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SEAT

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WINTER IS COMING

Rogers Place, the upcoming new home of the Edmonton Oilers, is the catalyst for the C\$2 billion ICE District development, a public-private partnership that is evolving the City of Edmonton.

By Max Snyder, ALSD

Canada's largest mixed-use real estate development is taking shape in Edmonton, Alberta. The C\$2 billion investment by the City of Edmonton and Katz Group, owners of the NHL's Oilers, consists of 26 acres of contiguous land in the downtown core. The new ICE District, set to be complete in 2019, will sit within two blocks of both the current residential and commercial centers of the downtown, and within three blocks of the city's arts district, all anchored by Rogers Place – a new arena for the city's beloved hockey team.

"We are very proud of how this has been master planned to ensure that it connects in an optimized way with everything around it," says Bob Black, Executive Vice President of Sports and Entertainment at Katz Group, "and can truly be a catalyst for driving other development within the core."

Bordering the arena's main entry is a 77,000-square-foot public plaza, which phase one of the development is located around. The new development also includes 1.3 million square feet of office space, over 1,000 residential units, and 70,000 square feet of retail space, all built around the plaza. It was also recently announced that Canada's third JW Marriott, a 356-room luxury hotel, will be erected outside the plaza.

"The city's prime objective in this development plan was to generate excitement, livability, walkability, and investment in our downtown," explains Rick Daviss, Executive Director of Downtown Sports and Entertainment District Project Sustainable Development for the City of Edmonton. "We saw the arena as not being an end product, but a way to get there, and from the city's perspective, the plaza is sort of the core."

The plaza is also intended to be heavily programmed

QUICK HITS

The ICE District includes

1.3 million square feet of office space, over 1,000 residential units, 70,000 square feet of retail space, and a 356-room JW Marriott.

The 819,000-square-foot

Rogers Place is designed in the shape of an oil drop to pay homage to one of Edmonton's main economic drivers.

The east end of the arena

can be transformed into an intimate amphitheater for up to 6,000 patrons.

Rogers Place includes

nine premium products, including 3,100 club access seats, 57 suites, 24 theatre boxes, 300 loge ledge seats, 136 loge tables, and two food-inclusive clubs.







Winter Garden: 35,000 square feet of public space functions as both a grand entrance into Rogers Place as well as a piece of infrastructure that safely connects the arena with pedestrian walkways in the ICE District.



“The city’s prime objective in this development plan was to generate excitement, livability, walkability, and investment in our downtown.”

— Rick Daviss, *City of Edmonton*

year-round with a range of activities from small community events to large international events. With this capacity in mind, it is designed with world-class digital, lighting, and audio capabilities, in addition to a permanent ice plant that will allow for the creation of ice slides and skating rinks.

In order to manage the flow of citizens and traffic throughout, the area is well-served by public transit. At the development’s completion, there will be seven LRT (light rail transit) stops and 12,500 structured parking spaces within a ten-minute walk from Rogers Place, including an LRT station right on the arena.

