

May 11, 2020

DOWNTOWN DEEP UTILITY REPLACEMENT PROJECT RIVER DISTRICT BUSINESS ASSOCIATION TOWNHALL DEBRIEF

OBJECTIVE

To share feedback from businesses that attended the Townhall on their perceptions of impact on their economic potential as a result of the implementation of the deep utility replacement project.

1. DISCUSSION OUTCOMES

There were fourteen attendees at the Townhall; a lower than hoped for attendance however due to quick turnaround, not unexpected. The RBDA was given one business day to engage with the business community which was not enough time to properly implement a comprehensive engagement process. They did offer to go forward to begin the conversation with businesses.

A clear recommendation or direction from the business owners and/or River District Business Association (RBDA) was **not achievable** as this is a complex topic with varying perspectives to consider. Instead, the following feedback was compiled to share with the Town of Okotoks Project Team and Senior Leadership Team.

Why Now?

The following statements of why to move forward with the project as planned were made by the attendees:

- Window of construction is dependent on the frost in the road therefore June/July is the only time to complete the project.
- Cannot predict or control leaks/breaks creating potentially more impact on businesses in the future.
- Reactive – repairing of infrastructure based on an emergency situation will create more risk and bigger impact on businesses and costs associated.
- Saving to ratepayers – overall is positive
- Contractors are available now – can dictate timing and costs better. Encourage aggressive timelines.
- Consumer behaviors may have changed and there might be hesitation to frequent businesses due to social distancing concerns – reducing the earning potential regardless of the project.

- There is an anticipated slow entry into economic activity so those businesses that feel the timing is incorrect may be surprised by how slow the economy will come back.
- Events cancelled creating an opportunity to complete the project.

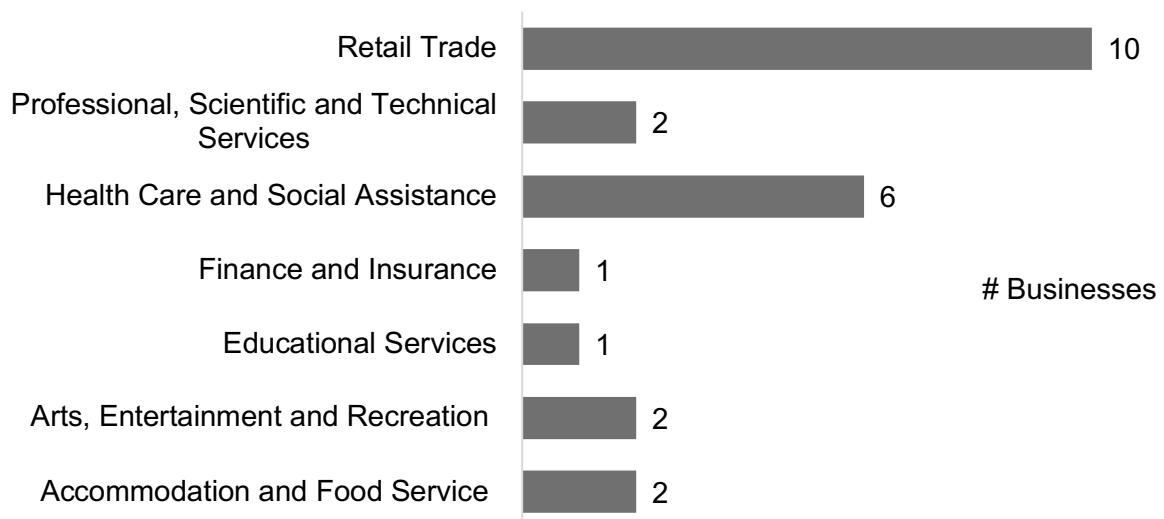
Why Later?

- Some business owners want to get going with opening. Others are waiting.
- Already an increase in business due to warm weather.
- September – better timeframe to consider to not impact the busy season.
- Concern about customers' perception of inconvenience with vehicular access being closed.
- Need to get some \$ in for the summer and think next June would be better than now.
- Even those businesses not directly impacted – there is a decrease in traffic in general to the downtown.
- Every customer counts right now.

2. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

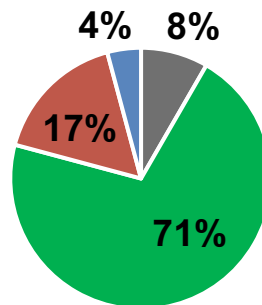
There are twenty-four businesses directly impacted by the project. It is important to recognize that there is a perceived and/or real negative impact on revenue during construction projects for all downtown businesses.

Impacted Businesses, by Industry Sector



Relaunch Status – Stage 1

■ 50% occ. ■ Allowed ■ Closed ■ Open (occ. limits)



Relaunch Status – Stage 1

	# businesses
50% occ.	2
Allowed	17
Closed	4
Open (occ. limits)	1

The majority of the businesses located in the project area are in Stage 1 of the Provincial relaunch strategy (71%). Since most of these businesses were not contacted by RDBA, it will be important to understand which businesses are planning on opening or are already open to support them during the project. It may be valuable to strategize how to best assist these businesses with communicating to their customers about the project details, parking options, and opening dates for business.

50% Occupancy (2)

Bistro Provence	Confirmed will be remaining closed until after project is complete due to business decisions. Supportive of project going forward.
Homeground Coffee	Hoping to have the project postponed as they are hoping to see an increased opportunity for economic activity over the summer months.

Allowed (17)

Agrifarm Health Centre Inc.
An Honest Room
Backbones Chiropractic and Sports Therapy
Diesel Punk Vape
Florence Fashions
French 50 Bakery
Langdon Strings
Netwisper (Vivid Computers)
Nikki's Best Esthetics
Okotoks Art Gallery
Okotoks Dental
Okotoks Museum
R. BRENT DRISCOLL, ACCOUNTANT
Rayomd James – Financial Planner
Robinson Bioproducts
Rumpled Quilt Skins
The Hair Studio

Closed

Centaur Massage
Healing Elements Acupuncture
MARNIE STANTON, Massage Therapist
Young Therapy

Open with occupant limitations

Brightpath Early Learning and Childcare

3. OPPORTUNITIES

Considering the impacted industry sectors and businesses the following opportunities may help to support businesses during the project:

1. Brainstorm solutions with Town subject matter experts and businesses on how to accommodate patios and parking. (Development Services)
2. River District Business Association discussed holding think tanks to help vulnerable businesses pivot their business models and collaborate with other businesses downtown to create opportunities for economic activity beyond their current earning potential. (Economic Development and RDBA)
3. Communication will be imperative for the businesses and the community to promote supporting a vibrant downtown during the duration of the project. (Communication and Economic Development)
4. Is there a shopping campaign specific to those businesses that are open that can be developed in collaboration with the RDBA, Chamber of Commerce, Okotoks Business Association, and informal stakeholders? (Economic Development team)
5. Reaching out to the businesses to best understand their plans to open, timing, and supports they may need. (Economic Development team)