

DATE: May 29, 2021

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Ian Wells, Acting Deputy City Manager

SUBJECT: City of Prince George Downtown Arts Strategy

ATTACHMENT(S): None

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated May 29, 2021, from the Acting Deputy City Manager, titled “City of Prince George Downtown Arts Strategy”.

PURPOSE:

To assist with Council’s consideration of capital investment needs associated with the arts, the purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update regarding the status of the Downtown Arts Strategy, completed by R. Radloff & Associates in conjunction with KR Solutions, and with David Hewko Planning and Program Management. Council is asked to receive this report for information.

BACKGROUND:

Council identified the development of an arts strategy in collaboration with the Regional District of Fraser Fort George and local arts organizations, as a 2019 priority. As such, Council approved a 2019 budget enhancement of \$75,000 to enable advancement of this priority. In July of 2019, Council received a report regarding a change in both the direction and scope of the strategy development work. Three factors precipitated the change.

The first was unprecedented private and public investment in the downtown that brought with it the opportunity to consider overall land use direction in the form of a Civic Core Master Plan. At the time, it was anticipated that a civic core planning process would unfold in 2020. Further, it was anticipated that the Downtown Arts Strategy would inform an assessment of functional space requirements for the arts, which was considered critical given the role the arts can play in creating a sense of place that attracts people and investment. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the civic core planning process was not started.

The second, and a related factor, was the Community Arts Council’s (CAC) efforts to determine the feasibility and viability of a new community arts creative hub in the downtown core. The Creative Hub Feasibility Study for 1310 3rd Avenue, funded by Heritage Canada, the City of Prince George, and the CAC has since been completed. The Feasibility Study informed the development of the City’s funding application to the *Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program – Community, Culture and Recreation* program. The application proposes development of a Downtown Creative Arts Hub at 1310 3rd Avenue which aligns with the intent of the ICIP grant to improve access to and/or increase quality of

cultural, recreational and/or community infrastructure for Canadians, including Indigenous peoples and vulnerable populations. Council authorized Administration to apply for the grant, and to commit \$1.5M from City reserves towards the project. This amount represented a 26.67% contribution to the project cost, required by the applicant.

The third factor impacting the scope and direction of the Downtown Arts Strategy was Council's approval to establish a Performing Arts Centre Reserve Fund on the request of the Prince George Regional Performing Arts Centre Society that had decided to dissolve and contribute its remaining funds to the City to support the provision of performing arts space in the downtown.

R. Radloff & Associates, the firm hired to prepare the Downtown Arts Strategy, was asked to:

- Conduct an environmental scan, informed by a review of the Community Arts Council Capital Investment Analysis consultation data, of trends and concepts related to potential space use options;
- Assess functional space requirements for arts amenities that contribute to downtown culture (place-making) that included a gap analysis reflective of current capacity and anticipated need;
- Provide recommendations regarding the placement, size, and programmatic capacity of a concert hall in the downtown;
- Provide recommendations regarding roles for the City of Prince George and the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George with respect to the servicing and financing of the Two Rivers Gallery and Exploration Place;
- Provide recommendations that would guide City investment decisions in relation to space requirements, public art, and grants based on prioritized need in a way that reflected the economic and social value of the arts and;
- Provide recommendations regarding approaches to the measuring of the economic and social impact of the arts on downtown Prince George.

The Downtown Arts Strategy was completed during the COVID-19 pandemic and as such, the consultant team recommended that the report be reassessed post pandemic. The revisiting of the report's recommendations was deemed advisable given the significant degree of uncertainty, especially in relation to fiscal issues and priorities for local government, post pandemic. In addition, the planned stakeholder and public review process had to be curtailed due to COVID-19 restrictions. This meant that the proposed recommendations had not been reviewed or informed by stakeholder/public consultation. Administration will return to Council with recommended next steps, once the City is advised of the outcome of its application to develop a Downtown Creative Arts Hub. Final decision related to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (Community, Culture and Recreation) are anticipated in the summer of 2021.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The Downtown Arts Strategy, completed in May of 2020, contains recommendations aligned with a scope of work that was relevant pre-COVID. The consultant team recommended that the report be reassessed post pandemic, and that this reassessment include an opportunity for stakeholders and members of the public to provide feedback in relation to the proposed recommendations. Administration will return to Council with recommended next steps, once the City is advised of the outcome of its application to develop a Downtown Creative Arts Hub.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Ian Wells, Acting Deputy City Manager

PREPARED BY: Chris Bone, Senior Manager – Strategic Initiatives & Partnerships

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, Acting City Manager

Meeting Date: 2021/06/14