

Date: October 24, 2025

To: **Mayor and Council.**

Name and title: Deanna Wasnik, Director of Planning and Development

Subject: Response to Council Resolutions for Downtown Nightlife Economy Action Plan and Downtown Commercial Vacancy

Attachment(s): Downtown Prince George Strategy Recommendations

Recommendation(s):

That Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated October 24, 2025 from the Director of Planning and Development titled "Response to Council Resolutions for Downtown Nightlife Economy Action Plan and Downtown Commercial Vacancy".

Purpose:

For Council information.

Background:

Downtown Prince George Strategy

Through a partnership, the City and Downtown Prince George completed the Downtown Prince George Strategy to strategically revitalize the downtown through programming, marketing, communications, and placemaking. The strategy's themes and recommendations were presented to Council at the February 4, 2024 Council meeting, and since then, Administration have presented reports updating Council on the activities of the Downtown Prince George Strategy Team at the July 22, 2024 and March 24, 2025 meetings.

The Downtown Prince George Strategy Team, led by Downtown Prince George, oversees and coordinates the implementation of the Downtown Prince George Strategy as and when possible, via existing workplans, capacity, and budgets, acknowledging that the strategy heavily relies on collaboration from community groups in addition to the Strategy Team members to contribute and support the vision of the strategy.

Regular Council Meeting – March 24, 2025

At the March 24, 2025 Regular Council Meeting, discussion regarding the Ottawa Nightlife Economy Action Plan resulted in Council passing the following resolution:

That Council DIRECTS Administration to refer to the Downtown Prince George Strategy Team regarding a Nightlife Economy Action Plan and to report back to Council with options.

In late spring 2025, staff attended a session on the Ottawa Nightlife Economy Action Plan at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities conference and reviewed the work done by the City of Ottawa.

The recommendations of the Nightlife Economy Action Plan required a significant investment of resources and time from the City of Ottawa as well as commitment from other organizations in the community towards creating and carrying out a shared vision, as will be discussed in this report.

Regular Council Meeting – September 3, 2025

At the September 3, 2025 Council meeting, Council considered a Notice of Motion titled, “Vacancy to Vitality: Launching a Temporary Use Pilot for Empty Storefronts in C1 Zone Downtown” and passed the following resolution:

That Council DIRECTS Administration to contact UNBC and work with them as appropriate to research reasons for vacancies downtown and provide options for interventions and strategies, (including allowing container shops on vacant lots similar the ones set up in Canada Games Plaza,) within the municipality’s control. The staff report back to Council would also include the original research produced by UNBC and should identify regulatory mechanisms and funding opportunities that council support implementation of the recommendations for implementation and public and private funding considerations.

Staff have reviewed the resolution carried at the September 3, 2025 Council meeting regarding research to understand reasons for vacancies downtown and provide options for interventions and strategies that could lead to regulatory mechanisms and funding opportunities as outlined in this report.

Discussion:

Downtown Prince George Strategy

In developing the Downtown Prince George Strategy, a strategic approach to supporting the downtown as a social space, entertainment destination, and ultimately attract residents and businesses, robust research and engagement was undertaken.

- **Strategic Review and Trend Analysis:** existing conditions, new projects, and economic trends impacting downtown through analysis of commercial inventory, development permits, and business licenses, as well as review of demographic, social, and economic conditions to identify key assets and challenges.
- **Community Engagement:** 1,936 Prince George residents participated in the community survey online. Community insights helped to define local community aspirations, identify key challenges and prioritize opportunities for downtown that shape the strategy.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** More than fifty stakeholder groups informed the Downtown Prince George Strategy as part of the process. The primary purpose of these discussions was to identify local opinions, aspirations and ideas for the future of downtown from a diverse range of perspectives. Stakeholder groups that were engaged included Mayor and Council, City staff, Downtown Prince George, the Lheidli T’enneh Nation government, downtown businesses, educational institutions, arts and cultural organizations, social services, tourism industry, downtown property owners, and law enforcement. There was also a Downtown Steering Committee that was engaged throughout the strategy development process.

- **Future Forum:** Following Market Analysis, Community Survey, and Stakeholder Engagement, a one-day virtual workshop hosted the leadership team and community stakeholders from a broad range of organizations and industries.

The Downtown Prince George Strategy has themes and recommendations that pertain to both motions from Council, with potential action items that could be carried out if policy-driven and properly resourced.

