



CITY OF STRATFORD

HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

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1.0 INTRODUCTION:

The City of Stratford has long been renowned for its unique and historically significant downtown area. This area has been the focus of several studies and was recently designated as a Heritage Conservation District (HCD) under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act.

The purpose of this community improvement plan is to provide the context for a coordinated municipal effort to preserve the heritage aspects of Stratford's Heritage Conservation District by encouraging the restoration, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of buildings within this area. While primarily focused on heritage preservation, it is also intended that this community improvement plan will accomplish several other Official Plan goals and policies with respect to Stratford's Downtown Core. The focus of these initiatives, and of the community improvement plan, is to; promote the preservation of heritage buildings, but also to improve the economic and social climates of the area and increase the supply of residential units within the Heritage Conservation District to ensure a viable downtown population.

The community improvement plan will be administered through the Building and Planning Department, with assistance provided by the various other Departments.

2.0 AREA OF APPLICATION:

The lands that are subject to the community improvement plan are described as the City of Stratford Heritage Conservation District and are shown on the attached Schedule "A"

3.0 SECTION 28 – ONTARIO PLANNING ACT

Section 28 of the Ontario Planning Act allows municipalities, where there are provisions in its Official Plan relating to community improvement to designate by By-law, a "Community Improvement Project Area", and subsequently provide for the preparation of a "Community Improvement Plan". For the purposes of carrying out the community improvement plan, a municipality may:

- i) acquire, hold, clear, grade, otherwise prepare, sell, lease or otherwise dispose of lands;
- ii) construct, repair, rehabilitate or improve buildings on lands acquired or held by the municipality;
- iii) make grants or loans to owners of land or buildings to pay for the whole or part of any cost of rehabilitating such lands or buildings; and

- iv) enter into agreements with any government authority for the preparation, implementation and financing of plans

provided that the above actions are in conformity with the approved community improvement plan.

The Ontario Planning Act allows Council to adopt a by-law to designate all or part of an area identified in the Official Plan as a Community Improvement Project Area. Where such a by-law is adopted Council can adopt a community improvement plan pursuant to the Planning Act requirements. This plan gives the municipality the legislative basis to offer financial incentives notwithstanding certain statutory limitations in the Municipal Act.

4.0 CITY OF STRATFORD OFFICIAL PLAN

On January 25th, 1993 City Council adopted By-law 14-93, approving a new Official Plan for the City of Stratford, entitled "*Official Plan 1993 – 2013*".

Section 11 of the City of Stratford Official Plan sets out the Community Improvement Goals and Objectives for the City of Stratford. The community improvement policies contained in this section of the Official Plan provide the basis for undertaking community improvement plans and community development projects to help ensure the ongoing maintenance, improvement and rehabilitation of Stratford's residential, commercial and industrial districts.

Section 11.4 of the City of Stratford Official Plan sets out Community Improvement Policies for heritage properties and states that the City will encourage the upgrading of architecturally and significant properties or areas within the community improvement areas.

Section 6.2 of the Official Plan deals with the Downtown Core and states that it is a compact, multi-use and multi-functional area located at the historic and geographic centre of the City. Its strategic location at the centre of the City and at the termination of five major arterial roads makes it highly accessible to all parts of the City and the surrounding region and is considered a major contributing factor for its continued health and prosperity. In large measure, the Downtown Core defines the City of Stratford, establishing the identity and image of the City for both residents and visitors.

Based on the above, the City of Stratford has adopted the following goals and objectives for the Downtown Core:

- i) To encourage the development, re-development, enhancement and maintenance of a downtown which is vibrant, compact, multi-functional,

attractive and people friendly and which constitutes the primary focus of the City with its own distinct identity and character.

- ii) To increase the diversity and number of residential opportunities.
- iii) To encourage the rehabilitation and “recycling” of functionally obsolete buildings and floor space no longer suited for the purpose for which they were originally designed or built.

Section 6.2.4 of the Official Plan states that the City also recognizes the importance and benefits of an increased resident population in the “Downtown Core”. For its residents, the “Downtown Core” offers a unique living environment in the City. At the same time, a resident population enhances the vibrancy and safety of the downtown, provides an additional market for downtown shops and services, and provides a viable use for functionally obsolete buildings and floor space. The City encourages the conversion of upper storey floor space and obsolete buildings to residential purposes.

Section 6.2.10 of the Official Plan has recognized the significance of certain buildings, groups of buildings and streetscapes in terms of their importance to the City’s identity and character. To maintain these streetscapes, the Official Plan outlines that the City may take measures to protect their continued existence and integrity, to encourage their restoration, maintenance and functional use; and to enhance their surroundings. Thus far, the City has implemented these goals by establishing a Heritage Conservation District and adopting standards that will apply to any alterations taking place in the Heritage Conservation District. The Heritage Conservation District area is currently identified as a Community Improvement Area in the City of Stratford Official Plan.

