

Report to Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee

To: Chair and Members
Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee

From: Kelly Scherr, Deputy City Manager, Environment and Infrastructure
Scott Mathers, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development
Kevin Dickins, Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development

Subject: Core Area Action Plan: 2022 One-Time Program Enhancements

Date: June 7, 2022

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Environment and Infrastructure, the Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development, and the Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development:

- a) The staff report dated June 7, 2022 entitled “Core Area Action Plan: 2022 One-Time Program Enhancements”, including its appendices, **BE RECEIVED**; and
- b) The enhancements to the Core Area Action Plan detailed in “Appendix ‘A’ 2022 One-Time Program Enhancements” **BE APPROVED** at a total estimated cost of \$1,055,000.00, with the funding to be sourced from the Operating Budget Contingency Reserve.

Executive Summary

In 2019, the health of the Core Area was recognized as vital to London’s prosperity as a whole and, as such, the City of London set out to develop the Core Area Action Plan (CAAP). The CAAP was received by Council in late 2019 and funding to deliver 68 of 71 actions were either approved through the 2020-2023 Multi-Year Budget process or available in existing programs. The CAAP is part of a larger suite of programs and projects focusing on the success of the Core area and ranging from the strategic to the operational.

The start of implementation of the CAAP coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in disproportionate negative impacts on urban centres across Canada. Dramatic reductions in the number of central office workers as well as reduced tourism, cultural, recreation and hospitality sector activity added to existing challenges in the Core. Vulnerable and marginalized communities also faced disproportionate effects from the pandemic. City staff and their partners have been working to reduce these impacts through efforts including the London Community Recovery Network and the CAAP. Impacts from COVID-19 in the Core are also being experienced in other parts of the city and best practices from the CAAP help inform service delivery elsewhere as well.

This purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the proposed program enhancements to the Core Area Action Plan (CAAP) in 2022 in order to address ongoing and emerging concerns and continue to mitigate the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

Council and staff continue to recognize the importance of actions to support the Core Area, as shown subsequently in Figure 1, in the development of its 2019-2023 - Strategic Plan for the City of London. Specifically, the efforts described in this report address all five Areas of Focus, including:

- Strengthening Our Community
- Building a Sustainable City
- Safe City for Women and Girls

- Growing our Economy
- Leading in Public Service

The City of London is committed to eliminating systemic racism and oppression in the community. Marginalized and vulnerable communities have faced disproportionate impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, adding to the historic and systemic barriers that exist in our community. The City of London will undertake deliberate intersectional approaches in the course of implementing the initiatives described in this report.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

The following reports are directly related to the Core Area Action Plan.

- March 8, 2022 - Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee - Core Area Action Plan 2021 Review
- November 30, 2021 - Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee - Strategy to Reduce Core Area Vacancy
- May 18, 2021 - Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee - Comprehensive Report on Core Area Initiatives
- July 14, 2020 - Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee - Core Area Action Plan - 2020 Progress Update
- October 28, 2019 - Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee - Core Area Action Plan

Please note that the May 18, 2021 report contained an extensive list of other reports related this matter in Appendix A that are not repeated here.

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Core Area Action Plan Proposed Enhancements

The Core Area Action Plan (CAAP), approved by Council on November 12, 2019, encompasses the area shown in Figure 1 and included 71 action items to address four key areas of need:

- People struggling with homelessness and health issues need help
- People need to feel safe and secure
- Businesses need an environment that allows them to be successful
- The Core Area needs to attract more people

Figure 1: Core Area Action Plan Boundaries



Recent meetings with a number of large property owners and stakeholders in the Core, and particularly in the Downtown, have been held to discuss concerns as follows:

- Increased visibility of and issues related to unsheltered homelessness in outdoor, public spaces making it more difficult to attract patrons, tenants and employees;
- Safety and security inside businesses, including erratic behavior, thefts, vandalism, trespassing, and threats of violence towards staff and patrons;
- Difficulty filling vacant commercial office space, noting that while property owners attribute this to concerns about safety and security, downtowns across Canada are struggling with vacant office space as companies and organizations work to define their future workplace models; and,
- Timeliness of response for police and capacity other services, such as Coordinated Informed Response and COAST.

