2016 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS APPLICATION BEST PRACTICES, Excellence in Action

Name of Local Government

City of Vernon

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Project/Program Title:

City of Vernon Transit Terminus

Project Summary Paragraph

Please provide a summary of your project/program in 150 words or less.

Arising from the new, sustainable growth strategy of the 2008 OCP, and a new Transportation Plan that introduced TDM initiatives and prioritized cycling, pedestrian and transit services, the City of Vernon opened the new transit terminus in the heart of the City's central business district in 2012. The previous transit terminus was on the edge of the City Centre, comprised of three shelters on a street with no additional seating or shade and not fully accessible. The City's key goals and objectives related to TDM, Economic Development, Revitalization of the Downtown

and Social Planning facilitated several supporting amenities at the new terminus, including a pop up (i.e. temporary) Art Gallery, bike lockers, public washrooms, mobile vendors, colourful murals, events sponsored by the local BIA and finally, a pop up park installation of musical instruments and oversized Adirondack chairs. At least four businesses have opened up within a block of the new terminus since its opening and transit ridership has increased 47% since the Transportation Plan was adopted in 2008. Please see before and after pictures at https://www.vernon.ca/node/14361

Project Analysis

1. SERVICES

How has the implementation of this program/project improved services in your community?

Enhanced access to services and amenities - The new transit terminus is ideally located in the heart of Vernon's central business district. Only one block from 30th Avenue (the City's "Main Street"), the terminus is within a block of City Hall, the RCMP, the Museum, Service BC and Service Canada. Please see the location map/aerial at https://www.vernon.ca/node/14361

Enhanced pedestrian, cycling and transit integration – The terminus is immediately adjacent to the 29th/30th Street Corridor Project. When complete, the corridor will extend from Polson Park in the south to the Village Green Centre in the north, bisecting the entire City Centre District (and passing the new Visitor Information Centre). This key north/south corridor will have a 4 m asphalt path along the eastern side, sidewalk along the western side, and physically connect the two streets at 39th Avenue (utility replacement is also a key component of the project). Completion of the entire corridor is anticipated for 2019/2020. The Transit Future Plan was completed in 2014 and was predicated on the completed 29th/30th Corridor and new terminus.

Enhanced Parks and Culture – In 2015 the City and Public Art Gallery partnered to bring a major exhibition to the site in a pop-up Art Gallery housed in shipping containers. The City's drums, xylophone and piano installation provide opportunities for young and old to play, or relax in the colourful oversized Adirondack chairs. This equipment and chairs will be relocated to a neighbourhood park in the future, as part of the City's pop up park initiative.

2. EFFECTIVENESS

How is the program/project more efficient and/or effective than it was before?

Transit Ridership Has Increased - The new transit terminus is attractive, accessible, and ideally located to key services and amenities. It helps to attract users to the transit system, and provides a great experience for transit riders in Vernon's downtown. The supporting amenities bring a wide array of user groups to the site, in addition to transit riders. The Art Gallery and BIA have both hosted events in the park. The integration of pedestrian, cyclist and transit uses serves these user groups very well. The UBC-O bus leaves from this terminus, and many students connect via cycling and walking. Transit use has increased by 47% since the City prioritized transit services as part of its 2008 Transportation Plan. The new terminus is a cornerstone of that enhanced service.

The Neighbourhood is Safer and Appeals to Multiple User Groups - Another benefit is the positive impact the new terminus and associated activity has had on the adjacent park. Cenotaph Park is a small urban park that has experienced the pressures of anti social behavior and drug use. An old building, used for medical clinic services, was previously located across the street, which the City purchased and the services were ultimately discontinued. The City demolished the building, and the new pop up playground, pedestrian connection to City Hall, public washrooms, bike lockers and transit benches now occupy the former medical clinic building space. The City, Art Gallery and local BIA have hosted events in Cenotaph Park, and it now serves as a shady respite on a hot day. The Cenotaph and associated murals provide a strong connection to our collective past.

3. ECONOMIC IMPACT

How has the program/project saved the community money and/or resources or encouraged economic development?

One of the guiding principles of the 2008 OCP was the Revitalization of the Downtown. Key to that is investment in amenities and infrastructure. The relocation and significant enhancement of the transit terminus set the stage for private investment. Four businesses have opened up within one block of the terminus within the last two years, one of which began as a mobile vendor associated with the pop up Art Gallery at the terminus in 2015, and went on to open a retail storefront in late 2015. Some of the bike lockers are used by a nearby tech co-work space. Bringing transit riders into the heart of the central business district, in addition to the positive impact on the streetscapes resulting from the City's capital investment and the provision of amenities, has helped to stimulate private investment.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY

How has this program/project improved accountability to citizens of your local government?

The relocation of the terminus was one of the results of the most significant public consultation process the City of Vernon has ever undertaken. The City undertook a complete rewrite of its OCP in 2005, a process that took three years and provided over 100 opportunities for community participation and engagement. The new growth strategy of that plan greatly limited new greenfield subdivision opportunities in the hillside and agricultural areas in favour of redevelopment and intensification of the downtown and many existing neighbourhoods. The new Transportation Plan was developed as part of that process, and the community voiced very strong support for enhanced pedestrian, cycling and transit services. The City created a TDM Coordinator position as a result this process.

The new terminus also reflects other citizen desires as identified in the City Centre Neighbourhood Plan, including public washrooms in the downtown, more useable parks and green space and access to cultural amenities.

