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Downtown Arena Entertainment District

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Background

The new proposal for a major world class arena and entertainment district which would renew and revitalize Edmonton's downtown core has created a great deal of excitement and although many questions have been raised about how the development will proceed there is no doubt that the initiative is aligned with the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce mandate of creating the best environment for business in Edmonton.

Chamber support for the proposal is based on strategic priorities of the Chamber and on positions that the Chamber has taken in the past on related issues.

Strategic Priorities

The Chamber's strategic priority of a Great Northern City with a vibrant downtown would be well served by the opportunities created by a new downtown entertainment district. It is also in keeping with enhancing Edmonton's status as a northern business and social center in our Northern Relations strategy.

Professional sports complexes are gathering places for large groups of people. They generate their own cultures in the surrounding area. With thoughtful planning and creative thinking they can become a catalyst for even more positive change and development. With the potential development of a new downtown arena, Edmonton has an opportunity to build a vibrant downtown community anchored by the arena district, with a growing residential community to the west of downtown, City Hall and the Arts Venues at the Center and the Legislature to the south. The commercial and investment potential that would be centered on the arena (residences, restaurants, shops, galleries, mini-parks and markets) is very significant.

The new arena is proposed as an exciting new home for our much loved Edmonton Oilers. However, Edmonton is also a major centre for national and international touring companies – the contemporary and popular music that entertains and inspires both young and old. Edmontonians have proven to music producers that Edmonton is a viable stop for major concert tours- a new arena will only help to grow that image. Indoor/outdoor markets, hotels, casinos, restaurants, conference facilities, homes, parks, shopping – all of these things are possible components of a revitalized economic corridor that links the downtown and the surrounding residential areas.

Downtown Plan

The Chamber has been an active participant over the years in creating and updating the current downtown plan. Although insertion of a major arena/entertainment district into the downtown area would certainly require a significant revision to the Downtown Plan it is also a great opportunity to enhance and upscale the vision for the core of the City that was presented by the Mayor in June of last year. That 30 year vision combined with the new arena district proposal can provide the foundation for a world class revitalization of the Downtown Plan.

Transportation

The Chamber has long voiced a concern about the need for better and more attractive access to Edmonton's downtown - particularly from the south. The arena/entertainment district proposal and the 30 year vision for downtown could provide the impetus for real progress in this area.

Finance

Although the arena/entertainment district proposal is a welcomed private initiative, the Chamber of Commerce is not adverse to some tax dollars being used to support it in the same way tax dollars support other significant developments that benefit all citizens and help to create pride in Edmonton and Alberta as world class places to live, work and play. By incorporating and linking sports, entertainment and fine arts facilities into the urban landscape along with retail, residential, hotel and conference facilities, Edmonton can be a Provincial Capital that is a "go-to" place for entertainment, shopping, eating, and living.

Conclusion

There are many aspects of the proposed new arena/entertainment district that deserve enthusiastic support of the business community and the citizens of Edmonton. This is an exciting proposal with potential for numerous positive spin-offs on a long-term basis. It certainly has the potential to set the tone for all future developments in Edmonton and would go a long way toward making Edmonton's downtown core one of the best environments for business.

Recommendation:

- That the business community, the City of Edmonton, the Province of Alberta and the citizens of Edmonton champion the development of a new arena/entertainment district in Edmonton's downtown core.

September 29, 2009