



REPORT

REPORT TO: Mayor and Members of Council

REPORT FROM: Tara Buonpensiero, Planner-Policy

DATE: June 12, 2009

REPORT NO.: PDS-2009-0041 (Revised)

RE: Proposed Community Improvement Strategy

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. PDS-2009-0041 (Revised) dated June 12, 2009, regarding the Proposed Halton Hills Community Improvement Strategy (copy provided under separate cover) prepared by MMM Group and RCI Consulting dated April 2009 be received;

AND FURTHER THAT the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy be endorsed and serve as the basis for developing the Community Improvement Plan during Phase 2 of the project;

AND FURTHER THAT a copy of this report and the Proposed Halton Hills Community Improvement Strategy be forwarded to the Region of Halton for consideration, and that the Region be requested to endorse the Strategy as it relates to matters of Regional interest;

AND FURTHER THAT a copy of this report and the Proposed Halton Hills Community Improvement Strategy be forwarded to the Stakeholder Advisory Committee, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

BACKGROUND:

Through Report PD-2008-0031, staff last updated Council on the status of the Town's Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Program, which included:

- a summary of the Community Improvement Plan Discussion Paper dated May 2008, prepared by MMM Group and RCI Consulting;

- an update on funding for the CIP Program;

- an outline of the next steps in the project; and,
- a recommendation that MMM Group and RCI Consulting be retained to complete Phase 2 of the CIP.

The consulting team has now completed the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy, and recently attended a Town of Halton Hills Economic Development Committee meeting to provide an overview of the Proposed Strategy. As per Recommendation No. EDO-2009-0013, Economic Development Committee recommended the following:

THAT Report No. PDS-2009-0041 - Proposed Community Improvement Strategy dated April 9, 2009, regarding the Proposed Halton Hills Community Improvement Strategy (copy provided under separate cover) prepared by MMM Group and RCI Consulting dated April 2009 be received;

AND FURTHER THAT the Proposed Halton Hills Community Improvement Strategy be amended to expand and clarify the financial impact of the strategy including the grant dollars and expand the commentary on the benefits of CIP's and the reasons why municipalities should invest;

AND FURTHER THAT the report and strategy once amended be presented to Council for endorsement and to serve as the basis for developing the Community Improvement Plan during Phase 2 of the project;

AND FURTHER THAT should Council adopt the Strategy that staff be directed to return to the Economic Development Committee for discussion and direction regarding detailed programs and priorities and suggested levels of municipal investment.

Staff have now incorporated the recommended amendments and are seeking Council's endorsement of the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy. The consultant team will be attending Council as a delegation to present the Proposed Strategy and answer questions as required.

Upon Council's endorsement of the Proposed Strategy, Phase 1 of the Community Improvement Plan Program will be complete. The Proposed Community Improvement Strategy provides the framework for the Community Improvement Plan, which will be prepared in Phase 2. Tasks that have been completed to date as part of Phase 1 include:

- project initiation;
- legislation and background policy review;
- conducting a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis;
- preparation of a Discussion Paper;
- public consultation; and,
- preparation of an overall Proposed Community Improvement Strategy.

The purpose of this report is to:

- highlight some of the long term benefits that municipalities with CIPs have realized;
- summarize the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy prepared by MMM Group and RCI Consulting dated April 2009;
- provide a summary of comments provided by the Stakeholder Advisory Committee; and,
- outline the components that are anticipated to be included in the CIP.

COMMENTS:

Benefits of a Community Improvement Plan

When Council originally approved the preparation of a Town of Halton Hills Community Improvement Plan, the main objective was to encourage revitalization of key areas within the Town, as well as promote additional economic development opportunities. The consultant team has clearly indicated that the Community Improvement Plan will provide Council with a “toolbox” of measures that the Town can use in any given year to promote revitalization within the designated Community Improvement Areas.

The consultants experience in other municipalities has seen modest public sector investment leveraging substantial private sector investment ranging from four to ten times the amount granted by the municipality. The benefits also include greater community pride and confidence in an area, since ratepayers can see visible signs that an area is improving and not declining, which often spurs further private investment. Ultimately, the municipality benefits from many years of higher property tax dollars, that would likely not have been realized without the Community Improvement Program.

Summary of the Community Improvement Strategy

The Discussion Paper, as reported on in PD-2008-0031, summarized current conditions of the following six candidate areas in Halton Hills for which Community Improvement Plan policies would apply:

- Downtown Georgetown
- Downtown Acton
- Georgetown GO Station lands
- The Upper Guelph Street retail area
- Brownfield Sites with intensification potential
- Agricultural areas

The Proposed Community Improvement Strategy builds upon the direction in the Discussion Paper by outlining a recommended approach for a CIP in Halton Hills.

