

Walkerton Research Summary



BOOK ONE

Launched in 2010, the Spruce the Bruce program supports the revitalization of Bruce County downtowns. Spruce the Bruce is based on the Mainstreet USA Four Point Approach which emphasizes Organization, Physical Design, Economic Development, and Marketing and Promotion as integral to successful downtowns.

Spruce the Bruce supports local community efforts to bring stakeholders together, strengthen their community identity, and build destinations and support communities through strategy, policy, and capital investment.

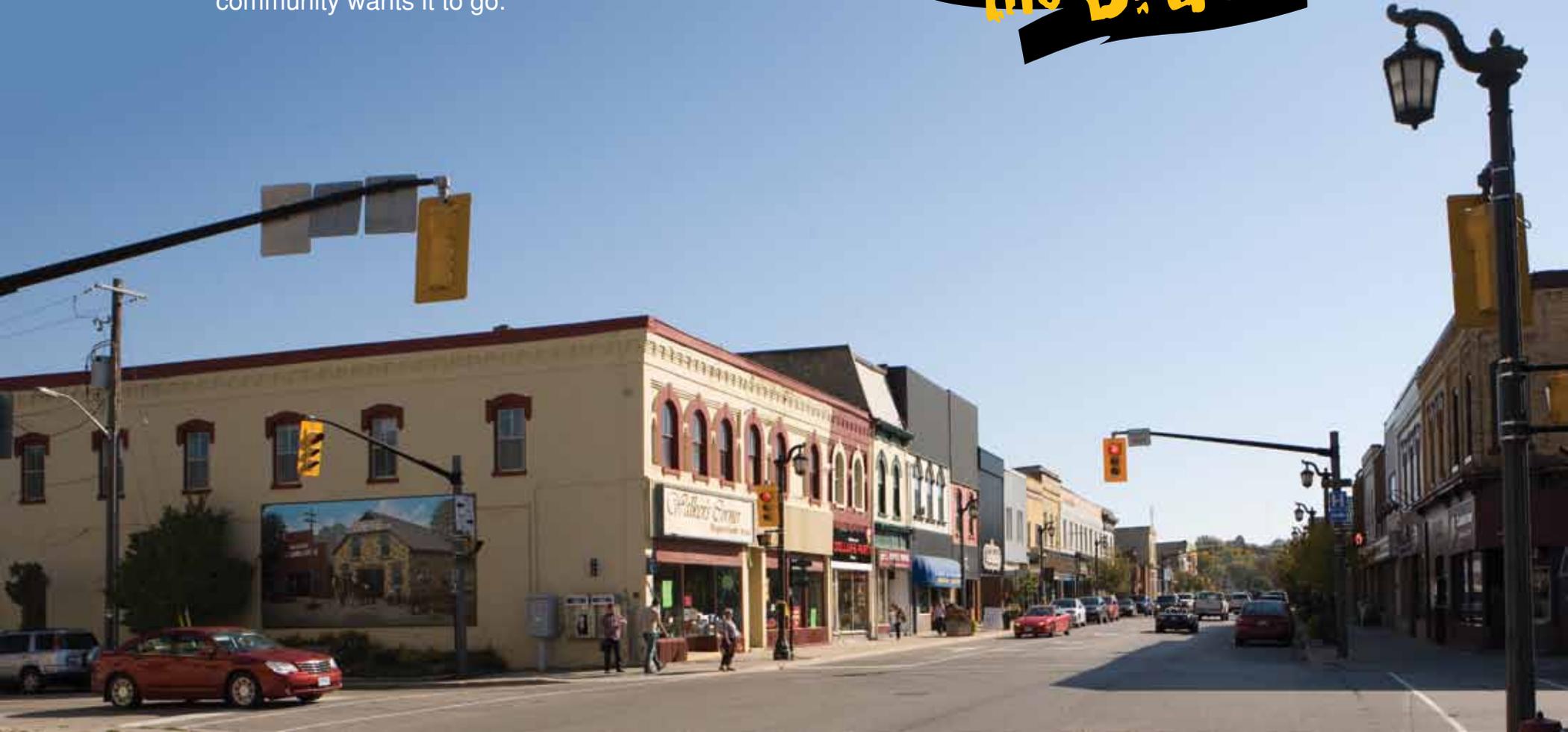
Let's Get Spruced!

