

## Community Improvement Plan could be retooled after slow uptake

It was intended to give property owners in the Aurora Promenade financial incentive to improve and enhance their properties through grants and tax grants but a slow uptake in the program could lead to a retooling for the years ahead.

Aurora approved its Community Improvement Plan (CIP) in 2014 to provide the Town with a flexible set of incentives in order to stimulate private investment that will result in increased assessment, jobs and managed population growth.

Among the raft of programs offered through the program were grants to improve facades and signage, an initiative to restore, renovate and improve buildings to promote the use of second floors in commercial blocks, a reduction in development charges for the redevelopment of specific sites, and grants for heritage properties, environmental site assessments, and tax assistance for environmental remediation.

But few of these programs saw significant uptake from property owners.

Since its inception, just five COP applications were approved in any part by Council with \$85,000 awarded under the Façade and Signage Improvement Program and the Building Restoration, Renovation and Improvement initiative.

Three of the applicants' funds have yet to be disbursed since the applicants have yet to complete their respective projects, said Lisa Hausz, Manager of Economic Development and Policy for the Town of Aurora in a report to Council. Of the seven programs offered in the CIP, the Façade and Signage Improvement Grant has been the most popular program. Three applicants applied for the program, each was granted the maximum \$15,000 for a total of \$45,000 awarded to applicants. To date, only two applicants have received the full disbursement of funds.

Three out of the seven programs did not receive any applications over the initial five-year period. They included the Development Charge Grant Program, Environmental Site Assessment Grant Program, and the Environmental Remediation Tax Assistance Program. The reasons for not receiving applications to the programs include eligibility for the program or little demand for the program.

Now, it is a matter for Council and staff to decide where the program should go from here.

A review, according to Hausz, will look at ways to improve the program and make what is offered more effective for the community. It will look at what should be eliminated and added, as well as how applications are evaluated.

Prior to holding the statutory public meeting, staff will schedule an open house to consult with stakeholders of the Aurora Promenade to gain insight and input on the review of the previous programs and policies of the CIP, what new programs could be introduced, and how they align with the vision of the Promenade Secondary Plan, said Ms. Hausz. Following the open house, a statutory public meeting will be scheduled to present a revised CIP for public review and comment in accordance with Section 17 of the Planning Act.

As part of the updating and public consultation process, staff will update the program comparison of neighbouring municipalities as well as review and present best practices and programs from across Ontario that are permitted under the Municipal Act for a Community Improvement Plan. Special consideration will be identified for programs that align with the Town's Strategic Plan and various departmental plans and objectives including: downtown revitalization, business support, climate and environment, green development, heritage preservation, accessibility and public realm amenities, along with managed growth in the Promenade.

**By Brock Weir** Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter