

An aerial photograph of downtown Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, showing a dense urban landscape with various buildings, streets, and parking lots. The city is situated along the banks of the Saskatchewan River, which is visible on the left side of the image. A bridge crosses the river in the upper left. The top portion of the image is covered by a semi-transparent green banner containing the title text.

INQUIRY TOWARD A DOWNTOWN STIMULUS STRATEGY FOR SASKATOON

2019

An aerial photograph of downtown Saskatoon, showing a dense urban landscape with various buildings, streets, and parking lots. The image is used as a background for the report's title and introductory text.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This inquiry of how best to set off growth for transformation of the Downtown of Saskatoon was undertaken in a workshop format engaging a cross-section of knowledgeable local people with a panel of distinguished visiting experts. It also involved input from a wider group of citizens in a public session. In an expeditious discussion over three days, an array of ideas was tabled, discussed, prioritized, and linked together. These ideas can ultimately be synthesized into a formal Stimulus Strategy for preferred Downtown change that is true to the personality of Saskatoon and realistic to the capabilities and resources that can be mustered by this community. The findings of this inquiry are on four levels.

Five “drivers” for change became apparent as the way that the people of Saskatoon wish to realize their Downtown vision. They want to do this through collaboration, coordination, focus, planning and action.

Four essential objectives were identified. These are the following.

- **Objective A:** Prepare the Downtown for Growth and Change.
- **Objective B:** Cut development risk in the Downtown.
- **Objective C:** Actively stimulate preferred Downtown growth.
- **Objective D:** Stay true to best city-building principles while sponsoring Downtown growth.



To undertake 13 key actions to kick-start and manage Downtown change, 27 separate initiatives were identified and detailed to some extent. Among this comprehensive set of specific initiatives, there were 8 “game-changers” proposed.

- A strong contemporary narrative needs to be immediately crafted for Downtown transformation and it should be housed in an “experience centre” dubbed the “Saskatarium”.
- An arms-length “re-imagine agency” needs to be founded to curate, manage, and market the experience of living downtown.
- A “parking authority” of some kind needs to be put in place to cope with pervasive surface parking.
- A “tax increment financing district” needs to be founded as a new source of capital for improvements and incentives.
- A “phasing plan” needs to be adopted by the City to cluster growth and related public spending and initiatives.
- The City’s successful Land Division (landbank), called Saskatoon Land, needs to significantly enhance its focus on inner-city development facilitation as a balance to suburban growth, with a new group to undertake this mission.
- Several special projects should be completed to kick-start change and one iconic project should happen as soon as possible to make clear the intention for City Centre transformation.
- A systematic community audit of the inner-established neighbourhoods should be completed to bring their needs positively into the Downtown change process.

To balance growth with quality, a variety of planning, process improvement, and monitoring initiatives will help to keep focus on progressive city-building so that change in the Downtown is not at the expense of the overall quality of city that the people of Saskatoon want. This is also important so that change does not stall.

This inquiry, as illuminated by a Cree Elder, is in service of strengthening the collective “ohtaynah”, the heart, of Saskatoon.



OBJECTIVE OF THIS INQUIRY



The City of Saskatoon wishes to set off growth of the key sectors for a vibrant livable Downtown, these being housing, workspaces (offices), retail, and anchor facilities. To these ends, the City convened an inquiry involving visiting experts and knowledgeable local people to evaluate the situation in Saskatoon and identify the essential components that ultimately will be synthesized into an explicit Stimulus Strategy for this area. These are initial “best ideas” and “most supported ideas” as a creative start to the process.

The purpose of this report is to document and summarize the results of this inquiry.



CONTENTS



01	Objective of this Inquiry	4
02	Process of this Inquiry	7
03	Range and Focus of this Inquiry	9
04	Outcomes of this Inquiry – Drivers for Change in the Downtown	13
05	Outcomes of this Inquiry – Ideas for Change in the Downtown	15
06	Final Thoughts	31
07	Appendices	33

PROCESS OF THIS INQUIRY

This inquiry, because of its very intentions, had to be expeditious with immediate results built upon the capacities and attitudes at hand. Accordingly, a workshop format was utilized, augmented by a public discussion session.

THE “DESTINATION DOWNTOWN” WORKSHOP

This was a single event, entitled “Destination Downtown”, over three days, March 12 – 14, 2019, in Saskatoon, with the main work sessions at TCU Place, and the evening public session at the Remai Modern Theatre.

Nature of the workshop

The workshop brought together forward-thinking and experienced people from the community and experts invited in from outside in an intensive creative discussion. This discussion was founded on available local information provided by the City of Saskatoon and offered by local participants, experience of the Downtown of Saskatoon through a site visit, hearing inputs at the public session, and presentations by visiting experts on their experience elsewhere.

Day 1 was for orientation. The discussion reviewed the current economic situation, public policies and plans, and development possibilities in Saskatoon. Then the public heard the thinking of the visitors, responded to the currents of the discussion, expressed what they felt was needed, and added other fresh ideas.

Day 2 brought a sharp focus on consolidating and generating further ideas. New ideas on ways and means for inner-city growth and development were introduced by both visitors and locals and their relevance for Saskatoon was assessed.

Day 3 was for synthesis. An initial attempt was made to organize the various ideas into a strategic framework of logical steps and timing.

The hour-to-hour agenda of the workshop is provided in Appendix 1 to this report. Outsiders brought fresh perspectives to foster innovative thinking and insiders kept feet on the ground for practical solutions. This created a collaborative process, building from current success, in an organic way that engaged people in the community and civic government organization positively. Consequently, everyone owns the results.

It is hoped that the workshop itself will stimulate further creative thinking in Saskatoon that will go beyond the prevailing workshop themes and the immediate results. It is also hoped that the experience will bring the community together, bring more leadership to the table, and catalyze cooperative action on a number of fronts to motivate new things to happen in Saskatoon.

Participants in the workshop

The workshop involved a total of 50 people, including local participants, visiting experts, facilitators, and local government support and management staff.

Participating from the local community were influential leaders, government officials and civic staff, as listed in Appendix 2 to this report. Also, some 200 citizens attended the evening presentation and discussion session. These are all key thinkers in the local community and other invited local participants who need to be connected to and buy into the process.

Also participating was a shortlist of distinguished outsiders who have experience with successful forward-looking private development, inner-city transformation, public land-banks and partnerships. The following were these visiting experts.

Michael Flanigan, a Vancouver-based real-estate and development leader focusing on social and affordable housing, as well as entrepreneurial deployment of public property (City of Vancouver Property Endowment Fund; B.C. Housing).

Cathy Grant, a Vancouver-based urban development leader and housing sales and marketing specialist with a long interest in culture (Intercorp, Coromandel Properties, Vancouver Symphony).

Mark Kristmanson, an Ottawa-based public property development and assets management leader with a focus on partnerships, Indigenous participation and public engagement (National Capital Commission).

Michael White, a Vancouver-based urban planner with a specialty in entrepreneurial planning and development management of publicly-owned precincts (City of Vancouver, Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, University of British Columbia Campus and Community Planning Department).

The workshop was chaired by **Mayor Charles Clark**. **Larry Beasley**, Founding Principal of Beasley & Associates, facilitated all the activities of the workshop. **William (Sandy) Logan**, Senior Associate, Beasley & Associates, and **Michelle Beveridge**, Mayor Clark's Chief of Staff, produced the workshop.

The City of Saskatoon staff handled all arrangements, supports, logistics, invitations, set-up, documentation, and archiving for the workshop. The Downtown YXE BID provided the photographic documentation of the event.

Next Steps

Out of this initial inquiry has come innovative and practical ideas that can be pulled together coherently into a Stimulus Strategy for the realization of the vision for a vibrant Downtown in Saskatoon. These are fully described in the following sections of this report.

Towards a strategy but not yet a strategy: This is not yet a useable strategy. Significant work still needs to be completed locally to confirm the utility and suitability of the ideas that were discovered and favoured in the workshop. This involves: testing these ideas against local conditions and capacities; putting new measures within the context of existing processes, programs, institutions, funding mechanisms, civic policies, and public preferences; building a strategic work program for a short-, medium-, and long-term yield ; building business, community, and other government constituency; and, securing political endorsement and implementation support. The workshop and this resulting report is the first step only.

Some action can be taken right now: Even though a completed integrated Stimulus Strategy is not yet in hand, some measures could be started almost immediately through existing community organizations and budgets. This would

be beneficial because it would illustrate the intentions of a more coherent, ongoing stimulus effort and bring immediate positive community attention. It would also consolidate and tap the energy and leadership of those who participated in the workshop.

Steering for action: Participants at the workshop expressed that the mere act of coming together and working in common cause was a fresh and forward-oriented experience for them. They saw how they engendered in each other creative new thinking but also how they were able to resolve different perspectives and align divergent interests. They declared that they were prepared to continue to give of their time, ideas, energy, resources, and influence to move ahead on the ideas that resulted from this inquiry. It became generally acknowledged that the group, perhaps with a few key additions, represents a vanguard of leadership to carry forward an agenda of strategic actions to stimulate preferred Downtown development and change in Saskatoon. It might well be that the group is identified as an initial Steering Committee in support of the City of Saskatoon and the existing organizations of the Downtown. Perhaps this is the most immediately implementable outcome of this inquiry that can drive all that will follow.

