



Community Improvement Plan

Municipality of Middlesex Centre

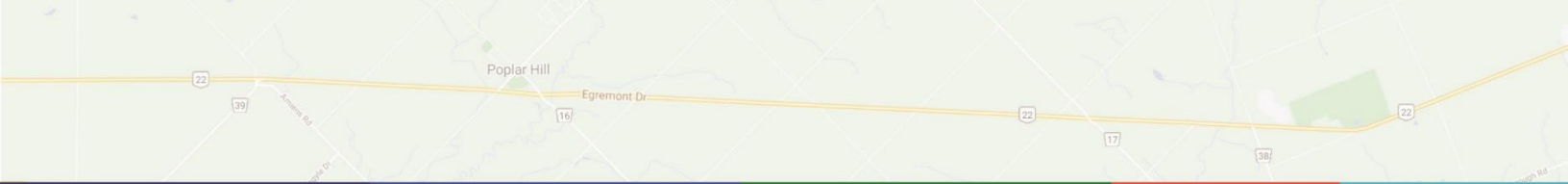
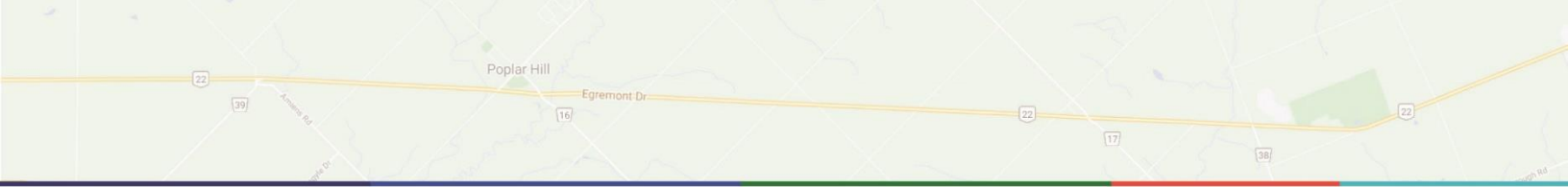


Table of Contents

- Purpose and Introduction 1
- Background 2
 - Dr. Avi Friedman’s Master Plan for Downtown Ilderton.....2
 - Erebus Municipal Services Review 2
 - Recommendation Findings 2
- Legislative Framework 3
 - Municipal Act 3
 - Planning Act..... 3
 - Development Charges Act..... 4
- Policy Content 5
 - Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 (PPS) 5
 - County of Middlesex Official Plan 5
 - Middlesex Centre Official Plan 6
 - Middlesex Centre Strategic Plan 7
- Community Improvement Review 8
 - Objectives 8
 - Project Area 8
 - Review of Incentive Programs 8
- Programs..... 10
 - Façade and Signage Improvement Grant 10
 - Development Charges Grant 12
 - Building Fee Reimbursement Program 13
 - Retrofits or Modifications to Premises to Improve Access pursuant to the Accessibility
for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 14
 - Allowance for Renovation or Construction Costs related to a Significant Public Health Event..... 15
 - Energy Efficiency and Retrofit Grant 16
- Implementation..... 18
 - CIP Budget 18
 - Eligibility and General Requirements 18
 - Evaluation of CIP Applications 20
 - Monitoring of the CIP 20
- Appendices 22
 - Appendix 1 – Map of Middlesex Centre
 - Appendix 2 – Erebus Municipal Services CIP Review Report
 - Appendix 3 – Community Improvement Plan Grant Application Form



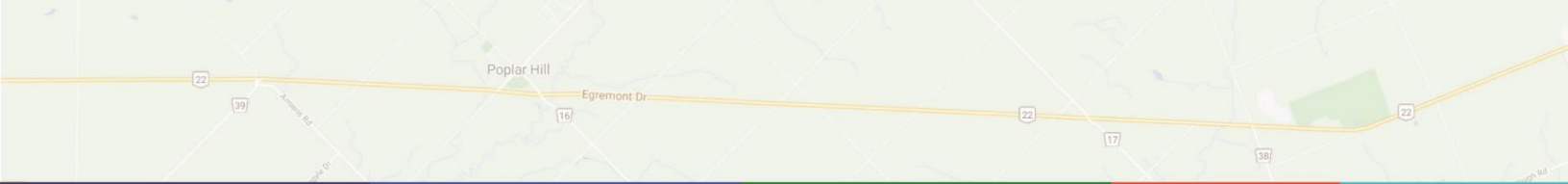
Version

The CIP was first approved by Middlesex Centre on November 25, 2020.

- Revised June 9, 2021 – added Energy Efficiency and Retrofit Grant
- Revised October 3, 2023 – removed Property Tax Increment Equivalent Grant

Accessibility

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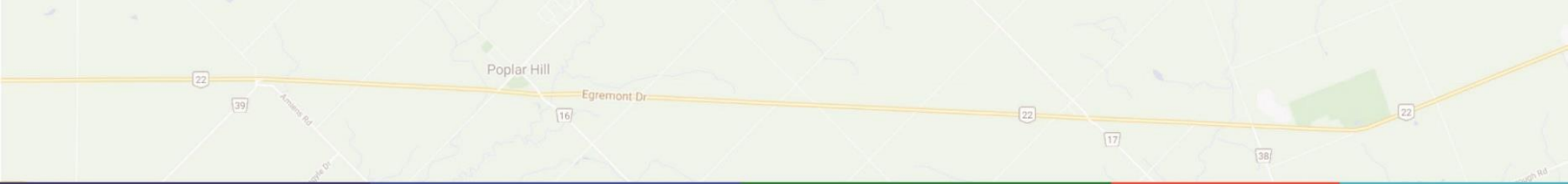


Purpose and Introduction

The Municipality of Middlesex Centre adopted By-Law 2013-034 to implement a Community Improvement Plan for the village of Ilderton. The Ilderton Community Improvement Plan was intended to advance a plan produced by Dr. Avi Friedman and his team entitled “Retooling Downtown Ilderton.”

In 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic, working collaboratively, the Municipality and County of Middlesex, recognized the need to implement incentive-based programming to assist the general business community. This unanticipated challenge to the business sector prompted a review of the current plan and to explore opportunities to expand the plan – both in terms of the catchment area and the existing suite of incentives.

The Municipality retained Erebus Municipal Consultants to review the existing Ilderton Community Improvement Plan and to comment on the Master Plan developed by Dr. Friedman.



Background

Middlesex Centre is a growing municipality which abuts the City of London's south, west and northerly borders. With a population of just under 20,000, the municipality is growing at an anticipated rate to surpass 20,000 in the near term.

The current Community Improvement Plan applies only to the village of Ilderton which has a population of 2,200 residents and is located at the intersection of Ilderton Road (County Road 16) and Hyde Park Road (County Road 20). Ilderton's commercial district is concentrated in its historic downtown.

Dr. Avi Friedman's Master Plan for Downtown Ilderton

Middlesex Centre retained the services of Dr. Avi Friedman to formulate a Master Plan for Ilderton's downtown and provide a vision and focus for the core's revitalization. In developing the Master Plan Dr. Friedman and his consulting team made several visits to Middlesex Centre and met with Municipal Council, staff, business owners and residents of the village of Ilderton. The Master Plan was crafted with mixed-use and medium density development as its driving land uses. The Plan's findings and recommendations are integral to the Ilderton Community Improvement Plan.

Erebus Municipal Services Review

Middlesex Centre retained Erebus Municipal Consulting to review the Ilderton Community Improvement Plan with the following mandate:

1. Review the existing catchment area and determine if the Community Improvement Plan could be expanded to include other parts of the municipality;
2. Review the existing incentives noted in the Master Plan and determine the relevance of the incentives while also offering other incentives permitted under legislation.

Erebus Municipal Consultants made several visits to Middlesex Centre and met with staff, business owners and residents to gain an understanding of the community and inform their review and report.

Recommendation Findings

Erebus Municipal Consultants report is appended to this updated Community Improvement Plan, including their set list of recommendations.



