



# COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Municipality of Huron East

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December 2023



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## **Schedules**

- A. Municipality of Huron East Community Improvement Project Area
- B. Brussels Community Improvement Project Area
- C. Seaforth Community Improvement Project Area
- D. Vanastra Community Improvement Project Area



## **1.0 Introduction**

The Municipality of Huron East was incorporated in 2001, following the amalgamation of the former Townships of Grey, McKillop and Tuckersmith, along with the Town of Seaforth and the Village of Brussels. The Municipality's population is distributed among the robust rural landscape and the community's primary development nodes of Seaforth, Brussels, Vanastra as well as the smaller settlement areas of St. Columban, Brucefield, Cranbrook, Walton and Ethel. The Municipality is home to the vibrant, historic downtowns of Seaforth and Brussels, which are comprised of numerous businesses offering a variety of products and services. Huron East also boasts a strong agriculture-based economy and takes pride in supporting its farmers. The industrial sector is an important presence within the community, with three established industrial parks in each of the three primary development nodes.

This Community Improvement Plan (CIP) provides a framework to encourage and support the maintenance and rehabilitation of buildings and properties in Huron East. This CIP draws on the background work of the previous CIPs developed for communities within Huron East as well as various documents and economic development reports relating to community revitalization.

### **1.1. Purpose of a Community Improvement Plan**

Community Improvement Plans are widely used by municipalities across Ontario to focus and initiate change and development in areas of need. A Community Improvement Plan (CIP) aims to leverage private investment to promote revitalization, redevelopment, and enhancement by providing financial incentives to projects within defined community improvement project areas. These areas can be defined as a municipality or an area(s) within a municipality.

This Community Improvement Plan (CIP) provides key revitalization and improvement strategies for the Municipality of Huron East to stimulate and support growth in the commercial downtown areas, local industries, value-added agricultural facilities, tourism businesses, and commercial businesses across the municipality. It is also intended to support the development of residential units. The Plan defines revitalization goals and objectives for the Municipality based on relevant studies and plans and establishes Financial Incentive Programs to meet these goals and objectives. This Plan takes a long-term approach to the revitalization of Huron East and not all programs may be implemented in a given year. It is anticipated that small, incremental improvements will collectively add up to more significant and visible changes over time.

### **1.2. Legislative Authority**

#### **1.2.1. Planning Act**

Ontario's Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, contains direction for the creation and delivery of CIPs. Section 28 of the Ontario Planning Act allows municipalities, where there are provisions in its Official Plan relating to community improvement, to designate by By-law a "Community Improvement Project Area" and prepare a "Community Improvement Plan".

Section 28(1) of the Planning Act defines community improvement as "the planning or replanning, design or redesign, re-subdivision, clearance, development or redevelopment, construction, reconstruction and rehabilitation, improvement of energy efficiency, or any of them, of a community improvement project area, and the provision of such residential, commercial, industrial, public, recreational, institutional, religious, charitable or other uses, buildings, structures, works, improvements or facilities, or spaces therefore, as may be appropriate or necessary".

Section 28 of the Planning Act establishes and defines the term "community improvement project area" as "a municipality or an area within a municipality, the community improvement of which in the opinion of the council is desirable because of age, dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement, unsuitability of buildings or for any other environmental, social or community economic development reason" (S. 28(1)). Section 28(2) states that the Municipality may, by by-law, designate all or part of the Municipality as a community improvement project area.

Once a community improvement project area has been designated, a community improvement plan can be prepared for that area. A Municipality may use a community improvement plan to:

- acquire, hold, clear, grade or otherwise prepare land;
- construct, repair, rehabilitate or improve buildings on land acquired or held by the municipality;
- sell, lease or dispose of any land and buildings acquired or held by the municipality; and/or
- make grants or loans to owners and tenants of land and buildings within the community improvement project area to help them pay for the cost of rehabilitating their lands or building.

### **1.2.2. Provincial Policy Statement (2020)**

CIPs help to achieve the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) objectives of healthy communities, a strong economy, and a clean and safe environment. Community improvement is supported through PPS policies for:

- i. Building strong, healthy communities;
- ii. Providing publicly accessible built and natural settings for recreation;
- iii. Promoting efficient development and a mix of land uses;
- iv. Improving accessibility;

- v. Ensuring that necessary infrastructure and public service facilities are available;
- vi. Promoting regeneration, including the redevelopment of brownfield sites;
- vii. Providing opportunities for economic activities in prime agricultural areas;
- viii. Conserving heritage resources;
- ix. Supporting green design; and,
- x. Encouraging residential intensification.

### **1.2.3. County of Huron Official Plan**

The County Official Plan provides guidance to local municipalities for the development of local official plans. The Community Services section of the Plan (Section 3) recognizes the importance of community services in Huron County and their contribution to a healthy rural community.

As stated in Community Policies and Actions #15:

Local Municipalities are encouraged to develop and/or revise existing Community Improvement Plans to support investment in projects to benefit the community such as downtown revitalization, accessibility and affordable housing.

### **1.2.4. Huron East Official Plan**

The Huron East Official Plan provides policies to guide land use decisions throughout the Municipality. The Huron East CIP must conform to the policies of the Official Plan. The relevant policies related to the preparation of a CIP are discussed below.

