



Southwold Economic Development Committee

Agenda

Thursday, March 21st, 2024 at 8:00 am
Township Council Chambers – Municipal Office Fingal

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Approval of the February 8th, 2024 Minutes
4. Development and Infrastructure Updates
 - a. Shedden and Fingal Wastewater Servicing Updates
 - b. Talbotville EA Addendum Completion & Next Steps
5. Elgin County Updates
 - a. BR & E Status Update
 - b. Solar Eclipse Planning
 - c. Elgin County Tourism Signage Program Update
6. Southwold Business Networking Event Planning
7. Items for Sale Strategy
8. Southwold's 175th Anniversary Planning - 2025
9. New and Other Business:
10. Next meeting date, time and location

11. Adjourn



Southwold Economic Development Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday February 8th, 2024 at 8:00 a.m.
Council Chambers/Webex Meeting

Voting Members

Present: Deputy Mayor Justin Pennings
Councillor John Adzija
Steve Bushell
Michelle Hoffsuemmer
Barry Harrison
Grayden Laing

Regrets: Rod Rattray, Elgin Business Resource Centre

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

1. Call to Order

Deputy Mayor Pennings called the meeting to order at 8:02 am.

2. Approval of Agenda

The Committee approved the agenda for the February 8th meeting.

3. Approval of the January 4th Minutes

The Committee approved the minutes as drafted from the January 4th, 2024 meeting.

4. Development and Infrastructure Updates

Director of Infrastructure and Development Aaron VanOorspronk spoke to the development initiatives currently underway in the municipality, including the recently approved and submitted draft plans of subdivision in Talbotville and North Port Stanley. Mr. VanOorspronk spoke briefly about the decision by Council to service Shedden and Fingal independent of Central Elgin and to the challenges in bringing on a new WWTP system, explaining the requirement to have minimum flows before operating the full system.

CAO/Clerk Lisa Higgs spoke to the efforts being made in Talbotville to engage with land owners of Industrially Zoned lands to move towards more industrial and commercial developments. Ms. Higgs also explained the recent efforts that are being made to advance utility availability in the community.

5. Grant Opportunity for Enabling Housing Infrastructure Fund

CAO/Clerk Lisa Higgs provided an update on a recently-announced municipal grant and the potential for significant funding being made available by the Province. Southwold is convinced that we have a very compelling application and are hopeful that we may be successful in the grant that provides 73 % of funding for the Shedden and Fingal sanitary servicing project.

6. Elgin County Update on Business Retention and Expansion Program

Elgin Manager of Economic Development Carolyn Krahn provided an update on the BR & E program that is conducting interviews until the end of February. Ms. Krahn indicated that Southwold had a strong participation rate and that County-wide they have conducted over 74 interviews.

7. Rural Equivalent of Chamber of Commerce

The Committee discussed the recent feedback from the BR&E interviews suggesting that rural business owners have indicated a preference for a more rural focused Chamber. There was a discussion on rolling it into the Chamber itself, as a sort of rural subgroup, but that past history has meant that rural events hosted by the Chamber are not as well attended. The committee decided that a good first event may be to have an EDC hosted event for Southwold businesses to serve as a networking event with various information pieces and access to various municipal staff. Carolyn Krahn indicated that Elgin County may be available to help provide a partnership in developing the event. Staff were tasked with initiating preliminary plans for the event and report back at a future meeting.

8. Municipal Auction/Market Planning – Inventory of Possible Items for Sale

The committee reviewed the inventory of items for sale, and agreed that there is not enough to hold a formal auction night. It was suggested that the office furniture be offered for sale (very cheap) at the Rosy Rhubarb festival. The Committee discussed various mechanisms to dispose of the gateway signage and

directed staff to bring a strategy back to the next meeting.

9. Highway 401 Signage Opportunity – Cost Estimates for Rental

CAO/Clerk Higgs updated that the signage rental opportunity along the 401 has been quoted at being \$10,000, which would be available to promote Southwold and many of the new developments in the community. At this time, the only thing required is a wrap to be installed on the billboard, which staff are requesting pricing on. A report will come at the next meeting with more details on costs.

10. 2024 Municipal Budget & Capital Projects Approved

CAO/Clerk Higgs provided a brief presentation of the various municipal capital projects approved as part of the 2024 budget and Director VanOorspronk provided a map with Southwold capital projects.

11. New and Other Business:

Carolyn Krahn indicated that planning for the 2024 Solar Eclipse is ongoing and the County is hosting an information session featuring the Royal Astronomy Society on February 21st at 3:30 pm.

