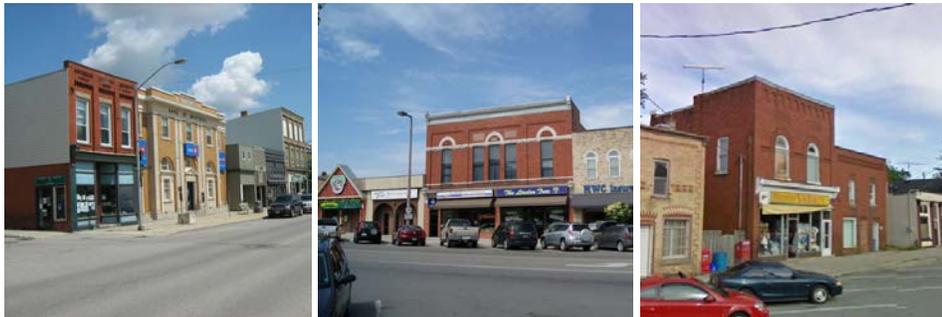




COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN



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1.0 PREAMBLE TO THE COUNTY COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Community improvement planning is commonly used as a tool to provide assistance to municipalities to address challenges related to growth management, accessibility and development. It provides a strategy for the redevelopment of lands, buildings and infrastructure through the implementation of various financial incentives. The development of a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is generally shaped by local needs, priorities and circumstances and it is intended that activities associated with community improvement address municipal or regional planning objectives within specific, defined areas through municipally-driven and/or incentive-based programs.

The County of Oxford proposes to build on existing Local Municipal CIPs through the adoption of a County CIP (CCIP) by providing an upper-tier framework for additional financial incentives to promote and encourage renewal, redevelopment and rehabilitation within the County.

1.2 COUNTY ROLE IN COMMUNITY PLANNING

The County of Oxford is comprised of eight (8) local municipalities and covers an area of approximately 2,030 square kilometres (783 square miles). The primary urban centres within the County, being the City of Woodstock, Town of Tillsonburg and the Town of Ingersoll, are generally recognized as focal points for employment, commerce, recreation and administration while the rural municipalities are known primarily for agriculture and resource extraction. The numerous rural settlements across the County provide residential opportunities, population-related services and employment functions on a smaller scale than found in the large urban centres.

Within Oxford, the County level of government is responsible for providing a number of services to the local municipalities, including public health and social services, long-term care as well as water and wastewater services. Economic development is the direct responsibility of the local municipalities, however, land use planning and development is administered County-wide through the County Community and Strategic Planning Office in accordance with the policies of a single, upper-tier Official Plan. While much of the Official Plan is implemented through local planning processes and decision-making, the Plan provides strategic initiatives and objectives to support local development. The County Planning Office, in support of the policies of the County Official Plan, assists the local municipalities in the preparation and implementation of various land use related initiatives including the preparation of the County Economic Strategy (2006), County Growth Projections, Design Guideline projects and Community Improvement Plans (CIPs).

The County of Oxford Official Plan represents the fundamental planning principles and strategic direction that is to be applied to land use policy decisions throughout the County and collectively, these principles define a vision of the future urban, rural, cultural, natural and economic environment for Oxford. With respect to economic competitiveness, it is a strategic initiative of the Official Plan to recognize the importance of traditional downtown Central Business Districts and Village Core Areas as retail, administrative and business centres and areas of residential intensification. The policies of the Official Plan support this initiative and reflect the planned function of the County's large urban centres and serviced villages.

In recent years, the County has partnered with local municipalities to develop and implement a number of studies and community improvement initiatives at the local level. Local Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) have been established in both Woodstock and Tillsonburg and central area design studies have been completed for each of these municipalities. CIPs are also being contemplated or developed for Ingersoll and Norwich Village, and the Township of Zorra has completed a community design study project. The development of both design guidelines and CIPs have led to, or otherwise complemented, the creation of specific financial assistance programs aimed at redevelopment and rehabilitation within defined areas (i.e. downtowns) of the County.

1.3 LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

i) Municipal Act

Ontario's Municipal Act, 2001 is the principle statute governing municipal organization and the delivery of services in Ontario. The Act came into effect on January 1, 2003, replacing the 1990 Municipal Act. Effective January 1, 2007, the *Municipal Statute Law Amendment Act* introduced significant amendments to the Municipal Act, providing municipalities with greater flexibility to meet community expectations and fulfilling responsibilities.

