

DATE OF MEETING July 21, 2021

AUTHORED BY BILL CORSAN, DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**SUBJECT FUNDING REQUEST FOR COMMERCIAL STREET
REVITALIZATION PLAN**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council background information on the proposed Commercial Street Revitalization Plan and to seek funding to commence the work in the fall of 2021.

Recommendation

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council amend the 2021-2025 Financial Plan to add \$150,000 in 2021 for a Commercial Street Revitalization Plan funded from Payment in Lieu of Taxes.

BACKGROUND

Commercial Street is the heart of downtown Nanaimo and together with the Old City Quarter and Victoria Crescent area comprise the downtown core of the City. Commercial Street is an important hub and destination for shopping, dining and events. Commercial Street was recognized by the Canadian Institute of Planners as a “Great Street” in 2011 for the retention of heritage buildings and the unique street scape.

While Commercial Street is well recognized as a regional destination, there is an opportunity to further improve the public realm and help revitalize the overall downtown core. The pavement treatments are worn and tired, the sidewalks are narrow and the overall appearance of the street falls short of today’s standards for a downtown public realm.

Commercial Street and the adjacent streets were last renewed between 1981 and 1985 as part of a downtown revitalization program which saw upgrades to utilities, pavement and street trees. As part of the Vancouver Island Conference Centre project in 2008, the eastern block of Commercial, Terminal and Gordon Street were upgraded.

Council has recently allocated funding for the land acquisition and design work for public realm enhancements in the 500 block of Terminal Avenue for transportation and public realm purposes. This investment is coupled with implementation of the Terminal Nicol Reimagined Plan between Comox and Esplanade. In addition, Council have engaged Dr. Dave Witty and Vancouver Island University to explore redevelopment options for Diana Krall Plaza.

The Downtown Mobility Hub Study has provided guidance leading to the Front Street upgrades that have recently been completed. In addition work has been completed at Esplanade and Victoria Crescent and further work is planned for Bastion and Commercial Street later this year.

In April 2021, the new Downtown Business Improvement Association (BIA) was established providing a voice for the Commercial Street corridor and a strong stakeholder group for the City to work with on this project.

On the development side, the new hotel is under construction at 100 Gordon Street and there are several mixed-use developments planned within the downtown core, including the Telus Project at 400 Fitzwilliam Street and 340 Campbell Street (former Caledonia Clinic).

Given the renewed interest in downtown Nanaimo, particularly Commercial Street; now appears to be the best time to prepare a comprehensive plan to coordinate and steer future investments in this area. This will ensure that Council can leverage and prioritize investments going forward.

DISCUSSION

Staff are recommending that a Commercial Street Revitalization Plan (the “Plan”) be prepared. The Plan would be prepared by a multi-disciplinary team of consultants including architects, planners, urban designers, traffic engineers and parking specialists.

The consultant team would engage the local business community and wider public in the development of options for the future of Commercial Street and based on feedback develop a preferred option, phasing and costings for Council.

The work would be able to incorporate existing direction from the Downtown Design Guidelines and Downtown Plan and build on the feedback received to date through the Reimagine Nanaimo public engagement process.

Project Area

Staff propose the study area to encompass the Commercial Street corridor from the intersection of Albert/Wallace/Victoria to the Cenotaph at Dallas Square (Front Street). In addition, streets such as Skinner Street, Bastion and Wharf will be included in the study (Attachment A).

Next Steps

Should the recommendation from the Finance and Audit Committee be endorsed by Council, Staff will issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a multi-disciplinary consultant team to prepare a Revitalization Plan for the Commercial Street Corridor.

Staff anticipate the RFP being issued in late July with the responses due at the end of August 2021. The work would commence in September 2021 with a final plan presented for Council’s consideration in the spring of 2022.

The Consultant team will prepare a detailed engagement strategy which will include involvement by Council, the new Downtown BIA and the general public.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Staff estimate the Commercial Street Revitalization Plan will cost approximately \$150,000 and be funded from Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) which has a project 2021-DEC-31 balance of \$1,321,274.

OPTIONS

1. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council amend the 2021-2025 Financial Plan to add \$150,000 in 2021 for a Commercial Street Revitalization Plan funded from Payment in Lieu of Taxes.
 - The advantages of this option: The development of a comprehensive revitalization plan for the Commercial Street Corridor will ensure that future physical improvements made by Council are consistent and can follow a logical phasing manner. The Plan will consolidate existing projects such as the Downtown Mobility Project, the Downtown Transit Exchange and the Diana Krall Plaza plan into one document. The Plan will provide costings for each phase which will enable Council to consider this project in future Financial Plan discussions. The redevelopment of Commercial Street is consistent with Council's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan and the recently endorsed Economic Development Strategy which both note the importance of the downtown core.
 - The disadvantages of this option: Creation of the Plan will require Staff time which could be used for other Council priorities.
 - Financial Implications: Staff estimate the Commercial Street Revitalization Plan will cost approximately \$150,000. Sufficient funding is available in Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) to support this plan.

2. That the Finance and Audit Committee provide alternative direction. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- Commercial Street is the heart of the downtown core and there are several public and private investments occurring in the immediate area.
- The City has a number of document that guide development in the downtown including the Downtown Design Guidelines, Terminal Nicol Reimagined and the Downtown Mobility Hub. Plans are currently being developed for the new downtown Transit Exchange and Diana Krall Plaza.
- A specific revitalization plan for Commercial Street would provide a more detailed framework for investment and pull together current initiatives to help guide future investments in public realm.
- Staff are recommending that a Revitalization Plan be prepared during the fall of 2021 and presented to Council in the spring of 2022.
- Funding for the project is available through Payment in Lieu of Taxes should the Committee wish to recommend advancing the project.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Commercial Street Corridor

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