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Date December 10, 2024 **Report No.** 2024-703

To Chair and Members
Committee of the Whole – Planning and Administration

From Michael Bradley
Chief Administrative Officer

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item
Item For Consideration

2.0 Topic Downtown Entertainment District – Options Report [Financial Impact: None]

3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT Report 2023-703, titled “Downtown Entertainment District – Options Report”, BE RECEIVED; and
- B. THAT Staff BE DIRECTED to proceed with Option 1 as outlined in Report 2023-703; and
- C. THAT Staff BE DIRECTED to report back to Council in Q3-2025 regarding Option 1 in Report 2023-703 with the potential costs and implementation strategy.

4.0 Executive Summary

On October 29, 2024 Council approved the development of a Sport and Entertainment Complex (SEC) in Downtown Brantford. [Report No. 2024-599](#), established recommendations to commence the work necessary to initiate the SEC; one recommendation was to seek out options for a Downtown

Entertainment District and report back by Q4 2024. This Report outlines the two options for Council on how to proceed.

In the first option, staff will lead all research, planning and strategy to establish the framework to guide workplans towards the implementation of a downtown entertainment district. This is staff's recommendation as it is the most cost-effective approach and staff have the capacity and resources to lead this project. The second option involves directing staff to hire a consultant to conduct the same work. This option has the benefit of gaining an outside perspective but extends both the cost and length of time it takes to complete the work.

In either option, the scope of work will be the same as staff and/or the consultant would consider the following elements: determine an appropriate boundary, lead design and development, elevate existing attractions and current or new programming, develop marketing and branding strategy, ensure the accessibility of the downtown and safety of the public, and provide support to local businesses.

5.0 Purpose and Overview

As in many recent examples of cities with new/proposed sport and entertainment complexes throughout the Country (Halifax, Edmonton, Saskatoon) entertainment districts have been considered. In most case studies, staff focused on the advantages of establishing such districts, including driving tourism to increase economic impact, potential benefits to local businesses and residents, and the community pride it brings to a City.

6.0 Background

On October 8, 2024 Special Committee of the Whole contained Report No. 2024-599 wherein direction was provided to Staff to proceed with approval of a SEC for the lands municipally known as 79 Market Street. Council subsequently ratified Committee's decision to approve the SEC on October 29, 2024. In Report No. 2024-599, recommendations were made to commence the work necessary to initiate the SEC. One recommendation subject to this Report is as follows:

“G. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to report back to Council by Q4 2024 with options to create a Downtown Entertainment area;”

This Report provides an overview of two potential options for the establishment of an entertainment district. If approved, staff will commence with the policy framework necessary to establish and brand a downtown entertainment district.

7.0 Corporate Policy Context

The option to establish a Downtown Entertainment District in the City of Brantford aligns with the following corporate plans and strategies:

- Economic Development Strategy (2016)
- Municipal Sport Tourism Strategy (2019)
- Municipal Cultural Plan (2014)
- The Official Plan - Envisioning Our City: 2051
- The City of Brantford Urban Design Manual
- Downtown Brantford Priority Plan
- Waterfront Master Plan
- Downtown Community Improvement Plans
- Brownfield Tax Incentive Program (BFTIP)
- Downtown Property Tax Increment-Based Grant Program
- 2036-2026 Council Priorities

This Report is consistent with Council Priorities Strategic Theme 8 (*Develop a planning and implementation schedule and commit resources for various projects related to City assets*), Strategic Theme 5 (*Commit to and implement the downtown revitalization plan and vision*) and Strategic Theme 10 (*Create a vision statement for the long-term future of the City*). Establishing an entertainment district will assist in achieving these Council priorities.

8.0 Input From Other Sources

Economic Development staff consulted with Corporate Services, Public Works and Planning staff in the preparation of this Report.

9.0 Analysis

In establishing a district, a clear vision is necessary which would determine the purpose, target and theme of the district. This would include but not be limited to goals related to driving tourism and increasing economic impact, leveraging

existing assets and businesses in the downtown core and attracting new business, and creating a positive cultural identity for Brantford residents. The district would reflect a unique newly created downtown entertainment brand and employ a marketing strategy whereby businesses will benefit from increased foot traffic from residents and visitors and further increase their revenues through the additional visitation. This is outlined further below.

