

SAULT STE. MARIE

THE SAULT STAR



City examines 'hub' for business, entrepreneurs, arts and students

A business case is being commissioned to determine if a new Science Technology, Innovation and Arts (STEAM) Centre is warranted in Sault Ste. Marie.

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City of Sault Ste. Marie council chambers at the Civic Centre

City council has cautiously approved moving forward with a feasibility study and design concept for a new Science Technology, Innovation and Arts (STEAM) Centre.

The vision is to create a dynamic hub for business and entrepreneurial support services, including services for remote workers, research collaboration, shared arts administration space and STEAM skill development.

If a positive business case results from the study, the facility is expected to be created in the downtown area.

Travis Anderson, director of tourism and community development, said the concept emerged after reviewing several of the action items from the various pillars of the FutureSSM project.

Initial thoughts are that a facility will include shared administration space and display areas for arts and culture groups, a space for remote workers and educators to enhance their skills, collaborate on research and help young students and youth hone skills in the STEM areas and receive after school support.

“From the action teams, it seemed like there is an opportunity to establish this kind of centre,” said Tom Vair, deputy CAO of community development and enterprise services.

Key focus areas of the centre also include developing research and employment opportunities for STEAM graduates, facilitating partnerships between industry, educators and the innovation centre, and develop a talent pool and attract new businesses and industry.

Several city councillors stressed that they don't want to see services or organizations that are already in the community duplicated.

Staff dispelled council's suggestions that the centre would be similar to the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre or incubator services like the Millworks Centre for Entrepreneurship.

“I don't really see what we are doing with this one,” said Ward 5 Coun. Corey Gardi.

Gardi said the city has recently restructured the economic development department, has had discussions about the need to improve the current incubator and he believes a re-evaluation of the innovation centre should in the future.

“Something like this needs to be driven through the current Innovation Centre,” Gardi said. “We have a facility right now whose mandate is innovation and I hope we can drive this through the Innovation Centre.”

Anderson told council that the Innovation Centre is a partner in the centre and there is no intent to duplicate that organization.

Ward 1 Coun. Paul Christian agreed.

“I want to see growth and innovation, not duplication,” Christian said.

He requested that any future report better articulate the differences of what this centre will provide and how it will compliment or be different from what already exists locally.

Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker said he believes many communities will be establishing places for shared workspace and wants to be on the forefront for that.

Vair told The Sault Star that the business case, expected to begin shortly and be completed in about 16 weeks, will better define and confirm what the centre will be, who will partner in it and who the expected stakeholders are.

He said community consultation will also be part of the process and staff welcome thoughts and ideas from the community.

The staff report says the study will provide a needs assessment and program plan, examine community needs and develop a functional design that includes the building and equipment.

All site criteria, architectural drawings, parking requirements and capital cost estimates will also be part of the study.

David Ellis Architect Inc. has received the nod to lead the study at a cost of \$88,5000. The costs are to come from FutureSSM’s 2021 budget allowance, supported by FedNor.