

BRUSSELS STREETScape MASTER PLAN



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Introduction

Through our Advanced Planning class at the University of Guelph our group (The Brussels Revitalization Group) has been assigned the development of a Streetscape Master Plan for the Village of Brussels. The project has been a joint process with the Municipality of Huron East, the community of Brussels including local business owners and stakeholders (further referred to as the client). It has also included referenced documentation of design guidelines for future improvements to the Village of Brussels.



Project Study Goals

- To create a visual rendering of the revitalized downtown core.
- To formulate a series of guidelines for private building owners and the Municipality of Huron East to consider and reference for future improvements.
- To build a series of policy recommendations for the Village of Brussels.
- To create a social media network to showcase what we are doing.



Getting People to use the space

Develop A Plan

Fill Vacant Stores

**REVITALIZATION
PROCESS**



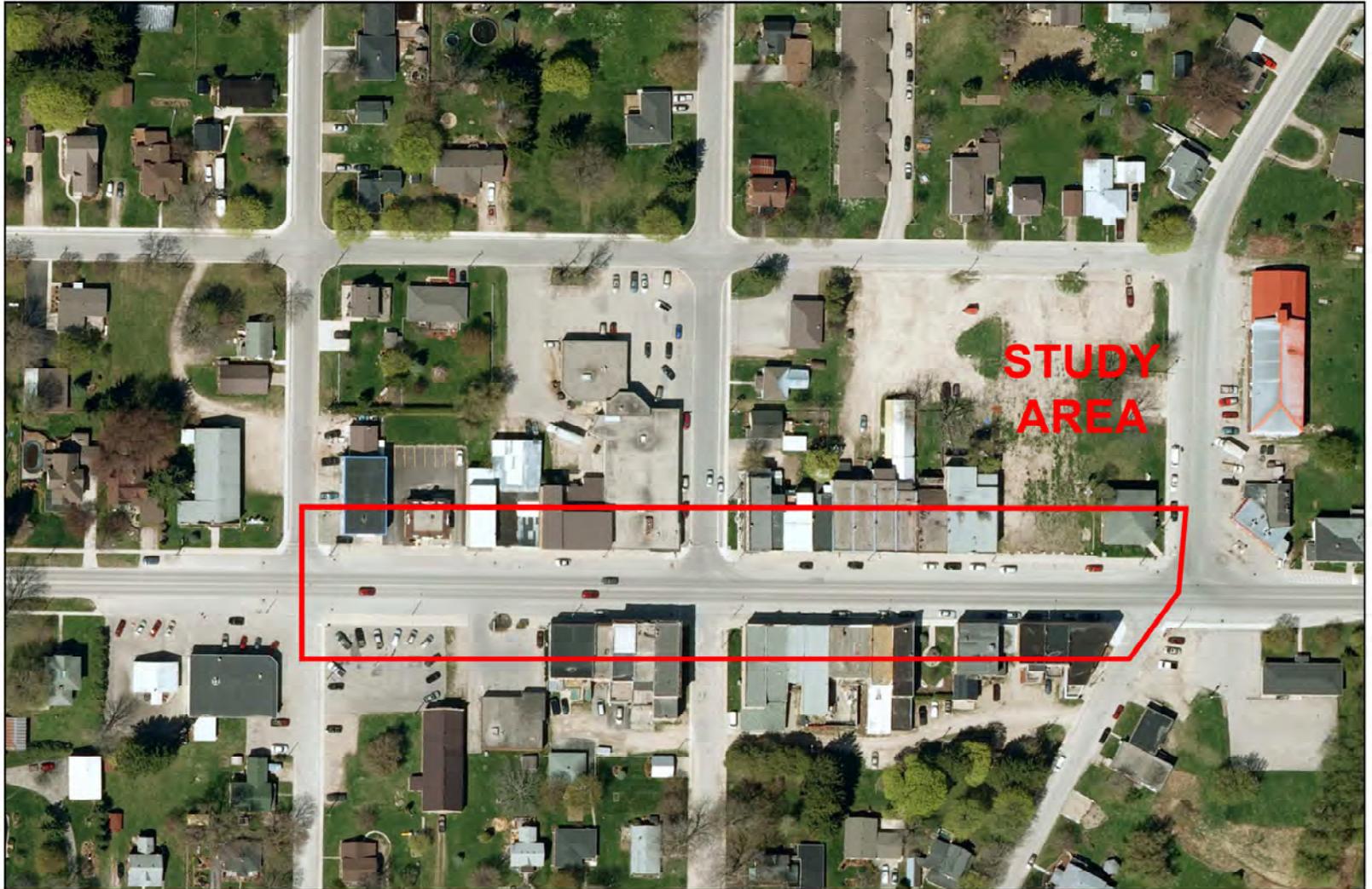
Locate Funding

**Formalize
Guidelines &
Design Policies**

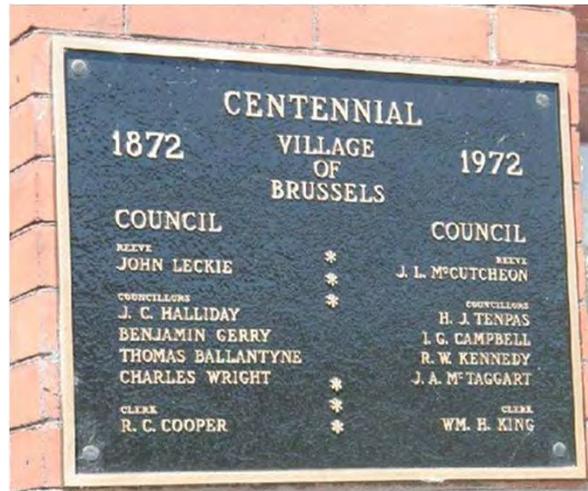
**Improve
Community Pride**



The Project Study Area



The Background of Brussels



Brussels is small rural community in Huron County, Ontario located within the municipality of Huron East.

In 1854 William Ainlay purchased two hundred acres of land in the area. The village was then originally named **Ainleyville** after William Ainlay.

