

Report to Council



Date: March 15, 2021
To: Council
From: City Manager
Subject: Bernard Avenue Program – 400 and 500 blocks
Department: Sport & Event Services

Recommendation:

THAT Council receive, for information, the report from Sport & Event Services dated March 15, 2021 regarding the activities related to the potential closure of the 400 and 500 blocks of Bernard Avenue;

AND THAT Council approve the development and animation plans of a pedestrian 'green street' program on the 400 and 500 blocks of Bernard Avenue, as described in the report;

AND THAT Council support staff to execute all documents necessary to complete the Canada Healthy Communities Initiatives grant;

AND THAT the 2021 Financial Plan be amended to include the grant revenue upon notification of a successful grant application;

AND FURTHER THAT the 2021 Financial Plan be amended to include \$50,000 of General Reserve funding if the grant application is not successful.

Purpose:

To update Council on the activities related to the potential closure of the 400 and 500 blocks of Bernard Avenue and seek endorsement on implementing the 'Meet me on Bernard' program for the summer months on an annual basis.

Background:

In November 2020, staff provided a report to Council regarding the activities related to the closure of Bernard Avenue from June to August 2020, and the lessons learned throughout the process. Based on the findings shared in that report, it was evident that the patio program on the 200 & 300 blocks of Bernard Avenue was successful and provided value to the community. By closing the roadway to vehicles, the area was transformed into a public plaza that allowed the extension of restaurant patios

and an expanded space for pedestrians to safely enjoy. Most participating businesses on the 200 & 300 blocks were pleased with the initiative and in support of it becoming an annual event. As a result, Council approved staff to operationalize the closure of the 200 & 300 blocks, during the summer months, on an annual basis.

Though the road closure for the 200 & 300 blocks was well-received, the 400 & 500 blocks closure was not met with the same level of uptake or acceptance, largely due to the limited number of food and beverage establishments located on those blocks. Retail businesses expressed that it was difficult to participate in a patio-oriented program primarily due to the additional staff-related expenses associated with it. The resulting “empty space” was not conducive to the intended vibrant, bustling atmosphere, and it highlighted the need for additional programming and animation to better utilize the space and provide community benefit.

Based on experiences and feedback from 2020, Council directed staff to further consider the closure of the 400 & 500 blocks of Bernard Avenue and report back on consultation findings and plan recommendations.

Discussion:

Since the November report, staff have been exploring the many facets of the Bernard Avenue initiative and road closure implications. Outcomes and findings were as follows:

Consultation

Success of any program relies on the communications and collaboration of key stakeholders and partners. In moving forward with this initiative, staff have purposefully engaged with many of the stakeholders/partners associated with it, including: Downtown Kelowna Association (DKA), Tourism Kelowna, Festivals Kelowna, and the downtown business owners. Consultation activities have included:

- Regular email updates to downtown businesses via the DKA network
- Door-to-door business consultations
- Virtual information sessions
- Personalized communications via phone & email

Based on the consultation to date, though the two blocks differ in their responses, the overall feedback from business owners on the 400 & 500 blocks weighs favorably towards transforming Bernard Avenue into an animated, pedestrian zone, as outlined in the table below:

	400 Block	500 Block	400 & 500 Block (combined)
For	8 (42%)	18 (69%)	26 (58%)
Against	8 (42%)	5 (19%)	13 (29%)
No Response	3 (16%)	3 (12%)	6 (13%)
Total	19	26	45

*Note: Does not include empty/closed storefronts (8 total).

Consideration Factors

When looking at the consultation results and exploring plans for Bernard Avenue, several factors have been considered and are outlined below:

Business owner feedback

Door-to-door consultation with Bernard Avenue business owners demonstrated an overall positive response towards the initiative. Many were optimistic of the potential benefits and wanted to see more animation to help attract visitors to the area, while several businesses expressed concerns, which included:

- **Parking / Visibility**
Loss of storefront parking and drive-by traffic was identified as a primary concern with some business owners feeling that prohibiting vehicles on the road will reduce visibility and thus customer visitation.
- **Safety/Security**
Related to parking, some business owners stated customer safety as a concern suggesting that customers feel unsafe walking from parkades, resulting in the decision of those customers to not visit downtown businesses.
- **COVID-19**
The COVID-19 pandemic was a concern that was also raised. While some business owners see the expansion of pedestrian space as increasing opportunity for physical distancing and business, others feel that it could be an initiative better suited for after the pandemic, when social gathering is possible.
- **Deliveries/Pickups**
Some business owners expressed concerns regarding the difficulties experienced during the 2020 closure with mail/parcel pickups and deliveries, especially those of a significant nature. In some cases, postal/delivery services were unwilling to “walk the block” and provide delivery/pick-up service to the stores.

