



TOWNSHIP OF SOUTHWOLD

Report to Council

DATE: March 22nd, 2021

PREPARED BY: Lisa Higgs, CAO/Clerk

REPORT NO.: CAO 2019-20

SUBJECT MATTER: Annual Strategic Plan Update to the End of 2020

Recommendation:

That Council receive this report as information.

Purpose:

The Township Strategic Plan was adopted in May of 2018 and requires an annual review to determine if the plan is being implemented. This report serves as the update of the plan's aims for the year ending 2020.

Background:

On February 27th, 2018 Council held a special public meeting to obtain input from the citizens and staff of The Township of Southwold for the purpose of developing a Strategic Plan. The input gained from this meeting was used to develop a four year Strategic Plan for the Township of Southwold. Many ideas received at the public meeting held in February 2018 were already being implemented by council and staff and therefore may not appear explicitly in the action plan contained in the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan was adopted by Council in May of 2018 and annual updates are a requirement of the plan. The below discussion outlines the aims of the plan and the progress made to the end of 2020 on each item.

Comment:

1. Growth

Strategic Goal:

To promote residential, agricultural, commercial, and industrial development by ensuring policies and services are in place to support growth in The Township of Southwold.

Strategies:

- 1.1 Encourage and invest in sewer services and waste water treatment facilities in the growth communities.

2020 UPDATES

<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Complete municipal servicing studies, environmental assessments, and development or connection charges studies in anticipation of growth on an ongoing basis. B. Ensure the appropriate development policies are in place and review and update the Township Official Plan every five years to ensure that the Township retains an adequate supply of vacant lands for growth. C. Prioritize the provision of sewer and waste water servicing in the Township budget process. D. Establish connection policies and connection charges in the growth areas to appropriately finance waste water treatment and collection systems via a user pay mechanism and federal and provincial government grants. E. Plan wastewater treatment facilities for diverse uses including residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, and institutional uses. 	<p>The Class C EA for Shedden and Fingal final comment period ends April 12th. The Township completed the DC study, Water-Wastewater Rate Study in 2020.</p> <p>The OP review is scheduled for completion in April 2021.</p> <p>The wastewater rate study helps to inform rates and connection charges for revenue purposes. A detailed capital sewer budget is prepared by OCWA and presented annually.</p> <p>Following significant public consultation, a Talbotville Wastewater Connection By-Law was adopted on August 12th, 2019. In 2020, updated wastewater rates were established following the rate study.</p> <p>The Talbotville WWTP MBR system is compatible with all uses. The preferred plant option for Shedden and Fingal is also an MBR unit which uses the same technology.</p>
<p>1.2 Support & prioritize access to high speed internet for all (agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, etc.) Township properties.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>

<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Support independent needs studies on telecommunications systems in the Township and promote surveys to ascertain data. B. Form partnerships with agencies, corporations, municipal neighbours, SWIFT, residents, local businesses, and telecommunications companies to find solutions, including alternative options for service. C. Investigate options for servicing growth communities and consider municipal investment or debenture options for residents to expedite installation of high speed internet. D. Support efforts by agricultural and rural property owners to facilitate “last kilometer” high speed infrastructure. 	<p>COVID-19 in 2020 revealed the importance of high-speed internet in our communities. However, COVID-19 also meant that staff efforts were expended elsewhere and many Committee meetings (like the EDC who were tasked with investigating options) were cancelled or delayed.</p> <p>The Township continues to participate in SWIFT through Elgin County.</p> <p>No work was completed in 2020 on this initiative.</p> <p>No work was completed in 2020 on this initiative</p>
<p>1.3 Encourage & Support Residential Development.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Support developers and builders by reducing unnecessary administrative processes and providing clear, responsive, and efficient service. B. Provide opportunities for residential development for diverse populations including young families and seniors. 	<p>The Township’s CBO introduced an electronic permitting solution to enhance service and streamline permit issuance.</p> <p>Talbotville and Ferndale are seeing significant subdivision development.</p>

