



Subject: Rural Economic Development (RED) Funding Application

To: Council

From: Chief Administrative Office

Report Number: 2021-248

Meeting Date: September 27, 2021

Recommendation:

That Chief Administrative Office Report 2021-248 be received;

That the Manager of Strategic Initiatives be directed to submit an application to the Rural Economic Development (RED) program for the West Street Renewal Project; and

That Council support the commitment to fund the City's share of the West Street Renewal Project in the 2022 Capital Budget.

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of a funding opportunity from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) for the Rural Economic Development (RED) program and staff's intention to submit an application by the October 1st deadline.

Background:

The OMAFRA RED program provides funding for municipalities, not-for-profit organizations, Indigenous communities and local service boards for projects that remove barriers to investment, open doors to economic development in small and rural communities, help facilitate economic diversification, build community capacity and create jobs. The program has two project streams:

1. The **Strategic Economic Infrastructure** stream provides up to 30 per cent in cost-shared funding (maximum of \$250,000) for minor capital projects that advance economic development and investment opportunities.

2. The **Economic Diversification and Competitiveness** stream provides up to 50 per cent in cost-shared funding (maximum of \$150,000) for projects that remove barriers to business and job growth, attract investment, attract or retain a skilled workforce, strengthen sector and regional partnerships and diversify regional economies.

Before deciding on the project described below, staff in the Economic Development & Tourism Services Division discussed a number of projects — both those already planned and those with future potential — that would align with the RED program criteria.

Discussion:

Consolidating several 2022 projects for West Street into one comprehensive project, staff have developed an initiative entitled: “West Street Renewal Project: Connecting the City’s Waterfront and Downtown”. This initiative is focused on new and updated signage, improved accessibility and safety, landscaping features and amenities, and creating connections between the new waterfront centre, West Street, the downtown business district and Main Street.

West Street is a busy commercial district within the City’s downtown that attracts many local residents and out-of-town visitors. The City plans to welcome approximately 60 cruise ship visits in 2022, and it will be important to make a positive first impression on passengers as they walk down West Street and visit the City’s downtown shops and restaurants. West Street is also an integral part of the City’s annual Canal Days festivities.

Staff believe it is an opportune time for a refresh on West Street to maintain its unique character, welcome and accommodate new visitors, and ensure that this popular area of the City’s downtown remains a vibrant public space for year-round activities. This project will include updating signage and interpretive boards and installing wayfinding signage to direct residents and visitors to our business and shopping districts, parks and public facilities. Pictures of current signage and interpretative boards along West Street are attached in Appendix A.

The proposed project will also focus on improving accessibility and safety. Wood planking along the canal requires replacement as there are safety issues and potential tripping hazards. Pictures of the condition of the wood planking are included in Appendix A.

Staff feel it is also important to create accessible and safe pathways and walkways from the new waterfront centre area and connect it with the West Street promenade and the downtown core.

There are currently several projects planned for next year that have been included in the 2022 Capital Budget and focus on renewal and improvements along West Street. It is staff's recommendation to combine these projects into one and submit an application to the RED program's Strategic Economic Infrastructure stream. This one comprehensive project consists of the following:

- Signage Renewal Strategy – there is a three-year plan to update signage across the entire City; however, it was envisioned by staff that a focus on West Street could be prioritized first, including new wayfinding signage and updating faded interpretative boards;
- Promenade Improvements – this project will replace the wood planks along the water's edge with concrete to create a long-term solution to safety concerns caused by the planks breaking free from their framing and resulting in tripping hazards;
- Waterfront Centre – the City received funding from the federal government for the construction of a new waterfront centre that will serve as a recreational and cultural hub for the community, as well as a welcoming centre for cruise ships. Part of this project, as outlined by the attached concept plan, includes creating new pathways for accessibility, walkability and connectivity for visitors and tourists to West Street, the downtown and nearby parks. Site redevelopment in advance of the 2022 season will also include landscaping features, lighting and new signage.

Staff have reached out to the Downtown BIA to make them aware of this project and to obtain a letter of support for inclusion with the City's RED application. There may also be a small amount of funding available from Niagara Region Economic Development for this project and staff are pursuing this opportunity. These community partnerships will be mentioned in the RED application.

Internal Consultations:

Staff from Economic Development & Tourism Services, Public Works/Parks, Office of the CAO, Corporate Services, Corporate Communications and the Museum have been consulted on these projects and are committed to the renewal and ongoing revitalization of West Street, the downtown business district and Main Street.

Financial Implications:

Projects and funding for West Street have been included in the 2022 Capital Budget, including signage renewal, improvements to the West Street promenade and the construction of a new waterfront centre. Staff have developed an estimated project

budget of \$800,000, with the maximum of 30% (\$250,000) funding being requested from RED and the remaining 70% from project funding allocated in the City's 2022 Capital Budget.

Project Cost Breakdown	
Signage Renewal (allocated in 2022 Capital Budget under Signage Renewal Strategy and *Waterfront Centre Site Redevelopment project budget)	\$100,000*
Promenade Improvements (allocated in 2022 Capital Budget)	\$250,000
Waterfront Centre pathways, walkways and landscaping (included in *Waterfront Centre Site Redevelopment project budget)	\$400,000*
Lighting (included in *Waterfront Centre Site Redevelopment project budget)	\$50,000*
Estimated Total Project Cost	\$800,000

*At this time, the project budget for Waterfront Centre Site Redevelopment is made up of estimates of probable cost prepared by a landscape architect consultant and a team of managers and directors from various City departments. A more precise accounting of actual and total project costs will be presented to Council at an upcoming meeting before the end of the year.

No new funding is being requested from Council as project funding has already been allocated in the 2022 Capital Budget. At the September 16th Budget Meeting, the Committee of the Whole recommended that Council approve the 2022 Capital Budget at the September 27th meeting.

Public Engagement:

West Street attracts thousands of visitors and tourists every year and it remains a focal point for the City's annual Canal Days Marine Heritage Festival. It is also expected that cruise ship passengers who disembark from the ships for a Port Colborne excursion will likely walk along the West Street promenade and into the downtown business district.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillars of the strategic plan:

- Attracting Business Investment and Tourists to Port Colborne
 - City-Wide Investments in Infrastructure and Recreational/Cultural Spaces
 - Value: Financial Management to Achieve Financial Sustainability
 - Governance: Communications, Engagement, and Decision-Making
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Conclusion:

There are several West Street renewal projects planned for 2022 that have been allocated in the 2022 Capital Budget. Staff have reviewed the RED program criteria and created the “West Street Renewal Project: Connecting the City’s Waterfront and Downtown”, which consolidates several projects together into one comprehensive project. Staff are recommending that a funding application be submitted to OMAFRA’s RED program, Strategic Economic Infrastructure stream, by the October 1st deadline. A motion of support from Council will be included with the RED application.

Appendices:

- a. Pictures of signage, interpretative boards, and wood planking along West Street
- b. Concept plan – waterfront centre area – connecting with West Street

Respectfully submitted,

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Report Approval:

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.