

Royal Vista Business Park

What We Heard Report

August 17, 2021

Project Overview

The Royal Vista Business Park is located at Stoney Trail & Country Hills Boulevard NW, south of 112 Avenue NW and east of 85 Street NW and in the northwest community of Royal Oak.

It has direct connections to the Calgary Ring Road (via Stoney Trail) and is only minutes away from the Calgary International Airport, Foothills Hospital, and the University of Calgary.

A Motion Arising directed Administration to undertake engagement in connection with the Royal Vista Business Park. There are currently a high percentage of vacant lots and spaces and we want to engage with business park land and business owners on potential solutions.

Given the historical challenges in fostering business and industrial growth within the Royal Vista Business Park, Council has directed Administration to:

- Identify land use and policy constraints, in collaboration with existing landowners, that have historically impacted development in Royal Vista Business Park.
- Perform a technical review to examine design and infrastructure considerations including traffic studies, transit service, architectural and development design guidelines, and site servicing.
- Conduct a City initiated land use amendment application, including policy changes (if required), for consideration and approval by Council to address development constraints and create a more business friendly land use framework within the Royal Vista Business Park.
- Report back to Council by no later than the end of Q1 2022 with the corresponding amendments, if required.

Project goals

The core vision and intent for the area is to be an employment area with supportive commercial uses. We want to:

- Welcome uses/businesses that are complimentary to what exists today.
- Create more flexibility for land and business owners by allowing for more uses.
- Incorporate new businesses that operate during the day OR evenings and/or weekends, in order to activate the area during other hours of the day.

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Engagement overview

Letters were sent out on two occasions to 155 land and business owners in the park, on July 7 and July 21, informing them of two virtual information sessions, as well as the opportunity to provide feedback online. Follow up phone calls and emails were also made to businesses on the site during the week of August 8, to inform them of the project and remind them of the sessions and online survey.

Two online sessions were held on August 12, 2021. The first from 12:00 to 1:30 pm, and the second from 4:30 – 6:00 pm. The online survey was open from July 20 – August 17, 2021.

Engagement activities were limited to online due to ongoing COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on in-person gatherings.

What we asked

Both online and in person we asked four questions:

1. In an effort to foster business and industrial growth, which of these proposed uses would you like to see in the Royal Vista Business Park? Please check all that apply.

- Animal services (veterinary, kennels)
- Business support services (convenience store, dry cleaning, banks, marketplace, print shop)
- Casinos
- Entertainment (billiard halls, movie theatres, night club)
- Entertainment industry (motion picture, radio & television studio, printing, publishing & distributing)
- Food services (restaurants, catering)
- Hospitality (hotels, banquet halls, conference or event centres)
- Health services (clinic, counselling centre, medical laboratory)
- Motor vehicle support services (auto body/service shop, car wash, gas stations)
- Municipal services (Police, Fire, EMS, municipal works depot)
- Personal recreation (fitness centres, yoga studios, swimming pools)
- Place of worship
- Recreational agriculture (brewery, winery, distillery or cannabis facility)
- Self-storage

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Other (please specify)

2. Are there any other proposed uses you would like us to consider and why?
3. Are there any uses you do not want to see in the Royal Business Park and why not?
4. Is there anything else you would like us to know about fostering business and investment growth of the Royal Vista Business Park?

What we heard

Stakeholders would welcome any changes that would make it easier to recruit tenants, land and business owners to the park. They emphasized the need for more flexibility to increase usage. There are 'too many roadblocks and 'hoops to jump through', making any proposal that does not fit the current requirements making the process costly and prohibitive.

The two main concerns surrounding the rezoning and acquisition of new tenants was customers taking over parking meant for office users (e.g. fitness centres), and potential security risks with late night or transient clientele.

Stakeholders were okay with existing facilities such as churches and medical offices but felt there were enough automotive services available.

What would they like to see in the park?

- Family related business (schools, daycares, learning centres)
- Light industrial
- Retail

What don't they want to see in the park?

