# **RE: Support for Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan**

# Dear councillors:

On behalf of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, I am writing in support of Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan. Vibrant communities lead to vibrant businesses, and this plan will advance the necessary and important work to reimagine and build on the vibrancy of our downtown.

We know that vibrant communities lead to vibrant businesses because we compete on much more than economics. By investing in Calgary's vibrancy, we can attract and retain top talent. This means investing in our community, including childcare, parks, public transit, the arts, and the charitable sector. It also requires capital and social infrastructure that directly supports community.

From the Chamber's perspective, the specific actions outlined in the plan build on Calgary's vibrancy through community investment through:

- 1. **Reimaging our downtown.** A struggling economy due to lower oil prices together with the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased vacancy throughout the downtown core. We need to reimagine the downtown core for our businesses and for all Calgarians. Improving connectivity downtown, mixed-use neighbourhoods and transportation, and making downtown living more attractive for Calgarians all contribute to that goal.
- 2. Addressing climate change. Climate change is the most pressing issue of our time, and Calgary is prepared to continue contributing to Canada's climate goals in the years to come. Calgary's leadership in this area extends beyond innovation in our energy industry -- our climate goals can be achieved through design actions that the plan lays out such as to plan, expand, and connect to the pathway network; protect, maintain and grow the park and outdoor spaces; and leverage green infrastructure through flexible design and use.
- 3. A strong, well-developed public transit network. Expanding and enhancing transit services, with particular attention to ensuring that they are welcoming for all Calgarians, is important for attracting the talent we need, boosting productivity and wages, and providing low-carbon options for people to move around the city.
- 4. Focusing on innovation and regulatory reform. At the Chamber, we believe innovation must be at the heart of everything we do. In all initiatives and actions, we need to consider how to best utilize our resources, create new value, and encourage bold thinking. At the same time, we need to enable businesses to grow and compete, which includes a focus on the regulatory environment and ensuring it allows businesses to thrive. With these aims top of mind, the plan's focus on innovation is very well aligned with our vision for the future.



No part of our economy will be left untouched by COVID-19, and the pandemic has revealed and made clear existing vulnerabilities in our political, social, and economic system. Calgary's long-term recovery and strength going forward will depend on the creativity, grit, and determination of entrepreneurial Calgarians and innovative thinkers, and on our community well-being.

The greater downtown is central to both Calgary's economy and our community well-being. A plan that invests, enhances, and builds on its vibrancy is needed now, more than ever. We're proud to support Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan, and look forward to the renewed community vibrancy it will deliver in the years to come.

Sincerely,

**Murray Sigler** 

Interim CEO Calgary Chamber of Commerce

CC: Kristyna Ng; Corporate Strategist, City of Calgary Thom Mahler; Manager, Urban Initiatives, City of Calgary





April 23, 2021

City Clerk City of Calgary 800 Macleod Trail South Calgary, AB T2P 3P4

# RE: Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan

BILD Calgary Region (BILD) wishes to express its thanks to City Administrative personnel for presenting the Greater Downtown Plan to BILD Board members and provides this letter of support for "Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan, Roadmap to Reinvention."

BILD recognizes and acknowledges the critical role an economically vibrant Greater Downtown plays in growing Calgary's overall economy, creating jobs and generating property tax revenues to support city services and competitive municipal tax rates.

BILD understands the plan as designed contains a number of elements specifically aimed at addressing a number of the challenges facing Calgary's Greater Downtown, including:

- 1. Investment in Greater Downtown amenities, all designed to make downtown more desirable, to stimulate an array of value adding private investments;
- 2. Elimination of 6 million square feet in vacant office space resulting in reduction of vacancy rate from approximately 29.5% to 14.32% over the next 10 years;
- 3. Other investments to increase value, supporting generation of an additional \$580 million of Greater Downtown property tax revenue by 2031; and
- 4. A timely schedule for execution of Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan to create early momentum as our economy recovers from the COVID-19 public health emergency.

