



**Subject: Waterfront Centre – Project Update**

**To: Council**

**From: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer**

Report Number: 2023-03

Meeting Date: February 14, 2023

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**Recommendation:**

That Chief Administrative Officer-Economic Development and Tourism Division report 2023-03 be received; and

That the Mayor and Acting City Clerk be authorized to execute an amended agreement with the Federal Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) to receive a one-year extension for the Canada Community Revitalization Fund (CCRF); and

That the Mayor and Acting City Clerk be authorized to execute any further amendments to the Canada Community Revitalization Fund agreement.

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**Purpose:**

The purpose of this report and the accompanying presentation is to update Council on the status of the waterfront centre project and seek authorization to execute any further agreements between the City of Port Colborne and FedDev Ontario for the Canada Community Revitalization Fund (CCRF).

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**Background:**

When Public Works moved to the new Engineering & Operations Centre in 2017, it opened up the area of King Street and Sugarloaf Street to a range of future possibilities. A cross-divisional team from the City took on the task of exploring these possibilities over the first half of 2021, and it adopted a strategic focus that encompasses improving public access to the waterfront, creating new recreational and cultural spaces for residents and visitors, generating increased economic activity, tourism, and new jobs, and attracting commercial investment and residential development. The waterfront centre project was first introduced to Council at the July 12, 2021, meeting, during which

a concept drawing was presented with a request to support an application to the CCRF program.

The \$750,000 non-repayable contribution from this federal funding program has allowed the City's project team to procure services for demolition, environmental investigations, project management, site plan development, and architectural design. The latter two services were awarded to J.P. Thomson Architects following Council's approval of a staff recommendation at the April 26, 2022, meeting. From then until now, the Manager of Strategic Initiatives and Tourism Coordinator have worked with the architects on a concept drawing and the site plan development process.

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## **Discussion:**

While work has proceeded as identified above, the economic and grant environment has continued to change. In light of high inflation and significantly higher interest rates than in recent years, the construction of a waterfront centre is not recommended by staff to be at the forefront of the site development plan.

This is not to say that a community facility or building will be completely removed from any future site development plan. Staff believe it is in the best interests of the City to rescope the project (back to its original roots) in such a way as to prioritize improvements to the waterfront area under these guiding principles:

- Remediation – restoring the City's waterfront assets and giving them a new lease on life by removing contaminated soils;
- Active Placemaking – promoting the use of trails and green spaces by designing an environment that encourages social, cultural, recreational, and physical activity;
- Green Infrastructure – expanding tree canopy cover, maintaining existing green spaces, and improving the site's landscaping aesthetic so as to create a new sense of place for residents and visitors;
- Connectivity – linking the site to West Street, the Promenade, the downtown business district, existing multi-use trails, Sugarloaf Marina, and H.H. Knoll Lakeview Park, as well as through Smart City solutions;
- Active Transportation – designing the site to encourage a mix of practical and recreational purposes; and

- Tourism – creating a safe and accessible public space to welcome cruise ships and help facilitate passenger and crew movement to other parts of Port Colborne or destinations outside of the city.

Staff remain mindful of Council's direction to minimize this project's impact on the City's levy. This is why staff recommend prioritizing the guiding principles in place of trying to achieve all six of them at the same time as constructing a waterfront centre.

As staff and J.P. Thomson Architects look to design a new site development plan that focuses primarily on the six guiding principles, they also want to invite community members and stakeholders to participate in a series of virtual and in-person engagement sessions during the spring/summer of 2023. Having the community's involvement is essential for meeting needs and expectations, and, ultimately, for helping to define what will make this project successful in the long run.

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### **Internal Consultations:**

The Manager of Strategic Initiatives and Tourism Coordinator have regularly informed the CAO, Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer, and Director of Public Works about the status of this project and the progress made during the site plan development process.

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### **Financial Implications:**

The City received \$750,000 from the federal government's Canada Community Revitalization Fund (CCRF) in 2021. To be eligible to receive the full contribution, the City was required to contribute \$250,000, which brings the total project envelope to \$1 million. To date, \$356,000 has been spent on demolition, environmental and substance assessments, project management, survey work, and architectural services to create concept drawings and site development plans. There is a balance of \$644,000 that will be spent on architectural services, other professional fees (e.g., third-party cost estimators, environmental consultants, specialist consultants), and the first phase of site remediation.

FedDev Ontario informed staff at the end of 2022 that the City's agreement with the federal government is eligible to receive a one-year extension (i.e., March 31, 2024). If the recommendations in this report are passed, the Mayor and Acting City Clerk will execute an amended agreement and any further agreements with FedDev Ontario for the CCRF.

Grant and funding opportunities, as well as private sector sponsorships and donations, for this rescope project will continue to be sought throughout 2023.

## **Public Engagement:**

The public was last engaged about this project at a public information session about the City's cruise ship initiative, which included a segment on the waterfront centre, on April 7, 2022. A dedicated page on the City's website remains accessible to the public should residents and stakeholders want to request more information, ask questions, or provide thoughts and opinions.

Staff intend to engage the public through in-person information sessions and virtual consultation (e.g., online surveys, virtual open houses, scenario testing, etc.) during Q2 2023 to solicit community feedback.

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## **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillars of the strategic plan:

- Attracting Business Investment and Tourists to Port Colborne
  - City-Wide Investments in Infrastructure and Recreational/Cultural Spaces
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## **Conclusion:**

The revitalization of one of Port Colborne's most valuable assets, its waterfront, is an agent for preserving the unique character and history that has made Port Colborne what it is today. The City's project team have been proactive in advancing through the development planning process and in facing the various challenges that have arisen along the way. It is under the circumstances of an uncertain economic climate that the project team recommends rescoping the project.

The opportunity to deliver on the guiding principles outlined in this report allows for revitalization to still happen in lieu of immediately prioritizing the construction of a waterfront centre. It is with a continued commitment to the project's strategic focus, including an emphasis on public engagement, that this area at King Street and Sugarloaf Street will finally be put on the path to a brighter future.

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## **Appendices:**

- a. Presentation: Waterfront Centre Project Update

Respectfully submitted,

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**Report Approval:**

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.