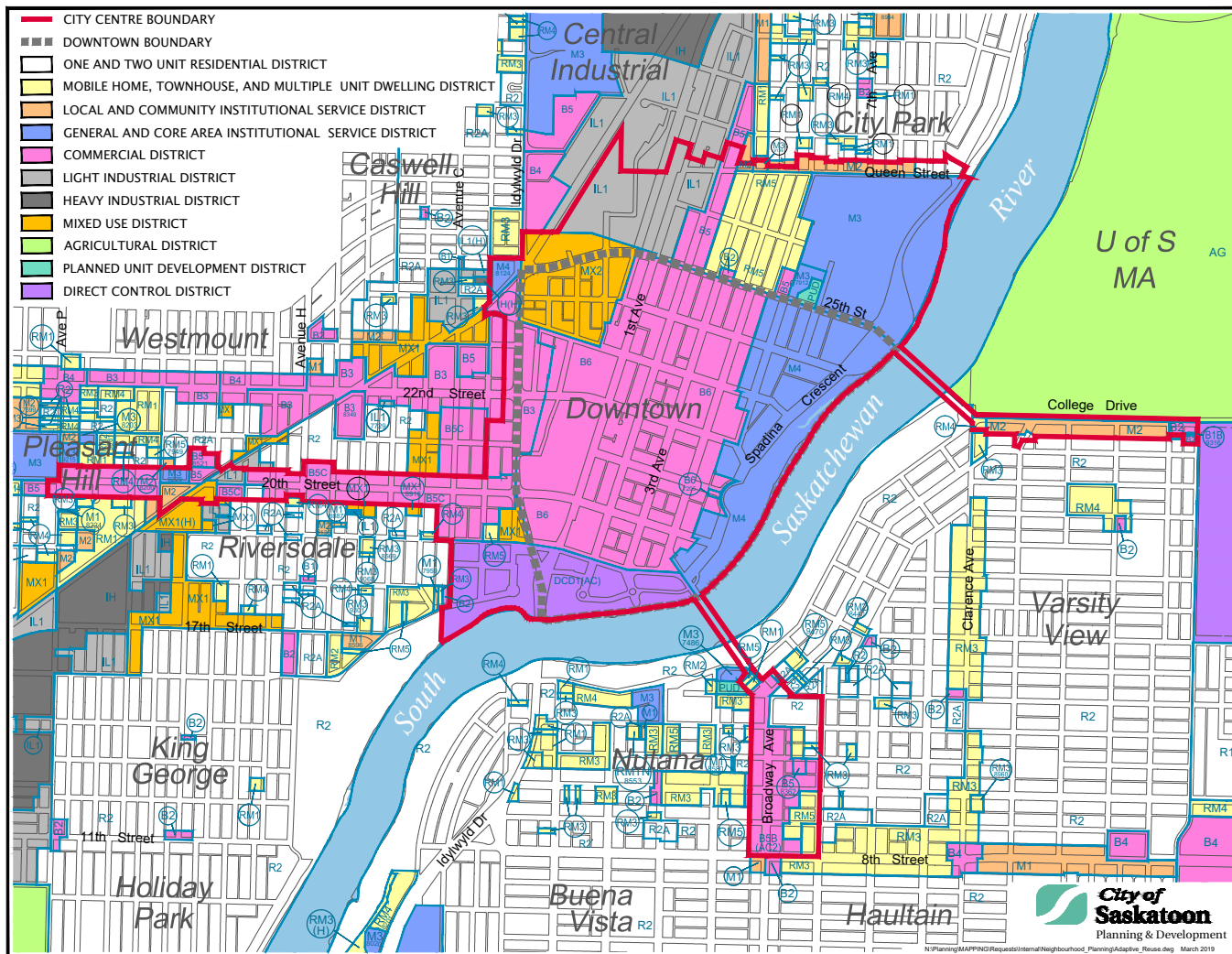
A Guide to the Outcomes of this Inquiry

While the many and diverse outcomes of the workshop were quite organic, with provocative ideas on many fronts, a thematic direction did emerge. This report provides a synopsis that is arranged in a logical fashion. It covers: the basic drivers of change that were identified; the prime objectives in stimulating preferred change that were prioritized; and the key initiatives that were pinpointed through which to take the necessary action. For ease of overview, a summary list is provided in Appendix 3.

All the ideas that are documented are in raw form. They often have not been fully elaborated, detailed or refined for implementation. That will be the subject of future attention. All documented ideas from the extensive discussions have been harvested but it is inevitable that some specific propositions will have been missed. The structure of this summary is such that more can be added as people in Saskatoon continue their creative thinking and as they pursue their quest for a coherent, formal, approved Downtown Stimulus Strategy.

RANGE AND FOCUS OF THIS INQUIRY

This inquiry is not about the whole region or even the whole city of Saskatoon. It is focused specifically on the centre of this region and city. It is about the social and economic factors of change that are particularly relevant to this centre. It is about the culture, capacity, tools, and actors to instigate preferred change – the ways and means that will be especially effective for stimulating the market to make change happen in this centre.



The Area of Attention – the Downtown within the City Centre

For the purposes of this report, the area of inquiry has been called the Downtown. This nomenclature has only been selected for convenience because the inner-city of Saskatoon is quite large and involves a number of distinct areas. Participants discussed the geography of attention and concluded on a dual focus. This primary and secondary geographic focus needs to be kept in mind when considering the ideas generated by this inquiry.

Primary area – the City Centre

The main focus of discussion was set as the area locally called the “City Centre”, inclusive of the traditional downtown, a significant expansion area to the north, and other specific expansion areas surrounding downtown.

Secondary focus - Historic Established Neighbourhoods

A second focus of discussion was set as the historical neighbourhoods in a constellation around the Downtown, including south of the river, because these neighbourhoods will definitely be affected by what happens at the centre and offer their own potentials for positive change and growth.

Growth Vectors to Engender

As a framework for this inquiry, key related vectors of growth and change have initially been identified. A stimulus strategy can be built around these growth potentials. These five vectors have shaped the inquiry.

Existing demand: An obvious consideration is to positively tap into any demand that appears on the horizon. Such demand naturally derives from the position of Saskatoon as the service centre of Northern Saskatchewan, with an economy and population thriving from both an agricultural and resource base. Overlaid on the broader, general communities of the region are a constellation of Indigenous communities with their own defined support needs for which the city is also a base.

With this base of existing demand, an explicit strategy to build demand can be more directive and yield greater, more predictable results over the long-run. This brings in the following additional vectors of change.

Residential demand: Because of typical urban demographic factors that are clearly evident in Saskatoon, there is potential to stimulate housing. Significant opportunity is engendered by two particular trends. The aging population often includes households who wish to unencumber themselves from the demands of a suburban home or simply want to free up wealth for other purposes. The younger population, who are particularly prominent in the age profile of Saskatoon, includes households where couples are marrying and having children later than in the past and have enjoyed urban living as young adults. The immigrant population, a major source of Canadian urban growth, often comes from very urban situations and want the same in their adopted country. All these groups are the vanguard urbanites in cities across North America. In Saskatoon, if the situation is attractive and appealing, these people might be naturally drawn to settle in a livable Downtown. Once this choice for these consumers becomes popular, others will follow. At the moment, most people see only a suburban housing choice as meeting all their needs. In turn, once housing is growing, this draws the attention of employers and retailers who want to tap the workforce and consumer base. Many say residential is the activating ingredient in revitalizing a downtown. Elsewhere this has been called a “living first” strategy.

Commercial demand: As the business and service centre for the regional economy, commercial growth opportunities can be identified for an active program of outreach, setting the stage to draw new activity and facilities. As a city such as Saskatoon grows, a maturing appeal and profile also increases tourism, engendering a commercial and cultural sector serving visitors. The mere existence of a sitting residential population is a magnet for new ventures in search of a readily available workforce, this being a special opportunity for Saskatoon because of the youthfulness of the population (average age is 36 years old). There is also commercial growth potential in the emerging economic development activities of Indigenous organizations.

Supportive facilities: To meet the needs of both housing and workplaces, civic facilities, supportive commerce, and special attractions round out the community mix. Indicative of such facilities, the proposed new Central Library in Saskatoon is a current priority of great importance. Other day-to-day community facilities also need attention, such as recreation centres, childcare, park spaces, and special-needs centres. Indigenous communities are in a creative mode regarding new support facilities to meet their self-defined needs. Higher orders of retail follow as the workforce and residential base, coupled with growing tourist demand, diversifies and consolidates as a dependable consumer population.

Anchor facilities: As a city grows and diversifies and as its position in the world is more clearly articulated, an increasing demand emerges for special facilities to serve both local and visitor needs. The Remai Modern Art Gallery is a provocative and evocative anchor already on the ground that has garnered worldwide attention and admiration. Indicative of other typical anchors, a new trade and convention centre and arena have been identified as initial key facilities needing top immediate priority to meet existing and pending demand. Other sports and cultural facilities will also be needed, including theatres, special-purpose sports complexes, and other arts installations. As the Remai Modern so well illustrates, other uses will cluster around popular anchors, so such installations can become growth hubs if strategically sited and designed with synergies in mind.

How to Make Change

Obviously, growth builds from existing demand spurred on by existing public and private initiatives. The public sector always has projects under way to enhance a city. The private sector market will naturally respond to obvious demand but it may be hesitant to test beyond that because of the risk. Also the private sector, both developers and consumers, may simply be focused elsewhere. The local government, particularly working with community forces, can foster conditions to limit risk as well as upgrade and bring attention to areas where new development is preferred. Where general conditions are supportive, as the market responds, catching the attention of consumers, new demand can be engendered and guided to those preferred locations. Of course, demand can only grow to the extent it is supported by the general level of population growth and economic activity in a region, but types of demand can certainly be shifted, locations for that demand can be managed, and there is potential for growth in overall demand through enhanced attractiveness. This is the essence of any stimulus strategy.

