

Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Next Steps March 2026

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon (City) is continuing to advance the Downtown Event and Entertainment District as a city- building project to maintain Saskatoon’s long- term national competitiveness and market position to attract major touring events and large conventions while strengthening Downtown as a key economic and cultural hub.

What are the key considerations and next steps before detailed design and construction could commence?

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 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.

At its February 14, 2024, meeting, the Governance and Priorities Committee received an information report entitled "[Downtown Event and Entertainment District – Conceptual Design](#)," which presented the conceptual design for the project.

At its August 28, 2024, Regular Business Meeting, City Council received a report entitled "[Downtown Event and Entertainment District Funding Strategy](#)," and resolved:

"That the Administration proceed with execution of the Funding Strategy, including:

1. Advancement of the funding tools included in this report subject to further engagement with partners and future reporting to approve specific assumptions on rates, timing, and projections;
2. Working towards securing firm financial commitments from other orders of government consistent with cost sharing arrangements from previous major infrastructure programs; and
3. That administration be directed to report back on additional revenue sources and project savings, with the intent to fortify the City's ability to fund the project with no property tax increase and reduce

the financial reliance on the accommodations industry and amusement tax revenue streams. If, during the work and further refinement of this funding strategy, it is identified that a property tax increase could be required to meet project revenue needs, reporting is to occur.”

CURRENT STATUS

The conceptual design established the scope of the Downtown Event and Entertainment District (District) and formed the basis for the preliminary cost estimate, which in turn enabled development of a funding strategy for the project. The funding strategy is a living framework that is refined over time as firm commitments and the necessary legislative authority are secured for specific funding sources.

Currently, no government funding program exists that would provide sufficient funding to partially cover the costs of all elements of the project. As external funding commitments are confirmed (such as provincial and federal contributions), they would be incorporated into the strategy.

While the proposed local funding mechanisms are varied, some require provincial authority to enact (such as a tax on short-term accommodations, and provincial education property tax contributions via tax increment financing). The funding plan ultimately brought forward for City Council approval would be comprised of confirmed funding commitments alongside City Council-approved municipal funding mechanisms, should legislative authority be granted for those sources that require it.

Given the funding uncertainty, the overall project is structured to allow individual components to be phased or otherwise staged in alignment with the availability and timing of secured funding. This approach provides flexibility to advance elements of the project incrementally as funding materializes, while maintaining alignment with the long-term vision for the District. Notwithstanding this flexibility, neither the overall project nor any individual component would proceed to detailed design or construction without a funding plan formally approved by City Council.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The District is more than a single facility; it is a coordinated investment that supports private development and attracts visitors and talent by offering a city with a Downtown built around great public gathering places and amenities, and that has a strong sense of community. By advancing a comprehensive shelf-ready plan, supported by diversified municipal funding tools, the City is aligning the project with how provincial and federal governments invest in major infrastructure by focusing on projects that demonstrate readiness, shared funding responsibility, and broad economic and community benefits, thereby improving Saskatoon’s ability to attract senior-government funding.

Engagement with Other Orders of Government

Initial efforts have focused on educating representatives from both the provincial and federal governments on the District project, including its objectives, scope, and

anticipated economic, cultural, and community benefits. These discussions have emphasized the role of major event and entertainment venues as essential city-building infrastructure that directly contributes to quality of life, economic vibrancy, and community identity. The Administration and City Council members have highlighted that modern, flexible event venues are increasingly viewed as foundational amenities in cities that wish to attract and retain residents, skilled workers, and businesses, and that such facilities are now a core component of how communities compete nationally and internationally for talent and investment.

In these early engagements, the Administration and City Council members have also positioned the District within Saskatoon's broader role as the economic centre of Saskatchewan. As the province's largest city and primary service, employment, and innovation hub, Saskatoon plays a critical role in supporting provincial economic growth and diversification. The project has been framed as infrastructure that strengthens the city's ability to host national and international events, industry gatherings, and cultural programming that serve not only Saskatoon residents, but the wider region and province. This perspective aligns the project with stated provincial and national government interests in supporting economic resilience, tourism development, and the long-term competitiveness of Saskatchewan's and Canada's urban centres.

Building on this foundation, ongoing efforts continue to focus on encouraging provincial and federal partners to consider participation in the project's funding. The absence of any eligible federal funding program(s) means continued advocacy is needed to bring the project to life. In advancing this, the Administration and City Council members have reinforced that high-quality event and entertainment infrastructure supports the broader business environment by enhancing Saskatoon's attractiveness as a place to locate and grow enterprises. This is particularly relevant in the context of Saskatchewan's unique global positioning in critical minerals and resources that underpin modern and future industries, including potash, uranium, rare earth elements, lithium, and helium. As global competition for investment and skilled labour intensifies, the ability of Saskatchewan's primary urban centre to offer a compelling quality of life, strong cultural and entertainment amenities, and venues capable of hosting major industry, research, and innovation-focused events becomes an increasingly important competitive advantage.

Community Partnership Advocacy

At this stage, there is a growing need to formally re-engage key community partners to support and amplify these intergovernmental advocacy efforts. Organizations representing business, tourism, industry, and the event and entertainment sector can play a significant role in reinforcing the message that the District is not solely a municipal initiative, but a strategic investment that supports provincial and national economic objectives.

Coordinated engagement with these partners will help demonstrate broad-based support, align messaging, and leverage established relationships with senior government decision-makers. A unified approach will strengthen the case for

investment in the District as a project that enhances Saskatoon’s livability, supports talent attraction, and fortifies Saskatchewan’s ability to compete and lead in industries of global significance.

To this end, the Administration intends to refresh the Terms of Reference for the Downtown Event and Entertainment Advisory Group to enhance participation with key community partners and focus next steps efforts on intergovernmental advocacy.

Funding Strategy Refresh

To support informed decision-making and advance discussions with funding partners, the Administration intends to proceed with refreshing the project’s funding strategy to reflect current conditions. This work will incorporate updated information from the most recent property assessment cycle to reassess the scale, timing, and distribution of the municipal funding components previously identified.

In parallel, and subject to direction from City Council on the OVG360 partnership Agreement Framework, the Administration will update the funding strategy. This updated funding strategy will be used to confirm financial feasibility, inform ongoing engagement with other orders of government and community partners, and provide a clearer basis for future City Council direction on funding commitments.

IMPLICATIONS

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

NEXT STEPS

In addition to continuing engagement with other orders of government, the Administration is anticipating the following reports to be brought forward in 2026:

- Advisory Group Terms of Reference Refresh; and
- Funding Strategy Refresh.

Upon approval of the refreshed Advisory Group Terms of Reference, the Advisory Group will be convened at regular meetings to coordinate next steps to strategically advance the project.

Report Approval

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