



Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC)

Friday, June 11, 2021 – 9:00 a.m.

Meeting held electronically under Ministerial Order No. M192/2020 and the current Order of the Provincial Health Officer - *Gatherings and Events*

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillor Mary Trentadue	- Chair, City Council Member
Councillor Chinu Das	- City Council Representative
Bob Crockett	- Sectoral Representative from Local Business Community
Alejandro Diaz	- Community Representative from Commercial Area
Mark Evans	- Sectoral Representative from Local Business Community (left at 10:26 a.m.)
Jolene Foreman	- Community Representative from Commercial Area
Jorden Foss	- Community Representative from Commercial Area
Kendra Johnston	- Representative Downtown New Westminster Business Improvement Association
Vera Kobalia	- Sectoral Representative from Local Business Community (left at 9:55 a.m.)
Paul Romein	- Sectoral Representative from Local Business Community
Bart Slotman	- Representative, Uptown Business Association
Catherine Williams	- Sectoral Representative from Local Business Community

MEMBER REGRETS:

Artemisa Bega	- Sectoral Representative from Local Business Community
Rnold Smith	- Representative, New Westminster Chamber of Commerce

GUESTS

David Bell	- Urban Systems
Justin Barer	- Urban Systems
Mitchell Reardon	- Happy City
Cheri Hessami	- Happy City

STAFF PRESENT:

Jen Arbo	- Economic Development Coordinator
Carolyn Armanini	- Planner, Economic Development
Blair Fryer	- Manager, Communications & Economic Development
Lynn Roxburgh	- Senior Policy Planner
Harji Varn	- Director of Finance
Lisa Wambaa	- Planning Assistant
Heather Corbett	- Committee Clerk

The meeting was called to order at 9:01 a.m. The Chair acknowledged that the meeting was being held on unceded Indigenous territory.

1.0 ADDITIONS / DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

MOVED and SECONDED

THAT the agenda of the June 11, 2021 Economic Development Advisory Committee be adopted with the following addition:

6.3 Appointment of New Alternate Chair for EDAC

CARRIED.

All members present voted in favour of the motion.

2.0 ADOPTION OF MINUTES

2.1 Adoption of the Minutes of April 9, 2021

MOVED AND SECONDED

THAT the Minutes of the April 9, 2021 Economic Development Advisory Committee meeting be adopted.

CARRIED.

All members of the Committee present voted in favor of the motion.

3.0 PRESENTATIONS

3.1 Tax Discussion

Harji Varn, Director of Finance, provided a PowerPoint Presentation on the topic of business taxes, tax rate drivers, and tax dollar breakdown.

In response to a question from the Committee, Ms. Varn noted that the timing of the tax rate analysis and any associated changes within the City would be dependent on resources and, depending on how discussions transpire at the Provincial level and with BC Assessment, would likely be prioritized for the 2023 budget process.

Committee members made the following comments:

- Appreciation was expressed for the City's efforts to look at this review of tax rates, as it seems that tax rates increase yearly and place a large burden on businesses;
- It would be helpful for EDAC to remain informed during the discovery and analysis process, and to ensure that the Committee is given the opportunity to provide feedback;
- It would be ideal to prioritize the analysis and bring it forward earlier than 2023.

Ms. Varn noted that as a first step, the City could investigate the tax splits of neighbouring municipalities and analyze if there are large discrepancies in the residential and business tax split percentages.

4.0 UNFINISHED BUSINESS

4.1 Retail Strategy – Urban Systems & Happy City

Carolyn Armanini, Economic Development Planner, gave a brief background on the City's Retail Strategy and introduced the consultant team from Urban Systems and Happy City.

David Bell and Justin Barer, Urban Systems, provided a PowerPoint presentation on the City's planned Retail Strategy, including the following information:

- Project purpose and components, including a planned audit of current retail conditions, coded by area and category; mobility data analysis, and trade area and demand analysis
- Primary research methods, including surveys and input from a broad array of residents, business owners and property owners; and,
- Desired project outcomes.

Mitchell Reardon and Cheri Hessami, Happy City, shared information and case studies on the Rapid Placemaking Toolkit, which aims to foster engagement for the overall retail strategy, using five stages of inspiration, ideation, implementation, engagement and iteration, and assessment.

In response to questions from the Committee, Ms. Armanini, Mr. Bell and Mr. Reardon provided the following information:

- The data for the study would be compiled through mobility analysis and through asking demographic questions in order to cross-tabulate, and this would be compiled in several key retail areas and sub-areas in the City;
- The intention is for the strategy to provide the following outcomes:
 - A municipal scan of what works in other municipalities;
 - An inventory of current conditions, which in turn would quantify the retail dollars spent in the City and how this influences floor space, growth of local demand, realistic market support, and outflow of retail spend to online platforms and neighbouring cities;
 - An analysis of how the retail market may influence potential changes to City land use policy and planning;
- The City has budgeted one year for the project, and therefore expect that the work would be complete by spring or early summer 2022;
- It is planned that the engagement would be split into two areas, as follows:

- Surveys targeted at business owners, which would provide them with the opportunity for input into the issues from their point-of-view;
- Door-to-door engagement, in order to meet retailers in their own locations and languages, and to determine a representation sample of stakeholders, which would be influenced by established criteria, such as business type, length of time in business, owner vs. manager, and newcomers, among others; and,
- In order to ensure that all types and communities of businesses in the City would be included, Happy City is establishing a database of languages spoken within the team and developing a toolkit of practical ways to increase engagement.

