

# **CITY OF FORT SASKATCHEWAN**

## **Regular Council Meeting - Information Report**

### **Business Retention & Expansion Project**

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#### **Purpose:**

To provide Council with an overview of the key findings from the Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) Project.

#### **Background:**

As presented to Council on March 14, 2017, the Economic Development Department has undertaken a comprehensive city-wide BR&E project. A major component of this Project was an extensive consultation process with local businesses to determine the obstacles and challenges to growth and expansion in Fort Saskatchewan, as well as to be used as a snapshot of the overall business climate within the City.

The intent of the Project is to provide:

- a better understanding of the key sectors and industries with the greatest opportunity for growth and expansion;
- a substantial augmentation of the Economic Development Department's business database to improve our ability to analyze and manage data and trends;
- a client management system to support current and future business retention and expansion efforts;
- recommendations on specific activities and initiatives the City can undertake to better support local businesses; and
- opportunities for export development to support local businesses in diversifying their revenue streams and expanding their market reach.

To gather the required feedback, 58 in-person interviews were conducted with local businesses, as well as 63 on-line surveys. Questions focused on the following areas:

- business planning and succession;
- diversification opportunities;
- impact of oil and gas prices;
- advantages and disadvantages of doing business in Fort Saskatchewan;
- future growth and expansion plans;
- barriers to growth; and
- supply chain and workforce issues.

#### **Current Situation:**

Some key findings from the consultations are noted below:

- Small and Medium Enterprises (these businesses are also known as SME's) account for the largest amount of job growth in the City.

- The majority of SME's in Fort Saskatchewan are heavily reliant on the Industrial Heartland for its business. This reliance extends to the service industry and retail sector within the City.
- There is a strong desire/need for SME's in the City to diversify their revenue streams.
- Third-party services designed to support small businesses and start-ups are not readily available in Fort Saskatchewan, as compared to other jurisdictions.
- Infrastructure and utilities such as broadband are inadequate in some areas of the City and as such are impacting productivity.
- There is a perception among businesses that crime has increased in certain areas of the City, resulting in increased costs for those businesses who have been vandalized.
- Large employers are consolidating their operations, and offering less opportunity for SME's in the region.

**Next Steps:**

The next steps for this Project will be to review and analyze the response from the consultation process to formulate an action plan and recommendations. These recommendations will help inform the Economic Development Department's 2018 work plan and budget.

**Attachment:**

Business Retention & Expansion Presentation

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File No.:

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Approved/Reviewed by:	Troy Fleming Acting City Manager	Date: April 5, 2017
Submitted to:	City Council	Date: April 11, 2017