



2022-2023 Business Advisory Committee Priorities – What we heard report

What we heard

Context

During the month of January 2022, the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) engaged with its Working Group members and Task Force members to gather current industry input and concerns in the context of pandemic recovery. Discussions identified current issues and opportunities for processes when doing business with The City of Calgary.

The goal of these meetings was to establish the BAC’s top priorities for the 2022-2023 year.

The mandate of the BAC is to act as a conduit between the business community and The City of Calgary to address perceived barriers at The City that businesses face in their everyday operations. The BAC receives and prioritizes the advice and recommendations of its sub-committee members and works with City Administration to resolve these barriers. The BAC reports to Council and may request additional resources for initiatives the BAC believes should be pursued.

The format of the whiteboarding sessions held with BAC sub-committee members was confidential and open-ended. Members were not prompted with themes or topics. Members were asked to identify all barriers they face within the BAC’s mandate which would then be summarized and presented in this report. Members also provided proactive suggestions for steps that The City could take to improve the business climate in Calgary.

The results presented in this report will be used to identify the BAC’s top priorities for the coming year, with the understanding that other barriers identified may be carried over to future years.

Findings

The BAC Working Group and Task Force members identified several different barriers they face when working with The City, along with several innovative ideas that could improve the business climate in Calgary. These issues and opportunities fell into four broad categories: Downtown revitalization, red tape reduction, improved customer service practices at The City, and advocacy. The findings are detailed in Table 1, including specific issues and relevant comments from BAC members.

Downtown Revitalization

Downtown Calgary is home to many businesses, but a revitalized downtown benefit all Calgary businesses. BAC Members raised concerns about the safety of downtown and the pace of people returning to downtown for work and for recreation. Members want the BAC to work with The City’s Downtown Strategy team to make sure that the right issues are being prioritized, and without imposing additional red tape. Members would also like to see the BAC advocate to other stakeholders for the revitalization of downtown and for the BAC to amplify the work done under the Downtown Strategy to a wider audience.

Ensuring a vibrant downtown starts with decreasing the high vacancy rates in the core. To do this, we may need to create meaningful incentives for businesses and citizens to entice them to choose downtown over other areas.



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Red tape reduction – “*Make it easier to do business in Calgary*”

Business owners require effective, efficient, and streamlined processes that save time and money. To help Calgary businesses grow and thrive, The City needs to get out of the way as much as possible. By streamlining internal processes, we can reduce the amount of time it takes for a business to open. This means Administration must prioritize business and the local economy and ensure there is smart resource allocation so that barriers faced by businesses can be removed.

A big part of this work will be improving the Change of Use permit. Another important step is developing customer journey mapping of the key industries who interact with The City. By looking at the needs of different sectors, we can identify gaps in customer service, opportunities to further streamline City processes, and we can remove barriers to entry.

Business Friendly – “*Improve customer service*”

To ensure The City is providing a customer service experience that supports businesses and helps them navigate through each and every service, there must be an open and ongoing dialogue with the business community. Businesses have direct contact with many of The City of Calgary’s lines of service and have raised concerns about customer service practices at The City. Businesses should not have to struggle to navigate various departments and points of service. The City needs to act as a one-stop shop for its business customers, whether over the phone, at the counter, or online.

Suggestions also included mandatory customer service training for City employees and a dedicated liaison role for working with businesses during major construction projects. Members also raised concerns about the effects that upcoming changes will have on customer service at The City, including the retirement of Building Safety Officers and The City’s plans for an organizational Realignment.

Advocacy

To continue to support businesses, BAC members also identified the need for The City to address particular issues to encourage businesses to relocate to Calgary and to provide more competitive opportunities for existing Calgary businesses and start-ups. Members raised concerns about several contextual issues that make doing business in The City of Calgary more difficult. They identified several areas where BAC could directly advocate for changes or resources, or where the BAC could recommend that The City advocate on behalf of businesses. Concerns included the effects of homelessness and drug use, the effects of protests, and support for unemployed Calgarians. Members also asked for advocacy through communications: encouraging Calgarians to return downtown, by using more businesses friendly language in City communications, and by continuing to support local businesses by expanding on the successful #SupportLocalYYC campaign.

Other Considerations

Working Group and Task Force members also noted that more attention is needed for Calgary’s nighttime and entertainment economy. This is an important contextual consideration that could inform the BAC’s other identified priorities as well as its long-term planning.



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Members also raised concerns about property tax rates and assessment practices. While this issue is explicitly outside of the BAC’s mandate, it is noted here for the record.

