

Exhibition Place – Vision Plan and Concept Scenario Presentation

Date: April 7, 2026

To: The Board of Governors of Exhibition Place

From: Don Boyle, Chief Executive Officer

Wards: Ward 10 – Spadina – Fort York

SUMMARY

In response to the various developments at and around Exhibition Place, staff, in collaboration with Studio tla, have developed the Exhibition Place - Vision Plan and Concept Scenario (the Vision Plan). This work considers the different needs of multiple transformative change proposals for the grounds while ensuring alignment with the recommendations of previous studies and plans, including the latest Next Place – Exhibition Place Master Plan approved by Council.

The Chief Executive Officer will present the Vision Plan attached as Attachment A.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Executive Officer recommends that:

1. The Board endorse in principle the Exhibition Place - Vision Plan and Concept Scenario (the Vision Plan) in Attachment A.
2. The Board directs the Chief Executive Officer to work with the City Manager, City CFO, and other relevant city divisions on planning and financing options to advance the concept to fruition, and to report back to the Board on progress by Q1 2027.
3. The Board directs the Chief Executive Officer to consult and engage on an ongoing basis with the local community, Exhibition Place tenants, and clients to gather their input through the project's lifecycle, and report to the Board with a Consultation and Engagement Plan by Q4 2026.
4. The Board directs the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation and alignment with the City Manager, to engage with the Province to seek interest-based solutions on the last-mile obligation and the financial contribution to achieve it, and report to the Board on the progress of this engagement by Q1 2027.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts to this report.

DECISION HISTORY

In the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan, several directional guidelines were established for staff as the Strategic Plan Goals are executed and delivered. One of those guidelines outlines the importance of connections and collaborative planning in revitalizing the site.

At its meeting on April 10, 2019, the Board received an update report and presentation from City Planning on the Cultural Heritage Landscape Assessment (CHLA) for Exhibition Place. The report recommends strategies for conserving Exhibition Place's cultural heritage resources and informs future planning.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EP2.8>

At its meeting on June 24, 2020, the Exhibition Place Board of Governors confirmed its support for the Exhibition Place Master Plan – Phase 1 Proposal. The Master Plan establishes principles for physical change at Exhibition Place, including creating connections through integration with public transit, promoting a green environment, and creating dynamic and diverse new places.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EP11.23>

At its meeting on June 9, 2022, the Board approved the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan and requested that the Chief Executive Officer develop initiatives to achieve the strategic goals and report to the Board annually on the status of the initiatives and the overall implementation of the Plan.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.EP24.12>

At its meeting of February 2, 2024, the Board received a report from the Chief Executive Officer and a presentation on a Multi-Modal Transportation and Events Logistics Study by WSP, the consulting firm contracted to conduct the study. The Board approved the final WSP recommendations from the study and authorized the Chief Executive Officer to complete Phase 2 of the study and initiate the design concept.

[Agenda Item History - 2024.EP8.2](#)

COMMENTS

The Vision Plan Summary

The presentation in this report addresses the diverse developments occurring on and around Exhibition Place, as well as the long-standing need to connect the neighbourhoods to the north and the new Ontario Line to the waterfront.

This proposal envisions a renewed Exhibition Place as a hub of ongoing development, stronger connections, and expanded public access for residents, visitors, and civic partners. It positions the site as a seamlessly integrated part of Toronto's waterfront and surrounding neighbourhoods—**an accessible, lively, future-ready festival destination and gathering place.**

At the core of this vision is a new north–south pedestrian corridor that creates a seamless connection from the new Exhibition Station through Exhibition Place to the Waterfront. To the north, it offers a clear, welcoming gateway at the reimagined Food Building for communities of Liberty Village and the future Ontario Line - Exhibition Station. Through the centre of the site, it enhances access by establishing a unified, pedestrian-friendly mobility hub. To the south, it provides a barrier-free link to the Waterfront—connecting visitors to the pedestrian bridge over Lake Shore Boulevard and the shoreline network. This north–south route becomes a key public-space feature, promoting year-round activity, improved wayfinding, and a continuous, people-focused movement corridor.

