

Winter City Strategy Update

ISSUE

This report provides an update on local public engagement held as part of the International Winter Cities Shake-Up Conference (Shake-Up) and the next steps for the development of the Winter City Strategy (Strategy).

BACKGROUND

The Strategy is an intentional effort by the City of Saskatoon (City) and community stakeholders to celebrate what makes Saskatoon unique, a four-season place that is inviting, vibrant and prosperous, even in the coldest months of the year. Several initiatives have been undertaken to move the preparation of a Strategy forward including:

- community dialogue about the art of the possible;
- a communications strategy focused on building awareness; and,
- a number of “Quick Wins” including the community-led activities supported through the Winter City Community Grant program.

At its meeting held on December 17, 2018, City Council received the Winter Cities Shake-Up Conference Engagement Update report, which provided information about the local public engagement opportunities planned as part of Shake-Up.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Shake Up Engagement

From January 23 to 26, 2019, Shake-Up was hosted in Saskatoon. Shake-Up was pursued by the community as an opportunity to accelerate the development of the Strategy and provide valuable learnings for its content by bringing international expertise into the local engagement efforts.

Shake-Up welcomed a total of 234 registrants. Effort was made to include a broad representation from across various sectors of the community and relevant civic staff. To support this, the Administration provided passes to 131 representatives from organizations and civic divisions who have participated in previous Winter City engagement activities, as well as those who have not yet been engaged.

The public and conference delegates were invited to participate in a number of different activities to provide their input into the development of the Strategy. Engagement activities included:

- the Winter City Café, which was located at the conference venue; and
- a pop-up engagement event in the Nutrien Wintershines Igloo on January 26, 2019.

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The key focus of these engagement events was to build relationships and connections, and create a larger interest base for the next phase the Strategy by:

- building awareness and excitement about the Strategy;
- informing the development of the Strategy; and,
- facilitating interaction and idea-sharing between conference delegates and local stakeholders.

More information about the engagement activities and engagement results can be found in Appendix 1: What We Heard Report January 2019 Shake-Up Engagement.

Next Steps in Strategy Development

The Strategy is intended to create a common vision and a shared understanding of opportunities for winter in Saskatoon. Based on current resource availability, it is anticipated that the Strategy will be completed in the next twelve months. Strategy development will consider feedback from all engagement activities as well as explore what other municipalities have done in developing their winter city strategies. The Strategy will develop a list of winter focused actions, including consideration of future funding needs and timelines for implementation.

Preliminary themes for the development of the Strategy have been identified and will be clarified as the project progresses. The themes identified to date are:

- public spaces and facilities that are designed for winter comfort, safety and activity;
- recreational activities that are attractive in the winter and make it easier to play and be active outdoors and indoors;
- social and cultural events and festivals that spark interest and build community spirit in winter;
- winter infrastructure and programs for moving around the city; and
- streets and public places that encourage economic and social activity in winter.

2019-2020 Winter City Initiatives

A number of Winter City initiatives have been identified for the 2019-2020 winter season. These include:

- installation of ice sculptures in the Business Improvement Districts;
- support for the City's decorative lighting program;
- a communications plan to support local events and activities; and
- the Winter City grant program which will provide local organizations and businesses up to \$5,000 (to a total of \$25,000) for initiatives that support the goals of Saskatoon's Winter City project.

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NEXT STEPS

The Administration will report back to the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services in late 2019 to provide a preliminary strategy.

APPENDICES

1. What We Heard: January 2019 Shake-Up Engagement

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SP/2019/PL/PDC – Winter City Strategy Update/pg



WinterCityYXE

What We Heard
January 2019



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1 Engagement Strategy

Our engagement approach aimed to take advantage of the energy and momentum surrounding the Winter Cities Shake-Up conference (Shake-Up) and the many other winter activities and events kicking off in January.

1.1 Engagement Objectives

- Build excitement and momentum about Saskatoon as a winter city – a community with a sense of possibility, inspiration, and connectedness.
- Expand participation base for future engagement on the Winter City Strategy (Strategy) and build upon the current stakeholder list.
- Explore ideas about how to change culture and mindsets about winter, and key shifts that could help this journey.
- Capture ideas and learning from conference delegates, both local and national/global, to further develop the Strategy and inform future engagement (e.g. topics include public space design, winter mindsets, darkness, economy).
- For local participants at conference, build awareness and interest in Strategy and desire to participate in future activities.