In 1872 the name was changed to Brussels when a branch line of the Grand Trunk Railway from Guelph came through the town. Early prosperity was based on wheat and beef and was showcased through a fine Victorian-era commercial streetscape. (BDBRE, 2010)

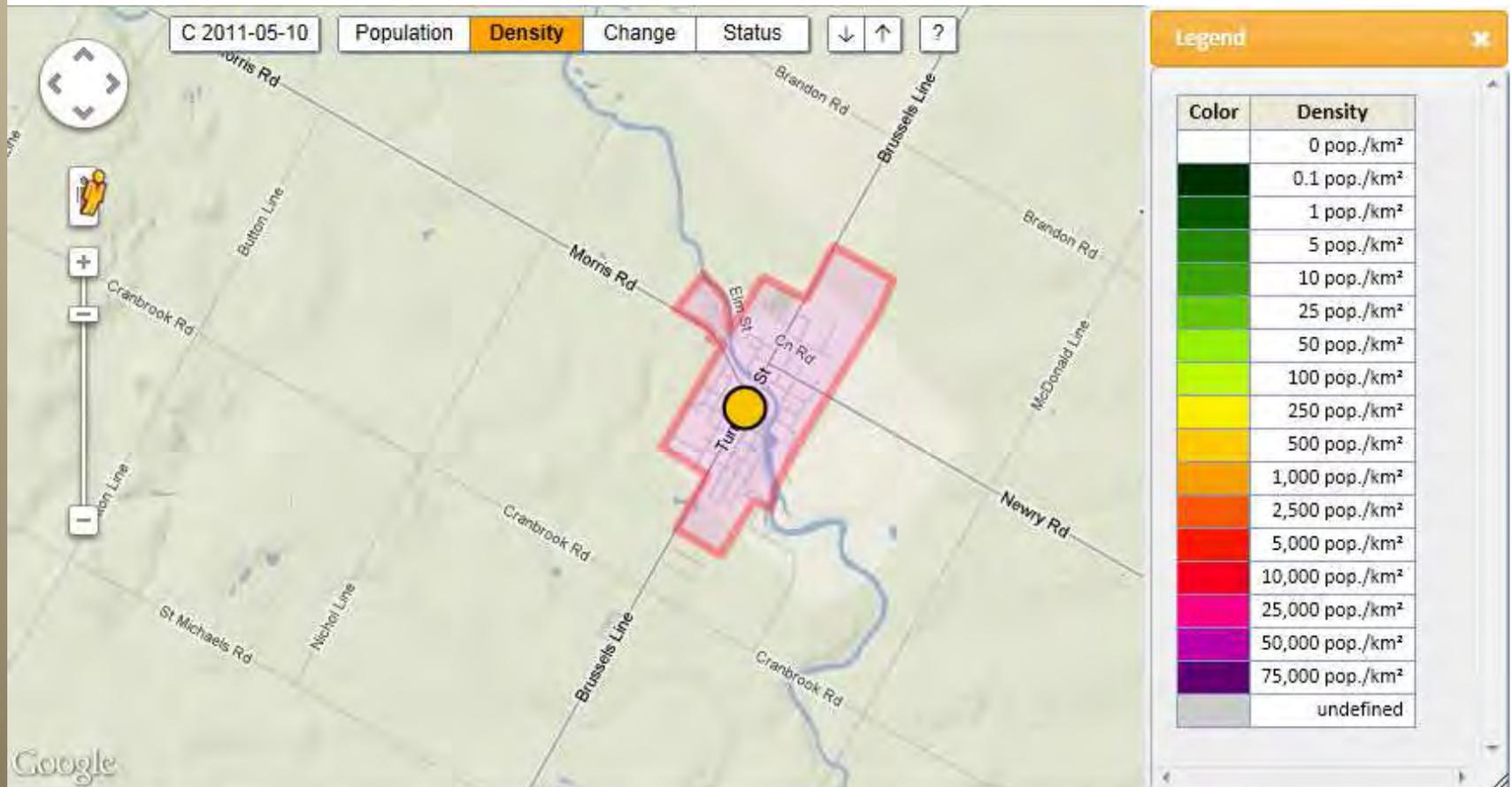
Since then Brussels has managed to retain much of the architectural flavour of the 1900's. However, many of the historic buildings are in disrepair, which contributes to a loss of rich cultural history the town possesses.



Brussels is significantly affected by the lack of activity in the downtown. There are not enough shoppers and tenants, and a high turnover of business owners. However, current business owners and public officials envision a downtown core in which every storefront is occupied, well maintained, and people are drawn into the dynamic area (Hawley, 2013).

Brussels Population and Density

Brussels has seen the population grow over the years from 827 in 1954 to 1,143 in 2001. It was amalgamated into the Municipality of Huron East on January 1, 2001. The population from the 2011 census is approximately 1,157. (Statistics Canada, 2013) With fewer citizens, smaller communities like Brussels may not be able to reach population densities necessary for certain types of infrastructure improvements. (i.e. public transit). Active commuting options with and around the city may also be prohibited by the need to travel over a large geographic area.



Purpose of the Project

The Village of Brussels is in a phase of physical, economic, and social transition brought upon by several factors. Today, the downtown commercial core is showing signs of deterioration and decline. Challenges have emerged due to a “shrinking population in the trade area, lower incomes and spending power, retail leakage to competitors, shortage of local entrepreneurs and deterioration of building stock.” (Huron East, 2010)

The Brussels downtown streetscape revitalization group was developed because the client group was facing a vacant retail space dilemma in their downtown core. The clients objective was to upgrade the image of the downtown core, to create a definable place unique to the county setting and to integrate responsible design and implementation strategies into its design. The purpose of the Streetscape Improvement Project design guideline is to educate the client about town morphology and provide them with ***"a common vision for renewal"***. (Hawley, 2013)



Project Study Objectives



- To retrofit the downtown core with site furnishings and amenities that will collectively create an attractive streetscape and in turn draw citizens into downtown Brussels.
- To research existing design guidelines for small towns and villages to form a comparison.
- To review the Official Plan, Cultural Heritage Landscape Study, Urban Design Guide etc.
- To survey and gain feedback on local opinions to be utilized for streetscape improvements and design guidelines.
- Improving the core of the downtown while maintaining the character and historic nature of the area.
- To create a comprehensive report outlining a series of design guidelines and community improvements.
- To consider and take into account pedestrian safety.
- Taking the time to do it right rather than rushing the process for immediate results.
- Getting people to reach consensus on what is best for the redevelopment.

