

Report to Planning and Environment Committee

To: Chair and Members
Planning & Environment Committee

From: Gregg Barrett
Managing Director, Planning and City Planner

Subject: City of London
Argyle Regeneration Study Recommendations

Date: December 14, 2020

Recommendation

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

- (a) This report, with regards to the Argyle Area Regeneration Study, **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
- (b) Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to undertake the development of a Community Improvement Plan for the Argyle area.

IT BEING NOTED that any potential funding requirements associated with the Argyle CIP will be identified for Council's consideration as part of a comprehensive review and recommendation on funding levels for all CIP programs, prior to the 2024-2027 Multi Year Budget process.

Executive Summary

On November 12, 2019, Civic Administration was directed to undertake a comprehensive regeneration study of the Argyle Business Improvement Area (BIA) and surrounding areas. City Planning staff have completed the study including research, data collection and analysis, and consultation with stakeholders, other service areas and the public.

Based on the research and consultation findings, Staff recommends adding an Argyle Community Improvement Plan (CIP) study to the City Planning work plan. The study will act as a good mechanism to organize an action plan for the community and identify specific projects that may be undertaken by the City, other stakeholders or the community to achieve community improvement.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

The Argyle Community Regeneration Study addresses three strategic areas of focus, as presented in Council's Strategic Plan 2019-2023. These are:

- Strengthening our Community
- Building a Sustainable City
- Growing our Economy

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

June 2012 Designation of an Improvement Area under Section 204 the Municipal Act, 2001 – Argyle BIA

August 10, 2020 Argyle Regeneration Study Update

1.2 Introduction

On November 12, 2019, Civic Administration was directed to undertake a comprehensive community regeneration study of the Argyle BIA and surrounding areas to determine whether a CIP, or other municipal tools were warranted to help improve the area.

Staff undertook research, data collection, analysis, and consultation with stakeholders and internal service areas throughout 2020.

An update report was presented to Planning and Environment Committee on August 10, 2020. This report including a detailed Community Profile of the Argyle area, a review of public and private investment over time and a comparison between investment activities and demographics in the Argyle area compared to the city as a whole.

Additional consultation and analysis has been completed since August 2020.

This report will outline the following:

