

Options for Supporting Businesses Outside of BIAs

Supporting Businesses Through Information Sharing and Engagement

- Administration can enhance current information-sharing activities through more focused and formalized engagement with partner organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Business Link, Alberta Women Entrepreneurs, AKSIS - Edmonton's Indigenous Business and Professional Association, and Black Canadian Women in Action.
- Summer students could be utilized to door-knock across the City (outside of BIAs) to provide information and awareness, and to gather feedback on City business supports.
- A social media plan can be developed and targeted at the small business community and its stakeholders to share information about programs or services they might not be aware of.
- Additional helpful small business-related information can be included as part of the business license application and renewal process (digitally or through print).
- Further efforts to engage with small business tenants of City-owned properties can be explored to learn more about their needs or to help them access City services.

Supporting Businesses Through District-Based Business Liaisons

- Geographically-assigned portfolios would allow the Business Friendly Edmonton team to develop hyper-local knowledge and networks, allowing the team to be informed champions at the individual community level. It may make it easier and clearer for businesses to know how to reach the City, and who to contact when they need to. This approach is particularly beneficial in the support of mainstreet and brick-and-mortar commercial businesses that rely on deep local knowledge.

Supporting Businesses Through Partner Organizations

- Administration can enhance information sharing with partners on how to access funding and other supports that would support the communities they serve.
- Administration could consider partnering with, and providing additional funding to, a community organization to provide diversified small business support. This could leverage the current relationships and networks (business type and geographical) of the partner organization, which already has community-level knowledge. This would potentially

allow the organization to amplify its programming to reach a wider range of businesses.

Supporting Businesses Through Financial Incentives

- Through the *Municipal Government Act*, cities have some abilities to use tax incentives to benefit businesses. Tax-based tools would only apply to property owners, and may offer limited support to the businesses that lease, depending on the nature of the lease. Tax incentive tools include:
 - The City can choose to apply a lower tax rate to properties that are owned or leased by a small business. While this subclass is technically within the City's legislated authority, Administration does not believe the definition as set out by the Government of Alberta would meet the City's intended objectives and therefore does not recommend pursuing this subclass given the current legislative drafting.
 - The City can choose to exempt certain properties from the tax levy if they are held by non-profit organizations. Some non-profits own and operate small businesses as a social enterprise or revenue stream. Many non-profits can be exempted within the current legislative framework without Council approval and any additional exemptions should be carefully considered.
 - Properties that are defined as contaminated brownfield properties can receive tax deferrals or exemptions. However, there is no current method to ensure the financial benefit of tax deferrals or exemptions would result in guaranteed and direct financial benefits for businesses. Currently, the City makes use of a brownfield grant program to support the redevelopment of brownfield sites.
 - The City is able to provide non-residential tax exemptions or deferrals for up to 15 years, provided the exemption is for the purposes of non-residential redevelopment or revitalization.
- However, tax exemptions are not typically recommended by Administration, as grant administration is often an easier and faster route to provide a solution. Grants can be used to target specific needs or concerns, and are easier to administer than tax incentives, while having the same impact on the City's budget and resulting in the same outcomes. Grants can be calculated using tax and assessment information, and can be applied directly to tax accounts to effectively reduce or offset tax liabilities.

- Administration could consider creating dedicated grants that contribute to targeted economic growth based on criteria such as employment, equity and diversity, geographic considerations, high-impact sectors or property value. For example, this could include expanding the Corner Store Program, which provides property improvement grants and leverages infrastructure spending in mature neighbourhoods undergoing renewal.
- An analysis of the Edmonton Economic Recovery Grant (EERG), which was created to directly assist businesses and business associations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, shows that grants can positively impact small businesses.
 - Smaller grants, such as the City Stream micro-grants, help businesses at a point in time, but have limited long-term impact.
 - Larger grants, such as those in the Economic Action Plan Grant stream (the program that followed the Edmonton Economic Recovery Grant), offer larger amounts and can help businesses diversify their product or service offerings, adopt new technologies, and implement process improvements that have the potential of longer term impacts.
 - Attachment 3 provides up-to-date details on the program and discusses the primary uses of the grant, the associations and businesses that received funding, and general feedback from the recipients.
- Cities may also consider reduced costs on permits, development levies and licenses and commitments to firm approval timelines to create predictability on when businesses can open. This requires significant analysis, given the permitting and licensing is conducted on a cost recovery basis.
- Administration may also advise and guide businesses in areas without any BIAs on the benefits, risks and governance steps related to setting up a new BIA.