Book One

Research Summary

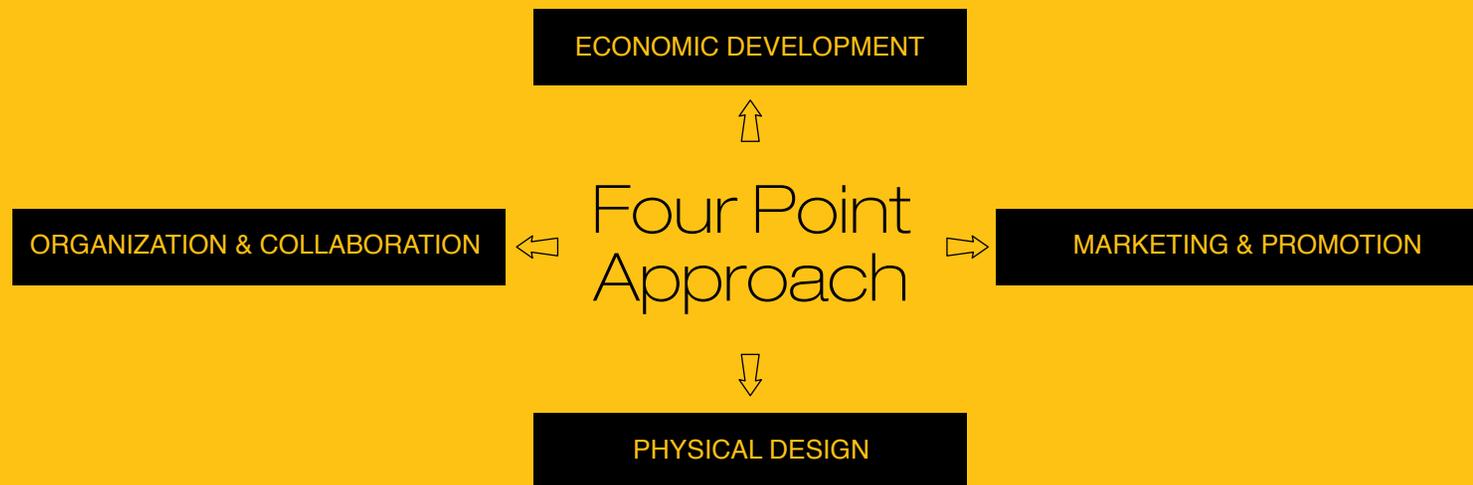
This book tells a story about Walkerton's downtown - what it has and where the community wants it to go.

**Spruce
the Bruce**



The Four Pillars

The key to any successful downtown revitalization program is to build a solid foundation. Research indicates that this foundation is built on four pillars: Organization; Economic Development; Marketing and Promotion; and Physical Design.



NOTE: One of the key pillars to any successful revitalization effort is Organization. Organization involves getting everyone working toward the same goal and assembling human and financial resources needed for revitalization. Through this research it became clear that existing organizations in the community are involved with physical design, economic development, and marketing; building Walkerton into a true destination, however, requires these efforts to become more coordinated.

In the summer of 2011 the Spruce the Bruce (STB) team collected background information about the health of downtown Walkerton

to develop a structured and focused downtown revitalization program. The team solicited feedback from a number of sources and this document represents a summary of those research findings. These research findings could be used to develop a Community Identity, Community Toolkit and Action Plan to support strategic efforts in downtown Walkerton. The sources were:

1

Existing Plans and Studies

2

Background Research

Downtown Diagnosis, OMAFRA Trade Area Analysis & Business Mix Analysis

3

Business Stakeholders

Key Informant interviews

4

River Users Workshop

focus group meeting

5

Public Input

Resident, Origin, Photo, & Video Surveys.
Community Workshop

1. Existing Plans and Studies

Brockton Official Plan

The Brockton Official Plan sets out “To encourage the strengthening of downtown Walkerton as the commercial, retail and service centre of the community.” The town is designated “Historic Walkerton” with goals “To actively promote the downtown as the focus for retail and service activity within the Community and Municipality;” “To provide for suitable opportunities for pedestrian access, visual connectivity and functional interaction with the Saugeen River valley;” and “Improve the streetscape of the downtown.”



Saugeen Riverside Feasibility Probe

In 2003 Brockton launched a study to investigate ways to strengthen downtown Walkerton as the centre of the community, strengthen the linkage between downtown Walkerton and the River, encourage recreational use of the river, and promote the community as the regional service centre and a **tourist destination**.

The study was based on the recognition that the river is one of the community's most significant distinctive elements. It recommended riverside improvements including boat launching facilities and recreation areas along the "RiverBar" just north of the Durham St. Bridge, trail upgrades, an

expanded Riverbend park, improved and extended trails, and a pedestrian suspension bridge over the river. The study also recommended a variety of arts and cultural events to attract visitors to the downtown and venue area.