2.2 General Approach

As part of the design of the Ambassador program, a consultant was retained to assess variances between the work undertaken by the London Ambassadors and that associated with similar programs in other cities. This evaluation evolved into the comprehensive Core Area Action Plan Gap Analysis summarizing the results of a literature scan and interviews with 16 other Canadian municipalities.

The gap analysis concluded that challenges related to homelessness and mental health, safety and security, fostering a thriving environment for businesses, attracting people to visit the Core, and increasing commercial vacancies are occurring across Canada. London was frequently cited as a best practice community by other municipalities, based on the strength of the CAAP and the enterprise-wide approach to its management. The report did not identify specific programs or services from other cities that could be implemented quickly, although some medium to long-term opportunities were highlighted that will be considered as part of the evolution of the CAAP. A list of all actions there were considered is included as Appendix 'A': Long List of Potential Enhancements.

2.3 Consultation and Engagement

Both the Downtown and Old East Village Business Improvement Associations were invited to provide ideas for CAAP enhancements for 2022 and were engaged on the recommendations outlined below.

2.3 Recommended One-Time Program Enhancements

The following recommendations focus on enhancing existing CAAP programs and services versus creating entirely new ones. The following questions were considered in the development of the recommendations:

- Can the enhancement be implemented quickly (i.e. within four to eight weeks, no legislative barriers to implementation)?
- Does the enhancement benefit a range of stakeholders?
- Does the enhancement contribute to lasting change in the Core?
- Does the enhancement support community recovery?
- For new capital expenditures, does the enhancement result in additional ongoing operating costs that are not funded and cannot be managed in existing budgets?
- Does the enhancement support equity-deserving populations?
- Will the enhancement create significant expectation that it will continue in future years? Will it be difficult to exit the program or project?

None of the ideas explored or recommended are studies; they are all action-based.

Enhancement	Estimated Cost
1. Pilot an expanded Coordinated Informed Response	\$315,000
2. Accelerate the implementation of the Safety Audit recommendations	\$260,000
3. Improve security gate program for private property by providing clear application instructions, preapproving certain types of gates and streamlining the review and approval process in Buildings and Heritage Planning	\$100,000
4. Update contact cards, distribute directly to businesses and promote their availability and use	\$5,000
5. Engage major employers regarding their return to in-person work plans and schedules and support their transition with enhanced services, promotion of activations, and contact information for concerns	\$100,000
6. Create a pilot London Lunches gift card program	\$100,000
7. Expand existing Core promotional work, such as the public art highlights, stories of people who work, live and patronize the Core, and promotion of events and activities	\$0
8. Provide public information on the work being done and how to report concerns	\$0
9. Expand activation and programming to include activities at different times, in more locations outside Dundas Place and targeting different audiences (families during summer break, seniors, teams, cultural communities, etc.)	\$100,000
10. Proactively create an inventory of major events (conferences, concerts, festivals, etc.) in the Core and	\$75,000

continue CIR, COAST, Diversion Pilot programming, and other programs and services	
Total	\$1,055,000

2.4 Financial Impacts

As noted above, the estimated cost of the temporary enhancements to the CAAP is \$1,055,000. Subject to the approval of the recommendations in this report, the funding will be drawn from the City's Operating Budget Contingency Reserve. As the challenges in the core area have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, these CAAP enhancements are an appropriate use of a portion of the \$14.7 million that has been previously contributed to the City's Operating Budget Contingency Reserve, and remains uncommitted, to mitigate future COVID-19 impacts on the City's budget.

Any permanent changes to the CAAP (and associated funding requirements) would be considered through a future budget process, if required.

