

**Planning & Development Report to  
SPC on Planning and Urban Development  
2020 March 04**

**ISC: UNRESTRICTED  
PUD2020-0204**

## **Update on the Establishment of a Downtown District**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Since the original Notice of Motion to investigate the merits of establishing a Downtown Convention District a considerable amount of work has been undertaken that affects the subject area. This work includes the development and approval of a Downtown Strategy, the continued progress on the Arts Commons Transformation project, the ongoing work of the Future of Stephen Avenue project and the initiation of a new project, in collaboration with the University of Calgary School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape known as 9 Block which is focused on piloting small interventions in and around City Hall to improve the safety and vibrancy in the area. Work has also continued with and amongst area stakeholders to advance collaboration not only on a joint marketing and hosting framework, but also on ways to better use public space to enhance the visitor experience for patrons and delegates to area culture and convention facilities.

This report summarizes some of the work underway and makes a case for formally establishing a district in the area to coordinate action and investment toward common outcomes amongst area stakeholders. The district would focus on the plans of all area stakeholders and institutions. A proposed list of projects and initiatives that will be considered for implementation and action is included in the report. Formal naming and branding of the district would be a part of that work. The work will ultimately be led through a working group to be formally established under the "Place" focus area of the Downtown Strategy that has an intended outcome of a central setting and built form that's desirable to current and future businesses, residents and visitors. Regular reporting will be through the Downtown Strategy Leadership Team structure.

#### **ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Urban Development recommend that Council adopt the proposed boundary for the downtown district as outlined in Attachment 2.

#### **RECOMMENDATION OF THE STANDING POLICY COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, 2020 MARCH 04:**

That Council adopt the proposed boundary for the downtown district as outlined in Attachment 2

### **PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY**

This work was initially directed through Notice of Motion (NoM) C2018-0671, Establishment of a Downtown Convention District, at the 2018 May 28 Regular Meeting of Council. Since that time there have been updates to Council, a number of postponements as well as additional direction from the SPC on Planning and Urban Development for further consultation with the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre and key stakeholders. The intended report back to the 2019 December SPC on Planning and Urban Development was further deferred to 2020 March. A complete summary of the previous direction is included in Attachment 1, but the most recent applicable direction is as follows:

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At the 2019 June 5 SPC on Planning and Urban Development, the following direction was provided:

Refer Report PUD2019-0677 back to the Administration, to work in partnership with the Calgary Convention Centre Authority (Calgary TELUS Convention Centre), and return to the Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Urban Development with key stakeholders, having considered multiple civic strategies, including but not limited to, The Rivers District, the Economic Strategy, the Downtown Strategy, etc., to further discuss the merits of formally establishing a Downtown Convention District, reporting back no later than Q4 2019.

### **BACKGROUND**

Since the last update report to Council regarding NoM C2018-0671, discussions through the establishment of the Downtown Strategy have continued regarding the best way forward to improve the area surrounding the Convention Centre, Olympic Plaza, Arts Commons, the Glenbow and City Hall/Municipal Building to provide a more vibrant and attractive area to stage and host events. Taking a district-wide approach helps to consolidate and coordinate various initiatives and projects that are occurring in the area. There continues to be broad support amongst area stakeholders for treating the area as a defined district where collective action and collaboration is the best way to drive results in increasing visitors to the area, addressing social disorder and improving perceptions of safety. With new leadership taking over Arts Commons and the Glenbow and the arrival of the University of Calgary to the area, now is an opportune time to formalize this support.

### **INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS**

The original Notice of Motion (see Attachment 1) proposed the idea of establishing a formal Convention District as the main focus for re-thinking and investing in programming and initiatives to improve the experiences of Calgarians, convention delegates and visitors. Area stakeholders (including Civic Partners, businesses, the School of Architecture Planning and Landscape and relevant City business units) are now proposing to expand the approach to be more encompassing of all issues that impact the user experiences of visitors to the area. This includes among other things:

- perceptions of safety
- vibrancy and activity
- ease of wayfinding and navigation
- engaging with vulnerable populations
- lighting
- aesthetics
- comfort and convenience

The objective is to create an environment that makes people feel welcome and comfortable to visit the area and the services and attractions including City Hall, the Central Library, Arts Commons, the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre, the Glenbow Museum and all the private businesses and destinations in the area. The approach will strive to address the needs of the businesses and visitors to the area. By focusing on the principles of comfort (both physical and