Legislative Framework

Municipal Act

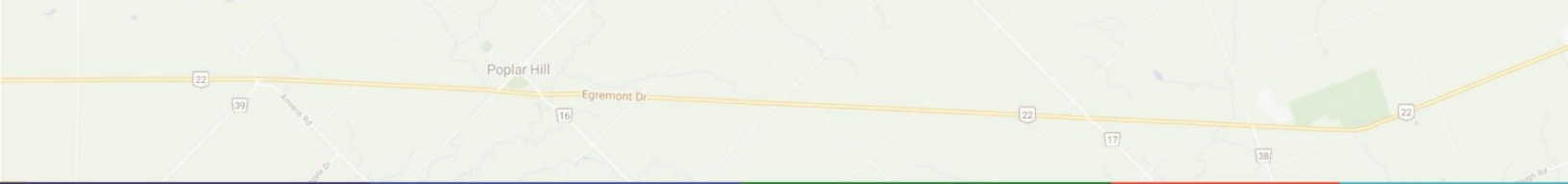
Sections 106(1) and 106(2) of the Municipal Act, 2001 prohibit municipalities from assisting industrial or commercial enterprises through the granting of bonuses, which includes giving or lending any money or property of the municipality; guaranteeing loans; leasing or selling any municipal property at below fair market value; or providing an exemption from any levy, charge or fee. Notwithstanding the aforementioned provisions, Section 106(3) of the Municipal Act, 2001 affords municipalities the ability to exercise their authority under Sections 28(6), 28(7) and 28(7.2) of the Planning Act and Section 365.1 of the Municipal Act, 2001, which centre around the provision of financial assistance and incentives for the purposes of community improvement planning. Specifically, Section 28 of the Planning Act empowers municipalities to implement CIPs and reap its many economic development benefits. Section 365.1 of the Municipal Act, 2001 authorizes municipalities to offer tax relief for properties that are pursuing environmental rehabilitation within the context of a CIP.

Subject to Section 106 of the Municipal Act, 2001, Section 107 of the said Act permits municipalities to make grants on such terms as the Council considers appropriate. The power to make grants includes the power to make loans and guarantee loans; sell or lease land for nominal fees or to make land grants; provide for the use of any person municipally owned or occupied land as well as municipal officers, employees or agents; sell or lease at a nominal price or grant any municipal property; and provide for the use of municipal property, among other items.

Planning Act

The Planning Act is the principal legislation that governs the formulation and application of CIPs. Section 28(2) enables municipal councils to designate community improvement project areas via by-law provided that their official plans contain policies that authorize the establishment of such areas.

Furthermore, Section 28(4) states that when a community improvement project area has been established a municipality may adopt a CIP for the project area. As stated in the recommendation findings, the designated project area has now been expanded to include the entire municipality. Within the framework of community improvement project areas and CIPs, and specifically as defined in Section 28(1), community improvement refers to the “planning or replanning, design or redesign, resubdivision, clearance, development or redevelopment, construction, reconstruction and rehabilitation, improvement of energy efficiency, or any of them, of a community improvement project area, and the provision of such residential, commercial, industrial, public, recreational,



institutional, religious, charitable or other uses, buildings, structures, works, improvements or facilities, or spaces therefor, as may be appropriate or necessary.” Section 28(1.1) also includes the provision of affordable housing as part of “community improvement.”

Section 28(6) outlines Council’s power for the purpose of executing a CIP that has come into effect:

- a) construct, repair, rehabilitate or improve buildings on land acquired or held by it in the community improvement project area in conformity with the community improvement plan, and sell, lease or otherwise dispose of any such buildings and the land appurtenant thereto;
- b) sell, lease or otherwise dispose of any land acquired or held by it in the community improvement project area to any person or governmental authority for use in conformity with the community improvement plan.

Section 28(7) of the Planning Act provides further authority to municipalities that are carrying out community improvement. Specifically, municipalities are permitted to make grants or loans in accordance with a CIP. The said financial incentives may be offered to owners and tenants of land and buildings within the community improvement project area and to any person whom the owner or tenant has assigned to receive the financial incentive, in order to pay for all or any part of CIP-eligible costs. The Act defines eligible costs as expenditures related to environmental site assessment, environmental remediation, development, redevelopment, construction and reconstruction of land and buildings for rehabilitation purposes or for the provision of energy efficient uses, buildings, structures, works, improvements or facilities.

Development Charges Act

Section 5(1)10 of the Development Charges Act, 1997 provides municipalities with the ability to phase in development charges and offer full or partial development charge exemptions, as identified through a municipality’s development charges study. Furthermore, Section 5(6) dictates that if a development charge by-law will exempt a type of development, phase in a development charge or otherwise provide for a type of development to have a lower development charge than is allowed, the rules for determining development charges may not provide for any resulting shortfall to be made up through higher development charges for other development. While the aforementioned provisions permit municipalities to provide development charge relief independent of community improvement planning, such an incentive may also be included as part of a broader CIP initiative.



Policy Content

Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 (PPS)

The PPS is issued under the authority of Section 3 of the Planning Act and mandates that all decisions pertaining to planning matters 'shall be consistent with' the PPS. While the municipal authority to adopt CIPs is enshrined in legislation, the PPS contains policies that support business improvement and community revitalization.

Section 1.1.3 of the PPS specifies that settlement areas shall be the focus of growth and their vitality and regeneration shall be promoted. Furthermore, the PPS directs that land use patterns within settlement areas shall be based on densities and a mix of land uses which use land, resources and infrastructure efficiently. It is further noted that planning authorities are responsible for promoting intensification and redevelopment where it can be accommodated, including on brownfield sites.

Section 1.3 of the PPS requires that municipalities support a diversified economic base and take into account the needs of current and future businesses. It is also noted that an appropriate mix of employment opportunities is to be provided in order to meet the long-term needs of the community.

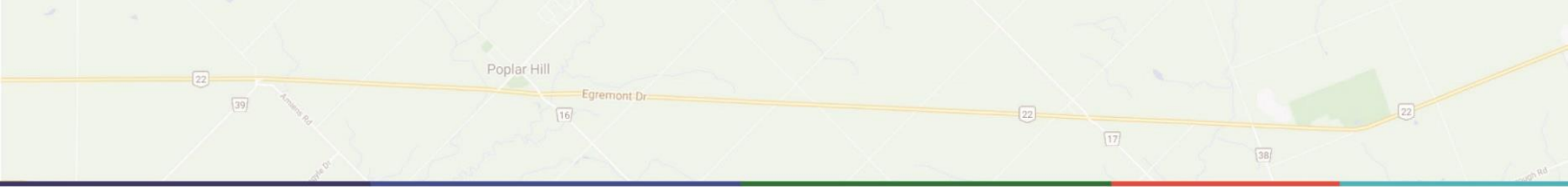
Furthermore, Section 1.4 requires municipalities to provide an appropriate range of housing types and densities; thus ensuring that employers have a diverse labour force, among meeting other objectives.

Section 1.7 notes that long-term economic prosperity is to be supported by maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of downtowns and main streets as well as by promoting the redevelopment of brownfield sites.

County of Middlesex Official Plan

The County of Middlesex Official Plan provides a regional planning framework within which member municipalities produce specific growth and development policies. Section 2.3.4 of the County Official Plan notes that the County will cooperate with member municipalities and the business community to ensure that employment centres are served by modern infrastructure. Furthermore, the County encourages a mix of housing to ensure a sufficient labour force as well as a high standard of urban design to create healthy communities which attract investment.

Section 3.2.3 of the County Official Plan promotes member municipalities' use of community improvement planning via the inclusion of policies to facilitate same in their official plans. Moreover, Section 4.6 notes that County Council as well as the councils of



member municipalities shall encourage public participation and ensure that the community is thoroughly consulted during the formulation of CIPs.

Middlesex Centre Official Plan

The Middlesex Centre Official Plan provides detailed planning policies for the municipality's settlement and agricultural areas. Section 9.2 of the Middlesex Centre Official Plan notes that one of the Municipality's goals is to develop a diverse and sustainable economic base. The Municipality is committed to business development as well as the retention and expansion of existing businesses.

