

That Staff provide recommendations for rapid and medium-term actions to support the vibrancy of business, the activation of the streets, and improving the amenity value of the historic Downtown for all residents of New Westminster.

In response, staff developed a Downtown Livability Strategy that included immediate and short term actions, endorsed by Council on October 18, 2021. The approach is interdepartmental and based on the City's vision that New Westminster is a vibrant, compassionate, sustainable city that includes everyone.

Through an interdepartmental team that includes Engineering, Police, Fire, Economic Development, Social Planning and Integrated Services, five areas of focus for the immediate and short term actions were determined:

1. Cleanliness and 24-hour public toilets
2. Homeless outreach and added emergency shelter capacity
3. Opioid epidemic and illicit drug response
4. Business support and engagement
5. Work with Fraser Health to address mental health issues

DISCUSSION

The following tactics are completed, or in progress, to promote vibrancy and encourage visitation in the downtown neighbourhood and to support businesses in their continued recovery.

Cleanliness and access to 24 hour toilets:

Engineering Operations continues to prioritize street cleaning in Downtown, including having added an additional 2-person shift for the "beat" crew in the evening to provide coverage until midnight, and starting earlier in the morning to support litter pick up prior to start of business each weekday. The later shift has been very challenging for staff due to staff shortages and competing priorities, so it has not been possible to achieve as consistent a service as desired.

In addition to addressing litter and other street cleaning duties, the "beat" crew had also been tasked with monitoring and responding to needs associated with the portable rental toilet in Hyack Square that include vandalism and significant damage. Work continues to design and procure the Permanent Freestanding Toilet project.

Business supports:

- *Patios:* To encourage vibrancy and livability, staff developed a new bylaw, [Sidewalk and On-Street Patio Bylaw No. 8318, 2022](#). Staff are working with the existing temporary patios to convert them to permanent ones. The Province

announced the extension of the Temporary Expanded Service Areas until March 31, 2023, to allow time for these permanent patio approval processes to proceed.

- *ReDiscoverNewWest*: The ReDiscover New West campaign continues, utilizing influencer marketing and social media to encourage people to shop locally. While the campaign has city-wide implications, many influencers are opting to post about downtown businesses and attractions.
- *Educational Materials*: Economic Development continues to develop materials in response to requests for information from businesses, including information on homelessness, the opioid crisis, and crime prevention. These materials are being shared with stakeholders when they are completed. Many business stakeholders are expressing fatigue and overwhelm, and staff look for ways to support them compassionately while still providing educational resources.

Festivals and Events:

Special events are valuable to the economic and social fabric of the City particularly on Columbia Street as they provide street activations that bring residents and visitors to the downtown core.

During the pandemic, the City produced and worked collaboratively with a number of community organizations such as the Downtown BIA, Family Place, Spirit of the Children and the New Westminster Arts Council in providing activities in the downtown core. Through the City's initiatives of the *Rest of New West* (spring, summer and fall months) and *Shine Bright* (winter months) light installations, scavenger/ treasure hunts, park entertainment and craft markets provided opportunities for residents and visitors to visit downtown.

Live festivals and events are returning to downtown in 2022. The Special Events Team is continuing to work with many community organizations for their events and through the City's Grant Program to support the production of events in the downtown core. Organizations such as New West Pride, Hyack Festival, Fraser River Discovery Centre and United Creative Artists Studio Society are providing activations this year. Over \$157,000 has been awarded in cash contributions and city services to support the numerous events in the downtown through the City's 2022 Grant program.

The summer line-up includes the following:

- New West Craft Markets – bi-monthly starting in June on Saturdays on the waterfront esplanade
- New West Craft Night market – July 2
- Fridays on Front – starting on July 8th and runs for 6 Fridays during the summer
- Car Free Day – August 6
- New West Pride - Aug 13
- Hyack Festival Fireworks – August 27
- Riverfest – September 20 -25th

- National Day of Truth and Reconciliation - September 30th
- Front Street Local - TBA
- Keg Race – Rotary Club

As more opportunities present themselves over the year, the Special Events Team will continue to support community organizations as needed.

Street Beautification:

An upcoming complementary capital investment is a 2023 budget allocation for new permanent stairs connecting Columbia Street to Front Street at 4th Street, furthering the Front Street Mews vision. The installation will also feature a seating area and other amenities that promote day to day animation and downtown connectivity. More details on the planning for this project will come to Council at a future meeting.

Parks staff have focused additional planting efforts in Hyack Square and have also installed hanging baskets and other plantings in the downtown areas as per their usual seasonal approach.

Hyack Square Improvements:

The Downtown BIA has applied for and been approved for a Healthy Communities Initiative Grant to activate Hyack Square with programmed activities in 2022/2023. Staff are working with the Downtown BIA on a timeline that coincides with capacity to support the activities. More details about the programming will become available as the planning process evolves.

Downtown BIA Activation Grants:

Through the support of the City grant program, the Downtown BIA is working on four activation projects suggested by the community that will be implemented over the course of 2022. The projects include: a new mural, sidewalk art, a mini multicultural library and an urban fairy door project geared towards kids.

Phase One of Metro Vancouver Sewer Rehabilitation Project:

Metro Vancouver commenced the rehabilitation of the New Westminster Interceptor Sewer in 2021. The work runs along downtown Columbia Street from the intersection of Front Street to the intersection of McBride Boulevard. The project is separated into multiple phases. Phase 1 suffered a series of setbacks/delays resulting in a prolonged construction period and disruption to the downtown businesses. In response to City and business community feedback, Metro Vancouver will complete the majority of Phase 1 works and vacate Columbia Street by mid May 2022, allowing the streetscape to be fully reopen for public enjoyment and programming for the busy spring and summer seasons. Metro Vancouver will complete the remaining Phase 1 works in the latter part of 2022 and pursue the subsequent phases near McBride Boulevard in 2023.

OPTIONS

Two options are presented for Council's consideration,

1. THAT Council receive this report for information;
2. THAT Council provide staff with alternate direction.

Staff recommend option 1.

APPROVALS

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