To arrive to the establishment of a district as outlined above, Council could choose to direct staff to prepare and implement a framework or direct staff to retain a consultant. The pros and cons of each option are weighed accordingly below.

9.1 Option 1

Option 1 would involve directing staff to prepare the necessary materials and policy framework to establish a downtown entertainment district workplan. This would be led by Economic Development Tourism and Cultural Initiatives staff and include cross-departmental involvement to ensure that the district will meet all departmental needs. A community engagement effort would also be considered in the preparation of the district.

In staff's opinion, this option is likely more cost-effective, although it would utilize staff time and resources, but not have a negative impact on work plans. Budget currently exists in the Department under the Tourism portfolio to help brand a proposed district with new signage. Additional work would include the consideration of the following:

- Consultation with all stakeholders (i.e. business and the DNVS and the DBBIA);
- Branding and marketing in partnership with Communications Division;
- Adjusting rules/policies/by-laws etc. (i.e. noise and operations);
- Downtown Security;
- Special events and pilot projects – i.e. food trucks etc.; and,
- Website and Visitor guide updates.

9.2 Option 2

Similar to the above, Option 2 would involve retaining an external consultant to develop the framework to establish a district. While this

option would bring an outside perspective on developing the district, this option would also have an increased financial impact to the project, Staff are of the opinion that this project it would be better handled in-house using the City's existing talent and resources.

9.3 Overall Concept of a Downtown Entertainment District

In either option, the framework would create the same outcome which would focus on the subheadings below.

District Vision

Creating a vibrant district involves planning, collaboration, and attention to the needs of all stakeholders. This exercise would clarify the goals of the district, consider demographics and other statistics, and focus on various themes. Such themes would include the arts, live music, food, events and nightlife. Some of which are already well underway.

Community Engagement

Staff will consider and determine the best means to engage, which will include social media, the City's website (i.e. Let's Talk Brantford), in-person interviews and building on current partnerships with local artists, investors, residents, developers, the Chamber of Commerce, the DBBIA, and post-secondary educational institutions, among others.

Preferred Location/Boundary (see Figure 1 of the initial draft)

Below is a preliminary concept of the general district area boundary (**Figure 1**). This initial consideration of the boundary is within the Urban Growth District of the Official Plan, and mostly within the Lower (Bowl) Downtown Precinct and the Downtown Priority Plan. To the north, the properties along Dalhousie (Mainstreets) would be included as there are some significant attractions such as the Sanderson Centre for the Performing Arts and Harmony Square. The western boundary naturally follows the waterfront and Veteran's Memorial to the south. The easterly boundary follows the Lower Bowl boundary as well. This concept has been provided as a visual and will be further evaluated through the review and consultation process.



Figure 1 – Draft Boundary of the future Downtown Entertainment District

Design and Development

The Lower Bowl has seen some significant development proposals come forward over the last number of years, some in the planning process and others under construction. The new Zoning By-law has been approved but is currently under appeal. The planning instruments currently in place will all lend policy and regulation to a downtown entertainment district without the need for further amendments or modifications.

The City of Brantford also initiated an Environmental Assessment (EA) for streetscaping the Downtown to improve walkability, accessibility, and underground infrastructure to allow for development, enhance the infrastructure for all transportation modes, and increase pedestrian capacity. The goal of this revitalization project would include streetscaping improvements to create a Downtown that is attractive, vibrant and safe for users and provides the infrastructure needed to accommodate expected

growth. This project includes underground infrastructure and above-ground streetscaping improvements like road configuration, street furniture, and plantings. In consideration of the downtown entertainment district, the general project limits of the Downtown EA has been approved by Council with the first phase of associated works budgeted for which will commence in 2025.

In April of 2022, Council endorsed the *Downtown Priority Plan: A Community Vision for the City Centre*. The actions of the Plan are as follows:

- Better position the downtown as a safe, secure and welcoming environment for all residents and visitors;
- Provide additional supports to vulnerable populations including individuals experiencing homelessness, those with substance use disorders, and persons struggling with mental health and addiction challenges; and
- Enhance tourism, arts, culture, music, entertainment and community events to attract more residents and visitors to the city's downtown.