- Entertainment facilities (nightclubs, casino, strip clubs, movie theatres)
- Anything that promotes after hours usage (after 9 pm)
- Bottle depot

Discussion Notes

NOTE: Raw transcripts of both sessions are available upon request.

Session 1
August 12, 2021
12:00 – 1:30 pm
23 pages

Session 2
August 12, 2021
4:30 – 6:00 pm
63 pages

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Session 1

What attracted me there was that I saw that there were already a lot of schools and daycares and educational facilities in the area and that tells me that. I mean, I mean there are going to be a lot of kids nearby, right? So, you don't really want you know [...] casinos or strip clubs.

Anything that brings in families is good for the area.

Well yeah, well because you know kids usually come after school, right? So that's like after four or after three. And usually during the school year, we would open to 9:00 o'clock.

And that's only this, usually for the older high school kids, right? So, the younger kids, they come a little earlier. The high school kids, they come a little later up to 9:00 o'clock.

There at the time when I was talking to a realtor, there supposed to be like 2 daycares. There were supposed to be opening, but maybe only one now because bit of conflict there. But probably like maybe one or two daycares.

Normally, the way the types of property scholars looks for our basically retail locations, right? So, in most. So, they have more stores in Ontario, right? They have like 50 stores in Ontario, and basically, they're all real retail locations. I mean, that's, that's what the company prefers.

[...] the proximity to the schools and the existing childcare facilities.

I don't have any problems of retail.

Session 2

We have lots of empty space in our professional center, so we're having a hard time to find. Tenants for our office space. Yeah, we have a mixed portfolio building. It's five story. Upper floors are with the self-storage units. The main floor is with office leasing space.

[...] under the design guidelines and we were required to put a podium of office space. We were originally hoping to maybe put something, maybe bit more industrial or maybe more. The storage more storage on the podium but we had to keep within the guidelines of the zoning except my right, and we've had a lot of difficulty given the office restriction, particularly with an AC of vacancy rate approaching 40% downtown, you know in office, so that's our biggest thing.

Where people are, it's just more suitable and a better deal. So, the things we have been seeing or more retail uses. Lots of daycares interest. Community stuff like fitness.

We have a church which we had to go through the process that you described earlier. It's extremely difficult. So, if there was any way that we could, maybe even expand some of our storage into some of the space

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and make some of the front. We have no problem keeping says some of the front part retail or something, but some of the spaces are incredibly deep.

It doesn't govern itself well for retail because most retail is looking for 4006 thousand 10,000. They're looking for 2000, right? So, the challenge is like, how do we do?

How do we work with a retailer that only needs 2000 but the depth of the space?

I know I'm in Vancouver and I know of a situation where there was a similar thing in Langley. A similar type of building office on the podium, and what they were able to do was maybe in part of the center of that podium, put some storage, but retain retail presence or something on the perimeter.

You can maybe still have that street front that whatever, but you can maybe make some of those spaces more marketable.

So, we were hoping when we moved into the park that the commercial base would be a lot stronger. We were expecting a lot of office users. That that never materialized. So, we're really pulling from the surrounding residential area and we don't have as commercial area like we don't have those businesses.

We've had people that have inquired most of them. There are many huge hoops we've had to try to work with an it like daycares and it just.

So, it's so it's been. It's been quite challenging.

We've spent a lot of money on building a beautiful building. We don't want it to be hodgepodge. We don't want it to look like an industrial park. We want it to look attractive and we want to. But we want to have traffic in the park, and it doesn't matter to us if it's the Tim Horton's or it's a combination of there's a fitness thing or this we love the school [...].

We do a lot with families, so we love the traffic because we're all about convenience and's, but we're not so much maybe casino we want it to be a healthy traffic. We don't want to have security risks.

We have a lot of moms and children that come to our facility to we don't want to have people hanging around in the evening.

The challenge I have is that most fitness users cannot sustain 4000 square feet.

As soon as they get bigger than they have all sorts of mechanical requirements and washroom, and it becomes quite cost prohibitive for the average.

Fitness user - thing is that we have parking issues then because we don't want to be in a situation where their attendees come, and they take a bunch of our parking lot and then the office tenants don't have an allocation.

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Yeah, it's being. It's being received. The one in North Vancouver is being received very well and it is like I said on the parking three level. They love it and it's surrounded by office. I mean just rounded by residential and residential on top and Senior Center and across the street.

Maybe residential.

We have a lot of small businesses using our storage unit says mini warehouses and they're here all the time. Although they're not in large numbers.

We have the ability for it to have like commercial delivery, acceptance

We offer convenience and it's clean and peace of mind and safe and all of that, but they, but it's difficult in this business park because no one's driving by it.

It's not so convenient for a lot because they are now relocating down in the Beltline and stuff.

We were mainly having to go after the residential market and that user is not. They don't store for as long as particularly in Calgary. You don't have the density in the northwest.

In Vancouver, it's a different thing because I could have a store across from Olympic Village and there's so much density and we truly are an extension of their home in in this area. Particularly, you know this is not downtown Calgary.

Yeah, so it's we don't have as many layers. We don't have the business so anything that is that brings anything that suits the look that brings families through the park or people through the park to get a service or maybe to go to a restaurant.

But no bottle Depot kind of thing. We're flexible.

I just need flex. I just need to have some way to lease this space because I'm being told by the brokers that we should be going after retail.

We've got a property there that we're working with some clients and trying to figure out what to do with. It's on the east side of Royal Vista and we split off portion of it. Did a subdivision. Had to go to subdivision, appeal Board and CBC supported it and I had to go to council so I'm it was successful. That was supported by both CPC and subdivision, but I'm encouraged to hear that we're streamlining that process because it resulted in a much better use of the property and happy clients, and they have 45 to 48 employees in there for the auto Body Shop, so it's meeting, what we feel is what the intention of the park was for but it wasn't initially zoned for that, so if we can streamline all that, that would be great.

So, we were left with this leftover piece of land. So, three acres, and that's a funny shape then we can only have one driveway into it, so we marketed it for a couple years now. Various uses of course it was high density.

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There was a lot of office space was a three-story building with a couple of our existing buildings. Absolutely no interest in anything above the first floor [...] There's also a lot available in this park, but there's so much available in other parts of the city as well. What we are seeing a lot of requests for because we've had a lot of interest in the lot.

Industrial uses and automotive uses. A person involved different franchise {than Mr. Lube}, but we couldn't do it because under the automotive minor, you're only allowed one Bay. Mr. Lube's are typically 3 Bay, so it was too small for them and I see now actually going through the land use bylaw. They've even removed that automotive service minor from IB, so I don't know if you guys were aware of that. I wasn't until just right now. I was double checking that the bylaw.

? I've had interest from recreational vehicle sales and service. You know boats and ATV's and all that kind of stuff. That's those are huge demand right now. That would drive a lot of traffic to the area and people are going to pick up their boat and then go get a sub

In some of our other marketing as well, we did have fitness people involved we had.

Pubs and you know sandwich shops and I think there's a quizno's that we talked to and people like that. And retail.

We talked to Shoeless Joes and I can't member who else, but they it's too far removed for what their model is. They said if it was out by the Walmart or out by the Sobeys, no problem, no questions asked, but because it's on a funny side of the park.

You need anchor tenants that are going to be there, so that's why it's places like auto body service. Tenants that would bring other business to the park in general.

You need to have the other uses in order to drive the traffic to the retail and so I totally agree with the original intention, which is that the retail is an XR reuse. If you have something else driving them to it.

You like that there are kids in the area? Maybe there's an opportunity for a sub shop kind of thing, but it hasn't been like, well, we want a restaurant or we you know it's mainly been gyms.

Because of the school. The odd pizza slash sub kind of thing because they see that there are students nearby.

We did have some office ideas, but that just got blown out of the water as vacancy increased.

Office specific to the Northwest. Maybe the owners of the office live in the northwest and it's convenient.

Or maybe it's a government kind of use and they're looking for something in that quadrant.