2 Engagement Execution

2.1 Winter City Café

A multi-faceted space at Shake-Up that drew participation from both conference delegates and the wider community. The Café was co-located at the Shake-Up venue on January 25 and 26, 2019. Activities at the Café were:

- Boards – Participants were invited to provide their thoughts on various related themes using post-it notes. Participants were asked “*Think about your life in the Saskatoon winter, tell us about your experience with each of the topics below. What has worked well, and where do you see opportunities?*” in 5 theme areas.
- Visioning – Participants were invited to describe their vision for the Saskatoon community.
- Conference Delegate Reflection – Conference delegates were invited to reflect on their learnings from the conference.
- Build It – Participants were invited to build, draw, or mould a winter scene that reflects their vision for winter culture in Saskatoon.
- Mad libs – Participants were invited to ‘fill in the blank’.
- Conversation tables – Participants were invited to join other participants at tables to discuss winter in Saskatoon. Tables had conversation-starter cards.
- A projector was also at the venue providing background on WintercityYXE as well as scrolling through videos of Saskatoon specific winter city experiences.

2.2 Pop-Up at Nutrien Wintershines Igloo

An opportunity for information-sharing and engagement with residents at a popular winter event. The pop-up was located in the Nutrien Wintershines Igloo on January 26, 2019 from 1pm to 4pm. Free hot chocolate was provided by WintercityYXE. Participants were invited to participate in a game of Plinko and answer some WintercityYXE related questions. Participants were asked *“Think about your life in the Saskatoon winter, tell us about your experience with each of the topics below. What has worked well, and where do you see opportunities?”* in 5 theme areas.



3 What We Heard

3.1 Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement

340 comments were received. Note that individuals may have contributed multiple comments, and may have addressed more than one topic or theme area within their comment.

This section incorporates data collected both at the Pop-Up and the Café, gathered from the following sources:

- Responses captured on post-it notes to the question: “Think about your life in the Saskatoon winter, tell us about your experience with each of the topics below. What has worked well, and where do you see opportunities?”;
- Written comment cards gathered from Conversation Café; and
- Mad Libs responses.

Responses have been divided into 5 theme areas:

- Public Spaces and Facilities;
- Recreational Activities;
- Social and Cultural Events and Festivals;
- Winter Infrastructure and Programs; and
- Streets and Public Places.

3.2 Themes

3.2.1 Public Spaces and Facilities

Designed for winter comfort, safety, and activity

Key strengths identified were the City’s various outdoor skating and sledding facilities, parks and Meewasin Valley, as well as indoor leisure centres for swimming and workouts.



Participants identified many opportunities:

Theme	Comment Count	Key Elements
Lighting & Fire	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More soft variable lighting, less “blow your eyes out” advertising signs • Fire pits and barrels, encourage fire pit/barrel animation and activities • More lights throughout winter across City, creative lighting in parks, bridge lighting • Hold a Light Festival in February – “Candelmas”
Shelters	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heated shelters or warm up spaces, including bus stops • Wind mediation, wind blocks and screens, improved building design guidelines to minimize impacts • Adding more bus shelters, and sheltered systems (covered sidewalks for example)
Age, Ability & Pedestrian Friendly	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design spaces and buildings to be more accommodating, more walkable and bikeable (bike parking, access), add seating along pathways • Pedestrian friendly streetscaping beyond just core streets • Raise street crossings to same level as sidewalk • Keep ramps free of packed ice and snow, add railings, reduce or remove steps • Keep bus stops accessible
Other	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make public areas fun, with accessible viewing areas and food at skating rinks, etc. • Involve developers in promoting areas for outdoor use • Ban the use of salt – destroys sidewalks and trees • Decorate the city in winter, make it an environment to look forward to. Promote warm and functional fashion • Create bike pump tracks built of snow
Outdoor Spaces	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve skating facilities, including oval, extended rink from existing Meewasin rink, skating pathway along river • Create or expand multi-use areas e.g. tracks (rinks, ovals), ponds (water retention and skating, water sports) • Improve plantings and landscapes with more winter vegetation • More cross-country ski trails; open a simple coffee shop at Holiday Park for skiers to enjoy on weekends
Washrooms and Garbage	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heated public washrooms and wash-up spots/soap dispensaries (like Vancouver); accessible bathrooms • More garbage cans on trails (and empty them regularly)
Art	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add ice sculptures every two weeks in public areas • Public art policy and program with winter friendly art, and artist recognition

3.2.2 Recreational Activities

That are attractive in the winter and make it easier to play and be active outdoors and indoors.

