

Marda Loop Business Improvement Area

What We Heard:

Member & Community Stakeholder Engagement

Summer 2025

# Executive Summary

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The BIA conducted a stakeholder engagement process with 20 members and stakeholders in June 2025 to understand member challenges, their expectations of the BIA and what they think the BIA should be doing in the future.

Four major themes emerged:

1. **Re-open, promote and protect Marda Loop business area:** Members understand the role and the work of the BIA and agreed that promoting Marda Loop re-opening is critical to post-construction recovery. They would like to see updated websites, branding and promotions. Some talked about the importance of preserving the history and character of the Community.
2. **The BIA is an important voice with the potential for greater impact:** Stakeholders recognized that infrastructure projects have placed a large responsibility on the BIA to advocate to the City and many stakeholders believe that the BIA needs to make advocacy a larger role. Some recognize that the BIA may lack skills and/or resources to do that. Others see the opportunity for the BIA to facilitate more dialogue amongst its stakeholders. Some are looking for more, varied amenities.
3. **(Focus on) Long term, strategic visioning:** Members believe it is a good time for the BIA to provide long-term strategic thinking and a vision for Marda Loop's future. They would like to see a focus on measuring and quantifying impact to enhance the BIA's value to business.
4. **Member-centric model:** Stakeholders would like to have more input on BIA activities such as marketing campaigns, seasonal signage and events. They believe they could contribute to a more innovative, creative, relevant BIA. Stakeholders talked about cross promotion of local businesses, thinking creatively about how to support local businesses and encouraging local area businesses to support each other. Members appreciate that opportunity to meet each other.

# Results

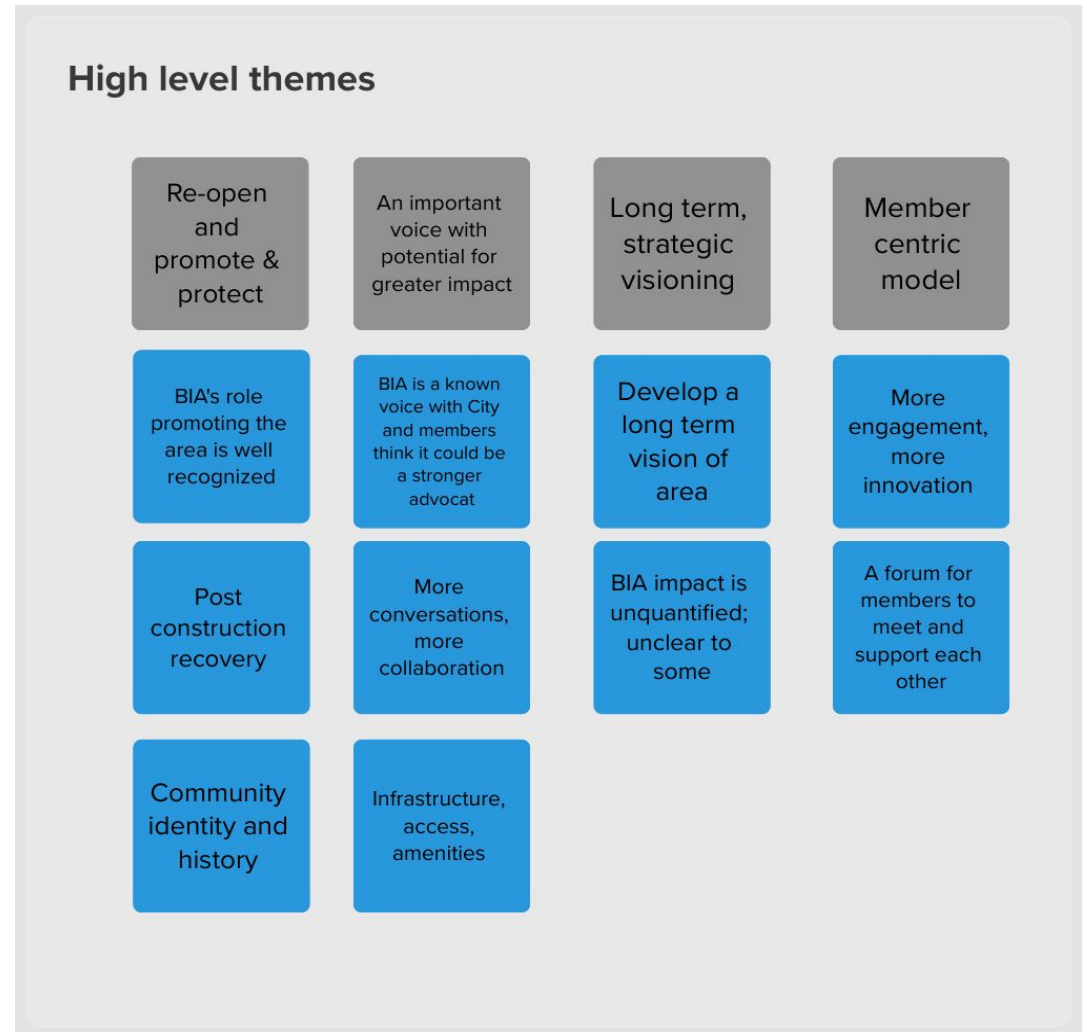
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This report represents our best effort to accurately present what we heard from those who participated in group discussions and interviews.