BILD looks forward to hearing of Council's commitment to and support of the Greater Downtown Plan and realization of the Plan's targets.

Once again, we would like to acknowledge the diligent work of City Administration on the Plan.

Yours truly, BILD CALGARY REGION

Brian R. Hahn Chief Executive Officer

c.c. Stuart Dalgleish, General Manager, Planning & Development Thom Mahler, Manager Urban Initiatives, Calgary Growth Strategies







April 23, 2021

Mayor Nenshi and City of Calgary Councillors P.O. Box 2100, Station M 700 McLeod Trail South Calgary, AB T2P 2MS

Re: Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan

Dear Mayor Nenshi and Calgary City Council:

On behalf of our organizations we want to take this opportunity to thank Administration and Council for their collaborative approach to the Greater Downtown Plan (GDP). BOMA Calgary, NAIOP Calgary, and the Calgary Downtown Association (CDA) collectively represent a significant proportion of commercial properties in the city of Calgary and are pleased to have contributed to the Plan's vision and development. In particular, we want to thank Thom Mahler and the project team for both their leadership in developing the GDP, and for engaging industry stakeholders including Calgary Economic Development's Real Estate Services Advisory Committee in contributing to the plan.

The market conditions of the past 6 years, primarily the result of a sustained contraction in the worldwide energy market and falling prices, has hit Downtown Calgary particularly hard, leading to reduced economic activity and employment layoffs. The consequence is 13 million square feet of current vacant office space, representing approximately 30% of the Downtown office market. This has resulted in the City of Calgary's downtown tax base being reduced from \$25B in 2015 to \$8B today. This loss has required the rest of the (primarily suburban) commercial tax base to make up the revenue difference. which is devastating to remaining businesses of all sizes across the city. In short, this is a serious problem for Calgary as a whole, its real estate sector and taxpayers.

The pertinent questions to solving this problem focus on how to revitalize Calgary's Downtown, attract reinvestment into the Downtown core and overcome the vacancy challenge of commercial office space that is affecting our local economy,

Our organizations are fully supportive of a comprehensive plan to address this ever-growing problem. There is no doubt that action must be taken. All parts of our city are interconnected so we must revive our Downtown to relieve the resultant economic strain on the rest of Calgary. We believe that to achieve our shared goals, all of the key stakeholders must be at the table and participate throughout the design, implementation, and monitoring phases of the proposed plan. These stakeholders have already unified behind the key themes of the GDP and its focus areas. We agree with the need for municipal investments and policy to promote a more vibrant public realm that integrates with surrounding buildings and deliberate action to attract and sustain a vibrant art

and cultural economy. In addition. liveability of the Downtown community must be enhanced by providing sufficient and appropriate recreational amenities and education opportunities as well as ensuring a safe social environment for residents, businesses and visitors alike.

Over the past number of years, The City and real estate industry stakeholders have made headway on initiatives to attract new businesses into Calgary and the Downtown, notably through the Opportunity Calgary Investment Fund. These efforts are beginning to show results, however, they are simply not enough to move the office vacancy dial in a meaningful downward direction. This is why the GDP is required with its vision and scope.

The Downtown office environment suffers from both insufficient demand as well as an oversupply of space. More recently real estate industry and municipal leadership have focused on the over-supply of office space to complement the work on increasing demand. As office rents have decreased, the tenant market has seen a "flight to quality" as businesses seek newer and higher quality spaces at reduced rates. This has come at the expense of lower quality buildings in certain locations particularly the west end of the Downtown core where there is now a shortage of potential tenants to absorb the vacated space. The GDP provides an opportunity to address the office oversupply by incentivizing new uses for this vacant space, including residential conversion.