Table 1 – Issues and Opportunities identified by Working Group and Task Force

Theme	Issue	Context and details around the issue	Comments from stakeholders
Theme 1: Downtown Revitalization Members would like to see the BAC use its platform as a key link between businesses and The City of Calgary to share information about The City’s downtown plan more widely and to amplify the plan for downtown revitalization.	1A - Campaign to get people back downtown	- As work from home orders are lifted and the threat of COVID-19 decreases, members would like to see a marketing campaign to encourage people to return to downtown for work and recreation. - One additional suggestion was a parking discount promotion to entice people back to the core.	<i>“Planning is necessary for a post-COVID environment recovery. How can municipal governments communicate that it is safe to leave your home and return to activities?”</i>
	1B - Downtown parking costs	Beyond a parking promotion, some members noted that downtown parking is too expensive year-round.	<i>“Downtown parking cost, too expensive and part of the problem. No one is coming downtown if parking is that expensive.”</i>
	1C - Homeless and vulnerable persons strategy	Members expressed concern about the presence of vulnerable Calgarians in downtown Calgary. They suggested the creation of a strategy to address problems like loitering and drug use in and around downtown businesses.	<i>“Calgary needs to do an environmental scan to find a proven strategy for the homeless population in Downtown Calgary.”</i>
	1D - Enable and amplify arts and culture	- The City should advocate for the growth of Calgary’s arts and culture sectors and make Calgary an easy place for businesses in the arts and culture sectors to operate. - There is an opportunity to revisit the nighttime/entertainment economy research for Calgary.	<i>“Successful municipalities thriving currently have a strong Arts & Culture sector. How do we amplify what we have now?”</i> <i>“There is a Creative Economy Strategy that Calgary Arts Development is developing in partnership with Calgary Economic Development, MRU, and a steering committee representing a variety of affiliated sectors. 4 draft pillars to the strategy are: 1) embed audacious creativity into our city’s DNA 2) incubate creative collisions 3) mobilize Calgary’s</i>

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Theme 2: Red Tape Reduction BAC members identified issues with the timing, delivery, and rationale for City processes.			<i>creative capacity 4) value the diversity of Calgary's creativity"</i>
	1E - Effects of protestors on businesses	Recent protests in business districts have created additional pressures for businesses, with concerns about safety and access for their customers.	<i>"Protesters along Inglewood 11th Ave and 17th Ave are so disruptive, and property damaged that people are intentionally avoiding those areas and hostile protestors. It's harassment and not peaceful protesting. What can be done? A huge impact on those businesses."</i>
	2A – Licensing, timelines, permits	Requirements for licences and permits Members noted that the requirements for obtaining new licences and permits from the city, including insurance and documentation requirements, create a steep barrier to obtaining these permits. Slow process for obtaining permits The time to obtain development permits and the time to obtain the permits necessary for opening a new business were identified as being too long. Inspection requirement uncertainty Members noted significant inconsistencies on what they were told was required on a project when dealing with different inspectors. Instead, they would like to see the same inspector throughout the entire process for continuity so as not to receive multiple conflicting sets of directions that can resulting in additional costs. Slow timeline for utility servicing The time to get new developments connected to utilities, especially in greenfield construction, is too long.	<i>"Look at total # of Development Permits in \$ worth sitting and waiting for DP hold ups." "Simplify the Land Use Bylaw (simple permits too slow, should be done within hours but still takes weeks. Should not take that long. Will re-org have measurable benefits to Planning? Need to be more nimble and responsive to the Business community. Still not there to have City perceived as 'streamlined'. Where's our baseline measurements to get better?)"</i> <i>"CPAG moving to DART is moving forward and should help, but the overall re-org is still miles away".</i> CPAG (Corporate Planning Applications Group) DART (Development Approvals Review Team)
	2B – Streamlining Change of Use	Build a better understanding of businesses needs and perspectives when interacting with The City to open and	<i>"3.5 months moving into new location in Vancouver. Was mocked by City of Calgary when</i>

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		manage their business, especially with the Change of use domain. 2. - Identify opportunities to streamline the Change of Use (Policy; Land Use Bylaw; Timeline and Cost) process when opening a business - The process for changing the use of land is currently too slow. - It is not timely enough to wait for Change of Use work to be folded into the Land Use Bylaw review. - Revisiting Change of Use is an ongoing initiative of the BAC. The committee previously conducted a separate whiteboarding session on Change of Use issues (BAC2021-0956, Attachment 4).	<i>brought up. Takes up to 2 years in Calgary for the same Change of Use. Why such a discrepancy? Some municipalities don’t even have a Change of Use process.”</i>
	2C – Permit innovative business practices	Enable pop-up commercialization in city parks and lands. Animate parks and parking lots. Explore the potential for offering more commercial services in City parks and on other City property and reduce the red tape to set up such an operation. Permitting for test sites to pilot new technologies Make it easier for businesses to pilot new technologies or business practices with support from The City. Tactical support for businesses trying to open in BIAs or for other creative ideas Support from The City, provided to or through BIAs, to make it easier for new businesses to establish themselves.	<i>“Potential Living Labs concept, quick and easy permitting for test sites and piloting new technology. How can the City be better at testing new technologies?”</i> <i>“Could become a ‘City of Pilots’ creating a super fast lane for companies to try new innovation (i.e. Mountain View, California)”</i>
Theme 3: Business Friendly	3A – Customer-centric training for dealing with businesses	Mandatory training for City employees Opportunity to make customer service training mandatory for City employees, similar to the current practice with Respectful Workplace training.	<i>“The City of Calgary defines business-friendly as: the balancing between the needs of our residents, customers and communities with the needs of our business community.”</i>

