

Renewed Vision for the Urban Design Program

ISSUE

The purpose of this report is to outline the renewed vision for the Urban Design Program (Urban Design), highlight proposed budget and staffing changes necessary to implement the vision, formally move the Sutherland Business Improvement District into the Urban Design – BID budget and discuss the City-Wide Urban Design Program.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services recommend to City Council, that \$50,000 from the Urban Design – City Wide Streetscape Reserve be transferred to the Urban Design – BID Streetscape Reserve to be used for the maintenance and provision of urban design assets within the Sutherland Business Improvement District.

BACKGROUND

At the [Standing Policy Committee on Finance meeting](#) on April 12, 2021, the Community Services Division presented a new formula for the distribution of parking meter revenue. At that time, Administration advised a future report would be prepared to discuss the effect of the changes to the Streetscape Reserve funding would have on Urban Design.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

History of the Urban Design Program

The Urban Design Program began in the late 1980's to help rejuvenate the Downtown through streetscape improvements. Urban Design was later expanded to include the Broadway and Riversdale Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). Urban Design work performed within the core BIDs is referred to as the Urban Design – BID Program. The funding source for this work is the Streetscape BID Reserve, which receives its funding from a portion of parking meter revenue, based on the application of a prescribed formula. Work in the BID areas includes streetscape improvement projects, seasonal flowerpots, banners, façade improvement grants, maintenance of existing assets and assisting major civic projects including the Growth Plan. Although efforts are primarily focused on the City's three core BIDs, Urban Design also provides services for other areas, including River Landing and the Growth Plan. Work in other areas is funded by the associated projects, not the Streetscape BID Reserve.

Urban Design has both an operating budget and a capital budget. The operating budget funds flowerpot, façade and banner programs, asset maintenance, small animation projects and currently funds three of the five Urban Design staff members. Although there are some exceptions, Urban Design works directly with the BIDs to prioritize capital projects which are presented to City Council as part of the capital budget process. Recent capital projects include the 21st Street Streetscape

Revitalization, 2nd Avenue Furniture Refresh and the 20th Street East Streetscape work planned for 2022.

Urban Design - City-Wide Program

There is a parallel Urban Design – City-Wide Program, for urban design work outside of the three core BIDs. The City-Wide Program was originally intended to be temporary and was funded from 2008 until midway through 2016. The funding source was a Land Sales Administration Fee which was collected as part of all land sales by Saskatoon Land. This Fee was discontinued in 2016, and there is currently no funding source to operate this program and the Urban Design - City-Wide Program will wind down when the residual funding is depleted.

Funding through the City-Wide Program was primarily dedicated to the first two phases of streetscape construction along Central Avenue, within the Sutherland BID. The third phase of streetscape construction on Central Avenue, which was completed in September 2021, required funding from the Reserve for Capital Expenditures. This concludes the major capital improvements along Central Avenue from 107th Street to 115th Street. The design work for a gateway feature to identify and celebrate this historic business district is underway with completion planned for summer 2022. The gateway piece was funded as part of the third phase streetscape project.

Evolution of the Urban Design Program

Urban Design was established to design and manage the construction of large streetscape projects and many of the major streets in the core BIDs have now been completed. Urban Design now dedicates approximately 1.5 full-time staff and significant operating budget to the maintenance and repair of the assets in these areas. The success of the flowerpot and façade grant programs have also led to these programs expanding in scope and requiring more staff time and financial resources.

In recent years, Urban Design has become more involved in strategic planning projects and dedicates one full staff resource to the City's Growth Plan and Corridor Planning Program, which has been funded through the Growth Plan capital project. Urban Design also participates on larger projects including the Active Transportation Plan, Imagine Idylwyld, and requests to develop streetscape and strategic plans in both core BID and city-wide locations.

Urban Design works closely with the three core BIDs to develop animation features which provide color, interest and excitement that further enhances these key commercial areas. Animation features include lighting projects, banners, bike parking facilities, new street furniture and other design related installations. These projects have been identified in recommendations from strategic plans, including the City Centre Plan, and requests from key stakeholders such as the core BIDs. For instance, the City Centre Plan recommends additional decorative lighting installations, alley conversions, and increasing greenery in public realm. Urban Design has a list of potential animation features and projects which have been unable to proceed yet, due to capacity.

Renewed Vision for the Urban Design Program

As the activities and recommended actions for Urban Design have shifted over time, a renewed vision has been created to better reflect the current and anticipated future role of the program:

“Urban Design works to improve the comfort, safety, identity, connectivity, and enjoyment of the public realm, translating those principles into the design, maintenance, operations, and policy framework of Saskatoon’s urban public spaces.”