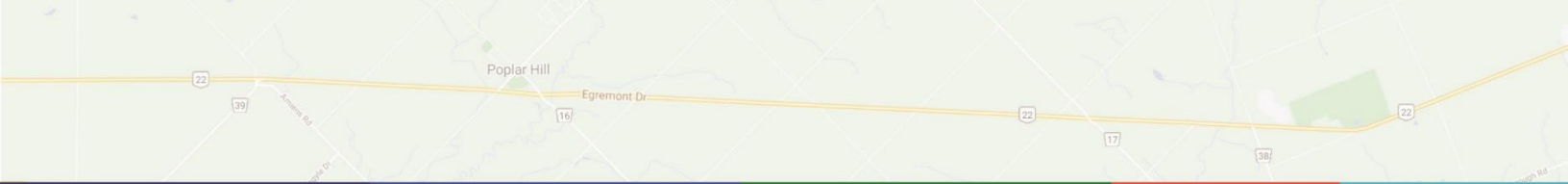
Section 9.2 further states that Middlesex Centre will promote the viability of its downtowns in its planning policies and decisions and encourage the remediation of brownfield sites.

Section 10.18 of the Middlesex Centre Official Plan permits the Municipality to identify areas within the Official Plan as community improvement project areas, in accordance with the Planning Act.

Furthermore, the Municipality is empowered to prepare CIPs that prioritize community improvement initiatives. Section 10.18 permits the Municipality to utilize the following criteria when considering the designation of a community improvement project area:

- a) Buildings or sites in need of maintenance, rehabilitation or redevelopment;
- b) Deterioration in structure or appearance of building facades, streetscapes, parking
- c) facilities, pedestrian access or signage, and so on;
- d) Municipal services and parking facilities which may be inadequate or in need of repair;
- e) An inadequate supply of parkland, cultural or social facilities;
- f) The existence of incompatible or conflicting land uses;
- g) Susceptibility to flooding and poor drainage;
- h) The need for construction and improvements to energy efficiency;
- i) The provision of affordable housing.

Section 10.18 permits the Municipality to offer grants and loans to owners and tenants of properties within community improvement project areas as well as to anyone whom the owners or tenants have designated to receive the grants or loans, provided the financial incentives or assistance is offered for the purpose of implementing a CIP.



The Municipality has engaged WSP Planning Consultants to undertake a review of the current Official Plan. It is anticipated that this review will be completed in Q2-2021. The objective of the Official Plan Review as it relates to the Community Improvement Plan is to ensure conformity in support of the policies outlined above.

Middlesex Centre Strategic Plan

The Municipality is undertaking an initiative to create a new community and corporate Strategic Plan, expected to be finalized by end of year 2020. Similar to the original Ilderton CIP, the intent of this type of master document would aid in supporting strategic plan priorities and associated outcome statements:

Strategic Priority	Outcome Statement
Realizing development potential	Middlesex Centre is committed to sustainable mixed-use land development
Realizing economic development opportunities	Middlesex Centre will proactively create and promote the best environment for opportunities, education and awareness
Capitalizing on Middlesex Centre's location advantage	Middlesex Centre will address challenges of bordering a large urban centre while maintaining a unique identity
Promoting local commercial and retail growth and sustainability	Middlesex Centre will position locally owned and operated businesses as regionally competitive, reducing reliance on neighbouring enterprises
Expanding local employment options	Middlesex Centre will grow its local economic base and opportunities by promoting and nurturing human and social capital



Community Improvement Review

Objectives

The purpose of the Community Improvement Plan review was to:

- a) Consider the expansion of the Community Improvement Program beyond Ilderton; and,
- b) Examine the relevance and scope of the existing incentive program through original time-line to 2028.

Project Area

The review by Erebus Municipal Consultants Services Inc. included engagement with the Ilderton and Komoka Business Associations as well as other stakeholder representatives from the broader community.

Erebus recommended that Middlesex Centre move forward with an amendment to the current Ilderton CIP to expand the designated Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA) to the entire municipality.

The recommendation is based on:

1. A perceived predisposition on the part of senior management to broaden application of the Community Improvement Plan, including municipal incentives.
2. Research conducted for this report, and experience of the Erebus team, indicating a trend in municipality-wide Community Improvement programming, particularly in consolidated communities with a mix of urban, small urban, highway commercial, and rural areas.
3. Building on the success of the current program.

Review of Incentive Programs

As outlined in the report findings attached to this Plan, the existing programs that are currently in the plan have been successful; particularly, façade and signage incentive program. From the program inception in 2015 to 2019, fifteen applications were approved with an aggregate grant amount of over \$48,000.

It is recommended that the existing programs remain in the updated CIP except for Item 5.4.4 – Municipal Streetscape and Land Redevelopment Program which has no uptake and is being replaced by other programs. Note that this provision was largely aimed at



the Municipality undertaking improvements and enhancements on public lands. The notion of securing partnerships for this sort of work is where the program stalled – without a formal BIA, shared funding deals are a challenge.

In addition, there are added incentives programs that are being suggested which are outlined in this CIP.



Programs



Façade and Signage Improvement Grant

Purpose:

The Façade and Signage Improvements Grant has been designed to enrich the business storefronts, particularly along the main thoroughfare of a community. Professional design services that are required to undertake eligible work may also qualify for the grant program, with the pre-approval of Municipal staff.

This grant is intended to encourage commercial property owners and tenants to revitalize, rehabilitate and restore building façades in order to encourage high-quality, attractive improvements to eligible commercial and mixed-used commercial buildings.

The grant is focused on exterior improvements to buildings that will support local businesses (both urban and rural) and tourism.

Eligible Projects:

- Installation of new signs and replacement of existing signs
- Painting, cleaning and restoration of exterior, including masonry work
- Landscaping (only applicable to street-facing)
- Repairs to windows and doors
- Roof work
- Replacement of exterior architectural features
- Installation and replacement of exterior lighting (including energy efficient upgrades)
- Alterations to awnings and other entrance features
- Professional design services that are required to undertake eligible work may also qualify for the grant program, with the pre-approval of staff.

Program Details:

The Municipality may provide a grant up to a maximum of \$5,000 or 50% of eligible project costs (whichever is lesser) in order to improve the façade and signage of a commercial building. A



maximum dollar value for the grant will be established annually based on the amount of funding made available for community improvement plan each year. The grant will be payable immediately following completion of the work to the satisfaction of staff.



Development Charges Grant

Purpose:

The function of the Development Charges Grant is to reduce the costs of development and redevelopment of sites in order to stimulate construction within the CIP project area. Eligible fees include only those that are paid directly to Middlesex Centre as per the Municipality's Development Charges By-Law.

Eligible Projects:

- Redevelopment of vacant (not greenfield) or underutilized commercial buildings, industrial buildings, value-added agricultural facilities, or on-farm diversified uses, which are subject to the Municipality's development charges;
- Development (not greenfield) or redevelopment located in either the settlement or rural areas of the municipality;
- Residential buildings are not eligible for this program.

Program Details:

The owner or tenant of a property for which agricultural, commercial or industrial development charges are paid to Middlesex Centre may be provided with a grant equivalent up to a maximum of 50% of the charges paid. The building permit facilitating the payment of development charges must be approved by the Municipality in order to receive the grant, which will be in the form of a rebate. The grant will be processed immediately upon approval of the building permit by the Municipality.



Building Fee Reimbursement Program

Purpose:

The building permit fee reimbursement program offers loans to offset required fees where a building permit is required for a construction project. The loan will help to reduce the costs to making major private property improvements and encourage desired improvements throughout the municipality. Fee reductions apply to the following application types:

- Demolition Permit
- Building Permit
- Sign Permit

Eligible Projects:

- Redevelopment of a property for commercial, office, mixed use, value-added agricultural facilities, or on-farm diversified uses;
- Major additions to a commercial, mixed use, value-added agricultural facilities, or on-farm diversified uses, involving an increase of at least 25% of the existing gross floor area;
- Signage requiring a sign permit, in accordance with municipal by-laws, for commercial, office, mixed use, value-added agricultural facilities, or on-farm diversified uses;
- Any combination of the above.