There are seven sections in the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy which are summarized below.

Section 1.0 – Introduction

This section explains the purpose of the Strategy and identifies the candidate areas where the Community Improvement tools could be applied. The candidate areas are the same as were previously identified in the Discussion Paper, with the exception of the Georgetown and Acton Industrial Parks, which were added at Council's request.

Section 2.0 – Synopsis of the Critical Needs

The critical needs are defined as those features that affect the built form or character of an area and can be addressed through a Community Improvement Plan. This section of the report reiterates the critical needs of the candidate areas and includes such things as difficult lot configuration, fractured land ownership, and areas that could benefit from revitalization.

Section 3.0 – Findings from the Stakeholder and Public Consultations

Section 3.0 of the Proposed Strategy summarizes the comments provided by the Stakeholder Advisory Committee and the public on the Discussion Paper during the Spring of 2008. The Stakeholder Advisory Committee identified a number of key points to be considered when preparing the CIP as follows:

- advocate for Regional participation in the CIP project;
- CIP programs will need to be prioritized to meet the goals of the community;
- enhanced By-law enforcement should be explored; and,
- investigate the possibility of extending the hours of retail stores to maximize the benefits of façade improvements.

A public open house was held in June 2008 and comments from the public suggest that the critical needs identified by the study team are on track. A range of comments were provided by the public including the desire for a CIP to encourage the restoration and adaptation of the hotel in downtown Georgetown, and to showcase arts and culture in Halton Hills.

Section 4.0 – Overview of the Recommended Strategy for a CIP for Halton Hills

This section of the Proposed Strategy outlines the provisions of the Planning Act that enable a municipality to implement a CIP and includes recommendations on how the Town of Halton Hills should structure their CIP.

To ensure the effectiveness of the CIP, the consultants are recommending that the Town of Halton Hills structure the CIP as follows:

- include municipal “leadership actions” which are Town initiated activities that would support the Community Improvement initiative;
- apply to only specific geographic areas;
- certain programs should be tied to the future availability of services;
- implementation of the CIP should be phased based on priority; and,
- participation in the CIP Program should be monitored.

The Proposed Community Improvement Strategy outlines the recommended municipal leadership actions and incentive programs for each of the identified critical need areas which are summarized in Table 1 below. Additional details on each of the actions and programs outlined below can be found in Section 4.0 of the Strategy.

Table 1: Summary of Municipal Leadership Actions and Recommended Incentive Programs by Study Area

Study Area	Recommended Municipal Leadership Actions	Recommended Incentive Programs
Guelph Street Retail Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with private sector in preparing Comprehensive Development Plans • Ensure Draft Zoning By-law is supportive of renewal • Advocate for Regional participation in Tax Increment Programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building and Façade Improvement Grant • Revitalization Grant • Comprehensive Planning Grant
Downtown Georgetown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a “Downtowns” Guide • Work with BIA to develop a marketing program • Develop a signage program for parks and trails • Work with BIA to ensure boundaries are appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential Conversion or Rehabilitation Grant • Revitalization Grant • Heritage Building and Façade Improvement Grant
Downtown Acton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review By-law enforcement activities • Develop a “Downtowns” Guide • Work with BIA to develop a marketing program • Develop a signage program for parks and trails • Work with BIA to ensure boundaries are appropriate • Revisit “Acton Tourist Area” in the Official Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building and Façade Improvement Grant • Residential Conversion or Rehabilitation Grant • Revitalization Grant
Brownfield Sites (including GO Station lands and Beardmore site)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with GO Station Study • Initiate a similar study for the Beardmore site • Advocate for Regional participation in the development charge reduction/deferral program • Consider other intensification sites as appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Site Assessment Grant • Brownfields Tax Assistance • Brownfields Redevelopment Grant • Parkland Dedication Reduction

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development Charge Reduction/Deferral
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Table 1: Summary of Municipal Leadership Actions and Recommended Incentive Programs by Study Area (Con't)

Study Area	Recommended Municipal Leadership Actions	Recommended Incentive Programs
Agricultural Lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with OMAFRA to improve government support of the Halton Hills agricultural community • Town's Economic Development function should include an agri-business component • Work with the Region to develop and distribute farm marketing materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture Feasibility Study/Business Plan Grant • Agricultural Buildings and Facilities Revitalization Grant
Georgetown and Acton Industrial Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better enforce property standards • Develop a signage program in partnership with landowners and business owners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape Improvement Grant • Energy Efficiency Retrofit Grant

