

TOWN OF OKOTOKS ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BRIEFING NOTE – APRIL 22, 2020

An integral part of our communities are local businesses. Local businesses allow people to live work and play in their own community. Healthy businesses make healthy and resilient communities. The 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic has placed strain on the business community. The Town of Okotoks has declared “business retention” as a Vital Service in its 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic Emergency Response plan. An economic and business development 2020 Covid-19 Overarching Response Framework has been developed to assist local businesses.

Outcomes:

- *Maintaining and building community resiliency by supporting local business wellness*

Objectives:

- *To establish clarity with internal stakeholders about the Business and Economic Development strategies through the COVID19 pandemic.*
- *To spark solutions focused discussions to remove barriers and challenges in the implementation of strategic imperatives as well as to leverage opportunities.*
- *To present opportunities for strategic consideration to other business centers across the organization that are well positioned or already contribute to the advancement of Economic Vitality in the Town of Okotoks.*

Key Messaging:

During this unprecedented time the vital role of the municipality in supporting the local businesses in our community has been recognized. The Economic and Business Recovery Strategic Plan outlines three phases of recovery for the COVID-19 crisis – Emergent, Sustainability, and Recovery. **Each business owner will move through the Emergent and Sustainability phases at their own pace depending on their financial strength.** The macro level economic impact may not be fully understood until much of the business community collectively moves into recovery. These are unprecedented times and requires new mindsets. The plan embedded transformational thinking to ensure the approach taken considers the position of administration and elected officials as well as setting up the business community with education, access to resources, and opportunities to engage.



Strategic Focus:

DASHBOARD DATA VARIANCE REVIEW

Recovery Phase: Sustain

Priority: 1

Tactics – Provide a baseline overview of the business community licenses and industry sectors to monitor changes.

Challenges

- *The data is pulled from a platform in a way that that may require a process review for standardization and validation.*
- *The validity of the data has been questioned by Council and senior leadership team.*
- *Confidence is required in the information provided to support strategic decisions and investments.*

Risks – Without confidence in the accuracy of the baseline data for 2019, it will be difficult to create strategic direction without an understanding of the overall economic landscape, impact on industry sectors and measurement for business plan; including budget.

Progress – Variance report to be completed by April 30th, 2020 by Business Disaster Recovery Specialist

Anticipated Completion – Next steps will depend on outcomes of variance report.

Interdependencies – Communication department may be asked to update pdf to be shared with stakeholders. Implementation of processes for standardization and validation by consultant or resource in the Town of Okotoks.

CRM SYSTEM

Recovery Phase: Sustain to Recovery

Priority: 1

Tactics – Implement a system to engage with businesses about their status, challenges, and opportunities. The process has taken longer than anticipated and expected.

Challenges

- *Working through the organization to understand what they would host and not host based on Canadian held data recommendations for municipalities. This was an internal requirement and not Federal requirement.*
- *The permissions of business owners to be put in CRM and/or email them were not granted and required due to FOIP.*
- *It was determined that the Town of Okotoks business to business communication is allowed. This has been confirmed by Records Management Coordinator.*
- *A tracking system is required to understand the quality of service levels being provided to businesses. What We Heard Report – this need for the business community is tracked in there.*
- *There is a process review (Development Services) underway to look at sharing information internally and externally.*

Future Logistics:

- *Stakeholders will receive a password to access only appropriate information to protect the town. Levels of permission and purpose need to be clearly identified for administration's understanding and support.*
- *Succession of this data to larger CRM system. Stakeholders will be removed from having access.*

Risks – To successfully accomplish goals in business retention and expansion the collection of data to influence direction is vital. It is valuable to respond to the outcomes of stakeholder engagement that improve processes for the business community, in general but especially during business disaster recovery.

Progress – Chose Executive Pulse; preparing stakeholder and business information for data entry. Survey will be customized.

Anticipated Completion – Survey to be launched out May 8th.

Interdependencies – Communications to develop strategy for rolling out survey. Process for FOIP barriers, Records Management Coordinator has been approved to send out survey.

BUSINESS FOCUSED CONTENT DEVELOPER FOR MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

Recovery Phase: Sustain to Recovery

Priority: 1

Tactics

- *Incorporate business disaster recovery content development into a marketing and communications strategy as a key tactic to support the business community.*
- *Building of trust and impactful relationships with the business community.*
- *Keeping up with the strategies that engage and inspire businesses based on research, data, and measures.*
- *Cross-departmental efforts embedded in strategy to support Economic Vitality.*
- *Reposting and leveraging other information that is vital to business recovery, retention, and expansion.*
- *Set and review targets to continue to achieve best practices and optimization of use of budgets.*
- *Creation of weekly content, messaging, concepts for social posts.*
- *Posts created to achieve awareness, education, engagement, and by drawing the business community in – utilize the other marketing pieces to funnel audience to further actions.*
- *Creatives are pre-loaded into a document to be reviewed by Communications and Economic Development team to be proofed.*
- *Communications implements the posts using their business unit strategies*

Challenges - Access to business disaster content expertise to support the unique needs of the Economic and Business Development business center.