2. Background Research

a. Downtown Diagnosis

25 Characteristics of a well functioning Downtown

This is a tool developed by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) for evaluating the function of the downtown. Characteristics of a downtown are divided into four categories: - organization, marketing, economic development and design. Each characteristic is ranked on a scale of 0 to 4 to yield a final score out of 100.

0 Does not meet criterion

1 Weakly meets criterion

2 Meets criterion moderately well

3 Meets criterion reasonably well

4 Very strongly meets criterion

21/24

Organization

This indicates that the downtown is reasonably well to very well organized.

11/16

Marketing

Suggesting that the downtown meets the criteria moderately well but that some improvements are needed.

23/28

Economic Development

Meets this criterion reasonably well.

27/32

Design

Suggesting that the downtown meets the criteria moderately well but that some improvements are needed.

Score

82/100

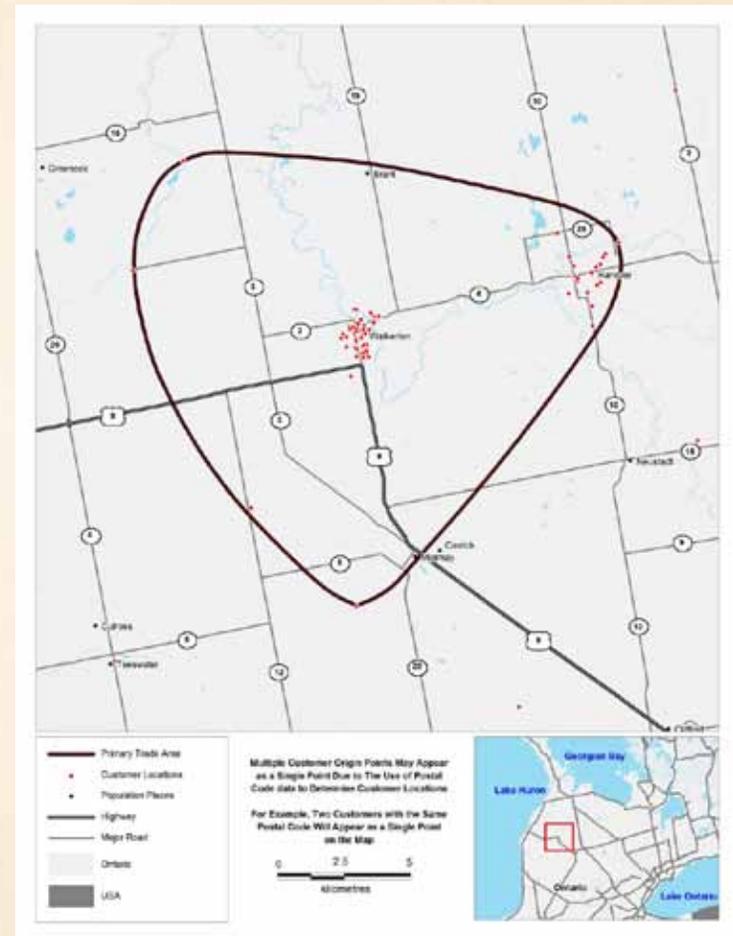
Walkerton's downtown appears to be functioning well. Major revitalization efforts are probably not needed, but the community should consider ways and means to maintain its current performance.

b. Trade Area Analysis

OMAFRA Trade Area Analysis

Customer origin surveys undertaken in November and December of 2011 were used to identify a Trade Area for downtown Walkerton. Statistics Canada census and survey data for this area was analyzed and provided some insights into the trade area and characteristics of people living within it. This data indicates that:

- The Walkerton Primary Trade Area includes Hanover and Mildmay
- This Trade area has a high daytime population of 20,311 when compared to a resident population of 15,925. This is a 27% increase in population during the daytime.
- The trade area is an employment area, with over 60% of the daytime population working
- The overall resident population of the area has significantly more people above age 65, and significantly fewer people aged 25-49, than the provincial average.
- The area has a significant number of 20-24 year olds living with parents.
- The area has lower than average income, which is partially offset by lower-than-average housing costs.
- The area has more “blue collar jobs” and fewer “white collar jobs” than the provincial average.





This analysis is based on an off season trade area analysis, which may differ from in-season trade area analysis. It highlights, however, that the trade area has somewhat limited potential to

support higher-end boutique or apparel-type shopping which tends to cater to areas with younger and more “white collar” occupations with greater disposable incomes.

