



Southwold Economic Development Committee

Agenda

Thursday, January 4th, 2024 at 8:00 am
Township Council Chambers – Municipal Office Fingal

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Approval of the November 9th, 2023 Minutes
4. Development and Infrastructure Updates
5. Rural Economic Development Funding
6. Commercial Plaza Tour Feedback
7. Municipal Auction/Market Planning
8. Township Highway 401 Signage Opportunity
9. 2024 Budget Development
10. Update from County on Business Retention and Expansion Program
11. Redevelop of County Economic Development and Tourism Websites/2024 Total Eclipse
12. St. Thomas & District Chamber of Commerce Luncheon with the Mayors
13. New and Other Business:
14. Next meeting date, time and location
15. Adjourn



Southwold Economic Development Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday November 9th, 2023 at 8:00 am
Council Chambers/Webex Meeting

Voting Members

Present: Deputy Mayor Justin Pennings
Councillor John Adzija
Steve Bushell
Michelle Hoffsuemmer

Absent: Hiba Arabi
Grayden Laing
Barry Harrison

Staff/Resource: Lisa Higgs CAO/Clerk
Aaron Van Oorspronk, Director of Infrastructure and Development
Carolyn Krahn, Manager of Economic Development and Strategic Initiatives
Rod Rattray, Elgin Business Resource Centre

1. Call to order

Deputy Mayor Pennings called the meeting to order at 8:05 am.

2. Approval of Agenda

The Committee approved the agenda for the November 9th meeting.

3. Approval of the October 5th Minutes

The Committee approved the minutes as drafted from the October 5th, 2023 meeting.

4. Draft Investment Readiness Marketing Material for Key Sites.

The Committee received an update from staff on the progress of the development of readiness marketing material. It was shared by staff that there are now a handful of key industrial site marketing materials developed and also a

few smaller, commercial properties under development.

The Committee was also advised that County legal is working on memorandums of understanding to be endorsed by the land owners, authorizing the municipality and County to actively market the properties. There is also the option of possibly joining forces to market multiple properties as another mega site.

5. Development Updates on Sanitary Services – Update for Talbotville and Shedden/Fingal

Director Aaron Van Oorspronk provided an update to the committee on the status of developments in Shedden/Fingal (working on sanitary servicing via either a second independent plant or servicing to Central Elgin Plan) and Talbotville (EA Amendment underway and Talbotville Meadows Phase 2 being approved shortly).

6. Elgin County Update on Launch of Business Retention and Expansion Program

Carolyn Krahn provided an update on the launch of the BR&E program currently under launch at Elgin County. She shared the marketing efforts of the team responsible for BR & E and the plan for meeting with local businesses to hear about their needs.

7. GIS/Asset Management Program – Business Needs on Mapping?

Township staff provided an update on the introduction of a GIS/Asset Management Coordinator. Staff remain open to feedback from the committee and local business community as to publicly available layers that would help with business development and planning.

8. Elgincentives Program Discussion & Feedback

The Committee discussed the Elgincentives program which includes many different granting programs. Committee members agreed that the perception in the community is that the program seems to be geared toward businesses “looking better” vs “operating better” and a program improvement could be to find ways that businesses be rewarded for investments that improve efficiencies.

9. Shedden Commercial Plaza – Scheduling Tour of the building and updates

A tour of the commercial plaza was scheduled for November 30th at 8:00 am.

10. 2024 Budget Development

The 2024 Township budget is under development; staff encouraged the EDC to make any requests for budget allocation for the committee as soon possible, so it can be included.

11. Success Stories for Southwold Social Media

The committee recommended that the following local businesses may be good to

feature on our social media, to celebrate their local success:

- Mike's County Grocer
- New Pharmacy in Shedden
- The Streeterly
- Made with Love Catering

12. New and Other Business

The Committee discussed the idea of hosting an event to auction off Municipal assets that otherwise are disposed of; for example, Hamlet signage being replaced with new branding, old pieces of equipment, office furniture, etc. It was suggested that this be done in conjunction with either the Tractor Pull or Rosy Rhubarb.

