

# REPORT

## *Community Services*

**To:** Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council  
**Date:** May 27, 2024

**From:** Blair Fryer  
A/Director, Community Services  
**File:** # 2487799  
**Item #:** 2024-314

**Subject:** Response to Council Motion: Ensuring that ground level retail spaces in new developments prioritize community-supporting businesses and organizations

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

THAT Council receive this report and confirm that the April 8, 2024 motion is being addressed to its satisfaction.

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### **PURPOSE**

To report back to Council in response to its motion of April 8, 2024 to ensure that ground level retail spaces in new developments prioritize community-supporting businesses and organizations.

### **SUMMARY**

In response to the motion supported by Council on April 8, 2024, staff are providing information on the work being done in conjunction with the implementation of the Retail Strategy. A consultant has been retained to prioritize implementing a component of the Retail Strategy with regards to encouraging “active uses” at grade in core areas of commercial main streets, known as Great Streets. Staff anticipate presenting options to Council by end of June 2024.

### **BACKGROUND**

On March 27, 2023 the following motion was supported by Council for further review of workplan implications, timeline and budget impacts:

*Whereas the City of New Westminster has developed a retail strategy; and  
Whereas community-serving businesses are essential for meeting our  
climate goals*

*Therefore be it resolved that the City review and refresh current policies  
relating to ground level retail to ensure that they are responsive to current  
market forces; and*

*That the City develop a policy to ensure that future ground level retail  
spaces in new development are built to prioritize community supporting  
businesses and organizations in alignment with the retail strategy.*

*MOVED and SECONDED Therefore be it resolved that the City review and  
refresh current policies relating to ground level retail to ensure that they are  
responsive to current market forces; and*

*That the City develop a policy to ensure that future ground level retail  
spaces in new development are built to prioritize community supporting  
businesses and organizations in alignment with the retail strategy.*

**CARRIED**

As per the terms of Council Procedure Bylaw No. 6910, respecting notices of motion, any motion arising out of a notice of motion must not take effect unless the following conditions are met:

- a) The Chief Administrative Officer, in consultation with senior staff, has submitted a report within three Council meetings on the feasibility of that motion considering any budget and work plan implications including but not limited to staff capacity, financial, policy, administration, feasibility, operational, legal, etc.;
- b) Council has considered the budget and work plan implications of the motion in light of any strategic plan adopted by Council; and
- c) Council has passed a motion to authorizing the budget and work plan set out in the Chief Administrative Officer’s report.

**DISCUSSION**

The intent of Council’s motion is generally aligned with adopted plans, strategies and priorities of Council specifically as related to the Retail Strategy, Economic Development Plan, and Council’s Strategic Priorities and Bold Steps for Climate Action.

A key goal of the Retail Strategy is to identify key opportunities to enhance the retail experience in the City’s unique commercial areas and to recommend how the City may leverage its tools in support of a strong retail commercial environment. Currently, staff are working on implementing the Strategy, with two of the Strategy’s recommendations specifically-related to Council’s motion:

- Limit at-grade uses in core areas of Great Streets to ‘active uses.’
- Amend the Sign/Business License Bylaw to encourage the visual connection between passersby on the street and interior uses to provide an engaging streetscape experience (e.g. limit opaque window treatments.)

The Retail Strategy defines *active retail uses* as optimal generators of street-level activity and vitality, including restaurants, retail and specialty food stores, specialty retail stores, arts culture and entertainment uses, and personal service-oriented businesses that generate frequent traffic. Other uses can be designed to be more ‘active’ (i.e., to better support street-level vibrancy), such as finance, insurance, and real estate offices. General office uses would not be considered active uses (e.g. professional, scientific, and technical services, business-to-business services).

The portions of Great Streets (main commercial corridors) that the Strategy recommends being designated for ‘active uses’ include:

- Columbia Street (Downtown) between Eighth Street and Fourth Street
- East Columbia Street (Sapperton): between Braid and Knox Streets
- Sixth Street (Uptown): between 5th and 7th Avenues
- Twelfth Street: between Nanaimo and Edinburgh Streets
- Ewen Avenue (Queensborough): between Gifford and Howes Streets

These commercial areas, Great Streets, are not only the location of retail and services but also act as the heart of a neighbourhood. They should be vibrant and animated with active uses like cafes and shops located on the ground level of buildings and less active uses, such as offices, located on upper levels of buildings.

#### *Implementation of the Retail Strategy*

To support implementation of the Retail Strategy and Council’s Strategic Priorities Plan, as well as an enhanced focus on Economic Development and Business Licensing to more fully support local business, staff requested an additional Regular Full Time position during the 2024 budget process. A one year 1.0 Temporary Full Time Business Growth Coordinator was subsequently approved and the position is currently in the process of being filled.

Recognizing that active retail uses are a priority for Council and that Planning staff are acutely focused on housing, in March 2023 staff reallocated a portion of the department’s operating budget to engage a consultant to start the work required to encourage “active uses” at grade in core areas of commercial main streets. This first order of work includes conducting background research and proposing the Zoning Bylaw (which regulates the use of properties) and Sign Bylaw amendments necessary to regulate active uses in ground level retail spaces. Consideration will be given to certain scenarios such as new vs existing buildings, heritage buildings, single level or buildings without elevators, non-profit and government offices that serve the community in at-grade spaces, and child care facilities. Additionally, requirements around the

treatment of storefronts and covering windows with decals, signs and other objects are being explored.

Economic Development and Planning staff are working together with the consultant on this component and anticipate this work to be completed by end of June 2024.

**NEXT STEPS**

Once the consultant has developed proposed options, staff will engage with the Arts, Culture and Economic Development Advisory Committee, as well as conduct other engagement opportunities determined through the development of this work such as using the City’s *Be Heard New West* platform. When the consultant’s recommendations are finalized, staff will prepare a report to Council and any necessary bylaw amendment process for Council’s consideration.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

The Retail Strategy was developed to be consistent with and support a number of related City plans and policies such as the Official Community Plan, Downtown Livability Strategy and active transportation improvements being explored and implemented.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Additional resources are not required at this time, as the resourcing to engage a consultant was funding out of existing operational budget. Further consideration regarding implementation will be brought forward for Council consideration as part of departmental work plan and budget processes, if necessary.

**INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

Implementation of the Retail Strategy is being led by Economic Development, with support from Planning and other departments as required.

**OPTIONS**

Options for Council’s consideration include:

- 1. THAT Council receive this report and confirm that the April 8, 2024 motion is being addressed to its satisfaction.
- 2. THAT Council provide alternate direction to staff.

Option #1 is recommended.

**CONCLUSION**

Economic Development is committed to implementing the recommendations of the Retail Strategy and supporting vibrant active commercial areas as part of Council’s Strategic Priorities Plan. A key goal of the Retail Strategy is to leverage the tools, policies and strategies available to create the conditions and environment for our commercial areas to evolve into thriving business and social hubs. As part of achieving this vision, options for ensuring at-grade uses are active, and that store fronts are transparent, are currently being developed. Staff anticipate presenting a series of recommendations to Council by end of June 2024.

**APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:  
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This report was reviewed by:  
Blair Fryer, A/Director Community Services

This report was approved by:  
Blair Fryer, A/Director Community Services  
Lisa Spitale, CAO