

Is a New Arena a Good fit for Downtown Edmonton?

Capital City Downtown Plan - Information Addendum

1. Focus, Assumption, and Limitations

This report is an information addendum to the Capital City Downtown Plan (CCDP) approved by City Council in July 2010. It expands on the Plan's rationale for including the downtown Sports and Entertainment District, inclusive of a new arena, as a *Catalyst Project*.

The purpose of this report is to address the key questions of whether such a District is a good fit for downtown Edmonton and, if so, under what conditions.

This report has been developed to assist the City in addressing the policy contained in the CCDP to support the Station Lands Area as a potential location for the District and to ensure a positive impact for the public realm.

For the purpose of this report, the Sports & Entertainment District is defined as the 16 acres in downtown Edmonton consisting of the Sports & Entertainment Zone north of 104th Avenue plus the undeveloped block of CCA zoned land south of 104th Avenue.

This report is focused on the broad urban design and city-building implications of a downtown Sports and Entertainment District inclusive of a new arena. Financial considerations are generally reflected in other associated arena reports. As a result, this report largely deals with qualitative rather than quantitative measures and implications.

A key assumption of this report is that Rexall Place will need to be replaced or significantly modified in the near future.

Further to the original research and outcomes for the CCDP, this report also references the following documents:

- Sports Facility Development Projects – Current and Proposed in North America; prepared for the City of Edmonton (March 2007 Daniel S. Mason Ph.D);
- City of Edmonton Finance and Treasury Department report 2011FT4062;
- San Diego Padres: PETCO Park as a Catalyst for Urban Redevelopment, Stanford Graduate School of Business, Case SMP-37, 02/19/08.

“Support the Station Lands Area as a potential location for the development of a Sports and Entertainment District in the downtown. Work with the applicants to ensure the overall impact of a large facility is positive to the public realm.”
[CCDP]

“All arenas of comparable age to Rexall Place are currently being replaced, or in the planning stages of replacement or renovation.” **[Mason]**

“A new arena or substantially renovated Rexall Place will be required in the next 5-10 years.”
[Mason]

2. Alignment with Official Plans

The Capital City Downtown Plan builds upon predecessor plans such as *The Way Ahead* (2009 – 2018 Strategic Plan), *The Way We Grow* (Municipal Development Plan) and *The Way We Move* (Transportation Plan). These foundational documents also inform the Sports and Entertainment District. **In general there appears to be significant alignment between the goals of these official plans and the role of the Sports and Entertainment District as a catalyst for downtown development.** Key areas of alignment include:

- ***Improve the city's urban architecture and urban form*** to ensure it meets environmental standards and exemplifies excellence in urban, architectural, and landscape design.
- Preserve, celebrate and ***support Edmonton's heritage, arts, and culture.***
- ***Downtown as a primary focus*** for residential, commercial, and office intensification.
- ***Create a strong downtown*** characterized by high density, mixed-use, transit and pedestrian orientation and excellent urban design.
- Preserve and strengthen the role of the ***downtown as a major regional employment centre.***
- Enhance downtown livability by ***increasing amenities*** to support the emergence of a highly desirable urban community.
- Promote the retention and development of major cultural, educational, and ***recreational facilities in the Downtown.***
- ***Modal shift*** in the predominant form of transportation away from cars to public transit, bicycles, and walking.
- ***Integrated land-use planning and transportation planning.***
- A more ***accessible, efficient, and compact urban form.***
- ***Transit oriented*** development
- ***Walkability***
- ***Commercial redevelopment***
- Planning for ***Growth***
- ***Urban Design***
- ***Improve the livability of Edmonton's neighbourhoods*** and the lives of the people who live, work, and visit in them.

The Way Ahead, Strategic Plan (2009 – 2018)

The Way We Grow, Municipal Development Plan

The Way We Move, Transportation Master Plan, Bylaw #15101

Smart Choices (2004) related goals

Great Neighbourhoods related goals

- A **vibrant, connected, engaged, and welcoming** city.
- An **attractive** city.

The Way We Live related goals

From the perspective of the City's official plans, a Sports and Entertainment District, inclusive of a new arena, has the potential to be a good fit with Edmonton's downtown.

