

Business Retention & Expansion Project

Synopsis of Final Report - Aug 2012

Background:

One of Cramahe Council's goals was to support the revitalization of the commercial sector in Cramahe Township and in particular, the retail sector primarily in the village of Colborne. In May 2011 Council hosted an open meeting with local businesses to gain their input and to gauge their support for moving forward.

Shortly afterwards the Cramahe Retail Revitalization Committee (CRRC) was formed. One of their initial projects was to undertake a Business Retention & Expansion survey in conjunction with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). A team of volunteer interviewers was formed and interviews with local businesses took place between October 2011 and January 2012. The information that was collected was collated by OMAFRA and the Final Report produced in July 2012 and presented to Council where it was accepted.

A BR+E project is a formalized survey process that is overseen by OMAFRA. Cramahe Township successfully implemented one with the industrial sector several years ago. It is recognized as a good first step in gauging the pulse of the business community.

Results:

- Number of businesses surveyed: 26 out of a potential 97 (27%)
- Most businesses (54%) have 1 to 4 employees, 31% have 5 to 9 employees
- 26 businesses interviewed employ 161 (97 full time & 60 part time)
- Years of operation in community:
 - Less than 1 year: 1
 - 1-3 yrs: 2
 - 4-10 yrs: 3
 - 11 to 15 yrs: 12
 - 26-35 yrs: 3
 - Over 35 yrs: 5
- Local Business Climate: Excellent: 4%, Good: 35%, Fair: 46%, Poor: 15%
- Attitude about doing business in community: 76% positive, 24% negative
- Top five barriers to expansion of existing business: Utility Costs (50%), Business Taxes (42%), Business Insurance Costs (35%), Public Transit (19%), Lack of proactive new business recruitment (19%)
- Top five barriers to development of new business: Business Taxes (31%), Business Insurance Costs, Utility Costs, Approval Processes and Public Transit (all 23% each)
- Satisfaction with:

	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Contact	No Response
Local Schools	19%	38%	4%	4%	19%	15%
Child Care	8%	27%	15%	0%	23%	27%
Medical & Health Services	8%	38%	27%	8%	12%	8%
Chamber of Commerce	12%	27%	12%	4%	27%	19%
Business Self Help	4%	8%	19%	0%	38%	31%
Planning, Zoning & Building Permits	4%	35%	19%	12%	23%	8%
Policing	15%	46%	12%	15%	4%	8%
Fire Prevention	27%	42%	12%	4%	8%	8%
Rec Facilities	15%	38%	12%	4%	19%	12%
Street Repairs	8%	50%	19%	8%	4%	12%
Snow Removal	35%	46%	8%	0%	4%	8%
Garbage Removal	27%	46%	12%	0%	8%	8%
Public Transit	0%	4%	12%	15%	46%	23%

- Only 19% have accessed Federal or Provincial programs/services within the past 2 years and only 13% are planning on accessing these in the near future. 52% did want to receive information on programs & services available
- Plans for the next three years: 56% plan on remaining the same, 32% plan to expand & 12% are planning on relocating either within the community or outside it
- What assistance could the local gov't or economic development organization give to support your business? The top six were:
 - Joint advertising & marketing: 39%
 - Website development: 27%
 - Marketing seminars: 23%
 - Business Networking Sessions: 23%
 - Attraction of related supply & services businesses: 23%
 - Workforce planning, employee training & attraction: 23%

- Condition of commercial district:

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Improving	No Response
Lights, benches & waste containers	22%	52%	4%	17%	4%
Sidewalks	22%	48%	4%	22%	4%
Public Amenities (Parks & Washrooms)	13%	35%	17%	22%	13%
Parking Facilities	13%	70%	4%	2%	4%
Parking Signage	4%	48%	22%	17%	9%
Parking Fees & Enforcement	13%	35%	4%	26%	22%
Highway signage	9%	57%	4%	22%	9%
Roadside Advertising	4%	35%	26%	22%	13%
Signage	9%	30%	26%	22%	13%
ÇaÇade appearance	4%	22%	30%	30%	13%
Window Displays	4%	26%	13%	39%	17%
Visual Identity (Banners etc)	0%	52%	13%	26%	9%
Vagrancy	13%	48%	0%	17%	22%
Vandalism	9%	43%	13%	22%	13%
Public Transit	0%	4%	9%	61%	26%
Appropriate Mix of Businesses	9%	30%	22%	26%	13%
Organization of Special Events	4%	61%	17%	4%	13%
Advertising Campaigns	9%	26%	13%	22%	30%
Traffic Flow	13%	70%	4%	4%	9%
Accessibility	0%	43%	30%	17%	9%
Public Safety (Lighting, Police Presence)	9%	30%	35%	17%	9%
Conditions of Housing Stock	0%	57%	9%	13%	22%
Number of vacancies/turnover	0%	22%	9%	52%	17%
Uniform Hours of Operation	4%	48%	17%	9%	22%

