

Stampede Park(ing)

Calgary as an Urban Playground

by

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Abstract

The sports district has developed into a common urban condition within cities. It is often idealized as a vibrant hub in the city fabric, when, in reality it at times plays a mediator (and mediocre) part within that fabric. Communal, active, sports-programed space is essential for these interventions – but its execution and implementation is usually subject to, and constrained by, a limited and specific event. These are often touted as hearts or engines of the city, as drivers of development, markers of a city's energy, atmospheric hubs that will activate neighbourhoods. If they are so connected, essential, and key to urban and civic space, why are they often so limiting and hindering?

This thesis explores – playfully, civically and critically – a sports-based intervention within Stampede Park in Calgary - a closed-off neighbourhood within the city's downtown that finds itself more exclusive than it is inclusive. How in turn can one address current city affairs while at the same time create new opportunities of re-engaging the site within the public life of the urban fabric?

Acknowledgments

To my family, dad Frank, mum Lynn and brother Aaron, thank you for the support not only throughout my education but as well in life. I hope to always make you proud.

To the boys, Evan Taylor and Matt Hagen, your two cents always come in handy and keen eye for detail will always be appreciated but more importantly so will our friendship.

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STAMPEDE PARK(ING)

CALGARY AS AN
URBAN
PLAYGROUND



Introduction

This thesis proposes a re-development of Calgary's Stampede Park as a newly revitalized urban and leisure playground in the core of the city.

Calgary is a sports city and this thesis is grounded in this relationship. For Calgary, sport is more than entertainment, it plays a significant role in the social, economic and political lives of the city – demonstrated in part by a recent 2026 Olympic bid, and by its long engagement with urban sport. The city – argued for and against so emphatically in recent local politics – is in need of improved infrastructure for its sport teams. The current (acrimonious) discussions regarding a new sport district development (with two possible locations within the city), has come to a standstill. City council and the private groups that manage professional hockey, football and lacrosse in the city cannot establish common ground. The intended new development, it was argued, would bring forward new and energized public, private and commercial spaces and would help create a new, strong civic hub for Calgary.

This thesis explores a notion of urban rejuvenation that emphasizes the public rather than the private, to open up spaces for public engagement and experience – to reverse the current platforms of rejuvenation that rely on elaborate venues instead of the immediacy of the public realm. It is a proposal that focuses on community and locality.

The project proposes a new scheme of urban development at Calgary's Stampede Park. It takes, transforms and extends the original proposals for the park to redefine a sporting hub for the city and possible future use. The proposal emphasizes the creation of a broadly beneficial use district that allows for the adaptive re-use of existing infrastructure, balanced by the addition of new space, program and experience.





The Sports District

Sport is more than merely activity; it can embed itself in the culture of a place and in return can be reflected in the community around it. It creates commonality, helps blur differences and is a force in creating and strengthening the notion of unity and community. It can be, in the end, so much more than merely entertainment. A recent story in the Duluth New Tribune (“Salmela family builds mini-Olympic venue, complete with luge, curling, biathlon and more”¹) describes the sport fever that overtook a family in Minnesota as a result of the Olympic Games and that extended to the broader community of the city as a result – a home became a de-facto pint-sized Olympic park for a while. A member of that family, Chad Salmela, called the Olympic Cross Country Skiing and Biathlon for NBC’s coverage of the games and his commentary was featured in a New Yorker article (“How much Yelling Do We Need in the Olympics”). Sport is cultural commentary, identity building, city building – from the scale of Duluth to the scale of Calgary.

Today’s cities face profound challenges including increasing urban sprawl, economic inconsistency, rapid urbanization, climate change and more. With continuously and aggressively expanding population cores, transportation needs expand and the urban continues to grow and sprawl. The dissolution of the “core” of the city meant less closeness in urban communities and suburbs chipped away at the spaces and vitality of the city. The problem of vacant space in the core is not new. This can be, however, both problem and opportunity. The Sports District is one of the urban development strategies that can address this.

In terms of sport as a public spectacle, stadiums in particular can provide unique opportunities to strengthen the urban core beyond their “spectacularity.” They can – and should – be embedded within neighbourhoods, becoming neighbourhoods. They should not be “stand-alones.” They should be “stand-withs.” Consider the classic ballparks of Ebbetts Field and Griffiths Stadium, or the recently built Target Field in Minneapolis – which integrates with public bikeways, commuter trains, parking garages, the downtown core of the city, views of the Minneapolis skyline, the LRT and the diverse North Loop industrial neighbourhoods.

¹ Lawlor, Christa “Salmela family builds mini-Olympic venue, complete with luge, curling, biathlon and more,” *Duluth News Tribune*, March 3, 2018. <http://www.duluthnewstribune.com/lifestyle/4412002-winter-games-salmela-family-builds-mini-olympic-venue-complete-luge-curling>

Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The predominant narrative lurches to the other extreme and this tends to be what we see in many cities. Promising intentions of developing a vibrant hub for the public - an ideal and oft-touted proposition – usually falls to economic and value engineering decisions (and a fair degree of NIMBYism). What tends to occur are the hyper-iconic, stand-alones. During times of activity, these stadiums can quite lively and enjoyable, but when not in use, they are blank spaces in the city. They may as well be vacant. And they are often difficult to get to.

Financial concerns are, of course, always at play – and are constantly part of the political machinations of sports owners and city politicians. Community and urban integration should be the paramount concern. Sectioning off a portion of the city (usually distant from the core), planting a few lavish sports venues and considering this a good solution to a communal challenge, does not address the problem of civic disconnection. These spaces are programmatically engineered to operate at peak efficiencies during their times of operation and generally do everything that one hopes they do, but by and large, the public spend most their time walking through vacant parking lots surrounded by buildings they cannot access. The single-use serving of these spaces is a significant drawback to their possible potential for more constant activation, use, engagement, experience, life and vibrancy.

PRECEDENTS/CASE STUDIES

The Ice District – Edmonton, Alberta

The Ice District in Edmonton has brought to life a stagnant section of the downtown core with world-class amenities. It has become Edmonton's most vibrant neighbourhood and has brought life and business back to the city. With this new life, however, development problems are beginning to manifest. Locals - whether businesses or neighbouring residents - find that property taxes are rising, rents are increasing and challenging competition with new businesses moving into the neighbourhood have become side effects of the project.² The Ice-District, it is important to note, is not a porous project. It does not connect well to its surrounding neighbourhoods and contexts. It is not a porous project; it is a defined neighbourhood tailored to the group that developed it and who bought and invested in it. While it does work – and work well - during peak times, the Ice-District is often also very quiet in off-peak times.

A significant problem is the continued non-use of the Coliseum that served as the original home area for the hockey team. Located in Northlands Park, an exhibition grounds north east of downtown, the facility has been dormant since the team moved downtown. Northlands is a non-profit organization and durned over the facility to the city which has little to no use for it in the near future.³ There was no anticipatory planning for the site, no projective determination about anticipated and future use.

² Stolte, Elise. "Residents say Rogers Place falls short on community benefits." *Edmonton Journal*. Published: August 23, 2016.

³ Unknown. Northlands Coliseum will close permanently at end of the year." *CBC News Edmonton*. Published: September 13, 2017.

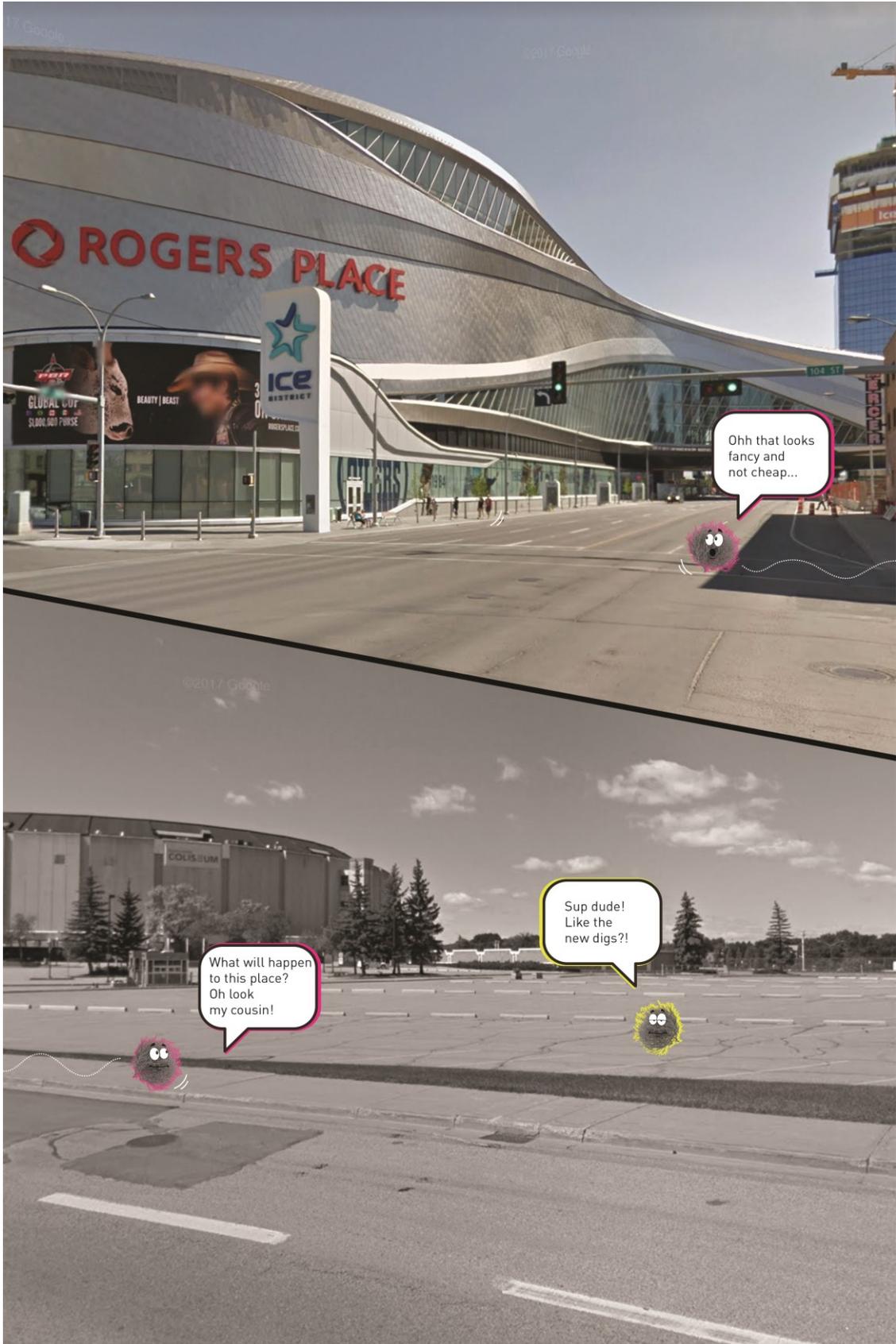


Figure 1: Edmonton's Ice District (top) Northlands Coliseum (bottom).

District Detroit – Detroit, Michigan

Detroit's economic turmoil has been center stage since the 1950's and increasingly evident since the US financial crises of 2008.⁴ This once-vibrant hub of the automotive industry today looks more like an industrial park on the verge of demolition. Fortunately for the city, investment came through with two of the city's more prominent establishment families - the Fords and the Illichs.

District Detroit was developed through the concentration of sport in the downtown core and its neighbouring communities. The essential focus was to connect people and spaces.⁵ All this, of course, was done with good intentions but not necessarily the right execution and as a result, the flaws of District Detroit are slowly emerging. With private money comes private spaces and private agendas, that, at times, have little inclusion of the general public. As a result, the site operates like an on-off switch: the district's neighbourhoods are predicated upon activity during a sporting event. When the local teams are in town, the district is packed with life. When not, the district is a sea of empty streets and vacant parking lots surrounded by lavish, locked up buildings.

⁴ Macdonald, Christine. "Detroit population rank lowest since 1850." *The Detroit News*. Published: May 19, 2016.

⁵ Unknown. "New District will help transform Detroit's economic future." *The District Detroit*. Published: September 24, 2010.

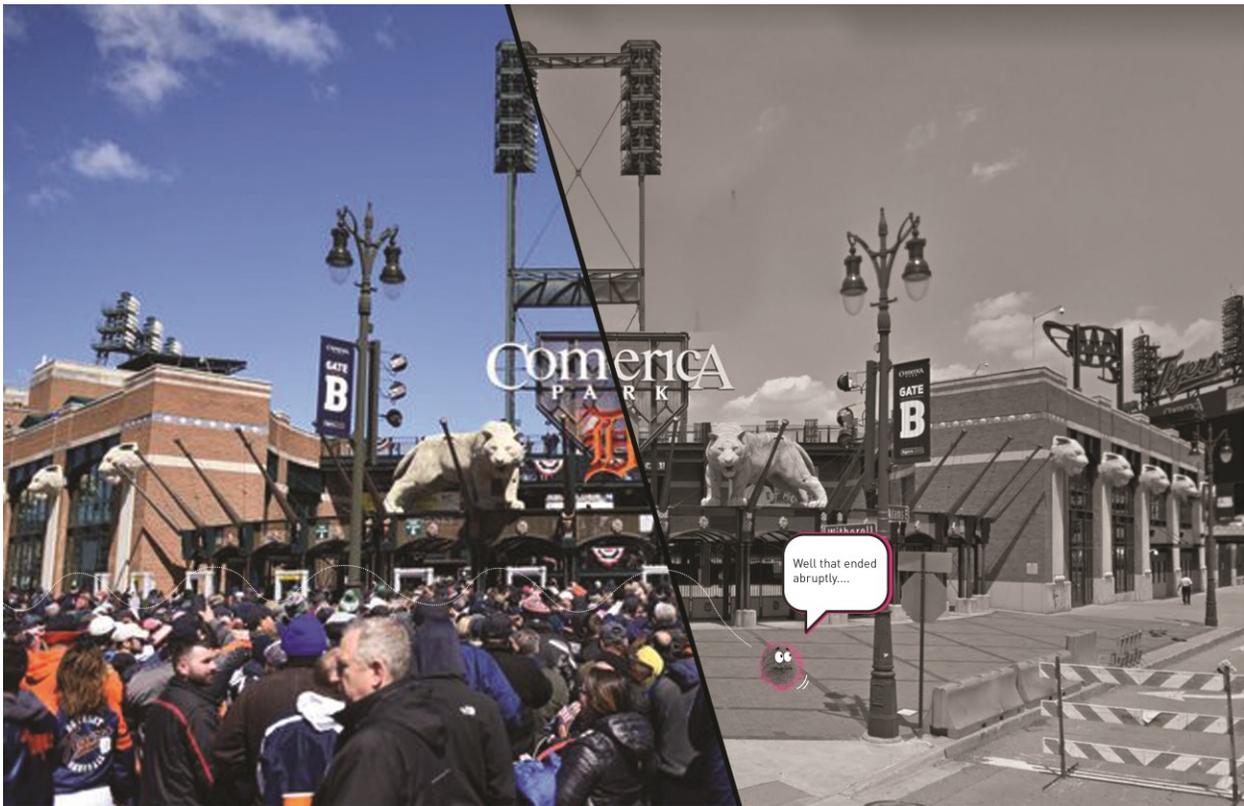


Figure 2: Detroit Tigers baseball game day, versus off day.

True North Square – Winnipeg, Manitoba

This island city is located in the heartland of the prairies and welcomed the return of its beloved National Hockey League (NHL) team, the Winnipeg Jets in 2011. With True North Sports & Entertainment's purchase of the former NHL Atlanta Thrashers and their relocation to Winnipeg, the city was revived – and in more ways than one. A burgeoning economy, increased development and a revitalized image of Winnipeg as a more cosmopolitan city is due in part to the team's return.⁶ With the success of the team, mothballed or previously impossible projects have begun to see the light of day.

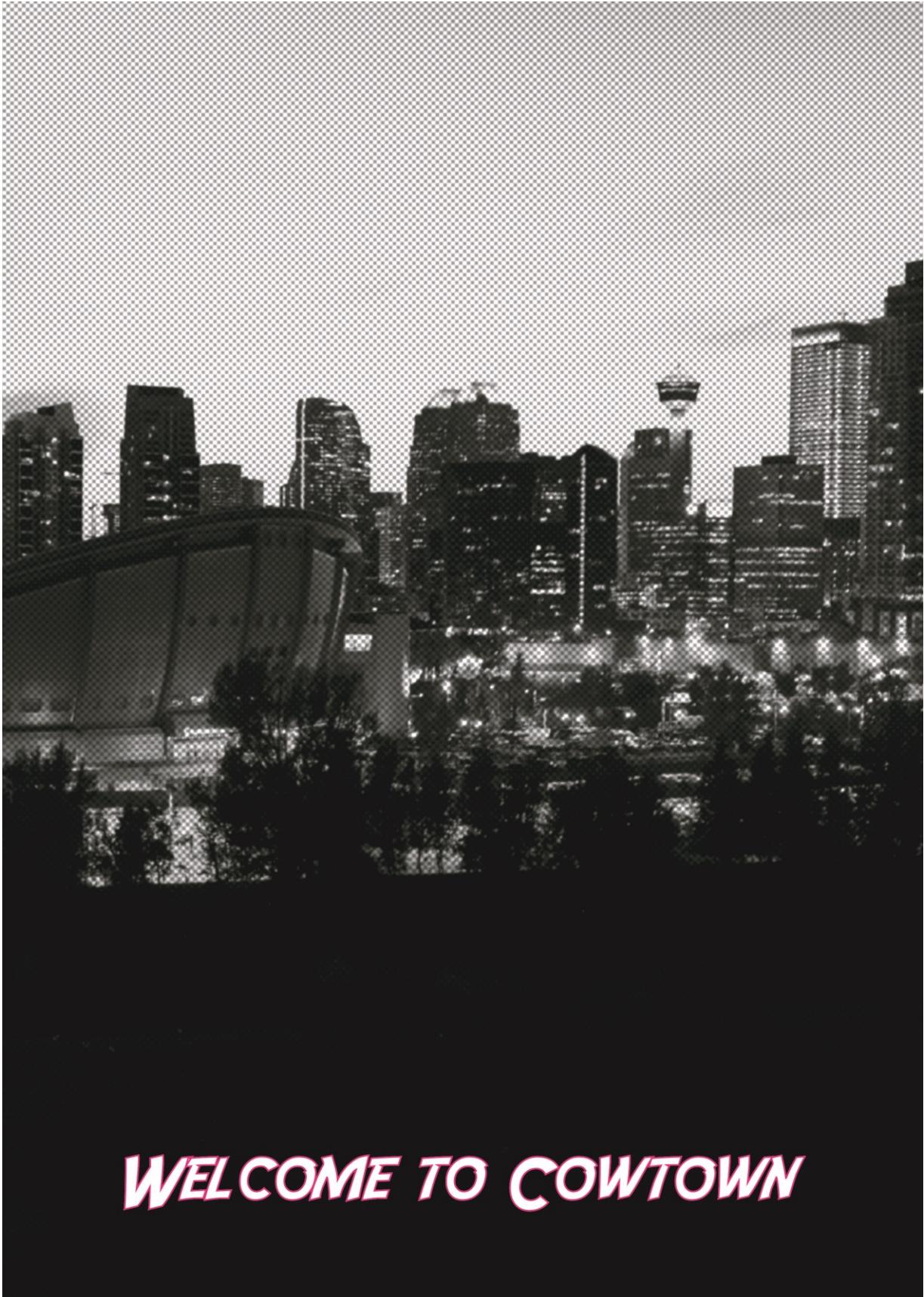
With the construction of True North Square (adjacent to BellMTS Place - home of the NHL Winnipeg Jets and the AHL Moose) the city is developing its own hub for entertainment. Embedded within the downtown of the urban core, the draw of True North Square is to create a synergy between, working, living, socializing and gathering in a single location.⁷ Ideal in thought but it falls short with its typical urban layout, unconventional architecture and very convectional application of public space. What the outcome will be is an elaborate space tailored to big business. How can this represent public space when – once again – private space is the driving force of development.

