
Wingham Business Retention & Expansion Report

February 2011

Township of North Huron



CAO Message – Business Retention and Expansion Report

I'd like to begin by thanking the many business owners and employees in Wingham for taking time to participate in this process and for offering their candid thoughts and suggestions.

I also want to thank Project Coordinator Janet Snider and North Huron's Community Development Coordinator Connie Goodall for leading and managing this initiative.

We get things done when we work together. To that end, North Huron Council and Administration are committed to working closely with our business community to implement the recommendations contained in this report.

We want to make sure we are providing the programs and services that residents expect and that make North Huron a desirable community in which to live, raise a family and own a business. It is our goal to create the conditions for our existing businesses to thrive and to position our community for new investment, new businesses, and business expansion.

The Josephine Street Reconstruction Project will help to revitalize and beautify our main street, and enhance the shopping experience for our residents and those visiting our community. I'm also confident the recommendations in this report will be beneficial for the long-term best interests of the business community.

Again, thank you for assisting us with this survey. Please feel free to contact me directly if I can be of assistance. Your feedback is always welcome. Council and staff look forward to working with you to make a difference in our community.

Sincerely,

Gary Long
CAO/Clerk
Township of North Huron

Message from Carol Mitchell
Message from North Huron Mayor
Message from North Huron CAO

Executive Summary

The Wingham (North Huron) Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) Project has used the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) BR&E tools to identify the business climate in Wingham. The project has occurred under the leadership of the Township of North Huron in partnership with The Huron Business Development Corporation, Huron County and OMAFRA

This process was undertaken to establish better working relationships and break down communication barriers/perceptions between the Township of North Huron and businesses. This proven economic development tool will provide Wingham with an economic and community development direction that is supported by their business community to develop and implement a downtown revitalization action plan using information obtained from the BR+E Program, resulting in the partners will work together for the betterment of the whole community.

The data was collected from 52 out of a total of approximately 130 business owners in Wingham and the surrounding area. The data was analyzed and discussed by the Taskforce Committee. The action plans are as follows: Business Improvement Area (BIA), Economic Development and Tourism/Attracting a Larger Market.

Business improvement area - 91% of respondents were in favour of forming a BIA. Currently, there is no organization that represents the total business community so that businesses can cooperate to market events and have access to workshops designed to make their businesses more competitive.

Economic Development - includes several perceived needs in the community supported by more than 90% of respondents: more accommodation, a farmers' market, small business support, attracting medical personnel, and attracting new businesses.

Tourism/Attracting a larger market - 83% of respondents chose this action plan as an economic development priority. There are several plans already underway and many other suggestions that can be implemented in the future.

Wingham has a great potential as a small town with many unique features and amenities to attract visitors and new residents. Implementing the action plans will make Wingham a more vibrant and appealing town in which to live and work.

HISTORY

The Wingham town plot was surveyed from 1852-54 and in 1852, the first settler arrived from Owen Sound by a roundabout route that by transport that included boat, railway, ox cart and finally a raft on the Maitland River.

The first lumber mill was built in 1860, followed by grist, shingle and woolen mills. Wingham was incorporated as a town in 1872 and in 1887 the railway came to town. Wingham industry was expanding with Brennan Tannery, Stockyards, a 40,000-gallon water tower and the Salt Block.

Wingham has a tradition of attracting industries and keeping them for many decades. Included in the list are the following: C Lloyd & Co. Doors (1886-1975), Canada Packers (1900-1937), Watt & Little Planing Mill (c.1890) which after 24 years became Gay Lea Creamery (to 1976), Kincaid Bros. chair Factory (1888) when through several changes in manufacturing products and most recently, metal fabricating, Wingham Glove works (1906-1976), Western Foundry (1901) is now Wescast Industries Inc., and Royal Homes (1970-present day). In 1880, Salt deposits were discovered that extended for 50 miles (N-S) by 10 (E-W) miles underground in Huron County. Wingham developed this resource in 1886. Brine was extracted and then evaporated at the Salt Block situated at the end of the rail line.

