

STAFF REPORT:



REPORT TO: Council
MEETING DATE: November 28, 2011
REPORT NO.: CEDC.11.25
SUBJECT: Proposed 2012 Economic Development Investment Plan
PREPARED BY: Lisa Kidd, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report CEDC.11.25 "Proposed 2012 Economic Development Investment Plan" for information purposes; and

THAT Council approve the proposed economic development investment plan for 2012 which includes the completion of a Business Retention and Expansion Study and Action Plan, local food promotion initiatives and an enhanced way-finding signage program as outlined in section (ii) of the report; and

FURTHER THAT Council direct Staff to move forward with continued economic development activity as outlined in section (ii) of the report.

B. Background

The purpose of this report is two-fold; first to provide an overview of the Town's investment in local and regional economic development in 2011 and second to offer Council a proposed economic development investment plan for 2012.

(i) 2011 Economic Development Investment

Over the course of 2011, a complement of Town Staff under the governance of Council, independently or in partnership with various stakeholders, invested in the following economic development related activities (* indicates Town-led):

- Annual advertising promoting The Blue Mountains*
- Annual Community Grants and Donations Program*
- Apple Harvest Fest
- Apple Pie Trail
- Bicycle Friendly Community Status*
- Centurion 2011
- Communication of Share The Road, Safe Cycling *
- Design, launch and operation of Town on-line building and by-law services *
- Interview with On The Bay magazine, re: local economic development
- Investment in the Georgian Triangle Tourist Association
- Environmental Farm Plan
- Fish webcast project in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources *
- Local Trails Map *
- NHL Officials Training Camp*

- Apple Promotion*
- “October is Harvest Month” proclamation and flag raising *
- Peak to Shore Festival
- Regional Economic Development Strategy
- Regional Labour Force Development Survey and Strategy
- Relationship Building with*:
 - Agricultural Advisory Committee
 - Thornbury Business Improvement Area
 - Blue Mountain Village Association
 - Beaver Valley Outreach
 - The Blue Mountains Chamber of Commerce
 - Clarksburg Business Association
 - County of Grey
 - Georgian Bay Destination Development Partnership
 - Georgian Triangle Tourist Association
 - Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs
 - Regional Economic Development Officers
 - RTO7
 - Small Business Enterprise Centre
- Revamped on-line business listing through new 3rd party provider with the intent to data share with other stakeholders as desired*
- Salsafest
- SPARC entrepreneurial competition

(ii) Proposed Economic Development Investment Plan for 2012

New Projects for 2012

In the absence of a Town Economic Development Committee, Staff has been in consultation with the following groups in the community to garner ideas with respect to a proposed plan for new economic development investment in 2012:

- Regional Economic Development Officers
- The Agricultural Advisory Committee
- The Blue Mountain Village Association
- The Blue Mountains Chamber of Commerce
- The Small Business Enterprise Centre
- The Thornbury Business Improvement Area

Staff believes that consultation with these stakeholders in our community was and remains a desirable process, helping the Town identify potential annual projects which align with our Economic Prosperity Plan and address the needs of our three main economic sectors: agricultural, tourism and small business.

Below is an un-vetted list of ideas which were brought forward by these groups and other individuals from the community:

- **Complete a regional and/or local business retention and expansion (BRE) study and action plan, to help the community identify actions that will help local businesses stay in business, keep existing jobs and create new ones**
- Develop a local food marketing program for the private-sector community
- **Develop local food promotion initiatives**
- Develop a “Savour The Blue Mountains” web portal to market local food and products
- Strike a Sister City Relationship with a Town/City in The Blue Mountains Region of Jamaica
- Recruit a post-secondary economic intern/co-op student for the Town
- Implement action items from the Regional Labour Force Development Strategy
- **Enhance a future way-finding signage program, allowing for private sector participation**
- Develop a business recruitment strategy

Through dialogue and dotmocracy processes with stakeholders, the items above identified in bold received the greatest support. As such, Staff is recommending these items as part of the economic development investment plan for 2012.

