



FINAL REPORT 2015 - 2018

DOWNTOWN COALITION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

November 2018

“The core of Cobourg’s character and personality is in the Downtown”

Gil Brocanier, Mayor of Cobourg, April 2015

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Executive Summary

This report compiles the work overseen by the Cobourg Downtown Coalition Advisory Committee (DCAC) between 2015 and 2018 that addressed the revitalization of Cobourg's Downtown. The mandate of DCAC was to facilitate the implementation of recommendations arising from the 2013 Downtown Vitalization Action Plan, though more activities to support vitalization were added subsequently.

Progress

The Coalition has considered, discussed and – where appropriate – acted upon all of the recommendations in the Downtown Vitalization Action Plan.

Major accomplishments include the Downtown Master Plan, the Community Improvement Plan (and its implementation), and support for Victoria Square Phase IV. These documents, together with the forthcoming Cultural Master Plan, set out a well-considered and comprehensive way forward for the next several years of Downtown vitalization.

The early implementation of the Community Improvement Plan has been a success: 25 restoration projects have been approved, most of them on the main street. Thirteen have already been completed. The leverage for the overall program so far is 4:1. In addition to undertaking significant façade improvements, several property owners are addressing the renovation of upper stories and there is indication that others will follow suit.

The business attraction marketing plan is complete and an ad campaign is well underway with completion set for March 2019.

The Henley Arcade has been re-furbished, including a new mural. Vehicle wayfinding signs for Downtown have been installed and pedestrian wayfinding and event signage is in progress.

An initial set of performance measures for vitalization, grounded in sound theory, has been established, data sources have been identified, and accurate data – specific to the Downtown Project Area – have been compiled for the last four years.

Finally, significant strategic planning has been undertaken by the Coalition to formulate a revised Vision and Mission for the vitalization project, and a set of Goals for the next 5-10 years.

Challenges

Notwithstanding this success, there have been challenges. The biggest challenge lies with engaging property owners and convincing them that they have a role to play in the success of Downtown. This being said, the situation may be changing in a positive direction: several

Downtown buildings have new owners in the last two years and some are capitalizing on the CIP program, indicating a commitment to upgrading their properties.

Another key group of players in Downtown property and business activity are the real estate brokers and agents. With some exceptions, it has been difficult to engage them in vitalization.

One area where the Coalition faltered was in communications with the public. The communications effort was not consistent, resulting in sporadic updates. In addition, the website was not updated in a timely manner.

Strategic Recommendations

Downtown vitalization is best regarded as a long-haul project. While short-term “wins” are helpful, substantial improvements in Prosperity and Livability, which can take several years to manifest, are the ultimate aim. Thus it is important to move steadily and keep the focus. Partnerships are crucial to success and the DCAC has provided a valuable mechanism for establishing them.

1. We recommend that the Downtown Coalition Advisory Committee be re-constituted by the Town for at least another four years.
2. A re-formed DCAC should adopt the following Vision and Mission that were developed through the Coalition’s strategic planning effort.
 - *Vision - Downtown Cobourg is a progressive sustainable lakeside community: the historic yet innovative hub of rich culture and thriving business.*
 - *Mission - The Downtown Vitalization project collaboratively and proactively leads the implementation of measurable actions that drive continuous improvement of Downtown vitality for people and business.*
3. A re-formed DCAC should adopt the following Goals that were developed through the Coalition’s strategic planning effort.
 - *Coordinate & Communicate* – The Cobourg Downtown Vitalization project will reach out to all stakeholders to coordinate activities with common outcomes, to ensure those outcomes are realized, and to communicate success.
 - *Measure Performance* – Building on its acknowledged expertise, the Cobourg Downtown Vitalization project will monitor, measure and track the vitality of the Downtown, and report on progress.
 - *Intensify* – Well-planned intensification of land uses in Downtown Cobourg results in reduced business vacancies, an increased number of residents and improved livability and vitality.
 - *Diversify* – With its robust infrastructure, Downtown Cobourg offers diversity in all seasons for all generations.

- *Strengthen Community* – Downtown offers all Cobourg’s residents a strong sense of identity and place, and provides many opportunities for engagement; residents view it with pride.
4. The DCAC should formulate clear and measurable Objectives and Actions based on these Goals, thus completing the OMAFRA strategic planning process.

Specific Recommendations

The following is a list of more specific recommendations for the Town or for the re-formed DCAC that have arisen from the work and experience of the Coalition so far:

1. The DCAC should have representation from Tourism.
2. The DCAC should regularly re-examine the Downtown Master Plan and recommend actions for Town implementation. The same should be done for the Cultural Master Plan once Council accepts it.
3. A concentrated effort should be made by the Town to find funding for Victoria Square development.
4. The CIP program should continue to be funded by the Town at the current level or increased as determined by future uptake of the program. Measures should be devised and data collected to ascertain the impact of the CIP program on Downtown Prosperity and Livability.
5. The CIP application evaluation criteria should continue to be tuned and revised by DCAC. As well, DCAC should consider implementation of methods to improve the efficiency of CIP program administration.
6. The DCAC should look for innovative ways to engage and motivate Downtown property owners regarding the maintenance and rejuvenation of their buildings.
7. Marketing of the Downtown to suitable prospective businesses is crucial and should be systematically planned and conducted.
8. To complement the current business attraction program, a customer attraction program for local residents should be prepared and implemented by the Town, supported by DCAC.
9. Renewed effort should be made by DCAC to engage the real estate community as partners.
10. The current set of measures should be updated yearly and new valid measures, especially measures of vitalization outcome, should be incorporated.
11. The Residents Survey should be repeated to provide an update on residents’ perceptions and opinions about Downtown.
12. A communications plan should be developed by DCAC to regularly update the public on its initiatives. In particular, the successful initiatives should be celebrated. The web page should be kept current.

Introduction

This report compiles the work overseen by the Cobourg Downtown Coalition Advisory Committee (DCAC) between 2015 and 2018 addressing the revitalization of Cobourg’s Downtown. The main body of the report includes the background for the formation of the committee, a summary of the committee’s activities over the four years, observations on the successes and challenges encountered, and a set of recommended actions for follow-on work on vitalization. Further details are available in the Appendices and from the reference reports that are cited.

Background of Vitalization

In 2012, the Town of Cobourg formed the Downtown Vitalization Task Force, an Ad Hoc committee charged with addressing the revitalization of the Downtown. The stated mission of the committee was to “coordinate the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan to be utilized as a guiding tool to encourage business retention, expansion and attraction in Downtown Cobourg”¹. The Task Force met over a series of months to compile best practices and expert advice, to solicit citizens’ views through meetings and surveys, and to establish strategic goals and a plan for Downtown vitalization.

The exact geographic area of Cobourg’s Downtown (also referred to as the “Project Area”) is shown in Figure 1. This area is slightly larger than that covered by the DBIA and also slightly larger than the area originally defined as “Downtown” by the Task Force.

The Province of Ontario recognizes and supports the need for Downtown revitalization in small towns and communities, as outlined in its policy statement:

“Main streets are at the core of small, rural communities and are home to thousands of small businesses across the province. That’s why our government is committed to ensuring they continue to remain vibrant hubs where residents meet, tourists visit and small businesses grow and prosper.”²

Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the Minister Responsible for Small Business

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) has long offered extensive material and guidance on the process of Downtown revitalization³ as well as funding for such

¹ *Downtown Vitalization Action Plan* (2013), p 3; available at <https://www.cobourg.ca/en/town-hall/Downtown-Vitalization-Plan.aspx>

² <https://news.ontario.ca/omafra/en/2018/01/ontario-revitalizing-main-streets-helping-small-businesses-grow.html>

³ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/Downtown-revitalization-program>

efforts (e.g., the recent New Main Street Revitalization Initiative⁴). OMAFRA was represented on the Cobourg Task Force. Based on a customer origin survey that had been conducted locally, OMAFRA provided a *Market Analysis Report* that established the Trade Area for Cobourg. In addition, a *Residents Survey* and a *Business Owners Survey* were carried out⁵.

