

Strategy Discussion Paper (September 2017)

What is the Winter City Strategy about?

A Winter City Strategy is an intentional effort by a community to celebrate what makes Saskatoon unique as a four-season place that is inviting, vibrant and prosperous, even in the coldest months of the year. Facilitated through the City of Saskatoon's (City) leadership and engaging the interest and efforts of motivated stakeholders and the entire community, the Saskatoon Winter City Strategy will articulate the changes necessary to help residents, businesses and visitors 'embrace' winter with as much enthusiasm as they currently demonstrate for the summer season.

Why is a Winter City Strategy being developed for Saskatoon?

An idea that has been around within the planning and urban design professions since the early 1980's, the concept of a Winter City capitalizes on opportunities to mitigate the real and perceived negative effects of the winter season (such as inconvenience and added expense) and reinforce positive ones (such as unique activities, beauty, and sense of coziness). The outcome can be a more vibrant, sustainable, prosperous and livable community. A Winter City requires a creative approach to addressing the problems associated with snow, ice and cold while enhancing the advantages, opportunities and beauty of the season. A positive approach has been found to benefit the attitudes of residents, and bolster the community's ability to attract new business and residents.

In the last three years in particular, a Winter City movement has been growing rapidly, in Western Canada based on factors such as:

- The idea of a strategy: In addition to design, an expanded focus including mobility, recreation, culture and vibrancy. In place of one-off actions, integrating actions into a co-ordinated strategy and raising the profile of winter-specific needs and opportunities.
- A broad movement: No longer limited to official circles, ideas and actions are now being generated by community groups, neighbourhoods, the creative sector as well as leading cities.
- The Prairies as a leading region: Key events such as the 2nd annual international Winter Cycling Congress (Winnipeg, 2014) and international Winter Cities Shake-Up Conference (Edmonton, 2015 and 2017) attended by members of the Saskatoon community, City Councillors and civic staff.

The overarching objectives most Winter City Strategies attempt to achieve include:

- Creating a compassionate community. Addressing community inclusion and social isolation issues that are exaggerated by inclement weather. This includes issues of community equity in terms of individual mobility and barriers to participation and accessibility resulting from income, language or other factors.
- Supporting healthy lifestyles. Addressing structural barriers to healthy choices, particularly related to active transportation, outdoor comfort in all seasons, and accommodation for a variety of active pursuits.

- Economic resilience through diversity and activity. Identifying and supporting business opportunities that sustain the community and generate further opportunities for innovation, creativity and employment.

These objectives align well with the City of Saskatoon Strategic Goals of Quality of Life, Sustainable Growth, Moving Around and Economic Diversity and Prosperity.

Specifically, Saskatoon's Winter City Strategy is being developed to improve broader community accessibility, inclusion, activity and energy, and lead to greater economic vitality (particularly within service, accommodation and retail sectors) as the opportunities of winter are realized and the challenges mitigated. The intent of the Strategy is to be broad, responding to opportunities associated with winter life, winter design and winter economy; as well as addressing perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of citizens to generate a positive winter culture.

What has been the process for developing the Strategy so far?

In an attempt to build on the successes and learnings of other cities who are further along in the development and implementation of their Winter City Strategies, the City of Saskatoon has approached the development of the Strategy as an iterative process where community stakeholders co-design the Strategy with the City.

This co-design process began with a Stakeholder Breakfast. An interactive breakfast workshop was held on March 15, 2016, at Le Relais, attended by 45 community members. An orientation to the concept and potential of a Winter City Strategy was provided (based largely on recent work by the City of Edmonton), and key steps for moving forward a Strategy forward in Saskatoon was discussed. Stakeholders identified the need to first inventory existing assets and improve awareness of them. There was strong stakeholder interest in engaging in the next steps in a Winter City Strategy, either through volunteering with tasks and events or on a project committee.

As a result of this feedback, the following four-step process for developing a Saskatoon Community Winter City Strategy was developed and implemented between January and May 2017.

Step One - Building on the strength of existing assets

With a small amount of capital funding (\$6500) to hire a communications consultant and the support of existing civic staff (approximately 15 hours), an inventory of existing assets was developed. The purpose of the inventory is to provide a foundation from which the City and community stakeholders can promote what already exists, seek synergies through cooperative efforts, and identify gaps to be filled by the Strategy.

The inventory is located at Saskatoon.ca/WinterCityYXE.

WinterCityYXE: Saskatoon's Winter City Strategy



We're leading the creation of a Winter City Strategy for Saskatoon - the goal of the Strategy is to make winter in our city great!

Check Out What Our Winter City Already Has to Offer!

There is already so much to do in Saskatoon in the winter! From outdoor winter activities like skating and cross country skiing, to PotashCorp Wintershines, one of Canada's Best Winter Festivals, to attending a winter camp.