Truly unique in Wingham's history are the radio and television stations and the CKNX Barn Dance. Doc Cruickshank, a radio retailer and service man, built a radio transmitter after reading about it in a Popular Mechanics magazine. Two days later, while fine-tuning the new device, he had a phone call telling him that he was on the air. This was 1926. In 1935 he applied for a federal broadcast licence. CKNX was born, making Wingham the only small town in Canada with it's own radio station. On Saturday nights in the '40's and '50's CKNX broadcast the Barn Dance. The program started as an event in Wingham and then later was broadcast remotely from area cities and towns. It was billed as "Canada's Largest Travelling Barn Dance". Now the North Huron Museum houses CKNX and Barn Dance memorabilia. By 1941 Wingham was calling itself "The Radio Town of Canada". Channel 8 television station aired in 1955, again a first for such a small town.

BACKGROUND

Wingham is a rich cultural centre with an attractive mix of building styles and heritage features. There is a diverse selection of service and retail businesses that often collaborate to promote the downtown core with special events. The historic North Huron Museum, Town Hall Historic Theatre, and municipal town office is centrally located with ample parking. The Wingham Branch of the Huron County Library is a community hub in itself and is located downtown just off the main street. Wingham has a wealth of supportive media outlets; the community is home to CKNX Radio Inc., a satellite for A-Channel television, and the Wingham Advance-Times, award-winning local newspaper.

OBJECTIVES

Creating jobs and building on existing or new business opportunities are key factors in developing a healthy and vibrant community. Through the BR+E approach the municipality will be able to work towards adopting action plans that take into consideration the needs and desires of the business community. With such a small population, the municipality sees BR+E as the single best opportunity for community economic development to date. Therefore the Wingham BR&E Project will set the foundation for action-oriented strategies to eliminate economic barriers and develop solutions to enhance the local Wingham economy. The information gleaned from the BR&E surveys should help us move forward in implementing the recommendations in an informed and efficient manner.

PROCESS

The process started with the First Impressions Community Exchange with Ridgetown in 2007. The project identified several issues that needed to be addressed: better signage at entrances, a more vibrant downtown, lack of accommodation, economic dependence on one industry, updated web site, museum as a wonderful tourist resource, need for branding and recognizing heritage buildings as assets.

The Wingham Project began in January 2010 as a result of the decision made by North Huron Council together with Huron County Downtown Revitalization Coordinator, Kerri Herrfort and OMAFRA Economic Development Consultant, Vicki Luke. The project was conducted by the BR+E Project Coordinator, Janet Snider, Director of Community Development, Connie Goodall, along with municipal support staff and volunteers. Following a thorough analysis of the generated data, action plans were developed to address the issues identified in the study. This program is viewed as being a continuous movement forward in economic development initiatives.

The Township of North Huron considers itself a forward thinking rural municipality that has undertaken branding, developed a new web site and strategic planning as major priorities since 2007. These exercises have organized the municipality's priorities and assisted in creating an effective economic development strategy. The Business Retention and Expansion project was initiated to give direction to economic development in Wingham.

ECONOMIC BARRIERS

There are several economic barriers that the community is seeking to overcome by implementing the BR+E project. Examples include the following:

- **Businesses' perspective of the municipality**
 - Many businesses in the community have a negative opinion of the municipality. By initiating this project it is hoped that opinions will change and businesses will realize the high regard the municipality holds for the businesses.
- **Issues identified by Businesses**
 - North Huron will do everything possible to address any issue identified by businesses as an economic barrier, ensuring a possible solution, as well as a closer relationship with businesses.
- **Community Size**
 - As a small rural community we are faced with deteriorating infrastructure and the associated costs, which leave little in the budget for other programs. BR+E is viewed as an ideal community and economic development tool for the community.
- **Rural Nature of the Municipality**
 - With the municipality being spread throughout and between several small towns, businesses do not tend to feel supported directly by the municipality. BR+E will allow business owners to know that North Huron is not only willing to listen to their needs, but wants to find ways to improve the municipality's economic situation.
- **Skilled Trades Persons**
 - Students must either travel or relocate to other communities other than North Huron to gain accreditation in skilled trades. The lack of qualified skilled trades employees is a huge barrier to industrial expansion in North Huron.
- **Loss of Youth**
 - Most youth between the ages of 18 – 30 wishing to obtain education are required to relocate in order to obtain training in their desired field. Youth out-migration is a major issue in North Huron and the lack of educational and employment opportunities in the area makes for a very low percentage of youth residing or returning to North Huron.

