



COUNCIL REPORT

Report No. PDS 052-2017

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Date: April 24, 2017
File No: 6520-20

To: Mayor and Council
From: Reuben Koole, Senior Planner
Subject: Historic Downtown Neighbourhood Plan – Stage 1 Background Research Report

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THAT Council receive the Historic Downtown Neighbourhood Plan Background Research Report, as attached to Report No. PDS 052-2017;
2. THAT Council direct staff to proceed with Stage 2 of the Historic Downtown Neighbourhood Plan, including engagement, as outlined in Report No. PDS 052-2017; and
3. THAT Council endorse the public engagement strategy, as outlined in Report No. PDS 052-2017, pursuant to Section 475 of the *Local Government Act*.

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

Staff have prepared a Historic Downtown Neighbourhood Plan (HDNP) Background Research Report (Attachment A). This report is being brought to Council at the conclusion of Stage 1 in the HDNP's planning process and to formally request authorization to proceed with Stage 2.

BACKGROUND

The Historic Downtown Neighbourhood Plan is one of the many projects initiated under the Plan 200K initiative to implement the City's Official Community Plan (OCP).

Abbotsford's OCP, adopted in June 2016, provides a vision and a framework for how Abbotsford will grow to a population of 200,000. One of the most important aspects of the new OCP is to create neighbourhood plans for specific areas of the city that help manage and direct growth through a neighbourhood-focused planning process. These areas of Abbotsford will generally see the most development and change in the future.

One of these areas – Historic Downtown – is envisioned as a neighbourhood which will be “as complete and mixed use as possible, while also having its own distinct character and sense of place”. The OCP outlines six policies specific to the Historic Downtown. The completion of a HDNP will help achieve a significant part of the OCP's vision.

DISCUSSION

The Historic Downtown Neighbourhood Plan is being completed over a four stage planning process, which includes: Background Research, Concept, Draft Plan, and Final Plan.



Stage 1 will conclude with Council receiving the Background Research Report. Stage 2 will look at various land use options and include the preparation of a preferred concept plan. Stage 3 will include a technical analysis of infrastructure requirements and market viability for the development of the preferred concept. Stage 3 will conclude with a draft plan presented to Council. Stage 4 will focus on refining the draft plan into a final version and having it adopted as a bylaw by Council.

Stage 1 - Background Research

The Background Research Report discusses the current state of the Historic Downtown and identifies key elements in successful historic centres that can help with creating land use concepts in Stage 2. The report is organized into the following sections:

Introduction:	Introduction of the planning context of the Historic Downtown
A Historic Neighbourhood:	Overview of neighbourhood history, the Abbotsford Downtown Business Association, and neighbourhood-specific policies
Historic Downtown Today:	Analysis of existing demographic and physical conditions within Historic Downtown
Elements of Vibrant Historic Downtowns:	Discussion of what makes historic downtowns unique and dynamic
Public Engagement Strategy:	Summary of engagement activities through the four stages
Next Steps:	Overview of upcoming work leading from Stage 1

Commercial Market Study

GP Rollo and Associates (GPRA) completed a joint Commercial Market Study for the Historic Downtown and City Centre Neighbourhood Plans. The report identifies trends and factors that govern the market for commercial space in the two neighbourhoods. The analysis considered existing retail, office and tourist accommodation inventories, and provides demand projections for future floor space requirements to support future population growth.

The analysis found that although Historic Downtown achieves relatively low market capture in much of Abbotsford, it has a unique identity, strong branding, and appealing venues that bring a unique and dedicated set of tenants and customers to the neighbourhood. Historic Downtown has a total of 595,600ft² of retail floor space, relatively balanced between convenience,

comparison, and restaurant and entertainment categories. Although 17% of the floor space is vacant, this is disproportionately caused by large individual units in the McCallum Centre (corner of McCallum and McDougall Avenues) and Abbotsford Shopping Centre (corner of Essendene and Pauline Avenues).

