



BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION BREAKFAST

Event Summary

January 28, 2020

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1.0 SUMMARY OF EVENT

The BIA Breakfast was held in the Alma Van Dusen Room at the Vancouver Public Library on January 28th, 2020 from 8:00 am to 10:00 am. The BIA Breakfast gave an opportunity to representatives of the four DTES Business Improvement Associations (BIAs) – Gastown, Hastings Crossing, Chinatown, Strathcona - to talk about the Plan’s impact on the local economy in the last five years since the Plan implementation. Staff provided an update on the implementation, facilitated table discussions to identify the gaps in the Plan that may be impacting the economic revitalization of the neighborhood, and discussed potential strategic priorities moving forward (see Appendix 1).

The event included display boards outlining the progress of the plan implementation in areas such as housing, community well-being, the local economy, transportation, parks, heritage, arts & culture, the environment, etc. The five-year implementation plan and other relevant documents were sent out to the BIAs prior to the event in order to prepare the participants for the discussions. In collaboration with the Executive Directors of the four BIAs, staff developed a survey to help BIAs identify where they align with the Plan’s actions relevant to the local economy and which areas they would like the City to focus on in the next five years. The results of the survey were used to frame the group discussions.

Staff delivered a presentation that included an introduction to the Plan, the conditions before the Plan implementation, the achievements to date and examples of initiatives being implemented in partnerships with BIAs and other groups. Staff also shared the results of the survey and introduced the potential strategic directions (see Appendix 2). There were facilitated group discussions following the presentation and then each group reported back on their key discussion outcomes. The table discussions were recorded by note takers and the plenary discussion was recorded using a graphic recorder (Figure 1 – Graphic Recording)

Approximately 17 participants (property owners, business owners, non-profit organizations) attended the event representing each of the DTES BIAs. The executive directors or representatives introduced their members and shared some of their current initiatives and priorities.



Figure 1. Challenges and priorities identified by Downtown Eastside BIAs (graphic recording by Tanya Fink)

2.0 KEY OUTCOMES

Shared challenges and themes emerged from the table discussions, formulating a common thread for the DTES local economy. Here is a summary of the key outcomes:

Safety and security

- Address safety and high security costs for businesses in the DTES.
- Expand innovative pilots such as the 'community stewardship' to the rest of the DTES.
- Activation of vacant spaces can be one of the solutions to safety and security issues.
- Advocate for support from other levels of government.
- Support skills training or income opportunities for local residents.

Partnership opportunities

- Share a universal waste management system, a shuttle system, and community stewardship programs amongst the four BIAs.
- BIAs can meet, share and learn from their best practices.
- Work with the Vancouver Economic Commission (VEC) and CoV to fill vacant spaces.
- Curation of vacant spaces (e.g. SBIA-community serving retail project).
- Work with Community Impact Real Estate Society (CIRES) to secure affordable spaces for businesses, social enterprises and non-profits.
- Expand wayfinding throughout the DTES.
-

Transit and parking

- Improve engagement with Translink to improve transit in the neighbourhood.
- Expand parking in the neighbourhood to ease parking challenges.
- Explore more parking requirements for new buildings in areas such as Railtown, an area with many jobs but almost no parking or transit access.

Affordability

- Address employee retention by introducing incentives for businesses to train employees and provide other needed supports.
- Ease tax burdens for business in DEOD who hire locally.
- Encourage business retention by easing tax burdens on tenants
- Address the need of affordable leases for small businesses
- Advocate with the Province for a change in the BC Assessment practices

Policy and regulations

- Ease restrictive policies for public realm improvements, building upgrades, etc.
- Develop a funding strategy to incentivize businesses and property owners
- Address the 'change of use' challenges causing long waits to fill vacant spaces and triggering building code changes.
- Re-examine the DEOD housing policy and the retail continuity policy

