

***Community Improvement Plans: Best Practices for CIPs in  
Huron County***

***A Study Conducted by SEDRD Students: Chuqiao Dai, Anissa McAlpine, Julie Welch***

***Support Provided by Monica Walker-Bolton of Huron County Planning and  
Development***

***Completed for: RPD 6280, Dr. Wayne Caldwell & Paul Kraehling***



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## Section 1: Introduction

In conjunction with the County of Huron Planning and Development department, students from the University of Guelph's Rural Planning and Development program set out to explore the state of Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) in Huron County. Five municipalities in the County were identified as having a CIP or having an interest in creating a CIP. Through interviews with key informants in each community, five case studies were completed. The central objective of the project is to help communicate amongst these communities the lessons learned and the challenges faced in the creation of a CIP. Furthermore, the County of Huron Planning Department intends to gain a comprehensive understanding of CIP opportunities and barriers at the lower tier and help extend CIP planning support to additional municipalities. Our hope is that the lessons learned in each municipality will be of use to its neighbouring communities in the County.

## Section 2: What is a Community Improvement Plan?

A Community Improvement Plan, commonly referred to as a CIP, is a document most often used to support and encourage physical improvement of the community landscape. The CIP delineates a designated geographic area within which the municipality hopes to drive investment in a cohesive and coordinated manner. A CIP can be created by an upper-tier, lower-tier or single-tier municipality. The designated CIP area may be as small as a section of Main Street or expand an entire county. Section 28 of Ontario's *Planning Act* provides powers to municipalities to develop financial incentives (grants and loans) to private property owners to undertake improvement projects. In the absence of a designated CIP area, this provision of funds to private businesses would normally be considered 'bonusing' and would be illegal under the Municipal Act.

The creation of a CIP must include a comprehensive study of the community's strengths and weaknesses and requires substantial community visioning and engagement. Ultimately a series of economic development tools will be selected to achieve the goals of that community taking into account its existing strengths and weaknesses. It is important to recognize the role of the rural context in Huron County as a driver but also a challenge for the implementation of Community Improvement Plans. In rural communities, the pace of economic activity is reducing as shopping relocates to metropolitan centers and the population ages. Business turnover is slow and demand for non-basic goods is insufficient to attract new businesses, while car dependency in these communities is inconducive to window-shopping. Nonetheless many communities in Huron are privileged with valuable historic architecture and Victorian charm. These assets are often used as a starting point for CIPs with downtown rehabilitation programs. Unfortunately, constrained staff resources and limited private finances pose challenges to

conducting development activities in rural places. These challenges are faced by all the case studies we explored.

### **2.1: CIP Goals**

The Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Community Improvement Planning handbook (MMAH, 2008) lists the following as objectives of a CIP:

- *To focus public attention on local priorities and municipal initiatives*
- *To target areas in transition or in need of repair, rehabilitation and redevelopment*
- *To facilitate and encourage community change in a co-ordinated manner*
- *To stimulate private sector investment through municipal incentive-based programs.*

### **2.2: A CIP is a toolbox**

Within a CIP, a variety of tools can be used to accomplish the targeted goals of each individual community. Tools should be designed to address the assets and liabilities of the area in question. Tools can be municipally driven programs such as infrastructure improvements, rehabilitation of municipal lands, creation of public parks and space improvements or signage improvements. Alternatively, CIP tools could be incentive based programs to encourage private investment. These would include grants and loans for downtown and waterfront revitalization, facade improvements, and the creation of affordable housing, green energy initiatives or accessibility enhancements. Tax assistance programs are also available for building improvement projects that increase the value at which the property is assessed and taxed at. There is no definitive list of tools that can be used in a CIP therefore communities can exercise a great deal of creativity in constructing a locally appropriate and effective CIP. *A list of CIP tools used by Ontario Municipalities as assembled by Mitchell Avis of the Huron County Planning and Development office is attached as Appendix B.*

A CIP is best understood as a toolbox from which council and municipal staff can chose to implement individual tools in varying combinations. While the CIP document as a whole must be passed by a municipal by-law, the tools within it are not actually realized until municipal council passes budget decisions and creates the programming necessary to implement them. Council may implement one, some, or all of the recommended tools in the CIP, however the CIP is only an enabling document which provides direction and guidance as to the best tools and the appropriate implementation guidelines for each of the associated programs. It is critical that the tools identified in the CIP are translated into programs and ultimately used by their targeted audience.

### **2.3: What a CIP is NOT**

Community Improvement Plans are one amongst many planning tools available to municipalities when embarking on economic development initiatives. It is critical to differentiate a CIP from other downtown or neighbourhood revitalization programs and tools. CIPs are often used in conjunction, but are not synonymous with Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs), nor streetscape guidelines.

CIPs are similar to Business Improvement Areas in that they both designate an area and have goals of creating economic development within that area. A BIA, however, procures its funding entirely from the membership while a CIP uses a combination of municipal funds, raised from the entire tax base, to leverage private funds. A BIA is not a requirement for the municipality in creating a CIP, however they are an asset. Local BIAs are often key stakeholders and leaders in the process of creating a CIP. The coincidence of Business Improvement Areas with the CIP area in a community's primary retail is not uncommon in the rural context. In these cases, members of the BIA are the primary beneficiaries of CIP programing and simultaneous the largest investors of private funds.

A Historic Conservation District (HCD) can also be complementary to a CIP. Unlike a CIP, a heritage conservation district can include a binding streetscape or architectural design for the area. The HCD also allows the municipality to have a greater degree of control over development in that area by being the approval authority for major renovations or demolitions. If a community were to implement both a CIP and an HCD in the same area, the programing could be complementary. One of the tools available through the CIP is Heritage Property Tax Relief Program for properties with existing heritage designation. CIPs are often used in tandem with HCDs to make use of the full range powers available between the two tools.

A streetscape design is not as powerful a tool for controlling development as an HCD, but can be equally complementary to the CIP. Streetscape designs are simply guidelines to help developers understand the community's vision for the area. Should a streetscape design be included in a CIP, it would help direct the allocation of CIP incentive funding to such programs that fit the vision, goals and objectives of the community. However, neither the CIP nor the streetscape design can restrict undesirable legal private development within the CIP area.

## **Section 3: Literature Review**

There has been much study of the effects of downtown revitalization projects for their effects on community and retail improvements. In international literature it is understood that improvements in urban quality can affect shoppers, employees and firms (Whitehead, Simmonds, & Preston, 2006). Investments to commercial buildings through historic façade improvements in an American case study brought

an increased number of shoppers, sustained increases in sales over several years, and an increased numbers of businesses establishing themselves in the area (National Trust, 1995). Weisbrod, (1984) suggests that other physical improvements in non-heritage retail districts also experience greater numbers of new firms entering the retail area. However, as much as downtown or retail district improvements can have positive affects on the businesses within it, Weisbord (1984) cautions that the uplifts are contingent on good project management and a healthy regional economy.