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Members identified areas where customer service at The City could be improved where businesses interact with various lines of service at The City.		• Expand Business Experience Program for Restaurant and Brewery Industry to other sectors Members would like to see the Business Experience Program expanded to other sectors, offering services like a Business Experience representative and streamlined approvals. Potential other sectors mentioned by BAC members included vertical/urban farming. • Business customer journey mapping Build a highest level of the current state end-to-end journey map to open a business in Calgary. Build a better understanding of businesses needs and perspectives when interacting with The City to open and manage their business.	
	3B – Succession planning for retiring Building Safety Officers	• Strategy for training new officers Members raised concerns about the effect on service delivery if several new Building Safety Officers are required in the coming years given the long period of time needed to train new officers. • Technology to streamline processes In addition to existing practices with Building Safety Officers, there is an opportunity to explore how new technology practices could improve service delivery to businesses. • More work required with climate resiliency Members noted that additional work is needed from The City to help businesses understand how climate resiliency changes will affect them, and what opportunities are available to business.	<i>“Advice for Building Services- approximately half of their safety codes officers/inspectors will be retiring in the next few years and it takes a few year to train new staff as 2 years in residential is mandatory before moving over the commercial inspections, resulting in delays for businesses. Streamline or use technology to mitigate resourcing and process perspectives.”</i>
	3C – Business construction mitigation strategy/liaison	• Strategy for mitigating the effects of construction on businesses	

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		Members raised concerns about the effect that major construction projects, like roadwork on 17th Avenue or construction of the Green Line, can have on businesses. • Liaison to businesses for construction projects As part of Urban Planning at The City, members suggested creating a liaison position to coordinate with local businesses during major construction projects, especially the construction of the Green Line.	
	3D – Unintended consequences of The City of Calgary’s Realignment	• There is uncertainty on how The City’s realignment will affect the business lines that businesses interact with, especially on whether it will improve service. • Slow progress on the realignment has added to the uncertainty, with some changes happening before the realignment is completed and other changes delayed until after. • Members are concerned that The City’s lacks the right metrics to assess whether the realignment is a success, which would also require setting a baseline now.	<i>“Will re-org have measurable benefits to Planning?”</i> <i>“Still not there to have City seen as ‘streamlined’. Where’s our baseline measure to get better?”</i> <i>“CPAG to DART change is moving forward and will help, but now overall re-org is miles away. Supposed to be rolled out in January, but now hearing mid to end of 2022 before completed”</i> CPAG (Corporate Planning Applications Group) DART (Development Approvals Review Team)
Theme 4: Advocacy Members identified several areas where The City can advocate to, or work with, its partners	4A – Business and Economy Environment Pillar; Calgary in the New Economy: The Economic Strategy for Calgary	• Highlighting investment and innovation in Calgary (communication) The City, along with partners like Calgary Economic Development, should highlight investment and innovation in Calgary to show what is possible here and to attract further investment and innovation.	<i>“Need more news articles highlighting new tech/pilots in City to encourage more companies to notice Calgary as a destination. Not being talked about enough. Better communication highlighting investment and innovation in Calgary needed.”</i>

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to make it easier to do business in Calgary.		- The <i>Calgary in the New Economy</i> strategy positions Calgary to become Canada’s most business-friendly city. The City of Calgary defines business-friendly as “the balancing between the needs of our residents, customers and communities with the needs of our business community”, while business environment refers to both the ease of conducting business and the level of business activities in Calgary. - The Strategy guides the economic development efforts of Calgary Economic Development, The City, the community, and other stakeholders. Its governance and implementation model supports a collaborative approach to economic development in Calgary where stakeholders work together towards shared goals. - The strategy requires active participation from City Administration to succeed. BAC members want to see accountability and evidence of a commitment from The City to implementing the initiatives outlined in the Business Environment pillar of the strategy.	
	4B – Unemployment services (CFIB survey, Chamber partnership)	Explore ways that The City can advocate for support for Calgarians dealing with long-term unemployment.	
	4C – Business-friendly messaging	Frame communications from The City in business-friendly terms, especially highlighting Calgary’s competitiveness.	