Complementing the north–south spine is a new east–west multi-use pathway that will seamlessly connect The Bentway, Exhibition Place, and Centennial Square to Dufferin Street. It strengthens connections between Fort York, Liberty Village, and the Waterfront. This trail will unify the new Exhibition Station, Coca-Cola Coliseum, BMO Field, Centennial Square, and the future Festival Plaza into a coherent, intuitive pedestrian network. The north–south and east–west corridors unlock new possibilities for seamless event circulation, seasonal activities, commercial and retail options, and an improved visitor experience.

Additionally, the Vision Plan includes the longstanding proposal for a Festival Plaza at the site of the Better Living Centre (BLC). While earlier versions of the plaza were located on Lot 852, this lot's ongoing role for events, parking, and event marshalling highlights its operational necessity. In contrast, the BLC is a class C facility with limited business prospects and faces structural issues that restrict its viability as an event venue, making it a practical site for the new Festival Plaza.

The proposal transforms the BLC into a vibrant Festival Plaza—a versatile outdoor cultural and event space. Create a landmark civic gathering place that can host festivals, markets, exhibitions, and community celebrations year-round. This enhances the site's identity as a cultural and entertainment district.

To preserve and celebrate its heritage value, the design retains elements of the BLC by preserving the northern section of the building. Heritage considerations are incorporated through adaptive reuse and commemorative strategies, ensuring that the purpose-built modernization respects the site's historical significance. The Vision Plan includes sustainable landscaping with a permeable surface, seating, shade, and public art, envisioning the plaza as a central gathering place for year-round activity and visitor engagement. In addition to its programming capacity, the design adds over 69,000 square-feet of flexible, adaptable space.

Essentially, the Vision Plan capitalizes on the transformative developments at and around Exhibition Place. Additionally, this evolution alleviates pressure on overburdened City services by hosting major festivals and events in a purpose-built destination. Festival Plaza will expand Toronto's capacity to host large-scale, high-profile international events year-round, accommodating over 100,000 people on a single

site. This opportunity will reconnect Toronto and its surroundings to the heritage and history of Exhibition Place, transforming the disconnected campus into a lively daily gathering place. A more robust public realm is created that links transit, heritage, events, community, waterfront access, and more green space.

As part of the process, City Planning staff and the Waterfront Secretariat have reviewed and provided feedback on the Vision Plan, confirming that they align with the direction outlined in the Next Place – Master Plan Phase 1 Proposal Report and other relevant planning documents. This feedback has been integrated into the Vision Plan.

Contextual Framework and Conditions

A. Business and Operational Impact

Exhibition Place is a key economic and cultural hub for consumer and trade shows, entertainment, meetings, events, and community activities. In 2025, Exhibition Place and its tenants hosted over 2,100 events, generating more than \$595 million in economic impact for the City and region.

Despite the success of Exhibition Place's current business offerings, several obstacles remain to realizing its vision of becoming an iconic visitor destination and gathering place for both tourists and Torontonians. Fortunately, many of these challenges are being addressed through these major infrastructure investments.

According to an Exhibition Place study conducted by urbanMetrics, Exhibition Station will be one of the busiest stations on the Ontario Line, with a weekday passenger volume of 42,000 by 2041. The transit improvements alone will significantly ease travel to the site and encourage more visits.

Along with the planned venues for Ontario Place and Exhibition Place over the next five to seven years, these developments offer an exceptional opportunity to integrate and maximize benefits. The Vision Plan proposes expanding food, concession, and retail options to handle increased foot traffic.

Additionally, the improved pedestrian-friendly connections will encourage more casual, passive engagement from visitors, motivating them to enjoy the green spaces, public art, festival activities, and cultural exhibits.

A key aspect of the Vision Plan's business and economic evolution is the repurposing of the BLC. This 220,000-square-foot Modernist structure, built in 1962, occupies a prominent yet underused position within Exhibition Place.