Conclusion

Significant efforts have been directed to the Core by the City of London, the London Police Service and other agencies and organizations since the approval of the Core Area Action Plan. The challenges facing London's Core area related to homelessness and mental health, safety and security, fostering a thriving environment for businesses, attracting people to the Core, and commercial vacancies are occurring across Canada. While the CAAP and other programs and plans are working to address these concerns, there will be an ongoing need to resource these efforts and understand how they may need to be adjusted to support a post-pandemic London. These additional measures will build on the previous important work achieved by the CAAP as our core moves toward recovery.

Recommended by: **Kelly Scherr, Deputy City Manager, Environment and Infrastructure**

Scott Mathers, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development

Kevin Dickins, Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development

Attachment: Appendix 'A': Core Area Action Plan: Long List of Potential Enhancements

cc: Lynne Livingstone, City Manager
Anna Lisa Barbon, Deputy City Manager, Finance Supports
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Inspector D'Wayne Price, Patrol Operations, London Police Service
Sergeant Mark McGugan, London Police Service, COAST Unit Supervisor
Barbara Maly, Executive Director, Downtown London Business Improvement Area
Jen Pastorius, Executive Director, Old East Village Business Improvement Area

Appendix 'A': Core Area Action Plan: Long List of Potential Enhancements

The CAAP Steering Committee has reviewed and costed a variety of enhancements aligned with primary areas of concern as described subsequently.

Impacts of Unsheltered Homeless Populations

Many of the individuals currently experiencing unsheltered homelessness or congregating in public spaces where they engage in unacceptable activities or behaviour are not willing to accept the supports currently available to them. Limitations in the health care and judicial systems are also impacting these activities and require longer-term changes by the Province. The following enhancements, however, have been explored by the Steering Committee to assist with concerns about response times and capacity:

Enhancement	Outcomes	Time to Implement	Estimated Cost	Proceed?
1. Pilot an expanded Coordinated Informed Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker response times for calls for service by businesses and residents • Reduced likelihood of encampments becoming well-established and harder, slower and more costly to remove • Awareness of the increased level of CIR activity by the populations engaged in the problematic behaviour may assist in reducing the behaviours or in the reluctance to accept available supports • Will demonstrate to the community that there are more responding teams on the street, increasing visibility of engagement 	Six weeks	\$315,000	Yes
2. Add dedicated Core COAST team(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker response times for calls for service by businesses and residents • Build relationships between Core 	See Note on Enhancement 2		Program changes and funding being reviewed separately (medium to longer term)

	COAST team(s) and their clients as well as with other service providers in the Core			
3. Expand diversion pilot project capacity targeting individuals committing frequent minor crimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker response times for calls for service by businesses and residents • More frequent interactions between the Pilot Project team and the by-name list of individuals • Expansion of the by-name list of individuals to include more people committing repeated minor crimes 	See note on Enhancement 3		Program changes and funding being reviewed separately (medium to longer term)
4. Expand the Ambassador Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the Ambassadors are not outreach workers or law enforcement professionals, they are a highly visible resource that increases the feeling of safety and makes it less comfortable to occupy public spaces for unwanted uses • The Ambassadors are important and well-trained eyes on the street, who can connect quickly with service providers and law enforcement when the public may not be clear on how to do so or comfortable in doing so 	10 weeks, including recruitment and training	\$220,000	No due to space constraints, time to on-board, and need to evaluate existing program impacts

Notes:

- Enhancement 1: The additional budget would add two new Municipal Law Enforcement Officers, including associated equipment and vehicle expenses, at a

cost of \$160,000. Having three teams would allow us to reinstate coverage on weekends and evenings. While the outreach service model has recently changed to enhance coverage during high demand times, an additional team costing \$100,000 through the contracted service provider would increase resources to vulnerable populations. Additionally, there is a need to pilot having a full-time administrator to manage and monitor the CIR program, at a cost of \$55,000 to year end.