5.0 STRATFORD DOWNTOWN HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT STUDY AND PLAN

In 1994, the City of Stratford commissioned Polymath&Thaumaturge Inc. and Baird/Sampson Architects to study Stratford’s downtown core and prepare a report as to how to best conserve the architectural and civic heritage. This study began in the spring of 1994 and comprised research, documentation and analysis as well as three formal public meetings. The study was guided by a steering committee and was presented to Council in the fall of 1994.

The purpose of the study was to provide a comprehensive architectural and historical study in support of a then proposed Heritage Conservation District designation, under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act, of Stratford’s downtown area. The study also was intended to provide planning and urban design recommendations that would aid in managing future change and development in the area.

This study recommended that a Heritage Conservation District be established and listed civic policies and initiatives that should be adopted to support heritage conservation in the downtown. The study also recommended that the City develop incentives to help support and reinforce the Heritage Conservation District.

6.0 ESTABLISHMENT OF A HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT AND HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT STANDARDS

On October 27, 1997, the City passed By-law 173-97, which designated an area of the downtown core as a Heritage Conservation District. This was done through Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act (Heritage Conservation Districts).

In 1998, the Heritage Conservation District Committee was formed to develop standards for the Heritage Conservation District that would apply to any alterations taking place within the HCD. Council adopted these standards on February 24th, 2003.

On June 25th, 2001, Stratford City Council approved the principle of a loan program for the restoration and maintenance of buildings in the Heritage Conservation District.

7.0 COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

7.1 Area of Applicability

The provisions of this community improvement plan dated March 7, 2003 shall apply to the City of Stratford Heritage Conservation District as identified by Municipal By-law 173-97 and as illustrated in Schedule "A" to this plan.

7.2 Goals and Objectives

This community improvement plan encourages property owners and developers in the Heritage Conservation District to pursue a range of incentives offered in support of preservation, restoration, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse projects.

The plan allows for the City of Stratford to offer technical and financial assistance to encourage completion of such projects in accordance with municipal and provincial standards. Use of these incentives is intended to support long-term heritage preservation and investment in Heritage Conservation District and to implement Official Plan policies for the Downtown Core.

The intent of offering these incentives as part of the Community Improvement Plan is to:

- Improve and maintain the existing building inventory in the downtown
- Encourage the rehabilitation and creation of 2nd and 3rd floor residential and commercial space in the Heritage Conservation District.
- Preserve heritage features within the Heritage Conservation District and encourage rehabilitation that is consistent with the “*City of Stratford Heritage Conservation District Standards*”.
- Provide opportunity for investment in downtown buildings that improves the economic climate of the area and increases its importance as a destination for residents and visitors.

7.3 Plan Parameters:

This community improvement plan will assist in rehabilitating existing buildings and structures in the Heritage Conservation District, and address poor building conditions as a result of age, construction and alignment.

The Community Improvement Plan encourages:

- a) improvements to building facades in accordance with the “*City of Stratford Heritage Conservation District Standards*”.
- b) Building Code upgrades to existing buildings in accordance with the “*City of Stratford Heritage Conservation District Standards*”.
- c) Rehabilitation of existing buildings within the Heritage Conservation District in accordance with the “*City of Stratford Heritage Conservation District Standards*”.

In order to ensure the preservation or restoration of unique and/or original features of architectural and historic significance, any rehabilitation in this area will have to be designed and constructed in accordance with the “*City of Stratford Heritage Conservation District Standards*” in order to qualify for any of the programs.

Where buildings in the Heritage Conservation District are removed or demolished through fire, inclement weather or other act of God, on a property within the area identified in Schedule “A” to this plan, City Council at its sole discretion may determine that part or all of the programs provided for this plan shall ~~not~~ apply to the rehabilitation of that same property.

Based on the above the following programs may be implemented by the City through the community improvement plan:

- 1) Providing clear and concise design guidelines that outline procedures available to receive assistance
- 2) Developing promotional material to successfully market the programs and assistance offered under this community improvement plan
- 3) Providing grants for application, permit and development charge fees
- 4) Providing interest free loans for façade improvements
- 5) Providing interest free loans for Building Code Upgrades
- 6) Providing a grant calculated on the basis of the increase in the municipal portion of taxes resulting from rehabilitation over a maximum 10 year period.

All loans and grants provided as part of this community improvement plan would only be paid out after the applicable improvements have been completed and inspected by the City and after all applicable taxes for the property have been paid in full.