A major goal of the GDP aims to address the oversupply by incentivizing the <u>removal of 6 million</u> <u>square feet of office space</u> through an immediate City investment of \$45 million with the aim of ultimately establishing a \$450M incentive program. It is expected that over 10 years the municipal government could see a \$580M increase in tax revenue from the Downtown core, which will allow us to reduce the burden in other areas of the city which will in turn lead to an increase in Calgary's overall competitiveness. This figure does not include the additional private sector investment that is expected to be spurred by this work, as buildings aim to leverage the City's own strategic investments into Downtown infrastructure. This is a crucial piece of the GDP, and one that our industry stakeholders support.

Real estate industry stakeholders are also pleased to see the GDP's focus on the types of amenities that help attract and retain talent, while improving the liveability and desirability of the area. We know that amenities like public spaces, social, cultural and recreation amenities, and diverse transportation networks have an important role to play in the competitiveness and appeal of the Downtown, and in fact many commercial buildings have invested in their own facilities to this same purpose. We also support efforts to better position Downtown as a community of choice for residents, and that means enabling access to such essential services as health care, groceries, education, and the types of amenities like parks and playgrounds that are the hallmarks of all great communities.

We are encouraged by and supportive of the work that has been done so far on the GDP, and believe we can assist in working through the details of creating a successful investment program with an associated governance structure to ensure minimal barriers to the program's success. First, for a program of this scope to have credibility and the leverage to promote additional private investment, it must be appropriately financed. This demonstrates to the real estate industry, and to Calgarians, the seriousness of the approach. Second, we believe it is vitally important to emphasize an 'all of the above' approach, as no single action alone can move the needle on the vacancy problem. Finally, the GDP must be viewed as a suite of programs and supports, not a set of a la carte recommendations, and one that must be accompanied by an appropriate, collaborative and

inclusive governance structure to ensure successful implementation of the investment program.

The commercial real estate sector remains committed to Downtown Calgary as the economic driver of our city. We are confident that with sustained focus and targeted investments - as envisioned by the Greater Downtown Plan - we can progress towards a shared vision of a liveable, vibrant, and economically competitive Downtown core that has something for all.

**Yours Sincerely** 

Sincerely, on behalf of, NAIOP

Sincerely, on behalf of, BOMA Sincerely, on behalf of CDA

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**Guy Huntingford Director Strategic Initiatives** NAIOP Calgary

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Lloyd Suchet **Executive Director BOMA Calgary** 

**Eileen Stan** Chair of the Board of Directors **Calgary Downtown Association** 

April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

Dear Mayor Naheed Nenshi and City Council:

## **RE: Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan**

I am writing to offer Calgary Economic Development's support of Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan and investment into the strategy.

As a wholly owned subsidiary of the City of Calgary, Calgary Economic Development takes great pride in our city and the growth and prosperity of its downtown core. As outlined in our economic strategy, *Calgary in the New Economy*, the attraction and retention of talent is key factor for being a thriving city, in which a vibrant downtown plays a vital role. At Calgary Economic Development, our primary role is to attract companies and talent from around the world. Increasingly, talent and business leaders look for new homes in vibrant cities – places that provide a work, live and play environment.

We know firsthand that a prosperous downtown means a prosperous city. If Calgary is to succeed and drive towards a more diverse economy and community, Calgary's downtown must transform toward a vision of a resiliency and vibrancy, with welcoming neighbourhoods, active streets and well-used public spaces for the benefit of Calgarians and visitors.

With an office vacancy rate of 30%, there is opportunity to adapt the vacant spaces by converting office space to residential housing and creating amenities, as an example. This can be achieved by The City investing \$450m on an Incentive Program throughout the next decade and in return, will create a \$580m increase to tax revenues from both increased office valuations, as well as an increase from residential over that 10 years; with the follow up effect from additional private and institutional capital expected to create even higher returns. Additionally, ensuring the self sufficiency of the plan through sales of non-core/non-strategic assets will make it viable and effective for many years to come.

By building a great downtown neighbourhood, we will create an active environment that people feel safe and welcome to explore, day *and* night. A great downtown contributes to our economic strategy's goal of Calgary being the city of choice in Canada to attract and retain the world's best entrepreneurs. Smart people that will advance technology to solve some of the world's biggest challenges; cleaner energy, safe and secure food, safer transport of people, and goods and better health solutions.

