

## Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan: Roadmap to Reinvention

### RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Urban Development:

1. Forward Report PUD2021-0220 and its attachments directly to the 2021 April 26 Strategic Meeting of Council, and
2. Recommend that Council:
  - a. Approve, by resolution, Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan (Attachment 3); and
  - b. RESCIND, by resolution, the Centre City Plan.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- *Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan: Roadmap to Reinvention* (The Plan) is our vision, roadmap and commitment to build a thriving, future-focused downtown over the next decade and beyond. It will replace the 2007 *Centre City Plan* and is a component of the Next Generation Planning System.
- *What does this mean to Calgarians?* When the downtown thrives, so does the rest of the city. Calgary needs a strong downtown that citizens can be proud of; a vibrant downtown where they can enjoy river pathways and parks, cultural events and great entertainment. Our future success relies on our downtown being a place where people want to live, visit and set up businesses. We need a bold new plan to implement the necessary changes and make decisive moves quickly in order to reinvent downtown.
- *Why does this matter?* Our downtown is facing a crisis. Office vacancy is at an all-time high of 29 percent, and property values have declined by \$16B since 2015. We need a bold new planning approach to transform our downtown from vacancy to vibrancy, and reinvent the heart of our city into a thriving place that is desirable to residents, visitors, talent, businesses and investors. The Plan will provide direction for decision-makers and investors, allowing us to be progressive and act quickly towards a common vision.
- The 10-year review of the *Centre City Plan* revealed that considerable progress has been achieved through the 2007 *Centre City Plan*, and we have great infrastructure to leverage and build on. It's now time for a new vision and approach to adapt to the changing economy, to ensure a resilient downtown for the next decade and beyond.
- The Plan is an initiative of the Downtown Strategy which will be the principle driver for implementation, coordinate future budget requests and prioritize Corporate action. Downtown Strategy implementation and investment is detailed in report C2021-0524. Recommendation 1 allows for The Plan (vision) and the Downtown Strategy (implementation) to be presented and reviewed by Council as comprehensive, interconnected package on 2021 April 26.
- Through Report PUD2018-0011, Administration identified the *Centre City Plan* as a priority to be updated with the project commencing in 2018.
- Strategic Alignment to Council's Citizen Priorities: A city of safe and inspiring neighbourhoods.
- Background and Previous Council Direction is included as Attachment 1.

## Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan: Roadmap to Reinvention

### DISCUSSION

*Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan: The Roadmap to Reinvention* (The Plan) is part of a group of interconnected planning initiatives which work together under Next Generation Planning – meeting the goals of the *Municipal Development Plan/Calgary Transportation Plan* and successfully planning for two million people (Attachment 2). The Plan is non-statutory and will provide the roadmap for action towards the evolution of Greater Downtown (Attachment 3). The investment strategy (Report C2021-0524) will initiate the mobilization of The Plan.

The pandemic has globally accelerated the need for action in downtowns. We need to start now to transform Calgary's downtown to respond to the situation that we, and many other cities find ourselves in. We are competing for talent with cities that are moving urgently to transform by providing remarkable places that put people first. Fortunately, Calgary's downtown has a great foundation to build on and The Plan will keep us focused and on track toward achieving a common vision for the next decade and beyond that will allow us to compete on a global scale.

The Plan aligns with other City direction as outlined below and found in Attachment 1.

- The Plan opens with an “Equity diversity inclusion access statement” recognizing that Greater Downtown should be a place for everyone – now and into the future.
- Greater Downtown will be an important driver for Calgary's transition to a low-carbon economy, as well as a focal point for the increased risk brought on by climate change.
- With an updated *Municipal Development Plan/Calgary Transportation Plan*, a proposed *Guidebook for Great Communities* (the Guidebook) and a forthcoming framework for a renewed Land Use Bylaw, The City is moving towards a modern approach to planning that focuses on consistency, predictability and continuous improvement.
- The Plan considers and incorporates the key directions from Tomorrow's Chinatown projects, the *Beltline Area Redevelopment Plan* review and all work currently in-flight within the *Rivers District Master Plan* area, including the Culture + Entertainment District.
- The Plan and future implementation of the strategic moves and actions will be aligned with the Next Generation Planning program and component projects, particularly with respect to funding, financing and the Land Use Bylaw Renewal project.
- *Calgary in the New Economy, the economic strategy for Calgary*, identifies four pillars of focus – Talent, Innovation, Place, and Business Environment – that are an integral part of a prosperous economy, with investment in place-making important for each focus area.
- The City created an administrative framework called the Downtown Strategy to support economic vitality by focusing resources on the geographical area of Greater Downtown. Strategic moves in The Plan will be implemented through the Downtown Strategy.

### Proposed Plan Strategic Moves

The Plan is downtown's roadmap for the future and like a roadmap, there are many ways to get to a destination. The strategic moves and actions provide many different ways to achieve a future where our downtown is a resilient and vibrant place for everyone, with welcoming neighbourhoods, active streets and well-used public spaces. To get there, we know that the strategic moves generally require:

- Significant investment in the public realm, infrastructure and servicing
- Regulatory improvements that enable adaptive reuse and new residential development
- A new approach to the streets network to support vibrancy
- Devoted consideration of the business environment for a thriving economy
- A drastic shift for the Downtown Core to attract residents, talent and businesses

## Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan: Roadmap to Reinvention

The strategic moves are outlined below.

