

CITYPULSE ANALYTICS INC.

TriAxis™ Urban Development Assessment

Olympic Legacy, Downtown Revitalization, & Civic Space:
Olympic Plaza Transformation

Calgary . Alberta . Canada . 2025-2028

Strategic Urban Analytics • Downtown Revitalization . Cultural Infrastructure . Public Realm Planning

Physical Layer

Economic Layer

Social & Perceptual Layer

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

CityPulse TriAxis™ — Sample Assessment

This assessment is delivered via the CityPulse TriAxis™ system. Our approach utilises a rigorous research methodology, organised through the Urban Pulse Structuring Framework (UPSF), and interpreted through the TriAxis™ model to provide actionable urban insights and published as a sample to demonstrate the TriAxis™ approach to prospective clients and policy partners. All findings are grounded exclusively in the referenced source materials.

Executive Summary

Olympic Plaza Transformation represents a major civic reinvestment in one of Calgary’s most recognizable downtown public spaces. Originally created as a central gathering place during the 1988 Winter Olympics, the plaza is now being redesigned as a modern, inclusive, accessible, and flexible civic destination connected to the broader Werklund Centre campus.

The transformed plaza is planned as a year-round gathering space capable of supporting day-to-day public use as well as large-scale events of up to 5,000 people. Major design features include a central water feature and splash pad in summer, a skating rink in winter, and a new pavilion with seating and public amenities. The project is expected to remain under construction through 2028.

This TriAxis™ assessment identifies three interconnected realities shaping the project’s future. The Physical Layer concerns the redesign of a historically significant public space into a flexible, accessible, and year-round civic landscape. The Economic Layer reflects a \$70 million public-space transformation connected to broader downtown revitalization and cultural infrastructure investment. The Social & Perceptual Layer is shaped by Olympic legacy, civic memory, public gathering, cultural identity, and expectations for downtown renewal.

The assessment’s central premise is that Olympic Plaza’s long-term success will depend not only on the quality of its redesign, but on how effectively Calgary sustains alignment between civic legacy, cultural investment, and everyday public value.

The Central Tension

Civic Memory ↑ · Cultural Investment ↑ · Everyday Publicness ?

KEY PROJECT STATISTICS

5,000

Person Event Capacity

\$70M

Investment

1988 Olympic
Legacy

1. Assessment Framework: CityPulse TriAxis™

TriAxis™ is CityPulse Analytics Inc.'s methodology for reading large urban projects and civic investments. Its premise is simple: any project of scale exists on three layers at once — a physical layer, an economic layer, and a social and perceptual layer — and the health of the project depends on whether those three move together or pull apart. These are the three layers analysed in Section 5. TriAxis™ measures each layer in its own terms and then reads them against one another, because the problems worth governing rarely sit inside a single layer. They show up in the friction between them.

The three layers are set out below. Each is assessed on its own evidence — spatial and design data on the physical layer, investment and stewardship data on the economic layer, and engagement, sentiment, and civic-identity data on the social and perceptual layer. What gives the method its value is the final step: reading the layers together to locate where pressure is building and what has to move first. A fix on one layer that ignores the other two tends to displace the problem rather than resolve it, and TriAxis™ is built to catch exactly that.

Layer	What it captures	What TriAxis™ measures	How it reads at Olympic Plaza
Physical Layer	The project as a public-space system	Public-realm design, accessibility, event capacity, winter and summer use, circulation, comfort, amenities, and integration with the Werklund Centre campus.	A redesigned downtown civic space expected to support events of up to 5,000 people, year-round use, skating, water features, and a more accessible public realm.
Economic Layer	Where the investment lands	Capital investment, downtown revitalization value, cultural-infrastructure integration, operating responsibilities, lifecycle costs, and long-term stewardship.	A \$70 million public-space transformation tied to a broader cultural-campus investment and Calgary's downtown revitalization strategy.
Social & Perceptual Layer	Whether the project holds civic legitimacy	Public engagement, Olympic memory, cultural identity, digital sentiment, perceived publicness, safety, belonging, and informal public reaction.	A symbolic 1988 Olympic legacy space with strong civic memory, formal engagement, and informal public debate around heritage loss, cost, safety, and everyday public use.
Cross-Layer Reading	The step that ties it together	Reading the three layers against one another to	Civic memory and cultural investment are rising, but the unresolved test is

		surface tensions no single layer reveals on its own.	everyday publicness: whether the plaza remains a genuinely public civic space after redevelopment.
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Figure 0 — The TriAxis™ method: three layers read against one another. Source: CityPulse Analytics Inc. proprietary methodology.

PHYSICAL LAYER
Public realm design · Accessibility · Event capacity · Year-round activation · Integration with Werklund Centre

ECONOMIC LAYER
Capital investment · Downtown revitalization · Cultural infrastructure · Operations · Long-term stewardship

SOCIAL & PERCEPTUAL LAYER
Olympic legacy · Civic memory · Public gathering · Cultural identity · Downtown belonging

Why all three layers matter simultaneously

A redesigned civic space can succeed physically while failing to meet broader downtown expectations if programming, accessibility, safety, and maintenance are not sustained over time. Likewise, a major cultural investment may strengthen downtown revitalization goals but still struggle to generate public value if residents do not experience the space as welcoming, usable, and meaningful in everyday life.

Olympic Plaza’s long-term success will depend on maintaining alignment across all three dimensions. The project must preserve civic legacy, support downtown revitalization, and function as an inclusive public gathering place. The TriAxis™ framework helps identify where these dimensions reinforce one another, where tensions may emerge, and where future governance attention may be required.

TriAxis™ prevents single-layer solutions that improve one dimension while creating unintended pressures in another.

2. Data Foundation

The evidence base for this assessment is organized according to the three TriAxis™ layers: the Physical Layer, the Economic Layer, and the Social & Perceptual Layer. Each source contributes to one or more of these layers by documenting the plaza’s design, investment structure, governance context, public engagement process, downtown role, and informal public perception. The sources below inform the TriAxis™ analysis presented throughout the report.

Source	Contribution to Assessment
City of Calgary – Olympic Plaza Transformation Project Page	Project scope, planned public-realm features, construction timeline, event capacity, and official project objectives.

Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC) Project Materials	Project delivery context, design-reveal materials, public engagement process, project cost information, and relationship to the broader Werklund Centre campus.
Olympic Plaza Transformation Engagement Report	Public priorities, design and programming feedback, engagement themes, and community expectations gathered during the 2024 engagement process.
Olympic Plaza Cultural District Engagement & Design Report	Earlier public-space planning context, civic-space aspirations, and design considerations related to the Olympic Plaza Cultural District.
Werklund Centre Transformation Project Materials	Relationship between Olympic Plaza and the adjacent cultural infrastructure expansion, including integration with the broader arts and civic campus.
Downtown Strategy and Downtown Vibrancy Materials	Policy context for downtown revitalization, cultural infrastructure investment, and public-realm renewal.
Media Coverage and Public Reporting	Independent reporting on project design, public discussion, construction timing, cost concerns, and downtown impacts.
Publicly Visible Reddit Discussions	Qualitative digital sentiment evidence based on 257 visible comments across six Reddit discussions related to design, demolition, cost, redevelopment opposition, commemorative bricks, Olympic memory, safety, and everyday public use. Used to identify recurring informal public narratives, not to measure representative public opinion.