Want to get out of the cold? The Saskatoon [Civic Conservatory](#) offers a free place to warm up! Or check out the City of Saskatoon Winter 2017 [Leisure Guide](#) for a listing of hundreds of indoor and outdoor winter activities!

Outdoor Recreational Facilities



Outdoor Winter Events



Outdoor Programs and Activities



Contact Us

Environmental And Corporate Initiatives

306-975-2487

[Email Us](#)

Share Your Ideas

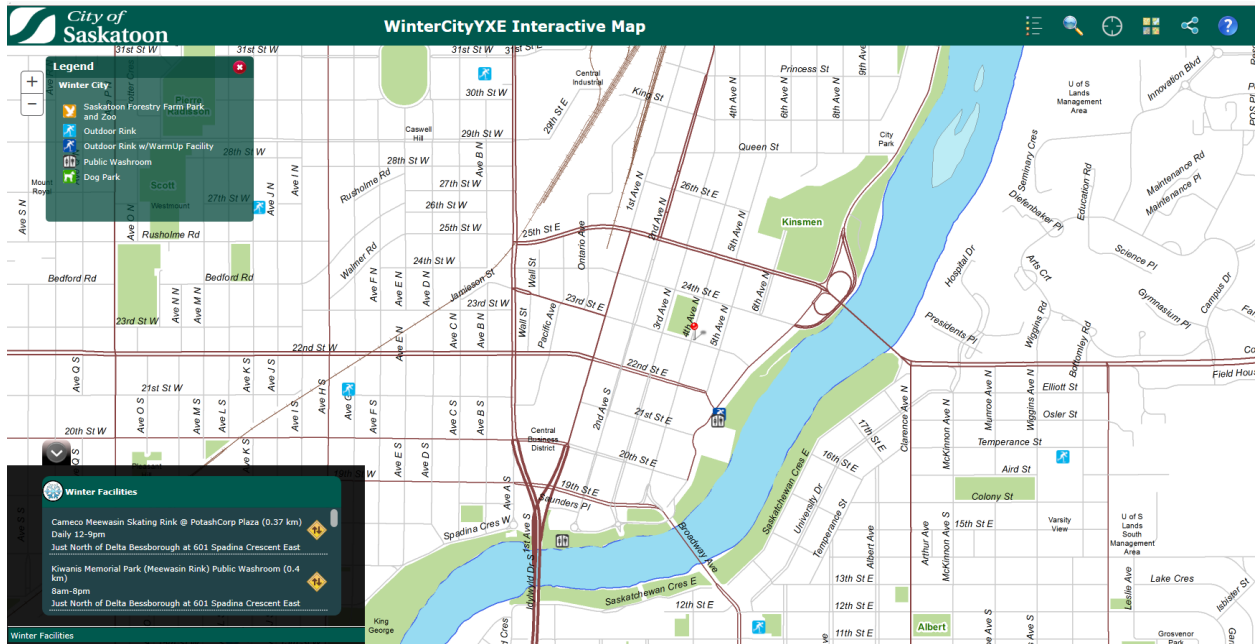
Submit your ideas online!

[Host your own "Kitchen Table Talk"](#)

Related Documents

The online inventory currently contains the following features:

- An interactive map of civic facilities and amenities that support outdoor activity.



- A list (and supporting maps where available) of community-developed outdoor recreational facilities
- A 'calendar' (list by date) of events throughout the winter season.

Engaging the community in change

The notion of a Winter City Strategy can seem vague and intangible. The purpose of community engagement and awareness was (and remains) to make the concept real through stakeholder and community conversations, a digital presence through a central webpage, and by starting the work to create new and/or promote and strengthen existing winter experiences. Spending associated with all communications and awareness activities to date (including design, production and ad placements costs) has been approximately \$25,000.

The City developed an engagement plan that could be implemented during the winter season to gain the interest and attention of the community. The hope was that if community co-design for winter occurred in the winter season it would achieve additional benefits as barriers are more physically evident and opportunities are more perceivable. The engagement process was supported by a contracted communications consultant (contract value including all costs for meeting logistics: \$14,000) and 100 hours of civic staff time.

The engagement process to date has involved the following approaches to help generate a 'blizzard' of ideas for inclusion in the Strategy:

- *Share precedents from other places to help citizens, stakeholders and businesses envision new possibilities.*

Phase one of this approach involved funding four (4) delegates from the community-at-large to attend the Winter Cities Shake-Up in Edmonton, Alberta in February. To apply for funding, applicants were asked to identify how they would contribute to the development and implementation of a Winter City Strategy in Saskatoon as well as how their commitment fit into the four key pillars of the Strategy: Winter Design, Winter Life, Winter Culture, and Winter Economy. The cost to send delegates to the conference was approximately \$10,000.