Historic Downtown has 284,500ft² of office, which is only 18% of the City's total office space. However, when compared to the total amount of commercial floor space in the Historic Downtown specifically, office represents 32% of the total 880,100ft² floor space. Office tenants generally tend to be smaller, locally owned businesses such as medical offices and accounting or design firms.

By 2040, there will be demand for an additional 165,600ft² of retail space, and up to approximately 97,600ft² of office space. Finally, one new hotel with approximately 100 rooms will be warranted in Historic Downtown by 2025.

Community Engagement

The Stage 1 report contains an engagement strategy to guide public consultation throughout the project. Section 475 of the *Local Government Act* requires Council to consider consultation with certain groups such as First Nations, School Districts, Regional Districts, neighbouring municipalities and other government agencies. The strategy also considers other groups and opportunities relevant to the HDNP project.

Stage 1 engagement was primarily completed under the Plan200K umbrella, which launched a new website with opportunities for the public to subscribe to a mailing list and to view project information. Staff also held monthly meetings with self-selected members of the Abbotsford Downtown Business Association (ADBA), and attended an ADBA Board meeting in April 2017 to present and discuss early research findings and Stage 2 engagement.

Stage 2 engagement will be more in-depth using the following methods:

Mail-out: A postcard will be mailed out to property owners/occupiers and business owners within the study area to inform them of the process, invite them to read the background research report, and participate in Stage 2 engagement activities.

Conversation Boards: These will be static, interactive boards located in numerous business locations around Historic Downtown for a two-week period, inviting participants to weigh in on options for future land use and design options for the neighbourhood. A visitor passport highlighting participating businesses will be included to encourage people to visit all stops. A random draw for a prize will be held at the end of the two weeks for completed entries. The conversation boards will also be set up at two Saturday Farmers' Markets to capture additional responses.

Design Charrette: This is a focused event to test design ideas and create the preliminary preferred concept with stakeholders. The one-day design workshop will engage ADBA stakeholders, businesses who hosted Conversation Boards, City and consultant staff, and members of Council. All of the input gathered through the Conversation Board activity will be used at the workshop to inform the creation of the preferred concept.

Our Downtown, Our History, Our Stories: This will be a short video that captures stories, perspectives, and ideas about the Historic Downtown from different perspectives. It will be filmed at various events throughout Stage 1 engagement, and will be used to promote the neighbourhood plan process.

Speaker event: A speaker event will be held on June 15, 2017, at The Reach Gallery Museum featuring two city-building experts who will present their ideas on how to create complete neighbourhoods in Abbotsford.

City Committees: A joint City Committee workshop will be held in coordination with other Plan 200K projects to give committee members an opportunity to provide feedback on the projects in which they are most interested.

Letter to Agencies: A letter will be sent with background and contact information to organizations and governmental agencies, ensuring they are informed about the project and given an opportunity to provide feedback.

Social media & website: The City's social media accounts and Plan 200K website will be updated to inform the public about project updates and engagement opportunities.

Advertising: Advertising will be focused on social and print media (i.e. newspaper).

FINANCIAL PLAN IMPLICATION

The Historic Downtown Neighbourhood Plan project has a budget of \$220,000, as approved in the 2017-2021 Financial Plan. \$35,290.68 has been spent on the project to date.



Reviewed and approved by the:
Chief Financial Officer

IMPACTS ON COUNCIL POLICIES, STRATEGIC PLAN AND/OR COUNCIL DIRECTION

The Historic Downtown Neighbourhood Plan will help achieve and implement the vision set out in Council's Strategic Plan and Official Community Plan.

SUBSTANTIATION OF RECOMMENDATION

The City adopted a new Official Community Plan in 2016 that expressed a vision for Abbotsford at 200,000 residents including a distinct and complete Historic Downtown neighbourhood. A Neighbourhood Plan is being developed through a four stage process to ensure future growth helps achieve this vision. The Background Research Report is the conclusion of Stage 1 and presents a benchmark for existing conditions in Historic Downtown. This benchmark will inform the public engagement and development of a preliminary preferred concept in Stage 2.



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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment "A": Historic Downtown Neighbourhood Plan Background Research Report