



Spruce the Bruce

Community Development Program Review

MDB Insight

July 2021

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Executive Summary

This report sets forth recommendations for changes to the Spruce the Bruce Community Development Program, including whether a new or revised Bruce County Community Development program is warranted. The report is based on a detailed evaluation of the existing program informed by an analysis of the communities in which the Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) operate, and success of the program to date.

Additional context is provided into relevant provincial and local land-use planning policy considerations, local governance priorities, related local economic development strategies, and community visioning efforts. Key trends affecting the economy of Bruce County are explored, from fiscal realities of the past to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in the present. Theories of community improvement are also examined, exposing a variety of methods and opportunities to achieve tangible results.

Select best practices are reviewed in several communities across Ontario, where traditional financial incentives are still in effect, and where innovative instruments have been developed.

Through an exploration of Spruce the Bruce by engaging in consultations with key Community Improvement Plan municipal stakeholders, observations around opportunities and challenges are set out in terms of what can be improved upon.

A series of recommendations were developed, focused on the need for Bruce County and its municipalities to demonstrate public-sector commitment to community improvement, and support for all industry sectors.

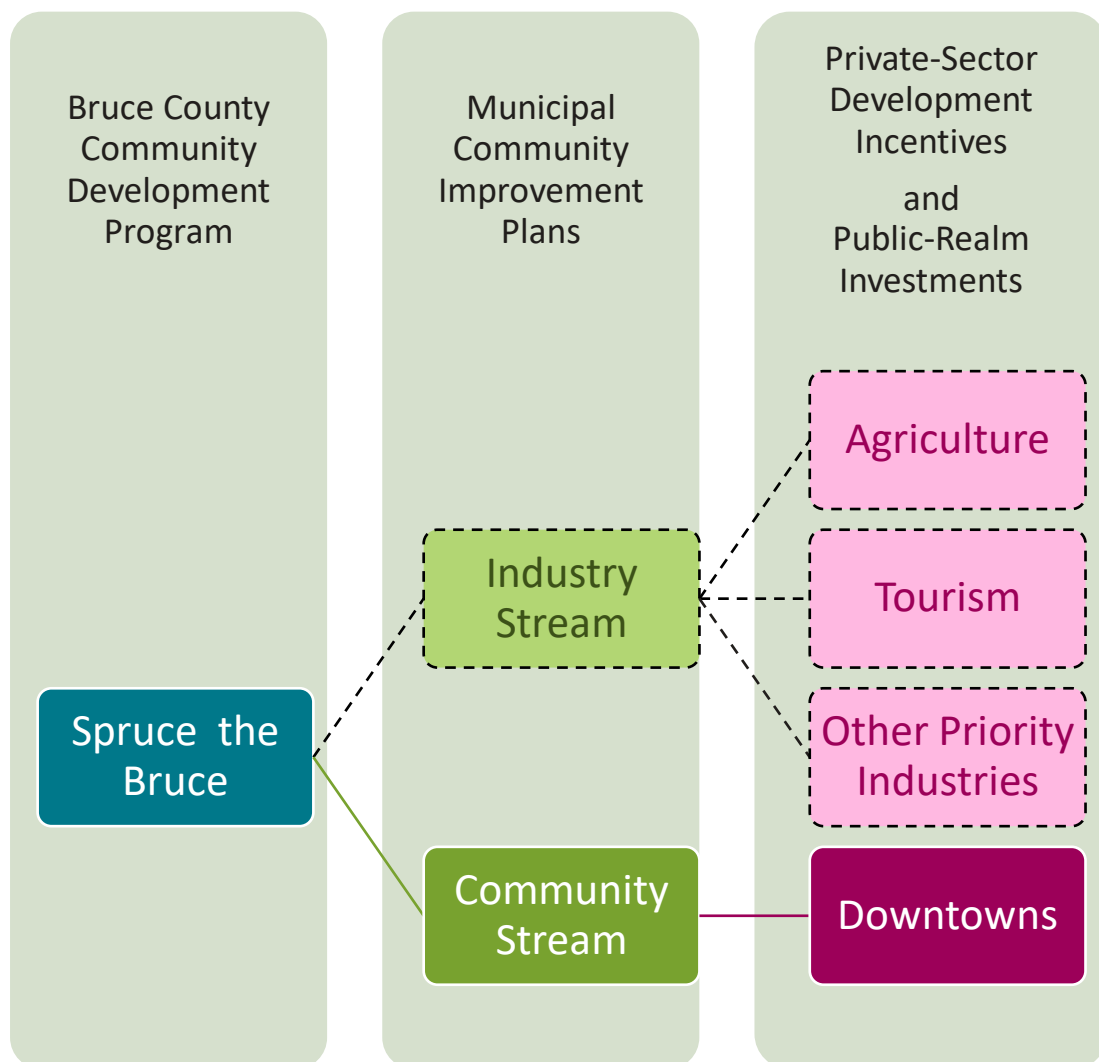
Action steps are grouped into six areas of priority recommendations:

1. Gather Intelligence
2. Modernize Policy
3. Expand Financial Incentives
4. Double-down on Collaboration
5. Fix Bottlenecks
6. Communicate and Measure

The report is supportive of Bruce County implementing Phase 3 of the project to update its Community Improvement Program in collaboration with its municipalities.

Two structural changes will assist in repositioning Spruce the Bruce for the future:

- **Industry Stream:** Adding an “Industry Stream” for agricultural, tourism and other priority industry sectors (e.g. affordable housing) to the existing community-oriented stream focusing exclusively on downtown cores.
- **Community Stream:** Encouraging mindful and detailed collaboration between Bruce County and the municipalities to maximize the value of all programs supporting the public realm and the private sector, and to eliminate any confusion.



Introduction

This Paper provides a review of Bruce County’s current Community Development Program, Spruce the Bruce. Spruce the Bruce was created by the County in 2010 to provide local municipalities with the resources to develop strategies and implementation plans to revitalize their individual downtowns and maintain and grow healthy commercial areas, within the context of Provincial and County land-use planning policies.

This Paper is supplementary detailed information which supports the Plan the Bruce: Communities Interim Report, which provided recommended directions for consideration in the Official Plan Update for enabling healthy community development and supportive economic development policies.

Purpose

The review of Spruce the Bruce provides an understanding of the current program, including perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program, a select review of best practices related to Community Improvement Plans across Ontario, and a discussion about potential enhancements to the program to ensure its long-term effectiveness.

Current Planning Context

Legislative Authority and Planning Framework

The preparation of a Community Improvement Plan must be consistent with applicable provincial, upper-tier, and local policy. The following provides an overview of the legislation as it relates to municipalities and Community Improvement Plans.

Planning Act	<p>Section 28(1) of the Ontario Planning Act, R.S.O. 1009 C.P 13 defines Community Improvement as “the planning or replanning, design or redesign, resubdivision, clearance, development or redevelopment, construction, reconstruction and rehabilitation, improvement of energy efficiency, or any of them, of a community improvement project area and the provision of such residential, commercial, industrial, public, recreational, institutional, religious, charitable or other uses, buildings, structures, works, improvements or facilities, or spaces therefor, as may be appropriate or necessary.”</p> <p>A Community Improvement Project Area is defined as a “municipality or an area within a municipality, the community improvement of which in the opinion of the council is desirable because of age, dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement, unsuitability of buildings or for any other environmental, social or community economic development reason.”</p> <p>Section 28 of the Planning Act requires that municipalities must have provisions within the Official Plan relating to community improvement, in order to designate a Community Improvement Project Area by By-law and prepare and adopt a Community Improvement Plan. The passing of the By-</p>
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	<p>law and the programs provided through the Community Improvement Plan require approval from Council.</p> <p>Once the Community Improvement Plan has been adopted by the municipality and comes into effect, the municipality may exercise authority under Section 28 of the Planning Act or Section 365.1 of the Municipal Act, 2001. Section 28 of the Planning Act informs that once a Community Improvement Plan comes into effect, the municipality may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acquire, hold, clear, grade or otherwise prepare land for community improvement; ▪ Construct, repair, rehabilitate or improve buildings on land acquired or held by the municipality; ▪ Sell, lease, or dispose of any lands and buildings acquired or held by the municipality; ▪ Make grants or loans to owners and tenants of land and buildings within the community improvement project area to pay for the whole or any part of the eligible costs of the community improvement plan (s 28(7)). <p>Eligible costs include “costs related to environmental site assessment, environmental remediation, development, redevelopment, construction and reconstruction of lands and buildings for rehabilitation purposes or for the provisions of energy efficient uses, buildings structures, works, improvements or facilities (Section 28(7.1)).”</p> <p>Section 28 (7.2) of the Planning Act allows an upper-tier municipality to make grants or loans to the Council of the lower-tier municipality for the purposes of carrying out a CIP. The upper-tier municipal Official Plan must have enabling official plan policies relating to the making of grants and loans for CIP purposes.</p> <p>Section 28 (7.3) of the Planning Act states that the total of the grants, loans, and tax assistance made for a property and its buildings shall not exceed the eligible cost of the Community Improvement Plan with respect to those lands and buildings.</p> <p>Section 28 (10) of the Planning Act specifies that as conditions of sale, no land acquired and no building constructed by the municipality in the Community Improvement Project Area shall be sold, leased, or otherwise disposed of unless a written agreement is entered into with the municipality that the person will keep and maintain the land and building in conformity with the Community Improvement Plan.</p>
Municipal Act	<p>Section 106 of the Ontario <i>Municipal Act</i>, S.O. 2001, C.25 prohibits municipalities from assisting any manufacturing, industrial, or commercial businesses either directly or indirectly through the granting of bonuses. Prohibited actions include:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ giving or lending money or municipal property; ▪ guaranteeing borrowing; ▪ leasing or selling any municipal property at below fair market value; and ▪ giving a total or partial exemption from any levy, charge, or fee. <p>The <i>Municipal Act</i> (Section 106(3)) does provide exceptions to this rule for municipalities using powers under Section 28 of the <i>Planning Act</i> or Section 365 of the <i>Municipal Act</i> which authorizes lower-tier municipalities to promote the land within the municipality for any purpose.</p> <p>Section 365.1 of the <i>Municipal Act</i> allows municipalities to pass a by-law providing tax assistance to an eligible property in the form of a deferral or cancellation of part or all of the taxes levied on that property for municipal and education purposes during the rehabilitation period and development period of the property. A municipality with an approved Community Improvement Plan in place that contains provisions specifying tax assistance will be permitted to provide tax assistance for municipal purposes.</p>
Development Charges Act	<p>Section 5 of the <i>Development Charges Act</i> allows a Municipality to exempt certain types of development from a development charge. Any resulting shortfall in the municipality's development charge reserve fund cannot be made up through higher development charges for other types of development. This allows upper and lower tier municipalities to offer partial or total exemption from municipal development charges in order to promote community improvement such as downtown/mixed use area redevelopment.</p>
Ontario Heritage Act	<p>The <i>Ontario Heritage Act</i> came into effect in 1975 and was developed to provide municipalities and the provincial government with powers to preserve the cultural heritage resources of Ontario. Section 39 of the <i>Ontario Heritage Act</i> allows municipalities to pass by-laws to offer grants and loans to owners of properties designated under Part IV of the Act. The grants and loans may be offered for the purpose of paying for whole or part of the cost of alteration on such terms as Council may prescribe. The grants or loans offered by a municipality could also be used for the rehabilitation or restoration of the property as a whole.</p>
Provincial Policy Statement (2020)	<p>The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. The PPS enables appropriate development while protecting resources of provincial interest, public health and safety, and the quality of the natural and built environment. The PPS supports improved land use planning and management, which contributes to a more effective and efficient land use planning system.</p> <p>The PPS is issued under the authority of Section 3 of the <i>Planning Act</i> and according to the Act, all land use planning decisions shall be consistent with the PPS. The PPS came into effect on May 1, 2020. The recent changes to the PPS were in response to changes to the <i>Planning Act</i> through <i>More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019</i> and <i>A Place to Grow, 2019</i>. Some of the key changes included increasing the mix and supply of housing through affordable and</p>

