

REPORT

Community Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: May 5, 2025

From: Blair Fryer,
Director, Community Services
File: 2639272

Item #: 2025-114

Subject: **Update on Response to Council Motion: “Enhancing Commercial Areas and Corridors in New Westminister”**

RECOMMENDATIONS

THAT staff continue to explore identification of potential location(s), operating considerations, resources and community partners on a micro-retailing project using shipping containers or a similar concept, and report back to Council by July 2025.

PURPOSE

This report responds to the Council motion passed on August 26, 2024: “Enhancing Commercial Areas and Corridors in New Westminister” by providing an analysis of the implementation feasibility of Combination Stores and Micro Retailing through the use of shipping containers or similar concept.

BACKGROUND

On August 26, 2024 Council passed the following resolution:

THAT the City of New Westminister identify potential location(s), operating considerations, necessary resources and local partners to activate Combination Stores and Micro Retailing commercial areas using shipping containers or similar concept to create a retail ecosystem that provides small businesses, artists, artisans, crafters and other vendors with affordable storefront locations and, at the same time, enhances commercial areas and corridors in New Westminister, with a report back to council on implementation feasibility.

Due to workload and staff capacity, staff have been delayed in responding to the above mentioned Council resolution. Staff has undertaken some due diligence in order to respond to Council's motion. If the staff recommendation is supported by Council, it is anticipated that staff would complete a feasibility and implication analysis in July 2025 and will report back to Council at that time.

DISCUSSION

Examples of container/micro retailing pop-ups or commercial hubs in the Metro Vancouver and Lower Vancouver Island areas include: Junction Public Market in Vancouver (operated by Junction Event Partners on land private property owned by Cadillac Fairview) and Langford Station (operated by the City of Langford, on land owned by Island Corridor Foundation). Further afield, Toronto also has a larger scale container market, Stackt, which is operated privately on land owned by the City of Toronto.

Case Study Example – Langford Station, Langford BC

At the December 2024 meeting of Arts, Culture and Economic Development Advisory Committee (ACEDAC), a staff member from the City of Langford's micro retailing project, Langford Station, presented on the experience.

Langford Station, completed in spring 2022, is a two-block corridor adjacent to a former rail line that has been revitalized into an arts, culture and micro business incubation district using converted shipping containers (also known as "sea cans"). The improvements also included enhancements to the public space. The project was initiated and developed by the City of Langford, along with Island Corridor Foundation, and City of Langford staff oversee its day-to-day administration.

Other details about the project include:

- City of Langford received \$2.1 million from the Canada Community-Building Fund
- Total project cost was approximately \$2.5M. Other funding included community partner contributions and donations, allocation from the City's amenity fund and general reserves, as well as a \$225K federal grant.
- City of Langford and Island Corridor Foundation (ICF), a charity that owns and manages former Esquimalt and Nanaimo rail corridor on Vancouver Island, entered into a collaborative agreement. The City holds a 30-year lease with the ICF.
- One City of Langford staff member, approximately 0.5 FTE and supported by the Manager of Economic Development, was hired to assist with ongoing administration such as reviewing contracts/leases, programming of the space and events, modifications to units, and reviewing new proposals.
- There are 13 shipping container units, plus a stage area and room for food trucks
- A permanent public washroom was included in project, funded through the aforementioned federal grant.

- Waste collection and washroom cleaning are contracted out (at City cost), with other facility-related operations undertaken by City staff.

As staff continue to build out a fulsome response to Council's Notice of Motion, staff will explore identification of potential location(s), operating considerations, resources and community partners on a micro-retailing project.

Utilizing vacant/underutilized sites as potential locations

Staff recommend that vacant/underutilized sites in commercial areas be considered as potential locations, to align with the City's Strategic Plan and [Retail Strategy](#) (2023), and to contribute to activation in existing commercial nodes. Initial considerations include finding a location in the Downtown and Uptown commercial areas.

