



Committee Report

To: Councillor Steve Hammell, Chair and
Members of the Planning and Development Committee

From: Mark Paoli
Director of Planning and Development

Date: November 18, 2021

Re: Enhanced Spruce the Bruce Community Development Program

Staff Recommendation:

The Enhanced Spruce the Bruce Community Development Program Report is for Information.

Background:

On August 12, 2021, Planning and Development Committee endorsed the recommended directions in the 'Spruce the Bruce Community Development Program Review Report'. The report provided a background review for communities and highlighted areas to consider for inclusion into an enhanced Spruce the Bruce Community Development Program (STB). The Report recommended that the program has two streams: Community Stream and Industry Stream:

1. Community Stream: This stream assists communities with improvements that make them more attractive, distinctive, and pedestrian-friendly.
2. Industry Stream: The industry stream addresses regional issues such as housing and transportation that affects the industries in Bruce County (i.e. agriculture, tourism, and energy).

Since then, staff met with colleagues from the eight member municipalities. The purpose was to share the report's recommendations for enhancements and to discuss collectively how to move them forward and create a program together that works for the broader Bruce Community and each of the member municipalities. This report is an update since those conversations and details the Spruce the Bruce Program will be enhanced in 2022.

Enhanced Spruce the Bruce Program:

Below are some initiatives that have been completed to Enhance the Spruce the Bruce Program:

1. Identified the Six Pillars of Community Development

Recommended Direction 4: Double-down on Collaboration
Recommended Direction 5: Communicate and Measure

Recommended Direction 6: Fix Bottlenecks

The revised Spruce the Bruce Guide includes six steps a community must go through to be onboarded to the Spruce the Bruce program, or for communities already onboarded to ensure they are up to date with the program requirements. These six steps include:

- i. Organize - All partners and stakeholders are brought together, forming a collaborative committee, where common a goal and vision are identified
- ii. Energize - A community assessment is completed, resulting in the development of the community's brand identity (including the unique value proposition, story, values, and beliefs)
- iii. Strategize - An action plan is created to highlight how the goals identified will be accomplished. New CIPs are created or updated in this step as well
- iv. Visualize - The community's style guide is developed (or refreshed / updated) including logo, tagline, imagery, fonts, colours, etc.
- v. Capitalize - The community and its eligible businesses are now able to access the Spruce the Bruce program and grants
- vi. Recognize - Celebration and recognition of the successful work achieved occurs in this final step

2. Updated and revised the Spruce the Bruce Guide (formerly titled the Municipal Handbook) and Improvements to the Municipal Action Plans (Formerly called the Annual Report Card)

Recommended Direction 4: Double-down on Collaboration

Recommended Direction 5: Communicate and Measure

Recommended Direction 6: Fix Bottlenecks

The Spruce the Bruce Guide helps municipalities and businesses navigate the Spruce the Bruce program. It's a guide with steps for communities become either a destination or attractive to new residents or investors. This easy-to-read guide provides municipalities with clear steps on how to get their communities onboarded into the Spruce the Bruce program and how the Program and incentives can help businesses in their municipalities to make façade improvements to increase walk in traffic.

The self-guided tools in the guide make it easier for communities to understand the onboarding process and how they and their local business can gain access to grants by:

- Making it easier with a clear checklist for communities in the Primary and Secondary Urban Areas to 'onboard' the program
- Following a self-guided tool that clearly explains the purpose of each of the six steps
- Including a checklist of action items to take in each of the steps
- Providing an easy-to-use template for municipalities to use when listing their community development action items

The above list will all be completed with direct support from Bruce County Economic Development staff. There is support for communities onboarding and for communities who are already onboarding and looking to make updates and refresh their community toolkits.

Moreover, the Municipal Action Plan template was developed as a tool to work alongside each member municipality to move their projects forward. This Tool was developed to not add work but to get a better understanding of projects each municipality had planned for the following year so that the Spruce the Bruce Program and Grants can support and move the initiatives forward. Staff will meet with the Economic Development Officers (EDOs) from each municipality to gather their Action Plans (Business Plans) for 2022. The Action Plans will be reviewed on an annual basis, to adjust and improvement to the Spruce the Bruce program to better support each community's initiatives.