The Committee acknowledged that 2025 will be Southwold’s 175th anniversary and the municipality may wish to start planning for recognizing the history.

12 Next Meeting date, time and location

March 21st, 2024 at 8:00 am in Council Chambers

4. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 am.

Chairperson, Justin Pennings

Staff Resource, Lisa Higgs



Report to County Council

From: Carolyn Krahn, Manager of Economic Development, Tourism & Strategic Initiatives

Date: February 27, 2024

Subject: Elgin County Tourism Signage Program Review

Recommendation(s):

THAT the Elgin County Tourism Signage Program be put on hold until a new Tourism Signage program has been developed;

THAT staff be directed to create a new Tourism Signage Program that aligns with Option #1; and

THAT the implementation of this program be considered during the 2025 Budget Deliberations.

Introduction:

Elgin County Tourism launched its Signage Program in 2010 to improve road signs across the County. The program has been successful, but the signs are now showing their age and require a significant investment to replace them. Before investing in new signage, staff have reviewed the program and would like to present three (3) options for the program's future:

- Option #1 suggests redesigning the signage environment to improve wayfinding.
- Option #2 proposes updating the signage policy to reduce administration and non-payment of fees.
- Option #3 considers discontinuing the program altogether.

Background and Discussion:

The Elgin County Tourism Signage Program was implemented to overhaul inconsistent, outdated, and damaged signage on County roads, including St. Thomas Elgin Tourism Association (STETA) and Tourism-Oriented Directional Signing (TODS) signs. After

extensive public consultation, County Council approved the Tourism Signage Policy in April 2010.

Figure 1: Elgin County Tourism Signage Example
An Elgin County tab heads the signs, which may include as many as three business tabs.

The program's key features included an annual user fee of \$200 per sign, with a \$50 discount for Elgin/St. Thomas Tourism members. Not-for-profit organizations could apply for grants to replace existing signs. A ten (10) year financial plan projected near breakeven for the program by 2019.

Elgin County Tourism updated the program in 2016 to address saturation issues and prioritize Elgin County businesses. Elgin Tourism membership was made mandatory for sign eligibility. Businesses outside of Elgin County were no longer eligible for new signage applications, except in exceptional circumstances.

A waiting list helped to manage saturation in popular locations, particularly in areas like Highbury Avenue and Sunset Drive. The updated policy also narrowed the focus to businesses "unique" to Elgin County, removing chain restaurants and stores.

The Elgin County Tourism Signage Program established guidelines for placing and managing directional signs on county roads, including:

- Prioritizing regulatory, warning, and information signs
- Acknowledgement that approved signs remain the property of the County
- Annual user fees
- Permission for sign placement expiring annually, with non-renewal leading to removal
- Reserving the right for the County to refuse or terminate permission
- Additional costs for changes to sign content or location

The program's success was evident in positive feedback from businesses, reporting increased revenues attributed to Elgin County Tourism Signage. Overall, the program has enhanced the County's brand, promoted local businesses, and attracted tourists, contributing to the economic development of Elgin County.

The signs have outlived their original ten (10) year lifespan and are now starting to show their age. Many of the signposts need to be replaced or reset. Some signs have also faded and need to be replaced. This project will require a significant financial investment and has prompted a detailed program review. Staff have considered sign replacement costs, administrative costs, program benefits, and alternative wayfinding strategies. Because the way people navigate has changed, staff have considered whether the program is still relevant today or whether there are better ways to connect visitors to our tourism destinations and local businesses.



By 2019, the signage program was expected to reach a near breakeven. The program did not achieve breakeven until 2024 – five (5) years after the anticipated breakeven date.

The administration of this program has been very time-consuming from a staff time perspective, and the administrative costs are not included in the breakeven calculation. Tourism operators are billed for their signs each year, and many of these bills go unpaid, requiring multiple follow-ups. Signs can be removed if businesses do not pay for their signage by the annual deadline. Removing signage involves a cost. We must hire someone to go out on location and remove the sign. Since the cost of the sign is distributed over a ten (10) year payment plan, if a business only pays for one (1) year and then stops, the County has to pay for the rest of the signage cost. Wanting to support our business community, we wait to remove signs. However, as of 2024, some operators have not paid for a few years. This approach creates inequity in the program for the tourism businesses that do pay annually.

