

# Previous Council Direction, Background

## Project background

When the Greater Downtown thrives, so does the rest of the city. The *Centre City Plan* is a coordinated strategy document that pulls together the vision for the area along with strategies and actions relating to land use planning, economic, cultural, and social development, and governance. The replacement of the *Centre City Plan* is an opportunity to refocus Calgary's energy and reinvigorate a commitment to success in Greater Downtown. Additionally, there are also opportunities to align with City and Civic Partner initiatives such as *Calgary in the New Economy, the economic strategy for Calgary*, the *Resilient Calgary* strategy, *Calgary's Climate Resilience Strategy*, Downtown Strategy, Tomorrow's Chinatown project and master planning by Calgary Municipal Land Corporation.

On 2007 May 07 Council approved the adoption of the *Centre City Plan* (CPC2007-049), which included a recommendation for regular monitoring and reporting. Since adoption, the *Centre City Plan* had only been amended three times. However, with newer policy initiatives, completed actions, and changes in Administrative governance, a more extensive Plan update was needed. On 2017 January 16, through a formal Council policy review at the Combined Meeting of Council, the *Centre City Plan* was identified as one of 28 Council policies to be amended.

Calgary's Greater Downtown is an economic driver and employment centre, historically generating 40 percent of non-residential tax revenue and 25 per cent of city-wide employment. However, an economic downturn has had a significant impact on Calgary's Greater Downtown with high unemployment and office vacancy rates. Fundamental changes in the oil and gas industry lead analysts to project that Calgary is unlikely to see any new downtown office construction for at least 12 years. To address the issues in Calgary's Greater Downtown, there is a need for a comprehensive and coordinated strategy that can leverage the efforts of The City and its strategic partners to invest in infrastructure and stimulate the economy.

When the project to update the *Centre City Plan* was scoped in June of 2018, the strategy was to prepare a limited refresh where the team would remove outdated content, engage affected Centre City stakeholders and update the existing *Centre City Plan* within a year. Since the Centre City Plan Refresh project started in July 2018, a number of factors have led to the need for a reconsideration of the project scope and timelines in August 2019. After reviewing stakeholder feedback, conducting research and reviewing the existing Plan, staff recommended that a new document be prepared to replace the existing *Centre City Plan* rather than simply updating the existing Plan. Preparing a new document required more time than initially scheduled. Then the COVID-19 pandemic further delayed the project, but allowed time to re-evaluate content.

In July 2020 a new project structure was put in place with a cross-corporate steering committee to have a quality assurance process to ensure an increasing amount of certainty and ownership over the content and document. Creation of the multi-departmental Steering Committee was also to oversee reviews, edits and decisions relating to the draft document. The visionary nature of the Plan highlighted differences in

priorities between different departments and the need for a multi-departmental Steering Committee of decision-makers to fill this role. The proposed Plan represents this collaborative effort.

## Plan context

*Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan* (the Plan) is a non-statutory plan that will replace the 2007 *Centre City Plan* by presenting a future vision and strategic moves to support the evolution of Greater Downtown over the next decade. The neighbourhoods of: Downtown Core, Downtown West, Eau Claire, Chinatown, East Village and Beltline are collectively referred to as Greater Downtown.

## Stakeholder feedback

Stakeholder feedback identified the need to be bold in our planning and action, boost economic vitality and diversity, focus on people, address climate change in a meaningful way, create quality green spaces, improve the public realm, protect the vitality of the rivers and shift the image of the Downtown Core towards residential vitality. This feedback is reflected throughout the Plan. A new name for the area was also needed as the term Centre City lacked meaning to our citizens who consistently refer to the area as the "downtown."

## Economic recovery and a thriving economy

*Calgary in the New Economy, the economic strategy for Calgary*, identifies four pillars of focus – Talent, Innovation, Place, and Business Environment – that are interconnected and an integral part of a prosperous economy – with investment in place-making important for each focus area. This Plan aligns with Calgary's economic strategy by providing the roadmap for placemaking in Greater Downtown to attract business, talent and residents, which supports growth in innovation. People are at the centre of vibrancy and putting people at centre of strategic action and decision-making in Greater Downtown will allow Calgary's downtown to be a more vibrant and prosperous place. Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan provides the guidance needed to create a vibrant people-place that will give us a competitive advantage over other cities.