Managed change starts with a Community Vision: Change is not inevitably positive to a community. If random, while it may accommodate growth, it can also create more difficulties than benefits. Also, if not managed for community ends, it might only meet the needs of a few beneficiaries, leaving many other people behind. These kinds of potentials can be avoided if a city carefully articulates its Community Vision. This clarifies preferred growth directions, sets in motion the necessary contingencies for growth, and broadens the positive effects of growth. Fortunately, Saskatoon has made great strides in putting in place a strong vision over the last few years. Based upon wide public engagement, especially through a program called “Saskatoon Speaks”, the City has contemporary and progressive plans, policies and consciousness to foster sustainability, liveability, and competitiveness. It has an establishment in both City Hall and the business community that is aware of modern city needs and trends. It enjoys a proactive Indigenous community. It has stable and vibrant community organizations. An early conclusion of this inquiry was that the prerequisite of a Community Vision is in place in Saskatoon that is more than adequate to guide a strategy to stimulate preferred growth.

Tools and arrangements to apply: A variety of tools are available to stimulate and direct demand and supply. This involves the right kind of civic regulatory and incentives framework, development management processes as well as creative public financing – a capacity and culture to get things done at City Hall. It involves many kinds of public/private partnerships and the open-mindedness to search out new partners – a community culture of collaboration. It involves fresh branding, marketing and related economic development activities as well as interesting programming, public realm enhancements, and special attractions – often through a tailored organization. It involves building and improving capacities on many fronts. These tools are available to any local government and business community if they choose to use them. In the case of Saskatoon, an additional tool is available for more entrepreneurial stimulus in the long-established and successful civic land-bank, known as the “Land Division”, or more officially, “Saskatoon Land”.

An emphasis on action: Most cities, both at City Hall and in community organizations, are organized to support and deliver the status quo as efficiently and effectively as possible. If the status quo is no longer the optimal situation to realize the vision of a city then reorganization and new ventures and investments are absolutely essential for transformation. In other words, the community has to be activist about change. This inquiry was focused on action and implementation of that Community Vision that is already well articulated in approved directions, as well as business and community consciousness. So the focus of the inquiry was on ways and means – organizational change and tools for action to achieve results in the short, medium and longer term.



OUTCOMES OF THIS INQUIRY: DRIVERS FOR CHANGE IN THE DOWNTOWN

A strong and broadly-held conclusion of the workshop is that the culture for getting things done will need to evolve in Saskatoon as the city grows, diversifies, and matures. This will be particularly true in tackling the array of liabilities and tapping the unique but nascent opportunities of the Downtown. Participants emphasized that many spontaneous things are happening now in the inner-city but they are not coming together consistently to be more than the sum of the parts. Some critical initiatives are not deliberately being followed through. Public and private sector moves are not necessarily meshing. More and different resources will have to be brought to the table. New personalities and organizations will need to augment current leadership and day-to-day implementers of change. Existing organizations will need retrofit to be useful in the inner-city. Actions of a kind not previously seen in the city will be essential.

Thinking and Working Differently in Five Ways

In this context, five particular drivers for growth and change were identified for the people of Saskatoon to embrace in defining a contemporary way of doing business and making things happen. These drivers should offer a useful attitude in shaping and pursuing the specific initiatives that were highlighted in this inquiry.

Collaboration: All the interests for change in Saskatoon need to collaborate more than ever before. Wealth needs to be pooled. Differing powers and authorities must be integrated and linked with new energies, new ideas, and new ways of doing things. Saskatoon is no longer a small town where a few people, either in the local government or business community, can unilaterally take charge of and complete whatever action is needed for the betterment of the city. The complexity of the core city, both now and as it grows, requires joint venturing and shared resourcing to move a positive agenda forward.



Saskatoon can build on its strong cooperative tradition realizing collaboration as a competitive advantage. A key addition to the organizational framework of the community will be the new or renewed institutions that facilitate and host shared action. To build the deep culture of collaboration, such organizations need to be co-governed by the key stakeholders – City Hall with the business and development community, social and arts non-profit community, activists for the disadvantaged, and the Indigenous community. People need to work together.

Coordination: The various interests for change in Saskatoon must be carefully coordinated to optimize their impacts. Divergent interests need to be aligned. Compatible interests need to be connected. Missing interests need to be brought into the process. The randomness of divergent activities is the enemy of optimal results and great outcomes. There is a division of labour between the public and private sectors, between government and non-profit organizations, between the municipality and Indigenous governance institutions, and between the collective and individuals, that needs to be aligned and tapped for optimal outcomes. No one group can take command and no one group can be excluded. Interests need to be constantly brokered. Although the municipality may be in the best position to be the prime convener and broker, arrangements for joint governance, multi-perspective advice, and trusted sharing, will be essential to bring everyone together in mutually reinforcing activities. People need to be going in a relatively similar direction.



Focus: Hubs of change and growth in the Downtown must be designated and attention, resources, energies, and special care need to be focused on these hubs. Synergies must be maximized. The inner-city is too big and the power and breadth of market supply and demand as well as government resources are not strong enough to support or sustain random investment. Dispersed initiatives will certainly not reinforce one another. Single-use facilities will not optimize public investment nor satisfy multiple demands – the potential for diversifying programming of the pending big facilities offers an immediate challenge. Securing specific locations for these anchor facilities as soon as possible is also vital. Phasing for development of the Downtown must be clearly sorted out – a particular inquiry being when and how the northerly part of the downtown is brought to development. Peoples’ actions need to build upon one another.

Planning: The existing strong planning framework for Saskatoon must continually be refined to reflect the state-of-the-art for modern cities and a particular Community Vision for the Downtown must be fully elaborated. This is vital for the Downtown to compete with other locations in the region but also for it to compete with the centres of other cities. Cities are more competitive than ever before so no community can be complacent about how it wishes to grow in comparison to other places. For this planning to augment an agenda to stimulate preferred Downtown growth, new dimensions need to be brought into the equation. A sense of deliberate timing and phasing must be added into the current plans for the inner-city in pursuit of that focus already described. Urban design must be brought to the fore, with sustained action to upgrade the physical environment of the Downtown. Social planning must be proactive in resolving inner-city social contradictions and defining new support services –

a key case in point is support and re-think of the Lighthouse facility. Planning for safety and security must be a priority. Economic development must be emphasized to both arrange an enticing setting for enterprise and strategic outreach for specific enterprises – the potential for high-tech and the ideas industries have been identified as needing current attention. Community audits are absolutely required to determine moves necessary for existing community protection from the impacts of change and their leveraging of the energies and opportunities of change. Policy development is important to channel change toward the core city and away from the regional suburban edge. People need a clear reference that change is positive and that consequences of change have been thought out.

Action: It takes direct action, the sooner the better, to kick start and manage positive, preferred change and growth. It cannot be expected that change will just happen or that when change does occur that it will be of the nature and extent that the community wants and that is consistent with its vision. This is especially true of the Downtown because it is not widely identified in the popular consciousness or developer thinking as a place for spontaneous growth and diversification. Saskatoon still generally sees itself as a suburban city. The Downtown is still seen as risky for investment. Its prevailing myth is of malaise with difficult problems. Action gets peoples’ attention – as is so well illustrated by reaction to the new Rемаi Modern and the building complex around it. Action gives confidence and cuts the sense of risk. Action denies malaise. Pilot projects, small interventions, fast new installations, fresh programs, new or renewed organizations – these all start the engine of change and indicate progress. An attitude is needed to “just do it”, to experiment and learn from incomplete successes. People want less talk and more action.

OUTCOMES OF THIS INQUIRY: IDEAS FOR CHANGE IN THE DOWNTOWN

Many different actions were discussed at the workshop to bring the Downtown of Saskatoon to life. An overview of all these ideas suggests several prime objectives for a deliberate and determined program of change and a specific strategy to sustain growth. The proposed actions fit well within this structure of objectives, offering a coherent picture toward the Downtown stimulus strategy that Saskatoon aspires to create.

In each of the sections to follow, the prime objective will be summarized. Related to that prime objective, the key actions will be listed and explained. For each action, the initiative for implementation, the tool or arrangement through which to undertake change, will be described. Often, the actual words of workshop participants are used in this report, in which case the words are shown in parentheses.

OBJECTIVE A

PREPARE THE DOWNTOWN FOR GROWTH AND CHANGE

At the present time, the Downtown of Saskatoon is not set up for the growth and change that is hoped for. The area lacks the kind of new and fresh identity that would draw new uses and activities as well as supportive tourism. It lacks many of the facilities and services that support downtown living as well as an overall ambience that will attract that lifestyle. It has few special attractions with the exception, of course, of the beautiful riverfront walkway and the Re-mai Modern. It has little traction to draw developers or consumers. The City Centre, especially the Downtown, of Saskatoon has to be re-imagined. The key factors to engender and support growth have to be deliberately put in place and they have to be managed and enhanced on an ongoing basis. This needs a vision, investment, a program of upgrades and activities, an ongoing story that is told, and determined, continuous management.



Action A1 – Articulate a Downtown narrative

What is the story that Saskatoon wants to tell about the Downtown, the place it is to become, the people that it will host in residence or visiting and working, its advantages compared to other places, its past and recent history, and its overall appeal? This narrative needs to be created and then projected out to the world.

Initiative A1a – Undertake a campaign to build the Downtown narrative

It is proposed to build a fresh narrative of inner-city “rebirth” through an explicit, well-designed and time-limited “narrative campaign”, over the upcoming year. This campaign would tell the story of the establishment of downtown as a complete and vibrant community. This campaign would learn and speak the language of the rich culture of “living downtown”. It would define the personality and ambience of the “Downtown we wish to live in”, describing the people who will choose the Downtown as home. It would envision a Downtown of many neighbourhood choices, even offering the names and special attractions of the locations that will soon develop. This campaign would also describe the Downtown as the “living room for all of Saskatoon”, expressing the “cool” factor and “youth” vibe that make downtown a destination for the whole region. It would build this aspect of the brand on themes of artful and edgy culture, heritage character, evocative architecture, Indigenous



history and occupation, increased diversity of food representing a diverse population, special events, celebrations and ceremonies. It would celebrate the magic of the river and the green of the natural assets of the river valley that are immediately at hand. It would describe a story of social and cultural change that is creating a completely new life and work choice for the people of Saskatoon.

