

Staff Report

Report To: Owen Sound Downtown Improvement Area Board
Report From: Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services
Meeting Date: March 10, 2021
Report Code: CS-21-020
Subject: River District Action Plan, Branding Strategy and Next Steps and Agreement Review

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CS-21-020 respecting the River District Action Plan, the Owen Sound Downtown Improvement Area Board of Management (OSDIA Board):

1. Approves the River District Action Plan;
2. Directs staff to bring forward a report at a future OSDIA Board meeting with a plan to implement the year one actions;
3. Directs staff to develop a Request for Proposals for website design with a budget with an upset limit of \$40,000 from the reserve set aside in the 2021 approved budget;
4. Approves a working group to include the Chair and Vice Chair to meet with City staff on a review of the 2019 Agreement with changes to come back to the OSDIA Board; and
5. Approves holding an OSDIA Board meeting in April of 2021 that is not part of the approved meeting schedule with notice and agenda being provided in accordance with the City's Procedural By-law.

Highlights:

- The Owen Sound Downtown Improvement Area Board and the City had partnered on a Downtown Action Plan, including a re-branding for the downtown.

- The plan was developed with public and stakeholder input as well as with the guidance of the Board.
- As an initial step, the Board is asked to allocate \$40,000 of the reserve to the creation and development of a new website.
- A more detailed report on implementation will come forward following approval of the plan.
- A working group of the Chair and Vice Chair is recommended to review the current agreement and report back to the Board.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

1.4 Continue to promote the Downtown

3.1 Promote Owen Sound as Where You Want to Live

Background:

At its meeting on August 15, 2019, the Board gave direction to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to engage a consultant to undertake a Downtown Marketing Action Plan and Branding for the OSDIA. At its meeting on November 13, 2019, the Board awarded the RFP to BC Hughes Inc., the highest scoring proponent at a cost of \$31,764 (including HST).

This is a joint initiative with both the City and DIA contributing half the cost of the project.

The **project goal** was to:

1. Create a refined downtown identity (brand) that captures the story and rallies people together; and
2. Develop a marketing plan with clear actions and objectives to tell that story.

Public Input

Stakeholder engagement was completed in June and July of 2020 in a variety of ways including a community and resident survey, OSDIA membership survey, and one-on-one interviews. Overall, the input demonstrated challenges offset by many positive factors.

Site visits were completed by BC Hughes from February to September 2020.

On November 25, 2020, BC Hughes presented the strategies and actions for success in four key areas:

- Branding. The branding proposes an impactful and bold identity. It has been recommended that downtown be rebranded as the “River District”.
- River District Management
- River District Experience Development
- River District Promotion

The River District Action Plan (Attachment 1) has four strategies. For each of the areas, there is a clear objective and a number of actions for success. The tasks are actionable, achievable, and measurable.

The last section of the River District Action Plan is devoted to moving forward and identifies 13 key actions to create momentum, rebrand the downtown, and start to tell the story.

Analysis:

The plan is designed as an action-oriented tool that has a new bold brand identity and three other strategic objectives in the area of Management, Experience Development, and Promotion. When implemented, they will achieve the goal and ensure that the downtown captures its potential and positions the City, and in particular the downtown, for vitality and economic stability.

Staff recommend that the DIA and the City approve the plan and request staff develop a plan toward implementation. Staff have already initiated some of the year one actions.

The plan has an ambitious timeline with three years to achieve the objectives and implement the actions. It is important to note that the key actions and the other objectives and actions will require resources, both dollars and City staff time and consultants with support and direction from the Board as well as City Council. \$40,000 has been set aside in the approved 2021 DIA budget process to support the implementation of the Plan.

Staff Support and Website Development

Staff will come back to the Board with a detailed plan on implementing the year one actions that are identified in the River District Action Plan.

When \$40,000 was set aside in the 2021 budget, City staff had indicated that we would come back with a detailed proposal on how the funds would be spent toward supporting the implementation of the plan.

Staff recommend that the \$40,000 be allocated to the development of a new website as identified under the River District Promotion Strategy.

There are several City staff who support the work of the DIA in the area of marketing, events, beautification, maintenance, waste management and snow removal, sidewalk repair, and financial services.

If the plan is to be successful, additional staff resources are required. A plan for additional staff resources will be presented in a future report to the Board and may reflect a partnership with the City.

The Manager of Community Development will continue to play a key role along with the Director of Community Services, and with staff from Public Works, Parks, Events, IT, Clerks, Parking Enforcement, and Finance to support the partnership under the operating agreement as well as to implement the direction of the River District Plan.

Of note, through the 2021 City budget process, two new staff positions focusing on sidewalk repair and maintenance were created. This support will be critical in addressing the disconnect between beautification and maintenance that was identified in the River District Action Plan. These two positions are being funded by the City.

Review of 2019 Agreement

The 2019 Agreement between the City and OSDIA was a new beginning for the working relationship between the parties founded on a shared goal of support, improvement, beautification, maintenance, and marketing and promotion (including events) for the downtown.

The Agreement (Attachment 2) was established as a 5-year agreement and contemplated that the City and OSDIA review the contents of the Agreement on an annual basis to ensure that the Agreement continues to reflect the needs of both parties. Amendments are to be made by mutual agreement of both parties.

Staff are recommending that a working group including City staff and the OSDIA Chair and Vice Chair review the agreement with any changes coming back to the Board and City Council for approval.

Financial Implications:

\$40,000 allocated in the 2021 budget to be allocated to developing a website.

Other financial and human resources will be identified in the more detailed report on implementing the River District Action Plan.

Communication Strategy:

Communication as described in the River District Action Plan.

Consultation:

Director of Corporate Services

City Manager

Manager of Community Development and Marketing

Attachments:

1. River District Action Plan
2. 2019 City & OSDIA Agreement

Recommended by:

Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services, pcoulter@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 ext. 1252.