

Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Conceptual Design

ISSUE

Development of the district plan, conceptual design, and funding strategy for the Downtown Event and Entertainment District (District) has been underway since late 2022. This report presents an overview of the conceptual design report.

BACKGROUND

At its November 19, 2018 Regular Business Meeting, City Council received a report entitled "[TCU Place / SaskTel Centre Market Analysis](#)," and resolved:

- “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;
4. That one of the overall principles be to seek approaches that minimize the reliance on Property taxes to pay for this arena; and
5. That the approach also recognize that while the City of Saskatoon has a leadership role, it will take collaboration with stakeholders and the community as a whole to come up with the best solution.”

At its April 26, 2021 Regular Business Meeting, City Council received a report entitled "[A Vibrant Future for Saskatoon’s Downtown – An Exploration of Potential Funding Opportunities to Bring the Vision to Life](#).” This report provided an analysis of the potential combination of new revenue sources, transfers from other levels of government, and existing revenue sources to fund the core projects without property tax contributions. City Council resolved:

- “1. That Council confirm pursuit of a downtown entertainment district/BRT, including the 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 the 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."

At its November 16, 2022 Special Meeting, City Council received 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."

At its December 12, 2023 meeting, the Governance and Priorities Committee received an information report entitled "[Downtown Event and Entertainment District - Phase 1 Engaging on Ideas Engagement Results](#)," which described the results of the first phase of engagement, including the feedback received from targeted stakeholders and the broader public.

At its January 17, 2024 meeting, the Governance and Priorities Committee received an information report entitled "[Downtown Event and Entertainment District - Navigating the Path Forward Beyond the Preliminary Funding Strategy](#)," which described the key considerations and next steps before a funding plan is established and detailed design and construction could commence.

CURRENT STATUS

The conceptual design for the proposed event centre/arena and convention centre, including public spaces around the facilities, is now complete and is the subject of this report. The conceptual design was developed in consideration of the results of the initial phase of public engagement and consultation with the Downtown Event and Entertainment District Advisory Group, Indigenous community members, and other public stakeholder groups.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The conceptual design report prepared by the City of Saskatoon's (City) Technical Advisor for this project is provided in Appendix 1. The scope of the report includes the District Core, event centre/arena, convention centre, theatre, and the streets and public spaces that tie them all together. The broader Downtown Event and Entertainment District is the subject of the District Plan, for which the companion report entitled "City Centre and Downtown Event and Entertainment District (District) Plan – Interim Strategic Directions Report" is also being considered at this meeting of the Governance and Priorities Committee.

The conceptual design involves visionary plans for revitalizing Downtown Saskatoon through investments in facilities and public spaces. The goals emphasize creating a distinctive identity, showcasing architectural and public realm design excellence, as well as honouring Indigenous histories and cultures. The goals also include reliable transportation, downtown density, sustainability, a robust economy, and community safety and wellbeing. The vision is inspired by the unique characteristics of Saskatoon, integrating urban and prairie elements, honouring the natural environment, and embracing the local culture and climate.

The design objectives for the public realm within the District Core highlight the importance of creating vibrant, functional, and engaging areas that enhance the city's social and cultural fabric. The conceptual design focuses on incorporating a diverse range of activities and amenities, ensuring these spaces are inviting and adaptable for various uses throughout the year. The design also includes integration of the District's unique cultural, environmental, and historical elements, aiming to create a dynamic and inclusive urban environment.

The conceptual design for the event centre/arena focuses on creating a new Downtown facility for live entertainment, including concerts, performances, and sports events that aligns with the contemporary standards of the entertainment industry. The new facility would initially be constructed to a 15,900 fixed seating capacity and designed for future expansion to 18,000 fixed seating capacity. The exterior design concept emphasizes a blend of modern architectural styles inspired by its surroundings with a connection to local heritage and environment, incorporating stone, metal panel, and glass materials.

The convention centre and theatre conceptual design emphasizes the importance of creating a market-competitive venue while integrating the facility seamlessly into the broader event and entertainment district, with a focus on enhancing the visitor experience and accommodating a diverse range of events and activities. The conceptual design report details the option to expand the convention centre to the west of the Sid Buckwold Theatre. Other options to expand or replace the convention centre were evaluated and are the subject of the companion report entitled "Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Convention Centre Options," which is also being considered at this meeting of the Governance and Priorities Committee.