SURVEY PROCESS

Two information meetings, letters sent to each business and two notices in the Wingham Advance Times newspaper informed businesses about the BR+E project. The Leadership Team, which initiated and determined the scope of the project, consisted of Gary Long, North Huron CAO, Connie Goodall, Community Development Coordinator and Janet Snider, BR+E Project Coordinator. The Task force Committee was formed later, consisting of the Leadership Team and members of the business, municipal and service sectors of the community. Volunteers were recruited and trained for their role as interviewers and scribes during the BR&E visits. Business visits began in February and continued until June 7, 2010. The surveys took an average of an hour and a half each. 52 business owners were interviewed out of a total of approximately 130 business owners in Wingham and the surrounding area.

Business Retention and Expansion is an excellent process to initiate and develop the municipal role in business and community growth. BR+E reaches out to the local business community, strengthening relationships between businesses, local business and community organizations and the municipality that become the foundation for future success. Identifying key strengths, opportunities and red flag issues enables the community to develop clear priorities, tackle high profile issues, implement some quick wins and build partnerships and momentum for the future. The results provide solid input and direction on improving the economic and business climate in Wingham and area.

Sample Selection of Businesses

A business directory was compiled from a number of sources including the North Huron business directory, web sites, the phone book and word of mouth. While businesses were randomly selected to participate in the interview process, careful attention was given to ensure that there was adequate representation from small, medium and large businesses, representation from the various business districts and representation from each type of business. All businesses were welcomed who volunteered to participate in the survey.

TYPE OF BUSINESS	# IN DIRECTORY	# SURVEYED
Food & Accommodation	19	5
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	3	2
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	22	11
Real Estate Rental & Leasing	6	2
Retail/Service (various)	59	25
Building Related Trades	25	3

Results of the Survey

Demographic Characteristics of Businesses Interviewed

- 53% corporations
- 33% sole Proprietorships
- 14% franchises

- 94% of owners involved in day-to-day operations
- 73% resident in Community
- 71% businesses Family-owned

- 73% employees Resident in Community
- 43% own their Location
- 57% lease their Location

- 12% businesses 1 -3 years
- 12% businesses 4-10 years
- 28% businesses 11-25 years
- 10% businesses 26-35 years
- 26% over 35 years

- 76% have less than 10 employees
- 24% have more than 10 employees

Business Climate

82% of business owners surveyed said that the community is a good to excellent place to do business.

The following services provided by local government and business organizations received:

Highest Levels of Satisfaction

- Policing
- Fire prevention and services
- Library
- Recreational facilities
- Snow removal
- Garbage removal
- Schools
- Medical and health services
- Childcare services
- Public utilities

