

Sky's the limit downtown

Height restriction lifted

BY CHARLES HAMILTON, THE STARPHOENIX JANUARY 14, 2014 7:43 AM



Saskatoon's skyline could look a lot different in the coming years as city councillors agreed in principle to remove building height restrictions.

Photograph by: Gord Waldner, The Starphoenix Photos, The Starphoenix

Saskatoon's downtown is looking skyward as city officials try to create a more compact core.

On Monday, city councillors agreed in principle to remove the height restrictions on all downtown buildings.

"We have to grow up," Mayor Don Atchison said in an interview after council's executive committee meeting Monday.

Buildings in the city's downtown are now restricted to a height of 76 metres, or around 23 storeys. City officials want to cancel that limit and allow developers to build higher and offer more density in the city's core. They also want to establish, for the first time, a minimum height of 10 meters for all new buildings in the downtown.

Atchison said he would like the taller buildings in the core be part of the city's downtown "theme," pointing to cities like Shanghai as places that have created an identity with collections of massive skyscrapers.

"I don't think buildings should be built helter skelter," he said.

Plans are already in the works for at least one tall building that would shatter records provincially. North Prairie Development plans to build a new luxury hotel and condo highrise, dubbed the City Centre Tower, at the corner of Third Avenue and 22nd Street. The \$80 million to \$100-million tower is expected to be at least 27 storeys and close to 90 metres high.

Karim Nasser, a well known Saskatoon developer who recently retired, said getting rid of the height restrictions is a great way to attract investment to the downtown.

"It's very important from an economics point of view. It's needed, especially as the land is getting so expensive in the downtown," Nasser said in an interview.

Nasser's former company, Victory Majors Investments Corp., and Cavalier Enterprises have plans to build a 27-storey residential tower at River Landing. Early plans indicated a structure that would rise to 95 metres. That building is technically outside of the downtown zoning district, but Nasser said the change to allow for more height is needed.

"If you want the downtown to grow, you are going to need the capacity for people to be there," he said. The loosening of height restrictions comes as part of a series of design guidelines that will dictate the way buildings are constructed in the downtown. The guidelines include requirements for setbacks for buildings over a certain height, as well as street-level access for pedestrians. They also call for parking to be located at the rear of downtown buildings.

"We are not putting restrictions on developers ... we aren't talking about materials or colours. We are talking about the position of the buildings on the street," city planner Paul Whitenect told the committee.

Whitenect, who works for the city's planning and development division, said the new guidelines are meant to improve the experience of people walking downtown. Whitenect said the setbacks, for example, would prevent the formation of wind tunnels and would help with the imposing nature of extremely tall buildings. Requiring street-level access to the buildings would make the entire street more comfortable for people walking downtown, he said.

"We want to allow flexibility for developers, but offer pedestrian comfort."

All building heights will have to be checked with the airport authority to make sure they do not

interfere with flights coming to and from the Saskatoon airport.

Some projects will likely still be restricted because of flight paths, city officials said.

Right now, Saskatoon's tallest building is the 79.2-metre La Renaissance Apartments. The second tallest building in the city is Hallmark Place, standing at 78.8 metres. The tallest building in Regina is the 20-storey Mosaic Potash Tower, which is 84.5 metres high.

cthamilton@thestarphoenix.com

© Copyright (c) The StarPhoenix

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)



Saskatoon's skyline could look a lot different in the coming years as city councillors agreed in principle to remove building height restrictions.

Photograph by: Gord Waldner, The StarPhoenix Photos, The StarPhoenix