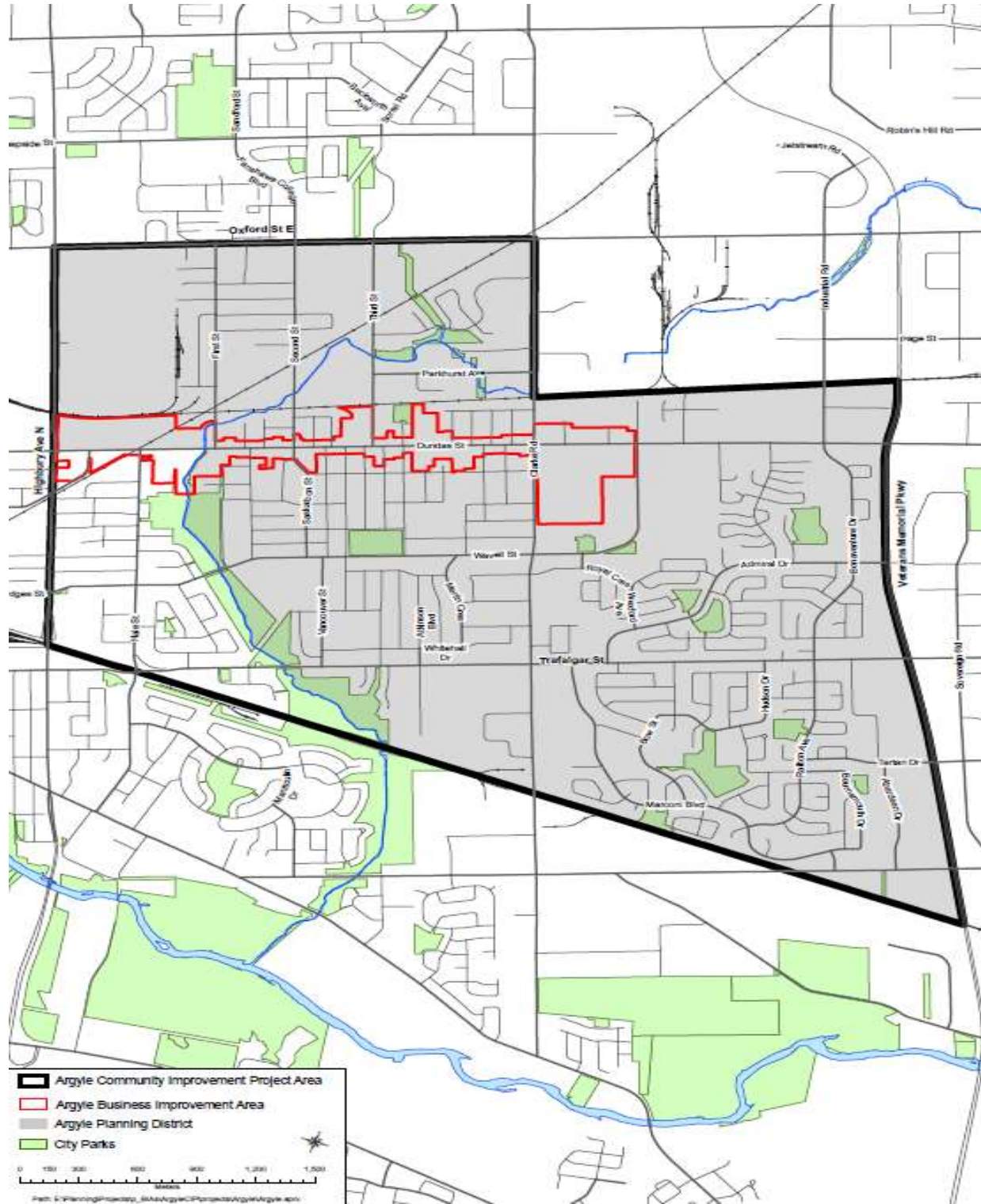
- The general study area, and character sub-areas;
- A summary of consultation activities and findings;
- New information that has been gathered since the August 2020 Community Profile was presented;
- An overview of the legislative framework for community improvement; and,
- A recommendation and rationale to continue with an Argyle CIP study.

1.3 General Study Area

The Argyle regeneration study applies to lands in the east end of London, generally bounded by Highbury Avenue, Oxford Street East, Clarke Road, Veterans Memorial Parkway, Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian National Railway. Comprising approximately 1,362 hectares of land, the Argyle Planning District is the second largest

district within the Urban Growth Boundary, after the Westminster district. The study area is shown below in Map 1.

Map 1: Argyle Study Area & Argyle Planning District



Within the Argyle study area, four unique sub-areas have been identified, with each having a unique character. These sub-areas will be explored further as part of the recommended CIP study.

- The Dundas Street corridor is the spine that runs through the Argyle community. Dundas Street is a main gateway to Downtown and provides access to the Veterans Memorial Parkway and from there to Highway 401. The large volumes of traffic that pass through have contributed to a decline in the quality of the urban corridor environment. Dundas Street and its many stores, restaurants and other businesses are conveniently located and provide residents with most of their day-to-day shopping needs.
- North and south of Dundas Street are primarily residential neighbourhoods. Although the majority of those neighbourhoods are made up of single detached dwellings, other forms of housing such as apartments, townhouses and semi-detached dwellings can also be found. Industrial and commercial land-uses are located on the eastern and southern edge of the neighbourhood, and adjacent to the railway tracks.
- The Argyle study area has a variety of parks and outdoor public spaces that serve as strong assets for the community. These parks and public spaces include the Kiwanis Park, East Lions Park, Nelson Park, Admiral Park, Mildred Barons Park, Bonaventure Meadows Park, and the recently enhanced Vimy Ridge Park.
- The former London Psychiatric Hospital (LPH) lands is a unique 160-acre heritage-property, and one of the largest available development sites within London. The LPH lands are designated as a Transit Village in The London Plan, meaning an exceptionally designed, high density, mixed-use urban neighbourhood connected by rapid transit to the Downtown and other Transit Villages.