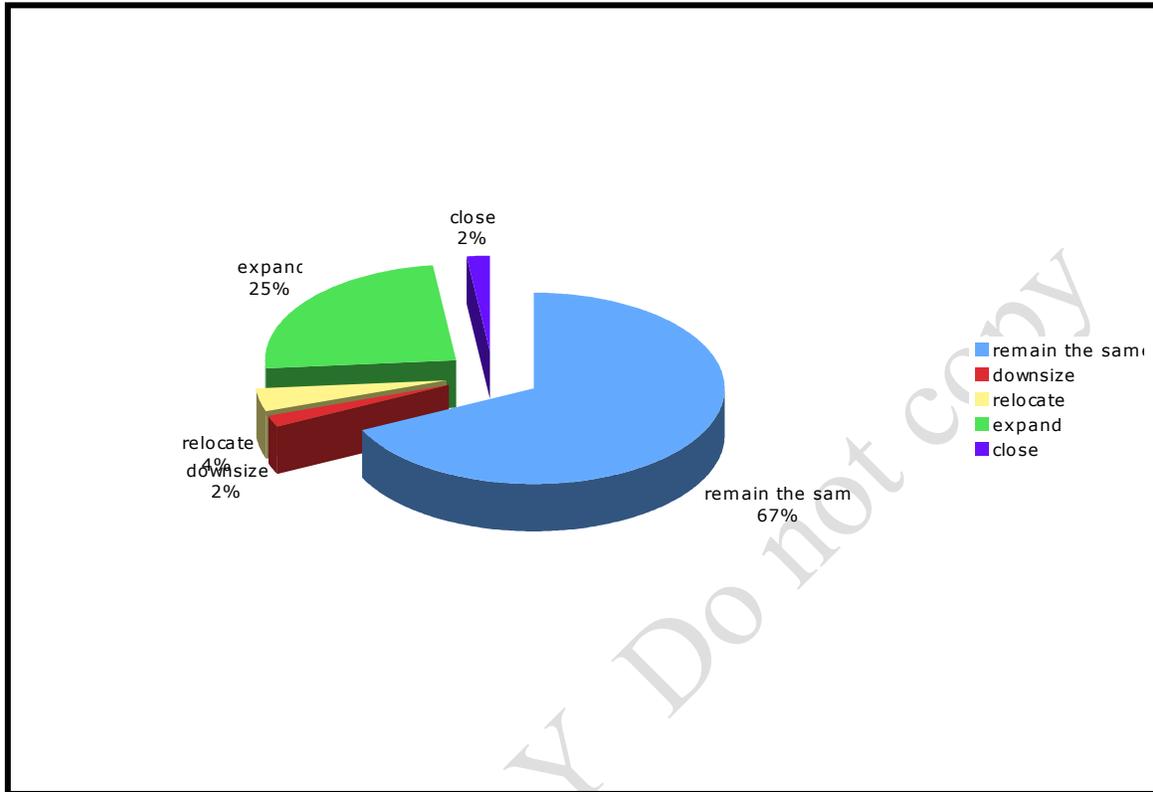
Lowest Levels of Satisfaction

- Planning, zoning, engineering and building permits
- Public transit

Comments from business owners included:

- There should be a BIA for communication amongst business owners
- There should be more team work for consistency of direction
- The municipality should be more proactive in business development

Future plans of business owners for the next 3 years



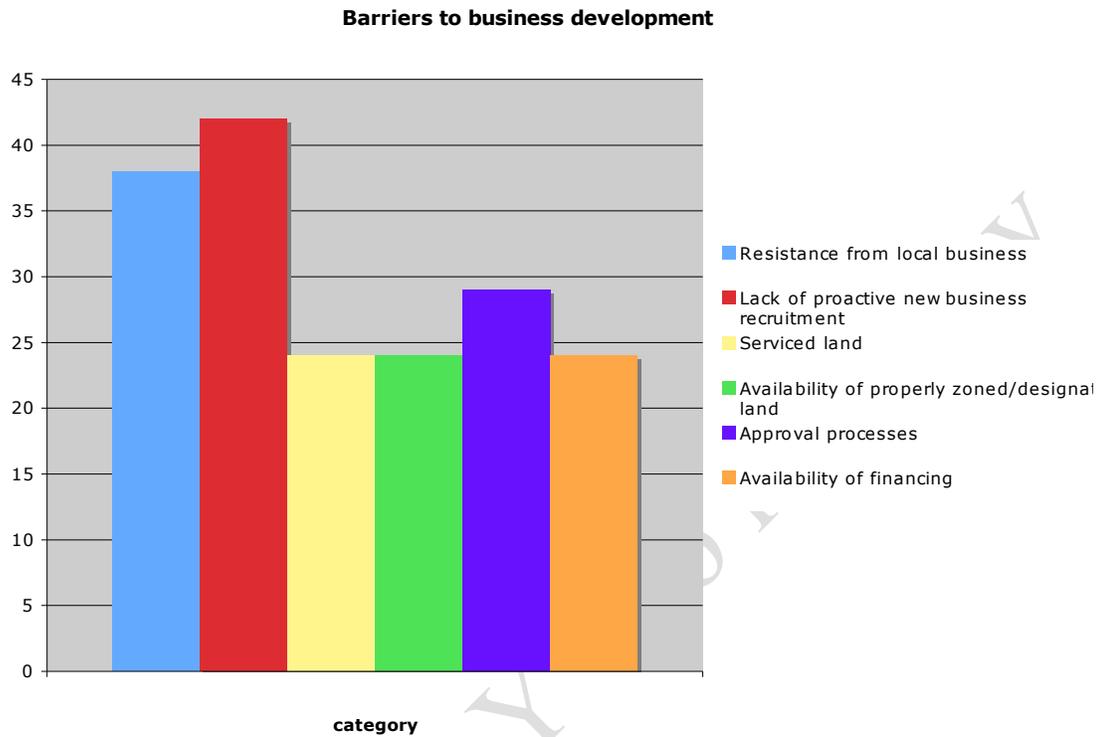
The summary of future plans is as follows:

- Two business owners expect to close, one is going to retire and one is closing due to lack of profitability
- Downsizing is occurring due to aging and loss of market share
- Relocation is occurring due to inadequate building space
- Of the 13 businesses that will expand:
 - 11 will require investment in new equipment
 - 7 will involve innovation
 - 3 will involve a building expansion,

The business expansion results are as follows:

- 90% of business owners indicate an increase in workforce
- 70% of business owners indicate additional services for customers
- 50% of business owners indicate investment in equipment and technology
- 50% of business owners indicate process improvements
- 40% of business owners indicate an increase in floor space

The barriers to expansion



Workforce development

Throughout Wingham and the surrounding area,

52% would remain the same

37% of businesses owners interviewed anticipated an increase in the number of employees in the next 3 years.

6% would anticipate a decrease in employees

Over the next 3 years the following additional employees are anticipated by the business owners interviewed during the BR&E process.

Skilled trades	55
Unskilled labour	33
Industry specialists	21
Clerical staff	3

Reduction in employee numbers were anticipated in

Sales staff	-11
Business administration	- 3

76% of respondents said the availability of skilled labour is good-excellent

62% of respondents said that labour costs are good-excellent

Skill shortages reported by 25% of respondent employers

- engineers
- accounting specialists
- mortgage specialists
- food specialists
- computer programmers and software specialists
- cooks and wait staff
- pharmacy technologists
- registered practical nurses and registered nurses
- insurance specialists

Employers state that their employees need additional training in the following areas:

- Customer service
- Computer software
- Sales and marketing

Most businesses rely on in-house training programs and customized training for employees, while some are trained through programs at community college

The barriers to other training opportunities are cost, distance to the training facility and loss of productivity during the training period.

