

DECISION/DIRECTION NOTE

Title: Re-Imagine Churchill Square Concept Plan

Date Prepared: March 29, 2021

Report To: Committee of the Whole

Councillor and Role: Councillor Ian Froude, Transportation and Regulatory Services & Sustainability

Ward: Ward 4

Decision/Direction Required:

Decision is required whether to approve the proposed Re-imagine Churchill Square concept plan and determine the next steps with regards to design and construction of improvements to the public space in Churchill Square.

Discussion – Background and Current Status:

In the fall of 2019, Council recognized an opportunity to explore and coordinate improvements and engagement on a concept design project for the Churchill Square area. In February of 2020, the City retained Mills & Wright Architecture and began work on the Re-Imagine Churchill Square project. The first phase of the project involved consulting the City's Advisory Committees and engaging business community stakeholders and the general public on their vision of what a Re-imagined Churchill Square could be.

Public Engagement Phase 1: Establishing Vision and Priorities

Priorities and a vision of how the public space in Churchill Square could be improved were explored in the first round of engagement that occurred from March to June last year. This process included a variety of methods to reach the community, including an interactive project page, an online survey, virtual meetings with the public and the Churchill Square Business Association representatives, as well as consultation with the City's Advisory Committees. The [What We Heard](#) document summarizing the feedback received through this process was released in mid August, 2020.

Key themes that emerged from the public consultation process include:

- The space needs to be pedestrian and community oriented;
- More outdoor amenities and upgrades to current infrastructure is needed;
- Ample parking is critical to the success of businesses in Churchill Square;
- Well-spaced accessible parking, and improved accessibility of buildings is required;
- Re-configuration of traffic flow and/or parking could provide more community space;
- More greenspace and amenity areas are important;
- Existing lighting is generally poor and could be improved;

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- Improved snow clearing and maintenance needs to be provided.

Proposed Re-Imagine Churchill Square Concept Plan

Public and stakeholder feedback was considered in conjunction with technical considerations such as site access requirements, vehicle, pedestrian and cyclist circulation needs, underground water and sewer service conflicts, and general site grading constraints. The proposed concept plan was developed and released for a second round of feedback on March 12, 2021.

A concept plan is an early design document that is intended to establish how areas of space will be used and the general layout of the public space. This includes areas of parking, drive-aisles, and sidewalks, as well as the general locations of intersections landscaping. Concept designs provide direction for the next step of detailed design and are used to develop project cost estimates. Some of the most notable changes to the existing layout shown in the concept plans include:

- Sidewalks in front of businesses around the square have been expanded to provide more amenity, landscaping, and pedestrian space.
- Parking areas have been reoriented by 90 degrees to improve circulation efficiency and the concept plan reflects a reduction in total area parking by about 26 spaces.
- Space along the central drive aisle has been dedicated for separated pedestrian and bike connections between Elizabeth Avenue and the central plaza area at the Terrace on the Square building.
- The intersection in front of Terrace on the Square has been reconfigured to allow through movements only and raised to sidewalk level providing improved accessibility while calming traffic. A separate lay-by area is located outside the front door for GoBus and passenger drop-off/pick-up and deliveries.
- A continuous sidewalk is provided adjacent to parking along the Terrace on the Square and ramps to the building have been improved to meet current accessibility requirements.
- Existing trees along Elizabeth Avenue have been preserved and enhanced with additional landscape features.
- Improved lighting for parking lot and sidewalk areas.

While the plans and images of the renderings show a lot of detail at this stage, many features including curb ramps and tactile warning surfaces are not shown. These features would be included as part of the detailed design process. Some features that are shown in the concept plan such as the type of tables and bike racks may not be the exact products used or shown in the exact placement. This phase of the project and these plans and images are the first step to understanding the re-imagined vision of Churchill Square.