The Committee also requested that the Zoning By-Law Amendment and Official Plan Application to permit alternative accommodations remain on the agenda moving forward so there are updates brought to the Committee.

13. Next Meeting date, time and location

The next meeting will be held on Thursday January 4th, 2024 at 8:00 a.m. in the Council Chambers in Fingal.

14. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:04 am.

Chairperson, Justin Pennings

Staff Resource, Lisa Higgs



TOWNSHIP OF SOUTHWOLD

Report to Economic Development Committee

MEETING DATE: January 4, 2024

PREPARED BY: Aaron Van Oorspronk

REPORT NO:

SUBJECT MATTER: Rural Economic Development Funding

Recommendation(s):

THAT the committee provide project recommendations for a funding application to the Rural Economic Development Program;

Purpose:

This report provides information regarding an available funding stream provided by the province known as the Rural Economic Development Program (RED).

Background:

Staff received a letter from the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs notifying rural municipalities of the new 2024 intake of funding applications for the Rural Economic Development Program (RED) and is attached to this report as Appendix A. Ontario's Rural Economic Development (RED) program provides cost-share funding to support activities that create strong rural communities in Ontario, and opens doors to rural economic development through:

- funding assistance to address barriers to economic development, better position rural communities to attract and retain jobs and investment, and enhance economic growth
- funding to build community capacity and support for economic development in Ontario's rural communities
- investments in rural communities to help diversify and grow local economies – making economic growth more inclusive so rural Ontario continues to share in the province's economic prosperity

More information on the RED can be found at ontario.ca/REDProgram

To quickly summarize there are two streams in which an eligible applicant can receive funding.

Economic Diversification and Competitiveness Stream

Economic diversification and competitiveness projects:

- remove barriers to business and job growth
- support investment attraction
- strengthen sector and regional partnerships
- diversify regional economies in rural Ontario

All costs for projects in this stream must be non-capital. **Funding up to 50 % and a maximum of \$150,000**

Strategic Economic Infrastructure Stream

This stream focuses on priority economic infrastructure projects that improve physical assets identified as strategically important to the community.

Enhancements would rehabilitate and renew the assets to preserve the unique character of a community and quality of life and enhance it for future generations.

The costs for projects in this stream must be minor capital costs. **Funding up to 30 % and a maximum of \$250,000**

More information on eligible programs and projects can be found at ontario.ca/REDProgram

Comment/Analysis:

Staff are seeking project recommendation(s) from the committee, for inclusion in a report to Council to authorize a formal application to the program. Generally based on the guidelines for eligible programs and projects Staff recommend an application seeking funding for the beautification of either the Shedden or Fingal Streetscapes. The requested improvements to the Fingal Streetscape were determined through a report to the committee and subsequent report to Council. However, if the funding has a timeframe that would eliminate the possibility of coordinating the improvements with the larger County reconstruction, the committee may want to look at beautification options for Shedden as a standalone project. Some possible improvements to the Shedden Streetscape include:

- new sidewalks with AODA compliance
- decorative boulevards
- decorative banners or street furniture

- tree plantings or planters

An additional option would be a partner application with the County and/or neighbouring municipalities on an application.

As always these are only recommendations based on Staff's opinion of the program, if the committee has alternative recommendations for a program or project that complies with the eligibility criteria, Staff would be happy to bring that forward to Council. Staff urge members to review the linked website to ensure any recommendations are eligible.

Financial Implications:

The financial impact on the Township is contingent upon the scale of the project or program under consideration. In the event of a successful application, securing additional funding becomes necessary, exceeding the initial 50 % allocation, up to a maximum of \$150,000 for a program and 30 % for a capital spend up to \$250,000. To cover the remaining financial requirements beyond the allocated percentages, the Township would need to explore alternative funding avenues, including but not limited to the Levy, Greenlane Trust Fund, or other potential funding sources.