<p>C. Encourage an appropriate mix of residential development including single family dwellings, multi-residential dwellings, and affordable housing.</p> <p>D. Support the development of a retirement community or condominium complex for seniors.</p>	<p>The Township’s Official Plan requires an appropriate mix of housing. While 2020 featured primarily SFD, discussions have begun with builders to begin their multi-residential blocks.</p> <p>The Township issued a permit in 2020 for the completion of Royal Oaks Senior Living, located within the Township.</p>
<p>1.4 Utilize the Economic Development Committee to prepare recommendations to attract key businesses to the municipality and develop strategies to retain and expand existing critical businesses.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <p>A. Provide the EDC the authority to make inquiries, meet with businesses and contacts to promote The Township of Southwold.</p> <p>B. Utilize the Economic Development Committee to help identify development opportunities in the Township and address strategies for supporting small businesses and reducing red tape.</p> <p>C. Utilize the Economic Development Committee to develop a strategy to attract, retain, and expand critical sectors and key businesses such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Gas Station b. Coffee Shop c. Financial Institution/Bank/Credit Union d. Pharmacy e. Family Restaurant f. Grocery Store g. Rural Tourism & Agri-Business h. Alternative Accommodation 	<p>This authority was granted previously and is ongoing.</p> <p>The EDC has requested that checklists be developed for potential business sites. This will need to be revisited in 2021.</p> <p>This project is ongoing. Alternative Accommodations have been discussed for inclusion in the Township Official Plan and a request for inclusion of policies in the County OP has been forwarded.</p>
<p>1.5 Attract new industrial development and encourage expansion and improvements on existing industrial businesses with input from Council and Council members of the EDC.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>

Action Plan:

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| A. Provide enticements for land owners of vacant industrial land to market their properties to industrial developers. | The Township made efforts in 2020 to converse with different industrial land owners in response to requests for property forwarded through Elgin County. |
| B. Investigate servicing options for lands earmarked for industrial development in the Township Official Plan and reserve funds to service the lands. | The Township completed significant research on servicing of industrial lands and participated in discussions on natural gas servicing, waste water treatment, and water distribution to industrial lands. |
| C. Partner with Elgin County, the Provincial Government, and Federal Government and other agencies to attract industrial development through a marketing plan of key sites. | The Township continues to work closely with Elgin County, MP Vechhio, and MPP Yurek to help market industrial lands. In 2020, the Township has participated in various Ministry initiatives to bring attention to industrial lands. |
| D. Support the creation of incentives that attract new industries and support incentives for existing industrial property owners to improve and expand their businesses. | In 2019, the Township updated its Community Improvement Program (Elgincentives) to include new incentives for industrial lands. |
| E. Provide excellent administrative services to assist businesses in navigating through various planning processes (plan of subdivision, re-zoning, consent, site plan approval, etc). | Township staff work hard to assist new business owners in planning ventures. |

2. Culture, Recreation, Environment, & Community Beautification

Strategic Goal:

Promote a healthy, naturally beautiful, and community oriented municipality by encouraging and supporting involvement of volunteer organizations wishing to provide cultural and recreational activities in the Township of Southwold.

Strategies:

2.1 Complete capital recreation projects and proceed with the revitalization of Township parks.

2020 UPDATES

Action Plan:

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| <p>A. Continue working with current multi-purpose committee to set long term priorities for the parks and establish multi-year parks capital project plan.</p> | <p>The COVID-19 pandemic and provincial response meant that Township parks were closed for much of 2020. The multi-purpose parks committee did not meet.</p> |
| <p>B. Improve the communication of Township park projects through improved web and social media posts and celebratory grand openings of new capital park investments. Consider an advertising & marking plan to increase awareness and use of facilities.</p> | <p>The COVID-19 pandemic meant that many parks projects were delayed and “grand openings” were prohibited. Despite this, the completion of the Fingal Heritage park was well publicized and a positive story in 2020.</p> |
| <p>C. Continue to improve efforts to engage community members and enhance representation from all areas of the Township.</p> | <p>More work to be done on a broader community outreach program for 2021.</p> |
| <p>D. Investigate the feasibility and confer with the multi-purpose committee to establish an action plan on proceeding with the following Township Parks Projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Bandshell/Outdoor Stage at the Keystone Complex b. Talbotville New Park Project c. Splash Pad d. New Shedden Open Space Park (Soccer Fields, Lawn Bowling, Football, etc.) | <p>The Talbotville Park is earmarked to be completed in 2021, following significant delays because of COVID-19 and design delays. The Shedden Open Space park was completed in 2020, including the parking lot.</p> |