2.0 Stakeholder Consultation

2.1 Consultation Activities

Community consultation has been a significant part of this project, and many people were involved in a number of ways. The section below provides a summary of the communication and consultation conducted for this project.

- Get Involved London- Argyle Community Regeneration Study: Staff established a presence on the Get Involved Website to provide the project background, study area, regular updates, opportunities for feedback, the timeline and project contact information. The website can be found at:
<https://getinvolved.london.ca/Argyle>

- Project Updates: City Planning Staff created a contact list and emailed project updates which included information about upcoming Community Meetings, Meetings Summaries, Committee Reports, and a link to the Project webpage.
- Office hours with Planners (February 20 and 27, 2020): Planning Staff hosted an opportunity to find out more about the study and provide input during 'office hours' in the East London Library.
- Argyle Community Association Meeting (March 9, 2020): Staff provided a presentation on the progress of the Argyle Area Regeneration Study and answered questions. Of particular interest were the upcoming infrastructure projects and community events.
- Argyle BIA Meeting (March 12, 2020): Staff provided an overview of the study, work done so far and received feedback from the BIA members and Councillor Shawn Lewis. There was a discussion about street calming measures, transit routes, and the necessity for a pedestrian crossover on Dale Street and Doulton Street.
- Virtual Community Information Meeting (November 5, 2020). Staff provided an update of the Argyle Regeneration Study so far, receive feedback from participants and presented next steps to members of the public through the online platform, Zoom.

2.2 Consultation Summary

Through the Argyle Community Regeneration Study Staff identified perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Argyle area, a short summary is provided here:

Stakeholders feel that Argyle's greatest strengths are the variety of businesses, sense of community and the mature and established nature of the neighbourhood. The range of independently owned and operated businesses and the fact that many people are able to meet their shopping needs locally are also seen as strengths.

Although Argyle is seen as a unique and strong community, Argyle does exhibit some characteristics of economic, social or physical issues. Educational attainment and household income are lower in Argyle than city-wide and the average age of housing is higher. Stakeholders identified concerns with substance abuse, mental health issues, drug paraphernalia, crime and people sleeping rough as key issues. Others commented that there is a need for more affordable housing, better police enforcement, improved transit connections and a better quality public realm.

In terms of opportunities, the potential for infill development and redevelopment was highlighted. The population in Argyle has been largely stable in the last decades. In light of the aging population and low vacancy rates, there is a clear need for more housing development, especially units below average market rent or aimed at seniors. In addition, the building stock requires some improvements, as some landlords and business owners have difficulty keeping their properties in fair condition as the properties are getting older. Other opportunities identified by stakeholders include the desire to establish a clear identity, maintain cultural heritage, and develop the Dundas Corridor as a traditional pedestrian focused Main Street environment and a focal point for the community and events.

General development pressures and the development of the former Psychiatric Hospital Lands are seen as threats to businesses and to the existing character of Argyle. Stakeholders commented that without support for small businesses and entrepreneurs, and improved accessibility, Argyle will struggle to maintain the current level of businesses. The lack of a coordinated approach to business support and attraction, and the goal to foster a broader range of uses in the Argyle Area were highlighted as issues requiring action.

3.0 New Information since the Update Report

The [Argyle Regeneration Study Update](#) report, presented to Planning and Environment Committee on August 10, 2020, contained a comprehensive Community Profile of the Argyle area, as well as outlining public and private investment in the area. The following sections **present new information that has been gathered since the August report.**

3.1 Update on Development and Building Permits in Argyle

During the Planning & Environment Committee meeting, it was pointed out that the city-wide building permit data includes greenfield areas, which tend to see more development than the built up areas of the city. As development in the Argyle area would be considered infill, the building permit data, provided below, now compares development activity in Argyle with the Built Area Boundary, as opposed to city-wide.