**Respectfully Submitted by:
Aaron VanOorspronk, CET.
Director of Infrastructure and
Development Services
"Submitted electronically"**

Ministry of Agriculture,
Food and Rural Affairs

Office of the Minister

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December 18, 2023

Lisa Higgs
CAO/Clerk
Township of Southwold
cao@southwold.ca

Dear Ms. Higgs:

Our government is committed to supporting economic growth in rural communities and ensuring Ontario is open for business. The Rural Economic Development (RED) program is just one tool for communities to complete outcome-based projects that will have tangible benefits across the province. This aligns with our government's priorities to remove barriers to investment, open doors to rural economic development and create good jobs throughout Ontario.

To further our commitment to supporting rural communities, I am pleased to share with you that a new intake for the RED program will be opening in January 2024.

When the intake is open, we will be sharing additional information with you directly. You will also be able to find all program information, including how to apply, on my ministry's website at: ontario.ca/REDprogram.

If you have further questions at this time, you are welcome to contact the Agricultural Information Contact Centre at 1-877-424-1300 or ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca.

I encourage you to take advantage of this funding opportunity and submit an application for your economic development project when the intake is open. Together, we can ensure Ontario's communities thrive.

Please accept my best wishes.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Thompson
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Report to Economic Development Committee

MEETING DATE: January 15, 2024

PREPARED BY: Carolyn Krahn, Manager of Economic Development and Strategic Initiatives, County of Elgin

REPORT NO:

SUBJECT MATTER: Business Retention and Expansion Program Update

Introduction:

This report provides an update on the Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) program by Elgin County Economic Development. The BR&E program aims to strengthen the ties between local businesses and the community while fostering continued business growth within Elgin County. It is designed to gather vital business information through direct interactions, events, and comprehensive research. This information is then transformed into value-added services, programs, and policies to address both individual and collective business opportunities and challenges.

Program Overview:

The BR&E program conducts confidential interviews using a standardized survey to learn the unique needs of local businesses and support their success. The program offers participating businesses the following advantages:

1. **Share Insights:** Compilation of survey data to assess the health and needs of the local business landscape, aiding in crafting annual reports and action plans to better serve the business community while maintaining transparency without disclosing identifying information.
2. **Receive Support:** Immediate assistance for businesses facing operational challenges or contemplating significant changes.
3. **Unlock Resources:** Share federal, provincial, and local-level services and resources to support business operations.

Goals:

Short Term:

1. Strengthen relationships with existing businesses.
2. Address immediate concerns.
3. Collect vital business and market data.
4. Identify community strengths and weaknesses.
5. Develop and implement tailored action plans.

Longer Term:

1. Enhance the competitiveness of existing businesses.
2. Foster sustainable development and job creation.
3. Provide accessible and streamlined support.

Program Progress:

Promotional Activities (as of Dec. 13, 2023):

Date	Promotion
October	Introduced program to Councils
October 31	Website launched
November 1	Warden's email
November 2	Email to Resource Network
November 7	E-newsletter, social media
November 20	Email follow up
Ongoing	Postcards, newsletters, social media, events
January	Phone calls to businesses

Progress Summary (as of Dec. 13, 2023):

Municipality	# of businesses emailed	# of interviews completed	# of interviews scheduled
Aylmer	26	7	1
Bayham	26	4	1
Central Elgin	26	5	-
Dutton Dunwich	13	1	2
Malahide	17	3	1
Southwold	17	4	1

Municipality	# of businesses emailed	# of interviews completed	# of interviews scheduled
West Elgin	14	9	-
Total	136	34	6

Preliminary Observations:

- Scheduling and completing interviews have seen improvement due to follow-up emails and effective use of scheduling tools.
- Proposed additions to the survey questions have been suggested based on initial interviews.

Workshop Summary, December 13, 2023: The leadership team reconvened for a mid-point review of the BR&E program. Key discussions and outcomes included:

- Reviewing additional interview targets and performance measures.
- Recommendations for enhanced promotion and outreach strategies.
- Additional performance measures for program success and communication between businesses and municipalities.

