



APPENDIX C

Community Consultation Sessions

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Local Entrepreneurs Workshops (Commercial Areas & Incentives)

Two workshops to discuss commercial incentives were held on January 22, 2014, with approximately 45 residents/business owners in attendance in total.

Twelve questionnaires were completed and returned, providing the following information:

	Consider Using Program		Level of Importance			Comments
	Yes	No	Very	Somewhat	Not At All	
Façade Improvement Grant Program	9		6	2		\$2,500; \$1,000-2,000; 25%
Signage Improvement Grant Program	9		7	2		\$1,000; 50% up to \$1,000; 33%
Accessibility Improvement Grant Program	4	5	5	2	2	50% up to \$5,000; 25%
Parking/Landscaping Improvement Grant Program	5	3	7	1		\$1,000; 30%
Municipal Permit/Planning Fees Rebate	7	1	7	1	1	100% rebate
Tax Increment Grant Program	6	1	5	3		\$500; 5 years = 100%, 80%, 60%, 40% etc
Decommissioning Rebate	4	3	4	2	1	100% rebate

In addition there were written comments submitted and there was discussion on a variety of commercial development topics and the proposed CIP incentive programs, summarized below (responses to some questions are noted in italics):

General Comments

Administration of CIP

- The Town should meet with businesses after approval to describe in more detail the specific community plan and what is expected over the next 10 years.
- What about businesses that have already made improvements ahead of the CIP being completed/approved? *The CIP programs will not be retroactive. One is only able to take advantage of the programs after the plan has been adopted and funds have been allocated. CIP incentives only apply to projects on a go-forward basis. Completion of a project through one's own means does not prohibit additional works or projects on the same property with the assistance of the CIP programs.*
- Will the CIP allow for combinations of grant programs? *Potentially – the details of the CIP's incentives are to be determined, and comments are being solicited through the workshops and PAC. In all likelihood programs will be able to be combined.*
- How will applications be evaluated? Will they be weighted? *These details are to be determined. However, it is thought that all applications which meet basic criteria will be treated equally, on a first-come, first-serve basis until annual funding is exhausted.*
- What about businesses that are outside of the project areas? Would like to see the project areas expanded to include 2nd Avenue. *The proposed project areas are those that will have the most visual impact – as they are the main commercial areas/corridors of the Town. If the Town would like to expand project areas in future years, they may do so by amending the CIP.*

General Building Comments

- There is a fear to start renovation projects with older buildings, as one change may lead to another (snowball effect).
- Businesses would be more inclined to fix up their properties if there was a tenant that would pay a proper rent.
- Need to give incentives to properties which are most in need of improvements.
- What if I improve my building, but other buildings around it are still not improved? Is there a way to make others improve their buildings? *The Town can cite properties for non-compliance with the property standards by-law. However, the Town cannot force property owners to make additional improvements beyond complying with applicable by-laws. It is thought that if neighbouring businesses make improvements that businesses which are in need of improvements may be more inclined to do so, 1) so as not to be left out, or be the worst building on the street; and 2) since there may be incentives available to assist monetarily.*
- Having a program in place would encourage me to use it. As a business, we outline annual improvements in our budgets – these exterior improvements are being chosen in an attempt to beautify our exterior, landscaping, etc. and to tie in with the existing downtown décor. Beautifying our downtown core will encourage more residents and tourists to fully utilize the businesses.
- I would like to commend the Town for trying to address this issue. My commercial property has recently been rebuilt so there is no need to apply for any of this money.
- Making buildings look better has been discussed with the Chamber many times. I am sure commercial property owners would put some money into fixing up their buildings if there was a reasonable chance of attracting a decent tenant.

CIP Budget

- How is this being budgeted for? *The CIP programs will come out of the Town's municipal budget, and the amount of funding (if any) for incentive programs may change on an annual basis depending on the municipal budget situation.*
- It seems like the Town is taking from one group (taxpayers) to give to another (businesses).
- All residents of Espanola stand to benefit from an improved Downtown Core and Highway 6 Corridor.

Other Topics of Interest

- Local food security could be addressed in the CIP – through zoning policies and tax incentives to encourage market gardening, food production on vacation land or rooftops; permission to sell local food on site from front gardens; allowances for local food trucks/development of vibrant outdoor social spaces for people to gather for food or entertainment; food bonds, small loans or incentive grants for local food enterprises and initiatives including food incubators, food clusters, shared use food facilities and food networks to promote access and distribution.
- I am not a business owner, so the CIP has no direct impact. But it seems that these improvements must be done in conjunction with municipal improvements, e.g. leveraging cycle tourism requires an overall approach for signs, lanes, bicycle racks, and promotion. Another area for program option may be support businesses in support of a strategic objective like “cycle tourism” that the municipality is working on.
- It seems to me that the CIP is being positioned as a program for and by private business owners incented by Town dollars. A recommendation that could be made by the PAC group is to say this program would be best implemented (i.e. most successful) if it was undertaken in conjunction with a municipal improvement program, towards things like: cycle tourism (maps, signage, lanes, promotion); complete streets (focus on pedestrians, cyclists, staying and living downtown). LAMBAC could help (?) fund this.