Section 106 of the Municipal Act prohibits municipalities from directly or indirectly assisting any manufacturing business or other industrial or commercial enterprise through the granting of financial incentives, a practice that is commonly referred to as 'bonusing'. Notwithstanding Section 106, the Act does provide an exception which allows a municipality to offer certain incentives where the said municipality has approved a Community Improvement Plan in accordance with Section 28 of the Planning Act.

ii) Planning Act

The Planning Act empowers the Council of a lower-tier or local municipality to designate community improvement areas (CIPs) and develop CIPs in accordance with the Act. Where a municipality has an approved CIP in place, the Act directs that the municipality may:

- Acquire, hold, clear, grade, otherwise prepare, sell, lease or otherwise dispose of lands;
- Construct, repair, rehabilitate or improve buildings on lands acquired or held by the municipality;
- Make grants or loans to registered owners, assessed owners and tenants of lands or buildings to pay for the whole or part of any cost of rehabilitating such land or buildings; and
- Enter into agreements with any government authority for conducting studies and for the preparation, implementation and financing of plans and programs.

Upper-tier municipalities, such as the County of Oxford, generally do not have these broad powers, however, certain upper-tier municipalities, as prescribed in the Planning Act, may develop CIPs pertaining to a limited range of matters. The County of Oxford is not a 'prescribed upper-tier municipality' as described in the Act, however, special status has been granted to the County under Section 77 of the Planning Act by which the County may exercise any authority under the Act that could be exercised by a lower-tier municipality, including the development of a 'general' CIP.

In light of Oxford County's special status under the Planning Act, County Council passed a resolution in June 2012 directing Planning staff to commence the development of a County Community Improvement Plan (CCIP) that will provide a financial incentive involving the granting back of the County portion of taxes on qualifying properties.

iii) Provincial Policy Statement

The Provincial Policy Statement – 2005 (PPS) came into effect on March 1, 2005 and provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development matters. The PPS establishes the policy foundation for regulating the development and use of land and supports the provincial goal of enhancing the quality of life for the citizens of Ontario. The PPS is issued under Section 3 of the Planning Act, which requires that all decisions affecting land use planning matters “shall be consistent with” policy statements issued under the Act.

The PPS provides high-level policy direction pertinent to community improvement areas, including intensification, redevelopment, mixed land use and heritage preservation. In this regard the PPS generally promotes:

- Land use patterns in settlement areas based on densities and a mix of land uses that use land and resources efficiently, promote energy efficiency and provide a range of uses and opportunities for intensification and redevelopment;
- Opportunities for intensification and redevelopment where it can be accommodated, taking into account existing building stock or areas, including brownfield sites;
- Development standards which facilitate intensification, redevelopment and compact urban form;
- Provision of an appropriate range of housing types and densities to meet projected requirements of current and future residents through residential intensification, densities which support alternative transportation modes (including public transit) and redevelopment which facilitates a compact form;
- Planning streets and spaces which facilitate pedestrian and bicycle movement;
- Land use patterns, density and a mix of uses which minimizes vehicle trips and supports alternative transportation modes;
- Maintenance and enhancement of the vitality and viability of the downtown and mainstreets;
- Energy efficiency and air quality through compact form and a structure of nodes and corridors focusing employment and other travel-intensive uses on sites which are well served by public transit, improving the mix of employment and housing to shorten commute journeys and design which maximizes alternative energy sources; and
- Conservation of significant built heritage resources and significant cultural heritage landscapes.

iv) County of Oxford Official Plan

Section 10.4 of the County Official Plan includes policies intended to direct County and Area Municipal actions regarding upgrading, redeveloping and rehabilitating the physical environment of existing, older residential neighbourhoods, ancillary open space and recreational areas, commercial centres and industrial areas. The policies are intended to guide both private and public community improvement activities within designated community improvement project areas and are premised on a number of goals, including:

- the upgrade and improvement of municipal hard services, social and recreational facilities and public utilities;

- the preservation and upgrade of older residential neighbourhoods and settlements;
- the strengthening of existing central areas and village core areas;
- the improvement of existing industrial areas by encouraging further development and redevelopment;
- consideration of participating in senior government funding assistance programs; and
- encouraging the coordination of municipal, private and community organizations in promoting community improvement efforts.

