

Interim Alternative Uses of Blue Line and Green Line LRT Rights of Way

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Infrastructure and Planning Committee recommends that Council:

1. Direct Administration to incorporate a request for resources to support continued work on interim uses, including a point of contact, as part of the Four-Year Business Plan and Budget process in November 2022; and
2. Direct Administration to report back after two years with operating impacts, a review of all fees, and the results of the committee relative to supporting applicants.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This report gives an update on the results of a framework that was shared with Council in 2019 and describes how and which partnerships should be supported to activate lands that will be needed for future LRT expansion. This report shares lessons that are applicable to all of The City of Calgary's targeted vacant land assets that may be enhanced through partner activation.
- *What does this mean to Calgarians?* Activating unused spaces can enhance community engagement by creating gathering places, providing opportunities for positive social interaction, and increasing safety. Activation can serve as incubators for future local businesses and can provide testing grounds for potential community assets in advance of significant capital investment.
- *Why does it matter?* Since 2019, Administration has supported three activations on LRT right of way and this report is an opportunity to share the lessons that have been gained while responding to Council direction to report back. The activations are:
 - Community garden along future Green Line in Auburn Bay
 - Community plaza along future Green Line at 40 Avenue N
 - Pop up activation at Heritage LRT station
- The activations have demonstrated many supports and processes by Administration:
 - Offering a single point of access via 311 as well as processes already in place to support partners who wish to enhance the value of City-owned assets in the short to medium term.
 - Developing Transit Oriented Development policy and investment plans to enhance Calgary's LRT and BRT stations, both built and future.
 - Enhancing the web experience for members of the public seeking information on the development process.
 - Promoting opportunities to communities and resources to volunteers through several channels including Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinators and Community Social Workers.
 - Developing a Green Line partnership framework that will support the development of interim use opportunities as well as permanent city shaping projects to increase stakeholder support through the delivery of the Stage 1 LRT project.
 - Simplifying the application process for use of Calgary Transit lands and facilities by migrating to ePermits later this year.
 - Offering two community placemaking libraries, which lend materials for pop up events to community partners.

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- Investing in established areas including a temporary plaza at the future Green Line station at Centre St and 40 Avenue N.E.
- Providing policy and planning support for the community garden in Auburn Bay.
- Strategic Alignment to Council's Citizen Priorities: A city of safe and inspiring neighbourhoods.
- Background and Previous Council Direction is included as Attachment 1.

DISCUSSION

Through the pilot activations, lessons were gathered to inform how Administration can better support future applicants. Lessons are listed by project in Attachment 2 and are themed here with recommendations on how Administration can support future project ideas:

- Costs - there are many types of costs that are paid by applicants:
 - Accessing insurance can be complex to arrange.
 - Utility connections, especially water supply, are complicated but essential for many activations such as community gardens.
 - Activations can help grow membership as well as revenue for Community Associations. Also, pop ups at existing LRT stations can build revenue through increased ridership and creating a welcoming environment at Calgary's transit stations.
 - Programming activation sites introduces costs for entertainment.
 - **Lessons:** examine typical costs and risks to determine whether any items could be offset by The City should it be more efficient and / or if risks can be mitigated. Alternately, prepare additional information on how applicants can access required supports.
- Design review:
 - Design review requires coordination and time as concepts are tested for the first time.
 - Internal partners can help clarify the full costs of activation including maintenance.
 - All sites are unique, and applicants should understand how their site and idea are a good match to ensure success.
 - **Lessons:** create an application form on Calgary.ca that has information on timelines and requirements. Also, continue to simplify the development and other formal circulation channels to continue to gain broad insights from internal expertise.
- Promotion and expectations management:
 - Activating City-owned land requires dedication and time.
 - Not all communities may understand there is an opportunity to activate City-owned land.
 - Communication and education are required to ensure community understands the project intent and timeline.

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- Not all elements of a short-term activation will necessarily be successful. Sharing lessons between applicants and Administration will help grow capacity internally and externally.
- **Lessons:** promote opportunities in a variety of ways, including: 1) mapping of land assets to be targeted for activation; 2) sharing opportunities with partners through the open data portal and communications materials that can be distributed by staff that regularly interact with communities; and, 3) promoting City grants in one place.
- Worthwhile opportunities:
 - Applicants share that while the time and effort may be high, the value of enhancing underutilized City-assets includes mitigation of vandalism and encampments, mitigation of The City's operating costs to maintain, and promotion of community building, social resiliency, and enhancing The City's reputation as a good neighbour.
 - **Lessons:** continue to have a cross-corporate approach to supporting temporary activation with single, initial point of contact for interested parties. Required processes and portal already exist including 311 scripts.

The lessons and experience gained show varied ideas and partners can be supported to execute their plans to enhance community. The experience also shows that not all parts of the city may be aware of the opportunities to activate underused lands and that ongoing efforts to promote and centralize information are important. In closing, transforming public spaces to be more inclusive and creative builds cohesion, creativity and is supported through existing processes and growing permission space.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION (EXTERNAL)

- Public Engagement was undertaken
- Public Communication or Engagement was not required
- Public/Stakeholders were informed
- Stakeholder dialogue/relations were undertaken

Leaders from the three case studies described in the Attachment 2 shared their experiences and helped develop the lessons learned that will inform Administration on ways to better support applicants. Stakeholders are: Hands-On Growing, Auburn Bay Community Association, and Sustainable Calgary.

IMPLICATIONS

Social

Partner-led activations build capacity in the community, enhance the value of open spaces, and help reduce social isolation. Many of these sites are new gathering spaces. Activations may generate educational and volunteer opportunities in communities.

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Environmental

Offsetting grass with gardens and other possibilities may mean environmental benefits. Gardens and other open space activations may increase stormwater capture of these vacant sites.

Economic

Land activation may help support community leaders needing space or may provide food security which in turn may reduce economic burden on communities. Fundraising was required for each of the projects described in the Appendix to this report.

Service and Financial Implications

New operating funding request

Increase operating funding through the creation of one full time employee, and an estimated maintenance. Maintenance savings associated with the activations are expected to be negligible.

It is expected that partner activation will reduce certain maintenance costs, including lawn mowing and removal of encampments on vacant lands. Conversely, applications require staff time to review and execute any agreements. Hiring of one full time employee is planned to support this work.

RISK

The risks associated with activating underutilized City lands includes complicating construction of LRT and other final land uses, which may include the possibility of increased demolition or community attachment to the temporary use. To mitigate, Administration will use processes, signage and agreements that describe the terms of each partnership. There is also the risk that City processes may inhibit applicants from applying. Additional supports for communities continue to be added over time.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Previous Council Direction, Background
2. Case Studies

Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Doug Morgan/ RV / SF	OS	Approve
Michael Thompson / CB	IS	Consult