

**Agenda Item: D.2**

Request for Decision

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| **Title** | **Online Business Promotion and Business Information Collection** |
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| **Proposed Motion** | 1. That Council direct Administration to work with local businesses to enhance the online business directory with more business information directly, and indirectly through complementary databases and information repositories. 2. That Council support the re-allocation of the “2021 Sturgeon County Bounty” approved budget to support a “Summer in Sturgeon” online events campaign to further promote Sturgeon County businesses and activities. |
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| **Administrative**  **Recommendation** | As a business license or mandatory registry for local business data collection is not recommended or required at this time, Administration recommends that the County work with local businesses to enhance the County’s online business directory with more business information directly, and indirectly through complementary databases and information repositories.  Administration also recommends that Council continue with elements of the “2021 Sturgeon County Bounty” but re-allocate the remaining budget to support a “Summer in Sturgeon” online events campaign to further promote Sturgeon County businesses and activities. |
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| **Previous Council / Committee Direction** | January 12, 2021 Regular Council Meeting  Motion 013/21: That Council direct Administration to investigate options for online platforms to promote local Sturgeon County products as recommended by the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force.  Motion 014/21: That Council direct Administration to investigate options for a Business Registry Program as recommended by the Economic Development Board.  June 4, 2020 Governance and Council Services Committee Meeting  Motion 011/20: That the Committee approve the mandate letters for the Agricultural Service Board, Calahoo-Villeneuve Sand and Gravel Advisory Committee, Community Services Advisory Board, Economic Development Board, and Transportation Advisory Committee as presented. |
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| **Report** | Background Information   * Administration was tasked to investigate options for online platforms to promote local Sturgeon County products and to investigate options to collect additional business information, potentially through a registry. * These were recommended by the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force and Economic Development Advisory Board, respectively, with the objective of both promotion and information collection to better serve and enable growth of Sturgeon County businesses. * Of note, all future marketing efforts considered by Administration would be reflective of the County’s brand identity, which is under re-development.   ***Online promotion:***   * Promoting local businesses can assist in their market success, particularly as companies emerge from pandemic economic conditions. * Administration researched online promotion avenues and determined realistic options in connection with engagements and insights provided by the Economic Development Advisory Board and the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force. Options include:   + **(RECOMMENDED) OPTION 1 – Launch a “Summer in Sturgeon” campaign and incorporate into the existing County website (**[**www.sturgeoncounty.ca**](http://www.sturgeoncounty.ca)**)**      - Cross-departmental collaboration would be utilized, to: increase awareness and activity for shopping local in Sturgeon County and buying farm fresh; position Sturgeon County as a hub for tourism and outdoor activity and agricultural experiences; and provide an opportunity for customer experience and engagement with Sturgeon County businesses.     - This campaign will promote various municipal events and initiatives, attract visitors to Sturgeon County, increase resident exploration, promote businesses and events, highlight local trails, showcase agricultural experiences, encourage shopping local, and build awareness for Sturgeon County as THE place to be active this summer!     - Positive feedback has been received regarding the County’s recent “Get Outside” campaign on social media and the “Summer in Sturgeon” campaign could see similar success.     - The campaign will include local vendor picnic boxes for pre-order.     - The campaign will require marginal costs and Administrative capacity.   + **OPTION 2 - Create a new online community-based local shopping platform, hosted by the municipality.**     - Construction, from scratch, of an e-commerce platform to support local businesses. A limited number of products or services would be available for purchase.     - Offers would refresh frequently and be new and interesting for customers. This would be an innovative approach, connecting customers directly to producers and small business owners.     - The County would need to build awareness and support for its new platform. This is often quite intensive and time consuming.     - Website infrastructure development would be required along with staffing resources to maintain, which may not be compatible with future website infrastructure used by the County.     - This would require significant costs and Administrative capacity.   + **OPTION 3 - Expand the County’s online business directory with connections to e-commerce features.**     - This includes use of existing County website technologies, enhanced to add e-commerce functionality.     - Additions could include photos, exclusive offers, featured listings, share functions, and e-commerce purchase options.     - Website infrastructure development would be required along with staffing resources to maintain, which may not be compatible with future website infrastructure used by the County.     - This would require significant costs and Administrative capacity.   + **OPTION 4 – Support and promote an external online business promotion platform.**     - This includes use of an existing e-commerce platform, with municipal support for business additions. There are several platforms in use across the region, serving a variety of functions and at multiple price points.     - These platforms highlight companies across Alberta; however, may not have captive audiences or be top of mind for the general public.     - This would require moderate costs and Administrative capacity. * Options 1 and 4 could be funded through re-allocations of the existing County Budget event budget, noting that **elements of the County Bounty would still proceed**, such as the Sturgeon Culinary Crate programming for County residents and visitors.   ***Business information collection:***   * Robust business data is required for good economic development support, understanding the economic landscape in Sturgeon County, and for municipal service delivery. * Administration explored four options - the potential of a mandatory business license, a mandatory business registry, developing additional business directory functionality, and additional business data collection processes. * Mandatory business licenses and registries are often subject to annual renewal requirements, and non-compliance penalties if not renewed. As businesses may already have faced challenges due to COVID-19 or other constraints over the past year, penalties and mandatory licensing are not ideal. * Business survey collection will provide a baseline for business engagement and information in the post COVID-19 era. * Online, phone, and in-person contacts will support data collection, positive relationships, and ongoing connection between area businesses and the municipality. * Proposed approach:   + Administration would work with local businesses to enhance the County’s online business directory with more business information directly, and indirectly through complementary databases and information repositories.   + Administration would provide survey and data collection contacts and focus on additional business visitations for the remainder of 2021.   + Administration would access trusted third-party data sources to supplement local information (ex: Statistics Canada, census, business counts data, Alberta Labour Force Statistics, Conference Board of Canada data, and business data such as Hoovers and others).   External Communication   * Administration has engaged with members of the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force and the Economic Development Advisory Board on these matters and ideas to collect more business information and to promote local products, companies, and the County as a whole. * The “Summer in Sturgeon” promotion will be hosted online through the County’s website and with promotion on social media and e-newsletters. A media release is planned at launch. * Business information will be collected through online, phone, and in-person activities. Information about the initiative will be communicated through direct engagement, website, and social media channels.   Relevant Policy/Legislation/Practices:   * Economic Development Strategy |
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| **Implication of Administrative Recommendation** | Strategic Alignment:  Increasing both local business promotion and local business information collection strengthens connection to, and understanding of, Sturgeon County’s business community. This will contribute to **Planned Growth and Prosperity** as well as **Community identity and Spirit.**  Organizational:  Work noted can be accomplished with existing budget and human resources.  Financial:  No additional budget implications; activities are within existing 2021 budget for Economic Development Services |
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| **Alternatives Considered** | Promotion:   * Use of a municipal or external promotion platform, or expansion of business directly functionality.   Information collection:   * Implementation of a mandatory business license or registry. |
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| **Implications of Alternatives** | Strategic Alignment:   * Promotion   New online shopping program development, existing directory expansion and external promotion website use would all provide support to local businesses (Planned Growth and Prosperity); however, may not be the most effective and efficient use of County resources and existing budget. Each option would take considerable budget to implement or would be introduced at a time when website infrastructure is expected to change.   * Information collection   Business licenses and/or registries require a considerable amount of staff capacity and budget to administer and include a mandatory compliance component that the Economic Development Advisory Board advised to avoid. Information collection should be the goal, not compliance with a cost. The introduction of a registry or license program could erode Planned Growth and Prosperity with the addition of a program that could be seen as creating “red tape”.  Organizational:   * Both alternatives require additional human resource capacity to support ongoing programs.   Financial:   * Both alternatives require additional budget requirement to support ongoing programs, evaluated further if required. |
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| **Follow up Action** | 1. Launch the “Summer in Sturgeon” promotion campaign and report on campaign performance (Economic Development Services, Q3-Q4 2021) 2. Enhance business information collection and report on uptake (Economic Development Services, Q4 2021). |
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| **Attachment(s)** | None. |
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| **Report Reviewed by:** | Tyler Westover, Manager, Economic Development Services  Lucas Warren, Manager, Corporate Communications  Travis Peter, Director, Development and Strategic Services  Reegan McCullough, County Commissioner – CAO |