In addition to a number of general criteria for the designation of community improvement areas, the Official Plan provides additional guidance for identifying residential, commercial and industrial improvement areas based on, among other matters, the structural integrity of building stock, lack of community facilities and, in the case of commercial improvement districts, those areas that are experiencing high vacancy rates, inadequate off-street parking and poor traffic circulation.

The County of Oxford Official Plan directs that those areas within the County designated Rural Cluster, Village, Serviced Village or Large Urban Centre on Schedule C-3 are intended to be identified as Community Improvement Project Areas (CIPA). While the Official Plan provides that designated CIPAs will generally cover an entire community, the policies do not preclude defining specific areas within a settlement for CIPA purposes.

1.4 PROCESS

In June 2012, County Council authorized Planning staff to initiate the development of a County-level CIP that would provide a tax grant back incentive to be administered together with Local Municipal CIPs.

The County Community Improvement Plan (CCIP) has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of Sections 28 and 77 of the Planning Act. A draft document was developed collaboratively by County planning and finance staff and further refined through consultation with Local Municipal staff. The draft Community Improvement Plan (CIP) was circulated to the prescribed public bodies as required by Section 17 of the Act as well as those groups and agencies that were considered to have an interest in the document. A final draft was prepared, taking into consideration those comments received from the noted circulation, where applicable.

2.0 COUNTY COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (CCIP)

2.1 COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT AREA (CIPA)

The CCIP applies to those lands within the County of Oxford which are subject to a local municipal downtown, central area, or village core-oriented community improvement plan. All lands within the area identified as the 'City of Woodstock Downtown Community Improvement Project Area' on Schedule 1 and the area defined as the 'Tillsonburg Downtown Community Improvement Project Area' on Schedule 2 have been designated by County Council, by by-law, as a Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA) as a prerequisite for the adoption of the CCIP, pursuant to Section 28 of the Planning Act.

It is intended that County Council will pass a by-law or by-laws identifying additional downtown, central area and/or village core areas to the designated Project Area as Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) are approved by Local Municipal Councils. Minor amendments to the boundaries of lands that have been included, by by-law, in the County CIPA will be considered by County Council to be minor adjustments to the boundaries of the CIPA and will not require an amendment to the CCIP.

The addition of lands that are not subject to a local municipal downtown, central area or village core-oriented community improvement plan shall require an amendment to the CCIP in accordance with Section 28 of the Planning Act.

2.2 PURPOSE

The purpose of the County Community Improvement Plan (CCIP) is to promote the development and redevelopment of lands within and around the central areas of the County's settlements.

2.3 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The fundamental goal of the CCIP is to promote development within the recognized core areas of the County by encouraging property and business owners to improve the visual quality and function of buildings within the said areas with a view to enhancing the long-term viability and economic stability of the County.

The goals of the CCIP are consistent with the policies of the County Official Plan and compliment Local Municipal CIPs and relevant design guidelines. The County CIP will focus on promoting the rehabilitation of lands and buildings within designated downtown, central area and village core CIPs by way of a tax 'grant back' incentive program.

Generally, the objectives of the CCIP are to:

- facilitate the ongoing viability, vitality and revitalization of core areas within the County;
- encourage long-term investment that improves the economic climate of the County and increases the County's importance as a destination for residents and visitors;
- use existing services and infrastructure more effectively;
- improve the physical and visual quality of the existing building inventory within the County;
- conserve and strengthen traditional heritage features within designated community improvement areas by encouraging improvement that is 'sympathetic' to the history of the area and encouraging reuse;
- stimulate private investment activity and private property maintenance; and
- increase sense of community participation and civic pride.

Further, the County CIP accepts the goals and objectives contained in Local Municipal CIPs as they pertain to the development, redevelopment and revitalization of the County's core areas.

2.4 MONITORING AND CHANGES TO THE CCIP

The County Community Improvement Plan (CCIP) is being implemented under the authority granted to the County of Oxford under Section 77 of the Planning Act, as described previously. The County supports actions that may be undertaken to promote countywide revitalization and renewal, either as 'stand-alone' initiatives or in cooperation with Local Municipal programs. However, the County is not obligated to implement the incentive program as outlined in this plan or any other incentive and may choose to discontinue any incentive associated with the CCIP at the sole discretion of County Council.