Many key strengths were identified, including: skating rinks, hockey, sledding, cross-country skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, making igloos, snowmen, and forts, winter cycling, winter recreational events, and other activities like curling, ringette and crokicurl.

Participants identified many opportunities:

Theme	Comment Count	Key Elements
Skating and Hockey	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More outdoor skating and hockey rinks; skating path like Winnipeg/Edmonton Skating shacks with real wood stoves
Attractions	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ice maze, snow slides, ice sculptures, ice playground Sleigh rides Build your own snow park – provide equipment (shovels, wheelbarrows) – to build forts, obstacles courses, etc. Outdoor Finnish Sauna
Sledding	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More sledding parks, areas, hills
Skiing, snowboarding, and snowshoeing	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More snowboarding hills and opportunities Ability to rent cross-country ski equipment at golf courses; trails with warm-up shacks; more affordable Kid-friendly bike and ski park Promote alтай skiing (backcountry versatile skis)
Other Recreational Activities (igloos, other sports, indoor)	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Snow fort building and snowball fights More of other activities including kicksledding, snow skates, geocaching More indoor parks, open play and activities for kids Activities for all ages
Recreation Events	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community ice sculpture tour or competition Trapper king/queen competitions with log-sawing, etc. Weenie roasts Annual snow fort design competition and snowball fight Events at neighbourhood toboggan hills Star and northern lights viewing events Free equipment rental days to try out new activities without barriers
Biking	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities to try out fat biking for cost/reduced rate More biking Winter Cycle to Work Day Bike park for kids

3.2.3 Social and Cultural Events & Festivals

That spark interest and build community spirit

Key strengths identified were winter events and festivals; Nutrien Wintershines was most frequently mentioned.

Participants identified many opportunities:

Theme	Comment Count	Key Elements
Festivals and Events	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding existing festivals like Winterruption and Wintershines, providing consistent funding Ideas for new festivals/events including: cocktails/food celebration, First Night (art, magic, light), Candelmas, clothing swap, "Parka and Patio" days, Venison festival with Wildlife Federation, First Nations festivals, skating disco party, sculpture festival, Winter Fashion and/or Art/Photography show Consider accessibility in event design (e.g. table heights), events that attract all ages including teens Front yards contest like in Edmonton, incentives to beautify yards with lighting and creativity Events to promote sports and recreation like skiing, geocaching, snowshoeing, snowball fights, toboggan days at Optimist Park with contests, hot chocolate
Music and Art	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand winter concert series, bring outdoor shows to Usask, more funding and support for Winterruption activities Light installations with art and dance; outdoor music Hire local talent to play on transit buses More permanent public art, temporary snow sculptures
Fire & Lights	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add more lights and lighting installations Fire pits in parks; roasting marshmallows and telling stories, fire barrel pop-up community Give winter candles to residents to experience ambience
Winter Patios and Gathering Spaces	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fight hibernation and social isolation, support people getting together indoors and outdoors Winter Patios, "outdoor living rooms" Indoor games and activities
Other	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More volunteer involvement, credit for students

3.2.4 Winter Infrastructure & Programs

For moving around the City (e.g. pedestrians, cyclists, transit, vehicles)

Only a few key strengths were identified, which included improved snow removal and street cleaning, the Meewasin skating rink, neighbourhood toboggan hills, free bus on New Years Eve, and crokicurl.

Participants identified many opportunities:

Values	Comment Count	Key Elements
Active Accessible Transportation	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design for and allow all modes of transportation More walking; add and repair sidewalks, wheelchair and stroller accessible sidewalks, de-icing