Table 1 - Evidence Sources Used in the Olympic Plaza Assessment

Key Quantitative Indicators

The following indicators provide the quantitative foundation for the assessment:

- \$70 million anticipated Olympic Plaza Transformation project cost;
- \$40 million allocated through The City of Calgary's 2023–2026 budget for downtown revitalization;
- Public closure from January 2025 through 2028 during construction;
- Event capacity of up to 5,000 people;
- 96% of the old plaza's usable space retained in the new design;
- Public engagement conducted in Q1/Q2 2024;
- 3,332 engagement participants across surveys, pop-ups, and workshops;
- Integration with the broader Werklund Centre Transformation;
- Legacy elements retained, including the small Olympic cauldron and "Citius, Altius, Fortius" arches.

TriAxis™ Evidence Standard

This assessment relies on publicly available project documentation, engagement reports, municipal materials, CMLC project updates, cultural infrastructure documentation, and independent public reporting. Where operational data, post-opening user satisfaction, long-term attendance, or lifecycle performance indicators were unavailable, findings have been limited to evidence that could be independently verified through available sources.

3. Place Context

3.1 Historical and Civic Context

Olympic Plaza occupies a uniquely symbolic position in Calgary’s downtown. Originally developed for the 1988 Winter Olympics, the plaza has long functioned as both a ceremonial space and a day-to-day civic gathering place. Its identity is closely tied to Calgary’s Olympic legacy, downtown public life, and the city’s broader cultural infrastructure.

Unlike a conventional public-realm renewal project, Olympic Plaza Transformation must address both functional and symbolic expectations. The project is not simply replacing aging infrastructure; it is reinterpreting a civic landmark whose meaning extends beyond its physical boundaries. This creates a complex planning challenge: the redesigned plaza must support contemporary accessibility, programming, safety, and event requirements while preserving the memory and identity associated with the original Olympic-era public space.

3.2 Strategic Importance

Olympic Plaza differs from many downtown public-space projects because it combines four objectives that are often pursued separately:

- Olympic legacy preservation;
- Downtown revitalization and cultural infrastructure renewal;
- Year-round public gathering and event capacity;
- Civic identity and public-realm placemaking.

This combination elevates the project from a plaza redesign to a major civic investment within Calgary’s downtown cultural district.

Indicator	Olympic Plaza / Calgary
Original Civic Role	1988 Winter Olympic gathering and ceremonial space
Project Cost	\$70 million anticipated project cost

City Budget Allocation	\$40 million through 2023–2026 downtown revitalization budget
Event Capacity	Up to 5,000 people
Construction Period	2025–2028
Major Adjacent Project	Werklund Centre Transformation
Key Public-Space Functions	Summer water feature / splash pad, winter skating rink, pavilion, event space

Table 2 - Key Contextual Indicators for the Olympic Plaza Transformation.

3.3 Why the Site Matters

The significance of Olympic Plaza extends beyond its role as an outdoor event venue. The site functions simultaneously as an Olympic legacy space, downtown gathering place, cultural-district connector, and symbol of Calgary’s civic identity.

The transformation arrives at a time when downtown Calgary continues to face questions related to vibrancy, public-space quality, cultural activation, and perceptions of safety and belonging. In this context, Olympic Plaza is not only a design project; it is part of a broader effort to reinvest in downtown civic life and strengthen Calgary’s cultural infrastructure.

The central question is therefore not only whether the new plaza will be physically attractive. The deeper question is whether the transformed space can become a durable civic platform: a place that honours Calgary’s past while supporting everyday public life, cultural participation, and downtown renewal over the coming decades.

3.4 Downtown Context: Why Olympic Plaza Carries More Than Design Expectations

The Olympic Plaza Transformation is taking place within a broader period of downtown restructuring in Calgary. The project is not only a renewal of a civic square; it is part of a larger municipal effort to reanimate the downtown core, strengthen cultural infrastructure, increase public-space quality, and support a more active city centre beyond traditional office hours.

This context matters because Olympic Plaza is being asked to perform multiple functions at once. It must preserve a recognizable civic and Olympic legacy, support the expansion of the Werklund Centre campus, accommodate large-scale public events, provide everyday public space, and contribute to downtown vibrancy. These expectations extend well beyond the boundaries of the plaza itself.

Calgary’s downtown strategy emphasizes the need to move beyond a conventional nine-to-five business district toward a more mixed-use, active, and resilient city centre. In that context, Olympic Plaza becomes part of a wider shift from downtown as an employment district toward downtown as a place to live, visit, gather, study, attend events, and participate in culture.

The project therefore carries a high symbolic and practical burden. A successful Olympic Plaza could strengthen Calgary’s cultural district, support downtown visitation, improve public perception of the core, and provide a

renewed civic gathering space. However, a single plaza cannot independently resolve broader downtown challenges such as office vacancy, uneven street activity, perceptions of safety, social disorder, transit experience, or limited evening and weekend foot traffic.

For this reason, the project should be evaluated not only by design quality or construction completion, but by its post-opening performance within Calgary's downtown ecosystem. The key question is whether Olympic Plaza can become a durable civic platform: a place that supports programmed cultural events while also remaining welcoming, useful, and meaningfully public during ordinary daily life.

TriAxis™ Downtown Interpretation

The Olympic Plaza Transformation sits at the intersection of three city-building agendas:

- **Public-realm renewal:** improving accessibility, comfort, year-round use, and civic-space quality;
- **Cultural infrastructure investment:** strengthening the Werklund Centre campus and Calgary's arts ecosystem;
- **Downtown revitalization:** contributing to vibrancy, visitation, public confidence, and a more active mixed-use core.

The project's long-term success will depend on how effectively these agendas reinforce one another rather than placing unrealistic expectations on a single public space.

4. Project Overview

The Olympic Plaza Transformation is a major public-realm and cultural-infrastructure project in downtown Calgary. The project renews one of the city's most symbolically important civic spaces while integrating it into the broader Werklund Centre campus and Calgary's downtown revitalization agenda.

Olympic Plaza is not a neutral site. It carries the memory of the 1988 Winter Olympics, decades of public gathering, winter skating, festivals, civic ceremonies, and downtown cultural life. For this reason, the transformation must solve two problems simultaneously: it must modernize a physically aging plaza, and it must preserve the public meaning attached to the site.

The current redevelopment is planned as a flexible, accessible, year-round civic space. It is expected to support everyday public use, cultural programming, winter and summer activity, and major events. The project is also closely connected to the Werklund Centre Transformation, meaning that Olympic Plaza will increasingly function as both a public gathering space and part of a larger arts-and-culture campus.

4.1 Project Logic

The Olympic Plaza Transformation is built around four overlapping project logics:

1. **Legacy renewal:** preserving and reinterpreting the site's Olympic identity for a new generation;

- 2. **Public-realm modernization:** creating a more accessible, flexible, and comfortable downtown civic space;
- 3. **Cultural-campus integration:** strengthening the relationship between Olympic Plaza and the Werklund Centre campus;
- 4. **Downtown revitalization:** contributing to Calgary’s broader effort to increase downtown vibrancy, visitation, and public confidence.

These logics are mutually reinforcing, but they also create tension. A plaza designed for major events and cultural-campus activity must still work as an everyday public space. A project framed as downtown revitalization must avoid being burdened with unrealistic expectations for solving broader downtown challenges. A space that preserves Olympic memory must ensure that legacy is experienced as civic meaning, not merely as symbolic decoration.

