

# Proposed Downtown Stimulus Strategy

## ISSUE

This report provides an update on current initiatives aimed at stimulating growth in the Downtown, and additional potential initiatives the City of Saskatoon (City) might undertake based on stakeholder engagement conducted in early 2019.

## BACKGROUND

Within the City's Strategic Plan 2018-2021 under the strategic goal of Sustainable Growth, the City is committed to implementing strategies to encourage Downtown and infill development, including development process initiatives and financial incentives. In addition, under the strategic goal of Economic Diversity and Prosperity, the City is committed to a number of actions pertaining to stimulating development Downtown, such as adopting incentives/regulations to encourage Downtown and infill development, streamlining the City's development process, and implementing the City Centre Plan.

In 2018, City Council endorsed a new Streamlining Downtown Development program that consists of a number of initiatives intended to streamline processes and incentivize new development specifically within the defined boundaries of the Downtown. Work related to commitments made under this program has been ongoing since then, including that of the City Centre Planner, a new position established to provide support and coordination for development projects within the Downtown and larger City Centre area.

Administration has also committed to the preparation of a City Centre Action Plan to provide a refresh of the 2013 City Centre Plan, which will include an implementation update, refocus on outstanding items, and incorporation of new ideas and issues. Among the new ideas that may be incorporated into the Action Plan include those resulting from the 2019 stakeholder engagement discussed in this report.

## DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

### Destination Downtown Workshop

In March 2019, a three-day workshop was convened with community stakeholders, local and visiting experts, and civic representatives to develop creative and innovative ideas that could help stimulate growth and transformation of the Downtown. This workshop was facilitated by Beasley & Associates, Planning Inc., and the accompanying report "Inquiry Toward a Downtown Stimulus Strategy for Saskatoon, 2019" summarizes their interpretation of the outcomes of the event (included as Appendix 1).

A number of "best and most supported" ideas were identified through the workshop, and key actions recommended by Beasley & Associates have been categorized under various themes, including:

- Prepare the Downtown for Growth and Change;
- Cut Development Risk;
- Actively Stimulate Preferred Downtown Growth; and

- Best City-Building Principles.

Some initiatives identified through the workshop are more suitably led by community partners (e.g. DTNYXE, Lighthouse) or coalitions of multiple stakeholders, as opposed to being led by the City. This would require these entities to commit to these initiatives if they are to be developed appropriately.

As well, some initiatives identified through the workshop may not align totally with other City commitments. So moving forward it will be of the utmost importance to ensure there is a balanced approach for city building and achieving the overall outcomes of the Growth Plan.

### Downtown Stimulus Strategy

City Council has the option to consider applying dedicated resources to support development of a Downtown Stimulus Strategy that works to further explore ideas generated at the March workshop. As part of the capital budget prioritization process undertaken by City Council in September, 2019 an option for \$150,000 was proposed to be set aside to support continued development of the Downtown Stimulus Strategy through 2020 and 2021. The results of this prioritization process and recommended capital initiatives is scheduled to be presented to the October 21, 2019 Governance and Priorities Committee.

Development of a more comprehensive Downtown Stimulus Strategy would include an in-depth analysis of the key actions recommended to determine which could be led by key stakeholders in the community and which would need to be led by the City. The analysis would include a full review of resource implications, both time and funding. Any initiatives considering a change to the current policies or protocols would be presented in a future report to City Council for further direction, and any required additional capital and/or operating investments to support the strategy would be brought forward to City Council for consideration in future budget cycles when they are confirmed.

There are also a number of ongoing initiatives that address some of the ideas generated at the March workshop, such as the City Centre Plan refresh and implementation, selection of sites for future major facilities (i.e. Downtown Entertainment District, central library), potential market release City owned development sites, and development management reviews (e.g. Development Civic Service Review). These initiatives would continue outside of a broader Downtown Stimulus Strategy.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The financial implications of this report include the option for \$150,000 of reserve for capital expenditures (RCE) funding over 2020 and 2021 to apply additional human resources toward development of the Downtown Stimulus Strategy. This is presented as an option for RCE capital funding within the 2020-21 multi-year business plan and budget. No additional permanent full-time employee equivalents are associated with this capital funding option. This strategy would incorporate ideas generated through the stakeholder engagement workshop, which are not already within currently planned or

ongoing activities by the Administration. Should this funding option not be approved by City Council, work on ongoing initiatives such as the City Centre Plan, selection of sites for future major facilities, and development management reviews would continue under existing funding allocations.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

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

### **NEXT STEPS**

The next step in this project is for the funding request to be considered during the 2020/21 Capital Budget deliberations.

### **APPENDIX**

1. Inquiry Toward a Downtown Stimulus Strategy for Saskatoon, 2019 – Report from Beasley & Associates Planning Inc.

#### Report Approval

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