	<p>market-based residential development, increasing minimum requirements for housing land supply to 15 years, further supporting a changing climate and green infrastructure, enhancing land use compatibility policies for sensitive land uses, and providing flexibility for the consideration of residential development on rural lands.</p> <p>Since Community Improvement Plans are enabled by Official Plans which in turn must conform to the PPS, any updates to this provincial policy provide an opportunity to modify CIPs.</p> <p>Long-term economic prosperity should be supported by promoting opportunities for economic development, providing range of housing options, optimizing the availability of public service facilities, enhancing the vitality and viability of downtowns and main streets, providing opportunities for sustainable tourism, supporting local food, minimizing negative impacts from a changing climate, and considering the ecological benefits provided by nature (Policy 1.7.1).</p> <p>The Province of Ontario has made no additional changes to the PPS since May 2020.</p>
Bruce County Official Plan	<p>Bruce County has the legal authority to disburse grants in support of community improvement. There are specific approvals that Bruce County must put in place, enabled by provincial legislation and the Official Plans of Bruce County and the Member Municipalities. (See Planning Act, above.)</p> <p>Under the Planning Act (Part IV, Section 28), municipalities must have an Official Plan in effect in a local municipality or in a prescribed upper-tier municipality that contains provisions relating to community improvement in the municipality, to designate the whole or any part of an area covered by such an official plan as a community improvement project area. With those provisions in place, the municipality may prepare a Community Improvement Plan and seek approval from the Minister of Municipal Affairs.</p> <p>The original County of Bruce Official Plan was approved in 1999. In 2010, the Province approved a major update to the Plan. The current County Official Plan is an important policy document that contains a broad range of community goals, objectives, and policies that provide guidance and direction to landowners, potential investors, land developers, home builders, and the community at large. It includes policies related to numerous community-building elements, such as housing, commercial and industrial development, heritage, the environment, parks and open space, transportation, infrastructure, and urban design.</p> <p>Policy Reference: Section 1.1 (Purpose); Section 3.2 (Vision); Section 3.4 (County Goals and Objectives); Section 4.5 (Economic Development).</p> <p>The current Official Plan includes several policies relating to economic development and supporting Bruce County's key industries. Section 3.4.1.5 details the County's economic goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide opportunities for the continued development of a diverse, sustainable, and viable economic base within the County, which is compatible with the natural environment; ▪ Strengthen the industrial and commercial base of the County;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recognize the interest in and importance of economic growth of the County; ■ Recognize, promote, and strengthen tourism as a viable, vital component of the County economy; ■ Recognize, promote, and strengthen the agricultural community as a viable and vital component of the County's economy; and, ■ Promote energy generation as a viable form of economic development including, but not limited to, nuclear, renewable alternative and green energy supply. <p>Section 4.5 Economic Development of the Current Official Plan details the County's economic development objectives and general policies. The objectives include identifying and supporting industries such as tourism, agriculture, the energy sector, home industries, and other local businesses that are important to the County's economy, and ensuring that the County's natural resources are identified, protected, and promoted to create and support recreation and tourism opportunities.</p> <p>The general policies for Economic Development include facilitating the expansion and diversification of the economic base, through sustainable economic development while recognizing the importance of existing industries and business.</p> <p>The current County Official Plan promotes the development of a four-season tourism industry and recognizes that the Rural Recreational Area is one of the principal areas for tourism and recreation. As such, the County supports the upgrading and expansion of existing commercial/tourism related facilities and allows commercial uses that service tourists and residents to be permitted in this designation. Downtowns commercial areas are not mentioned in detail in the current County Official Plan. Instead, the County defers to Local Official Plans on downtowns. Bruce County is developing a new Official Plan. Currently, Spruce the Bruce only applies to communities in the Primary Urban Areas. The focus is on the Primary Urban areas and not just the Secondary (Hamlets, smaller villages).</p>
Bruce County Corporate Strategic Plan	<p>In 2013, the County adopted a "Corporate Strategic Plan" that established a vision, values, and goals that are expected to guide decision-making by County staff and Council to 2023. The vision is for a healthy, prosperous, and innovative community that is supported by several value statements and strategic goals to meet the needs of the residents of the County.</p>
Bruce GPS Findings	<p>In 2019, Bruce County released the findings of its "Bruce GPS: Guiding the Next 20 Year Journey" initiative, a public engagement visioning campaign involving extensive in-person and online engagement, designed to obtain feedback from the community to inform the County's updated Official Plan. Priorities relevant to the development of a Community Improvement Plan included balanced growth and development, jobs and employment.</p> <p>The community identified the following areas that required improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improve infrastructure to keep pace with tourism demands, including hotels and visitor accommodation; ■ Increase access to shops and restaurants, including the availability and diversity of shopping and restaurant options in local communities across Bruce County, including during the off-season;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support local businesses and workers, including considering supports and programs to help ensure local businesses have customers year-round; ▪ Manage growth and development, including changing how rapid growth is managed in communities to minimize the impact this growth has on the “look” of towns, traffic and crowding, historical structures, the natural environment, and farmlands. <p>Guiding principles developed in the visioning campaign included the following statements of relevance to CIPs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To put growth in the right locations with the right services. ▪ To increase the supply and mix of homes. ▪ To support our key economies, including supporting a thriving agriculture community. ▪ To create opportunities for a diversity of businesses, jobs, and employers.
Economic Development Strategic Plan	<p>In 2017, Bruce County approved a five-year Economic Development Strategic Plan titled “Find Yourself in Bruce County”. Strategic priorities for the County include increasing the population and tax base by attracting visitors and entrepreneurs to the area. In addition, the Strategy identifies business development and sector development as priorities, which help to support the CIPs. Other objectives in this focus area included implementing directional and wayfinding signage and ensuring the community design, roads, and public spaces align with each community brand.</p> <p>Bruce County is updating its Economic Development Strategy in 2021.</p>

Key Economic Development Considerations

Economic Development Realities

The employment landscape in smaller Ontario communities is undergoing a shift, with the emergence of more diverse demographics – increases in newcomers and visible minorities, increases in remote workers young and old – and a new way to look at economic development. This changing context will require economic development policies that focus both on protecting key employment lands for future employment growth and adapting to the technology-based economy, where employers and businesses may choose to locate outside of traditional employment areas and explore opportunities in more dynamic urban/commercial centres, future-oriented smart towns and villages with flexibility baked into their frameworks. While an opportunity for Bruce County, these changes also bring challenges – providing a suitable inventory of land and buildings with which to attract businesses and entrepreneurs and addressing the availability and attainability of housing stock for a future workforce.

It is critical to provide and manage an appropriate supply and range of commercial and employment lands that support ongoing economic growth, fosters a diversified tax base, and enables *complete communities* where residents have access to jobs, goods, and services. Trends in economic development in proactive communities across Canada indicate that, beyond traditional employers, Bruce County should explore strategies for supporting and attracting the businesses of the ‘new economy’, through the provision of business incubators, flexible/shared workspace, start-up supports, and support for home occupations.

Attracting and Retaining Workers

Resident and talent attraction strategies are a relatively recent addition to a community’s toolbox for economic development, as quality of life increasingly has joined the list of attributes a municipality must nurture to remain competitive for new investment.

Economic development organizations are now employing datasets and microtargeting to deliver on objectives in more sophisticated resident and talent attraction strategies. This work begins with developing the strategy itself, reviewing workforce demands and employer challenges, reviewing projected employment changes and location quotients, as well as documenting pinch points related to welcoming new talent, by analyzing demographic and geographic sources. Available housing (including rentals) at attainable prices for the target workforce is one of the most critical challenges particularly in small communities. Enhancing local amenities to attract professional remote workers can also be obstacles for communities. Local buy-in for these efforts at the strategy-building stage is key and may make the difference between lukewarm outcomes and more tangible success.

Tied to an innovative Community Improvement Plan, communities can easily implement and measure the results of any effort made to attract workers and talent. Worker retention within the community is best incorporated within Business Retention and Expansion initiatives, utilizing support from local workforce agencies and intelligence from employers.

Business Recruitment and Enhancement

Strategies for investment attraction and business retention and expansion are the most important foundational elements for a community involved in economic development.

Investment Attraction

An investment attraction strategy describes which economic drivers a community depends upon, and which industry sector prospects best fit the community's aspirations for new development or investment. Critical to investment attraction is an assessment of market readiness. The community must demonstrate the value proposition, (e.g. location, access, available land or buildings, infrastructure and services, planning tools, policies, programming, quality of place attributes and workforce) that satisfies a business or site selector's requirements.

When the community is investment-ready, it can initiate the marketing and promotion of the community, by gaining a deep understanding of target business/industry players, liaising closely with Canadian Consulate offices, and prospecting at global conferences and marketplaces. For a rural community, investment attraction efforts are best maximized by collaborating with neighbouring municipalities and alliances, because lead generation, trade missions, collateral development and staff resources are cost prohibitive without partners. Although Bruce County may not be pursuing foreign-direct investment aggressively for industries such as manufacturing or food processing, retail strategies and tourism product development benefit from regional cooperation.

Business Retention and Expansion

Business retention and expansion (BR&E) efforts are less a set strategy and more an evolving work plan of communicating, assisting, and supporting existing enterprises within the community. Helping major employers in a way that encourages them to retain their operations and jobs in the community, and to expand further, is usually a top priority for an economic development office.

BR&E programming is often administered through a business survey – perhaps circulated to major employers once a year. Effective BR&E efforts involve dedicated economic development staff making routine visits and calls to key employers and as many small- and medium-sized enterprises as possible. Relevant information is collected and tracked within a database – all in confidence – and intelligence gleaned from businesses helps to shape how the economic development office chooses to evolve its strategies and work plans (e.g. investment in broadband infrastructure).

Depending on the needs of a business, one visit per year may be enough to build good will, trust, and rapport, and to address any resource requirements the business owner/operator may have. However, corporate calling can often reveal emerging challenges, plans for expansion, municipal customer service gaffes, business to business networking opportunities or research requirements. Economic development staff are then called upon to work as fixers or opportunity agents, working closely with the business owner/operator, directing them to resources and information available elsewhere, or connecting them with other businesses and sources of funding.

Any municipality that is serious about supporting the growth of its economy must have a BR&E effort in place, as defined above. It requires the daily motivating of municipal and/or County staff to make the calls, arrange the appointments, visit the businesses, talk to the business owners, make notes of the conversation, provide valuable information, and feedback, and follow up as needed. A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is a very productive tool for BR&E efforts. The process is complicated by managing visits of businesses with municipal EDO partners. An agreed-upon 'plan of attack' generated through County-wide discussions may prove helpful. Many communities are not resourced or positioned to provide this level of service. It is one of the most unsung, tedious, and time-

consuming tasks in community economic development, but usually the most rewarding.

Conducted in 2018, the Business Retention and Expansion Study of the agriculture and agri-food value chain for Simcoe, Grey and Bruce Counties provides a glimpse into trends affecting related businesses. Asked if the municipalities could potentially provide some assistance to support expansion plans, respondents identified the following areas:

- Labour (affordable housing and public transportation)
- Regulation (zoning, official plans, Building Code, conservation authorities, engineering)
- Infrastructure improvements (broadband and municipal services, sewers)
- Funding for expansions (capital, grants, tax rebates and loans)

The study also discovered that new technologies are changing the agri-food value chain in significant ways, requiring further financial investment by business owners. The new technologies identified included robotics and automation (computer feeding, robotic milkers), GPS/self-driving tractors (including produce self-pickers), and new genetic and chemical research (animal DNA for breeding, disease resist crops and seed development). The study also explored the concept of an “agri-minium”, a small-lot development that includes housing and provides access to shared agricultural land and processing facilities.

Placemaking

Place development and placemaking is a community and economic development tool that looks to capitalize on local assets to create appealing places for people to live, work and play. Placemaking and place development often requires looking at locational assets and features in a new way and actively working to change existing attitudes and perceptions through marketing, land use and community improvement policies that support and sustain community development, public participation, and private sector investment.

Historically, being a low-cost environment was the key to attracting business investment and jobs to a community. The emergence of innovation, entrepreneurship, and small and medium enterprise (SME) development as key driving factors in job creation have shifted thinking across the economic development sector. In addition to nurturing homegrown entrepreneurship and the scale-up of existing businesses, economic developers, and companies themselves, are increasingly focused on talent as determining factors in location decisions. With increasing competition for talent, place development has a key role in talent attraction even in small rural and urban settings. Typically, a municipality will focus its efforts on creating attractive, walkable downtowns that play host to a diverse retail experience and a range of public amenities such as parks, event venues, waterfront trails etc.

The downtown or village core is a key feature of any municipality and highlights the vibrancy of that community. A welcoming downtown invites both residents and visitors and creates a unique value proposition for businesses and investors. Niche retail options, housing and entertainment (e.g. festivals and events), co-working spaces, upper story re-development, and broadband investment support a unique community of downtown residents and provides a gathering space for the broader community.

In this spirit tourism can be viewed as a gateway to attracting new investment in a community. The creators of Bruce County’s Spruce the Bruce program identified early on that the community could benefit from enhanced placemaking, to attract new investment. At the time, Bruce County was receiving increased interest and spending by tourists, due to its appeal as a summer vacation spot. Municipal officials realized that most of the money spent by tourists was going to businesses in downtown cores, towns, and villages. The concern was that the promise of great destinations in Bruce

County would be compromised if visitors “arrive to find rundown main streets”¹. Residents and tourists would be turned off by deteriorating infrastructure (e.g. sidewalks, lighting, planters), dilapidated buildings, and other small-town deficiencies. Unhappy visitors would be less likely to return or recommend the experience to others. By investing in a visitor’s ‘experience’ in a community, Bruce County and its municipalities were attempting to maintain the best possible image for tourists, that would guarantee future visits, and potentially, new investment.