The narrative would offer the experiential elaboration of the formal plans and policies of City Hall, expanding the scope to a projection of Saskatoon with half-million residents. The campaign would be a community-wide effort with major public engagement. This would involve all the traditional stakeholders of the downtown but also people who are or might become downtown residents. It would make a special outreach to residents of the inner-established neighbourhoods for their perspectives on close-in living.

Initiative A1b – House the narrative in a “downtown experience centre”

It is proposed that the narrative have a permanent home. For this report, let’s call it the “Saskatarium” – a place to tell the narrative, debate and evolve the narrative, show the whole picture in models, drawings, plans, and photography, showcase the new downtown lifestyle, and program around the excitement of Downtown’s “rebirth”. It might well become the place for ongoing programming for conversations about collaboration, coordination, and innovation in city

building – an “urban lab” to “chew on issues in detail”. It might have a small performance capacity. Some places call this an “urbanarium” or “city gallery”. It should be opened sooner rather than later, perhaps first as a “pop-up” in a tent on a former parking lot, later in the base of another facility, ultimately perhaps in its own building. It should include a giant, evolving model of the Downtown, other associated graphics, and a digital platform for social media and e-outreach. It would have an associated website. To help finance the facility, it might be used as a sales centre exhibiting current downtown developments (Calgary’s “East Village Experience Centre” offers as inspiration).

Initiative A1c – Aggressively market the narrative and brand

As soon as it is complete, perhaps as quickly as within six-month, it is proposed to convert the narrative into a compelling media and communications plan and later into an ongoing downtown marketing and sales program. This marketing initiative should be a collaborative community effort, involving people to build a coalition around the narrative, bringing the narrative out through the commentary of “influencers” and identifying “champions” for the messages.

Action A2 – Curate, create and program the urban lifestyle and overall quality

An inner-city “urban lifestyle” is a complex experience of many dimensions and parts. Where it grows organically, it can take decades and the efforts of thousands of contributors to come compellingly together. Where it does not organically exist, it must be deliberately brought into being. That will only happen by marshalling the forces and resources with the right mindsets, focus, mandate, and creative license to make it real. This is exactly what needs to happen in Saskatoon.

Initiative A2a – Found a “Downtown re-imagine agency”

It is proposed that an activist agency be established in Saskatoon to undertake all aspects of curating an inner-city lifestyle for the Downtown. This will offer an organized, mandated, and designated capacity for the necessary urban “rebirth”. This agency would have an ongoing program to: understand the unique downtown-living consumer; make improvements to address deficits and meet the needs and expectations of that consumer; program for that consumer; and, market to that consumer as well as telling the story of downtown living, as the custodian of the narrative already discussed. It would also undertake more immediate, smaller and faster actions as well as facilitate others to do the same thing, since “small accomplishments add up” and can be very symbolic.

It would be a coordination and collaboration agency. It would work closely with, among others, the Downtown Saskatoon Business Improvement District (YXE BID), a new downtown group in Saskatoon Land, and the other line departments at the City of Saskatoon, particularly the Planning and Engineering Departments. Initial discussion suggests it might include the following specific responsibilities (but this is not inclusive of all the possibilities of this agency).

- It might have a ‘downtown living’ team to define, understand, and target the inner-city housing consumer and liaise with YXE BID on the type and particular needs of visitors and workers.

- It might have a downtown improvement group to undertake, in collaboration with others, all kinds of liveability improvement projects to embellish the new neighbourhood for living, working, and playing and to make the public realm the “signature of the city”. Workshop ideas to create “cool public places as local destinations” included: “adopt a block”, sidewalk audits, pop-up retail and food carts, sidewalk improvements and defined “walking corridors”,

Indigenous placemaking and markers, back alley animation, atmospheric and safety lighting (“festival of lights evolving to a winter street festival”), public art, landscaping, benches, trees (Rotterdam’s “City Lounge” program as inspiration). This group might have a key mission to “enhance the personality of each different sub-area” and “build on the vernacular”, perhaps using “cultural mapping”. With existing heritage organizations, this group might also mount a strategic initiative to conserve and repurpose heritage buildings and landscapes.



- It might have a programming/animation group to “choreograph downtown experience”, including the “touch and feel factor”, enjoying the importance of fun and ceremony. Workshop ideas suggested the potential for programming for culinary, sports, recreation, arts and other fun events. This group might also mount a “volunteer host program” to support new residents and assist tourists and visitors.

- It might have a marketing group to manage and continually update and elaborate the civic narrative and to manage counter narratives. Workshop suggestions were to “harness the youth vibe”, leverage the “winter city” story, focus on “social opportunities”, and bringing out the Indigenous story. This group might manage the Saskatarium. This group might work with YXE BID on economic development efforts to chase preferred companies and build tourism, with perhaps an emphasis on “newcomer relationships”. A special assignment might be to work with the University of Saskatchewan on a Downtown presence.

- It might have an Indigenous group to undertake all kinds of inner-city social and cultural initiatives relevant to the many communities around Saskatoon, to build the profile of Indigenous culture in the Downtown.

- It might have a strong public engagement group that could constantly outreach to all stakeholders, acting as a facilitator of shared action, working through “sticky files”, and building a “collaboration culture”.

Most workshop participants felt that the agency should be an arms-length, joint venture between the City, business, Downtown residents (including inner-established neighbourhood interests), Indigenous organizations, and non-profits and cultural groups, in a co-governance model. It should have autonomy to make decisions and move forward with fewer constraints than the municipality working alone or the private sector working alone. It should become as independent-funded as possible for its operations, with innovative arrangements for funding which might include philanthropy, naming rights, land dividends, parking revenue, senior government grants, Indigenous grants, volunteerism (“engage university students/staff as a resource”). Perhaps financial support from the development community could get the agency off the ground with seed funding. It should have a public yearly plan that is achievable and makes progress across all fronts. The Meewasin Valley Authority and the San Diego Downtown Redevelopment Agency were identified as inspirations.

Initiative A2b – Found a “Downtown parking authority”

It is proposed that the sprawling surface parking situation in the inner-city be taken in hand by a new organization or arrangement to manage parking and, over time, to transform parking into a more suitable configuration for intensive and diverse urban development. This would involve both private parking coordination and provision of public parking, with the intent to have a coherent oversight of all parking. Initial discussion suggests the following directions for this organization or arrangement.

- It might manage the existing parking resource, regarding geography, configuration, rates, and other provisions to make sure parking needs are met, particularly as new development is set off in the “rebirth” of the Downtown and as BRT is implemented.

- It might be responsible for relocating parking off of “trophy sites” for important new development, as an immediate priority.

- It might provide interim use for publicly-owned properties, pending their permanent development.

- It might lead a long-term program to convert surface parking to structured or underground parking as downtown builds out.

- It might facilitate beautification/landscaping of parking lots, particularly at the sidewalk edge.

There was debate as to whether this should be an independent group (EasyPark in Vancouver is one inspiration), or a part of the City, or a part of the new “re-imagine agency”. Pros and cons need careful evaluation. It was felt the initiative surely could be self-funded and even offer a parking dividend to invest in Downtown improvements.

Initiative A2c – Coordinate an explicit ongoing Downtown planning program with other “rebirth” initiatives

It is proposed that the City’s Planning Department become a catalyst in the overall program of Downtown growth and change by evolving public plans and policies to guide and support other initiatives. This initiative would build upon the solid platform of the current City Centre Plan (which was conceived

for rapid population growth, meeting community expectations, and setting the stage for the market to drive downtown development – it posits a series of neighbourhoods, a network of public spaces, a network of cycling, with measures related to heritage and parking, among other things) as well as other recent planning initiatives (such as planning for BRT, “Imagine Idylwyld”, entertainment district, and farmers market). Workshop discussion suggests the following further planning.

- Planners might refresh and further detail the City Centre Plan and consolidate and reconcile all inner-city plans and policies, identifying a set of civic priorities, particularly related to the public realm.

- Planners might flesh out the scale, nature, and character of new neighbourhoods in the Downtown, with policies and guidelines to shape these for a “5-7 minute walking radius from services and populations that support those services of at least 15,000 people”.

- Planners might merge policy dimensions with the experiential aspects of the Downtown vision from the narrative, in collaboration with the “re-imagine agency” and YXE BID.

- Planners might go a step further to envision the new Downtown by creating a specific urban design master plan for Downtown growth (inspired by the quality and detail of the proposed North Downtown Master Plan). This would include addressing obvious deficiencies but workshop ideas also suggested further attention to: greenspace (maybe a winter conservatory?), traffic management, enhancing active movement, green streets, re-imagined streets, a tree planting program, storm water management, night illumination, facilitating higher education anchors downtown, and destination placemaking.

- Planners might take a lead role in other initiatives proposed in this report, such as creating the phasing plan to cluster and triage growth in the Downtown and collaborating on regional policy redirecting growth from the suburbs. This would be consistent with their current leadership in the priority initiative to locate the major new facilities downtown.

- Planners might take a lead role in framing and implementing a housing strategy and an affordable/rental housing program, in a joint venture with the new downtown group in Saskatoon Land, YXE BID, and the proposed “re-

imagine agency”. A significant workshop theme was that rental and affordable housing will be the vanguard in bringing people to live downtown. This might even include modular temporary housing for the homeless and would certainly include measures to protect existing modest-income housing. While some condos will happen, many condo consumers, particularly middle-income buyers, will not feel secure living downtown or making the big investment downtown until they see others in residence. On the other hand, once the downtown population has grown and housing becomes a premium, then a secure component of middle-income housing will be essential to avoid the affordability crisis seen in more mature city centres, such as Vancouver or Victoria.

It was felt that this focused planning agenda for the Downtown is well within the mandate of the Planning Department and that the planners are “on top of their game” to move this forward.