Where County Council resolves to discontinue a program or incentive, any approved proposals underway at the time that the program is discontinued, or a project area is dissolved, will generally be honoured until the development is concluded.

2.5 IMPLEMENTATION

Programs established through the County Community Improvement Plan will generally be implemented over five year periods, but may be extended where Council deems it appropriate or necessary to do so. Council will adopt a set of general guidelines and procedures regarding program implementation and will include additional details specific to the program as required.

3.0 TAX GRANT BACK INCENTIVE PROGRAM

3.1 PROGRAM DETAILS

The County Tax Grant Back Program will provide a grant to owners of lands and buildings who undertake improvements or redevelopment that would result in an increased property assessment. Generally when a land owner redevelops or rehabilitates a commercial, industrial or institutional property, the assessed value and annual taxes for that property increase. In essence, this increase in taxes works as an economic disincentive to projects since the return on investment will generally be less than in peripheral 'greenfield' locations due to higher overhead costs.

To counteract this disincentive the 'Tax Grant Back Program' provides an annual grant back to the land owner to offset the increase in County taxes resulting from reassessment due to physical improvement works occurring during the specific time period the program is in effect. If there is a general increase in the tax rate, if the County of Oxford adjusts the tax ratios, or if the improvements result in a change in tax classification, the property would not be exempt from such increases. The grant is only intended to grant back the County tax increase which would occur with respect to building improvements resulting in increased assessment.

It is intended that the County program would be tied to and administered in conjunction with a local municipal CIP and as such, the County tax grant back will be flexible in this regard. Relevant sections of the City of Woodstock and Town of Tillsonburg tax grant back programs, as contained in their respective CIPs, are attached to the County CIP as an appendix.

3.2 INTEGRATION WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Where a property is eligible for a tax grant back in accordance with the eligibility criteria as contained in a Local Community Improvement Plan (CIP) which is identified as being within the Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA), as defined in the County CIP, the subject property will also be considered to be eligible for a tax grant back under the County CIP. As the County CIP is intended to complement and enhance the incentives offered through the Local CIP, this duplication of financial assistance is acknowledged and will be permitted.

Local Municipalities will be responsible for ensuring that properties receiving the tax grant back incentive are eligible in accordance with the requirements of the Local CIP. Further, where a Local Municipality approves a grant under this program, the municipality will be responsible for notifying the County accordingly.