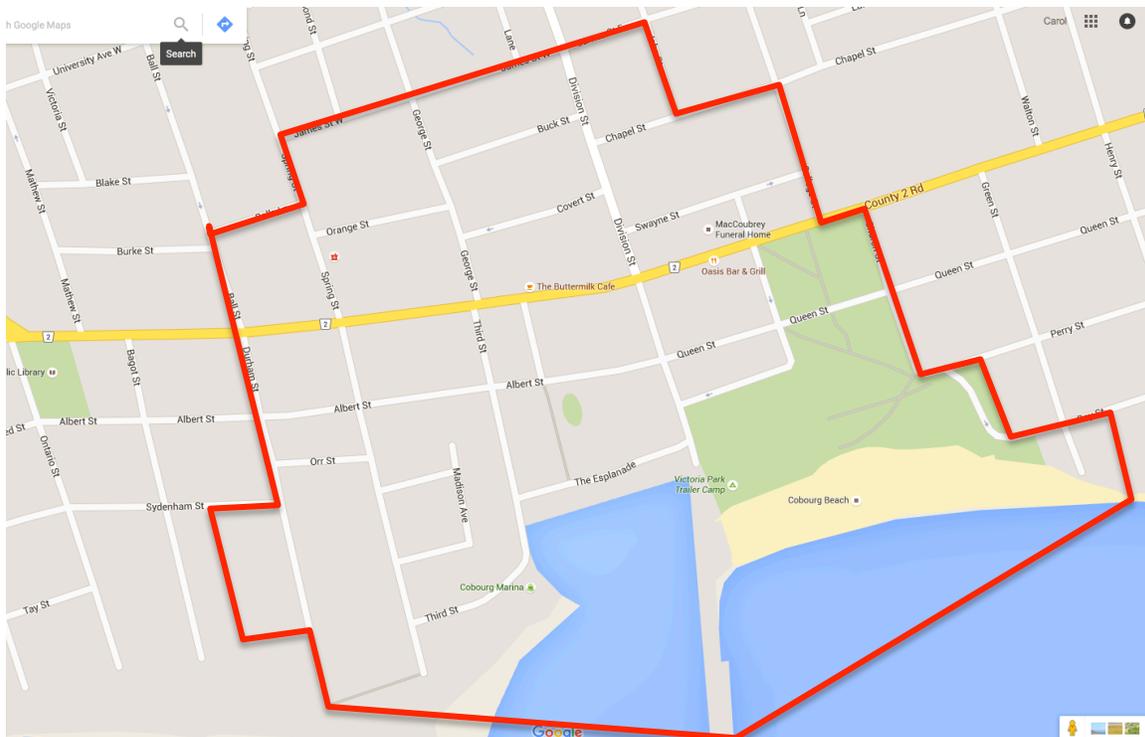


Figure 1: Downtown Project Area

The Task Force adopted the following Vision Statement for Vitalization:

Downtown Cobourg is Ontario’s foremost cultural and recreational small town destination forged from a beautifully preserved historic community on the waterfront. As the economic hub of Northumberland County, it will deliver accessible experiences and opportunities generated from local agriculture, environmental consciousness and active, health-centered living.

⁴ <https://onregionalecdev.com/2018/01/23/new-main-street-revitalization-initiative/>

⁵ All vitalization reports marked in italics hereafter are available at <https://www.cobourg.ca/en/town-hall/Downtown-Vitalization-Plan.aspx>

In November 2013, Cobourg Council approved the resulting *Downtown Vitalization Action Plan* consisting of nine Strategic Elements and associated Objectives (listed in Appendix 1).

Downtown Coalition

Cobourg Council formed the Downtown Coalition Advisory Committee (DCAC), also known as the Coalition, in February 2015. Its purpose was to oversee and ensure the timely execution of the Downtown Vitalization Action Plan (DVAP) and to focus the efforts and the coordination of all the stakeholders that are working to promote and vitalize the Downtown. The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the committee (as updated in March 2018) are in Appendix 2. As the TOR show, the committee is a cross-section of stakeholders in the Downtown, including representatives from other relevant Town advisory committees, as well as the Chamber and the DBIA. The Mayor and CAO typically attend meetings. The term of DCAC aligns with that of Council. The TOR has been updated at the beginning of each calendar year, although such updates have been modest.

The first task of the Coalition was to fold the many sub-objectives of the DVAP, also referred to as the Action Plan, into more tractable projects. Table 1 below shows the list that was established.

Priority	Project	Principles Addressed	Action Plan Objectives Incorporated
1	Create a Downtown Coalition	Visionary	1.2a, 2.2a,b, 8.1, 8.2
1	Downtown Master Plan	Strategy/Visionary	7.1a
1	Report on Town Tourism Assets	Visionary/Prosperity/Strategy	7.1d, 9.2a
1	Report on Venture Initiative (CIVIC)	Visionary/Strategy	3.2
1	Downtown Marketing Partnership	Prosperity	2.1a, 5.1, 5.2, 6.2, 9.1
1	Signage and Property Enhancements	Livability	7.2a
2	Post Secondary Institution to the Downtown	Livability/Visibility	6.1
3	Municipal Business Certification	Prosperity	2.1b
3	Town Redevelopment of a Downtown Building	Strategy/Vision	7.1c
3	Victoria Hall Square	Strategy/Vision	7.1d
3	Municipal Culture Plan	Strategy/Vision/Livability	9.1b

Table 1: Mapping of Action Plan Objectives onto Coalition Projects

The Table shows the project names and the relevant Action Plan Objectives. This project grouping was done bearing in mind the Canadian Urban Institute Principles (discussed in the section on Performance Measures), as shown in the third column. The priorities were assigned by the Coalition. Note that some of the Action Plan Objectives (namely, 1.1, 3.3, 4.1, and 4.2) had already been completed before the Coalition was formed. Objectives 2.2c, 3.1a, 7.1b, 7.2b, 7.2c, 7.2d and 9.2b were considered as part of normal Town business activity and were not felt to require special action by the Coalition.

This project list formed the basis of the work of the Coalition, with two other projects (Vacant Building Utilization and Building Renewal) being added later. The next section describes the progress on each of these projects.

Vitalization Projects

Downtown Master Plan

The first Coalition project, the Downtown Master Plan (DMP), was intended to set the stage for later decisions regarding vitalization. The development of the plan was contracted in April 2015 to Dillon Consulting partnered with RCI Consulting. A steering committee made up of a subgroup of members of the Coalition and staff representatives from Planning and Economic Development oversaw the work. The work on developing the DMP proceeded alongside and fully cognizant of the concurrent development of the *Cobourg Heritage Master Plan*. The *Cobourg Downtown Master Plan* was completed and accepted by Council in March 2016.

The following notes are extracted from the Executive Summary of the Cobourg Downtown Master Plan:

The Downtown Master Plan provides detailed and strategic direction for the revitalization of Downtown Cobourg by building on the overarching policies outlined in the existing Official Plan and a number of other strategies and economic development initiatives developed for the Downtown over the years. The Master Plan contains a Downtown strategy, urban design guidelines, and implementation tools to assist the Town in guiding new development, investment and community building initiatives in Downtown Cobourg for the next 10 to 20 years.

The plan:

- Creates a detailed framework to guide planning and development decisions in a manner that is compatible with the local context and respectful of the broad community interests.
- Builds on the community's existing unique assets and opportunities.
- Responds to unique circumstances and contemporary realities facing Cobourg.

- Creates opportunities to increase the diversity of housing types within the Downtown, attractive to seniors, families, and a wide range of household types.
- Creates opportunities to increase economic development opportunities within the Downtown through encouraging mixed use infill development and other redevelopment opportunities.
- Establishes design guidelines and strategies specific to character areas that will inform the design details of site specific development applications.
- Describes opportunities for public realm and infrastructure improvements.

The Master Plan is a strategic document that will be used by the Town, local residents and businesses as a tool to communicate the vision, goals, and direction to the public, external agencies, and investors. It includes the Downtown Revitalization Toolbox, a development manual summarizing relevant policies, development permit and approval processes, financial incentives, as well as appropriate municipal contacts and links to important documents and application forms.

The Downtown Master Plan provides a comprehensive guide for future short and long-term development in the Downtown and, as such, is a key anchor for future vitalization. Several of its recommendations are being implemented (e.g., signage enhancements) or primed (e.g., Victoria Square design renewal). Some may be considered in other contexts (e.g., possible rehabilitation of the Park Theatre as a cultural asset). However, many should be re-visited and possibly re-invigorated. The document deserves regular review by a future vitalization group to ensure that its excellent recommendations do not “sit on the shelf” but are implemented in a timely and appropriate manner.

Community Improvement Plan

The Community Improvement Plan (CIP) was prepared in tandem with the Downtown Cobourg Master Plan (DMP) to complement, support and be implemented in conjunction with the DMP. The preparation of these two documents was a collaborative effort between the consulting team (RCI Consulting), the Town, DCAC, and other stakeholders. This CIP is called the Downtown Cobourg “Vitalization” CIP because it has been expressly developed and refined to help achieve the Vision and support the strategies and recommended actions contained in the Cobourg Downtown Vitalization Action Plan (DVAP). The CIP was adopted by Council in March 2016 (By-law No. 015-2016) and implemented that year. Its purpose is described in this extract from the Executive Summary:

The purpose of the *Downtown Cobourg Vitalization Community Improvement Plan* is to identify the key community improvement needs in Downtown Cobourg, establish a

Community Improvement Project Area⁶ (Project Area), and outline public realm improvements and a toolbox of incentive programs that will stimulate private sector investment activity in the Project Area.

The financial incentive programs contained in this CIP represent a comprehensive tool kit of programs specifically designed to address the community improvement needs in Downtown Cobourg, and over time, help achieve the vision for Downtown Cobourg laid out in the DVAP and the DMP. These financial incentive programs are designed to encourage private sector investment, rehabilitation, adaptive reuse, redevelopment, and construction activity in Downtown Cobourg. The incentive programs include a:

- Study Grant Program;
- Façade Improvement Grant/Loan Program;
- Building Improvement Grant/Loan Program; Residential Grant/Loan Program;
- Vitalization Tax Increment Grant Program;
- Brownfields Tax Assistance Program;
- Vitalization Development Charge Grant Program; and,
- Fees Grant Program.