What follows are their observations and advice.

# High Level Themes

1. Re-open, promote and protect Marda Loop business area
2. An important voice with the potential for greater impact
3. (Focus on) Long term, strategic visioning
4. Member-centric model



# 1. Re-open, promote and protect Marda Loop business area

- BIA's role promoting the local business area is well recognized
- Post-construction recovery
- Community identity and history

# BIA's role promoting the local business area is well recognized

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Most stakeholders have a good understanding of the BIA's core functions: event planning & event hosting, promoting area businesses, providing social media and marketing support, street scaping, advocating for the business area, supporting the local Community and speaking on behalf of local business.

A few stakeholders were new to the business area or had not had a lot of interaction with the BIA and were less sure of what it does.

*"Attract visitors and more locals to small businesses (economic development)"*

*"Help support and help grow business in community"*

*"Mardagras is one of the best street festivals in the City"*

*"BIA from a practical sense speak on issues that impact local businesses"*

# Post-construction recovery

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All stakeholders agreed that promoting the re-opening of Marda Loop is critical to post-construction recovery.

Some stakeholders expressed reservations about promoting the area while street construction was still underway for fear of reinforcing negative perceptions. Others suggested that *"it doesn't benefit us to talk about construction, so let's stop talking about it"* and focus on businesses. One person suggested focusing on the ultimate vision of Main Streets project. There is concern about the long-term viability of traffic flows and parking, given new high-rise developments.

Many mentioned an opportunity for the BIA to update websites, branding, and focus on improving its digital presence. One stakeholder mentioned promoting Marda Loop as a tourist destination and ensuring the neighbourhood shows up on a "top 10 things to do in Calgary" kind of list.

*"We need a BIG campaign to help us."*

*"I joke that it's easier to go to Lakeview than to shop at my own Safeway"*

*"We need to be an attraction; we are competing with other parts of the City (Entertainment district, Inglewood)"*

*"BIA image is outdated - BIA online - the website looks like its was done in 2010 at best"*

*"We may figure it out.. But worried it will get to 'who designed this?'"*

*"When we look at our brand and image - it needs a refresh"*

# Community identity and history

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Stakeholders commented that the BIA demonstrates care for the Community and promotes it well. Marda Loop's unique history and character should be promoted and stewarded. The BIA can play a role maintaining Community character and ensuring its history isn't lost.

*"Seem to care about the community - people who want to do good things for the community"*

*"We're losing a lot of historical structures"*

*"Take care of the village, while business take care of themselves"*

*"Opportunity to protect our past, where we come from"*

*"Keep our community a place where people want to come here"*



## 2. An important voice with the potential for greater impact

- A well known voice that could be a stronger advocate
- Opportunity to facilitate more conversations
- Infrastructure, access, amenities

# A known voice that could be more assertive

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All stakeholders recognized that infrastructure projects and re-development have placed a large responsibility on the BIA to advocate to the City and developers on behalf of the area.

Many stakeholders believe that the current reality requires that the BIA make advocacy a larger role and give it higher priority. Some recognize that the BIA may lack skills and/or resources to do that.

Stakeholders hold contradictory views about the BIA's actual influence. They recognize its "voice" and question its effectiveness. Some question whether this is an appropriate expectation of the BIA, whether it is appropriate that they represent the business community to developers and whether processes to do this are clear or appropriate.

*"They (BIA) are under a microscope"*

*"I'm challenging the promotion mandate ... I think it needs to be advocating / bridges so business can survive / thrive"*

*"Thought at first they were the intermediary with the city .. not sure if that's true"*

*"Should the BIA be in the middle?"*

*"Be a bit more antagonistic with the City"*

*"BIA responsibility is to be a loud and firm voice pushing against the City, in a healthy way as it makes its plans to protect the community."*

*"Clear messaging about what is planned for the Community and WHY things have been done as they ahve"*

*"Staff up. Bob is only one person. Who would want his job?"*

# More conversations, more collaboration

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Some stakeholders indicated some confusion around who the voice of the Community is, or who it should be. Some noted the opportunities for the BIA to bring the business community together more often, in more conversations to build more relationships. Others mentioned that the BIA should continue to clarify its role with the business, relative to the City's role. And others talked about the BIAs willingness to explore collaborations.

