

TOWN OF SOUTH BRUCE PENINSULA COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR THE URBAN AREAS OF ALLENFORD, HEPWORTH, SAUBLE BEACH AND WIARTON

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Town of South Bruce Peninsula is comprised of the four main urban communities of Allenford, Hepworth, Sauble Beach and Wiarton and several rural areas and hamlets.

Each community possesses a unique character and history and although they are part of the amalgamated Corporation of the Town of South Bruce Peninsula this plan aims to address them each individually. The goal of this Community Improvement Plan is to create a tool for community improvement that will encourage the rehabilitation and revitalization of the four downtown cores within the Town.

The Town of South Bruce Peninsula has undertaken a number of initiatives and studies related to improving the health and function of its downtown areas. By focusing efforts and being strategic with both public and private undertakings, the intent is to create an atmosphere that attracts more visitors and businesses and creates a vibrant, healthy, self-sustaining community for the local residents.

1.2 Overview of Issues

The Provincial Policy Statement 2005 states that the long-term economic prosperity, environmental health and social well-being depend on wisely managing change and promoting efficient land use and development patterns. By supporting and maintaining the health of our downtowns and waterfronts we are supporting strong, liveable and healthy communities that facilitate economic growth. To set the stage for the policies and programs of the Community Improvement Plan, the following are offered as a rationale and overview of the issues that support the creation of the Community Improvement Plan.

a) Physical Conditions

In rural municipalities the downtown areas are the heart of the community. Not only are they the main economic generators (2/3 of countywide commercial assessment is from downtowns) they are also the social centre of the community. Additionally, in Bruce County, our downtowns and / or waterfronts are our main point of contact with tourism dollars. This is particularly important as tourism is the 2nd largest industry in the County and most of the County's tourism attractions, such as the Bruce Trail, are non-gated. However, lately our communities are struggling with retail leakage to bigger centres and a lack of investment from the local municipality. As a result, our downtowns are:

- Lacking a definitive ‘sense of place’ or common design theme in each community resulting in conflicting projects and improvement work.
- Disconnected from the main tourism draws of the area due to discontinuous urban streetscapes, lack of directional and informative signage, and intermittent street and public realm design, lighting and street furniture.
- Suffering from poorly maintained buildings and facilities throughout the commercial core and waterfronts.
- Lacking clear connections for pedestrian, cycling, and other modes of transportation to the beach areas, residential neighbourhoods and other community amenities.
- Underdeveloped, with low open space usage and limited programming in public spaces and facilities.

b) Social Issues

The number of families and students living below the poverty line in the Town of South Bruce Peninsula is significantly higher than the provincial average. It is important that improvement projects are undertaken at a steady and sustainable pace and that funds be leveraged through grants and public/private partnerships wherever possible so as to not put added pressure on taxpayers. Improvements to public spaces and facilities should take the above into consideration.

c) Environment Considerations

The existing development along the waterfronts and its inherent environmental impacts is recognized. The protection of waterfront resources including the Great Lakes shorelines and inland rivers is paramount to any revitalization proposals of the commercial and waterfront areas.

Any revitalization projects should recognize the environmental attributes of the project areas and achieve environmental protection while meeting user needs and addressing development pressures.

The Municipality has limited sewer and water facilities with only Wiarton currently having full services. Any revitalization efforts should consider the provision of full services to support increased development pressures.

Finally, initiatives should reflect, wherever possible, continued involvement and support of existing environment initiatives including: Sauble Beach’s Blue Flag designation; the protection of the endangered piping plover; sand dune preservation; and phragmites abatement.

2. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Purpose of the Community Improvement Plan

The purpose of the Community Improvement Plan is to establish a framework for the Town's support and implementation of a program(s) to encourage development in the downtown and waterfront areas of its four main urban areas. This Plan is intended to improve the existing physical landscape and to stimulate rehabilitation and revitalization of the four main downtown areas by using, reusing, and restoring lands, buildings and infrastructure.

