Water Street Construction Project Debrief meeting
July 29, 2019 11 a.m. to noon
Foran-Green Room

The City solicited feedback at the in-person session as well as via e-mail.

Business community	**City staff and Council**	**Business Associations**
Peg Norman, Bee's Knees and Travel Bug	Dave Lane (at large)	Scott, Cluney, Downtown St. John's
Gerry Rogers, Bee's Knees and Travel Bug	Hope Jamieson (Ward 2)	
Steve Denty, Murry Premises Hotel	Sandy Hickman (at large)	
Kelly Mansell – Rocket Bakery	Shawn Butt (City Business Liaison)	
Steve Campbell, Downtown Executive Suites	Mark White, Construction Engineering	
Colin Baird, GateAcre Limited	Kelly Maguire, Communications	
Scott Giannou, Jump Careers	Victoria Etchegary, Organizational Performance and Strategy	
Gail Decker, Next Clothing	Jason Sinyard, Planning, Engineering and Regulatory Services	
	Jamie Korab, (Ward 3)	
	Heather Mills- Snow, Economic Development	

Councillor Lane hosted the session. He outlined the purpose of the meeting, namely, to get feedback from those most impacted by the project and noted the importance of continuing to improve upon the process for the next phase. He stressed the importance of having continuous conversation about this project.

He invited the project lead – Mark White to provide an overview of the project (a copy of the presentation is attached). Mark reviewed key elements of the project including:

- What went well/risks that were mitigated
- Challenges
- Feedback from businesses received to date
- Overview of the phases of the project left to complete

Dave then opened the floor to questions and comments.

<u>Feedback from business community on what worked well/general observations</u>:

- The street looks great now – it's how the whole street should look.
- Shawn Butt, the business liaison was great – responsive, respectful of concerns. Generally, staff responsive to issues and they were addressed quickly.
- Businesses felt a little battle fatigued at the end. Every day is important to small business.
- Downtown and Water Street important for tourism, always need to be mindful of this and especially during construction.
- Different perspectives on the one-way traffic flow:
    - One-way traffic flow didn't work in one person's experience. If there is one-way flow it should be moving most of the time.
    - Having the traffic rerouted one way was great because it gave the perception that it was not as disruptive as one might think. 'If the traffic could still drive through, it couldn't be that bad!
- With the changes to the streetscape, bus drivers now stopping in front of Yellow Belly as there is no space to pull in with the bump out; this impacts traffic build up at the lights.
- So many Downtown businesses just hang on, commitment to what their business is… not sure there is a real understanding of the fragility of the businesses. Need more recognition that Water Street was impacted – could we ask how much they were impacted during construction.
- Recognize there is an effort to make things better.
- Archeologist on site is fabulous – how can we tap into that?
- Most feedback from tourists was fine, they recognize that construction work needs to be done, locals felt more challenged.
- One business noted that the City made a great effort to listen to concerns about keeping the sidewalks open with proper signage. Customers commented how good it was.

<u>Suggestions for improvement re: construction generally for next year</u>:

- Construction workers should park somewhere other than at meter spaces in Downtown. Encourage conversations with contractors to facilitate this for next year and therefore have less impact on parking for patrons. Ensure construction workers understand the importance of parking, be more aware of challenges businesses experience during construction.
- Must get the cars through – keep traffic flowing as much as possible.
- Consider all requests for parking meters carefully during the construction period – any loss of meters for general patrons is a challenge during construction.
- Need to consider accommodations industry for construction zones – people need to roll luggage.

<u>Suggestions regarding marketing and communications:</u>

- Need as much positive media coverage as we can get. There should be continued coverage on the progress throughout the project because many people do not realize it is a five-year project for three months at a time. They were under the impression it was going to continue all summer.
- One business noted that while signage in the downtown works for those already downtown, more promotion is needed get people to come downtown.

- Social media is critical – engagement with shop owners and restaurants – get people more active on social media.
- Need story of downtown.
- How do you better tap into the Downtown St. John's Love DT campaign? There was a feeling that there was not enough engagement with the business community on that campaign.

Suggestions/comments on signage:

- Pedestrian navigation still difficult a lot of the time. Tourists navigating their way was still confusing.
- Signage for businesses – one business felt that those signs were not effective.

Questions that arose:

- Is there an option for economic relief for businesses impacted? One business owner suggested a need to get a clear picture of the economic impact since DT businesses are also employers, specific store front businesses most impacted. Businesses bearing the economic burden of this.
    - Dave noted that the City can't change taxes because of legislation. There could be grants options but would need to change bylaws, considering what can be possible.

Councillor Lane clewed up the meeting noting some things that could be addressed for next year:

- A signage committee including business owners was established for 2018-19 and most of the signage put in place was recommended from that group. We could upgrade the signage committee and make more improvements and get message outside of the downtown.
- We need to keep conversation going.
- Arrange a meeting for fall to discuss improvements overall for next year.