Due to the insurance requirements, few contractors are willing to put up and take down the signs. As a result, the availability and cost of this service present some challenges for putting up and taking down signs in a timely manner. The popularity of the program presents a challenge with signage saturation. Based on human information processing models, if drivers observe too many of the same signs, they may no longer pay attention to those signs. In other words, having too many signs limits their effectiveness. Signage saturation can also result in distracted driving and can impact road safety.

To address these concerns and continue the success of the Signage Program, staff would like to present three (3) options.

Option #1

To enhance visitors' navigation within Elgin County and improve the overall wayfinding experience, the current "pay-to-play" tab system could be replaced with a new signage environment designed to create a sense of arrival for visitors, highlight key tourism assets, and avoid sign and message pollution. This approach would efficiently guide residents and tourists to downtown areas and prominent attractions strategically placed at key decision points within the County's road network. For example, signage near a beach would direct visitors from the beaches and marinas to other noteworthy features and areas, including the downtown districts, for shopping and dining experiences.

This approach would focus on placing signs throughout the region to avoid clutter while still effectively guiding visitors. Priority would be given to attractions with greater appeal to visitors, ensuring a streamlined and user-friendly wayfinding experience. Additionally, the program would prioritize and guide individuals to specific districts or population centers where multiple destinations are available.

In alignment with our commitment to effective wayfinding, selecting destinations and attractions would be a crucial aspect of this program. Only market-ready destinations would be included in the signage, ensuring visitors are directed to experiences such as

exploring retail districts, food districts, recreation and leisure areas, and visiting cultural sites and museums.

The examples below are included for illustration purposes only. If Council supports Option #1, staff will develop and present signage design options and finalize signage locations.



Figure 2: Wayfinding Signage Example

These highway signs promote specific tourism districts and highlight available tourism experiences.



Figure 3: Wayfinding Signage Example

These highway signs promote specific tourism districts and highlight available tourism experiences.



Figure 4: Wayfinding Signage Example

These highway signs identify the County at entry points and key tourism arrival points and promote the website as a place where visitors can get more information.



Figure 5: Wayfinding Signage Example

These highway signs identify the County at entry points and key tourism arrival points and promote the website as a place where visitors can get more information.

Option #2

Update the signage policy and require businesses to pay for five (5) years upfront before installing signage. This approach would reduce the program's administration and help avoid the non-payment of signage. Old signposts and structures would be replaced, and faded signs would also be replaced. The County tabs would be replaced with the new logo.

Option #3

Discontinue the signage program.

Financial Implications:

Option #1

Costs to install one new large "tourism area sign."

Sign	\$1,500 (dependent on sign dimensions and materials)
Install posts and hardware	\$1,000
Total approximately	\$2,500 each

Option #2

Currently, there are a total of 172 sign structures and 310 business sign tabs.

Replace header tabs on all structures	+/- \$ 50,000 (labour and materials)
Replace business sign tabs	+/- \$100,000 (labour and materials)
Replace existing sign posts	+/- \$ 43,000 (\$125 x 2 posts x 172 structures)
Total	+/- \$193,000

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Serving Elgin	Growing Elgin	Investing in Elgin
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring alignment of current programs and services with community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exploring different ways of addressing community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engaging with our community and other stakeholders.	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning for and facilitating commercial, industrial, residential, and agricultural growth. <input type="checkbox"/> Fostering a healthy environment. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Enhancing quality of place.	<input type="checkbox"/> Ensuring we have the necessary tools, resources, and infrastructure to deliver programs and services now and in the future. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Delivering mandated programs and services efficiently and effectively.

Local Municipal Partner Impact:

An updated Tourism Signage Program could help drive more visitors into our local municipalities' shopping and dining districts. We can also work with our local municipal partners to enhance the signage program.

Communication Requirements:

Any changes to the Tourism Signage Program will be shared with our local municipal partners and tourism operators.

Conclusion:

The Elgin County Tourism Signage Program aims to welcome and guide tourists to local attractions and services, thereby stimulating the local economy. It is important to note that the program is designed for visitors and not residents. The focus is on enhancing the wayfinding experience for tourists once they arrive in our communities.

Staff recommends further exploring Option #1. It aligns with the evolving trends in trip planning, creating a sense of arrival for visitors and strategically highlighting key tourism destinations. This option reduces signage clutter, minimizes confusion, and directs individuals to prominent areas such as downtown retail and dining districts. It is cost-effective, imposes no financial burden on individual businesses, and reduces administrative and maintenance efforts. Including our website on tourism signage will drive visitors to our site, showcasing local businesses and attractions at no cost to our tourism operators. Emphasizing pre-arrival engagement allows us to support the local business community and allocate staff time to work with tourism operators on destination development.

