

COUNCIL – AGENDA REPORT

Meeting Date: 4 June 2018

Subject: Downtown Plan Update

Boards Routed Through: N/A

Date: N/A

Issue:

Council is being provided with an update on the preliminary work completed for the development of a new Downtown Plan and an outline of the next steps forward, including the opportunities for public engagement.

Background:

Timeline of Council Requests and Planning’s Responses

November 21, 2016	Council directed Administration to commence a downtown visioning exercise
January 16, 2017	Administration presented the public and stakeholder engagement plan for the visioning exercise “Airdrie, Let’s Connect: Downtown”, which Council accepted for information.
April 18, 2017	Administration presented the results of the downtown visioning exercise. Council directed Administration to undertake a new Downtown Plan that incorporates elements from previous and existing downtown plans

Throughout the downtown visioning exercise, Administration gathered over 7,500 comments through a range of engagement activities including workshops, focus groups, online surveys, meetings and email submissions. The questions posed to participants were specifically designed to address four critical issues and a brief summary of the responses received is included as Attachment #1.

Project Timing

Following the visioning exercise and Council's decision to move forward with a Downtown Plan, Administration began background work on several key items to support the downtown planning process. These items include:

Budget and Funding

The Downtown Plan was approved under the 2018 budget process, and additional Alberta Community and Regional Economic Support (CARES) funding was secured, bringing the total budget to \$149,000.

Downtown Servicing Strategy

In January 2018, City of Airdrie Engineering staff and consultants (CIMA+) completed the Downtown Servicing Strategy, which was developed to assist Administrators in directing and planning for redevelopment and densification in the downtown core, with a focus on increasing the robustness of the water distribution system and resolving existing issues with the wastewater and stormwater infrastructure.

Downtown Parking Study

City of Airdrie Planning and Development and consultants (Watt Consulting) are nearing completion of the Downtown Parking Study, which will be presented to MPC and Council for information in early summer 2018 once final revisions are complete. The study will include recommendations for managing the parking supply as the city continues to grow and will provide context for the creation of downtown supportive parking policies. The study will provide data that may test common feelings, attitudes and assumptions about the parking supply in the downtown.

Downtown Retail Analysis

The City's Economic Development department is currently working with a consulting team to develop a comprehensive retail analysis for the city with a special focus on the Downtown and downtown redevelopment. The analysis will study locations, demographics and the current retail supply, as well as identify retail gaps, current and future needs and potential niche market opportunities for targeted business attraction and investment. The analysis will also look at the state of regional competition, retail trends and consumer expenditure patterns. This analysis will help link downtown planning and economic development policy for a holistic approach to ensure mutually supportive efforts. The expected completion date for this analysis is August 31, 2018.

Site Tours, Design Charrette and Meetings with Key Landowners

Administration has completed site visits, walking and cycling tours of the downtown area to get a finer-grained user perspective of key issues, existing problems and opportunities to leverage potential. Furthermore, Administration has held meetings with key landowners and tenants in the downtown such as First Capital (Towerlane Mall), Bow Valley Credit Union and Bow Valley College

to discuss current challenges, market trends, future plans and potential opportunities.

RFP Process

The Planning and Development department has issued an RFP and is in the process of selecting a set of consultants to assist Administration with preparation of the Downtown Plan. The intended approach will be to create the Downtown Plan in-house as a 'made in Airdrie' solution by drawing on local knowledge, the skillsets of the project team, and other City of Airdrie departments. External consultants will be drawn on as needed throughout the process to supplement the project team with expertise where it will add the most value to the project. Consultant selection is expected to be finalized by the end of June 2018.

Public Engagement and Stakeholder Consultation Strategy

A successful Downtown Plan will require further focused public engagement to drill down into issues raised in the downtown visioning. It is imperative that the new plan be rooted in shared values and aspirations with which a broad range of the community can identify. A strong, bold, and practical plan needs to be developed to achieve that shared vision and an equally robust implementation plan must be vetted to ensure the plan maintains momentum throughout its life.