3. Central vs. Peripheral Location

In his report to City Council, Daniel Mason Ph.D, notes that the trend for new arena facilities is to locate them in downtown areas. He outlines three reasons for doing so:

1. Arena developments are often tied to broader redevelopment agendas seeking to rejuvenate blighted urban cores;
2. Downtown workers are a core market for sports teams and are easier to attract by locating an arena in the downtown;
3. Taxes generated from development of surrounding areas are often utilized to finance new arenas.

"The metropolitan Edmonton area is not large by NHL standards." [Mason]

On this last point regarding the synergy with surrounding development, Mason highlights the risk of a suburban arena competing with the downtown for spending and investment. Although he cites the Jobing.com Arena in Glendale, AZ, the example Edmontonians are more familiar with is West Edmonton Mall. Opening in 1981 as the world's largest mall, this development has been a mixed blessing for the City. While it has served as a major tourist draw for Edmonton it has also been a source of competition to the city's downtown, arguably hampering its growth for the past 30 years.

"While a development in suburban Glendale, AZ, has resulted in substantial development surrounding the arena there, an argument could be made that this simply draws spending away from downtown Phoenix." [Mason]

If Rexall Place is maintained as Edmonton's main professional sports arena it would appear that one of the following scenarios are likely:

- Investment is made in the redevelopment of Rexall Place but with restrictions on surrounding redevelopment that might compete with downtown;
- Investment is made in Rexall Place with no restriction on surrounding redevelopment and therefore another peripheral retail-commercial node is created that competes with downtown.

In the first scenario, limitations to surrounding development can arise from zoning restrictions or a lack of private investment (as has generally been the case in the

surrounding neighbourhoods over the past 37 years) due to the very modest opportunities in the area. In this scenario, visitors to Rexall Place will continue to spend little time and money in the surrounding area. Given the significant number of visitors to Rexall Place from outside Edmonton, this scenario represents a lost opportunity to leverage the full potential of visitors by failing to provide them with spending opportunities beyond the confines of a single event at the arena. The result of this scenario will be limited tax revenue and neighbourhood renewal compared to a more centralized urban location.

The second scenario, assumes that surrounding development would be stimulated by including adjacent neighbourhoods in the arena project, as was the case in some US cities. This enlarged development footprint would be required to create the tax and renewal opportunities that the neighbourhoods around Rexall place don't currently offer. It may also require a potentially greater investment by the City than what would be the case in a more centralized urban location. If this scenario could be realized, its scale would significantly hamper the City's goals for its downtown. It would drain away development investment from the downtown in the short-term and consumer spending in the long-term. The result would be another strong regional node competing with downtown that was disadvantaged by not benefiting from the investment generated by a Sports and Entertainment District.

Mason's second point regarding the synergy between a downtown arena and its primary target market has a key benefit that extends beyond financial considerations - the arena's ability to keep its customers in the downtown beyond the end of the work day. Edmonton's downtown struggles in the evening once the workforce departs. Therefore even if the additional revenue potential of a new arena district is discounted, simply keeping the major population group, and their existing level of spending, in the downtown in the evening offers significant benefits consistent with the City's Municipal Development Plan, The Way We Grow, including:

- Enhanced safety from more people and eyes on the streets;
- Better use of existing transportation infrastructure by shifting use off of peak times;
- Reduced green house gas emissions arising from a more compact and walkable urban form, where development is concentrated in the downtown in support of a larger downtown resident and workforce population.

The applicability of Mason's first point to Edmonton regarding the degree of significance of new arenas in the redevelopment of blighted city cores is relative to one's perception of the success of Edmonton's downtown in the past and its prospects for the future.

Edmonton's downtown has grown since the 1997 Downtown Plan. The 1997 Plan contained a number of complementary initiatives that were successful in helping to lift the downtown out of a long period of stagnation. These projects ranged from small scale (e.g. converting the one-way street system to two-way traffic, establishing a Downtown Community League, establishing a privately funded art program) to large scale (\$4.5 million in grant monies for the first 1,000 new housing units built). Most of the initiatives were spread across the various neighbourhoods of downtown as part of a balanced, strategic approach. Success resulted from a broad, community based effort where a large number of organizations became directly involved in the process.