4.2 Project Timeline

Milestone	Year
Original Olympic Plaza created as part of Calgary’s Olympic legacy	1988
Early Olympic Plaza / cultural district engagement and planning context	2016
Prime design team announced for Olympic Plaza Transformation	2023
Public engagement conducted for Olympic Plaza Transformation	2024
Design reveal for Olympic Plaza Transformation	2025
Plaza closure begins to support construction activities	January 2025
Plaza construction period	2025–2028
Anticipated completion / reopening period	2028

Table 4 - Major milestones in the Olympic Plaza Transformation.

4.3 Major Project Components

Based on publicly available project documentation, the Olympic Plaza Transformation includes a combination of public-realm, cultural, recreational, and legacy features.

Public Realm and Accessibility

- Accessible and barrier-free plaza design;
- Flexible open space for everyday use and major events;
- Improved pedestrian circulation within the downtown cultural district;
- A stronger physical connection between outdoor civic space and adjacent cultural infrastructure;
- New public amenities supporting longer stays and year-round use.

Recreation and Year-Round Activation

- Central water feature and splash pad for summer use;
- Winter skating surface;
- Pavilion with seating and public amenities;
- Green areas and gathering spaces;
- Space for large-scale outdoor events of up to 5,000 people.

Cultural Infrastructure Integration

- Physical and operational connection to the Werklund Centre campus;
- Support for arts, culture, and civic programming;
- Outdoor performance and event capacity;
- Relationship to the broader Werklund Centre Transformation.

Olympic Legacy and Civic Memory

- Retention and reinterpretation of Olympic legacy elements;
- Integration of the small Olympic cauldron;
- Integration of the “Citius, Altius, Fortius” arches;
- Digital archiving of Olympic Plaza’s 1988–2024 chapter;
- Continued recognition of the site as a civic gathering place.

4.4 Design and Use Profile

The redesigned plaza is intended to support a broad spectrum of use conditions. At one end, it must function as a large-scale event venue capable of supporting civic celebrations, festivals, performances, and cultural gatherings. At the other end, it must remain useful during ordinary periods when no major programming is taking place.

This distinction is important. The success of Olympic Plaza should not be measured only by event capacity or major festival performance. It should also be measured by daily comfort, visibility, accessibility, seating, winter usability, perceived safety, informal use, and the ability of different publics to feel welcome in the space.

The design attempts to preserve much of the plaza’s usable space while accommodating the footprint and functional needs of the adjacent Werklund Centre expansion. This creates a compressed but strategically important public-realm condition: Olympic Plaza must remain generous and civic while also serving a more intensive cultural-campus environment.

4.5 Financial Evolution

The Olympic Plaza Transformation is identified as a \$70 million project. It is also embedded within the broader Werklund Centre campus transformation and Calgary’s wider downtown revitalization investments.

This financial context matters because Olympic Plaza will likely be judged against a wider set of outcomes than a conventional public-space upgrade. Residents and decision-makers may assess whether the project contributes to downtown vibrancy, cultural participation, tourism, civic identity, and the public value of adjacent cultural infrastructure.

From a TriAxis™ perspective, the project’s capital investment creates a high-value opportunity but also increases expectations for operational performance. The future question will not only be whether the plaza is completed on time and on budget. The more important question will be whether the investment produces sustained public value after opening.

Investment Component	Value
Olympic Plaza Transformation	\$70 million
City of Calgary Downtown Strategy contribution	\$40 million
Broader Werklund Centre campus transformation	\$680 million
Government of Alberta support for Werklund Centre and Olympic Plaza transformations	\$103 million over seven years
Dave Werklund and family gift	\$75 million

Table 5 - Public Investment Context for the Olympic Plaza Transformation

4.6 Project Overview Assessment

Olympic Plaza Transformation is best understood as a multi-layered civic project rather than a standalone plaza redesign. Its value proposition depends on the alignment of public-realm quality, cultural infrastructure, downtown revitalization, and civic memory.

The project’s greatest strength is its symbolic and strategic location. Few public spaces in Calgary have the same combination of Olympic legacy, downtown visibility, cultural-district adjacency, and event potential.

The project’s greatest risk is expectation overload. Olympic Plaza is being asked to preserve history, support cultural expansion, host major events, improve downtown vibrancy, and remain an everyday public space. These goals are compatible, but they require careful governance, adequate operating resources, and a sustained commitment to public accessibility after reopening.

TriAxis™ Project Interpretation

Olympic Plaza will succeed if it becomes more than a redesigned square. It must become a durable civic platform: a place where Calgary's Olympic legacy, cultural infrastructure, and everyday downtown life remain visibly connected.

5. Triple-Layer Reality Analysis

5.1 Physical Layer ↑ Strong civic-space redesign, but everyday performance remains untested

Olympic Plaza's Physical Layer is built around the renewal of an aging civic space into a more accessible, flexible, and year-round public realm. The project's physical ambition is clear: the redesigned plaza is expected to support large civic gatherings, cultural programming, daily public use, summer activity, winter skating, and stronger integration with the adjacent Werklund Centre campus.

The planned design includes several high-value public-realm features: a central water feature and splash pad in summer, a winter skating surface, a new pavilion with seating and public amenities, green areas, flexible programmable space, and event capacity for gatherings of up to 5,000 people. These elements position Olympic Plaza as both a civic event space and a year-round downtown destination.

A notable design strength is the attempt to preserve usability while accommodating the footprint of the Werklund Centre expansion. The redesigned plaza is expected to retain a very high proportion of the former plaza's usable space while integrating new cultural-infrastructure demands. This is important because the project is not simply improving the plaza; it is also absorbing pressure from the adjacent campus transformation.

The Physical Layer, however, should not be evaluated only through design ambition. Large civic spaces often succeed during major events but underperform during ordinary conditions. Olympic Plaza's long-term physical performance will depend on how the site works on a weekday afternoon, during winter shoulder periods, after events, and when no programming is scheduled. Seating, washrooms, weather protection, lighting, visibility, universal accessibility, comfort, and informal use will determine whether the plaza functions as a genuine everyday public space.

Physical Layer Assessment

The Physical Layer is strong in concept and design ambition. The project has the potential to create a flexible, accessible, year-round civic space. However, its real performance cannot be confirmed until after reopening. The main test will be whether the plaza works not only as a major-event venue but also as a comfortable, legible, and welcoming public space during ordinary daily use.

5.2 Economic Layer ↑ Major cultural investment carrying downtown revitalization expectation

The Economic Layer reflects Olympic Plaza's role within Calgary's broader downtown revitalization strategy. The project is not a narrow plaza upgrade. It is part of a larger investment in the Werklund Centre campus, cultural infrastructure, and public-realm renewal in the downtown core.

The Olympic Plaza Transformation represents a \$70 million component of a wider cultural-infrastructure transformation. This positions the plaza as a civic investment intended to generate value beyond its physical boundaries. Its economic logic rests on several expected benefits: strengthening downtown cultural activity, supporting festivals and events, increasing visitation, improving the public value of adjacent cultural assets, and contributing to perceptions of downtown vibrancy.

This creates a strong strategic rationale, but also a risk of expectation overload. Calgary's downtown challenges are broader than any single public-space project. Office vacancy, uneven street activity, perceptions of safety, limited evening and weekend foot traffic, and the need for residential and cultural diversification all shape the downtown context. Olympic Plaza can contribute to downtown revitalization, but it cannot independently deliver it.

The project's long-term economic performance will therefore depend less on the capital investment itself and more on operational follow-through. A plaza with water features, winter skating, public washrooms, programmed events, green space, lighting, food and beverage amenities, safety needs, and cultural activation requires sustained funding and management capacity. Without a strong operating model, the plaza could become expensive to maintain or fail to meet the level of public value expected from the investment.