- Enhancement 2: Information on the practicality and cost of expanding the COAST program until the end of 2022 was not available at this time as the program managers are reviewing the program to date and funding available.
- Enhancement 3: LPS Community Foot Patrol is just about to commence the second implementation of the diversion partnership project with London Cares. They are hoping for to start in early May and plan to support of at least 20 identified individuals. There are concerns about capacity both with the LPS and London Cares, but neither can be addressed in the short-term. No additional funding has been requested.
- Enhancement 4: Cost includes salaries and benefits to year-end as well as uniforms, lockers and tablets. There may be space challenges at the Dundas Place Hub, depending on when the new Ambassadors are scheduled to work relative to existing staff occupancy times.

Safety and Security

Many of the concerns being raised relate to incidents occurring both in public spaces and on or inside private properties, including theft, vandalism, and break-ins. Concerns about the impacts of people using outdoor vestibules as areas for sleeping, consumption of narcotics or as bathrooms were also raised. While Project Clean Slate and the new Core Municipal Bylaw Enforcement Officers (MLEOs) have been effective and well-received, concerns persist. The following enhancements have been reviewed with respect to the safety and security:

Enhancement	Outcomes	Time to Implement	Estimated Cost	Proceed?
5. Accelerate the implementation of the Safety Audit recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker implementation of the results of the Safety Audit that was completed in early 2022 would see the concerns these measures were meant to address resolved sooner 	Eight weeks	\$260,000	Yes
6. Conduct a second private property Safety Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses that elected not to participate in the recent Safety Audit may choose to join this time 	See note on Enhancement 6		Not required at this time
7. Improve security gate program for private property by providing clear application instructions, preapproving certain types of gates and streamlining the review and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about the complexity of the application process and the length of time to review applications could be reduced • More security gates would reduce the opportunity for break-ins and 	Immediately	\$100,000 would fund 10 to 20 properties in addition to the 2022 budget	Yes

approval process in Buildings and Heritage Planning	vandalism as well as the impacts of the use of vestibule space for unacceptable activities			
8. Update contact cards, distribute directly to businesses and promote their availability and use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns the current cards were not clear enough would be addressed Concerns from businesses that they did not receive the card from their BIA or from tenant businesses that they did not receive cards from their property owner would be addressed 	Six weeks	\$5,000	Yes
9. Enhance CPTED program capacity and promote its use by private businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides clear information to businesses to support them in refining their private security practices 	See note on Enhancement 9		Not required

Notes:

- Enhancement 5: This cost includes \$100,000 for the installation of additional lighting in Ivey, Queens and Victoria Parks, as well as \$50,000 for additional security gating of laneways and alleyways. It also includes a pilot project to install Emergency Call Stations in OEV and Downtown at a cost of \$110,000. Note that the pilot project would incur an annual operating cost of \$10,000 to \$15,000 that would need to be absorbed in existing budgets.
- Enhancement 6: The current safety audit includes an extensive list of recommendations that will take time to review and assess for implementation, so an expansion to additional geographic areas and properties is not recommended at this time. A second round of safety audit work would also take considerable time to complete.
- Enhancement 8: Update the cards in June and distribute before the end of the month. Leverage the ambassadors to support door to door distribution. The \$5,000 cost covers all communications enhancements.
- Enhancement 9: The LPS CPTED program is resourced to meet demand.

Pandemic Impacts on Downtown Office Space

Downtowns across the country are experiencing the impacts of the departure of large numbers of office workers who shifted to remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic. While their departure from on-site work was rapid, their return to in-person work is much slower and less certain. Many employers are investigating new working arrangements that could see virtual work remain for some or all of their employees on a full-time or part-time basis. The impacts of this are multiple: vacant office space is a reality in Canadian cities and the future demand for such spaces is unknown; onsite workers provide intrinsic levels of activity in the Core, increasing the perception of safety and making unacceptable activities both less frequent and less noticeable; and, onsite workers are customers of Core businesses before, during and after their work days.