Table 1: Building Permits – Argyle vs. Built Area Boundary (2015 -2020)

	Built Area Boundary	Argyle Area	Argyle BIA
# Permits	22,400	536	68
Permit Density	1.26 permits / ha	0.43 permits / ha	0.79 permits / ha

Between January 1, 2015 and October 31, 2020, a total of 536 building permits were issued in Argyle, and 68 of these permits occurred in the Argyle BIA. In the same

timeframe, 22,400 permits were issued in the Built Area Boundary city-wide. This results in 1.26 permits per hectare in the Built Area Boundary, compared to 0.43 permits per hectare for the Argyle Area and 0.79 permits per hectare for the Argyle BIA. Overall, there was less building activity in Argyle, compared to the rest of the Built Area Boundary. It can also be concluded that within Argyle relatively more building activity concentrated along the Dundas Corridor than in the rest of Argyle.

3.2 Infrastructure Projects

Additional infrastructure renewal projects in Argyle that were not identified in the August report have progressed in various stages of design and implementation during the summer and fall of 2020, including:

- Churchill Avenue, Winnipeg Boulevard and Wavell Street Reconstruction;
- Jena Crescent Infrastructure Renewal Project;
- Saskatoon Street;
- Seaforth Court;
- Spruce Street and Haig Street.
- Park projects in Kiwanis Park, East Lions Park, Vimy Ridge and Mildred Barons.

3.3 Impact of COVID-19 on Argyle Businesses

A new reality that emerged during the Argyle Regeneration Study process is the ongoing pandemic of Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). Due to the Provincial state of emergency, closures of non-essential businesses, social distancing, and other health precautions, the Dundas Street corridor saw significantly less traffic and clientele during the spring and early summer of 2020. According to the Argyle BIA, the traffic volumes have rebounded since the months of July and August, and visiting patterns are now somewhat similar to pre-COVID levels. This is partly explained by the dependence on vehicular traffic in Argyle, compared to more foot traffic in other BIA's in London.

Interestingly, it seems that in Argyle some large, chain businesses have closed, while smaller independent retailers remain open. The Pennington's, Moore's and Hallmark stores have shut down, resulting in some vacant storefronts in the Argyle Mall. On the other hand, eight new businesses in a variety of sectors have opened in Argyle during the COVID-19 pandemic. The relatively large amount of businesses deemed essential (such as food services, professional services and car repair/dealerships) in Argyle and more affordable commercial rents have contributed to the resilience of Argyle businesses. However, business owners note a significant increase in petty crimes, disruptive behavior, vandalism (graffiti tagging), homelessness and garbage accumulation along Dundas Street. These secondary effects of COVID-19 are challenging for businesses and local residents and are an indication that a CIP in Argyle is warranted.

4.0 What is a Community Improvement Plan?

4.1 Planning Act

Community improvement plans are intended to provide City Council with the necessary tools to stimulate reinvestment and redevelopment, inspire appropriate infill and intensification, coordinate planning efforts, improve physical infrastructure, support community economic development, preserve neighbourhood and cultural heritage value, and lead to the establishment of an improved neighbourhood. In accordance with the provisions of Section 28 of the *Planning Act*, a by-law may be passed to designate a geographic area of a municipality as a community improvement project area.

A community improvement project area is “an area within a municipality, the community improvement of which in the opinion of the council is desirable because of age, dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement, unsuitability of buildings or for any other environment, social or community economic development reason.”

4.2 London Plan

The London Plan provides further criteria with which to evaluate the need for a CIP. To identify an area for community improvement, City Council shall consider the following criteria:

1. Deficiencies in physical infrastructure including but not limited to the sanitary sewer system, storm sewer system, and/or watermain system, streets, sidewalks, curbs, streetscapes and/or street lighting, and municipal parking facilities.
2. Deficiencies in recreational, social or community facilities including public open space, municipal parks, neighbourhood parks, indoor/outdoor recreational facilities, and public social facilities.
3. Commercial, residential, industrial and mixed-use areas with poor physical condition and/or poor visual quality of the built environment, including but not limited to building facades, building condition, streetscapes, public amenity areas and urban design.
4. Vacant lots and/or underutilized properties and buildings which have potential for infill, redevelopment, expansion or development to better utilize the land base.
5. Non-conforming, conflicting or incompatible land uses or activities that disrupt the predominant land use, function and/or viability of an area.
6. A demonstrated interest in community improvement by the private firms within an area.
7. Presence of potential or recognized cultural heritage resources.
8. Known or suspected areas of environmental contamination.
9. Lack or deficient affordable housing or mix of housing opportunities.
10. Improvement to energy efficiency and/or renewable energy efficiency.
11. Traffic and/or parking problems or deficiencies.
12. Other significant barriers to the repair, rehabilitation, redevelopment or development of underutilized land and/or buildings.