Higher daytime populations and working populations tend to demand restaurants, bars, financial institutions, dry cleaners, florists, coffee shops, business supply stores, retailers, and specialty stores catering to daytime shoppers.



c. Business Mix Analysis

OMAFRA Business Mix Analysis

OMAFRA also conducted a business mix analysis, mapping the distribution of different types of businesses throughout the downtown core and comparing the number and type of businesses in a broad range of categories to communities which are similar in size and location. This analysis can indicate potential business strengths and opportunities.

The analysis indicated that downtown Walkerton has a significant destination service component that includes 22% of the downtown trade area.

People may travel to Walkerton for a variety of legal, professional, health, and financial services. Many of these services tend to operate during the work week, with limited weekend activity.



3. Business Stakeholders

Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Interviews were conducted (with downtown business owners and operators) in August 2011 to determine what is currently working and not working in the downtown and to identify changes that would help to improve the business environment of the downtown area.

The first set of questions asked respondents to rate items as excellent (4), good (3), fair (2), or poor (1).

Questions were broken down into seven categories: Physical Setting, Transportation, Parking, Gateway/Entrances, Storefronts, Competitive Position, and Joint Marketing/Promotion. The average for each item was between fair and good.

Highest Rated Elements

- Overall neat and tidy appearance of the street
- Appropriate mix of businesses
- Appropriate range of prices
- Well organized special events downtown

Lowest Rated Elements

- Lack of a unifying element letting visitors know they are downtown
- Parking signage
- Number of parking spaces
- Businesses not working with other businesses
- Some areas of the downtown are inaccessible for people with disabilities

The next section asked respondents whether their business would benefit from any programs, grants or services including façade improvement grants, joint marketing ventures, and improvements to the physical infrastructure. They all agreed that grants would benefit their community downtown. This is evident as Spruce the Bruce was introduced to Walkerton in July and businesses were quick to apply for the grants offered in 2011. Applications from Walkerton secured 24% of the 50 grants given out by Spruce the Bruce in 2011.

Respondents
were asked:
“What are your
suggestions
for improving
downtown.”

The top five
answers were:

1

More easily accessible parking spaces

2

Need for public washrooms

3

Uniform store hours

4

Clean up the streets by enforcing bylaws and
buying garbage bins

5

Slow down traffic downtown



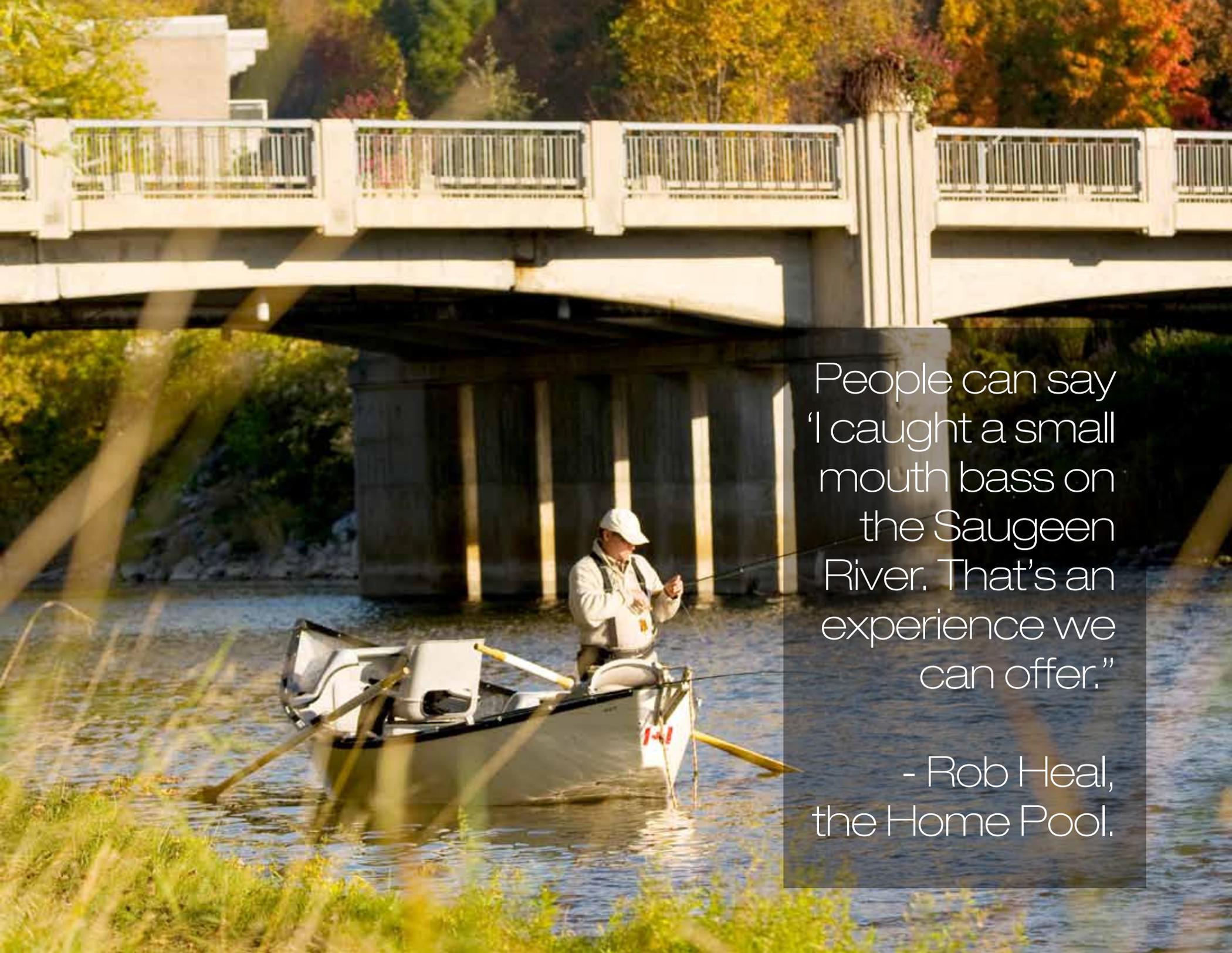
COFFEE

White King

GAGGIA



PLEASE REUSE YOUR MUG FOR...



People can say
‘I caught a small
mouth bass on
the Saugeen
River. That’s an
experience we
can offer.’

- Rob Heal,
the Home Pool.

4. River Stakeholder Workshop

Based on the prevalence of the river in the research, the STB Team / Image Committee held a meeting in March 2012 with Town staff, horticultural society members, trails committee members, fly fishing guides, anglers, and members of the Image Committee and Council. The overwhelming message was that the specific and most unique features of the river are the fly fishing / angling opportunities, particularly for smallmouth bass and trout. The river has remarkable potential to be a great destination but needs some work to ensure that the fishery is sustainable before it can be marketed. Key needs identified through this include:

- Concerted efforts at riverbank cleanup.
- Regulation to establish the majority of the river as a catch and release fishery to preserve fish stocks, starting as a voluntary program if needed.
- Continued support for fishery restocking programs
- Education and outreach into the importance of the fish and different fish life cycles to create a culture of stewardship of the fishery
- Physical design improvements at key access points, including the informal access located behind the downtown Tim Horton's
- Measures to improve boater stewardship of the river (especially regarding litter).

Recommendations:

1. Form a stakeholder group to lead river revitalization efforts. This group should involve more than just Walkerton or Brockton stakeholders.
2. Pursue package offerings and coordination with sportfishing industry operators to get visitors into the downtown and for overnight stays.
3. Most people come equipped to fish, but sundry items, food and drink, and fly tying materials would be good retail additions

5. Public Input

a. Residents Survey

Every household in Walkerton was mailed a survey in August 2011 asking them specific questions regarding downtown Walkerton. The questions were oriented around marketing and economic development elements in the downtown. The survey concluded with some basic demographic questions. In total, 1960 surveys were mailed out and 117 responses were received. While the response rate is not statistically significant, it does give an impression into the opinions of people who have an interest in the vitality of downtown Walkerton.

Marketing

Residents were asked if they were familiar with any specific identity elements for both their Municipality and their community and if they thought these elements represented their community. Nearly 48% indicated that they were familiar with the identity elements that represented the Municipality but only 52% indicated they were familiar with identity elements that represented Walkerton.

41% of the respondents felt that these elements did not accurately reflect the community. 69% felt that visitors to the community did not recognize these identity elements.

Residents were also asked what unique features of the community would draw people in and what positive images or aspects of downtown should be promoted. Features of the community that should be promoted are:

- 1 variety of boutique shops
- 2 trees and flowers in downtown
- 3 Jubilee Hall
- 4 Saugeen River

The majority of respondents indicated that they had attended at least one event within the community in the last year. Most responses included the Busker's festival, Dirt Pig Festival baseball tournament and the Christmas Parade.

Economic Development

The majority of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statements that they “tried to shop locally whenever possible”; “businesses in my downtown sell the products/services I want”; “I feel safe downtown at night”; and “I like the look and feel of my downtown”.

The majority of respondents somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “I prefer to shop outside of my community downtown.”

Respondents were also asked if they would use extended hours for businesses – 47% indicated they would use extended hours on Thursday and Friday night and 38% indicated that they would not use expanded hours on any given night.