⁶ Unknown. "4 ways the Jets have changed Winnipeg." *CBC News Manitoba*. Published: May 31, 2012.

⁷ Unknown. "Redefining the Heart of the City." *True North Square*. 2016. Web: <http://www.truenorthsquare.com/>



Figure 3: Construction at True North Square.



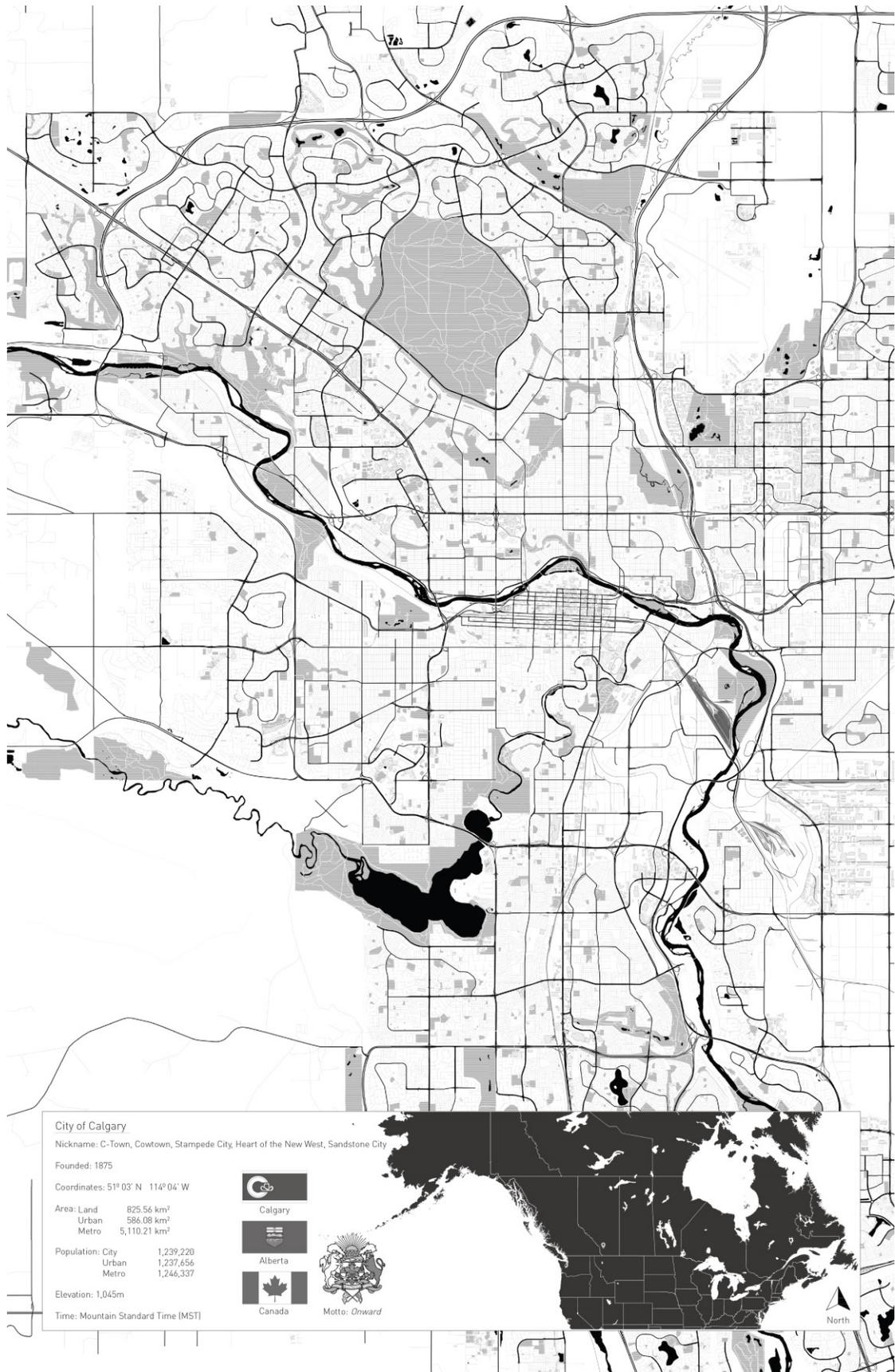


Figure 4: Calgary city map and current information.




North America Sport Network

With professional sport in the city, it gives Calgary the opportunity of being a significant hub within North America.



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Figure 5: Calgary's professional sport network within North America.

Welcome to Cowtown – Calgary, Alberta

The city of Calgary is located within the foothills of southwestern Alberta. Home to 1.25 million people, the city has emerged as the financial center of western Canada.⁸ A strong history in the cattle industry boosted the migration of people and products to the west, which later had a contributing effect on the oil boom. Today, subject to the economic boom-and-bust of the energy sector, the city finds itself seeking opportunities in other markets. One area in particular that has seen significant development is that of winter sports. Calgary today is one of the leaders in athletic training from amateurs to professionals - although this wouldn't necessarily be the case if it wasn't for the city's work in pursuing the opportunity in hosting the Olympic games. Calgary is, and continues to be, a winter City.

In 1988 Calgary hosted the 15th Olympic Winter Games and in doing so a winter sports culture emerged and remained. The games brought the development of valued infrastructure and more importantly, a strong sense of a community and a global image of the city. The Games were significant for Calgary. Beyond the opening up of the city to the world (and the world market), there was the creation of a renewed sense of optimism and opportunity. Calgary was so much more than an oil-town, the city declared, it was a diverse multifaceted urban space. The city had changed.

Olympic Games often have immense impacts on cities; however, in Calgary they were especially significant. It was widely agreed that they exceeded expectations and were the most prosperous games to date.⁹ Today the facilities that were built for the Games are still in full operation and are located within the fabric of the city. As time has proceeded, however, their aging infrastructure shows and a number of the facilities' future use and viability is uncertain.

Two of these older facilities are especially in question: McMahon Stadium, home to the Canadian Football League (CFL) Stampeders (located at the University of Calgary) and Scotiabank Saddledome, home to the NHL Flames, the Western Hockey League (WHL) Hitmen and the National Lacrosse League (NLL) Roughnecks. These facilities mark the professional sport scene in the city and have become iconic architectural projects - the Saddledome in particular. Both stadia find themselves falling behind the times versus conventional stadiums and are increasingly having a negative impact on the city –

⁸ Unknown. "Calgary, Alberta." *Historica Canada*. Web: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/calgary/>

⁹ Unknown. "New Calgary area for the Flames, Stampeders in West Village to cost \$900 M." *CBC News Calgary*. Published: August 18, 2015.

particularly with missed opportunities to host large-scale events. They are no longer considered destination facilities, which have considerable drawbacks for a city that wants to be part of a bigger stage. Strong state of the art facilities bring people, business and civic pride.

In the case of Calgary, the development battle is between two particular groups, the Calgary Sports and Entertainment Corporation (CSEC) and City Hall. Both have very different opinions on the subject of what to do. The CSEC are the majority owners of the Calgary Flames (NHL), the Calgary Stampeders (CFL), the Calgary Hitmen (WHL) and the Calgary Roughnecks (NLL). In 2015, the CSEC revealed plans for a \$900-million project that would replace both the Saddledome and McMahon Stadium.¹⁰ The project would be located within the West Village of downtown, along the Bow River, on the existing site of a creosote wood-treatment plant.¹¹ The land would be reclaimed and a new sporting hub would be born. It was an ambitious proposal that came with a very long list of controversial issues. The city responded with their own proposal – an arena - that would be located within Victoria Park adjacent to the existing Saddledome.¹² While not as ambitious as the CSEC proposal, the city’s project was definably more attainable. At the root of both these projects, however, was the need for public funding - the most controversial piece of the puzzle.

To consider the urban and architectural context: both projects would have abandoned not only the two existing sport buildings but also the two neighbourhoods they currently resided in. For example, in Edmonton the creation of the Ice District has benefitted a lackluster section of downtown but has left a portion of Northlands, where the existing Coliseum lays, with an uncertain, and currently vacant, future.¹³ It solved a problem but created another one at the same time. For Calgary a more beneficial approach would be to work within the context of one area, either the University of Calgary, or Stampede Park.

¹⁰ Unknown. “New Calgary area for the Flames, Stampeders in West Village to cost \$900 M.” *CBC News Calgary*. Published: August 18, 2015.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Unknown. Northlands Coliseum will close permanently at end of the year.” *CBC News Edmonton*. Published: September 13, 2017.



Figure 6: City politics, Ken King with the CalgaryNext proposal (top) and Mayor Naheed Nenshi with the Victoria Park proposal (bottom).

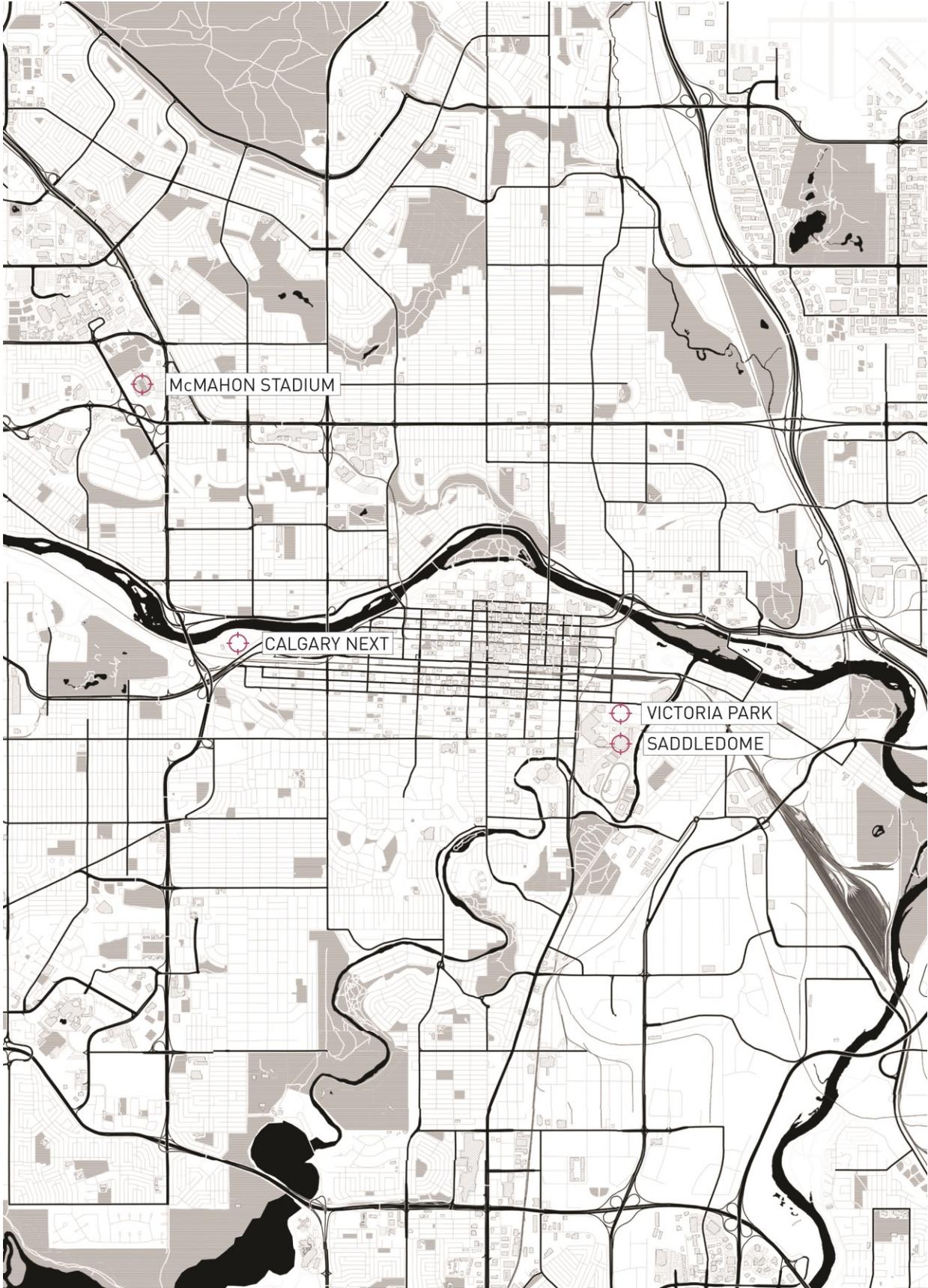


Figure 7: Site locations.



Figure 8: CalgaryNext site plan (top) Victoria Park site plan (bottom).

McMahon Stadium

Built in 1960 to replace the Mewata Stadium - the original home the Calgary Stampeders since 1945 – McMahon Stadium has seen its fair share of renovations and events. ¹⁴ Nearing sixty years in operation, the building finds itself structurally sound although falling behind in standards seen today with conventional stadiums. With the abandonment of the proposed CalgaryNext project put forward by the CSEC, a replacement for this building, or substantial renovations to it, have been left in question. A sport platform such as this does add value to a city when it is versatile, but in its current state lacks the benefits of that adaptability.

With its close proximity to the University of Calgary and the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, the building operations extend further than that of just the CFL team. University sports, local sports, concerts and performances have been hosted at McMahon. If the CFL team relocates to another venue in the city, not all is lost. The University of Calgary owns McMahon and its operations will still exist without the future of neighbourhood being negatively impacted.

¹⁴ Unknown. "McMahon Stadium". *Calgary Stampeders*. Web: <https://www.stampeders.com/mcmahon/>

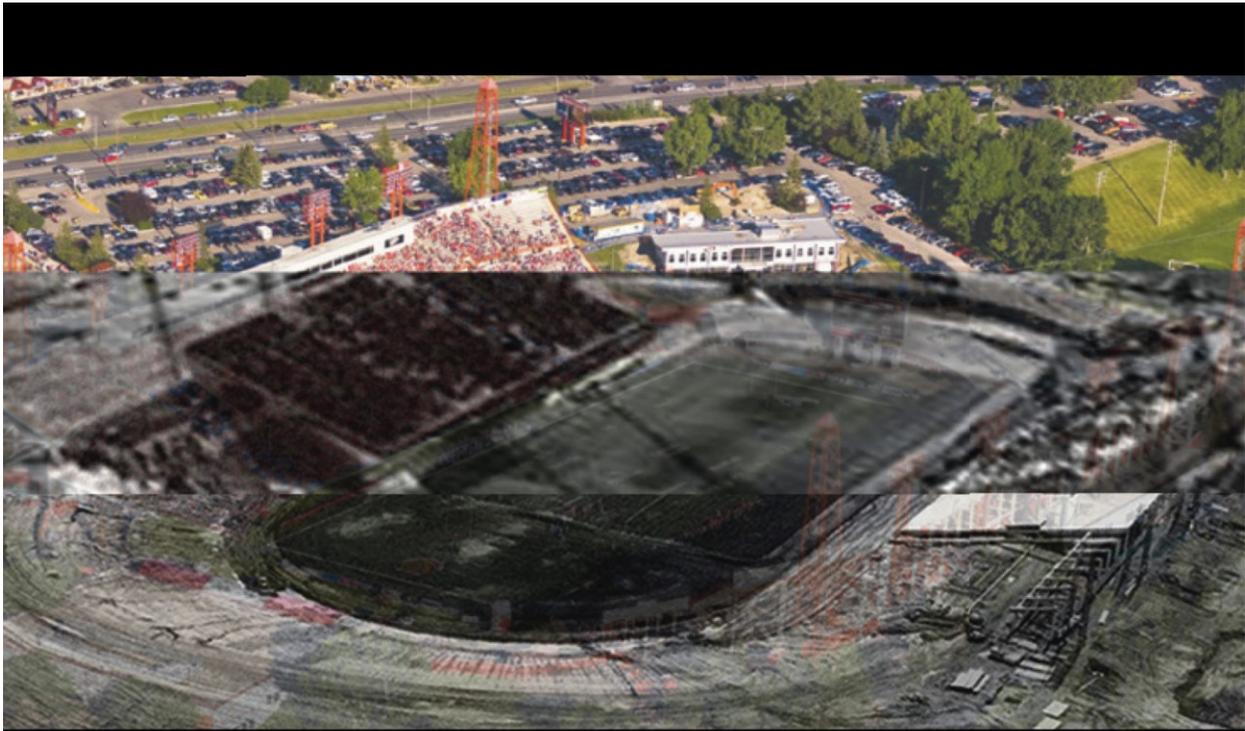


Figure 9: McMahon Stadium over the years.