Recommendations stemming from the literature suggest that place based development is fundamental to the success of downtown improvement efforts. Firstly, a study from small towns in Maine and New York State identified some important further considerations for the revitalization of commercial areas in smaller places. The authors highlighted the need to increase pedestrian activity and not to underestimate street level activity (Robertson, 1999). To do so, density requirements, waterfront development, public and civic space improvements can all be useful tools (Robertson, 1999). More so, to develop 'sense of place', the authors determined that successful communities did not 'suburbanize' their downtowns; rather they focused on their assets, historical character, and the creation of strict design controls (Robertson, 1999).

A second study discussing two Markham, Ontario Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs) found that despite the proximity of the two areas, the districts possess different challenges and strengths (Shiple & Snyder, 2013). Each of the two HCDs required management plans that reflected their own physical and social climate (Shiple & Snyder, 2013). Overall, business owners in the two neighbourhoods agreed that being part of the designated area made their business part of the destination: "Part of the success of business is tied to the success of the heritage area" (Shiple & Snyder, 2013). Overall, both sets of case studies highlight that the uniqueness of each place need be recognized as an asset, and that the unique context of the community must be taken into consideration in the creation of a revitalization plan.

### **3.1: Comparisons of CIPs in Ontario**

A comparison of CIPs in Ontario demonstrates differences in rural and urban municipal goals. Rural communities are commonly challenged by stagnant downtowns and the loss of local services. Local initiatives to improve the community tend to be narrowly directed at main street revitalization. Thus a trend in rural municipalities and smaller communities is to use tools that are aimed at promoting the local retail economy. For instance, façade improvement grants are a commonly used financial incentive program, as are heritage conservation tax incentive programs. These tools are commonly used because of their effectiveness in small communities. In Rural municipalities, it is rare to see more than one CIP tool implemented.

Other CIPs in rural Ontario identify a significant challenge with implementing a CIP. This may be because the MMAH CIP Handbook actually lacks detailed information on implementing a CIP. In order to reduce costs and ensure appropriate implementation, a rural municipality may choose a pilot study community to 'trial run' the CIP. The village of Cookstown in Innisfil, for example, was chosen to lead CIP's implementation. Municipal staff from Innisfil guided the implementation of the Plan while observing for improvements that could be made when the CIP is rolled-out among the wider municipality.

In the urban context, where we can presume a larger operating budget and a greater degree of available resources, multiple CIPs can be implemented in a single municipality. These CIPs can compliment each other by targeting different objectives. For instance, the Downtown and Community Renewal (DCR) CIP in the City of Hamilton focuses on redevelopment of downtown commercial districts and surrounding mixed-use neighbourhood while the Environmental Remediation and Site Enhancement (ERASE) CIP is designed to encourage brownfield redevelopment. Simultaneously, the LEEDing the Way CIP promotes certified LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) sustainable development. In Hamilton, CIPs have traditionally been driven by shared community improvement goals. Similar to Hamilton, several CIPs were designed in Windsor. In this case, however, specific neighbourhoods are targeted for rejuvenation.

Overall, CIPs developed in the urban context are broader in scale and scope than CIPs in rural the context. These municipalities are capable of managing multiple designated CIP areas and can become quite creative in their choice of CIP tools and financial incentives. A greater degree of variability is seen in the structure of urban community improvement planning. That being said, rural municipalities benefit from close-knit business communities and strong community groups like BIAs: There are challenges and opportunities in each scenario.

## **Section 4: Huron County Case Studies**

On February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, we set out to conduct interviews with municipal staff and planners regarding each municipality's perspective, understanding and potential progress on CIPs. Our goal was to gain insight into what each municipality knew about CIPs and what expected outcomes were. If municipalities were currently implementing CIPs or had previously undergone one, we were interested to learn what their challenges were and lessons learned through the process.

### **4.1: South Huron, Claire Dodds**

Our first interview was in Goderich at the Huron County Planning and Development office with Claire Dodds. Claire is a senior planner with the County, but was offering us information from her experience working in South Huron during their CIP and Streetscape Design planning for downtown Exeter in 2012. Exeter took a unique approach by combining both a CIP and Streetscape Design into one

document. This was done with leadership provided by hired consultants as well as the CAO, economic development officer, and planning staff. This CIP was done with funding and direction provided by OMAFRA, with funding matched by the municipality and BIA. A strong public engagement process was utilized throughout in order to develop a strong dialogue with Exeter's Business Improvement Area (BIA) and the Chambers of Commerce. Claire sat on the steering committee to provide input and be a liaison between the planning department and the community.

Another unique aspect of Exeter's CIP and Streetscape Design was that it was undertaken simultaneously with the Official Plan review. This provided municipal staff with a public consultation tool and doubled as a community visioning exercise for Exeter residents and municipal staff. Claire emphasized that rolling out both the CIP and Streetscape Design with the Official Plan review was a "win-win" from a planning perspective. The CIP public engagement did not replace the Official Plan consultation process: it simply helped guide the process. Tools proposed for Exeter's CIP and Streetscape Design were: façade improvement, rear parking improvement grant, tax increment equivalent grant and waiving planning fees and development changes for businesses. Other CIP tools like brownfield development were not applicable in the case of Exeter.

While Exeter's CIP and Streetscape Design is a very comprehensive document, there have been significant challenges with implementing the plan and taking the next steps in the CIP process. Although council adopted the plan in October 2012, it has not been implemented. This is due to a variety of factors, but is highly linked to issues surrounding shifts in municipal staff. Another issue identified by Claire was that the municipal treasurer was not involved in the CIP process and thus was not aware of the financial implications associated with CIPs. This led to council not being fully aware of the financial commitment and investment required to implement a CIP. Additionally, there was some miscommunication between municipal staff and Exeter's business community, thus hindering support for implementation later in the process. Overall, varied expectations across key stakeholders, municipal staff changes and miscommunication all contributed to the plan not being implemented. Claire also mentioned that a slower pace of development often found in rural areas reduces successful implementation because smaller businesses may not have the competitive drive to improve their façade and overall street appeal.

Several lessons were learned through Exeter's CIP and Streetscape Design plan. Among the most important was the role of communication because it is critical at every stage of the process. For example, there must be discussion between staff and council to see if the municipality will be able to provide funding for the various incentive programs. This conversation should happen early on to ensure that the CIP would be worth implementing after investing time and money into the design. Furthermore, since many of the CIP tools involved financial incentives, it is integral



to have financial staff on board, as their input will be essential during implementation.