<p>E. Maximize the use of community spaces and support community programs that incentivize the use of facilities. Consider partnerships that ensure municipal facilities can be rented for summer camps, day programs, and programs that encourage full rental of parks and municipal buildings.</p>	<p>COVID-19 meant that facilities and parks were closed.</p>
<p>2.2 Promote community volunteerism and support community driven events.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <p>A. Promote volunteering opportunities for Township Committees and local organizations and service clubs through the use of Township staff, website, social media, and communications products.</p> <p>B. Encourage collaboration between community groups by establishing a secure, privacy compliant, central volunteer database and volunteer mentoring program that supports cross-organization sharing.</p> <p>C. Sponsor efforts, including the creation of a central listing of assets and organization skillsets, to maximize the use of existing assets and sharing of existing resources between organizations.</p> <p>D. Ensure that fair and festival organizers receive support from the Township to aid in their promotion and that resources are committed from the municipality that prioritize the continuation of municipal traditions (i.e. Rosy Rhubarb, Shedden Fair, Optimist Club Parade, Southwold by Tractor, etc).</p> <p>E. Partner with Schools, Elgin Manor, Community Groups to support community events.</p>	<p>COVID-19 regulations prohibited community events and social distancing reduced opportunities for recruiting members.</p> <p>To be worked on in 2021.</p> <p>To be completed in 2021.</p> <p>All events, fairs and festivals in 2020 were cancelled because of COVID-19.</p> <p>COVID-19 cancelled all community events, schools were closed, and Elgin Manor was locked down.</p>
<p>2.3 Prioritize Township-wide beautification projects that enhance our natural resources and promote the rural character of the municipality.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <p>A. Emphasize year-round, four season, park and municipal property maintenance. Ensure that parks can be accessed in spring, summer, fall, and winter and encourage activities in all seasons.</p>	<p>To be addressed in 2020.</p>

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| <p>B. Work closely with the Township Communities in Bloom Committee to support the beautification of the municipality.</p> | <p>The Township continues to support the Communities in Bloom through the Public Works Department and by supporting financial requests to the Green Lane Trust. Despite COVID-19, Communities in Bloom continued to maintain flower boxes and hosted a no-contact plant sale to support the beautification of the Township.</p> |
| <p>C. Investigate progressive waste management solutions and evaluate the costs and benefits of different waste management collection service types (i.e. single stream vs. two-stream recycling, compost/organic collection, etc.) and service levels (weekly, bi-weekly, additional seasonal collections, etc). Council selection of the optimal service based on this evaluation.</p> | <p>The newly formed Zero Waste Committee worked in 2020 to provide direction to staff and council on preferred waste management options and have created initiatives for 2021 to reduce waste.</p> |
| <p>D. Provide options to residents for special waste management such as large article collection, household hazardous waste, community swap days, or a community dumpster option.</p> | <p>In 2020 the Township continued to participate in the St.Thomas Community Recycling Centre. Information to residents regarding waste collection has been frequently posted on the Township Facebook page.</p> |
| <p>E. Encourage wildlife preservation and environmental protection through the use of the protection and promotion of Fingal Wildlife Sanctuary, the consideration of greener services and alternative energy, and the control of invasive species.</p> | |

<p>F. Celebrate our local history and work to preserve heritage features of our community through the support of History Committee initiatives.</p>	<p>The Township continues to support the history committee. In 2020, the Township supported the rejuvenation of the Fingal Heritage Park and a Victorian-style Gazebo was completed. The Township's War Memorial Committee presented a modified Remembrance Day event (modified because of COVID-19).</p>
<p>2.4 Place special focus on cultural and recreation activities aimed at serving seniors in our community.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <p>A. In partnership with Elgin County, develop and implement a plan for our aging population.</p> <p>B. Combat social isolation felt by many seniors by supporting services that help provide care to seniors including volunteer organizations.</p> <p>C. Establish a senior's advisory committee of council to provide input on services for seniors and suggestions for social support.</p> <p>D. Provide recreation opportunities for seniors and invest in activities to create a central hub for seniors.</p> <p>E. Make accessible public spaces a priority by designing fully accessible parks and facilities, and conferring with the County Accessibility Coordinator to ensure parks and facilities are fully committed to the goal of accessible and inclusive spaces.</p>	
	<p>In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was especially challenging and compounded the isolation felt by many seniors. Southwold Young at Heart committee provided programming and drive-through/drop-off materials.</p> <p>The Township established the Southwold Young at Heart Committee in late 2018 and adopted Terms of Reference in 2019. The Committee met virtually throughout 2020 and hosted COVID safe events/materials.</p> <p>COVID-19 meant congregate recreation for seniors was prohibited.</p> <p>All parks projects continue to be constructed in compliance with the AODA.</p>

