



SASKATOON'S FUTURE – DOWNTOWN ENTERTAINMENT AND EVENT DISTRICT

April 13, 2021

His Worship Mayor Charlie Clark and
Members of City Council
City of Saskatoon
222 – 3rd Avenue North
Saskatoon, SK, S7K 0J5

Subject: City Council Budget and Priorities – Downtown Entertainment District

To His Worship and Members of City Council,

On behalf of the key stakeholders in the proposed Downtown Entertainment and Event District, we are pleased to provide this written letter to City Council demonstrating strong unified support of the Downtown Entertainment District. The purpose of this letter is to request consideration for committed and continued development of the Downtown Entertainment District, incorporating a new Convention Centre (inclusive of Sid Buckwold Theatre) and the Entertainment and Sports Arena.

City Council will be inundated with capital project proposals through the budget cycle, focusing on post COVID recovery. It our wish that strong consideration and high prioritization be given to development of the Downtown Entertainment District during these deliberations. The development of the Entertainment District, including both of the anchor venues, is critical to enable Saskatoon to not only bounce back from COVID, but to thrive in the face of that recovery.

Economic Impact of Downtown Entertainment District

The arena and convention centre (including Sid Buckwold Theatre) are essential components of the economic vitality of the City of Saskatoon, and a significant draw for both business and leisure travel. Entertainment and conference facilities are known to be important drivers of the national and regional economies through domestic and international visitation, facilitating small business, and fostering innovation.

Studies validating the economic impact of both venues have been completed in recent years. Both venues, in their current state, add economic stability and jobs to Saskatoon and region.

TCU Place	SaskTel Centre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TCU Place provides combined local and provincial Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$63.3M, \$27.0 of which is local to Saskatoon. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SaskTel Centre provides, on average, a GDP impact of \$43.0M per year.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TCU Place created 493 local jobs (612 provincially). • Roughly 1 in every 216 jobs in Saskatoon depend directly or indirectly on TCU Place (1 in every 626 jobs provincially). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SaskTel Centre has provided an employment impact of 565 full-time equivalent jobs on average per year.
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Through these measures, it is clear that both the convention centre and arena play pivotal roles in Saskatoon’s economy and will continue to be a driver in the near future. However, sustaining the positive impact of both facilities will become more challenging as its components near or exceed their useful life, while most other competing facilities across the country, have been either refurbished or rebuilt. New facilities in a purposefully planned district, will see strong financial metrics and payback in the form of its local economic contributions. Entertainment districts similar to the one proposed for downtown Saskatoon have seen increases in economic impact and jobs up to tenfold. This is possible for Saskatoon.

Aging Infrastructure

Saskatoon currently holds a unique competitive advantage on the national convention centre stage as a smaller, inexpensive, yet vibrant and energetic meeting destination, with the addition of the Sid Buckwold Theatre to add an upscale element to conventions. Additionally, SaskTel Centre holds the unique position of being the only large arena between Edmonton and Winnipeg, and so it is a natural stop for tours. The age of these facilities is the predominant risk factor in eroding these advantages.

SaskTel Centre was constructed in 1988, with expansions / renovations in 1990 and 2009. TCU Place was constructed in 1968 and underwent expansion in 2006. The expansion added two levels of meeting space and back-of-house connectivity at the lowest level of the original auditorium. All original components of both facilities are rapidly approaching, if not already exceeding, their useful lives.

A 2018 report, ‘Analysis of New and/or Expanded Event and Convention Facilities in Saskatoon’, published by HLT Advisory, Convergence Design, and Conventional Wisdom offered a collaboration between the City of Saskatoon, SaskTel Centre, and TCU Place. The report noted that, while the expansion components are in good repair, they are serviced by the infrastructure and systems of the original building making the “overall building problematic”.

At TCU Place, the segmented nature of the convention operations presents a challenge to meet the needs of customers hosting conventions, meetings, and trade shows. It presents significant risks to sustaining Saskatoon’s competitive advantages in the national and international markets while restricting TCU Place from achieving growth in the industry. For example, TCU Place falls behind current industry trends of large, flexible, adaptable spaces with streamlined catering, high ceilings, outdoor community space, natural light, parking, electrical power distribution, and dedicated display space.

Furthermore, deterioration of major building systems and components will drive maintenance costs up. These factors may result in negative impacts to the customer experience for TCU Place customers and the financial stability of the facility.

SaskTel Centre is faced with operating in an environment with ever increasing challenges and competition. With an original seating capacity of less than 9,000, SaskTel Centre has, through multiple expansions, increased its capacity to 15,300. These expansions were necessitated due to demands of event producers and the ticket purchasing public. These expansions have created an environment where our concourses are now too narrow, our building systems (example: air conditioning) as well as concessions, kitchen and restroom facilities are inadequate to service the number of event attendees that we currently attract. Additionally, our ceiling clearance is becoming too low for concert and special event productions. If we desire to remain competitive and continue to bring high quality event entertainment to the citizens of Saskatoon and the region, we need to provide an environment that is attractive to the consumer of today.

If the current facilities are not updated or enhanced, Saskatoon will lose customers, events, and visitors to competitors, therefore eroding the local economic benefits of the facilities. For these venues to remain competitive in the marketplace, and for Saskatoon to remain a key player in the events and entertainment world, the Downtown Entertainment District, including both an arena and convention centre, must be included in the near-term capital budgeting plans of the City of Saskatoon.

Project Status

SaskTel Centre and TCU Place are fully engaged in protecting the future of Saskatoon, and the wellbeing of the city and its residents. We are actively involved with the Downtown Entertainment District Steering Committee and have completed internal needs assessments reports for the facilities. We have consulted with venues, architects, and Associations to identify those factors that will enable these venues to thrive as part of the Downtown Entertainment District.

It is the intention of both facilities to continue developing internal feasibility and planning documents, processes and structure, for inclusion in the overarching Downtown Entertainment District project.

Request

As indicated above, the economic impact of the Downtown Entertainment District is substantial. A decline in activity due to aging infrastructure is a risk to these impacts that must not be overlooked. Our comparable and competitive destinations across North America are upgrading their respective venues and we feel Saskatoon has the unique opportunity to not only match, but create a best-in-class district, to not only hold our tourism and economic spinoff, but significantly grow it.

The management and boards of both venues would like to formally request that the City Councilors include consideration of both an arena and convention centre, within the scope of the Downtown Entertainment District, in its priorities of future major capital projects.



Mr. Will Lofdahl
Chief Executive Officer
SaskTel Centre



Ms. Tammy Sweeney
Chief Executive Officer
TCU Place

*Tammy Sweeney signing on behalf of TCU Place
Board*

Mr. Brian Bentley
Chair – Futures Committee
TCU Place Board of Directors



Mr. Bryn Richards
Chair
TCU Place Board of Directors



Mr. Jack Brodsky
Chair – Futures Committee
SaskTel Centre Board of Directors

Mr. Paul Jaspar
Chair
SaskTel Centre Board of Directors

- c. TCU Place Board of Directors
SaskTel Centre Board of Directors
Keith Moen – Executive Director NSBA
Jason Aebig – Chief Executive Officer, Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce
Stephanie Clovechok – Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Saskatoon
Brent Penner – Executive Director Downtown YXE