

Date: November 13, 2024

To: **Mayor and Council.**

Name and title: Deanna Wasnik, Director of 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 \$500,000 to support the analysis of economic feasibility and potential benefit of establishing a life sciences sector in Prince George and AUTHORIZES the Director of Planning and Development to sign any necessary funding agreements.

## Purpose:

For Council consideration.

## Background:

The University of Northern BC (UNBC), Lheidli T'enneh Nation, and Northern Health are pursuing an initiative to build a sustainable innovation ecosystem through market research, investment attraction, and addressing healthcare disparities in rural and Indigenous communities, ultimately positioning the region as a hub for life sciences and health innovation.

The greater initiative would establish a life sciences sector based in Prince George that would serve northern BC residents with a focus on rural and indigenous communities and other demographics in the region that face significant health disparities. If successful, it could result in a new facility built at the UNBC campus, upgrades to Northern Health facilities, and life sciences private sector investment within the City's key clusters such as pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing and scientific research and development services, further diversifying the local economy towards sectors less reliant on cycles of natural resource extraction and commodity prices.

The first step towards securing the investments and funding support that will go towards this initiative starts with an economic analysis that will determine the economic feasibility and potential impact of establishing a life sciences sector in northern British Columbia, focusing on regional capacity, infrastructure, and workforce development. This enabling economic analysis would include the following:

**Market Research and Sector Analysis:** Conduct comprehensive market research to assess the demand, opportunities, and competitive landscape for developing a life sciences sector in northern BC. This activity will provide insights into economic potential, guide the strategy for job creation, and attract investment to support the sector's development.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** Engage with local communities, Indigenous leaders, industry experts, academic institutions, and government bodies to gather input, foster partnerships, and ensure the project aligns with regional needs. This will help ensure the life sciences sector addresses community health disparities and economic development priorities, creating a broad support network.

**Economic Feasibility Assessment:** Evaluate infrastructure, workforce availability, and investment requirements to determine the viability of establishing a life sciences hub in the region. This will guide decision-making on necessary investments and inform strategies to create new jobs and diversify the local economy.

**Ecosystem Development Strategy:** Develop a strategy to create a sustainable innovation ecosystem, including incubation programs, research collaborations, and commercialization pathways. This will build a foundation for long-term growth, enabling the region to become a center of life sciences innovation while addressing healthcare challenges.

**Policy and Funding Alignment:** Align the project with regional, provincial, and federal policy priorities, including programs like PacifiCan's Regional Innovation Ecosystems (RIE) and other economic development initiatives. This activity will position the project for public and private funding, ensuring long-term financial support for building the life sciences sector.

Each of these activities is designed to contribute directly to the intended outcomes of job creation, economic diversification, investment attraction, and healthcare improvement.

The in-depth nature of this analysis and engagement is costly; however, it is an eligible and well-fit activity within the guidelines of the Province's Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program (REDIP) and could be awarded up to \$500,000. Although the University is an ineligible applicant, the City is eligible and, if awarded the funding, support the initiative as a partner. Speaking with provincial staff, the project is well-aligned with the program goals and has been well thought through. Work done by the City's economic development division to support this initiative would fall within operational capacity and no financial contribution is required, and the lead role the University and other partners would take would ensure the project's viability. The City recently took a similar approach when it enabled the SupportPG initiative in the last REDIP intake with the Chamber of Commerce. A Council resolution of support is needed for a successful application to the REDIP program.

### Strategic Priorities:

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

- myPG goal: Social Development; Economic Development
- Strategic Plan: Economic Growth and Diversity; Social Health and Wellbeing
- Economic Development Strategy: Target Cluster Development

### Summary and conclusion:

The University of Northern BC, Lheidli T'enneh Nation, and Northern Health are pursuing an initiative to establish a life sciences sector based in Prince George that would serve northern BC residents but first require an economic analysis to prove feasibility of the initiative. With a resolution of support from Council, the City can apply to the REDIP grant program on behalf of the partnership and support operationally with no financial contribution required. The project aims to help diversify the local economy while providing health benefits to the region.

### Respectfully submitted:

Deanna Wasnik, Director of Planning and Development

Prepared by Deklan Corstanje, Manager of Economic Development

### Approved:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting date: 2024/12/02