Key Themes:

Several emergent themes from initial interviews:

- Challenges in affordable housing for employees.
- Workforce development issues.
- Limited local access to training and skills development.
- Marketing challenges for smaller businesses.
- Importance of community development to support the local workforce.
- Desire for increased communication with municipalities.
- Addressing red tape in the development approval process.
- Planning for business growth within the next five years.

While the interviews identified a number of challenges, the individuals participating in the interviews have also been positive about their relationship with the municipality and the County.

Encouraging Business Participation:

The leadership team recommended a number of additional strategies to generate awareness of the BR&E program with the business community in addition to those already underway:

- Making personal phone calls to interview targets.
- Developing social media messages that can be shared by the individual municipalities.
- Updating the BR&E post cards.
- Asking other economic development partners to promote the BR&E program including the Elgin Business Resource Centre, Small Business Enterprise Centre, St. Thomas & District Chamber of Commerce, Aylmer & Area Chamber of Commerce, etc.

Next Steps:

Continued interviews through to February 2024 with a focus on diverse industry representation. Subsequent steps include result analysis, action recommendations, and a final report presentation to County Council in the second quarter of 2024.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Carolyn Krahn, Manager of Economic Development & Strategic Initiatives, County of Elgin
“Submitted electronically”

Report to Economic Development Committee

MEETING DATE: January 15, 2024

PREPARED BY: Carolyn Krahn, Manager of Economic Development and Strategic Initiatives, County of Elgin

REPORT NO:

SUBJECT MATTER: Updating Elgin County's Websites and the 2024 Total Solar Eclipse

Elgin County Website Redevelopment:

Elgin County has received funding of up to \$50,000 from the Ontario government through the Rural Economic Development (RED) program. This grant will support the redevelopment of the County's main website, along with the Tourism and Economic Development websites. The project aims to prioritize accessibility, cybersecurity, and seamless program integration. The redevelopment will focus on the creation of a more user-friendly website that effectively showcases the region's assets and local business community, attracting investment, strengthening the local economy, and attracting tourists.

Elgin County has engaged Sandbox Software Solutions for the redevelopment of the websites. Currently, we're assessing the content of our Economic Development website (www.progressivebynature.com) and Tourism website (www.elgintourist.com). This involves a thorough review to identify necessary updates, irrelevant information, and missing content from both sites.

We value your input on what you would like to see on our new site. Your feedback on how to enhance user-friendliness is also appreciated. Are there specific pieces of information you are struggling to find on our current sites? Additionally, we welcome any suggestions on content that could better support local businesses, attract new investments, and promote local tourism. Your insights will greatly assist us in tailoring our websites to better serve the community.

2024 Total Eclipse:

On April 8, 2024, Elgin County and select areas in southern Ontario will experience a total solar eclipse. The last time such an event occurred in the province was back on February 26, 1979, in Northern Ontario, and the next one is not expected until 2099.

Ordinarily, people travel long distances to witness a total solar eclipse, but next year, residents will have the chance to see it right here in Elgin County.

Elgin County Tourism is working on a website (<https://www.elgincounty.ca/2024-total-solar-eclipse/>; password @Eclipse24!) to provide information for residents and tourists. While it is still a work in progress, we wanted to share our plans and invite your feedback.

We are mapping out public areas where both locals and visitors can view the eclipse and where they can park. Additionally, we will be informing local businesses to anticipate increased visitors on April 8th. For those operating seasonally, opening on that day might be beneficial.

Conversations with the Royal Astronomer's Society of Canada, London Centre, have led to plans for talks at our local libraries, helping residents prepare for the eclipse. Furthermore, we are developing a marketing campaign to attract visitors and to provide education on safe eclipse viewing for residents and tourists.

The website includes details on safely viewing the eclipse, what to expect during the event, and where to find eclipse viewers.

If you have any suggestions for the website or ideas on promoting the eclipse in Elgin, we would love to hear from you. Your input will contribute to making this event enjoyable and safe for everyone involved.

Respectfully Submitted by:

**Carolyn Krahn, Manager of Economic Development & Strategic Initiatives, County of Elgin
"Submitted electronically"**