Program Details:

The building permit fee reimbursement will be a maximum of \$2,500 or 100% of the Municipality's fees, whichever is the lesser.

The reimbursement is provided after the site works (including construction) are complete to the satisfaction of municipal staff. This includes full payment of any applicable planning fees by the applicant at time of submission. Upon project completion a rebate for eligible fees, up to the stated maximum is provided to the applicant.



Retrofits or Modifications to Premises to Improve Access pursuant to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

Purpose:

This program encourages property owners to make external accessibility improvements to their commercial, tourist or recreational properties in order to bring them into compliance with Provincial Legislation. Relevant legislation includes the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA).

Accessibility improvements should not greatly compromise the character of the building or property and as such, this grant will assist owners in designing and implementing accessibility improvements that maintain key architectural elements. Improvements may include installation of accessibility ramps, automatic doors, or improving entryways.

Eligible Projects:

- Installation of new or improvement of existing automatic doors, wheelchair access ramps, entryway widening, leveling or repairs to pathways/accesses, which clearly improve accessibility of a commercial, tourist or recreational building or property;
- Improvements to stairways/steps, provided the improvements are designed to maintain architectural elements of the property and are considerate of the existing site landscaping. Landscaping improvements may also be made in combination with the improvements, where applicable.

Program Details:

Middlesex Centre will provide a maximum grant of \$2,500 or 50% of the eligible costs, whichever is the lessor.

Consultation with the County Accessibility Advisory Coordinator and municipal staff is recommended prior to proceeding with any retrofits. Once reviewed to ensure the retrofit meets the program eligibility by the County Accessibility Advisory Coordinator and municipal staff, the property owner will proceed and must provide receipts at the completion of the retrofit for reimbursement.



Allowance for Renovation or Construction Costs related to a Significant Public Health Event

Purpose:

Should a significant public health event be declared by the Federal, Provincial and/or Middlesex London Health Unit, the Municipality will support area businesses for renovation or construction costs as a result of the pandemic.

These costs must be a direct result of the public health infection control directives and/or any associated by-laws that are implemented to combat the pandemic.

Eligible Projects:

- Interior and exterior renovations and retrofits;
- Signage – both exterior or interior – to meet new health and safety requirements; and,
- Costs associated with any recommendations that are outlined by public officials.

Program Details:

Middlesex Centre will provide eligible businesses a one-time grant up to \$2,500.00 to off-set the costs associated with significant health event such as a pandemic.

The property owner must provide receipts at the request of staff and must first enquire to determine eligibility prior to submission for reimbursement. Eligible costs may not be claimed by another program, i.e., façade and signage program so that the total grant/loan will not exceed the cost incurred.



Energy Efficiency and Retrofit Grant

Purpose:

The Energy Efficiency and Retrofit Grant is intended to provide financial support to our business community who are environmentally conscious incorporating sustainable improvements that reduce the impact of our build environment on the natural environment.

This grant will encourage the pursuit of improvements to buildings and properties that incorporate Low Impact Design (LID) elements, green technologies, sustainable building materials, and energy efficiency.

Eligible Projects:

This grant is applicable to businesses that invest in their properties and/or buildings incorporating green technology with the goal of energy efficiency.

Examples include:

- Replacement of existing heating systems with ENERGY STAR® systems;
- Replacement of central air-conditioning systems with ENERGY STAR® units or systems;
- Replacement of existing hot water systems with recognized energy efficient systems;
- Insulation upgrade to attics, exterior walls, exposed floors, basements and crawl spaces;
- Replacement of doors, windows and lighting with ENERGY STAR® models;
- Implementation of a green roof, which will mean a roofing system that is partially (at least 20% of the roof area) or completely covered with vegetation in order to absorb rainwater and to provide insulation;
- Installation of small-scale renewable energy generation systems which are not subject to approval under the Green Energy Act, as determined by the Ministry of Energy; and
- Other similar repairs/improvements as may be approved, at the discretion of the Municipality in consultation with staff.



Program Details:

Middlesex Centre will provide financial support to eligible businesses who undertake green initiatives with a grant of 50% of the construction costs of the eligible works, up to \$7,500.

The property owner must provide receipts at the request of staff and must first enquire to determine eligibility prior to submission for reimbursement. Eligible costs may not be claimed by another program, i.e., façade and signage program so that the total grant/loan will not exceed the cost incurred.



Implementation

The implementation and approval protocols of the revised Community Improvement Program remain set out in the current CIP. Consequently, the platform of the current Community Improvement Plan for Ilderton forms the basis of the revised plan. The guidelines set out in the plan which pertain to incentives, application, intake or other relevant criteria remain in effect.

CIP Budget

An annual budget will be set and approved by Council. These funds will be allocated to specific community improvement programs or to a general fund to be used for any of the programs outlined above.

Based on the intake and the budget, there will be at minimum one (1) intake per year, possibly two (2) based on both factors.

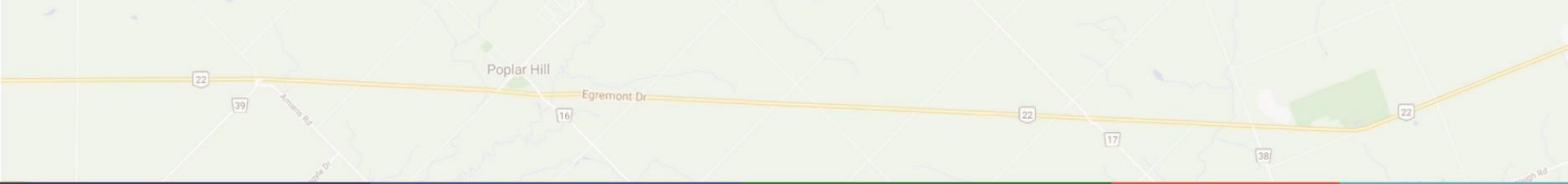
Consideration may be given to establish a Community Improvement Reserve Fund to carry over unused community improvement funds to future years.

