

December 29, 2020

Dear Madam Mayor & Council,

RE: Economic Development Board Mandate Letter for 2020.

Sturgeon County Council requested that the Economic Development Board, *"Provide recommendations related to business licensing options, considering best practices, information requirements, and other factors"* as a part of our 2020 mandate letter.

The Economic Development Board met on December 9, 2020 to discuss the topic. The discussion began by reviewing the goals and outcomes Sturgeon County would potentially be looking to achieve through implementation of a business licensing program. As one can understand, this topic is complex and has many implications. Although many potential outcomes and purposes were identified throughout our discussion, the Economic Development Board arrived at the conclusion that the primary outcome sought would be for the purposes of business attraction, retention, and expansion.

There becomes tremendous value in having insight and data from the local business community to aid in business attraction, retention, and expansion activities. With an increased knowledge of existing local supply chains, an opportunity to connect Sturgeon County businesses to other local goods and services emerges. This would result in a significant competitiveness advantage. That being said, to be able to implement a successful Business Licensing Program, the business community needs to see and perceive that same value. So, in consideration of business community support, the Economic Development Board identified a potential concern in implementing this program through a Business Licensing vessel as opposed to that of a Business Registry Program. It was discussed that the business community would likely have the expectation of an enforcement and regulatory component if it were to be introduced as a "licence". As there is currently no desire for an enforcement component, we have concluded that the implementation of a registry for businesses would be more appropriate and hold a higher likelihood of acceptance.

Further to the review of a business registry option, we discussed other considerations such as the merits of a mandatory vs. voluntary program. It was also identified that Sturgeon County will need a program that shows value for diverse business types and sizes including home based, agriculture, small, medium, large industrial, store front etc., ensuring we create a scalable and sustainable program. Consultation with the business community will be vital to showcase intent and benefits of the program.

Collaborative inclusion from internal departments such as Economic Development Services, Planning & Development Services, Emergency Services, GIS, and Corporate Communications should also be considered as well as cost and time for Administration to implement and maintain on an ongoing basis. These costs could include the ongoing maintenance of the program, data collection and analysis. We will also need to be sensitive to FOIP, data collection and intent for use of information collected.

Notable future benefits could include emergency response preparedness including flood, fire, pandemic, and other emergency situations. However, this would require additional resources and costs incurred and would be a very integrated process with Protective Services.

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The Economic Development Board considered tools already in place that could serve to meet the needs of a potential Business Registry including potential adjustments to the Regional Business Directory and the ability to collect more information from area businesses. Other potential uses of a Business Registry (or enhanced / adjusted business directory) can include, but is not limited to marketing and promotion, procurement opportunities, business education opportunities, and networking

When considering timing for implementation with COVID-19 challenges, consultation with the COVID Recovery Task force and other boards, we propose Sturgeon County further explore this topic throughout 2021. Further discussions centered around the goal and focus of what Council wants from this program will be key.

In conclusion, The Sturgeon County Economic Development Board presents the following as its overall recommendation to Council:

- 1) Recommended that Sturgeon County explore developing a “business registry” over a “business licence” to remove the enforcement component from the conversation; potential to enhance the Regional Business Directory.
- 2) The intent of the program should be to support businesses while providing as many benefits to the business as possible and not for regulatory purposes.
- 3) Consultations with businesses prior to launch for transparent communication and implementing a strong communication plan to businesses for program intent and benefits.

Please feel free to contact me should you have further questions. Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Mark Stevens  
Chair  
Sturgeon County Economic Development Board