

2011

Town Centre CIP Report



Growth and Development

Department

City of Greater Sudbury

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Background

In the spring of 2010, Planning staff presented a report to the City of Greater Sudbury Policy Committee regarding options for expanding the financial incentive programs available through the Downtown Sudbury Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to the former municipal Town Centre area identified in the Official Plan, the Development Charge By-law and also the Flour Mill Business Improvement Area.

The Committee directed that staff develop criteria for historical downtown cores and consider the following centres mentioned by the Committee members: Kathleen Street, Copper Cliff, Coniston, West End, Val Therese and former Village of Hanmer.

The purpose of this report is to present criteria for evaluating the different areas in terms of their ability to achieve the goals of a Town Centre Community Improvement Plan. The report also analyses each of the subject areas and suggests the best option for achieving the type of improvements desired. Finally the report introduces a draft Town Centre Community Improvement Plan to be used in upcoming public consultations in the former municipalities and in the City's historic "Main Street" commercial areas.

What is a Town Centre?

A town center is typically an enduring, walkable, and sometimes integrated open-air, multiuse area that is organized around a clearly identifiable and energized public realm where citizens can gather and strengthen their community bonds. These areas are anchored by retail, dining, and leisure uses, as well as by vertical or horizontal residential uses. At least one other type of development is included in a town center, such as office, hospitality, civic, and cultural uses. Over time, a town center should evolve into the densest, most compact, and most diverse part of a community, with strong connections to its surroundings.



Purpose of the Downtown Sudbury Community Improvement Plan

When evaluating the potential sites for an expanded Town Centre CIP program staff focused on the essential elements of a Town Centre and also referred back to the rationale for implementing the original 1987 Downtown CIP program which was to “Improve the function, condition, image and appearance of streets and streetscape within Metro Centre”. While this program originally only included physical improvements on City property, the intent was to make the Downtown a more attractive and pedestrian friendly environment to attract people and business.

When the Downtown CIP was expanded to include a tax increment financing component in 2003, the rationale was to assist downtown businesses in rehabilitating their buildings to accommodate new tenants as high vacancy rates in the downtown were a concern to the City.

In 2007, the downtown CIP was amended for a second time to include a number of financial incentives including Planning fee rebates, Feasibility Study Grants, Building Improvement Loans and Façade Improvement Grants. The rationale for this third amendment was to augment the existing incentives, recognizing that the downtown area was comprised of older building stock and a mix of uses, to encourage the adaptive reuse of older building stock and the creation of additional dwelling units in mixed use buildings.

Generally it is acknowledged that downtown is important, and the City continues to develop tools to assist downtown businesses to remain competitive and viable in support of maintaining a strong downtown. What the CIP programs are not intended to do is use public money to pay for deferred maintenance on private buildings.

Based on the rationale for implementing the Downtown CIP, the purpose of a proposed Town Centre CIP would be to:

- Enhance pedestrian friendly commercial areas to attract people and new business;
- Address Commercial and Residential vacancy issues by improving the building stock; and
- Rehabilitate older, mixed used (and preferably multi storey) building stock, to promote the creation of additional residential units.

It is these criteria that were used to assess the various subject areas in terms of their ability to serve as a Town Centre and in turn to benefit from a Community Improvement Plan targeted at rehabilitating existing Town Centres in the City of Greater Sudbury.

Proposed Town Centre Community Improvement Plan

Similar to the issues facing downtown Sudbury, the Town Centre areas in Greater Sudbury are facing new challenges, as the retail sector proceeds through restructuring. Membership warehouse clubs, home-improvement centres and big box stores that locate in the outskirts of a municipality draw upon consumers from what was the traditional “Main Street” retail areas located in the Town Centres of surrounding communities. These Town Centres and traditional “Main Street” areas serve an important role as they are located in established residential areas, have existing mixed use buildings, are compact and promote pedestrian activity.