With the alignment to *Calgary in the New Economy*, Calgary Economic Development endorses Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan. We are committed to continuing our work with The City and serving on the Greater Downtown Strategy Working Group to support its prosperity for the benefit of Calgarians, and global talent considering Calgary as the city to make a living and make a life.

Sincerely,

Mary Moran

Mary Moran President & Chief Executive Officer

April 21, 2021

To Calgary City Council;

As the Master Developer of the Rivers District, we are writing in support of the Greater Downtown Plan. The plan is an essential tool to attract and retain talent and capital investment in downtown and safeguard against future detrimental economic impacts to the City of Calgary.

The economic conditions stalling private development require us to look at how we support and incent investment in order to attract new businesses, new talent and new residents into our downtown. The Greater Downtown Plan supports a more resilient City by incenting short-term and long-term development plans through a broader diversity of land use, prioritizing amenities and renewed focus on identify and place. It is a step in the right direction that puts Calgary's downtown on a path to recovery.

When CMLC was incorporated 13 years ago to kick-start east downtown Calgary's urban renewal, we knew downtown was a place that attracted diverse groups of people to thrive and share ideas in business, culture and community. As we turn our attention south to the Culture + Entertainment District, economic vitality and innovation are imperative to the success of our projects, many of which are scheduled for completion in 2024.

While we are doing our part by including quality urban design into our \$396 million-invested East Village infrastructure, we need a long-term solution in the form of a strategic Greater Downtown Plan to support the growth of the East Village and Culture + Entertainment District.

On behalf of the Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, we support the Greater Downtown Plan.

Yours Sincerely,

Kate



KATE THOMPSON, Architect, AAA, MRAIC President and CEO

Calgary Municipal Land Corporation KThompson@calgarymlc.ca April 23, 2021

City of Calgary 800 Macleod Trail, S.E P.O. Box 2100 Stn. M Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2M5

## Re: Greater Downtown Plan, Letter of Support

On behalf of the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre (CTCC), please accept this letter of support for the Greater Downtown Plan, which seeks to transform and reinvent the economic and cultural heart of our city for decades to come.

The CTCC supports the strategic direction presented in this tactical plan. It will ensure a thriving future for our downtown core through vibrant gathering places for civic, arts, cultural, recreation and entertainment activities, quality urban design, improved accessibility, green networks with parks and natural spaces, a modern transit system that appeals to citizens and visitors, and creative spaces that position Calgary as world-class tourist and tier-one conference destination.

The pandemic has presented complex challenges for our city, requiring new and innovative ways for Calgarians to live, work, entertain, travel and build community. Downtown and its businesses, including the CTCC, will play a key role in the economic recovery post-pandemic, and together with diverse business sectors and economic enterprises we will need to be stewards of innovation.

The Greater Downtown Plan and the roadmap to reinvention outlined will create vibrancy and activity by improving the environment and experience for residents, workers and visitors. When downtown thrives, Calgary thrives.

Our organization is in agreement with the proposed Greater Downtown Plan and looks forward to continuing the collaboration with the City, civic partners, community partners and businesses for the economic vitality and innovation of Calgary, and a future-focused downtown.

Sincerely

Kurby Court President & CEO Calgary TELUS Convention Centre



April 22, 2021

The City of Calgary Via PublicSubmissions@calgary.ca

Re: Greater Downtown Plan

On behalf of Platform Calgary, I am pleased to share our support of the Greater Downtown Plan. This is an important strategy that provides immediate and long-term direction to revitalize and strengthen the heart of our city.

Platform Calgary plays an important role in the future of our city and its downtown. As the trusted civic partner responsible for bringing together all the resources and partners of Calgary's tech startup ecosystem to create shared prosperity, we know the importance of a vibrant and thriving physical space for innovation. The Greater Downtown Plan correctly identifies a strategy to "future-proof and innovate for the next generation", and we are prepared to be a part of that strategy.

