

**Urban Strategy Report to
SPC on Planning and Urban Development
2019 June 05**

**ISC: UNRESTRICTED
PUD2019-0677**

Establishment of a Downtown Convention District

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A defined downtown convention district would be a community of businesses, retailers, restaurants, and hosting facilities brought together to create a unified community product and service offering; a recognized place, a landmark neighbourhood, a brand, and a downtown gathering space. It would establish a proactive strategy for marketing the district as a destination for conventions, arts and culture events, hotels, restaurants and retail businesses in the area. Administration has met with the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre (CTCC) and other key stakeholders and there is agreement that the concept of a district focused on improving delegate and visitor experiences can be layered onto other planning initiatives in the downtown core. Bringing more focus to the area will improve the experiences of multiple groups including local residents, workers, tourists and leisure visitors and showcase access to the cultural and entertainment amenities in the downtown core. This report provides an initial overview of the potential benefits of establishing a Downtown Convention District and recommends that further work is required to prepare a plan and scope of work that would lead to establishing a new Downtown Convention District.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:

That the SPC on Planning and Urban Development recommend that Council direct Administration, in partnership with the Calgary Convention Centre Authority (Calgary TELUS Convention Centre), to prepare a plan and scope of work that would lead to establishing a Downtown Convention District, and report back no later than Q4 2019 to Council, through the Planning and Urban Development Committee.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

At the 2019 January 14 combined meeting of Council, the following direction was provided to Administration:

That with respect to Postponed Report C2018-0671, the following be adopted, after amendment:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Administration be directed to:

1. Engage with the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre (CTCC) and key stakeholders to examine the merits of formally establishing a Downtown Convention District, reporting back in Q2 2019;
2. Bring proposed analysis and amendments for a Downtown Convention District to Council through the Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Urban Development no later than December 2019; and
3. Upon Council direction by December 2018, return with an updated Centre City Plan along with associated amendments for a Downtown Convention District no later than Q4 2019 for final Council approval.

At the 2018 September 24 combined meeting of Council, the following direction was provided to Administration:

That with respect to Report C2018-0671, the following be adopted:

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That Council:

1. Postpone Report C2018-0671 to no later than a 2019 January Meeting of Council; and
2. Direct that the closed meeting discussions with respect to Report C2018-0671 remain confidential pursuant to Section 24 and 25 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

At the 2018 May 28 regular meeting of Council a Notice of Motion was brought forward by Councillor Colley Urquhart providing the following direction:

That Councillor Colley-Urquhart's Motion, as follows, be postponed to the 2018 September 24 Regular Meeting of Council.

That with respect to Notice of Motion C2018-0671, the following be adopted:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Administration be directed to:

1. Engage with the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre (CTCC) and key stakeholders to examine the merits of formally establishing a Downtown Convention District;
2. Bring proposed analysis and amendments for a Downtown Convention District to Council through the Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Urban Development no later than December 2018; and
3. Upon Council direction by December 2018, return with an updated Centre City Plan along with associated amendments for a Downtown Convention District no later than Q1 2019 for final Council approval.

BACKGROUND

The Calgary Convention Centre Authority (CCCA) has a mandate to manage, market and operate the City-owned Calgary TELUS Convention Centre (CTCC) in an efficient and competitive manner to maximize overall economic benefits to The City of Calgary while maintaining financial performance within an acceptable range. Like many other jurisdictions across North America, The City of Calgary has invested in convention centre facilities to support economic development by attracting spending that supports the local economy and promotes Calgary as a business traveler and tourist destination. CCCA is a key partner in implementing Calgary's economic strategy, and its vision is to attract and build events to and for Calgary with the intent of activating the downtown core by connecting global thought leaders to the business community.

Since its opening in 1974, the CTCC facility located between 7th Avenue and 9th Avenue, has been a focal point for activity in the downtown. The facility exists as two buildings, one on the north side of Stephen Avenue and one to the south. They are connected by a Plus 15 bridge that provides for future potential connections of the CTCC into the overall Plus 15 system. The CTCC has been Calgary's premier hosting facility for 45 years. Today, it continues to deliver a compelling offering for conventions focused on professional, academic and corporate gatherings. This continues to position Calgary as a vibrant urban community that welcomes, embraces and connects with our inbound delegates.

The establishment of a district to enhance convention delegate experiences in the downtown core would align and extend to other planning initiatives underway that focus on investment, programming and initiatives to improve the experiences of Calgarians and visitors. Once

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established, the district would have nearly 300,000 square feet of mixed meeting space to rent, (compared to CTCC's 122,000), 1,250 hotel rooms, six theatres, various local restaurants, an art gallery and museum, a major library, along with arts and culture offerings such as the philharmonic, live plays and shows. It would become a place to live, work, celebrate, share and belong; a community where businesses thrive, and people come together. Having a recognizable and cohesive district in which to operate and market convention facilities in and around the CTCC would be a considerable advantage to generating future business.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

Under the current Centre City Plan, there is a provision for the establishment of special districts and to create strategies within these districts. The Centre City Plan is currently in the process of being reviewed and updated. However, there is also an opportunity to include more specific direction and consideration for a district to illustrate and inform the role it could play within the city overall and the downtown core.

CTCC and Administration have identified several potential short, medium and long-term opportunities for improvement in the area related to this work including, but not limited to, those found in Attachment 1. Ultimately, the strategy would include a vision, along with a fully developed set of goals for the area, and an implementation plan including timelines and assigned leads for specific tasks. It would also include discussion on potential funding arrangements to implement the strategy.