Seasonal Tourism Economy

As previously discussed, tourism plays a large role in the County’s economy, adding \$326.7 million a year to the local economy and creating 3,244 direct and indirect jobs in 2019. Most tourists visit the County during the summer months, creating a seasonal economy for some municipalities. These busy summer months however often result in traffic jams and issues relating to garbage and overuse of facilities such as public washrooms. In addition, many residents are choosing to rent out their properties as short-term rental accommodations during the summer months, removing needed housing from the rental market and further constraining supply. It will be important for the County to work with local municipalities to ensure that a year-round approach to the tourism sector is supported and advanced.

Counter to the effects COVID-19 (see next section) has had on many sectors of the economy, in particular international travel and tourism, the opposite effect – over-tourism – has been noted in Bruce County, exacerbating an already existing problem. Grey Sauble Conservation Authority recorded a 50 percent increase in visitation in 2020, attributed to a combination of more flexible working hours for people, employees out of work, and people generally staying within the province for their vacations. This increase has resulted in parking issues, visitors traveling out of bounds, and growing litter and waste. These issues have a direct impact on the quality of the experience for others, the integrity of the natural areas, and can cause nuisance issues for neighbours².

Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored structural challenges within the business sector that have existed for several years. It has also accelerated trends that will impact community improvement efforts for years to come. Online shopping, curbside pickup, loss of outdoor event traffic, loss of indoor events and programming, remote workers, loss of coworking spaces, loss of office spaces – the repercussions are wide and deep.

Downtowns that have typically provided an inventory of bricks-and-mortar retail space now question the viability of this activity long term. If less retail space will be needed in the future, proponents of community improvement must consider what will fill the vacant storefronts.

The need for formal office space is also in question. Professional and health care services may function differently in the future. The design and zoning of dwelling units may need to change to accommodate an exponential increase in home-based businesses and occupations.

The lasting economic impacts of COVID-19 are not yet clearly understood, making it difficult to develop community improvement policies in such a fluid atmosphere. Ultimately, businesses will be the entities taking the risks in reopening scenarios. Municipalities must be articulate, flexible, and responsive to ensure that local government is ready and able to respond to business investments and expansions

¹ Bruce County Staff Report, “Spruce the Bruce Community Improvement Initiative,” May 2010.

² Collingwood Today, February 2021.

when they do restart.

Bruce County established an Economic Task Force in March 2020 to “support businesses and guide Bruce County back to a thriving economy” after the pandemic. In May 2020, Bruce County Council endorsed the “Support the Bruce: Business Sustainability Fund” of \$1.75 million, including grant and loan options. By fall 2020, the fund resulted in 52 façade improvements, 36 patio and take-out windows, 28 new or expanded product lines, and 19 e-commerce platforms. More than \$1.3 million was directed to 383 local business owners. Full details of the effort were promoted in a brochure entitled “Faces of Resilience.”³

Most Bruce County tourism-sector businesses earned significantly less in April, May, and June 2020, compared to the same period last year, according to a survey conducted in October by the economic development office. COVID-19 restrictions caused lower revenue for 71% of tourism businesses in Q2 of 2020, decreases which were mainly experienced by restaurants, shops, and bars. This is despite the significant increase in visitors to the region. About 15% of businesses saw more revenue in the second quarter, on average a 40% increase.

One quarter of businesses surveyed in October saw business decrease in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first quarter. However, 47% saw business increase and 18% saw no change. In October, 91% of businesses were open, with 62% of businesses being open since March. In addition, 6% of businesses that closed in April have not reopened.

³ Faces of Resilience brochure. Link: <https://brucecounty.on.ca/sites/default/files/file-upload/business/Bruce%20County%20Faces%20of%20Resilience%20-%20Final.pdf>



Approaches to Community Improvement

In addressing the requirements for an updated community development plan, it is important to reflect on the purpose of such a plan. Community improvement, also known as placemaking, uses principles of urban design to capitalize on a community's assets and potential to improve the identity and character of a town, city, village, or place.

Project for Public Spaces

Founded in 1975 and based in New York, the Project for Public Spaces aims to help communities transform their public spaces into vital places that highlight local assets, spur rejuvenation, and serve common needs. Eleven principles make up the Project for Public Spaces philosophy⁴:

- **The Community is the Expert** – “In any community there are people who can provide an historical perspective, valuable insights into how the area functions, and an understanding of the critical issues and what is meaningful to people. Tapping this information at the beginning of the process will help to create a sense of community ownership in the project that can be of great benefit to both the project sponsor and the community.”
- **Create a Place, not a Design** – “To make an under-performing space into a vital "place," physical elements must be introduced that would make people welcome and comfortable, such as seating and new landscaping, and through "management" changes in the pedestrian circulation pattern and by developing more effective relationships between the surrounding retail and the activities going on in the public spaces.”
- **Look for Partners** – “Partners are critical to the future success and image of a public space improvement project. Whether you want partners at the beginning to plan for the project or want to brainstorm and develop scenarios with a dozen partners who might participate in the future, they are invaluable in providing support and getting a project off the ground.”
- **You Can See a Lot Just By Observing** – “By looking at how people are using (or not using) public spaces and finding out what they like and don't like about them, it is possible to assess what makes them work or not work. Through these observations, it will be clear what kinds of activities are missing and what might be incorporated.”
- **Have a Vision** – “Essential to a vision for any public space is an idea of what kinds of activities might be happening in the space, a view that the space should be comfortable and have a good image, and that it should be an important place where people want to be. It should instill a sense of pride in the people who live and work in the surrounding area.”
- **Start with the Petunias: Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper** – “You cannot expect to do everything right initially. The best spaces experiment with short term improvements that can be tested and refined over many years. Elements such as seating, outdoor cafes, public art, striping of crosswalks and pedestrian havens, community gardens and murals are examples of improvements that can be accomplished in a short time.”
- **Triangulate** – “Triangulation is the process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other. In a

⁴ Project for Public Spaces, “How to Turn a Place Around”, 1999.



public space, the choice and arrangement of different elements in relation to each other can put the triangulation process in motion (or not)."

- **They Always Say 'It Can't Be Done'** – "Creating good public spaces is inevitably about encountering obstacles, because no one in either the public or private sectors has the job or responsibility to "create places." Starting with small scale community-nurturing improvements can demonstrate the importance of places and help to overcome obstacles."
- **Form Supports Function** – "Input from the community and potential partners, understanding of how other spaces function, experimentation, and overcoming the obstacles and naysayers provides the concept for the space. Although design is important, these other elements tell you what 'form' you need to accomplish the future vision for the space."
- **Money is Not the Issue** – "Once you've put in the basic infrastructure of the public spaces, the elements that are added that will make it work will not be expensive. If the community and other partners are involved in programming and other activities, this can also reduce costs. People will have so much enthusiasm for the project that the cost is viewed much more broadly and consequently as not significant when compared with the benefits."
- **You Are Never Finished** – "Good public spaces that respond to the needs, the opinions and the ongoing changes of the community require attention. Amenities wear out, needs change and other things happen in an urban environment. Being open to the need for change and having the management flexibility to enact that change is what builds great public spaces."

Main Street America

Established in 1980 and based in Chicago, The National Main Street Center aimed to address issues facing older downtown cores across the United States. In 2015, the Center launched Main Street America, a new brand to bolster the organization as a leader locally and across the U.S.

The 'Main Street Approach' is centered around 'Transformation Strategies', a series of focused paths which lead to revitalizing or strengthening a downtown. The model recommends that any work locally be organized around four points: Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization. This is the model Bruce County has adapted for community development.

- Economic Vitality focuses on tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs.
- Design enhances the physical and visual assets that set the downtown apart.
- Promotion positions the downtown as the center of the economy, creating a positive image and showcasing the community's unique characteristics.
- Organization involves the creation of a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources.

OMAFRA's Downtown Revitalization Program

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs published the Downtown Revitalization Coordinators' Manual as an aid to communities and coordinators working to revitalize their downtowns. This manual focuses on tools and resources that can be used by towns and villages ranging in size from 500 to 50,000 people. It emphasizes relatively low- cost, do-it-yourself techniques that engage volunteers and build relationships among local organizations. Like Main Street America, OMAFRA uses a four-point approach:



- Economic Development objectives such as helping existing merchants target specific market segments in their trade area or identify possible new businesses that complement the existing business mix.
- Physical Improvements such as restoring historic façades, streetscaping, parking, and creating safe, walkable environments.
- Marketing and Promotions to ensure that the identity and positive image of the downtown is communicated, and that events and activities animate the area.
- Leadership and Management activities to include various organizations to ensure the process continues and volunteers are celebrated and renewed.

The manual walks communities through actions and tasks group into four stages: Preparation, Collect Data and Analyze, Develop Goals and Action Plans, Implement and Monitor.

Tactical Urbanism

Also known as DIY Urbanism, Guerrilla Urbanism, or Planning-by-Doing, Tactical Urbanism includes low-cost, temporary changes to the built environment, intended to improve neighbourhoods and gathering places. It is usually action-oriented and community-focused. In some cases, it follows the strategic directions of a municipality, but can also be implemented without official direction, as grassroots initiatives and projects. The Tactical Urbanist's Guide is one of many online resources encouraging residents to participate in tactical urbanism.

Idea Friendly Method

For rural communities, the website SaveYour.Town builds on the concepts of tactical urbanism and placemaking theories for smaller towns, turning theories into actionable projects. The Idea Friendly Method, developed by the website's founders, simplifies the Project for Public Spaces principles into three elements: Gather your crowd, build connections, take small steps. This approach can sometimes be referred to as guerrilla downtown revitalization because the proponents of community improvement act, then ask for forgiveness from officials and regulators later.

Downtown Success Indicators

The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, based in Michigan, published a set of downtown success indicators⁵ that could be applied in smaller centres. Capturing and measuring indicators requires the organizations involved to be committed over the long term to put resources in place to implement a performance measurement system. The best approach for a smaller community may be to pick one of two metrics from each category and pledge to track the data for a period of three to five years, using staff from partner organizations, local businesses, and volunteers.

Here are examples of Downtown Success Indicators:

- **Retail Development:** Strong retail activity downtown is a popular indicator for measuring success.

⁵ North Central Regional Centre for Rural Development, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Illinois Extension, "Downtown Success Indicators: A Review of the Literature", August 2014.



- Quantitative: Proportion of all retail businesses located downtown, increase in retail businesses downtown over a time period, occupancy rate (or drop in vacancy rate), longevity of businesses (or turnover rate).
 - Qualitative: Business mix, sidewalk activity, increase in daytime population, hours of operation.
- **Housing:** Downtown housing is a relatively new indicator of success downtown.
 - Quantitative: Proportion of town's population residing downtown, increase in downtown housing units over a period
 - Qualitative: High density residential development, surrounding market rate residential neighborhoods, regulatory framework supporting downtown housing
- **Partnerships:** Organizations and collaboration can indicate downtown success, but there are few metrics available to provide any method to quantify the effectiveness of active leadership, organizational support, partnerships, vision, and community involvement.
 - Qualitative: Active leadership, downtown development authority (or organizational support), partnerships and coalitions, downtown redevelopment plan, community involvement (or affection from citizenry)
- **Downtown Traffic Generators:** These assets attract visitors downtown providing spinoff benefits to the overall local economy.
 - Quantitative: Proportion of city's civic and cultural uses located downtown
 - Qualitative: Access to natural amenities (or waterfront development), arts and entertainment amenities, educational establishments, civic buildings, sports facilities
- **Preservation and Rehabilitation:** History and heritage help downtowns to enhance uniqueness and create identity over other locations.
 - Quantitative: Proportion of city's registered historic structures located downtown, number of hotel/motel rooms per 1,000 central town residents
 - Qualitative: Rehabilitation projects, historic preservation initiatives, heritage tourism
- **Immigration and Diversity:** These are new indicators of downtown success, reflecting a community's openness toward socioeconomic changes and entrepreneurial activities.
 - Quantitative: Percentage of newcomer population in the town, percentage of visible minority population in the town
 - Qualitative: Civic leaders' attitude toward diverse population
- **Multifunctionality:** Although there are no quantitative measures, downtowns that attract a variety of population at a variety of times maximize the space, its function, and contribute to success.
 - Qualitative: Mixed use development, office development, conference/meeting space
- **Downtown Design:** These attributes are hard to measure quantitatively, but qualitative metrics could be used in surveys of residents and visitors.
 - Qualitative: Sense of place, clear boundary, clear entrance, design guidelines, bike/pedestrian friendliness, public space, streetscape and façade improvement programs, accessibility and connectivity
- **Branding and Promotion:** Downtown events and advertising plans are qualitative indicators of downtown success.
- **Downtown Finance, Employment and Demographics:** Population age cohorts (preferably 25-to-34-year age group), education attainment (preferably four-year post-secondary education), and community safety are used as metrics in the United States to determine the best places to live.