With the launch of the Platform Innovation Centre later this year, we will be an important physical hub for innovation in our greater downtown. Yet, we know that our success, the success of our economy, and the success of downtown is tightly interrelated. The Greater Downtown Plan demonstrates a holistic understanding of the issues facing our downtown and the solutions to best address them.

I wish to thank the team behind the development of the Greater Downtown Plan. This is important work that will guide our collective and collaborative actions to ensure a resilient and vibrant downtown for everyone. At Platform Calgary, we look forward to supporting this critical endeavour for the benefit of all Calgarians.

Sincerely,

Roch

Dr. Terry Rock President and CEO Platform Calgary



Distrib-Letters-PUD2021-0220 Suite 400, Strategic Centre 630 - 8 Avenue SW Calgary AB T2P 1G6 strategicgroup.ca

Via Email: publicsubmissions@calgary.ca Cc: to kristyna.ng@calgary.ca

April 22, 2021 Public Submission Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan

#### Public Submission: Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan

Strategic Group is in support of the Downtown Plan and ask City Council to invest in the Downtown.

To have a great city, it must have a vibrant and thriving downtown and unfortunately Calgary's does not. The successful digital and tech-oriented cities such as Vancouver, Toronto, Seattle, San Francisco, etc., all have vibrant downtowns with significant residential populations. When a company considers a new location, Calgary will likely be lower on their list because of our Downtown. To attract the talent, companies need to show their potential employees they will be relocating to an exciting urban environment. Currently most of the companies and talent are flying over Calgary to Vancouver or Toronto.

The solution is to invest in creating a cool and vibrant City core. Residential development is critical to the solution, whether by office to residential conversions or new builds. Unfortunately, because the Downtown does not have that vibrancy, most people do not want to live there, and if they do, they want a significant discount. Therefore, developers can get an investment return building in the Beltline and East Village, but not in the Downtown. With lower rents downtown, the only way to attract residential development to the Downtown is by offering subsidies. Once there is a significant residential population, developers will be attracted without any subsidies because the Downtown will become a cool place to live. Subsidies have worked in other Cities, including Edmonton. The City of Calgary must put a program together if they want a thriving downtown.

The other key pieces to transforming the Downtown is to create amenities and programing to make the Downtown cool, and this requires investment as well.

Allocating new capital in today's environment takes courage, but an investment in the Downtown will create paybacks for all Calgarians for years to come. We urge you to have the courage to support the Downtown Plan and invest in the Downtown so Calgary can become the City of choice to work, live and play in.

#### **Strategic Group**

Ken Toewa

Ken Toews Senior Vice President, Development



Distrib-Letters-PUD2021-0220 Suite 400, Strategic Centre 630 - 8 Avenue SW Calgary AB T2P 1G6 strategicgroup.ca

Via Email: publicsubmissions@calgary.ca Cc: to kristyna.ng@calgary.ca

April 22, 2021 Public Submission Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan

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# **Strategic Group**

Ken Toewa

Ken Toews Senior Vice President, Development

#### **Office of the President**

AD100, 2500 University Drive NW Calgary, AB, Canada T2N 1N4 ucalgary.cs



April 6, 2021

The City of Calgary P.O. Box 2100, Station M Calgary, AB T2P 2M5

Dear Members of the Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Urban Development and City Council,

On behalf of the University of Calgary, I am pleased to provide support for The City of Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan and its vision of creating vibrant and welcoming spaces to live, work and conduct business in the heart of our city. UCalgary holds a long history of partnership with The City in which we have worked together to enhance quality of life, nurture our local innovation ecosystem, and build a great city for all Calgarians. The Greater Downtown Plan reflects this shared commitment and opens promising new avenues to position Calgary as a national and international leader in innovation, economic growth, cultural capital, and sustainability.