It should be noted that Council requested that the consultant team consider the potential to apply CIP policies to both the Georgetown and Acton Industrial Parks. The Georgetown Industrial Area is well occupied with limited vacancies, whereas the Acton Industrial Area has more 'greenfield' characteristics, with a considerable amount of vacant employment land. The consultant team has reviewed the legislation related to implementing CIPs and concluded that there were clear limitations in providing CIP policies to promote development of 'greenfield' industrial parks. Given these limitations, and the number of Community Improvement Areas identified in the Town, the consultants recommended that the Town proceed with a Landscape Improvement Grant and Energy Efficiency Retrofit Grant for the Georgetown and Acton Industrial Parks. In the event that the Acton Industrial Area does not develop based on market forces in the next 5 years, the Town may wish to revisit opportunities to provide incentives based on the legislative framework in place at that time.

This section also includes recommendations for monitoring variables, which would be used to measure the success of the various Community Improvement Plan programs. Monitoring variables include such things as: number of applications received; value of grants; square footage of new construction; total value of construction; value of development charge reductions; remediated area; LEED results achieved; increase in assessed value of property; and increase in property taxes.

The consultant team recognizes that implementation of the Town's CIP Program will require coordination from staff and in this regard the consultant team recommends that the Town appoint a part-time Community Improvement Plan coordinator to champion the municipal leadership activities, administer the programs, collect data and prepare monitoring reports to Council.

Section 5.0 – Implementation of a Comprehensive CIP

With respect to implementation of the CIP, the Proposed Strategy provides two options available to the Town to implement a Comprehensive CIP. The first option, and consultant recommended approach, is for the Town to designate the CIP project areas by By-law and adopt one Comprehensive CIP with multiple programs directed to each of the program areas. The second option would see the Town adopting multiple CIPs over time.

The Town of Halton Hills CIP will include municipal leadership actions, general incentive program eligibility criteria, details of the program including financial limits, phasing, implementation and general program administration guidelines.

Preliminary phasing of the CIP programs is included in Section 5.0 of the Proposed Strategy; however more detailed prioritization will be included in the Community Improvement Program, which will be completed in Phase 2 of this study.

Section 6.0 – Next Steps

The Proposed Strategy outlines the steps necessary to complete the Town of Halton Hills CIP including:

- working with staff to identify a preliminary budget for municipal incentives for 2010;
- consultation with the appropriate Provincial Ministries regarding the boundaries of the CIP Areas;
- staff preparing an enabling Official Plan Amendment to designate the boundaries of the CIP Areas;
- the preparation of a first draft of the Comprehensive CIP by the consulting team;
- stakeholder and public consultation on the Draft CIP;
- consultation with the appropriate Provincial Ministries on the Draft CIP;
- statutory public meeting for the Draft CIP; and,
- consideration by Council to adopt the CIP.

Upon adoption of the CIP by by-law, it will be necessary for the Town to publish eligibility criteria, program guides and applications to implement the incentive programs.

Section 7.0 – Glossary of Incentive Programs

A description of each of the incentive programs included in the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy is outlined in this final section.

Consultation with the Region of Halton

In order for the Community Improvement Plan to be most effective, the Proposed Strategy recommends working with the Region of Halton on a number of municipal leadership actions, and advocating for Regional participation in some incentive programs. A summary of the consultants recommendations for Regional participation are as follows:

- to participate in tax increment grant and tax assistance programs by matching grants on a percentage basis for Guelph Street, Downtown Georgetown, Downtown Acton, brownfield sites and agricultural areas;
- to participate in development charge reduction/deferral programs for brownfield sites; and,
- to work with the Region and the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs to improve support services to the Halton Hills agricultural community, including preparation of an Agribusiness Economic Development Strategy, and to develop and distribute farm marketing materials.

Staff from the Region of Halton were in attendance at the Spring 2008 Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting, and the Proposed Strategy document has been forwarded to the Region of Halton for their review. Due to the potential financial commitments that could arise from Regional participation in the Town of Halton Hills CIP, it is recommended in this report that the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy be endorsed by the Region of Halton as it relates to matters of Regional interest. Since the incentive programs will be refined during preparation of the CIP, Halton Hills staff will continue consulting with Regional staff on this initiative.