Uptown

Over the last several months, staff have been exploring the temporary use of a site in the Uptown area as a pop-up park or community activation use. The property owner has been receptive to the City having a short term (3-5 year) lease and the site could be a potential location for a retail incubation market in combination with a flexible pop-up park space.

Once the availability and cost implications of the Uptown site are better understood, staff will be in a position to report back with more information on project considerations and estimated budget for site preparation as well as supporting infrastructure required. Preliminary discussion with the Uptown Business Association has been positive and they have indicated they would be interested in exploring working with the City, along with other community partners, on such an initiative.

Downtown

Staff are also exploring sites in the downtown and are in discussion with the Downtown BIA. Options include vacant/underutilized properties on Columbia Street and under the Front Street parkade near the soon-to-be-constructed Fourth Street stairs and covered public space (completion anticipated fall/winter 2025). Like the Uptown Business Association, the Downtown BIA is very interested in the idea of a market or event-based activations in the area.

Creating a Budget and Project Program

As noted in the City of Langford example, there are capital costs, along with operational and administration costs, necessary for this type of project to be successful. Other examples, such as the Vancouver market, are run by a for-profit business, with an emphasis on supporting community-based artisans and retailers. Staff have reached out to this organization to explore potential expansion opportunities as well as understand their process to establish the market.

Considerations for a retail incubation market include:

- Site identification and selection

- Community partner collaboration (e.g. local business association, Tourism New West, Arts New West, Chamber of Commerce, etc.)
- Exploration of multiple uses on site: retail incubation, temporary park use, community gathering space, pop-up space for community partners (e.g. tourism/ambassador type function, pop-up City Hall/engagement opportunities), public toilet, etc.
- Accessibility considerations including gravel surfaces and access into containers.
- Capital budget for project, including but not limited to: potential site lease costs, purchase/lease of modular units, site preparation costs and utility connection costs.
 - As a rough order of magnitude, staff anticipate that container shop rentals would be approximately \$2,000/month for a 10' unit and \$3,000/ month for a 20' shop (divisible into two shops), plus delivery/pick up at \$7,000 for the group of units. Power would need to be run and budgeted separately.
- Operating budget, including program development, administration and site operations and maintenance costs (e.g. garbage, washroom cleaning, etc.).

From an events perspective, staff in Community Partnerships hear regularly from community partners that there is a need for additional free or low-cost event space that includes public washrooms, the potential for covered outdoor spaces, and options to store event equipment such as PA systems or tables and tents. Staff have identified some community events that could be a good fit for a pop-up style of multi-use space such as craft markets or children's fairs.

Incorporating Small Retail Spaces in Development Application Review

Beyond temporary/pop-up locations for this type of commercial space, staff continue to incorporate the principles and recommendations of the Retail Strategy into the review of development applications. As new commercial retail space is proposed, and where the location is appropriate, staff are seeking a range of unit sizes including small units that would provide a more affordable option to end-users.

As an example, the principle of small retail units was incorporated into the Columbia Square Master Plan/Basic Zoning work. Additionally, as staff continue to work on the Lower Twelfth Street Study Area, consideration is being given to fostering ultra-light industrial/production space that would encourage incubation and provide affordability for these uses and could potentially include promotion of micro or smaller sized units.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will continue to explore potential sites and prepare a site analysis that includes financial and operational considerations by July 2025. It is anticipated this work will take up to five days of cumulative staff effort to undertake the work and prepare the report back to Council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff will report back to Council by July 2025 with further information on the scope of financial implications of implementation. Should Council direct staff to continue exploring the business case, a request for allocation would be included 2026 budget.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Exploration of this initiative is being led by Community Services with input from Parks and Recreation and Engineering Services.

OPTIONS

There are two options for Council:

1. THAT staff continue to explore identification of potential location(s), operating considerations, resources and community partners on a micro-retailing project using shipping containers or a similar concept, and report back to Council by July, 2025.
2. THAT staff are directed not to pursue this initiative.

Staff recommend Option 1 and 2.

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
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