Risks – To achieve the strategic priorities of Council regarding Economic Development and Business Disaster Recovery it is imperative to establish and maintain a foundation of trust with the business community through strategic messaging that includes appropriate transparency and impactful content in a timely fashion.

Interdependencies – Shared accountability between Communications and Economic and Business development to implement measures and achieve targeted outcomes.

VIRTUAL REALITY PROGRAM

Recovery Phase: Recovery

Priority: 3

Tactics

Business Investment and Attraction: This will be an online tool (web based or virtual glasses) to showcase to developers across the globe current town owned land that is serviced and other properties to demonstrate the development opportunities and vision.

Business Retention and Expansion: Used in same way as above. Can also monitor changes in business activity for targeted opportunities. Powerful visual tool to drive inspiration and decisions to expand business in Okotoks.

Business Disaster Recovery: Online marketplace. Use this technology to assist business during crisis to showcase open businesses and what they are offering and how their business models have adapted.

Challenges – Adoption of the new technology internally in order to fully meet the potential of the tool. Needs to be populated in partnership with the business community. Time and resources.

Risks – Invest in this tool without fully realizing potential. Important to understand the readiness of the organization to innovate in this way.

Progress – BIA mapping exercise is complete and ready to be leveraged in the organization. Empty land populated with potential builds. Positioned as a tool to market the community as an investment.

Interdependencies – Working with planning to comply with zoning and permits. Business community participation. Communication collaboration – internal and external strategic messaging.

ONE STOP SHOP

Recovery Phase: Sustain to Recovery

Priority: 1

Tactics

Council direction regarding how the Town supports regular business is now vital for business disaster recovery strategies.

Responding to the business community engagement outcomes of making development process easy and transparent. Execution of Business Retention and Expansion Gaant Chart.

Process review under Development Services; business license, planning and safety.

Requires a software to set up an online platform where efficiencies both internal and external can be realized. Example: City of Calgary

Risks – Business community is expecting some movement forward on this initiative. It is important to manage business community expectations if there is delays or not going forward to protect the Town of Okotoks reputation. There is a potential to be lobbied by Chamber again.

Progress – Meeting weekly. Intent: look at internal resources including software platform to complete business activities with the Town of Okotoks. To be completed by Dec 2020.

Interdependencies – Development services capacity. Communications department.

CAPITAL PROJECT ASSESSMENT

Recovery Phase: Recovery

Priority: 2

Tactics

Lead at a corporate level to align capital projects not only for town but also what might be coming forward from provincial and Federal initiatives. Ongoing consideration of opportunities and approaches for internal stakeholder and community engagement.

Identify the potential impact that 2020 capital projects may have on the business community during the COVID-19 crisis. 2020 Capital Projects – BDR Business Impact Assessment document (Attachment) completed.

Position projects for the least amount of resistance, manage community negative perceptions, and find opportunities to align with business disaster recovery strategies.

The goal is to provide recommendations for identified projects that directly impact the financial earning potential of businesses in Okotoks, strengthen or weaken the image of the Town in the community, provide opportunities to contribute positively to the business community, align the timing of projects with the Business Disaster Recovery framework to position the business community as “ready for business” once the suppression levels have receded and businesses can operate.

Municipal Affairs has requested a summary of capital projects list. The focus is to promote local capital projects so local contractors can bid on projects.

Challenges – Ensuring the majority of the business community has been engaged with in appropriate and effective ways as well as strategic communication strategies. Both take time and resources to develop a consistent approach and to implement.

Risks – There is some sensitivity about community perceived and/or real impact.

Progress – Ongoing meetings to assess capital projects. Compiling shovel ready to submit to province.

Interdependencies – Infrastructure, Operations, Finance, Communications

Lead at a corporate level to align capital projects not only for town but also what might be coming forward from provincial and Federal initiatives. Responding opportunities and approaches for internal stakeholder and community engagement.

SHOP LOCAL CAMPAIGN

Recovery Phase: Recovery

Priority: 3

Tactics – Help promote those business that are open for business for the next two years. Collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to support the planning and implementation of the campaign. The focus for sustain is with the business community stakeholders.

Challenges – The position of the town is to support the business community in general without highlighting one over another.

Risks – Business community needs a solution to improve exposure for the next two years. This initiative will eventually be the focus of Business Retention and Expansion recovery efforts.

Progress – Stakeholders are leading with Economic Development guidance and support.

Interdependencies – Virtual Reality Program (4). Communications department strategic plan.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Recovery Phase: Sustain and Recovery

Priority: 1

Tactics – The Okotoks Entrepreneurial Ecosystem pivoted some funding from the Town of Okotoks to support the business community with mental health webinars. This is operating independent of the Town. It will be valuable to connect to FCSS Community Wellness Manager to collaborate and share in the opportunity.

Challenges – Measures of communication targets and successful engagement are unclear. It is important to be able to pivot in a timely manner to respond to opportunities to support businesses.

Progress – The communications for the webinars are underway. Stakeholders are applying for funding for long term strategies for free mental health support for business owners.