In all situations, the total level of loan or grant provided to an applicant under the community improvement plan, shall not exceed the cost of rehabilitation.

The City will make available a maximum annual amount of \$150,000 for interest free loans under this community improvement plan. All applications for loan assistance under this community improvement plan will be considered on a “first come, first served” basis and will be restricted to the limit of the budgeted funding. Should the number of eligible projects exceed the annual funding available, those eligible projects will be held in queue until funding becomes available in the following year.

Prior to approving an application under this community improvement plan, the City reserves the right to request an independent audit of the applicants accounts, at the expense of the applicant, and to ensure that all other work orders or requests to comply from other departments or agencies have be satisfactorily addressed.

This Community Improvement Plan is consistent with Provincial Policy, guidelines and legislation, and implements the City’s Official Plan, Zoning By-law and Heritage Conservation District Standards.

7.3.1 The Heritage Conservation District Façade Improvement Loan Program

Where a building façade improvement project is proposed which satisfies the “*City of Stratford Heritage Conservation District Standards*”, City Council can approve an interest free loan to cover up to 50% of the capital cost of the façade improvement to a maximum of \$25,000 per building.

Where an application has been approved, the loan would be payable after the owner executes a commitment agreement with the City, after the presentation of proof of accounts paid for the completed project and after an inspection of the completed work by City staff. The commitment agreement would specify eligible works and specify a maximum 10-year repayment period.

7.3.2 The Heritage Conservation District Building Code Upgrade Loan Program

Where a project is proposed to renovate and/or redevelop residential or commercial space in existing buildings, and it satisfies the “*City of Stratford Heritage Conservation District Standards*”, City Council can approve an interest free loan to cover up to 50% of the capital cost of health and safety related improvements to a maximum of \$50,000 per building.

Where an application has been approved, the loan would be payable after the project is complete, after the owner executes a commitment agreement with the City, after the presentation of proof of accounts paid for the completed project and after an inspection of the completed work by City staff. The commitment agreement would specify eligible works and specify a 10-year repayment period.

7.3.3 The Heritage Conservation District Rehabilitation Grant Program

Under this program, owners would indicate their interest in the tax incentive program by completing an application at the building permit stage. If approved by Council, a commitment agreement would be executed confirming participation in the program.

The difference between the municipal portion of the taxes prior to the work being completed, and the municipal portion of the taxes after completion of the works would be calculated. The municipal portion of the tax increase would then be granted back to the applicant after all taxes (including the increase) have been paid for the entire year. The amount of the grant would be pro-rated over 10 years and would be split into two different types of grants. If the improvements do not result in an increase in assessment, there will be no grant.

Type A grants would apply to rehabilitation projects in buildings built prior to 1976. Type A grants would be based on the following:

Type A – Year/Type Factors

Year	Grant Amount	Year	Grant Amount
1	100%	6	50%
2	90%	7	40%
3	80%	8	30%
4	70%	9	20%
5	60%	10	10%

Type B grants would apply to rehabilitation projects in buildings built after 1976. Type B grants would be based on the following:

Type B – Year/Type Factors

Year	Grant Amount	Year	Grant Amount
1	60%	6	20%
2	60%	7	10%
3	50%	8	10%
4	40%	9	10%
5	30%	10	10%

The amount of the grants provided for a property over the life of this program will not exceed the cost of rehabilitation done that resulted in the increased level of municipal tax assessment. For this reason the amount of grants will be monitored in relation to the total value of work done and the grants will cease if they equal the value of the work done.

Accounting practices will be established by the Corporate Services Department to monitor, report and reconcile these on-going incentives and include the appropriate figures in the annual budget.

8.0 Plan Implementation:

The programs which may be established under the Community Improvement Plan will be implemented over five years, but City Council may elect to extend the program for an additional period where Council deems it appropriate or necessary to do so. It is intended that plan implementation commence November 1st, 2003 and end December 31st, 2008 except where Council extends plan implementation in accordance with the City's official plan.

City Council shall prepare and adopt a set of guidelines and procedures to establish the specifics of how the plan components will operate. The guidelines will address such issues as the nature of improvement projects that will be approved, the application and approval procedures, requirements for legal agreements, and in the case of competing projects how decisions will be made as to which project receives priority approval.

At the time City Council establishes its annual budget, Council will determine the maximum contribution to be made available to the various programs under this Community Improvement Plan for the current year.

Council will conduct periodic reviews of the programs being implemented under this community improvement plan to determine their effectiveness and to determine whether funding levels should be increased or decreased, or whether modifications to the program should be made.

Should Council decide that additional programs are to be added to this plan or to significantly increase the financial commitment to the programs, an amendment to this plan will be required.

APPENDIX "A" – CIP AREA OF IMPLEMENTATION