- Quantitative: Change in assessed value of property, change in real property investment, change in downtown employment by sector, percentage increase in rental value, lease rate comparison with peer towns, income of downtown residents, crime known to police per 1000 residents
- Qualitative: Make up of downtown labour force, number of physicians, air quality, green infrastructure (e.g., management of stormwater runoff).



Community Development Programs

Municipalities may undertake community development using a limited set of tools provided through legislation by the Province of Ontario. Depending on their structure (i.e. single-tier, regional, County, upper, lower), municipalities may have the authority to develop these tools into sophisticated programs, either alone or in collaboration with lower-tier municipalities.

Passive community development efforts by municipalities would rely solely on capital infrastructure improvements to the public realm. In some cases, municipal grants to community groups may pass as community development tools but, without a vision, criteria, or budget, it is difficult to measure the success of passive community development.

A Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is a financial tool created by the Province of Ontario to allow municipalities to invest in priority projects located on public land and on privately-owned properties. A CIP provides a locally designed plan for municipal investments in the public realm (streets, parks, other amenities). By creating a CIP that is endorsed by the Province, municipalities can provide financial incentives to assist the private sector to stimulate redevelopment and to help with property improvements on privately owned parcels of land, if they adhere to specific criteria and objectives. Like municipal community grants, however, a CIP without a vision, targeted approach, and reasonable budget will be difficult to sustain, and may demonstrate little benefit.

Active community development, such as the collaborations used in Bruce County, combines municipal grants and incentives with advanced principles and benchmarks. Improvement to these cooperative programs may always be improved, but a review of the existing program shows much progress to date.

Spruce the Bruce

Since 2010⁶, Bruce County has worked with its municipalities to grant a total of \$785,000 for 305 projects, resulting in more than \$5 million in private-sector investment in communities' downtowns through the Spruce the Bruce program. The program was built upon a macro approach, one which focused on common systemic issues and organizational capacity issues related to downtown revitalization. Although a financial audit has been prepared on the impact of Spruce the Bruce over the life of the program, it can be estimated the multiplier effect of public/private investment is 1:4.

Project Background and Initiation

In 2007, in response to a report by the Warden of Bruce County, a Local Service Improvement Plan was presented to County Council aimed at improving the level of planning services available to local municipalities. As a result, the Local Commercial Studies Report was prepared for Bruce County's Agriculture, Tourism and Planning/Land Division (ATP) Committee, seeking endorsement of a new local urban community improvement initiative using the Municipality of Saugeen Shores as a pilot.

In 2008 and 2009, County staff worked with Saugeen Shores to develop Urban Design Guidelines and a Signage Strategy. Ongoing research and discussions determined that the economic enhancement of

⁶ May 20, 2010, County of Bruce Planning and Economic Development Department staff to Agriculture, Tourism and Planning/Land Division Committee



core areas was the responsibility of lower-tier municipalities, most of which had limited resources to support such initiatives, causing them to struggle to move an economic development agenda forward.

Rural downtowns were facing numerous challenges, including aging infrastructure, limited adaptability to new accessibility standards, and increasing competition from large-scale retailers. At the time, total assessment for commercial areas within Bruce County communities was \$462 million, with downtown areas making up 65% of the total or \$301 million. It was suggested that downtowns function as the main point of contact for tourism dollars, Bruce County's second largest industry after agriculture:

"The program recognizes that the County is well positioned to provide both professional and capital support to enhance these main economic generators. Prior to the program, downtowns did not have the necessary support for maintenance and upgrades to make them viable points of contact with essential tourism dollars⁷".

In 2009, Bruce County expressed its intention to assist municipalities through a variety of programs under the umbrella of the "Spruce the Bruce" Community Improvement Initiative. Modeled on concepts promoted by the National Main Street Centre (NMSC) in the United States, the Spruce the Bruce program replicated the NMSC structure of using the pillars of Organization, Design, Economic Vitality and Promotion to improve local quality of life and create attractive and supportive business environments in rural communities.

Program Launch

Spruce the Bruce was formally launched in 2010, beginning with the development of community design toolkits within local municipalities, local planning support to update or create the local policy framework needed to support the program, and grants to directly fund capital investments in streetscapes, infrastructure development, building facades, signs and awnings, and community signage. In the first year of Spruce the Bruce, the County worked with Huron-Kinloss (Ripley/Lucknow), Kincardine, Saugeen Shores (Port Elgin and Southampton) and South Bruce Peninsula (Allenford/Hepworth/ Sauble Beach/Wiarton), as those municipalities were better prepared with enabling policy documents. Bruce County partnered with the Bruce Community Futures Development Corporation (BCFDC) to administer the grant program. This allowed County staff resources to focus on the community identity and local policy development areas of the program. A budget of \$60,000 was established, as well as \$10,000 for Tourism Grants for capital infrastructure support.

At the end of the first year, \$69,719 had been spent, leveraging \$326,621 in investment across 33 projects. Bruce County and its constituent municipalities met to review the program successes and areas of improvement. It was acknowledged that each municipality was at a different stage in the process.

In a report to the County of Bruce ATP Committee, a Municipal Readiness Matrix was presented (Figure 1). Some communities were just starting down the road while others had developed plans and established their own Community Improvement incentives. It was widely known that Provincial grant dollars were more likely to be approved for downtown revitalization projects if the necessary plans, policies, and studies were already in place.

⁷ February 16, 2012, County of Bruce Planning & Economic Development staff to the Agriculture, Tourism and Planning Committee



Figure 1: Bruce County Municipal Readiness Matrix, June 2011

Municipal Readiness Matrix								
	Arran-Elderslie	Brockton	Huron-Kinloss	Kincardine	Northern Bruce Peninsula	Saugeen Shores	South Bruce	South Bruce Peninsula
Premier Ranked Tourism Destination Study	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
First Impression Study		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
SWOT / Business Analysis	✓					✓		
Labour Market Analysis	✓	✓						
Downtown Strategic Plan				✓				✓
Community Toolkit			✓		✓			✓
Streetscape Plan			✓	✓		✓		
Design Guidelines / Site Plan / Façade Guidelines				✓		✓		✓
Community Improvement Plan	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
Economic Development Plan	✓			✓				✓
Sustainability Plan								
Municipal Cultural Plan								

Eligibility

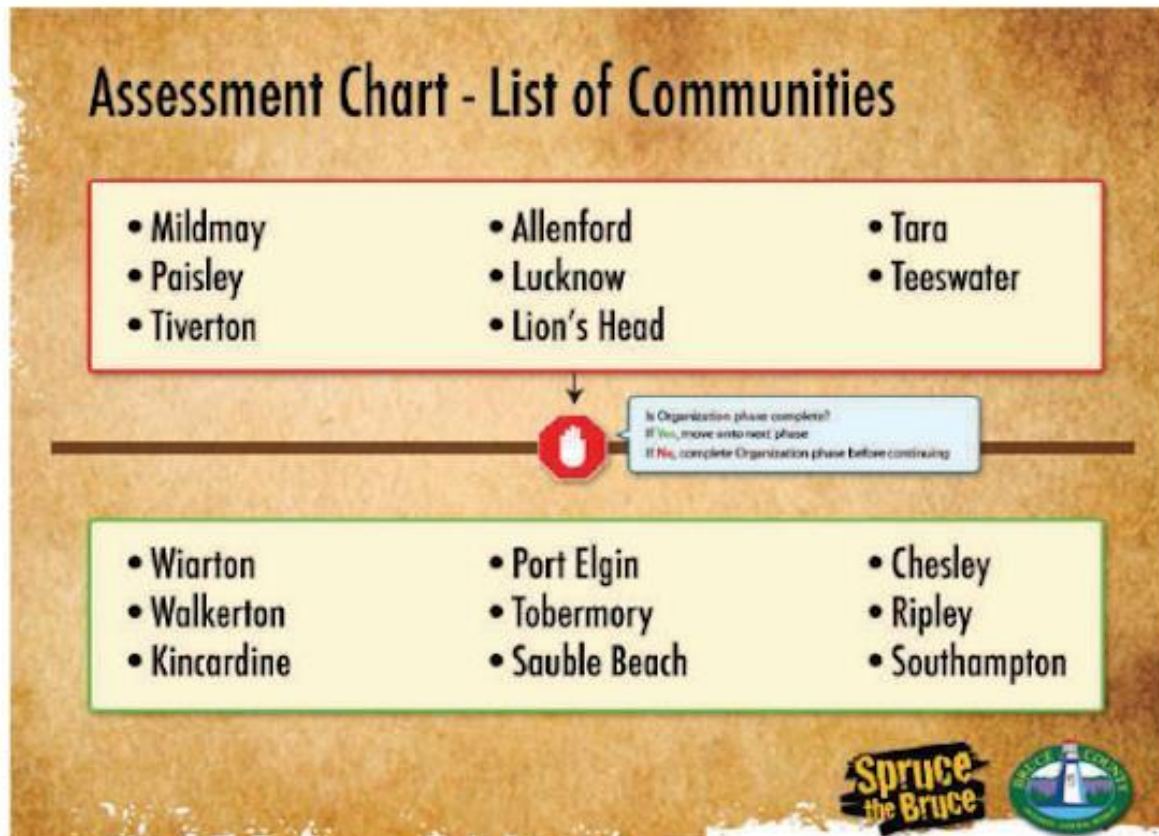
Spruce the Bruce continued in 2012 with \$119,000 invested, leveraging about \$380,000 in additional funds over 46 projects. As the program grew, a two-stage checklist was established so proponents of community projects understood how they could work toward receiving grants. Local municipal councils were asked to:

- Declare support for the concept of Spruce the Bruce, including its potential to shape projects within the municipality, and to support County involvement in the local municipality;
- Appoint a senior municipal staff person to be the main local government contact for the Spruce the Bruce committee, and to ensure staff support for local committee coordination, and additional support;
- Establish a local Spruce the Bruce support committee including senior municipal staff with responsibility in key areas;
- Define a 'downtown' or project area;
- Recruit local champions within each community to sit on the local Spruce the Bruce Committee;
- Obtain commitments to the project from local stakeholder groups, such as Chambers of Commerce and other public groups and where appropriate, appoint one of their members to the local Spruce the Bruce Committee; and,



- Secure copies of all relevant downtown policies (e.g., Official Plans, Zoning Bylaws, Sign Bylaws, and other studies).

Figure 2: Assessment Slide



Criteria

For a community to participate in the Spruce the Bruce grants program, additional criteria needed to be met. Baseline downtown assessments had to be completed (Figure 2). Direction on a downtown identity needed to be set. An Action Plan had to be formed. Support for downtown revitalization also needed to be confirmed in the municipal budget.

Early Success – 2013

In 2013, Spruce the Bruce budget continued at \$125,000 for grants, plus \$5,000 for administration. Approximately \$150,000 was invested, leveraging \$442,000 in additional funds over 55 projects. A project coordinator was hired to assist with inquiries, communication, and program administration. Three years into the program, municipalities and local communities had completed varying levels of improvement in organizational capacity:



- Kincardine, Wiarton, Ripley, Port Elgin, Tobermory, Lion's Head, Southampton and Sauble Beach had fulfilled the organizational requirements to access the full program in 2013 including grants and support services;
- Lucknow, Allenford, Walkerton had partially fulfilled the organizational requirements to access the program and public grants such as community signage and *streetscape* beautification grants; and,
- Teeswater, Mildmay, Paisley, Chesley, Tara, Hepworth and Tiverton were working on the beginning organizational stages, with access to services but not grants.

Rural Economic Development (RED) Program

Bruce County applied to the Rural Economic Development (RED) program of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs in 2013, for \$750,000 in funding to expand the Spruce the Bruce program. In terms of projected deliverables, it was expected that:

- Every dollar invested by Bruce County would leverage four dollars from other sources;
- Total investment in revitalization projects would be over \$3.5 million;
- Participating municipalities would establish competitive advantages for future funding; and,
- 25 direct full- and/or part-time jobs and 219 growth-related jobs would be created.

The program plan associated with the RED application supported individual communities completing programs and studies such as First Impressions Community Exchanges, business surveys and analysis, branding and marketing plans, asset mapping, strategic plans, sustainability plans, Community Improvement Plans, *streetscape* improvements, identity toolkits, and traffic and parking studies.

