



## REPORT TO COUNCIL

**DATE:** June 11, 2017 **REPORT:** DEV 17-028  
**FROM:** Yazmin Hernandez, Planner **FILE:** 6240-20 and 7710-01  
**SUBJECT:** BV Arts & Culture Centre – Public Feedback & Concerns

### RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receive report DEV17-028 as background information for Public Architecture’s presentation, and for information regarding stakeholder and public input received to date and the consultant’s approach to addressing recurring concerns.

### BACKGROUND:

In February 2017 Town Council contracted Public Architecture + Communication to undertake the Bulkley Valley Arts & Culture Centre (BVACC) Pre-feasibility Study. The project has progressed from March to May with over 40 hours of stakeholder engagement. The study’s public engagement strategy includes:

- A public open house held at the Farmer's Market on May 20th, 2017 from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm. Community members shared their ideas, thoughts and concerns regarding relationships between uses/users within the proposed facility, as well as share their vision for the park itself.
- A public presentation to Town Council will conclude the pre-feasibility study. This public meeting is scheduled for June 20, 2017 at 6:30 pm. The consultants will incorporate feedback received at this meeting to finalize their report to Council.

The pre-feasibility study final report is scheduled to be completed by end of June 2017. The study will help define an overall vision and concept for Central Park and a new regional Arts and Culture Centre.

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| CAO         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Dir/DS  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Dir/FIN  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Agen Date: June 20, 2017            |
| Dir/CS      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Dir/WO  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Bldg Ins | <input type="checkbox"/> | In-Cam Date:                        |
| Admin Asst. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fire    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Planner  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Agenda Placement: Staff 'A' Reports |
| Dir /Rec    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Air/Mgr | <input type="checkbox"/> | PCSO     | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other:                              |

**DISCUSSION:**

Over the past four months, stakeholders and members of the public have expressed their vision, feedback and concerns regarding the proposed development of Central Park and a new regional facility. Based on feedback to date, the consultants have decided to provide an analysis across three sites in Smithers:

1. Central Park
2. Bovill Square (including in some cases adjacent properties)
3. Veteran's Park and current Library site

Using the Town of Smithers zoning requirements for parking, the BVACC gross program area and information gathered during the stakeholder interviews, this analysis will be used to examine the 3 options and illustrate their impact on the Downtown Area. The consultant's decision to explore the feasibility of other sites was born out of concerns by stakeholders and members of the public, which became recurring themes throughout the planning process.

The following explores recurring themes, as well as other concerns which lie outside the scope of the consultants work plan, but should inform Council's understanding of this study and the overall project.

- a) **Central Park as a green space** – There is overwhelming community support regarding the development of Central Park as a park/green space. The preservation of green and open space was often noted as a priority. Residents also recognize the key role that the park plays and could play for tourists, as well as regional residents. Stakeholders and residents would like to see Central Park developed as a landmark green space that attracts and serves locals and visitors alike.
- b) **Selection of key stakeholders and uses** – Throughout the process there have been ongoing questions on the lack of a performance space within the Arts & Culture Centre. The public and some stakeholders pointed out that there is no representation of music and performance artists or organizations in the proposed facility. In more than one occasion, stakeholders mentioned the need for a performance space with flexible seating (not theater seating) that could accommodate community feasts, an indoor farmer's market and live performances. That said, performance space was not integral to the programming needs of any of the potential future tenants of the facility. Hence, the final programmed space for the facility does not reflect this component.

The lack of music/performing space in a regional facility was disappointing to some, given recent efforts by the arts community and Chamber of Commerce to work towards the Music City designation.

Feedback received during stakeholder interviews and the public open house indicates members of the arts and culture community are unclear on Council's stakeholder selection process. Members of the arts & culture community who were not identified as potential tenants feel alienated from the process. There is a perceived bias to benefit key uses without an understanding for the reasons why or how key public uses were prioritized by Council.

The success of a shared facility depends upon acceptance and buy-in from Town Council, Town staff, government stakeholders (Office of the Wet'suwet'en, Village of Telkwa and Electoral Area A), members of the art and culture community, and most importantly, the general public. Currently, there appears to be no champion among the arts and culture community for the shared facility. At this point, Council is the champion for this project.

**c) Prioritizing the space needs of the community vs those of potential future tenants**

Representatives from the Office of the Wet'suwet'en, Electoral Area A and the Village of Telkwa all identified the need for un-programmed space/ indoor sitting area within the new facility where residents from the Bulkley Valley can "be". While this type of space is often associated with community centres, all three representatives agreed that an Arts and Culture Centre could offer a much needed safe space for the regional population. It was suggested that providing this kind of space would be in and of itself "the hook" for the region's residents to visit the new facility and become involved in the arts and culture.