This Plan also supports the consideration of a downtown entertainment district, which includes but is not limited to the development of a cultural hub, outdoor patios, downtown investment video, patrolling downtown, safety, the streetscaping plan outlined above as well as the proposed Economic Development Strategy (2024-2031) which is also before the Committee.

The Downtown Streetscaping EA has outlined the improvements which are to occur and be constructed over the course of the next number of years, commencing in Q2 2025. Such improvements will include underground infrastructure upgrades for services and utilities. Above ground, improvements will include modernized lighting standards, urban furniture and accessible sidewalks for better pedestrian experience. Through this district exercise, operational considerations will be evaluated such as waste collection and snow removal.

Attractions and Programming

Staff will consider attributes to enhance the proposed district which will focus on various events and attractions. Tourism staff is already planning a Summer 2025 signature event, which will drive visitors to the downtown core to experience programming at the Civic Centre, Harmony Square, Sanderson Centre, and more. The district will elevate assets within the area, including existing programming at the Sanderson Centre and Harmony Square, Trail Mix Live! events at the Brantford Farmers' Market, as well as Bulldogs game nights at the Civic Centre. With the construction of the SEC, more signature events will be planned within the district as well as an increasing number of shows and concerts that differ from Sanderson Centre's typical 'soft-seat' theatre shows or exceed the capacity of that space. Mid-size performances will also be a focus, with a staff report explaining that forthcoming in Q1 2025. The creative arts community will be further engaged.

Marketing and Branding

This theme and topic is one of great importance as the main focus is to develop a memorable name and brand which will reflect our City and Downtown character. The goal will be to build a robust online presence for web, social media and other applications as well as implement physical signage and design elements (e.g. light fixtures) within the district that is distinctly branded. Staff in the Economic Development, Tourism & Cultural Initiatives Department will work collaboratively with staff in the Communications, Community Engagement and Customer Service department to develop a brand and marketing strategy for the new district. Staff will also consider partnering with local organizations for promotional content.

Safety and Accessibility

Brantford Police Services will also be engaged on this project to determine if additional service will be required among other strategic actions, such as lighting, surveillance and security personnel. Staff will also engage with the City's Accessibility Coordinator to incorporate AODA compliant designs to ensure Brantford's downtown is accessible and inclusive.

Supporting Local Businesses

Supporting local business is a key theme for economic success. The Downtown Community Improvement Plan (CIP) currently exists and will help local businesses with improvements and upgrades to their storefronts and other development. The goal will be to highlight such incentives within the district through workshops and other networking opportunities in collaboration with the Brantford Business Resource Centre. Pilot projects will be key initiative in also allowing unique opportunities for entrepreneurs and placemaking activities.

Monitoring Success

Monitoring endeavors has been a key task of this Department's workplans. Key Performance Indicators is valuable data to obtain, track and monitor. Metrics would include foot traffic, sales and revenue of business and social media engagement among others. Visitor feedback will be important to consider any adaption of strategies necessary for future improvements.

10.0 Financial Implications

Currently there are no municipal financial implications as a result of this Report. If Council decides to direct staff to establish the district framework, when reporting back to Council, staff will outline the detailed costs associated with advancing the district framework, which in Staff's opinion will be nominal.

11.0 Climate and Environmental Implications

There are no direct impacts to climate nor the environment as a result of this Report.

12.0 Conclusion

The SEC is one of the City's biggest initiatives and a catalyst for downtown revitalization. The magnitude of such a project has impactful economic results to assist local businesses and residents, increase tourism and celebrate local pride. A focused effort to establish an entertainment district is one that mostly involves a marketing and branding exercise to help promote the downtown as a cohesive and exciting district. Preparing this framework in-house will be the most effective and efficient way to establish the district. Staff have the resources and expertise

to prepare the necessary materials and work collaboratively with all the necessary City Staff to ensure success.

Micheal Bradley, Chief Administrative Officer

Prepared By:

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In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required yes no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk yes no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? yes no