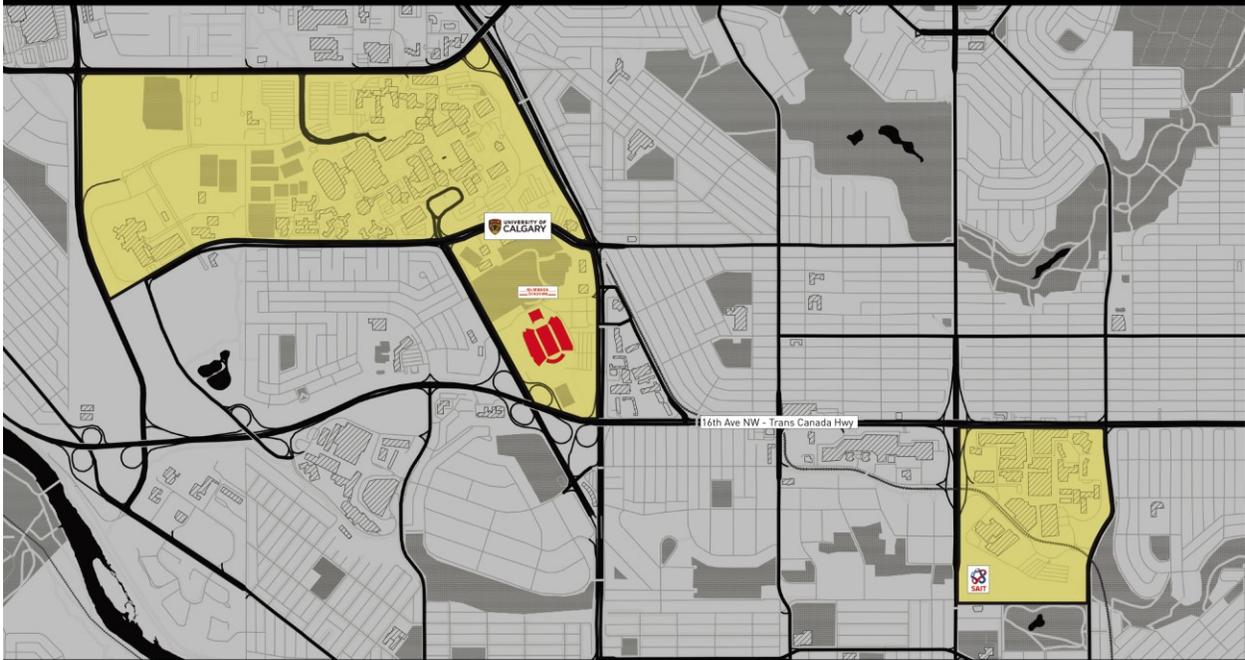
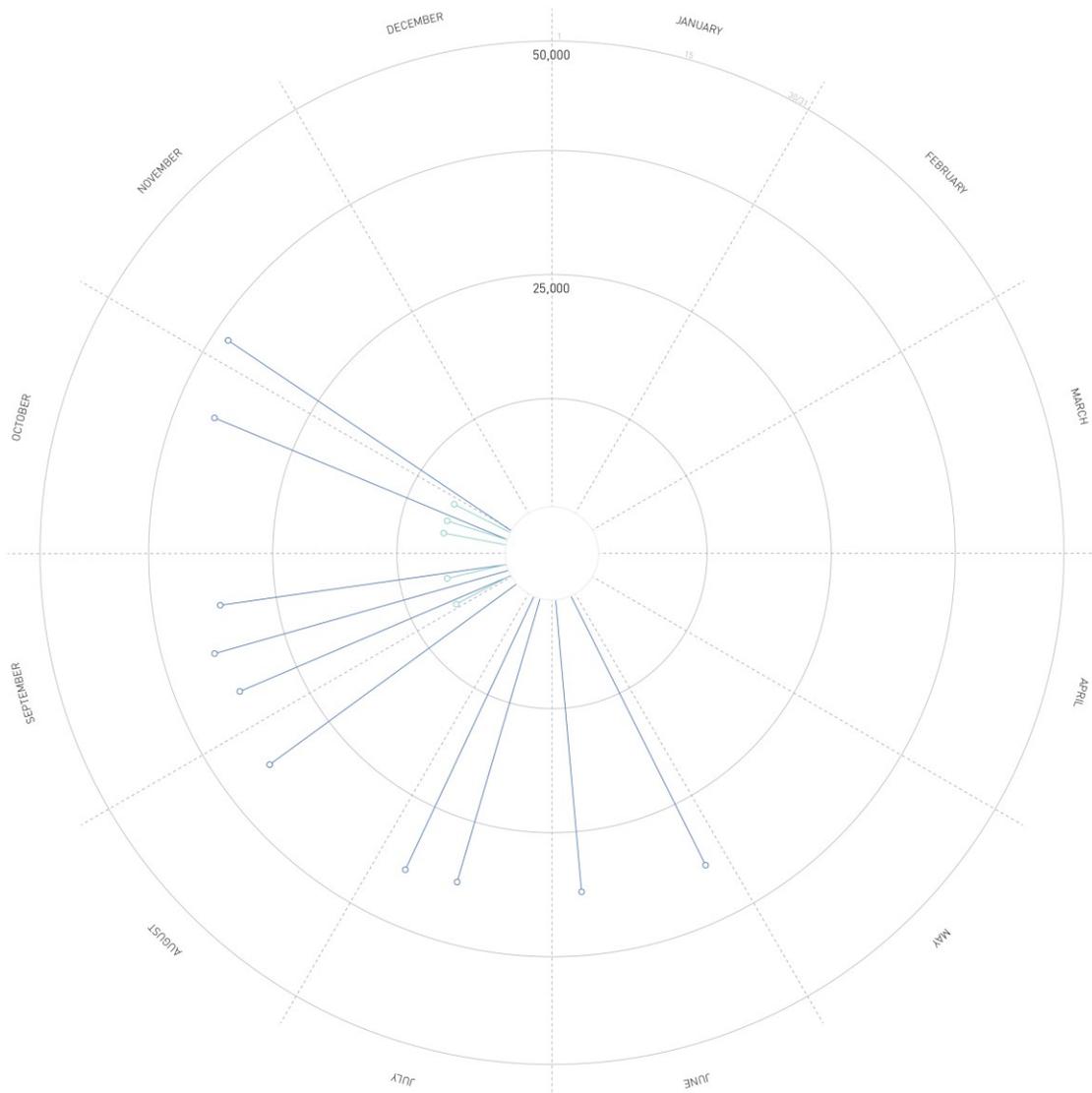


Figure 10: McMahon Stadium located in red.



McMAHON STADIUM

2017 Calendar Year

Cap. 46,000

Avg. Att. 27,500

Est. 1960

CFL

OTHER

Additional Seating/Stands

Figure 11: McMahon Stadium annual attendance and building information.

Saddledome

Located within Stampede Park is Scotiabank Saddledome - Calgary's largest indoor venue. Home to the Calgary Flames, the Hitmen and Roughnecks along with other concerts and performances held throughout the year, the Saddledome has become a crucial piece of infrastructure for the city. With its completion in 1988 for the Olympic Winter Games the International Ice Hockey Federation described it as "The finest international rink in the world"¹⁵. Now thirty years have passed and even though it remains fully operational, it too is facing uncertain questions regarding its future.

Advancements in stadium technology, construction techniques and overall experience mark the Saddledome as behind the times. It is very little programmatic or experiential elasticity. The Saddledome has very little programmatic or experiential elasticity; it cannot host a broad range of events or programming due to its construction. Its location, however, is spectacular – within the grounds of Stampede Park. For a sprawling city like Calgary, the grounds could act at as a central hub, a communal space, a meeting place bringing people together – a community commons. For ten days in July this space does just that - becoming a city-within-a-city with the Stampede - but beyond this, the space oscillates between the occasional event and its life as a vast tundra of vacant parking lots. There is opportunity here, however, that could see the grounds become a vibrant, versatile hub within a city that keeps progressively moving outward – life for 365 days a year.

¹⁵ Podnieks, Andrew. "Canada's Olympic Hockey History 1920–2010", *Fenn Publishing*. 2009.



Figure 12: Saddledome over the years.

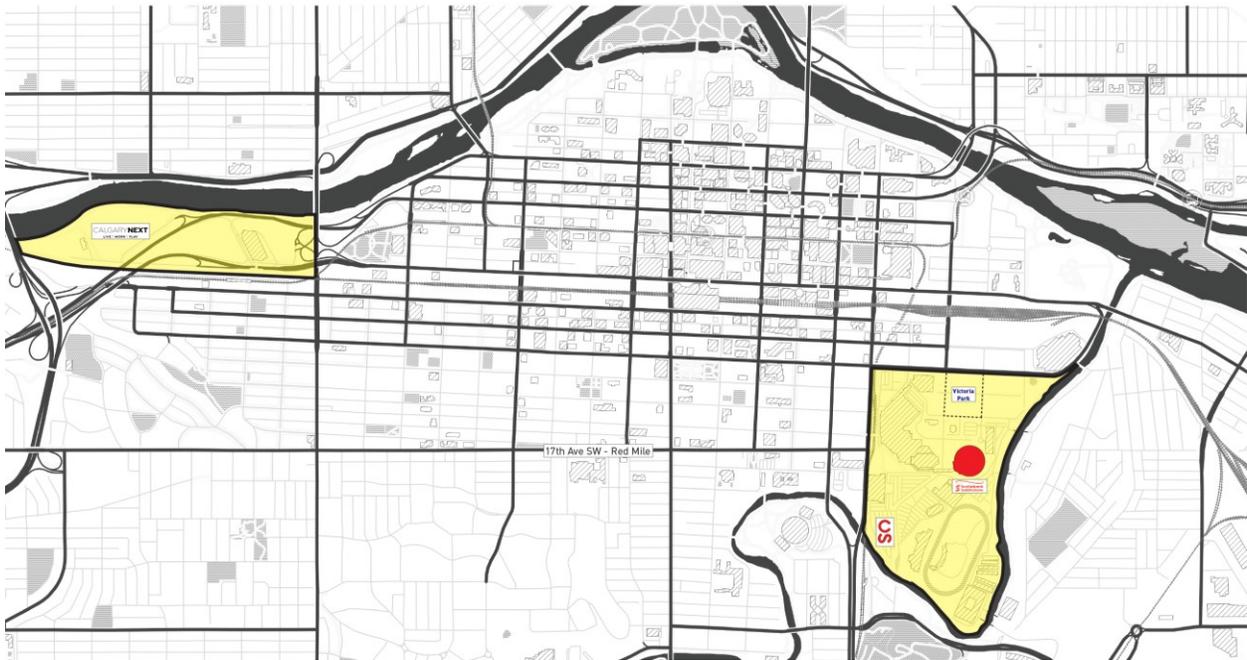
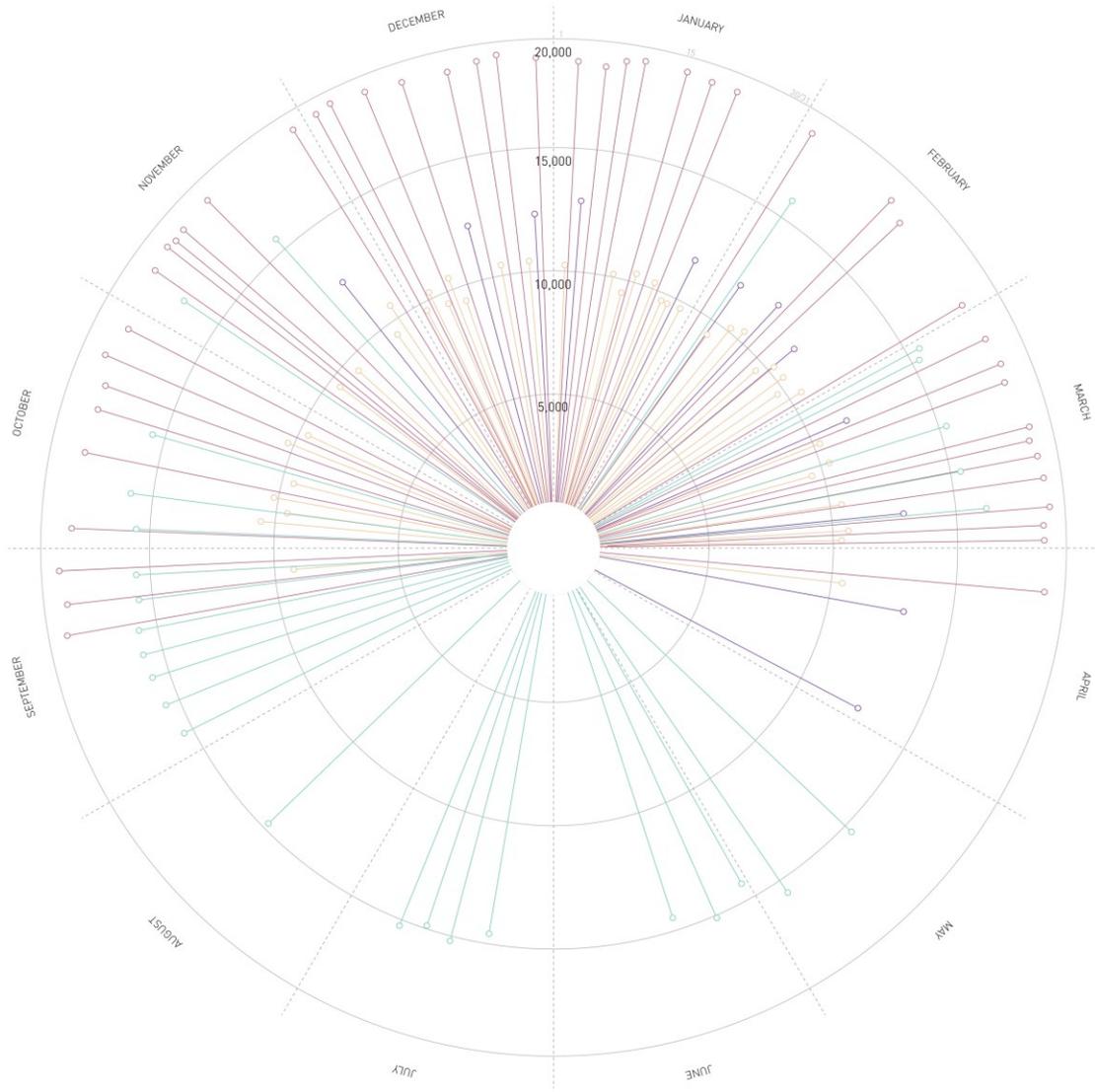


Figure 13: Saddledome located in red.





2017 Calendar Year
 Cap. 19,289
 Avg. Att. 19,000 [NHL]
 15,000 [WHL]
 11,000 [NLL]
 Est. 1983

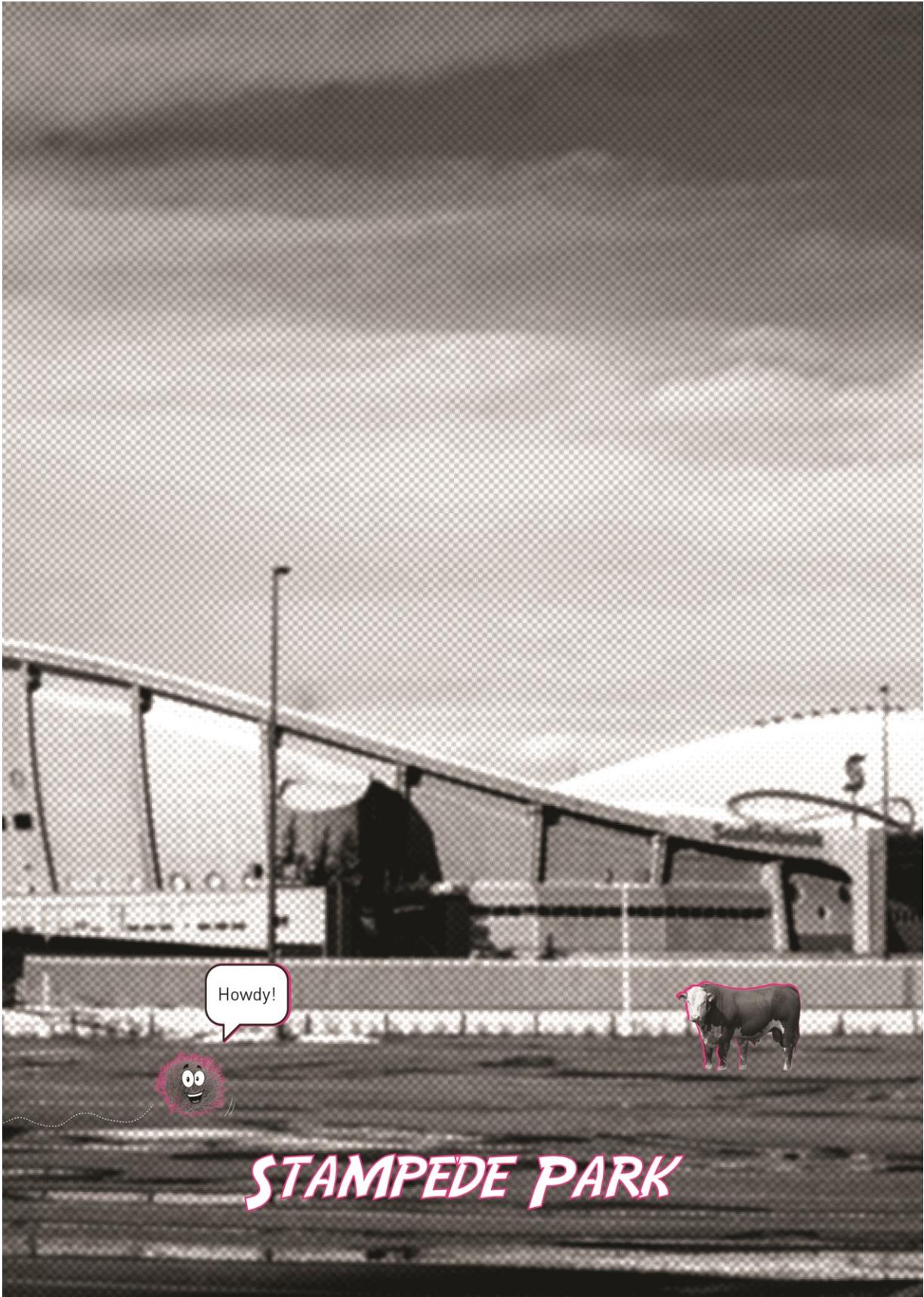









Figure 14: Saddledome annual attendance and building information.



Howdy!

STAMPEDE PARK

Stampede Park

The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth

In 1884 the town of Calgary was founded and along with it so was the local agriculture society.¹⁶ Seen as the heart of the cattle industry and the new financial centre of the west, Calgary began to reap benefits commercially, industrially and socially.¹⁷ It was a boomtown that saw significant prosperity with its western culture and economic strength. It even paved the way for the first exhibition, in 1886, as a demonstration of the “best in the west” of agriculture ideas and practises.¹⁸ It became such a spectacle with its growth and popularity that the government of Canada awarded Calgary the Dominion Exhibition in 1912 - a traveling road show that demonstrated all that Canada offered along with international entertainment.¹⁹ The event was growing and with it brought recognition of not only the city, but also its people and culture. It had such the impact that one man, one who was apart of the Dominion Exhibition, saw the potential of it being so much more.

A young traveling American showman, one who was captivated by the cowboy lifestyle, returned to Calgary in 1912 in the hope of conjuring up enough attention of hosting an event based solely on western lifestyle and by September 1912, the first official Stampede of Calgary took place.²⁰ It was met with decidedly mixed reviews and it was uncertain if such an event could survive. The following year the Stampede was held on the road in Winnipeg, as an attempt to promote the event and to see if a traveling road show was possibility more appropriate.²¹ Unfortunately this was not the case and the future of the show looked bleak with the economic downturn now facing the west and the onset of war breaking out in Europe.²²

In 1915, the Stampede returned to Calgary in the hope of attaining a new life. The event continued throughout the war years but unfortunately the west faced once again a recession that saw the show to

¹⁶ Unknown. “Heritage Home.” *Calgary Stampede*. Web: <http://www.calgarystampede.com/heritage/history/the-world-wars>

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

go on hiatus. From 1920 to 1923 the Stampede did not take place, and for it to do so a different approach was needed.²³

In 1924 the modern day Stampede was born. The events and infrastructure were allotted more time to be properly set and established. New events were included and defining traditions were imposed. The spectacle was set to be more inclusive such that the entire city could take part in it. Parades, decorations, pancakes and chuckwagons, all became staples that we still see today. It was called “The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth,” and the event, which is held in early July, brings millions of people from all around the world.²⁴

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Sekus, Tony. “Calgary Stampede: The beginnings – Guy Weadick’s grand vision, Chapter 1.” *Calgary Herald*. Published: July 11, 2016.