The focus of a proposed Town Centres CIP would be the historical commercial and retail areas (or “Main Streets”) in the amalgamated City of Greater Sudbury. These areas, like the downtown of the former City of Sudbury, have traditionally served as retail and commercial centres for their respective areas but are now in danger of going into decline due to the shift in the retail market place over the past number of years. This shift has seen the development of New Format retail stores in the suburban areas away from the Town Centres and “Main Street” areas of the City of Greater Sudbury.

During this transition the Town Centres and “Main Street” areas have, in many cases, experienced higher than desired vacancy rates in all sectors, including commercial, retail and residential. These vacancies represent a challenge to the revitalization of these areas. The ability of businesses and property owners to rehabilitate their buildings to respond to tenant needs or to changes in the market place requires innovative solutions.



The Planning Act allows municipalities the opportunity to use tax increment financing, grants and loans as methods to finance improvements to buildings or land which assist with revitalization initiatives. These programs are in place in the Downtown Sudbury CIP and are also proposed to be used in a Town Centre CIP.

This report evaluates each of the areas proposed in the previous staff report, along with those included by the Policy Committee, based on their ability to meet the three criteria outlined in the previous section. The purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether areas should be included in the proposed Town Centre Community Improvement Plan, or if they would be better served by other programs.

Draft Town Centre Community Improvement Plan

Using the Downtown Sudbury Community Improvement Plan as a template, staff have developed a draft Town Centre Community Improvement plan that incorporates essentially identical programs, application processes and eligibility requirements.

It is recommended that this draft Town Centre CIP be used as a starting point in public consultations surrounding Town Centre improvement programs.

Funding for a Town Centre Community Improvement Plan

As with any other Community Improvement Plan, the document is necessary to fulfill the Planning Act requirements of determining up front how and where public money will be spent in a Community Improvement Area. The amount of public funding flowing through a CIP is determined by Council, usually on an annual basis.

One of the largest components of any Community Improvement Plan is the amount of financial support and funding it receives from Council. In the case of the proposed Town Centre CIP, funding has yet to be determined. One option would be to allocate some or all of the remaining funds from the Downtown Sudbury Community Improvement Plan to the proposed Town Centre CIP. If the project is successful, Council could decide to keep funding the Town Centre CIP on an annual basis.

Other Alternatives

In reviewing the Town Centres and other “Main Street” commercial areas in the City of Greater Sudbury it became evident that some of the areas did not meet the traditional definition of a town centre. In a number of cases, the town centre or “Main Street” area is centred on a major road, the speed and size of which do not lend it to pedestrian activities. In other cases the defined Town Centre area no longer reflects the existing condition on the ground, as the area has transitioned to a residential one. Additionally, some Town Centre areas are composed of only a few commercial properties that may benefit more from a site specific CIP as opposed to one for an entire area. Finally, some of the areas reviewed already have Community Improvement Plans in place and may be better served by modifications to the existing CIP instead of implementing a new one.

As a result, the question becomes; if some areas are not suitable for a Town Centre CIP, what tools does the municipality have to assist in their rehabilitation?

Brownfields CIP

The Planning Department is currently in the process of developing a Community Improvement Plan for Brownfield sites.

Brownfields are those places where, in the past, a commercial or industrial use existed, but now sit idle. We know them as old manufacturing sites, warehouses, gas stations, dry cleaners and auto repair and

service sites, to name a few. Sometimes a vacant building is left behind on these sites, looking for a new lease on life. In other cases the building is removed, the site cordoned off and allowed to go fallow. Sometimes, the past use impairs the soil and groundwater quality, restricting future potential and deterring investment. Other times, soil and groundwater quality is not impaired, but thought to be, which can have the same result. Sometimes, owners are not paying their property taxes, leaving the City with growing liabilities.

The purpose of the Brownfields CIP will be to use financial incentives to encourage development on individual sites. This type of approach may better lend itself to some of the areas reviewed in this report as the problems are restricted to individual sites as opposed to the area as a whole.