Action A3 – Invest strategically in civic capital works

The best way for the government and community of Saskatoon to “send a signal” that the Downtown is on the verge of and is ready for “rebirth” is strong and sustained public investment in the public realm and public works. If the City is actively investing in the area, then the private sector sees less risk in also investing there. Tapping into and directing current capital spending programs is a part of this. Also new funding sources have to be found because this is an expensive undertaking to do in a way that will spontaneously draw the attention and trust of both developers and consumers. Partnerships and co-funding are important. It is acknowledged that such collaborations with the private sector will be more practical once the market has become strong enough to secure solid profitability.

Initiative A3a – Make Downtown a priority in upcoming City capital investment plans

It is proposed that an explicit capital spending strategy be developed in collaboration with inner-city stakeholders to provide investment as soon as possible for upgrading and renewal of the physical and social infrastructure of the Downtown and to get on with problem solving to remove barriers to core growth. Since the public realm is “where the society of the city comes



together” and where the City can “host urban social intercourse”, up-front investment in the physical setting will kick-start everything else. Since social concerns and safety have been identified as immediate roadblocks to downtown growth, up-front investment in social initiatives and facilities is urgent. Since Saskatoon wishes to avoid the “problems of affordability seen in other revitalized downtowns”, investment in low- and middle-income rental housing is prudent.

Initiative A3b – Implement a Downtown Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District

To provide a new funding source for investment in Downtown “rebirth”, it is proposed that tax increment financing be considered. This is an arrangement where the present value of a stream of increasing property taxes resulting from public expenditure in infrastructure or investment in development incentives is borrowed to make those up-front investments. The public investment sets off increases in property values, resulting in more municipal taxes. This tax increase, above the status quo expectation, is used to pay off the initial debt that provided the capital or incentive funding. This is usually done in a given area through designation of a TIF District. TIF use in the City of Chicago is an inspiration. This funding can be used to underwrite public realm improvements, provide new civic facilities, upgrade existing facilities, or solve problems where capital investment is needed. It can also be used to incentivize preferred development through partnerships or grants, which is discussed below.

OBJECTIVE B

CUT DEVELOPMENT RISK IN THE CITY CENTRE

As compared with suburban investment, the risk of investment in the Downtown is seen as significant by the development community and by others who need to sponsor new facilities and services. The first step toward cutting this risk and creating a positive climate for investment is to actively prepare the Downtown for change and to be seen to be doing so, with all the initiatives and measures already proposed and described above. Several further initiatives will further cut risk to reinforce these efforts.

Action B1 – Cluster growth logically in the Downtown

The City Centre and, specifically, the Downtown of Saskatoon encompass a large area with potential for several distinct neighbourhoods as it is populated over many years. Yet, the profile of demand for inner-city living is naturally quite modest and yet to be fully brought out by measures to make such a lifestyle popular. Demand will grow slowly over many years. A large area with small demand needs careful management or investments will be randomly located, dispersed, and isolated – that is to say, investments will be risky. Synergies will be difficult. Creating identifiable character, a sense of vibrancy, and comfortable integrated living will be difficult. Servicing the necessary public physical and social infrastructure will not be financially realistic. Avoiding widespread land value “boom and bust” will be difficult. Development clustering is essential – some have actually called for “shrinking the currently developable downtown” and “combining uses”. A workshop theme was to focus public investment, private development, and consumer interest in a few obvious places with expansion in the future according to a pre-determined phasing scheme.

Initiative B1a – City to adopt a Downtown growth phasing plan within a year

Working with the development community and a variety of community interests and stakeholders, it is proposed that the City set the geography and pace of inner-city development in an explicit, Council-adopted plan for new neighbourhood growth and development phasing. This phasing plan would coordinate several key dimensions.

- This phasing plan should be cognizant of sustainable models for the viable scale of neighbourhoods as well as the principles of “transit oriented development” related to the new BRT alignment.

- This phasing plan must be specifically framed around the practical pattern of existing and projected housing demand for the area over time, coordinating the areas of development opened up with the realistic demand at each point in time.

- This phasing plan should be coordinated with the civic capital investment plan to parallel public and private investment over time.

- This phasing plan might build out in a pattern from the currently strong focus around the Remail Modern.

Some have called for “putting the brakes on development of the North Downtown and the City Yards for the time being” but this matter should be carefully evaluated as part of the phasing planning process. This phasing plan might be undertaken by the City Planning Department and should be done in collaboration with Saskatoon Land, through its management of public lands in the area.

Initiative B1b – Saskatoon Land to adopt a policy and program to deploy City lands consistent with the adopted Downtown phasing plan

Bringing publicly-owned property to development is an entrepreneurial way to catalyze private development using the public land as a magnet. It is also realistic to coordinate public capital investment in infrastructure with public land offerings for development. It is proposed that this become a specific policy and working objective of Saskatoon Land, with its greater Downtown focus. Echoing the patterns in the City’s general phasing plan, Saskatoon Land can then deploy City lands for development in preferred hubs and “mothball” currently less well-positioned City lands for the foreseeable future (many call for such definitive action for the City yards). Saskatoon Land can also help focus development around the pending new anchor sports and cultural installations, to enhance their city-building potential.

Action B2 – Locate major facilities

Locating private investment in the Downtown at present is seen as somewhat of a gamble because the pending new major facilities are expected to set the pace for other development. No one wants to be “left in the backwater”. Once these facilities are officially located, even if not built for some time, there will be more clarity of expectations for the pattern of inner-city urban expansion, cutting risk all around.

Initiative B2a – City to decide on major facility locations in 2019

On behalf of the City, the Mayor has confirmed that the City will make the essential decisions on the location of the new Library, Trade and Convention Centre and Arena before the end of 2019. This is unanimously supported by the workshop participants.

Action B3 – Resolve social and safety concerns

An overarching concern expressed by workshop participants is that the Downtown has social and safety issues that limit its attractiveness for people to come and live here. Without the free and spontaneous response of consumers for the urban lifestyle, it remains unduly risky for developers. Even if the statistics do not support undue safety concerns, perceptions are everything. Even with the best efforts of government and non-profit forces, there are people at risk in the Downtown who need support. It should not be the intent or by-product of fostering new population growth to displace modest-income, special needs or at-risk citizens.

Initiative B3a – City to adopt a Downtown social development plan as soon as possible

It is proposed that a concerted effort be made to address the few but key social concerns that exist in the Downtown with adoption of an explicit social development plan and associated action plan sooner rather than later. The intent is to position the “Downtown as a neighbourhood like all the others”. Workshop ideas for this plan included: a range of safety and security measures, enhanced CPTED (“crime prevention through environmental design”) guidelines, designation of “safe retreat areas”, community policing

arrangements; organization of “volunteer community hosts in the community every day, perhaps under the auspices of the new ‘re-imagine agency’ or YXE BID”; a special “cleanliness campaign” to foster the sense of civility of the area; and actions to foster a “family friendly ambience”.

Initiative B3b – Rethink and revitalize the Lighthouse as an essential downtown anchor

It is proposed that a task force be formed of key downtown and nearby neighbourhood interests to outline a plan for renewal and updating of the Lighthouse as both a facility and essential service downtown. This will take a close collaboration of all forces in a critical and creative conversation that is not based on removing the service but, rather, enhancing its potential to deal with tough issues as the inner-city grows and prospers. Workshop ideas included: to “de-densify” the location and program of the Lighthouse, to spread it out on to good alternative sites, to enhance its services and where they can be accessed. An expressed anxiety is that putting all vulnerable people in one location simply exaggerates problems and makes solutions more difficult. This might best be avoided as the Downtown is “reborn”.

Action B4 – Expedite Downtown development approvals

Again and again in the workshop, the concept of “certainty” was highlighted as key to cutting risk for developers where risk is inherently high. An essential aspect of that risk is the City Hall approval process and the time it takes to secure development approvals. The City of Saskatoon is well aware of this risk and has already taken significant measures to evaluate and streamline its development management process in the Downtown. It convened a process called the “Infill Roundtable”, which has led to significant process improvements, including a one-stop permitting and licensing service for inner-city applications and active facilitation of catalyst projects. Appreciation and support for these measures were expressed by developer representatives at the workshop. Now, more can be done to these same ends because “improvement is a process not a fixed result”.

Initiative B4a – City to convene a further development management review

It is proposed that a task force be formed of key downtown developers and City staff to continue the inquiry that was so well begun in the Infill Roundtable. This might even result in an ongoing citizens' and developers' advisory committee on continuous process improvements. It would definitely carry forward and elaborate the process themes of the Infill Roundtable for responsiveness of City Hall to important downtown development projects. This will build a culture of "collaboration rather than policing" with City staff as "enablers rather than gatekeepers" and developers "understanding public objectives and the necessity of 'quality control' and coordination". Workshop ideas to enhance certainty included: "announcing process time projections weekly", "pre-agreeing on processing time targets for preferred developments", a "major projects steering committee" at City Hall to resolve departmental issues for a development, and increasing the service of "application facilitators" to navigate approvals. This initiative would be convened and hosted by the City.



OBJECTIVE C

ACTIVELY STIMULATE PREFERRED DOWNTOWN GROWTH

As the Downtown is upgraded and enhanced in preparation to accommodate and entice growth, and as developer risk is diminished, the situation is set for the private market to do what it does best – conceive and build the buildings and spaces that appeal to a downtown population by offering the lifestyle choices they prefer. In turn, the public sector can do what it does best – manage public objectives and deliver the services and supports that make that urban lifestyle evocative, inclusive, and increasingly desirable. But with a completely new venture such as building out the Downtown in a way never before considered, preparations are not enough. Actively seeking out and facilitating development is also necessary. Developers have many other easier opportunities. They can be set in their long-tested ways. They have their attention elsewhere, where an opportunity has been brought to their attention. Some are skeptical of the words of area advocates or governments. The economics of early pioneering development is tenuous at best. A smart city will not just wait to be discovered, it will actively stimulate the development that it wants – going for what it wants, where it wants it. In the early years of transformation, this needs organizational and financial supports and incentives to make a marginal proforma pencil out. Partnerships, pilot projects and leveraging of public investment can make all the difference for a developer to go ahead or defer. Also, the developer thrives within a constituency of support that brings buyers to the table but also community endorsement for projects to be approved. Developers, selling a lifestyle, benefit from local problems being resolved rather than falling in their laps. A major stimulus to push a project forward is a general sense of community good will. This all has to be deliberately achieved not just expected to happen by accident.