The incentive programs contained in this CIP can be referred to as a “toolkit” because once the CIP is adopted and approved, the incentive programs in the CIP can be activated by Council, one or more at a time, based on Council approval of the implementation of each program, subject to the availability of funding. In this regard, the CIP enables Council to implement the incentive programs, but does not obligate Council to implement these programs. The incentive programs are tools for Council to use to help achieve the vision for Downtown Cobourg, and Council will decide which incentive programs to implement. The programs are also referred to as a “toolkit” because once activated, these programs can be used individually or together by an applicant as the programs apply to that applicant’s particular development, just like the tools in a toolbox. The CIP contains a Monitoring Program designed to help Town staff and Council monitor the effectiveness and economic impact of the incentive programs in the CIP and make adjustments to these programs and the CIP, as required.

Finally, the CIP contains a Marketing Strategy designed to proactively and regularly educate, advertise and market the Town’s incentive programs and the planned improvements being taken by the Town to actively support vitalization within the Community Improvement Project Area. Experience in other municipalities with successful Downtown and commercial area CIPs suggests that early and effective implementation of the Marketing Strategy will help make property and business owners in the Project Area more aware of the Town’s plans and incentive program opportunities, thereby resulting in a more successful CIP.

⁶ The CIP Project Area is identical to the area shown in Figure 1. Note that the exact boundary for the area runs down the middle of the streets delineating the area.

More details on the implementation of the program are provided in the section addressing Building Renewal (p 20).

Town Tourism Assets

In 2014, prior to the start of the Coalition, the Town had contracted The Economic Planning Group of Canada to review Cobourg's tourism assets. The focus was on identifying potential tourism development opportunities and determining the best sites for the selected opportunities. The consulting team reported to, and took direction from a working group consisting of Economic Development, Tourism and Planning staff and a Council representative. As the project progressed it was folded into the newly formed Downtown Coalition Advisory Committee. The project was completed in July 2015 with the submission of the report *Cobourg Tourism Investment Opportunities Study*.

The following notes are extracted from the Introduction to the report:

The project explores potential tourism investment opportunities for Downtown Cobourg and assesses potential sites so as to identify a preferred location. The overall objectives were:

- To screen and assess the investment readiness of tourism sites/properties in the Downtown study area. The sites to be considered were identified by the Town.
- Define preliminary tourism project development concepts for the highest potential opportunities, describing the opportunities and the challenges in realizing the investment.
- Identify the potential economic impacts that might be associated with the highest potential opportunities.
- Prepare a marketing/sales document for the selected priority opportunities.

The report concluded that the best investment opportunity was a boutique waterfront inn and restaurant located on the current Victoria Park Campground site. Council accepted the report for information purposes in August 2015 and the results were subsequently incorporated into the Waterfront Needs Assessment.

Community Improvement Venture Initiative (CIVI)

A key component of the Downtown Vitalization Action Plan was the proposal to create a Community Improvement Venture Initiative (CIVI) to provide gap financing, mortgages and loan guarantees for small and medium renovation projects. Location Strategies and Blue Krystal Technologies had been contracted in 2014 to prepare a business case for the CIVI. DCAC members participated in a stakeholder meeting for this effort in Feb 2015. The business case, which examined best practices in the deployment of similar entities together

with other delivery models that have underpinned successful Downtown revitalization programs, was subsequently presented to Council and approved in principle. Council requested a follow-on business plan for laying out the operational framework for a corporation CIVI, which was presented in March of 2016. At Council's direction, public input was solicited. In September 2016, Council deferred a decision on going ahead with the CIVI, pending the outcome of the effectiveness of the CIP incentives. The subsequent success of the CIP program (now running for three years and described in the section Building Renewal, p 20) suggests that the CIVI is not necessary.

Business Attraction

Business Attraction Marketing

A Downtown Marketing Partnership was created in 2015 to focus on developing a plan to a) attract desired businesses and b) attract consumers to Downtown Cobourg in accordance to the Downtown Vitalization Plan. The partners, consisting of the DBIA, Town of Cobourg Economic Development & Tourism and the Northumberland Central Chamber of Commerce, completed a *Downtown Vitalization 2017/2018 Market Analysis & Business Attraction Marketing Plan* in September 2017. Council approved the requested budget later that year. The plan focused on business attraction only, and used the 2013 *Residents Survey* as a basis for determining the specified categories of businesses to attract. (It was decided that a separate plan for marketing the Downtown to residents and consumer marketing would be developed later.)

The implementation of the marketing plan began in early 2018 with the detailing of an advertising campaign themed as "Start Here". A graphic designer was hired to create pop-up banners, designs for window wraps, portfolio folders for marketing materials and a large billboard map outlining available units for sale/lease. A photographer took photos of businesses and a videographer did a series of short video clips of successful business owners in the Downtown. A StartHereCobourg.ca web page was designed in-house by staff and populated with the video clips and photos. The web page focused on Downtown business success stories, incentive programs for business, and information on starting a business Downtown.

The ad campaign kicked off with the launch of the web pages and the unveiling of the first window wrap at 52 King Street West depicting a grocery store/butcher shop as a potential business for this location. A second window wrap depicting a ladies clothing store was later unveiled at 79A King Street West.

Research was undertaken to identify established businesses (in the specified categories) within a 45-minute radius of Cobourg. This was followed by direct telephone marketing to encourage these businesses to open a second location in Downtown. In early fall, marketing

partners⁷ held an information event for potential business owners called “Explore The Core”. Several of the 15 registrants participated as result of the telephone campaign. The event featured information on programs, services and incentives available to business owners through the various partners; a map and detailed sell sheets describing Downtown units available for sale or lease; and a guided tour of Downtown with visits to many of those units. Subsequently a billboard showing available units was unveiled at King and Division. A social media campaign will be continued throughout the fall, winter and spring.

One of the challenges of the business attraction marketing campaign has been to keep current with respect to the units that are available for rent or sale in the Downtown: units can go on and off the market very quickly. It will be important for Economic Development to continue to develop strong relationships with property managers, owners and realtors to mitigate this situation. These relationships can be enhanced via the CIP program, since the owners are required to come forward with their intentions. Another challenge arises when new business owners sign leases without being fully aware of Town requirements (e.g., with respect to heritage) or even without a solid business plan. The question is “How to encourage new businesses to take advantage of the help that is available?” (The idea of business certification, described on p 18, was an attempt to address this issue.) Pro-active ad campaigns will help to alleviate this situation by making prospective owners aware of assistance before they commit. However, effective (and efficient) marketing depends on narrowing down the categories of businesses to be targeted. Ideally, these categories should be the ones that residents (and visitors) say they need or want. The current business marketing plan and subsequent ad campaign has relied on very old data (the 2013 Residents Survey) to set its target categories. This survey needs updating.

Youth Entrepreneur Partnership

The Youth Entrepreneur Partnership (YEP) is an education program operating since 2014 that is administered between the Town of Cobourg and the Business & Entrepreneurship Centre Northumberland. The goal of the program is to develop Cobourg’s “Entrepreneurs of the Future” by offering a positive experience and opening the doors for youth (between 15 and 29 years) to consider entrepreneurship as a career opportunity. Young entrepreneurs are solicited through advertisement and selected on the basis of their submitted business idea. The Town provides the participants with signage and a location for a summertime business: the option of two 10’ x 10’ beach kiosks at Victoria Beach, a location at Northumberland Mall or a Downtown storefront. Participants are given advice and tools to prepare a business plan, mentorship and support to enhance skills, knowledge and networking opportunities with other youth entrepreneurs. The program has seen seven youth participants, three of whom are still

⁷ Partners included the DBIA, Town of Cobourg Economic Development and Planning Departments, Cobourg Communications, Northumberland Central Chamber of Commerce and Business & Entrepreneurship Centre Northumberland.

operating their businesses. A list of YEP businesses and comments from young entrepreneurs is in Appendix 3.

Signage and Property Enhancement

Henley Arcade

The poor state of the Henley Arcade had been a particular source of concern to residents and was therefore selected for property enhancement. In April 2015, after a review of 16 submissions by an Ad-Hoc art group, Council agreed to fund a mural by Heather Cooper for the interior for the arcade. Further upgrades to the space, including electrical and signage, were also approved, for a total of \$38,584. The re-furbished arcade was unveiled in October 2015 as part of Cobourg Day.

Downtown Signage

In 2013 GSP Group, under the direction of with the Town of Cobourg's Downtown Physical Improvement Working Team, prepared a high-level conceptual signage program including recommendations on the hierarchy, location, form, and materials for the various wayfinding, gateway, parking, and information signage elements. A summary of the program recommendations and sample images is in Appendix 4.

In the first phase of implementation of the program (in 2015), wayfinding signage elements to direct visitors to the Downtown and waterfront were fabricated and installed along William Street and Division Street. The program was in hiatus for a couple of years, due to funding limitations; during this period, the concept of the gateway signage was dropped, again due to cost. Provision for funding of the remaining elements was made in 2018. Upgrades have been made to the parking signs and the pedestrian wayfinding features will be installed in Fall 2018. The event boards will be combined with the location map. Community Services staff are working to secure a contract for their installation.

