

Business Forum
on
City Development

Issues and Recommendations

February 25, 2009

Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce

*Greater Charlottetown Area
Chamber of Commerce*

*Tourism
Charlottetown*

*Downtown
Charlottetown Inc.*



*Charlottetown Area
Development Corporation*

Introduction

The Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with Downtown Charlottetown Inc., Tourism Charlottetown and the Charlottetown Area Development Corporation hosted a Business Forum on City Development at the Rodd Charlottetown Hotel on February 25, 2009.

Synopsis of issues raised, suggested actions and recommendations

1. Zoning and Development Bylaw

There were numerous comments during the Forum about the current zoning and development bylaw. There is a strong perception that development applications are handled on a case by case basis without reference to overall guidelines. Presenters mentioned lack of long range planning, inconsistencies in application, lack of enforcement and out-of-date content. As well, there appears to be belief that the City is not pro-development and lacks an appreciation of the importance of development to the growth of the City. Clearly, this is a sore spot that needs to be addressed.

It was suggested that there needs to be an overall vision of what the City should, and can, be as part of the process of reviewing the Bylaw.

The Mayor offered to establish an ad hoc committee consisting of city officials, representatives of business organizations, and interested individuals to review the development bylaws with respect to currency, appropriate content and process.

2. Vibrancy of the downtown

The Forum revealed significant concern over the vibrancy of the downtown. Presenters noted the amount of vacant space, derelict buildings, how uninviting University Avenue is as a gateway to the downtown, deteriorating properties and a lack of connectedness between the business core and the waterfront. A major concern is the future of the soon-to-be vacated Dominion Building. Additional residential accommodation would be a most positive move, but this is contingent on changes to density and height restrictions.

It was suggested that an ad hoc committee be established consisting of the Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Charlottetown Inc. and the City to focus solely on this issue, with a prime focus on street level vacancies, the University Avenue gateway and key corners in the downtown.

3. Efficiencies and value for money in City operations and finances

The Forum revealed a somewhat widely held view that the City's programs and finances are not implemented as efficiently as possible, that taxpayers are not getting good value for money. While no direct evidence to support this belief was presented, it remains a contentious issue in relations between the business community and City Hall.

It was recommended that appropriate Provincial legislation should be amended to require external audits of City operations and finances, with public reporting of the results. It was suggested that the GCACC take the lead to bring this recommendation to the attention of the Provincial Government.

4. Cooperation and partnerships

The need for business organizations and the three levels of government to work cooperatively was a consistent theme throughout the Forum. It was recognized by all that development of the City can only occur if all partners are working together toward common objectives. The key organizations are GCACC (representing more than 850 members with 16,000 employees), Downtown Charlottetown Inc., Tourism Charlottetown, CADC, the City of Charlottetown, and the Provincial and Federal Governments.

While Forum presenters expressed strong commitment to cooperation and the building of partnerships, there were no specific suggestions on how to enhance cooperation and keep organizations focused on common development objectives.

5. Development tax incentive programs

There was a call for the reinstatement of development tax incentive programs to spur development in the City. Mayor Lee indicated that a review is now underway and a report is expected to be placed before City Council in the near future.

It was suggested that the chamber be an advocate for reinstatement.

6. Harmonized Sales Tax

There was a call for further consideration by the Provincial Government of the benefits to business of moving to a harmonized sales tax.

It was suggested that the GCACC, on behalf of the business community, approach the Provincial Government to initiate a review of the merits of harmonization.

7. Infrastructure

The state of the City's aging infrastructure (including storm sewers) was raised as an issue which must be addressed.

It was suggested that the City establish a long term plan and a clear list of priorities, in consultation with the business community.

8. Permanent site for events and concerts

Tourism Charlottetown noted the importance of establishing a permanent and appropriate site for major events and concerts, stressing that this would be an excellent tourism asset.

9. Further development of the waterfront, both commercial and residential

It was suggested that there are additional developments on the waterfront which could be pursued to the benefit of tourists and residents alike.