- Would your business benefit from.....?
 - Business Directories, Brochures, Maps 75%
 - Cooperative Advertising/Joint marketing 70%
 - Retail & Special Event Coordination 67%
 - Building Improvement Loans/Grant Program 65%
 - Sign Improvement Loans/Grant Program 60%
 - Marketing on the Web 56%
 - Networking Events 55%
 - Analysis & Reporting on Downtown Market/Economy 50%
 - Succession Planning 42%
 - Physical Improvement in Public Areas (benches, lighting etc 40%
 - Improved Telecommunications Infrastructure 37%
 - Store Design & Layout Assistance 35%
 - Mentorship Programs 35%
 - Training in Financial Management & Product Pricing 25%
 - Customer Service Training 21%

- What four community assets would you like to see developed? The top four were:
 - Public Washrooms located downtown 20%
 - Farmers Market 20%
 - Walking & Bike Trails 14%
 - Public Parking 12%

Issues and Actions

The Cramahe Retail Revitalization Committee (CRRC) reviewed the findings from the survey and developed the following “issues & actions”:

- Community Growth (low population growth & businesses that rely heavily on local patronage)
 - Actions:
 - Residential development/attraction strategy
 - “Shop Local” campaign
 - New & diverse retail and service business attraction
- Cost of Doing Business (ever increasing cost of utilities, insurance & taxes)
 - Actions:
 - Work with utility providers to educate businesses on how to conserve energy & alternate energy options
 - Seminars/info sessions hosted by utility & insurance companies
 - Taxes ??
- Commercial Building Vacancy Rate (current vacancy rate at 18% and vacant stores have been an ongoing issue for many years)
 - Actions:
 - Business recruitment strategy; cultivate an “open for business” image
 - Gap analysis re: mix of businesses
 - New & diverse retail and service business attraction
- Streetscape/ Building Facades (condition & presentation of the downtown Colborne businesses and signage was identified as a major issue of concern)
 - Actions:
 - Downtown business district’s image and presentation become a priority for revitalization
 - Heritage preservation through encouraged building restoration also become a priority
 - Financing the façade, exterior signage and building improvements and upgrades continue through the CIP (Community Improvement Plan)
 - Complete the south side of King St East
 - More accessibility for those with disabilities
 - Increase police presence/monitoring to deter vagrancy and vandalism

- Marketing (businesses wish to have more opportunities for marketing their businesses and downtown Colborne)
 - Actions:
 - Develop a marketing program/strategy which may include:
 - Website for community commercial businesses
 - Joint advertising options
 - Events development
 - Improved visual displays/presentation

- Business Development Training (businesses are in need of and want to improve their ability to develop & manage their business)
 - Actions:
 - Establishment of a Resource Awareness Program that provides group information or one-on-one consultations on the resources available to businesses. First session is planned for this Fall.
 - Businesses be encouraged to foster a cooperative business environment and increase networking
 - Establish business plan and marketing plan training sessions
 - Encourage or offer training on visual/window displays
 - Develop a mentoring program
 - Training on website development, web marketing and social media

- Transportation (issue is the difficulty that exists for employees to travel to & from work)
 - Actions:
 - Work more closely with NTI (Northumberland Transportation Initiative)

Conclusion & Final Recommendations

- The CRRC strongly recommends that a working strategic plan for downtown revitalization be developed
- The CRRC seeks Council support to move forward with a strategy outline that includes:
 - Business resource & cost cutting programs
 - Business recruitment strategy
 - Streetscape/building façade & signage improvement plan
 - Marketing plan
 - Business development/training opportunities
 - Staffing to complete the project
 - Funding Options including RED, Northumberland CFDC, Ministry of Universities, Colleges and Training, business partnerships etc)

Thank you to all those involved in the project:

- CRRC:
 - Lorne Bumstead, Gerri Weatherbee, Tamica Potter, Clark Kristmanson, Debbie Young
- Volunteer Interviewers:
 - Paul Anstee, Donnarene Knapp, Mary Lee, Bob Lee, Andy Zvagulis, Sherry Richmond, Bill Doherty
- Eric Lawlor, Regional Information Coordinator, OMAFRA
- Rebecca Goddard-Sarria, Twp of Cramahe