Post Secondary Institution in Downtown

Experience with vitalization in other communities has pointed to the benefits of having a post-secondary institution in the Downtown, also a recommendation in the Action Plan. Fleming College has had ties with Cobourg since 1975, operating a satellite campus in the Fleming Building with limited full-time and part-time programming such as Personal Support Worker, Food Service Worker, Academic Upgrading and Contract Training. The Mayor has encouraged more extensive engagement by local colleges, including Fleming, but these efforts have not been successful. However, see the description of the collaboration between the Planning Dept and Durham College's architectural technology students (p 23), which may be one model for future engagement.

Municipal Business Certification

The Action Plan had recommended that a municipal business certification and recognition program be implemented. This idea was generated as an alternative to implementing a business license, which was viewed as more “red tape” for small businesses. The intent was to encourage new business owners to interact with Economic Development and other business service agencies who could provide assistance in business planning and access to local market intelligence, thereby increasing likelihood of their success. Some work was done in 2015 by the Economic Development Office to create a pamphlet listing organizations that a prospective business owner should visit to then be “endorsed”. At that time, the concept did not get buy-in from partners. The idea was discussed extensively by the Coalition again in 2017, but several problems were noted (e.g., What, exactly, does the certification mean for customers? How would established businesses react?). In addition, the Coalition was unable to find instances of this idea being successfully implemented in other municipalities. Consequently the idea was abandoned.

Redevelopment of a Downtown Building

The Action Plan had proposed that the Town might consider buying and redeveloping a Downtown building as a model for other property owners and/or developers. This idea was considered by the Coalition, but was rejected on the basis of cost.

Victoria Square Phase IV

Based on the Downtown Master Plan, DCAC recommended the completion of the market square to the south of Victoria Hall as a Canada 150 signature project. The intent was that the square would be a flexible forum for Downtown business, activities and events with key features including:

- pedestrian-oriented civic square with lively edges
- features & spaces to accommodate indoor & outdoor programming, including performance platforms and temporary stages
- year-round flexible spaces and uses, including streets and parking
- interactive public art
- innovative use of water and lighting
- accessible and universal design for all users
- wayfinding and information
- sheltered seating

An Ad Hoc Committee with Coalition representation was formed to update and complete a design originally developed in 1999. An artist’s rendering of the square in “market” mode is shown in Appendix 5. The total cost of the project was estimated as \$1.2M. However, the anticipated government funding of \$800K was not received and the project has been put on “hold”.

It has been particularly disappointing that this project could not be implemented in 2017 to keep the momentum of the re-design going. The re-working of the square would have provided an obvious and significant physical focus for vitalization – one that residents could easily connect to – and would have been a very appropriate signature project in that year.

Municipal Culture Plan

Work on a Cultural Master Plan for Cobourg was initiated in 2018 under the Director, Community Services. The objectives of the plan are to:

- Assess the health of Cobourg’s cultural sector
- Identify the Town’s current involvement in the cultural sector
- Deepen engagement of residents with culture in all its forms
- Identify service gaps and improve overall cultural service provision and strategies
- Specifically identify the Town’s future role in Cobourg’s cultural sector

MDB Insight has been contracted to formulate the plan. Their work, which will be completed no later than June 2019, will entail focus groups, one-on-one interviews, a community telephone survey, and a Council workshop. A steering committee of representatives from local arts organizations and community members will provide feedback on the contract work. The Chair of DCAC sits on the steering committee.

This work is of particular importance for the vitality of the Downtown as the arts and culture are typically associated with the heart of a municipality. In fact, many of Cobourg’s cultural activities (e.g., plays at the Firehall, concerts at Victoria Hall, outdoor street festivals) take place in the Downtown and can drive its economy through associated services (e.g., restaurants) for both residents and visitors.

Vacant Building Utilization

Vacant stores on King St. have been a particular source of concern to Town residents, since they suggest an atmosphere that is not conducive to business. As a Canada 150 Project, the DBIA, supported by the Coalition, initiated a co-operation between the owners of vacant storefronts and local art organizations to mount displays of art in empty windows. This project was successful in filling vacant windows at 18, 41, 43, 45 and 99 King W with rotating displays of work by local artists. The following art associations were involved:

- Pine Ridge Art Association
- Colborne Art Gallery
- Art de Triomphe
- Cobourg Museum Foundation
- Art Gallery of Northumberland

This innovative project has had benefits beyond simply the beautification of what were often shabby window spaces. It has offered an opportunity for visual arts organizations to showcase members' work and it has caused an engagement between the property owners and the larger community. Thus it represents a “win” all around.

Building Renewal

Community Improvement Implementation

The major task in this project has been the implementation of the Community Improvement Plan, which has been administered from 2016 - 2018 by the Planning Department. As described previously, the CIP is comprehensive set of financial incentive tools designed to address community improvement in Downtown by encouraging private sector investment, rehabilitation, adaptive reuse, redevelopment and construction. A working committee of the Coalition worked with the CAO and planners to develop a set of evaluation criteria (sample in Appendix 6) for scoring applications.

In 2016, Council approved a fund of \$50,000 drawn from the Holdco Reserve to be used for CIP projects. Applications were solicited (through newspaper advertisement, press releases, social media/website postings and word-of-mouth) and five were eventually received. They were evaluated by the Coalition subgroup, recommended, and approved by Council to be funded at an estimated Town cost of \$56,252 (Council approved additional funding). These projects addressed façade and building improvement (mainly along King St) and totaled \$231,119 in value for a leverage of 3:1 on the Town's costs⁸.

In both 2017 and 2018, Council approved \$150,000 for CIP. A marketing and advertisement campaign was implemented for the 2017 and 2018 intakes that consisted of newspaper advertisements, press releases, social media/website postings and direct mail-out to property owners in the Downtown project area. Sixteen applications were received in 2017 of which 13 were approved, entailing façade/building improvement totaling \$310,502. The Town's cost was \$107,200 for a leverage of 2:1. In 2018, seven of eight applications were approved for work totaling \$991,000 at a cost of \$149,322 for a leverage of 5.6:1. The state of all CIP applications as of November 2018 is shown in Appendix 7.

The program has now been in place for over two years and has grown considerably in that time, both in terms of total funding allocation by Council, and in terms of the total value of projects being undertaken and the leverage. Furthermore, the quality of the applications is

⁸ Leverage is calculated as the ratio between the property owner's financial contribution to the cost of a project against the Town's financial contribution to that project (i.e., cost of any grant plus cost of the interest on and administration of any loan).

improving. And we are now starting to see projects that are ambitious (e.g., 39 King E) and, especially, those that target not just the exterior of buildings (e.g., roof and facade) but the interiors. The significant example from 2018 is 35-37 King W where four new residential units are being constructed.

While program uptake is moving in a positive direction, there remains the question of whether the program will improve the Prosperity and Livability of the Downtown (see section on Performance Measures for definitions of these terms). Roof repairs contribute to the preservation of the Downtown heritage building stock. Facade improvements address complaints in the 2013 Residents Survey that the exterior appearance of buildings was being neglected and that the Downtown was looking shabby and rundown. But the rejuvenation of upper stories in these buildings is a more significant outcome. Renovation and rental of residential and commercial units on the upper floors will directly address Livability and potentially contribute to Prosperity of the shops and services in the Downtown. It is, however, highly desirable that specific performance measures be devised that assess the Town's investment in CIP in respect of desirable outcomes such as Prosperity and Livability.

Now that there is good uptake on the CIP program, it is desirable to make the program operate as smoothly and efficiently as possible, with the aim of ensuring the most suitable and highest quality applications. The administration of the program including application evaluation, loan agreement preparation and follow-up has been time-consuming, especially for Planning staff. Not surprisingly, the evaluation methodology has been revised through discussion in the sub-committee but it could probably be improved further. For example, there needs to be a tighter alignment between the score and the size of CIP grant/loan. And the committee might want to award extra points for projects that deliberately incorporate accessibility and sustainability. The following are some further recommendations in terms of program efficiency:

- Decide on consistent intake policy from year to year and make it known. This could be one intake, as in 2018, with a consideration of additional applications if funds are still available. It would be best if the application deadline were consistent from year to year as well.
- Be clear about any particular CIP priority for a given year (e.g., upper floors) and reflect this in the evaluation criteria.
- Consider a set-aside of a portion of funding for a large project.
- Create an example of a well-constructed application that can be distributed to improve application quality and to reduce second-guessing by committee members; include heritage requirements (if any).
- Inform applicants in advance of the criteria and weighting to be used in evaluation of applications.
- Publicize successful projects.

Vacancy Rebate

Until very recently, owners of commercial buildings that had been vacant for at least 90 days were permitted to apply for a 30% tax refund from the Town. This rebate was mandated under the provincial Vacancy Rebate Program and has cost the Town \$50,000 per year on average. However, in 2017, the province announced it would allow municipalities to manage the rebate programs however they liked and in April 2018, Northumberland County Council voted to cancel the program, effective 2018.