3.3 PROGRAM RESTRICTIONS

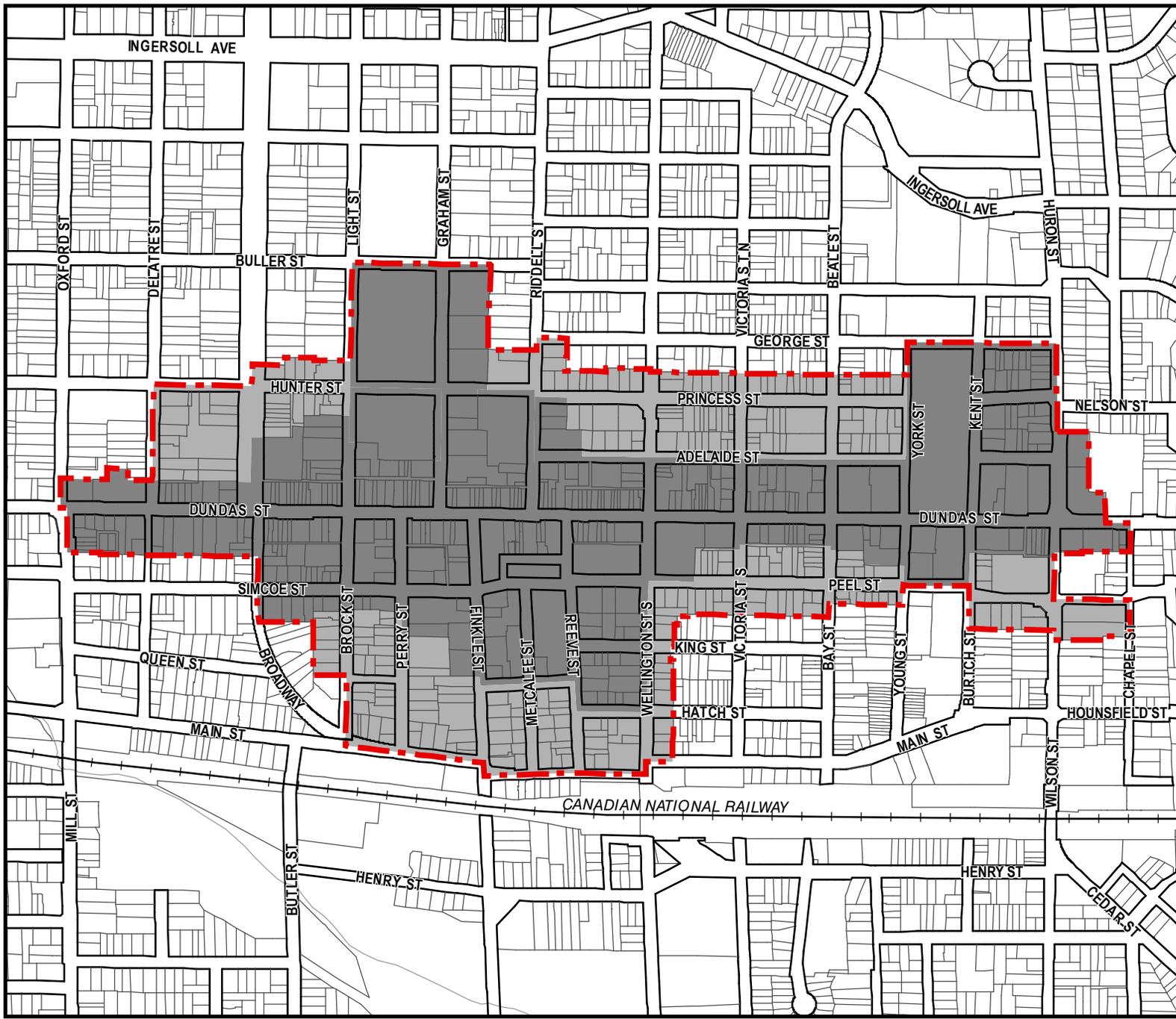
This program applies only to those lands that are located entirely within the Community Improvement Project Area identified in subsection 2.1. Improvements to buildings and/or land made under this program shall be undertaken pursuant to all applicable legislation.

3.4 FUNDING

The nature of the tax grant back program is such that the cost to the County will be realized in foregone tax revenues resulting from property improvements and no pre-budgeting will be required. Where the approval of an application results in a temporary need for the advancement of funds in advance of the County receiving the offsetting tax increase, such funding will be facilitated through the use of County reserves, as determined to be appropriate by the County Director of Corporate Services.

3.5 LOCAL MUNICIPAL CONSULTATION

The County of Oxford is committed to working with the Local Municipalities to cooperatively and effectively facilitate the redevelopment and revitalization of downtown, central area and village cores within the County. The County, in determining the Project Area as those areas subject to Local downtown, central area and village core-oriented CIPs, has identified an important element of economic growth in all of the County's member municipalities. The County CIP enables the County and Local Municipalities to further common community improvement goals in a partnership beneficial to both levels of government.



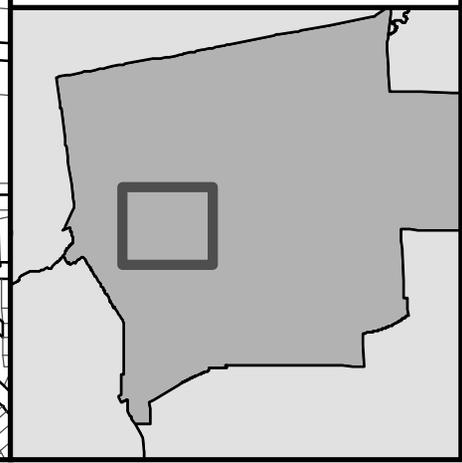
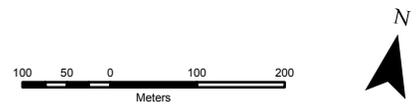
LEGEND