The Spruce the Bruce project team had undertaken a detailed capacity review of each of the downtowns using the Rural Economic Development Data & Intelligence (REDDI) tool assessment of well-functioning downtowns. This analysis determined the organizational capacity of each community, with the end goal being to get each downtown on the appropriate footing to support economic success.

Continued Success – 2014-2020

In 2014, the Spruce the Bruce program invested \$111,665, leveraging about \$453,000 in additional funds over 44 projects. Most grants were disbursed to façade improvement and perpendicular signage/awnings. With RED program funding in place, Bruce County organized another “brand camp” that culminated in community toolkits for Port Elgin and Southampton. Roger Brooks, an international destination development speaker, was also brought in to inspire businesses at seven presentations at several locations, engaging more than 250 attendees. That year, Bruce County received the National Achievement Award by the Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA).

In 2015, Spruce the Bruce had a budget of \$125,000, but the program's granting portion had a delayed start due to department staffing resources, following departmental restructuring. By year end, \$57,867 in grants had been allocated towards 24 projects, leveraging an additional \$162,389, made up of both private and public funds. A rural business recruitment workshop was also organized for all communities. Community report cards continued to be used to assist in directing efforts in the coming year.

In 2016, the Spruce the Bruce budget remained at \$125,000 and over \$73,000 was invested in six projects, leveraging an additional \$344,505 of both private and public dollars. The average cost of a project was \$16,091 and the program overall had more than a fourfold multiplier effect.

For 2017, \$125,000 was budgeted for grants, with hopes of broadening Spruce the Bruce funding into



new economic development programs called “Business to Bruce” and “Explore the Bruce.” The Business to Bruce program focuses specifically on capacity building around business foundations, business marketing and promotion, and support, outreach, and education. Two business development officers were supported, and grant programs to encourage and support entrepreneurs were provided, through Business to Bruce Services -- formally Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC) -- through the County’s contract with the provincial government to operate an SBEC⁸.

In 2018, \$106,816 in grants had been allocated, from a total budget of \$125,000, across 41 projects, leveraging \$295,607 in private investment. That year, Bruce County received an award from the Economic Developers Council of Ontario for the Paisley Community Toolkit.

In 2020, Bruce County Council endorsed a \$1.75-million investment in grants and a loan to support local businesses impacted by pandemic restrictions⁹. As part of the Support the Bruce: Business Sustainability Fund, Bruce County businesses could apply for a grant of \$1,500 to offset the cost of PPE supplies; a total of \$250,000 is available. For Spruce the Bruce grants, matching requirements for businesses was removed and grants covered 100% of project cost, up to a maximum of \$4,000 per business.

New Reporting System

Over the course of the program, reporting evolved from the readiness matrix of 2011 to an assessment chart that was being populated for 2020 (Figure 3) as this report was being prepared.

Figure 3: Assessment Tool 2019-2020

CATEGORY		ORGANIZATION			BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT			COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT			MARKETING & PROMOTIONS			TOTAL		
2019 - 2020 Comparison QUESTIONS		TOTAL / 20		CHANGE FROM 2019	TOTAL / 32		CHANGE FROM 2019	TOTAL / 28		CHANGE FROM 2019	TOTAL / 20		CHANGE FROM 2019	TOTAL / 100		CHANGE FROM 2019
MUNICIPALITY	COMMUNITY	2019	2020	20-19	2019	2020	20-19	2019	2020	20-19	2019	2020	20-19	2019	2020	20-19
Saugeen Shores	Southampton	19	15	(4)	25	24	(1)	15	17	2	4	11	7	63	67	4
	Port Elgin	19	15	(4)	25	24	(1)	18	19	1	4	11	7	66	69	3

Conclusions

In a ten-year recap report to the Planning and Development Committee in 2019, Spruce the Bruce grants were described as the ‘carrot’ that engages communities and business owners to move their action plan into reality. This is an important step in attracting new residents and growing the labour force.

While there is no statistical data to directly link the aims of Spruce the Bruce programs to the settlement of newcomers or increase in workforce participation, the program was well supported across many communities and likely had the effect of reinforcing community pride.

⁸ January 18, 2018 Committee Report by the County of Bruce Director of Planning and Development to Members of the Planning and Development Committee

⁹ July 23, 2020, County of Bruce Media Release.



In general, Spruce the Bruce is a program built on a respected formula, and has not strayed from its initial mandate of building capacity within communities to take responsibility for advancing downtown revitalization and the enhancement of public spaces. Spruce the Bruce is considered a best practice in the realm of rural economic development.

Local Community Improvement Plans

All lower-tier municipalities in Bruce County have adopted Community Improvement Plans. An outline of their attributes is found in Figure 4.

In 2008, Kincardine was the first to adopt a CIP, followed in 2010 by Saugeen Shores (covering Port Elgin and Southampton); in 2013 by Huron-Kinloss (covering Lucknow and Ripley), Northern Bruce Peninsula (covering Lion's Head and Tobermory), South Bruce (covering Mildmay and Teeswater), South Bruce Peninsula (covering Allenford, Hepworth, Sauble Beach, and Wiarton), and in 2014 by Brockton (covering Walkerton).

All of the CIPs focus on business façade improvement incentives. All except Kincardine and Port Elgin have storefront sign improvement incentives. All except South Bruce Peninsula's commercial centres have accessibility improvement incentives. Port Elgin and South Bruce Peninsula are the only CIPs that do not include an energy efficiency incentive.

All the CIPs offer grants to businesses. About half of the communities have the capacity within their CIPs to offer business loans and tax increment grants (TIGs). Unfortunately, no documentation or analysis was made available for any of these instruments, in terms of a business-by-business take-up rate of specific tools (i.e. grants vs loans vs TIGs). It is possible that these loans and TIGs were never financially resourced or communicated.

The Spruce the Bruce program allowed Bruce County to participate in the CIP process, which normally would be a transaction involving only the municipality and the participating private-sector property owner. In the municipalities of Huron Kinloss and South Bruce Peninsula, for example, businesses that qualified for the Spruce the Bruce program would be required to fund one third of project costs, with the municipality providing one third, and the County providing one third. In principle, this is a more generous model than many other municipalities, where businesses are required to match the total funds provided by local government. Other municipalities participated in some years but not others, and some offered lump sums toward grants but not a portion of the project cost.

The range of improvements eligible under the CIPs is limited, in terms of project scope and geography. For example, there are no residential-related incentives to encourage the development of housing stock at a price point that is attainable for lower-middle-class workers. There are no agriculture-related incentives to spur value-added on-farm diversification. There are also no destination-related incentives to nurture a year-round tourism industry. There are no incentives to support the attraction of entrepreneurs looking to start a home-based business.



Figure 4: Summary of Attributes of CIPs across Bruce County

LOCATION			BUSINESS INCENTIVES				MUNICIPAL INCENTIVES		DELIVERY INSTRUMENT		
Municipality	Town	Year Enacted	Facade Imp.	Storefront Sign Imp.	Building Restoration/ Accessibility	Energy Efficiency	Streetscape, Signage, Landscaping	Public Space, Parks	Grant	Loan	Tax Increment Grant
Arran-Elderslie	Chesley	2014	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	•	•	•
	Paisley	2014	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	•	•	•
	Tara	2014	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	•	•	•
Brockton	Walkerton	2014	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	•	•	•
Huron-Kinloss	Lucknow	2013	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	•	•	•
	Ripley	2013	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	•	•	•
Kincardine	Kincardine	2008	\$						•		
Northern Bruce Peninsula	Lion's Head	2013	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	•		
	Tobermory	2013	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	•		
Saugeen Shores	Port Elgin	2010	\$		\$		\$		•	•	•
	Southampton	2010	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	•	•	•
South Bruce	Mildmay	2013	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	•		
	Teeswater	2013	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	•		
South Bruce Peninsula	Allenford	2010	\$	\$			\$	\$	•		
	Hepworth	2010	\$	\$			\$	\$	•		
	Sauble Beach	2010	\$	\$			\$	\$	•		
	Wlarton	2010	\$	\$			\$	\$	•		

Best Practices

As has been noted previously, CIPs can enable municipalities to provide grants and loans to stimulate private sector investment in targeted areas of the community. In recent years, many municipalities, including several counties, have taken a more progressive approach to CIPs through the adoption of larger project areas and instituting a broader suite of CIP programs to support investment attraction and revitalization efforts. Some examples of these programs and targeted objectives include:

- Incentives for the development of a variety of *affordable/attainable* housing types, including upper-storey redevelopment, to address critical shortages in rural municipalities;



- Incorporating value-added agricultural uses as a way to encourage economic diversity in primarily rural and agriculture-based economies (i.e. incentives for the development of processing facilities);
- Development of tourism and agri-tourism focused CIP programs (i.e. programs encouraging the development of on-farm stays, agri-tourism and on-farm experiences); and,
- Industrial development – previously largely excluded from CIP programs, some rural municipalities are extending their CIP programs to pick up industrial/commercial development.

Spruce the Bruce represents a best practice for the use of Community Improvement tools in Ontario. This review provides several additional examples of municipalities that have taken a more progressive approach to Community Improvement Plans to support investment attraction and revitalization efforts, creating viable living environments and a supportive economy.

Central Manitoulin

The Central Manitoulin Community Improvement Plan, approved in 2013, was intended to support the development of commercial accommodations, as a means of enhancing tourism experiences and supporting economic development objectives. The CIP outlines three target zones, two in hamlets and one zone broadly including all rural lands within the municipality. The four financial incentive programs available in the rural target zone are applicable only to fixed-roof accommodations projects (i.e. hotels, motels, tourist cabins, bed and breakfasts), as a means of protecting the rural environment while supporting economic development:

- Facade, Landscape, and Signage Improvement Grant
- Building Restoration, Renovation, and Improvement Program (Building, Fire Code compliance)
- Planning and Related Fees Grant Program (Official Plan/Zoning By-Law amendments)
- Tax-based Redevelopment Grant Program.

All programs have been implemented, though there has been limited interest in programs and incentives outside of hamlet zones.

Haldimand County

Approved in 2012, the Haldimand County Rural Business and Tourism CIP is County-wide, applying to urban (for only roofed accommodation applications), hamlet, and rural areas outside of the County's six downtown areas. There are five programs currently offered through the RBTCP, as outlined below.

- Facade, Landscape and Signage Improvement Grant Program
- Development Charge, Planning Fees, and Building Permit Grant
- Tax-based Redevelopment Grant (TIG) Program for Large Scale Capital Projects
- Building Restoration, Renovation, and Improvement Grant
- Heritage Commercial Use Grant Program

Budgetary resources for the CIP are provided from a pooled CIP fund. Uptake of programs were relatively slow over the first year of implementation, though it is generally understood that the business community is only slowly becoming aware of the CIP and its potential benefits. Haldimand County continues to see increasing levels of interest, and is proactively trying to market the program through



agricultural channels and rural networks.

Halton Hills

The town-wide Halton Hills Comprehensive CIP, approved in 2010, offers incentives programs and municipal leadership strategies for eight sub-areas of the Town, including agricultural and rural lands. Though the CIP was designed to address a number of challenges across the Town of Halton Hills, such as development and redevelopment at major transit nodes (e.g. Georgetown GO) along historic commercial corridors (e.g. Guelph Street, downtown Acton), and in brownfield areas (e.g. Beardmore tannery lands), the focus on rural and agricultural areas of the Town of Halton Hills is meant to respond to the continued pressures faced by rural and agricultural businesses in the rapidly urbanizing Greater Toronto Area.

In terms of municipal leadership, several non-financial programs and strategies were included in the CIP, including:

- Development of an agri-business economic development strategy aimed at improving the viability of farming in Halton Hills,
- Expansion of government support to the agricultural community,
- Development of marketing materials to promote agriculture and value-added sector,
- Creation of an agriculture sector-specific assistance function in the economic development office, and
- Liaison with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food on the re-opening of a local office.

Beyond these non-financial programs and strategies, the CIP includes three programs applicable in the agricultural/rural sub-area, as outlined below.

- Agricultural Feasibility Study/Business Plan Grant: Matching grant to assess the feasibility of converting agricultural/rural buildings to specialty in-demand agriculture/agri-tourism uses, and to encourage the development of business plans for new agricultural and related uses.
- Agricultural Buildings and Facilities Improvement Loan Program: Five-year, no interest loan to existing agricultural/rural properties, buildings, and facilities and construction of new agricultural/rural buildings and facilities.
- Agricultural Buildings and Facilities Revitalization Grant Program: Grant where improvements and alterations to existing agricultural/rural properties, buildings, and facilities results in an increase in assessment. The program is also designed to assist with securing project financing.

Uptake of the program has been limited, with three businesses successfully receiving grants for facade improvement. A program that preceded the CIP, focused on small-scale enhancements (i.e. under \$1,000) to facades continues to be a popular choice for some businesses based a perception that there are fewer requirements and less paperwork.