Nightlife Economy Action Plan

In late spring 2025, staff attended a session on the Ottawa Nightlife Economy Action Plan at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities conference regarding the work done to produce the action plan including:

- **Leadership and Coordination:** Establishing a Nightlife Commissioner Office to oversee and promote nightlife activities, ensuring better coordination and resolution of nightlife issues. This includes a Nightlife Commissioner and the formation of a Nightlife Council of several stakeholder groups.
- **Community Engagement:** Encouraging participation from residents, visitors, and businesses in nightlife activities through marketing and promotional efforts.
- **Policy Support:** Considering amendments to city policies to support nightlife, such as facilitating night markets and food festivals.

A Nightlife Economy Action Plan for Prince George is aligned with the recommendations of the Downtown Prince George Strategy; however, to action recommendations of the Downtown Prince George Strategy, Administration would seek direction from Council through Council's Strategic Priorities and a resolution specifying the Downtown Prince George Strategy recommendation to action. The development of a Nightlife Economy Action Plan is complex and would require adequate capacity, resources, and partnerships to develop thoughtful analysis of key considerations such as governance and coordination, economic development, urban design and infrastructure, transportation and mobility, public safety and inclusivity, human resource requirements, and financial implications.

Staff also referred to the Downtown Prince George Strategy Team to discuss the concept and resources required to successfully carry out such an initiative. Due to the nature of the Downtown Prince George Strategy Team, which is to coordinate and monitor the strategy's implementation, relying heavily on strategy-aligned initiatives being part of partner association current workplans; it isn't currently resourced to carry it out as a standalone resource. Feedback from the Team can be summarized in a general positive sentiment towards the concept of the initiative, but consensus of inadequate resources and capital to carry it out in addition to current priorities and workplans.

As a response to the March 24, 2025 Council resolution, the following options are provided for Council's consideration:

- a) Add implementing the Downtown Prince George Strategy to Council's Strategic Plan at the next available update and identify a specific recommendation of the strategy to focus on; or
- b) Take no action.

Downtown Commercial Vacancy

The Downtown Prince George Strategy considered downtown commercial vacancy and the perceptions of downtown that would have potential to affect vacancy rates. Negative perceptions related to safety,

cleanliness, crime, concentration of vulnerable population and limited residential population were all key themes identified in impacting commercial vacancy rates in the downtown.

The Council motion from September 3, 2025 can be broken down into a) a request to work with UNBC as appropriate on researching reasons for downtown vacancies, b) to identify and come up with interventions, strategies, and regulatory mechanisms to help with this, and c) identify funding and partnerships that can carry out these interventions, strategies, and regulatory mechanisms.

The Downtown Prince George Strategy Team, which the City is a member of, relies on the contributions and integration of other community groups, like UNBC, to contribute to the vision of the Downtown Prince George Strategy. Should UNBC have a goal in mind and the resources to carry out the work to achieve it, the Downtown Prince George Strategy Team would support this in principle, engage with project leads at a high level to help coordinate and ensure novel outcomes, and monitor results as it relates to the Downtown Prince George Strategy.

Downtown commercial vacancies are one part of the multi-faceted matrix of challenges in supporting downtown development and activation. The research and analysis of the downtown has been performed, including in-depth research, deep engagement with community groups and residents, and expert insights. The recommendations in the Downtown Prince George Strategy are a result of this, and they include ways to support reducing commercial vacancy.

The recommendations of the Downtown Prince George Strategy vary and are based on six (6) principles. Each principle includes objectives that require further analysis and actions. As previously mentioned, to action recommendations of the Downtown Prince George Strategy, Administration would seek direction from Council through Council's Strategic Priorities and a resolution specifying the Downtown Prince George Strategy recommendation to action.

With respect to the September 3, 2025 Council resolution Administration believes the existing Downtown Prince George Strategy and Recommendations largely address the key components of the resolution. Identifying funding and partnerships that carry out the recommendations would be dependent on the specifics and focus of an identified project.

Summary and conclusion:

This informational report provides responses to Council resolutions passed on March 24, 2025, and September 3, 2025.

A Nightlife Economy Action Plan and supporting downtown occupancy are recommendations within the Downtown Prince George Strategy. To action recommendations of the Downtown Prince George Strategy, Council could include implementation of recommendations from the Downtown Prince George Strategy on Council's Strategic Plan and consider resources through budget deliberations. Inclusion of the Downtown Prince George Strategy on Council's Strategic Plan is key as it informs the Corporate Work Plan, divisional work plans, and operational budget.

The Downtown Prince George Strategy Team member organizations are limited in capacity and resources and cannot take on additional work in the near term without additional resources but may support in principle any work in the spirit of the Downtown Prince George Strategy.

Respectfully submitted:

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Prepared by Deklan Corstanje, Manager, Economic Development

Approved:

Walt Babicz, City Manager

Meeting date: 2025/11/03