3.0 GROUP DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Key Engagement Survey

The BIA Breakfast was organized in collaboration with the BIAs. Staff engaged in conversations with the Executive Directors and developed a survey to identify where the BIAs align with the DTES Plan and the strategic priorities moving forward. The Executive Directors were invited to complete the survey divided in two parts:

- a) Chose the top five actions in the Local Economy chapter that connect with the BIA mandates. The BIAs selected the following actions:

| Actions | Votes |
|--|-------|
| Use City-owned properties, affordable leases, and revitalization tax supports to provide affordable goods and services in the area | 3 |
| Work with developers to allocate affordable space for important community assets and social enterprises (especially in Community-based Development Area). | 2 |
| Promote a social procurement policy for the DTES in partnership with key stakeholders. | 2 |
| Ensure the regulatory environment and city infrastructure maximises opportunities for industrial lands. | 2 |
| Facilitate social and green enterprise practices, innovative business methods to achieve Social Impact objectives and Greenest City Action Plan objectives | 1 |

- b) Share the strategic directions or actions for the local economy that are missing, including the areas of interest they would like to discuss at the event. The BIAs shared the following potential strategic directions:

The image displays seven strategic directions, each with a representative image above a blue text box:

- Vacant spaces:** Image of a vacant storefront.
- Lease rates & property taxes:** Image of a multi-story residential building.
- Legacy business:** Image of people at a market stall.
- Policy & regulations:** Image of a document with a large blue arrow graphic.
- DTES Area Business Review:** Image of a large, ornate building.
- Safety & security:** Image of two people wearing winter gear.
- Transit:** Image of a street scene with a bus and cars.

The results of the survey helped frame the table discussions. Each table was asked to answer and discuss the three questions below, and report their findings to the entire group:

1. What are the 3 most important strategic directions?
2. What are the strategic projects and funding priorities you would like the City to consider in the next 5 years?
3. Do you see any partnership opportunities (e.g. BIA-to-BIA or BIA-City) for the implementation of these strategic projects?

Based on the table discussions, the top strategic directions for the BIAs overall were:

- Safety and security (16 votes)
- Lease rates & property taxes (9 votes)
- Vacant spaces (8 votes)
- Policy & regulations (8 votes)

3.2 Table discussions

This section summarizes the main themes and comments shared at each of the table discussions.

Table 1

Staff: Dear Bhokanandh (facilitator) and Paul Siggers (note taker)

Participants: Theo Lam (Strathcona); David Walker (Chinatown); Adam Hayasi (Hastings Crossing); Emma Carscadden (Strathcona); Henning Knoetzele (Gastown)

Top strategic directions:

- a. Safety & Security (6)
- b. Vacant space / policy regulations (3)
- c. Transit / Lease rates / Property taxes/ Partnerships (1) - noted that this is a multi-government issue
- d. Importance of engaging with residents (new direction)
- e. Partnerships with residents & community groups (new direction)

Main themes:

- *Policy and regulations*
 - It is good that the strategic directions are less prescriptive than sixteen actions in original plan;
 - Want to see a less prescriptive plan moving forward, just strategic “buckets”
 - Taxes are killing our businesses
 - Façade program not taken up because of how onerous it was (reporting, requirements)
 - Awnings in disrepair, nobody wants to rent a space
- *Downtown Eastside/Oppenheimer District (DEOD) policy*
 - No housing sales in Strathcona BIA in DEOD in five years.