**Neighbourhoods for vibrant urban life:** This strategic move is about supporting our great mixed-use neighbourhoods by creating exciting places and by providing housing choices that attract, support and retain businesses, entrepreneurs and desired talent to work, live and enjoy in Greater Downtown. A critical action is to investigate opportunities for initiatives, regulatory changes, programs, funding and investment opportunities to repurpose underutilized or vacant commercial, office or hotel space.

**A green network for a healthy environment:** This strategic move is about providing more opportunities for people to access parks, the river, natural areas and greenery in the public realm. People need this for recreation, to connect with one another and to relax and recharge their batteries. A critical action is to acquire additional open space.

**Streets for people:** This strategic move is about reaping a multitude of economic and health benefits from enabling people to move more easily and safely by walking and wheeling. A critical action is to prepare a strategy to prioritize networks across types of mobility.

**Transit for all:** This strategic move builds off downtown as the hub of the transit system with the aim for this mode to be the preferred mobility choice by offering a great transit experience – whether it's getting to and waiting at a station or stop as well as riding a bus or Light Rail Transit vehicle. A critical action is to prepare a study for dedicated transit lanes.

**Future-proof and innovate for the next generation:** This strategic move is about preparing for the future by reducing our vulnerability to hazards and climate impacts as well being innovative, fostering a testing environment and offering regulatory flexibility to enable development. A critical action is to develop a program for energy retrofits of existing buildings.

### Next steps

The Plan was prepared by a cross-Corporate team representing key functional areas that are responsible for delivering on the actions in The Plan, including planning, transportation, parks and climate change. This cross-Corporate approach will continue through the implementation of The Plan to ensure that work programs, resources and budgets are aligned to deliver on priority actions. The Plan is a living document, meaning that amendments will be ongoing as needed.

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION (EXTERNAL)**

- Public Engagement was undertaken
- Public Communication or Engagement was not required
- Public/Stakeholders were informed
- Stakeholder or customer dialogue/relations were undertaken

The City of Calgary started conducting engagement in 2018 for the project to replace the *Centre City Plan*, now referred to as *Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan: Roadmap to Reinvention*. The project embraced a collaborative approach guided by a Technical Advisory Committee, a Management Steering Committee and involvement of a variety of stakeholders. Engagement targeted key stakeholders, Calgarians passionate about downtown and internal colleagues.

The project team met with 535 different people in-person and 300 virtually who offered their time, expertise and hopes for the future of downtown through 16 formal engagement sessions and many more informal meetings. Nearly 1000 people completed online surveys. To ensure

## **Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan: Roadmap to Reinvention**

widespread and inclusive participation in developing The Plan, public outreach included standard outreach with a website, an email list and Facebook and Twitter posts as well as targeted outreach for Chinese-speaking residents. In total, the engagement process for this project engaged over 1,500 people. More details can be found in Attachment 4.

### **Calgary Planning Commission (CPC) workshop**

On 2020 March 19, Administration had a closed session workshop with members of the Calgary Planning Commission to review the draft Plan. Commissioners were supportive of the direction of The Plan and provided a range of comments that informed subsequent revisions. Attachment 5 provides a summary of key themes from that session as well as Administration's response.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Social**

The Plan establishes a vision for accommodating an equitable community that makes it easier for all citizens to live and thrive in Greater Downtown, regardless of stage of life, income, cultural background or ability.

### **Environmental**

The Plan supports more compact, complete and climate resilient neighbourhoods. Removing barriers and encouraging redevelopment in Calgary's oldest neighbourhoods makes efficient use of existing infrastructure and brings people closer to services and amenities, resulting in reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The Plan supports the integration of climate change mitigation and risk-reduction strategies into decision-making within Greater Downtown. Additionally, the Plan leads in approaches to transitioning to a low-carbon economy, improving energy use and potentially resulting in reduced GHG emissions. The Plan also includes direction to protect the health of the rivers and urban tree canopy.

### **Economic**

What happens downtown, especially in terms of real estate, has a direct impact on the rest of the city. Calgary needs a strong downtown to grow our economy, create jobs and fund the City services we rely on. Calgary's future success relies on our downtown being a place where people want to live, visit and set up businesses. Moving forward, we need our downtown communities to reflect our citizens: diverse and inclusive to different cultures, ages and financial means. The Plan provides the roadmap to ensure Calgary's downtown communities remain attractive and vibrant. When our communities are attractive, diverse and vibrant, so is Calgary.

### **Service and Financial Implications**

Budget for implementation will be presented at the 2021 April 26 Strategic meeting of Council.

## **RISK**

Without a shared vision for Greater Downtown, decisions around city-building and investment may be reactive and unfocused. Delays to The Plan could mean that Administration would need to re-evaluate subsequent implementation actions or requests for funding, which further prolongs action in our downtown. This could impact investor confidence, affect economic recovery, and add to the number of Calgarians leaving for other locations. A more detailed risk assessment relative to implementation of The Plan will be included in report C2021-0524.

**Planning & Development Report to  
SPC on Planning and Urban Development**

**ISC: UNRESTRICTED  
PUD2021-0220  
Page 5 of 5**

**Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan: Roadmap to Reinvention**

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

1. Previous Council Direction, Background
2. Next Generation Planning System Overview
3. Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan: Roadmap to Reinvention
4. Engagement Summary Report
5. Calgary Planning Commission Review – Administration Follow-up

Department Circulation

| General Manager | Department             | Approve/Consult/Inform |
|-----------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Stuart Dalglish | Planning & Development | Approve                |
|                 |                        |                        |
|                 |                        |                        |