Public Engagement Phase 2: Feedback on Proposed Concept Plan

A second round of consultation was held from December 2020 to March 2021 to gather feedback on the proposed concept plan. Staff met with the Inclusion Advisory Committee (IAC) on March 23, 2021 to review the concept plan and gather input. Key points discussed at the meeting are summarized below:

- There was support expressed for the drop-off layby accommodation provided for Go Bus at the front of Terrace on the Square and the IAC was very pleased with the proposed improvements to the drop off/pick up including the raised intersection at this central drop-off and crossing point.
- There was a request for one or two accessible spaces to be located at parking along the end of Rowan Street (near the street exit to Pine Bud Avenue).
- There was general support expressed for the project as a whole with emphasis on the potential improved accessibility and amenity areas, including structures that will protect users from weather (wind, wet, fog).
- IAC members highlighted that layout/paths that prioritize pedestrian movement and safety were an extremely important part of design and that providing spaces that are comfortable for these users to spend time is key.
- No significant concerns were identified at this project stage and the IAC was generally supportive of the project at this time.

Consultation with other City's advisory committees was held on March 24, 2021 during a virtual meeting. Public feedback on the concept plan was gathered through the project's online Engage! page through quick polls, commentary, and questions submitted through the platform. Emails to engage@stjohns.ca and phone calls to the Access Centre were also received. In addition, two virtual public open houses were held on March 25, 2021.

Key points heard through this second round of engagement are provided below:

- Too much space is still allocated for parking.
- The redesign is an improvement to pedestrian safety.
- Interest in the mix-use opportunities was expressed while some had concerns about neighbourhood impacts of possible events.
- The concept plan represents a definite improvement in accessibility.
- Expanded sidewalks in the area were well received and people were generally supportive of expanding pedestrian and amenity space.
- Some people were disappointed there wasn't more pedestrian and green space. There was an expectation by some that there would be a significant reduction in area parking.
- Residents in the area generally felt the project was positive for the neighbourhood.
- Support for maintaining the existing vendor setups and improving the Square for vendors was noted.
- Importance of the bike facility connections and parking was voiced.
- People want to see electric vehicle charging stations incorporated.
- The importance of ongoing winter maintenance and design to support all-season and all-weather use was expressed.
- Many comments provided feedback on what people would like to see out of a detailed design (e.g. types of landscaping) were received in addition to other comments on things outside of the project scope (e.g. type of businesses in the square and ideas for the park space across the street).

Representatives of the Churchill Square Business Association were consulted through the process and reviewed the proposed concept plan. They have expressed that they are supportive of the proposed concept plan and would like to see the project move ahead. They also provided requests for ongoing maintenance and other operational considerations. A copy of the letter outlining their support and comments is attached for consideration.

Maintenance

Maintenance was identified as being critical to the success of the proposed concept plan, both by city staff and through the engagement process. To prioritize snow clearing and winter maintenance of the parking area in Churchill Square, Council approved the work to be completed by a private contractor in the fall of 2019. This annual contract is currently \$57,000 before tax and includes snow clearing and ice control of the parking area. This two-year contract is currently cluing up, and an increased total cost is expected when it is re-tendered. It is noted that this contract does not currently include sidewalk snow clearing in the area. City crews clear the sidewalk along the Rowan Street side of the Square up to Elizabeth Avenue.

The proposed concept plan was reviewed by the City's Public Works department to estimate the potential costs of a future contract for continued enhanced winter maintenance of the reconfigured public space. Enhanced winter maintenance for the parking area with the addition of sidewalk and pedestrian plaza snow clearing could cost an additional \$60,000 to \$90,000 annually for a total annual anticipated cost of about \$120,000 to \$150,000 before tax. The main reasons for the additional cost would be the additional scope of sidewalk clearing as well as the introduction of new features, which would require the use of additional machinery (not just a loader, but smaller equipment as well) as well as some clearing by hand. In addition, the reduction of snow storage space would require added costs to include more frequent snow removals from the area.

