

NO: **R114**

COUNCIL DATE: **May 28, 2012**

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## REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **May 28, 2012**

FROM: **General Manager, Planning and Development**

FILE: **6520-20 (Surrey City Centre)**

SUBJECT: **Update on the Community Building Strategy Component of the Surrey City Centre Plan**

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## RECOMMENDATION

The Planning and Development recommends that Council receive this report as information.

## INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding the status of the Community Building Strategy component of the Surrey City Centre Plan.

## BACKGROUND

On February 9, 2009, Council considered Corporate Report No. C001 and subsequently approved the Surrey Centre Plan Update- Phase II - Stage 1. Council at the same time authorized staff to move forward with the Stage 2 component of the Plan.

On July 25, 2011, Council considered and approved the recommendations of Corporate Report No. R151 entitled "City Centre Plan Stage 2 Status". This report provided an updated Land Use Density Concept, a new Building Heights Concept and an updated neighbourhood park areas concept and introduced the Finer Grain Road Network Plan Concept and Green Lanes related to the City Centre Plan. The report also advised that work was underway on a City Centre Community Building Strategy.

## DISCUSSION

A Community Consultation Process for the Community Building Strategy has been completed and actions will be taken in response to the input that has been received through that consultation process. This is documented in more detail in the following sections of this report.

### **Community Consultation**

The intent of the Community Building Strategy is to foster a sense of belonging and community among the residents and businesses in City Centre. This is a crucial element in creating a true "downtown" that is attractive, safe, vibrant and successful.

The Planning and Development Department undertook a consultation process to build an understanding about what residents and business owners think is necessary in relation to creating a vibrant downtown for Surrey. Survey questionnaires and focus groups were used in the consultation process. Focus groups included residents from the City Centre area as well as employees who work in each of the Gateway Tower and the Central City Tower and students from the Simon Fraser University Surrey Campus. Input was also solicited from the Downtown Surrey Business Improvement Association and from the owners of businesses that are located in the City Centre. Interviews were conducted with some long time residents of the City Centre area.

Those involved in the consultation process identified the following as positive assets of Surrey's City Centre:

- Close proximity to Skytrain;
- Access to mall and shopping;
- Presence of SFU and office towers;
- Annual Fusion Festival; and
- Iconic Central Library.

In addition, the following were ranked by those involved in the consultation process as the most important elements to add to the City Centre area to create a vibrant downtown:

1. Quality Entertainment

Feedback indicated that a key missing element in the City Centre area is entertainment, a "reason to hang out downtown". Although people opined that the Fusion Festival was a key positive feature with regard to entertainment, day-to-day entertainment venues needs to be improved in the area.

Specifically, references were made to the need for quality restaurants, venues for concerts or spectator sports, movie theatres, small-scale street performers and buskers. Appendix I provides a sampling of specific quotes that were documented during the focus group sessions.

2. Walkability and Comfort

Most respondents spoke about the need for a better pedestrian experience in City Centre. Residents, employees, and students advised that the walking environment between SFU and the Surrey Central Skytrain Station on City Parkway was reasonable but other key areas needed improvement.

It was stated that King George Boulevard was noisy and busy, being described as a "driving street not a walking street". Respondents indicated that, in general, they drove to and between destinations in City Centre. Reasons for this behaviour included a lack of pedestrian connectivity due to the large block sizes, heavy traffic including truck traffic making streets unpleasant to walk along and uninteresting streetscapes.

3. Arts and Culture

Those engaged in the consultation process viewed the new Central Library as a very positive element, providing an iconic feature for the downtown. They desired to see more places that provide a draw to the downtown, at a smaller scale as well. Examples cited include art galleries and museums as well as a desire to see the historical aspects of Surrey incorporated into the new urban landscape.

4. Connection to green space/public space

The desire for green space and outdoor public meeting space were also key elements about which respondents remarked. Holland Park is considered to be a significant asset in the area. Respondents were of the view that more small-scale green spaces as well as small plaza spaces with benches should be provided in the area. Residents of the high-rise towers in the City Centre are identified the need for more dog off-leash park areas in close proximity to the high-density areas.

5. Safety at Night

Concern about personal safety at night was a common theme raised in the focus group discussions. Residents, employees and students alike held the view that there needed to be more activity in the evening. It was indicated that the activity during the day made the core of the downtown area feel vibrant and safe; however, the lack of activity at night made the same area feel barren and unsafe.

6. Clean Up

Respondents indicated that while the area was improving in terms of cleanliness and beautification some areas still required attention.

### **Response to Public Feedback**

The input received through the consultation process confirmed that the current work, which is underway as part of the City Centre Plan Update, including beautification elements and crime prevention initiatives are well, aligned with community views in relation to creating a vibrant downtown. Projects such as vacant lot beautification, graffiti removal and the banner program along with the City's community beautification grants are aimed at improving neighbourhood spaces, promoting neighbourhood activities and developing a stronger sense of civic pride. Alongside with these beautification efforts, crime prevention initiatives are also being undertaken in the City Centre area involving a team of City staff, RCMP members, community stakeholders and local businesses.

The Community Building exercise indicated that residents, employees and students want to experience better pedestrian comfort, including places with seating. They also want to experience more street entertainment and improved connections to green spaces in the City Centre area. City staff is examining means by which to create more interest and vibrancy in the downtown public realm. Future development in the area will bring public amenities such as seating and small-scale plaza spaces but this transformation will take some time to occur as it will parallel new development in the area.

