



Committee Minutes

Economic Development and Planning Advisory Committee

October 20, 2020 – 8:30 AM

The Economic Development and Planning Advisory Committee met on the above date through electronic means with the following members in attendance:

Present: Brian Davenport, Steacy Den Haan, Sharif Rahman, Ashley Chapman, Lisa Taylor, Ian Reich, Councillors Ian Boddy, John Woodbury, Sue Carleton, Tom Hutchinson, Aakash Desai, Shirley Keaveney and Warden Paul McQueen

Staff

Present: Kim Wingrove, Chief Administrative Officer; Randy Scherzer, Director of Planning; Savanna Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Culture, Scott Taylor, Senior Planner, Steve Furness, Manager Economic Development, Philly Markowitz, Economic Development Officer, Courtney Miller, Business Enterprise Manager; Hiba Hussain, Planner; Jacinda Rudolph, Economic Development Officer; Kim Trombley, Administrative Assistant; Melissa Avedesian, Local Immigration Partnership Coordinator and Tara Warder, Deputy Clerk / Legislative Coordinator

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Reports

Climate Change Action Plan – Verbal Update

Randy Scherzer introduced Hiba Hussain to the Committee.

Hiba Hussain provided an update on the Climate Change Action Plan and anticipated timelines for the various milestones.

Ms. Hussain noted that the Plan will focus on two areas: a community section which will look at emissions in the community, and a corporate section which will look at emissions from our corporate assets.

She outlined the project timelines, noting that the project was started in December 2019 and began with a communications plan and internal committees being established.

She noted that the current status of the plan is primarily carrying out the communication plan and conducting an inventory mapping and analysis. Phases 4 and 5 will begin later this year and early into next year and will consist of continuing the strategies, finalizing the priorities and setting targets and developing a draft action plan.

Ms. Hussain then spoke to the engagement strategy.

Affordable Housing - Verbal Update

Randy Scherzer provided an update on the actions being taken to create more affordable housing in our communities.

He noted that a key item stemming from the updated Housing and Homelessness Plan is the development of an Affordable Housing Action Plan. Information was provided on some of the initiatives and action items being explored.

Discussion occurred on secondary units, the rising costs of insurance and the implications of these rising costs to the local economy and businesses.

Living on Main Street Project

Scott Taylor provided an update on the Living on Main Street project. The County has partnered with University of Toronto students to work on a project which looks at downtown incentives and policies. The students are examining nine of Grey County's downtowns, and the state of the current main streets. Prior to COVID-19, the downtowns were evolving. There is a huge need for rental housing. Typically, it is encouraged for commercial establishments to be on the ground floor and for residential dwellings to be above. In many cases, there are empty storefronts and developments. The question arises as to the need to look at more flexibility on the ground floor. Some of those ground floor spaces provide excellent accessibility opportunities or live-work opportunities.

The Committee discussed building standards, ages and conditions of some downtown buildings. Staff noted that these are challenges and the students are interviewing the owners to see what challenges they face and if these are indeed barriers.

Staff further noted that there are grants or other assistance available under the Community Improvement Plan as well as tax increment financing to help with some of the cost of the studies that may need to be undertaken with building conversions and to help offset any increased tax costs resulting from the building improvements.

The Committee inquired as to what types of businesses may be successful on a main street in order to help the economic development committees understand what types of businesses to focus on.

EDTC-CW-09-20 Impact on Grey County Businesses

Savanna Myers addressed the Committee on the impacts of COVID-19 on Grey County businesses.

Staff noted that when the pandemic hit, the Economic Development Working Group was able to change course very quickly and take action as soon as possible. The group started meeting bi-weekly to talk about what they were hearing from the business community and political environment. This process has been a team effort and the group has grown to 35 people. Ms. Myers recognized the working group for their efforts.

It was noted that staff have stayed connected to the Western Ontario Warden's Caucus (WOWC) and have had regular contact with FedDev. By working with the WOWC, surveys were completed showing where the needs were.

Ms. Myers noted that the pandemic has impacted Grey County so differently because this is an area of small to medium sized businesses. They were hit hard, and the circumstances are very different with businesses this size. Originally, the programs coming out from the Federal and Provincial governments weren't focused on those types of businesses, but quickly adapted to become more inclusive.

Staff noted that the highest priority of the businesses was about their employees and ensuring they would be looked after. It made sense for Grey County and member municipalities to work on providing factual information, grants, tax relief and promotional support to help build confidence.

It was noted that staff worked quickly at the beginning of the pandemic to develop a community and business resiliency map showing information on what services businesses were providing, whether stores were available online, had curbside pickup, etc. There was significant interest in the mapping tool so staff made it an open source software which has been shared across the province and country.

EDTC-CW-10-20 COVID-19 Impacts on Grey County Businesses

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Savanna Myers presented the above report for information, noting further impacts from the pandemic.

Staffing was adjusted and new teams were created which made more sense under the new circumstances. Communications were ramped up. Staff are still working in those same configurations because it is working well.

As funding and investment ready projects come down the pipeline, it is key to ensure that staff are aware of what is available and are ready with partnerships and projects in order to move forward.

It was further noted that, business impact is wide ranging, from major loss in revenue to, in some cases, reporting their best year ever.

Through the Business Enterprise Centre and consultations, business owners are being encouraged not to forget what was learned in the spring at the beginning of the pandemic for long term use and business model pivots.

EDTC-CW-11-20 Economic Development Recovery Plan

Steve Furness spoke to the Phase 1 recovery plan efforts. Initiatives were noted, such as marketing campaigns and videos, promotions surrounding which Grey County businesses were open, distributing important information to businesses and the public, compiling protocols and procedures, developing a downtown toolkit, grants to municipalities to make their downtowns safe and more welcoming, safe graduation celebrations, small business supports, and a buy local campaign.

Courtney Miller provided an update from the Business Enterprise Centre, noting that an increase has been seen in the number of people wanting to open their own business, including bricks and mortar type business.

Roundtable

Jacinda Rudolph highlighted some points on the third survey released by the Economic Development department with WOWC. The option was there to create a space for business owners to discuss their concerns and needs. The top concerns from this survey were financial impacts on operations and capital, decreasing consumer confidence and a global recession or Canadian recession.

Discussion occurred on the newcomer program. Melissa Avedesian provided an update, noting that Grey and Bruce Counties received approval for funding for the program. She outlined recent initiatives, including virtually gathering partners, establishing connections and supporting the connection and collaboration of these partners to support the communities.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Next Meeting Dates

The next meeting will be held December 15, 2020 at 8:30 AM.

Adjournment

On a motion of Warden McQueen and Councillor Hutchinson, the meeting adjourned at 10:08 AM.

Brian Davenport, Chair