerns expressed about a potential expansion of the convention centre.
- Concerns about places for people to shelter in the winter.
- Linear or pocket parks near the event centre would be encouraging for pedestrians and residents.
- Concerns about costs and funding for the project.
- Who will operate the future arena? Potentially a private sector partnership.

Downtown Residents and Businesses (1 workshop)

- Interest in transportation corridors and community gardens.
- Interest in a Downtown grocery store.
- Concerns about development along Spadina Crescent.
- Interest in more lighting and enhanced walkways.
- Interest in promoting Downtown as a place to live.
- Interest in how the YMCA will be impacted.
- Interest in what is happening with the new Central Library.
- There is noise pollution in the Downtown, primarily from emergency vehicles using their sirens.
- Property crime deters people from living Downtown and feeling safe.
- Regina has free parking on Saturdays, should Saskatoon do the same thing to attract shoppers?
- Should Spadina Crescent be a vehicle-less promenade attractive for pedestrians?
- Improved lighting to enhance safety.
- Safety is a key theme and its relationship to lighting, vandalism and comfort in walking and being Downtown.
- Park and Ride could be setup to assist with the transportation and access into Downtown for events.
- Concern about the loss of parking that will happen with a new arena taking over parking spaces.
- The rail line is a challenge for convenient connections to the Downtown.
- Opinions are mixed about having a Downtown Community Association.
- Posters and email would be good ways to communicate information to Downtown residents.

Targeted Workshop with University Students (1 workshop)

- Interest in improving the amount and quality of green spaces Downtown to attract students to live and spend time in Downtown.

- Questions about the plans for a new Downtown library, including timelines and amenities for students.
- Concerns about adequate parking and the cost of parking Downtown.
- Interest in the type of bike infrastructure being considered. There were suggestions for improved bike lanes and secure bike parking Downtown.
- Interest in more communal gathering spaces for residents.
- Interest in a Downtown grocery store.
- Suggestion to remove vehicle traffic from a street to create more interesting pedestrian environments, similar to examples from other Canadian cities.
- Interest in how affordable housing will be incorporated into the Downtown through this plan.
- Interest in recreation opportunities that appeal specifically to students.
- Interest in activating popular Downtown spaces in the winter months.

Online Survey

An online survey was made available to the public throughout November 2023 and was completed by 62 respondents. Respondents provided feedback using mapping tools to provide locational responses for connections to and around the Downtown, and green and open spaces in the Downtown.

Respondents were asked what important amenities or places in the Downtown should have increased connections. Top responses included:

- River Landing;
- Meewasin Trail;
- Midtown Plaza;
- TCU Place; and
- Central Library.

They were asked what their primary mode of transportation Downtown is. Top responses were:

- car;
- walk;
- bus; and
- bike.

They were asked where improvements could be made to make their experience of getting around Downtown better. Top locations for enhance crosswalks were:

- 1st Avenue North and 23rd Street East;
- 1st Avenue North and 22nd Street East;
- 1st Avenue North and 20th Street East; and
- Idylwyld Drive and 20th Street East.

Respondents were asked where there were opportunities to integrate new open or green spaces. Locations chosen for community gardens, community plazas, and pocket or linear parks centered around the proposed event centre/arena and convention centre sites. Respondents also indicated

many opportunities along the streets of Downtown, and on underused sites primarily north of the proposed event centre/arena and convention centre locations.

Respondents were asked where and what type of public realm improvements they would like to see. Enhanced lighting and streetscaping were indicated around the proposed event centre/arena and convention centre sites. Street trees and pedestrian and cycling facilities were favoured near the proposed event centre/arena site, and along streets in and leading to the Downtown, including 22nd Street West/East, 20th Street West/East, 23rd Street East, 1st Avenue North/South, 3rd Avenue North/South and 4th Avenue North/South.

What Went Well

- An online survey option to reach out to individuals who were not able to make it to the in-person targeted workshops.
- Group workshops allowed for participants to have plenty of opportunity to provide input and to discuss with City staff.

What We Can Do Better

- Limited responses were received to call out for engagement workshops and the online survey. It is unknown why there was not greater responses, whether due to lack of interest, not receiving the information, or some other unknown barrier.

How is the Input Being Used?

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 are also provided to City Council for their consideration, as well as made available to the public.