

To: Mayor and Members of Woodstock Council

From: Eric Gilbert, Manager of Development Planning, Community Planning

Revised Woodstock Community Improvement Plan

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Planning staff and City staff have undertaken a review of the existing Downtown Community Improvement Plan and associated programs and have determined that it would be advantageous to develop a single CIP program area encompassing the entire City.
- Based on a review of existing CIP programs and programs offered by other municipalities throughout the Province staff recommend that the revised CIP offer a wider range of potential programs and incentives with a view to addressing the strategic objectives of City Council.
- It is recommended that City Council endorse and adopt the proposed CIP.

DISCUSSION

BACKGROUND

Community improvement planning is commonly used as a tool to provide assistance to municipalities to address challenges related to growth management, accessibility and development. It provides a means of planning and financing development activities that effectively assist in the redevelopment of lands, buildings and infrastructure through the implementation of various financial incentives.

The intent of a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is to outline the possible range of programs and incentives that may be offered by the City, to promote and encourage renewal and redevelopment within areas of the City that require investment. This Plan is intended to outline a broad range of possible programs and incentives, including eligibility and evaluation criteria for CIP applicants. The City is not obliged to implement all of the incentives outlined in this Plan and may discontinue or reduce funding for the incentives at any time. Further, City Council reserves the right to determine, at its sole discretion, the implementation schedule of the proposed financial incentives contained in this Plan.

Through a review of the City's existing Downtown CIP and a number of neighbouring municipalities' CIPs, City staff determined that a number of existing programs could be enhanced to increase their uptake, and new programs could be introduced. In identifying additional programs that would be viable in Woodstock, the intent is that these programs could be bundled in order to leverage additional private sector investments in the City.

It is important to note that there are a number of other incentives that the City/County offer with respect to promoting development that are outside of and in addition to, the various existing and

proposed CIP incentives. Development charges for projects in the Central Area are exempt from development charges. The relatively low fee charged for planning applications (when compared to other municipalities outside of Oxford), together with reduced parking requirements and cash-in-lieu of parking opportunities in the Central Area also assist to encourage development and redevelopment in the Central Area of the City.

Public / Agency Consultation

City staff and planning staff have circulated the draft CIP to a number of public agencies and bodies, including the Downtown Woodstock BIA, the Woodstock Chamber of Commerce, Oxford County Human Services and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Public notices were published in the Oxford Review and Woodstock-Ingersoll Echo for the statutory public meeting on February 17, 2026.

APPLICATION REVIEW

2024 PROVINCIAL PLANNING STATEMENT

The 2024 Provincial Planning Statement provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. The PPS establishes the policy foundation for regulating the development and use of land and supports the provincial goal to enhance the quality of life for the citizens of Ontario. The PPS is issued under Section 3 of the Planning Act, which requires that decisions affecting planning matters “shall be consistent with” policy statements issued under the Act.

The PPS provides high-level policy direction pertinent to community improvement areas, including intensification, redevelopment, mixed land uses and heritage preservation. In this regard, the PPS promotes:

- The achievement of complete communities by accommodating an appropriate range and mix of land uses, housing options, public service facilities, institutional uses (including childcare facilities), improving accessibility for people of all ages and abilities by addressing land use barriers which restrict their full participation in society (Section 2.1.6);
- Providing for an appropriate range and mix of housing options and densities by permitting and facilitating all housing options required to meet the social, health, economic and well-being requirements of current and future residents, and all types of residential intensification, including the development and redevelopment of underutilized commercial and institutional sites for residential use, development and introduction of new housing options within previously developed areas and redevelopment, which results in a net increase in residential units (Section 2.2.1);
- Land use patterns within settlement areas based on densities and mix of land uses which efficiently use land and resources, optimize existing and planned infrastructure and public service facilities. Planning authorities shall also support general intensification and redevelopment to support the achievement of complete communities, including by planning for a range and mix of housing options and prioritizing planning and investment in the necessary infrastructure and public service facilities (Section 2.3.1);
- Support a modern economy by promoting economic development and competitiveness by providing for an appropriate mix and range of employment, institutional and broader mixed uses to meet long-term needs, providing opportunities for a diversified economic base, including maintaining a range and choice of suitable sites for employment uses, identifying

strategic sites for investment and seeking to address potential barriers to investment (Section 2.8.1)

- Conservation of significant built heritage resources and significant cultural heritage landscapes (Section 4.6).