*"Facilitate convos between business / residents / people that live here and the City or the Community"*

*"Is there a uniform voice in the neighbourhood from business, and we haven't seen that amplified? Who is our voice? Is that the BIA?"*

*"Lots of opportunity in place making (paint, lighting) to be more walkable... we're starting to work with Bob, MLA, Cspace .. where we can all work together in that process"*

*"Bring us together more so we can support each other"*

*"Educate businesses on what their roles / responsibilities are and what you can go to them for (vs City of Calgary)"*

# Infrastructure, access, amenities

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While access to business during the construction period (parking, road closures, traffic flow) is a significant pain point for business, other needs surfaced. These included better street signage, replacing aging wheelchair ramps, improving walkability, and considering access for people with physical limitations.

One stakeholder talked about the absence of any park space, or outdoor seating that a client might use while waiting for service. One stakeholder mentioned the opportunity for more interesting bike racks and others mentioned garbage cans that are too few and always full. One mentioned the desire for streamlined patio expansion applications and better street vibrancy.

*"Restrictions - bylaws.. E.g signage bylaws"*

*"Foot traffic ... People aren't coming"*

*"Can we approach developers to improve green space/ park areas..."*

*"Focus more on preserving walkability and actual accessibility of the neighbourhood"*

*"There isn't a close by public space for people to just exist (e.g. park) - nothing outdoors"*

*"Beautification ... source more art and more local"*

### 3. (Focus on) long term, strategic visioning

- Develop a long term vision for the area
- BIA impact is unquantified and unclear to some

# Develop a long term vision for the area

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While some stakeholders were focused on the importance of near term survival, many talked about the importance of the BIA to provide long-term strategic thinking and a vision for Marda Loop's future that can be clearly communicated to business and championed with the City. Some asked how Marda Loop would position itself for the future, including in a digital economy.

*"This is a great time to re-define what Marda Loop will be in the future"*

*"How are we going to position Marda Loop in the future?"*

*"BIA needs a clear vision of what they are standing for, for the business (their value proposition)"*

*"How can we work at maintaining the Community spirit?"*

*"Board needs to be thinking forward."*

*"We need good business strategy"*

*"BIA needs to be in the new digital economy. BIA - could be visioning how they operate within a digital economy"*

# BIA impact is unquantified, unclear

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Many stakeholders indicated that they don't know whether marketing efforts are working or not. They mentioned events such as Eggfest and Night Markets and wondered what the return on investment is for the Community, as they don't see tangible, positive business impacts.

Many expressed their appreciation for Mardagras but indicated that it is typically a lost revenue day for them. Some feel that the levy they pay is simply a tax that doesn't deliver a return and some choose to disengage due to low perceived value.

Many would like to know what is working and what isn't. If something isn't working, they'd like to know how can it be adjusted for more tangible benefits?

*"Events - are they net positive to the Community? Mardagras Night Market? Eggfest?"*

*"Think about how to move the needle for businesses to thrive in Marda Loop."*

*"It's just a tax that you pay ... that I'd rather not pay"*

*"Many BIAs don't quantify their value to members very well"*

*"If we're going to do something, evaluate it after... how did it work? Survey to business owners.. And then we have data"*

*"Do they canvas all the business - is this a benefit for you?"*

## 4. Member Centric Model

- More engagement, more innovation
- A forum for members to meet and support each other



# More engagement, more innovation

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Most stakeholders said they were pleased to be engaged and would like to see more of it. Some acknowledged that the BIA has tried a lot of things. Many would be happy to engage on specific topics, rather than just construction related information sessions.

Stakeholders would like to have more input on BIA activities such as marketing campaigns, seasonal signage and events. They believe they could contribute to a more innovative, creative, relevant BIA and they encouraged the BIA to look to others for inspiration and insight.

Stakeholders also said that engagement with BIA businesses is inconsistent and uneven. Some spoke of positive relationships with the BIA and some said they'd never met anyone from the BIA. Some said Board Members should be more visible and that the BIA needs to be member driven rather vs board driven. All agreed that they'd like to see more Community feedback opportunities.

*"Asking us for more input ... what they'd like the BIA to focus on"*

*"The BIA has tried a lot"*

*"Where are the ideas from BIAs around the world?"*

*"Be more member driven, vs board driven."*

*"Continue to be really open to Community feedback."*

*"Everyone matters or nobody matters. You have to engage with everybody!! (I've never met them in 2 years)"*

*"Give a bigger voice to people offering solutions and ideas vs the pitchfork crowd."*

*"More contact with the business community to understand business needs."*

*"Adhoc meetings on specific topics ... "*

# A forum for members to meet and support each other

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Some stakeholders were very appreciative of opportunities provided by the BIA to meet their fellow business people. They were grateful for networking, connection and finding new colleagues.

Stakeholders talked about more cross promotion of local businesses, thinking creatively about how to support local businesses (e.g. delivery services) and encouraging local area businesses to support each other.

*"Meet / greet with other business owners; there was a recent one... these are worthwhile"*

*"They are trying to connect the Community and Businesses ... bringing in a sense of community"*

*"Cross promoting is possible through the networking"*

*"Networking is huge!! Being able to meet people; the breakfast"*



Parsons  
DIALOGUE

Thanks