The current concept plans prioritize the space needs of potential future tenants over other regional/community space needs as identified by key representatives and stakeholders. This is the case because the evaluation of the project assessed and accommodated the space needs of the future potential tenants, and under this premise un-programmed space became difficult to justify.

Council should consider whether there is value in including un-programmed space within a regional public facility or if the facility should have space that is not specifically assigned to the building tenants and the costs of this space.

**d) Location, scale and focus of potential new public facility** - The 2015 Table Talks

demonstrated strong community interest in having community, arts and culture functions combined in a multi-purpose facility. During the pre-feasibility study it has become clear that further consideration should be given to ongoing efforts to support and enhance the Downtown area and to develop a plan to repurpose or utilize public facilities or spaces which may become vacant upon construction of a new facility.

Much of the charm of the region's arts and culture scene is the vitality and vibrancy of its numerous, diverse and small ventures. The Town of Smithers is geographically compact and spreading the energy and art and culture uses throughout the downtown area has ensured visitors and local/regional residents explore more of the Town than

just one key destination. Its functional and beautiful downtown is one of the key features that makes Smithers a unique destination in Northern BC.

While there are definite benefits for centralizing services and venues (e.g. fostering synergies, sharing infrastructure and cost), there are also broader implications regarding potential impact on the community. Public input suggests the nature of the services and activities provided by potential future tenant of the facility, with the exception of the Visitor Information Centre, do not necessarily fit a highway location. Relocating the library across Highway 16 poses questions regarding the vitality of the south end of Main Street, walkability and connectivity to the Downtown. A Visitor Information Centre, on the other hand, requires a vehicle-oriented location on or near Highway 16.

Further questions have emerged regarding any future plans for the repurposing of the public library facility and the first floor of the Central Park building were they to become vacant. Members of the public offered ideas on how those spaces could be utilized and expressed fears that without a repurposing plan to go along with the construction of a new facility, the vitality of key sites would be compromised.

#### **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

According to the consultants, the construction cost per square footage of civic/arts centers is \$400/ft<sup>2</sup>. Please note that this estimate does not include the cost of developing the park/green space in Central Park, it only reflect the estimated cost of building a new facility.

Based on the current input and a preliminary space/needs assessment, the consultants have estimated that a 33,678 ft<sup>2</sup> building is required. Including a 25% “soft cost,” the rough cost estimate is \$16.8 million, which exceeds the \$10 million budget ceiling established by Council for this project.

Prioritizing uses may be an important next step before proceeding to a schematic design stage. Developing criteria to help prioritize uses for a new facility as well as community needs can help make this project more financially and politically feasible. Additional consultation with local and regional residents, the arts and culture community, other regional decision makers and Town Staff will ensure transparency in the prioritization of uses for a public facility.

#### **SAFETY, ENVIRONMENTAL & ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS:**

Sustainability Guidelines for a public facility will be presented in the final report, as per the consultant’s scope of work, based on their proposal and on stakeholder/public input.

#### **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS:**

- **Official Community Plan Section 5.3.3. DOWNTOWN**

Objective: To concentrate new residential, commercial, and community uses within the downtown area in order to:

- Reinforce the downtown as the heart of the community.
- Create well defined, pedestrian-oriented streets.
- Support continued downtown revitalization.
- Provide a balance of jobs, amenities & housing for all stages of life.
- Create a compact, complete and walkable downtown.

Policy 1 - Downtown is the preferred location for multi-unit residential buildings, mixed-use commercial and residential buildings, office buildings, institutional buildings, arts and cultural facilities, and retail.

Policy 3 - Comprehensive plans may be developed for the Central, Heritage and Veteran's Peace parks to improve the design, function and services provided by these important and valued civic spaces.

The intent of the Downtown Commercial designation is to encourage a greater intensity and mix of uses (commercial and residential) with pedestrian oriented streets to provide adaptability and flexibility in use over time. Service based businesses, such as retail, restaurants, cafés, as well as professional services, civic facilities, parks, public gathering spaces, appropriate light manufacturing, and a variety of residential uses are supported.

### **COMMUNICATIONS:**

The June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017 public presentation has been advertised on the Town's website. A poster invite was also circulated among stakeholders.

An email invite was also sent to members of the public who attended the public open house and expressed their interest in receiving project updates.

Respectfully submitted by:

Approved for submission by:



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