



Committee Report

To:	Warden Hicks and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	January 14, 2021
Subject / Report No:	Addendum to PDR-CW-35-20
Title:	Living on Main Street Student Report
Prepared by:	Scott Taylor and Steve Furness
Reviewed by:	Randy Scherzer and Savanna Myers
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All Municipalities in Grey County
Status:	

Recommendation

1. That Addendum to Report PDR-CW-35-20 be received; and
2. That the University of Toronto report titled 'Living on Main Street' be received; and
3. That staff be directed to utilize the Living on Main Street report to inform future planning and economic development policies and program updates; and
4. That the report be shared with member municipalities across Grey County.

Executive Summary

The County partnered with students from University of Toronto Masters of Science in Planning program to undertake a study on downtown revitalization and residential opportunities in Grey County. The 'Living on Main Street' study was completed as part of the students' course work for their Masters in Planning, and will benefit the County and member municipalities. As part of the study, the students conducted stakeholder interviews, in addition to background research, and a review of other municipal approaches. The Living on Main Street recommendations are summarized in this report, and will be further examined by County Planning and Economic Development staff and shared with member municipalities.

Background and Discussion

County Economic Development and Planning staff have partnered with Jayne Armstrong, Dahab Ibrahim, Anne James, Catherine Jiao, and Nick Rhamey-Smith, students from University of Toronto Masters of Science in Planning program, to study downtown main streets in Grey County. More specifically the project looked at downtown revitalization and the possibility for additional residential units on main streets. The 'Living on Main Street' study process included;

- completing a policy review of other municipal official plan and zoning provisions for downtown commercial mixed-use areas,
- reviewing existing and proposed community improvement plan (CIP) incentives, and their efficacy in supporting downtowns and housing,
- a site visit to Grey County,
- consulting with local landlords, business owners, and municipal staff across the County to get their input on the current situation, including any barriers to redevelopment such as planning policy, legislation, market factors, or inadequate incentive programs, and
- providing recommendations on policy or incentive program updates to promote downtown revival, with a focus on the creation of new attainable housing opportunities.

As part of this study, County staff supplied background resources to the students and connected them to municipal staff, as well as the development community and landlords for their input on this project. Living on Main Street studied one downtown per municipality and included Chatsworth, Dundalk, Durham, Hanover, Markdale, Meaford, Owen Sound, Shallow Lake, and Thornbury.

The Living on Main Street study has been linked to in the Attachments section of this report.

Living on Main Street Recommendations

Within downtown areas, there is great diversity across the County, and a ‘one size fits all’ policy approach does not work. In our downtowns, municipalities need a balance of commercial and residential spaces. Below is a quick summary of some of the key recommendations from Living on Main Street.

Housing

- Attainable housing programs should be included in all CIPs to help create more housing stock.
- Municipalities should consider encouraging dormitory style housing to provide attainable housing to the local labour force.
- Grey or member municipalities should undertake a survey of commercial properties on main streets to see where there may be an over-supply of commercial space and where some conversion to residential space could be considered.
- Municipalities should track housing needs (including seniors housing) and vacancy rates.
- Municipalities should consider a downtown transition zone where they may look at higher density residential or a transition from commercial to residential and vice versa.
- Municipalities should look at criteria for where conversions from commercial to residential uses may be permitted; such criteria may include prolonged vacancy as a consideration. The preservation for ground floor commercial should remain a priority in these reviews, but there may be instances where ground floor commercial space can be converted to other uses.
- Municipalities should consider reviewing their downtown parking standards for both commercial and residential uses. Depending on the outcome, larger downtown parking lots may facilitate some new attainable housing development opportunities.

Community Improvement Plans (CIPs)

- CIPs need to be ‘living documents’ with regular reviews and updates.
- Prioritization of CIP funding programs is recommended, and these priorities may evolve over time.
- The review of CIP applications should involve input from planning, building, and economic development staff.
- Municipalities should conduct impact audits to measure the impact of their CIP funding programs, and how such incentives may be ‘stacked’ to provide greater impact.
- Grey and member municipalities need to actively and regularly advertise their CIPs to ensure potential applicants are aware of the opportunity. Business improvement associations, chambers of commerce, or the Business Enterprise Centre (BEC) may be potential partners in marketing these programs.
- Grey or member municipalities should offer ‘wrap-around’ support to aid those applying for incentives; such supports may include advice or assistance in applying for funding. This service could be an add-on to an existing staff role, or it could be a new position. Wrap-around support could potentially be offered by the BEC in the future.
- Municipalities should consider offering small up-front loans with respect to the partial costs of a project.

Downtown Revitalization

- Consider implementing urban design guidelines, to ensure a consistent look and character in downtowns.
- Review current zoning provisions, including parking standards and the protection of the ‘commercial street wall’.
- Modify the vacant property tax rebate program to implement a tax on vacant properties. This modification may mean a suspension of the program until further study can be done.

Next Steps

Staff are extremely impressed with the quality of the report created by the students and believe this will serve as a helpful resource for staff in the County. This report, in addition to the recommendations, provides very valuable input from the stakeholder interviews conducted throughout all nine member municipalities. There are some topics such as the vacant property tax rebate program that warrant further study or consideration. Other recommendations will be useful as municipalities continue to prepare and update their CIPs, official plans and zoning by-laws.

County staff would like to thank the student team for their work on this project, the University of Toronto, as well as the municipal staff, developers, and landlords who provided input into this project.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

There are no legal or legislative considerations at this time.

Financial and Resource Implications

The work completed by the student consulting team is without cost to the County, and done as part of the coursework for their master's degree. County staff are grateful to the students' efforts in this regard, and would note that having to pay a consultant to complete a similar guideline would likely cost between \$25,000 - \$35,000.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal: Economic Development and Planning staff
- External: Municipal staff, Developers, and Landlords

Appendices and Attachments

[Living on Main Street](#)