Economic Layer Assessment

The Economic Layer is strategically important but exposed to long-term operational risk. The \$70 million investment may be justified if Olympic Plaza strengthens downtown cultural life, supports public gathering, and enhances the value of the Werklund Centre campus. However, the investment will only produce durable public value if programming, maintenance, safety coordination, and lifecycle planning are funded and sustained after opening.

5.3 Social & Perceptual Layer ↑ Powerful civic memory, but publicness must be protected

The Social & Perceptual Layer is especially significant because Olympic Plaza is not just a physical site. It is a place of memory. Its identity is tied to the 1988 Winter Olympics, public celebrations, winter skating, festivals, civic ceremonies, and Calgary's downtown cultural life.

This symbolic value is a major strength. The plaza already has recognition, emotional resonance, and a civic story. Unlike many new public spaces that must build meaning from scratch, Olympic Plaza begins with an established place identity. The integration of Olympic legacy elements, including the small Olympic cauldron, the "Citius, Altius, Fortius" arches, and design references to the 1988 Winter Games, helps preserve continuity between the old plaza and the new one.

However, civic memory is not preserved simply by retaining symbols. The deeper question is whether the transformed plaza will still feel publicly owned by Calgarians. As Olympic Plaza becomes more closely integrated with the Werklund Centre campus, there is a risk that residents may experience it less as a civic square and more as an institutional forecourt. This does not mean the campus relationship is negative. In fact, the cultural connection can strengthen the

plaza. But the governance and programming model must protect everyday public access, free use, informal gathering, and democratic visibility.

Public engagement is therefore central to the Social & Perceptual Layer. Engagement findings suggest that Calgarians want a space that is accessible, inclusive, active, comfortable, culturally vibrant, and connected to the site's legacy. The project's success will depend on whether those expectations are visible in the completed plaza and sustained through operations.

Social & Perceptual Layer Assessment

The Social & Perceptual Layer has strong foundations because Olympic Plaza already carries civic meaning. The principal risk is not lack of identity, but the narrowing of identity. The transformed plaza must remain more than a cultural-campus extension or event venue. It must continue to function as a shared civic space where different publics can gather, pause, participate, and feel welcome.

5.4 Critical Tensions

The Olympic Plaza Transformation presents a strong alignment between civic legacy, cultural investment, and downtown revitalization. However, several tensions should be acknowledged because they will shape how the project is judged after reopening.

Public Space vs. Cultural-Campus Forecourt

One of the most important questions is whether the transformed plaza will continue to function as a fully public civic space or become perceived primarily as the forecourt of the Werklund Centre campus. These identities are not necessarily in conflict, but they create different governance and programming priorities.

A civic plaza must support informal daily use, spontaneous gathering, protest, rest, winter activity, and casual public life. A cultural-campus forecourt, by contrast, may prioritize scheduled events, institutional programming, audience circulation, and the needs of adjacent cultural facilities. The long-term challenge will be ensuring that Olympic Plaza remains visibly and meaningfully public, even as it becomes more closely integrated with Calgary's major cultural infrastructure.

Event Capacity vs. Everyday Use

The redesigned plaza is intended to support large gatherings and major events. This is an important strength, but event capacity alone does not guarantee successful public space. Many plazas perform well during festivals, concerts, and civic celebrations but struggle on ordinary weekdays, winter mornings, or periods between scheduled programming.

For this reason, the most important test of Olympic Plaza will not be whether it can host large events, but whether it remains comfortable, accessible, active, and inviting when nothing major is happening. Seating, shade, weather protection, washrooms, food and beverage access, visibility, safety, and informal social use will be central to everyday success.

Olympic Memory vs. Design Symbolism

The integration of Olympic legacy elements helps preserve continuity with the site's 1988 identity. However, preserving symbolic features is not the same as preserving public memory. There is a risk that Olympic heritage becomes treated primarily as design language rather than as a living civic story.

The challenge is therefore interpretive as well as physical. The transformed plaza should allow residents and visitors to understand why the site matters, how it connects to Calgary's Olympic history, and how that legacy is being carried forward into a new civic era.

Downtown Revitalization Expectations vs. Operational Reality

Olympic Plaza is being renewed within a broader context of downtown revitalization. This gives the project strategic importance, but it also creates a risk of expectation overload. A redesigned plaza can support downtown vibrancy, but it cannot independently solve office vacancy, perceptions of safety, social disorder, transit conditions, or uneven evening and weekend activity.

The project's success will depend on how well it is supported by programming, maintenance, safety coordination, cultural partnerships, and surrounding downtown activity. Without sustained operational support, even a well-designed plaza may struggle to deliver the level of civic impact expected from it.

5.5 TriAxis™ Synthesis

Olympic Plaza Transformation reveals both strong alignment and significant future risk across the three TriAxis™ dimensions.

The Physical Layer is ambitious and well positioned to renew a prominent downtown civic space. The Economic Layer links the project to major cultural infrastructure and downtown revitalization investment. The Social & Perceptual Layer benefits from Olympic memory, civic identity, and public engagement.

The challenge is that these strengths are interdependent. The design will only succeed if operations sustain daily use. The investment will only be justified if the plaza produces visible public value. The civic legacy will only remain meaningful if Calgarians continue to experience the site as genuinely public.

TriAxis™ Interpretation

Olympic Plaza's long-term success will not be determined by design quality alone. It will depend on whether Calgary can convert a major capital investment into a durable civic platform that supports Olympic memory, cultural participation, downtown revitalization, and everyday public life simultaneously.

6. Governance, Public Engagement, and Digital Sentiment Assessment

The Olympic Plaza Transformation is governed through a multi-actor delivery structure involving The City of Calgary, Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC), and Werkbund Centre. This structure gives the project significant delivery capacity, but it also creates a more complex accountability environment than a conventional municipal public-space renewal.

Olympic Plaza sits at the intersection of four governance domains: public space, cultural infrastructure, downtown revitalization, and civic legacy. This makes governance especially important. The project's long-term success will depend not only on whether the plaza is completed successfully, but on whether public access, everyday use, maintenance, programming, safety, and civic identity are protected after reopening.

6.1 Public Engagement Process

Public engagement formed a central part of the project's design process. In 2024, engagement activities were conducted to inform design and programming considerations for the Olympic Plaza Transformation. The process gathered public priorities and aspirations related to the plaza's future role as a civic, cultural, and everyday public space.

This engagement is important because Olympic Plaza is not simply a construction site. It is a place with memory, emotional attachment, and symbolic value. Residents were not only being asked what amenities they preferred; they were being asked what kind of civic space Olympic Plaza should become.

The engagement process appears to have influenced several key design directions, including the preservation of Olympic legacy elements, the continued presence of winter skating, the addition of green space and public amenities, and the emphasis on accessibility and year-round use.

From a TriAxis™ perspective, the engagement process strengthened the Social & Perceptual Layer by treating public memory, everyday experience, and civic identity as design considerations rather than afterthoughts.

6.2 Community Priorities

Public engagement and project materials suggest several recurring community priorities:

- Maintaining Olympic legacy and civic memory;
- Creating a more accessible and barrier-free public space;
- Supporting year-round activity, including winter skating and summer gathering;
- Providing flexible space for festivals, markets, performances, and civic events;
- Improving comfort through seating, green space, washrooms, and amenities;
- Supporting both programmed cultural activity and informal everyday use;
- Strengthening downtown vibrancy and public confidence;
- Ensuring that the plaza remains welcoming to a broad range of users.