Existing Community Improvement Plans

In some of the areas reviewed, there are existing CIPs already in place (i.e. West End CIP, Donovan CIP, Flour Mill CIP). Much in depth public consultation and planning work has already gone into these CIPs and it would not be efficient to abandon them in favour of a new CIP. In these situations it may be more prudent to amend some of these existing CIPs to include financial incentives instead of putting them under the proposed Town Centre CIP.

Other Options

In other cases, the areas reviewed do not meet the definition of a Town Centre and do not have an existing CIP in place. In these areas, improvements may best come from improvements in landscaping on Municipal property and in the road allowances, or from some other type of program in the future.

Town Centre Review Findings

The following section provides a breakdown of each area reviewed for possible inclusion in a proposed Town Centre CIP and provides recommendations on the best way to address each area.

Levack

The Town Centre Area Official Plan designation for Levack comprises an area of Levack Drive from 3rd Avenue South to approximately mid block between 2nd Avenue South and 1st Avenue South. The north side of Levack Drive is a public space containing a mix of parking areas, landscaping, sitting areas and a cenotaph serving a central place function. The area is well maintained and inviting to pedestrians. The south side of Levack Drive is occupied by a variety of commercial uses, including a bank,



post office, hardware store, convenience store and restaurants. There are some vacancies, including a former grocery store and mixed use buildings along 2nd Avenue South with ground floor commercial space and residential possibilities above. Currently, there is not a CIP in place in Levack.

In evaluating the Levack Town Centre against the above three criteria, it can be determined that a pedestrian friendly compact commercial core exists, there are a number of vacant commercial buildings and there are opportunities to rehabilitate older mixed use commercial buildings. As a result, Levack would be an excellent candidate for the proposed Town Centre CIP.

Onaping

The Town Centre Official Plan designation for Onaping consists of an area on the north side of Regional



Road #8 between Fraser Avenue and St. James Street, extending west to include a gas station and Royal Canadian Legion. The bulk of the Town Centre designation is occupied by an existing commercial strip mall that is half vacant and includes a LCBO, convenience store and a retail store. The area is auto oriented as there are no existing pedestrian amenities in this area, and few

opportunities for residential intensification exist.

Based on the above the Onaping Town Centre area does not meet the requirements of a Town Centre in the sense of the proposed CIP. Since the Onaping Town Centre is primarily focused around one semi-vacant and underutilized property, it may be a prime candidate to benefit from the upcoming Brownfields Community Improvement Plan.

Dowling

The Dowling Town Centre includes areas north and south of Highway 144. The area to the north of Highway 144 consists of a strip mall, anchored by a grocery store and a few single detached homes accessed off of a service road (Main Street). The area to the south consists of public uses including Larchwood Public School, City of Greater Sudbury Public Works and EMS buildings and an arena.



There is one private commercial business, which occupies the former municipal offices of Dowling. The area is not pedestrian friendly due to the presence of Highway 144 and the auto orientated strip mall. There were no perceived vacancy issues nor were there any visible opportunities to rehabilitate mixed use commercial buildings. Essentially the area is a highway with some auto orientated strip retail uses.

Given the fact that a large number of the buildings in the Dowling Town Centre are publicly owned and the fact that Hwy 144 is a major obstacle to pedestrian activities, the area does not fall into the category of a Town Centre as envisioned in this CIP. The area also does not have an existing CIP to work with,

meaning that the area may benefit from some other type of program in the future.



Chelmsford

The Chelmsford Town Centre consists of the east and west sides of Errington Avenue from Morin Street north to Lorne Street. The southern part of the Town Centre is dominated by a newer commercial strip plaza that includes a grocery store, bank, drug store, LCBO and discount retail store. North

of Mona Avenue, the area transforms into an older and more pedestrian orientated retail area that includes various retail stores, personal service shops and restaurants. Opportunities for residential intensification in mixed use buildings were identified along Errington Avenue and Main Street East. A number of vacant commercial units were also identified.