The Greatest Vacant Space on Earth

Throughout the years the stampede has vastly expanded in space to accommodate the programs it hosts. This has had the effect of “Stampede Sprawl,” creating momentarily activated spaces of program and life, but also resulting in large – and often – blank and vacant spaces. The grounds are home to the city’s three major professional sports teams, as well as casinos, a convention center and (over) ample space for parking. These are meaningful spaces and programs for the city. However, the spaces lack the sense and experience of public inclusion due to the periodic (and therefore, inconsistent) activation of these spaces. The draw to the park is due solely to the temporary activation of its spaces. For most of the year, the park is empty and quiet.

On a typical day the grounds see little life for those venture through or along it. There are no regular social or commercial programs. There are no restaurants, businesses, and leisure spaces. There is it seems, however, mile upon mile upon mile of parking. These spaces – and the casinos – are what embody the urban make up of the space. There is a strong sense of disconnection between the site and its surrounding context, compounded by the physical disconnection of moving into, across and through the site. Where you can see the city skyline – a lovely prospect – the links essentially stop there. Establishing stronger relationships – physical accessibility and programmatic continuity – would be a step forward in re-linking the site to a broader ecology of the urban.

As one travels through the park, the spaces are vast and unrelentingly big. The buildings are big. The programs housed in them are big. It’s neo-Texan in scale. Big portions of parking. Big portions of mute buildings. Big programs that are big when activated, and blank when not. A western theme permeates and the site is riddled with conflicting conditions. Fences, roads, parking, light rail line a few transport control buildings are all necessary infrastructural pieces but as they stand, create a negative impact on the site in their current states.

Not all is lost. Some adjustments, some new lines, some new (and old) strategies, and the site could be something else entirely.



Figure 16: Stampede Park site plan and tour.



Figure 17: Stampede Park tour stop 1.



Figure 18: Stampede Park tour stop 2.



Figure 19: Stampede Park tour stop 3.

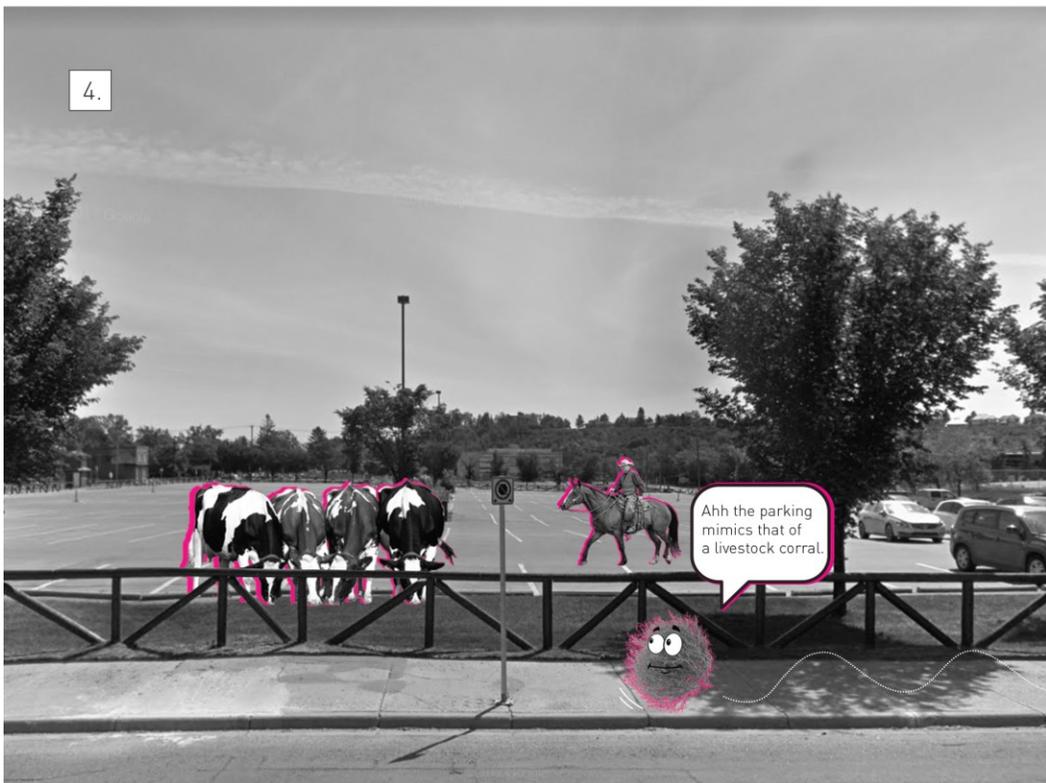


Figure 20: Stampede Park tour stop 4.



Figure 21: Stampede Park tour stop 5.

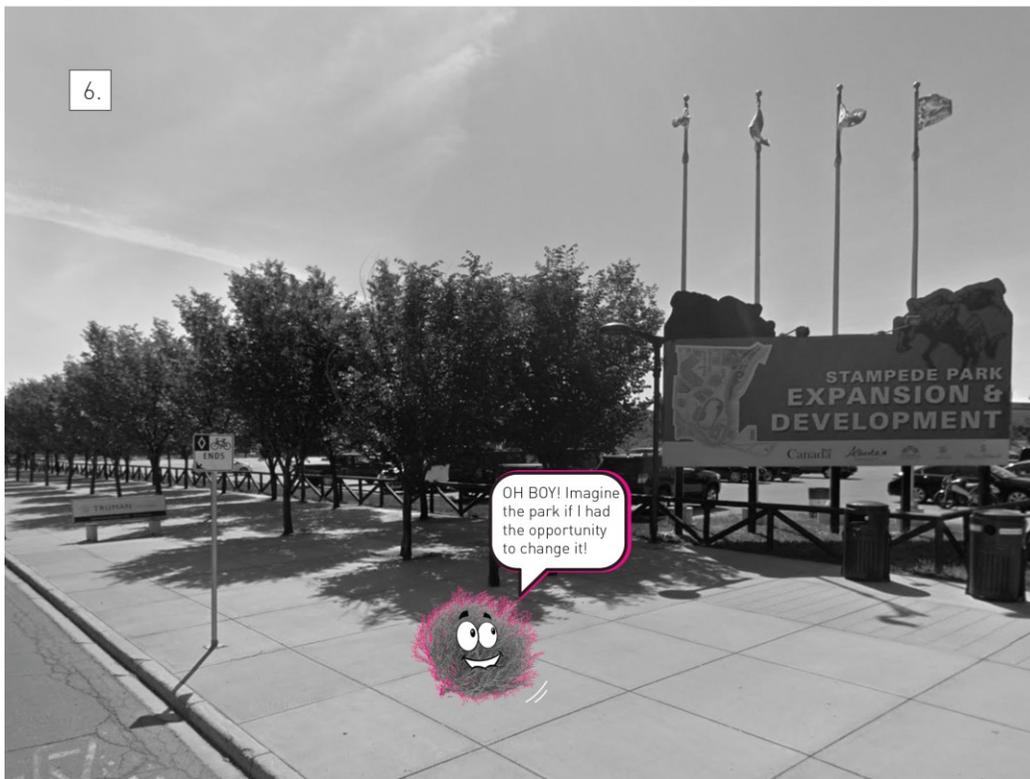


Figure 22: Stampede Park tour stop 6.

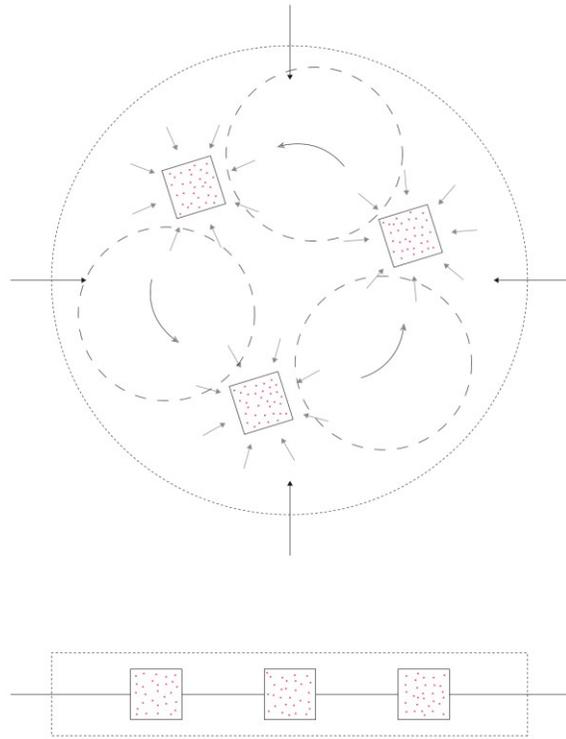


Figure 23: Current site program activation diagrams.



Figure 24: Site Analysis – Area.



Figure 25: Site Analysis – Buildings.

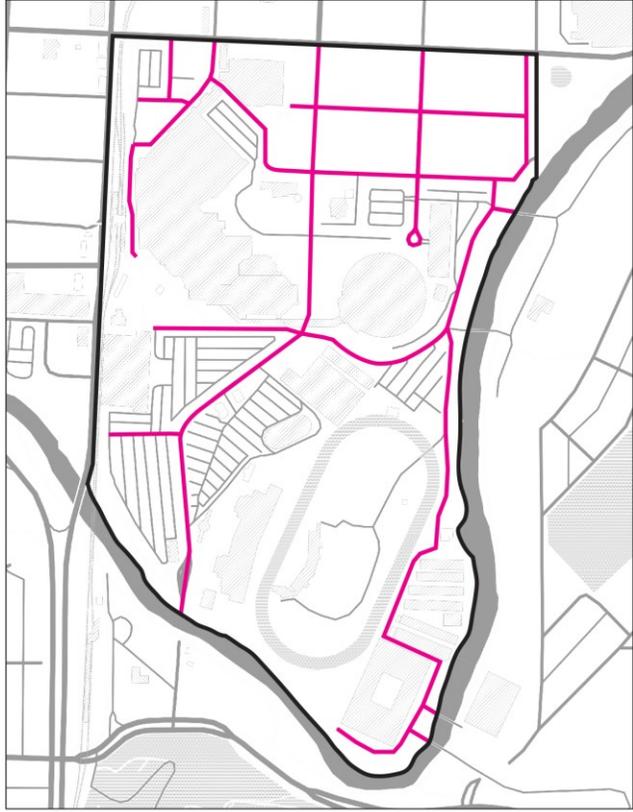


Figure 26: Site Analysis – Roads.

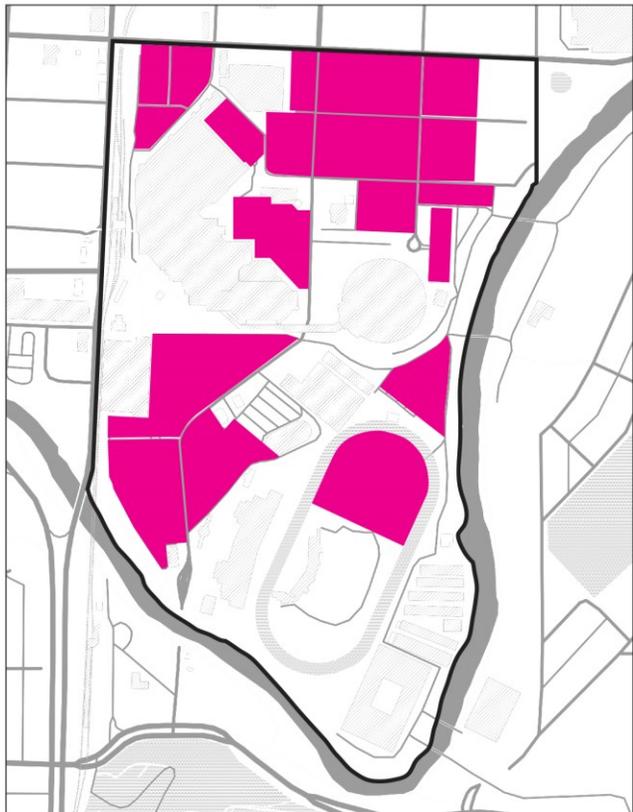


Figure 27: Site Analysis – Surface Parking.

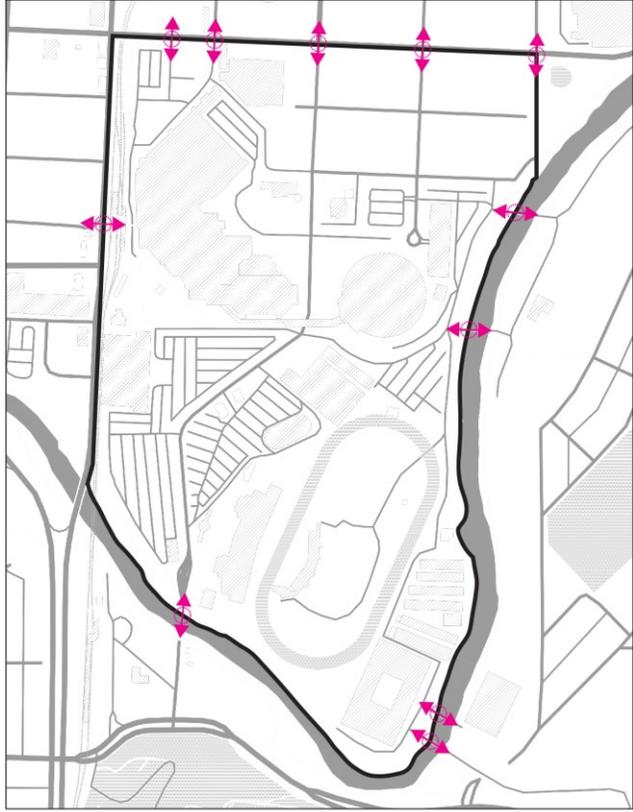


Figure 28: Site Analysis – Access Points.

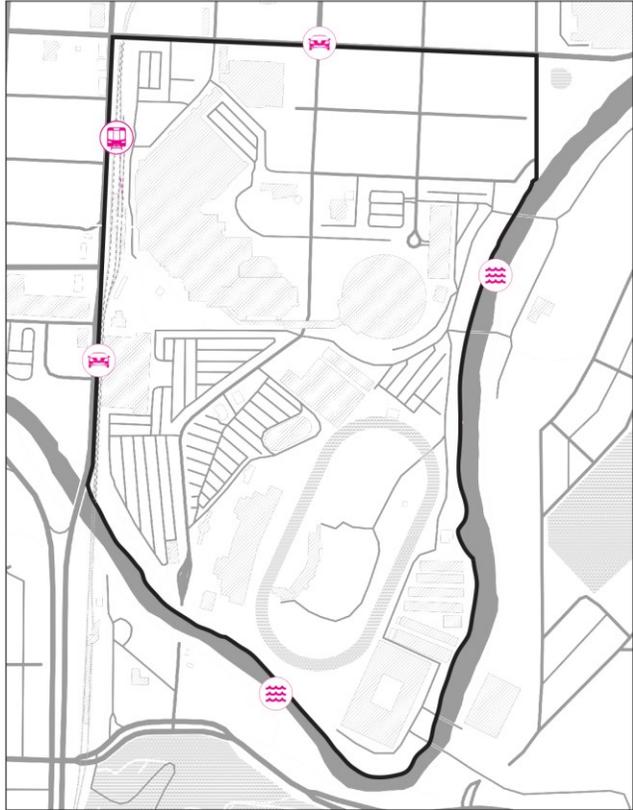


Figure 29: Site Analysis – Site Borders



Figure 30: Site Analysis – Site Activation Stamped.



Figure 31: Site Analysis – Site Activation Scheduled Events.



Figure 32: Site Analysis – Site Activation Daily.



Figure 33: Site Analysis – Elbow River



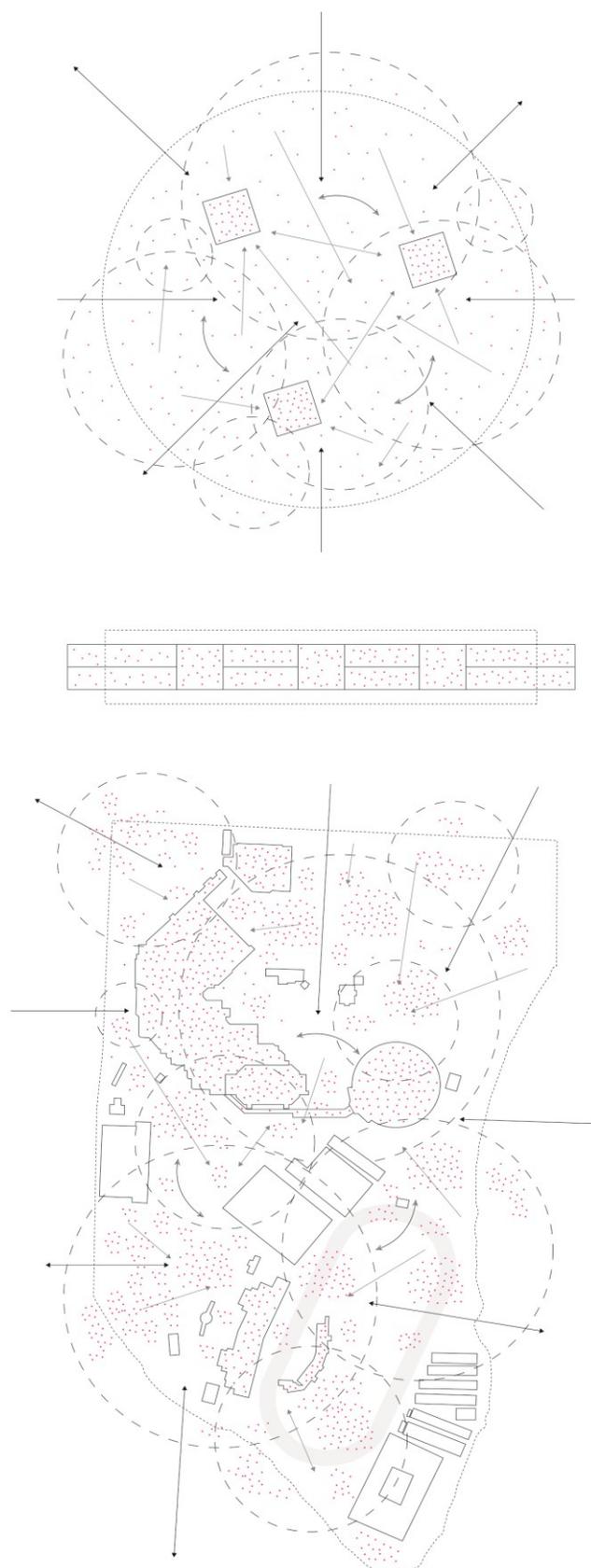


Figure 34: Proposed site program activation.

This next section looks at a possible design implication for the site through focusing on two particular lenses and themes. City + Site, and Building + Program.

City + Site

1. The city and site as a whole

To look more fully at the city and the site of the Stampede as a singular unit as opposed to separate urban parcels allows a re-reading of the site boundaries in order to foster more connectivity and a less closed off environment. By addressing each side of the site, this project proposes that we can determine a more appropriate action, intervention and program in order to attain a more open and engaged relationship with city and site.

2. Accessibility

To the north of the site, we see the up-and-coming neighbourhood of the East Village. It is a revamped community immediately adjacent to downtown that has seen an increase in population and activity, which can begin to overlap into the park. It is important to leverage the vitality of adjacencies in constructive fashion. While the East village is connected to the downtown, it is important to extend a similar attitude of connectivity to the site as well. Accessibility is key and a strategy of programmatic and urban porosity is essential to allow site fluidity and experience.