3. Updated and added new incentives, Spruce the Bruce Grants

Recommended Direction: Expand Financial Incentives

The Spruce the Bruce grants are defined in two streams: Industry and Community (Downtown). The Community Stream is the traditional STB grants that have been offered over the past 10 year with a focus on revitalizing downtowns and supporting destination development, but they have since been slightly changed based on the feedback highlighted in the Report. Additionally, new grants have been added to the Industry Stream to address regional issues.

Below lists the grants that will be offered in 2022:
(* represents newly introduced grants)

Community Grant Stream:

The Community Grant streams support projects that build vibrant communities and downtown revitalization projects. The community development stream assists communities with improvements that make them more attractive, distinctive, and pedestrian-friendly.

1. Façade Building Improvement (Exterior)

- a. The Façade Improvement grant encourages businesses to restore, upgrade, or otherwise improve their building facades. This includes replacing windows, doors, exterior lighting and/or bricks and mortar.

2. Building Interior Renovation Grant*

- a. The Building Interior Renovation Grant provides funding for interior renovations to commercial properties within the Community Improvement Areas (CIPs). Interior improvements to commercial units are used to help property owners and new business tenants fill vacant storefronts and support a vibrant community.

3. Fascia Signage
 - a. For businesses who are only replacing a sign on their building.

4. Patio Installation*
 - a. Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and ongoing changes with Public Health Regulations, in addition to the positive impact patios have on commercial core areas, there is an ongoing demand for outdoor patios. This grant is for businesses looking to build an outdoor patio on private properties and on public right-a-ways, while following the appropriate municipal bylaw.

5. Perpendicular Signage
 - a. For the Installation of a perpendicular signage. For businesses to stand out to passing pedestrians and vehicles while showcasing their brand and product offerings. It helps Bring greater awareness to businesses with a perpendicular sign. Perpendicular signs are signs that attached to the front of the building and are mounted so that the face of the sign is perpendicular to the normal flow of traffic.

6. Awning*
 - a. This grant is for the installation of an awning. Awnings and coverings on facades encourage a year-round shopping experience and support businesses offering curbside pick up.

7. Streetscape Beautification
 - a. These grants can be used towards (but are not limited to) street improvements such as: banners, benches, garbage/recycling cans, bike racks, flower containers, green space/park enhancements, seasonal decorations and/or public art, provided that the items are installed within the designated downtown area.

8. Community Signage
 - a. Designed to encourage community and stakeholder groups to improve signage within their community. This grant may be directed towards signage that improves visitor experiences in and around the downtown, including gateway signs, interpretive / historical plaques, kiosks, and route markers (i.e. for cycling or hiking).

9. Community Marketing Grant (Campaign Development & Production)
 - a. This grant is done in partnership with Regional Tourism Organization 7. This marketing grant will support efforts to create and produce a digital marketing campaign to attract visitors to the area, especially during the shoulder seasons. This grant is to support the production of

marketing campaigns (campaign stories and development of digital advertisements, etc.). Once applicants receive their digital advertisements, they will be encouraged to apply for a Regional Tourism Organization 7 Digital Advertising Fund to support the cost of the execution of the campaign.

Industry Grant Stream:

The Industry Grant Stream focuses on addressing regional issues and support businesses not only located in the downtown cores but are located within the CIP.