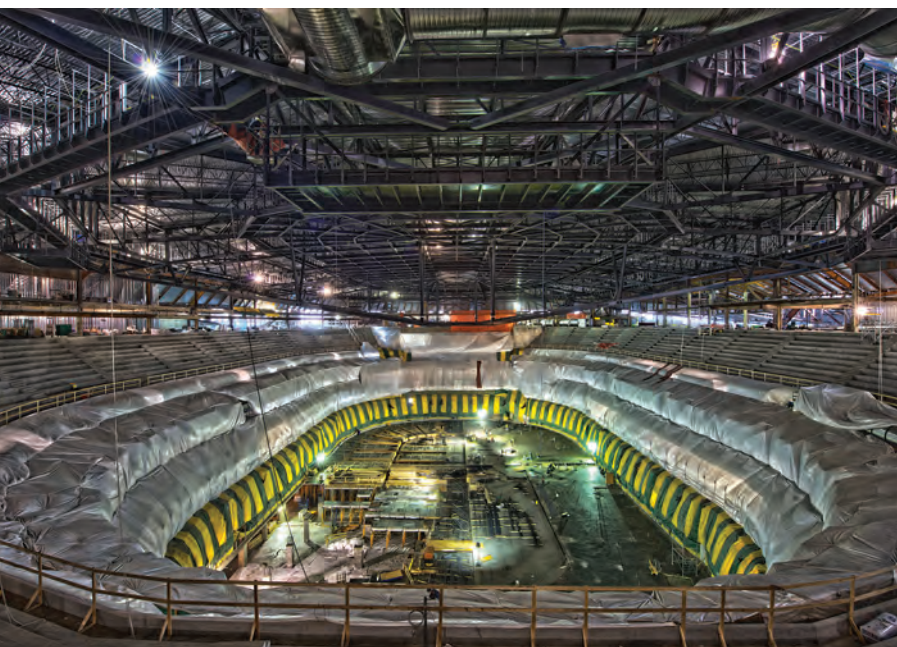
A CITY BUILT FOR ITS CITIZENS

With the investment of public tax dollars in the district and the Katz Group’s focus on improving the experience for Oilers fans and all Edmontonians alike, public consultation and consideration significantly impacted certain design outcomes.

One category impacted was the significant level of public access granted and built into the new construction. While the plaza is privately owned, a pedestrian access easement makes it always open to the public, and there is a public corridor through the arena itself connecting to the LRT. In other words, there is no ticket necessary to get into the arena. It’s truly open to the public at all times. Another public feature of the arena is an attached community ice rink, which is owned and operated by the city. The rink



The ICE District: The entire 26-acre mixed-use development includes office space, retail space, residential units, a luxury hotel, and public plazas for ice slides and skating rinks.



Coming Soon: Currently under construction, Rogers Place is scheduled to open in September 2016.

“We were able to get it into budget without picking that low-hanging fruit from a value engineering standpoint.”

— *Dan Vaillant, ICON Venue Group*

will also house both Oilers’ and visiting teams’ practices.

“For someone who can’t necessarily afford a hockey ticket, they get to see their heroes on the ice at a practice,” says Daviss. “It brings the Oilers into the community. It brings the community down into the building. And it’s really much more of a public building than Rexall Place is right now.”

In addition to the public corridor and ice rink, Rogers Place is connected to the plaza by the Winter Garden, one of the arena’s signature design features.

The 35,000-square-foot Winter Garden is a public space that functions both as a grand entrance into the arena and a piece of connective infrastructure. Consistent with the public-private theme, the City of Edmonton has rights to program the space for city use. The Winter Garden’s southern bound location is also deliberate, with the team’s pedestrian movement analysis indicating that somewhere between 70- and 75-percent of patrons will arrive at the arena from the south. As a result, it is built over the busiest east-west road in downtown Edmonton and provides a passageway to ensure that people are able to safely enter and exit the arena.

ROGERS PLACE

Oilers fans are looking forward to the opening of Rogers Place in September 2016. The 819,000-square-foot arena in the shape of an oil drop pays homage to one of Edmonton’s main economic drivers. By itself, the arena represents a C\$480 million investment, reaching a C\$604 million mark with the inclusion of the LRT connection, the pedestrian corridor, and the Winter Garden.

“I think that will be one of the real hallmarks of this project, the value for money,” says Black. “We have a \$480 million building here that I think has spectacular exterior architecture, that will be a LEED Silver certified building, and will be the most technologically enabled arena in North America.”

A few years into operation, Katz Group and the City of Edmonton anticipate that Rogers Place will run anywhere from 180 to 200 nights of entertainment a year, with 85 to 90 of these dates being guaranteed through the venue’s two tenants, the NHL’s Edmonton Oilers and the Western Hockey League’s Edmonton Oil Kings. The facility has a capacity of 18,641 for hockey and 20,500 for concerts, with the ability to downsize to a 4,500-6,000-person amphitheater.

DESIGNING VALUE

The building’s exterior is primarily stainless steel and glass,



Sportsnet Club: This two-level club provides fans with an immersive experience of out-of-town scores and statistics, as well as a multitude of televisions.

built to allow natural light to enter not only the Winter Garden but the arena itself. Internally, the building rests on a structural steel frame and pre-cast concrete seating risers, and contains a parking structure under the ice sheet.

The citizens of Edmonton have set high expectations for Rogers Place to be an iconic building. The development team, made up of ICON Venue Group, HOK, and PCL, has sought to meet these expectations by designing an attractive building from all four sides that meets a challenging set of certain structural requirements.

“We were not allowed to make all the walls straight,” says Dan Vaillant, Project Executive and Senior Vice President at ICON Venue Group. “We were not allowed to remove ceilings throughout the building. We were not allowed to take out square footage. So I’m impressed with the fact that we were able to get it into budget without picking that low-hanging fruit from a value engineering standpoint.”