3. Municipal Infrastructure, Improved Transportation, and Public Safety

Strategic Goal:

Provide improved transportation and a strong commitment to asset management with a goal of maintaining the Township's infrastructure in the promotion of public safety.

Strategies:

3.1 Update and expand on the existing asset management plan including financing, as regulated by the Provincial government, and commit to maintaining the Township's infrastructure and assets to an always improving level.

2020 UPDATES

Action Plan:

A. Commitment from Council and staff to follow recommendations arising from the asset management plan.

In 2019 the Township of Southwold adopted a strategic asset management policy and completed an update to its Roads Needs Study and Asset Management database.

B. Provide rapid response to repairing Township roads, assets, fleet, and facilities to prevent further damage to municipal properties.

This is an ongoing Township responsibility.

C. Ensure that new subdivision development and impacts of growth are well planned and managed for the future impact on municipal assets.

The Township completed a water/wastewater rate study in 2020 and a development charges study & adopted the charges via By-Law. The DCs ensure "growth pays for growth."

3.2 Emphasize public safety on municipal roadways and provide safe active transportation options.

2020 UPDATES

Action Plan:

A. Ensure speed limits in small communities are compatible with the goal of public safety with an emphasis on low speed limits near parks and public facilities where children are travelling.

This is an ongoing Township responsibility. Speeds were reduced on Ferndale Roads. Stop signs were installed on Talbotville Gore Road in 2020.

<p>B. Partner with the OPP to ensure that municipal speed limits are enforced and encourage targeted enforcement via focused patrols.</p> <p>C. Confirm that new subdivisions in growth communities include sidewalks and active transportation networks to encourage safety. Ensure all new parks are fenced.</p> <p>D. Ensure that new subdivisions are designed with traffic control measures that reduce impacts on public safety resulting from growth.</p>	<p>The Township continues to lobby the OPP to improve enforcement</p> <p>All plans of subdivision submitted and under construction in 2020 were required to provide sidewalks and trail systems to new parks.</p> <p>Talbotville plans of subdivision included community input related to traffic control.</p>
<p>3.3 Investigate transportation options for seniors and isolated populations in rural communities.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <p>A. Support and help facilitate shared senior transportation opportunities.</p> <p>B. Explore alternative public transportation models used in other jurisdictions and investigate the feasibility of these systems in Southwold.</p> <p>C. Work with community volunteer organizations and municipal partners to help promote transportation options for seniors and isolated populations.</p>	<p>COVID-19 prohibited the Township from proceeding with this initiative.</p>
<p>3.4 Ensure that residents have access to health services and are well informed about ways to protect their own personal safety.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <p>A. Maintain medical building in Shedden for health service(s) and work to preserve and attract various health providers in the municipality.</p> <p>B. Educate residents about emergency management and emergency preparedness and provide frequent public education on fire prevention.</p>	<p>The doctor's office in Shedden remains occupied. Improvements to the medical building in 2020 included new windows.</p> <p>2020 was defined by the COVID-19 Emergency and the Declaration of a State of Emergency. The Township's website and Facebook page have been dominated by COVID-19 messaging.</p>