The CCCA has conducted research and consulting work, in cooperation with Creative Intelligence, which recommends that now is the time to invest in recognizing, unifying and establishing a Downtown Convention District. Creative Intelligence was hired to determine the viability of establishing a Convention District Marketing Partnership. In response to this, they initiated a stakeholder consultation process by consolidating both customer (delegates, event coordinators, etc.) and industry insight. Through their engagement consultation, they determined that marketing Calgary as a destination space is ever evolving and the only way for CTCC to continue to carry out its mandate was to move towards delivering a more service-oriented convention offering. This offering would bring a greater emphasis on providing a total attendee "experience" that moves beyond traditional expectations both locally and abroad. The results of this business survey can be found in Attachment 2.

A district has also been identified as a key opportunity under the 'Place' pillar in the implementation of the Council approved economic development strategy - Calgary in the New Economy. Under Place, the vision is that Calgary is Canada's most livable city. The newly created Place Committee, which has the mandate to implement the Place pillar and is chaired by CMLC, has identified a Downtown Convention District as one of its three priority actions. Discussions at the Place Committee have included ways to implement the Winter Strategy within the area, testing creative signage and wayfinding, delivering more programming to activate the area and to address safety concerns. These initiatives would not only enhance the experience of convention delegates but would equally support Calgarians, visitors, and other cultural institutions in the area. This work will be ongoing through 2019 and it is being fully integrated into the work on the updated Centre City Plan to ensure alignment and coordination of effort amongst key stakeholders. Administration and the CTCC are committed to continuing to work with the Place Committee and the Centre City Plan refresh project.

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To date, stakeholders have agreed that establishing a district refers to more than just the CTCC and any future boundary, the branding or strategy must also consider the variety of businesses, attractions, communities, and arts and cultural venues in the area as part of its stakeholder work. It should also be purposeful in considering how the area links to other destinations such as the riverfront pathway. The approach would leverage work previously undertaken in 2007 under the Olympic Plaza Cultural District and its implementation strategy, “Calgary Starts Here: Manifesto,” an initiative that had significant success in animating the area with activity and events but ended due to limited funding and the economic downturn. Since that time, Council also approved the Civic District Public Realm Strategy (2015) which identified many physical improvements and connectivity projects to help make the area more identifiable as a special and unique place within the downtown. This work can also inform the considerations of the Place Committee.

A District would include the Glenbow Museum and City-owned Arts Commons facility. The role of a District in supporting Arts Commons and how Arts Commons can support the growth and success of other partners in the area, including the CTCC, is being considered as part of this work. The integration with the Arts Commons project has been identified as a long-term opportunity and the CTCC, local hotels and businesses, as well as Arts Commons, are currently in negotiations to draft a memorandum of understanding that will outline how the different facilities interact with one another and their clients. The CTCC currently provides weekly event schedules to surrounding businesses so that they are aware of how to anticipate allocation of staffing resources and have provided anecdotal evidence that the CTCC’s conference and event activities help to sustain their small businesses, particularly through the winter months when fewer Calgarians frequent Stephen Avenue (see Attachment 2).

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

Administration developed this report in collaboration with CCCA and has met with CCCA on two occasions since 2019 January, specifically on this Notice of Motion (NoM). Through participation on the Place Committee, Administration has also engaged with other key stakeholders including Arts Commons, Calgary Downtown Association, and Calgary Economic Development. The list of potential groups to engage with has expanded to include CMLC, Tourism Calgary, Calgary Downtown Association, Calgary Stampede (BMO Centre), Calgary Public Library, Calgary Arts Development Authority, Aspen Properties, and TELUS Sky in addition to the following groups that were outlined specifically in the NoM:

- Calgary Marriott Downtown Hotel
- Hyatt Calgary Downtown
- The Fairmont Pallister Hotel
- Palliser Square
- Le Germain Calgary Hotel
- Glenbow Museum
- Arts Commons

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 (currently under development) 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,

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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)

Spending in the local community by delegates of the CTCC and by leisure travelers in the local community has a significant impact on Calgary's economy. Embedding a focus on improving the experience of convention delegates within existing efforts to improve the downtown core for all users, including patrons, visitors and Calgarians, will enhance collaboration among facilities in the area, including Civic Partners, hotels, and businesses. Creating an area that Calgarians can identify with will help to attract tourism and business to the downtown. Enhanced connections to and from the area will provide comfort to convention delegates, visitors and Calgarians who live and work in the area.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

None.

Current and Future Capital Budget:

None.

Risk Assessment

Supporting the CTCC, Arts Commons, Glenbow Museum, tourism, hotels and businesses in the downtown is a priority for The City. Establishing an identifiable District is an opportunity to enhance the area and leverage the proposed plans for Arts Commons, Olympic Plaza, Stephen Avenue public realm and other enhancement projects in the area.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

Convention delegates contribute significantly to the local economy, and The City has invested in the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre as part of its portfolio of economic development strategies. Establishing a District will support the services and offerings of the CTCC by improving the experience of CTCC delegates. 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 a District aligns with *Calgary in the New Economy: An Updated Economic Strategy for Calgary*, in particular the work of the Place Committee, Downtown Strategy, and Centre City Plan.

ATTACHMENT(S)

- Attachment 1 – 2019 Short, Medium, and Long Term Workplan Items
- Attachment 2 – Convention District Impact Study