Thanks to ongoing collaboration and support from The City of Calgary and community partners, the University of Calgary has established a number of key initiatives in the downtown core. On the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW, for example, UCalgary's Downtown Campus provides more than 140,000 square feet of flexible space for teaching, learning, and community engagement, including the university's School of Public Policy and programs offered through the Haskayne School of Business, Continuing Education, and Alumni Office – among others. The location of our Downtown Campus has enabled UCalgary to better support the needs of learners at every career and life stage through professional development, community service learning, executive education, networking events, and more.

In May 2019, the University of Calgary expanded our downtown presence with the opening of the City Building Design Lab in the Castell Building – an ideal location for students and faculty in our School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape to explore the future of designing vibrant, equitable and sustainable cities. The CBD Lab was made possible through a generous investment of \$1.5M over five years from the Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, and in a short span of time, the Lab has fueled impressive outputs and impact on our community. To date, the CBD Lab has supported opportunities for experiential learning, entrepreneurial thinking and innovation among hundreds of students and more than two dozen faculty members. Their collaborative efforts have produced unique initiatives and community events such as the Green Alleyway project and the City-Building Innovation mapping project funded by the Calgary Downtown Association, collaborations with the City of Calgary through the 9 Block Project and the Future of Stephen Avenue project, and the Civic Common Catalyst project funded by the Alberta Real Estate Foundation, all of which engage some of the complex challenges facing our city.

In addition to the University of Calgary's presence in the downtown core, we hold a strong history of collaboration with The City of Calgary through the Urban Alliance. Since its launch in 2007, the Urban Alliance has provided a framework for knowledge transfer between leading researchers at UCalgary and

front-line city planners to create solutions to issues spanning everything from transportation and the environment, to homelessness. The Urban Alliance has supported more than 200 collaborative research projects to date, with over 40 projects currently active. Several of these initiatives have earned national recognition, including the recent collaboration between UCalgary, the City and Alberta Health Services which received a \$500K grant from the federal government to provide early detection and mapping of COVID-19 in Calgary's wastewater. Such initiatives demonstrate the significant talent among Calgarians and our collective ability to lead groundbreaking, innovative solutions in urban planning.

The University of Calgary is poised to build on these existing partnerships and community presence in the downtown core with an eye to the future needs of our city in the upcoming decade. We recognize the urgency of addressing current challenges facing Calgarians, while also creating a long-term strategy for resilience in the years that follow the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recession, and social justice movement. Accordingly, UCalgary has developed a progressive plan for the path forward, *Growth through Focus*, in which we will galvanize the expertise and skills of UCalgary campuses in partnership with our community towards transdisciplinary scholarship, future-focused programs and deeper community integration.

Guided by these three big ideas, the University of Calgary aims to enhance our presence, programs and partnerships in the downtown core. Our current collaborations with The City of Calgary and local organizations have demonstrated the significant impact that is possible in the lives of our students, scholars and neighbours through hands-on learning, community-driven research, future-focused programs that will help Calgarians upskill and reskill in a changing economy, and unique initiatives to support entrepreneurial thinkers in our city. A strong downtown core is essential to creating a hub for these endeavours and impact, with benefits that extend far beyond Calgary's centre. What happens downtown matters to our city as a whole – through the economic growth and diversification created by new business development, to the role that the heart of our city plays in building Calgarians' cultural, social and intellectual identity.

Accordingly, the University of Calgary's vision strongly aligns with the aims and principles of The City of Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan. In building a strong downtown core, we are contributing to a stronger Calgary defined by its excellence in innovation, talent development, culture, and community connections. Further, the resilience and strength of our city is closely linked to the impact and progress of the University of Calgary – our city and university have grown in tandem, and we have created meaningful impact on the lives of Calgarians through our history of partnership and collaboration. The UCalgary community welcomes the opportunity to build on this record by contributing a signature project to the Greater Downtown Plan. I would be delighted to further explore the value that our university can bring to this important initiative.

Sincerely,

Edward McCauley, PhD, FRSC President and Vice-Chancellor

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