1. Business Accessibility Adaptability Grant*
 - a. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) is intended to reduce and remove barriers for people with disabilities so that Ontario can become more accessible and inclusive for everyone. This grant is to help business adapt and make renovations to accommodate those with disability to comply with the AODA.
2. Enhanced Product Development Grant*
 - a. Product Development improvements to support tourism businesses adapt to the impacts of the pandemic. The projects include implementation of an online book system, patios, pavilions, outdoor playgrounds.
3. Destination Infrastructure / Active Transportation Grants*
 - a. A Destination Infrastructure Grant/ Active Transportation Grant may be used towards capital investments that improve the quality of attraction products and any projects that encourages a pedestrian friendly community. This grant is to encourage communities to consider active transportation, human power forms of commuting to work, school, recreation or socialization. This may include (but is not limited to):
 - i. Capital improvements to core attractions like the Bruce Trail, Saugeen River, Rail Trail and area beaches and may include upgrades related to parking, restrooms, staging and lookouts.
 - ii. Project that makes a bike friendly community such as: bike share rental programs, bike tune up stations, bollard lighting on trails, safety enhancements on trails
 - iii. It also may include signage that improves visitor experiences such as interpretative/ historical plaques, kiosks and route markers (i.e. for cycling or hiking)
 - iv. Projects that connect Destination Infrastructure to the downtown core will be given priority (i.e. signage connect the Bruce Trail to the downtown)
 - b. Action Transportation Projects, includes capital improvements to improve the following modes of transportation:
 - i. Walking

- ii. Cycling
- iii. Rollerblading
- iv. Winter Activities (snowshoeing, cross country skiing, snowshoeing)
- v. Water Focused (paddling, kayaking, stand up paddling or tubing)
- vi. Other

4. Agri-Food Innovation Grant*

- a. This grant is to encourage Agri-Food businesses to invest in technologies or innovations that create efficiencies in production, labour and supply chain.
- b. Eligible projects could include the purchase of technology or equipment that:
 - i. Reduces or replaces labour intensive production practices - addresses labour shortage
 - ii. Reduces food waste at any stage in the supply chain (production, post-harvest handling, processing, distribution and consumption)
 - iii. Vertical farming, farming in a controlled environment agriculture where crops are stacked up a greenhouse rather than across

5. Residential Improvement Grant*

- a. This grant is offered to support rehabilitation of existing residential units and/or constructing new residential units. This would include renovations to existing residential units in mixed-use buildings to ensure they comply with the Building Code, Property Standard by-laws, and Fire Code. Conversions of excess commercial and vacant spaces on upper stories of a commercial or mixed used building will create one or more net residential units. This grant can be used for vacant lots to be converted to mixed use or residential use where two or more net residential units are created.

The Report, “encourages municipalities to expand the geographic scope of their CIP by-laws to enable the disbursement of financial incentives outside downtown core areas, via Industry Streams into agricultural, lakeshore and recreation zones, including residential, retail and service commercial, restaurant, as well as for intensified forms of mixed-use residential development.”

It is important to note that the first step is for each municipality to update their Community Improvement Program (CIP), as financial incentives can only be offered to applicants within the CIPs. The CIP provides context and highlights the main issues each community is looking to address. The County will then provide incentives and grants to support the municipal CIPs.

Next Steps:

The Enhance Spruce the Bruce program will launch in Q1 in 2022. The purpose of the Enhanced Spruce the Bruce Program will be to build vibrant and welcoming communities to attract residents, tourists, and entrepreneurs to the area. Implementing the recommendations from the Spruce the Bruce Community Development Report will ensure that the County is keeping up to date with industry trends and continues to be a leader in community development.

Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations:

Bruce County budgeted \$125,000 for 2022, which is the same amount that has been allocated for the Spruce the Bruce program over the past 10 years for only the Community Stream. This means the \$125,000 allocation in 2022 will be for both Community and Industry Stream.

It should be noted that, the Municipality of Huron Kinloss and the Municipality of South Bruce Peninsula have leveraged their community development budgets to match 'STB' funds. These opportunities help extend the number of businesses benefit from the funding in their communities as such. Bruce County, the Municipality and businesses owners would pay for 1/3 of each project. There are ongoing discussions with additional municipalities to also leverage their community development funds. By collaborating with the partnering municipalities helps elevate each applicants grants, especially during these trying times of the pandemic.

Interdepartmental Consultation:

NA

Link to Strategic Goals and Elements:

Community Development was identified as a major initiative and Council priority in the 2021 Planning and Development Business Plan.

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