Façades

- Public art could include murals on empty walls – like the Group of Seven murals that are located throughout downtown Huntsville, Ontario, for example. However, for this type of project to be successful, the Town would need to have artistic standards and rules. These projects also require maintenance and care.
- Will the CIP specify materials? *The CIP will have a set of design guidelines. It may recommended preferred materials.*
- Awnings do not last.
- I have a building in the downtown core and am considering façade improvements.
- Murals in the downtown could identify the Town's history, and serve to clean up the downtown.
- Would love to see an “art” related component – murals, etc. community art project. What about the bridge as part of the art project?
- Could apply to restoration of brickwork, replacement of windows, signage, exterior lighting, with a % rebate.
- Include doors, windows, cladding, lighting, canopies.
- In Northern Ontario sometimes there are more overhead costs.
- Engineering and Architect fees can be very prohibitive, perhaps reimbursement of part or all of these fees can be included as an incentive. or if there were multiple projects, would there be a way to coordinate a joint review by an architect (thereby saving on some of the cost)? *This is a great idea, however this is outside of the Town's role as part of the CIP, this could be achieved as a Chamber network or initiative of a group of business owners taking the lead.*
- Some are afraid to make changes because of the stringent requirements of the Building Code.
- An idea was proposed that the Town tender out electrical work so there is one Electrician that property/business owners go to and they would have a set, pre-negotiated rate. *This is a great idea, however this is outside of the Town's role as part of the CIP, this could be achieved as a Chamber network or initiative of a group of business owners taking the lead.*
- It would be helpful to know costs upfront and ahead of time.

Signage

- Most felt the Signage Improvement Program as a separate incentive is a good idea.
- Considering the potential lower cost for a signage improvement, an incentive might push some businesses to replace their sign.
- Is there a way to do a group tender? Such that a number of businesses could improve their signage, at a fixed rate with a designer/contractor (potentially benefitting from a reduced individual rate). *This is a good idea, and could be pursued at the business/ Chamber level. The Town does not have the resources to administer such a project as part of the CIP.*
- If a sign has already been replaced, the incentive could apply to signage lighting.
- Could apply to design support, with a % rebate.
- Start with signs.
- Lighting for signage.

Accessibility

- Accessibility improvements to an entrance may trigger substantial interior improvements (with significant costs) as well.
- Will the CIP address going from private property to the Town's infrastructure (i.e. sidewalks) with respect to accessibility? *The CIP can address public sector improvements. However, the Town is not planning on any major road reconstructions during the duration of the CIP, so these have not been examined in detail.*
- Improvements may trigger the need for accessible washrooms.
- We are a small home-based business with no intention of becoming accessible.
- Considering installation of an automatic door – some portion of a grant would be helpful.

Parking Areas / Landscaping

- Would like to see “complete streets” idea implemented – i.e. with pedestrian, cycling, and vehicular infrastructure. Street furniture, trees, water fountains all entice people to stop and stay in a more beautiful downtown core. *Note that LAMBAC may be able to provide funding for cycling infrastructure (i.e. bike racks, etc) as well.*
- Increase corner curbs and create mini plazas, green spaces with street furniture, cycling racks, green water catch belt, and re-greening of spaces not used.
- Parking improvements have been recently completed – would be interested in cycle racks.
- Consider partnering with Canadian Tire for landscaping projects.
- I may think about applying to inquire about helping me repave the parking lot.

Tax Increment

- Would this apply to building on vacant lots or demolition? *The Town is considering this incentive to apply to both types of projects, given a minimum threshold of an increase in assessment is met.*

Municipal Fees

- Reimbursement for signage fees seems attractive.
- The sign permit fee is definitely perceived as an annoyance, despite the small fee amount.
- The Town should come to businesses and ask – what can the Town do for you?
- Would like to see more assistance from the Town, potentially by hiring an architect for review. The Town may not need to cover the fees, but often it is simply the perception of assistance which is also appreciated.
- Would like to see total waiving of fees.
- Building permit/planning application fee rebates are a good incentive.

Residential Projects Workshop

The workshop focussed on residential development was held on February 4, 2014 with three property owners in attendance. The following was noted:

- There are very large upfront costs to multiple residential development, at this point the Town may be unable to offer large enough incentives for the creation of residential units (costs to build are approximately \$150,000/unit – if Town is only providing a grant for \$2,000/unit – this is not attractive enough to incentivize development).
- Would prefer if municipal fees were rebated up front.
- The tax increment grant is appealing, over a longer period of time (potentially 10 years, with larger rebate – potentially 100% for first few years). Over the first 10 years of a residential development there is often no profit to the landowner, so this type of incentive may assist.
- Using the Town's money for loans might not be the best use of limited resources, and could have significant administrative requirements.
- Would CIP incentive budgets be separate or grouped together for residential / commercial programs? *This is to be determined based on the CIP incentive programs proposed.*