Action C1 – Motivate preferred development

When development is pending but financially tenuous, a financial stimulus may make all the difference. Sometimes the offering will be more symbolic than substantial. Sometimes it will fill the gap in a proforma. In either case, it moves a stalled project forward. The City of Saskatoon understands this and has increasingly offered incentives over the past several years in the Downtown. It has offered tax abatement and cutting of processing fees, which have strong symbolic value. For real financial assistance it will likely need to do more, particularly in the early years of “rebirth” when the market has not yet stabilized. New sources of funds can support this.

Initiative C1a – City to provide development incentives within its regulatory framework

It is proposed that the City’s zoning framework be evolved to integrate a range of incentives within zoning and through rezoning for preferred development. The key incentives used in other cities are more density, height, or preferred uses than generally allowed in the zoning. If a developer is allowed to build more than was expected when purchasing the property or more than is allowed on other sites around the development, then there is more profit in the project than expected. That profit can be plowed back into the project to make the numbers work or to moderate risk. The system has to be clear, fair, and transparent but, if so, it can bring new wealth into the equation to facilitate development. Since such a system is based upon historic allowances, it is best to put it in place early in the transformation process, for which Saskatoon’s Downtown is perfectly positioned at present. While the current densities, heights, and allowed uses may have already been influential in setting land values in some locations of immediate development interest, that will likely not be true in other areas with more long-term development potential. These future development areas may provide the best opportunity to insinuate incentives now, years before development interest focusses there. Augmenting such integrated incentives, the City might also consider expanded tax abatement and other developer considerations.

Initiative C1b – City to offer incentives through Downtown TIF District funding
It is proposed that in the early years, before the market has become resilient, incentive funding in the form of grants be made available to stimulate City Centre development. This might be offered only to the top catalytic projects that anchor the “trophy sites”. It might be used only for strategic public investment that reinforces a private project. It certainly has to be scaled within the capacity of the TIF. It should be curtailed once the market is functioning well and no longer needs the “leg up”. TIF-based development grants in Dallas offer an inspiration.

Action C2 – Take entrepreneurial action with joint ventures

The best way to stimulate development in a risky situation is to offer partnership where not only is risk shared but also confidence is expressed by becoming a financial player in the development. Few cities have the organization or capacity to become development partners but Saskatoon is fortunate to have the ways and means for this through its already described Land Division or landbank, formally called Saskatoon Land. Like all cities, Saskatoon can also undertake special projects and pilot projects, but more aggressively than most, again because of the entrepreneurial potentials in the Land Division. Strategic use of the Land Division may be the pivotal factor that brings the kind of success to Saskatoon’s Downtown transformation that has eluded other cities without this activist, land-based organization and the wealth it offers. Re-positioning Saskatoon Land is the initial challenge.

Initiative C2a – City to further focus, enable, and equip its Land Division – Saskatoon Land– to be a development activist and facilitator in the Downtown

Saskatoon Land is a well-managed, well-running machine of the City to sponsor suburban growth, which has been its prime mission for decades, yielding major land dividends for City coffers. Initial efforts have recently been underway to re-mission the Land Division for equal success in Downtown growth – moving “from yesterday’s suburban agenda to tomorrow’s urban agenda”. It is proposed to step up this process significantly. Maintaining its agenda in the suburbs is, of course, essential to the ongoing financial planning of the City of Saskatoon, but operationalizing a new group within Saskatoon Land for urban development will make all the difference for Downtown transformation. Several key features are suggested.

- The group should have a new Downtown mandate to be an intervener and coordinator in inner-city growth.

- The group should incorporate new capacity to learn and speak a language of urban development, to make complex inner-city development deals and partnerships, to understand the urban consumer, and to turn its current prowess to public/private ventures of many kinds. The more direct experience and expertise that can be brought into the organization of multiple and mixed development at medium and high intensity, the better. This might involve expanding the organization's capacities in designing, financing, and marketing such development. It might involve more experience with inner-city consumer needs and expectations and the special community supports essential for downtown living. It might involve more expertise in the legalities and parameters of joint ventures and public/private partnerships for complex development situations.

- The group could implement a real estate/development advisory panel to tap best practices and innovative development scenarios.

- The group should be given custody of all the appropriate City-owned land in the Downtown, to deploy as a stimulus for change.

- The group might be offered a land dividend from the suburban profits of Saskatoon Land to operationalize the new mandate and capacity, without the need for extra funding.

Once in place, at full capacity, the urban group of Saskatoon Land could take on a wide range of stimulus activities to kick-start the transformation of Downtown. Workshop ideas for consideration include the following.

- The group might take on the role of a public development corporation with instructions to secure profitability but also meet civic and social objectives. From forward-looking development, the group might yield a level of value-add that would be seen as a "dividend from innovation". It might also experiment with a range of density, in terms of market take-up, not just high density.

- The group might steward and direct new private development by taking a key role in the activities to phase and cluster investment using public lands as the leverage – directing seed investment for "body heat" at development hubs. This might involve direct development, joint ventures, strategic land purchases and

sales, and facilitating workable private arrangements as land is deaccessioned (involvement in the Caswell Hill former transit barns was offered as an example – it was noted that Jaime Lerner calls this "urban acupuncture").

- The group might offer unique "government" access to senior government incentive funding not available to the private sector (mentioned were CMHC grants and support by the First Nations Financing Authority).

- The group might take early action to make strategic land purchases, creating a new Downtown landbank (suggested were properties within 5-minute walk of Remai, City Hall, Mid-town Plaza, the river and the alignment of the BRT) for the long-run management of Downtown growth.

- The group might take parallel early action to decide on what public lands have no public interest but are developable, so they can be "monetized as a source for buying strategic sites".

- The group might do an immediate service to the community by implementing interim and short-term uses on languishing civic sites with future public potential. This would make the Downtown immediately more amenable and interesting.

- The group could immediately explore the pros and cons of long-term lease vs freehold land sale, possibly making more resilient use of public property, or perhaps just "trophy sites", if market conditions in Saskatoon can support this.

A specialized inner-city development group within Saskatoon Land could work closely with the new "re-imagine agency" as well as YXE BID to operationalize stimulus measures on many fronts at once. It might collaborate extensively with the parking authority to operationalize new parking solutions involving public land. In all these situations, it would be a powerful partner.

Initiative C2b – Civic coalitions to undertake special projects to kick-start change

It is proposed that differing collaborations come together over time to undertake special projects that would be difficult or beyond the capacity of a single party. These might be to enhance amenities, exploit new ideas, and solve existing problems that limit Downtown appeal. Such projects would give people something to see and touch – the workshop discussed the "value

of touchables". These projects would give people a sense of progress and highlight the benefits of change. The workshop offered the following as initial ideas.

- A coalition could develop attractive river access with a new pier and boat docks.
- Indigenous organizations could joint venture with a coalition of other groups to realize the full and exciting potential of "urban reserves".
- The City, with a coalition of interested stakeholders, could tackle the problem of a downtown food store. Suggested solutions might include a distribution outlet for on-line shopping, specialty food shops, a roving farmers market, or a food delivery service. Many felt that cleverly filling the grocery gap is a top priority to make downtown living appear viable. "Farm Boy", an Ontario outlet emphasizing fresh foods and prepared meals is a useful reference.
- Proponents of the large new anchor projects soon to be built, including the proposed trade and convention centre, arena, and library, might re-imagine their projects as multi-functional community hubs, leveraging investment

into catalytic, city building ventures. These might be significantly diversified from single-use operations to mixed-use service centres and magnets for private investment around them. Ideas to be considered might be: the arena as "entertainment and community space"; all the big-building lobbies as "meeting and gathering places" with food and beverage offerings and art and entertainment; any one of the facilities hosting a food store or university outlet. The idea is to make these complexes important downtown "places" and "anchors".

- Other workshop "pitches" included: a playground structure at City Hall plaza; a civic conservatory (for winter gathering and play); a storefront civic service centre near City Hall; an illumination program for special Downtown buildings; a downtown beach; a new City Hall as a multi-function community centre; and, enticing the university to find a stake in Downtown.





Initiative C2c – A civic task force to undertake an immediate iconic start-up pilot project

Saskatoon needs a powerful project to say “Downtown is happening”. It is proposed that a task force of multi-stakeholders and funders be immediately convened, perhaps drawing from workshop participants, to determine and complete as soon as possible a showcase project that exemplifies the dream of the “rebirth”. This would be a single bold move that sets off other activities and investments. It could showcase preferred development and a new way of doing things. As a “quick win”, it should be activated immediately to bring visible action within the next 12 months. Two top workshop ideas were explored.

- The first proposition is to build a mixed-use rental housing building and gathering place with public service spaces such as childcare or a food store. This would illustrate the immediate appeal of rental housing and seed growth of a rental population downtown from which condo owners can follow. It would be located in a “sweet spot” location in downtown. Expediting would show that rental housing is viable and the easiest thing to build. It would help to draw the “first wave of population”, middle-income people with disposable income. They would become the “new crowd to tell the urban story”. It was later identified that a pending development project, the Baydo proposal at 5th and 25th, includes many aspects of this proposition, so the community might be well positioned to move on this idea.