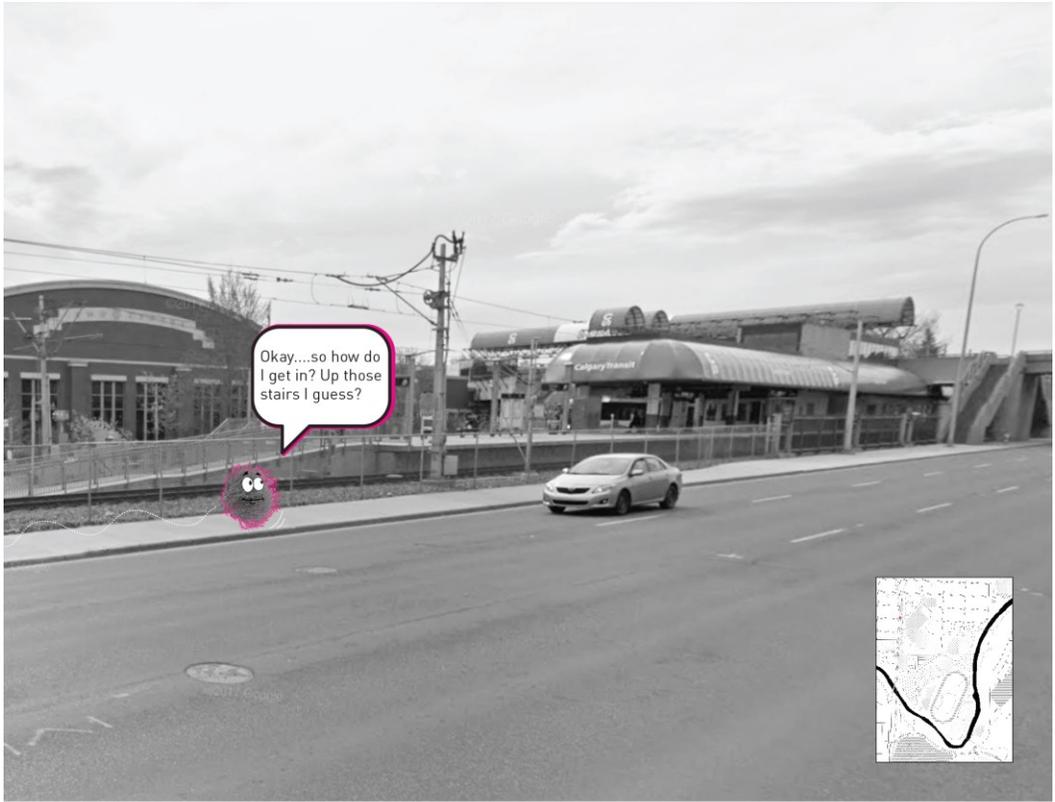


Figure 35: The city and site as a whole.

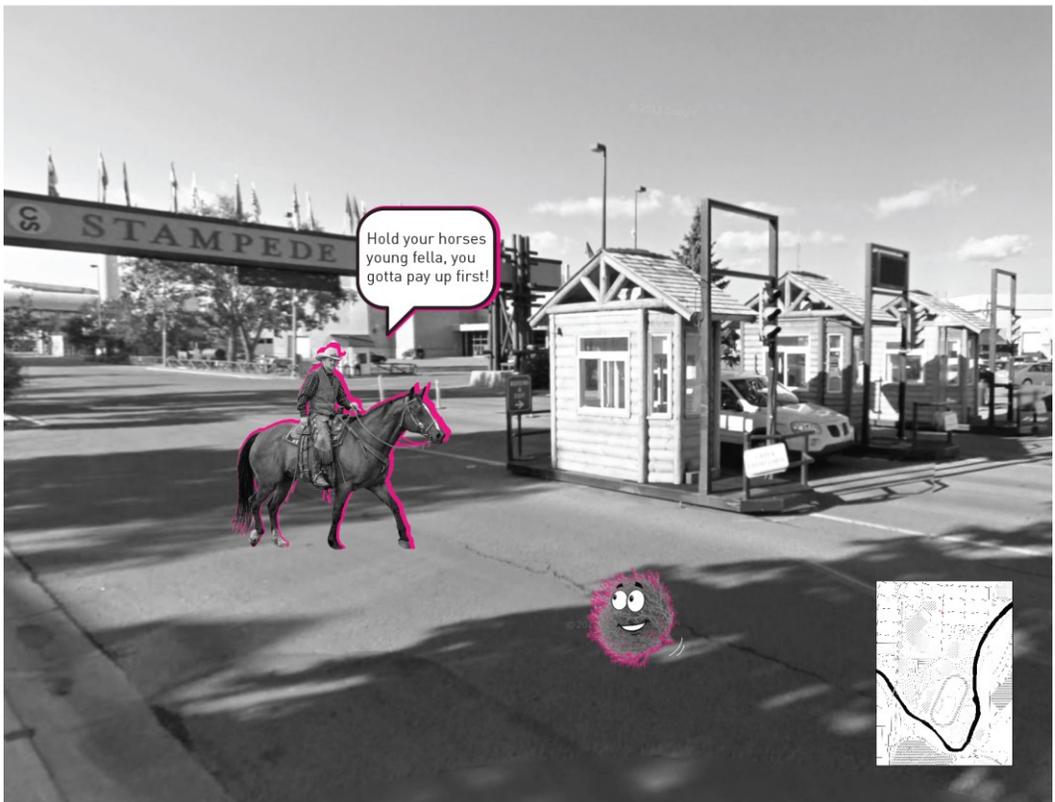


Figure 36: Accessibility

3. The River

The Elbow River wraps around the site to its east and south, creating a natural divide. Enmax Park and the northeast entrance to Stampede Park are found here. While the river physically disconnects the site, it provides a balancing context to the other more urbanized edges of the site. Bridges connect adjacent neighbourhoods although many end in gates that bar consistent movement to the site. The river is an underutilized amenity and, by and large, has not been integrated into site concerns.

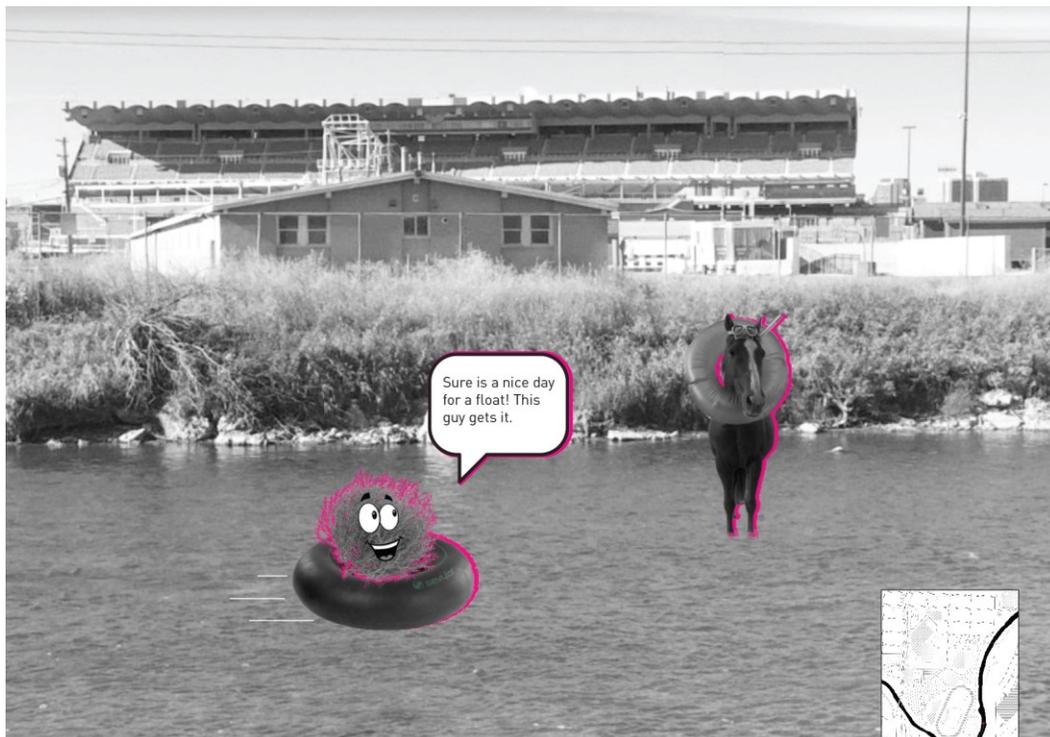


Figure 37: The River.



Figure 38: Connections.

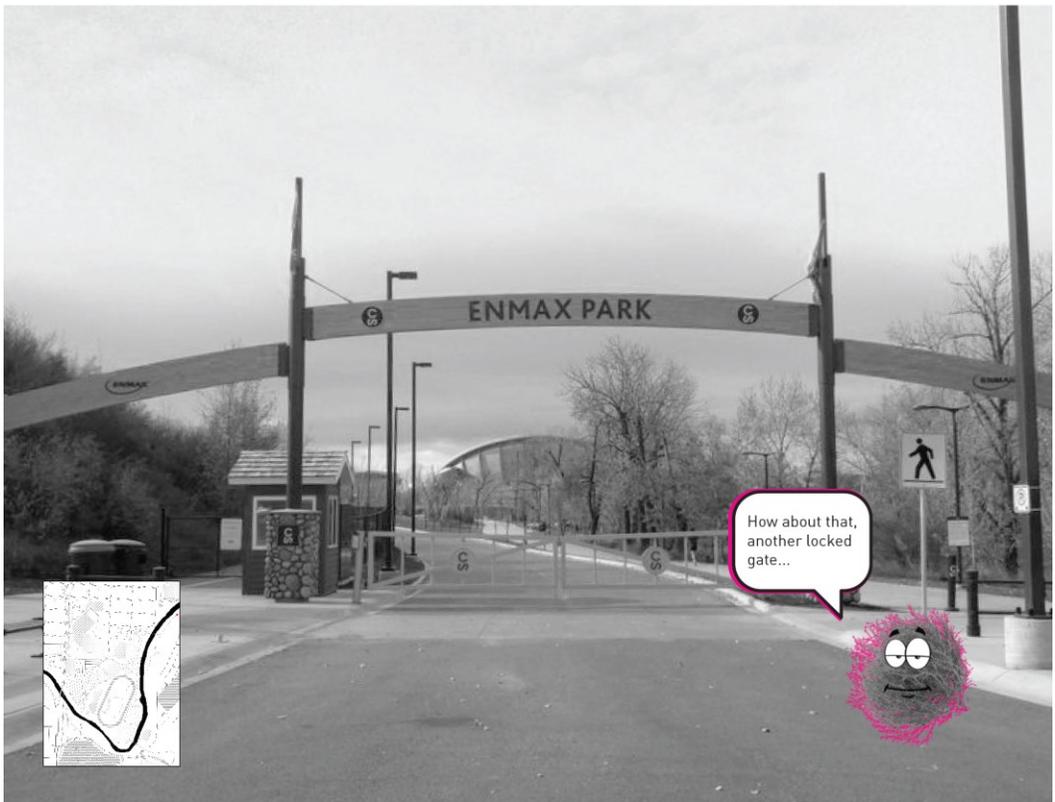


Figure 39: Consistent Movement.

4. Connections

The site's western side is one of its largest hurdles. Buildings, fences, highway and light transit rail effective create a barrier that cuts off any strong or current connection to the downtown. As it currently exists, the only accessibility to the site from the west and northwest is via a pedestrian bridge, at the rail station and the intersection at the corner of the site. Bridging this edge is essential. The Beltline – 17th Avenue - embodies Calgary's most vibrant urban strip of public spaces, bars, shops and entertainment that abruptly ends at the Stampede grounds. If connected, these two spaces – the line of 17th Avenue and the void of the park would intersect and engage, transforming Stampede Park as an urban island in the middle of a city into a more connected and linked space of activity and program.

5. Consistent Movement.

The site consists of large vacant spaces, ideal for where the midway can be located. For those 10 days of the year, the site is abuzz with activity, and for the remaining 355 days of the year, it is largely a vast and deserted landscape of empty parking lot – acres that would be perfect for ranging cattle if it was a greenspace. Although the buildings on site function pragmatically, most of them function, unfortunately and inadvertently, as barriers that enclose the site – in particular the BMO Convention Center. There is little flow through the site and the major artery that flows from north-south -Olympic Avenue - still requires passing through two sets of entrance gates from both directions. Currently there is no east-west flow for traffic, the pedestrian bridge bottle-neck peoples from the west onto the site; access to the belt line is non-existent, and if you cross the bridges on the Elbow, chances are you'll have to climb over a locked gate.

What does the city have to say about this site? Two separate bodies are currently working on this question. The Stampede itself is in the process of being redeveloped and the Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC), in charge of redeveloping the East Village and Victoria Park – has been exploring the issue of the site for some time, and a non-official schematic plan by the CMLC group was recently released in January of this year.²⁵ The desired municipal goal is to have these two proposals eventually emerge in the hope of creating the desired cultural hub of the city. The new plans by CMLC include needed infrastructure such as the Plan B Arena, social, commercial, residential and educational are all proposed, but it is likely that similar problems will continue to persist.²⁶

²⁵ Dippel, Scott. "Blowing down the saddledome and building a new Victoria Park." *CBC News Calgary*. Published: January 27, 2018.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Building + Program

Stampede Grandstand

Seating approximately 18,000 with additional space for 3000, the grandstand is a large venue with a short period of activation. Unless otherwise planned, its use is mostly during the 10 days of Stampede events in July. The grandstand houses the typical array of events associated with the Stampede but apart from that very limited seasonal programming, spends most of its time dormant. What are its possibilities?

Could the grandstand be renovated? Could parts of it be transitioned to house a suitable football field or soccer pitch – particularly with McMahon stadium falling into disrepair? Could it be a year-round outdoor performance venue?

Its location along the Elbow River is both a challenge and opportunity. Floods in 2013 created significant river rise that submerged the grounds of the Grandstand. Looking to more contemporary strategies of flood prevention, could the Grandstand be renovated to respond more porously and accessibility to its local ecology as well as creating spaces of unique programmatic opportunity?



Figure 40: Stampede Grandstand and racetrack. Image sourced from Google Earth.

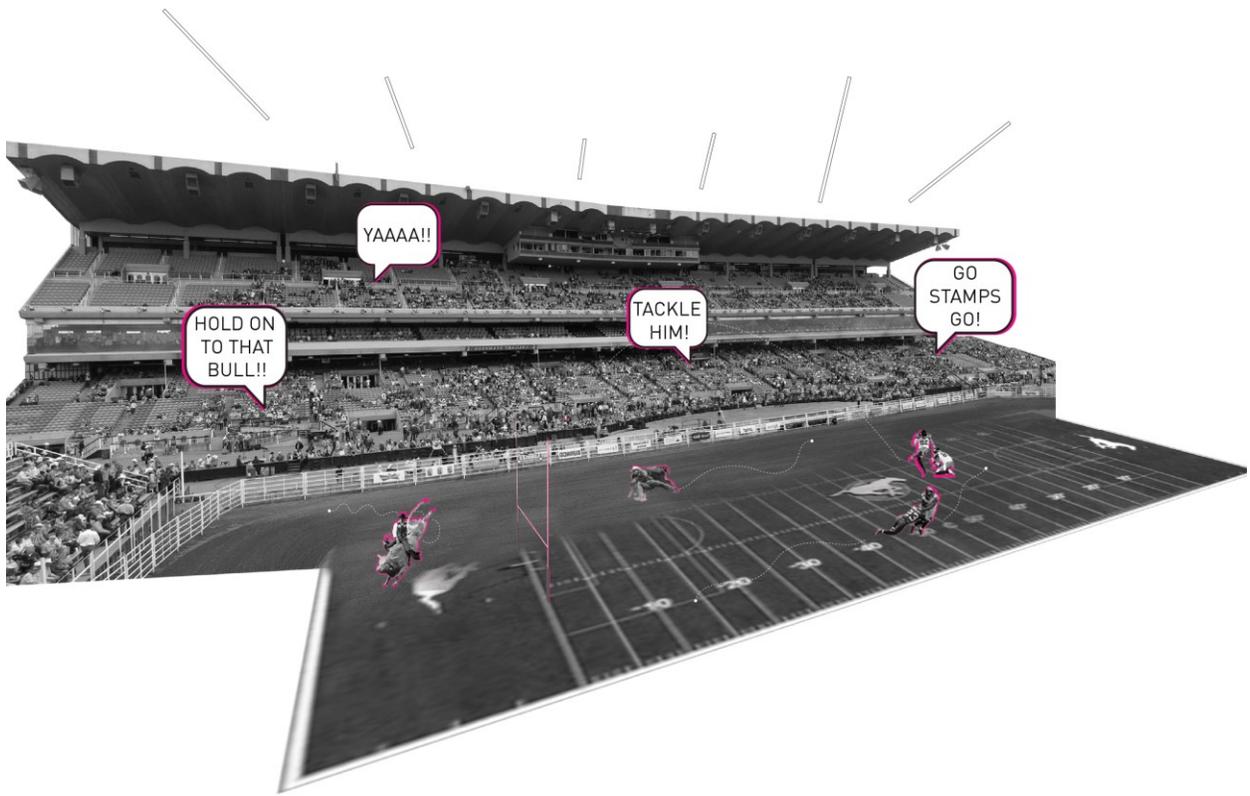


Figure 41: Grandstand Envision.