Claire also highlighted the role of education early on in the process. Council members, municipal staff and BIAs/Chamber of Commerce need to have a clear idea of what a CIP is in order to have shared expectations regarding the final outcomes. Education leads to buy-in at all levels, which is a central theme we picked up on in several interviews. Educating stakeholders about what a CIP can accomplish may create excitement and thus incentivize “champions” to take leadership roles in the process. Claire used this term often and stressed the importance of having champions in CIPs (whether they be downtown business champions, economic development champions, etc). This led Claire to believe that steering committees are essential when developing CIPs because they create a space to invite champions to the table and share ideas while ensuring communication across all players.

### **Summary:**

#### *Lessons Learned:*

- Work as a team with municipal staff, council and BIAs/Chambers of Commerce/Community
- Create buy-in through education/training
- Ensure organizational and financial capacity exist prior to CIP development
- Education leads to shared expectations

#### *Best Practices:*

- Leverage other documents/plans/processes (i.e. Official Plan review)
- Community visioning
- Develop a steering committee with key stakeholders
- Seek out and recognize champions (in all positions)

### **4.2: Goderich, Victor Kloeze (Planner), Dwayne Evans (Clerk/Planning Director), Lori Rounds (Deputy Treasurer/Tax Collector)**

This interview was conducted at the Town Hall in Goderich on February 26<sup>th</sup>. Victor was our initial contact, but he is relatively new to his position and therefore asked Lori and Dwayne to join him in our interview. Goderich completed their CIP in 2008 and it has been successfully implemented. Staff members now accept applications for façade improvement grants, fee grant equivalent programs and tax increment equivalent grant programs (24 applications since 2008). The purpose for the Goderich CIP was to improve the existing physical landscape and to stimulate the rehabilitation of the commercial district by using, reusing and restoring lands, buildings and infrastructure.

Some central goals that motivated the development of the CIP in Goderich were the desire to enhance the development of a stronger local economy and encourage new investment in the downtown core. The town also wanted to increase tourism and to elevate the town’s status as a destination as well as attract and

provide for more long term visits to Goderich. Additional goals include preserving the heritage character while supporting affordable, mixed housing types. The Downtown Trade Area Report was used as an economic indicator for developing the CIP.

Central players included the BIA, town council, town staff and OMAFRA. The council and town staff assessed the budget and set aside enough funding for each year. The business community was the central driver behind the CIP because they wanted an improved downtown in order to attract more business. There was some disagreement within the BIA regarding where the Project Area was identified as some business owners felt it should include other business districts (i.e. South end of Goderich). Lori agreed that the CIP program creates winners and losers, but while some business owners have requested a Goderich-wide CIP, it would be far too expensive. In addition, Lori stated there has been some challenges with property tax assessment because property owners often feel that the assessments do not correspond with their anticipated savings.

Overall developing and implementing a CIP in Goderich appears to have been a smooth process. The businesses wanted to see improvements and council understood the benefits of a CIP. While some issues have arisen with other business areas wanting to be part of the Project Area, Goderich continues to administer and fund the program. Leveraging Goderich's heritage designation in the downtown core was also useful for the CIP. Town staff is now considering an evaluation of the CIP in order to ensure it is still an effective tool for downtown revitalization.

### **Summary:**

#### *Lessons Learned:*

- Conflicts of interest among business owners and other tax-payers require mediation
- Managing the finances keeps the program operating

#### *Best Practices:*

- Façade improvement was very successful
- Business motivation was important in ensuring implementation
- Strong organizational capacity
- Council was educated by planning staff, thus gaining buy-in early

### **4.3: North Huron, Connie Goodall**

We interviewed economic development officer of North Huron, Connie Goodall, in Wingham on February 26<sup>th</sup>. North Huron is in the early stages of beginning to think about CIP implementation. Both Blyth and Wingham have recently designated Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and are hoping to use these to improve their downtowns. Connie expressed strong interests in façade improvements and the potential for a streetscape design in Wingham. While interest for developing a CIP is shared within North Huron, the goals for Blyth and Wingham

vary. Blyth, for example, wants to maintain its historic downtown whereas Wingham may be interested in seeing improvements like modernized signage and updated design in its downtown.

A CIP would engage many players throughout the process and similar to neighbouring municipalities, North Huron needs to identify champions. Champions will help drive the process and incentivize others to participate. With the recent development of BIAs and organizations like the Blyth Idea Group (BIG), North Huron is in a strong position to begin the CIP planning process. Similar to Exeter, there is keen interest in rolling out a CIP and Streetscape Design simultaneously.

Some future challenges for North Huron will be acquiring funding and convincing council and staff to prioritise for CIPs. Staffing will also be a challenge unless buy-in can occur early on. Overall, next steps include educating staff and council about what CIPs are, what they are capable of doing and how they can leverage other municipal programs and documents while undergoing a CIP.

#### **4.4: Bluewater, Mark Cassidy**

We interviewed Bluewater's Economic Development Officer, Mark Cassidy, via telephone on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Mark holds a wealth of knowledge as he has worked on CIPs around Huron County for several years now. He was among the leaders for South Huron on the CIP and Streetscape Design for Exeter and has since successfully implemented a CIP for the village of Hensall in Bluewater (2010-2014). In 2014, Bluewater council approved undertaking the development of a municipality-wide CIP for the three villages and six hamlets (Blake, Dashwood, Hensall, Bayfield, Brucefield, St. Joseph, Varna, Kippen and Zurich). At the time of writing, Bluewater is the only municipality in Huron County that is implementing a CIP at a municipal-wide scale.

There is strong motivation for CIPs and downtown revitalization in Bluewater. While multiple stakeholders are drivers, the Chambers of Commerce has been significantly involved in the process. Residents and business owners have strong hometown pride and want to show neighbouring communities and regions why they should live, visit and invest in Bluewater. Overall, façade improvement for commercial buildings in the downtown core areas and for Ontario heritage designated buildings appears to be among the top priorities.

In addition to façade improvement grants, other tools proposed for use in the Bluewater CIP include tax increase-based equivalent rebate program (TIER) and heritage grant improvement programs. While Bluewater applicants may apply for any or all programs, there will be a cap on total grant amount any property may receive in a year and in a lifetime of the property. Hensall's CIP used the façade improvement grant program and provided over \$100 000 of financial support and leveraged over \$300 000 in private sector investment over the entire four-year program.

Community engagement has been critical in the Bluewater CIP process. Open houses were held in the villages of Hensall, Bayfield and Zurich as well as Varna in order to gain input from the smaller hamlets. Each open house was an opportunity to engage the public in collectively mapping the project area and define community Priority Areas. The Huron County Planning Department GIS system will create the map layer and print maps of the Project Area for each of the nine communities in Bluewater. We were fortunate to attend the Bayfield meeting and witness first-hand the public consultation process that Mark and his colleagues developed. Overall, community members were excited to participate and provided the local context needed for taking the next steps in the CIP process.