This vision builds on Urban Design’s current mandate by highlighting the focus on providing expertise on design and policy work, as well as maintenance which is often overlooked but key to the long-term success of urban design assets. This new vision is built on the following goals:

- Continue to provide high quality streetscape improvement projects within the core BID areas;
- Expand services into the Sutherland BID;
- Maintain existing urban design assets to a high standard;
- Provide urban design perspective and expertise on large, corporate projects and policies;
- Shift resources to provide for additional animation features;
- Continue to build strong relationships with internal and external partners; and
- Find efficiencies through formal project management processes and operational procedures.

Urban Design has identified three key actions that will help position the Urban Design Program to meet the evolving expectations and achieve the new vision. These key actions are detailed below and if approved during the budget deliberation process, will be operationalized in 2022.

1. Staffing Adjustments to Address New Expectations

With a staff complement of five members (three in operating and two in capital), there are very few resources which can be dedicated to work outside of its core mandate of building and maintaining streetscapes, delivering core programs and the strategic planning commitments. The team’s structure and funding model is insufficient to meet new needs and pursue opportunities requested by key stakeholders. To meet these expectations, the staff complement and funding model needs to be adjusted.

Administration proposes a new Project Manager position be added to the team. The purpose of this position is to have a senior staff member with formal training and significant experience in architecture, urban design, as well as formal project management training and experience. This staff person will implement formal project management systems to efficiently deliver the numerous and wide-ranging projects within Urban Design.

This position has been included in the 2022/2023 Preliminary Business Plan and Budget, funded through the Streetscape BID Reserve, resulting in no mill rate impact. The proposal was discussed with and supported by the BID Executive Directors. If approved during the 2022/2023 budget deliberations, the position will be filled in 2022. In addition, the 2022/2023 budget submission includes a mill rate funded position for a Landscape Architect to support the Growth Plan. This change is consistent with the report to September Governance and Priorities Committee outlining the transition of the Growth Plan implementation from capital to operating. A 1.0 FTE for Urban Design Non-BID was identified in that report and will be supporting the public realm and design considerations for the Corridor Planning Program.

2. Budget Adjustments to Address New Expectations

To accommodate the proposed new Project Manager position and the additional funding dedicated to animation projects, the operating budget submission has been increased by \$182,900. This results in an increased draw on the Streetscape BID Reserve with no effect on the mill rate.

3. Moving the Sutherland BID into the Urban Design – BID Program

With the major streetscape improvements now completed on Central Avenue, the timing is appropriate for moving the Sutherland BID into the Urban Design – BID Program. This move would take effect in 2022 and would provide a sustainable funding source for the urban design work in the Sutherland BID going forward, including funding for ongoing maintenance of these new urban design assets and for programs, including the flowerpot program and façade grants. This proposal has been discussed with the three core BID Directors, and they are supportive of the move.

Associated with this transition, Administration is requesting approval to transfer \$50,000 from the Urban Design – City Wide Streetscape Reserve to the Urban Design – BID Streetscape Reserve for the maintenance and provision of urban design assets within the Sutherland BID. This would help transition the Sutherland BID into the Urban Design – BID Program and minimize the initial financial impact of the move.

Financial Impact of the New Parking Revenue Distribution Formula

Under the new parking revenue distribution formula, which will take effect in 2022, the Streetscape Reserve will be funded from 50% of the revenues remaining after the applicable operating costs have been deducted. In the new formula, the BID Streetscape Reserve will be funded at a slightly lower level than under the former formula. This, along with reduced parking revenues in 2020 and 2021, primarily due to the impacts of COVID-19, will impact the Urban Design Program.

To address the new funding level, the proposed 2022/2023 Urban Design budget will reduce the amount of funding dedicated to capital projects. This action will ensure that the important operational programs and services are maintained, and key stakeholders will not be impacted. This action may reduce the opportunity to fund large-scale construction projects, but smaller capital projects will continue as planned. In the future, the Urban Design Program will continue to partner with other internal Divisions to deliver

large-scale construction projects but may require an additional funding source for the provision of urban design features. There is no impact to the mill rate at this time.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The 2022/2023 Urban Design Capital and Operating budget has been prepared with the additional \$182,900 allocation to Urban Design's operating budget. There is no mill rate impact by this change as it flows through the Streetscape BID Reserve.

If this report is approved by City Council, \$50,000 would be transferred from the Urban Design - City Wide Streetscape Reserve to the Urban Design – BID Streetscape Reserve to be used for the maintenance and provision of urban design assets in the Sutherland BID area. Upon completion of Phase 3 construction, the Central Avenue Streetscape Project Capital Project will be closed, and any remaining funds would be returned to source. There is no mill rate impact associated with this action.

A mill rate funded position, as part of the Growth Plan transition to operating, has also been included and has an impact of \$95,800.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no privacy, legal, social or environmental implications identified.

NEXT STEPS

Consideration of the operational changes noted in this report will occur during the 2022/2023 budget deliberations. If the Urban Design budget as prepared is approved by City Council, the Sutherland BID will be transitioned operationally to the Urban Design – BID Program and a Project Manager position will be posted in 2022.

REPORT APPROVAL

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