

City Centre and Downtown Event and Entertainment Plan – Interim Strategic Directions Report

ISSUE

The City Centre Plan represents the City of Saskatoon’s (City) ongoing commitment to ensuring the Downtown retains and enhances its significance, while meeting the evolving needs of the community as the city grows. Saskatoon is planning for a Downtown Event and Entertainment District. To facilitate this, a comprehensive planning effort is underway to integrate the proposed Downtown Event and Entertainment District into a revised City Centre Plan framework.

The forthcoming City Centre and District Plan will serve as a framework to guide public realm design for streets, plazas and other public spaces. The City Centre and District Plan will develop a complementary land use framework for both the Downtown and Downtown Event and Entertainment District (District), as well as a plan for transportation network components and facilities and will include actions addressing recommendations related to components that may have an impact on, or be influenced by, funding, legislation or policy considerations.

As the City Centre and District Plan takes shape, strategic moves and objectives have been outlined for City Council’s information. These preliminary details are provided ahead of the presentation of the finalized plan, to City Council.

BACKGROUND

City Council, at its Regular Business Meeting on December 16, 2013, received a report entitled “[City Centre Plan – Phase No. 3 of the City Centre Plan Project](#)”, and resolved:

“That the key strategies outlined in the City Centre Plan be endorsed.”

City Council at its Regular Business Meeting on November 19, 2018, received a report entitled “[TCU Place/SaskTel Centre Market Analysis](#)” and resolved, in part:

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.”

CURRENT STATUS

The [City Centre Plan \(2013\)](#) is a non-statutory plan outlining key strategies and direction for both the Downtown and the broader City Centre. Subsequent actions have been taken since 2013 to actively implement the strategies, as outlined in Appendix 1.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The emerging City Centre and District Plan (Plan) outlines a vision and strategic initiatives to support the Downtown, District and broader City Centre. The Plan will aim to establish a framework for the future to assist City Council and its Administration, builders, investors and residents to understand and realize opportunities within the City Centre over the coming decades.

The Plan will be used as the foundation upon which future Downtown-related budget requests, both capital and operating, will be based. Additionally, it will foster ongoing community dialogue with civic and community partners.

The Vision for Downtown

Downtown is the geographical and metaphorical heart of Saskatoon and has a direct impact on the rest of the city. A dynamic and vibrant Downtown has far-reaching impacts, benefiting all residents. City Council, at its Regular Business [Meeting](#) on March 29, 2023, adopted the [Vision Statement and Guiding Principles](#) for the Downtown Event and Entertainment District Plan of Saskatoon:

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

The vision for the Downtown and the District builds upon the success of the 2013 City Centre Plan. The Plan will outline an approach for integrating a potential district within the Downtown, complementing the existing area and offering greater opportunities for infill development, dynamic public and park spaces, new anchor facilities, as well as serving as a new gathering centre in the heart of Downtown.

Site Context and Analysis

The development of the Plan has involved an examination of conditions within the geographic study area, encompassing both the broader Downtown and the District. A Downtown and District Baseline Analysis is being finalized. The Analysis is focused on evaluating the impact of existing uses and transportation on the built environment. Insights gained from the Baseline Analysis are informing the concept design, strategies and directions aimed at enhancing the vibrancy of Downtown and improving connections between Downtown and the District.

City Centre and District Plan Interim Strategic Directions Report (Interim Report)

The City Centre and District Plan Interim Strategic Directions Report, included in Appendix 2, presents a set of strategies that will form the basis of the Plan. The supporting strategies are as follows:

Public Realm Strategy: The Public Realm Strategy serves as the anchor for the City Centre and the District, offering a framework for Downtown street types, intended outcomes for each and key elements to be incorporated into public realm design. Catalyst streetscape projects would be prioritized to uplift the design and identity in the Downtown.

Indigenous storytelling and cultural expression opportunities will be emphasized through the creation of a process and framework for Indigenous placemaking/placekeeping. This will be outlined, aiming to establish and integrate placekeeping throughout projects in the City Centre and District.