Above is an image of the community mapping process done in Bayfield. (Courtesy of Mark Cassidy)

Huron County's Official Plan supports the creation of a CIP Project Area in accordance with section 28 of the *Planning Act* (section 4.4(3.)). At the time of interview, Bluewater was wrapping up the initial open house phase and awaiting a council meeting to decide on specific financial incentives for the Bluewater CIP. Bluewater is also waiting for the municipal budget to be finalized. Key players in the Bluewater CIP development include Mark with support from Bluewater's planner and Huron County Planning staff and GIS specialists. The Huron County Economic Development Partnership (HEDP) provides financial support while the Healthy Community's Ontario Link (HC Link) provides consulting support.

Overall, major challenges for the Bluewater CIP include a lack of local economic development resources and financial constraints. Strong initial planning and creating staff/council/community buy-in early on are all critical when developing a CIP. Mark emphasized that seeing improvements in the built environment – with the help of CIPs – can be useful for drawing attention to priority areas. This reiterates the importance of identifying champions in the CIP process. Overall, Mark feels that hometown pride has increased as a result of this CIP process. By building partnerships between the municipality and business community, the community is taking ownership of their economic future.

Next steps for Bluewater include securing council approval and allocating a budget for the incentive programs. To follow, the program guidelines, policy and application forms will need to be developed. Upon implementation, it will be critical to promote the uptake of the CIP with the Chambers of Commerce in each community. A strong relationship and communication between the lower tier municipal staff and Huron County Planning Department is essential.

**Summary:**

*Lessons Learned:*

- It is important to incentivize key players in the business community (BIA)
  - This creates champions!
- Need ongoing support from staff, council and community over the next 5, 10 or 20 years because CIPs are a long term venture

*Best Practices:*

- Leverage other plans/programs when identifying need for CIP
- Support/guidance from MMAH/province/federal government is critical
- Need guidance from MMAH on how to *implement* a CIP
- Involve Chambers of Commerce to create buy-in and gain community support
- Leverage the approved CIP to secure funding for other projects in the designated Project Areas
- Create consensus through community mapping/visioning exercises

**4.5: Central Huron, Peggy Van-Mierlo West (CAO)**

A telephone interview was conducted with Central Huron's CAO Peggy Van-Mierlo West on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015. Central Huron has already undertaken a CIP for Clinton in order to implement a façade improvement program, which was desired by the business community. Peggy is now interested in doing an evaluation of this program in order to see how it can be improved and to help develop a new CIP for Central Huron.

The first CIP was undertaken in order to provide façade improvement grants to downtown Clinton businesses. Peggy, as the CAO, provided training sessions for council and staff, thus gaining strong support from council. Public consultation was central, and a team effort between staff, council and the BIA were all integral to the implementation of the CIP. While successfully implemented, not many façade improvements were seen in Clinton. Looking forward, Peggy is hoping to incorporate more tools in order to distribute the funding that has been allocated to the CIP.

There is hope that the next CIP will be municipality-wide for Central Huron and tools surrounding energy efficiency, water conservation and other green initiatives will be integrated into the plan. Peggy also mentioned downtown branding and a marketing plan might come into play with the next CIP. Further

steps include undertaking more studies and researching tools that would work well for Central Huron. Additionally, if Central Huron wanted to hire consultants, a request for proposals would need to be distributed.

### **Summary:**

#### *Lessons Learned:*

- The CAO leading the project allowed for strong communication between council and municipal staff
- The use of a single tool (façade improvement) is not ideal, thus a more comprehensive plan may lead to broader community improvements
- Re-evaluation of an already implemented plan provides opportunities for improving and producing a more applicable CIP

#### *Best Practices:*

- Led by municipal staff, strong communication between stakeholders

## **Section 5: Best Practices and Recommendations**

Based on the case studies in Huron County, a few best practices are extracted from the development and implementation of CIPs. In specific, best practices are classified into four categories: **organizational groundwork, financial capacity, stakeholder buy-in and community visioning.**

### **5.1: Organizational Groundwork**

Organizational capacity of the municipality/county needs to be assessed before the development of a CIP. Staff availability and resource accessibility should be considered and assessed before and throughout the process of developing a CIP to ensure that the CIP can be successfully implemented. Since a CIP is a long-term project (may be used up to 20 years), long-term support from the council, staff and other stakeholders is fundamental. A CIP must survive changes in staff and municipal council; thus a steering committee will allow community groups, BIAs and other stakeholders to continue driving the process through times of change. Players from the public, council and staff members are expected to balance the objectives of a CIP and to ensure that the CIP lies on multiple interests.

Conducting a routine CIP review approximately every 5 years is recommended to ensure the CIP is meeting the needs of the community. In addition to conducting an in depth review prior to implementation, coinciding the Official Plan review with CIP reviews may ensure the legitimacy and feasibility of the CIP and reduce conflicts with the Official Plan. As seen in Exeter, developing the CIP during the Official Plan review was beneficial for staff as it complemented the consultation processes required by each.

## **5.2: Financial Capacity**

The financial situation of the community and municipality should be evaluated prior to the development of a CIP. The feasibility and scope of the CIP is often measured according to the budget and funding available. Any financial constraints need to be acknowledged throughout the development and implementation of the CIP. Since CIPs may endure up to 20 years, it is necessary to construct long-term financial plans. Treasurers and other municipal staff have an important role and thus must be included in the CIP process.

## **5.3: Stakeholder Buy-in**

Stakeholder buy-in is essential in developing a CIP. It is recommended to ensure buy-in before assigning resources and funds in developing a CIP and negotiation and facilitation between different stakeholders should be accomplished in advance. As seen in the Goderich and Central Huron case studies, staff and council training allowed smooth implementation of CIPs because it quickly created buy-in. In the case of Exeter, however, lack of communication and variations of expected outcomes created barriers when it came to implementing the plan.

## **5.4: Community Visioning**

Community visioning is critical early on in the development of a CIP because it allows for public input and creates consensus. We were fortunate to attend Bayfield's "Have your say" open house which was used to determine the Project Area for Bayfield's CIP in Bluewater. While there was some conflict between where the designated area would be, working together through a community mapping exercise (led by Mark Cassidy) provided a space for reaching consensus. In the case of Goderich, there was some disagreement over the designated CIP area. Perhaps undertaking community visioning would have created consensus, and reduced tensions.