The Role of the Brussels Revitalization Group

The role of the Brussels Downtown Revitalization Group covered a variety of subject areas throughout the duration of the project assignment.

1. The significant role of the Brussels Revitalization Group included that of educators, communicators, facilitators, design and policy advisors.
2. The Client Group expressed a need to be advised of principles of landscape architecture, city structure, revitalization design concepts of the street, hierarchy of space and the relationships and reciprocity between town physical structure and human activities.
3. A second, and major role of the Student Consultants was that of project facilitators. As facilitators our group assisted the Client Group in the establishment of objectives for their downtown streetscape revitalization design guidelines as they relate to Brussels situation and issues.



Preparation of the Plan

The Streetscape Master Plan is intended to act as a guide for the progressive development and aid in improvements along the arterial and collector streets within the Village of Brussels. In order to properly prepare for the design of the Master Plan our group needed to know more about the Village of Brussels. To do so we set up a Public Engagement and Design Charrette Meeting to gain feedback from the local community on what they saw as a "vision" for the village.

Date: February 01, 2013

Location: Cinnamon Jim's, Brussels ON

Purpose: To acquire stakeholder's and community feedback regarding the Village of Brussels Streetscape Revitalization.

Events that occurred: Outdoor walking tour of Brussels streetscape, presentation by University of Guelph student group, followed by design charrette with community stakeholders.



Brussels Revitalization Group Social Media

Additionally our group created a facebook group to gain feedback from the community and to include everyone in what we are doing.

Check us out at: <https://www.facebook.com/BrusselsDowntownRevitalizationGroup> or you can find us on the Huron County Website at: <http://www.huroneast.com/>



Seaford, ON

Business/Community Directory
Accommodations
Restaurants
Retail

Community Calendar
Events
Meetings
Notices

Interactive Map
Community Links
Contact Information
Doors Open

Community Guide
Fitness Programs
Registration Forms
Program Schedules

Life in Huron East
Government
Economic Development
Guests

HEADLINES
Customers - Pre-authorized Payment Form - Utilities - Pre-authorized Paym... Read More

Welcome

Exceptional Huron East
— Much More than a Place

Whether you're an entrepreneur, a hardworking employee or someone embarking on retirement, Huron East offers countless opportunities and a variety of ways to enjoy the best of life's good things.

A leader in agricultural technology, innovation and production, Huron East is also a centre of exceptionally successful business, industry and medical research.

This fusion of progressive town centres, rolling farmland, wildlife conservation areas, recreation and entertainment means Huron East has something for everyone.

The towns and villages of Huron East are unique in their histories, facilities and celebrations, but all reflect the pride in community, attention to taking care of business and solid work ethic of their founding families. Take a walk through our website.

Explore everything that is Huron East. Discover the space to grow.

Professional & Community suites now available for rent >>> FIND OUT MORE



facebook Search for people, places and things

You are posting, commenting, and liking as Brussels Downtown Revitalization Group — Change to Heather Simpson

Tammy King and Margaret Dianne Harris commented on Brussels Downtown Revitalization Group's photo.
on Tuesday

New Likes See All Insights See All Invite Friends See All

Joan C 11 hours ago
Jason Oud about 2 weeks ago
Frédéric Solvel about 2 weeks ago
Yvonne Martin about 2 weeks ago

Xiao Zhang Invite
Mark Ferguson Invite
Dan Levy Invite
Qiuqi Song Invite

Brussels Downtown Revitalization Group
99 likes

Community Organization
Our group is working towards a downtown streetscape plan for the Village of Brussels as part of our Advanced Planning course at the University of Guelph.

