

## Staff Report

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**Report To:** City Council

**Report From:** Brent Fisher, Manager of Community & Business Development  
Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services

**Meeting Date:** May 9, 2022

**Report Code:** CS-22-051

**Subject:** RTO7 Grant Opportunity

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### Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CS-22-051 respecting an RTO7 grant intake, City Council:

1. Directs staff to apply to the RTO7 Tourism Relief Fund to recuperate the 2021 and 2022 costs relating to the River District Community Development Coordinator position; and
2. Approves the extension of the River District Community Development Coordinator position for an additional 12 months through to 2023, subject to receipt of the grant.

### Highlights:

- The River District Board of Management has approved the River District Action Plan that sets out a plan for strategies and actions in four key areas, including re-branding.
- The Plan has strategies and actions that set out an ambitious timeline for implementation that requires human and financial resources.
- The recently announced RTO7grant intake provides an opportunity to extend the current River District Community Development Coordinator position an additional twelve months through 2023.

## **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

### Safe City

Objective: Supporting inclusivity, diversity and accessibility in our community and recognizing the importance of a safe and secure community.

### Prosperous City

Objective: Working towards a positive business environment and supporting initiatives that increase our competitive economic advantages.

KR1 Reduce commercial vacancy in the River District by 10%.

### Collaborative City

Objective: Maintaining and improving relationships through engagement.

## **River District Action Plan:**

Strategic Objective: Create an impactful and bold identity.

Strategic Objective: Create a safe and clean space.

Strategic Objective: Create a visually appealing River District.

Strategic Objective: Create an engaging space.

Strategic Objective: Attract people to the River District.

## **Previous Report/Authority:**

None.

## **Background:**

In 2021, the City and Owen Sound River District Board of Management collaborated on and approved the River District Action Plan presented by BC Hughes. The plan offers strategies and actions for success in four key areas:

- River District Branding;
- River District Management;
- River District Experience Development; and
- River District Promotion.

There is a clear objective and many actions to succeed in each area. The tasks are actionable, achievable, and measurable. The last section of the River District Action Plan is devoted to moving forward and identifies thirteen key actions to create momentum, rebrand the downtown, and start to tell the story.

The River District Action Plan has an ambitious timeline of three years to achieve the objectives and implement the actions.

In 2021, the Board and Council approved jointly funding an 18-month contract position (Community Development Coordinator) to lead the plan's implementation (Resolutions: SDIA-210414-002 and R-210503-005).

Implementing the actions as set out in the Plan requires resources, both dollars and staff time, with support and direction from the Board and City Council. Significant progress has been made on initiatives to date, including:

- A new, user-friendly website;
- Re-branding of Social Media Channels;
- Digital media content creation plan;
- New banners throughout the River District;
- Re-imagining events with a focus on year-round promotion and activation; and
- Creation and distribution of a River District-focused business-to-business newsletter.

The River District Action Plan was recently the recipient of the Economic Developers Council of Ontario Award of Excellence in the Planning and Strategic Development category.

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of a grant opportunity and to seek Council approval to proceed with an application to the 2022/2023 Tourism Relief Fund application through Regional Tourism Organization 7 (RTO7).

## **Analysis:**

FedDev has recently announced that applications are open for the Tourism Relief Fund. RTO7 administers the funding for Owen Sound & Area. The City of Owen Sound is an eligible applicant. The grant was released on April 12, with a submission deadline of May 15, 2022.

Given the short timeline and Council meeting schedules, staff have submitted an application for the Tourism Relief Fund under the “External or New Labour Cost to execute the project” stream. Grant funds available in this stream are retroactive to April 10, 2021. If Council does not support the application, the submission can be withdrawn.

The proposed grant application is to seek retroactive funding (April 10, 2021) for staff costs to implement the River District District Action Plan. If the City is successful in the application to receive retroactive funding, the monies would be used to fund the continuation of the Community Development Coordinator role to support the River District Action Plan implementation. Given that the River District Board has also financially supported this position, the board's agreement will be requested in a separate report on May 11, 2022, to that Board as well. The funds through the grant would recuperate funds spent on this position dating back to 2021. The idea is that the recovered funds would be directed through the agreement of Council and the River District Board to extend the current 18-month contract to the end of 2023.

For the City and River District Board of Management to continue the successful and effective implementation of the River District Action Plan, the continuation of funding for this staff position is a priority. The position would continue to:

- Work collaboratively with City departments and the Board of Management to plan, implement, and administer strategic objectives of the River District Action Plan.
- Work closely with the City’s Activation and Events Coordinator and Tourism Marketing Coordinator to plan and execute a variety of River District events, cultural programming, and creative experiences.
- Prepare and publish content and work with contracted content creators for the River District and Community & Business Development website and social media platforms.
- Seek out and apply for grants that support River District and City Strategic initiatives in the area of Community & Business Development.
- Provide general assistance in the area of Community & Business Development.

The City's application for Tourism Relief Funding will be \$88,563.64 to reflect the staff wages retroactively from April 2021 to December 31, 2022.

### **Financial Implications:**

If the City is successful in the grant, the funds will recuperate costs expended to date, and these funds will be directed to extend the current contract position to the end of 2023. The funds currently allocated to the staff position in the River District Budget are funded from reserves and would not decrease the levy in 2023. The City and Board will need to consider this position's funding if it is extended beyond 2023.

In 2021 and 2022, the funds for this position are budgeted from a City reserve established in 2020 from funds allocated to cancelled events due to the pandemic (\$42,500) and the RDBM half coming from the RDBM reserve.

If the grant application is successful, there is no impact on the approved City budget or any additional taxation to support the contract position to the end of 2023.

### **Communication Strategy:**

The City and River District Board of Management will continue to communicate with members, stakeholders, and the public in implementing the Plan.

### **Consultation:**

The Board Chair and Vice-Chair were contacted regarding this grant opportunity.

The River District Board will consider a separate report on May 11, 2022.

### **Attachments:**

None.

### **Recommended by:**

Brent Fisher, Manager of Community and Business Development  
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, at [pcoulter@owensound.ca](mailto:pcoulter@owensound.ca) or 519 376 4440 ext. 1252.