

Overview of Projects Initiated or Influenced by the Business Advisory Committee

1. Business Experience Representative Program

In response to the 2020 What We Heard Report – Restaurant and Brewery Industry (BAC2020-1312) led by the Business Advisory Committee working group, The City identified opportunities to enhance customer service for applications for complex business licence types (i.e., restaurants and breweries) that would provide applicants with a consistent and predictable level of service, and reduced permitting and licensing timelines.

The Business Experience Representative (BERs) Program was first launched as a pilot program for applications for business licence types related to restaurants, breweries, distilleries and urban agriculture. BERs provide consistent guidance through permit and licence processes, connecting customers with subject matter experts and helping to reduce approval timelines. After operating for one year, it was demonstrated that the BER Program reduced the timeline to opening a business by 21% and the program was made permanent and expanded.

The re-named Business Experience Improvement Program now consists of BERs who work with complex licence types and Business Approvals Representatives (BARs) who work with other licence categories. As of August 2023, every single application for a business licence has a file manager that will see the application through to completion, providing customers with consistent service and reduced wait times.

2. Customer Service Training Scoping Project

In 2022, the BAC and Council received the What We Heard Report (BAC2022-0518). That report contained a request for mandatory customer service training for City employees. In September 2022, the Response to the What We Heard Report recommended that the Business & Local Economy (BLE) team begin scoping a customer service training solution. BLE provided progress updates to the BAC in April and September 2023, with options for customer service training based on available resources and desired outcomes.

Throughout Q1 and Q2 2024, meetings have been held with the Chief Operating Officer and his team to discuss what the preferred approach should be. The COO's team will be leading the implementation of any customer service training solution with the support of BLE.

3. Calgary Covid Business Support Program

The impact of restrictions implemented to stop the spread of COVID-19 on Calgary's small businesses was immense. Throughout 2020 and into 2021, many businesses – but particularly those in the hospitality and entertainment sectors – experienced a lot of uncertainty due to ever changing rules on how many people could gather together. With the introduction of vaccines in early 2021, many governments decided to phase in plans to reopen businesses that had been shuttered entirely or whose operations had been severely curtailed. At the same time, the federal government had provided significant financial support to address needs in our community related to this new phase.

In May 2021, Calgary City Council approved three grant programs to assist businesses with the cost of reopening. The Reopening Grant distributed \$7,022,500 to 2,240 businesses. In September 2021, the Alberta government announced a Restrictions Exemption Program (REP) that allowed businesses who limited their clientele to those who had been vaccinated against COVID-19 to be exempt from other restrictions related to occupancy and spacing. The BAC convened a special meeting where representatives from the business community asked the committee to request a bylaw that would mandate that all businesses in scope of the REP must follow it. Council adopted this recommendation. Concurrently, the BLE team led the implementation of a REP Business Support Grant that gave businesses impacted by this bylaw a \$2,500 grant for any expenses associated with its enforcement.

Between these two grant programs, \$12,644,000 was distributed to 4,569 businesses.

4. **Streamlining Change of Use**

Some of the feedback received in What We Heard Report (BAC2022-0518) discussed the challenges of opening a business, including the impact of regulations when applying for a Change of Use. BAC asked Council to direct a review of the Land Use Bylaw to help streamline the Change of Use process. These amendments were unanimously approved by Council 2023 September 19 and began being implemented shortly thereafter. These changes make it simpler, less costly, and faster to open a business in Calgary.

Specifically, these changes have made it clearer as to when a Tenancy Change is allowed as opposed to having to undertake the entire Development Permit process. When a Tenancy Change is required instead of a Development Permit, the application is free and there is less information required to complete. Although the changes have been in place for less than a year, already there are noticeable improvements.

- Because we no longer have to calculate and know what the existing uses in an entire building are to determine whether a new business is permitted or discretionary (C-O district), the time for reviewing applications has been reduced. In some cases, conducting this type of extensive review meant that files had to be retrieved from storage. Now, it can take as little as 30 minutes for a review, instead of up to a full day.
- On other applications, with the removal of a calculation rule (where certain food service types could only have a seating area of 15sqm), there is cost savings for administration review (no longer needing to review as the rule is removed) and less detailed information needed from a business on the drawings.
- Volumes are up overall for both Development Permits (new average is 633 DP's a month, which is +10%) and Tenancy Changes (new average is 394 TC's a month, which is +30%). This increase in volume for Tenancy Change requests directly translates into time and fee savings for our customers.

5. **Social Procurement**

In 2018, Council directed Administration to develop a report on Social Procurement. Following the presentation of that initial report to Council, the Benefit Driven Procurement Advisory Task Force was launched in May 2019. The BAC provided an Opinion on Social Procurement (BAC2019-1524) and made a number of recommendations for Council to consider, including approving the Advisory Task Force Terms of Reference and Work Plan.

A three-year pilot to develop and implement a Social Procurement strategy and framework at The City was approved by Council on 2020 July 13. At this time, the Benefit Driven Procurement Questionnaire was also introduced.

The first focus of the strategy was to determine how to remove barriers and increase access to small- and medium-sized businesses and underrepresented groups while also maintaining The City's accountability to applicable trade agreements and public procurement principles such as fairness and competition. Administration continues to collaborate to implement various goals of the strategy, consulting with the BAC and Working Group as required.