



Legislation Text

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COVID-19 Recovery Task Force Business Resiliency Program

Presented by: Mike Erickson, Acting Director & Nicole Pearson, Manager, Business Retention & Expansion

RECOMMENDED MOTION

That Council direct Administration to establish a business resiliency program funded through the previously approved COVID-19 Supports, to a maximum of \$100,000, and that Administration use these funds to hire a marketing student to promote local businesses and develop a grant program where eligible businesses can either apply for a Marketing Grant (to a maximum of \$500) or a Digital Transformation Grant (to a maximum of \$1000) per eligible business.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of a recommendation from the COVID-19 Recovery Task force to Council and to seek direction from Council on the development and implementation of the business resiliency program.

ALIGNMENT TO PRIORITIES IN COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic Priority #2: Economic Development: Enhance business/commercial growth.

Activity #3: Implement a broader economic sustainability platform to develop commerce retention and resiliency strategies.

ALIGNMENT TO LEVELS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

Business Attraction, Retention and Expansion

- Entrepreneurship Development
- Granting for local businesses and community groups
- Information Services

ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL DIRECTION OR MANDATORY STATUTORY PROVISION

Council Bylaw 24/2020, St. Albert COVID-19 Recovery Task Force Bylaw

On April 20, 2020 Council passed the following motion:
(AR 20-134)

That Council approve the COVID-19 Recovery Concept Plan set out in the report dated April 20, 2020 entitled “St. Albert COVID-19 Recovery Concept Plan” with the yellow highlighted amendments as proposed by Administration.

On February 16, 2021 Council passed the following motion:
(AR-21-052)

That Administration research and prepare options for COVID-19 business resiliency programs for the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force’s consideration, as recommended by the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 Recovery Task Force is an advisory Council Committee that was established in April 2020 and is a key component of implementing the City’s Recovery Conceptual Plan, approved by Council. The Task Force is mandated with developing a report and recommendations focused on ways the City can assist residents, community partners and businesses recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic over an 18 to 24-month period.

At their February 3, 2021 meeting, the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force passed a motion recommending that Council direct Administration to research and prepare options for COVID-19 business resiliency programs for the Task Force’s consideration.

In February 2021, Administration, in collaboration with the St. Albert Chamber of Commerce, conducted a survey with St. Albert businesses. Responses from the survey were used to develop a framework for a business resiliency program. The survey results, attached as Appendix A, and business resiliency program framework were presented by Administration to the Recovery Task Force.

At their March 24, 2021 meeting, the Recovery Task Force passed a motion recommending the following:

That a business resiliency program be established and funded through the previously approved COVID-19 Supports to a maximum of \$100,000 and that Administration use these funds to administer marketing/digital transformation initiatives to a maximum of \$1,000 per eligible St. Albert business.

Administration has amended that motion slightly to provide greater clarity regarding the implementation of the program.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS OR ENGAGEMENT

To support and inform the development of a business resiliency program, Administration, in collaboration with the St. Albert Chamber of Commerce, conducted a survey with St. Albert businesses. This survey was delivered from February 9 until February 15, 2021 and was completed by 166 respondents.

IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

Financial:

Establishment of a business resiliency program would be funded through the previously approved COVID-19 Supports to a maximum of \$100,000.

Legal / Risk:

Some business resiliency initiatives, particularly those that provide grants or funding to private business and community organizations, can carry some inherent risk. In some instances, they can be perceived by the public as inequitable or as a form of government intervention. As the grants have been limited to \$1,000 per business, the risk is relatively low.

Program or Service:

The Economic Development department currently administers the Beautification Program, which offers local licensed businesses up to \$2,500 in matching dollars toward specific storefront beautification improvements. A budget of \$15,000 has been allocated to this program for 2021. To compliment the development of a business resiliency program, Economic Development intends to refresh the Beautification Program guidelines and increase its promotion as an additional resource to assist local business and commercial property owners.

Organizational:

The development, implementation, and ongoing administration of the business resiliency program can be performed using existing departmental staff capacity, although some moderate reordering of department work plans and priorities may be required. Administration is exploring the opportunity to use post secondary students, through a Work Integrated Learning program, to support aspects of the business resiliency program.

ALTERNATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS CONSIDERED

If Council does not wish to support the recommendation, the following alternatives could be considered:

Alternative 1 - That Council direct Administration to establish business resiliency program, funded through the previously approved COVID-19 Supports, to a maximum that is greater or less than \$100,000.

Council may wish to establish an alternative financial threshold; however, Administration believes that \$100,000 is the right amount, based on comparisons with similar sized municipalities.

Alternative 2 - That Council does not direct Administration to establish business resiliency program.

Report Date: April 6, 2021

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