The Parks and Open Spaces division of Public Works reviewed the proposed concept plan and advised that maintenance of the landscaping in the area could be addressed with existing resources.

Coordination of Capital Works Projects

Existing underground watermain in the area are generally in poor condition and in need of repair/replacement. Public Works has confirmed that the planned and budgeted work required to upgrade this utility infrastructure could be coordinated with the potential implementation of the proposed Churchill Square concept plan. A condition assessment of the sewer infrastructure in the area has also been initiated. While this inspection is not yet complete, it is expected that it will likely reveal the need for rehabilitation work. A high-level estimate for sewer main lining in the area was completed and found that the work could cost in the order of \$2,000,000. If required, underground infrastructure rehabilitation work would need to be completed and coordinated with the construction of the Re-imagined Churchill Square.

About 30 years ago (in the early 1990s) the access to Churchill Square along Elizabeth Avenue was consolidated from two unsignalized accesses to the signalized intersection present today as part of a street widening project along Elizabeth Avenue. At that time, some limited paving and sidewalk work was also completed. Just over 10 years ago the asphalt

surface of the northeast parking lot was repaved. No other significant capital projects have occurred in this area since that time.

Key Considerations/Implications:**1. Budget/Financial Implications:**

The overall estimated cost for design and construction of the proposed concept plan is in the order of \$3,225,100. This budget excludes any potential sewer rehabilitation costs noted below.

In addition to the estimated capital project costs, ongoing enhanced winter maintenance of the reconfigured public area could cost \$60,000 to \$90,000 annually in addition to the current winter maintenance budget of \$57,000.

If sewer rehabilitation in the area is deemed necessary through the detailed condition assessment, a coordinated project to complete this work could cost approximately \$2,000,000.

At present, there is about \$560,000 available in the Churchill Square Parking Reserve Fund. Of the parking meter revenue generated in Churchill Square, 20% is dedicated to this fund which is set aside for capital improvements in Churchill Square. A portion of the proposed concept plan project could be completed through this available fund.

2. Partners or Other Stakeholders:

Residents, businesses (and their employees) and visitors of Churchill Square, City Advisory Committees, and the general public.

3. Alignment with Strategic Directions/Adopted Plans:

4. Completion of the Re-Imagine Churchill Square project aligns with the strategic direction to create a Connected City. Specifically, "A city where people feel connected, have a sense of belonging, and are actively engaged in community life." and the goal to "develop and deliver programs, services, and public spaces that build safe, healthy and vibrant communities".

5. Legal or Policy Implications: Not applicable**6. Privacy Implications: Not applicable****7. Engagement and Communications Considerations:**

Two rounds of consultation and engagement with City Advisory Committees, area stakeholders, and the general public were completed as part of this project. What We Heard documents were prepared and submitted to Council summarizing the feedback received.

If the concept plan were to move forward for implementation, the City would continue to engage with necessary stakeholders and relevant Advisory Committee's while

communicating project progress to the public. Where feasible, feedback from the engagement on the concept plan will be incorporated into the design process.

- 8. Human Resource Implications: Not applicable
- 9. Procurement Implications: Not applicable
- 10. Information Technology Implications: Not applicable
- 11. Other Implications: Not applicable

Recommendation:

That Council approve the proposed Re-imagine Churchill Square concept plan and it be referred for future capital works consideration to proceed with the detailed design and construction as funding becomes available.

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Approved by: Scott Winsor P.Eng., Director of Engineering

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Re-Imagine Churchill Square Concept Plan.docx
Attachments:	- Re-imagine Churchill Square_Concept Report.pdf - 23-03-2021-Inclusion Advisory Committee Meeting.pdf - CSBA REPORT COMMENTS.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Mar 31, 2021

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Scott Winsor - Mar 31, 2021 - 2:33 PM

Jason Sinyard - Mar 31, 2021 - 3:11 PM