13. Other significant environmental, social or community economic development reasons for community improvement.

4.3 CIP Tools

A CIP is an implementing mechanism that gives Council the authority to make targeted investment of municipal resources to an area designated for community improvement. A CIP could be considered a toolkit and some of the tools may include, financial incentives programs; the acquisition and disposal of land; and the prioritization of municipal activities such as plans, programs and projects within a community improvement project area. Council has the ability to turn on and off various programs through the allocation of Multi-Year Budget funding.

5.0 Rationale for Community Improvement

Based on analysis of stakeholder feedback, provincial legislation, existing planning framework, available tools and programs, current and planned projects, and the types, rates and levels of private-sector investment, Staff are satisfied that a Community Improvement Plan study for the Argyle Study area is warranted, including for the following reasons:

- The Dundas Street corridor and surrounding area can be described as an area in relatively poor condition; with an older building stock that was predominantly built before 1980, lack of landscaping and street trees in the streetscape, and significant issues around upkeep, security, littering and vandalism (graffiti). In addition, business-owners and residents have identified Dundas Street as an unpleasant public realm, especially for pedestrians and public transit users. There are few places to sit, limited pedestrian crossings, garbage bins and/or transit amenities, and the large amount of hydro poles and numerous private driveway entrances further detract from the public realm.
- Although within Argyle relatively more building activity is concentrated along the Dundas Corridor, it can be concluded that there is less building activity density in Argyle and the Argyle BIA-area compared to the rest of the urban area of the city. There is a clear opportunity to redevelop and expand commercial, residential and employment options in Argyle and provide appropriate infill along Dundas Street, Clarke Road and on the London Psychiatric Hospital Lands. Financial and planning tools should be considered to incentivize quicker redevelopment.
- Argyle is a unique mixed-use area with significant amounts of commercial and industrial land uses. Especially along Clarke Road, First Street and Second Street, industrial and commercial industrial activities could threaten the surrounding residential character and amenity. A detailed analysis of the existing zoning and land use context could help to increase the viability and sustainability of these residential neighbourhoods by preventing adverse impacts from noise, odor and congestion and identifying opportunities for sensitive intensification.

- There is a strong need for more and better quality affordable housing in the Argyle area. The neighbourhood used to be known as more affordable and an area where young families could enter the housing market. This is rapidly changing, resulting in increasing average sold prices, low housing inventory and vacancy rates, and unfortunately also an increasing population of people experiencing homelessness. The lack of rent-geared-to-income housing and opportunities to age-in-place for senior residents are another indication of a need for more stable, and affordable housing options in Argyle.
- The older building stock in the area, with 70% built before 1980, indicates an opportunity to improve the energy efficiency of residential, institutional, commercial and industrial properties. This is further highlighted by the average residential electricity use & gas usage (measured in 2014), with Argyle predominantly in the red zones, meaning the highest 20% use (far above City average).
- The new East Lions Community Center is nearing completion and will provide a range of programs and services to the local neighbourhood and serve as a regional destination for indoor aquatics. However, during this study, Staff received a number of concerns and questions from residents about the availability, accessibility and affordability of future recreational programs, especially for teenagers and seniors.
- The Argyle study area is experiencing deficiencies in the physical infrastructure. The pavement quality index on some streets is in poor to very poor condition, some streets are missing sidewalks and/or streetlights, and upgrades to sanitary services are necessary and on-going. Existing City programs do deal with infrastructure upgrade and renewal and the CIP study will provide an opportunity for the public to outline their preferences and priorities in the Argyle area.
- Argyle has significant areas with known environmental contamination, and some have undergone remediation measures, such as the large removal contaminated soil, sediment and debris from the former General Electric facility. More recently, the UTRCA released a Watershed Report Card for the Pottersburg Creek. Both the surface water quality and forest conditions were graded with a D (poor), which shows the necessity for more conservation efforts on private and public lands.
- Due to the high traffic volumes on major corridors such as Dundas Street, Highbury Avenue, Oxford Street, Clarke Road, Trafalgar Street and Veterans Memorial Parkway, automobile traffic patterns and congestion are an issue in Argyle. Many stakeholders raised concerns with the adverse impacts of congestion, such as time delays, increases in different forms of pollution, and frustrating driving conditions. The planned East Link of the Bus Rapid Transit system, additional sidewalks and bike lanes will alleviate some of the traffic issues in Argyle and shift to more sustainable and clean transportation options as an alternative to car-use. However, active transportation can only be a real