Committee members made the following comments:

- This study has been long-awaited in the City and the measures being proposed, such as the health and vitality report, mobility tracking and application of an equity lens, sound comprehensive and ambitious;
- It would be very important to ensure that the health and vitality of all retail areas in the City are analyzed;
- It would be important to approach the analysis with an accessibility lens, as the steep hills in many parts of the City pose mobility challenges for certain demographics of residents in the City to access retail areas;
- It will be interesting to see the results of the study, particularly in terms of maintaining areas such as Twelfth Street, where there are many small businesses because of affordability;
- It will be interesting to see how the study proposes to resolve considerable disconnects that have been observable in the retail sphere over several years due to changes in consumer patterns, including demand vs supply of retail space, quality of retail offerings vs affordability, and demand for location vs availability;
- It would be crucial to ensure that the study takes into account the perspectives of both the landowners and the retail business owners, as their concerns can often be very different; and,
- It would be important to consider how to tailor the study to address cultural barriers and encourage involvement from as many cultural groups as possible.

Committee members noted a willingness to participate in the study and to disseminate relevant survey links and information to their networks. There was also an interest in having the project return to the Committee at a future meeting, once tangible results are available.

5.0 NEW BUSINESS

5.1 Transitioning New West's Economy to Adjust to a Post-COVID Reality

Blair Fryer, Manager of Communications and Economic Development, referred to a letter included in the agenda package, which was brought forward by a Committee member, on the discussion topic of how the City's economy would be affected by the long-term effects of the pandemic, and what the City could be doing to prepare itself for a different economic environment in the coming years.

Committee members made the following comments:

- There are tangible concerns that the post-pandemic world will see significant impacts on the global, national and local economy, and underlying trends that were underway prior to the pandemic are accelerating;
- It would be important to examine and discuss what the City could be proactively doing, from a policy perspective, to prepare itself for a different economic environment and avoid becoming a bedroom community;
- It may be important to consider looking 5-10 years down the road and be prepared for long-term effects; and,
- There seems to be a disconnect between what is available in terms of low-risk opportunity and exciting, attractive developments that appeal to entrepreneurs.

Mr. Fryer noted that these observations are quite common in neighbouring cities and is a conversation that is ongoing at the regional level. He noted that the Regional Prosperity Service (RPS) has recently been set up and aims to conduct research and analysis on sectors within the context of a regional economy, and provide information on which sectors to pursue and support with Municipal and Provincial policies and training. Mr. Fryer noted that the City would be developing a new Economic Development Plan in the future, which would incorporate the retail strategy, and the RPS research would be analyzed to ensure that the City is set up to maintain a growing economy and one that has some built-in resilience to overcome ebbs and flows.

Committee members agreed that this is an important topic that could be brought forward at a future EDAC meeting.

6.0 REPORTS

6.1 Standing Reports

a) Downtown New Westminster Business Improvement Association (BIA)

Kendra Johnston, Representative, Downtown New Westminster Business Improvement Association (DBIA), provided the following report:

- On May 24, the Downtown suffered another fire and four businesses were lost, causing shock and sadness for the business owners and the wider community. The Downtown BIA is trying to support the affected businesses, and the community has also shown overwhelming support;
- There has been an increase in optimism with BC's Restart Plan, and the DBIA has observed that business owners are looking forward to next steps;
- The DBIA and several partners have been supporting the second leg of the Rediscover New West campaign, which is supporting the retail sector; and,
- The DBIA is looking at small scale pop-ups, activations for Canada Day, and is also launching Quest New West, which is a scavenger-style project.

b) Uptown Business Association

Bart Slotman, Representative, Uptown Business Association, provided the following report:

- The Uptown Business Association community has also been showing support of the BC Restart Plan, mixed with caution and concern about financial grants and support from higher levels of Government coming to an end, which may lead to an increase in business failures over the next few months; and,
- There are five large parcels of land for sale in Uptown, and with four being likely for redevelopment, more density and related effects on businesses are to be expected.

c) New Westminster Chamber of Commerce

No report was given.

6.2 Economic Development Workplan 2021 Status

The updated 2021 Economic Development workplan was appended to the agenda for the Committee's reference.

6.3 Appointment of New Alternate Chair for EDAC

The Chair noted that Rnold Smith had recently stepped down as the Committee's Alternate Chair due to other commitments, and invited Committee members to volunteer or nominate a replacement.

MOVED and SECONDED

That Catherine Williams be appointed as the Alternate Chair for the Economic Development Advisory Committee for the remainder of the 2021-2022 year.

CARRIED.

All members of the Committee present voted in favor of the motion.

7.0 CORRESPONDENCE

8.0 NEXT MEETING

The next EDAC meeting will take place on Friday, September 10, 2021 at 9:00 a.m., location to be confirmed.

9.0 ADJOURNMENT

ON MOTION, the meeting was adjourned at 10:42 a.m.

Certified Correct,

Original Signed
Councillor Mary Trentadue
Chair

Original Signed
Katie Stobbart
Committee Clerk