OXFORD COUNTY 10 YEAR SHELTER PLAN AND MASTER HOUSING STRATEGY

The County of Oxford adopted a 10-year Housing for All Plan in 2024 for the purpose of providing a vision of how housing services and supports should be delivered to meet the diverse needs of the community. The Housing for All Plan builds upon the previous 10-year Plan, while considering changing market conditions, housing/community needs and financial challenges. The Plan also considers varying strategies and actions to address critical needs across the housing continuum, including emergency shelters, transitional, social and supportive housing, market and affordable rental housing, and homeownership.

While the creation of affordable housing is central to the County's 10-Year Shelter Plan, the County also adopted a Master Housing Strategy in 2022, to provide a variety of strategies and initiatives to more specifically assist in addressing the current housing supply shortage. Of note, the Strategy included the consideration of incentives to further promote more affordable housing options throughout the County.

Following development of the Strategy, County Council further authorized staff to review the County CIP with the intent of formally exempting affordable housing projects from County planning application fees and encouraging Area Municipalities to consider similar incentives with respect to Affordable Housing.

OFFICIAL PLAN

CITY OF WOODSTOCK LAND USE POLICIES

Section 7 of the Official Plan contains land use policies applicable to the City of Woodstock that provide general policy direction and the long-range planning framework for development within the City. Within these policies are a number of strategic initiatives that are relevant in the development of a CIP, including:

- Facilitate small business opportunities by designating entrepreneurial districts within the Central Area which will permit the conversion of residences for offices and business services, personal services, cottage industry and similar types of uses while continuing to permit residential uses;
- Increase the residential population living within and in the vicinity of the Central Area through the creation of new accessory residential units within commercial, institutional, and industrial buildings and new medium and high density residential development;
- Maintain a Central Business District which provides opportunity for new retail commercial redevelopment while at the same time promoting compactness to support pedestrian use;
- Conserve and enhance the heritage resources of the Central Area including the administration of municipal programs to maintain and enhance heritage elements in the Central Area;
- Provide opportunities to develop the full range of housing required to meet the needs of Woodstock residents, including ownership and rental housing, affordable housing and specialized housing throughout the City;
- Increase the supply of affordable housing by integrating adequate housing for low- and

- moderate-income households and those with special needs through the City;
- Ensure that existing housing stock is conserved and renewed as an important element in meeting future housing needs by promoting the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing stock.

CULTURAL HERITAGE POLICIES

The Official Plan requires that significant built heritage resources and cultural heritage landscapes that are valued by the community be conserved. If the City identifies a property as having significant cultural heritage value or interest, it may initiate the process of designating the property by By-law under the Heritage Act. The City also has the power to designate Heritage Conservation Districts where the character of older neighbourhoods and areas of the City have significant heritage value such as the Central Area.

The proposed CIP supports these policies in the Official Plan by recognizing existing cultural heritage resources and promoting the designation of potentially significant properties within the Community Improvement Project Area and supporting the funding and completion of technical studies and design work to maintain and enhance cultural heritage resources.

TRANSPORTATION POLICIES

The goal of the City is to establish a coordinated transportation system that facilitates the safe and efficient movement of traffic within the City as well as external linkages in the regional setting.

Schedule “W-5” of the Official Plan identifies the road network within the City of Woodstock. These identified roads have various functions based on the capacity and their location within the City. The CIP should recognize the established road network and identify opportunities for improving the transportation network through off-street parking, infrastructure improvements and other initiatives deemed appropriate by the City. It is recognized that some roads within the City are under the jurisdiction of the County and any program would need approval and cooperation of the County.

CONTAMINATED SITES

Section 10.4.6 of the Official Plan provides that where a redevelopment proposal demonstrates a change in land use on a site where contaminants may be present, the County and/or City will require that environmental site assessment and site clean-up be undertaken as required in accordance with Section 3.3.3.2 of the Official Plan. The County and/or City may:

- Provide grants and/or loans to owners and tenants of properties to assist in clean-up and redevelopment of the lands or buildings to conform with the Community Improvement Plan;
- Cancel or not increase the municipal portion of the property tax on sites during the rehabilitation period;
- Cancel or not increase the education portion of the property tax on sites during the rehabilitation period with the approval of the Ministry of Finance.

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT POLICIES

Section 10.4 of the Official Plan also contains policies directly related to Community Improvement and designates land within the City of Woodstock as an area eligible for community improvement. The policies are intended to guide both private and public community improvement activities

within designated community improvement project areas and are premised on a number of goals, including:

- The upgrade and improvement of municipal hard services, social and recreational facilities and public utilities;
- The preservation and upgrade of older residential neighbourhoods and settlements;
- The strengthening of existing central areas;
- The improvement of existing industrial areas by encouraging further development and redevelopment;
- Consideration of participation in senior government funding assistance programs; and
- Encouraging the coordination of municipal, private and community organizations in promoting community improvement efforts.