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protected bike lanes and promotion of winter cycling infrastructure, add art and landscaping along bike lanes, cyclist warm up spots Improve visibility for intersections between bike trails and roads (e.g. along Meewasin Trail) Strategic grit application (no salt) so less “brown sugar” snow impeding pedestrians and cyclists
Shelter & Heat	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heated shelters and warming huts/shacks, including protected and heated bus shelters – encourage use by vulnerable, marginalized, and homeless Outdoor heaters with space to sit/stand and park bikes Shelter from wind, wind assessments for new buildings
Transit Improvements	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase bus frequency to reduce waiting in cold when buses are full, add signage showing when buses are arriving and more dependable scheduling platform More bus stops; get community/schools involved with design Heated, cleared, accessible, sheltered transit stops
Outdoor Activities & Attractions	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add ski and/or skating tracks along Meewasin Valley Add a tobogganing hill in my neighbourhood Winter activity rental and education spaces with membership model like Canoe & Kayak Club; fat bike rentals Winter water maze (ice)
Snow Clearing	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve snow clearing for pedestrians – key sidewalks, especially for seniors and people with disabilities Improve snow clearing on side streets
Other	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close downtown to traffic Love locks on the bridges (City of Bridges) Increase solar input

3.2.5 Streets and Public Places

That encourage economic and social activity

In this category participants only identified opportunities:

Theme	Comment Count	Key Elements
Animated Public Spaces	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase vendors and activity at Farmers Market, make it come alive; add large Christmas tree, benches, fire pits Winter plazas, patios (with heaters and blankets), fireplaces, outdoor living rooms, pedestrian

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> oriented street furniture, heat sources, sidewalk cafes with warmup food and beverages • Ice slides • Lit-up signage; e.g. SASKATOON block letters along riverbank
Heat and Fire	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire pits and heaters • Rentable fire pits at public squares/central areas • Other heat sources
Colour and Light	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More colour! (“pretty much everywhere”; “less beige”) • Focus on aesthetics in cool weather through lighting, colours, blankets, etc. • Restaurants and businesses could use energy efficient lighting to create warm ambience
Pop-Ups	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cafes along river and at the weir, or mobile coffee shops • Pop-up areas with change-able programming; spaces for education, organizations to showcase activities
Other	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End exclusivity – include the actual population in events that are put on, especially when in public spaces • Salt makes a mess and damages runoff and concrete – find alternatives soon • Exploring around the city
Safety and Accessibility	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riverbank trails can be slippery and require attention • Support seniors and the less able-bodied so they can get out and about

3.3 Wintercity Visioning

Participants were invited to describe their vision for Saskatoon through reflection on the current state (what you feel, see, hear and experience now) to what you want to feel, see hear, and experience in the future.

3.3.1 Describe It

What does a vibrant winter culture meant to you? What is your vision for Saskatoon?

Current State

What you feel, see, hear and experience now?

See / Hear

- Focus on the cold and the dark

- [illegible]

- Unsafe
- Wondering if I'll be warm enough skating in the park
- Isolation

- Less mobility
- Unsafe walking – surfaces, darkness
- Injury
- Trudging through snow windrows
- Wind chill that scares people to the indoors. What about the sun factor?

What you want to feel, see hear, and experience in the future?

- Implementing some of these ideas!
- More festive and twinkle lights and colour across the City
- 4 season active transportation. Pedestrian, bike, etc. People accessibility is #1, vehicles #2
 - 4 season rest points on pedestrian malls
 - Clear sidewalks and paths
 - Covered bicycle parking downtown
 - Bus shelters should be focused on the standing area so that feet don't get cold. Heated bus shelters to warm up at bus stops
 - Covered sidewalks or allow commercial overhangs to shelter walkways
- Knowing there's warming spaces at public, outdoor skating amenities
 - Open accessible warming shelters in neighbourhood rinks (not just 4-6 hours per week)
- Public Art: grants for winter
- Free indoor public spaces
- Pop-up cafes (e.g. on river paths), pop-up winter public spaces – e.g. fire barrels, sidewalk cafes, food trucks, patios
- Free snowsuits for low income residents
- People are asking: "What are the GHG implications of all decisions?"