About Photos Likes

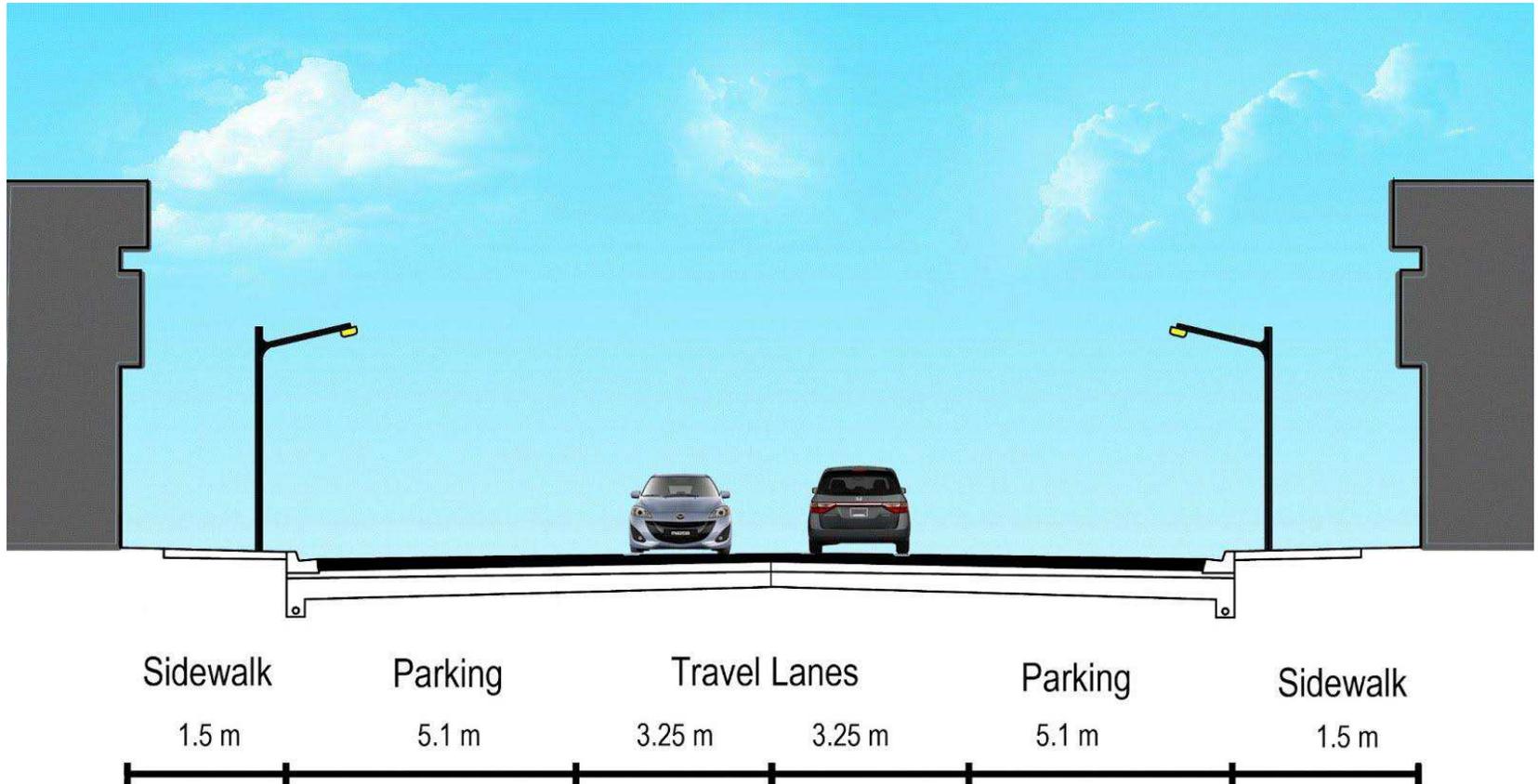
1 Chat (Off)

Context and Existing Conditions



Existing Cross Section

The existing streetscape of downtown Brussels is currently rather basic. The high street lights give the area a highway feel. Currently the main road is a regularly used trucking corridor. The wide travel lanes and parking give the village a rather unstructured downtown. Small sidewalks and unnoticeable crosswalks, do not provide pedestrians with a strong reassurance for their safety. Although trees in planter boxes are present in the summertime, greenery and colour is lacking during the majority of the year.



Policy and Planning Framework

The Municipal Council adopted the Huron County East Official Plan in 2003, under Section 17 of the Planning Act. The Policies and Actions stated in the Official Plan are intended to operate within those already established in the Huron County Official Plan and conform with the Provincial Policy Statement (Huron East, 2009). The Huron East Official Plan applies to all lands within Huron East including:

- The former Municipalities of the Village of Brussels
- The Town of Seaforth
- The Townships of Grey, McKillop and Tuckersmith

The Plan is organized around the following Planning Principles, which are used as the basis for policy throughout:

- Create an agreed upon vision of the future for Huron East
- Conserve a Strong Community Character
- Promote the development of those portions of the urban places based on their level of servicing.
- Encourage non-farm uses to locate in urban designated areas to minimize land use conflicts in the agricultural areas.
- Increase Economic Development in the downtown Business District through an Integrated Development Strategy.



Policy and Planning Framework continued..

- The new Huron East Official Plan identifies Brussels as one of the larger settlement areas in Huron East where intensification will be encouraged (Huron East, 2009).
- This intensification would occur in a manner that would be sensitive to nearby residential neighbourhoods and would be encouraged in concert with significant improvements to the public realm (Huron East, 2009).
- The settlement of Brussels functions as an urban service centre for the surrounding rural agricultural area and provides an important residential, institutional and commercial focus.
- Rich in natural and built heritage, Brussels' location on the Maitland River provides a scenic location for its historical features and homes (Huron East, 2009). Brussels promotes itself as providing the ambiance of rural life – with urban convenience (Huron East, 2009). Therefore, the urban designated area of Brussels is large enough to accommodate its anticipated growth, at this time (Huron East, 2009).
- The Plan is concerned with creating an attractive and liveable downtown core through the visual environment and urban design.

Current Policies and Strategies

An important aspect of community identity and downtown revitalization is heritage buildings. These buildings offer the community a **sense of identity** and glimpse into the past. As noted in the Provincial Policy Statement, *“significant built heritage resources and significant cultural heritage landscapes shall be conserved”* (PPS 2.6.1, 2005). As such, one key to the revitalization of a rural community is the formation of a long term plan for improving the downtown. A plan demonstrates commitment to the community and provides people in the area with a goal to look forward to, as well as a vision to work towards. It can also implement strategies for protecting the historic landmarks, increasing tourism and improving the economic future of the area.





Guiding Design Principles

The streetscape improvement project aims to work towards achieving a unique process that:

- Integrates design, with the people, through consistent public engagement processes.
- The project process is part of a broader movement within Brussels that is working towards bringing together merchants, town property owners, and residents towards a common goal.
- Some of these goals include:
 - Improving storefront improvement projects.
 - Maintaining historically and culturally significant sites such as the Post Office and Carnegie Library, as well as
 - Generating more human activity and traffic within a new vibrant, walkable, sustainable and aesthetically pleasing downtown core.
- The Guiding Design elements for Brussels future downtown streetscape improvement referred to and utilized the Urban Design Guideline developed by the Huron County Planning and Development Department , with the intention to foster a high quality of urban design strategies on a county-wide basis (Huron County, 2012). The Brussels downtown streetscape revitalization project is a conclusive phase in the ongoing effort to revitalize Huron County East's principal heritage conservation areas.