 Woodstock Downtown Community Improvement Project Area Boundary

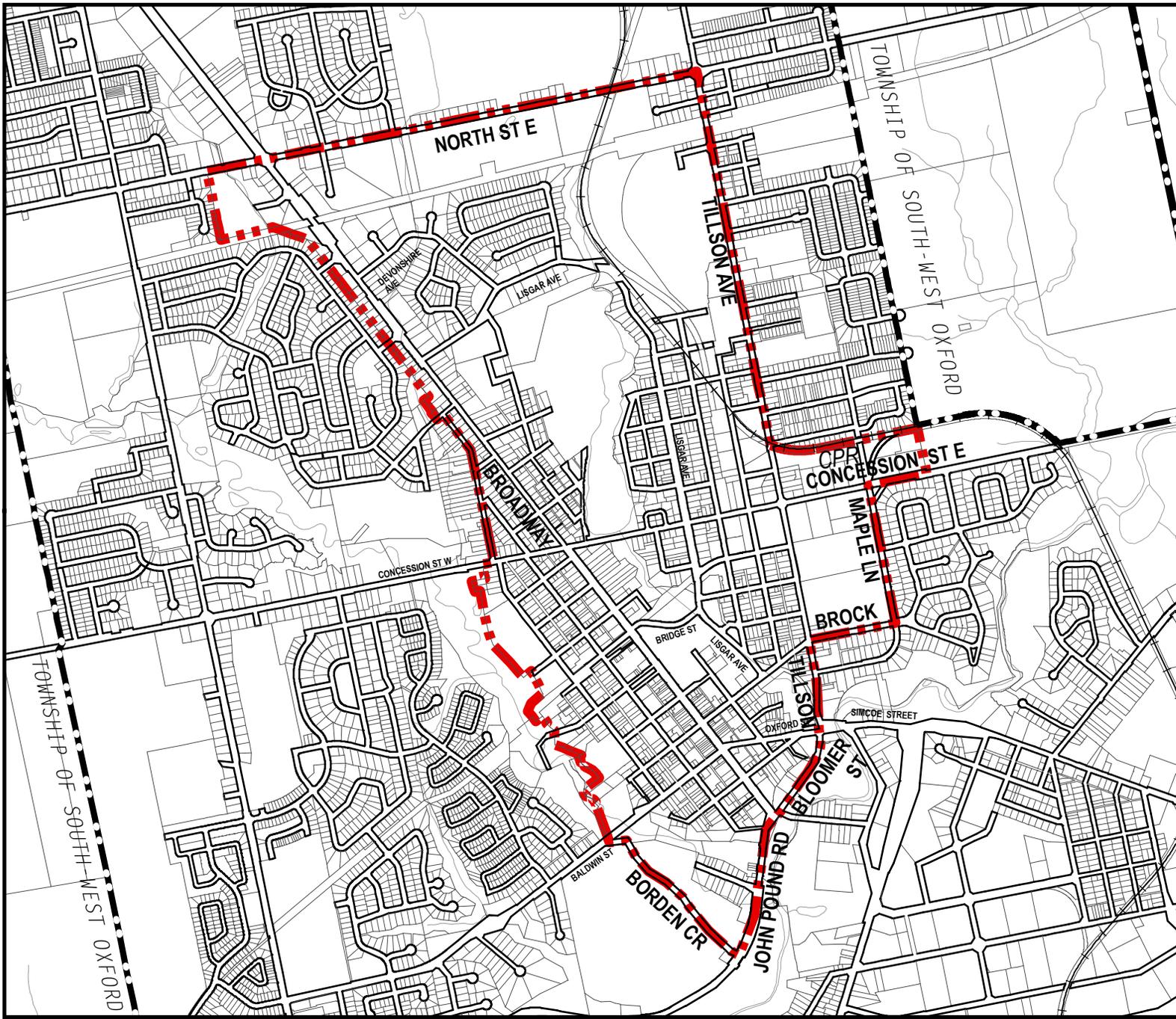
Central Area Development Plan

 Central Business District

 Entrepreneurial District



SCHEDULE 1

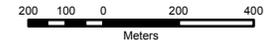


LEGEND

--- Municipal Limits



Tillsonburg Downtown
Community Improvement
Project Area Boundary
(Dereham Forge)



APPENDIX I

TAX GRANT BACK PROGRAM GUIDELINES

OF THE

CITY OF WOODSTOCK DOWNTOWN CIP

TAX GRANT BACK PROGRAM

This program would provide a grant to owners of lands and buildings who undertake improvements or redevelopment that would result in an increased property assessment. Every time a land owner either within or outside of the core redevelops or rehabilitates a property or building, the assessed value and annual taxes for that property increase. In essence, this increase in taxes works as an economic disincentive to downtown projects since the return on investment will be less than in peripheral 'greenfield' locations due to higher overhead costs.