As part of its Rural and Agricultural Strategy, Halton Region operates the Agriculture Community Development Fund, which supports agricultural organizations seeking to undertake projects. Halton Region employs an Agricultural Liaison Officer within its Legislative and Planning Services Department. The Rural and Agricultural Strategy utilizes the five key pillars identified in the Golden Horseshoe Food



and Farming Action Plan:

- **Grow the Golden Horseshoe cluster** – “become the leading food and farming cluster in the world, renowned for healthy and safe products”
- **Link food, farming and health** – “educate current and future consumers about the importance of locally sourced food and farming products for enhancing their health and well-being”
- **Foster innovation** – “encourage and support innovation to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of Halton's food and farming sector”
- **Enable the cluster** – “align policies and their application to enable food and farming businesses to be increasingly competitive and profitable”
- **Cultivate new approaches** – “support pilots of new approaches to support food and farming in the region”

City of Kawartha Lakes

The City of Kawartha Lakes' Green Hub CIP, approved in 2009, explored the opportunities to use community improvement planning tools to encourage the attraction and/or development of businesses and industries engaged in environmentally significant activities, such as green technologies, services, and products. The CIP also focused on opportunities to address the age and dilapidation of some buildings through green construction methods and retrofits.

The attraction of a cluster of these types of businesses or related employment would enable the community to position itself as 'green hub' consistent with emerging global trends around the growth of clean technologies. This idea was supported by the City's Economic Development Strategy which had incorporated an 'Environment First' value as part of its mission statement thus supporting the attraction of eco-industries of all types. A strong environmental platform was also seen as an opportunity to support the attraction of:

- Renewable energy projects;
- Alternative water and waste management treatment;
- Environmental research and innovation;
- Environmental consulting;
- Energy management technologies; and,
- Agro-tourism and Eco-tourism.

In support of the implementation of the CIP several Municipal Leadership initiatives were also identified. These included a Green Hub CIP Review Panel, Green Design Guidelines, a Green Business and/or a Green Employment Database, and a Green Certification or Recognition Program.

Norfolk County

Norfolk County approved its original CIP in 2007, which included traditional incentive tools of façade improvement and brownfield rehabilitation. In 2011, Norfolk County undertook the development of a new Economic Development Strategy, which noted that the CIP should be evaluated to ensure that businesses in both the traditional and emerging industries are encouraged and included in CIP programs. The potential expansion of CIP programs to areas outside of the traditional CIP areas, namely the



hamlets and agricultural areas, provided an opportunity to further implement the programs in the economic development strategy, and to explore areas outside of Central Business Districts.

Three incentives were added to the portfolio of CIP instruments in Norfolk County, because of the review:

- **Agricultural Buildings and Facilities Improvement Program:** The program was expanded into the agricultural area, making the following types of projects eligible for funding:
 - Facade Improvements;
 - Substantial physical improvements or alterations made to existing agricultural properties, buildings and facilities including source water protection activities, renovations, or additions to barns, storage buildings, agricultural/food processing facilities, and greenhouses; and
 - Agri-tourism uses including renovations for B&Bs and other facilities open to the public.
- **Landscaping, Signage and Property Improvement Grant:** This program was added to urban, hamlet, agricultural, and lakeshore areas, providing assistance for:
 - Upgrading the open areas associated with the property, including parking areas, boulevards, and other landscaping features;
 - Providing new signage, replacing and updating existing signage. Signage improvements (including street numbering and awnings (seasonal or permanent) may be included.
- **Structural Improvement Grant:** The program was added in the urban, hamlet, agricultural, and lakeshore areas, although it was not made available for participants in the Agricultural Buildings and Facilities Improvement Program. The following types of projects became eligible for funding:
 - Adaptive re-use of derelict or underutilized structures (e.g. conversion of a closed school);
 - Accessible entrances and internal accessibility for grade level store fronts and offices.

Sarnia

The revised Community Improvement Plan in Sarnia, approved in 2020, focused efforts in specific urban areas of the city. The following financial incentive programs were adopted:

- **Affordable Housing Development Program:** financial support and incentives to develop and/or rehabilitate greater than two affordable housing units.
- **Additional Residential Units Program:** financial assistance to create new Additional Residential units; servicing to an Additional Residential Unit located in an ancillary building (e.g. converted garage or gate house); and upgrades to meet Building and Fire Codes;
- **Renovation Program Grant:** financial assistance to upgrade, rehabilitate, and redevelop commercial, mixed-use and residential buildings, including installation of safety and fire protection systems, improvements to the electrical, ventilation, heating and plumbing supply systems; barrier-free accessibility upgrades; window openings and windows; and energy and water efficiency upgrades.
- **Tax Increment Based Program Grant:** financial assistance at a high order of magnitude to be considered on a case-by-case basis, targeted to very specific properties, perhaps involve public-private partnerships, generating tangible City-wide community benefits, such as a major waterfront amenity that can be enjoyed year-round by residents and tourists.
- **Landscape and Property Improvement Program Grant:** financial assistance to improve properties through landscaping improvements, pedestrian connections, sidewalk cafes/patios and other



improvements that can contribute to enhancing the public realm, including professional landscaping and/or installation of alternative ground cover treatments; re-sodding; installation or improvement of pedestrian walkways; tree planting; installation or improvement of a permanent sidewalk café or patio; installation of benches or permanent planters; and services of a professional landscape architect.

Wellington County

The County of Wellington's InvestWell Community Improvement Program, established in 2018, is supported by local CIP programs framed by five specific priorities for the community.

- **Use Land Strategically** - focused on enhancing and intensifying the existing property fabric and using infrastructure more efficiently;
- **Provide Rental Housing** - focused on providing more rental housing options in downtown areas including upper floor apartments in mixed-use buildings;
- **Improve Building Infrastructure** - focused on beautification and revitalization of built-up areas done following the County's green building standards and physical, structural and aesthetic improvements to buildings;
- **Diversify the Economy** – focused on diversifying and cultivating new economic opportunities in strategic areas that create high-quality local jobs; and,
- **Promote Tourism** – focused on building out existing appeals and resources and enhancing local tourism experiences.

What makes the programme unique and innovative when compared to historical CIP programming is that criteria for funding support the creation of new mixed-use buildings, as well as upgrades to existing rental units; the adaptive reuse of vacant or underutilized buildings and improvements/upgrades to utilities and servicing; new on-farm diversified or agriculture-related uses, the creation of a new business in a target sector or value chain/cluster; and new retail, restaurants or other businesses considered critical to the downtown areas.

Currently, support is available in three phases: Pre-Development Design Study Grant; Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG); and, Marketing Investment Attraction Support for eligible properties.

Lessons Learned

The following lessons have been learned by reviewing other communities:

- **Importance of the Official Plan:** The Official Plan sets out the scope of the incentives. CIPs are required to conform to the Official Plan, and policies in the Official Plan often provide the context for developing incentives. There may be opportunities to review the Official Plan to target or expand the range of projects permitted, but the CIP will remain a tool to implement those opportunities.
- **Think outside the Community Box:** To respond to priorities identified by Bruce County through its policy directions specific to sustainable economic growth, the CIP has the potential to balance alignment with sector-specific and broader community goals and needs. The most successful CIPs create an equilibrium between geographic targets (e.g., downtown revitalization) and industry-related priorities (e.g., value-added agriculture, tourism, and culture). Too narrow a focus on specific sectors or clusters can limit the applicability and appeal of CIP initiatives. In rural areas, incentives are



often needed to encourage reuse and revitalization of older agricultural buildings or launch new business ventures. The demand for such incentives is in response to development pressures that threaten the existing land base for agriculture, by supporting a thriving agricultural industry and rural economy¹⁰. Changes to provincial policies supporting alternative crops and alternative enterprises on agricultural land offer opportunities to retrofit existing rural and agricultural buildings and properties for related uses (e.g. retail) as well as launch new on-farm businesses that can diversify revenue sources. These buildings may not be compliant with building, health, fire, and accessibility requirements. New agricultural or tourism activities also often have a long lead time for return on investment. Business start-ups in rural areas may also have property tax implications. As such, tax increment equivalent grants and interest-free loans can offset these costs and encourage reuse of older agricultural buildings and launch new enterprises.

- **Prioritizing applications to maximize limited funding:** Eligibility criteria can be used to prioritize applications where limited funding is available. CIPs often have relatively standard eligibility criteria protecting municipalities from fraudulent claims (e.g. multiple quotes for work) and ensuring recipients are in good standing with the municipality (e.g. in compliance with zoning by-law). However, where multiple programs are funded from the same budget line, eligibility criteria can be used to ensure that only the projects most in alignment with the municipality's objectives or the community's needs receive funding or assistance. Incentives are often extended if certain unique conditions exist (e.g. visibility from major tourism assets).
- **Myth of paperwork:** Property owners often perceive that obtaining government grants and loans is a difficult process. It is important that the municipality try to facilitate CIP applications (perhaps through an administrator or expeditor) and walk potential applicants through the application, while also clearly outlining the process for each program to potential applicants. Councils that delegate approvals to staff can rapidly accelerate the process, if checks and balances are in place, and reporting is transparent and regular.
- **Marketing and communications support:** Often the most notable challenge with community development programs and CIPs is in understanding the assistance available. In areas with a more dispersed potential applicant base (e.g. rural areas), this becomes more complicated. The programs should be supported by a well-planned and ongoing marketing and communications effort on the part of the municipality. It should leverage the networks of community partners and leaders. This could also include ongoing media relations efforts, to build a public identity for the programs.
- **Proving the worth of a CIP:** Ongoing performance measurement can assist with the sustainability of the program. Most CIPs outline measures against which the program will be assessed, but few have implemented more formal measurement and reporting programs to inform municipal council and other decisions makers. Metrics can assist with ensuring the sustainability of funding for the CIP, as well as justifying increases to program funding based on popularity. Most current CIPs employ both broader program tracking (e.g. number of applications) and program-specific metrics (e.g. tax increment from improvements), as well as offer qualitative insight into the programs progress on planning and economic development goals or objectives.
- **Funding caps:** Grants and loans for improvements are often capped at 50% of total cost. The Planning Act requires that grants or loans not exceed the cost of a project funded through a CIP. However, a good portion of CIP programs will place a cap of 50% on project costs to extend the availability of

¹⁰ Province of Ontario, "Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas, Publication 851", 2016.



financial incentive programs to a wider range of potential applicants. Where there are opportunities for grants or loans valued higher than 50% of cost, maximum funding levels are often imposed.

- **Flexibility to address financial impacts on business:** Tax increment equivalent grant values vary: These programs in the leading practices offer returns between 50% and 100% of the total tax increment per year, with all leading programs holding that share constant over the duration of the grant (unlike graduated scales which are often used). Some communities offer the lowest percentage return among the leading practices – there is flexibility in the program for an applicant to negotiate annual returns of up to 90% of the tax increment. However, if levels of assistance are set too high, the program could potentially have the unintended effect of producing a notable financial impact for the business at the conclusion of the program, so graduated levels of assistance are often preferred.
- **Streamline administration:** Municipalities should ensure that after the incentive is approved for a business, the administration of that transaction is well planned and recorded. More complicated incentives such as loans and tax increment rebates will require more hands-on participation and recordkeeping by municipal staff with the experience and financial expertise to carry the burden.



Opportunities and Challenges

What We Saw

To understand the opportunities and challenges of each community, a tour around Bruce County was completed over a weekend in October 2020. It is important to note that the tour occurred during the "off-season" for some of the more tourist focused communities, as well during the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic, which, no doubt has an impact on the look and feel of these downtowns, as many of the restaurants and retail and service commercial businesses are adversely affected.

The tour revealed significantly different downtowns and community development contexts. Overall, the County has a diverse collection of downtowns with varying scales, functions, and historical contexts and significance. Importantly, they have distinct built form characteristics, and somewhat different levels of *streetscape* enhancement. While individually all the downtowns have unique and endearing qualities, together they represent an interesting experiential touring opportunity.

Bruce County's communities are grouped into three primary categories, known as hubs in the Bruce County lexicon, based on their geographic location and context. The various communities are generally identified as follows:

Inland Hub

Rural Service Centres have historically provided the surrounding agricultural community with important goods and services. They are located in the heart of Bruce County's rural/agricultural community.