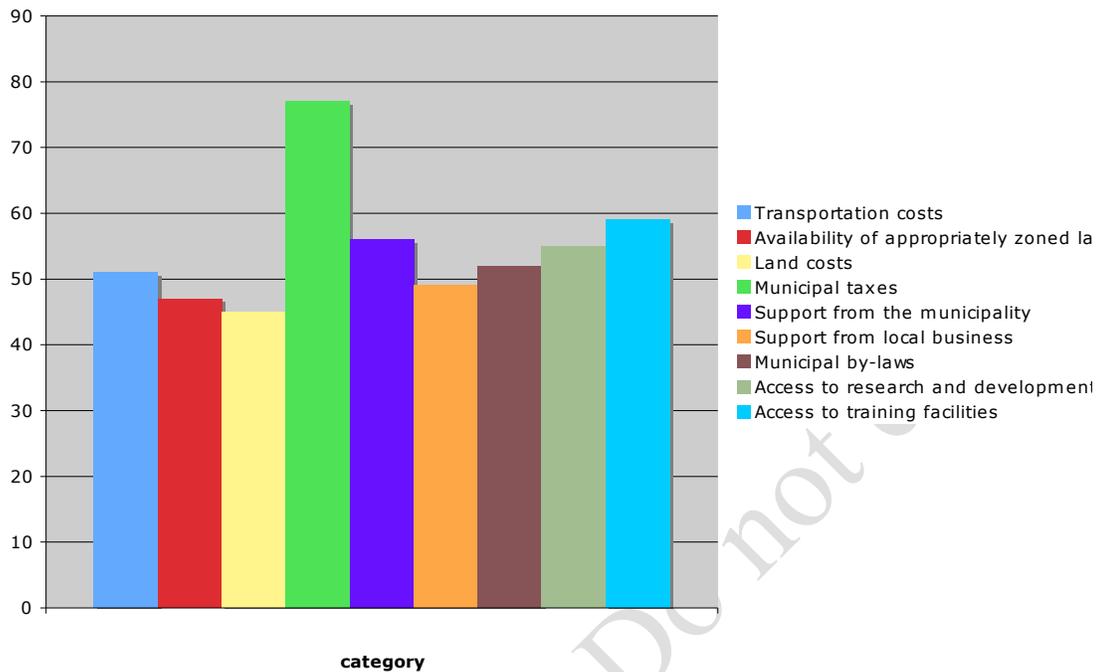
Local Community

The questions pertaining to the local community identify issues about economic development plans and the role that the Municipality is taking in providing adequate support to business owners.

50% of respondents believe that there is no economic development plan or they do not know of one.

88% of those surveyed said that the quality of life is good to excellent, but they need support in the following areas to make their businesses more successful.

Impediments to business success



The comments about the advantages of doing business in Wingham and the surrounding area are as follows:

- We have a small-town, friendly atmosphere.
- We have good customer service.
- We have a good variety of stores for a small town.
- We have a good variety of restaurants for a small town.
- We hear many good comments about our parks and the Alice Munro Literary Garden
- We have many amenities: hospital, elementary and high schools, recreation centre and churches
- We are well-located for easy access by road.
- Our sales people have personal knowledge.
- Our town is neat and clean.

The suggestions and comments about doing business in Wingham and the surrounding area are as follows:

- We need to have money available to maintain the heritage sites.
- We need new opportunities for expanding retail locations.
- We need to realize that competition is healthy.
- We need education for local business on the internet and e-commerce.
- We need some larger stores such as Canadian Tire and/or Zellers.
- We need consistent store hours.
- We need a local bus or other public transit.
- We need to work together more effectively.

Retail and service sector

The BR&E Project allowed respondents to answer an additional set of questions dealing with issues faced by retail and service businesses. This section gives us insight into the state of commercial districts and provides suggestions for areas of improvement.

82% of participating businesses are located in an “identifiable commercial district,” with 78% located in the downtown area.

Business self-improvement

Business owners recognized the need for improvement and identified the following areas as having the greatest need:

- 76% of business owners recognized the need for customer service programs
- 65% of business owners recognized the need for standard hours of operation
- 64% of business owners recognized the need for visual identity of the area
- 60% of business owners recognized the need for roadside advertising
- 60% of business owners recognized the need for more parking spots
- 56% of business owners recognized the need for improvement in sidewalks and pedestrian environments.
- 53% of business owners recognized the need for improvement in public amenities, including parks, fountains and washrooms.

The following are insights into marketing issues, concerns and challenges for Wingham and the surrounding businesses in the area.

Numerous businesses are open to pursuing:

Joint marketing 76%

Many businesses also indicated they would like assistance on marketing issues including:

- Marketing
- Dealing with the competition
- Evaluating market opportunities
- Training customer service representatives
- Visual merchandising

These requests and challenges will be addressed during the BR&E follow-up activities. Businesses requesting assistance will have access to information sheets and/or seminars.

Action Plans

Strategy # 1: Business Improvement Area (BIA)

Supporting Data

- 91% of respondents supported the formation of a BIA
- 87% of respondents have had no contact with a BIA
- 77% of respondents have had no contact or are dissatisfied with a chamber of commerce
- 49% of respondents reported that support from local business was fair to poor
- at present no organization exists that represents businesses
- 80%+ of respondents would attend workshops designed to make their businesses more competitive
- 46% of respondents have been in business more than 26 years
- 45% of respondents do not have a succession plan