Parks and Open Space Strategy: The Parks and Open Space Strategy aims to establish a network of interconnected green and open spaces designed for specific purposes. New park and public gathering spaces within the District Core and Warehouse District, as well as connecting larger park spaces Downtown using Greenway streets and activation of underutilized green spaces are all part of the Strategy.

The plazas surrounding the proposed event centre/arena and convention centre are envisioned as hubs for culture and entertainment, offering possibilities for community and cultural events, organized pre- and post-event activities and informal seating areas. These spaces will also be opportunities to create distinctive identities through placemaking/placekeeping efforts.

Economy and Land Use Strategy: The Economy and Land Use Strategy is informed by market and demographic trends, insights from previous City initiatives in the Downtown and consultation with Downtown stakeholders, developers and retailers. The envisioned land use mix anticipates a wide variety of uses in Downtown to activate and encourage residential development while supporting a balanced approach to retail.

To achieve and foster the right mix of uses, the Plan will include an updated zoning strategy. This is expected to include the introduction of a new zoning district for the District Core to ensure high quality building design that engages with the public realm, as well as amendments to the B6 – Downtown Commercial District and MX2 – Downtown Warehouse Mixed Use District to facilitate a greater variety of residential development forms. These changes could allow for increased development rights in exchange for public benefits, contributing to the overall livability of Downtown.

Connectivity and Mobility Strategy: The Connectivity and Mobility Strategy complements the Public Realm Strategy by focusing on how people move in and through the Downtown and the District. The design of the City Centre and District is centered around efficient transportation options, including the Bus Rapid Transit system.

Inclusiveness and Vibrancy Strategy: The Inclusiveness and Vibrancy Strategy outlines directions to attract people to stay and experience Downtown for its location, activities and culture. Increasing vibrancy Downtown relies on people but can be further enhanced by reviewing policies related to parklets, patios, sidewalk cafes and food trucks.

Resilient Infrastructure and Servicing Strategy: The Plan will reflect the notion of climate leadership through innovative community design, addressing the imperative for climate adaptation and resilience. Implementing strategies and actions, such as integrating native and resilient species in streetscaping projects, utilizing rainwater capture for public spaces and landscaping, and adopting green building practices for the design of the anchor facilities in the District, will advance Downtown toward greater sustainability and resiliency.

Engagement

Engagement on the District was conducted in April and May of 2023. The Governance and Priorities Committee, at its meeting on December 12, 2023, considered the [Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Phase 1 Engaging on Ideas Engagement Results](#) report.

Additional engagement was undertaken for the Plan to shape the directions presented in the Interim Report. During October and November of 2023, the City organized targeted workshops open to the public and a public survey on specific topic areas related to the Downtown and the District. The input gathered indicated priorities and considerations for these topics, which will be considered in the development of the Plan. A summary of the results of the targeted workshops and public survey is provided in Appendix 3.

IMPLICATIONS

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

NEXT STEPS

Building upon the directions outlined in the Interim Report, Administration will formulate actions and recommendations to form the City Centre and District Plan. The Plan will include an implementation strategy.

Before presenting the finalized Plan to City Council, Administration intends to share the draft Plan with the relevant City Council Advisory Committees. Additionally, ongoing communication and engagement with rights holders, stakeholder organizations, community partners, business owners, residents and the broader community will continue throughout the development of the finalized Plan.

Administration intends to present the finalized Plan to City Council for consideration in Q2 of 2024.

APPENDICES

1. Building on Success in the City Centre
2. Saskatoon's City Centre and DEED Plan – Interim Strategic Directions Report
3. City Centre and DEED Plan Targeted Engagement Report (Fall 2023)

REPORT APPROVAL

Written by: Ian Williamson, Senior Project Planner
Reviewed by: Chris Schulz, Planning Project Services Manager
Lesley Anderson, Director of Planning and Development
Dan Willems, Director of Technical Services
Approved by: Lynne Lacroix, General Manager, Community Services
Jeff Jorgenson, City Manager

SP/2024/PD/GPC/City Centre and Downtown Event and Entertainment Plan – Interim Strategic Directions Report/mt