

Council and public talk community improvement

By Angela Gismondi

The draft Community Improvement Plan (CIP) was presented at a public meeting recently.

The CIP establishes visions for revitalizing the three core areas of the Township ? King City, Nobleton and Schomberg ? and outlines the tools that will be used to achieve those visions.

The recommendation to develop and implement CIPs came before council in November 2013 as one of 12 action items in the Township's Economic Development Strategy, which was adopted at the same time. Despite the ambitious timeline in which it was drafted, the plan was well received by council and the public, who only requested a few minor changes.

?The last five months has been a fairly intense and comprehensive process,? explained Jamie Smyth, King's director of economic development. ?The Community Improvement Plans are a tool for not only for place making but also a tool for economic development in the township.?

MMM Group Ltd. was retained to manage the preparation of the CIP. A series of six public open houses and workshops were held during May and July to get input from stakeholders. The meetings were attended by residents, property owners, businesses and special interest groups. Participants were very supportive of the community improvement plan initiative and the options for financial incentive programs and municipal leadership strategy programs. Some of the recommendations that came out of the workshops included the need to improve parking, connectivity and support for facade improvement to maintains the unique heritage of King's villages and small-town feel. All comments received to date have been considered in the development of the draft document.

?There was considerable interest in all three communities and a good level of support for completing the plans,? explained Chris Tyrrell of MMM Group.

The draft plan proposes seven financial incentive programs to promote improvement to private property ? a façade and signage improvement grant, a landscaping improvement grant, a building accessibility improvement grant, a motor vehicle/bicycle parking improvement grant, a property conversion, reuse and repurposing grant, a planning and building permit fees rebate and a tax increment equivalent grant. The plan also describes how the grants work and who is eligible.

The CIP outlines other municipal leadership projects and strategies for helping to achieve the visions. Since the financial incentives focus on improving private property, the municipal leadership projects and strategies focus on improving the public realm, such as sidewalks, public boulevards, trails and public amenities. Proposed Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA) maps, where the financial incentive programs and municipal leadership projects and strategies would apply are also included in the plan.

Implementation and financial resources required to support the CIP initiative will be incorporated into the 2015 and subsequent budget and work plan approval processes through the 10 year life of the CIP. Council will have to decide how much money to allocate to the program.

?There is no indication at what level council will fund the Community Improvement Plan ? you will manage that through your budget process,? said Tyrrell. ?Council will decide at budget time which programs to include.?

He also suggested that an administrator be designated to manage the plan day-to-day.

?We believe this is critical for success,? added Tyrrell.

The implementation of CIPs in other municipalities were reviewed as part of the process. Other municipalities have spent anywhere from \$5,000 to \$100,000 a year on their community improvement plans.

The plan takes a long-term, 10-year approach to revitalization of the core areas. Tyrrell recommended the plan be reviewed every year with a comprehensive review after five years.

?Revitalization and real change will take time, and is best accomplished through incremental, small improvements that will add up to big changes over time,? states the staff report. ?Initially, it is anticipated that the communities will be improved through modest property improvements and minor streetscaping enhancements.?

The goal is that as the communities improve aesthetically, they become increasingly attractive to new investment and will continue to evolve and revitalize.

Tyrrell concluded by saying that there was a request to add the old arena in Schomberg and the lands surrounding the GO Station in King City to the financial incentive areas in both communities. Councillor Peter Grandilli also requested the financial incentive area be expanded in Nobleton to allow businesses in the area to be eligible for grants.

?It seems to be cutting Nobleton in two pieces and leaving half of Nobleton outside of that line,? said Grandilli, adding he would like to see the employment lands included as well as all the businesses north on Highway 27 to MacTaggart Drive.

Bruce Craig came forward at the meeting on behalf of the Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT). Although CCKT is

supportive of the plan, they did have a few suggestions. They ask that traffic concerns be taken into account through the implementation of the plan with the goal of reducing traffic, making the communities more pedestrian friendly and creating links with public transit.

"The whole issue of traffic needs to be part of whatever is done," said Craig. "We ask you to focus on how much that needs to be addressed."

He also asked that council stress the preservation of significant trees and the attractiveness and rural aesthetics of the village cores in the plan. He also agreed with the notion that the financial incentive areas should be expanded in the communities.

"We just ask that there is good, sound thinking along the way," said Craig.

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti echoed the concern for traffic safety, especially in school zones. He said the Township's community safety zones need to be more prominent.

"We need to do more to slow down the traffic on King Road," Mortelliti said, recognizing there are signs posted. "I don't think it's enough."

Councillor Debbie Schaefer is concerned about preserving the heritage in the communities and offering more grants to restore heritage properties.

"We have a number of properties in our village cores that have cultural value and are important to the streetscape," explained Schaefer. "Right now, property owners are tearing those down and putting something else up. The only way we're going to turn this around is if property owners see it as something with value."

Councillor Bill Cober wanted to ensure that all three communities will be treated equitably throughout the process.

"We want to get the best bite for our buck," said Cober. "We need to make sure we're all united because we are all ambitious about this and we all want to see it succeed."

While Smyth agreed fairness is important, he recognized there is a need to help businesses across the township, no matter where they are located.

"We want to make sure it doesn't get bogged down and that it's flexible," said Smyth.

Township CAO Susan Plamondon added the challenge will be to determine the appropriate budget allocation for the program to meet the needs of the community.

"From a staff perspective, we would be delighted if the project is oversubscribed because that means it's really successful," said Plamondon. "At that point we wouldn't have a problem coming back to council and asking for more money."

Based on the input received prior to and during the public meeting, staff will prepare the necessary refinements to the CIP and bring forward the CIP and the CIPA bylaws for Council's consideration for adoption and enactment at the Sept. 22 council meeting.