From 1997 to 2009 the resident population doubled and real-estate value grew from \$2.2 Billion to over \$5 Billion. There have also been a number of high profile investments such as the new AGA building and major urban successes such as the redevelopment of 104 Street north of Jasper. While it appears that Edmonton's downtown may be turning a corner, it is not certain that the commercial, retail, residential, and institutional drivers of downtown growth have achieved the necessary critical mass to be self sustaining in the face of economic downturns and unrelenting suburban competition. As an example, the value of new construction in the downtown as a per cent of total construction in Edmonton's mature areas has remained relatively constant. The economic boom years of 2001 – 2006 provided the downtown with its greatest per cent of construction, peaking at 32.5% before falling to just 0.5% in 2009. Although this capture rate for the downtown began to rebound in 2010, it seems that the downtown is not yet a self sustaining engine in the face of economic downturns when compared to other parts of the City.

Over the past decade the majority of Edmonton's job growth, commercial space development, residential construction, and transportation investment have all been in its suburbs. By comparison to many of the cities Edmonton competes against, growth in its downtown has been lagging even with its recent successes. The area proposed for the Sports and Entertainment District in particular is characterized by large parking lots and low density development. Other nearby areas, such as the Warehouse Campus Neighbourhood and the Quarters are in similar condition.

The 2010 CCDP has taken a similar balanced, comprehensive approach to the 1997 Plan, while focussing special attention on Catalyst Projects.

"In the past 10 years the [lands that would comprise the Sports and Entertainment] district has generated less than \$25M in municipal tax." [City of Edmonton]

While these underdeveloped zones may not characterize desperate urban blight, they have been resistant to development for decades. Therefore they do not appear too dissimilar from areas as outlined in recent US case studies where arena projects proved to be significant catalysts for re-development:

- **Columbus, OH (Nationwide Arena):** a public sector driven economy with a population similar to Edmonton's (720,008 in 2006) whose downtown was in decline and under pressure from major suburban malls. Building of a new downtown mall across from the state's Capitol and large office buildings for state agencies, a hotel and meeting center had failed to improve development in downtown.
- **San Diego, CA (PETCO Park):** an aging warehouse district called East Village that adjoined both the convention centre and the city's historic core, consisting of surface parking lots, warehouses, and outdoor storage yards as well as artists' studios, galleries, and shops.
- **Brooklyn, NY (Barclays Center/Atlantic Yards Project):** a built-out but lower density area in Brooklyn that raised concerns among residents of surrounding communities that the project's scale was too large.

In all of these cases there was significant benefit arising to the city through increases in retail, office, and residential activity. There appears to be a similar opportunity to increase activity in Edmonton's underdeveloped adjacent neighbourhoods such as Warehouse Campus and Jasper Avenue, as well as in the Commercial Cultural Core.

"The downtown area featured vacant lots and buildings."
[Mason]

"Prior to the development of the Arena District, other nearby areas had already started to see new development." [Mason]

"Where Petco was built, the general area was not experiencing the kind of growth many areas of San Diego were. (Sen. Christine Kehoe, D-San Diego)" [Mason]

"Criticism of the project generally focussed on the scale of the project, which would include Brooklyn's tallest building." [Mason]

"Overall, the Downtown Columbus Development Corporation reported that in the five years since the opening of Nationwide Arena, downtown Columbus had witnessed nearly \$2 billion in new private/public investment and the construction of over 3,500 new housing units (DCDC, 2005, p. 2). In addition, the various amenities provided by the Arena District draws 2.7 million per year, with the 95-acre site 75 percent completed. The District employs 3,600 people in 40 different businesses, including financial and legal firms, restaurants, government offices, and creative companies (Nutt, 2005, p. 8)." [Mason]

From the point of view of locating a Sports and Entertainment District inclusive of a new or renovated arena in a downtown vs. suburban location, it appears that the downtown location has the potential to be a better fit for the City and its downtown. It enables the City to capitalize on development opportunities arising from a new arena, minimize competitive risks to the downtown, and align its investment with the City's goals for a strong vibrant downtown.