All of which is Respectfully Submitted

Approved for Submission

Carolyn Krahn
Manager of Economic Development,
Tourism & Strategic Initiatives

Blaine Parkin
Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk



TOWNSHIP OF SOUTHWOLD

Report to Economic Development Committee

MEETING DATE: March 21, 2024

PREPARED BY: Lisa Higgs, CAO/Clerk

REPORT NO: CAO EDC 2024-01

SUBJECT MATTER: Disposition of Southwold Signs on Former Branding

Recommendation(s):

That the Committee receive this report as information and provide direction on which option to pursue for disposing of surplus signage.

Purpose:

This report provides an update to the Committee on various options for disposing of formerly used entrance signs. There are 6 Gateway Entrance Signs available (that say "Southwold", 2 Fingal Signs and 1 Ferndale Park sign currently available.

Background:

The Township's re-branding initiative resulted in new entrance signage being installed in 2023 and significant interest from residents in purchasing the old signs. At their meeting in February, the Committee tasked the CAO/Clerk with providing a follow-up report with various options.

Comment:

Before proceeding with the sale of items via auction or other means, the Committee requested that staff investigate the Township's disposal By-Law and confirm that auction licensing is not required.

According to the Auctioneers Association of Ontario, in the province of Ontario – a person does not need a license to be an Auctioneer. The AAO recommend that anyone hosting an auction confirm with local business licensing departments to ensure that they do not require an auctioneer business license and are not required to pay any fees. The Township of Southwold does not have a business licensing By-Law so this requirement is not a hindrance to holding an auction.

A guiding principle of the Township's procurement policy By-Law is that the ultimate goal to encourage open competitive bidding for the acquisition and disposal of goods and services. Another relevant section of the procurement policy states that, "No

employee or elected official shall purchase surplus assets except by bidding on the same at public auction or by sealed bid.” Given that there is interest from both employees and elected officials on the signs, the most fair approach that is in compliance with the procurement policy and its goal to encourage competitive pricing is either via a sealed bid process or auction.

It was generally agreed by the Committee that the Township attempt to dispose of a small number of signs at first as trial and use this as a gauge on interest levels and then from this result determine whether to proceed with future disposition. Staff recommends that two signs be used for the first round of disposition: a Southwold main gateway sign and a Fingal village sign.

Option 1: Sealed Bid

This option would involve putting an advertisement out via various mechanisms (social media, water bill notices, website posting, etc.) with details of the signs (sizes, pictures, materials). Staff would create a generic bid form and request that sealed bids be received by a specific date. Upon the opening of the bids shortly after the close time, the highest bidder for each respective sign would win the sign and submit payment shortly thereafter. Failure to submit payment would result in the next highest bidder winning the bid. Tied bids would be determined by draw.

The advantages of the sealed bid option is that it is the easiest to administer and provides a very fair mechanism to solicit competitive bids. The possible downside of this option is that it only gives bidders one chance to submit a bid and does not always result in higher bids being submitted, since bids are only revealed at the end of the process.

Option 2: Public Auction

A second option would be for the municipality to conduct a public option, via a hybrid online/in-person bid submission process. Under this arrangement, staff would again recommend that there be a bid closing date and time announced and a form of silent auction being completed over a two week period. Bids would be accepted in person at the Township office, or via email to communications@southwold.ca or private message to our Facebook account. Upon receipt of a bid electronically, the communications clerk will confirm the bid amount and communicate the terms of their bid. At the end of every business day during the bidding period, the Township will post the highest bid received to the Facebook page for each respective sign. On the day of the bid closing, the clerk will update Facebook each hour and then every 15 minutes for the last hour of bidding. The highest submitted bid for each sign would be notified that they won and required to submit payment. Failure to submit payment would result in the next highest

bidder winning the bid. Tied bids would be determined by draw, but less likely in this scenario since bidders have a chance to continue bidding.

The advantage of the public auction is that it creates lots of opportunities for higher bids and lots of drama and excitement about the old signs (and therefore promotion of the new brand as well). The disadvantage is that it is a bit more work to administer and track all bids coming in and ensuring that all bids received are actually legitimate.

Financial Implications:

None.

**Respectfully Submitted by:
Lisa Higgs, CAO/Clerk
"Submitted electronically"**