To counteract this disincentive a 'Tax Grant Back Program' be established which would provide for an annual grant back to the land owner to offset the increase in taxes resulting from reassessment due to physical improvement works occurring during the specific time period the program is in effect. If there is a general increase in the tax rate, or if the County of Oxford adjusts the tax ratios, or if the improvement works result in a change in tax classification the property would not be exempt from such increases. The grant is only intended to grant back the local municipal tax increase and Business Improvement Area (BIA) levy which would occur as a result of building improvements resulting in increased assessment. The BIA has indicated its support for such a program.

The percentage of the grant which would be available will reflect the type of project being proposed. For example a higher percentage tax increment-based grant would be applied to renovation projects as opposed to demolition and new development to encourage the retention and reuse of historical buildings. The addition of new residential units within existing buildings in the downtown area would also receive a higher grant than new development. The program is intended to be established for a specific period of time (i.e. from 2013 to 2018) and be reviewed with respect to its success upon completion.

Under the program, properties that are re-assessed as a result of renovation, rehabilitation, or redevelopment would be eligible to apply for a grant during a set period of time following work that would trigger a reassessment.

The details of the proposed grant programs are provided below:

- * It is intended that the grant would be available on a once per property basis and that it would be transferable to a subsequent owner of the same property once approved.
- * At the time of building permit application the owner would provide the value of the rehabilitation/redevelopment work to be undertaken and the pre-construction taxes on the building or land shall be noted and used as a benchmark or 'base year' tax rate.
- * After completion of the project the property will be reassessed and taxes will be paid by the property owner in the normal fashion.
- * The difference between the 'pre-construction' taxes and the 'post-construction' taxes (associated with the improvement as opposed to any class change) will be calculated and this difference would be the portion eligible for a full or partial tax increment-based grant to the owner for the specific period of time the program is in effect. Grant applications approved near the end of the program will be permitted to be finalized according to the terms of the program.
- * The portion to be granted back only includes the increase in municipal taxes and BIA levy associated with the improvement. The portion of municipal taxation levied for Education and Upper Tier purposes will not be granted back.

- * Participating property owners will be required to enter into an agreement with the City specifying such items as the level of grant available, and the terms and conditions associated with the grant including the circumstances whereby an owner would be obligated to repay the City for any grants received. A grant schedule will be incorporated within the Agreement setting out the annual grant to be received in each subsequent year.
- * Payment of the grant will be made once per year by the City.
- * The grant will be payable each year over the time period that the grants program is in effect, in accordance with the provisions of the aforementioned agreement for each grant.
- * The total value of the grant shall not exceed the value of the work done.
- * The time period for which a grant would be available would be a maximum of 5 years following construction.

Available funds equate to 50% of the value of eligible works to a maximum at the discretion of City Council.

Eligibility Requirements

- i) All applications for assistance under this program will be considered subject to the availability of funding.
- ii) Any property owner within the Downtown Target Area may apply in writing to the City at the time Building Permits are applied for.
- iii) The amount of renovations undertaken shall be sufficient to result in a re-assessment of the property and shall have a minimum value of \$10,000.
- iv) Tax payment for the subject property shall be up-to-date and shall be kept up to date during that period of time participation in the program occurs otherwise the grant shall be forfeited and any grants paid shall be repaid to the City.
- v) Outstanding work orders for the City's Building Department or Fire Department and requests to comply must be addressed prior to approvals being granted.
- vi) The proposed development must conform to the Zoning By-law, pertinent Official Plan policies, the Downtown CIP, and any other documents that the City deems relevant. Additionally, the improvements to be undertaken shall conform to approved Council design guidelines, policies and regulations apply to the property.
- vii) If the property is demolished before the tax increment-based grant period elapses it shall cause the grants to be forfeited and be repayable to the City.
- viii) The property shall be maintained in a satisfactory state of repair consistent with City By-laws otherwise the grant shall be forfeited and any grants paid shall be repaid to the City.
- ix) The property owner must not have defaulted on any City-sponsored loan or grant program in the past.
- x) If the property is under an assessment appeal, the grant application will be held in abeyance until the appeal is resolved.