Property Owner Engagement

In addition to the marketing of the CIP program to property owners, the Coalition has reached out, through the Mayor, to specific building owners. These have been one-on-one meetings intended to engage and persuade them of the need for upgrades and renewal of their properties, as well as to hear of perceived impediments to building improvement. However, this outreach has not prompted much action on the part of building owners.

Realtor Engagement

The overall real estate situation in Cobourg is tight. The vacancy rate for rental properties lies somewhere between 0.5% and 3%, depending on the source; this is well below the national average. In terms of condominiums in the Downtown, two approved projects will be coming on stream in 2019/20: Harbour Breeze located at 135 Orr St., and a new proposal for 22 Queen St. adding about 90 units. The economics of renovating 2nd and 3rd level of existing buildings on King St. remain doubtful under current economic conditions and so the CIP program may be required to offset costs if restoration of the upper buildings remains a priority. The median price for a single-family home in Cobourg is currently \$425,000.

Real estate agents are often the first to interact with potential business owners who are interested in opening in the Downtown. This makes them potentially important partners in Downtown vitalization. In an effort to bridge the gap between the real estate community and Town's Economic Development services regarding the establishment of new businesses in the Downtown, the Coalition established the following goals for discussions with a representative set of brokers:

- To understand the real estate perception of Downtown Cobourg properties and property owners (cost of space, leasing terms, types of spaces, condition of properties, attitudes of owners)
- To understand the real estate perception of business people who wish to establish in Downtown Cobourg (knowledge of Cobourg, their knowledge of business)
- To understand the challenges in the property leasing or purchasing process
- To understand the real estate perception of Cobourg economic development services
- To assess the willingness of the real estate community to participate in a process to improve prospects for the success of businesses in Downtown Cobourg.

Preliminary discussions took place in mid-2018, but the relationship needs to be developed and reinforced for substantial progress to be made.

Durham College Collaborative Design Project

For three years, the Town's Planning Department has partnered with Durham College's Architectural Technician and Technology department to showcase students' conceptual design work that complements the character and heritage of Cobourg's Downtown. The collaboration provided an opportunity for students to gain practical and relevant experience in planning and design that is focused on the preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration of heritage buildings. The Town gained new and innovative ideas about rehabilitation, adaptive re-use of heritage buildings, preservation and restoration.

Student groups were assigned buildings in the Downtown and created conceptual designs to renew and upgrade them. Students presented their designs at an annual open house. It was hoped that the program would encourage building owners to consider innovative (but heritage-appropriate) rehabilitations, but there was little interest on the part of the owners.

Partner Activities

The DBIA has been very active in creating events for residents and visitors to the Downtown, especially in the last two years. Appendix 8 lists the DBIA events during the period 2015-2018, showing that the number of events increased by 50% in the second half of this period compared to the first half. These events are in addition to the annual Town-organized events (Canada Day, Sandcastle Festival). The DBIA also recognizes new businesses with a "Grand Opening" and the major anniversaries of established businesses. Coalition members are strongly encouraged to attend these events.

In 2015, the DBIA, supported by several partners⁹, held an innovative contest called *Win This Feel Good Space*. The goal was to encourage the development of new sustainable businesses in the Downtown. The winner was offered \$12,000 towards a one-year lease of a vacant space in the Downtown, as well as thousands of dollars of business services from contest sponsors. The competition was formatted in stages: business proposals from candidates were first invited. Candidates with the best proposals participated in a series of workshops hosted by the Business Advisory Centre Northumberland to develop a viable business plan. The winner, Skye's Clothing Boutique, was selected from these. Notably, Skye's is still in business in Downtown Cobourg almost 4 years later.

⁹ Partners included Northumberland Community Futures Development Corporation, the Business Advisory Centre Northumberland, and the Town of Cobourg.

Performance Measures

This section presents a brief summary of the approach used for developing indicators to measure success in Downtown Cobourg Vitalization. Appendix 9 provides a more detailed rationale for the approach, which was developed in 2015 and based on a review of extensive background material mainly from the Canadian Urban Institute.

The following set of principles were adopted by the Coalition as an over-arching framework for vitalization outcome measures:

1. Visibility – Does the Downtown have an integral and central role in the life of the wider city?
2. Visionary – Does the Downtown benefit from a multiplicity of strong, bold leaders who collaborate to achieve and sustain a shared vision?
3. Prosperity – Does the Downtown have a robust and innovative economy?
4. Livability – Is the Downtown vibrant, liveable and connected?
5. Strategy – Is the municipality investing strategically in its future?

The five principles were used as a categorization system for developing a range of metrics to assess performance of Downtown revitalization. A review of metrics used in other municipalities provided a start point for choosing specific performance measures for Cobourg's Vitalization. A special effort was made to go beyond just measures of Prosperity, which tend to focus on business success. In developing metrics, we need to address both of the following aspects of measurement: a) ensuring timely, sufficient implementation of the Downtown Vitalization Action Plan; and, the harder aspect, b) determining whether positive "change on the ground" has resulted.

The table below shows the performance measures that the Coalition developed to track vitalization progress. The definition of each measure is given in Appendix 10, together with details on how the associated data are collected and compiled.

	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Visionary & Strategy Measures						
Vision statement shared by stakeholders		✓				
Downtown Coalition established				✓		
Downtown Master Plan approved					✓	
Town spending on vitalization since 2014					\$132,000	
Value of Heritage loans paid			\$0	\$0	\$0	\$34,565
Value of Heritage incentives paid			\$35,704	\$9,305	\$33,049	\$33,672
Vacancy tax rebates			\$46,049	\$55,632	\$45,593	
Number of CIP applications/approved					5/5	16/13
Total estimated value of renovation work					\$231,119	\$310,502
Total CIP grants approved					\$54,696	\$105,796
Total CIP loans approved					\$51,886	\$46,812
Total estimated cost to Town of CIP incentives					\$56,252	\$107,200
Prosperity Measures						
Number of businesses (at 31 Aug)		254	262	252	255	255
Number of business openings in previous year			26	30	19	19
Number of business closings in previous year			24	38	16	16
Number of businesses that closed in less than 2 yrs			5	5	5	
Number of businesses on King St			116	109	118	121
Number closed on King St			15	26	8	8
Number of employees in DT		1610	1641	1586	1638	1658
Number of full-time employees in DT		1007	1011	985	1045	N/A
Number of commercial properties in DT			173	172	173	
Assessed value of DT commercial properties			\$50,633,341	\$51,342,529	\$53,263,836	
Property tax revenue from commercial properties			\$1,845,242	\$1,845,801	\$1,927,642	
Number of commercial properties on King St			78	78	78	
Value of commercial construction (permits) in year			\$154,500	\$871,801	\$355,700	\$727,500
Number of properties for sale (at 31 Dec)		9	8	12	13	12
Number of properties for sale on King St		6	5	8	10	11
Number of properties for lease		21	24	24	20	19
Number of properties for lease on King St		11	15	16	14	14
Parking meter revenues					\$184,835	\$154,176

Table 2: Summary of Performance Measures for Downtown Cobourg 2011 – 2017

	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Livability Measures						
Number of residents	1,555				1310	
Median age of residents	61				60	
Average household income (private households)	\$56,820				\$64,166	
Total number of residential properties in DT			584	589	585	
Number of residential condo units			376	380	376	
Assessed value of residential properties			\$140,084,625	\$145,822,245	\$148,577,670	
Property tax revenue from residential properties			\$2,150,568	\$2,209,339	\$2,240,234	
Value of residential construction (permits) in year			\$91,000	\$1,255,500	\$202,230	\$570,000
Average monthly DT pedestrian counts - winter						
Average monthly DT pedestrian counts - summer						55,829

Table 2: Summary of Performance Measures for Downtown Cobourg 2011 – 2017 (con’t)

In general, the measures have not changed much over the last 4 years. With respect to Prosperity measures, which focus on commercial and businesses, the trends are pretty flat, with the exception of 2015, when the number of businesses closings (and openings) was particularly high and the number of businesses along King St dropped to a low. While the number of properties for lease in the Downtown has stayed relatively constant, the number for sale has risen slightly. Assessed value and tax revenue have also stayed constant.

With respect to Livability measures, the number of residential units, of which over 60% are condos, has stayed constant, as has the property tax revenue. There has been an upswing in residential construction (as reflected in building permits in 2015) that will add a bit to the housing supply. Surprisingly, the number of residents in the Downtown has dropped.

Collecting and compiling the data in Table 2 has been a huge task, involving many people. It began with defining exactly what is included in “Downtown” (which was eventually established in the CIP report). The bulk of the data came from Finance (tax information), and much of it had to be extracted, one property at a time, from a database. Economic Development had been compiling their business directory for several years, but the job of matching businesses to properties (to ensure complete coverage of the Downtown) was tedious and time-consuming. Data pertaining to number and age of residents had to be specially ordered from StatsCan, since the Downtown covers a very specific area. Data relating to the CIP was easier to obtain because, right from the start, measures were established and applications were tracked.

There are many other measures that could be considered for vitalization, some of which are given in Table 2 of Appendix 9. One that kept coming up in Coalition discussions was a

measure of business “vacancy” which relates to unoccupied commercial space as distinct from business “closing”, though the two are connected. Vacant ground-level spaces, especially on the mainstreet, are usually quite obvious to residents and contribute to the sense of a town that has lost vitality. Establishing a rigorous measure for vacancy might be something for future work.