These priorities align closely with the TriAxis™ framework. Accessibility, comfort, and design quality relate to the Physical Layer. Cultural infrastructure, downtown investment, and operational sustainability relate to the Economic Layer. Olympic memory, civic identity, and everyday public belonging relate to the Social & Perceptual Layer.

6.3 Digital Public Sentiment Analysis

To supplement formal engagement materials, this assessment conducted an analysis of publicly visible Reddit discussions related to the Olympic Plaza Transformation. The purpose was not to measure representative public opinion, but to identify informal public narratives that may shape how the project is interpreted before and after reopening.

Reddit was used because it provides discussion-based public reaction rather than only promotional or institutional communication. Comments were read qualitatively and coded for recurring themes. The coding focused on the substance of public reaction rather than individual users. No usernames or personal identifiers were included in the analysis.

Reddit Corpus Reviewed

Reddit Discussion Title	Focus of Discussion	Visible Comment Count
Ice Skate/Water Feature included in Olympic Plaza Design Reveal	Design reaction; physical layer; year-round use	33 comments
Pics of Demolition of Olympic Plaza	Demolition, loss, nostalgia, memory	77 comments
Olympic Plaza upgrades remain on time and on budget	Cost skepticism and delivery confidence	9 comments
Please save Olympic Plaza from redevelopment (basically cut trees and make a building)	Opposition, trees, public-space loss, institutionalization	34 comments
Worries over future of Olympic Plaza bricks resurface as major makeover looms	Material memory, family legacy, stewardship trust	91 comments
Some Olympic Plaza bricks can be saved, city now says	Mitigation response and return/recovery of bricks	13 comments

Table 6. Reddit Corpus and Comment Counts for the Digital Public Sentiment Analysis

The coded Reddit corpus therefore included **257 visible comments across six primary threads**. Because Reddit users are self-selecting, these comments were not treated as statistically representative of Calgary residents. They were used as qualitative perception evidence.

Coding Framework

The Reddit material was coded into seven recurring themes.

Theme	What Was Coded	TriAxis™ Relevance
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Support for renewal	Comments welcoming redesign, accessibility improvements, skating, water features, and a more active downtown plaza.	Physical Layer
Heritage and memory concern	Comments expressing attachment to the old plaza, concern about demolition, or concern about losing Olympic-era identity.	Social & Perceptual Layers
Material memory and commemorative bricks	Comments expressing attachment to engraved bricks, concern about their removal, requests for reuse or return, and debate over whether the bricks can or should be preserved.	Social & Perceptual Layers / Governance
Cost and delivery skepticism	Comments questioning project cost, construction timelines, disruption, or value for money.	Economic Layers
Safety and downtown comfort	Comments linking the plaza's future success to cleanliness, safety, visibility, maintenance, and broader downtown conditions.	Physical / Social Layers
Event space vs. everyday public space	Comments questioning whether the plaza will serve everyday public life or mainly function as a programmed event space.	Cross-Layer Reading
Publicness and institutionalization	Comments raising concern that the space may become less of a civic plaza and more of an extension of adjacent cultural infrastructure.	Social & Perceptual / Economic Layers

Table 7. Reddit Coding Framework for the Digital Public Sentiment Analysis

Analytical Findings

The Reddit analysis shows that informal public reaction is mixed rather than simply supportive or oppositional. Support for renewal exists, but it is accompanied by concern about memory, material heritage, cost, safety, and whether the transformed plaza will remain genuinely public.

- First, the design-reveal discussion shows meaningful support for renewal. Some users welcomed the redesign, especially the return of skating, the addition of a water feature, improved accessibility, and the possibility of a more active downtown space. These comments support the project's Physical Layer rationale: many users recognize that the old plaza had functional and design limitations.
- Second, demolition-related discussion produced a different emotional register. Once the project became visible through demolition, comments shifted toward loss, nostalgia, and concern about the removal of a familiar civic place. This suggests that Olympic Plaza is not perceived only as infrastructure. It is also remembered as a symbolic public space connected to Calgary's Olympic history and downtown life.
- Third, the commemorative-brick discussion adds an important material-memory dimension. The bricks are not treated by some users as minor paving elements; they are understood as personal and family-linked civic artifacts. Comments in this discussion express concern about whether the bricks can be preserved, incorporated into the new design, returned to families, or documented in an accessible way. Other comments emphasize the need to

modernize the plaza if the bricks are deteriorating or technically difficult to save. This tension shows that Olympic memory is materially embedded in the site, but redevelopment requires decisions about which forms of memory are preserved, translated, digitized, or lost.

- Fourth, cost and timeline discussion was smaller in volume but more skeptical in tone. Comments in this area questioned whether the project would remain on budget, whether construction disruption was justified, and whether the final plaza would generate enough visible public value. This theme connects directly to the Economic Layer and suggests that public confidence will depend on post-opening performance, not only construction updates.
- Fifth, redevelopment-opposition discussion highlights the importance of existing public use. Opposition comments framed Olympic Plaza as a space for festivals, winter skating, trees, social gathering, and informal downtown life. Even where other users supported redevelopment, the discussion shows that some residents understood the old plaza as already socially valuable. This creates a key perception risk: if the new plaza feels less public, less green, or too institutional, criticism may intensify after reopening.
- Sixth, safety and comfort appear as recurring concerns across discussions. Some users connected the plaza's future success to cleanliness, visibility, social disorder, maintenance, and broader downtown conditions. These comments suggest that design quality alone will not determine public perception. The plaza will also be judged through everyday experience: whether people feel comfortable sitting, skating, passing through, attending events, or using the space outside scheduled programming.

TriAxis™ Digital Sentiment Interpretation

The Reddit analysis strengthens the Social & Perceptual Layer by showing that Olympic Plaza carries emotional, symbolic, and material meaning beyond its physical redesign. Informal public reaction identifies several issues that official project descriptions may understate: attachment to the old plaza, concern about demolition, skepticism about cost, concern about downtown safety, uncertainty about everyday publicness, and the personal significance of commemorative bricks.

The most important finding is that Reddit discussion repeatedly returns to the question of publicness. Users are not only reacting to design features; they are asking what kind of place Olympic Plaza will become. Will it remain an everyday civic square, or will it become primarily a cultural-campus and event-oriented space?

The commemorative-brick discussion sharpens this concern. Olympic legacy is not only expressed through large symbols such as the cauldron or arches. It is also carried through smaller material artifacts that connect residents and families to the site. For this reason, legacy preservation should not be treated only as a design issue. It is also a governance and communication issue.

Digital sentiment should therefore be treated as an early-warning layer. It does not replace formal engagement, but it helps identify perception risks that may become more visible after reopening. The analysis suggests that Olympic Plaza's legitimacy will depend not only on design quality, but on whether residents experience the transformed plaza as accessible, familiar, safe, active, materially respectful, and publicly owned.

6.4 Governance Implications

The governance and engagement evidence suggests that Olympic Plaza's post-opening success will depend on more than design quality. The project will require a clear operating model, transparent performance reporting, balanced programming, and sustained attention to public access and everyday use.

The formal engagement process shows what residents hope the plaza can become: accessible, active, comfortable, culturally meaningful, and connected to Olympic legacy. The Reddit analysis shows what residents may worry the project could lose: publicness, familiar memory, material heritage, affordability, comfort, and trust in stewardship.

This contrast is analytically important. Formal engagement captures aspiration; digital sentiment captures informal concern. Together, they suggest that Olympic Plaza's legitimacy will depend on whether the completed project can convert official design objectives into lived public experience.

Several risks emerge from this governance context, including publicness risk, programming risk, operations risk, expectation overload, equity-of-use risk, and material-memory risk. These are assessed in detail in the Risk & Opportunity Matrix later in this report.

Governance Assessment

The governance model for Olympic Plaza has strong delivery advantages because it connects municipal authority, CMLC's development capacity, and Werklund Centre's cultural infrastructure role. This alignment strengthens the project's ability to deliver a high-quality public realm within Calgary's downtown cultural district.

The main governance challenge will emerge after reopening. Olympic Plaza should be governed not only as a capital project or cultural-campus asset, but as a shared civic platform requiring long-term stewardship, visible public access, material-memory interpretation, and transparent performance monitoring.

7. Key Findings

Finding 1: Olympic Plaza is being transformed from a legacy plaza into a cultural-district platform

The project is not simply renewing an aging downtown square. It is repositioning Olympic Plaza as part of a larger cultural infrastructure system connected to the Werklund Centre campus, downtown revitalization, and Calgary's civic identity.

This shift creates a stronger strategic role for the plaza, but it also changes how the space will be experienced. Olympic Plaza will no longer function only as a standalone public square; it will operate within a more intensive cultural, institutional, and event-oriented environment.

TriAxis™ Implication

The project's value depends on whether the Physical, Economic, and Social & Perceptual Layers remain balanced as Olympic Plaza becomes more closely connected to Calgary's cultural infrastructure.

Finding 2: The design appears strong, but everyday public-space performance remains unproven

The planned design includes several important public-realm improvements, including a more accessible layout, year-round use, winter skating, a summer water feature, pavilion amenities, green space, and capacity for large gatherings.

However, the strongest test of the plaza will not be its performance during major events. The more important test will be whether it works on ordinary days: when there is no festival, no performance, no ceremony, and no large crowd.

A successful Olympic Plaza must support casual sitting, informal gathering, winter use, public comfort, accessibility, visibility, safety, and a sense of welcome during everyday conditions.

TriAxis™ Implication

The Physical Layer is promising, but its actual performance will require post-opening evaluation rather than design-stage assessment alone.

Finding 3: Civic memory is one of the project's strongest assets, but also one of its most sensitive risks

Olympic Plaza has a level of symbolic value that many public spaces do not possess. Its association with the 1988 Winter Olympics gives the project an existing civic identity and emotional resonance.

The decision to retain and reinterpret Olympic legacy elements helps preserve continuity. However, civic memory cannot be protected only through design symbols. Residents must be able to recognize the transformed plaza as a meaningful continuation of the old Olympic Plaza, not simply as a new space with historical references added to it.

TriAxis™ Implication

The Social & Perceptual Layer is strong, but public acceptance will depend on whether the redesigned plaza feels familiar, shared, and genuinely civic after reopening..

Finding 4: Public engagement strengthened legitimacy, but informal sentiment reveals unresolved concerns

Formal public engagement provided important legitimacy for the project and helped identify priorities related to accessibility, year-round activity, cultural programming, legacy preservation, comfort, and public amenities.

At the same time, informal online discussion shows that public opinion is not uniformly promotional. Digital sentiment suggests support for renewal, but also concern about demolition, cost, safety, construction disruption, heritage loss, and whether the future plaza will remain an everyday public space.

This combination is important. Formal engagement shows what residents hope the plaza can become. Informal sentiment shows what residents may worry the project could lose.

TriAxis™ Implication

The Social & Perceptual Layer should be monitored after reopening through both formal evaluation and informal public sentiment tracking.

Finding 5: The central challenge will shift from capital delivery to long-term stewardship

The project's current focus is design, construction, and coordination with the Werklund Centre campus. After reopening, the challenge will change. Olympic Plaza will need consistent maintenance, programming, safety coordination, winter operations, public amenities, free civic use, and clear accountability for performance.

This is where many public-space projects succeed or fail. A well-designed plaza can underperform if operating resources, programming balance, maintenance standards, and public-access commitments are not sustained over time.

TriAxis™ Implication

The Economic Layer should not be evaluated only through capital cost. Long-term value will depend on lifecycle management, operating capacity, and the ability to convert investment into durable public benefit.

Finding 6: Olympic Plaza may be carrying more downtown revitalization expectation than one space can reasonably deliver

Olympic Plaza can support downtown vibrancy, cultural participation, tourism, and public life. However, it cannot independently resolve broader downtown challenges such as office vacancy, uneven street activity, public safety perceptions, social disorder, or weak evening and weekend foot traffic.

The plaza should therefore be understood as a catalyst, not a cure. Its success will depend partly on design and operations, but also on surrounding land use, cultural programming, transit experience, safety coordination, downtown housing growth, and wider public-realm conditions.

TriAxis™ Implication

The project’s strategic value is high, but evaluation should avoid placing unrealistic downtown-recovery expectations on a single public-space investment.

Overall Finding

Olympic Plaza Transformation has strong potential because it combines civic memory, cultural infrastructure, public-realm renewal, and downtown revitalization within one highly visible project. Its main risk is not weak design ambition. Its main risk is expectation overload.

The plaza will succeed if it remains more than a cultural-campus forecourt, more than an event venue, and more than a symbolic Olympic reference. It must become a durable everyday civic space that supports Calgary’s past, present, and future public life.

8. Risk & Opportunity Matrix

The Olympic Plaza Transformation presents a strong opportunity to renew one of Calgary’s most visible civic spaces. However, the project’s future risks are less likely to arise from design ambition alone and more likely to emerge during post-opening operations, programming, maintenance, and public perception.

The matrix below identifies the main risks and opportunities that should be monitored as the plaza transitions from capital project to operational civic space.

Area	Risk	Opportunity	Suggested Response	TriAxis™ Layer
Publicness	The plaza may be perceived as an institutional forecourt rather than a fully public civic space.	Protect Olympic Plaza as a shared civic platform connected to, but not absorbed by, the Werkbund Centre campus.	Establish clear public-access principles, visible free-use areas, and communications emphasizing civic ownership.	Social & Perceptual

Everyday Use	The plaza may perform well during major events but feel inactive or uncomfortable during ordinary periods.	Create a space that works both for 5,000-person gatherings and for everyday sitting, passing through, meeting, skating, and informal use.	Monitor daily use, seating occupancy, seasonal activity, and user comfort after reopening.	Physical / Social
Programming Balance	Event-oriented programming may crowd out informal or non-ticketed public use.	Build a programming model that combines major cultural events with free civic programming and casual everyday activation.	Track the balance between ticketed, institutional, free, and community-led programming.	Social / Economic
Operations and Maintenance	Water features, skating infrastructure, washrooms, pavilion amenities, lighting, cleaning, and security may create high operating demands.	Use the project as a model for long-term stewardship of complex downtown public spaces.	Develop a publicly visible operations and lifecycle management plan before or shortly after reopening.	Economic / Physical
Olympic Legacy	Olympic memory may be reduced to symbolic objects rather than experienced as a living civic story.	Use the redesigned plaza to reinterpret Calgary's Olympic legacy for new generations.	Add interpretation, storytelling, digital archives, public art, and programming connected to the 1988 legacy.	Social & Perceptual
Downtown Expectations	The project may be expected to solve broader downtown challenges that exceed the capacity of a single plaza.	Position Olympic Plaza as one catalyst within a wider downtown revitalization ecosystem.	Communicate realistic success measures and connect plaza performance to broader downtown strategy indicators.	Economic / Social
Safety and Comfort	Perceptions of safety, cleanliness, and social disorder may affect public willingness to use the space.	Improve public confidence through activity, visibility, amenities, maintenance, and coordinated downtown supports.	Track perceived safety, maintenance response, lighting performance, and user experience across different times of day.	Social / Physical
Equity of Use	The plaza may primarily serve arts audiences, tourists, and event attendees rather than a broad public.	Create a genuinely inclusive civic space serving downtown workers, residents, youth, seniors, families, visitors, and passersby.	Monitor who uses the space, who feels welcome, and whether free and informal use remains visible.	Social & Perceptual

Cost and Public Value	Public skepticism may grow if the completed space does not feel worth the cost, disruption, and construction period.	Demonstrate the public value of investment through transparent reporting and visible use.	Publish annual performance reporting on visitation, programming, accessibility, operations, and public satisfaction.	Economic
Institutional Coordination	Multiple partners may create unclear accountability after opening.	Build a coordinated governance model for downtown cultural public-space stewardship.	Clarify roles for programming, maintenance, public access, safety, evaluation, and reporting.	Economic / Social & Perceptual

Table 8 - Risk and Opportunity Matrix for Olympic Plaza Operations and Stewardship

Most identified risks are not design risks. They are governance, operations, perception, and stewardship risks. This distinction is important because the project's success will not be determined only at the moment of reopening. It will be determined over time through programming quality, public accessibility, maintenance standards, everyday use, and the ability to keep Olympic Plaza visibly civic.

TriAxis™ Risk Interpretation

The central risk is not that Olympic Plaza lacks ambition. The central risk is that its ambition may become too concentrated in the opening image of the project rather than sustained in long-term public performance.

A successful Olympic Plaza will need to function simultaneously as a cultural venue, Olympic legacy space, downtown gathering place, and everyday public square. These roles can reinforce one another, but only if governance protects the balance between event use, institutional connection, and informal civic life.

9. Recommendations

The recommendations below are designed to support Olympic Plaza as it transitions from a capital project into an operational civic space. They focus on protecting public value, strengthening everyday use, clarifying post-opening governance, and ensuring that the plaza's cultural and institutional role does not weaken its civic function.

Horizon	Recommendation	Purpose	TriAxis™ Layer
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Immediate / Pre-Opening	Develop an Olympic Plaza Public Access Charter.	Clarify that the plaza remains a fully public civic space, not only a cultural-campus forecourt or event venue.	Social & Perceptual
Immediate / Pre-Opening	Prepare a detailed operations and stewardship plan.	Define responsibilities for maintenance, skating, water features, washrooms, safety, cleaning, events, and daily public use.	Economic / Physical
Immediate / Pre-Opening	Establish baseline performance indicators.	Create a pre-opening framework for tracking visitation, programming, public satisfaction, accessibility, safety, and operating costs.	All Layers
Immediate / Pre-Opening	Develop a legacy interpretation strategy.	Ensure Olympic memory is communicated through storytelling, public art, digital archives, signage, and programming, not only preserved objects.	Social & Perceptual
Short-Term / Opening Years	Conduct a two-year post-opening public-space evaluation.	Assess whether the plaza works during ordinary daily use, not only during major events.	Physical / Social
Short-Term / Opening Years	Monitor programming balance.	Track the balance between ticketed events, institutional programming, free public events, community-led activity, and informal use.	Social / Economic
Short-Term / Opening Years	Implement seasonal comfort and safety audits.	Evaluate lighting, visibility, seating, washrooms, winter usability, maintenance, and perceived safety across different times and seasons.	Physical / Social
Short-Term / Opening Years	Track digital sentiment after reopening.	Identify emerging public concerns around publicness, safety, cost, heritage, programming, and everyday use.	Social & Perceptual
Medium-Term	Publish annual Olympic Plaza performance reporting.	Make public value visible through data on use, operations, programming, accessibility, satisfaction, and stewardship.	All Layers
Medium-Term	Integrate Olympic Plaza reporting with downtown revitalization indicators.	Evaluate the plaza as one part of Calgary's broader downtown ecosystem rather than as a stand-alone solution.	Economic / Social
Medium-Term	Conduct a five-year TriAxis™ review.	Reassess whether the Physical, Economic, and Social & Perceptual Layers remain aligned after regular operation.	All Layers

Table 9 - Strategic Recommendations by Implementation Horizon and TriAxis™ Layer

9.1 Priority Recommendation 1: Create an Olympic Plaza Public Access Charter

The most important governance recommendation is to make the plaza's public role explicit before reopening.

Because Olympic Plaza will be closely integrated with the Werklund Centre campus, there is a risk that the space may be perceived as primarily institutional or event-oriented. A Public Access Charter would help prevent this by clearly defining Olympic Plaza as a shared civic space.

The charter should address:

- free public access;
- informal daily use;
- non-ticketed programming;
- public gathering and civic expression;
- washroom and amenity access;
- accessibility expectations;
- use by residents, visitors, workers, families, youth, seniors, and passersby;
- the relationship between institutional programming and everyday public life.

This would give Calgary a clear public-value standard against which the plaza can be evaluated after opening.

9.2 Priority Recommendation 2: Shift from Capital Delivery to Civic Stewardship

The project's first challenge is construction delivery. Its second challenge will be stewardship.

Olympic Plaza will include public-realm features that require sustained management: skating, water features, washrooms, pavilion amenities, lighting, seating, green areas, safety coordination, event infrastructure, and daily maintenance. A strong operating model should therefore be prepared before reopening, not after problems emerge.

The stewardship plan should define:

- who manages daily operations;
- who funds maintenance and lifecycle replacement;
- how programming decisions are made;
- how public access is protected during events;
- how safety and social-support coordination will work;
- how public complaints and feedback will be handled;
- how performance will be reported.

The goal is to ensure that Olympic Plaza is not only well designed, but consistently well managed.

9.3 Priority Recommendation 3: Measure Everyday Use, Not Only Event Success

Olympic Plaza will likely be most visible during festivals, performances, civic celebrations, and major gatherings. However, its deeper public value will be determined by ordinary use.

Post-opening evaluation should therefore track how the plaza performs:

- on weekdays;
- during winter;
- during low-programming periods;
- before and after events;
- for people not attending cultural programming;
- for people using the space casually or briefly.

Potential indicators include seating use, dwell time, pedestrian flow, perceived safety, washroom use, skating participation, maintenance conditions, accessibility barriers, user diversity, and satisfaction across seasons.

This would help prevent a narrow definition of success based only on event capacity, design quality, or opening-year enthusiasm.

9.4 Priority Recommendation 4: Treat Digital Sentiment as an Early-Warning System

Formal engagement should remain the primary source for structured public feedback. However, digital sentiment can help identify issues that emerge quickly after reopening.

Publicly visible online discussion should be monitored carefully but cautiously. It should not be treated as representative public opinion. Instead, it can function as an early-warning system for recurring concerns about safety, comfort, programming, cost, publicness, heritage interpretation, and maintenance.

A light-touch digital monitoring approach could include:

- recurring theme tracking;
- comparison between formal survey findings and informal online discussion;
- identification of emerging complaints;
- monitoring of public reaction after major events;
- attention to whether residents describe the plaza as public, institutional, safe, active, or welcoming.

This would strengthen the Social & Perceptual Layer by treating public perception as something to be monitored over time, not only during formal consultation.

9.5 Priority Recommendation 5: Connect Olympic Plaza to Downtown Strategy Without Overloading It

Olympic Plaza should be evaluated as part of Calgary's broader downtown revitalization ecosystem. It can support vibrancy, cultural activity, tourism, public gathering, and civic confidence. However, it should not be expected to solve downtown challenges on its own.

Performance reporting should therefore distinguish between:

- outcomes the plaza can reasonably influence, such as use, programming, comfort, accessibility, and public perception;
- broader downtown conditions, such as office vacancy, housing growth, transit experience, safety concerns, and evening foot traffic.

This distinction will help protect the project from unrealistic expectations while still recognizing its strategic value.

TriAxis™ Recommendation

The strongest future governance model for Olympic Plaza will be one that treats publicness, cultural programming, downtown revitalization, and Olympic memory as mutually reinforcing objectives.

The plaza should not be managed only as an event venue, cultural-campus asset, or downtown beautification project. It should be managed as a civic platform: a place where Calgary's Olympic legacy, cultural life, and everyday public experience remain visibly connected.

10. Limitations and Evidence Boundaries

This assessment evaluates the Olympic Plaza Transformation using publicly available information, including municipal project materials, CMLC documentation, engagement summaries, public reporting, and limited digital public discussion. Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, the transformed Olympic Plaza has not yet reopened. As a result, conclusions regarding visitation, user satisfaction, programming success, perceived safety, accessibility, maintenance performance, and long-term public value are necessarily prospective rather than observational.

Second, many of the project's most important future outcomes will depend on operations rather than design. The assessment can evaluate planned features, governance arrangements, engagement findings, and anticipated risks, but it cannot yet determine whether the plaza will function successfully during ordinary daily use, winter conditions, low-programming periods, or major-event conditions after reopening.

Third, detailed post-opening operating budgets, lifecycle maintenance projections, staffing arrangements, and long-term asset management plans were not fully available through publicly accessible sources. The Economic Layer assessment therefore focuses primarily on capital investment, governance structure, anticipated operational responsibilities, and stewardship risks.

Fourth, public engagement materials provide valuable insight into community priorities, but they do not represent the full range of public opinion in Calgary. Engagement participants may differ from non-participants in their level of interest, downtown use, cultural participation, age, neighbourhood, or attachment to Olympic Plaza.

Fifth, the digital public sentiment analysis is exploratory and non-representative. It reviewed 257 visible comments across six publicly visible Reddit discussions to identify recurring informal narratives around design, demolition, cost, heritage, safety, commemorative bricks, and everyday public use. These discussions should not be interpreted as

statistically valid evidence of overall public opinion. Reddit users are self-selecting, and highly engaged or dissatisfied users may be overrepresented. For this reason, Reddit material is used only as a supplementary perception source alongside formal engagement materials, municipal documentation, CMLC project materials, and public reporting.

Sixth, the assessment distinguishes between what Olympic Plaza can reasonably influence and broader downtown conditions that extend beyond the project. The plaza may contribute to downtown vibrancy, cultural activity, public gathering, and civic identity, but it cannot independently resolve office vacancy, social disorder, perceptions of safety, transit conditions, or uneven evening and weekend activity.

Seventh, several project benefits will only become measurable over time. These include the balance between ticketed and free programming, user diversity, everyday public access, seasonal performance, perceived publicness, operating costs, maintenance quality, and whether Olympic legacy remains meaningful in the redesigned space.

TriAxis™ Limitation

The Physical Layer can be assessed with moderate confidence because the project's planned design features, spatial intentions, and public-realm components are publicly documented. The Economic and Social & Perceptual Layers require greater caution because their success will depend heavily on post-opening operations, programming, public perception, and long-term stewardship.

The strongest conclusion this assessment can make at the pre-opening stage is therefore not that Olympic Plaza will succeed, but that its success will depend on converting design ambition and capital investment into sustained public value after reopening.

11. Conclusion

Olympic Plaza Transformation is one of Calgary's most symbolically important public-realm projects. It is not simply a redesign of an aging downtown plaza. It is an attempt to reconnect Olympic memory, cultural infrastructure, downtown revitalization, and everyday civic life within one highly visible public space.

This assessment asked a central question:

Can Olympic Plaza become a renewed civic platform that preserves Calgary's Olympic legacy while supporting cultural activity, downtown vibrancy, and genuinely public everyday use?

Based on available evidence, the project has a strong strategic foundation. The planned design responds to several long-standing public-space needs: accessibility, year-round use, event flexibility, winter activity, summer gathering, public amenities, and integration with adjacent cultural infrastructure. The project also benefits from a powerful place identity. Unlike many new civic spaces, Olympic Plaza already carries public memory and symbolic recognition.

At the same time, the project's greatest risks are not only physical or architectural. They are operational, perceptual, and governance-related. The plaza may be beautifully redesigned and still underperform if it feels too institutional, too

event-oriented, too difficult to maintain, or insufficiently welcoming during ordinary daily life. Its success will depend on whether Calgary can protect the plaza's publicness while expanding its cultural and event-based role.

The strongest conclusion of this assessment is that Olympic Plaza should not be evaluated only at the moment of reopening. Opening-year enthusiasm, design quality, and event capacity will matter, but they will not be enough. The deeper test will come over time: whether the plaza is active in different seasons, accessible to different users, comfortable outside major events, visibly connected to Olympic memory, and supported by a clear stewardship model.

From a TriAxis™ perspective, Olympic Plaza's potential is high because the three layers are meaningfully connected. The Physical Layer offers a redesigned civic space. The Economic Layer links the project to downtown revitalization and cultural infrastructure investment. The Social & Perceptual Layer draws strength from Olympic memory, public engagement, and civic identity.

The challenge is that these same strengths create expectation pressure. Olympic Plaza is being asked to perform as a cultural-campus connector, downtown catalyst, Olympic legacy site, event venue, and everyday public square. These roles can reinforce one another, but only if governance, programming, operations, and public access remain carefully balanced.

Final TriAxis™ Assessment

Physical Layer: ●●●●○

The project demonstrates strong design ambition through accessibility, year-round use, event flexibility, public amenities, and integration with the Werklund Centre campus. However, actual everyday performance cannot be confirmed until after reopening.

Economic Layer: ●●●○○

The project is strategically important as part of Calgary's downtown and cultural-infrastructure investment. However, long-term value will depend on operating resources, lifecycle planning, programming capacity, and whether the plaza produces sustained public benefit beyond its capital cost.

Social & Perceptual Layer: ●●●●○

Olympic Plaza has strong civic memory and public recognition. Engagement and legacy retention strengthen the project's legitimacy, but post-opening perception will depend on whether residents experience the new plaza as genuinely public, familiar, safe, and welcoming.

Closing Observation

Olympic Plaza Transformation illustrates both the promise and difficulty of renewing symbolic civic spaces. The project's opportunity lies in transforming a legacy plaza into a contemporary public platform for culture, memory, gathering, and downtown life. Its risk lies in assuming that design quality alone can secure public value.

The future success of Olympic Plaza will depend on stewardship. If Calgary protects everyday public access, balances cultural programming with informal use, monitors public experience, and communicates the plaza's legacy clearly, the project can become a model for how cities renew inherited civic spaces without erasing their meaning.

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The TriAxis™ system is applicable across civic plazas, downtown revitalization projects, cultural districts, public-space redevelopments, heritage landscapes, destination parks, and major urban investments at any governance scale.

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