Eligibility and General Requirements

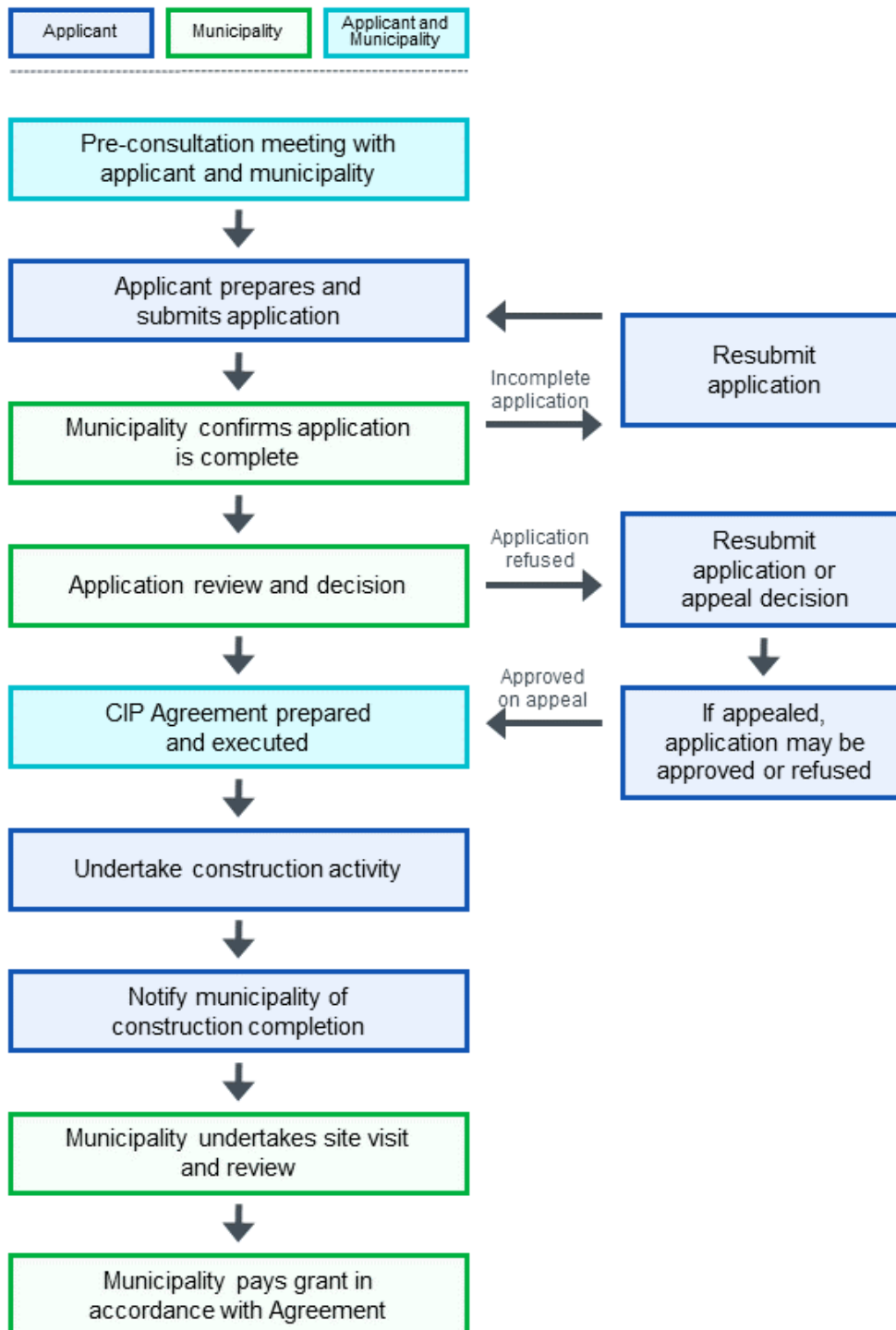
Potential applicants are requested to meet with the municipal staff prior to submitting a grant application through the CIP. The Director of Community Services will serve as the primary contact for potential applicants and will coordinate the initial consultation meeting between proponents and municipal staff.

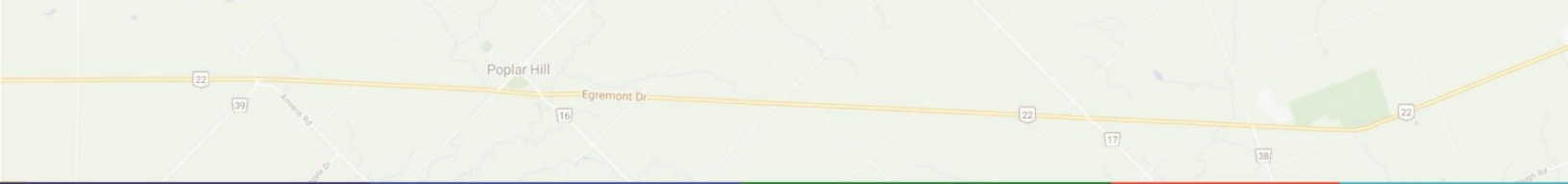
Applicants will be required to complete the grant application form and be prepared to outline their proposal at the meeting. Specifically, proponents will be requested to provide details regarding estimated costs, timeline of the project and how their improvements or redevelopment plans conform to the vision of the CIP. The CIP grant application is found in the Appendices section of this master document.

It is anticipated that minor changes will be made to the application from time to time and such changes will not necessitate amendments to the CIP. Potential applicants are requested to visit Middlesex Centre's website or contact municipal staff in order to obtain the current application. While the intent of the CIP is to have a single, multi-purpose application for the various community improvement programs, it is anticipated that applicants may be required to enter into agreements with the Municipality to qualify for some of the programs available. The determination of whether such an agreement is warranted will be made by municipal staff following the endorsement of an application and the applicant will only be requested to enter into such an agreement in order to satisfy a specific condition of approval.



Community Incentive Program Application Process





Evaluation of CIP Applications

Upon receipt of a completed application, each application will be reviewed by a sub-working group consisting of appropriate municipal staff, elected officials and a member of the public appointed by Council based on the program application.

This working group will review each application based on the evaluation criteria and formulate a recommendation to Council regarding whether or not the submission should be approved. Applications that receive the highest score rating will be recommended to proceed. At its discretion, the working group may request additional information from the applicant in order to evaluate the application. The primary evaluation criteria that the working group will consider will be the proposal's conformity criteria established in this master document and its support for the Municipality's vision to enhance residents and the public to shop local.

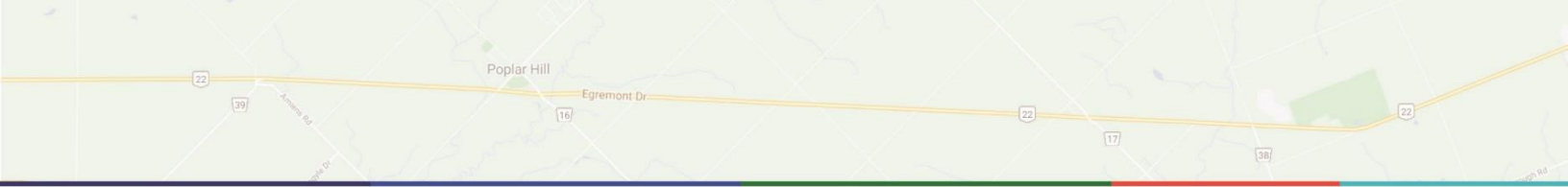
As part of its review, the working group will also consider the timeframe and size of the proposed project as well as the amount of money being requested by the applicant. At its discretion, the working group may opt to set a deadline for the receipt of all CIP applications for a given year or instead process requests on a rolling basis.

Should an appeal arise based on the decision to not approve an application, the applicant will have an opportunity to bring forward an appeal to Council who confirms the approved listing of applications recommended by the working group.

Monitoring of the CIP

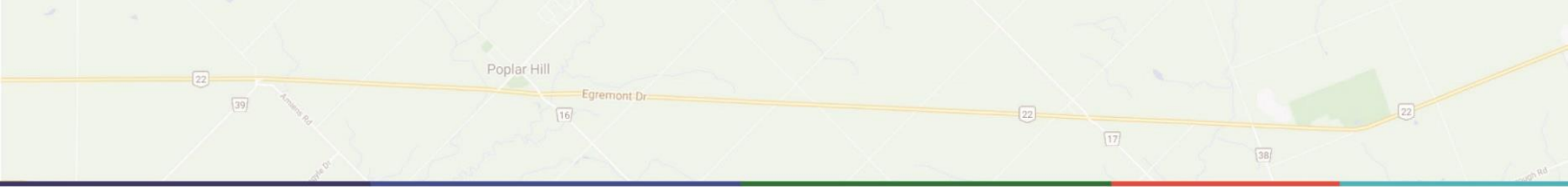
Once an application has been approved, municipal staff will monitor the progress and effectiveness of the CIP. In preparing the budget, staff will prepare an information report that outlines the following:

- Number and type of applications received during the previous year;
- Number and type of applications that were approved during the previous year;
- Funding information for each community improvement program undertaken during the previous year;
- Overview of the applications that did not qualify for funding during the previous year and a review of the reasons for the decisions;
- Increase in municipal property taxes that has resulted through the community improvement programs;
- Square footage of new commercial and industrial space created through the use of the CIP;



- Overview of the streetscape and façade improvements that have resulted in the CIP;
- Status of ongoing projects that have received approval for CIP funding; and,
- Any feedback received regarding the community improvement programs from the public and business community.

The timeframe of the CIP will be 15 years from the original implementation of the Ilderton CIP. While Council may review the CIP at any time, it is anticipated that the Plan will be reviewed at least once every five years to ensure that the community improvement programs are meeting the needs of the community and its businesses. Municipal staff will monitor the CIP on a continuous basis and may recommend that Council review the CIP if a specific program or component of the plan is no longer appropriate or necessary or if additional programs are needed. The inclusion of additional programs into the CIP will necessitate an amendment to this plan by by-law.