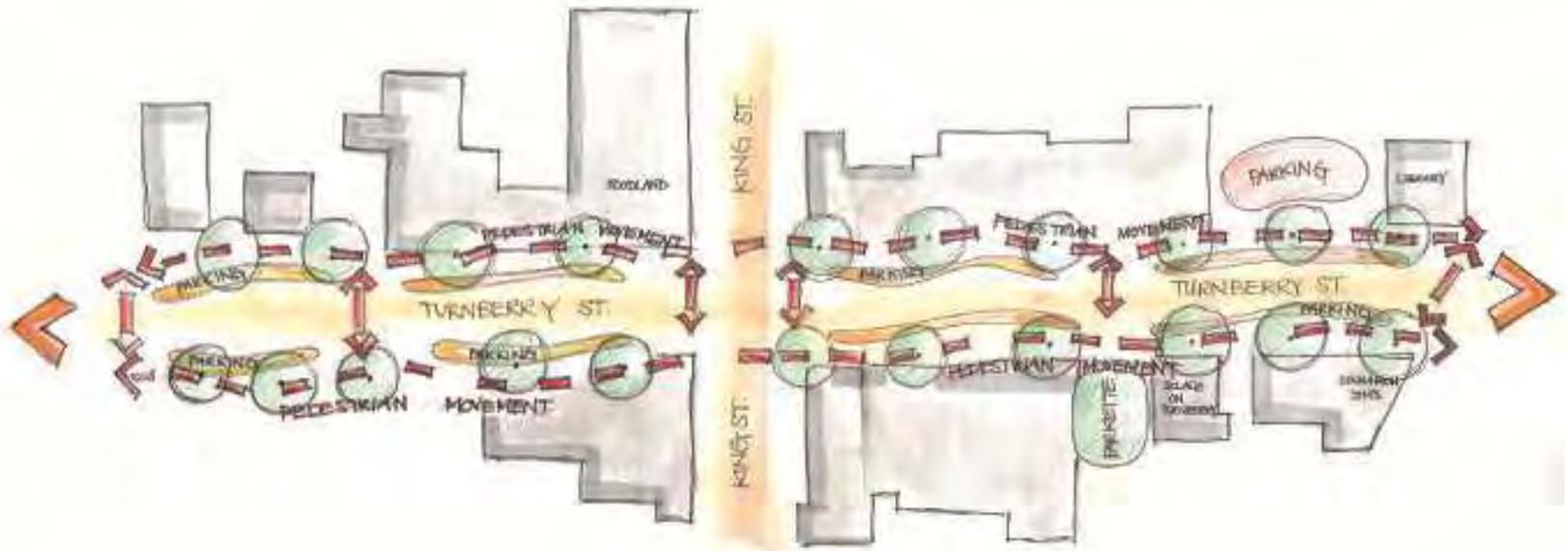


Design Guidelines

The final Streetscape Revitalization Plan does not “design” the vision and strategic recommendations; rather it provides the conceptual basis and intent for their design in the future. To assist in the future design and development of various streetscape elements, the following design guidelines are provided as a reference:

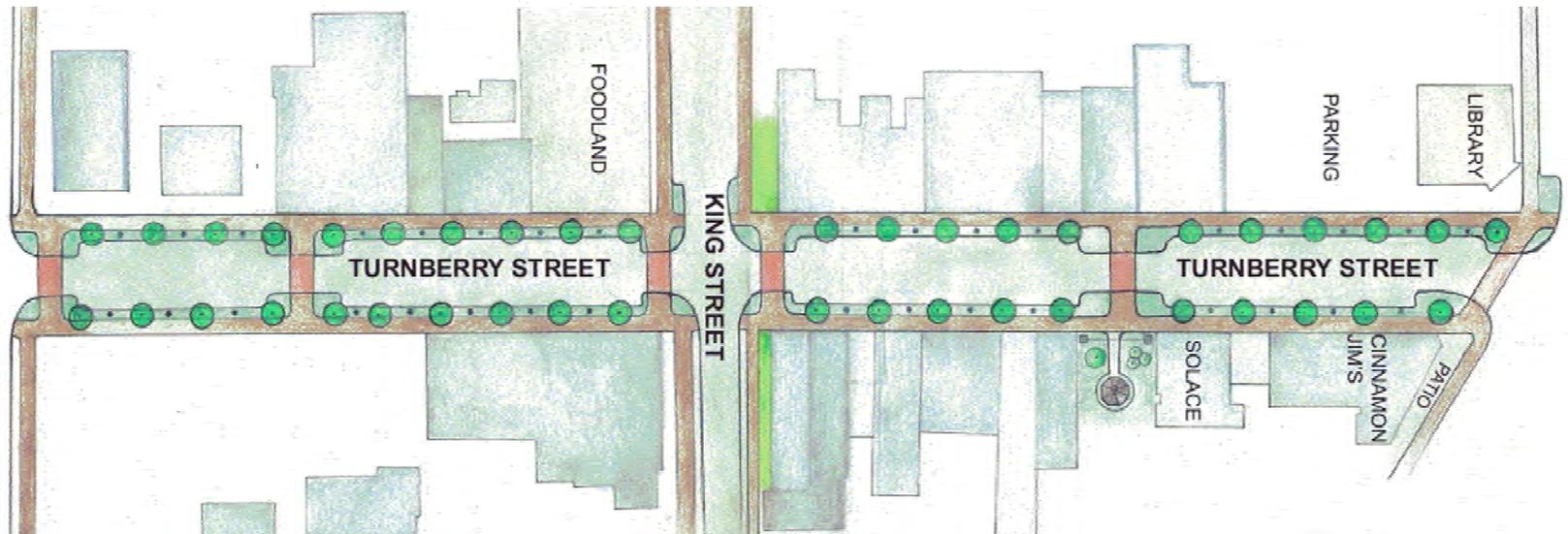
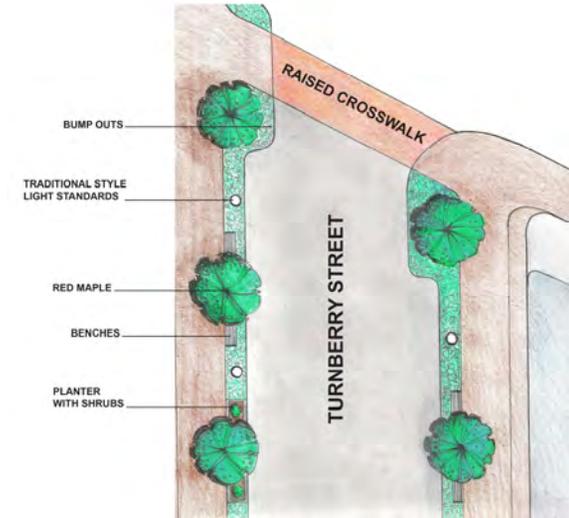
1. Growth in Brussels downtown core should include places for people to live, work, shop and visit, that are compatible with the built form and character of the area.
2. The Village of Brussels should build upon its unique characteristics (Crankshaw, 2009).
3. Brussels downtown core should strengthen its visual and physical connections to link all areas of the downtown neighbourhood (Crankshaw, 2009).
4. Buildings should be positioned to face the main street, and individual buildings and their signs should build upon the quaint and aesthetically pleasing variety of business along the street walkway and should be expressive rather than standardized (Crankshaw, 2009).
5. The Village of Brussels downtown revitalization should encourage a walkable neighbourhood that encourages neighbourhood gathering space, outdoor activities and pedestrian movement.

