



CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

May 15, 2020

Tim Syer, President
Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce
#21, 4802 50th Avenue
Yellowknife, NT X1A 1C4

Dear Mr. Syer,

RE: Support for Yellowknife Businesses During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The City of Yellowknife knows how important businesses are to our community, and it is undeniable that Covid-19 has presented unforeseeable hardship to many local businesses. On behalf of City Council, I would like to assure you that we are taking action at a municipal level to minimize the impact of Covid-19 and see economic recovery take place as soon as possible.

In light of the current economic situation, the City's role in supporting economic resiliency must be explored in relation to the federal business supports, federal income supports, and territorial funding that have been made available to businesses. The measures outlined herein are meant to assist businesses in responding to the economic impacts of Covid-19, while taking into account what other orders of government are providing in terms of support.

Recommendation #1 – Reserve Fund

As noted in the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce letter dated April 9, 2020, the City currently has the following two reserve funds aimed at revitalization:

- (i) The Downtown Development Reserve sets aside 25% of parking meter revenues to “fund future projects that impact the downtown area”. As a result of the City's decision to stop enforcing parking meters, revenues will be substantially reduced and the anticipated closing balance of this fund for 2020 is currently estimated to be \$675,000.
- (ii) The Revitalization Initiative Reserve was created by funding from land sales and was created to target “land assembly which supports revitalization initiatives within the targeted areas” (Downtown, Old Town, Old Airport Road and Kam Lake).

Administration is currently working on developing a comprehensive plan for the downtown that will address recommendations from various reports and strategies for Council's consideration, and funding

for initiatives identified in the comprehensive plan are likely to come from these two reserves. When drafting this plan, we will look to balance possible short-term actions to address the current economic crisis against long-term objectives. Initiatives that can achieve both will be higher priorities. Some of the documents to be reviewed include the following:

- (i) Retail Revitalization Strategy ([https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/resources/Reports/Economic Development/Downtown Yellowknife Retail Revitalization Strategy - Final September 2019.pdf](https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/resources/Reports/Economic%20Development/Downtown%20Yellowknife%20Retail%20Revitalization%20Strategy%20-%20Final%20September%202019.pdf));
- (ii) THEIA Report(<https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/doing-business/resources/Downtown-Revitalization/THEIA-Partners-Report-July-9-2018.pdf>);
- (iii) Vision for Downtown([https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/doing-business/resources/Economic Development and Tourism Strategy/Economic-Development/Downtown Revitalization Vision.pdf](https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/doing-business/resources/Economic%20Development%20and%20Tourism%20Strategy/Economic-Development/Downtown%20Revitalization%20Vision.pdf));
- (iv) Economic Development Strategy ([https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/doing-business/resources/Economic Development and Tourism Strategy/CITY-OF-YELLOWKNIFE-ECONOMIC-DEVELOPMENT-STRATEGY-2020-2024-FINAL.pdf](https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/doing-business/resources/Economic%20Development%20and%20Tourism%20Strategy/CITY-OF-YELLOWKNIFE-ECONOMIC-DEVELOPMENT-STRATEGY-2020-2024-FINAL.pdf));
and
- (v) Visitor Services Strategy ([https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/resources/Reports/Economic Development/Yellowknife-Visitor-Services-Strategy-Final-JULY-2018.pdf](https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/resources/Reports/Economic%20Development/Yellowknife-Visitor-Services-Strategy-Final-JULY-2018.pdf)).

During the Governance and Priorities Committee meeting held on April 27, 2020, you also indicated that you had not yet identified a specific program or developed a project that could be offered or supported by the municipality. If you do identify a possible program or project that we could partner on, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss.

Recommendations #2-5 – Fees and Penalties

As you may be aware, municipal governments have limited financial resources and are legislatively required to adopt a balanced budget. The City's Budget 2020 was based on projected revenues which included items raised in the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce letter dated April 9, 2020 such as penalties related to utility and property taxes, development and building permit fees, and business licence fees (Recommendations 2-5). In light of the impacts of Covid-19 on residents and businesses, the City determined that it could take the following immediate steps to assist with concerns regarding cash flow:

- (i) **Utility/Wastewater Billing**
The City stopped charging new late fees and City-imposed non-sufficient funds (NSF) charges for utilities and wastewater bills in March 2020. This practice will continue until further notice.
- (ii) **Property Taxes**
As of March 2020, the City has not charged any new late fees or City-imposed non-sufficient funds (NSF) charges for tax bills. This practice will also continue until further notice.



However, the City must continue to monitor the pandemic situation and its effect on the City's anticipated revenues and expenditures before further reductions can be considered.

Recommendation #6 – Online permitting

Permitting for many City-required permits is available online (<https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/living-here/applications-forms-licenses-and-permits.asp>). Attached is a list of services that are currently available from the City online. Business licence permit applications can be downloaded, completed and e-mailed to the City for processing. Preliminary work has been done to provide business licensing services online, however it is difficult to commit to a timeline as current staffing arrangements – both within the City and with our vendors – make this a challenging time to introduce major process changes.

Recommendation #7 – Covid-19 Commercial Rent Strategy

The City would welcome the opportunity to work with the territorial and federal governments on a Commercial Rent Strategy focused on providing rental relief for businesses who have been forced to close or are unable to generate revenue as a result of COVID-19.

I would also like to take this opportunity to outline additional actions taken by the City to help get the city back in a strong economic position. Some of these include:

(i) Infrastructure Investments

The City will continue with core infrastructure projects such as roads, utilities, and other infrastructure and capital items identified in our 2020 budget to support future growth.

(ii) Suspension of Parking Meter Offenses

As part of the City's response to Covid-19, the City has stopped enforcement of parking meters in the downtown business area until further notice.

(iii) Free Transit

The City recognizes that it is critical for people to have the ability to ride the bus to obtain basic things like groceries or to jobs that we rely on, and as such, transit has been provided to residents free of charge since March 2020.

(iv) Letters of Support

The City provided letters in support of the Chamber's recommendations to the Government of Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories.

As we move through these difficult times, the City hopes to continue to connect and consult with the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce on measures that can be taken to alleviate the economic impacts of Covid-19 on our local businesses.



Sincerely,



Rebecca Alty
Mayor

Attachment: List of Online Services (DM#606461)

c.c. Yellowknife City Council
Deneen Everett, Executive Director
Sheila Bassi-Kellett, City Administrator

DM #610393