For Council's consideration, a BRE study and action plan, development of local food initiatives and enhancement of a future directional signage program meet the following actions outlined in the Town's Plan for Economic Prosperity, Red Hot and Blue:

- Conduct a Business Retention and Expansion study and investigate funding such as the Rural Economic Development Program to carry out the study
- Develop buy-local branding and marketing materials
- Enhance way-finding and sense of place for current and future residents and tourists with regional signage coordination

Projected Financial Impact of New Projects

Based on stakeholder consultation, Staff proposes an investment of \$15,000 in a BRE study and action plan, and a \$15,000 investment in local food promotion initiatives for the 2012 year. The enhanced directional signage program would be cost neutral.

The proposed economic development initiatives budget is \$30,000. The above-noted projects would fully expend the proposed budget.

With respect to the BRE, financial partnerships with regional municipalities and an application to a matching fund program through OMAFRA would increase the budget for this project.

With respect to local food initiatives, Staff expects to bring forward specific local food initiatives for Council's consideration, pending budget availability.

There would be no cost to enhance the current way-finding signage plan. Private sector participation would be on a fee basis. **However**, there is a cost to implementing the base way-finding signage strategy. As previously noted in a prior report to Council, the cost for the **base project** is considered as separate enhancement report in the 2012 budget.

Continued Economic Development Activity in 2012

Staff is of the opinion that the following financial and in-kind investment in economic development **continue** in 2012. These investments would not result in an increase to the annual operating budget:

- Annual advertising promoting The Blue Mountains
- Annual Grants and Donations Program
- Investment in the Georgian Triangle Tourist Association
- Fish webcast project in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources
- October is Harvest Month proclamation and flag raising
- Communication of Share The Road, Safe Cycling
- Relationship Building with:
 - Agricultural Advisory Committee
 - Thornbury Business Improvement Area
 - Blue Mountain Village Association
 - Beaver Valley Outreach
 - The Blue Mountains Chamber of Commerce
 - Clarksburg Business Association
 - County of Grey
 - Georgian Bay Destination Development Partnership
 - Georgian Triangle Tourist Association
 - Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs
 - Regional Economic Development Officers
 - RTO7
 - Small Business Enterprise Centre
- On-line business listing

Other Comments Received During the Stakeholder Consultation Process

During this consultation process, group representatives also made the following suggestions with respect to economic development:

- “Clearly identify short and long-term strategies that can be implemented and are within the town’s financial ability to support.”
- “Look at proposed by-laws through the economic development lens while reviewing such proposals.”
- “...[R]educe red tape [as] a good inexpensive start to economic development.”
- “[Develop] a business plan for economic development that sets out all of the resources to going to that plan. So that would include events that have economic impact, tourism and agricultural programs and others.”
- “[Amend the grant process]... it seems that the [business] stream is for initiatives that have a measureable economic impact on the community.”
- “Consider focus[ing] on items with deliverables that will have a true impact on economic development within the community, either in the short term or with clear directives for growth over the next few years.”
- “Consider... the impact upon current business retention and business development of any new initiative or by-law during the development stage, to ensure it is not counterproductive to the economic development of the Town. To obtain the maximum

benefit from the limited funds within this budget, a cohesive strategy for business must be developed and supported by all departments within the municipality.”

Staff is of the opinion that there is value in these comments. Staff is committed to working through these challenges and opportunities under Council's direction.

C. The Blue Mountains' Strategic Plan

- 6.3 Practice open and proactive communications
- 6.4 Develop and encourage innovation and use of best practices by Council and Staff
- 6.5 Involve the community, business sector, developers, public partners and others in the ongoing work of the municipality
- 6.6 Implement processes for continuous improvement

D. Environmental Impacts

The notion of local food initiatives described in the 2012 plan would aim to encourage local food consumption, thereby reducing food transportation costs and green house gas emissions.

E. Financial Impact

This will have a potential budget impact of \$30,000 on the Economic Development Initiatives Budget. This is an increase of 50% over last year's budget for Economic Development Initiatives.

The Economic Development Initiatives Budget will be considered during the 2012 operating budget discussions taking place in December 2011.

F. In Consultation With

This staff report was prepared in consultation with Chief Administrative Officer, Troy Speck and Director of Financial and Information Services, Robert Cummings.

G. Attached

None.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Kidd, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator

For more information, please contact:
Lisa Kidd
lkidd@thebluemountains.ca
519-599-3131, ext. 282