- The DEOD is frozen in terms of development with high vacancy rates
- There's a need to talk about how to activate, incentivize, and rethink the DEOD policy
- The DTES team needs to hear that the DEOD policy is not working for businesses
- The DTES team needs to see some of the more established business and that are not part of the survival economy
- There is a concern about the concentration of social challenges and services in the DEOD
- BIAs are making a difference through procurement because businesses are always being asked about creating job opportunities (e.g. hiring local residents for security support). This is a way to address multiple issues at once
 - Hope that Van Plan can help redistribute services more
- *Transportation*
 - Gastown's experience of working with City somewhat incoherent
- *Safety / security*
 - It is getting worse, but it feels like a problem beyond the city and its planning methods
 - There's not much that can be done without support from other levels of government
 - This has impacts in other areas such as vacant space, legacy businesses, etc.
- *Other*
 - Ranking the strategic directions reduces complex causal relationships between priorities
 - The City needs to treat the strategic directions as a "complex whole", prioritization doesn't work, for example safety and security is at the top of the list, but vacant spaces, legacy businesses could improve it
 - It is important to rethink how we approach this complex challenge
 - Sense that traditional planning is not working
 - How do you prioritize interlinked issues?

Table 2

Staff: Peter Vaisboard (facilitator) and Wesley Joe (note taker)

Participants: Chris Chan (Chinatown); Anu Kainth (Strathcona); Peeroj Thakre (Gastown); Steve Johnson (Hastings Crossing)

Top strategic directions:

1. Lease Rate & property taxes (3)
2. Policy & Regulation (3)
3. Safety & Security (3)

Main themes:

- *Strategic Projects*
 - We need a plan to support businesses when there are potential lease increases

- Find ways to make leases to be more affordable
 - Review BC Assessment practice of valuing properties at 'best use' and not actual use.
 - Vancouver needs to be a more affordable place to retain and hire employees
 - Explore how to lower taxes for businesses in the DEOD area to reduce business's costs in order to support hiring more inclusively and locally.
 - Improve the public realm.
 - Vibrancy will bring more people into the area.
 - Consider beyond patio spaces and look at activating laneways
 - Review retail continuity policy.
 - Consider allowing other uses like social services, office, even for a time limited period.
 - Consider allowing retail use floor area to be less than currently required (of 50%)
 - Help businesses to train employees by offering reduced leases to business owners. This will help with hiring and to support for example immigrant workers that don't have time to train, in order to learn English, provide tax exemptions
- *Partnerships*
 - Maximize budget with the 4 BIAs working together to retain and attract new businesses.
 - Add 'Public Realm' as an strategic direction
 - VEC and City to work together to help with vacant spaces
 - CIREs can provide affordable spaces
 - Hastings Crossing BIA - all four BIA to meet together to share concerns and to learn best practices about the streets in their area
 - Security - join together to reduce cost by using one company.
 - Improve services to tourism, i.e. shuttle service for tourists among the 4 BIAs
 - Combine services to reduce costs
 - Partner with City to address vacant spaces
 - Partner with senior government as social issues are beyond the capacity of the City and BIAs.
- *Local serving*
 - Answer the question: who is considered local and who should be served? Consider other groups like non-profits and social services.
- *Affordability*
 - Property values are increasing too high and affecting the viability of businesses.
- *Policy and regulations*
 - Need to review policy to facilitate ease of opening a business and getting permits.
- *Safety and security*
 - Safety for tourists and especially for the workers during late hours needs to be improved.
 - Support for stewardship program to reduce or provide alternative to calling VPD.

Table 3

Staff: Colleen Hamilton (Facilitator) and Sean Martinez (note taker)

Participants: Jordan Eng (Chinatown); Tom Wakaruk (Gastown); Tammy Tsang (Strathcona); Jordan Stewart (Gastown).

Top strategic directions:

- a. Safety and security (3)
- b. Policy and regulations (2)
- c. Vacant spaces (2)
- d. Lease rates and property taxes (1)
- e. Transit (1)

Main themes:

- *Security*
 - Staff feels unsafe working in the neighbourhood
 - Security burden is too high on BIAs
 - Half of VCBA budget spent on security
 - Daytime thefts during operating hours
 - Night time break-ins
 - No parking for workers in the area
 - Upstream solutions
 - Need to promote more local procurement
 - Chinatown sandwiched between geographic pressures of Gastown and DTES
 - Some current policies keeping status quo
 - Better integration would be helpful
- *Transit and parking*
 - No parking for community employees
 - Issues for worker retention
 - No direct transit to the area (Strathcona), staff needs to walk
 - Ignorance, fear
 - Job growth stifled
 - Only one parking space per unit employing hundreds
 - Lack of transit was linked to safety
 - Action idea: more parking requirements for new buildings
 - Specific issues in Railtown, an area with many jobs but almost no parking or transit access.
- *Policy and regulations*
 - Vacant spaces & space availability
 - It takes 15 months for change of use
 - Causes vacant spaces
 - Change of use triggers building code changes
 - Regulation & policy need to be rethought
 - Vacant spaces are symptom
 - Very selective tenanting by property owners leaving spaces unused

- Delays in licensing & signage
 - Solutions needed to alleviate time and effort required in licensing and approvals
 - Develop funding strategy similar to a heritage plan
 - People “stuck” in the DTES due to lack of options
- DEOD policy
 - Need to critically examine if ‘funneling’ people and services into the DTES (especially DEOD) is evidence based (does it work in terms of recovery, social mobility?). Anecdotal stories of people ‘stuck’ in DTES – not because it’s their chosen community but because they have no other options
 - Social housing concentration very high – need more dispersing
 - Need for accountability does not exist due to concentration
- Issues with gentrification, need to balance with economic development of community
 - Seek balance (like in Gastown)
 - Do not close off neighbourhoods to economic development
 - Police no longer able to enforce any consequences for repeat offenders
 - Action idea: Remediation and rehabilitation such as skills training or income opportunities for those stealing for livelihoods
- *Partnership opportunities*
 - BIAs can curate vacant spaces
 - Program wherein tenant and BIA can split costs of code related upgrades with COV
 - BIA can possibly share /match cost to getting vacant spaces opened up

Table 4:

Staff: Tom Wanklin (facilitator) and Camilla Lade (note taker)

Participants: Stefanie Schulz (Gastown); Walley Wargolet (Gastown); Peter Joe (Strathcona); Johanna Vortel (Strathcona)

Top strategic directions:

- a. Legacy businesses (4)
- b. Safety & security (4)
- c. High taxes (4)
- d. Transit

Main Themes:

- *Partnership opportunities*
 - BIAs connect with Translink with COV help.
 - Strengthen social enterprise opportunities
 - Wayfinding improvements and continuation should be addressed with partnership with COV
 - Create a wayfinding corridor between Gastown and Chinatown to improve tourism

- Community safety or “patrol team” / “community steward” - safety patrols synergies between BIAs (exchange & share)
- Waste hauling for DTES - use one company
 - Targeted specifically for area
 - Targeted contract
 - Below market
- *Policy and regulations*
 - Current limitations on liquor licenses or patio licenses are impacting businesses negatively
 - Restrictive requirements for tree light installation, painting clean globes and replacing/fixing light poles 5 or more years old and other public realm issues
 - DEOD policy
 - No housing purchases occurring and no social housing being built either
 - Zero sales of property in the DEOD
 - Restriction on housing moratoriums have to stop
- *Successful DTES models*
 - A “Made in Strathcona” branding is possible
 - Activation of a Restaurant Café in Railtown “Giving back to the community”
 - A social enterprise example - a cleaning campaign by ‘United We Can’ who hired local residents
 - Gastown Patrol Team are respected, they act like social workers, providing support and guidance to residents. It’s tough to replace this amazing model.
- *Transit and parking*
 - More engagement with Translink.
 - Gastown would like to work with EasyPark on parking lot expansion.
 - Lack of long term parking to commuters, parking and transit to Railtown
- *Legacy business*
 - Gastown concerned with losing business and losing character to chains/corporations