Appendices

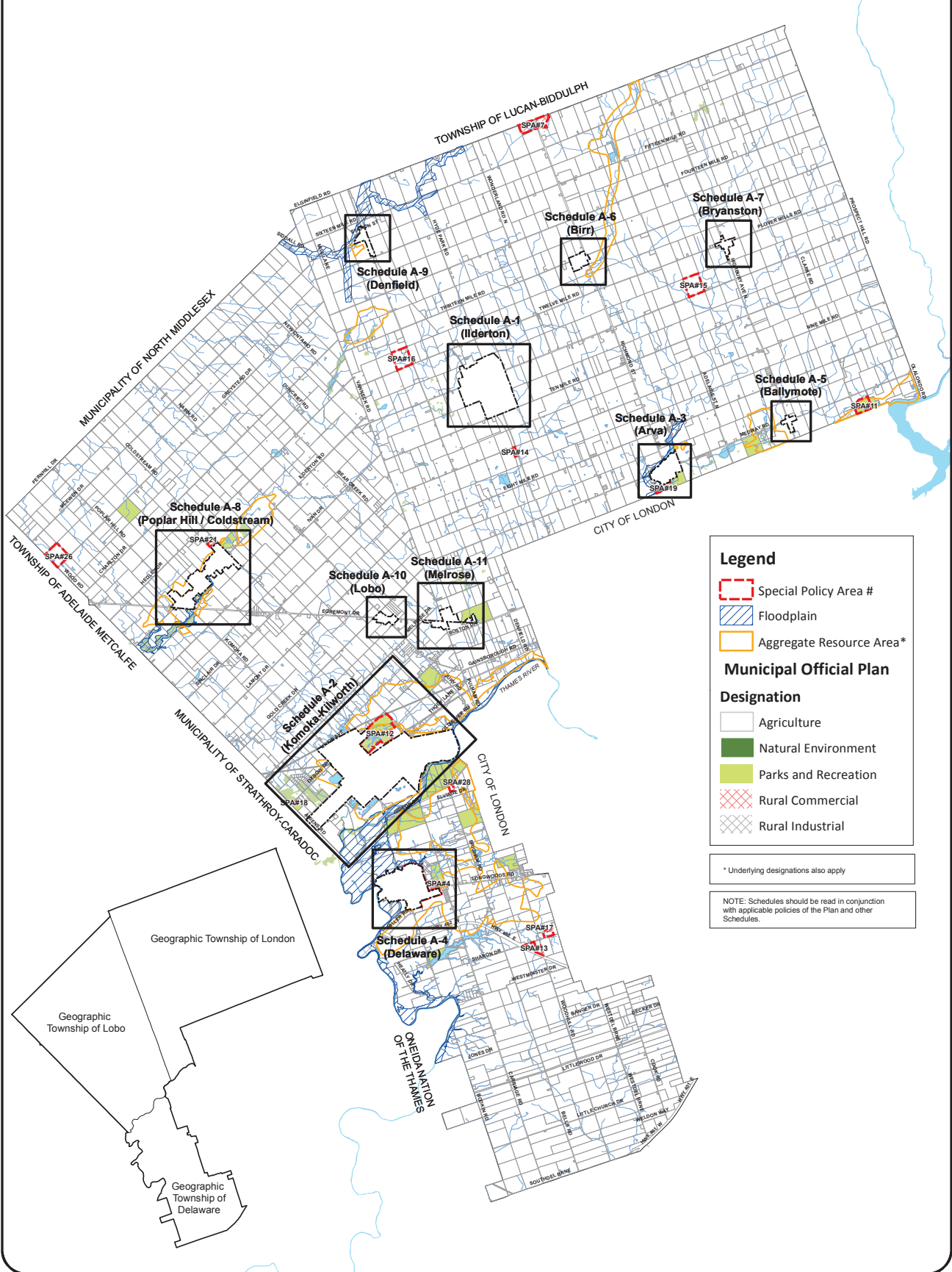
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APPENDIX A - Map of Middlesex Centre

MUNICIPALITY OF MIDDLESEX CENTRE OFFICIAL PLAN



Legend

- Special Policy Area #
- Floodplain
- Aggregate Resource Area*

Municipal Official Plan Designation

- Agriculture
- Natural Environment
- Parks and Recreation
- Rural Commercial
- Rural Industrial

* Underlying designations also apply

NOTE: Schedules should be read in conjunction with applicable policies of the Plan and other Schedules.

Municipality of Middlesex Centre Community Improvement Program Review

September 4, 2020



Erebus Municipal Services Inc.



MUNICIPALITY OF MIDDLESEX CENTRE

Community Improvement Program Review by Erebus Municipal Services Inc.

Index

Background and Context — The Assignment	3
Approach/Scope of Work, Existing CIP Program, Key Elements of the Existing CIP & Friedman Recommendations	4
Alignment with Strategic Plan, Middlesex Centre Official Plan, Project Area	5
Current Ilderton Community Improvement Plan — Programs	6
Incentive Program	7
Business Improvement Area	8
Consultation with Stakeholders	8
Municipal Commitment	9
List of Recommendations	9
Appendix A: Resources/Sources	10

Background and Context

The Ontario Community Improvement Plan program is provided for in Section 28 of the Planning Act. It is an optional tool, available to Ontario's upper tier and lower tier municipalities. The program contemplates development of plans that focus on maintenance, rehabilitation and redevelopment of target areas. To access the program, municipalities must have in place appropriate policy in their Official Plans, and a bylaw to designate a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) project area. Under a CIP, municipalities may provide grants or loans to owners of properties within the CIP project area to support certain renovation/enhancement works and to offer property tax assistance for remediation purposes.

In 2019, Middlesex County approved an initiative to support development of a basic Community Improvement Plan (CIP) template for the member municipalities that did not have CIPs in place. Currently, conversations are underway to advance development of CIPs in all the County member municipalities. The Municipality of Middlesex Centre (MXC), however, does have an existing CIP in place, with the designated Community Improvement Area (CIA) applied to a defined sector within the downtown area of the Ilderton Urban Settlement Area.

With the onset and continuing challenge presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic impacts on all sectors of the economy have been devastating and swift. The small retail/commercial sector has been particularly hard hit by the restrictions imposed by public health authorities in attempting to slow the rate of infection transmission. Consequently, several programs have been rolled out by the federal and provincial governments aimed at providing a degree of financial relief to the employment sector. Municipalities have also been active in advancing programming to ease the economic impacts on their business communities, including advisory services, sharing best practices, advocacy and with fiscal measures such as tax due date deferrals and waiver of penalties and interest.

Middlesex Centre staff have been working with the Middlesex County Economic Development Department on a plan to divert existing County program funding to support specific business infrastructure enhancements that aid in COVID-19 recovery.

The Assignment

The Municipality of Middlesex Centre has set a goal of updating its Community Improvement program, with an aim to have a new strategy in place for 2021. Specifically, the objectives of this review are to examine:

1. Expanding the existing Community Improvement Area beyond the village of Ilderton to include other parts of, or the whole of, the Municipality; and,
2. Broadening the range of incentives that are permitted as set out in Section 28 of the Planning Act, and Sections 106 and 365 of the Municipal Act.

Erebus Municipal Services Inc. (Erebus) was engaged to undertake this high-level review. Erebus is currently supporting the municipality's strategic plan review and update initiative.

The Approach/Scope of Work

Tasks undertaken to support this review included:

1. A detailed review of the existing Ilderton Community Improvement Plan (ICIP) pursuant to Section 5.5.4 of the Plan;
2. Researching best practices and emerging trends in the Ontario municipal landscape, with specific reference to the extent of community improvement areas, the range of incentives offered via community improvement plans, and measures of the uptake and effectiveness of community improvement plans;
3. Consideration of potential community improvement incentives that might assist business in Middlesex Centre to adapt to and recover from the COVID-19 experience;
4. Consultation with key stakeholders in the business community, including the Ilderton and Komoka-Kilworth Business Associations, the Middlesex Centre Community Services Advisory Committee, the CAO and senior management team, and the Middlesex County economic development team.