Most respondents strongly agreed that parking in their downtown was easy and convenient to get to. However this appeared to be contradicted by respondents disliking a “lack of parking spaces downtown.” This may be due to lack of signage indicating public parking locations.

Respondents were asked what new businesses they would like to see downtown.

The top five responses were bookstores, restaurants, childrens and mens clothing, outfitters and a full service hardware and tool store.

Finally, respondents were asked to provide some general feedback regarding the downtown retail environment. Most people liked how the downtown was small and easy to walk to, and the variety of stores. Respondents were disappointed in the lack of uniform store hours. Some respondents were also unhappy with the look of vacant lots and facades of some businesses. Signage was also identified as weak, as visitors did not know where extra parking was and where downtown was. Better signage could help to clear up traffic congestion. Overall, almost everyone said they like the friendly people, the hometown feel, and great customer service in downtown Walkerton.

Of the people who responded, 66% have lived in the area for over 10 years. 70% live 6-15 minutes away by car, 62% work in Walkerton and 31% are retired, 71% of respondents were female, 47% were between 45-64, and 29% were between 20-44.

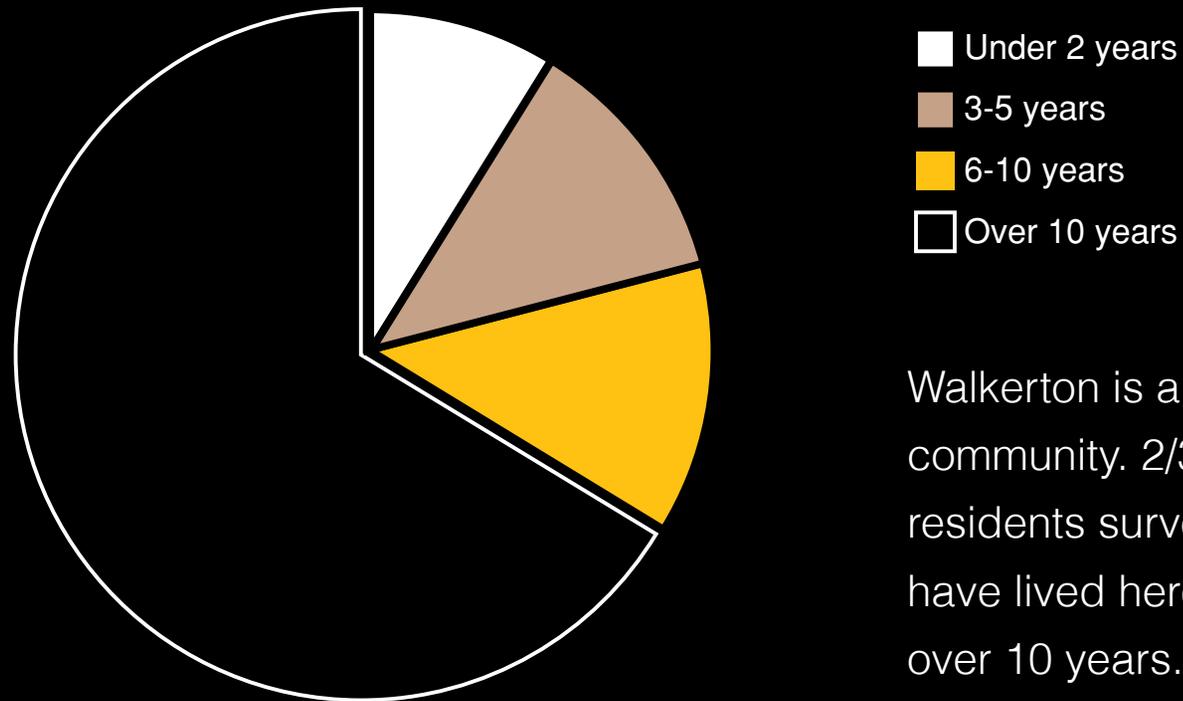
Respondents like:

- Their walkable downtown
- Shopping locally where they can
- Free parking that is in the downtown
- Friendly people, hometown feel, & great customer service

Respondents would like:

- Extended hours on Thursday and Friday
- A bookstore, restaurant, childrens & men’s clothing, outfitters, and full-service hardware

How long have you lived in your community?



Walkerton is a stable community. 2/3 of residents surveyed have lived here for over 10 years.

b. Origins Survey

Origin Surveys were conducted at the Buskers Festival, Dirt Pig Fest Baseball Tournament, Foodland and LCBO. Respondents were asked ten questions to help determine a direction for the brand of the community and see where visitors were coming from. Most visitors came from within one hour away such as Chesley, Port Elgin and Hanover.