Classified as a Class C facility, the BLC has outdated infrastructure, limited amenities, and significant structural limitations. According to the Ten-Year Capital Plan, there is a \$56.5 million backlog for building maintenance. Despite its historical and heritage significance, it no longer meets the functional, operational, or environmental standards expected of a modern event venue.

Over the past five years, the BLC has primarily served as a temporary winter shelter operated by Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS). The General Manager of TSSS has recognized that the BLC, as a temporary shelter, is not ideal and is actively collaborating with the City's Corporate Real Estate Management to address the shelter system's needs, with plans for the BLC to no longer be needed after the Spring of 2029.

B. 2022-2026 Strategic Plan

The Board-approved Strategic Plan establishes a framework to guide the decision-making process at Exhibition Place. The Vision Plan recognizes that the grounds and surrounding areas are in transition, with numerous current and planned infrastructure projects.

Central to the Strategic Plan are guidelines that will support staff as the grounds evolve in this complex environment. First among these guidelines is Exhibition Place's stewardship role: to continue safeguarding and maintaining our historic assets for future generations. Additionally, other highlighted criteria include the need for stronger multi-use connections and the promotion of complementary uses across the site. New experiences, such as improvements to digital wayfinding, illuminated signage, upgraded lighting, and a cohesive look and feel, complete these guidelines.

Moreover, the Strategic Plan is grounded on six Strategic Goals, four of which are directly relevant to framing the Vision Plan.

- Promote site animation 365 days a year.
- Exceed client and visitor expectations.
- Solidify position as leading convention and event space.
- Ensure competitively priced services and sustainable (green) operations.

C. Next Place – Master Plan Phase 1 Proposal Report (Master Plan)

City Planning and Exhibition Place staff undertook a master planning exercise in 2019. The Board received and approved support for the Master Plan at its meeting on June 24, 2020. The purpose of a master plan is to provide a comprehensive planning framework to guide physical changes and future use of the Exhibition Place grounds. The Master Plan has the following objectives for Exhibition Place:

- Support its economic benefits to the City;
- Introduce public realm improvements that enhance the visitor experience;
- Rehabilitate or repurpose heritage buildings and landscapes as a critical component of the Exhibition Place identity/sense of place;
- Leverage external initiatives that will significantly improve local and regional transit accessibility and connectivity; and
- Establish City priorities and opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration with the revitalization of Ontario Place in whatever form it takes on.

With a range of historical features and functions across the 192 acres, the Master Plan proposed a strategy to organize the Exhibition Place grounds according to current and prevailing operational uses. Each of these zones - Relax, Entertain, and Exhibit – would be treated with a distinct public realm approach, generally summarized as follows:

The Relax Zone, situated at the west end of the site, has the highest concentration of heritage buildings, park spaces, and landscapes. It emphasizes passive recreational options and improved connections to Marilyn Bell Park and South Parkdale.

In the central area, the Entertain Zone has the potential to become a flexible and resilient part of the grounds. The proposed connections and Festival Plaza provide an opportunity to create and enhance gathering places, multipurpose public plazas, and

north-south connections linking the Exhibition GO/TTC/Ontario Line transit hub, the Waterfront, and the neighbourhood to the north.

At the east end, the Exhibit Zone reinforces the formal axis of Princes' Boulevard with the Enercare Centre, the Automotive Building, and the Hotel to support exhibition, meeting, and trade show functions. Enhanced linkages to Coronation Park, Gore Park, and Fort York/Bentway provide connectivity to the surrounding public realm network.

The Master Plan endorsed linking these thematic zones through a connected network of public realm amenities, wayfinding, green infrastructure, and open spaces.