Notes:

- Enhancement 10: Part of the Core Area Vacancy Study involves hiring a consultant at a cost of \$50,000, funded through that study. In addition to advancing other related deliverables, the consultant would engage major employers regarding their return to in-person intentions. This work will help understand net difference in average daily occupancies before and after the pandemic. An additional \$100,000 would provide a contract position to year end to coordinate the use of the consultants' information and the other activities included in Enhancement 10.
- Enhancement 11: The program could launch in August, which is traditionally a slower month for many restaurants and carry into September when it is hoped more office workers will be back in the Core full-time or on a hybrid basis. The cost includes the fee for establishing the program, plus 1000 cards at \$25. More cards at a smaller dollar value could also be provided.

Promotion and Activation

Safety and the perception of safety in has been raised throughout the progression of the CAAP. In addition to the massive reduction in Downtown office workers discussed above, the pandemic has created additional concerns as much of the usual activity in the Core has been impacted by closures and capacity restrictions on sporting and entertainment events, restaurants and stores, and conferences and festivals. Many customers have elected to shop and dine virtually during Covid both in response to lockdowns and to avoid exposure to the virus. The following ideas were explored to continue to persuade people to come back to the Core:

Enhancement	Outcomes	Time to Implement	Estimated Cost	Proceed?
12. Provide supports for property owners and organizations wanting to host pop-up events and programming on private property, such as vacant lots as a pilot project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased activity not only encourages more people to visit the Core, it also decreases the desirability of these spaces for unacceptable uses 	Ten weeks	\$125,000	Not at this time due to impacts of supply chain issues, program oversight requirements and liability concerns
13. Expand existing Core promotional work, such as the public art highlights, stories of people who work, live and patronize the Core, and promotion of events and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging more people to visit the Core by promoting the unique things they can experience will create more customers for businesses and an increased sense of safety and vibrancy 	Four weeks	Included with Enhancement 8	Yes
14. Provide public information on the work being done and how to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing information on who to call about concerns to Core area patrons and employees could 	Four weeks	Included with Enhancement 8	Yes

report concerns	improve their understanding of the work being done, their feeling of safety and their sense of empowerment in being part of a solution, especially for programs such as the Ambassadors which have not been widely promoted outside of the business community in the Core to date			
15. Expand activation and programming to include activities at different times, in more locations and targeting different audiences (families during summer break, seniors, teams, cultural communities, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversifying the times, locations, and types of programming in the Core can attract patrons for businesses and increase feet on the street Reinforcing the Core is for all Londoners and visitors helps build confidence and interest in the heart of the city 	Four weeks	\$100,000	Yes, for locations outside of Dundas Place
16. Proactively create an inventory of major events (conferences, concerts, festivals, etc.) in the Core and continue CIR, COAST, Diversion Pilot programming, and other programs and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring people who visit the Core for events have a positive experience Continuing the Core Area Diversion Pilot through to the end of 2022 will help combat the narrative that the Core is unsafe and continue to help reduce repeat crime in the area 	Immediate	\$75,000	Yes

Notes:

- Enhancement 12: The cost is based on four additional casual staff to assist with delivery and collection of city-owned equipment as well as the acquisition of additional equipment. A risk assessment is required for this work to proceed.

Additionally, supply chain concerns may impact the ability to acquire equipment for the pilot project.

- Enhancement 15: Staffing this work would require about ten weeks of lead time for recruitment and training. An event management company could likely be onboarded sooner. This cost includes an additional two hours of activations each week from July to December.
- Enhancement 16: The creation of the inventory can be accommodated within existing resources. Likely existing resources can be used to provide a more focused response around events as well. The additional \$75,000 is an estimated cost to continue the Core Area Diversion pilot which is a partnership between London Police Services and London Cares.