The following community representatives attended the conference and shared their learnings and observations by producing a video (viewable at Saskatoon.ca/WinterCityYXE):

- Kirby Wirchenko, Broadway Theatre – Winter Culture
- Tannis Millar, Downtown YXE – Winter Economy
- PJ Bell, Saskatoon Cycles / Liveable YXE / EACCA – Winter Design
- Chris Standing, Wanuskewin – Winter Life

These delegates have remained involved in the Strategy and act as champions from the community to share their vision and help craft a new story about winter in Saskatoon. They are also members of a Community Working Group formed to provide ongoing guidance on the Strategy development process.

- *Host roundtables with stakeholders to discuss opportunities, gaps, ‘quick wins’ and strategies.*

Lively and insightful conversations were held with community representatives from arts, culture, and festival groups, newcomers and settlement groups, seniors, advocacy groups for the mobility challenged, environmental groups, bus riders, cyclists, business groups, community associations, Indigenous students, and sports and recreation groups.

- *Conduct online engagement to gather ideas and feedback.*

An open-ended survey tool to document ideas and advice from community members received 531 responses.

- *Empower self-directed ‘kitchen-table-talks’ utilizing online discussion guides and workbooks.*

This type of engagement approach has not been widely utilized in Saskatoon before. Several groups used the workbook to guide their discussions, recording their results using the online survey. One group (of 17 individuals) submitted a completed workbook.

- *Host a Community Workshop.*
Not originally included in the engagement plan, as conversations with the community evolved, the stakeholders, as well as individuals from the community-at-large,

expressed interest in having a broader session where dialogue on the results of targeted stakeholder engagement could be discussed. Stakeholders gathered for a Community Workshop held at the Royal Canadian Legion Saskatoon Branch 63 Hall (606 Spadina Crescent West) on April 27, 2017.

The workshop format involved a modified world café-style session where stakeholders reviewed and comments on the 'blizzard' of ideas already gathered, circulated through the 'café' again to participate in an exercise to develop a general consensus on priorities among those participating, and a plenary discussion on themes.

The goals of the workshop were to:

- Identify the big ideas (new things) to be included in the Strategy. Some ideas receiving significant support at the workshop included:
 - Creatively designed warmup shelters
 - Washrooms available through the winter
 - Clear paths and sidewalks to support persons of all abilities
 - Address accessibility barriers to active transportation (particularly for those with mobility challenges)
 - Winter festivals introducing new themes
 - Intergenerational events
 - Neighbourhood-level events
 - More cultural events (particularly Indigenous)
 - Indigenous winter structures in parks (e.g. tipi with warm-up fire)
- Establish a sense of the priority actions to undertake immediately (i.e. supporting or growing existing initiatives and initiating small changes). The ideas receiving the strongest consensus at the workshop included:
 - Coordinate efforts through partnerships and collaborative funding
 - Heated outdoor patios
 - Add more food and drink options to existing events
 - Focus on affordability to enable participation by all Saskatonians
 - Implement 'pop up' features to better utilize existing spaces
 - Continue to provide small amounts of community grant funding to support community innovation

The plenary discussion highlighted the following concepts that participants felt important to develop further through the Strategy:

- Focus on accessibility of all types
 - Cultural
 - Affordability
 - Mobility
- Recognize the importance of equity and its relationship to accessibility
 - Individual mobility

- Income
 - The goal is a caring, compassionate community
 - Focus on becoming a diverse city
 - Recognize not every initiative can be all things to all people all the time but that in aggregate everyone is well served
 - Some initiatives should be broad while others should be specialized and targeted
 - There is tremendous benefit to be realized from focussing on making the city walkable
 - Light is important to creating an atmosphere of warmth and sociability
 - The riverbank is the heart of the community and a network of sites with connections should be a priority
 - People seek opportunities to gather together
 - More opportunities should be created to take advantage of the full spectrum of winter activities and themes
 - Improve assets to accommodate small or large events, whether formal or informal
 - Invest in infrastructure
 - Permanent
 - Pop-up and/or Mobile
 - Include initiatives that focus on continuous improvement (i.e. accessibility improvements) and also include entrepreneurial ideas that are innovative and a departure from our current norms (i.e. take risks)
 - Continue to support community learning through workshops, speakers, etc.
- *Create a Community Working Group.*
Volunteers representative of a variety of community sectors that relate to the themes of the Strategy helped the Administration by guiding the plans for the Community Workshop, debriefing on the results of engagement activities to date, and will continue to meet to guide further community engagement.