<p>C. Continue to liaise with Elgin County to maintain ambulance services in a timely manner for residents and that growth is accounted for in coordinating service.</p>	<p>The Township supports EMS services through Elgin County and through tiered medical response.</p>
<p>4. Municipal Financial Stewardship</p> <p><i>Strategic Goal:</i> To exercise good financial stewardship in the management of Township expenditures and revenues.</p>	
<p><i>Strategies:</i> 4.1 To continue researching and applying for applicable Federal and Provincial funding.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <p>A. Continue memberships in various Municipal Associations and collaboration with municipal partners.</p> <p>B. Pre-screen grant information at staff level to determine eligibility and qualifying projects prior to Council recommendation and application.</p> <p>C. Engage, where appropriate, the services of a consultant for completion of grant applications.</p>	<p>Township maintains memberships in AMCTO, MFOA, OBOA, DSAO, AMO, ROMA, OGRA, etc. and participates in shared Elgin working groups.</p> <p>The Township successfully received multiple grants in 2020.</p> <p>The Township continues to use consultants where required to apply for and receive grants.</p>
<p>4.2 Review and protect the assessment base.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <p>A. Review large changes in assessment as identified by MPAC and monitor and report on changes in assessment practices and legislation.</p> <p>B. Support and consider assessment management efforts beyond Township staff including the use of external consultants, County resources, and municipal organizations.</p>	<p>The Township has worked with MTAG as well as Elgin County to help review and protect assessment changes. COVID-19 meant that MPAC delayed scheduled 2020 assessment update to 2021.</p>
<p>4.3 Adopt, review, and frequently update policies that support strong financial stewardship including policies on the following:</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p>	<p>To be completed in 2021</p>

<p>A. Use of Township owned lands (including commercial owned buildings and future development lands) and Township owned properties.</p> <p>B. Revenue and Tax Collection</p> <p>C. Procurement/Purchasing.</p> <p>D. Use of and Contributions to Township Reserves.</p> <p>E. Financial Reporting.</p> <p>F. Investment Policy</p>	<p>To be completed 2021</p> <p>To be completed by 2021</p> <p>To be completed by 2021</p> <p>To be completed by 2022</p> <p>To be completed by 2022</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">5. Public Engagement, Transparent Government, and Informing the Community</p> <p><i>Strategic Goal:</i> To promote public engagement, transparent government, and strong communications with all members of the community across various mediums for the strengthening of civic participation.</p>	
<p><i>Strategies:</i> 5.1 Continue improving information disseminated by the municipality.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <p>A. Develop improved website content more frequently and re-format so that residents can more easily navigate municipal information.</p> <p>B. Maintain a stand-alone bulletin board (whether physical or digital) within communities for local advertising use.</p> <p>C. Continue newsletters with water and tax bills.</p> <p>D. Create a central information contact list whereby residents can opt into receiving various memos and communications from the municipality.</p>	<p>Township staff worked on the creation of a new website in 2020 which is proposed for finalization in 2021.</p> <p>To be completed in future.</p> <p>2020 featured newsletters in the tax bills and Southwold in Motion in the water bills.</p> <p>To be completed in 2021.</p>

<p>E. Aim for improved communication with residents and engagement via sharing through various social media platforms.</p>	<p>The Community Services and Communications Clerk has significantly improved Facebook posts. The Township in 2020 created multiple social media accounts (Twitter, Instagram, etc).</p>
<p>5.2 Adopt practices that promote transparent government</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <p>A. Adopt and abide by public notice policies.</p> <p>B. Consider proactive disclosure practices.</p> <p>C. Make public records easily available online in an accessible format.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p> <p>To be investigated in 2021. Staff is including a recommendation for a public portal to many of the Township’s public records database (Laserfiche)</p> <p>The new website to be launched in 2021 will include all documents posted in an accessible format.</p>
<p>5.3 Celebrate community engagement and create vibrant connections within the community.</p>	<p>2020 UPDATES</p>
<p><i>Action Plan:</i></p> <p>A. Consider strategies to support community neighbourhood engagement.</p> <p>B. Support community outreach efforts and neighbourhood efforts that enhance our subdivisions, making them more than “bedroom communities”.</p> <p>C. Encourage collaboration between community groups of volunteers to move towards common goals.</p>	<p>In 2020, COVID-19 and social distancing protocols meant neighbourhood engagement was challenging.</p> <p>Ongoing.</p> <p>Collaborative events (i.e. Winterfest, Volunteer Appreciation) were cancelled because of COVID-19</p>

Approved by: Lisa Higgs, CAO/Clerk