Ideally the data for a measure should be indicative and easy to obtain. The Coalition felt that a count of pedestrian activity would be one such measure and the next section discusses how that was addressed.

Pedestrian Counters

In 2017 the Town purchased two pedestrian counters from Eco Counters. These devices were recommended by the Coalition as a means of providing a more sensitive and on-going look at the activity Downtown. They use passive infrared technology to count pedestrians passing by on the sidewalk, down to a resolution of every 15 minutes, 24 hours a day. The resulting data can be accessed, aggregated and graphed using an on-line software package. The counters were initially located (in April 2017) on the north and south sides of King St., roughly at Victoria Hall. The count results for those locations showed that pedestrian traffic on the north side of King was slightly higher than on the south, but that the two were correlated over time. In addition, the counts showed a 50% increase in traffic during the main summer months (July/August), compared to early summer (May/June).



Figure 2: Daily Pedestrian Counts on King St, North Side; 4 Aug – 3 Sept 2017

The counters are most useful in measuring *changes* in pedestrian traffic patterns as a result of some factor. So, for example, pedestrian traffic is higher when the weather is sunny than when it is raining. More particularly, we can now easily measure the changes in traffic resulting from Downtown events like Canada Day (2.3 times the Saturday average), the Art Walk (1.4 times the average) or the Rib Fest (no change from average); see Figure 2 above. The DBIA considers this information to be very valuable and is always anxious to have the results for its members.

In late June of 2018, the southern counter was moved to the NE corner of Queen and Division to track traffic coming to and from the harbor/beach area to DT. Counts there were typically 25% of those measured on King St. In 2018, new locations for both counters were chosen to assess the range of pedestrian traffic along King St: one opposite CIBC and the other at the NW corner of King and Division.

Mobile Counters

As a further approach to pedestrian counting, the Town will be testing a system from a company called Locality that recognizes and tracks pedestrians carrying Wifi-enabled mobile devices in the Downtown area. The system is currently used at the Cobourg Community Centre and is based on sensing the unique Media Access Control address of a device, as well as its location. (No other information is used or decoded.) Analysis of these data over time can provide information on number of pedestrians, their return frequency, and their pathways through the Downtown.

Cost of Program

The total financial resourcing of Cobourg's vitalization program over the period 2015-2018, inclusive, was \$415,918¹⁰. Of this, \$27,618 was covered by provincial grants from OMAFRA. In addition, the Town spent or committed a total of \$312,774 to the CIP. These figures do not include the cost of Town staff time.

Communication of Program

The activities and progress of the Coalition have been communicated by various means, although often intermittently.

¹⁰ The major costs were DMP & CIP reports (\$108,342); CIVI reports (\$31,250); signage (\$54,997 plus \$45,000 budgeted for 2018/19); Henley Arcade (\$38,584) Victoria Square renewal plan (\$14,100); tourism asset report (\$5,072); pedestrian counters (\$9,350); marketing (\$33,411); Cultural Master Plan (\$64,890).

In 2015, a billboard was placed on the south side of King and Division, describing some of the vitalization projects to be accomplished. All have been completed (and several more have been added since that initial list), but this fact was unfortunately not indicated on the billboard until a media event in 2018. Also during the first year a newsletter, called *Downtown News to Feel Good About*, was prepared and distributed through email to a list of interested recipients. The newsletter was not continued past 2016 due to lack of staff resources. An effort was made in 2017 to use photos with short captions on the Town’s Facebook site to communicate vitalization progress (e.g., new businesses, building upgrades on King St.), but it was not really sustained. The Town’s website for vitalization would normally be a source of information, but it is quite out of date. However, more recently, in connection with the Business Attraction Marketing project, there have been several media events, as well as a new billboard announcing vacant buildings for lease.

Finally, the Chair presented updates on the activities of the Coalition to Council, one update in October 2016 and a second in February 2018.

Strategic Planning for Future Work

As its final activity, the Coalition undertook a strategic planning process with the intent of recommending a future mandate and high-level goals for Downtown vitalization. Led by Heather Candler¹¹, the group followed the process laid out in the OMAFRA Strategic Planning Resource Manual up to and including the *Goals* component of Stage IV.

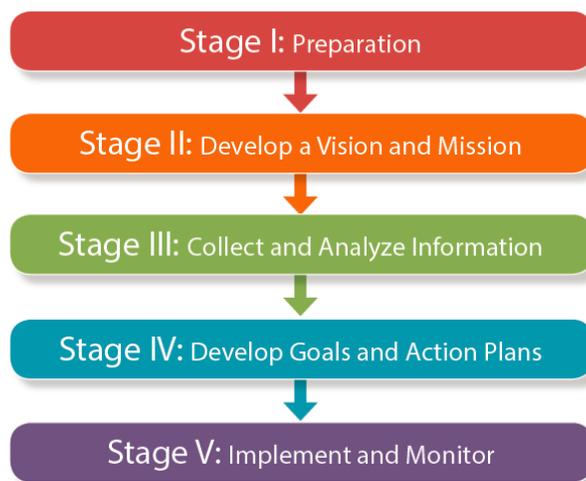


Figure 3: OMAFRA Strategic Planning Process

¹¹ Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Advisor, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

This was an intensive process that fully engaged all Coalition members over three separate sessions in Fall 2018.

Vision & Mission

After much thoughtful discussion, the Coalition proposed the following Vision and Mission for the next 5-10 years of vitalization in Downtown Cobourg:

Vision:

Downtown Cobourg is a progressive sustainable lakeside community: the historic yet innovative hub of rich culture and thriving business.

Mission:

The Downtown Vitalization project collaboratively and proactively leads the implementation of measurable actions that drive continuous improvement of Downtown vitality for people and business.

Background to Goal Setting

Members then provided summaries of their research on future trends in demographics, real estate, retail, tourism and employment, areas that had been identified as particularly pertinent to vitalization.

In a PESTO analysis, we also listed other trends specific to Cobourg, including

- Political (political climate, shifts in thinking, changes to programs of regulations, changes in administration of leadership),
- Environmental/economic (changes in funding or spending patterns, the general economic state of Cobourg, educational needs, environmental trends),
- Social (changing demographics, cultural trends, ways of interacting),
- Technological (trends in technology, communication), and
- Other.

These lists are in Appendix 11.

This was followed by a SWOT analysis, looking at the current internal strengths and weaknesses of the vitalization project, as well as outside threats and opportunities. These aspects are listed in Appendix 12.

Finally the group collapsed these analyses into a list of critical issues — issues that, if not addressed, would have a major impact on continued vitalization:

- New Council’s priorities
- Labour force
- Infrastructure (parking, WiFi, upgrade of electrical)
- Having rent-ready space – commercial & residential
- Landlord engagement
- Maintaining & growing strategic partners
- Implementation of Community Improvement Plan, Downtown Master Plan, Heritage Master Plan
- Communication (accountability, celebrating success, informing, being positive)

Recommended Goals

From the preceding analyses, the group extracted five recommended high-level goals for future vitalization work. These goals are of two types: the first two are goals associated with the future vitalization project (process goals); the remaining three are goals associated with a re-vitalized Downtown (outcome goals).

1. Coordinate & Communicate – The Cobourg Downtown Vitalization project will reach out to all stakeholders to coordinate activities with common outcomes, to ensure those outcomes are realized, and to communicate success.

This goal recognizes the critical importance of partnerships to any Downtown vitalization effort. These partnerships include those with local stakeholders (e.g., DBIA, Chamber, Town Council and Staff, business owners, CFDC, building owners, arts groups, the public) and those with strategic government partners who can provide resources beyond the Town’s (e.g., OMAFRA). Motivating, leading and coordinating vitalization efforts that are targeted at common outcomes with these diverse partners takes time and effort. But the benefits of establishing common intent and plans and the leveraging of action across stakeholders will have significant impact on success. The communication of vitalization activities and successes is a key aspect of this goal.

2. Measure Performance – Building on its acknowledged expertise, the Cobourg Downtown Vitalization project will monitor, measure and track the vitality of the Downtown, and report on progress.

This process goal addresses the need for accountability for the vitalization project. Over the last four years, the DCAC has adopted a solid framework for measuring vitalization, has developed many relevant measures and has gained considerable experience in compiling data on the health of the Downtown. The measurement of performance, which demands time and precision, must be continued so that progress can be objectively assessed, gaps and needs can be identified, and actions and accountability achieved. Furthermore, new vitalization initiatives will require that pertinent new performance measures be devised and that the

associated data be collected and summarized. As is the case for Goal 1, it will be critical to keep stakeholders — especially the public and Council — up to date on successes, as well as indications of where a different approach might be needed.

3. Intensify – Well-planned intensification of land uses in Downtown Cobourg results in reduced business vacancies, an increased number of residents and improved livability and vitality.

This outcome goal speaks to the need for more appropriate, efficient use of Downtown property. The DCAC has been challenged to find ways of filling vacant storefronts, and of encouraging the renovation of the second and third floors of Downtown buildings for residential or commercial use. Some success in this regard is now being achieved through the CIP program, but much remains to be done.