"It is strongly recommended that new arena development in Edmonton occur in its downtown." [Mason]

4. Location Within Downtown

Downtown Edmonton is officially defined by a downtown ARP Boundary encompassing 160 Ha (395 acres) and five neighbourhoods (Commercial Cultural Core, Jasper Avenue, Warehouse Campus, McKay Avenue, and Capital City). Based upon the earlier case studies, there are a number of locations in addition to the currently identified and zoned site that could potentially house a Sports and Entertainment District. Some of these, such as the Warehouse Campus District, are located within the downtown; some such as Central McDougall, the Quarters, Boyle Street, or Rosssdale are outside the downtown but adjacent to it.

A key difference between the case studies and Edmonton's site for its Sports and Entertainment District is size:

- Edmonton Sports & Entertainment District: 16 acres (approximately 4 square blocks) consisting of the Sports & Entertainment Zone north of 104th Avenue plus the undeveloped block of CCA zoned land south of 104th Avenue.
- Columbus Arena District: 95 acres
- Glendale Westgate District: 60 acre Jobing.com Arena project as part of 223 acre Westgate Development
- San Diego PETCO Park District: 26 square blocks
- Brooklyn Atlantic Yards District: 21 acres

The implication of the proposed/zoned location for the Sports and Entertainment District in Edmonton is that the wider downtown will, or must, play a key role in facilitating re-development opportunities that spin off from the arena investment if the full value (and tax revenue benefits) of the investment are to be realized. By comparison, the Glendale Westgate development is more than half the area of Edmonton's entire downtown; Columbus' is approximately a quarter, and; San Diego's is about a third – enormous by comparison to Edmonton's downtown.

Case Study statistics [Mason]

"By 2007 PETCO Park had become the cornerstone of massive redevelopment in the previously neglected East Village of downtown San Diego. While the ballpark, including land and infrastructure, had cost a total of \$474 million, about \$4.25 billion had been spent, or committed to the larger redevelopment project - \$4

If the US case studies represent the scale of redevelopment that can be leveraged with a new sports arena, and conversely represent the scale of lift required to finance an arena through tax revenue increases, then the implications for Edmonton are clear. Either the benefits to Edmonton's downtown must accrue to a much greater area than just the 16 acres currently identified as the Sports and Entertainment District, or a site with a much larger development footprint, an opportunity, should be found.

If the opportunities arising from the current site are allowed and encouraged to flow across a wide area of Edmonton's downtown, then the advantages of the current site for the Sports and Entertainment District are significant:

- **Existing public transportation infrastructure:** Significant LRT capacity exists or is planned within easy walking distance of the proposed District and its arena. With the exception of the proposed 105th Street station on the NAIT line, which will be adjacent to the new arena, most will be two or three blocks away via the existing underground stations at Churchill, Central, or Bay or the proposed surface LRT line along 102nd Avenue, two blocks south of the arena. Other potential districts such as Rosedale, the Quarters, and Boyle Street would require significant public infrastructure investment to achieve this level of LRT access.
- **Existing parking infrastructure:** There are approximately 13,000 parking stalls within a 10 minute walking distance (800 metres) of the centre of the Sports and Entertainment District with 9350 of these in parking structures and therefore likely to remain in large measure following the development of a new downtown arena. Many of these are in structures that have been built as part of commercial, retail, and institutional projects and are therefore available for use by patrons in evening hours when not filled by day-time workers and shoppers. Constructing an arena in areas such as the Quarters, Rosedale, or the Warehouse Campus neighbourhood that lack easy access to this existing structured parking resource would require a significant investment in purpose-built/single-use parking as there are few complimentary uses in these areas that could make good use of the resource in alternate times.

billion of which was private money. “ [Stanford Graduate School of Business]

“Three trolley stations were located two or three blocks from the ballpark so that fans would have to make a short walk to the ballpark, providing exposure and opportunities for local businesses. This encouraged them to come early and visit restaurants and bars in the Gaslamp District, or in a redeveloped East Village.” Stanford Graduate School of Business]

