



Committee Report

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| To: | Warden McQueen and Members of Grey County Council |
| Committee Date: | September 24, 2020 |
| Subject / Report No: | PDR-CW-35-20 |
| Title: | Living on Main Street Student Project |
| 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 adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CW167-20; Endorsed by County Council October 8, 2020 per Resolution CC78-20; |

Recommendation

1. That Report PDR-CW-35-20 regarding the University of Toronto student project entitled Living on Main Street be received for information.

Executive Summary

The County is partnering with students from University of Toronto Masters of Science in Planning program to undertake a study on downtown living opportunities in Grey County. The 'Living on Main Street' study is being 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 will develop recommendations on policy and incentive opportunities for new housing on downtown main streets across Grey County. Outreach in the form of stakeholder interviews, in addition to background research and a review of other municipal approaches, will be completed to inform this project. The students will complete and present their findings in December 2020.

Background and Discussion

In 2019, the County completed a new Official Plan, Recolour Grey, which provides the policy framework for the County until 2038. One of the key areas of public input throughout the creation of the new official plan was the need for additional attainable housing. The County has a number of initiatives on-going to support the creation of additional housing, including a recently established housing task force, and a community improvement plan template. With a new County Official Plan in place, a number of our member municipalities are now undertaking official plan reviews to bring their plans into conformity with the County. While the County is

experiencing residential growth, there continues to be a lack of attainable housing throughout the County. Council and staff, in addition to community advocates and employers, have raised the lack of attainable housing as a barrier to attracting newcomers and youth retention.

Downtown commercial areas (i.e. traditional 'main streets') continue to evolve with the increase in online shopping, and the impacts of larger commercial tenants outside the downtown. While the downtowns contain some housing currently, County staff would like to explore options for additional housing in these areas, in addition to maintaining healthy commercial activity. With vacancies on our main streets, there is additional pressure for downtown revival, whether it be through policy or incentive programs. Traditionally new ground floor residential has not been supported in these areas, but the County is open to new policy initiatives including mixed use live-work opportunities that may benefit both the residential and commercial sectors. County staff also want to determine whether the Community Improvement Plan template is effective in this regard, or if further adjustments are needed. Within downtown areas, there is great diversity across the County, and a 'one size fits all' policy approach will not work.

County Planning staff are partnering with students from University of Toronto Masters of Science in Planning program to study this issue further. The project has been branded as 'Living on Main Street' and the study process will include;

- completing a policy review of other municipal official plan and zoning provisions for downtown commercial or mixed-use areas,
- reviewing existing community improvement plan incentives, and their efficacy in supporting downtowns and housing,
- consulting with local landlords 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
- recommending policy or incentive program updates to promote downtown revival, with a focus on the creation of new attainable housing opportunities.

Staff are cognizant that the scope of this study needs to consider the County as a whole, while also recognizing that each of our downtowns is unique in their composition and needs. Main street housing solutions must have flexibility to allow for community specific autonomy (i.e. downtown Thornbury is different from Owen Sound, which is different from Chatsworth, etc.). Furthermore, the student team is working within a very limited timeframe (the study needs to be completed by early December 2020), which is partnered with their workload from other classes as well.

As part of this study, County staff will supply background resources to the students and connect them to County, Municipal, as well as the development community and landlords for their input on this project.

The County has been lucky enough to partner with the Universities of Guelph and Waterloo on similar projects on many other occasions, and in all instances received high quality results. The results of these past studies have been incorporated into Recolour Grey and are informing the Climate Change Action Plan.

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, Housing, and Planning staff will all be consulted as part of this study.
- External: Municipal staff, Developers, and Landlords will be consulted as part of this study.

Appendices and Attachments

None