Chelmsford currently does not have a Community Improvement Plan in place. As a result, it is recommended that the portion of the Chelmsford Town Centre north of Mona Avenue be included in a CIP due to its compact pedestrian built form, noticeable vacancies and mixed use building rehabilitation opportunities.

Walden

The Walden Town Center Area consists of a broad area extending north and west of the intersection of Regional Road 55 and Municipal Road 24. The area consists of a number of automobile orientated uses including a grocery store, hardware/lumber stores, hotel, strip malls and a bank. The area is not pedestrian orientated or compact and is best described as suburban commercial. The area did not contain a significant amount of mixed use buildings capable of being rehabilitated with residential intensification.

As a result, it is not recommended that the current Walden Town Centre be included in the proposed CIP program. This area may benefit from some other type of improvement program in the future.

However, the commercial district off of Municipal Road 24 in Lively would benefit from the proposed Town Centre CIP program. This area is pedestrian orientated with landscaping and other amenities and contains mixed use buildings suitable for adaptive reuse, and should be included in a Town Centre CIP program as opposed to the Town Centre area designated in the Official Plan.



Azilda

The Azilda Town Centre area is centred around the intersection of Notre Dame and St. Agnes Streets. The area is characterized by low density commercial uses along the north side of St. Agnes Street. The area is somewhat compact; however the built form (mostly strip malls and one storey commercial buildings) does not lend itself to residential intensification. Additionally, there were few vacancies observed.



Based on these criteria, the Azilda Town Centre would not meet the objectives of the proposed CIP, nor is it covered by an existing CIP. As a result, Azilda may benefit from some other type of program in the future.

Val Caron

The Val Caron Core Area, as defined in the Development Charges By-law, centres on the intersection of Municipal Road 80 and Main Street. The area is predominantly an automobile orientated suburban commercial area. The buildings are mainly newer one story strip malls set back a large distance from the road, with few vacancies observed. The speed of traffic and size of Municipal Road 80 does not lend its self to enhancing pedestrian traffic in the area.



The Val Caron core area can, therefore, best be described as a low density, auto orientated, suburban area.

As a result, the Val Caron commercial area as defined in the Development Charges By-law does not meet the requirements of a Town Centre and should not be included in the proposed CIP. Since there isn't an existing CIP in place, this area may benefit from some other type of program in the future.

Hanmer

The Hanmer Core Area designation as defined in the Development Charges By-law is also located on either side of Municipal Road 80, from St. Joseph Street in the west to Cote in the east. The area is low density with one storey commercial building (mostly automotive related uses) mixed in with single detached homes. The one mixed use building (former Hanmer Tavern) was recently demolished. Again, the size of Municipal Road 80 and the speed of traffic do not lend its self to the creation or enhancement of a pedestrian friendly area. Retail uses are spread out along Municipal Road 80 and are set back a significant distance from the road. Additionally, few



vacancies were observed and the building stock did not lend itself to residential intensification.

Based on the above, Hanmer would not qualify as a Town Centre and shouldn't be included in the proposed CIP. Given that no CIP currently exists, this area may benefit from the upcoming Brownfields CIP or some other type of program.

Capreol

The Capreol Town Centre encompasses an area on both sides of Young Street, north of the railway tracks, an area east of Bloor that includes the railway museum, and an area south of the railway tracks around Crescent and Hanna Avenues. Capreol's Town Centre is compact, centrally located within the town and is comprised of a variety of mixed use buildings. The main area



along Young Street is pedestrian orientated with angle parking on both sides of the road. A number of vacancies were observed, along with opportunities for residential intensification via the upgrading of existing and creation of new dwelling units.

Capreol meets all of the requirements of a Town Centre CIP and is currently not subject to an existing CIP and should, therefore, be included in the proposed CIP.

Garson

The Garson Town Centre area is triangular shaped with Falconbridge Road comprising the east and south boundary, over to Orell Street north of the creek on the west. The northern boundary is Spruce Street. This area is a Town Centre in the sense that the school, arena and community centre are all located in this area. There is evidence of a historical commercial district; however, most of these buildings have been converted



to residential uses some time ago. As such there is no identifiable commercial area in the Town Centre area of Garson. In terms of the commercial activity in Garson, it is dominated by plazas and strip malls on the south side of Falconbridge Road.