alternative if the public realm is more attractive, pleasant and safe for all residents.

Recommendations and Next Steps

6.0 Recommendations

This report recommends that a Community Improvement Plan for the Argyle area be undertaken, and that any funding requirements to support future Community Improvement initiatives be considered as part of a comprehensive review of funding levels for all CIP programs, prior to the 2024-2027 Multi Year Budget process.

7.0 Next Steps

The development of the Argyle CIP will be added to the City Planning work plan to be initiated in 2021. The following outlines the next steps and deliverables going forward:

7.1 Continue Engagement

Building on the existing research and consultation to date, Staff will continue to work with the Argyle BIA, other community partners and stakeholders. A communication and engagement plan will be developed for future consultation opportunities. The community will be involved in identifying a vision for Argyle, community improvement goals and specific improvement initiatives through future engagement activities.

Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, creative engagement strategies and techniques will need to be considered to reach everyone in the community.

7.2 Community Improvement Plan

Through previous community improvement plan studies, Staff have found the process to be a great opportunity to prompt community interest and organization, educate the public on existing and upcoming projects and programs and develop community revitalization initiatives. However, many of the ideas and initiatives that often come out of these discussions do not actually require a CIP for implementation.

For this reason, Staff will endeavour to work with the community to identify and organize those initiatives that do not require a CIP to be brought forward as a Community Action Plan. This will bring together the community's vision and goals, provide information on existing City programs, and organize a list of initiatives that can be implemented outside of a CIP, by community partners, the BIA and as opportunities arise through public and private projects.

The CIP study will be developed to designate an area for community improvement, and develop the Community Improvement Plan for that area in order to access municipal funding for any proposed programs or initiatives that do require a CIP. Staff will ensure the Argyle CIP includes baseline data, measures of success for any CIP programs, as

well as metrics and targets to monitor municipal investment in any proposed programs.

7.3 Review and Recommendation of CIP Funding

In 2016 and 2017, a comprehensive review of existing CIP incentive programs was conducted and Council directed updates and revisions to many of the existing programs and funding levels. Included within that Council resolution, it is noted that funding for the existing programs will expire no later than December 31, 2023, pending a Municipal Council review of the program results to be provided prior to the adoption of the 2024-2027 Multi-Year Budget.

Therefore, Staff is recommending that funding for any potential incentive programs or other financial requirements in the Argyle CIP be considered through the comprehensive review of funding levels for all CIPs prior to the next (2024-2027) Multi-Year Budget.

Conclusion

Based on the Argyle Area Regeneration Study consultation and research, it is recommended that a Community Improvement Plan for the Argyle area be undertaken. The Argyle area does exhibit some characteristics of economic, social or physical decline. The Dundas Street corridor has opportunities for appropriate infill and intensification which could assist in the revitalization of the area. A CIP can provide the necessary tools to improve some of the key concerns identified by residents including the quality of the public realm, incentivizing intensification and redevelopment and improving connectivity between neighbourhoods and commercial areas. As part of the community consultation, a Community Action Plan to describe initiatives that can be implemented without the need of a CIP may also be developed.

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Note: The opinions contained herein are offered by a person or persons qualified to provide expert opinion. Further detail with respect to qualifications can be obtained from Planning Services

December 7, 2020

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