

# News Release

November 30, 2021

## City-building research positioned to drive downtown reinvention

**Civic Commons Catalyst pilot proposes strategic interventions for downtown Calgary and attracts participation of three Albertan municipalities**

**Calgary, AB** – A hyperloop station, a waste-to-energy facility, a Calgary Airport-Downtown-Banff Rail, crypto-mining farms, hydroponic facilities, an innovation district and an artist/rainbow village. These are just a few of the interventions the [Civic Commons Catalyst](#) is proposing to reinvent downtown Calgary's vacant public spaces and spur economic recovery and investment. The Civic Commons Catalyst is transdisciplinary research partnership under the [Center for Civilization](#) between the University of Calgary's [School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape](#) (SAPL), the [School of Public Policy](#) (SPP), [Evergreen](#), the [City of Calgary](#) — and funded by the [Alberta Real Estate Foundation](#).

*"The goal of Civic Commons Catalyst is to create a more resilient future for Calgary's vacant downtown spaces. Our phase one research culminated in 20 strategic recommendations for unique spatial projects that will transform downtown Calgary, and help spur economic recovery and investment."*

**Alberto de Salvatierra, assistant professor, SAPL, UCalgary and director and founder, Center for Civilization**

Phase one of the Civic Commons Catalyst's research culminated in a list of 20 recommended strategic interventions for Calgary. The proposals catalyze underutilized spaces across the city into positive assets for the public, allowing communities to pioneer an innovative future backed by data and design-at-scale. Six research areas, including interviews, horizon scanning, public policy, finance innovation, geospatial data and urban design, along with the support of 13 UCalgary graduate students, were used to gather the data and determine the interventions.

While navigating the challenging circumstances presented by the pandemic, de Salvatierra has secured nearly a million dollars in project support from a range of organizations, including a grant from the Alberta Real Estate Foundation. This funding allows the project to move into phase two with an expanded team of 25 researchers and will focus on bringing stakeholders, such as building owners and operators, developers, policy makers, community associations and civic leaders, together to facilitate these 20 recommendations and turn them into reality. Currently, the Civic Commons Catalyst is encouraging interested parties to reach out to collaborate on these interventions.

*“The Civic Commons Catalyst drives the transformational and long-term change we were looking for through our one-time legacy grant program. We’ve heard from our stakeholders that to navigate this emerging world, we need to be intentional about fostering a future that contributes to healthy, vibrant Alberta communities. The ripples of this project will be felt in Calgary’s downtown economic recovery and the real estate industry throughout the province. We are thrilled to fund this critical work.”*

**Patti Morris, executive director, Alberta Real Estate Foundation**

As Calgary moves into phase two, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and Okotoks will start phase one research. Currently, select existing phase one work is viewable until December 30 in the Create Space at the Central Library in the interactive exhibition “Comple(x)ity: Data, Discovery and Design.” In 2022, this research on Alberta’s innovative approach to downtown revitalization will be shared in a series of knowledge mobilization activities. The project’s work will also be available to the public through lectures, exhibitions and a regional/national forum hosted by Evergreen.

*“This project has the potential to radically transform the landscape of available strategies to address the 30 per cent vacancy in Calgary’s downtown core and to provide a model for other cities to leverage their underutilized civic assets. Embedding this in UCalgary leverages the institution’s significant intellectual and creative capacity, and helps de-risk innovation for municipal governments. It’s exemplifies the kind of forward-looking innovation that is gaining momentum and having an impact in communities across the country.”*