As well as synchronizing with the thematic zones, the following are relevant recommendations emerging from the Master Plan that have influenced Exhibition Place - Vision Plan and Concept Scenario

- Delineate usage zones (Relax, Entertain, Exhibit) and identify target future infrastructure needs and development opportunities within each thematic zone;
- Identify connectivity between each zone within Exhibition Place, including the nature and type of support services, transportation and parking;
- Identify the linkages to future public transit and road networks;
- Accommodate emerging mobility technologies and innovations that complement transit and active transportation;
- Connecting and enhancing the public realm and maximizing green open space;
- Promote a clean and green environment;
- Create dynamic and diverse new places;
- Ensure that the preservation and interpretation of cultural and historical assets have a predominant position in the planning;
- Consider the future integration of the Western Waterfront Plan.

D. WSP Multi-Modal and Logistics Study

The WSP Study proposes a new transportation network that supports community and public access throughout the site, informing planning for future transit investments and multi-modal connectivity to the waterfront. Recommendations from this plan considered vehicular movements, patterns, and the working vehicles at Exhibition Place. The event operations and logistics component of the study provides recommendations for goods movement, event vehicle marshalling, and vehicle staging.

WSP reviewed background documents, including the 2022 – 2026 Strategic Plan, Exhibition Place Parking Study, Next Place – Master Plan Phase 1 Proposal Report, and Cultural Heritage Landscape Assessment, to understand the context in which Exhibition Place operates. Further, WSP conducted site visits to assess current pedestrian connections and existing loading features, operating procedures, and the setup of the CNE fair.

The WSP study confirms that the proposed pedestrian pathways are compatible with current and future operational requirements. The proposed pedestrian and vehicular network offer flexibility for various scenarios, including non-event days, major events, and event set-up and takedown periods. Additionally, WSP's recommendations include

design considerations that improve the public realm, such as enhanced lighting, public art, and wayfinding infrastructure. The WSP recommendations were fully integrated into the Vision Plan.

E. Alignment with Toronto's Festival Strategy

Toronto hosts approximately 300 festivals annually, drawing nearly 20 million attendees across more than 180 venues, and contributing significantly to cultural vitality, economic activity, and global reputation. The Festival Strategy identifies rising costs, infrastructure gaps, administrative complexity, and inequitable access to high-quality sites as major challenges facing festival organizers.

The Vision Plan and particularly the Festival Plaza would provide a purpose-built, flexible outdoor venue designed specifically for festivals of varying scales, reducing barriers for new, equity-deserving, and growing events identified in the Festival Strategy as needing improved access to space and infrastructure.

A Festival Plaza at Exhibition Place would serve as a strategic response to the main challenges outlined in Toronto's Festival Strategy. It enhances all four strategic priorities by:

- Expanding equitable access to high-quality festival spaces
- Enhancing financial and operational sustainability
- Streamlining City processes and approvals
- Increasing cultural visibility, audience reach, and economic impact

The proposed Festival Plaza would establish the City as a proactive, long-term partner to Toronto's festival sector and serve as a key investment in the City's cultural and economic future. The General Manager of Economic Development and Culture has been briefed on the Vision Plan concept and is in support of the plan and its alignment with Toronto's Festival Strategy.

Conclusion

Exhibition Place's operational strength lies in its broad-ranging and adaptable capabilities. The Vision Plan recognizes these features and maintains this business-value advantage. This proposal can boost Exhibition Place's ability to attract economic investment, foster new partnerships, and expand its capacity to support increased and more diverse activations.

The Vision Plan offers a variety of options for Exhibition Place, outlining strategies, emphasizing visitor-centred approaches, and improving public realm amenities. It is a guide that can transform Exhibition Place from a collection of event venues into a connected civic and tourist destination.

Finally, the Plan can act as a catalyst for a comprehensive proposal that goes beyond boundaries to build a unique relationship by positioning Exhibition Place's location as a hub connecting the strengths of diverse regional assets, both on the grounds and around Exhibition Place.

CONTACT

Don Boyle, Chief Executive Officer, 416-263-3611, dboyle@explace.on.ca

SIGNATURE

Don Boyle
Chief Executive Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Exhibition Place - Vision Plan and Concept Scenario
Attachment B – Review of Proposed Exhibition Place Vision Plan Letter – City Planning