



LETHBRIDGE
CHAMBER *of* COMMERCE®

Engaging the Voice of Business in Municipal Planning

Issue

The City of Lethbridge would benefit by implementing a more structured and vision-based planning process - including how it approaches its Capital Improvement Program - in order to better develop City infrastructure, community needs and the enhanced development of commerce for the benefit of Lethbridge and its residents. As the Voice of Business, the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce believes that it can add a unique and critical perspective, and add value, to the City's stakeholder-engagement process related to community planning.

Background

The City of Lethbridge undertakes a review of its capital spending program on a periodic basis. Prior to approving its ten-year Capital Improvement Program ("CIP"), Lethbridge's City Council provides information to and seeks the input of residents and community groups. This process allows residents to recommend projects to the City of Lethbridge for consideration and allows the City to gauge interest in - and viability of - any number of potential projects that would require a capital expenditure.

The City's CIP process requires Council to make a series of choices as to which capital expenditures it should undertake in the near-term, which expenditures may be delayed or dealt with in the future, and which expenditures are not viable or should otherwise be rejected. In making these choices, Council assesses any number of factors affecting proposed capital projects, including cost and availability of funding, benefit to the community, status of necessary infrastructure, and so on. This certainly is not an easy task, and the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce would commend City Council for taking on this role for the benefit of our community.

An understated aspect of this process is the inevitability that City Council will make, with each CIP, judgments about how our City will look in the near future and beyond. The planning and visionary aspects of this enterprise may not be appreciated in the community at large but of necessity play a crucial role in how Lethbridge develops. As such, City Council should strive to ensure that it possesses a clear vision for development, and that this vision will address the needs of the community as a whole.

The Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce Recommends

1. In conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Lethbridge ("EDL") and other stakeholders such as the Province of Alberta and city administration, work on a framework for the short-term and long-term development needs and objectives of the City of Lethbridge. Long-term development needs and plans should be identified in a single vision-based document that is publicly available.
2. Give consideration to developing planning agencies to assist with creating, refining and implementing this framework over time - such as a Downtown Development Authority, to give one example.

3. Place greater emphasis in CIP considerations to encouraging business development in the City and its environs, and recalibrate its CIP evaluation tools to give greater weight to economic/business development. Part of this emphasis should address the establishment or advancement of leading industries.
4. Consider the CIP process within this overall framework. As such, certain projects that are currently proposed should be evaluated in accordance with regard to needs such as community accessibility, transportation needs and infrastructure impacts, complementary business development, and other factors that will maximize the utility of such developments/projects.
5. To ensure the most efficient and effective use of City resources, give greater consideration to use of flexible and innovative project-funding models, including partnerships with other stakeholders including the business community.

While the above recommendations will play a role in how the Chamber responds to the current CIP cycle, the intention of these recommendations is necessarily focused on longer-term development strategy, and the Chamber hopes that the City will implement these recommendations over the 2017-2018 timeframe.