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We're not so worried about things like a, you know, a like a wine. You make wine kind of place or we already have municipal services in there and stuff. I don't have a big issue with like a Mr. Lube or you know, if it's if it looks now you know it's maintained.

Maybe there's a place where they keep their RV's. I don't know if it's as long as it's sort of not right next to like, but I'm just saying it traffic we do have people that go to their lockers and get their things before they go on the trip so.

We just need to get traffic into this park a

They didn't want to go through those hoops, so it was all about that flexibility again, you know so.

Because people just want to come, you know, make an application or not have to make an application and just get on with it. So that's really what we're trying to achieve here.

It's very costly to go through the approvals and you know I went through that for the church and it was a very long process and it was costly for them. So, it creates a barrier. You know right up front; lot of groups aren't willing to do that.

And then there's a time involved as well. I mean, for the timelines the you know any kind of rezoning or use applications or just adding time to it, especially if it must go before council. In our case, it added a year to our development permit, so it's it becomes prohibitive for sure.

It's interesting on that same map you showed some areas that were light industrial as well. So that's another use that there's very, very little light industrial in the northwest.

Right, there's lots of. There's lots of retail lots of commercial, but light industrial, not very much so. Like you say, that's why the electricians and plumbers are using storage lockers instead of instead of getting, you know, their own shop or their own, their own little Bay. We see the 1200 square foot.

Light industrial condos. We can build in fast enough.

And that's why when we originally, we did our plan, we did have Flex Office Light industrial because that's what we did at our Glenmore store in Calgary. Or display dynamics or business computing solutions which are all business in employment people. But they have that warehouse in the back. And they can they have their warehouse and they have the retail or mezz in the front.

It's all about like traffic and people using the park if they're already going to get there, you're going to work at a light industrial that just because.

Let's just say it's an it's a plumber, but like an electrician company, let's just say and they have a business there and they're employing 10 people or 15 people. Those 15 people may store it Maple Leaf individually as a person.

No casinos or recreational agriculture, but I think we might think of some.

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As well there, I think there we have enough motor vehicle support services. I think on the southern edge of the park we have on the other side of the street, it's collision auto body glass [and a] body Shop when there's a Mercedes so auto parts. So, I think we have enough, but the gas station might work.

Entertainment industry maybe a few. So, what I'm thinking maybe a mix of all this might drive some traffic. I'm not sure about the hospitality I mean banquet halls, conference and event centers probably need Aa lot of parking available to drive the traffic. But yeah, that's my take on it.

I work with a lot of career developers and people who are, you know, doing this all the time, finding bare land, figuring out. OK. What's the best used to put on this? Who was going to have the best Marketability too and complementary uses as a whole?

We've had this leftover parcel for over 2 years now, and I have been trying my darndest to get one of my developers involved in this and time and time again so if I could give any advice, it's the more flexible the better. The perception is already out there that it's too restrictive, it's over built and it's half vacant.

I think it will be successful for everyone and nobody wants to see their land sitting there not moving and not being developed. That's not good for the people who are already there, and that's not good for anybody trying to get there so.

My final two cents are if you get on the flexibility idea if there's any way to look at, like for example our building. If there are opportunities for us to perhaps absorb some of that interior space on the podium level to provide some large, there is a need for larger space for our commercial users that only needs 200 square feet of storage.

There's this grouping of people that need a couple 100 square feet. If there's any way that we can modify some of our podium to include some of that, maybe retain a little bit of that retailer that glass frontage we do.

We now at our commercial driver Quebec Street or Kutney facility, which we're developing. They all have glass on the street front, but then you can see activity you could see. So, if there's any opportunity for us to do some of that, we could. We would be generating more traffic as well, again in an more employment because those are commercial users.

It would provide that dynamic look you want. It would also prove that they are typical user for that type of thing would be a business and it would employ people. It would be clean, and it would be dynamic and provide kind of some visual interest in traffic cars and for the all the services.

We're genuinely trying to get people into the park and to have profitable businesses and stuff where we're busting our butts trying to try to do that. I think we're all. We're all just we want it to happen. That's why we bought in the park.

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