

Report to the Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee

To: Chair and Members
Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee
From: John M. Fleming - Managing Director, Planning and City
Planner and
Martin Hayward - City Manager
Subject: Core Area Action Plan
Meeting on: October 28, 2019

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Planning and City Planner, and the City Manager, the following actions be taken:

- (a) The Core Area Action Plan attached hereto as Appendix "A" **BE RECEIVED**.
- (b) The initiatives identified in this Plan that can be addressed through existing budgets **BE IMPLEMENTED**;
- (c) Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to submit business cases for all Core Area Action Plan initiatives requiring additional investment through the 2020-2023 Multi-Year Budget process.

IT BEING NOTED that Appendix "B" attached hereto shows the relevant business case for each proposed initiative.

Executive Summary

The health of the Core Area is vital to London's prosperity as a whole. There has been extensive investment in the core; however issues persist that threaten its long-term success. The Core Area Action Plan outlines short-, medium-, and long-term initiatives to address such things as homelessness and health issues, safety and security, creating a positive business environment and attracting more people to the Core. Collaboration among many Core Area stakeholders will be crucial to the successful implementation of the Plan.

Some of the initiatives in the Core Area Action Plan can be implemented within existing budgets, and some are subject to separate business cases to be considered as part of the 2020-2023 Multi-Year Budget process. The remainder will be included in a specific Core Area Action Plan business case for Council's consideration during the Multi-Year Budget process.

Core Area Action Plan

1.0 Introduction

London's Core Area holds our greatest concentration of employment, many of our heritage properties, our largest community gathering places, our primary stage for music and entertainment, and the majority of our tourism infrastructure. The health, vitality and resiliency of the Core Area is key to any successful economic development strategy.

London's Core Area was thriving until about the 1970s. Like most cities across North America, our Core Area declined throughout the following decades as everyday commercial uses spread into the suburbs, residential neighbourhoods grew strong outside the core, and congestion, urban decay and disinvestment made the Core Area less attractive to many Londoners.

Recognizing these trends, London has made many municipal investments in the Core that have slowed this decline and even generated new growth and private investment. The *2017 State of the Downtown Report* shows many positive business and economic signs for the Downtown, as does the *Old East Village Progress Report*. Despite extensive investment in London's Core Area, issues persist that threaten its long-term success.

If we do not address those problems that are threatening its long-term success, we stand to:

- See a significant decline in our Downtown assessment base, leaving a greater tax burden on property owners in the remainder of the City;
- Send the image of a declining city to prospective new businesses, undercutting our economic competitiveness with other cities;
- Weaken our competitive position for attracting and retaining a talented workforce in London and innovation that follows them;
- Undermine our significant municipal investments in the Core Area;
- Portray London as an unattractive city to live and work in;
- Lose existing businesses in the Core Area, leading to job losses and a reduction in local economic activity;
- Leave our city's most vulnerable populations at risk and without supports;
- Damage our Core Area's residential neighbourhoods;
- Reduce the viability of important cultural heritage resources and neighbourhoods that define our city's history;
- Undermine our city-building strategy to grow more inward and upward in the future; and,
- Weaken our City's music, entertainment, culture and arts offerings.

2.0 A Plan for Action

Recognizing the urgency, over the course of a few weeks, staff interviewed more than 75 people including various property owners, business owners, employees, residents, agency leads, building operators, City police, social service providers, municipal service providers, and other Londoners who regularly use the Core Area. While many perspectives were covered during this time, it is the intention of staff to continue to engage all Core Area stakeholders as the Plan unfolds, as well as to monitor its progress, identify what is and what is not working well, and to adjust its course accordingly.

Through this consultation, four clear messages were heard:

1. People struggling with homelessness and health issues need help;
2. People need to feel safe and secure;
3. Businesses need an environment that allows them to be successful; and,
4. The Core Area needs to attract more people.

These four key "needs" are interconnected – if one of these needs is not successfully addressed, the others cannot be fully resolved. Through the initiatives identified in the Plan, helping people struggling with homelessness and health issues is planned to be addressed through strengthening the Coordinated Informed Response program, focusing on housing, and creating daytime resting spaces and stabilization spaces. To reinforce people's perception of the Core Area as being safe and secure, the Plan identifies initiatives including increased presence of London Police Services, increased By-law enforcement including loitering regulations, and an Ambassador program. To improve the environment for successful business operations, the Plan includes initiatives such as heightening the clean standards in the Core, waiving a number of different fees including those for patios, signage, and encroachment; enhancing existing incentive programs and creating new incentive programs; and, expediting building and signage permit applications. Lastly, to attract more people to the Core Area, the Plan focuses on initiatives that encourage the activation of spaces through more regular and intense programming, a bistro chair program, food trucks, shipping container pop-up shops, public art, and streamlining the event process.

3.0 Budget Considerations

The Core Area Action Plan aims to address the four key “needs” through short-, medium and long-term initiatives. Short-term initiatives will begin immediately or have already begun. Medium-term initiatives will be underway in 2020 following approval of the Multi Year Budget. Long-term initiatives will begin no earlier than 2021. It is important to note that some initiatives are fundamental to advancing this Plan, including some short-term initiatives which link to medium- and long-term initiatives. For instance, expanding the Coordinated Informed Response program is foundational to the success of this Plan.

Appendix “B” includes a list of all initiatives in this Plan. The source of funding column in Appendix “B” identifies:

- Initiatives that can be accommodated within existing budgets and have no additional cost;
- Initiatives where another separate business case is expected to be submitted through the Multi-Year Budget process; and,
- The remaining initiatives for which a specific Core Area Action Plan business case will be submitted through the Multi-Year Budget process.

4.0 Next Steps

To successfully implement this Plan, collaboration is critical. This Plan involves a wide range of complex initiatives that will be delivered by a broad range of Core Area stakeholders, some of which are outside of the Corporation of the City of London, including: the Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), the business community, Tourism London, London Economic Development Corporation, London Police Services, the London Middlesex Health Unit, health care agencies, and housing agencies. These partners are integral to both implementing the initiatives identified in this Plan, and extending momentum by creating and undertaking their own complementary initiatives.

The successful implementation of this Plan requires many different stakeholders. Therefore, it will be necessary to establish a coordinating mechanism, whereby all stakeholders come together on a structured and regular basis to collaboratively track progress, monitor results, and strategize on next steps. Such a structure needs to be established in the short term.

Over the long term, the need for a permanent organizational structure should be explored for the Core Area. This could be in the form of a Core Area Management Organization (CAMO) that implements some functions directly, coordinates other functions delivered by the municipality, and partners with various organizations who will deliver services within the scope of their mandates (e.g. BIAs, community associations, social service entities, event planners, etc.).

5.0 Conclusion

Council has made significant investments in the Core Area over the past two decades. Implementation of this Core Area Action Plan will ensure those investments are not undermined, and that the revitalization of the Core Area continues to progress. Initiatives that require additional funding will need to be considered through the Multi-Year Budget process.

Prepared & Submitted by:	Britt O'Hagan, MCIP, RPP Manager, City Building and Design
Recommended by:	John M. Fleming, MCIP, RPP Managing Director, Planning and City Planner
Recommended by:	Martin Hayward City Manager

October 21, 2019
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