Walkerton



Mildmay



Paisley



- Within the Municipality of Brockton, Walkerton is the focus. Walkerton's downtown is one of the largest in the County, with numerous historic buildings that range in size from one to three storeys. The streetscaping is in good condition, and includes a full suite of pavers, planters and other street furnishings. This full service downtown contains numerous retail stores, restaurants and commercial offices to serve residents and tourists. Vacancy appears to be very low within the downtown, creating a vibrant and lively destination with an air of long-term success.
- Within the Municipality of South Bruce, both Mildmay and Teeswater were visited. Mildmay's downtown is small in scale, with a mix of services and restaurants. Retail is limited, with no chain stores present. Mildmay's *streetscape* is in fair condition, with pavers, lights and trees lining the



sidewalks. Vacancy within Mildmay's downtown is estimated at about 25%, suggesting that the area is struggling to attract and retain commercial tenants.

- Teeswater's historic downtown is highly attractive, having retained the historic brick buildings and facades along its main street. The addition of decorative lighting and planters has further contributed to its attractive *streetscape* condition. Retail is limited within the downtown, with few shops available, and the vacancy rate appears to be high, indicating that the downtown, like Mildmay, is struggling to attract and retain commercial tenants.
- The Church of the Immaculate Conceptions overlooks the river valley in Formosa, a small hamlet in South Bruce with a post office, general store, restaurant, potter, and auto body shop. The Formosa Springs Brewery once held great potential but is closed under new ownership.
- Within the Township of Huron-Kinloss both Lucknow and Ripley were visited. Lucknow's downtown is small, with an eclectic collection of buildings that has resulted in an inconsistent street wall. Lucknow's downtown clearly acts as a rural service centre, providing services to local residents. Ripley's downtown is also very small and offers fewer shops and services than Lucknow.
- Within the Municipality of Arran-Elderslie both Tara and Paisley were visited. Tara's downtown is very small, with the retail mix providing local services to residents. Paisley's downtown, on the other hand, located at the confluence of the Saugeen and Teeswater rivers, has a main street with one to three storey historic buildings. The retail mix caters to residents and tourists alike, with a mix of local services, coffee shops and antique stores. Vacancy in Paisley is estimated at around 20%, indicating that this downtown may be struggling somewhat to retain tenants.

Lakeshore Hub

Lake Huron Waterfront Communities serve the local full-time population and support a substantial tourist and recreational population, particularly in the summer months.



Kincardine



Port Elgin



Southampton

- Within the Municipality of Kincardine, the community of Kincardine has a substantial historic main street that appears to be highly successful, with the facades of the buildings in excellent condition, creating a consistent street wall. Streetscape improvements such as planters and lighting as well as public art pieces all contribute to an attractive environment, and vacancy appears to be less than approximately 10%. Numerous restaurants, as well as offices and retail shops are located within the downtown, indicating that it is a destination for both residents and tourists.



- Within the Town of Saugeen Shores both Port Elgin and Southampton were visited. Port Elgin's downtown is large, with a variety of building types and heights, ranging from one to three storey buildings, some of which are historic and some that have been built in the last 25 to 30 years. Port Elgin's downtown is bookended by large format retail but continues to have a vibrant feel, containing a mix of local retail and restaurants. Vacancy appears to be below 10%. Port Elgin's downtown appears to be functioning well, although it does not have the consistent street wall and inventory of historic buildings that characterize the other downtowns of similar scale.
- Southampton's downtown is located by the lakeshore, with an extra wide main street which allows for angled parking. The downtown is modest in scale, contributing to the historic and small town feel of the downtown. Both the *streetscape* and buildings are in excellent condition, and a consistent street wall is maintained. Vacancy appears to be extremely low, and there are numerous retail stores, restaurants, and services. Unlike Kincardine's and Port Elgin's main streets, the Southampton main street is perpendicular to the Lake Huron shoreline, providing a beautiful view to the waterfront.
- Within the Town of South Bruce Peninsula, Sauble Beach was visited. Sauble Beach's downtown appears to cater almost exclusively to tourists who arrive in the summer months to take advantage of the area's beautiful beaches - it is all about the beach! The downtown lacks a diversity of services and shops, and its buildings are low scale and appear to require some general improvement. Further, improvements to the *streetscape* have been minimal, and there is no consistent street wall for the majority of the downtown. Sauble Beach lacks historic buildings that are prevalent throughout the rest of the County's downtowns.

Peninsula Hub

Upper Bruce Communities are set in a more rugged landscape. Key communities are generally located along the Georgian Bay shoreline. This part of Bruce County is focused on the Bruce Peninsula National Park, Cabot Head Provincial Nature Reserve, and the Johnston Harbour/Pine Tree Point Provincial Park.

Wiarton



Tobermory



Lion's Head



- Within the Town of South Bruce Peninsula, Wiarton was visited. Wiarton's downtown has many of the features found on main streets throughout Ontario and Bruce County, such as historic buildings that range in size from one to three storeys and create a consistent street wall. Most businesses in Wiarton are all local, with limited chain retail stores or chain restaurants. While there was a significant road construction project underway along Wiarton's main street, it was considered an



attractive, small scale and historic main street. Streetscaping had been carried out with sidewalk improvements and decorative lighting. Vacancy did not appear to be a major problem.

- Within the Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula, Tobermory and Lion's Head were visited. Tobermory, the most northern community in Bruce County, is the southern terminus for the ferry service to Manitoulin Island, and primarily serves as a harbour focused tourist centre in the summer months, with restaurants, shops, and services, including a presence of artisan-based shops, catering to the travelling public. Unlike all of the other downtowns, Tobermory has been built based on the topography of the area, rather than with a traditional main street, which creates an interesting and eclectic built form.
- Lion's Head is a small service centre, with little *streetscape* improvements made, and small-scale businesses. Built form is eclectic and low scale. Some businesses are within house form buildings. Unlike Tobermory, which is focused on the harbour function, the Lion's Head downtown is set well back from the water's edge.

Observations and Opportunities

It appears that both the Walkerton and Kincardine downtowns are excellent examples of successful Ontario historic main streets. Both have good building stock that creates a desirable street wall, and both have completed comprehensive *streetscape* improvement projects. They are also of a scale that is large enough to ensure multiple locational opportunities for a full array of downtown style restaurants, retail and service commercial uses, and office space.

In the Walkerton and Kincardine downtowns there appears to be significant opportunity to enhance the resident populations - both within upper storeys of existing buildings, and with historically compatible infill development. Community improvement within Walkerton and Kincardine should remain focused on traditional facade improvement programs and ongoing *streetscape* investments, but the County may wish to consider, in collaboration with its municipal partners, a community improvement program that incentivizes the creation of new residential dwelling units, either above grade in existing historic buildings and/or within new historically compatible buildings within these defined downtown areas. Additional municipal investment in parking infrastructure and/or transportation connections should also be considered.

The Port Elgin downtown is more eclectic in terms of built form and history. While some historic building elements remain, there are substantial gaps in the street wall - both horizontally and vertically, that will be difficult to repair over time. Continued support for streetscape investments and façade improvement for the remaining historic building stock may be warranted.

After the "Big 3" community improvement should remain focused on traditional facade improvement programs and ongoing *streetscape* investments. All these smaller downtowns need to enhance their role as regional destinations, as well as local service centres.

As noted previously, the impacts of a greater proliferation of on-line shopping brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, will undoubtedly have an impact on all of Bruce County's downtowns. While there is no agreement among retail commercial experts on what the extent of the impacts on "bricks and mortar" retail commercial facilities, there is a general understanding that "experiential retail environments" may suffer less than both the plaza developments of the 50s through the 80s, and the newer and larger format retail centres. "Experiential" retail is all about the character of the location, and the mixture of retail and service commercial, restaurant and other supporting uses that locate



together. A beautiful place with a good mixture of commercial, recreational, and cultural land uses creates an interesting and enjoyable place to visit - an experience, not just a functional shopping trip. Many of the downtowns found throughout Bruce County either already have, or can, create an “experiential” environment that is supportive of ongoing, and sustainable commercial success, which is in line with the current program.

What We Heard

To further supplement our findings from the physical tour around Bruce County, and to get a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing local municipalities, key informant interviews were completed with all eight lower-tier municipalities. These interviews allowed municipalities to share their thoughts, recommendations and experiences with their local CIPs and the Spruce the Bruce (STB) program. Below is a summary of what was heard during these interviews.

Demographic Challenges

- A key challenge that was heard throughout all the interviews was the difficulty in attracting and retaining both skilled and unskilled workers. The respondents believe this is due in part to the lack of *affordable housing* in the County, as well as the fact that other employers or industries looking for skilled workers often cannot compete with the wages and benefits offered by Bruce Power.
- Another challenge affecting the County is the aging population. People are aging out of the workforce, and there are not enough people to replace them. Numerous housing developments are being built that are aimed at the senior’s population, but there is concern that there will be difficulty staffing these facilities.
- Youth out-migration is a major challenge as those aged 15 to 24 leave to attend post-secondary institutions, according to the Bruce County Workforce Development & Attraction Strategy 2021-2025. The Strategy targets Millennials and Youth for attraction efforts, specifically recommending outreach to Ontario post-secondary institutions for co-op opportunities with Bruce County’s local employers.

Economic Challenges

- Some municipalities have numerous vacant commercial properties within their Downtowns that are in poor condition and not move-in ready. Finding tenants for these buildings can be difficult, according to municipal EDOs, especially when there are few programs in place that can help offset the cost of renovations.
- The seasonality of some community’s economies is cause for concern, with places being too busy in the summer and completely dead during the winter months.

Housing Challenges

- There is a lack of attainable and *affordable housing* in Bruce County, with the cost of purchasing a house increasing by more than 30% this year.
- There is a lack of rental housing, with extremely low vacancy rates.
- In some parts of the County homes are rented out as short-term accommodation throughout the summer, removing needed supply from the rental market.

Transportation Challenges



- There is no public transportation system within Bruce County, making it difficult for those who do not have access to a vehicle to move around the County.
- The lack of public transportation has also been noted as a challenge in attracting unskilled workers who may not be able to afford a personal vehicle and may rely on public transportation to get to and from their job.
- The lack of public transit is also a concern for the aging population, who may be unable to drive.

Business to Bruce

- Investment attraction and business recruitment need to be developed into functioning programs.
- Lack of understanding of what Business to Bruce is, what the program is does, what is involved.
- There are no metrics to it, or how they are measuring success - not shared or explained well.
- Concern that any positive outcomes relate solely to Bruce Power.
- Webinars provided are great.

Spruce the Bruce

Positive Support for Program

- Overall, STB is seen as a good program that has provided businesses and municipalities with funding for projects that have contributed positively to both the business and the community.
- There is strong support for maintaining the program, as well as for expanding it geographically and financially.

Areas of Applicability

- The STB program only applies to CIP areas, and CIP areas are typically restricted to certain commercial areas. Businesses that are outside of these CIP areas are not eligible for STB or CIP funding. This has been a challenge for some municipalities and businesses who would benefit from receiving grants through the STB program.
- STB is also seen as being too exclusive, and only applies to communities that the County thinks have the capacity, resulting in areas that need funding the most not getting any.

Signage Program

- STB only funds perpendicular signage, which is a challenge for some businesses where implementing a perpendicular sign is not feasible due to the design of the storefront and would prefer to implement a sign that is flush to the façade. STB supports perpendicular signs because they are easily seen by pedestrians as they are walking down the street. Flush signs are supported if they are part of the Façade Improvement and Patio Grant.

Communications and Reporting

- The report cards are viewed as an administrative hassle and it was suggested that municipalities should only have to submit one report card for the whole municipality rather than for each community.
- It was suggested that the County consider developing a graphic brochure or report that highlights some best practices from the program, or past projects that had been funded that year. This report could include testimonials from program participants.



- It was suggested that the County undertake a survey each year of the businesses who received funding to ask them follow-up questions to see if their business has been positively impacted by the grant i.e. more foot traffic, higher sales.
- There needs to be better communication between the County and municipalities on who has received funding. Many municipalities are unaware that grants have been provided until they see business improvements. This can result in businesses receiving grants from both the municipality and the County, which can be an issue when municipal funding is limited.

Expanding Spruce the Bruce

- Many municipalities believe that the STB program could be expanded to address more current issues facing municipalities, such as interior renovations, housing development incentives, AODA compliance, marketing material development, brownfield and/or derelict property redevelopment, and destination development opportunities.
- Some municipalities would also like their communities to be included within the STB program, feel that the County requirements are too onerous and hurting local businesses.
- The approach taken by the County during COVID-19, where any business regardless of location is eligible for funding has been lauded by municipalities and some would like to see a similar model adopted post COVID-19.

Toolkits and Branding

- Some of the municipalities that have been part of STB since its inception feel that community branding within the toolkits have run their course and are no longer relevant to their community.
- Other communities that are newer to the program really value the tool-kits and would like more support in developing them for their communities.

Community Improvement Plans (CIPs)

- Many of the tools in local municipalities' CIPs have been created by policy but have not be enabled by budget allocations.
- Several municipalities are in the process, have recently completed or are planning to update their CIPs. These updates include the expansion of the CIP area and new grants are in place or are being explored to address the issues that these communities are facing, and that STB is not addressing i.e. housing development, interior renovations, flush signage, AODA compliance, incentivizing new business, heritage preservation, new tourist accommodations.



