



## CITY OF VANCOUVER

### ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: September 6, 2005  
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Meeting Date: September 20, 2005

TO: Vancouver City Council

FROM: Director of Current Planning

SUBJECT: Council Approval for a Grant for the *Strathcona Open Windows Design Project*

#### RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council approve a grant to the Strathcona Business Improvement Association, in the amount of \$20,000. The grant will be paid under the Downtown Eastside Revitalization Program funds with the expectation that the \$20,000 will be reimbursed to the City from Western Economic Diversification, as allocated under the Contribution Agreement between Western Economic Diversification and the City of Vancouver, dated April 7, 2005.

#### GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The General Managers of Community Services and Corporate Services/Finance RECOMMEND approval of the foregoing.

#### CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager RECOMMENDS approval of the foregoing.

#### COUNCIL POLICY

***On July 28, 1998, Council confirmed principles to provide general guidance to actions and planning in the Downtown Eastside, Chinatown, Gastown and Strathcona, which include encouraging legitimate commercial activity, improving conditions at street level,***

***improving conditions in SROs, and helping community people find allies and seek a common future.***

***In February 2005, Council approved the renewal of the Vancouver Agreement, confirming the City's cooperation with the Provincial and Federal governments in a five year urban development initiative.***

***On June 24, 2000 Council adopted the following principles to guide the development of an Economic Revitalization Strategy for the Downtown Eastside:***

- ***Build from within and involve those who already live and work in the area;***
- ***Preserve and enhance the sense of community felt by residents of the Downtown Eastside and surrounding communities;***
- ***Listen to those most affected;***
- ***Improve the livability and safety of the Downtown Eastside for everyone; and***
- ***Develop and implement a well understood plan that delivers results.***

***Approval of grant recommendation requires eight affirmative votes.***

## **PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

This report seeks Council approval of a \$20,000 grant for the *Strathcona Open Windows Design Project*.

In January 2004, Council received the Vancouver Agreement's draft Economic Revitalization Plan for information and instructed staff to report back on the outcome of the public review of the draft Plan, with recommendations on how this Plan can be implemented in cooperation with business, community and Vancouver Agreement partners. Staff will be reporting back to Council on the public review of the Plan in the coming months and have begun to identify community initiatives which will support the Plan's overall objective of revitalizing the Downtown Eastside economy.

The Economic Revitalization Plan supports community priorities and initiatives aimed at improving local business activities and increasing employment opportunities for inner-city residents. Specifically, the Plan identifies three interlinked objectives:

- ***Demand:*** Increase the demand for products and services in the DTES;
- ***Supply:*** Strengthen the capacity of local suppliers to meet demand; and
- ***Employment:*** Increase local labour market participation rates.

In fall of 2004, the Vancouver Agreement's Economic Revitalization Task Team, together with various community partners, identified a series of eight proposed projects which will help implement the strategies, actions and priorities outlined in the Plan. Western Economic Diversification (WED) and the City of Vancouver signed a Contribution Agreement in April of this year in which WED agreed to provide the City funding for these eight identified projects.

The *Strathcona Open Windows Design Project*, which the Strathcona Business Improvement Association (SBIA) is seeking a \$20,000 grant to implement, is one of the eight identified projects. Council approval is required to provide the Strathcona Business Improvement Association with the \$20,000 grant needed to implement the project.

## DISCUSSION

Improving the public realm and infrastructure has been identified as a key strategy to discourage drug-related activity and crime. This, in turn, increases the sense of community safety which can lead to an increase in pedestrian activity and support for local products and services.

Currently in Strathcona, along the 300 and 400 block of Powell Street near the Oppenheimer Park area, there are a number of barred or boarded-up windows, storefronts and building facades that give the impression that the area is unsafe and neglected and which has negatively impacted existing businesses and has made it difficult to attract new businesses and customers to the area. This section of Powell Street is the historic "Japantown" and has been serving the commercial needs of the community for many years.

This project - the *Strathcona Open Windows Design Project* - will explore alternative ways to provide security and enhance the appearance of individual storefronts, as well as generate possible options for overall streetscape improvements. The project deliverables include:

- Site specific conceptual design ideas generated through an inclusive community-based design competition for storefront improvements which can be implemented by local businesses, the SBIA, non-profit organizations and other agencies and service providers; and
- General design recommendations to improve the public realm/streetscape and security.

The Strathcona Business Improvement Association will be providing overall project management and coordination. The SBIA intends to hire a consultant to develop and implement a design process that will:

- facilitate a community dialogue among local artists, business owners, local residents and locally based planning and design professionals about issues related to public realm treatments, street safety and revitalization of neighbourhood commercial activities; and
- generate improvement ideas, including artistic interventions, to upgrade the look and feel of the area, particularly with respect to storefronts along 300 and 400 Powell Street, and which will lead to an "open windows" environment that is more welcome and positive, rather than defensive, fearful and closed to the public.

The consultant for the project will also be working in partnership with a local area resident and artist who will assist with all aspects of conducting the design competition process.

There are generally four phases of this project:

- Inventory and analysis  
*The consultant will take inventory of the street conditions and choose sites for the design competition during this stage of the project.*
- Promotion and outreach  
*The consultant and the SBIA will outreach to local business resources and approach potential project sponsors.*
- Design charette

*This is when open calls to artists working in DTES will be delivered and store owners, design professionals, artists and local residents will be brainstorming on artistic interventions.*

- Community workshop and selection of the winning design concepts  
*The community and artists will work together to further develop design concepts.*

Staff are currently exploring alternate funding sources for the implementation of the design concepts produced by this project. Funding for the fabrication and installation of designs for storefronts owned by non-profits, as well as any public realm design improvements, will first be pursued through Western Economic Diversification. As a second option, funding may also be found in the Downtown Eastside 2006-2008 Capital Funds which have already been approved by Council. The SBIA will be negotiating cost-sharing arrangements for the privately owned storefronts between potential private funders and WED or the City. It is intended that any fabrication and installation of the winning design concepts should benefit locally based artisans and businesses but that no additional City funding will be sought.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

While this grant, as well as the other seven projects, will be paid for under the Downtown Eastside Revitalization Program funds, the City will be reimbursed for all expenses by Western Economic Diversification, as per the Contribution Agreement between Western Economic Diversification and the City of Vancouver, dated April 7, 2005. The City's role is to administer and manage the contracts for each project and will seek reimbursement from WED for funds dispensed midway through the projects and at completion. Therefore, while there will be no net impact to City budgets, under the Vancouver Charter Council approval is required to provide the Strathcona Business Improvement Association with the \$20,000 grant to implement the project.

It should also be noted that there will be no additional financial implications for the fabrication and installation of the storefront improvements. City staff will seek funding from Western Economic Diversification or the already approved Downtown Eastside 2006-2008 Capital Budget for the implementation of the design concepts produced by this project.

## **CONCLUSION**

Staff recommend Council approval to dispense a grant to the Strathcona Business Improvement Association, in the amount of \$20,000, as allocated under the Contribution Agreement between Western Economic Diversification and the City of Vancouver. The "Strathcona Open Windows Design Project" is consistent with Council Policy and the objectives outlined under the Vancouver Agreement's Economic Revitalization Plan which aim to improve local business activities and increase employment opportunities for area residents.

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