Respondents were asked if they were familiar with specific identity elements (logos, symbols, slogan, etc.) currently used in Walkerton and Brockton and 90% of the respondents answered no. They were also asked what the unique features or assets downtown Walkerton has to draw visitors to downtown, and 70% answered the river and the unique boutique shops.

New businesses respondents wanted to see downtown

were: children and maternity clothing store, an outfitter, and bookstore.

Top three community events attended in the past year:

Busker's Festival, Christmas Festival and Dirt Pig Tournament.

c. Photo Survey

In August 2011, disposable cameras were handed out to a variety of people (i.e. student; senior; visitor; resident; business owner; etc) within the community of Walkerton in order to capture visually what defines their community. The participants were given 4 weeks to take photos of Walkerton and all the cameras were returned at which time staff sorted all the pictures into like groupings.



The themes that were highlighted through this exercise were:

Vibrant Downtown – with pictures of the streets and boutique shops;

Water / River – with pictures of fly fisherman and the river entrances;

Icons – Walkerton's Heritage Garden, Lobies Park, and Centennial Park;

Historical Theatre – with pictures of the Jubilee Hall.



d. Video Survey

In August, the STB team interviewed people walking in downtown Walkerton. The interviewees were tourists, residents, business owners of all ages.

Interviewees reported that they visited downtown Walkerton mainly because of the friendly people, the nearby river, and the downtown location.

Three new business respondents wished for were: clothing stores, baby/kids store, and bookstore.

The interviewees wished that there were more clothing stores, a splash pad, and a clean downtown.

Some respondents felt that the garbage and vandalism downtown was one of the main reasons why people didn't spend more time downtown." Recommendations included lowering drug and alcohol abuse and cleaning up vandalism and garbage.

1

When you think of Walkerton, what do you think of?

2

What are three new businesses you would like to see downtown?

3

What are things you wish would change in downtown Walkerton?



“We came downtown for shopping and pizza!”

e. Community Workshop

In September, the STB Team hosted a two hour public workshop to gain information on what the community felt were their major assets. This workshop was attended by six members of the public. The low turnout suggested that for the most part residents are comfortable with Walkerton's downtown.

The workshop consisted of a Visioning Exercise and Asset Mapping Exercise.

In the Visioning Exercise, the group was introduced to what is a Primary Vision compared to Diversions, with the goal of identifying Walkerton's greatest, unique asset(s) that are attractive to visitors as well as the diversions which help to complete an experience of Walkerton but which by themselves are not major attractions.

Everyone was given a postcard and asked to imagine that they had been away from Walkerton for 10 years and came back to visit in 2021 for the first time since leaving.

They were asked to write a message on the postcard that answered the four questions about the downtown:

- i. **What is different about downtown in 2021?**
- ii. **What is special about downtown and why do you love it?**
- iii. **Where do people gather and what do they do?**
- iv. **In 2021, what are the top 4 assets of downtown?**

i. What is different about downtown in 2021?

- Many new businesses and facade improvements, with no vacant stores
- Lots of traffic, lots of visitors
- More parks and open space
- Public washroom downtown
- Heritage theme is evident
- Clear focus on the river

ii. What is special about downtown and why do you love it?

- Lots of activity (people and vehicles)
- Heritage theme/Heritage buildings are preserved
- Lots of pedestrian walkways and walking paths
- Lots of trees and flowers
- People/merchants are very friendly



iii. Where do people gather and what do they do?

- Beside the Saugeen River to enjoy the view
- Green space near the river to listen to music
- On the river for a fishing derby
- Downtown for dining and shopping
- Victoria Jubilee Hall for community, social and cultural activities

iv. In 2021, what are the top 4 assets of downtown?

- Great looking storefronts/Successful businesses
- No vacant stores/Well-maintained buildings
- Beautiful Victorian streetscape/Hanging baskets, planters, gardens, etc.
- Saugeen River
- Victoria Jubilee Hall

In the Asset Mapping exercise, the group was to list what they felt was Walkerton's top assets. Later, each person was given four stickers to place beside what they felt were Walkerton's top asset(s). The stickers could be placed all together or individually beside the each of the assets on the asset lists.

Results showed that the community felt that their top three assets are:



1 Clean Water



2 Saugeen River



3 Victoria Jubilee Hall

Summary & Recommendations

The Saugeen River is Walkerton's best known and unique asset.

The river provides a great setting for the downtown, which has many of its own excellent features.

