

# STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

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**DATE:** October 30, 2023

**TO:** MAYOR AND COUNCIL

**NAME AND TITLE:** Deanna Wasnik, Director, Planning and Development

**SUBJECT:** Application to Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program

**ATTACHMENT(S):** None

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

That Council SUPPORTS Administration's application to the Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program (REDIP) for a grant of up to \$400,000 to support the business and community development program SupportPG and AUTHORIZES the Director of Planning and Development to sign any necessary funding agreements.

**PURPOSE:**

For Council consideration.

**BACKGROUND:**

In March 2020, 11 Prince George, BC organizations with a stake in economic development came together to determine how they could best support local businesses in navigating and overcoming operational challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The partnership included the creation of a website aimed at giving businesses access to all COVID-19 support resources in one centralized location, a marketing campaign designed to promote local businesses by encouraging residents of Prince George to shop local, and a large amount of information and support for shoppers and businesses alike. The program received widespread recognition and was seen as a success.

Since the end of the global Covid-19 emergency, SupportPG was considered a success and was paused, the website hidden, and partners returned to their regular programming and primary mandates. Recent discussions by the partners have raised the absence of a shared platform that can facilitate projects, share success stories, various available and changing business supports, and an overall "good news" outlet that can raise the profile of Prince George, its businesses, and its community champions; altering SupportPG away from its Covid-19 focus to a broader lens can provide that platform. The partners also identified a challenge of capacity to carry out and actively run the program and its associated costs, so grant funding will be required to ensure a successful relaunch of the program.

The City is an eligible applicant to the Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program (REDIP) and the Prince George Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) is an eligible partner

organization, and together the two organizations are planning to apply as a partnership. The request to the REDIP will be approximately \$400,000 of 100% funding (no leverage required) to support a two-year implementation of the SupportPG program, including 3<sup>rd</sup> party contracting, marketing and advertising costs, shop local promotions, localized event supports, and other related costs. The Chamber will continue to own and manage the SupportPG brand and domain, and would provide the capacity to run campaigns, create content, respond to inquiries, and run and maintain the website and other assets of the program. Other groups in the community like Tourism Prince George and Downtown Prince George may also see supports to enhance the programming they offer. The City would be one of the active partners in the program and create an avenue for the funding from REDIP to go to carrying out the program for a two-year period.

Funding decisions from the Province will be announced in the Spring of 2024.

#### **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

This project is aligned with myPG Goals, Council's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, and Economic Development Strategy goals:

- myPG goals:
  - Diversified Economy
  - Vibrant Economy
  - Sustainable Business
- Strategic Plan:
  - Economic Growth and Diversity
  - Social Health and Well-Being
- Economic Development Strategy:
  - Foster a Startup Ecosystem
  - Create, Embrace, and Promote Place

#### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

The grant is 100% funding and will require no financial contribution from the City.

#### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:**

The SupportPG business support and shop local program that was paused after successful implementation during the Covid-19 pandemic has an opportunity to be relaunched to focus on general business supports to adapt to changing economic influences. The REDIP grant program can fully-fund a two-year program of capacity, campaigns, and other supports and costs to relaunch the program, where the City would be the grant applicant, and the Chamber would carry out the program.

#### **RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:**

Deanna Wasnik, Director, Planning and Development

**PREPARED BY:** Deklan Corstanje, Manager, Economic Development

#### **APPROVED:**

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting Date: 2023/10/30