

Stakeholders provide input for Community Improvement Plan

By Angela Gismondi

The second round of public consultations for King's Community Improvement Plan (CIP) wrapped up this past week.

Public open houses and workshops were held in Nobleton, King City and Schomberg, giving local businesses, property owners and residents the opportunity to comment on the draft CIP before it goes to council for approval in September.

King Township initiated a CIP study for the three downtown commercial areas in an effort to help local business owners, residents and investors plan for the revitalization and redevelopment of the communities by encouraging private investment through the use of grants and other incentive-based programs. MMM Group Ltd. has been retained to undertake this project and ran the workshops in the three villages.

"We were pleased with the turnout at all six public open houses and workshops over the last three months," said Jamie Smyth, economic development officer for the Township of King. "Each event had a good mix of residents, business people and property owners and it was a chance to make them aware of a community place-making tool that is widely used by municipalities throughout Ontario."

A CIP is a tool, prepared under the Planning Act, to help facilitate revitalization and redevelopment efforts in defined areas. The purpose of the public consultation meetings and workshops was to introduce the study, define a vision for the three downtown commercial areas and build an understanding of each community's critical needs which must be addressed through the CIP's programs.

In the second round of public consultations held during the month of July, consultants shared the input they received in the first round of workshops. For all three communities, local business owners, property owners and residents said more local business and employment opportunities are needed, the pedestrian realm should be enhanced and walkability should be improved, the core areas would benefit from better signage and marketing and historic buildings and properties need to be preserved and enhanced. They also suggested a lack of parking threatens commercial vitality and taxes, fees and processes are a barrier to building and property improvements.

The stakeholders also discussed Nobleton's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). Nobleton is a small, bedroom community with heritage buildings, which give it character. However, there are a lack of sidewalks and a lack of designation of Highway 27 parking. Overall, stakeholders concluded there is a lack of identity for the core.

The vision for Nobleton is a more complete, walkable community, more community gathering places, mixed use and consistent design and designated street parking.

As for King City's core commercial area, there is the history in the village, proximity to major cities, Highway 400 and the GO station. However, it is not pedestrian friendly, there is a lack of parking, a lot of traffic and the need for more streetscaping.

The vision is to create transportation solutions, public art, heritage buildings, new services/stores, more activity (patios) and a Kleinburg or Unionville-type, pedestrian-oriented atmosphere. All these elements would help create a complete community.

As for Schomberg's SWOT, it has a great Main Street off the beaten path with no through traffic, heritage, history, greenspace and a unique, quaint vibe. There are also issues with Main Street - it's narrow, there is a lack of parking and there are chicanes. Some of the buildings are old and in need of improvement. The vision is for Schomberg to be a thriving, mixed-use main street, a daytripper destination offering a historic experience. Stakeholders also suggested burying wires, making Main Street more walkable and creating an overall cohesive design.

Financial incentives programs were also discussed at the workshops. Incentive programs such as façade improvements, signage and landscaping will help establish consistent themes in the township's villages that will reflect and reinforce their character. Participants were given a variety of options and asked to rank which they would like to see the Township implement.

"There is a limited amount of funding and council is going to have to set some priorities in terms of the incentive programs," Bobby Gauthier of MMM Group explained to the participants at the workshop. "We are trying to get some input as to what you think the priorities are."

One program which received the most support from stakeholders is the façade and signage improvement grant which assists property owners and tenants with improvements to buildings or signage up to \$2,500 for signage and \$10,000 for façade improvements (increased to \$15,000 for corner lots) or 50 per cent of costs. Another program stakeholders would like to see implemented is the property conversion, reuse or repurposing grant which assists property owners and tenants with conversion of existing residential or vacant space into commercial uses, or addition of upper storey residential units up to \$10,000 or 50 per cent of the cost.

Ultimately council will decide how much money to allocate to the CIP through the budget process. Other municipalities have

allocated anywhere from \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year for incentive programs.

?It was important to get attendees input on what type of private property improvements and enhancements they felt the Township should support through partnership dollars and what other municipal investments and programs should be pursued and established to support village vitality, prosperity and sustainability,? said Smyth.

The Township will now proceed to finalizing the plan and presenting it at a statutory public meeting on Monday Sept. 8. Adoption of the CIP is expected on Sept. 21 with implementation in 2015.

Written comments and suggestions from the businesses, property owners and residents on the draft Community Improvement Plan will be accepted up to and including Friday Aug. 8 via the respective questionnaires also available online.

For more information visit www.economicking.ca/CIP.