Community visioning also leads to gaining support and buy-in from the community. Developing a dialogue with community members throughout the planning may reduce disagreements due to confusion or contrasting understandings of what a CIP is. During the development and implementation of a CIP, it is critical to keep the public excited about the plan. For example, Mark Cassidy from Bluewater discussed tapping into sentiments of hometown pride in order to encourage communities to remain involved and develop roles of champions. This can be done through successful marketing/branding projects that involve a high degree of collaboration.

Champions from within the community are needed as a driving force in the development of a CIP. Based on our case studies, CIPs driven by BIAs with strong support from economic development officers are more likely to be successfully implemented. A champion in the business community creates a channel between the

community and the municipality, thus leading to active community engagement and resulting in a more involved business and public foundation for the development of a CIP.

## Section 6: Take Away Messages & Conclusion

The best practices described above were identified from the case studies developed through our interviews. While several tools and best practices are explored within the MMAH handbook, we tried to select best practices that are critical for planning CIPs in rural municipalities. Overall, four major themes stood out to us throughout this project.

First, it is critical *to tailor a CIP to your community* based on their needs, assets and challenges. Through public engagement, as seen with Mark Cassidy's work in Bluewater, CIPs should be developed through the lens of the recipient community and organizations (BIAs and Chambers and Commerce). Furthermore, this means that communities can select a range of tools that take into account the community's local context and challenges. While façade improvement grants have been effective for many rural communities, we encourage municipalities and communities to take a broader look at other tools that may meet municipal objectives. We look forward to learning more about Central Huron's CIP journey as Peggy expressed interest in tools associated with energy efficiency and water conservation.

Next, we encourage rural municipalities to *leverage other planning tools*. Through this research we realized that several communities are interested in the outcomes associated with Streetscape Guidelines, Historical Conservation districts and BIAs. While these planning and economic development tools do not replace a CIP, they strengthen its impact by providing further guidance for practitioners. CIPs are simply a document to help guide municipal investment in community improvement projects. As seen in South Huron, however, with their CIP and Streetscape Design, they were able to generate a document that would help steer future development in the downtown core of Exeter. Exeter's CIP process also stands out to us because they used it as a consultation tool during their Official Plan review. We encourage municipalities to coincide their CIP review with their Official Plan review for the opportunity to do community visioning and to ensure harmony between the two documents.

A critical lesson learned through our case studies with Huron County is that economic development practitioners and planners must *look beyond development of the CIP and plan for implementation*. As previously mentioned in our best practices section, creating the initial document and ensuring strong public engagement are critical for developing community buy-in. While acknowledging this is an involved process, municipal staff must carry the document through development and into use (accepting applications). This requires organizational



capacity and financial resources to be secured in order to ensure the document does not remain unutilized. Furthermore, this reiterates the role of champions from within the community because there needs to be a driver of the process through frequent staff and council changes. If a CIP can trigger excitement from within the community, organizations like BIAs and Chambers of Commerce can become vital during implementation because they will keep the community enthusiastic about the potential outcomes from improvements.

Finally, the most significant lesson learned through this project was that ***physical improvements inspire hometown pride***. While it becomes easy to sit back and argue that CIPs are just another bureaucratic tool used by municipalities, we experienced first-hand the pride that can come out of this process. Through Bluewater's "Have your say" open houses, we saw a community come together and take ownership over their revitalization efforts through a consensus-forming activity. Business owners and residents were genuinely excited about the potential changes that could occur through a CIP and it was inspiring to hear about how something that may sound like a simple beautification project could create so much enjoyment in a small community.

While it may be difficult to measure the full impact of a CIP in Huron County and its lower tier municipalities, our research shows that developing CIPs become an opportunity to engage community members in a process that develops a strong dialogue between municipalities and its constituents. CIPs are a tool that lead to physical improvements and evoke sentiments of pride; thus becoming a tool that meets more objectives than simply those of economic development. While CIPs are a valuable tool for communities of any size, rural areas pose different challenges and opportunities than that of their urban counterparts. By ensuring best practices are adopted by practitioners, we hope that Huron County will be able to effectively use CIPs and experience first-hand the benefits that come out of this engaging process.

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## Section 8: Appendix

### A. Presentation (Presented at Township of North Huron: April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015)



# Community Improvement Plans

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## BEST PRACTICES FOR CIPs IN HURON COUNTY


A Study Conducted by SEDRD Students: Chuqiao Dai,  
Anissa McAlpine, Julie Welch

Support Provided by Monica Walker-Bolton of Huron  
County Planning and Development

## Presentation Goals

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- What is a CIP?
- Huron County Case Studies
- Best Practices for Developing a CIP
- Lessons Learned



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## What is a CIP?



## CIP is a Toolbox

| Tool/Program                               | Community/Region                          |
|--|---|
| Façade Improvement Plan                    | Exeter, Hensall, Clinton, Bruce County    |
| Tax Increment Equivalent Grant             | Goderich, Prescott, Kawartha Lakes        |
| Upgrade to Building Code Grant/Loan        | Oshawa, Elliot Lake                       |
| Accessibility Improvement Loan             | Region of Peel, Simcoe County             |
| Brownfield Financial Tax Incentive Program | Kingston, Region of Waterloo, Amherstburg |

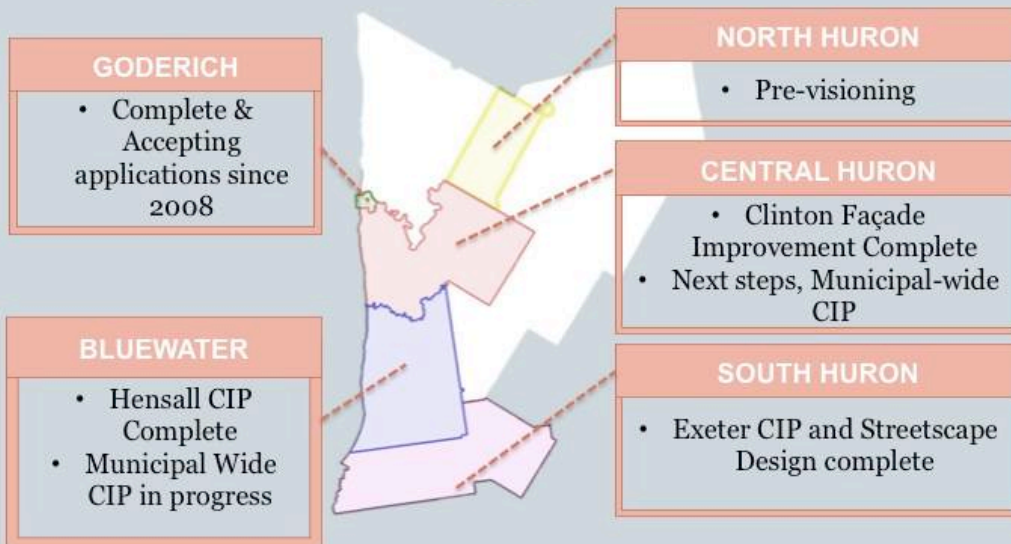
- There is no definitive list of tools in a CIP
- Be creative!
- Address your local assets and needs