Conceptual Diagram



This diagram represents the proposed flow of the future revitalized streetscape. The arrows represent pedestrian movement and indicate the importance of walkability for the proposed streetscape. Conceptual graphics illustrate the proposed vegetation and 'greening' of the downtown. Parking areas are also represented in the conceptual diagram and indicated in yellow. The overall goal of this diagram is to show a reduction in vehicular traffic, which will increase opportunities for pedestrian movement and walkability.

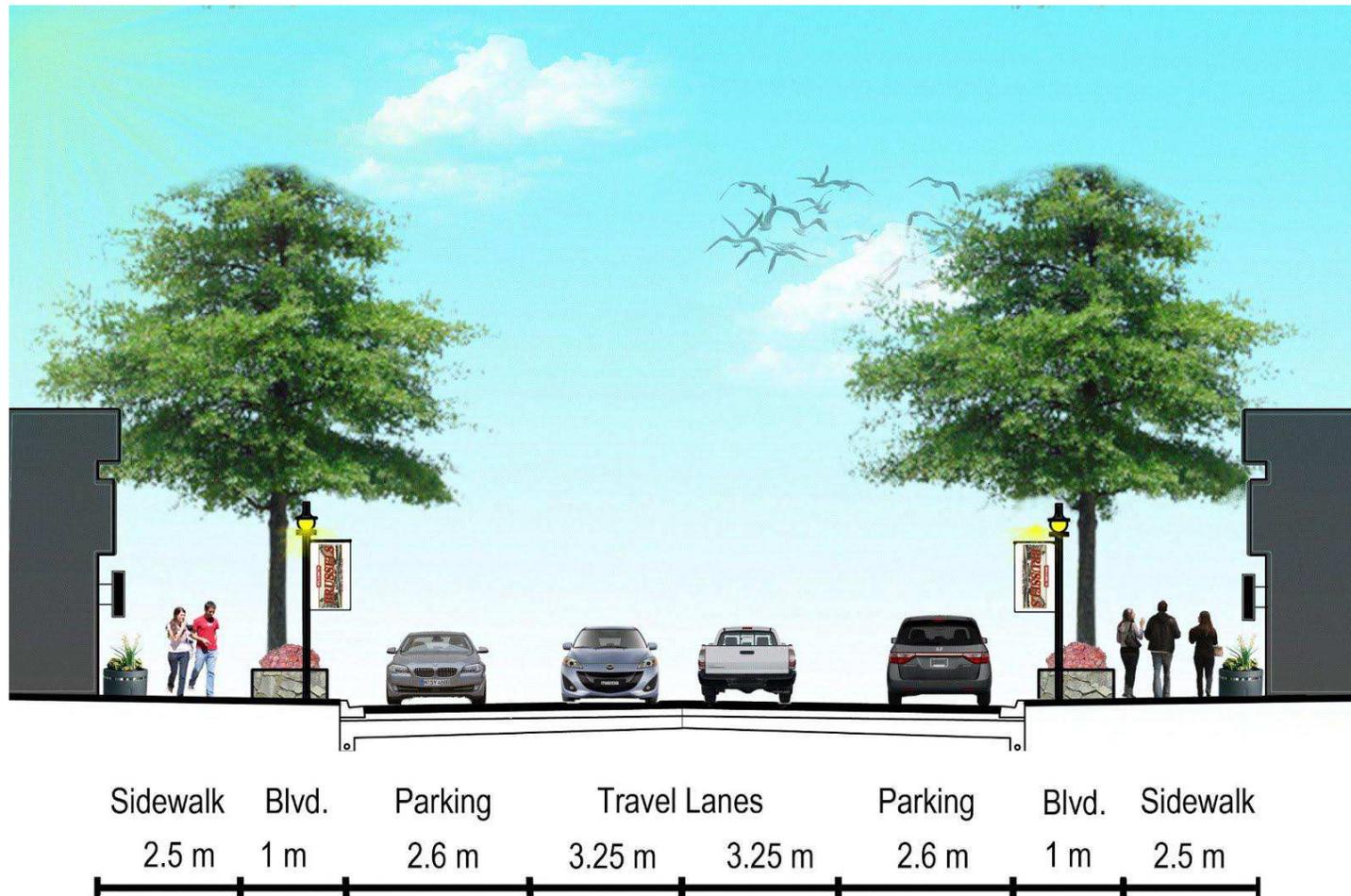
Master Plan Overview



Our Streetscape Master Plan represents the proposed revitalized study area. It shows civic beautification through the addition of green space, increased pedestrian walkability, street furnishings and formal parking.