For these reasons, it is not recommended that the Garson Town Centre be included in the proposed CIP program. This area of Garson is not covered by an existing CIP and may benefit from some other type of program to improve the area.

Wahnapitae

The Wahnapitae Town Centre area as outlined in the Official Plan essentially applies to two properties, a convenience store on Hill Street near Hwy 17 East and a lumber store further south. There is no evidence of a central commercial district in Wahnapitae. Due to the fragmented commercial nature of Wahnapitae, it is not recommended that it be included in the proposed Town Centre CIP. Wahnapitae, would most likely benefit from some other type of program to improve the area.



Flour Mill BIA

The Flour Mill BIA encompasses areas on the east and west sides of Notre Dame Avenue from Leslie Street to the rail tracks in the north. The east and west boundaries of the BIA are Clinton and Laforest Avenues respectively. The west side of Notre Dame is a compact pedestrian orientated environment with most of the buildings abutting the street line. The built form predominantly includes older two and three storey buildings with residential uses and opportunities on the upper levels. The east side of Notre Dame is less pedestrian friendly with the buildings set back a large distance from the road and an abundance of front yard parking lots. The BIA area also extends along east/west street from Notre Dame approximately 1 block. These side street areas include residential and commercial uses in mixed use buildings. A review of the area revealed a functional commercial area with some vacancies and opportunities for residential intensification.

There is an existing “Flour Mill Community Improvement Plan” in place in the Flour Mill. This plan was adopted in 1991 and does not contain any financial programs. One option would be to update the existing Flour Mill CIP with a financial incentives program, another option would be to include the Flour Mill BIA in the proposed Town Centre Community Improvement Plan. The applicability of



the existing Flour Mill Community Improvement Plan is something that could be further explored during the public consultation sessions.

Additional Areas

In addition to the areas outlined in the staff report, Council also directed staff to evaluate Kathleen Street, Copper Cliff, Coniston, West End, Val Therese and the former Village of Hanmer as possible locations to take part in a proposed Town Centre Community Improvement Plan.

Copper Cliff

The Copper Cliff Mixed Use Commercial Area identified in the Official Plan is located on both sides of Serpentine Street from Godfrey Drive to Jones Lane. The area is compact, pedestrian friendly (with angle parking provided on the streets) and occupied by mixed use buildings. There were no obvious vacancies visible and a



few of the buildings appeared to have undergone recent façade and interior improvements.

This area would meet the criteria established earlier and would be a good candidate for the proposed Town Centre CIP program.

Coniston

Like Garson, Coniston is a town that grew around a former mine site. When the mine ceased to be the focus of the town and access to commercial uses in Sudbury was improved, the former commercial area transitioned to residential. Evidence of the former commercial area of Coniston is still visible in the architecture of some of the buildings; however, they have long since been converted to residential uses. The Town Centre Area identified in the Official Plan is occupied by an arena and a park. The current



commercial area of Coniston is situated at the intersection of Hwy 17 East and Second Avenue and is occupied by a commercial plaza and some strip mall developments. Coniston is similar to Garson in the fact that there is evidence that the former commercial area has transitioned to residential uses and the current commercial uses have consolidated into a newer commercial strip mall near the major

roadway.

Based on the above observations Coniston is not considered to be an appropriate candidate for a Town Centre CIP program and may be better served by some other type of improvement program.

West End

The West End area as defined in the 2000 “West End Community Improvement Plan” encompasses an area centering on Regent and Lorne Streets from Elm Street to Kelly Lake Road. The main commercial areas are located on the north side of Lorne Street and on Regent Street in the Douglas Street area. On Lorne Street, there is a mix of uses, including low



density residential and commercial. The speed of traffic on Lorne Street does not lend itself well to the establishment of a pedestrian friendly environment, there are also few buildings that would lend themselves to residential conversions or intensification.