## Downtown Strategy

Following the approval of Calgary's economic strategy, The City created an administrative framework called the Downtown Strategy to support economic vitality by focusing resources on the geographical area of downtown. The Downtown Strategy brings together civic and community partners through coordinated and collaborative work with the commitment to making life better every day for citizens, customers, residents and businesses through a focus on four pillars: place, work, live and connect. The Plan is an initiative of the Downtown Strategy with a focus on these pillars. The Downtown Strategy will be the principle driver and coordinator of implementation over time and will help coordinate future budget requests (both capital and operating) and prioritize corporate action across all Service Lines. It will also ensure ongoing community dialogue and alignment with other Civic Partners and partnerships.

## Climate Change

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. Its proximity to flood-prone rivers, low surface permeability, tall buildings and intensive energy use mean that Greater Downtown is a major source of emissions and that people and infrastructure are exposed to climate-related shocks and stresses. The increasing likelihood of severe weather will result in property damage, service disruptions

and safety risks. The inevitability of climate change requires us to integrate mitigation and risk-reduction strategies into all land-use and operational planning within Greater Downtown. This will help us to maintain servicing ability and minimize the cost of adaptation. The Plan supports strategies that mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and increase Greater Downtown's climate resilience.

## Social equity and inclusion

The Plan starts with an "Equity diversity inclusion access statement" recognizing that Greater Downtown should be a place for everyone that reflects all of Calgary – now and into the future. This means providing and enabling vibrant urban environments with a sense of place, diverse housing choices and desired amenities so there are choices for everyone. Social equity and inclusion start with planning and Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan supports this approach for anyone doing work in Greater Downtown.

## Continuous improvements and modernization

With an updated Municipal Development Plan/Calgary Transportation Plan, a new Guidebook for Great Communities (the Guidebook) and a forthcoming framework for a renewed Land Use Bylaw and Districts, The City is moving towards a modern approach to planning that focuses on consistency, predictability and continuous improvement. While Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan boundary is not included in the Guidebook, the document has been written with a view to align with the Guidebook as much as possible to enable possible incorporation in the future. The Guidebook sets up the renewal of the Land Use Bylaw that will improve and modernize land use districts, uses and rules to be more future-focused, people-centred and outcome-responsive. The Plan is the first step towards modernizing and improving the approach to planning in Greater Downtown where changes to land use districts are important to ensure future success.

The Plan also considers and incorporates the key directions from Tomorrow's Chinatown projects, the Beltline Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) review and all work currently in-flight within the Rivers District Master Plan area. 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.

## Previous Council Direction

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The following table summarizes Council direction to Administration for the Greater Downtown Plan.

### Timeline relating to the Greater Downtown Plan

DATE	REPORT NUMBER	DIRECTION/DESCRIPTION
1/16/2017	LGT2016-0919	<p>FORMAL COUNCIL POLICY REVIEW – 2016 OUTCOMES</p> <p>Through a formal Council policy review at the Combined Meeting of Council, the Centre City Plan was identified as one of 28 Council policies to be amended.</p>
1/15/2018	PUD2018-0011	<p>Planning &amp; Development Policy Prioritization Strategy</p> <p>Administration identified the Centre City Plan as a priority to be updated with the project commencing in 2018.</p>
5/7/2007	CPC2007-049	<p>CENTRE CITY PLAN NON-STATUTORY</p> <p>Council adopted, by resolution, the Centre City Plan, with a number of amendments to supercede the Core Area Policy Brief and the Downtown Handbook of Public Improvements. Council also adopted the use of Appendix 'A' of the Centre City Plan, entitled 'Downtown Design Guidelines' as official policy for review of land use redesignation and development permit applications within the Downtown area as defined by the Centre City Plan.</p> <p>Council also directed administration to use action item priorities as an input into preparation of the 3-year departmental business plans and budgets.</p>