Feel

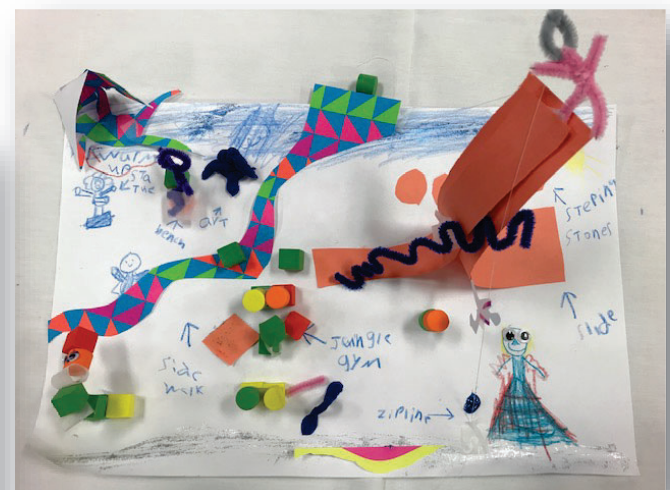
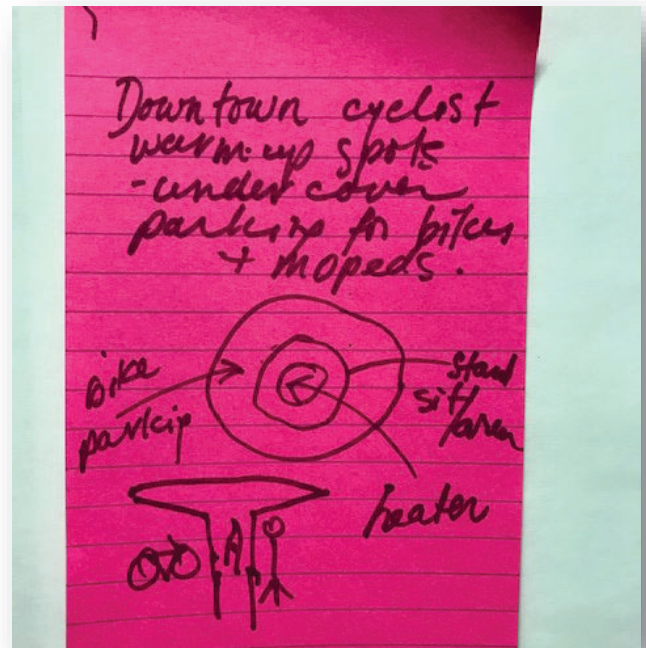
- Comfort
- People being proud of living in a winter city and become advocates of a fun winter life
- Connectivity in winter
- More inclusion
- People gathering together, celebrating diversity
- Celebrate the small victories
- Safety and warmth for ALL

Experience

- Fewer bureaucratic barriers to new ideas and pop-ups
- Skating path like Edmonton
- Regular opportunities for outdoor gathering
- Public outdoor Finnish style sauna, then roll in the snow!
- All parks – open and accessible (day and night) for skiing, skating, sledding, snowshoeing and other winter fun
- More annual winter events
- Candlemas
- Teach kids in school how to play outside in all weather, no prescribed indoor recesses; Pilot program, provide appropriate clothing

3.3.2 Build It

Participants were invited to build, draw, or mould a winter scene that reflects their vision for winter culture in Saskatoon.



Some participants put together a construction paper garland with key words written on each ring:

Co-operation	Flexible bylaws	Courage to fail	Close streets for fun
Limit bureaucratic barriers	Bureaucratic and political champions	Expression	Honour culture
Accepting of all lifestyles	Acceptance of out of the box thinkers	Collaboration	Creativity
Experimental	Less negative	Variety	Inclusive
Artwork	Willingness to try	Connected	Experiential
Grassroots momentum	Active, inclusive, genuine, honest engagement	Supportive of new ideas	Issue social license

3.4 Conference Delegate Reflections

Conference delegates were invited to reflect on their learnings from the conference.

3.4.1 Highlights

From the conference so far, what has sparked your interest? What do you want to remember?

- You can change the mindset of people to be more positive about winter
- Exploring winter without vision and in a wheelchair really brought home the importance of design and maintenance for all abilities (deep dive session on accessibility)
- Encourage residents to embrace winter! Some companies have done wonders in marketing and making YXE more cool and desirable (e.g. Hardpressed). Pushing an embrace of YXE as a Winter City could work wonders
- Just do it – change is good

- Hygge – from the Danish culture meaning a quality of coziness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being¹
- This gives people ideas of how to be active in winter
- The City needs to get out of its own way for progress, forward thinking initiatives while also removing barriers for grassroots involvement, and development, which only seek to increase satisfaction, engagement, and positive growth of the city and its residents
- Positive communication to the public around winter makes a big difference in changing mindsets.
- Involve the community – ask what users want/need and be authentic in serving those interests. Engage in a genuine way and use the results of engagement to create something people actually want
- Take ideas from Edmonton's Winter City Strategy

3.4.2 Recommendations

What ideas could we test or embrace in Saskatoon?