“The new venue [Jobing.com Arena in suburban Glendale, AZ] would sit on 15.1 acres of a 60 acre footprint including 40 acres of asphalt parking lots (Wendel, 2003, p. 21).” [Mason]

- **Existing pedestrian connective infrastructure:**
The proposed Sports and Entertainment District is at the edge of the connective infrastructure of the downtown. This infrastructure consists of streets, sidewalks, overhead pedways, and underground tunnels. These are critical infrastructure as they serve to connect the District into adjacent areas thereby enabling the development/tax revenue opportunities of the arena investment to be leveraged across a far greater area than the 16 acres of the Sports and Entertainment District. This connective infrastructure does not readily exist in other areas in, or surrounding, the downtown.

When taken together, these advantages highlight the significant synergy required, and possible, between the proposed 16 acre Sports and Entertainment District and the remaining 379 acres of downtown Edmonton. Essentially the entire downtown, or at least a major portion of it, becomes the effective development zone with the arena as its catalyst. The key benefits of this approach are:

- existing infrastructure is leveraged,
- a major portion of the downtown, if not all of it, has the potential to utilize the arena as a catalyst,
- investment costs should be lower than in a stand-alone development.

If downtown Edmonton was under significant development pressure then an argument could be made for effectively enlarging the downtown by moving the Sports and Entertainment District to an adjacent area as a recipient for pent up development that the downtown could not otherwise accommodate. This is clearly not the case in Edmonton where employment growth in the downtown has been relatively flat for years and projected residential, commercial, and office space growth is modest without the intervention of the catalyst projects projected in the CCDP. An approach of consolidating investment to create a critical mass in its downtown would appear to be the best fit with Edmonton's current circumstances, future projections, and civic goals.

Edmonton's site has great potential for a very well integrated project because of its relatively small size and the synergies resulting from its proximity to the heart of the downtown. It will also benefit from concurrent improvement projects being implemented in adjacent areas through the CCDP's upcoming Downtown Action Program. It seems the potential for a truly well integrated project is greater than in any of the abovementioned U.S. case studies.

“As explained by Michael Kalt, senior policy director for the New York City Deputy Mayor’s Office for Economic Development and Rebuilding, “You have to find the way to justify any public cost put into these things. And, frankly, the stadiums on their own aren’t as attractive as when you can actually do something more with them” (Fargo, 2005, p. 99).”
[Mason]

“Clearly, the Arena District has been an important component of a broader resurgence of the city of Columbus’ downtown core. However, it is the overall development that is the key to the city’s success, and the fact that Nationwide Arena was only one part of the Arena District development.” [Mason]

From the perspective of the location of the Sports and Entertainment District within the downtown, its proposed location on the Station Lands (Sub Area 3b) and on part of the Commercial Core (Sub Area 1) north of 103 Avenue and west of 102 Street, has the potential to be a good fit with the downtown. From the perspective of its implications, they are profound in terms of the design of the development and its integration into the rest of downtown.

5. Sports and Entertainment District Catalyst

A key strategy of the Capital City Downtown Plan is the use of **Catalyst Projects** to stimulate transformation of the downtown over the next 10 years. These projects are intended to focus investment where it will do the most good in supporting private investment and enhancing the vibrancy and economic wellbeing of the downtown.

Over a 35 year period (2009 – 2044), the benefits arising from the Catalyst Projects proposed in the CCDP are estimated to be in excess of a base-line projection (without Catalyst Projects) by the following:

- 7.6 million more square feet of development (consisting of 12,200 additional residential units, 2.35 million more square feet of commercial retail and 2.25 million more square feet of office).
- \$206.4 M more property tax revenue.

Catalyst Projects were proposed on the basis of their ability to achieve one or more of the following:

- More people living, working, and playing downtown – attracting more people to move and stay downtown in order to make it a more attractive place to work, shop, and learn.
- Enhancing downtown neighbourhoods – leveraging strengths of individual neighbourhoods.
- Strengthening the linkages downtown – linking the neighbourhoods of downtown to each other and to adjacent neighbourhoods and the rest of the City; capitalize on opportunities to improve pedestrian, bicycle, and LRT connections.