In addition to a number of general criteria for the designation of community improvement areas, the Official Plan provides additional guidance for identifying residential, commercial and industrial improvement areas based on, among other matters, the structural integrity of building stock, lack of community facilities and, in the case of commercial improvement districts, those areas that are experiencing high vacancy rates, inadequate off-street parking and poor traffic circulation.

Implementation measures to achieve community improvement objectives include:

- Preparation and adoption of CIPs;
- Regulatory measures such as maintenance and occupancy by-laws and the designation of buildings and Heritage Conservation Districts under the Ontario Heritage Act;
- Utilizing public funding available from municipal, provincial and federal programs to assist in community improvement; and
- Land acquisition for the purposes of community improvement.

CITY OF WOODSTOCK CENTRAL AREA DESIGN STUDY

In 2010, the City of Woodstock and County of Oxford Community Planning Office initiated an update of the City's Downtown Urban Design Guidelines to replace the previous guidelines, which were adopted by the City in 1991. The new guidelines were developed with the goal of developing a new vision for Woodstock's Central Area in addition to the fact that the 1991 guidelines were considered to be dated. This study focused on the Central Business District and Entrepreneurial District, as defined in the Official Plan. The first step was to conduct an in-depth site analysis to examine the existing conditions downtown. The overall study considered issues such as main street character, circulation (driving, walking and cycling), key intersections, property characteristics and key destinations and views. The study further examined the study area for redevelopment opportunities to revitalize the downtown and surrounding areas.

The Design Study contains several overall recommendations for the study area as well as area-specific goals and phasing for each of the 'Character Areas' that are identified in the study. More specifically, the Character Areas are:

- Central Area West, which is defined as the area which runs the length of Dundas Street between Mill and Brock/Light Streets. This is the western limit of the area examined in the Design Study;
- Civic Central Area, which is defined as the area that runs the length of Dundas Street between Brock/Light Streets and Wellington Street. This area contains several significant institutional buildings including the County Courthouse, City Hall, Woodstock Art Museum, Museum Square, Market Square, and County of Oxford Administration Office;

- Central Area East, which runs the length of Dundas Street between Wellington Street and Bay/Beale Streets; and
- Transit Opportunity Area, which runs the length of Dundas Street between Bay/Beale Streets and Huron/Wilson Streets.

The recommendations, which are intended to provide a long-term and fluid plan for the City's downtown, propose to transform the study area into a pedestrian-oriented destination with day and evening activities through the introduction of residential development and improved integration with surrounding neighbourhoods.

The Design Study also includes a number of recommendations intended to assist the community in effectively implementing the design principles contained in the document. Generally, the study will serve to guide the physical development of the Central Area and will provide a basis for Council's consideration of future Official Plan policies, Zoning By-law provisions, site plan guidelines and community improvement initiatives. The recommendations relevant to a community improvement plan included:

- Targeted land uses for each character area;
- Four proposed street character classifications;
- Gateways, green streets and enhanced treatment areas;
- Proposed building form, ground floor conditions, angular planes, setbacks, stepbacks, building width, streetwall condition, outdoor amenity space, roofscapes, building articulation and detailing;
- New and existing developments within heritage character areas, including site design, building orientation, built form, height, massing, building articulation and detailing; and
- Specific urban design guidelines for each identified character area.

The results of the above-noted analysis were brought to the public through an extensive consultation process. This included open house/workshops to obtain feedback from the community, together with more focused meetings with selected stakeholders and interest groups within the City. The guidelines were ultimately adopted by City Council in June, 2011.

Recommended Incentive Programs

Through review of the existing Downtown CIP and CIPs of other municipalities in Ontario, City staff and planning staff recommend the following incentive programs be included in the revised CIP:

Façade Improvement Programs

This program is intended to offer a loan or grant to encourage exterior renovations, which are in keeping with the Woodstock Central Area Design Study design principles and historical/heritage characteristics of buildings within the Downtown area. Eligible improvements may consist of external repairs to facades, including signage, entrances and display windows as part of a larger restoration program.

Downtown Residential Conversion, Rehabilitation and Intensification Program

This program is proposed to be offered in the form of a loan or grant. This program would apply to encourage property owners to create one or more new residential dwelling units within and near the Downtown through the rehabilitation, renovation or addition to an existing building(s). The purpose of this program is to encourage an increase in the residential population living in and

around the core that may also frequent the commercial, business and cultural uses in the Downtown area.