Summary of Stakeholder Advisory Committee Comments

The Community Improvement Program Stakeholder Advisory Committee is comprised of representatives from the Acton and Georgetown Business Improvement Associations, the Chamber of Commerce, the agricultural community and a brownfield landowner. A meeting of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee was held on March 12, 2009, in order to provide an overview of the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy and obtain input from the Committee on the Proposed Strategy.

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee was supportive of the direction of the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy, however, as a result of the discussions at the Stakeholder meeting, the Proposed Strategy was revised to include:

- an improved relationship between the Community Improvement Strategy and the Halton Hills “shop-local” initiatives;
- an expansion of the Brownfield Redevelopment Grant Program to include mixed-use development;
- an improved connection between the agricultural sector and the value added opportunities that they provide; and,

- a new Energy Efficiency Retrofit grant program for industrial buildings to align with new green awards being considered by the Chamber (for example the “Green Business Awards.”)

Phase 2 – Preparation of the Community Improvement Plan

Upon endorsement of the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy by Town Council, Phase 1 of the Town's CIP Program will be complete. The CIP will be prepared during Phase 2 and will be based on the framework included in the Proposed Strategy. The CIP is anticipated to include the following:

- a comprehensive CIP with multiple specific programs applicable to each of the CIP project areas;
- detailed draft incentive programs and municipal leadership actions for each of the project areas;
- an education strategy to assist landowners, developers and investors regarding the CIP, including the types of programs that are available and eligibility criteria; and
- a comprehensive implementation strategy.

During this phase, the Town would continue to engage the Stakeholder Advisory Committee as well as the public through an open house and a formal public meeting pursuant to the *Planning Act* as outlined in the summary of Section 6.0 of the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy above.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

The Town's Community Improvement Plan relates extensively to the following Strategic Directions:

- Foster a Healthy Community
- Preserve, Protect and Enhance Our Environment
- Foster a Prosperous Economy
- Preserve, Protect and Promote our Distinctive History
- Preserve, Protect and Enhance our Countryside
- Achieve Sustainable Growth
- Provide Responsive, Effective Municipal Government

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The costs associated with preparing the CIP Program are being undertaken in accordance with the approved Capital Budget. The cost breakdown for preparing the CIP is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Town of Halton Hills Community Improvement Program Cost Breakdown

Town of Halton Hills	\$ 17,560
Federation of Canadian Municipalities *	\$ 68,000
OMAFRA *	\$ 47,440
Region of Halton	\$ 3,000
Total Cost to Prepare Halton Hills CIP	\$136,000

* Note – Funding contributions are through performance based grants.

Implementation of the CIP will entail financial commitments on the part of the Town of Halton Hills. As indicated in the Proposed Strategy and previously summarized in Section 6.0 – Next Steps, one of the next steps in the project is for the consultant team to work with staff to identify a preliminary budget for incentives which will be brought before Council for consideration during the 2010 Budget deliberations.

By adopting a Community Improvement Plan, Council is not obligated to fund a specific level or all programs in any one year. Council can set a budget that is based on its available resources, and as positive results are apparent in the program monitoring, Council can adjust its funding of any given program to improve programs that are working well, or change priorities away from programs that are not as successful.

COMMUNICATIONS IMPACT:

It is recommended that once the Proposed Strategy is endorsed by Halton Hills Council, a copy of this report and Proposed Community Improvement Strategy be forwarded to the Stakeholder Advisory Committee, the Region of Halton, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT:

There is no immediate environmental impact associated with this report. Environmental implications will be further canvassed as part of the detailed reporting on the CIP Program.

CONSULTATION:

Given that the municipal leadership actions and recommended incentive programs have Town wide implications, the consultants presented the Proposed Strategy at a Department Head meeting. In addition to the Department Head meeting, two additional meetings were held with senior staff from Parks and Recreation and Finance to discuss in more detail the incentives related to reductions in cash-in-lieu of parkland for brownfield site development and the range of financial incentives included in the Proposed Strategy. Feedback received from the internal consultation on the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy was positive, recognizing that the directions in the Proposed Strategy are at a high level, and next steps in the CIP project would provide

more details for each of the incentives including potential financial implications and variables to monitor the long term success of the CIP.

CONCLUSION:

This report has:

- highlighted some of the long term benefits that municipalities with CIPs have realized;
- summarized the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy prepared by MMM Group and RCI Consulting dated April 2009;
- summarized the results of consultation on the Proposed Community Improvement Strategy; and,
- outlined the next steps in the process including Phase 2 of the Community Improvement Plan.

Upon endorsement of the Proposed Strategy by Town Council, the consultant team will move forward with preparation of Phase 2 of the Community Improvement Plan.

Respectfully submitted,

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