The CCDP proposed nine City-led projects and four concurrent ones, including the Sports and Entertainment District. Concurrent projects were defined as those that were either underway (like Capital Boulevard) or were to be led by organizations other than the City, such as private

“Past experience with the Downtown Housing Reinvestment Program, initiated through the previous Capital City Downtown Plan, demonstrated that \$11 of private investment was generated for every \$1 of public investment in the downtown. This gives us confidence that these Catalyst Projects will result in a favourable return on investment for the City.” [CCDP]

City Led Catalyst Projects:

- **Housing Incentive - Campus Warehouse**
- **Central Park – Campus Warehouse**
- **Main Street Revitalization - Jasper Avenue Vision**
- **River Valley Promenades**
- **Downtown LRT**
- **Integrated Bikeway**
- **Central Gathering Place - McKay Avenue**
- **Green Building Strategy**
- **Enhanced Public Realm**

Concurrent Catalysts:

- **Capital Boulevard Upgrade**
- **Legislature Grounds Redevelopment**
- **Downtown Universities and**

interests, educational institutions, or the Alberta Government.

Whether led by the City or not, all Catalyst Projects have the potential to significantly impact in the downtown. However they are intended to be integrated in approach so they draw people downtown in a manner that is supportive of the downtown's five neighbourhoods as well as the City's goals for pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit transportation modes. The Sports and Entertainment District has the opportunity to contribute on all fronts if properly designed. An expanded approach wherein a broader area than just the 16 acre District is considered has the opportunity to incorporate multiple catalysts.

From the perspective of Catalyst Projects, the Sports and Entertainment District, inclusive of a new arena, has the potential to be a good fit with the downtown if properly designed and integrated.

6. Alignment with Capital City Downtown Plan Policies

The Capital City Downtown Plan contains 182 area-wide policies to guide development and investment across the downtown. Eleven of these directly support the development of a Sports and Entertainment District in the downtown:

- **4.1 High Priority to Downtown Improvements:** Place a high priority on the funding and implementation of the CCDP commensurate with the downtown's role as the City's key economic driver.
- **4.2 Targeted Reinvestment in the Downtown:** Support strategic public and private investment in the downtown to enhance the quality of the downtown environment and further strengthen the downtown tax base.
- **4.3 Office and Retail Growth in the Downtown:** Strengthen the role of the downtown as the premier employment centre in the Capital Region.
- **4.4 Employment Growth Areas:** Support employment growth in the Commercial-Cultural Core.
- **4.5 Downtown as a High Quality Tourist Destination:** Strengthen the unique advantages of the downtown and central river valley as a tourist destination through the development of new and

- **Colleges**
- **Sports and Entertainment District**

upgraded tourism services and facilities.

- **5.3 Social Interaction throughout the Downtown:** Support the development of public spaces located throughout the downtown.
- **5.11 Special Events and Attractions:** Actively encourage a variety of events and activities to increase the vibrancy of downtown.
- **7.1 Employment Growth Target:** Support employment growth in the core through initiatives designed to make downtown the most attractive destination for business.
- **7.3 Retail Growth Strategy for the Downtown:** Encourage all types of retail to locate throughout downtown.
- **8.10 Edmonton's Premier Arts, Culture, Sports, and Entertainment Centre:** Enhance the downtown's role as the major entertainment centre in Edmonton.
- **17.2 Transit Supportive Land Uses:** Encourage and support development that will support transit use and discourage reliance on the automobile for trips to/from the downtown.

Thirty-nine of these area-wide policies have a direct impact on the design of the arena and Sports and Entertainment District. These policies cover a wide range of design aspects, which taken together have the potential to shape the design of the development for the benefit of the CCDP goals and the City's aspirations for its downtown.

These policies encourage expansion of the City's urban forest, development of high quality streets and parks, activation of block faces and use of finer grain development, appropriate transitions between dissimilar scaled developments, minimization of blank walls, consolidation of the pedway system, and integration with public transit.