Non-street Front Façade Improvement Loan Program

The Non-Street Front Facade Improvement Loan Program is intended to assist property owners in identified community improvement project areas with non-street front facade improvements in addition to bringing participating buildings and properties into conformity with the City of Woodstock Property Standards By-law.

For the purposes of this program, a non-street front facade shall mean that portion of a building that is visible from an adjacent street or alleyway. All works shall be in keeping with the recommended design principles as contained in the Woodstock Central Area Design Study.

Awning, Signage and Decorative Lighting Grant Program

The Awning, Signage and Decorative Lighting Program is intended to provide financial assistance to property owners in designated areas for the installation of appropriate new signage, canopies/awnings or exterior lighting, security improvements, or improvements to the same, as well as bring participating buildings and properties within the identified community improvement areas into conformity with the City of Woodstock Property Standards By-law. All works shall be in keeping with the recommended design principles as contained in the Woodstock Central Area Design Study.

Building Update Loan Program

This program is intended to assist property owners with the financing of building improvements that are often necessary to ensure older buildings comply with today's Building Code Requirements. The costs associated with these improvements as a means of protecting the public interest by proactively helping the City in dealing with dilapidated buildings in the Central Area. This issue is amplified in the Downtown where much of the building stock is older and needs major improvements to meet present-day Building Code standards.

This program will support the maintenance, improvement, beautification and viability of the historic building stock in Downtown Woodstock as well as encourage the development of residential units in older buildings through conversion and adaptive re-use, ensuring that buildings are safe for residents and patrons alike and bring participating buildings and properties within the identified community improvement project area into conformity with the City of Woodstock Property Standards By-law. Examples of works eligible for funding may include; the installation or alteration of fire protection systems such as sprinklers, stand pipes, fire alarms, emergency power and lighting, exit signs; the installation or alteration of fire separations; the construction or alteration of stairs, guards, handrails; the reinforcement of floors, walls, or ceilings; required improvements to ventilation systems; or improvements for barrier-free accessibility.

Incremental Tax Grant Back Program

This program would provide a grant to owners of lands and buildings within the Central Area who undertake improvements or redevelopment that would result in an increased property assessment. Every time a landowner, either within or outside of the core redevelops or rehabilitates a property or building, the assessed value and annual taxes for that property increase.

To counteract this disincentive a 'Tax Grant Back Program' be established which would provide for an annual grant back to the landowner to offset the increase in taxes resulting from reassessment due to physical improvement works occurring during the specific time period the program is in effect. If there is a general increase in the tax rate, or if the County of Oxford adjusts the tax ratios the property would not be exempt from such increases. The grant is only intended to grant back the local municipal tax increase and Business Improvement Area (BIA) levy which would occur as a result of building improvements resulting in increased assessment. The BIA has indicated its support for such a program.

Grant in Lieu of Permit Fees Program

This program provides for a grant equivalent to the fees paid for Building Permits, Sign Permits, planning application fees etc. within the designated area. The program is meant to stimulate and encourage development and property improvements in Downtown Woodstock. As building permits are required for internal and external alterations, renovations, new construction and demolition, these fees can be significant. The removal or reduction of such fees, in conjunction with the proposed 'Grant Back' programs, could be used as an incentive over a specific period of time to encourage downtown investment. All commercial, business and residential properties within the Central Area of the community improvement project area will be the target of this program.

Parking Fees Grant Back Program

This intent of this program is to allow the City to grant back the cost of municipal parking permit fees for certain targeted developments within the Downtown area. The program is intended to encourage redevelopment of larger projects with the CIP area that may not meet the requirements for dedicated on-site parking. In an effort to encourage development within the Downtown area, the City has also included the provision of no parking requirements or reduced parking standards within the City's Zoning By-law. Larger developments may still not provide sufficient on-site parking to meet the Zoning By-law requirements.

Design Grant Program

This program will help applicants hire an architect (for preparing designs, estimates, etc.), an engineer (for structural analysis) or accredited professional (landscape, building code etc.) to develop the project concept and can be applied for before the applicant applies for a grant/loan. Design Grants can be applied for at anytime of the year, prior to the submission of an application for the applicable program, if funds are available. All design work shall be in keeping with the recommended design principles as contained in the Woodstock Central Area Design Study to be eligible for funding through this program.