2.2 Goal

The goals of the Community Improvement Plan conform to and are a refinement of the Official Plan. The goal is:

To improve facilities and infrastructure in the Town's four urban areas that contribute to community health, social, environmental and economic priorities.

2.3 Objectives

Progress towards the achievement of the goals of the plan will be advanced by through the following objectives:

1. To improve the physical appearance and economic health of the downtown commercial areas, waterfront areas and recreational areas/facilities of the Town.
2. To encourage development and redevelopment by the private and/or public sectors to improve the appearance and functionality of the downtown commercial areas, waterfront areas and recreational areas/facilities of the Town.
3. To improve and enhance the existing downtown commercial areas by encouraging improvements to street beautification, facade improvements, store front signage and community signage.
4. To increase tourism and to elevate the Town's status as a destination by coordinating stakeholders to promote each of the communities unique identity.
5. To improve and enhance the recreational facilities/opportunities within the Town by creating communities that are attractive, pedestrian-friendly, and distinctive.
6. To encourage improvements to existing waterfront facilities and the creation of sustainable waterfront environments.
7. To increase both physical and economic connections between the waterfront and the downtown commercial areas.

8. To involve the public in identifying areas in need of improvement and encourage their participation in the process of improvement and rehabilitation projects.

2.4 Project Area

The Community Improvement Plan applies to the commercial areas of Allenford, Hepworth, Sauble Beach and Wiarton and corresponds to the downtown areas as outlined in Appendix 'A' attached.

3. SUPPORTING STUDIES AND PUBLIC CONSULTATION

3.1 Supporting Initiatives

First Impressions

In 2008, the Town invited the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs to perform a "First Impressions" evaluation of the municipality, specifically the four urban communities. The purpose of the evaluation was to obtain a structured and unbiased first impression of the community's appearance, services and infrastructure prepared by people who lived and worked outside of the municipality. This was to be the basis for positive community action focused on downtown revitalization, tourism development, investment attraction, quality service improvements and broader community strategic planning efforts.

The report identified the following considerations for improvement within the Town:

- a lack of cohesion with signage;
- the need for more visually pleasing streetscapes and storefronts; and
- underdeveloped parks, public areas and recreational facilities.

Downtown Revitalization Study

In addition to the First Impressions Report, in 2008 a Downtown Revitalization strategy and public consultation process was initiated. The purpose was to identify immediate and long-term needs and to develop a 3-year action plan for feasible and approved projects to be implemented. The Downtown Revitalization Plan and 3-year timeline was adopted by Council in 2009 and includes projects such as light standards, street furniture and improved signage (see Appendix 'B').

Community Design Toolkit

In 2009, the Town undertook a Community Design Toolkit development process that showcased the municipality and the unique identities of each of its four urban areas. The Toolkit surveyed both residents and visitors to identify characteristics that summarize each community's individual identity.

The Toolkit provides guidelines to ensure that all stakeholders are working towards a common vision. Each community Toolkit defines a 'brand' or common identity that is

key to developing a memorable, valuable and appealing community identity that will draw visitors to the area(s). In order to achieve ‘brand’ consistency the Toolkit presents design elements to be used in a range of applications from media opportunities to municipal infrastructure projects. Council adopted the Community Design Toolkit in May 2010 (see Appendix ‘C’).

3.2 Process & Public Consultation

In the fall of 2007 the Economic Development Committee (EDC) of the Town of South Bruce Peninsula developed a three-year Strategic Plan for Downtown Revitalization (see Appendix ‘B’) for its four downtown cores. Over the course of a 6-month period a number of public consultations took place within each community involving the Sauble Beach Chamber of Commerce, South Bruce Peninsula Chamber of Commerce/BIA, Allenford Improvement Association and the general public.