Interdependencies – Communications; Community Wellness Manager

REGIONAL AND/OR INDUSTRY SECTOR FOCUSED ENGAGEMENT

Recovery Phase: Sustain and Recovery

Priority: 2

Tactics – Town of Okotoks representative on Taskforce to share local business needs and strategies for a global economic recovery. This taskforce offers direct engagement with local Senator, MP, MLA, regional business stakeholder representatives and industry sector leaders. A regional survey will provide data to the Town of Okotoks. An initial survey report is available. (Attachment)

Risks – Without a representative, there is a loss of access to resources, supply chain solutions, slower communication about the region. The data and outcomes will help guide senior leadership and Council with strategies for business recovery.

Progress – Taskforce first meeting early May 2020.

Interdependencies – Access to reports for Council, Senior Leadership team and other business centers.

REMOVAL OF RED TAPE

Recovery Phase: Recovery

Priority: 3

Tactics

- *Changes to land use bylaws to accommodate businesses transitioning from current location to home-based operation. The municipal development plan is a key component for Business Investment and Attraction.*
- *Position the town as open for business and make it easy to welcome businesses to set up.*
- *Adapt Economic and Business Development plan to ensure disaster recovery is aligned. As a Town, this does not mean strategic initiatives stop; instead look for opportunities to thrive and improve and contribute to towards the corporate strategic plan.*

Challenges – Processes in the Town to make changes to remove red tape is complex and does not allow for improvements in a timely manner. The CRM will assist with understanding the challenges businesses are facing.

Risks – Business Investment and Attraction is a priority with tax ratio measurement (80/20). Goal is to work towards achieving a balanced budget and tax ratio due to lack of investment in community. Needs to be streamlined.

Progress – Process review is meeting some of these needs; One stop shop.

Interdependencies - Development services capacity. Communications department.

TOWN OF OKOTOKS BUSINESS SUPPORT GRANT PROGRAM

Recovery Phase: Sustain and Recovery

Priority: 2

Tactics –

- *The Council of the Town of Okotoks has a broad mandate to provide good government, develop and maintain a safe and viable community, and to supply desirable and/or necessary services to the community.*
- *Lend support to the local business community and contribute to the Economic Vitality of the Community by providing a one-time grant to qualifying businesses.*

Challenges – Managing expectations of business owners who do not qualify for the grant program.

Risks – There are other community funds and programs that are or will eventually be available to support small and mid-sized businesses.

Interdependencies – Finance; Communications, Assessment

RENT FORGIVENESS OR DEFERRED

Recovery Phase: Sustain

Priority: 1

Tactics – Strategic discussion with Facilities Manager for next steps recommendations.

Challenges – Consistent and strategic information for stakeholders.

Risks – Loss of Mainstreet as a business, however there is funding to support small to mid-size enterprises.

Impact on Budget – Total yearly rental revenue from Community Futures and Mainstreet = \$66,225.00 plus GST, utilities and common costs.

Interdependencies – Stakeholder (Community Futures and Mainstreet) engagement. Facilities Manager.

CALGARY FOUNDATION GRANT

Recovery Phase: Sustain and Recovery

Priority: 2

Tactics – Process to determine how-to best support businesses and not for profit organizations. Reassessment to consider new funding from Federal government programs for small to mid-sized businesses and social profit groups. Connect with regional program in partnership with FBRT.

Challenges – Resources to develop and implement grant.

Risks – Propping up the non-viable businesses with money and the need to manage expectations of businesses for qualifications.

Progress – Idea stage; compiling information and making connections across the province. Reassess considering Federal programs.

Interdependencies – Finance, Communication strategy when awarded.

OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT FOR EVENTS

Recovery Phase: Recovery

Priority: 3

Tactics - Align all internal stakeholders with one overarching strategy of where to invest funds with measures, impact assessment, and coordinated communication strategy. Develop a Return on Investment and Returns on Experience impact assessments to make strategic decisions. Work with community stakeholders to leverage opportunities for implementation – similarly to Okotoks Entrepreneurial Ecosystem model. Example: Nooks and Crannies; BuskerFest; Chili Cook off; Light up, Car Show, Okotoks Chamber events, Summer Games, etc.

Challenges – There are opportunities to collaborate to develop a comprehensive corporate strategy that includes social fabric and economic vitality events.

Risks – Maintain relationship and communication with the stakeholders. Align internal departments towards a unified strategy.

Interdependencies – External stakeholders, Community Services, Development Services, and all other internal departments

BUSINESS DISASTER RECOVERY STRATEGIST

Recovery Phase: Sustain to Recovery

Priority: 1

Tactics – The scope includes support to the economic and business development team to compile information, prepare reports, and strategic plans, attending team meetings to contribute to strategic planning for the team, implementation of transformational disaster recovery strategies and approaches for internal and external stakeholder engagement, ongoing disaster recovery support for Okotoks Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Okotoks Downtown Business Association for as appropriate.

Progress – RFP required.

Disaster Recovery Framework: Strategic Focus