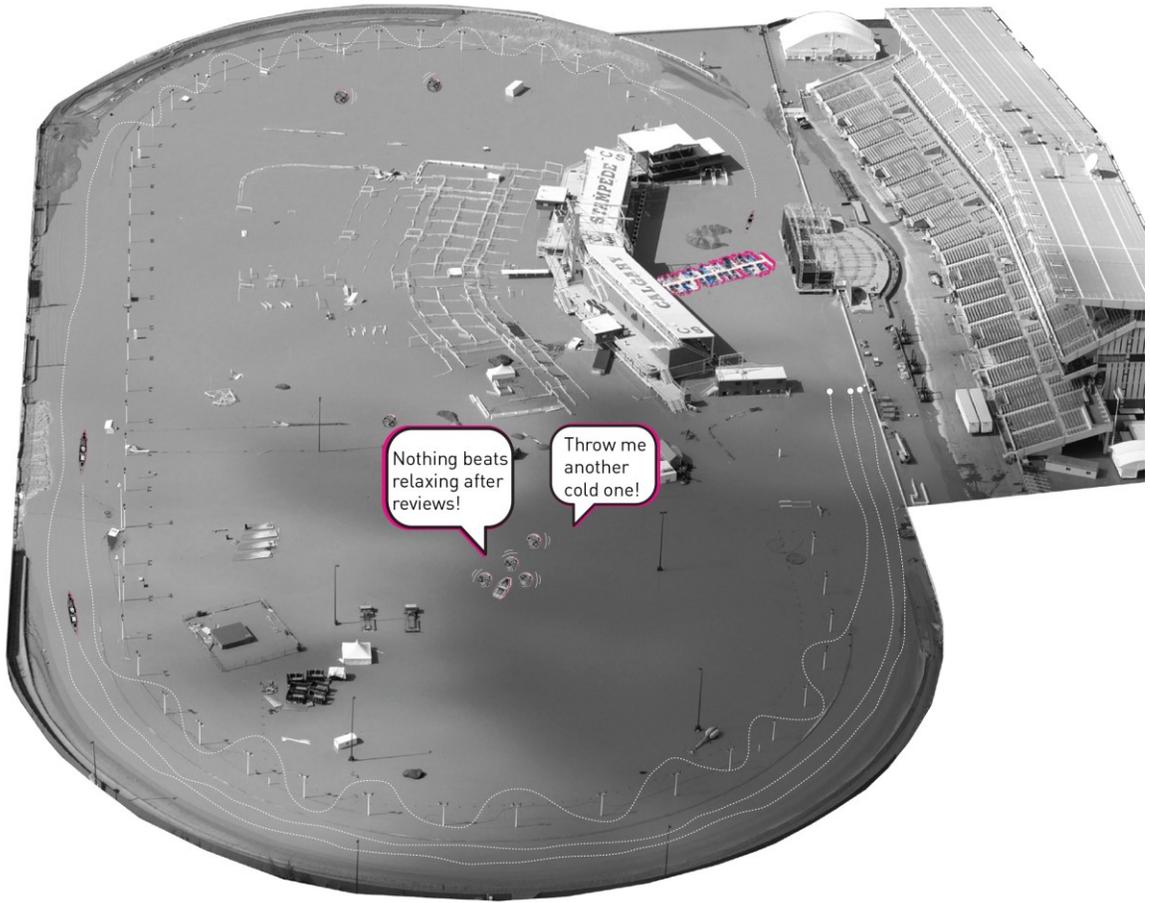


Figure 42: Flooded Envision.

Saddledome

The shape of his building has been the iconic image of how the rest of the world sees Calgary. The saddle-like building was built for the 1988 Olympic winter games and now approaches its 40th year – and its purpose and function are in question, particularly with a proposed current bid of building an entirely new facility north of the venerable building. Is it appropriate to consider demolishing it? It is a sensitive topic in the city – given the cultural value of the building as a community legacy and city icon, but to leave a building unused with no significant purpose is of no benefit. Its location is at the heart of the grounds and its absence would be felt. Could the transition of internal to external program be a potential solution, which would allow for, at least, a preservation of the iconic saddle shape? How do we re-program it to allow for connection, porosity, constant use and activation?



Figure 43: Scotiabank Saddledome. Image sourced from Google Earth.

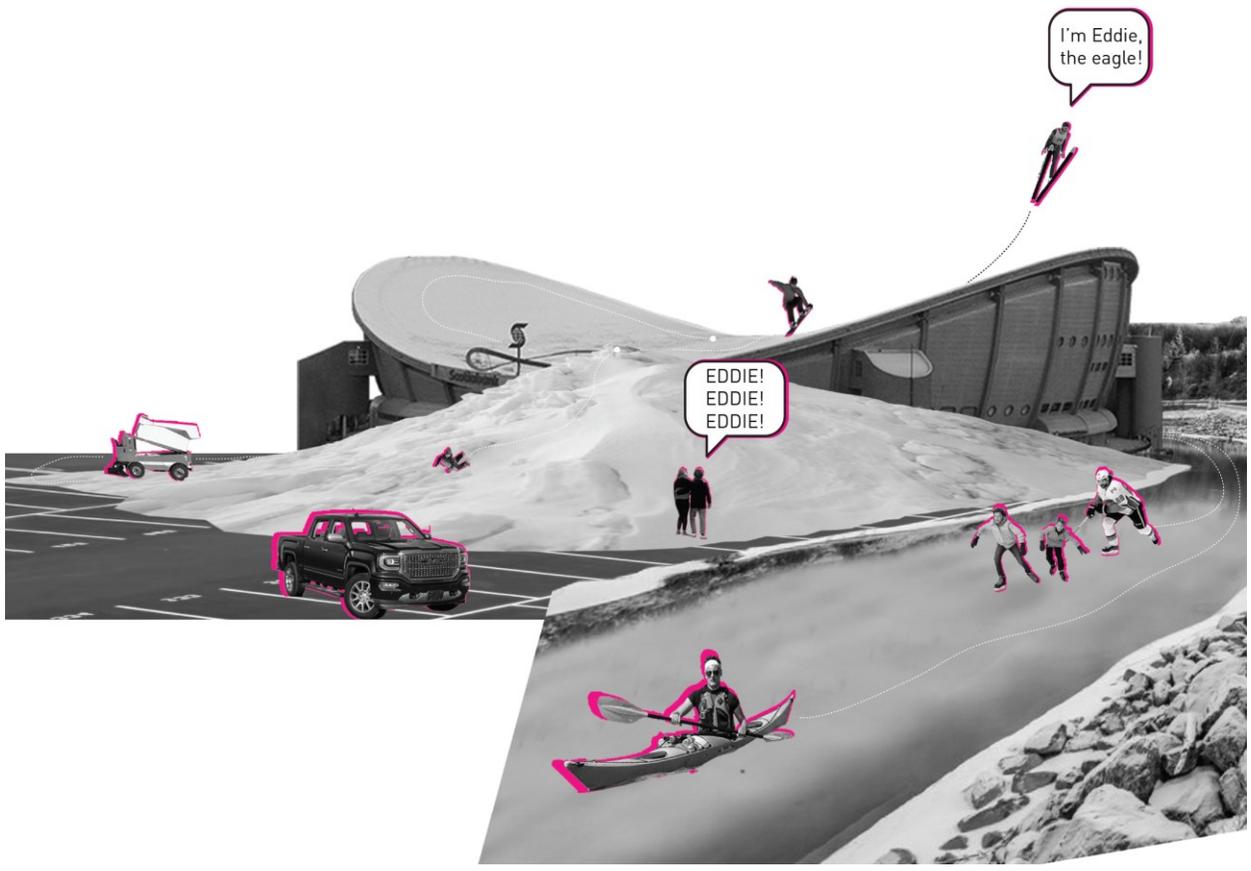


Figure 44: Saddledome Envision.

Sky Ride

The Sky Ride is an iconic component to every fair and is no exception here at the Stampede. It brings visitors up above the grounds to view the sights and the city skyline. When not in use during the Fair events, the ride is a line of brightly coloured chairs blowing creakily about in the wind. What are the possibilities of an alternative future for the Sky Ride? How might we keep its iconic use and extend that beyond a slow ride? Could it be used more effectively to engage with programs on the ground as well? In its current state there isn't enough topography for it to function as a ski-lift, but with the addition of a constructed landscape below, a skate park for instance, could its function serve purpose in assisting a proposed program – a cable park for boarders during the winter?



Figure 45: Aerial of Sky Ride. Image sourced from Google Earth.

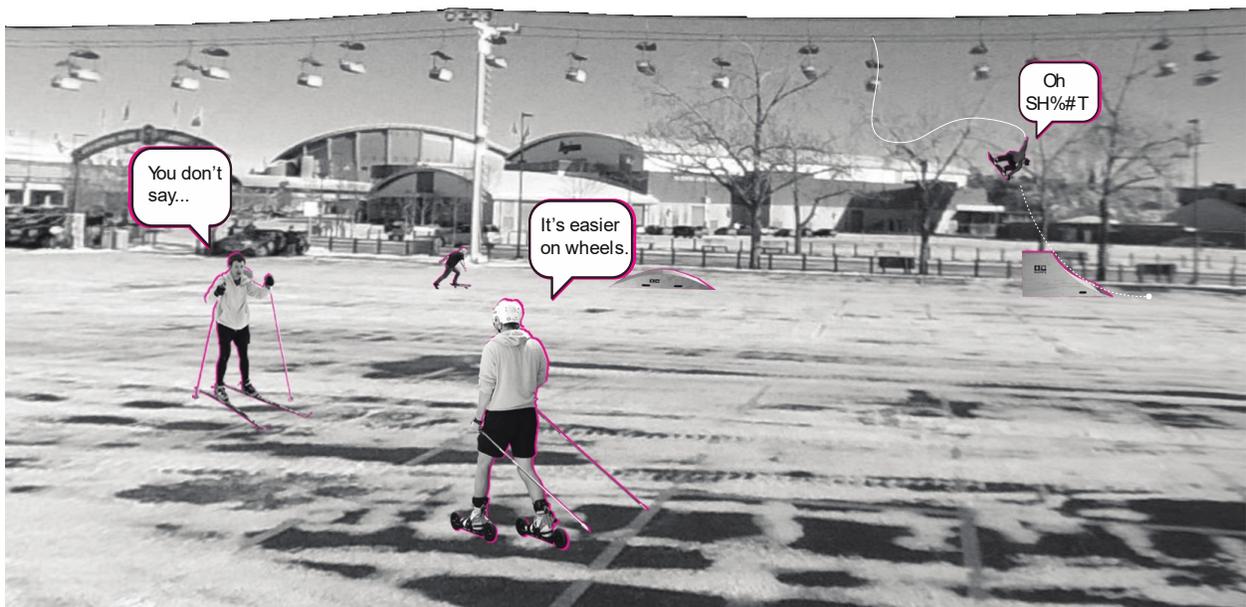


Figure 46: Sky Ride Envision.

Parking Facilities

The sites parking garages were a necessity but are boring at their very best. Calgary is a truck city and this will not change anytime in the near future. What can these essentially boring programs provide? They are enormously engineered and often poorly imagined and integrated into their surroundings. Could parking become a gathering space for more than cars? More than a blank façade that numbly faces the spaces around it? Could it serve functions when not in use – and not filled with cars? A skate park? A bike track? A running track? Can we parkour the site and its spaces? Can we create programmatic stampedes? A continuous, helter-skelter activity that changes surfaces and facades. Blank façade to bouldering façade? What is the alternate possibility of parking?

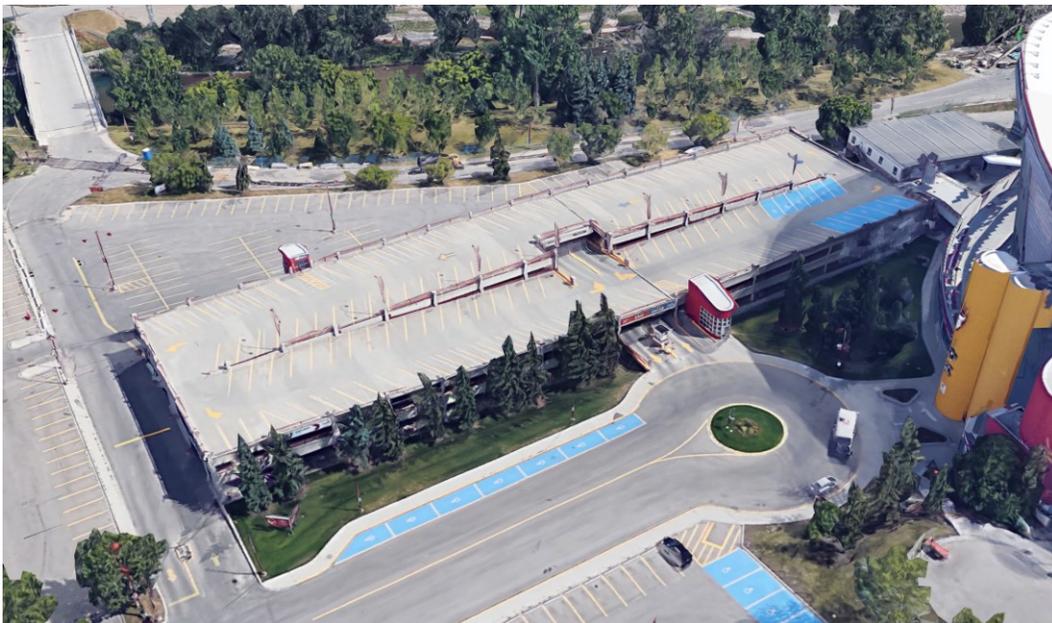


Figure 47: Saddledome Parkade. Image sourced from Google Earth.

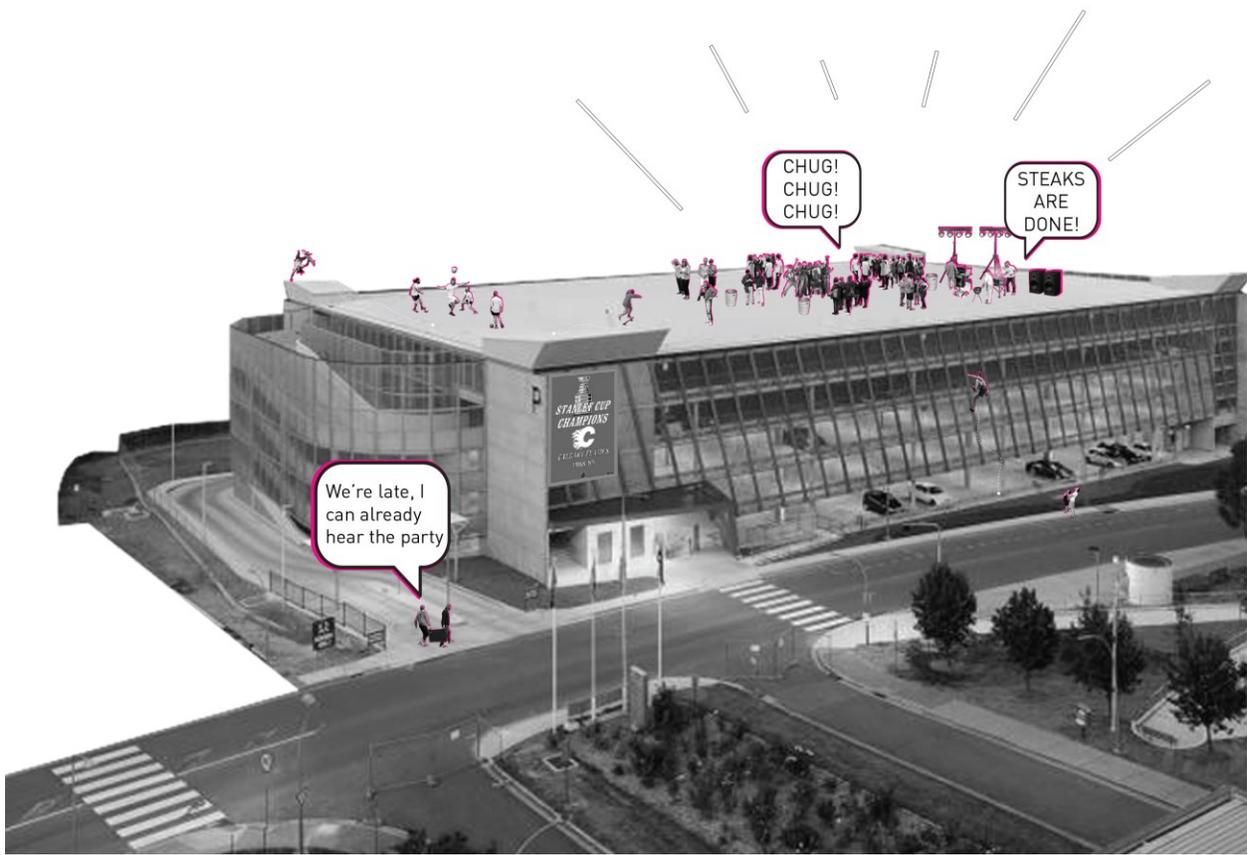


Figure 48: Parkade Envision.

Olympic Way

The main north south artery within the site is Olympic Way. It is a vehicle friendly route to get through the site. Its major problem is that its... vehicle friendly, with pedestrians barely considered at all. Pedestrians should BE the focus and not just through tokenistic walking path but users and wanderers of a versatile route that changes and adapts with the seasonal conditions of the city – through Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring. Paths should be skating trails, provide for cross country skiing, snow-shoeing, biking, inline skating, ambling, running. What could a stampede path be? Could the current city pathway that resides along the elbow river on the south and east side be able to cross into the park and become apart of the system?



Figure 49: Aerial of Olympic Way. Image sourced from Google Earth.

New Programs

The site – throughout its entirety – should have pockets of simple but vital spaces of public program, restaurants and leisure spaces and versatile and adaptive outdoor spaces that can be easily implemented. These pieces that are – more of a commonality within urban spaces – will be applied but not necessarily the focus.



CALGARY'S URBAN PLAYGROUND

Calgary's Urban Playground

Urban Play

The purpose of the thesis was to explore the creation of a space that is versatile in its public programming – tailored to a sports based infrastructure and the desire to continuously activate the space of the city. Locality is essential – Calgary's reality as a Winter City, a Sports City, a Western City – and of the integration of this site into the larger urban context of city and environment. The intention of the proposal was to explore – through the design proposals presented at the defence – a possibility, and appropriate (and decidedly whimsical) approach to an idea of Urban Play.

The design proposal focuses on working within the context of the current site conditions, and through the strategies noted in the "Drawing the Play" section. The objective is not a radical re-envisioning of the site, but to expand and draw on the familiar – with the occasional bold, but contextualized move - in order to propose a more vibrant and consistently active site. The desire is to create something new that feels familiarly contextualized for Calgary.

The proposal for the site means that it will be accessible from all sides. From the north, numerous corridors will be opened to allow for Victoria Park and Stampede Park to become a cohesive condition to productively and symbiotically build off one another. The East and South Park of the site are left with existing bridges, with the addition of a pedestrian bridge that links the current city pathway with to a proposed one within the grounds. Finally the troublesome West side barrier is dealt with: the rail line is buried, and access to the Beltline and 17th Avenue is emphasized.

As a result, the internal site emphasizes the importance of free and continuous movement – of being able to move and flow through the site no matter from which direction one may have entered. The space is broadly democratized and as one ventures throughout the site, public space and program are emphasized and are continuously met at ground plane with ease of accessibility.

Building Play

The existing built environment has been improvised to attain certain desired program characteristics that were first introduced in the earlier Stampede Park section as potential design interventions. Here

the ideas have been grounded permanently in the site to demonstrate a possibility of how these conditions could be achieved in order to create a more engaging and vibrant site.

Three groupings can be identified in the development of this new plan and how it was conceptualized. The proposal does not begin a blank slate. The decision to not start with a clean canvas was due, in large part, to the fact that the project and its site would lose a fundamental and key sense of grounding – cultural iconicity, local memory, memorial value etc. As a result, it was essential to work with (within reason) the existing infrastructure so as not to lose the qualities that Calgarians value about the site. What results is a scheme that utilizes existing infrastructure with alternative programming borrowed from both the CMLC and Stampede proposals and the design and research observations of the thesis work itself.

Buildings such as the grandstand, western events centre, agriculture centre, BMO centre and casinos will remain. The stampede sees the expansion of the BMO Centre, the completion of Shaw Park across the Elbow river and youth campus all as necessary additions. The CMLC has developed a scheme incorporating an Arena, social, commercial and private facilities, all tailored to towards the continued expansion of Victoria Park.