Reflections and Recommendations

The Spruce the Bruce Program has been highly successful, and has resulted in positive, visible impacts for local municipalities. There is strong support for the program to be maintained, modified, and potentially expanded to address new and emerging issues that did not exist when the program began over ten years ago.

Community improvement is an inherently complex process, carried out over many years by many actors, both public and private. Experience in other jurisdictions, however, suggests that sustaining a prosperous future requires municipalities to collaborate and lead the way. The private sector will respond only when a clear level of commitment is demonstrated by the public sector.

While the County can be a major contributor, the achievement of sustainable prosperity is a shared responsibility. Municipal governments, Business Improvement Areas, Chambers of Commerce, local business owners, and property owners must all work together to ensure that County-sponsored initiatives result in an appropriate response from all the community stakeholders.

Public sector investment in streetscape improvements, public spaces, and the building or improvement of public buildings and facilities sends an important message of commitment to the business community and development industry. Strong political will and supportive administration are also important in providing clear direction, and in supporting the environment for change. It is crucial to plan for ongoing and long-lasting public-sector improvements that reinforce the collective healthy community development vision. Improvements to public sector assets can be a catalyst for private-sector investment. The Bruce County Official Plan supported by Spruce the Bruce has the potential to set a long-term direction that will span multiple council terms.

Reducing the risk of private-sector development initiatives is necessary because the development industry is typically conservative and averse to risk. The public sector needs to promote and champion private-sector development that achieves the collective healthy community development vision. The private sector must understand Bruce County's direction and be confident that their investment ideas and projects – when in conformity with the County and municipal objectives and policy frameworks – can and will be approved quickly. To reduce risk for the private sector, Bruce County must collaborate with its municipal partners to fund new incentive programs that may be outside of the program's original mandate, such as new private-sector incentives targeted at diverse affordable/attainable housing types, structural renovations, value-added on-farm agricultural uses, tourist accommodation, landscaping, farm stays, social enterprises, and selected business uses outside of downtown cores.

Reducing the cost of private redevelopment and reuse of existing buildings is required because in many instances, existing planning policy makes redevelopment/reuse costly. Wherever feasible, using tools and incentives to reduce the cost to the private sector when they redevelop or reuse existing buildings in accordance with the key directions for each municipality can be enormously beneficial, especially when desired outcomes are more complex or provide a higher benefit than what is typically provided. Incentive programs at the local level will play a crucial role in achieving this objective, by providing clear incentives for redevelopment and reuse that meet established criteria. However, it is important to note that some strategies for reducing costs can also be implemented without the use of a CIP. For example, key cost factors related to parking standards, parkland dedication requirements, development charges, and application fees need to be looked at to ensure that they, individually or cumulatively, are not a significant barrier to appropriate redevelopment or reuse activity.



Recommendation 1: Gather Intelligence

- **Action 1A:** Activate a robust County-wide business outreach program, in collaboration with municipalities, that is personalized and targeted, aimed at gathering relevant and timely intelligence about proposed construction activity well in advance of the approvals, in order to facilitate expansions and investment plans.
- **Action 1B:** Set specific goals for outreach and engagement, particularly with top employers or high-growth sectors and influencers within key local industries, recording and reporting on levels of business satisfaction.

Recommendation 2: Modernize Policy

- **Action 2A:** Ensure that the healthy community vision and supportive planning policy frameworks are fully articulated in County and local Official Plans, including capacity to enlarge the scope of potential Community Improvement Plan incentives across geography and economic sectors, as well monitoring policies as an approach for measuring success.
- **Action 2B:** Ensure County and local Official Plans, Zoning By-laws, design standards or guidelines, and other policies and regulations are updated to facilitate innovative investment opportunities like temporary uses and pop-up activities, outdoor restaurant facilities, festivals, artisan studios, maker spaces, small-scale breweries and distilleries, farm experiences, monetized sustainable tourism experiences, and other desired mixes of uses and forms of development.
- **Action 2C:** Encourage 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, cultural, administrative land uses, as well as for intensified forms of mixed-use residential development.
- **Action 2D:** Support municipalities to update their Community Improvement Plan objectives, incentives, policies, and procedures, and encourage alignment of documentation and processes across the County.
- **Action 2E:** Encourage municipalities to change their local Zoning By-laws to permit additional uses as-of-right, to reduce the time and risk of the planning approvals process by limiting application review, processing, and public consultation processes, and to encourage uses associated with the ‘new economy’, (e.g., on-farm malting facilities, value-added meat production, agricultural experiences, protein processing, etc.).

Recommendation 3: Expand Financial Incentives

- **Action 3A:** Expand the Spruce the Bruce Community Improvement Program to create an “Industry Stream”, to include a deeper toolbox of incentives and instruments to support all communities outside of the program's original mandate, such as new private-sector incentives targeted at diverse affordable housing types, brownfield remediation, on-farm experiences, tourist accommodation, breweries and distilleries, social enterprises, environmental protection, and selected industrial and commercial uses outside of downtown cores.
- **Action 3B:** Assist with funding the facilitation or development of rebranding initiatives for municipalities and communities, for updated community design toolkits.



- **Action 3C:** Develop criteria for priority projects and uses that benefit from waived or reduced application fees, development charges, or taxes to incentivize preferred types of development within target areas.

Recommendation 4: Double-down on Collaboration

- **Action 4A:** Establish a Joint County/Municipal Community/Business Incentive Process Task Team with a short-term mandate to streamline the Community Improvement Plans and Spruce the Bruce program into a clear, easy-to-communicate joint initiative; communicate intelligence across municipal boundaries, and brainstorm on tactics acknowledging that not all communities are at the same stages of development; discuss program changes or enhancements; streamline program delivery and performance metrics; and define and measure success. The Task Team would involve Bruce County and all municipalities (including Planning and Economic Development staff, and colleagues from other departments where appropriate) with the assistance of the Municipal Innovation Council.
- **Action 4B:** Continue to fund the Spruce the Bruce Community Improvement Program, linked with locally activated Community Improvement Plans, through the existing “Community Stream”.
- **Action 4C:** Identify and prioritize public realm improvements (streetscapes, parks, community facilities) within all the local downtowns and coordinate improvement opportunities with local municipalities.
- **Action 4D:** Continue to seek opportunities to partner with local stakeholders (BIAs, Chambers of Commerce, community organizations, local business operators, and property owners) to share the costs and responsibility for enhanced maintenance of the public realm, as well as other initiatives to activate and energize each individual community.
- **Action 4E:** Expand the Spruce the Bruce program by designating a share of the budget for businesses located within CIP boundaries in communities that have not completed the organizational capacity assessment phase.
- **Action 4F:** Develop a work plan to assist all communities successfully complete the organizational capacity assessment phase of the Spruce the Bruce program.
- **Action 4G:** Consider any municipality’s wish to revisit branding and slogans to ensure community design toolkits resonate with residents, businesses, and community groups.
- **Action 4H:** Develop and implement a clear, results-oriented Investment Attraction Strategy for Bruce County, in collaboration with municipalities, outlining specific target sectors and geography, with tangible marketing tactics and performance metrics to measure outcomes.

Recommendation 5: Fix Bottlenecks

- **Action 5A:** Run a regular series of tabletop exercises focused on identifying bottlenecks in the development process, involving all government agencies and departments: County, municipalities, Planning, Engineering, Public Works, Conservation Authority, Building, utilities, and other agencies, to ensure the private sector is not at risk of encountering unexpected delays, and to align with Bruce County’s LEAN continuous improvement culture. (Facilitated as part of Action 4A.)
- **Action 5B:** Revise policies and standards and remove or modify cumbersome definitions and criteria that result in cost barriers, wasted time, or inconvenience which would impede a developer’s plans for appropriate redevelopment or reuse opportunities. (Facilitated as part of Action 4A.)



- **Action 5C:** Provide clear, simple, low-cost mechanisms (e.g., fee rebates, lowered or no fees, etc.) for accessing exceptions to obstacles for redevelopment or reuse opportunities that meet the healthy community development initiatives, where policies and standards may not be removed or modified. (Facilitated as part of Action 4A.)

Recommendation 6: Communicate and Measure

- **Action 6A:** Undertake a survey each year of the businesses who received funding to understand and quantify how their business was positively impacted by the grant i.e. more foot traffic, higher sales, incorporating implementation and reporting into ongoing business outreach, and to better understand the economic impact of the grant program.
- **Action 6B:** Communicate successes and obstacles associated with Spruce the Bruce and the CIPs, as encountered by the private-sector development community, gathered through grant-recipient surveys or general business outreach, to facilitate improvements to programs, and prove their worth.
- **Action 6C:** Explore alternatives to the municipal report card system, with input from the municipalities.
- **Action 6D:** Report sources of funding for Spruce the Bruce, in terms of financial support by the County, by each of the municipalities, and by non-profit community groups, including metrics and evidence that directly attributes the aims of Spruce the Bruce programs to increases in the attraction of investment, settlement of newcomers or workforce participation; and modify reporting of the Spruce the Bruce program to separate funding of public-realm improvements from funding for incentives of private-property upgrades.
- **Action 6E:** Develop highly visual print and digital media tactics highlighting projects that have utilized Spruce the Bruce funding and include testimonials from business owners and other valuable information gathered in the annual survey of participating businesses.
- **Action 6F:** Review metrics, incorporate performance indicators into analysis, and recalibrate reporting efforts for Spruce the Bruce to ensure long-term political support for financial and human resources.

Next Steps

The Spruce the Bruce Community Program Review is intended to provide insights about the development, operation, evolution, and potential modification of a successful program involving many moving parts and players.

If it has been determined by Bruce County through the findings in this review that an updated CIP is required, additional tasks will be undertaken with an extended timeline, as outlined in Phase 3: Community Improvement Plan (CIP) by The Planning Partnership.

The scope of work would include further research and review, proposed policy direction and incentive programs, draft and final Community Improvement Plan, and presentation to Council.



Appendix

Definitions

Affordable Housing: In the case of ownership housing, the least expensive of:

- housing for which the purchase price results in annual accommodation costs which do not exceed 30 percent of gross annual household income for low and moderate income households; or
- housing for which the purchase price is at least 10 percent below the average purchase price of a resale unit in the regional market area;
- In the case of rental housing, the least expensive of:
 - 1. a unit for which the rent does not exceed 30 percent of gross annual household income for low and moderate income households; or
 - 2. a unit for which the rent is at or below the average market rent

Public realm: the publicly owned places and spaces that belong to and are accessible by everyone. These can include municipal streets, lanes, squares, plazas, sidewalks, trails, parks, open spaces, waterfronts, public transit systems, conservation areas, and civic buildings and institutions.

References and Resources

Bruce County Economic Task Force, Faces of Resilience brochure

<https://brucecounty.on.ca/sites/default/files/file-upload/business/Bruce%20County%20Faces%20of%20Resilience%20-%20Final.pdf>

Theories of Community Improvement

Main Street America

<https://www.mainstreet.org/home>

North Central Regional Centre for Rural Development

<https://ncrcrd.ag.purdue.edu/>

OMAFRA Downtown Revitalization Program

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/downtown-revitalization-program>

Project for Public Spaces

<https://www.pps.org/>

SaveYour.Town

<https://saveyour.town/>

Tactical Urbanist's Guide

<http://tacticalurbanismguide.com/>



Community Improvement Plan Examples

Municipality of Central Manitoulin Community Improvement Plan

<http://www.centralmanitoulin.ca/manitoulin-business/community-improvement-plan>

Haldimand County Rural Business and Tourism Community Improvement Plan

<https://www.haldimandcounty.ca/business/rural-business-tourism-community-improvement-plan/>

Town of Halton Hills Community Improvement Plan

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/business/community-improvement-program.aspx>

Halton Region Agriculture Community Development Fund

<https://www.halton.ca/For-Business/Agriculture-and-Environment/Agriculture-Community-Development-Fund>

City of Kawartha Lakes' Green Hub Community Improvement Plan

<https://pub-kawarthalakes.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=17942>

Norfolk County Community Improvement Plan

<https://www.norfolkbusiness.ca/business-incentives/>

City of Sarnia Community Improvement Plan

<https://www.speakupsarnia.ca/community-improvement-plan>

County of Wellington InvestWell Community Improvement Programme

https://www.wellington.ca/en/business/resources/2016EcDev/MeansBusiness/Invest-Well-CIP_Final_JUN_1.pdf

Brownfield Information

Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks - Records of site condition and transition notices

<https://www.lrcsde.lrc.gov.on.ca/besrWebPublic/generalSearch>



MDDB
INSIGHT