Evaluation of the success of engagement so far

Engagement of the community in the co-design of a Winter City Strategy for Saskatoon has generated enthusiasm for the Strategy among a significant number of stakeholders across the community. However, there is more work to be done to ensure engagement is inclusive of the entire community such that the Strategy appropriately reflects the challenges and opportunities associated with the winter experience of all Saskatonians.

The Community Working Group has noted there have been fewer 'voices' or perspectives participating in the Winter City dialogue so far among Saskatoon's youth, children, frail older adults, new Canadians, Indigenous peoples, and restaurant owners.

Elements critical to the success of future engagement efforts were identified to include food, facilitators from the community (rather than civic staff or professional facilitators), and meeting locations in community spaces.

Helping community members understand what already exists (i.e. through further development of the asset inventory) was identified as an important starting point to future conversations.

The success of the Strategy requires momentum among stakeholders capable of demonstrating the Winter City concept through initiatives. The Community Working Group is willing to continue to participate with the City to keep this momentum going and have identified that the small amount of grant funding provided through the Strategy has been a useful method for engaging and supporting community initiative

'Quick Win' Actions

\$25,000 was used in a call for submissions to support community initiatives deemed to advance learning or move core concepts of the Strategy forward. The community cash grant process was administered by the Recreation and Community Development Division in alignment with other community granting processes.

Funding criteria: Projects that further the four areas of WinterCityYXE: Winter Life, Winter Design, Winter Culture, and Winter Economy. Specifically, grant dollars were made available for new winter program or design initiatives where a gap was verified and need demonstrated. Funding was targeted to meet specific Strategy outcomes focussing on initiatives that:

- add a new dimension to existing initiatives;
- pilot an urban design concept in a high-use public area; and/or
- facilitate linkages between existing initiatives to create new outcomes

Grant awards: Six (6) grants were provided to community groups. The minimum grant available was \$500; the maximum \$5,000. There were 15 applications at the April 21, 2017 deadline requesting a total of \$62,354.99. Only one project and one application was considered from a given organization.

From the emerging themes identified through engagement activities, at the Community Workshop, and in ongoing discussions with the Community Working Group, it has been identified that further work on 'quick win' actions is critical to the success of the Strategy. By continuing to implement actions in parallel with the iterative Strategy development process, the community can capitalize on the current momentum and continue to build community understanding of what is possible.

Quick win actions to be explored beginning in 2018 as the Strategy continues to develop include:

- Theme of improving mobility
 - Work with civic divisions and utilize the Snow Angel promotional program to focus on clearing paths and sidewalks to support persons of all abilities
 - Determine where accelerated enhancements anticipated under the City's Accessibility Action Plan may be required to address accessibility barriers to active transportation (particularly for those with mobility challenges)

- Theme of improving facilities and infrastructure
 - Invest in creatively designed warmup shelters.
 - Invest in washrooms available through the winter, particularly noting that the riverbank is the heart of the community and a network of connected sites with winter amenities should be a priority.

- Theme of providing more support to existing activities
 - Work with community event organizers and winter programs and facilities on opportunities to enhance affordability to enable participation by all Saskatonians and opportunities to add more food and drink options to existing events.
 - Continue to provide small amounts of community grant funding to support community community-led initiatives that generate learnings for the Strategy.
 - Coordinate efforts through partnerships and collaborative funding (e.g. 'blankets and mugs' program similar to the 'bikes for hotels' launched last summer).
 - Work with civic approving authorities to review and revise civic policies and procedures to better reflect the objectives of the Strategy and facilitate community initiative by taking a less 'risk-averse' perspective.
 - Explore to opportunity to provide summer student ambassadors

- Theme of introducing new events and things to do
 - Continue to provide a small amount of funding to community groups to support community-led initiatives that generate learnings for the Strategy
 - Bring community event organizers together to explore the potential to expand existing winter festivals by introducing new themes or introduce new festivals with new themes, including a focus on:
 - Winter lighting;
 - Intergenerational events;
 - Neighbourhood-level events; and
 - More cultural events (particularly Indigenous and French).
 - Invest in new assets that support outdoor winter activities such as:
 - Indigenous winter structures in parks (e.g. tipi with warm-up fire);
 - 'Pop up' features to better utilize existing spaces; and
 - Mobile event supports (i.e. water, power, washrooms, warming facilities).
 - Facilitate the creation of heated outdoor patios.

- Theme of improving the promotion of events and activities
 - Maintain and expand the online inventory of existing assets.
 - Conduct a benchmark survey on current attitudes, perceptions and behaviours related to Saskatoon's winter season.
 - Continue to study the potential economic and quality of life benefits achievable through the Strategy.

- Continue the community conversation, guided by the Community Working Group, about challenges and opportunities associated with winter, ensuring under-represented population segments have a voice in the further development of the Strategy.