The exterior design concept for the theatre and convention centre takes its inspiration from the rolling hills outside the city and the curves of the South Saskatchewan River, incorporating stone, metal panel, glass, and wood materials. The scope of renovations to the Sid Buckwold Theatre aims to help meet TCU Place's revenue generation interests, while maintaining flexibility and growth options that will make the theatre a cherished venue for generations to come.

The District Transportation Strategy covers a multi-modal strategy and accommodation of various transportation modes that include new on-site parking; a shared parking district; a managed park and walk strategy; a pedestrian strategy; a transit integration strategy, including both Bus Rapid Transit and local transit routes; and a rideshare, tour bus, and taxi strategy. This multi-modal strategy aims not only to reduce congestion but also to improve and build upon existing Downtown assets. This approach involves efficiently leveraging current and planned multi-modal systems to seamlessly blend the enhanced District into the broader Downtown area.

The design for both anchor facilities will conform to the requirements of the City's High Performance Civic Building Policy. A series of analyses have also been completed to provide a roadmap to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 aligned with the City's sustainability goals. Several energy conservation measures are recommended to be incorporated in the detailed design to achieve the High Performance Building Policy requirements, as well as additional measures that can be considered for fully zero emission design.

TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE IMPLICATIONS

A Triple Bottom Line review was completed. A variety of environmental, social, and economic impacts and opportunities were identified. Key implications include:

1. Environmental:
 - a. The City's High Performance Building Standard shall be the minimum standard applied to the anchor facilities.
 - b. Landscaping and urban forest areas shall be established on the surrounding grounds, enhancing the green network, reducing the heat island effect, and reducing storm water run-off.
 - c. The central location within the Downtown core and near Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) routes should result in an overall reduction in vehicle emissions for event participants.
 - d. The anchor facilities and public spaces will be designed to minimize water and energy use.
 - e. The anchor facilities could utilize onsite solar power generation to offset a portion of its power demands or may employ offsite offsetting of renewables for a portion of its power supply. District energy is also being evaluated for feasibility of implementation within the Downtown Event and Entertainment District.
 - f. Constructing the event centre/arena with the event level located below ground level will reduce the overall height of the building, which will further enhance solar access to surrounding areas around the new arena.

- g. The new parking structure will include provisions for electric vehicle charging.
- h. Future operational plans for the anchor facilities should consider replacing single-use plastic food and beverage materials with reusable or compostable materials (e.g., Climate Pledge Arena).

2. Social:

- a. The project involves a holistic design that is welcoming for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. This applies not just to the facility, but to the surrounding public spaces. Accessibility will be integral to all aspects of the design of the public gathering areas and the anchor facilities.
- b. Indigenous placemaking and placekeeping will be incorporated into the design.
- c. The project includes ensuring broad representation in public engagement, including targeted engagement with historically under-represented groups.
- d. CPTED principles will be used in the design of all public spaces.
- e. Public spaces are included that facilitate civic engagement.
- f. Public spaces are intended to be enjoyed by everyone and carefully designed to create "Saskatoon's living room," supporting an attractive and vibrant District Core year-round.

3. Economic:

- a. The private partner Request for Proposals includes various provisions pertaining to desirable community benefit outcomes that support sustainable procurement and good jobs.
- b. Sustainable design targets will reduce operational costs.
- c. Development of the project will support the local economy, including having a positive influence on Saskatoon's tourism economy.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial, communications, policy, privacy, or CPTED implications or considerations at this time. These will be the focus of future reports.

NEXT STEPS

The budget estimate and preliminary funding strategy are anticipated to be brought forward in the coming months. At that time, City Council will be asked to direct the Administration to pursue achievement of the funding strategy, which is expected to take two to three years to fully achieve. City Council's approval of the funding strategy would signal to the public, the Administration, and other orders of government that the project is a priority and City Council intends to approve commencement of the project should the other orders of government contribute the required funding and legislative amendments required to achieve the funding strategy.

The Administration intends to conduct public engagement to solicit feedback on the conceptual design, which can then be incorporated into the future detailed design of the project, along with input from the private partner. As the detailed design phase is not anticipated to commence for at least two years, this public engagement is currently planned to occur in 2025.

APPENDICES

1. Saskatoon Downtown Event and Entertainment District Conceptual Design Report

Report Approval

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