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psychological) and creating a sense of welcome and vibrancy the plan will leverage investments in programming the area through conventions, performances, exhibits and festivals. The work will also be aligned with and informed by The Future of Stephen Avenue project being co-led by the Calgary Downtown Association Business Improvement Area and the Urban Initiatives team at The City. The proposed boundary for the District is as follows (see map in Attachment 2):

- North: 5 AV
- East: 3 ST SE
- South: CP Rail Corridor
- West: Centre Street

A specific, Council endorsed boundary is necessary in order to ensure clarity of purpose and to focus energy and investment in a defined area that has common objectives. Making the area too large will dilute the impact of the proposed work on the areas that need targeted attention. The proposed boundary has been purposefully defined to include those stakeholders that share common objectives and to avoid overlap with other initiatives. Specifically, the area east of the proposed district is well covered and part of the vision for East Village and the Rivers District Master Plan. The area to the west is the focus of separate initiatives that are being led more by private interests as they seek to re-invest and animate vacant retail and office space. To the north, Chinatown is the subject of a new Area Redevelopment Plan and Cultural Plan. The area to the south of the rail tracks is part of either the Rivers District Master Plan or the Beltline Area Redevelopment Plan Phase 2 review. By defining a clear district, it is easier to identify linkages between areas and tell a story of the plan for the overall downtown area. Failure to define a boundary results in perceived overlap of initiatives and conflicting priorities.

There are four complementary tracks of work currently underway that will advance the thinking on what would be the most strategic investments and initiatives to accelerate activity and vibrancy in the area.

### Research, Experimentation and Implementation

Administration, in partnership with the Mayor's Office, has been working with the University of Calgary's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape (SAPL) and several City Business Units to facilitate innovative collaboration in the nine block area radius in and around City Hall. The area is defined as 1 ST SE to the east, 6 AV SE to the north, 4 ST SE to the west and 9 AV SE to the south. The intent of the project is to leverage the work of the Downtown Strategy and test some of the ideas in a defined geographic area with the goal of making the area more vibrant and welcoming.

This is a one-year project which is in the early stages of development.

### Enhancing Venue Programming

Local venues and partners in the area are all interested in accessing public spaces in the area, including Stephen Avenue and Olympic Plaza, to enhance Calgaryan, patron and delegate experience and to increase exposure of programming to the public. This could include measures such as:

- investigating/piloting events and exhibits on Stephen Avenue and in Olympic Plaza including, installations that could span several days without the need for removal

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- finding ways to create revenue through hosting of outdoor paid events; and
- installing better signage on buildings or in the public realm to advertise events and exhibits which could include partnerships with third-party advertising companies.

In order to better enable such initiatives, there is a need to review City processes governing the use and management of both Olympic Plaza and Stephen Avenue. There is also a need to review Land Use Bylaw provisions related to the installation of either temporary or permanent signage, banners or pageantry that could advertise both local events as well as third party advertising that could raise revenues to fund area initiatives that would further enhance programming in the area and can improve wayfinding during events or conventions. Finding opportunities to generate revenue that can be collected in the area would be a new way to invest in both physical improvements and programming rather than relying on unpredictable one-time funding. These ideas and opportunities are also being explored through the Future of Stephen Avenue Project and recommendations on possible actions will be forthcoming in 2020.

### Vision and Policy

As per the original Notice of Motion, Administration is currently drafting a new downtown plan that will replace the existing Centre City Plan. The new plan will include specific language regarding the vision and role of this area as a major visitor destination within the overall downtown as well as specific goals and objectives for this area to give weight to the initiatives currently underway. It will be aligned with the Downtown Strategy and was informed by many of the stakeholders involved in the district.

### Joint Marketing and Hosting Initiative

The Calgary Telus Convention Centre continues to work with other area facilities, hotels and private businesses to formalize a framework to guide how they will work collectively to market and host conventions and events, making use of all facilities and attractions in the area. This has resulted in the signing a number of memorandum of understandings among the partners.

### Next Steps

Under the Place focus area of the Downtown Strategy, work is underway to bring these efforts together into an ongoing, multi-year program of initiatives and investments that will include further consultation with key partners in the Downtown Strategy. It is proposed that an ongoing working group focused on this geographic area will be embedded in the Downtown Strategy. While it is being led by the Place focus area, there is direct linkages and collaboration with the Live and Connect focus areas as well. Work will include investigating various funding models for area initiatives and how the area could best be governed to reach its maximum potential. Attachment 3 includes a proposed work plan that will be used by both Administration and the Downtown Strategy Leadership Team to drive work and investment over the next few years. Funding is available in 2020 to undertake small scale pilots and initiatives to test potential solutions identified through the SAPL and Future of Stephen Avenue projects. Reporting to Council will be within the context of the Downtown Strategy or as needed to implement specific actions or funding opportunities that would require Council approval.