**Strategic Alignment Checklist**

**Vision:** *Sturgeon County: a diverse, active community that pioneers opportunities and promotes initiative while embracing rural lifestyles.*

**Mission:** *Provide quality, cost effective services and infrastructure to meet the diverse needs of the Sturgeon County community, while improving competitiveness and sustainability.*

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| **Focus Areas** | **Not consistent** | **N/A** | **Consistent** |
| **Planned Growth and Prosperity** |  |  |  |
| *We encourage varied and integrated enterprises that enhance our strong economic*  *base, while balancing the needs of the community and natural environment.*  *(Strategic Plan and MDP pg. 36)* |  |  |  |
| * *Supports a strong thriving business environment to strengthen our economic foundation* |  |  |  |
| * *Plans for responsible growth through the MDP and regional growth plan.* |  |  |  |
| * *Manages growth for current and future developments through:*   + *transparent bylaws, policies and processes to enable responsible land development* |  |  |  |
| * + *targeting growth around existing and identified future growth areas* |  |  |  |
| **Maintain and Enhance Strong Communities** |  |  |  |
| *We are committed to a safe and viable community, where our residents are*  *provided with access to opportunities and quality of life.*  *(Strategic Plan and pg. 27 MDP)* |  |  |  |
| * *Provides access to programs and services that have a positive impact on residents’ quality of life* |  |  |  |
| * *Provides access to safe and reliable infrastructure assets* |  |  |  |
| * *Supports the safety of people and property* |  |  |  |
| **Strong Local and Regional Governance** |  |  |  |
| *We promote consistent and accountable leadership through collaborative and*  *transparent processes (Strategic Plan and pg. 27 MDP)* |  |  |  |
| * *Provides effective leadership and management consistent with Strategic Plan, MDP, master plans, bylaws, policies, community engagement* |  |  |  |
| * *Considers fiscal stability and sustainability* |  |  |  |
| * *Fosters collaborative intergovernmental partnerships* |  |  |  |
| **Community Identity & Spirit** |  |  |  |
| *We will build upon our strengths, where together we will create an inclusive, caring community (Strategic Plan and MDP pg. 27)* |  |  |  |
| * *Promotes and/or enhances residents’ identification with Sturgeon County* |  |  |  |
| * *Support and/or collaborate with voluntary organizations in the region* |  |  |  |
| **Environmental Stewardship** |  |  |  |
| *We foster a healthy environment and minimize our impact on ecosystems. (Strategic Plan and MDP pg. 27)* |  |  |  |
| * *Plans and partnerships that minimize environmental impact on natural areas* |  |  |  |
| * *Provides awareness of environmental issues impacting the County* |  |  |  |