

Schomberg revitalization given green light by council

By Mark Pavilons

Schomberg's revitalization has received the full backing of King council.

Councillors voted to approve, in principle, the strategy to implement the improvements as part of the village's face lift.

Armed with more than \$50,000 in provincial funding, the plan is to share the vision, hold community workshops and implement the 74 action items through 2019.

Jamie Smyth, King's economic development officer, provided an update to councillors at the Jan. 28 meeting.

The strategy embraces the vision statement: "Schomberg Main Street is the heart of a vibrant village that takes pride in its agricultural heritage. A walkable, picturesque destination for residents and tourists alike, Main Street has maintained its historic quality, while offering a mix of local services, unique shops, restaurants and beautifully preserved homes."

The goals of the strategy is to attract visitors and drive customers to Main Street businesses. Enhancing the physical appearance of the village will help in this regard, and even attract more businesses that fit in with Main Street's atmosphere.

The multi-faceted strategy includes improvements to Lion's Park, as well as improving parking and crosswalks.

The entire project comes with a price tag of roughly \$104,000. Provincial funding tops \$52,000; local partners will contribute \$7,250 and King Township will pitch in \$44,750 over a two-year period.

"For long-term success, vitality and village prosperity, Main Street Schomberg's historic commercial core needs a unique and strategic approach," staff noted. "Once realized, a revitalized Main Street will be a shining example of enhancing quality of life for residents, attracting visitors and shoppers, and a prosperous and sustainable local economy."

The operational programs and capital improvements will be under Smyth and the economic development department.

Smyth said they hope businesses, property owners and residents of Schomberg review and provide input on the draft Strategy and proposed action items before the end of March. After that, staff will take the Strategy and Implementation plan to council for final endorsement in April and will be commencing implementation and execution of the action items as we enter the second year of the government-funded project.

A lot of work went into creating the strategy, including a residents' survey, business surveys and trade area analysis.

Schomberg benefits from many distinguishing physical features "an abundance of assets.

The river crosses Main Street in the business area and two businesses enjoy patios overlooking the river. Hopes are the river's role can be enhanced with some beautification, and the addition of plaques attesting to the rich history.

The Schomberg Fairgrounds are an important feature for the entire community. This space is adjacent to the river and is home to several major events each year. The space is perhaps underutilized and the Township wants to explore renting out the fairgrounds for more events and look into Trillium funding for some property enhancements.

The historic Community Hall but it needs physical improvements. There are opportunities to enhance the interior and use the hall for more events such as a farmers' market, etc.

There are plans to improve the sidewalks, add benches and decorative trash cans.

Parking has been singled out as one of the major issues in the core, but an analysis found there's ample parking, but it may not be convenient. There are some 164 spaces on Western Avenue, along with 140 on-street spots. There is also a Green P lot with 20 spaces between 203 Main Street and the post office.

The strategy has generated a lot of support in the community.

Tom Allen, president of the King Chamber of Commerce, noted there's a "synergy" between local events (think Fair, Street Gallery, Main Street Christmas) and the business community. Schomberg is already a destination, he observed, one that can be expanded and grown.

Charles Cooper, chair of the Schomberg Village Association, noted Schomberg is a "wonderful place to live," but it has some challenges and one of them is the state of the historic Main Street.

"Anytime someone talks about Schomberg, there's always a mention of its marvellous Main Street. Much is made of the fact that it is not on the highway and has therefore escaped the ravages of high-traffic. It's still a place where you can walk, live and visit shops. But right now there's a high risk of losing that Main Street to neglect. I believe that this initiative can help turn that around."

The strategy, Cooper said, is solidly built on the Four Points formula from Ontario's Rural Economic Development program. The four points include economic vitality, design, promotion, and strong organization.

People need a reason to come to Main Street, he said. Main streets in small villages all need a focus, and this plan can provide just that focus.

The SVA is, in part, dedicated to improving life in Schomberg and the surrounding area.

Every year the SVA presents Schomberg's A Main Street Christmas celebration, and work with other like-minded community groups to sponsor and support other activities in the town.

When we were approached to support this initiative, we signed on board immediately, he said. We believe that a vital Main Street in Schomberg is key to Schomberg remaining special. And for the Village Association it's truly a case of 'putting our money where our mouth is.' Each of the community groups donated a sum of money to the program as part of the application to the province's program.

He pointed out the SVA has donated \$5,000 over two years to this initiative.

We believe that this is an important program, and it has the best chance of reinvigorating Main Street.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said this is a model that could be repeated in Nobleton and King City.

All parties invested both financial and sweat equity into this initiative, he said. I am extremely supportive of this important initiative and thankful for everyone's efforts and contributions.