

NORTH RAILWAY STREET UNDERGROUND UTILITIES REPLACEMENT

Issue

Feedback from the businesses impacted by the North Railway Street Underground Utilities Replacement program is provided to Council for review and consideration.

Motion Proposed by Administration

That Administration be directed to defer the start date for Project #61 - North Railway Street Underground Utilities Replacement from June 2020 to late August or early September 2020.

Report, Analysis and Financial Implications

Council originally advanced the Underground Utilities replacement program from 2022 to now, in order to align construction with the closure of a majority of impacted businesses due to COVID-19. After this decision, the Province announced its potential relaunch strategy for businesses, which may lead to conflict with the proposed construction project.

The shifting of dates from June to late August or early September may result in higher costs given competition, availability of contractors, and seasonal variations. The attached Project Risk/Reward table provides a weighted decision tool based on technical requirements associated with the project. While there is technical merit in proceeding now, there is recognition with the advancement of a relaunch strategy, that the impact to businesses needs to be more highly weighted. Based on the input from business, Administration recommends a delay to the start date past the busier summer season.

Strategic Plan Goals

<input type="checkbox"/>	Manage Community Growth	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide Strong Governance
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Provide Quality Community Infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	Healthy and Safe Community
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhance Organizational Excellence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Foster Economic Vitality
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Promote Environmental Excellence

Governing Policies/Bylaws/Legislation or Agreements

n/a

Public Participation Strategy

The budget change and project details were mailed April 29, 2020 to all businesses in the affected area. The River District Business Association (RDBA) approached business owners between May 6 and May 11, 2020.

The Town met with the RDBA on May 6, 2020 to discuss the pros and cons of the project and an information package was sent to the RDBA on May 7, 2020. A Town Hall meeting was hosted by the RDBA with businesses on May 11 to discuss the project.

Discussions between all businesses resulted in no clear recommendation as to whether this project was supported given the technical reasons and concerns around business impacts. While there were businesses in favour, there were others who expressed a preference to move the project until the fall, while others were opposed to the project generally.

Alternatives for Consideration

Alternatives include:

1. Continue with the project as planned. The project could proceed in June based on the technical merits including cost savings, less disruption due to some restrictions remaining, contractor availability, and mitigation measures such as more signage being added during construction to promote businesses. Even with the accelerated timeframe proposed by Administration - there are risks. Some businesses have expressed concerns around their “high” season being summer and the potential loss of foot traffic and parking. Mitigation strategies would be put in place to promote businesses and reduce loss of traffic.
2. Defer the Project until 2022. This alternative would push out the entirety of the project to 2022 (underground and surface works). Business disruption in this case would likely be a greater risk but would allow for a longer period of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

CAO Comments

While the Town had the best of intentions with advancing this project, I believe the timing of proceeding with this infrastructure project now is not in the mutual best interests of the Town or the businesses. Right now businesses need to devote time to developing and implementing new business processes and adapting to COVID-19. For many this means operating at 50% capacity. Businesses are worried about every dollar they spend and attracting as many customers as possible. The Town does not want to further contribute to this stressful time. My recommendation is to postpone the project until late August or early September. The reversed phasing proposed for the late August start means that the businesses most impacted by foot traffic will be done in the last phase and will have the advantage of completing a full summer of operation.

Attachment(s)

1. Project Risk/Reward Table
2. Town Notice to Business
3. Information Package to Business
4. RDBA Town Hall Debrief
5. RDBA Outcomes

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May 12, 2020