Steps to be taken

1. Define the duties of steering committee for BIA formation.
2. Steering committee to establish a position description and scope of work for board members and set meeting dates/times
3. Steering committee to continue to establish an effective network group for BIA members by encouraging involvement in BIA conference. This committee will access fresh and new ideas by attending training at the conference that will ensure a “moving forward” mode for the Wingham BIA.
4. a) Cooperation amongst property owners, business owners and the public to establish a working group to spearhead the initiative. Arrange to have members attend Huron County Business Leaders Network meetings to engage with other members/leaders or business organizations to learn the process of leading a community organization.
5. Communicate the proper protocol for the establishment of a BIA:
 - a) requests to council or objections
 - b) set out a clear timeline and map of duties/milestones to be observed through the process
 - c) organization, protocols and education should all be documented in the project plan
 - d) define the Business Improvement Area
 - e) define the services for potential members
6. Education - hold public meetings to provide information about a BIA – i.e. have current, correct and relevant information in place so that the organization, its formation and mandate are all fully understood.

7. After the BIA Board is in place
 - a) Establish a tourism sub-committee to dovetail tournaments with business events
 - b) Establish a retail sub-committee for joint marketing purposes

Partnerships

- North Huron Council
- Community Development Coordinator
- Business owners
- Building owners
- Consultation with the existing merchant committee

Resources

- North Huron CAO and Community Development Coordinator
- Community Futures Development Corporation
- Taskforce Committee Members
- OMAFRA
- Municipal Affairs and Housing (BIA policies and procedures)

Recommended time frame **March 2011**

Anticipated outcomes

Establishment of a BIA with defined boundaries, board of directors, members, budget, constitution, policies and procedures by January 2012.

Strategy #2 Economic Development

A. Small business support

Supporting Data

89% don't believe that there was a plan in place to promote their business district

100% of respondents chose small business support and development as an economic development priority

94% of respondents chose downtown development as an economic development priority

81% of respondents chose community infrastructure as an economic development priority

1. Small business advisory board set up by council of North Huron or in partnership with Huron County to support fledgling and established businesses with help such as: accounting, bookkeeping, business planning, marketing, tax breaks through grants, web site assistance.

Note

- Some of the above services are already available through the Services Canada office in Wingham. Formation of an inventory of available services through Services Canada, Centre for Employment and Training and HBDC is already underway
- Brochures about services from North Huron available on the North Huron web site, www.northhuron.ca
- Welcome packages are available at the North Huron Municipal Office
- Inventory of available buildings, businesses and building lots is available on the Invest in Huron web site, www.investinhuron.ca

2. North Huron web site to highlight new and established businesses in a regular rotation -2011

3. Support the BIA so that businesses can work together to produce agreeable ambience in Wingham especially during downtown redevelopment 2011

4. Post drawings and plans for streetscape on the web site 2011

5. Regular communication through newsletters

6. Block captains to meet weekly with the project team to communicate plans and issues for the upcoming week

7. Develop a promotional map for Wingham businesses

8. Succession planning and marketing were seen as priorities by many business owners and the need for such training was identified in the BR&E process. Make training a priority and look for effective ways to implement it in the community.

9. Request that Community Futures Development Corporation provide business training in the Wingham area so that workshops are more accessible to business owners in the northern part of county.

Partnerships

- Municipality of North Huron
- County of Huron - Economic Development Officer
- Huron Business Development Corporation
- Centre for Employment and Training
- Conestoga College

Recommended time frame fall of 2011

Anticipated outcomes

A small business incubator office established in Wingham to be integrated with Huron County initiatives to provide 'quick fixes', communication and marketing information.

B. Strategic Plan for Economic Development

1. Branding

Branding is needed to identify the character and establish a consistent profile of Wingham so that future actions and development will reflect that character. Branding is the foundation of marketing communication to get Wingham where it wants to be. To get consistent results that support the community's vision of the downtown, the community must be involved to help business align with that vision.

Supporting Data

Would you consider the current community image in Wingham to be an advantage to doing business in the area?

52% of respondents said Yes and 48% said No

One respondent's comment sums up the reality, "We don't really have an image direction or clarity."

Recommended time frame: in 2011

2. Business Mix Analysis and Residents' Surveys

Supporting Data

100% of respondents chose accommodation as a desirable additional service.