## What a CIP is NOT



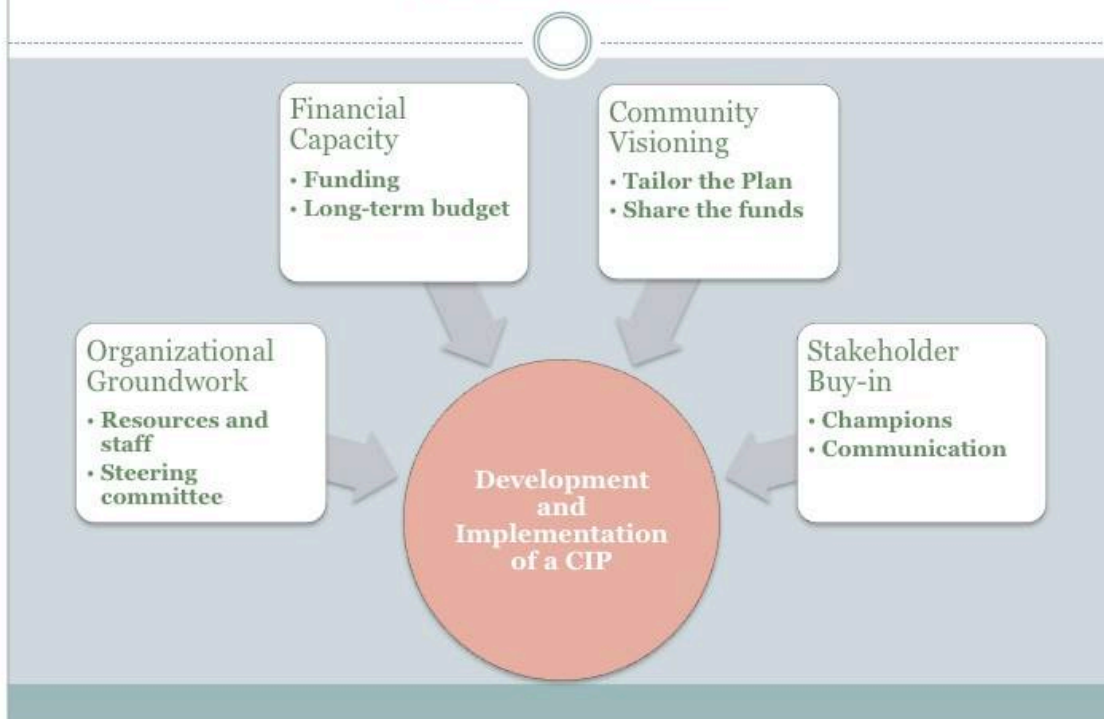
CIPs build upon other strategic planning and economic development tools

## Case Studies and CIP Progress





## Best Practices



## Take Away Messages

- Tailor the CIP to your community
- Look ahead to the finances required
- Leverage other planning tools
- Look beyond development, plan for implementation



Painting Credit to Susan Hay



## B. Community Improvement Plan Toolbox

Assembled by Mitchell Avis of Huron County Planning and Development

| Incentive   | Details  |
|---|--|
| Façade Improvement Plan                           | <p>A façade improvement plan is intended to encourage building owners to improve their façade in a manner than contributes to the streetscape and improves the overall area.</p> <p><i>Example: Exeter Community Improvement &amp; Streetscape Design Plan</i></p> <p>Only exterior renovations and the associated design work for building facades facing a street, side laneway, or open space are eligible for the grant. Funding comes in a one-time grant worth 50% of the eligible costs up to a maximum of \$5,000 for improvements to each façade having street or side laneway frontage. Buildings exceeding two storey's may have their grant increased by \$1,000 for each storey above the 2<sup>nd</sup>.</p> |
| Façade and Accessibility Improvement Loan Program | <p>In addition to the façade improvement plans found in many CIPs this one also incorporates upgrades to a building's accessibility through a loan program.</p> <p><i>Example: Oshawa Simcoe St South CIP</i></p> <p>The loan is secured through a lien placed against the title of the property. The loan is interest free and has a maximum amortization period of 10 years. The loan covers 100% of the costs of the eligible work per building to a maximum of \$15,000 per municipal street address/storefront (the minimum loan is \$2,500).</p>   |
| Rear Parking Lot Improvement Grant                | <p>This grant is intended to encourage property owners to create parking opportunities for the public by undertaking rear parking lot improvements (paving &amp; sharing parking with the municipality and other property owners).</p> <p><i>Example: Exeter Community Improvement &amp; Streetscape Design Plan</i></p> <p>Eligible projects can get a grant of up to 50% of costs associated with creating rear lot paved public parking. A maximum of \$500 per parking space plus \$1,000 per 10m of laneway will be allocated. The total for each qualifying grant will be capped at \$5,000.</p>   |
| Tax Increment Equivalent Grant                    | <p>This grant is intended to provide financial incentive for the redevelopment of lands/buildings by reducing the increase in the municipal portion of property taxes from the reassessment of the property due to redevelopment.</p> <p><i>Example: Exeter Community Improvement &amp; Streetscape Design Plan</i></p> <p>Eligible works are projects that see the assessed value of the</p>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <p>property increase by no less than 25%. As a result, 50% of the Municipal portion of the property tax differential will be granted in year one. The amount of subsequent grants will decrease by 10% in each year thereafter for a maximum of 10 years.</p>  |
| Brownfields Financial Tax Incentive Program     | <p>This grant is intended to encourage the cleanup and redevelopment of brownfield properties by providing tax assistance for the purposes of environmental rehabilitation.</p> <p><i>Example: Exeter Community Improvement &amp; Streetscape Design Plan</i></p> <p>Eligible works means a Phase II environmental site assessment has been conducted and a record of site condition could not be filed because it did not meet the standards of the Environmental Protection Act. Eligible properties can qualify for cancellation of up to 100% of property taxes for municipal and school purposes during the rehabilitation period and up to 100% for municipal and school purposes during the development period. The total amount of property taxes cancelled cannot exceed the total eligible costs of the work required to prepare a record of Site Condition acceptable to the MoE.</p> |
| Planning Fee & Development Charge Grant Program | <p>This grant is aimed to promote development, redevelopment, improvement and/or preservation by waiving a portion of the required fees (if in a 2-tiered system). Possible fees to be waived include application fees, site plan approval fees, development charges, building permit fees, OPA and ZBLA fees.</p> <p><i>Example: Exeter Community Improvement &amp; Streetscape Design Plan</i></p> <p>The grant would 100% reimburse successful applicants for the municipal portion of the required application fee up to a maximum of \$3,000 per applicant. The municipality may also work with the County to waive their portion as well.</p> <p>For the development charges portion of the incentive the municipality will provide a grant equal to 50% of the sum of the fees applicable to 'soft services'. The grant will be capped at \$200,000.</p>                                  |
| Downtown Housing Grant Program                  | <p>Offers property owners a grant for the rehabilitation of existing upper floor/rear building residential units or the conversion of existing commercial/mixed-use building space to residential units.</p> <p><i>Example: North Perth CIP</i></p> <p>Following completion of the project, a grant is provided up to 50% of the construction cost to a maximum of \$10,000 per unit (for a maximum of 4 units).</p>   |
| Commercial Landscape Improvement Grant Program  | <p>This grant offers property owners funding for improvements to the landscape of existing commercial, institutional, or mixed-use properties (e.g. adding plants &amp; green space, permanent landscaping elements, new pavement for parking areas, adding</p>  |