Proposed Cross Section

Our proposed cross section for the downtown core places an emphasis on pedestrian safety and a small town feel. By shrinking the parking areas and increasing the sidewalk widths, pedestrian needs are prioritized. With the addition of permanent trees and vegetation, the area seems to come alive. Street lights with Village banners and hanging baskets on them adds beauty to the space attracting tourist and increasing community pride.



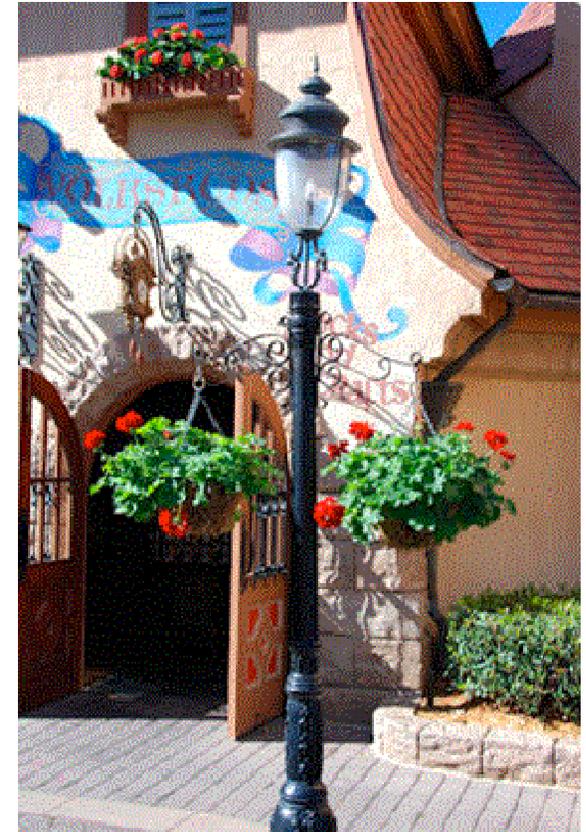
Perspective Drawings



These drawings show a graphic representation of our design ideas. The images illustrate our overall vision for the revitalized streetscape.

Lighting and Light Standards

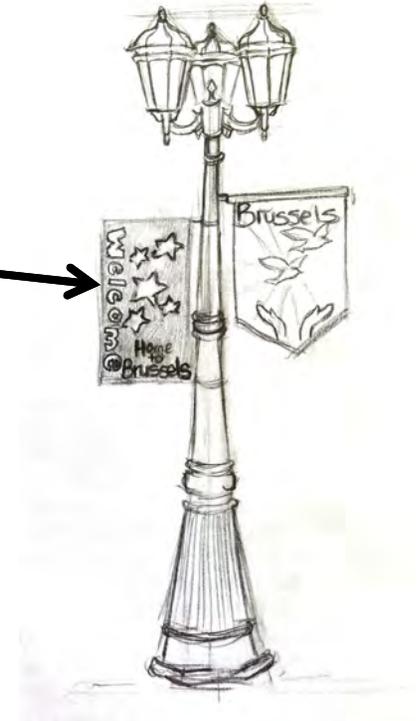
Traditional decorative lighting was chosen to light the downtown area. The design choice was based on the feedback from the facebook group. Spacing for the light standards is aimed at 10 meters between lamp posts. This will create a warm, low lying lumination. Solar powered traditional styled lamps are available and are energy efficient with super-bright LEDs.



Banner Design

Banners add liveliness, colour and artwork to the street and downtown core. They also designate districts and highlight significant areas for tourist to visit. They also aid in promoting events and local history in and around the community.

One suggestion is to use seasonal banners to accent the changing season and add colour to the downtown core.



Crosswalks Markings

Crosswalk markings provide guidance for pedestrians who are crossing roadways. Raised crosswalks increase pedestrian safety, encourage motorists to yield and slow down traffic travelling through the area. They also increase the likelihood that motorists will see pedestrians sooner than they would otherwise. Raised crosswalks bring the roadway up to the level of the sidewalk at the crosswalk. They improve the visibility of the pedestrian, and by acting as a speed hump they can be effective at reducing vehicle speeds.



Sidewalk Material

Our group has suggested sandstone pavers for the design. Sandstone is a dense and cohesive stone known for its remarkable durability. It is very appealing visually and has a generally well accepted earthy look to it. Sandstone has the texture of hardened sand and its coarse surface can remind viewers of the natural rock formation in the outback. In comparison cement based building materials are not as durability, and cannot be expected to last nearly as long a true natural stone.

Sandstone has very little maintenance. All you simply need to give your sandstone pavers is a quick rinse here and there to get rid of any fallen leaves that can end up staining the pavers.



Pedestrian Safety



The implementation of bump-outs at crosswalks can do a number of things to increase pedestrian safety in the downtown core.

- They can decrease the crossing distance from curb to curb.
- Pedestrians stand on a raised surface where they are more visible to drivers.
- It is really clear that a pedestrian standing on a bump-out is crossing the street, not just hanging out.
- Cars are physically prevented from blocking the crosswalk.
- Traffic responds by slowing down at crossings.



Vegetation Colour Schemes

Vegetation suggestions for the Village range from red to yellow colour schemes. These colours are primary eye catching colours that jump out at people passing by.

A yellow color scheme can bring happiness, it's bright, airy and playful. It can also create warmth and can be a great contrasting color for darker colours like blacks, browns and greys. Yellow makes a great highlight color for showing off important elements of design.



A red colour scheme is bold, fiery and grabs your attention. Red is also associated with energy and so red can also be effective in moving the users eye to impact colour schemes and designs. Red is a really powerful marketing color that can be used to grab the user's attention.



Entrance Feature to The Parkette



One aspect of the downtown core that we looked at was the parkette beside the Solace Spa. We are suggesting an archway to mend the gap between the two buildings. This will enhance the structural definition of the streetscape and enhance the two storey image to the downtown core. A welcome sign could entice visitors to the community of Brussels.