Five rounds of engagement are therefore required to address each aspect of the process:

1. Values, Aspirations and Challenges

The visioning process raised some key philosophical questions to which responses were inconclusive and at times, controversial. Data showed that people want a clear direction and theme for downtown redevelopment. To determine what that direction and theme should be, the project team will use Round 1 of engagement to drill down into the following philosophical issues:

- a) What role should the City take in supporting and stimulating economic development in the downtown?
- b) If Airdrie ties downtown redevelopment to a unique theme, what should that theme be?
- c) What types of civic facilities should be prioritized and located in the downtown?
- d) What are the primary challenges that face current businesses in the downtown and how can they be addressed through Downtown Plan policy?
- e) What are the primary obstacles to redevelopment and development of vacant parcels?

2. Design Charrettes

Using opportunities, constraints, visioning data and the results of public engagement Round 1, the project team will hold design charrettes with key internal and external stakeholders to create three or four concept plan options.

3. Review of Concept Plan Options

In Round 3, concept plan options will be presented to stakeholders and the public for review and comment. Respondents will be asked to identify their likes and dislikes for each plan, as well as to identify their preferred options overall.

The project team will use this feedback to create a single draft plan, which will be refined to a greater level of detail. A set of core supporting policies and implementation strategy will also be drafted at this stage.

4. Draft Plan Refinement

Round 4 will request broad public comment on all aspects of the plan and will include a more focused engagement with stakeholders and the business community to vet the policy and implementation aspects. Key questions to be addressed further will be:

- a) How well does the draft plan respond to the primary challenges that face current businesses in the downtown?
- b) How well does the draft plan respond to the primary obstacles to redevelopment and development of vacant parcels?
- c) What challenges do you foresee with the proposed draft plan?
- d) How might those challenges be best addressed?

5. Summary of Decisions Made

The concept plan will be refined based on responses to Round 4 of engagement. The final draft will be presented back to stakeholders and the public with explanations of input gathered, how that input helped shape the plan, and why key decisions were made.

The final draft is expected to be presented to Council by third quarter of 2019.

Alignment with AirdrieONE:

The Downtown Plan project aligns with the commitment under the Built Environment pillar of AirdrieONE for the City to update the Downtown Plan and develop policies to create a more vibrant, diverse mix of uses. Furthermore, it will align with:

- **Economic Prosperity** objectives of enhancing economic resiliency by attracting and retaining a broad range of employment opportunities and improving peoples' access to workplaces;
- **Built Environment** objectives by promoting infill development rather than greenfield sprawl, taking advantage of existing infrastructure, and supporting a development pattern that enables people to access services, shops and facilities easily;
- **Socially Sustainable Communities** objectives by promoting a healthy community through urban design, walkable and transit-oriented site development, and synergistic application of land uses;

- **Arts, Culture and Recreation** objectives by protecting the character that makes Airdrie unique, maintaining a small town feel and increasing opportunities for arts, culture and recreation events;
- **Sustainable Natural Environment** objectives by incorporating Nose Creek as an ecological asset, and applying sensitive stormwater management practices to protect the Nose Creek watershed.
- **Energy** objectives by creating a downtown that is fully accessible for alternative modes of transportation rather than being dependent on private vehicles.

Boards Routed Through:

N/A

Alternatives/Implications:

N/A

Communications Plan:

Throughout the public engagement and stakeholder consultation activities outlined above, the project team will continue to use the branding, project webpage (www.airdrie.ca/downtown) and project email address (downtown@airdrie.ca) that was set up for downtown visioning in 2017. City of Airdrie will use all standard and social media methods to broadcast the engagement opportunities.

Round 1 of public engagement for the project will begin in fall 2018.

Recommendation:

That Council accepts the report entitled “Downtown Plan Update” for information.

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Planner II

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Attachments:	Attachment : # Summary of Downtown Visioning Attachment : # Downtown Visioning Boundary Map
Appointment:	N/A