Stampede Bowl

The Grandstand is the largest existing piece of infrastructure on the site that sees the least amount of intervention and transformation because of its particular structure and established function. Outside of the Rodeo, it has no other use besides the odd staged event. The proposal with this area is to extend not only the timeline of operation of the facility but also its versatility. With McMahon Stadium coming of age, the city will require a replacement facility – empty seats await and all that's missing is a proper field. Instead of just planting a football/soccer/lacrosse field, the intent is to carve out the infield and install a bowl – stampede bowl. Why a bowl? With the Elbow River running in close proximity, flooding is a yearly occurrence, and was most evident in 2013, which saw the grounds completely submerged. The intent is for this piece of infrastructure to aid in flood prevention by serving as a detention pond. This at the same time will not only offer protection from potential floodwaters but as well – for a short period of time – create a rafting and fishing spot for locals to enjoy.

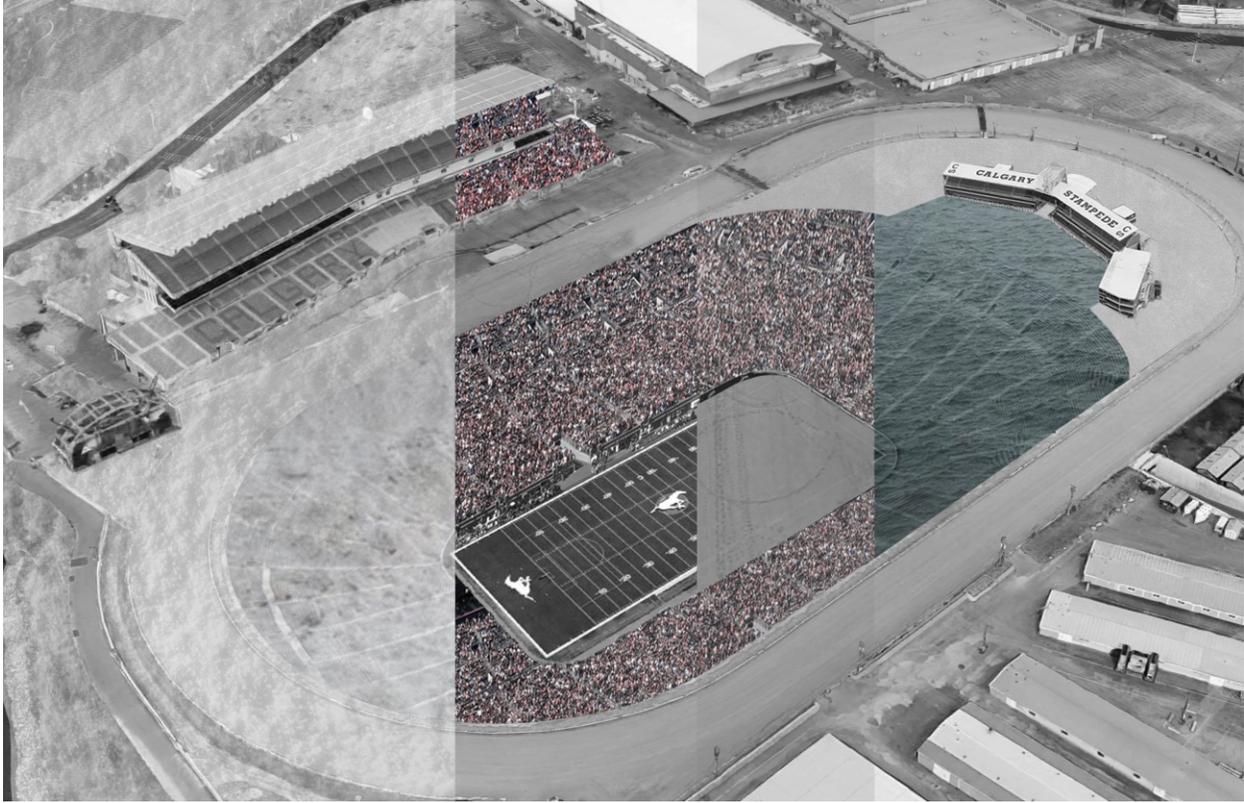


Figure 50: Stampede Bowl.

Saddle Plaza

Rather than demolishing the Saddledome to make way for a small public plaza, accompanied by – yes, sadly – more parking (which is the strategy of the CMLC scheme), this design proposes to incorporate the building *as* a plaza. Here the bowl is in-filled, the roof is removed and its exterior paneling replaced with a digital flat surface ideal for projection. The exterior, as a result, becomes Calgary’s largest 360-degree video board that projects back upon the city. Hockey, lacrosse, football, soccer, and rodeo all projected upon the big screen for all to see. Within the walls the open space is that of an amphitheatre for any out door event to be hosted no matter the season. Calgarians are hardy – they can take a bit of snow.

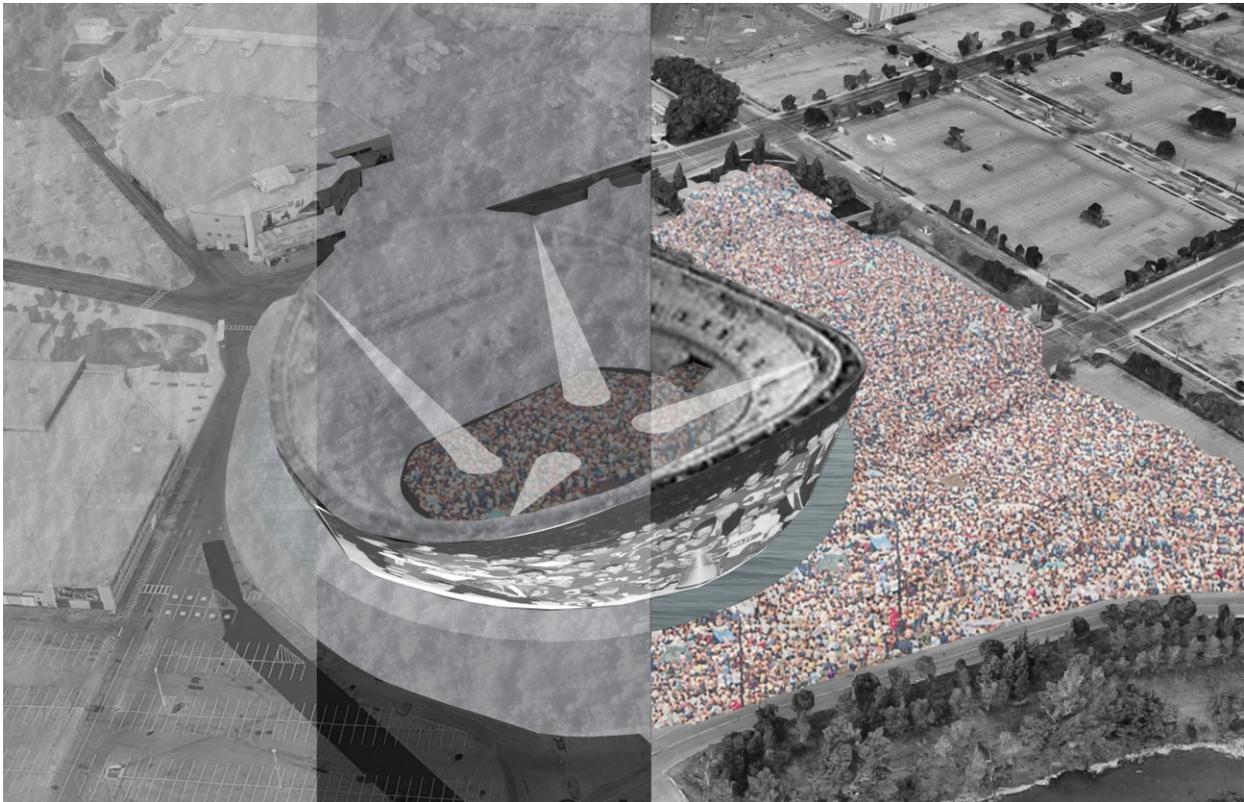


Figure 51: Saddle Plaza.

Stampede Rhythm

Skate parks tend to always be filled – when the weather co-operates and its not winter – but for the most part are highly active spaces. How might this - as programmed space become a more consistent and continuous activity in the site? This is where those colourful chairs come in. The thesis proposes a Skate Park– in the winter becoming a snow park and for a short period of time during the spring a wake course. Shifting from BMX biking, inline skating and skateboarding to snowboard and skiing to even wakeboarding, this piece of infrastructure is seen as a versatile, adaptive piece of sport infrastructure. Spanning below the sky ride, it is divided into sections that both creates separate locations for individuals to skate, but also becoming an obstacle course for skiers and borders. The Sky-ride can be repurposed to serve as a tether – a rope line - (when the seats are removed, of course) with handles that help pull participants through the course.

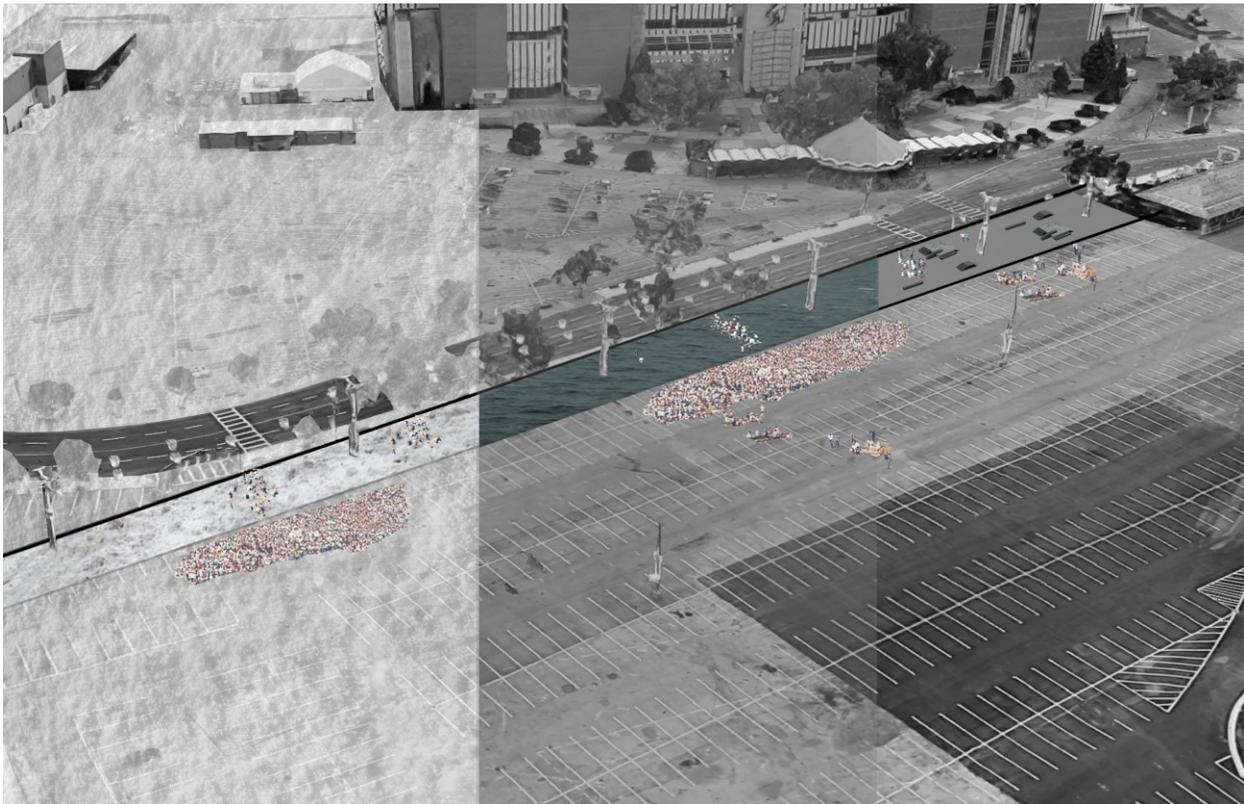


Figure 52: Stampede Rhythm.

Car Park(ing)

With a large portion of surface parking being allocated to new greenspaces and sport influenced programs, there has been a reduction of space to park your pickup but don't worry – your precious parking didn't completely disappear. Two locations on the site have concentrated parking; not including the remaining surface parking. These two garages are located on opposite ends of the park but are in close proximity to the major sporting venues, Plan B Arena and Stampede Bowl.

Located adjacent to the arena, is the north car park. More conventional than its counterpart, the facility is to serve not only the influx of vehicles during game day, but the surrounding neighbourhood throughout. Located north of the arena it also plays host as additional parking for the new city proposed green line LRT terminal. As a transit point, it is also a designated meeting place and a space to tailgate. Why not join immediately into the festivities the minute you arrive? Roll down the truck windows, pop the tailgate, fire up the grill and crack a cold beer. Be immersed in the experience – after all, its why we go to cheer on the home team.

The southern car park serves a different role. Seen as the more active of the two parking locations, it spans the Elbow River and bridges the two sides with access from either end. It plays host to multiple sport based programs – basketball and tennis courts up high, climbing/bouldering walls on the northeast and west side, even access to the river below so individuals can float down the river on a hot day. Its purpose is to be engaged by offering more to the public realm besides a place to park your pickup.

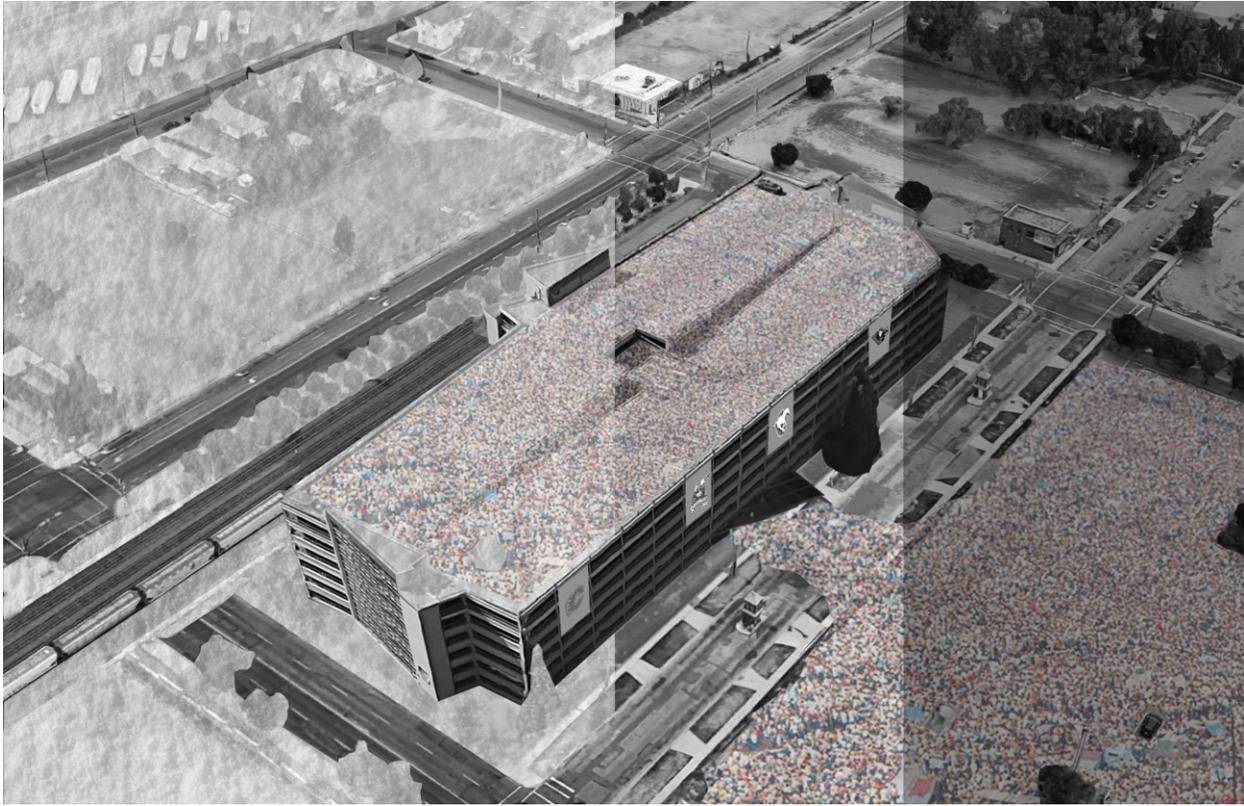


Figure 53: Party Parkade – North Parkade.

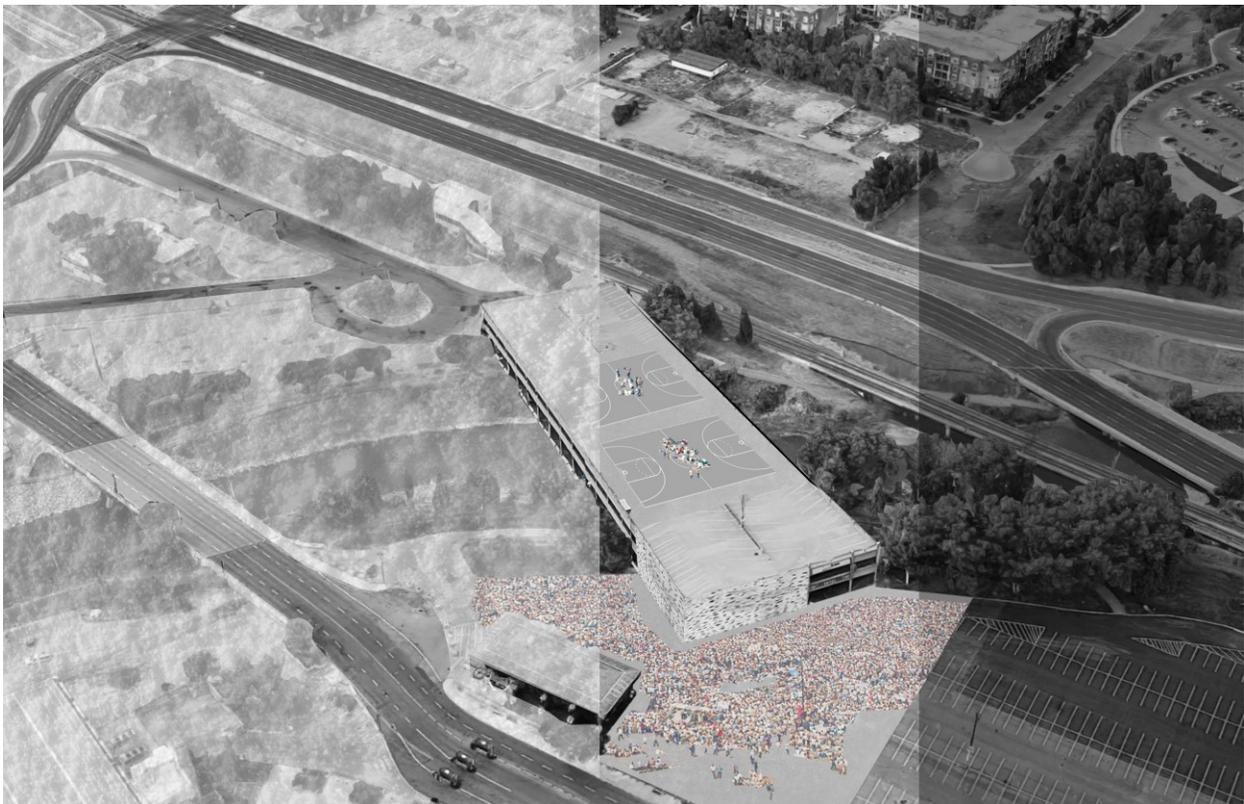


Figure 54: Active Park(ing) – South Parkade.