The downtown also serves as an employment and service destination with a high daytime population. The downtown should take full advantage of the trade area's existing weekday population of employees and clients of its destination services through:

- Well-advertised 'business lunches'
- Emphasis on customer service
- Uniform operating hours with early evening services available, for example until 6 or 7 pm on Thursday / Friday

Walkerton needs to decide whether to carry on as it has to date, or to invest the time, energy, and resources to become a premier destination. The river itself offers the best opportunity to create a destination for visitors to Walkerton, and through this to increase its attractiveness and trade area. Development of a quality fly fishing experience can appeal particularly to higher income consumers. Becoming a destination requires concerted efforts in each of the 'Four Points,' beginning with:

Organization & Collaboration:

Initiating a river stewardship group that includes stakeholders throughout the watershed Improved coordination between the Image Committee, Municipality, Parks, Economic Development, Heritage, and Community Groups and Committees.

Economic Development:

Partnering with fishing guides and outfitters to promote overnight stays, stores and restaurants within the downtown.

Marketing and Promotion:

River stewardship promotion that starts with 'bringing home the fish' that were commissioned throughout the Saugeen River watershed in 2001.

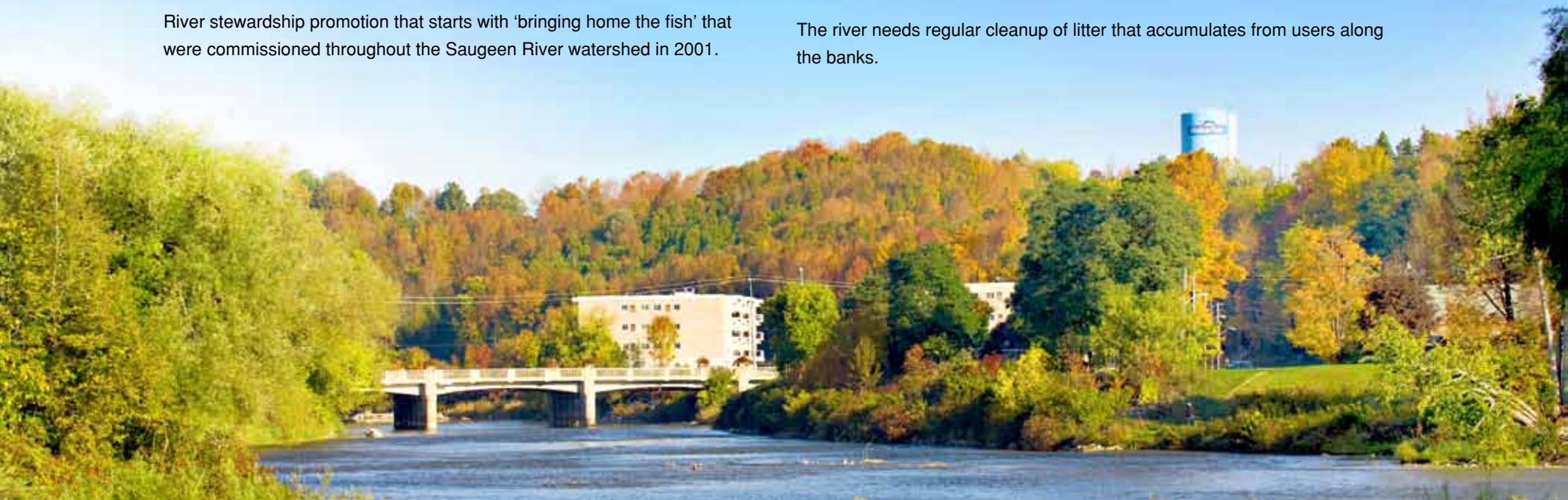
Physical Design Improvements

Hard work and diligence over many years has resulted in an attractive downtown. Physical improvements should continue this work and focus on strengthening connections between the River, parking areas, and the downtown and improving the riverbank park areas. Previous studies have suggested ways this can be accomplished.

River access points and services near the downtown need to be improved, such as the access next to the Durham Road.

Wayfinding signage at River access points and throughout the downtown can draw people in and direct them to community assets and parking.

The river needs regular cleanup of litter that accumulates from users along the banks.



CREDITS:

Kim Clarke
Kara Van Myall
Vicki Ly
Jakob Van Dorp
Canvas Studios

PHOTOS:

ImagePort Photo Agency & Studio,
Port Elgin, ON

Copyright 2012 County of Bruce,
All Rights Reserved. No part of this
publication may be reproduced in any
form or by any means without the written
permission of the County of Bruce
Planning and Economic Development
Department.

**Spruce
the Bruce**