- Winter market (huts)
- Ski rentals on Meewasin Trail
- Outdoor winter patios
- Fog lasers show on the South Saskatchewan River
- Indoor Farmers Market
- Removing barriers to programs and initiatives
- Pop-up Cafes on pathways
- Start designing for accessibility for all (e.g. cars, carts and vans). This would include mobility impaired households or groups to travel independently in their social circles. Including non-visible mobility issues (e.g. dignity, inclusion and equity).
- Create better microclimates
- Geocaching in winter
- Stop designing the city for cars and car culture
- Invite bike companies to provide bikes for public bike rentals all over the city
- Learn from European northern cities, like Helsinki and Copenhagen, on how to make the public participate and enjoy winter activities (e.g. cycling) and have the public get on board with the idea of having separated bike lanes.

3.4.3 Next Steps

What do you want to learn more about? What questions are still on your mind?

- Develop toolkit for municipalities to facilitate culture change at/within the City government
- Lighting Pilot Projects (many)
- Differing abilities training for most civic employees in the winter
- How the internal functions of the city flow to get more traction on concepts and ideas
- The science/data drivers behind designing a city
- Train, educate, and inform

¹ Note "Hygge" is actually Norwegian in origin not Danish as participant notes. However, in recent history, the practice of hygge has been adopted across Scandinavia, and is particularly popular in Denmark. .

- Having high level admin staff show up and interact with the public
- Tools for implementing good winter design and the need to share these with one another
- Winter design performance measures –requirements, regulations; the things we need to operate efficiently and effectively
- Winter geocaching!

3.5 Other Feedback

Other feedback was received through various forms that may not fall within one of the specific categories above. This feedback is reflected below.

3.5.1 General

- I'd like to see more action and less talk with the Wintercity Strategy
- Wintercity grants are awesome! Thanks.
- Re-thinking risk and trying new things! (Experiment, even if it doesn't work!)
- Would like to see better cold weather strategies and improved poverty reduction

3.5.2 Social Marketing Ideas

- Create a slogan that encourages not only winter activities, but also one that includes appreciation of the beauty of winter. Attempt to influence a mindset wherein people start to actually appreciate what winter has to offer (and possibly complain less)
- Marketing campaign of the upside of winter including the dark. — “flip” peoples' attitudes around and encourage creative and imaginative thinking to really enjoy winter.
- Encourage people to have a sense of pride in winter living. Not something that you have to “escape from” but that you want to be a part of
- Have a “sister” city in say, Sweden or Norway for example that each city connects with to promote the aesthetics of winter living.
- Encourage fabulous winter fashion perhaps with a marketing campaign that focuses both on warm winter clothes where you actually stay warm and on fashionable winter wear. This makes it enjoyable for people. Cultivates creativity and imagination.

3.5.3 Specific Feedback about President Murray Park in winter

- In the summer/spring/fall the playground in President Murray Park is crawling with kids. Daycare, afterschool parents and grandparents around and visiting, many students; in the winter it is dead. Would be great to use creative lighting to light the path, ice sculptures along the path and around the park. Have winter festival in the parks. Good thing is that when enough snow, there's a set cross country ski trail which is a good beginning
- There is no sidewalk between the Sunset Home on Temperance & Munroe & the Park. There is also no sidewalk in the block south of the park on Munroe. Older people from the Luther Tower are pushed in wheelchairs in the middle of the road on their way to the park to enjoy the flowers and people-watching. If Pres. Murray Park was to become winter friendly it would need to have a sidewalk for getting them on the icy road.

3.5.4 Temperance Street Parkette as a model for winter engagement

- Need to review and adjust bylaws
 - Fire pit in the middle of the asphalt
 - Used Christmas trees placed in stands (after use) around the park and lit

- Programming to roast marshmallows in fire pit and tell stories

3.5.5 Wind Effects of New Towers

- There is going to be a tower built on the corner of Clarence & College. Has there been a comprehensive wind assessment done on the effects of this building? Short notice = to be discussed on Jan 27 Council Meeting

4 Next Steps

The Strategy will be developed in 2019. Strategy development will be informed by feedback received during the January 2019 engagement as well as engagement during 2016 and 2017. Additional engagement will be undertaken as the Strategy takes shape.