Sustainable Design Recommendations



- Encourage the planting of native trees and plant species on street boulevards, on hanging lamp-posts, and other areas where appropriate. (This can occur by collaborating with local horticultural groups or businesses who specialize in indigenous species.)
- Reduce parking requirements and encourage the development of sustainable transportation methods such as bike lanes/ racks, widened sidewalks and walking trails as well as other leisure type activities in the downtown core.
- Encourage permeable paving by using a range of techniques and materials in order to maintain sustainable design principles.
- Consider creating a Heritage Program which will work towards conserving and enhancing heritage resources throughout the area.



Opportunities

In large or small rural towns, such as Brussels, there are opportunities for:

- Government funding.
- Local partnerships (maximizing resources).
- Preserving historic buildings and character.
- Increased economic development, higher revenue potential for businesses.
- Marketing and promotion of tourism, drawing people in from other cities, selling the rural lifestyle (natural beauty, charm, friendliness).
- Improving community pride and sense of identity.
- Improving existing or previous infrastructure and services.
- Fixing identified problems or issues (introducing missing amenities).
- Increasing residential diversity and overall density.
- Reviving the heritage preservation aspect of the built environment.

Many of these opportunities revolve around the preservation of historic buildings and sites, which increase funding, economic development potential as well as promoting a sense of identity and community pride. All of these opportunities apply to both large and small rural communities, but they differ under specific circumstances. For example, in Brussels it is harder to find funding and partnerships because of the size of the Village. However, Brussels has one key factor on there side, a huge volunteer and community involvement base. Brussels has a highly productive agricultural sector, a relatively diversified industrial base, an attractive quality of life and a vibrant volunteer service community. (Hawley, 2013) In this case marketing and advertising of what the area has to offer can be done through community programs, activities and events.(i.e. Western BBQ and Brussels Homecoming). Additionally, high amounts of marketing may not be as financially viable for smaller towns, where larger ones may have a department dedicated solely to marketing (UNC, n.d.).

Key Future Recommendations

- Increase the number of people living Downtown, by encouraging additional residential development.
- **Create a unique niche for the downtown by advertising the area as a centre for arts and cultural activities. i.e.. Ontario's Largest Outdoor Art Show (Hawley, 2013)**
- Increase the number of people working in downtown, by increasing the base of the downtown core and promoting economic development.
- Aid in infrastructure improvements and pedestrian safety to incentivize downtown activities.
- Decrease the speed limit through the downtown core to 50km/hr to slow down traffic and movement in the downtown core.
- **Add additional bike lanes where possible to increase the traffic flow and active transportation gradually as the Village grows in scale.**
- Build/design new signage to brighten the downtown core and aid tourists visiting to the area.
- Increase wayfinding in the area to make it easier for visitors to find their way around the Village.
- Move services such as overhead wires to the back of building to clean up and simplify the downtown street view.
- Empty lots (i.e. north of the library) in the downtown could be used for additional parking or event parking.
- Increase in community events in the downtown core to get people out and using the space.
- Continue to beautify the downtown storefronts with artwork and murals to retain local history and build community pride.
- **Green roofs are a sustainable feature that could be added to buildings in the future, this would help increase rainfall infiltration and mitigate issues with stormwater management.**





Rural Economic Development and Funding

- The Green Municipal Fund offers grants and loans to develop feasibility studies, field tests and projects related to brownfields, energy, transportation, waste and water. These programs can complement downtown revitalization projects (FCM, 2013).
- The Rural Economic Development Data & Intelligence Website is an online tool that for the purposes of a downtown revitalization project could be a useful supportive tool for the project implementation and tracking phase (OMAFRA, 2013).
- OMAFRA also supports a comprehensive, integrated "four point approach" to Downtown Revitalization programs and offers in-depth free training sessions covering (OMAFRA, 2012):
 - Economic development
 - Leadership and management
 - Marketing and promotion
 - Physical improvement
- The Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority Loan Program provides access to capital if it's a problem for municipalities that are trying to implement downtown revitalization and other infrastructure plans (Infrastructure Ontario, 2013).



Conclusion

"The first principle to grasp is that solving economic problems is not a short-range project" (Miller, 1997)

In a small town such as Brussels, possibly the most important opportunity is networking. Through connecting with locals such as concerned citizens, business owners, high school students, other communities and other professionals, the limited resources in small towns can expand. Most small communities are willing to share in an equally beneficial relationship and many planners and economic development officers for small rural towns will also help each other largely because it would be impossible to do all of the work on their own (Hawley, 2013).

Additionally the uniqueness of rural downtown's, historic sites/buildings and natural beauty, can be a great way to market downtowns that are revitalizing to achieve funding. The accessibility of a town from larger urban cities and ports can also be an opportunity for drawing in tourism. Additionally marketing and advertising incentives can do a lot for the economic development of small rural towns like Brussels. Some overall strategies for the effective revitalization of the Village of Brussels should be to, build on strong public/private partnerships, maintain an overall 'vision' for the downtown, become multifunctional, preserve/build in heritage, become pedestrian friendly, and maintain a streetscape with a unified image (Ofori-Amoah, 2007).

To conclude, it is evident that revitalizing downtown areas such as the Village of Brussels requires significant thought, particularly with the difficult task of preserving pride and heritage in the built environment. This analysis presented some challenges that exist as well as opportunities for Villages such as Brussels to thrive. Perhaps the most important reflection, is to remember to patiently and thoughtfully move through the revitalization process. Taking time to consider one planning issue at a time. After all, these decisions if successful are ones that will ideally be in place for a long period of time. Although it can be challenging to match the new with the old, protecting the past can be an effective way of saving for the future. Planning departments should not feel rushed to grant approvals and should strategically place one brick on another, to get the job done.



Special Thanks To:

The University of Guelph

Professor Dr. Wayne Caldwell

Doctoral Student Paul Kraehling MCIP RPP

The Municipality of Huron East

Jan Hawley

Economic Development Officer at Municipality of Huron East

Sandra Weber

Huron County Senior Planner

The Community of the Village of Brussels

'Partial Funding Assistance' provided by

"Knowledge Translation and Transfer" (KTT) program of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF) and Ministry of Rural Affairs (MRA)

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