Accessibility Renovation Program

This program is intended to provide grants or loans to improve accessibility to and of existing commercial buildings and properties through the renovation of building entrances, upgrading of doors, installation of power assist door operators, installation of ramps, elevating devices, and accessibility washrooms for the public.

This grant is intended to provide funds to assist owners and tenants of existing commercial buildings, particularly older buildings in the Central Area, with accessibility improvements to improve the accessibility of commercial spaces in the City.

Affordable Housing Incentive Program

The Affordable Housing Incentive Program will provide a grant for the costs of applicable City planning application fees and building permit fees. To enable more affordable housing through multi-family residential and mixed-use development, these grants will not apply to additional residential units.

The planning application waiver will apply to City planning applications, including Zone Change, Site Plan (amendment and approval) and Minor Variance, as set out in the City's Fees and Charges By-law. The waiver will not include any deposits required to cover the costs of peer reviews in relation to studies submitted in support of a planning application.

Building permit fees will be waived based on the proportion of units that are affordable within the development. For example, if 50% of the proposed units are considered to be affordable, then 50% of the application/permit fees will be waived.

Affordable Housing Incremental Tax Grant Back Program

This program would provide a grant to owners of lands and buildings who undertake improvements or redevelopment related to affordable housing that would result in an increased property assessment. The grant is intended to grant back the local municipal tax increase which would occur from building improvements resulting in increased assessment.

Under the program, properties that are re-assessed because of renovation, rehabilitation, or redevelopment would be eligible to apply for a grant during a set period of time following work that would trigger a reassessment.

Affordable Housing Studies and Reports Program

Other Community Improvement Plan supports for affordable housing may include financial assistance for the initial planning and design phases of affordable housing projects by funding studies, plans, or designs that assess site-specific potential for eligible projects. This assistance facilitates background research and development for projects on eligible properties.

Brownfield Redevelopment Program

This program is intended to stimulate private sector investment in the reuse and redevelopment of suspected contaminated sites or Substandard Buildings and partially offset the costs associated with the site/building assessment and remediation. Incentives offered by the City could include a grant equivalent to 50% of the cost of an environmental or building hazard study including a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment, designated substances and hazardous materials survey, remedial work plan or risk assessment. A maximum grant would be determined by City Council per environmental study and per property.

Physician Recruitment Forgivable Loan Program

This program is intended to assist with the attraction of qualified physicians to the City of Woodstock, thereby improving access to healthcare services for residents. The City of Woodstock Community Improvement Plan (CIP) will offer forgivable loans to eligible physicians who commit to practicing in the community for a minimum 5-year period. The forgivable loan is intended to act as an incentive to attract physicians Woodstock.

Licensed Child Care Centre Program

This program is intended to stimulate private sector investment in licensed childcare centres by both for profit and not-for-profit organizations. Incentives offered by the City may include grants or loans intended to reduce planning and initial start-up costs. Eligible grant items may include a grant in lieu of municipal permits and approvals, as well as incremental tax financing.

Licensed In-Home Childcare Program

This program is intended to provide incentives to encourage the creation of licensed in-home childcare spaces. The City may offer grants or forgivable loans to reduce planning, development, and initial start-up costs. Eligible grant items may include a grant in lieu of municipal permits and approvals. In addition, the City may offer grants to offset capital costs associated with improvements to meet the requirements of licensed home-based childcare.

Legal and Registration Costs

In addition to the above, for landowners accessing the CIP programs, the City will be responsible for all legal costs and costs associated with registration of agreements for all of the above listed programs.

Full details and proposed program guidelines for all programs are contained within the draft CIP program, included as Attachment 1 to this report.

Conclusion

In general, it is important to note that the inclusion of the proposed revised economic incentives in the CIP does not obligate City Council to use them. All of the measures proposed for inclusion in the CIP are considered to be part of a 'toolbox' of incentives that can be applied at City Council's discretion and will be primarily implemented through the annual budget process. City Council will have the final approval as to how and when these programs are implemented.

Planning staff and City staff support the broader range of programs that are proposed through this revised CIP, and recommend the revised CIP be adopted by City Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

THAT City Council endorse the revised Woodstock Community Improvement Plan and potential range of programs and incentives;

AND FURTHER, that a By-Law to adopt a revised Community Improvement Plan be brought forward for City Council's consideration;

AND FURTHER, that a By-Law be brought forward to repeal By-Law 8809-12, establishing the previous Downtown CIP program.

SIGNATURES

Authored by: Original Signed By Eric Gilbert, MCIP, RPP
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Approved for submission: Original Signed By Paul Michiels
Director of Community Planning