APPENDIX II

TAX GRANT BACK PROGRAM GUIDELINES

OF THE

TOWN OF TILLSONBURG DOWNTOWN CIP

REHABILITATION, REHABILITATION AND REDEVELOPMENT AND NEW RESIDENTIAL UNIT GRANT PROGRAMS

Development, redevelopment and rehabilitation in the downtown area is generally more difficult to achieve due to higher land costs, demolition costs and the costs of retrofitting older buildings to meet current Building Code and Fire Code requirements.

To counteract this disincentive, the proposed grant programs will provide for annual grants back to the land owner to offset the increase in taxes resulting from reassessment due to physical improvement works occurring during the specific time period the program is in effect. If there is a general increase in the tax rate, or if the County of Oxford adjusts the tax ratios, or if the improvement works result in a change in tax classification, the property would not be exempt from such increases. The grant is only intended to grant back the local municipal tax increase and Business Improvement Area (BIA) levy which would occur as a result of building improvements resulting in increased assessment.

The percentage of the grant which would be available will be based on the type of project being proposed. For example a higher percentage tax increment based grant would be applied to renovation projects, as opposed to demolition and new development, to encourage the retention and reuse of historical buildings or exterior renovations which are in keeping with the downtown facade/streetscape. The addition of new residential units within existing buildings in the downtown area would also receive a higher grant than new development. The program will be established for a specific period of time (ie. from 2006 to 2011) and be reviewed with respect to its success upon completion.

The details of these proposed grant programs are provided below:

- * Under the program, properties that are re-assessed as a result of renovation, rehabilitation, or redevelopment would be eligible to apply for a grant during a set period of time following approved work that would trigger a reassessment.
- * It is intended that the grant would be available on a once per property basis and that it would be transferable to a subsequent owner of the same property once approved.
- * At the time of building permit application the owner would provide the value of the rehabilitation/redevelopment work to be undertaken and the pre-construction taxes on the building or land shall be noted and used as a benchmark or 'base year' tax amount.
- * After completion of the project the property will be reassessed and taxes will be paid by the properly owner in the normal fashion.
- * The difference between the 'pre-construction' taxes and the 'post construction' taxes (associated with the improvement as opposed to any class change) will be calculated and this difference would be the portion eligible for a full or partial tax increment-based grant to the owner for the specific period of time the program is in effect. Grant applications approved near the end of the program will be permitted to be finalized according to the terms of the program.
- * The portion to be granted back only includes the increase in municipal taxes and BIA levy associated with the improvement. The portion of municipal taxation levied for Education and Upper Tier purposes will not be granted back.
- * A grant schedule will be incorporated within the required agreement setting out the annual grant to be received in each subsequent year.
- * Payment of the grant will be made once per year by the Town.
- * The grant will be payable on a 'declining basis' over the time period the grant program is in effect as set out in the details relating to each type of grant program as set out below.

- * The time period for which a grant would be available would be a maximum of 5 years following construction.

The objectives and proposed grant rates relating to each of these categories of potential grant programs are outlined in more detail below.

REHABILITATION, RENOVATION OR REDEVELOPMENT GRANTS:

This category of grant program would apply to existing buildings or property that are rehabilitated, renovated or redeveloped resulting in an increase in assessment. The purpose of the grant is to encourage and stimulate revitalization and re-use of existing buildings and property.

The grant schedule for this program will be 80% of the increase in the municipal portion of the taxes and BIA levy in year one, decreasing to 60% in year two, 50% in year three, 40% in year four and 30% in year five following reassessment. The portion of municipal taxation levied for Education and Upper Tier purposes will not be granted back.

NEW RESIDENTIAL DWELLING UNIT(S) GRANT:

This category of grant program would apply to proposals to create one or more new residential dwelling units through the rehabilitation, renovation or addition to existing buildings. The purpose of the grant is to encourage an increase in the residential population living near the core.

The grant schedule for this program will be 90% of the increase in the municipal portion of the taxes, decreasing to 70% in year two, 70% in year three, 60% in year four and 50% in year five, 40% in year six, 30% in year seven, 20% in year eight, 10% in year nine and 0% in year 10 following reassessment. The portion of municipal taxation levied for Education and Upper Tier purposes will not be granted back.