In addition to these area-wide policies, the CCDP also contains neighbourhood-specific policies. For the Sports and Entertainment District nine planning and urban design principles are provided addressing the following key areas:

1. **Design:** Create outstanding design.
2. **Open Space:** Provide a significant public open space.
3. **Pedestrian Routes:** Maximize pedestrian activity on the streets.
4. **Design for Edmonton's Climate:** Address winter challenges.
5. **Parking and Loading:** Locate majority of parking underground.
6. **Retail and Restaurants:** Street addressed and focused along 102 and 103 streets
7. **Major Streets:** Support the Public Realm Plan
8. **Streetscape:** Design permeable and human scaled street walls.
9. **Sustainable Design:** Achieve a high standard of sustainability.

From the perspective of alignment with CCDP policies, the Sports and Entertainment District, inclusive of a new arena, has the potential to be a good fit with the downtown under the conditions outlined in the policies.

7. Benefits and Challenges for Downtown

A new Sports and Entertainment District, inclusive of a new arena, will present many benefits and challenges to the downtown. Its key benefits are generally consistent with its role as a Catalyst Project, consistent with CCDP policies and official plans, and include the following:

- **Increase downtown vibrancy:** Up to 20,000 people, including arena/District patrons and staff, will come to, or remain in, Edmonton's downtown almost every second day that previously would not have due to Rexall Place's location. This increased vibrancy in the downtown would be especially evident during evenings and weekends when the downtown is comparatively vacant;
- **Increased downtown safety:** More people in evening hours means that, if appropriately

“Support the development of a Sports and Entertainment District in the downtown located on lands within the Station Lands Area (Sub Area 3b), and on part of the Commercial Core (Sub Area 1) north of 103 Avenue and west of 102 Street. Work with applicants to ensure the overall impact of a large facility on the public realm is positive. Apply the following planning and urban design principles in the review and approval process for proposed development within the Sports and Entertainment District:” [CCDP]

“A new Edmonton facility should have a capacity of 18,500 to 19,000.” [Mason]

“A new, multipurpose venue should expect to host 150-160 events per season, including Oilers games, based on existing use by Rexall Place.” [Mason]

designed, there will be more eyes on the street to help create a safer public realm;

- **Increased employment and revenue:** Downtown employment and tax revenue will increase;
- **Enhanced stature:** Downtown's stature as Edmonton's premiere arts and entertainment venue will be strengthened – a major draw for visitors;
- **Infill:** A key location near the centre of downtown that has remained vacant for decades will be infilled;
- **Spill over:** Adjacent areas of the downtown that are in need of development, such as the Campus Warehouse neighbourhood, have the opportunity to capitalize on the spill over (Catalyst) effect of the District;
- **Increased LRT patronage:** Ridership will be supported as the District is at the cross roads of existing and proposed LRT lines;
- **Reduced GHG emissions:** Greenhouse gas emissions should decrease due to downtown patrons walking to events, transit availability, as well as with the opportunity to replace a dated facility with a state-of-the-art, high-performance, LEED certified building.
- **Downtown-wide catalyst:** The catalytic effect on the entire downtown, if properly designed and integrated, should be profound given the relatively small area of the Sports and Entertainment District compared to the significant size and impact of a new arena.

The challenges to the downtown resulting from a new Sports and Entertainment District, inclusive of a new arena, have the potential to be equally impactful. Many of these challenges are anticipated in the CCDP with policy positions proposed. Some of the key challenges include:

- **Blank walls:** Arenas are inherently inward focused which can make their exteriors uninviting, impenetrable, and devoid of activity. Careful attention is required to the planning of the facilities and their urban interface to avoid detriment to the public realm.

