

DATE: November 2, 2021

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Adam Davey, Director of Public Safety

SUBJECT: Updating CN Centre’s Digital Sign on Ospika Boulevard

ATTACHMENT(S): None

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council APPROVES the addition of the capital project “CN Centre Digital Sign Upgrades” in the amount of \$150,000 to the 2021 – 2025 Financial Plan with funding to come from the Northern Capital Planning Reserve Fund as described in the report dated November 2, 2021 from the Director of Public Safety titled “Updating CN Centre’s Digital Sign on Ospika Boulevard.”

PURPOSE:

For Council’s approval to update CN Centre’s digital sign on Ospika Boulevard with funding to come from the Northern Capital Planning Reserve Fund.

BACKGROUND:

CN Centre is the City of Prince George’s showcase venue.

In 2004, the existing digital sign was installed to market and promote CN Centre and Exhibition Park events. This sign replaced the usage of 4’ x 8’ coroplast signs that were mounted on the old, wooden “Exhibition Park” sign, located at the south-west corner of Ospika Boulevard and 18th Avenue (which no longer exists).

The present sign consists of a wooden “City of Prince George” header; a CN Centre backlit sign, a digital sign, and a Prince George Cougars backlit sign footer. On the side of the sign, carved in wood, are City of Prince George logos.

The existing sign has been a workhorse. Installed in the fall of 2004, it worked steadily, twenty-four hours per day, until the autumn of 2019. City staff designed and managed the digital images, promoting Cougars games, TicketsNorth events, CN Centre events, as well as other Exhibition Park events, including PG Horse Society events, the BCNE, lacrosse games, etc. The sign has also been used to communicate City messages, including directives to wildfire evacuees in 2017 and 2018.

Unfortunately, the pixels and quality of the images deteriorated significantly to a point that it was inoperable. Plus, the sign is now so old, that replacement parts are unavailable, so the sign has been shut down for almost twenty-four months. The backlit signs are still operational, but the digital images no longer work.

With an estimated 15,000 cars driving on Ospika Boulevard every day, this sign is one of the most exclusive and attractive advertising spaces in the city. It plays an essential and vital role in branding the CN Centre as a professional sports and entertainment venue.

On average, there were between nine to twelve concert/event/Cougars game messages cycling through 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Each message ran 5 to 12 seconds – enabling a vehicle driving past to see at least one full message. With an average message time of ten seconds, over the course of the sign's fifteen years, 47,304,000 messages were displayed. The budget to install the existing sign in 2004 was \$192,425, meaning that each message cost less than half a penny (\$0.004) – an extremely cost effective form of communicating and marketing.

Furthermore, in the contract with EDGEPRo Sports and Entertainment, re: the Prince George Cougars Hockey Club, the City has a contractual agreement to supply the sign. The sign enables the Cougars and City to sell tickets to increase revenues, which increases the revenues for the City, Eurest, other CN Centre partners, and creates greater value for advertising locations inside the CN Centre.

Over the past three years, Administration has researched various operating models for the digital sign, including third-party operating models. These were deemed unsuitable for the City's requirements. Within the private management option, the City loses control of this vital communications tool; losing the ability to focus on building revenue for City events and facilities.

Staff recommend the cost-effective choice of not replacing the entire sign, but simply to upgrade the existing sign structure. Staff also recommend not installing a larger digital sign (for example the 10' x 20' digital billboards seen in other areas of the city). A new, larger sign will only increase the costs. The existing size is effective, but also not exceedingly obtrusive. It fits in well with the aesthetics of Exhibition Park and its surrounding neighbours.

The present request is to replace the existing digital sign, and refurbish the existing sign structure with funding to come from the Northern Capital Planning Reserve Fund. This includes restaining and/or replacing the wooden header and sides, repainting the steel supports, and installing needed hardware and software to operate the sign.

Staff believe it is vital to update the sign before the 2022 World Women's Curling Championship in March 2022. Weather may preclude painting and staining until warmer weather, but at the very least, the digital signboards should be replaced. A new sign will welcome the world, as well as support other 2022 upcoming events, including the 2022 BC Summer Games.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Upgrading the digital sign aligns with Council's priority of enhancing Prince George's attractiveness to visitors, especially for meetings and sporting events.

Plus, it aligns with the Work Plan Priority of: planning for the 2022 BC Summer Games and work with event organizers who had to delay events that were scheduled for 2020 and 2021.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The budget to upgrade the Ospika Sign in 2021 is \$150,000 and the proposed funding source is the Northern Capital Planning Reserve Fund.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

Administration requests that Council approve the updating of the CN Centre's digital sign on Ospika Boulevard with the funding to come from the Northern Capital Planning Reserve Fund.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Adam Davey, Director of Public Safety

PREPARED BY: Glen Mikkelsen, Manager Entertainment – Prince George Events Group

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting Date: 2021-11-22