Stakeholder Support

Key stakeholders have been consulted and engaged in the development of a program to animate the 400 and 500 blocks of Bernard Avenue. Potential stakeholder involvement includes:

- Downtown Kelowna Association will provide COVID recovery opportunities for local businesses, support logistical/COVID management, and enhance visitor experience.
- Tourism Kelowna will operate a mobile visitor centre, provide education on COVID-safe activities and travel, and support overall logistical/COVID management.
- Festivals Kelowna will produce local entertainment such as musical performances, busker activities, and on-street pianos, and support overall logistical/COVID management.
- Rotary Centre for the Arts and the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association will provide an Indigenous mobile art gallery to further establish connection with our syilx/Okanagan heritage.

- Snccewips Heritage Museum have demonstrated expression of interest in providing Indigenous art, educational and cultural demonstrations to share the history of the syilx/Okanagan People.
- Kelowna Art Gallery and Alternator Gallery have been approached to explore the possibility to procure and create public art that enhances our space while representing our community's identity.
- Local landscape architectural firms will design, create and build 'green street' parklets that are safe, vandal resistant, and COVID-friendly.
- Local business will expand operations to outdoor patio-spaces, offering expanded dining and shopping areas.

*Note: Letters of support from key stakeholders are included in Appendix A.

Public interest

Feedback from the general public on the Bernard Avenue experience was very positive as evidenced by the large numbers of participants during the first weeks of the program in 2020, before further gathering restrictions were imposed by the Province. Though no official public interest survey has been conducted, anecdotal responses to the project have been favorable.

Animation Readiness

Though extra precautions will be required, staff are confident that the physical features (i.e. parklets, games, etc.) associated with the Bernard Avenue initiative can be implemented successfully, and the related logistical elements (i.e. cleaning/disinfecting, storage, etc.) managed effectively at this time.

Conversely, the delivery of live entertainment, events, and other demonstrations, as well as public uptake, is more unpredictable due to the uncertainty of COVID. Many community groups and organizations have expressed interest in this initiative, however a cautious approach to their involvement will need to be taken. Street animation plans will need to be developed in alignment with public health guidelines, and necessary modifications put in place accordingly.

Construction / Traffic

A traffic management plan will be created that will address items such as re-routing transit, educational signage for motorists and pedestrians, and short-term parking for pickups/deliveries. It has also been noted that the St. Paul corridor will become a busier detour route and may be further congested with surrounding construction projects.

Project Design & Programming

With positive support from stakeholders in place, and a greater understanding of key factors and concerns, plans for the Bernard Avenue initiative have started to take shape. Dubbed the 'Meet me on Bernard' program, staff have been building on the initial 'green street' plans to include additional animation that would effectively activate the 400 & 500 blocks and support the Bernard Avenue transformation.

A broad range of project ideas and expertise has been gathered and used to design a layout that meets program objectives and has proven successful in other cities such as Vancouver's Granville Island, Miami's Lincoln Road, Whistler Village, and Charlottetown's Victoria Row.

The 'Meet me on Bernard' program includes four key components:

1) Opportunities for businesses

The patio program will once again be in place to allow businesses an opportunity to expand their service area and provide a welcoming environment within the pedestrian-only street. Additionally, dedicated space for pop-up businesses will be made available for businesses not located on Bernard Avenue. These pop-up business opportunities will complement existing Bernard businesses and be made available through the Downtown Kelowna Association.

2) Physical design features

Parklets, small pop-up parks approximately the size of a parking stall, will be a main component of the overall design. These parklets will provide special spaces for individuals, friends, and family to come together downtown in a safe and meaningful way. A Parklet Challenge program has been developed where local landscape architects can create and build parklets, within set parameters, that highlight their creativity and demonstrate community support. To date, nine landscape architects and architecture firms have expressed interest.

Another key feature will be the inclusion of public art, guided by the City's Temporary Public Art program. The Kelowna Art Gallery and the Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art have been approached with the opportunity to curate public art exhibit(s) that will act as a focal point to draw pedestrians to the area and showcase local artists. Community associations will also have the opportunity to create art forms such as on-street designs and infrastructure decorations to further enhance aesthetics.

3) Flexible games, furniture and activations

A variety of unique activities and games will contribute to the street animation plans and support the urban park setting. Planned on-site activities/games include:

- Mobile indigenous art gallery
- Mobile visitor centre
- Street games (i.e. giant chess and checkers, ping pong, snakes & ladders, basketball, etc.)