4. Diversify - With its robust infrastructure, Downtown Cobourg offers diversity in all seasons for all generations.

Downtown must respond to the needs and support the activities of all its residents. This will require that the Downtown broaden its appeal and diversify what it has to offer in terms of shops, services, cultural activities, recreation and housing. Activities and services must animate the Downtown and attract residents and visitors in all seasons of the year. A broader range of uses in the Downtown will demand a solid, sustainable, flexible infrastructure of physical assets and better connectivity.

5. Strengthen Community - Downtown offers all Cobourg's residents a strong sense of identity and place, and provides many opportunities for engagement; residents view it with pride.

Residents feel that the heart of Cobourg lies in its Downtown. They will be strongly attached to the Downtown and they will take full advantage of the range of experiences, services and activities it offers. They will point to it with pride.

Final Steps in Strategic Planning

The DCAC strategic planning process has provided a recommended Vision, Mission and five high-level long-term Goals as a start-point for a future vitalization project. Future project members will need to complete the planning process by defining Objectives under these Goals – Objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable and timely. Based on these, Actions and associated deliverables can then be developed for implementation.

Conclusions

The Downtown Coalition Advisory Committee is a new committee for Cobourg, formed in 2015 to oversee the implementation of the 2013 Downtown Vitalization Action Plan. It is unique insofar as it is the only committee whose work and areas of concern span many municipal departments (including planning, community services, public works, tourism, heritage, communications and economic development) and involve input from outside stakeholders, including the DBIA and the Northumberland Central Chamber of Commerce. As well as the core voting members, attendees routinely include the Mayor, the CAO, and staff reps from planning, heritage and economic development. The resulting diversity of viewpoints has been essential: vitalization is a complex problem with many aspects that interrelate and need to be mutually supporting if progress is to be made. Particularly valuable has been the recently renewed interest, energy and efforts of the DBIA, making this organization a solid contributor to discussion and decisions. The Coalition has become an excellent forum for information exchange and partnership in support of Cobourg's vitalization.

The Coalition has considered, discussed and – where appropriate – acted upon all of the recommendations in the Downtown Vitalization Action Plan. Major work included the Downtown Master Plan, the Community Improvement Plan (and its implementation), and support for Victoria Square Phase IV. These documents, together with the forthcoming Cultural Master Plan, set out a well-considered and comprehensive way forward for the next several years of Downtown vitalization.

The early implementation of the CIP has been a success: 25 restoration projects have been approved, most of them on the main street. Thirteen have already been completed. The leverage for the overall program so far is 4:1. In addition to undertaking significant façade improvements, several property owners are addressing the renovation of upper stories and there is indication that others will follow suit.

An approach to marketing of the Downtown was slow to be established due to delays in coordinating between partners but, at this point, the business attraction marketing plan is complete and an ad campaign is well underway with completion set for March 2019. The partnership between the Town of Cobourg and the DBIA is on a much better footing and there is better information exchange than two years ago. This improved partnership can now facilitate the pro-active attraction and retention of strong businesses that have a good fit to the needs of Cobourg residents and that are likely to succeed.

A solid initial set of performance measures for vitalization, grounded in sound theory, has been established, data sources have been identified, and accurate data – specific to the Downtown Project Area – have been compiled for the last four years. Finally, significant strategic planning has been undertaken by the Coalition to formulate a revised Vision and Mission for the vitalization project, and a set of goals for the next 5-10 years.

Notwithstanding this success, there have been challenges. The biggest challenge lies with engaging property owners and convincing them that they have a role to play in the success of Downtown. Some owners have neglected the maintenance of their buildings,¹² others place road-blocks in the way of renters, while others are content to let their properties remain unused and vacant. There appears to be no single reason for these behaviours: some owners seem completely uninterested while others seem risk-averse. This being said, the situation may be changing in a positive direction: several Downtown buildings have new owners in the last two years and some are capitalizing on the CIP program, indicating a commitment to upgrading their properties. In fact, one new owner said that he had bought property in Downtown Cobourg specifically because of the CIP program.

Another key group of players in Downtown property and business activity are the real estate brokers and agents. With some exceptions, it has been difficult to engage them in vitalization. However, they are an important source of information about owners, renters and buyers and potentially helpful partners who could direct new property or business owners to community business resources that could help them succeed. Their more active engagement should continue to be pursued.

As previously mentioned, an initial set of performance measures for the vitalization program has been established, based largely on the recommendations from work of the Canadian Urban Institute. However, in the context of Cobourg, some measures are more valid than others. For example, the number of business closings on King St is probably a more valid indicator of (poor) Prosperity than just the number of businesses. And the square footage of ground-level vacant space may be a better indicator than either. As discussed in Performance Measures (p 24), the challenge is to find measures that are valid (in terms of the intended outcome, that is, “improved” vitalization) and for which data either are available or can be (reasonably easily) collected. The mobile counters collecting cell phone movement data now being tested Downtown by the Town seem to offer one good measure of Livability with associated ease of data collection. A repeat of the residents survey will offer an additional gauge of the outcome of vitalization efforts.

In terms of its mandate, the Coalition would have benefited from a better connection with the Community Services Dept. – especially Tourism. Although the primary targets of vitalization should be Cobourg residents, visitors play a big role in the Downtown, particularly in the summer. Furthermore, their experience can be impacted by what happens in the Downtown. It would be useful for the Coalition to have input into the development of any future tourism surveys that may be conducted.

¹² The Town’s current practice is to inspect, and where necessary, enforce the Property Standards By-law only when a written complaint is made.

One area where the Coalition faltered was in communications with the public. The communications effort was not consistent, resulting in sporadic updates. In addition, the website was not updated in a timely manner.

Recommendations

Strategic Recommendations

Downtown vitalization is best regarded as a long-haul project. While short-term “wins” are helpful, substantial improvements in Prosperity and Livability, which can take several years to manifest, are the ultimate aim. Thus it is important to move steadily and keep the focus. Partnerships are absolutely crucial to success and the DCAC has provided a valuable mechanism for establishing them. The Coalition has the following strategic recommendations.

1. We recommend that the Downtown Coalition Advisory Committee be re-constituted by the Town for at least another four years.
2. A re-formed DCAC should adopt the following Vision and Mission that were developed through the Coalition’s strategic planning effort.
 - *Vision - Downtown Cobourg is a progressive sustainable lakeside community: the historic yet innovative hub of rich culture and thriving business.*
 - *Mission - The Downtown Vitalization project collaboratively and proactively leads the implementation of measurable actions that drive continuous improvement of Downtown vitality for people and business.*
3. A re-formed DCAC should adopt the following Goals that were developed through the Coalition’s strategic planning effort.
 - *Coordinate & Communicate* – The Cobourg Downtown Vitalization project will reach out to all stakeholders to coordinate activities with common outcomes, to ensure those outcomes are realized, and to communicate success.
 - *Measure Performance* – Building on its acknowledged expertise, the Cobourg Downtown Vitalization project will monitor, measure and track the vitality of the Downtown, and report on progress.
 - *Intensify* – Well-planned intensification of land uses in Downtown Cobourg results in reduced business vacancies, an increased number of residents and improved livability and vitality.
 - *Diversify* – With its robust infrastructure, Downtown Cobourg offers diversity in all seasons for all generations.

- *Strengthen Community* – Downtown offers all Cobourg’s residents a strong sense of identity and place, and provides many opportunities for engagement; residents view it with pride.
4. The DCAC should formulate clear and measurable Objectives and Actions based on these Goals, thus completing the OMAFRA strategic planning process.

Specific Recommendations

The following is a list of more specific recommendations for the Town or for the re-formed DCAC arising from the work and experience of the Coalition so far:

1. The DCAC should have representation from Tourism.
2. The DCAC should regularly re-examine the Downtown Master Plan and recommend actions for Town implementation. The same should be done for the Cultural Master Plan once Council accepts it.
3. A concentrated effort should be made by the Town to find funding for Victoria Square development.
4. The CIP program should continue to be funded by the Town at the current level or increased as determined by future uptake of the program. Measures should be devised and data collected to ascertain the impact of the CIP program on Downtown Prosperity and Livability.
5. The CIP application evaluation criteria should continue to be tuned and revised by DCAC. As well, DCAC should consider additional recommendations (listed on p 21) targeted at improving the efficiency of CIP program administration.
6. The DCAC should look for innovative ways to engage and motivate Downtown property owners regarding the maintenance and rejuvenation of their buildings.
7. Marketing of the Downtown to suitable prospective businesses is crucial and should be systematically planned and conducted.
8. To complement the current business attraction program, a customer attraction program for local residents should be prepared and implemented by the Town, supported by DCAC.
9. Renewed effort should be made by DCAC to engage the real estate community as partners, with the objectives listed on p 22.
10. The current set of measures should be updated yearly and new valid measures, especially measures of vitalization outcome, should be incorporated.
11. The Residents Survey should be repeated to provide an update on residents’ perceptions and opinions about Downtown.
12. A communications plan should be developed by DCAC to regularly update the public on its initiatives. In particular, the successful initiatives should be celebrated. The web page should be kept current.