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|  | <p>walkways).</p> <p><i>Example: North Perth CIP</i><br/>Following the completion of a successful project, a grant is provided that is equivalent of 50% of the construction cost to a maximum of \$3,000 per property (could be increased to \$5,000 at the municipality's discretion for a corner lot or where more than 1 lot is visible from a public street/space).</p>   |
| Upgrade to Building Code Loan Program  | <p>This loan program is intended to assist property owners with the financing of building improvements required to bring existing older buildings into compliance with the OBC.</p> <p><i>Example: Oshawa Simcoe St South CIP</i><br/>The loan will be secured through a lien placed against the title of the property. The loan will be interest free with a maximum amortization period of 10 years. The loan covers 100% of the costs of the eligible work per building, subject to a maximum of \$25,000 per building (minimum loan is \$2,500).</p>   |
| Upgrade to Building Code Grant Program | <p>This grant program is to assist with making building improvements required to upgrade existing buildings to bring them into full compliance, or more into compliance, with the current standards of the OBC or to provide additional assistance to support accessibility. There are 2 components to this grant: accessibility and energy efficiency.</p> <p><i>Example: City of Elliott Lake CIP</i></p> <p><u>Accessibility</u><br/>The grant will be used to provide accessible entrances and internal accessibility for grade level store fronts and offices. The grant will be 50% up to a maximum of \$2,500 toward the cost of improving accessibility to buildings.</p> <p><u>Energy Efficiency</u><br/>Additional retrofitting related to the façade improvements that would cover additional costs associated with improved insulation, or improved energy efficient windows may be considered for an additional grant. The grant will be 50% up to a maximum of \$1,500 toward the cost of providing additional energy efficiency components. The grant may be used to cover the expenses of consulting services for energy audits but the recommendations of the energy consultant must be implemented for the grant to be paid out.</p> |
| Heritage Signage Grant Program         | <p>This program will provide a grant to owners or tenants of buildings to construct a 'heritage' sign on their buildings. This program is meant to stimulate property improvements, increase building visibility, and encourage visual continuity in the downtown.</p> <p><i>Example: Brockville CIP</i><br/>A grant of \$1,000 or 50% of the cost of the sign, whichever is</p>   |

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|  | <p>lesser, will be paid to the property owner or tenant by the City following submission and review by the Planning Dept.</p>  |
| Signage (and awnings and street numbering) | <p>This grant will assist applicants with replacing and updating existing signage. Signage improvement, including street numbering and awnings (seasonal or permanent) may be included.</p> <p><i>Example: City of Elliott Lake CIP</i></p> <p>A grant of 50% up to a maximum of \$2,000 will be available for the following projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Removal of inappropriate, older or obsolete signs;</li> <li>2. Erection of appropriate signs or awnings in accordance with City guidelines</li> <li>3. Lighting improvements associated with the signage</li> </ol> <p>The grant is available initially as a onetime grant for a property; a grant may be provided for a subsequent replacement sign by a new owner/operator, at 50% to a maximum of \$1,000.</p> |
| Design Study Grant                         | <p>This grant helps property owners improve buildings and redevelop lands. The types of projects eligible include design studies prepared for heritage restoration, architectural preservation, safety &amp; building code audits, and energy audits.</p> <p><i>Example: Trent Hills CIP</i></p> <p>A grant of 50% of the cost of professional design services to a maximum of \$1,000 per applicant.</p>  |
| Commercial Improvement Loan Program        | <p>In addition to exterior façade improvements and signage, owners of an eligible commercial building can apply for an interest free loan to help finance the restoration, repair or renovation of the interior of their building.</p> <p><i>Example: North Dundas CIP</i></p> <p>An interest free loan up to a maximum of \$10,000 repayable over 5 years.</p>  |
| Heritage Property Improvement Program      | <p>Historic facades and buildings are a great asset and while many of these buildings are in good condition, others would benefit from improved maintenance or restoration to original brickwork, masonry, or architectural detailing.</p> <p><i>Example: Arnprior CIP</i></p> <p><u>Grant Program</u></p> <p>Grants for the restoration, repair, rehabilitation or preservation of designated heritage buildings and properties, or to undertake a feasibility study to determine the viability of restoring a designated heritage building, or to undertake an architectural or design study in relation to restoring a heritage building or property, will be provided to eligible applicants for 50% of eligible costs to a maximum of \$7,500.</p> <p><u>Interest Rebate Program</u></p>          |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>A rebate (grant) may be provide to eligible applicants to cover the cost of interest paid on a loan issued by a financial institution to a property owner or tenant for the purpose of restoration, repair, rehabilitation or preservation of designated heritage buildings and properties, or to undertake a feasibility study to determine the viability of restoring the designated heritage building, or to undertake an architectural or design study in relation to restoring a heritage building or property. The rebate will not exceed \$2,500, and will be issued for interest repaid at a rate considered reasonable in the opinion of the review panel. The rebate may be combined with the grant program for a total maximum of \$10,000.</p> |
| Sidewalk Café Grant Program                  | <p>This program provides property owners and tenants with financial assistance to design and construct a temporary sidewalk in place of on-street parking spaces to allow for a sidewalk safe or patio on the right-of-way in order to enhance Uptown eating establishments and encourage street level pedestrian activity.</p> <p><i>Example: Leamington CIP</i><br/>The Municipality will provide a onetime grant of 50% of the costs up to a maximum of \$2,000 to assist property owners or authorized tenants with the professional fees related to the design of a sidewalk café. The Municipality will also provide a grant of 50% of the costs, up to a maximum of \$2,000 to assist property owners to create a sidewalk café.</p>                   |
| Cafes, Patios, Display Areas and Court Yards | <p>Grants and/or loans to commercial property owners constructing cafes, patios, display areas or court yard accessory to the commercial use.</p> <p><i>Example: Chatham-Kent CIP</i><br/>Grant amount is 50% of construction cost to a maximum grant of \$10,000 per application. Maximum interest-free loan amount is 50% of construction cost to a maximum loan of \$20,000 per application repayable over 5 years.</p>  |
| Building Relocation and Expansion Grant      | <p>The intent of this grant is to encourage new and existing businesses to located in the downtown core in order to help foster and develop successful businesses.</p> <p><i>Example: Leamington CIP</i><br/>All business owners are eligible provided they relocate to a space that is equivalent in size to their current location or larger. The Municipality will provide a onetime grant of 50% of the costs, up to a maximum of \$5,000 to assist business owners to relocate to a vacant location in the downtown core.</p>  |
| Public Art Grant Program                     | <p>The purpose of this grant is to promote uniqueness, sense of place, community spirit and vibrancy through the provision of art forms on both public and private properties, where such art can be enjoyed by the public. Eligible art includes: murals, sculptures, paintings, local heritage based art pieces and displays, interactive art pieces and displays, etc..</p>  |