With respect to the Regent Street corridor it is similar to the Coniston and Garson areas in that there is evidence of a former commercial area, however, the conversion to residential uses is well underway.

Given the fact that there is currently an existing CIP in place in the West End and that work is underway implementing that plan, it is not recommended that the West End be included in the proposed Town Centre CIP. In the future, it may be desirable to amend the West End CIP to include financial incentives.

Kathleen Street

Kathleen Street extends from Frood Road in the West to Notre Dame Street in the East. The street is mainly commercial in nature from Frood Road to the railway tracks at Antwerp Avenue, after which it transforms to primarily a residential street before becoming an institutional area at Notre Dame. The west end of Kathleen Street can best be described as a former neighbourhood commercial area that is currently in decline. In terms of pedestrian accessibility the Kathleen Street commercial area is pedestrian friendly with many of the buildings located right at the streetline. The built form includes some one storey strip mall type developments; however, the majority of the buildings are two storey mixed use buildings with opportunities for residential intensification.



The Kathleen Street area is currently included in the existing “Donovan & Area Community Improvement Plan”, which has been in place since 1995. The Donovan CIP is a very comprehensive plan that includes options for improving the Kathleen Street Commercial Area. One of the options in the plan is the use of grants or loans to implement plan

objectives. Since a large amount of consultation and design has already been invested in developing the Donovan CIP, it may be more appropriate to introduce financial incentives into the existing plan as opposed to introducing a new CIP.

Val Therese

The Val Therese commercial area extends along Municipal Road 80 from, approximately, Desmarais Road to Deschene Road. Much like Val Caron, the area is predominantly an automobile orientated suburban commercial area. The buildings are mainly newer one storey strip malls set back a large distance from the road, with few vacancies observed. The speed of traffic and size of Municipal Road 80 does not lend its self to enhancing pedestrian traffic in the area.

Based on the above, the Val Therese area does not meet the definition of a Town Centre and it is not recommended that it be included in the proposed CIP. Since no CIP is currently in place for this area, it may benefit from some other type of program in the future.



Summary

The purpose of this report was to develop criteria to analyze the Town Centre Areas identified in the City of Greater Sudbury Official Plan, along with other “Main Street” commercial areas and areas identified by Council, to see if they were appropriate areas to introduce a proposed Town Centre CIP with financial programs similar to those that make up the Downtown Community Improvement Plan. The report also identified other opportunities that could be used in the subject areas if they did not meet the criteria of a Town Centre.

A review of the nature of Town Centres and the history of the Downtown Sudbury Community Improvement Plan found that there were three key elements that areas had to have in order to be candidates for the proposed Town Centre Community Improvement Plan:

- Pedestrian friendly commercial areas with the potential for enhancement to attract people and new business;
- Commercial and Residential vacancy issues that could be addressed by improving the building stock; and
- The presence of older, mixed used (and preferably multi storey) building stock, to promote the creation of additional residential units.

If the areas did not meet these criteria, it was determined that they may be better served by an existing CIP (if one is in place), the upcoming Brownfields CIP or some other type of program that may be introduced in the future. Based on the analysis conducted the following table was produced with respect to which areas should be included in the proposed Town Centre Community Improvement Plan.

Include in the proposed Town Centre CIP	Modify Existing CIP in place or use Brownfields CIP	Address with other program in the future
Levack	Onaping Falls	Dowling
Chelmsford	Hanmer	Azilda
Lively	West End	Val Caron
Capreol	Kathleen Street	Wahnapitae
Flour Mill BIA – option 1	Flour Mill BIA – option 2	Garson
Copper Cliff		Coniston
		Val Therese

Recommendation

That Council direct staff proceed with a public consultation process regarding a Town Centre Community Improvement Plan and its suitability in the subject areas. It is also recommended that staff be directed to use the attached draft Town Centre Community Improvement Plan as part of the public consultation process. And further that staff be directed to report back to Council with the results of the public consultation and recommendations for moving forward.