

## Old Strathcona Heritage - Commercial Area

### Recommendation:

That the October 5/6, 2015, Sustainable Development report CR\_2822, be received for information.

### Report Summary

**This report outlines Administration's approach to test the efficacy of the Strathcona Area Redevelopment Plan relative to recent redevelopment interest in and around the Old Strathcona heritage/commercial area. Undertaking this work will either affirm the current direction of the plan, or point to the need to review and potentially amend the Plan. This work will also inform current and potential land development applications that are not compatible with the Plan.**

### Report

Edmonton is a rapidly growing and changing city. Over the next ten years the city's population is forecast to increase by 170,000 people. This growth presents both risks and opportunities relative to the future prosperity, attractiveness and livability of Edmonton. Old Strathcona is a key area where this risk needs to be managed and positive change should be leveraged.

Old Strathcona has been celebrated and valued for decades. The value of the unique commercial historic character and 1890-1920 building styles in Old Strathcona were recognized by the community in 1974 with the formation of the Old Strathcona Foundation. The Foundation undertook a range of actions to revitalize the area, including the purchase, restoration and sale of key properties in Old Strathcona's commercial core. Some of these properties include the Princess Theatre, the Dominion Hotel and the Hulbert Block.

In 1993 Edmonton's Inventory of Historic Resources recognized the heritage nature of Old Strathcona. In 1998, Council adopted the *Strathcona Area Redevelopment Plan*. Key policy directions of the Plan are to retain the historic character of the core commercial area, and to manage the compatibility of redevelopment surrounding this core area in part by limiting building heights to four storeys.

In 2007 the Province of Alberta designated the Old Strathcona Provincial Historic Area as one of only two provincial historic areas. Recently, City Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Old Strathcona Foundation, the International Council of Monuments and Sites Canada and the World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for Asia and the Pacific in Shanghai to cooperate on the research and promotion of a Historic Urban Landscape approach in the Old Strathcona heritage area.

Today, Old Strathcona is a premiere destination business area recognized provincially, nationally, and internationally as a significant contributor to Edmonton's character. The area is a major destination for Edmonton residents and visitors alike. Its unique historic character has contributed significantly to the area's ongoing success.

In part due to the success of the Whyte Avenue area, there is increased interest in redeveloping properties in the Old Strathcona core commercial and surrounding transition area. In some cases this interest is in development forms that are markedly different in height and scale from that envisioned in the Area Redevelopment Plan. This interest raises questions if additional redevelopment potential might be harmful, or beneficial to the ongoing success of the Old Strathcona historic core commercial area.

To answer these questions Administration will:

- undertake best practice review on managing the redevelopment of successful heritage/destination commercial areas
- engage stakeholders, including the Old Strathcona Foundation, the Old Strathcona Business Association, area land owners, and developers, to understand their views on how to best manage the continued success of the old Strathcona area.

The above work will inform:

- whether the current direction of the Plan remains valid in protecting the historic core commercial area, or if it potentially needs to be updated to accommodate additional development potential and thereby encourage additional private investment in the area
- whether existing and future planning applications seeking additional development potential over that identified in the Plan are appropriate.

The above work aligns with the purpose of the Nodes and Corridors Program and the Urban Design Framework to focus Administration's revitalization efforts on those parts of the city that have the most potential for positive change, and leveraging urban design to create great places. Attachment 1 illustrates the area of focus for this work.

### Next Steps

Administration will initiate project design discussions with stakeholders in late 2015 and undertake the identified work in 2016 and in time for consideration relative to ongoing development applications that are not necessarily aligned with the approved *Area Redevelopment Plan*. Once complete, Administration will report to Executive Committee on its findings, recommendations for follow up actions, and the priority of those actions relative to other current and planned area planning work.

Resources are in place to undertake a limited engagement process with work focused on heritage, image and design. Should the project scope be expanded, the timing of other planned projects could be affected.

### Policy

*The Way We Grow*, Edmonton's Municipal Development Plan:

- 5.2.1.1: Require development to fit with the existing and planned neighbourhood context, to respect the scale, form, massing, style and materials of the neighbourhoods and to incorporate other design elements that create a transition between the new development and existing neighbourhoods.
- 5.2.1.5: Undertake Urban Design Plans to guide the redevelopment of prominent sites, corridors, entrance ways, older commercial areas and character areas and integration of historic sites.
- 5.2.1.7: Support traditional retail shopping streets as centres of community activity by: Encouraging good quality development of a type, density and form compatible with the character of the area and adjacent uses.
- 5.8.1: Encourage a sense of local identity and create connections to the city's cultural and historical roots through the conservation and preservation of significant structures, buildings, districts, landscapes and archaeological resources.

### Attachment

1. Proposed Area of Focus - Old Strathcona Heritage/Commercial Area