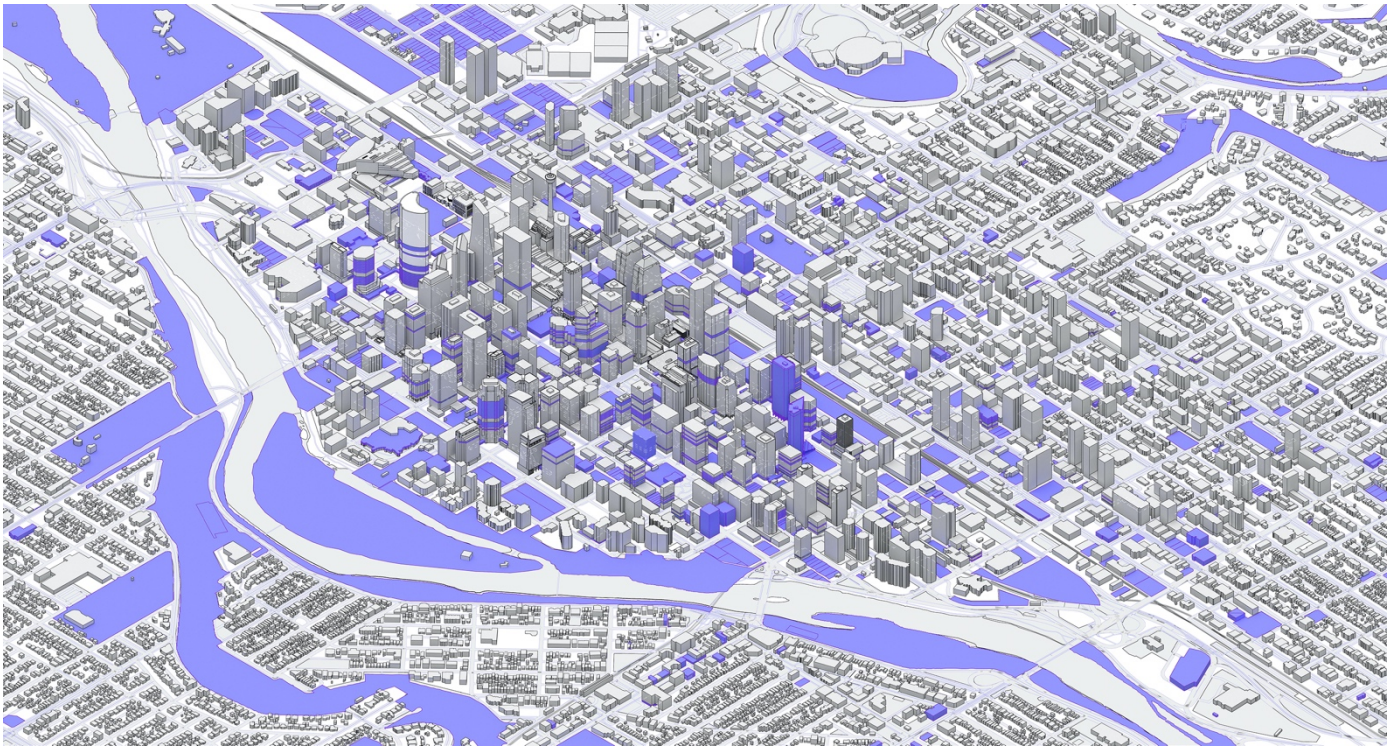
**Robert Plitt, associate, Evergreen**

The project is part of [Urban Alliance](#), a strategic partnership between The City of Calgary and UCalgary to promote the seamless transfer of cutting-edge research for the benefit of all of Calgary’s communities. The initiative is supported by, and leverages, Evergreen and [Future Cities Canada’s](#) history of convening networks and incubating social labs and participatory design practices for complex urban issues.

[Download “Civic Commons Catalyst 2021: Strategic Interventions” briefing report.](#)

[Download high-resolution research images and exhibition photos.](#)

Parties interested in collaborating on this project can email de Salvatierra at [alberto.desalvatierr@ucalgary.ca](mailto:alberto.desalvatierr@ucalgary.ca).



*Image: Civic Commons Catalyst Downtown Catalogue. Image courtesy of Center for Civilization*

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## About the University of Calgary

*The University of Calgary is a global intellectual hub located in Canada's most enterprising city. In our spirited, high-quality learning environment, students thrive in programs made rich by research, hands-on experiences and entrepreneurial thinking. Our strategy drives us to be recognized as one of Canada's top five research universities, engaging the communities we both serve and lead. For more information, visit [ucalgary.ca](http://ucalgary.ca). Stay up to date with University of Calgary news headlines on Twitter [@UCalgary](https://twitter.com/UCalgary). For details on faculties and how to reach experts go to our media center at [ucalgary.ca/newsroom](http://ucalgary.ca/newsroom).*

## About School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape

*The [School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape](http://sapl.ucalgary.ca) at the University of Calgary is one of the top design schools in Canada. Founded in 1971, SAPL celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Since its inception, SAPL has demonstrated a commitment to challenging the status quo with holistic design thinking. For more information, visit [sapl.ucalgary.ca](http://sapl.ucalgary.ca). Follow [@ucalgarysapl](https://twitter.com/ucalgarysapl) on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram.*

### **About the Civic Commons Catalyst**

*The Catalyst is an interdisciplinary research and innovation platform embedded within City Building Design Lab at the [School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape](#), University of Calgary. Partner faculties include the School of Public Policy and Haskayne School of Business. It is funded by the Alberta Real Estate Foundation. The project is part of [Urban Alliance](#), a strategic partnership between The City and the University of Calgary to promote the seamless transfer of cutting-edge research for the benefit of all of Calgary's communities. The Catalyst is part of the [Future Cities Canada](#) collaborative platform, and is supported by Evergreen.*

### **About the Alberta Real Estate Foundation**

*Created through the Alberta Real Estate Act, the Alberta Real Estate Foundation is a nonprofit organization that makes purposeful impact-oriented grants and investments that make a difference to the real estate industry and for all Albertans. We contribute to thriving Alberta communities and a stronger economy through our grant programs, benefitting homeowners, landowners, tenants, and real estate industry professionals. We do this by funding real estate-related education initiatives, law reform, research, and industry and community innovation activities. We connect people and share knowledge in collaboration with real estate industry and public stakeholders. Since 1991, the Foundation has invested \$26.5 million in grants to over 665 initiatives across Alberta. For more information, visit [www.aref.ab.ca](http://www.aref.ab.ca). Follow @arefabca on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.*

### **About Future Cities Canada**

*Convened by Evergreen, Future Cities Canada is a national cross-sector initiative with the mission to accelerate innovation to transform cities for the benefit of all. Drawing on the expertise of its founding organizations - The McConnell Foundation, TD Bank Group, Evergreen, Maison de l'innovation sociale and Community Foundations of Canada - and together with a diverse and growing network of partners, Future Cities Canada collectively strives to address the challenges facing cities and city-dwellers to reimagine cities that are equitable, regenerative and prosperous. [www.futurecitiescanada.ca](http://www.futurecitiescanada.ca)*

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