

## COUNCIL REPORT

M&C No.	2020-267
Report Date	October 22, 2020
Meeting Date	October 26, 2020
Service Area	Growth and Community Services

His Worship Mayor Don Darling and Members of Common Council

***SUBJECT: Staff feedback on letter from Slate Asset Management***

***OPEN OR CLOSED SESSION***

This matter is to be discussed in open session of Common Council.

***AUTHORIZATION***

Primary Author	Commissioner/Dept. Head	City Manager
<b><i>Phil Ouellette</i></b>	<b><i>Jacqueline Hamilton</i></b>	<b><i>John Collin</i></b>

***RECOMMENDATION***

Direct the City Manager to connect with the property owner advising them of the City's interest to collaborate on a strategic plan for Brunswick Square and to detail the appropriate avenue to navigate their questions about the levy.

***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

City staff has had the opportunity to review a letter received from Jeremy Kaupp on October 14, 2020 from Slate Asset Management ("Slate") and staff would like to offer feedback on the items raised in the letter. The City should be encouraged by the company's motivation to establish a new strategic path for Brunswick Square and staff offers some guidance on next steps for Slate to navigate its request for funding considerations.

***PREVIOUS RESOLUTION***

This initiative aligns with Common Council's priority of Growth and Prosperity, by promoting Saint John as a community to live, work, invest and play.

***REPORT***

City staff has had the opportunity to review a letter received from Jeremy Kaupp on October 14, 2020, and would like to offer feedback on the items raised in the letter.

We believe it is first important to acknowledge the investment Slate has made into our community and we are encouraged by the company's motivation to identify a strategic path forward and to build a partnership with community partners in order to do so.

Most retail companies across our community have experienced significant pressures over the past years, which was made only more challenging with the recent public health pandemic. The City of Saint John continues to be encouraged by the resiliency, determination and courage companies have demonstrated through this pandemic, and it is our collective responsibility to illustrate our support for our local businesses in this time of economic turmoil. It is our hope that businesses are benefiting from the federal and provincial funding programs designed to support businesses through these difficult times. In addition, the City of Saint John has also developed its own programming to support local businesses impacted by the public health pandemic - The Saint John Economic and Community Recovery Initiative. This program's design invites greater people traffic in key economic areas of the City, most notably the Uptown.

This is not the first time that the City has received feedback on the importance of re-imagining Brunswick Square, as staff collected this feedback during the public engagement for the Neighborhood Plan for the Central Peninsula. As a result, one of the actions for the Uptown Neighborhood is to "build upon the Brick Park initiative by undertaking an Uptown Office Strategy to address high vacancy rates within commercial office buildings and urban malls."

It is staff's recommendation that the City should become an active participant in a community-led partnership to support a new strategic path for Brunswick Square, which should ideally include representatives from Uptown Saint John, Develop Saint John, Economic Development Greater Saint John, the Regional Chamber, among others.

The Government of New Brunswick's Business Improvement Areas Act ("BIAA") outlines the parameters in which municipalities can proceed with the introduction of a BIA and offers directive on the parameters of a BIA. For the City of Saint John, it chose to proceed with a municipal bylaw to enable a BIA in 2004, upon the request of businesses from the Uptown area.

Staff observe that Uptown Saint John is very much focused and effective in delivering upon the purpose of a BIA, as outlined in the BIAA under subsection 5(1)(b):

- “(i) the promotion of the business improvement area as a business or shopping area
- (ii) the improvement, enhancement, beautification and maintenance of municipally owned land, buildings and structures in the business improvement area, with the consent of council, beyond the level ordinarily provided by the municipality within that area;
- (iii) the construction, operation and maintenance of public parking facilities on municipally owned land;
- (iv) the maintenance of an administrative structure capable of carrying out the programs of the corporation within the business improvement area.”

The request from Slate is to use their specific levy to the BIA for an initiative in which they are interested in pursuing, when the BIA seeks to consolidate the interests of all those paying the levy within a geographic area and generate collective value. Staff observe that Uptown Saint John fulfills the expectation to complete “improvement, enhancement, beautification and maintenance of municipally owned land, buildings and structures in the business improvement area” for their members, and Slate is well served to work with the membership of the BIA to further pursue their objectives to re-imagine Brunswick Square.

Moving forward, the City of Saint John should exercise caution in any request from a local business for the City to become involved in the operations of the BIA outside of the legislative requirements outlined in the BIAA, especially related to the redistribution or elimination of levies owed to Uptown Saint John.

***STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT***

n/a

***SERVICE AND FINANCIAL OUTCOMES***

n/a

***INPUT FROM OTHER SERVICE AREAS AND STAKEHOLDERS***

The Saint John Common Clerk supported the development of this report.

***ATTACHMENTS***

n/a