Erebus will provide support to the Middlesex Centre team at open houses and statutory public meeting events associated with a proposed new Community Improvement program (virtual or in-person, if and as required).

Existing Program

The current Middlesex Centre Community Improvement Plan (Ilderton CIP) was adopted in February 2013 by bylaw No. 2013-17. The plan, based on a 15-year timeline, is targeted to the downtown section of the Ilderton Urban Settlement area. It was Council's intention to identify Ilderton's downtown for redevelopment, municipal investment, and revitalization. The Plan was crafted to complement the work of Dr. Avi Friedman who was retained in 2012 by the Municipality to produce a strategy, or master plan, entitled "Retooling Downtown Ilderton". Dr. Friedman is a noted authority on urban design, sustainable environments and progressive building practices.

Recommendation One: *That overall, the approaches and direction set out in the current Ilderton CIP have retained currency and relevance, and, given the 15-year timeline (to 2028), any new Community Improvement Plan for the Municipality of Middlesex Centre carry forward the goals and objectives as set out specifically for Ilderton, subject to a full and complete review of the findings of the Friedman report, and the outcome of the current Official Plan review for the Ilderton Urban Settlement Area.*

Key Elements of the Current Community Improvement Plan

Friedman Reports

Section 2.2.3 of the current Community Improvement Plan lists the various development alternatives and program options determined by Dr. Friedman and his team after an extensive consultation process. The recommendations include several urban design options, as well as suggested municipal works.

The key documents produced by the Friedman team are:

Retooling Downtown Ilderton, March 2012, and Middlesex Investment and Branding Guide, May 2012. The *Retooling* report sets out the results of data gathering and research and consultation that will be

important to the Middlesex Centre Official Plan review that is currently underway. The document includes specific concepts related to land use: suggested mix and style of residential and commercial development, massing, design guidelines, connectivity, pedestrian and cycling movement, open space, hard and soft landscaping and style templates for signage, facades, street furnishing and amenities.

The *Investment and Branding Guide* is a high-level economic development strategic plan, which includes an analysis of gaps, challenges, opportunities and suggestions to advance investment in the community. It addresses the goals of attracting new commercial, industrial development and residential investment. The guide includes ideas to promote the community as a tourism destination as well as options for new branding and imaging for the municipality. The current municipal logo and tagline *In the centre of it all*, was adopted after the presentation of the branding guide.

Overall, the approaches, findings and recommendations of Friedman's work are significant, and represent a major re-think of growth and settlement in Ilderton. It will be important for Council to understand any expectations that were created from the lead-in to the current Ilderton CIP, including the commitment of the municipality to advance execution of the Friedman vision. In tandem with the Official Plan review, it will be critical to engage the Ilderton Business Association on the extent and current relevance of the sweeping vision set out in the Friedman report.

Alignment with Strategic Plan

Section 4.3 of the CIP identifies the alignment of the Ilderton CIP with the Strategic Plan that was adopted in 2012. The section lists identified strategies that focus on economic growth and development along with associated outcome statements.

Recommendation Two: *That the specific strategic priorities and outcome statements cited in the Ilderton CIP and in this report be considered during development of the new Corporate/Community Strategic Plan, in progress at the time of writing this report.*

Middlesex Centre Official Plan

Section 4.4 of the CIP reviews the key provisions of the MXC Official Plan that pertain to Community Improvement programming.

Recommendation Three: *That the Official Plan review and update currently underway include an analysis of the existing policy framework respecting application of the Community Improvement provisions of the Planning Act, and any modification to the application of Community Improvement programming be addressed in a new MXC Official Plan;*

And further, that the current Official Plan review have specific regard to the Friedman reports, particularly "Retooling Downtown Ilderton, March 2012".

Project Area

The Community Improvement Project Area is generally described as the downtown area of the Ilderton Urban Settlement Area. As set out above, the first objective of this review exercise is to consider:

Expanding the existing Community Improvement Area beyond the village of Ilderton to include other parts of, or the whole of, the Municipality.

Recommendation Four: *That MXC Council move forward with an amendment to the current Ilderton CIP to expand the designated Community Improvement Area to the entire municipality. This recommendation is based on:*

1. A perceived predisposition on the part of senior management to broaden application of the Community Improvement Plan, including municipal incentives.
2. Research conducted for this report, and experience of the Erebus team, indicating a trend in municipality-wide Community Improvement programming, particularly in consolidated communities with a mix of urban, small urban, highway commercial, and rural areas.
3. Building on the success of the current program (more on this below).

Current Ilderton Community Improvement Plan – Incentive Programs

As set out in Section 5.4 of the current CIP:

1. **A façade and signage improvements grant program.** The municipality may provide grants of up to 50% of eligible project costs based on a maximum grant amount set annually based on approved budget allocations.

Examples of eligible works noted in the CIP include:

- Provision of barrier-free access
- New or replacement signage
- Exterior restoration works
- Landscaping and exterior lighting
- Window and door repair
- Roof repair or replacement
- Professional design services (on pre-approval)

It should be noted that the municipality has had excellent results from the existing Ilderton façade and signage incentive program. From the program inception in 2015 to 2019, fifteen applications were approved with an aggregate grant amount of over \$48,000. At a theoretical maximum grant of 50%, this number represents a total spend of close to \$100,000. (Given the cap on the municipal contribution, the actual total spending will be much higher). That is an impressive record for a small urban centre. It may also be an indication that Ilderton may be approaching a saturation point with the incentive program, further reinforcing the recommendation to consider expanding the CIP program to the whole municipality.

2. **Development Charges (DC) Grant Program.** The municipality will rebate up to a maximum of 50% of Development Charges associated with development or redevelopment in Ilderton's downtown area.
3. **Property Tax Increment Equivalent Grant Program.** This incentive provides relief for one year where a commercial, industrial or medium density residential project results in an increase in current value assessment. It applies only to applicants who are ineligible for the Development Charges rebate program noted above.
4. **Municipal Streetscape Enhancement and Land Redevelopment Program.** This final operational element in the Ilderton CIP reinforces the municipality's commitment to beautification and enrichment of the downtown commercial core through implementation of Dr. Freidman's Master Plan. The various streetscape enhancements recommended in the Master Plan are to be

considered on an ongoing basis, through annual budget allocations. This program emphasizes the value of seeking out partnerships with community groups and other stakeholders to facilitate the downtown streetscape improvements. As noted in this report, it will be important for Council to understand the sweeping vision for Ilderton that is set out in the Friedman material, and to consider the extent of financial resources the municipality is willing to commit in order to advance that vision.

Section 5.5 of the Ilderton CIP confirms that an annual budget is to be set, with allocations to specific projects or programming, or through a general fund to be used for any CIP purpose, as demand warrants. This annual budget exercise would be largely focussed on the aggregate of the façade/signage program, as well as on any planned municipal streetscape improvements.

Incentive Program

Consistent with the recommendation to expand the CIP policy area to the whole municipality, the full suite of incentive programs would apply across the community. **With respect to the DC and property tax incentives, there may be merit in incorporating these elements into current or contemplated business retention and attraction programming, particularly with respect to attracting investment to the municipality's proposed business/industrial park.**

Other jurisdictions have added to the suite of direct municipal incentives. For example, full or partial rebate of building permit fees where the proposed development advances the community improvement aims of the municipality. In some municipalities, relief from permit fees is offered for work related to façade improvements, signage, accessibility enhancements, COVID-related retrofits, brownfield development and work done to restore or enhance heritage properties.