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
|                                       | <p><i>Example: Pelham CIP</i></p> <p>This program will provide a grant equal to 50% of the cost of eligible art pieces and displays on public property or on private property (including the exterior of buildings) that are clearly visible to the public. The minimum grant per property will be \$2,000 up to a maximum grant per property of \$5,000 with a maximum of one application per property.</p>  |
| Non-Street Front Façade Loan Program  | <p>This loan is intended to assist property owners in identified community improvement project areas with non-street front façade improvements. A non-street front façade means that portion of a non-street front building that is visible from an adjacent street or alleyway.</p> <p><i>Example: Woodstock</i></p> <p>A loan will be issued up to \$25,000 per building. The total available funds will equate up to 50% of the value of eligible works. In addition, 50% of the professional service design fees, to a maximum of \$1,500 may also be applied for per property.</p>   |
| Downtown Co-operative Marketing Grant | <p>This marketing grant will support efforts to create 'Best of Guides' and itinerary based marketing which connects visitors to downtown. It encourages local stakeholders to highlight their businesses and partner with other businesses in an attempt to increase/stimulate business in downtown commercial cores.</p> <p><i>Example: Bruce County (Spruce the Bruce)</i></p> <p>Their grant matches local cash contributions up to \$2,500. Examples of the grant include: a local campground, canoe outfitter and restaurant partner to provide a package offering/itinerary; OR the BIA creates a seasonal collaborative promotional program; OR multiple businesses work together to create a package highlighting the experiences for visitors. The goal of the program is to encourage business owners to work together to create a targeted experience for visitors.</p> |
| Destination Infrastructure Grant      | <p>This grant encourages local stakeholders to upgrade and invest in destination infrastructure. This may include trails, beaches, and upgrades to parking, restrooms, staging, lookouts, etc..</p> <p><i>Example: Bruce County (Spruce the Bruce)</i></p> <p>Their grant matches local cash contributions up to \$2,500</p>  |
| Street Beautification Grant           | <p>This grant can be used towards street improvements. For example, banners, benches, garbage/recycling cans, bike racks, flower containers, green space/park enhancements, seasonal decorations and/or public art.</p> <p><i>Example: Bruce County (Spruce the Bruce)</i></p> <p>Their grant matches local cash contributions up to \$10,000.</p>  |

## C. Interview Guide

### **CIP Interview Guide:**

1. What has been your personal experience with CIPs? Can you share what you know about CIPs with us?
2. What is the municipality's motivation for starting the CIP process? Provincial level? County level? Financial? Community driven?
3. If undertaking a CIP, what stage are you at? Have any studies been completed to encourage CIPs?
4. How is your municipality prepared to implement the plan when it is done?
  - a. On a scale of 1-5, how prepared is your municipality to implement the CIP?
5. Are there any tools/best practices that you think would be applicable for this area?
6. What are some assets in this municipality that will make your CIP unique?
7. What do you think the role of public engagement is in a CIP process? What do you think public engagement would look like?
8. What is the biggest challenge for implementing a CIP in this municipality/county? How will you overcome these challenges? Are there any challenges specific to the rural context?
9. What do you expect the outcomes will be of doing a CIP?

## D. Brochure (CIP Best Practices in Huron County)

### What is a CIP?

A Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is a strategic document.

It is used to encourage beautification of the local streetscape in the downtown or another chosen neighbourhood.

A designated CIP area must be identified within the community's Official Plan.

A CIP drives private investments in a cohesive and coordinated manner.

*Section 28 of the Planning Act allows municipalities to legally develop financial incentives through a CIP to encourage private property improvement.*

### Other Economic Development Tools

Other planning tools can also be helpful for encouraging neighbourhood and downtown revitalization.

Each of these tools have different objectives and powers. For best results, one or more tool may be used together. Carefully decide which tool will best help your community realize its vision!

### Community Improvement Plans In Huron County:

Best Practices for the Implementation of a CIP in Rural Ontario

**Huron County Planning & Development**  
 57 Napier Street, 2nd Floor  
 Goderich, Ontario N7A 1W2  
 Telephone: 519.524.8394, ext 3 OR  
 1.888.524.8394, ext 3 (Toll Free)  
 planning@huroncounty.ca  
 invest@huroncounty.ca

*Check out the Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing's CIP Handbook for more information on developing a CIP!*

### Your CIP is a TOOLBOX

Here are some examples of tools your community can use in its CIP. Fill your toolbox with tools that build on your towns' assets and address its weaknesses

- Public Art Grant
- Brownfields Redevelopment Tax Incentive Program
- Street Beautification Grant
- Heritage Signage Grant
- Downtown Housing Grant Program
- Accessibility Improvement Loan
- Façade Improvement

Several communities in Huron County have implemented CIPs. These are some of their best practices to help you implement a CIP in your own community.

### Best Practices

**NORTH HURON**

Two towns have recently developed Business Improvement Areas and are interested in creating CIPs. Best Practices are yet to be determined...

**GODERICH**

Goderich successfully implemented a CIP in 2008. The Business Improvement Association has been an ongoing partner through the project.

**CENTRAL HURON**

Training municipal staff and council at an early stage led to successful implementation of façade improvement grant program in their CIP.

**BLUEWATER**

Through a community mapping exercise, residents and business owners were able to provide direct input and determine the CIP area.

**SOUTH HURON**

The Town of Exeter drew Streetscape Guidelines simultaneously with its CIP. Combining these tools helps guide beautification in the CIP area.