Strong public support for revitalization projects within the Community Improvement Plan area were expressed in a variety of settings leading up to the preparation of the Strategic Plan. These public meetings highlighted a number of projects to be undertaken in each of the downtown areas.

In addition to the Downtown Revitalization public consultations, the Town worked closely with Bruce County’s Economic Development and Tourism Department staff to develop the Community Identity Toolkit. The communities were once again engaged through this process through a community survey, photo exercise and outreach program.

Specific comments made through public consultation processes have led to the prioritization of four focus areas within this Improvement Plan:

- Façade Improvement Programs
- Storefront Sign Improvement Programs
- Streetscape Beautification, Signage and Landscaping Improvements
- Public Space, Parks and Recreation Works.

3.3 Supporting Planning Policies

Town of South Bruce Peninsula Official Plan

The Town of South Bruce Peninsula Official Plan establishes local authority and criteria for selecting Community Improvement Areas and for implementing the Community Improvement Plan.

Criteria for Selection of Community Improvement Areas

The following criteria shall be used in the selection of community improvement areas:

- 1) Deficiencies in the condition and adequacy of commercial areas including areas within commercial building or building facades which exhibit structural deficiencies

or need for rehabilitation, inappropriate signage, insufficient off street parking, the need for improvements to the commercial streetscape, etc.

- 2) Deficiencies in pedestrian access to commercial businesses and recreational assets or inadequate vehicular access or traffic circulation within the commercial and / or waterfront areas.
- 3) Deficiency in the availability and/or condition of municipal hard services such as roads, sanitary sewers, water systems, storm water drainage, sidewalks, street lighting, or hydro.
- 4) Deficiencies in the availability and/or condition of municipal recreation facilities such as parks, playgrounds, arenas, community centres or trails, etc.
- 5) Deficiencies in the condition of waterfront facilities and natural resources under both municipal and private jurisdiction such a marinas, parks, beaches, etc.
- 6) Deficiencies in the availability and/or condition of municipal, social and cultural facilities such as administration offices, meeting rooms, galleries or libraries, etc.

Implementation Guidelines

In order to carry out the Goals and Objectives of the Community Improvement Plan, Council may:

- 1) Provide for the preparation of a "Community Improvement Plan" for a Community Improvement Project Area pursuant to Section 28(4) of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, as amended.
- 2) Designate by By-law the Community Improvement Project Area pursuant to Section 28(2) of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, as amended.
- 3) Participate and coordinate with senior levels of government. The County of Bruce Official Plan Section 6.13 encourages local municipalities to prepare Community Improvement Plans where appropriate.
- 4) Cooperate with groups and organizations whose objectives include community improvements and rehabilitation initiatives.
- 5) Utilize public funding available to municipalities from provincial and federal programs to assist in implementing community improvements.
- 6) Support and encourage the business improvement area organizations in their efforts to maintain a strong and vibrant business area.

Community Improvement Project Area

The boundaries of the Community Improvement Project Area are established through the Community Improvement Plan and are considered approximate and minor adjustments may be made without an amendment to this Plan, provided that the overall intent is maintained.

It is the Official Plan's intent that community improvement projects be undertaken in identified areas as needed, whenever funds are available, provided Council is satisfied that the municipality can reasonably finance and afford the cost or its share of the cost.

Phasing

It is the intention of this policy that a prioritized list of Community Improvements be identified in a Community Improvement Plan and not as part of the Community Improvement policies of this Official Plan.

In considering the phasing of improvements, priority will be given to those projects that will most substantially increase the safety, stability and aesthetic quality of the community. The public consultation may be utilized as a basis for the phasing of improvements and rehabilitation projects.