- The second proposition is to create a network of symbolic Indigenous places in the Downtown. These would be marker places for each of the differing Indigenous groups having history in the Saskatoon region. This showcase project would exemplify community commitment to reconciliation and collaboration.

Initiative C2d – Everyone keep eyes and minds open for unexpected innovations

Dynamic urban transformation is a situation of constant new ideas brought on by new players. It is proposed to engender a culture in Saskatoon of constant scan for the best of these ideas to adopt and make happen. The workshop talked about the “fox and hedgehog concept” where the “fox is always looking everywhere for opportunities while the hedgehog is totally focused on the main purpose and always plowing away”. Spontaneous actions, often growing

from grass roots, show emergence of “latent social capital”. Deliberately planned actions show dedication to a long-term quality result. Both attitudes and approaches are needed by a city bound and determined to change its Downtown for the better. The custodian to build this open-minded, scanning culture might be the new “re-imagine agency”.

Action C3 – Leverage growth but moderate impacts

Growth has its obvious good side, bringing in all the most contemporary offerings that a city could want. But it can also have impacts, often on long-sitting residents and communities, who are forgotten in the “wild urge to grow”. Or, the growth is simply not relevant to these people because it offers no benefits. Such people suffer from growth and rightfully become opponents and critics wanting to stop the process. And yet, these sitting communities are actually the vanguard of a Downtown population searching for an urban lifestyle and they know more about the living experience in the inner-city than most other people. It is vital to leverage growth for wide-spread community benefits, to moderate impacts, and to build a sitting constituency for change. It is vital to tap the local knowledge of sitting residents. This has to be actively pursued because it will not automatically be taken care of. In Saskatoon's greater City Centre the most vulnerable of populations, beyond the people at risk lost in the core, are in the established neighbourhoods that surround the Downtown – places like Riversdale and Nutana. Embracing these communities actually stimulates all inner-city growth because they become its advocates and allies.

Initiative C3a – City to undertake careful audits of inner-established neighbourhoods to identify deficiencies to resolve

Working closely with residents, it is proposed that a systematic process be completed of all the established neighbourhoods over the next several years to determine service and facility deficiencies that can be added to the list for priority funding and development as the overall City Centre redevelops. Unique deficiencies, special to these historic locations can also be addressed if they become evident, such as building conditions and lack of commercial infrastructure. This might include a base budget allocation to make immediate improvements agreed upon by the neighbourhood as well as making such improvements a policy priority for upcoming capital funding.

Action C4 – Redirect growth inclinations from the suburbs to the Downtown

As long as most growth demand in Saskatoon is channeled to the urban edge suburbs, the growth of a Downtown market for living and working will be sluggish at best. Serviced lands will languish while new land is serviced at great expense. Agricultural and natural lands will be converted while ample vacant sites exist in the inner-city. Without denying the suburban inclinations of many residents and businesses of Saskatoon, it is prudent to begin the process of re-balancing the range of urban and suburban choices, at least with positive actions to attract growth back to the centre. This can only be started through public policy, after which the private sector can latch on to the resulting new vectors of growth.

Initiative C4a – City to work with regional partners to focus growth

Beyond the boundaries of Saskatoon, the destiny of urban growth and expansion is in the hands of various government authorities other than the City of Saskatoon. Managing regional growth is a partnership, as indicated by the recently-completed regional plan, through the Saskatoon North Partnership for Growth. It is prudent for the City to be a progressive collaborator in shaping the region as an active player in such partnerships, with the intension to re-direct growth where possible to serviced locations, particularly where density and diversity can also be achieved, such as in the City Centre. This will help establish an equal footing for urban development as compared to suburban development. Within City boundaries, the City can model the kind of approach it advocates with regional partners, so it will be seen to “walk the talk”. Workshop ideas within the City included: zoning and policy measures to restrict/limit office use on dispersed industrial lands; and policy measures to protect agricultural lands and natural habitat precincts.

Initiative C4b – Saskatoon Land to curb initiatives in support of suburban expansion

Since the Land Division is the primary land developer in Saskatoon, bringing new greenfield sites to suburban development to meet growth needs, it could become a prime agent to redirect growth in a planned way over a longer time horizon, while opening up options for urban development as described elsewhere. It might even use the dividend from suburban development to open up new inner-city development opportunities. A part of the enhanced inner-city focus of Saskatoon Land might be adoption of an objective to shift growth patterns over a reasonable time.

OBJECTIVE D

STAY TRUE TO BEST CITY-BUILDING PRINCIPLES WHILE SPONSORING DOWNTOWN GROWTH

Growth can be intoxicating and even addictive. This is particularly true of a city, like Saskatoon, with a limited demand profile and little experience of managing the kind of transformation envisioned for the Downtown. It becomes easy to cut corners or “settle for second best” just to see a shovel in the ground to make change. This can become a “nasty trap” because the results can actually curb future growth potential because the offering is just not good enough for discerning consumers. Some cities start a positive growth trajectory for their inner-city but plateau too early, leaving a problematic result. Saskatoon has put in place, through its adopted plans and policies, a progressive, laudible vision for the future Downtown but the only protection against that vision being diverted is to continually elaborate the best city-building ideas in their best Saskatoon manifestation and to monitor how the city is growing and turning out. This is an essential process to balance the dynamics of growth with the equally important dynamics of a quality outcome. This is also the only insurance against unforeseen outcomes.

Action D1 - Keep the Downtown Vision current and contemporary

The City holds the most powerful responsibility for quality management of Downtown change and it needs a strong program and solid capacities to do this job. The workshop emphasized two aspects to keep the focus on best practices and innovation.

Initiative D1a – Planning Department to mount an ongoing planning program for enhancement of sustainability, liveability, affordability, and resilience

It is proposed that the Planning Department, as the prime custodian of civic plans and policies, be strongly supported to complete ongoing enhancement of the civic policy framework. Knowledge and experience in these dimensions is evolving all the time and the City should keep up with the best thinking. Workshop ideas were certainly not comprehensive but included further policy

work on: response to climate change; bringing “smart city” technology into the equation; dealing with transportation innovations; responding to changing retail formats; and assuring the inner-city is a place for everyone (affordable, welcoming, diverse, accessible).

Initiative D1b – City Hall to develop new capacities in development management and coordination relevant to Downtown development

New tools are being implemented every day in cities to facilitate a collaborative approach to development management that taps more than civic staff capacities. This is especially important for Downtown development because it is complex and serves many stakeholders. While Saskatoon is a forward-acting city in this respect, enhancements are always helpful. It is proposed that new capacities in the development management process be brought to bear as these become evident from experience in other cities. Workshop ideas, again while not comprehensive, included: founding an urban design studio in the civic organization to offer direct urban design services and expand urban design consciousness; implementing expert peer design review such as the Urban Design Panels in place in most Canadian cities; determining new ways and means, as are effectively used in other cities, to leverage and secure public benefits from development; and, involving the community in determining expectations for community benefits from such development.

Action D2 - Keep the Downtown Vision on track

All stakeholders must work together to insure that the basic trajectory of growth and development stays true to the collective vision for the future of the Downtown. Everyone who is making change will make compromises to move forward and can be blind to the real implications of these compromises. Many compromises lead to a change of direction that no one may have actually meant or foreseen. It is prudent to regularly take stock of progress. It is best when this is done by a cross-section of involved interests. The workshop emphasized two possibilities for keeping tabs on the change process.

Initiative D2a – City Hall to form a “citizens’ steering committee” to monitor progress in the Downtown

The cross-section of participants brought together for the workshop is reflective of the range of interests at play in the Downtown. It is proposed

that this participant group form the nucleus of an ongoing citizens' steering committee to overview activities and monitor results in the transformation of the Downtown on a regular basis. Additions might include representatives from the inner-established neighbourhoods, from the university, and from a wider cross-section of Indigenous groups. The existing workshop group illustrated sensitivity to quality and inclusiveness but also to action and speed. It showed a commitment to get into deep conversations with a spirit of collaboration and coordination. It showed an energy and desire to continue to be involved. It showed widespread good will. It will push for long-term fixes but also for fixes in the next 12 months. These are all the required features of a helpful steering group.

Initiative D2b – City Hall to complete an annual progress report – a Downtown Action Plan – to sustain transformation

Deliberate and methodical tracking is vital to understand success and roadblocks in transformation of the Downtown. Identifying performance measures and setting targets is vital. Identifying action items to solve problems and respond to barriers, delays, and new directions is vital. It is proposed that the Planning Department initiate an annual Downtown Action Plan as a regular progress monitoring vehicle and strategic work program to facilitate Downtown transformation.



FINAL THOUGHTS

A Cree teaching, offered by an Elder at the workshop, became symbolic of the intentions of sharing and working together that reflected both the workshop experience and the way participants hope their city will move forward on Downtown transformation. The metaphor is the human hand. The hand is a symbol of how we are in the world and our sense of belonging with others.

- The thumb represents the creator – the strongest part of our hand.
- The index finger acknowledges others in our circle – family, allies, friends, neighbours.
- The middle finger directs energy – the positive energies we give to one another.
- The next finger is respect.
- The little finger is humility.

As we offer our hand to one another in our act of engagement and assistance, we offer all of these things. We are connected to one another. What we do together is bigger than what we might individually do apart.

The discussion at the workshop emphasized that the future people want for Saskatoon's Downtown can only be achieved with proactive measures to make it happen. The discussion showed a courage to organize differently to make a different future – not just at City Hall but throughout the community of interests who have a stake in the future core.

As the workshop surveyed the situation of Saskatoon, it was reinforced constantly that the city has a lot of advantages as a mid-sized Canadian city, sitting

within a stable, sanctuary country with democracy, the rule of law, and a free-market system. It has the key ingredients to make positive change in the Downtown.