To activate the City Centre area in its current state of development staff piloted a project named PARKit, which introduced small-scale activities in public space in the City Centre area over a 10-day period at the end of April 2012. The results of this test are detailed in the following section of this report.

### **PARKit! Event**

The PARKit project involved a temporary conversion of a parking lot in City Centre to a mini urban "pop-up" park. A structure was constructed involving a series of platforms and seating cubes along with a grassy area, landscaping plantings and a wooden deck. Appendix II contains a site layout plan of the PARKit area while Appendix III contains a series of photographs of the area.

The PARKit project was located in a high pedestrian traffic area under the Skytrain guide way near the North Surrey Recreation Centre. The project was designed in attempt to create a pedestrian-friendly space for pedestrians to use by chance, as a place for people to meet and as a place for employees of adjacent buildings to relax or enjoy their lunch.

As part of the project, street food cart vendors sold interesting food including Salvadoran pupusas, Vietnamese food, Asian-grilled skewers, and hotdogs. Food carts are a thriving trend in cities such as Portland, New York, and Vancouver.

Through a PARKit website, the public was invited to comment on the project. Response to the food carts was very positive. Feedback showed that people enjoyed having seating in the area along with the food vendors and there was strong interest in more of this kind of programming. One of the respondents advised, *"I just ate at the Guanaco pop up cart at Surrey Central today - loved it! Please bring more, on a regular basis!"* PARKit was also mentioned on many blog sites with one excerpt being, *"Having stumbled upon the sight today, I must say that I am incredibly impressed. The City has chosen an active corner with abundant pedestrian traffic."*

The food cart vendors advised that there were a wide range of users in the space and that people were curious and friendly. Even though the site was not secured overnight during the 10-day pilot, the PARKit site did not experience any vandalism.

### **Food Cart Studies**

Research supports the success of food carts as an element for creating neighbourhood vibrancy. A study titled, "Food Cartology: Rethinking Urban Spaces as People Spaces," was commissioned by the City of Portland and reviewed the food cart industry in four of Portland's neighbourhoods. The report indicates that the presence of food carts in each of the study areas contributed to increased neighbourhood vitality by fostering social interaction and walkability.

The study also stated that the food carts contributed to increasing the sense of safety on the streets. Food carts become places where people meet while waiting for food, which in turn attracts more people. Vacant lots and parking lots can create gaps in the pedestrian environment, with no 'eyes on the street'. Such circumstances decrease the perception of safety and deter people from walking on the street. Interim uses, such as food carts, fill those 'gaps' and create activity on the street, which in turn establishes a sense of safety.

### **Next Steps**

Staff will continue to test the PARKit project at various times this summer. In addition, staff will gather feedback from other municipalities to better understand the food cart industry and its role in public space activation as well as impacts on local businesses within the area.

A further report on the outcome of staff's continuing research will be forwarded to Council later this year.

## CONCLUSION

This report outlines progress that has been made in the Community Building Strategy component of the Stage 2 element of Surrey City Centre Plan Update process. It also details some early results of the PARKit! event. Staff will provide a further complete report on the Community Building Strategy for the Surrey City Centre Plan later in the year.

*Original signed by*  
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PH:saw

Attachments:

Appendix I	City Centre Focus Groups- Key Themes and Sampling of Quotes
Appendix II	PARKit! Site Layout
Appendix III	Photos of the PARKit! Event held from April 17-26, 2012

Focus Groups- Key Themes and Sampling of Quotes

1. Quality Entertainment

"Give me a reason to hang out downtown"

"I'd like to see street performers/buskers."

"We need a large venue for concerts, sports, conventions, etc."

"It is important to have small venues for theatre/improv, small musical performances."

"There are no movie theatres here; I have to drive to Guildford or Newton."

"We need better restaurants, mostly fast food here."

"I love the Fusion Fest, but we also need smaller scale festivals."

2. Walkability and Comfort

"I get in my car to get to each destination; it's not pleasant to walk"

"A main shopping street would create interesting places to walk along"

"King George Boulevard is noisy and busy, not a good atmosphere, it's a driving street not a walking street"

3. Arts and Culture

"We need to create/highlight something that is interesting, a destination, something uniquely Surrey"

"I want to show my out-of-town visitors places here, but not too much nothing really is a draw"

"A vibrant downtown needs art galleries and museums"

"We should incorporate historical aspects at Whalley's Corner"

4. Connection to green space/public space

"I can see Holland Park from my office, but I don't go there, it takes too long to get to during my lunch hour"

"We need off-leash parks to walk our dog, even those small "pocket" off-leash areas in some cities"

"I would like to see more places to sit and meet friends, nice plazas and benches"

5. Safety at Night

"Create more activity, draw people at night"

"We need better lighting"

"It feels safer during the day, there are lots of people, but it feels desolate and unsafe in the evening"

6. Clean Up

"The garbage and unsightly properties need to be cleaned up; there are some bad ones on the back side of King George and also the property by the Gateway Skytrain station"

"It's getting better, but it's not there yet"

"Garbage still gets dumped here"

PARKit Site Layout



Photos Related to the PARKit Event