Appendix I: Agenda

| Time | Activity |
|-------------------------|---|
| 8:00-8:15 (15 mins) | Participants arrive and mingle |
| 8:15-8:35 (20 mins) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome and land acknowledgement• Purpose of the meeting, agenda and expected outcomes• Ice-breaker: your name, your BIA, one BIA initiative you are most proud of.• Executive Directors/Representative introduces their members and BIA projects/priorities |
| 8:35-8:50 (15 mins) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff presentation• Update on Plan implementation |
| 8:50-9:50 (60 mins) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Groups discussions• Facilitators report back |
| 9:50-10:00 (10 mins) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Next steps - draft an event summary with key messages. Summary will be shared with participants and included in the Council report |

Appendix II: Survey

| Top action items identified by the BIA Executive Directors that connect with their BIA mandates | | |
|---|--|-------|
| # | LOCAL ECONOMY STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS & ACTION ITEMS | Count |
| 24 | Use City-owned properties, affordable leases, and revitalisation tax supports to provide affordable goods and services to the area. | 3 |
| 23 | Work with developers to allocate affordable space for important community assets and social enterprises (especially in Community-based Development Area). | 2 |
| 35 | Promote a social procurement policy for the DTES in partnership with key stakeholders. | 2 |
| 28 | Ensure the regulatory environment and city infrastructure maximises opportunities for industrial lands. | 2 |
| 25 | Facilitate social and green enterprise practices, innovative business methods to achieve Social Impact objectives and Greenest City Action Plan objectives. | 1 |
| 26 | Identify, secure and maximize economic/business assets that serve the low-income community (particularly in the Community-based Development Area). | 1 |
| 27 | Investigate regulatory changes and building code modifications to accelerate small conversions and renovations of business premises to allow business owners who wish to make physical improvements. | 1 |
| 29 | Support a permanent location for the DTES Street Market for safer survival vending, and opportunities for sale of locally-produced arts and crafts. | 1 |
| 31 | Work with the four business improvement associations to create a neighbourhood-wide business characteristics survey. | 1 |
| 33 | Establish new neighbourhood retail centres, e.g. focus areas of Paueru Gai/Powell Street, Hastings Crossing, Main Street and Hastings East, to serve local needs. | 1 |
| 30 | Undertake a study of vending alternatives and the establishment of neighbourhood market-selling facilities. | 0 |
| 32 | Work with the Vancouver Economic Commission and business improvement associations to attract suitable new enterprises with retail strategies. | 0 |
| 34 | Innovate and support opportunities for market-selling, small business and micro-enterprise opportunities for DTES residents to build the survival economy. | 0 |

Suggested strategic directions or action items for the Local Economy

Legacy businesses

- Programming/policy that supports local businesses/culturally-aligned tenants/businesses to have opportunities to be part of new developments/builds.
- Strategies that directly speak to and activate the arts community in support of economic revitalization.

Vacant spaces

- A clear call to activate vacant space, whether it is city-owned or privately owned (policy, programs and incentives that would encourage property owners to revitalize their space, even on a temporary basis.)

Lease rates & property tax

- Mitigation/ support strategies that support property owners/tenants face the rising cost of commercial tax and rents across Strathcona.

Safety & Security

- Support to pilot new safety and security models throughout the DTES.
- To encourage and promote business in the Business Improvement Area with a reduction of crime rates, cleaning of alleys and graffiti removal.

By-laws

- Examining city policies that may be a headwind for businesses ie. practice of fining businesses for illegal dumping outside of their control, graffiti fines.
- A formal review/audit of the DEOD zoning impacts on property and business.

DTES area business review

- A DTES Business Climate Study could be helpful to get a clearer picture of main concerns/challenges of businesses/social enterprises/orgs. A partnership between the BIAs and COV could make this happen.

Transit

- Transit strategy/advocacy support for Railtown.

Specific questions or areas of interest to discuss

- The Strathcona Business Improvement Association would like to engage the DTES Planning team on the impacts the DEOD zoning has had on property and business owners and further explore how we might work together to support thriving retail in this district.