To further encourage public to stay and enjoy local shops and restaurants while supporting active transportation methods, items such as picnic tables, chairs, benches, shade trees/planters and bike racks will be available. Storage containers will be provided to securely store moveable furniture and games overnight.

4) Additional animation

Program spaces will be set aside to provide further opportunities for site animation and COVID-compliant programming. Many individuals, businesses and community organizations have expressed interest in participating in the 'Meet me on Bernard' program and ideas currently being explored include:

- Musical entertainment, street performers
- Outdoor events and other sport/cultural demonstrations

- Recreational programs/classes

Operations and Logistics

Logistical items and required permits will be secured to ensure a safe and successful delivery of the 'Meet me on Bernard' program. As with other events that have an impact on the public realm, members of the City's Outdoor Events Committee will be engaged to ensure all appropriate operational measures are in place, including, but not limited to:

- Traffic management plan (TMP)
- Access for Emergency Services (Kelowna Fire Dept., RCMP, BC Ambulance)
- Liquor and patio licensing permits
- Waste management and street cleanliness
- Access for City services (i.e. Parks Dept.)
- Public transit
- Bylaw and security patrols
- Promotional plans and public notifications
- COVID safety plans

Staff will work with local businesses to explore practical solutions to the logistical concerns raised through the consultation process and support a smooth transition with the Bernard Avenue transformation.

Program Evaluation

Consultation and collaboration with stakeholders and residents will take place throughout the program. Ongoing communication, transparency and evaluation will be of paramount importance to ensure viewpoints are recognized, concerns are addressed, and new ideas considered. Program evaluation methods will include:

- Daily onsite monitoring
- Ongoing business consultation
- Public questionnaires
- Scheduled stakeholder updates/meetings
- Post-event surveys and feedback

Program Funding

To effectively support the design and animation of the 400 & 500 blocks of Bernard Avenue as outlined, an additional \$50,000 of funding is required. This funding will be used for beautification items, logistical equipment, and animation expenses. Staff are exploring alternative revenue sources including sponsorship opportunities and grants. The Canada Healthy Communities Initiatives (CHCI) grant has been identified as a potential revenue source for this funding need. Staff have applied for the CHCI grant and anticipate a response by the end of April.

Conclusion:

The proposed 'Meet me on Bernard' program is an initiative to stimulate the local economic and social recovery process from the COVID-19 pandemic. The program will transform Bernard Avenue, Kelowna's popular main street, from a vehicular corridor to an urban park, allowing pedestrians to

move freely through the downtown core, explore local shops and restaurants and enjoy a variety of fun activities.

The engagement process has contributed to a deeper understanding of implications on businesses, particularly within a pandemic environment, and continues to generate creative ideas on how we can support recovery efforts and strengthen our community. Initial feedback on the Bernard Avenue plans has been positive and has indicated a desire for this initiative to take place on an annual basis.

The proactive plan being developed takes COVID-related safety measures into consideration and fosters active transportation, safe spaces, economic resiliency, inclusion, and creative contributions for the betterment of our community. The vibrant atmosphere will offer an inviting destination for all to enjoy and provide an exciting reason for people to re-engage downtown in a safe and meaningful way.

Internal Circulation:

Active Living & Culture

Parks Planning

Financial Services

Communications

Sponsorship & Advertising

Considerations applicable to this report:

Financial/Budgetary Considerations: The 'Meet me on Bernard' program will be cost shared between the City of Kelowna and program stakeholders. As part of the 2021 Provisional Budget, Council supported a request of \$53,000 towards this program, which included \$20,000 revenues from the patio extension program. As planning progressed, it was determined that additional funds were needed to develop and implement the program for 2021. Staff have applied for the \$50,000 Canada Healthy Community Initiatives grant and anticipate a response by the end of April. If the CHCI grant application is successful, staff request the 2021 Financial Plan be amended to include the grant revenue. If unsuccessful, staff request the 2021 Financial Plan be amended to include \$50,000 from the General Reserve.

Existing Policy: Council's 2019-2022 priorities identified focus areas supporting staff recommendations in this report, including:

- Vibrant Neighbourhoods
- Social & Inclusive
- Economic Resiliency
- Transportation & Mobility
- Community Safety

Additionally, the 'Meet me on Bernard' program aligns with key objectives of the Kelowna Community Sport Plan, Cultural Plan, Community for All Action Plan, Journey Home Strategy and Events Strategy Framework.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Legal/Statutory Authority:

Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:

External Agency/Public Comments:
Communications Comments:

Submitted by: Chris Babcock, Event Development Supervisor, Active Living & Culture

Approved for inclusion: Jim Gabriel, Divisional Director, Active Living & Culture

Attachments: Powerpoint Presentation – Meet me on Bernard program
Appendix A - Letters of Support