5. RESULTS

How has this program/project resulted in excellence in action in your community?

The City could have simply relocated the three bus shelters from the old terminus on the western edge of the City Centre to the new location. Functionally, it would have served the identified transportation needs. But the City had many other goals in the area, related to Economic Development, Revitalization of the Downtown and Social Planning. By looking at the new terminus as an opportunity to further these other goals, many small initiatives and contributions by other partners and the private sector have resulted in a significant overall change in the immediate neighbourhood (and transit ridership). Vernon is not a large community, at 40,000 people, yet it has created a really great terminus! With a park, great seating, visual interest, adjacent shops and even musical equipment to play. The private sector has responded and participated – on the site and by virtue of the new commercial activity around it. Successive Councils have sent the strong message to the community that we care about our transit riders, our downtown and our community.

Another example of how this demonstrates excellence in action is with the City's first pop up park installation at the terminus. The piano, xylophone, drums and

colourful Adirondack chairs will eventually rotate to other neighbourhood parks. The pop up park arises from the City's new Parks Master Plan, endorsed by Council in 2015. It seeks to provide new and fun play equipment (for young and old alike!) that will move from park to park after a year or two.

6. TEAMWORK

Tell us about the teamwork involved in making this program/project possible.

The new terminus is the result of multiple City Divisions, BC Transit, Social Planning Council of the North Okanagan, Downtown Vernon Association (the local BIA), the Public Art Gallery and local businesses working together. It has taken four years to complete the terminus (opened in 2012, with the pop up playground installed in the spring of 2016). During that time, the City worked with BC Transit and Canada First (the local transit operator) to develop the Transit Future Plan, predicated on the new terminus and 29th/30th Street Corridor completion), with extensive public engagement and consultation. The Art Gallery and BIA have hosted events in the park, further bringing activity to the terminus and enhancing the area as a new key focus of activity and events downtown. The pop up Art Gallery in 2015 at the site, coupled with the BIA sponsored murals of aspects of the City's heritage, has also helped to raise the profile of, and access to, arts and cultural activities in the downtown (missed your bus? How about a tour through the special print exhibit at the pop up Art Gallery?).

7. INNOVATION

What makes this program/project innovative and creative?

A terminus is a functional, necessary component of a community's transit service. It doesn't always serve to make a downtown park safer, bring arts and culture to the transit rider, provide new opportunities for play in the downtown (with the City's first pop up park), stimulate economic development, have public washrooms, bike storage lockers, colourful murals, events and activities in the adjacent greenspace, or immediate access to coffee, shops and services. Vernon's does! For those that choose to use transit, it offers a safe and attractive option. For those that must use transit, it demonstrates that the City cares about its transit riders.

8. SUSTAINABILITY

What measures have you put in place to ensure the continued operation of this initiative?(e.g. staff time, resources, financial)

All of the initiatives described in this submission have ongoing funding to ensure the ongoing operation of the terminus. In addition, following the relocation of the pop up park equipment (musical instruments and Adirondack chairs), funding is identified for the replacement permanent playground installation. While still in the design phase, the permanent equipment will include Literacy in the Environment elements, as well as appeal to both young and old alike.

9. BEST PRACTICES

How do the processes behind the program/project, and the subsequent results, serve as an example of best practices?

The City's Economic Development function is integrated with its Planning and Engineering functions. The City also contracts the Social Planning Council of the North Okanagan, which works closely with this staff group. Multi disciplinary teams are engaged in the development of all plans, be it neighbourhood plans, transportation plans or park plans. This ensures that multiple goals and objectives are brought into the discussion. The new terminus, and the many related initiatives that have resulted in all the amenities and services at this location, is a great example of the multi-disciplinary team approach used by the City of Vernon.

10. TRANSFERABILITY

How is this program/project transferable to other local governments?

This project provides a great example for local governments of all sizes. We all have challenges and opportunities in our downtowns, transportation network and with economic development. None of the initiatives described in this submission are costly. Each initiative, in and of itself, would not have resulted in the overall success of the new terminus. But many smaller initiatives, each furthering a community goal or objective (often with different funding partners), have created a result with exceeds the sum of its parts. It didn't happen overnight. There are many partners that have contributed to the success along the way – and where the City was faced with new, out of the box proposals (i.e. a pop up Art Gallery), Council embraced the opportunity and challenge of helping to make it happen.

11. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

What helpful advice would you share with other communities looking to embark on a similar project?

If other communities are looking at a similar project, our advice would be to start small. Find a location that meets multiple priorities – the transportation network, economic development, social planning, arts and culture. Work with other community partners to bring activity to the terminus. Incremental improvements can have a big impact over time. Consult with the community to find out what their concerns and goals are. Create a place that you would want to be in!

12. TELL US MORE

Please share any other information you think may support your submission.

The pictures at the link provided do not really do the terminus justice. They don't capture the sounds of people playing the musical instruments, the amazing aroma coming from the mobile food vendor, or illustrate the complete change in this public space from 2011. In the mid 2000s, the Parks Department removed the benches and tables from the park to try and reduce the crime in the park. Now, this urban park has been reclaimed and anchors the new terminus with events, vendors, seating, the Cenotaph and historical murals, and shade on hot sunny afternoons. Four new businesses have opened within one block of the terminus in the last two years. Transit ridership has increased by 47%. The next time you're in Vernon, please stop by to see it for yourself!