***“In planning the Ballpark District, the Padres’ advisors felt that people should be encouraged to be on the streets. Increasing the number of people on the streets would enhance the economy of the area.”
[Stanford Graduate School of Business]***

- **Pedway expansion:** An expansion of the pedway system to the Sports and Entertainment District and its arena presents the risk of drawing pedestrians off the streets with the result that the hoped for vibrancy on the streets may not materialize. Due to the presence of the pedway network adjacent to the district, and its ability to provide convenient climate controlled connections to LRT, parking, and offices, it is reasonable to explore connecting the District to it. However, should this connection be made, care must be taken in its design to balance the benefits of pedways with their potential impact on street-level activity so that the City's goals for a vibrant public realm are realized.
- **Winter:** Edmonton needs to find a way to embrace its winter climate in a highly urban environment that enhances rather than detracts from the public realm at the street. Many Northern European cities have successfully addressed this challenge without resort to strategies that avoid interaction with the climate.
- **Inward focus:** A critical challenge is to avoid creating an overly inward-focused District where patrons spend their time at internalized sports venues, retail establishments, and gathering spaces that they access via pedways removed from any interaction with the downtown's streets and adjacent neighbourhoods.

On balance, the potential benefits of the Sports and Entertainment District and its arena arise largely from its location whereas its potential challenges are generally linked to its design. However design challenges are a much finer grain of issue than are location challenges. **Therefore it appears that the appropriate strategy is to secure the benefits of the District through a downtown location while addressing its design challenges through strategies involving the design and consultation process as well as design team make-up.** With this approach, the District, inclusive of a new arena, has the potential to be a good fit with the downtown.

8. Considerations for a Successful Sports and Entertainment District

Within the focus, assumptions, and limitations outlined at the beginning of this report, the following are proposed as considerations to support the success of the Sports and Entertainment District and its arena. These considerations are intended to be complimentary to the design principles and policies outlined in the CCDP:

- **Intense Integration:** The District and its arena should be integrated into the entire downtown to the greatest extent possible. The District should be planned as the hub of a development area that does not stop at the borders of the District but instead extends westward into the Campus Warehouse Neighbourhood and along 104th Avenue into Oliver, down 104th Street to Jasper Avenue, eastward into the heart of the Commercial Cultural Core and beyond to the Boyle Street Neighbourhood, and northward into the 'North Edge' district of Central McDougall.
- **External Focus First:** The District and its arena should, to the greatest extent possible, focus outward and engage the public realm as its primary orientation and key functional relationship. The success of the District should be defined by, and conditional upon, the success of the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- **People on the Streets:** As part of its external focus, the District and its arena should be designed to focus on the surrounding streets and maximize pedestrian activity on them. If Edmonton seeks to have vibrant streets then it must use the opportunity afforded by over one million visitors into the downtown.
- **Winter Ready:** The District and its arena should embrace the challenge of creating a positive public realm in a winter urban environment without turning its back on either the environment or the public realm through internalized solutions such as extending the retail mall typology already prevalent in large parts of Edmonton's downtown. Many positive precedents exist in Northern European cities, in some North American cities (e.g., Rockefeller Centre in NYC), and in Edmonton's past.
- **Multiple Catalysts:** As noted earlier, the potential positive impacts of the Sports and Entertainment District are dependent upon a number of other Catalyst projects proposed in the CCDP. The intent of these Catalysts is that they form an integrated whole employing proactive investment in the downtown to stimulate development.

Key catalysts to which the success of the Sports and Entertainment District is linked, and to which the District could contribute with its design, include:

“We began the journey as a baseball team in need of a new facility. Along the way we become the planning and implementation team for a new ballpark and a new neighbourhood – a massive redevelopment project. The tireless efforts of the public and private partners rendered a beautiful ballpark surrounded by tremendous new development that has more than paid for the public’s investment. Without question, this public-private partnership was the catalyst that drew billions of private investment dollars and transformed a blighted area of downtown into a thriving community (Chairman John Moores).” [Stanford Graduate School of Business]

- Central Warehouse Area Housing Incentive Program
- Warehouse Campus Neighbourhood Central Park
- Jasper Avenue New Vision
- Integration of at-grade LRT
- High Profile Bikeway System
- Green Building and Development Strategy
- Green and Walkable downtown
- Expansion of downtown Universities and Colleges

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DIALOG [Cohos Evamy + HBBH + Office for Urbanism + Mole White] was the prime consultant of the Livable City Design consortium that assisted the City with the preparation of the Capital City Downtown Plan.