- It has good government.
- It has vibrant projected growth.
- It has a youthful population.
- It enjoys pre-eminence within the Northern Saskatchewan region.
- It enjoys a good general quality of life.
- It has a lot of downtown land to develop without displacement.

As the workshop focused on the future, a strong vision was reinforced of what people want for their new Downtown. This reflected most of what has already been articulated in the visioning to date, but perhaps needing a refreshed narrative.

- They want a diverse city with many opportunities for downtown living.
- They want an inclusive city that is affordable, welcoming, and embracing of everyone, including Indigenous citizens and new Canadian citizens.
- They want a unique city in the special image and style that can only be Saskatoon.
- They want a competitive city that is economically buoyant, allowing all to “rise with the tide of prosperity”.
- They want a sustainable and resilient city.





The power of the workshop was that it came to practical working conclusions and propositions for how to apply the benefits, leverage them, consolidate them, and improve/enhance them to achieve the vision that is so clear. It came to conclusions on how to tap the energy and resources of the people of Saskatoon. Pulled together and harnessed into a coherent Stimulus Strategy, there is no doubt that it will unlock the organic process to transform the Downtown while protecting what is so special in Saskatoon.

A closing thought – another Cree concept offered by the same Elder – found the essence of the whole endeavor. He taught us the concept of “ohtaynah”, which is the “heart”. The quest is to strengthen the heart – the collective “ohtaynah” of Saskatoon.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Summary Agenda of Workshop

Day 1: March 12, 2019 – ORIENTATION DAY

8:00 – 9:00	Participants arrive – opening Cree blessing.
9:00 – 9:30	Welcome by Mayor Clark; explanation of event purpose, agenda and expected outcomes by Larry Beasley.
9:30 – 10:30	Presentation by Lesley Anderson – review of current plans and policies for Downtown + q and a.
10:30 – 10:45	Break.
10:45 – 11:30	Presentation by Frank Long – review of Saskatoon Land and current public land holdings + q and a.
11:30 – 12:30	Presentation by Taylor McCallum – review of current economic situation and community profile + q and a.
12:30 – 1:45	Lunch.
1:45 – 3:45	Tour of Saskatoon's Downtown.
3:45 – 4:00	Break.
4:00 – 5:30	Group discussion with focus on visitors' first reactions.
5:30	Recess for the day.
5:30 – 7:00	Break.
7:00 – 9:00	Public Session – Mayor Clark hosts Larry Beasley and visiting experts on stage for discussion and engagement with the audience.

Day 2: March 13, 2019 – IDEAS DAY

8:00 – 8:30	Participants reconvene.
8:30 – 8:45	Welcome back by Mayor Clark; explanation of today's aspirations highlighted by Larry Beasley.
8:45 – 9:00	Doors open for extra participants – welcomed by Mayor Clark.
9:00 – 10:00	Presentation by Mark Kristmanson + discussion.
10:00 – 10:15	Break.
10:15 – 11:15	Presentation by Cathy Grant + discussion.
11:15 – 12:15	Presentation by Michael White + discussion.
12:15 – 1:30	Lunch.
1:30 – 2:30	Presentation by Michael Flanigan + discussion.
2:30 – 2:45	Break.
2:45 – 3:15	Group discussion of applicable ideas for Saskatoon – generating a first list.
3:15 – 3:30	Break.
3:30 – 5:30	4 workgroups to explore best ideas + report out.
5:30	Recess for the day.

Day 3: March 14, 2019 – SYNTHESIS DAY

8:00 – 8:30	Participants reconvene.
8:30 – 9:00	Welcome back by Mayor Clark; explanation of today's aspirations highlighted by Larry Beasley.
9:00 – 10:30	Pitches by individuals to the group on best ideas for Downtown growth and transformation + discussion.
10:30 – 10:45	Break.
10:45 – 1:15	4 workgroups to explore the principles, structure and initiatives of a stimulus strategy for Downtown growth + report out.
1:15 – 2:00	Lunch.
2:00 – 2:45	Visiting experts and local leaders provide individual comments to the group on the sketch stimulus strategy, offering last thoughts + discussion.
2:45 – 3:00	Closing words by Mayor Clark and Larry Beasley – closing Cree blessing – final adjournment.

Appendix 2 – Summary List of Workshop Participants

The workshop involved a total of 50 people, including local participants, visiting experts, facilitators, and local government support and management staff. 200 people attended the evening public session.

Chair:	Mayor Charlie Clark	Heritage Society	Peggy Sarjeant
Facilitator:	Larry Beasley, C.M.	University of Saskatchewan	Ryan Walker
Producers:	Michelle Beveridge		Greg Fowler
	William (Sandy) Logan		Zoe Hagen
		Meewasin Valley Authority	Mike Velonas
Other Elected Officials:	MP Sheri Benson	TCU Board and Futures Committee	Bob Korol
	Councillor Bev Dubois		Morris Smysnuik
	Councillor Cynthia Block		Brian Bentley
		SaskTel Board and Futures Committee	Will Lofdahl
Visiting Experts:	Dr. Mark Kristmanson		Jack Brodsky
	Cathy Grant		Art Postle
	Michael White		Blair Davidson
	Michael Flanigan	Broadway BID	DeeAnn Mercier
		Riversdale BID	Randy Pshebylo
		Saskatoon Tribal Council	Robert Daniels
		SREDA	Taylor McCallum
Local Participants:		Saskatoon Public Library	Carol Cooley
Downtown Saskatoon	Brent Penner	Other City of Saskatoon Participants:	Lynne Lacroix
	Devin Clarke		Lesley Anderson
	Sarah Marchildon		Brent McAdam
Midtown Plaza	Janice Sander		Jay Magus
Saskatoon & Region Home Builders	Chris Guerette		Jim McDonald
Meridian Development	Karl Miller		Frank Long
Shift Development	Curtis Olson		
Arbutus	Murray Totland		
Cavalier Enterprise	Paul Leier		
Colliers	Tom McClocklin		
ICR	Stacy Dybvig		
Vendasta	Dani Mario		
Open Door Society	Ali Akhubar		
	Sultan Ali		
Downtown Residents	Stephanie Yong		
Tourism Saskatoon	Stephanie Clovechok		

Appendix 3 – Summary List of Objectives, Actions and Initiatives

OBJECTIVE A: PREPARE THE DOWNTOWN FOR GROWTH AND CHANGE

Action A1 – Articulate a Downtown narrative.

- Initiative A1a** – Undertake a campaign to build the Downtown narrative.
- Initiative A1b** – House the narrative in a “Downtown experience centre”.
- Initiative A1c** – Aggressively market the narrative and brand.

Action A2 – Curate, create and program the urban lifestyle and overall quality.

- Initiative A2a** – Found a “Downtown re-imagine agency”.
- Initiative A2b** – Found a “Downtown parking authority”.
- Initiative A2c** – Coordinate an explicit ongoing Downtown planning program with other “rebirth” initiatives.

Action A3 – Invest strategically in civic capital works.

- Initiative A3a** – Make Downtown a priority in upcoming City capital investment plans.
- Initiative A3b** – Implement a Downtown Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District.

OBJECTIVE B: CUT DEVELOPMENT RISK IN THE DOWNTOWN

Action B1 – Cluster growth logically in the Downtown.

- Initiative B1a** – City to adopt a Downtown growth phasing plan within a year.
- Initiative B1b** – Saskatoon Land to adopt a policy and program to deploy City lands consistent with the adopted Downtown phasing plan.

Action B2 – Locate major facilities.

- Initiative B2a** – City to decide on major facility locations in 2019.

Action B3 – Resolve social and safety concerns.

- Initiative B3a** – City to adopt a Downtown social development plan as soon as possible.
- Initiative B3b** – Rethink and revitalize the Lighthouse as an essential downtown anchor.

Action B4 – Expedite Downtown development approval.

- Initiative B4a** – City to convene a further development management review.

OBJECTIVE C: ACTIVELY STIMULATE PREFERRED DOWNTOWN GROWTH

Action C1 – Motivate preferred development.

- Initiative C1a** – City to provide development incentives within its regulatory framework.
- Initiative C1b** – City to offer incentives through Downtown TIF District funding.

Action C2 – Take entrepreneurial action with joint ventures.

- Initiative C2a** – City to further focus, enable, and equip its Land Division – Saskatoon Land – to be a development activist and facilitator in the Downtown.
- Initiative C2b** – Civic coalitions to undertake special projects to kick-start change.
- Initiative C2c** – A civic task force to undertake an immediate iconic start-up pilot project.
- Initiative C2d** – Everyone keep eyes and minds open for unexpected innovations.

Action C3 – Leverage growth but moderate impacts.

- Initiative C3a** – City to undertake careful audits of inner-established neighbourhoods to identify deficiencies to resolve.

Action C4 – Redirect growth inclinations from the suburbs to the Downtown.

- Initiative C4a** – City to work with regional partners to focus growth.
- Initiative C4b** – Saskatoon Land to curb initiatives in support of suburban expansion.

OBJECTIVE D: STAY TRUE TO BEST CITY-BUILDING PRINCIPLES WHILE SPONSORING DOWNTOWN GROWTH

Action D1 - Keep the Downtown Vision current and contemporary.

- Initiative D1a** – Planning Department to mount an ongoing planning program for enhancement of sustainability, liveability, affordability, and resilience.
- Initiative D1b** – City Hall to develop new capacities in development management and coordination relevant to Downtown development.

Action D2 - Keep the Downtown Vision on track.

- Initiative D2a** – City Hall to form a “citizens’ steering committee” to monitor progress in the Downtown.
- Initiative D2b** – City Hall to complete an annual progress report – a Downtown Action Plan – to sustain transformation.



This document was prepared by:

LARRY BEASLEY, C.M., F.C.I.P.
BEASLEY & ASSOCIATES PLANNING INC.

On behalf of:

CITY OF SASKATOON



BEASLEY & ASSOCIATES, PLANNING INC.