97% of respondents chose support for the farm community and agri-business as an economic development priority

95% of respondents chose a farmers' market as a future benefit to the community

68% of respondents chose agri-tourism as a primary product to attract people to the area

Suggestions for new businesses included a jewellery store and a farm equipment service centre/ e.g. TSC

A business mix analysis:

- helps determine the downtown's strengths and weaknesses
- is a useful exercise to determine the relative health of the downtown
- helps identify clusters of opportunity
- provides a means of determining possible retail and service opportunities.

e.g. is the community under-served or over-served in specific business categories?

- informs business recruitment

e.g. before new businesses are recruited, there needs to be a determination about how particular businesses can compliment existing **business** and how they can share the same customer base.

A residents' survey:

- gathers information that will assist the Town of Wingham in planning for the downtown core
- determines the need and/or desirability of new businesses to meet community needs.

- provides information to assist in the feasibility analysis of those identified business opportunities
- identifies resident patterns of use of the downtown and their participation in events

Partnerships:

Municipality of North Huron

OMAFRA

County of Huron

Recommended time frame: for you here

Anticipated outcomes:

Surveys completed and data compiled to inform planning for the attraction of new businesses

I have not included the CIP here because there would need to be some explanation or preamble to explain it and it would follow all of the above initiatives.

C. Medical Personnel

Supporting Data

100% of respondents chose health care services and recruitment as an economic development priority

1. Cooperate with and support the existing committee by supporting medical personnel
2. Find out what hasn't worked for Doctor recruitment to prevent some mistakes and look at what has worked in other rural towns in order to coordinate efforts in the future

Partnerships

- Municipality of North Huron
 - North Huron Medical Recruitment Committee
- "Wingham must be a destination that is appealing" (Task force member)
Recommended time frame to be determined with the recruitment committee

Strategy #3 Tourism/Attracting a Larger Market

Supporting Data

83% of respondents chose attraction of visitors and tourism as an economic development priority

88% of respondents chose sightseeing as an attraction for the future

83% of respondents chose arts and culture as an attraction for the future

80% of respondents chose cycling and motorcycling as an attraction for the future

76% of respondents chose trails and snowmobiling as an attraction for the future

74% of respondents chose the museum as an attraction for the future

74% of respondents chose food and culinary as an attraction for the future

73% of respondents chose heritage buildings as an attraction for the future

67% of respondents chose music and the performing arts as an attraction for the future

1. Festival Centred on Alice Munro

This festival has been sponsored by the horticultural society, but has been reduced in size by a shortage of volunteers.

Alice Munro is read and admired world wide; a native of Wingham who inspires. The Festival is in the process of being reinstated in partnership with Rick Sickinger of Huron County Heritage and Culture Partnership

Tours of identified places in Wingham from her stories is already in place, thanks to the horticultural society efforts in the past.

Workshops of interest to writers are planned along with a juried writing contest.

Responsibility

- Huron County Heritage and Culture Partnership
- Tourism sub-committee
- Horticultural society

Resources

- Trillium or other grants
- Research through Festival Ontario

Recommended time frame - 2013

2. Heritage theatre maximization

Theatre board has hired a coordinator

Develop and implement a plan to connect the theatre to school tours with youth discount, community movie nights

Expand the use of the theatre and scope of the performances

These suggestions should be discussed with the board and coordinator....

Anticipated Outcome - increased use and revenue

3. Enhance the Musical Muskrat Festival

Ideas for consideration by the MMF Committee

- establish youth voice, ideas of how to engage youth e.g have an info night and seek commitments
- vendors with memorabilia
- Muskrat passport - visit specific locations and win prizes when all stamps earned
- Beach volleyball tournament
- Outdoor movie night
- Coordinate with sidewalk sales - BIA
- Midway in park
- Market campground
- Legion breakfast connection
- Bed races on main street
- Shirt tail parade (see sheet)

5. Capitalize on Recreation Centre

- Get schedule of tournaments from Rec Director
- Promotional info for downtown in registration package - BIA

6. Seasonal Projects - further suggestions

- Winter Project
- Carnival
- Parade - the Christmas Parade is already established
- Promotional material e.g winter team sports reg. package
- Rec centre/high school

Summer Project - Musical Muskrat Festival - already underway

- partner with firefighters, retailers. Minor baseball

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