

Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Convention Centre Options

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. Various potential options were assessed in consideration of the future convention centre. What design option for the convention centre should be carried forward to future detailed design?

BACKGROUND

History

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 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.

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 the companion report entitled “Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Conceptual Design,” which is also being considered at this meeting of the Governance and Priorities Committee. 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.

OPTIONS

The convention centre technical team included representatives from the Technical Advisor team of external consultants, City Administration, and TCU Place. Several potential options for either a completely new facility or an expansion and comprehensive renovation of the existing facility were identified and evaluated based on several factors, including:

- Sufficiency of available space to achieve the building program requirements (e.g., room sizes, pre-function space, support spaces, space layout);
- Level of complexity and cost to design and construct;
- Adjacency/proximity to other facilities (i.e., event centre/arena, theatre) within the District Core such that the benefits of daytime and evening animation would be achieved by the activity generated by these facilities;
- Land availability;
- Degree to which the visitor experience would be enhanced or eroded; and
- Degree to which operations would be improved or complicated.

Appendix 1 describes the nine site options that were identified and evaluated by the convention centre technical team. Based on this analysis, Option 4a and 4b were both determined to be viable options and are further described below.

Option 4a – Expanding West with New Convention Centre

This option involves constructing a new convention centre to the west of the theatre across Auditorium Avenue, utilizing the YMCA property, and the City of Saskatoon (City)-owned parcels at the southeast corner of Idylwyld Drive and 22nd Street (110, 120, and 126 Idylwyld Drive). This option would require permanent closure of Auditorium Avenue at this location and the acquisition and demolition of the YMCA property.

This option was confirmed by the technical team as a viable option that provides sufficient space to establish a convention centre that meets the target building program requirements, is of a reasonable level of complexity to design and construct, maintains connection to the theatre, has great adjacency/proximity to the event centre/arena, offers good opportunity to improve the experiences for visitors to the facility, and creates good opportunities to improve operational efficiency over the existing facility.

Option 4b – Compact Expansion West with Renovation of Existing Space

This option involves comprehensive renovation of existing convention centre spaces and the addition of a more compact expansion of the convention centre to the west of the theatre across Auditorium Avenue utilizing the YMCA property and edging into the City-owned parcels at the southeast corner of Idylwyld Drive and 22nd Street. This option would require permanent closure of Auditorium Avenue at this location and the acquisition and demolition of the YMCA property.

As with Option 4a, this option was confirmed by the technical team as a viable option that provides sufficient space to establish a convention centre that meets the target building program requirements, is of a reasonable level of complexity to design and construct, maintains connection to the theatre, has great adjacency/proximity to the event centre/arena, offers good opportunity to improve the experiences for visitors to the facility, and creates good opportunities to improve operational efficiency over the existing facility.

While Option 4a provides greater opportunity to optimize the design to achieve the desired outcomes for the visitor experience and operational efficiency by creating an entirely new facility, the technical team determined the integration and renovation of the existing convention centre spaces in conjunction with a more compact expansion could still achieve these targets.

RECOMMENDATION

That Option 4b be approved with the future detailed design of the convention centre to include expansion to the west with renovation of the existing convention centre spaces within the building.

RATIONALE

Of the options evaluated, Options 4a and 4b were both determined by the technical team to be viable and able to meet the target building program. Option 4b – Compact Expansion West with Renovation of Existing Space is being recommended for three significant reasons, as follows:

- Renovating existing convention centre spaces in the east portion of the building requires less demolition and new construction, resulting in lower overall cost for the convention centre.
- The compact expansion creates an attractive development opportunity on the City-owned parcels at the southeast corner of Idylwyld Drive and 22nd Street (110, 120, and 126 Idylwyld Drive), as well as a potential revenue opportunity through future sale of this surplus property.
- While final cost estimates are still in development, and will be the subject of future reporting, preliminary estimates indicate Option 4b to be approximately 15% lower in overall cost than Option 4a.

ADDITIONAL IMPLICATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

There are no policy, privacy, or CPTED implications or considerations at this time. These will be considered in future reports as required.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

The Administration will continue to communicate milestones and engagement opportunities for the Downtown Event and Entertainment District in a variety of ways to inform the public of the project’s progress and ways to participate in its development. Plans will include a variety of tactics such as updates to the Journey to the District webpages, subscriber emails, news releases and PSAs, media scrums, social media, videos, and other forms of advertising.

APPENDICES

1. Convention Centre Options – All Options

Report Approval

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