Appendix 1 – Downtown Vitalization Action Plan Objectives

Strategic Element	Objectives
1. Engage public & stakeholders	1.1 Implement DBIA list, new lighting
	1.2 Create a communication strategy, including between partners
2. Establish cornerstone business(es)	2.1 Shift commercial categories to promote Vision & economic strategy (target desired businesses, business certification)
	2.2 Create climate for business retention & expansion (client referral, Coalition, business relations)
3. Establish position/brand statement	3.1 Market Cobourg to residents & visitors
	3.2 Cultivate Town image as a place for business (Venture Initiative)
	3.3 Educate public & businesses on value of hospitality
4. Resources	4.1 Offset marketing (REDF application)
	4.2 Offset action plan costs
5. Establish new commercial categories	5.1 Provide variety of Downtown shopping experiences
	5.2 Shift to business categories that support the Vision
6. Create strategies for educated workforce	6.1 Expedite the locating of an post-secondary campus in Downtown
	6.2 Position Cobourg as a great place to open a business
7. Facilitate physical improvement of Downtown	7.1 Included Downtown Master Plan, adoption of parking study, re-develop of King St property, complete Victoria Square
	7.2 Included improved wayfinding, improve Downtown properties, improve accessibility, garbage collection
8. Establish performance indicators	8.1 Annual public report card
	8.2 Evaluate outcomes and adjust
9. Enhance cultural significance of Downtown	9.1 Increase business & services in the creative economy, included Cultural Master Plan
	9.2 Identify current and propose new cultural assets



Appendix 2 – DCAC Terms of Reference (March 2018)

COMMITTEE NAME: COBOURG DOWNTOWN COALITION

COMPOSITION:

Councillor/Coordinator of Economic Development Advisory Committee

1 representative of the Cobourg Downtown Business Improvement Area Board of Management

1 representative of the Northumberland Central Chamber of Commerce

1 representative of the Cobourg Heritage Committee

1 representative of the Cobourg Economic Development Advisory Committee

1 representative of the Cobourg Planning and Sustainability Advisory Committee

1 representative of the Cobourg Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

1 representative of Friends of Downtown Cobourg

REPORTING TO: Council

TERM OF APPOINTMENT: Term of Council

MANDATE/TERMS OF REFERENCE:

Authority

Downtown Vitalization Action Plan accepted by Council on 25 November 2013 (562-13)

Purpose

The Cobourg Downtown Coalition is established to oversee and ensure the timely execution of the Town of Cobourg Downtown Vitalization initiatives. It is intended to focus the efforts and the coordination of all stakeholders that are working to promote and vitalize the Downtown.

Mandate

The Coalition shall:

- a) In liaison with Town Staff, review, detail, and/or recommend amendments to the objectives of the 2013 Town of Cobourg Downtown Vitalization Action Plan, including budget requirements;
- b) Oversee the timely implementation of approved Vitalization objectives, including those from the original Action Plan, and from the Downtown Master Plan and Community Improvement Plan;
- c) Establish appropriate performance measures for the achievement of Downtown Vitalization;



- d) Meet, from time to time, with a range of key stakeholders to address specific Vitalization plans and objectives of interest and concern to them;
- e) Provide an annual report to Council on the progress of Vitalization, including the performance measures;
- f) Work to align and coordinate Town Staff and member effort, resources, marketing, projects, events and activities so as to maximize the efficient achievement of the Vitalization objectives;
- g) Prior to the end of Council's term, provide a Coalition report to Council summarizing all initiatives and measures of Vitalization performance, including recommendations for future Vitalization actions;
- h) Advise Cobourg Municipal Council on any matters relating to Downtown Vitalization, in particular, as characterized in the Action Plan Vision to "deliver accessible experiences and opportunities generated from local agriculture, environmental consciousness and active health-centred living".

Administration

All meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the Town of Cobourg Advisory Committee and Local Board Policy and Procedures and the Town of Cobourg By-law No. 100-2008 being a by-law to Establish Rules of Order and Procedures to Govern the Proceedings of the Municipal Council of the Town of Cobourg.

Staff Resources

The participation of the Chief Administrative Officer and a representative of Economic Development will be required. Other staff may be required on occasion.
Secretary: Secretarial Services provided by Town of Cobourg.

Appendix 3 – Signage Program

Description	Sample Image	Proposed Locations
Vehicular Wayfinding feature – e.g. to waterfront/Downtown		Downtown (4) William & King King & McGill Street (?) Division & Covert Division Street, North of Covert
Pedestrian Wayfinding features – e.g. directions to parking lots, Downtown, waterfront, services and events		Division & Covert Street Downtown (6) Division Street
Parking Signs – lot identification		Covert Street
Gateways Signs – e.g. waterfront		Ball & King Street College & King Street Chapel & Division Street
Event Boards		Division – south of King
Location/Attraction Map		Waterfront – TBD Downtown – TBD

Appendix 4 – Youth Entrepreneur Partnership

Business	Owner	Exit Interview Comments	Still Operating?
Under The Sun Beach Treasures	Ellee Hellier	Keeping up with her bookwork was much more of a challenge than she anticipated but she loved the experience and entrepreneurship is definitely in her future.	Seeking opportunities
Tech Tonics	Ryan Barrett	Ryan was operating from home before YEP & will continue to operate from university. He learned a lot about customer service and record keeping.	√
Phone & Photo	Nicholas Jakubowski	Nick was glad he had the opportunity to run his own business. He enjoyed the experience and the money was a bonus but he is not sure he would make a career as an entrepreneur.	
Shiatsu4Relief	Charlie Canzana	Charlie gained many new customers that stayed with him after he left his beach kiosk location. The program gave him the confidence to continue his business in Cobourg.	√
Mermaid Braids	Brynn Landry	It was great learning all about the business end of entrepreneurship and she very much appreciated the support and mentorship she received. Brynn continues to create hair styles as she furthers her education.	√
Volta Consignment	Emma Shehan	Emma said her summer was “amazing” and she could not have done it without all the great support.	
The Surfside Tuck Shop	Rachel LaLonde	Rachel was our youngest participant and still in high school. She learned a lot about wholesale buying and determining inventory levels for her products. She said it was a great experience and would love to operate her business at the beach again if she could.	

Appendix 5 – Victoria Square Phase IV Renewed



Figure Appendix 4-1 Artist's rendering of a renewed Victoria Square in Market mode

Appendix 6 – Sample CIP Score Sheet and Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria	Significance (1.0-2.0)	Score (1-10)	Value
Grant/Loan Cost Leverage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ratio of the applicant’s contribution to the Town of Cobourg’s grant/loan funds requested 	2.0		
Residential Square Footage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The percentage of the total gross floor area of the building that is residential space being rehabilitated/converted/upgraded/created 1.0 bonus point if one or more new residential units is being created. 	1.6		
Business Square Footage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The percentage of the total gross floor area of the building that is commercial/business space being rehabilitated/converted/upgraded/created 1.0 bonus point if one or more new commercial or business units is being created. 	1.6		
Visual Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the proposed work visible from the street or public realm? If not, this criterion is not applicable. Does the scope of work represent a significant visual improvement to the building/property? 1.0 bonus point if the improvements apply to an existing street-level façade. 0.75 bonus point if the improvements apply to an existing second-storey façade. 0.5 bonus point if the improvements apply to an existing third-storey façade. 1.0 bonus point if the entirety of the existing building’s publically visible façade is being improved in a single scope of work. 	2.0		
Structural Integrity Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For this criterion to be applicable, the applicant must submit supporting documentation from a qualified professional that demonstrates the 	1.3		

nature and extent of engineering/structural issues to be addressed.			
Historical Preservation Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the subject property located within a designated Heritage Conservation District, or designated individually by by-law? If not, then this criterion is not applicable. Does the scope of work reflect best practices of heritage building stewardship? Will the scope of work have a heritage conservation impact? 	1.7		
Downtown Vitalization Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project support the goals and objectives of the Downtown Business Attraction Plan? 	1.8		

NOTES

1. Significance is scored as follows:
 - a. 1-4 = Not significant
 - b. 5-6 = Minimum standard
 - c. 7-8 = Meets standard
 - d. 9-10 = Exceeds standard
2. Grant/Loan Cost Leverage is calculated as follows:
 - a. Calculate 3% of the loan requested and multiply it by 10 (years). This represents the cost of the loan to the Town.
 - b. Add the total amount of grant funds requested, without including HST.
 - c. Divide the total cost of the project by this number to determine the ratio.
 - d. Multiply the ratio by 2.0 to translate it into a score. The highest score possible is 10 (round down to 10 if needed).
 - e. Multiply the score by the Significance, which weighs the score and gives a sub-total value.
3. A minimum score of 5/10 must be achieved in a criterion in order for it to be applied to the overall score. You will only be evaluated according to the criteria that are applicable to your application.
4. You must score a minimum score of 5 in at least two categories. You must achieve a minimum score of 5 in at least one category in addition to Grant/Loan Cost Leverage.
5. All numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number. (ie: 8.4 = 8; 8.5 = 9)
6. All bonus points are applied to the score before applying the Significance (weight). Bonus points applied in the Visual Impact category are “stackable”.