Inside the arena, both concourses are top loaded, including the upper concourse, with the intent of allowing fans to approach their seats from the top in both the upper and lower bowl. This top-loading strategy will create the perception that the fan’s seat is only getting better as he or she enters the bowl and will also improve sightlines to the ice.

DESIGNING A LOGISTICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In addition to those noticeable design features, there are a number of behind-the-scenes pieces of the new build that provide the Oilers Entertainment Group with certain advantages in enhancing the logistical operations within the

arena and in impacting the fan experience.


One unique new feature is the loading facilities. On the east side of the building is the primary loading dock for entertainment and talent functions. This particular loading dock is covered by a piece of private sector development, sheltering it from the public eye. Logistically, this dock will provide the team with substantially increased capacity for an elephant ramp and four semi trucks (with room for a fifth semi truck if necessary), all in a weather-protected environment.

On the west side of the building is a second loading dock for all food and beverage functions, creating a more coherent operation at the event level. This dock also creates an opportunity for a limited number of smaller events to serve as a substitute for the dock on the facility’s east end. In this case, the east end of the building can be transformed into an intimate amphitheater for between 4,500 and 6,000 patrons that uses five levels of clubs stacked on this end of the building.

“This building has a tremendous amount of flexibility, but it’s got some really unique design features on the event level,” marvels Black. “This building has a tremendous amount of capacity to circulate people and to create neighborhoods for all of the patrons of the arena, each of which has food and beverage, washroom, and retail support.”

PREMIUM SEATING

From a premium seating perspective, Rogers Place boasts one of the largest varieties of any North American venue. This mix is made up of nine different types of premium products, including 3,100 club access seats, 57 suites, 24



“We’ve got something for everyone in this building by way of premium experiences, and I think that is something that will be an enduring legacy of this building.”

— Bob Black, Katz Group

Lots of Loges: An entire level of loge seating will sit above the suite level at Rogers Place. Products include 300 loge ledge seats and 136 loge tables.

theatre boxes, 300 loge ledge seats, 136 loge tables, and two food-inclusive clubs.

“We did a tremendous amount of focus group work with Edmontonians, testing out concepts, and I think one of the hallmarks of this building will be that each offering will target a different demographic in our fan base,” says Black. “So we’ve got something for everyone in this building by way of premium experiences, and I think that is something that will be an enduring legacy of this building.”

The 3,100 club seats are serviced by the mezzanine clubs on the north and south sides of the building. Club members in the center of the ice have access to the mezzanine clubs, and club members in the corner have access to a bistro bar.

One of the notable premium products is the loge level. Directly above the suite level sits an entire level of loge product. The loge offering consists of a drink rail, one table with four chairs, and service to the table. The team is confident that this new offering caters perfectly to the Edmonton market.

Two uniquely branded offerings include the Sportsnet Club and the Sky Lounge. The Sportsnet Club is a two-level club at the east end of the building, targeted at the ardent, blue-collar sports fan. This space has a Sports Desk vibe to it, allowing fans to always tie in to what is going on in the out-of-town scoreboard or watch other games on one of many TV screens. Above it is the two-level Sky Lounge, aimed at a more casual and social crowd, and possessing a vodka bar atmosphere during the game, while after the game, becoming a night club.

EARLY SUCCESSES

Edmonton’s corporate demographic contains some larger companies, but the majority of the market base is made up of small-to-medium-sized corporations, impacting the variety present in the arena’s premium offerings. One of the areas tailored towards smaller customers is the 804-seat loge level, with premium food and beverage service to the table. This layout is conducive to both social and business networking.

As an alternative, the theatre-box concept, inspired by those in the United Center, consists of 24 “mini” suites in configurations of four leather chairs with two stools for overflow capacity, sitting in front of a private bar and restaurant area.

The team’s transition campaign, beginning in November of 2015, saw a 100-percent sell-through rate by mid-December, with some walk-up tickets that will be preserved. In areas of high demand, such as the loge level, the team used a priority system in which the longest serving fans gained first access to these products.

In the short term, nearly C\$5 billion worth of development has come online in the downtown Edmonton core, including the C\$604 million in arena facilities and the C\$2 billion entertainment district.

“It’s kicked off a level of interest in Edmonton that we’ve never seen before,” says Black. “The catalytic effect of this arena has been profound.”#

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How is your venue creating experiences for all fan lifestyles?
Write to Max at max@alsd.com.