It is the intention of this policy that Community Improvement priorities be subject to review as a result of changes in economic, social or environmental considerations, and the availability of funding. Each new term of Council may conduct a review of the Community Improvement Plan, however additional review may be appropriate if there is changes in the conditions that established the Plan

4. AUTHORITY

The Town of South Bruce Peninsula has identified a Community Improvement Project Area for each of the four urban communities within the Town limits (see Appendix 'A'). Under Section 28 and 17 of the Planning Act, RSO 1990, those Official Plan provisions give the Town the authority to:

- 1) Designate by by-law areas as Community Improvement Project Areas.
- 2) Prepare and adopt a Community Improvement Plan for the Project Areas.

This plan gives the municipality the authority to offer incentives notwithstanding certain statutory limitations in the Municipal Act, 2001.

The Community Improvement Plan is consistent with Provincial Policy, legislation and guidelines and implements the County of Bruce Official Plan and Town of South Bruce Peninsula Official Plan, Downtown Revitalization Plan, Community Design Toolkit, and Town of South Bruce Peninsula Zoning By-law.

5. COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS

All programs and initiatives undertaken in the Community Improvement Plan Project Areas should strive to enhance the identity highlighted in the Community Design Toolkits as approved by Town Council in May 2010. The goal of each of these programs is to create a sense of place and make the local community successful and realize the economic and social benefits available to each of the Project Areas.

5.1 Façade Improvement Program (Incentive-Based Program)

As a result of the process of creating the Strategic Downtown Plan the Economic Development Committee of the Town suggested implementing a Façade Improvement Program with a specific priority to downtown Wiarton in the initial years of the program. Wiarton was chosen for two reasons:

- i. Wiarton had been previously identified in the Town's Official Plan as a Community Improvement Area; and
- ii. Several studies and recommendations have been prepared for downtown Wiarton, including a report by Lehman & Associates: Wiarton Commercial Façade Improvement Study.

As per Section 28(7.2) of the Planning Act, all grants, loans and tax incentives may not exceed the eligible cost of remediating the lands and / or buildings. It is the intent of the Town of South Bruce Peninsula to make incentive grants and /or loans available for up to 50% of the total project cost for exterior improvements to the visible facade of existing buildings in the Wiarton CIP Project Area. Town Council may review the inclusion of the remaining three CIP Project Areas (Sauble Beach, Allenford, and Hepworth) in this program for future years.

5.2 Storefront Sign Improvement Program (Incentive-Based Program)

Downtown buildings and establishments define the street and are a major contributor to the character of the community. Clear and effective storefront signs have a large role to play in communicating the services and features on offer and in encouraging passers-by to stop and discover what that town has to offer.

As per Section 28(7.2) of the Planning Act, all grants, loans and tax incentives may not exceed the eligible cost of remediating the lands and / or buildings. It is the intent of the Town of South Bruce Peninsula to make available through this Community Improvement Plan an incentive grant and /or loan program to promote businesses to revamp their storefront signs and awnings. These incentives will be available for up to 50% of the total project costs of the exterior sign and / or awning improvements on an existing building in the four downtown CIP Project Areas.

5.3 Streetscape Beautification, Signage & Landscaping Improvements (Municipally-Driven Program)

The Town of South Bruce Peninsula recognizes that healthy and vibrant downtowns are key components in defining a community's identity. The Town is committed to ongoing revitalization efforts through the Downtown Revitalization Plan. Projects over the next three years include: replacing/adding light standards, street furniture (benches, banners, planters, garbage/recycling receptacles) and improved signage.

5.4 Public Space, Parks and Recreation Works (Municipally-Driven Program)

The Town is currently engaged in three major capital projects geared to enhance, preserve and derive more economic benefits from public spaces within the CIP Project Areas including (1) the development of a Town Square in Sauble Beach; (2) the redevelopment of Bluewater Park in Wiarton; and (3) the Arena/Community Centre rehabilitation in Wiarton.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

Town Council, at its sole discretion and on an annual basis, shall determine the monies to be made available to both the Incentive-Based and Municipal-Driven Program(s) as outlined in 'Program Policies' above. Council will determine the maximum contribution to be made available to the various programs under this Community Improvement Plan for the current year. Council reserves the right, where project numbers exceed expectations, to offer financial incentives to eligible projects on a 'first come first served' basis.