### Reporting

As mentioned, the responsibility for leading this work will be through a specific working group of area stakeholders under the guide of the Downtown Strategy's Place focus area. Reporting on

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the implementation of the district will be done through the Downtown Strategy Leadership Team which will have annual communication to Council and also regular communication with Calgary Economic Development, the steward of Calgary's economic strategy, *Calgary in the New Economy*.

### **Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication**

Through the Downtown Strategy implementation, Administration has engaged with key stakeholders including the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre, Arts Commons, Glenbow Museum, Calgary Downtown Association BIA, Calgary Economic Development and the Calgary Municipal Land Corporation. As the initiatives outlined in Attachment 3 are actioned, additional stakeholders will be included in discussions and projects. Further, activities undertaken through this district will be part of the overall Downtown Strategy communications plan and where required, individual projects and initiatives will have their own communication plans. Letters of Support for the proposed district and the related projects and initiatives are included in Attachment 4.

### **Strategic Alignment**

The establishment of a district aligns with the Centre City Plan, the Civic District Public Realm Strategy, the Cultural Plan for Calgary, *Calgary in the New Economy: An Updated Economic Strategy for Calgary*, Business and Local Economy Initiative, the Resilient Calgary strategy and One Calgary's citizen priorities: A Prosperous City and A Well-Run City. The strategy for establishing a district would also support the following ongoing work: the update of the Centre City Plan, implementation of the Stephen Avenue Master Plan, the Downtown Strategy work, the development of a Winter City Strategy and exploration of the Arts Commons Transformation project. Many of the stakeholders in the area, including The City's Civic Partners, also have their own strategies and Administration has been coordinating with them to ensure alignment and to identify opportunities to leverage related work currently underway.

### **Social, Environmental, Economic (External)**

This district is currently experiencing the impacts of social disorder challenges, particularly related to addiction and mental health concerns. This is having an impact on the perceptions of safety in both the public realm and within buildings and facilities. Focused effort to address these impacts is required not only for health and safety of the individuals experiencing addiction but also for convention delegates and those who visit this area to access the educational, arts, cultural and civic facilities, and private offices and businesses.

Spending by visitors, delegates and tourists in this district has a significant impact on Calgary's economy. Having a vibrant and safe district in this part of our downtown will not only support local business, but it will help attract additional events, meetings and conferences that add vibrancy to the overall downtown, which is a key component of the implementation of our community economic development plan, *Calgary in the New Economy* and a focus of the Downtown Strategy.

Much of the public infrastructure in the area is also nearing the end of its lifecycle and there is an opportunity through this work to plan for the future environmental quality of the area - both from an aesthetic and environmental performance perspective.

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### **Financial Capacity**

#### ***Current and Future Operating Budget:***

None as a result of this report.

#### ***Current and Future Capital Budget:***

None as a result of this report.

### **Risk Assessment**

The risk of not treating this area as a formal district is that there will not be a mechanism to align actions and investments in a coordinated way that drives agreed upon goals and results. A lack of focus and attention to the area could lead to a deterioration in the desirability of the area and negatively impact the performance of the existing facilities and their contribution to the economy. Pooling resources and having an ongoing forum for collaboration will support the plans of The City, the Calgary Telus Convention Centre, Arts Commons and the Glenbow Museum. Further it will support the considerable investments that have already been in the area by Bow Valley College, the Calgary Public Library and the Calgary Municipal Land Corporation. It will also support the health and vibrancy of businesses in the area.

### **REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):**

Establishing a downtown district will help area facilities and stakeholders improve the experience of Calgarians, delegates, patrons and visitors. It will leverage and enhance the arts, cultural, and business assets in the downtown core and align with broader efforts to improve experiences for visitors and Calgarians in the area. Establishing this area as a district aligns with *Calgary in the New Economy: An Updated Economic Strategy for Calgary*, and in particular the work undertaken under the Place pillar of Downtown Strategy, and Centre City Plan.

### **ATTACHMENT(S)**

1. Attachment 1 – Original Notice of Motion and Summary of Previous Council Direction
2. Attachment 2 – Map of Proposed Downtown District Boundary
3. Attachment 3 – Proposed Projects and Initiatives as part of the Proposed Downtown District
4. Attachment 4 – Letters of Support for the Downtown District