A caution is required regarding reduction or relief from building permit fees. Pursuant to regulation, municipalities may only establish a permit regime based on cost-recovery, or less than cost recovery (in which case, inspection services are supported by the property tax levy). Many municipalities include a portion in their permit fee structure that is allocated to a reserve, which may only be used to offset building departmental costs during times of low permit activity. **One option may be to rebate only the portion of the permit fee allocated to the reserve, for projects that support the aims of the CIP program and / or a business retention and attraction strategy.**

The CIP provision in the legislation also refers to “affordable housing”. This issue has emerged as a major consideration in the work currently underway to create a new strategic plan for the municipality. **However, it would be premature to suggest any specific incentives to promote affordable housing projects, or components within larger developments, until a clear policy and land use program is established under the new Official Plan.**

Regarding the more familiar façade and signage incentive element, a key consideration in this review concerns the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and its profound impact on the local business community. Currently in the municipal sector there is much discussion (and a degree of urgency) over expansion of the list of eligible works under a CIP program to include COVID-19 related retrofits. Examples include:

- Purchase and installation of protective screening;
- Markings on the floor for physical distancing;
- Office renovations to meet the 6' spacing guideline;
- Renovations for window/door and curbside pick-up;
- On-line website work for retail operations to accommodate curb-side sales;

- Business counselling advice on operational changes in response to COVID

Recommendation Five: That an expanded MXC CIP incentive program applicable to premises include the following additional elements:

Renovation or construction costs, including but not limited to interior and exterior renovations and retrofits and signage related to meeting new health and safety requirements and/or recommendations due to public health infection control directives associated with the COVID-19 pandemic or other significant public health event;

Retrofits or modifications to premises to improve access pursuant to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Recommendation Six: That municipal staff be tasked to evaluate the projected impacts and implications of a building permit fee full or partial rebate program for eligible projects under a revised and expanded Community Improvement program.

It is important to note that, although the intake window for 2020 premises grants has expired, a reasonable interpretation of the **existing grant-eligible project criteria** does, in the view of Erebus, provide adequate latitude to contemplate the sort of work described in Recommendation Five above.

Business Improvement Area

As provided for in the Municipal Act, a Business Improvement Area (BIA) is a self-taxing body created by bylaw, applying to a designated area (typically downtown sectors). A BIA brings together the businesses and commercial property owners and tenants within the defined area, in partnership with the municipality, to undertake physical improvements and to market and promote their district. A partnership between a BIA and its host municipality can foster economic development and revitalization and provide a stimulus for tourism and investment in the community. A successful and active BIA often fosters community engagement, strengthens and builds community interest, spirit, pride and networking well beyond the boundaries of the BIA.

Our analysis of the existing and projected business clusters in the urban settlement areas of Middlesex Centre suggests there may not be a critical mass to support creation of a formal BIA. However, from our engagement with the Ilderton and Komoka Kilworth business groups, we understand there is a positive relationship between the business community and the municipality. Middlesex Centre is positioned to build on this relationship and investigate opportunities to advance the economic health and vitality of the community's commercial and business interests.

Consultation with Stakeholders

Consultation sessions with the Ilderton and Komoka Kilworth Business Associations were held August 4 and August 11, 2020, respectively. Both groups were in general agreement with the suggestions to broaden both the area and incentive package beyond the provisions of the current Ilderton Community Improvement Area and Plan. A follow-up engagement with the Ilderton Business Association was held September 3, 2020.

Municipal Commitment

As referenced above, the final incentive provision in the current Ilderton CIP is a commitment of the municipality to undertake measures to beautify and enrich the streetscape in Ilderton's downtown core. There appears to be room for a stronger municipal role in this regard. The municipality may consider engaging the Ilderton Business Association to explore opportunities to work in partnership on both physical improvements and programming to advance the economic health of the village. It should be noted that there is a concern that the recent commercial development at Ilderton Road and Hyde Park road is inconsistent with the Friedman vision for Ilderton's downtown core.

List of Recommendations

Recommendation One: *That overall, the approaches and direction set out in the current Ilderton CIP have retained currency and relevance, and given the 15-year timeline (to 2028), any new Community Improvement Plan for the Municipality of Middlesex Centre carry forward the goals and objectives as set out specifically for Ilderton, subject to a full and complete review of the findings of the Friedman report, and the outcome of the current Official Plan review for the Ilderton Urban Settlement Area.*

Recommendation Two: *That the specific strategic priorities and outcome statements cited in the Ilderton CIP and in this report be considered during development of the new Corporate/Community Strategic Plan, in progress at the time of writing this report.*

Recommendation Three: *That the Official Plan review and update currently underway include an analysis of the existing policy framework respecting application of the Community Improvement provisions of the Planning Act, and any modification to the application of Community Improvement programming be addressed in a new MXC Official Plan;*

And further, that the current Official Plan review have specific regard to the Friedman reports, particularly "Retooling Downtown Ilderton, March 2012".

Recommendation Four: *That MXC Council move forward with an amendment to the current Ilderton CIP to expand the designated Community Improvement Area to the entire municipality.*

Recommendation Five: *That an expanded MXC CIP incentive program applicable to premises include the following additional elements:*

Renovation or construction costs, including but not limited to interior and exterior renovations and retrofits and signage related to meeting new health and safety requirements and/or recommendations due to public health infection control directives associated with the COVID-19 pandemic or other significant public health event;

Retrofits or modifications to premises to improve access pursuant to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Recommendation Six: *That municipal staff be tasked to evaluate the projected impacts and implications of a building permit fee full or partial rebate program for eligible projects under a revised and expanded Community Improvement program.*

Appendix A: Resources/Sources

Documents

1. Ilderton Community Improvement Plan – Adopted by Bylaw 2013-017, February 2013
2. Community Improvement Planning Handbook, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2006
3. Middlesex County Community Improvement Plan Primer, Middlesex County
4. Middlesex Centre Community Improvement Evaluation Matrix
5. Ilderton Community Improvement Plan Evaluation Guide
6. Ilderton Community Improvement Plan Grants 2020, Guide

Interviews

- Municipality of Middlesex Centre Chief Administrative Officer and Senior Management Team
- Cara Finn, Director, Middlesex County Economic Development Department

Municipal Consultation/Research

1. Municipality of Brockton
2. Municipality of Clarington
3. Town of Penetanguishene
4. City of Thunder Bay
5. City of Pembroke
6. County of Bruce
7. Town of Hanover
8. City of London

Stakeholder Consultation

Ilderton Business Association – August 4 and September 3, 2020

Komoka Kilworth Business Association – August 11, 2020

APPENDIX C - Community Improvement Grant Application Form



Community Improvement Plan Grant Application

Note:
Forms are
updated
annually.

Applicants
should use
the most
up-to-date
application
form, which
can be
found on
the
municipal
website.

Applicants are encouraged to review the Middlesex Centre Community Improvement Plan prior to submitting a grant application (visit www.middlesexcentre.on.ca).

Please note that a consultation meeting with the Municipality's staff is required prior to submitting an application. Please contact the Municipality at (519) 666-0190 x227 to discuss your proposed project and set up a consultation meeting.

Please select which grant you are applying for:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Façade/Signage Improvement Grant | <input type="checkbox"/> Building Fee Rebate Program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Development Charges Grant | <input type="checkbox"/> AODA Retrofits Program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Property Tax Increment Equivalent Grant | <input type="checkbox"/> Rebate: Reno/Const Cots - Public Health Event |

Address of subject property: _____

Legal description of subject property: _____

Assessment Roll Number: _____

Business Name (if applicable): _____

Applicant(s)

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Village: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____ Cell: _____

Fax: _____ Email: _____

Registered owner(s) of the subject property (if different from above)

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Village: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____ Cell: _____

Fax: _____ Email: _____

Please provide a detailed description of your project, including a timeline for completion:

Have you or will you be applying for any other public funding for this project, including monies from federal, provincial or municipal sources? Please provide the sources and amounts.

Please provide detailed cost estimates for your project. Supporting materials such as drawings and construction quotes may be attached to this application.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Details</u>	<u>Cost</u>

Total Project Cost

\$ _____

I solemnly declare that the information contained in this application form is complete and true. I acknowledge that this application is subject to review and does not guarantee that funding will be granted for the proposed project.

Applicant's Signature

Date