6.1 Program Criteria

Town Council shall prepare and adopt a set of Program Guidelines and procedures to establish the specifics of how the Plan components will operate. The Guidelines will address such issues as the nature of improvement projects that will be approved, the application and approval procedures, requirements for legal agreements, and in the case of competing projects (where applicable) how decisions will be made as to which project receives priority approval.

6.2 Eligibility Criteria

1. Town Council, at its sole discretion, shall determine those properties eligible for the program based on, among other matters, the condition of existing buildings, the level of Town participation in the project (if any) and other relevant considerations.
2. Only applications for commercial properties within the designated Community Improvement Project Area will be eligible. The Town's approval process for applications is outlined in the Program Guidelines.

3. An application for a Community Improvement Incentive must be consistent with the Official Plan, Community Improvement Plan, and Program Guidelines.
4. Priority will be given to those applications which most closely meet the Program Guidelines. Additionally, the Town at its sole discretion may elect to offer partial funding of any application.
5. Eligible proposals may receive reduced funding if they are already receiving public assistance from other sources.
6. Financial incentives are not permitted to be retroactive, and only projects commencing after the approval of the project for program funding will be considered.
7. Eligible Project costs must be actual cash outlay to third parties acting at arms length and which can be documented through original invoices or proofs of payment.

6.3 Administration of Incentive Programs

1. The owner/ applicant to an incentive program shall enter into an agreement with the Town stipulating at a minimum:
 - a. Terms of the financial assistance;
 - b. Timetable for provision of assistance and completion of the project;
 - c. An undertaking by the owner to satisfy all municipal and other relevant laws and requirements for the project;
 - d. All taxes and fees owing to the Town will be kept current and up-to-date prior to approval. The agreement and / or payments will be terminated and / or payments may be reclaimed should taxes or fees fall into arrears during the project development.

7. MONITORING

The Town will conduct a periodic review of the programs being implemented under this Community Improvement Plan to determine their effectiveness and whether funding levels should be increased or decreased, or whether modification to the programs should be made.

The Town shall ensure the Community Improvement Plan programs operate in accordance with any applicable Provincial legislation and any other applicable policies.

The Town may conduct an audit of the work done and the use of incentives for any approved project, as it determines necessary. Further, the terms and conditions of the Incentive Program may be amended as a result of the monitoring efforts, or the Program may be discontinued.

The CIP will be monitored on an annual basis to determine the following:

- Whether established targets for Program uptake are being met;
- If the desired outcomes for the Downtown Area are being achieved;
- If the program participants are completing their commitments; and
- An analysis of the full benefits and costs of each program.

8. AMENDMENT

It is the intent of the Municipality that the provision of any grant or loan as described herein will be implemented over a ten year period. All incentive programs contained in the Community Improvement Plan shall commence following the approval and adoption of the Plan. Any costs incurred prior to approval and adoption of the Community Improvement Plan are not eligible costs. Specific details regarding the grants, loans and administrative procedures are contained the Program Guidelines to this Plan. Terms and conditions of any grant or loan program and administrative procedures detailed in Program Guidelines may be changed, altered, amended or modified by the Town of South Bruce Peninsula without the necessity of an amendment to this Community Improvement Plan. The addition of a grant or loan program shall required an amendment to this Community Improvement Plan; however, the Municipality may discontinue any program without requiring an amendment to this Plan.

The Municipality will also pre-consult with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on all amendments pertaining to:

- A change or expansion in the geographical area to which financial or rebate programs outlined in the Community Improvement Plan apply;
- A change in eligibility criteria;
- The addition of new municipal assistance programs involving grants, loans, tax incentives or land; and
- An increase to a financial incentive to be offered to a programs(s), regardless of its significance.