Seasonal Play

A key goal of the thesis is propose a series of strategic program and architectural interventions that respond to changing environments – in both a pragmatic and playful way. The idea of seasonal programs across the site for a year was important to create consistent synergy in the site.

Seasonal change drastically changes the environment and conditions how we respond. A piece of infrastructure designed for a singular purpose lacks the ability to quickly or versatility adapt, and can result in limited or mono-functionality. How might we creatively think of ways that embody the idea of being multifaceted with new and existing pieces? This is what will allow the new Stampede District to stand as a vibrant hub *of* and *in* the city.

SEASONALITY

Summer

The large events take place in the summer. The Stampede brings everyone and everything to the park. Space is of vital necessity and without compromising, the park can adapt. The rodeo grounds take place within the new grandstand bowl, the track still evident and capable of races. Autonomous spaces are overtaken by carnival food, games and vendor booths. Ease of flow between outlying and adjacent neighbourhoods allow for the transition of additional, summer businesses to be located both in and out of the park grounds. Aside from the “Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth”, the site embodies and celebrates surfaces of play. Parking facilities, when not occupied with of vehicles, act as parks, bouldering walls, climbing walls and places to gather and connect. The plaza plays host to festivals, markets and performances tailored to the season. The program suggests that you get out and enjoy the warm weather while it lasts because, well, Alberta. We could wake up the next day with snow on the ground.



Figure 55: Stamped Park Seasonal Plan – Summer.

Fall

The change of season changes the space. As winter approaches, this season sees the least amount of physical or programmatic transformation but acts as a transitional period to prepare for winter. The field within the bowl remains as is to allow for the waning season of outdoor sports such as football and soccer to take place until the arrival of winter and snow and the programmatic spaces that snow and winter bring. Spaces that are programmed to tailor to summer activities - rental shops for bikes, skates, kayaks, or summer food and beverages (beer is all-season), transition now to accommodate winter activities and programs: rental spaces serve up snow-shoe rentals, snowboards and skis. In this period, the park remains as an active, threshold space, still public and open. Winter can be long and harsh but also the most enjoyable time of the year, so it's better to be prepared.

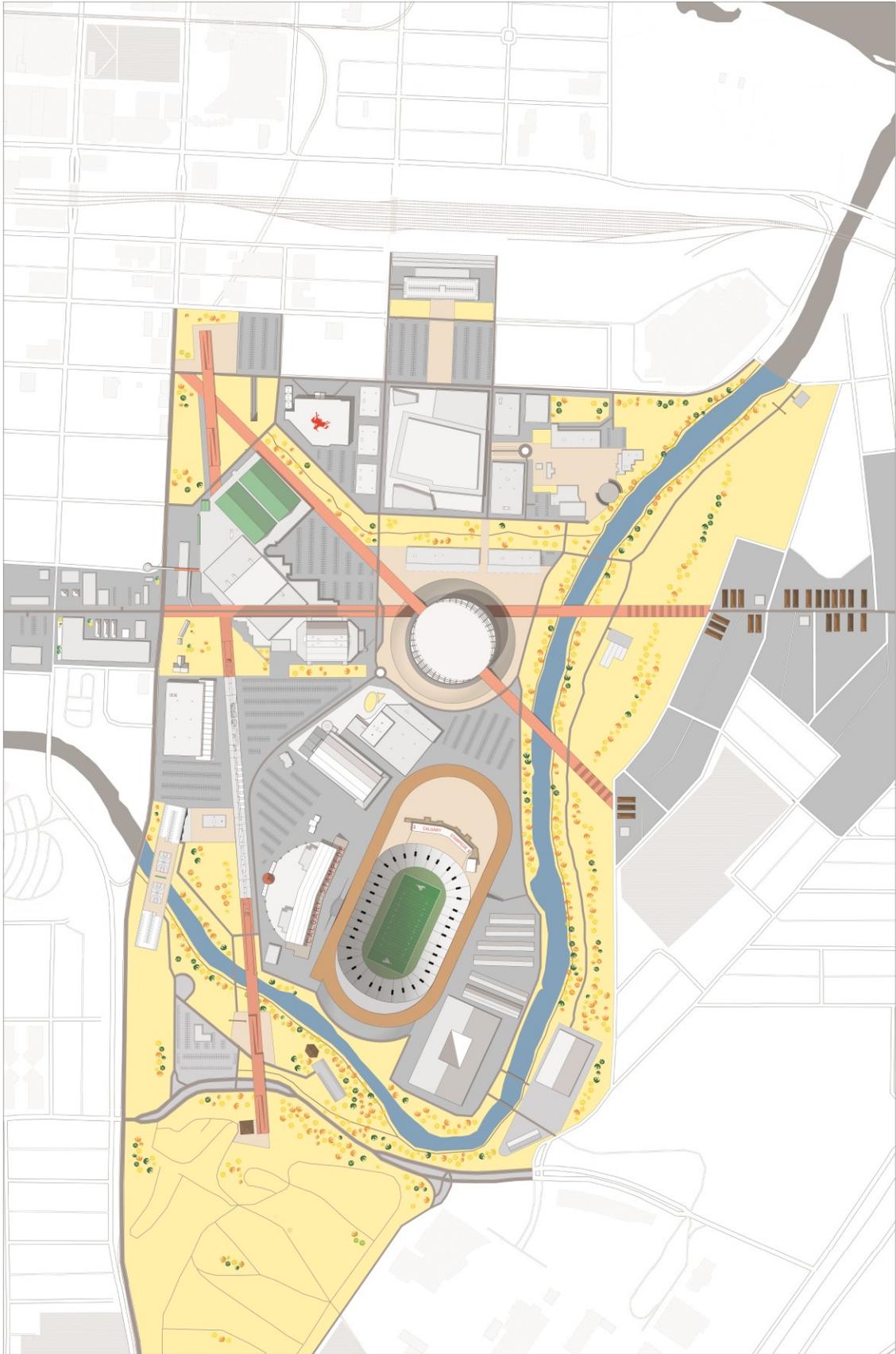


Figure 56: Stamped Park Seasonal Plan – Fall.

Winter

Calgary is a winter city and this is the season most embraced. It is during this season that the most drastic changes occur on the site and its programming, all tailored now to the many outdoor enthusiasts that call the city home. The grandstand bowl begins collecting snow, not only from precipitation but as well from the city's snow removal systems, to create a vast snow bowl for tobogganing, tubing and skiing. The track circle opens for those who enjoy cross-country skiing or dog sledding. The central artery of the site - Olympic Avenue - is transformed into a skating promenade throughout its length. Winter festivals take place, evening hockey games up on the big screen, beaver tails eaten and hot chocolates drank. Oh! to be Canadian, eh?.



Figure 57: Stampede Park Seasonal Plan – Winter.

Spring

As the snow retreats and winter programs close up shop, the showering of springtime rain refreshes the site. Even though the spring season offers fewer programmatic changes, it does feature an important role of water detention due to its close proximity to the Elbow River. Controlling the yearly runoff is a challenge and can be unpredictable (like the 2013 flood), but anticipating this as part of larger ecological strategy is part of the new park ground program. As the river swells, the stampede bowl becomes activated by embracing the additional water surge, and transforms into a pond that can prevent upstream flooding. This newly created controlled lake now becomes an opportunity for adventure seekers – becoming a short-program kayaking and fishing spot. As the river levels return to normal, so does the bowl in the anticipation of the water funnelling out, removing all left over snow and revealing the field and stands.

Another area of the site tailored to take on excess water is the Stampede Rhythm course. After being packed full of snow during the winter season, as the temperature rises water begins to pool and just like the pond, a short-term programmed wakeboard park unfolds. Grab a board and ride the wave because bull riding season is not far off.



Figure 58: Stampede Park Seasonal Plan – Spring.



Figure 59: Calgary's Urban Playground Plan and tour.

1.

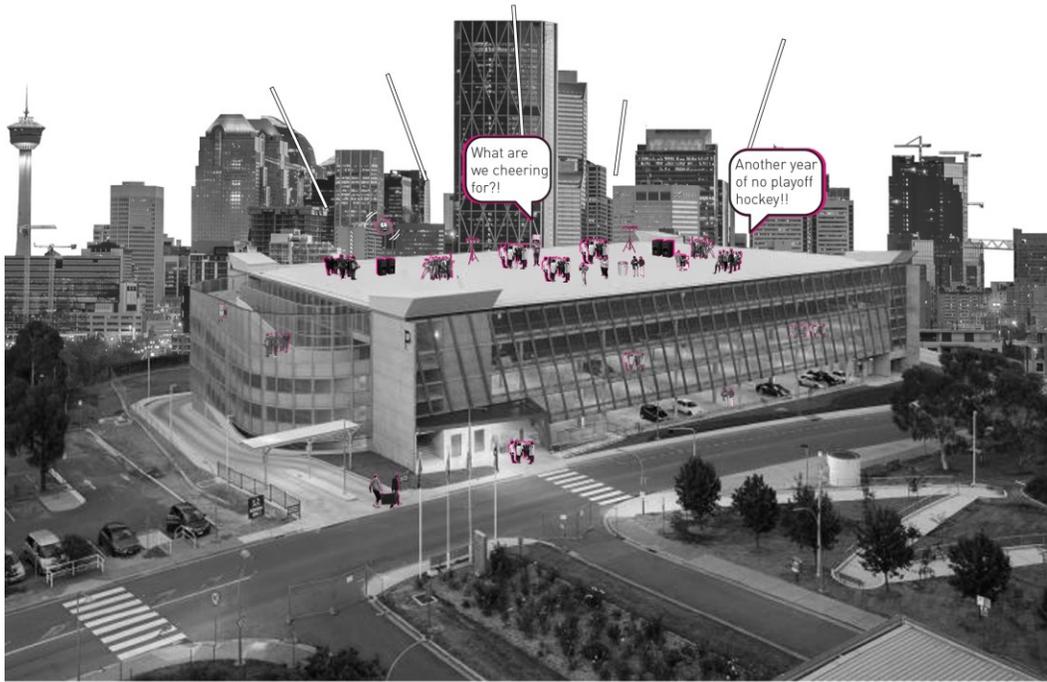


Figure 60: Party Parkade tour stop 1.

2.

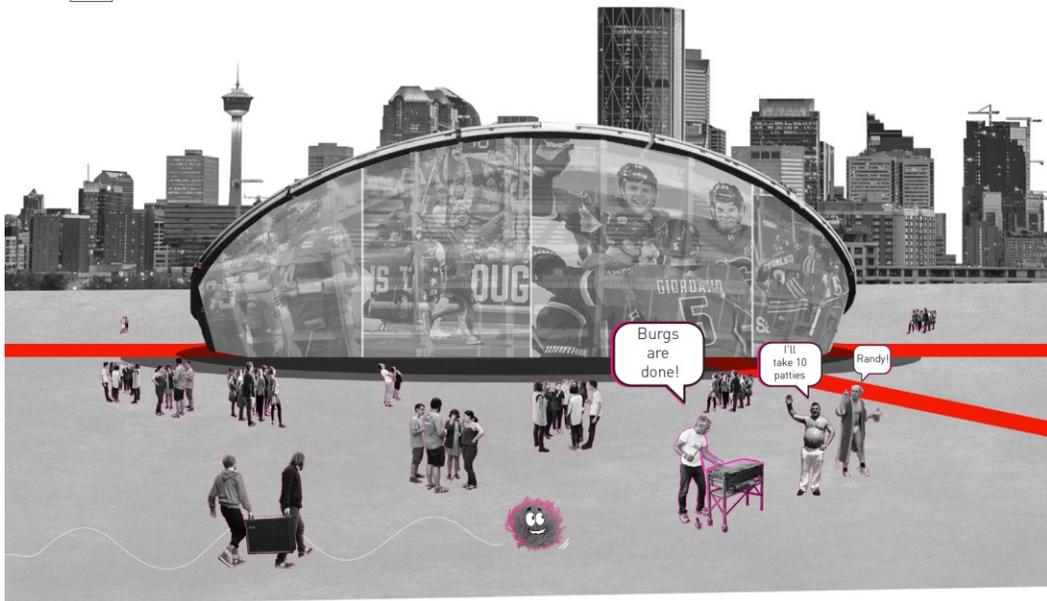


Figure 61: Saddle Plaza tour stop 2.



Figure 62: Stampede Rhythm tour stop 3.

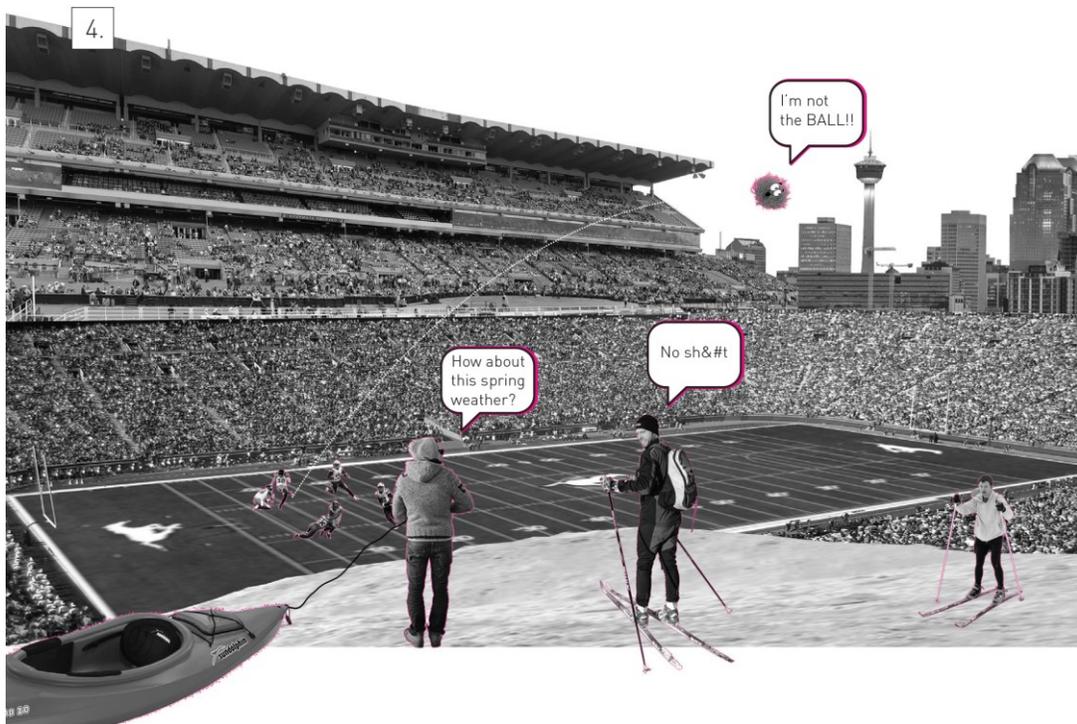


Figure 63: Stampede Bowl tour stop 4.

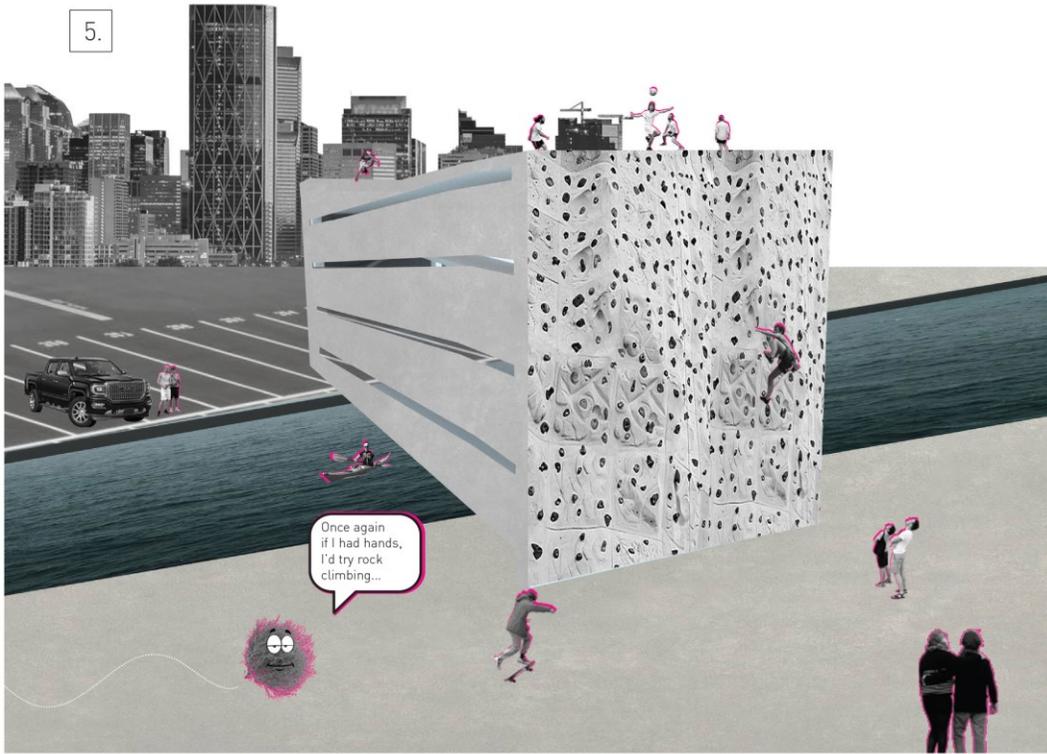


Figure 64: Active Park(ing) tour stop 5.

Afterword

So did we solve the problems surrounding the current conditions seen within the sporting district – not even close, but more importantly we’ve opened up the discussion. These projects are vast in size and demonstrate great potential in becoming vital pieces to the urban fabric of any city – but what drives their existence is also their biggest downfall.

It’s selective in nature, not only for those who benefit from it, but even during times of operation. The general public – the ones who are swayed into thinking by developers that such neighbourhoods are beneficial – enjoy only a fraction of what the space offers.

What this project aimed to produce was a setting tailored to optimising public involvement through sport-based programs. Spaces that didn’t need special access or skill set. What occurred were pockets of public opportunity that became the main driving force of the district. The professional stadia – the hockey rink and football field – took the backseat. Still being apart of the process, just not the focus.

In choosing Calgary and Stampede Park, the platform was ideal due to its current political affairs with the city and obvious physical ones. It’s a very central piece and can be the most vibrant space – as seen with the Stampede in July – but aside from that, the site struggles to connect with its surroundings.

The proposal of the Urban Playground was about breaking barriers and creating connections. The city will continue to densify and the site will continue to grow. Opportunities of joined spaces will emerge and programs will be able to coexist. The strong linear gestures stand as a cohesive platform of connecting, bringing people and future program – whatever that may be – within.

The site layout could be one of many but what it embodies are the ideas of what drove the project initially. Did we open the site to the city – yes. Did we introduce public sport based program – yes. Did we introduce new program to existing infrastructure – yes. Finally, did we apply a layer that allows for program and architecture to respond to the changing conditions seen throughout the year – yes. This is how I perceive a sports district; this is Calgary’s Urban Playground.



Figure 65: Calgary's Urban Playground.

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