#### **a) Goals and Objectives**

The Huron East Official plan provides a framework where specific goals and objectives of community improvement are outlined. The following policies below outline community improvement goals and objectives found within the Huron East Official Plan.

Goals (Section 9.6.2):

1. To encourage, support and aid in the co-ordination of private efforts to rehabilitate and/or redevelop property, which will have a positive impact on the well-being of the community, such as downtown revitalization, intensification, heritage preservation, affordable housing, high quality urban design and brownfield requirements;
2. To improve the physical appearance and environmental condition of the community;
3. To foster community pride;
4. To attract business investment and new residents to the Municipality of Huron East;
5. To involve the public in identifying areas needing of community improvement, what deficiencies exist and the improvement and rehabilitation priorities; and
6. To focus on the development and redevelopment of downtown cores.

#### **b) Project Area Selection Criteria**

The Official Plan also provides guidance on the selection of community improvement project area by outlining specific criteria for project area selection. Below is a policy found in the Official Plan.

#### Project Area Selection Criteria (Section 9.6.3.2):

In determining the location of a Community Improvement Project Area and preparation of a Community Improvement Plan, one or more of the following conditions shall exist:

- i. Buildings (including façades), structures, and / or properties which are of heritage or architectural significance in need of preservation, restoration, repair, rehabilitation or redevelopment;
- ii. Built or natural heritage resources in need of preservation or renewal;
- iii. Areas where elements of the natural heritage or parks system present opportunities for municipal improvements that would encourage redevelopment and improved recreational facilities for the community;
- iv. Non-conforming or incompatible land uses or activities;
- v. Deficiencies in physical infrastructure or community facilities and services;
- vi. Lack of public and private parking facilities;
- vii. Areas susceptible to flooding and requiring protection;
- viii. An inadequate mix of housing types;
- ix. Known or perceived environmental contamination (i.e. brownfields);
- x. Poor visual quality, including streetscape and design;
- xi. High industrial or commercial vacancy rates;
- xii. Any other relevant social, economic, or environmental reason; and/or
- xiii. Demonstrated support by residents and taxpayers of the area.

A map showing the Community Improvement Project Area (Municipal boundary) is shown in Appendix A. Maps showing the commercial, industrial and future development project focus areas can be found in Appendices B, C, and D.

## **2.0 Background Information**

A CIP for Downtown Brussels was adopted in 2017. A CIP was also developed for Downtown Seaforth in 2019; however, it was not adopted by Huron East Council. This CIP would seek to repeal the existing Brussels CIP and replace it with a broader, more comprehensive CIP that takes various historic and background reports into account.

### **2.1. Brussels Community Improvement Plan**

A Community Improvement Plan for Downtown Brussels was adopted in 2017, which included a commercial façade improvement grant program focused on the enhancement and protection of the built environment in the commercial core area. This has been a useful tool in maintaining and promoting the vibrancy of the downtown core of Brussels; however, it is limited in geographic area and is focused primarily on exterior façade improvement. This CIP would apply to the broader area of Huron East with focus

areas in the downtown areas of Brussels, Vanastra and Seaforth. Brussels CIP included eligibility requirements and façade renderings, which will be incorporated into the new Façade Improvement Program Guidelines in the Huron East CIP.

The Brussels Community Improvement Background Report included a downtown SWOT report. This report is summarized below.

#### Strengths

- Maitland River
- Distinctive historic architecture
- Downtown parkette

#### Weaknesses

- Several buildings lack accessible entries
- Many buildings are not maintained to the same standard as others
- Inconsistent signage
- Lack of streetscape furniture
- Vacant commercial buildings
- Original architectural detailing altered on some buildings

#### Opportunities

- Available commercial space
- Wide sidewalks can accommodate streetscape improvements
- Large brick walls great for murals
- Improvements to accessibility is possible
- Opportunity to restore original architectural character of buildings
- Streetscape through rehabilitation, cleaning and maintenance

#### Threats

- Derelict, perhaps unsafe buildings
- Poorly-maintained building facades that are visually unappealing and may discourage shoppers
- Residential uses migrating into the frontage of commercial land uses

Based on the background research done for the Brussels Community Improvement, it was concluded that Brussels' critical needs are: improvement of the visual state of buildings; support for the creation of a barrier-free pedestrian environment; and improvement of pedestrian safety and public realm aesthetics. These needs are still relevant and there are programs included in this new Plan to address all of the critical needs identified when the Brussels CIP was developed.



## **2.2. Seaforth Community Improvement Plan**

The Seaforth CIP was developed in 2019 with the intention of addressing the needs of the Seaforth Heritage Conservation District and encouraging property owners to enhance and maintain the heritage features of Seaforth's Main Street. The CIP mentions that the historical and cultural value Seaforth's main street is highly recognized by the 1984 Seaforth Heritage Conservation District Plan, the Huron East Heritage Committee and its Municipal Council; however, there is a lack of clear and stringent guidelines for private property owners on taking the proper steps for restoration on the buildings. Many of the buildings within the Seaforth Main Street incorporate details of Victorian architecture. In some cases though, the building restoration has not been well-maintained over the years.

As mentioned previously, the Seaforth CIP was not adopted by the Huron East Council. The document does, however, highlight the importance of preserving the historic buildings that line the main street and describe how incentive programs can encourage property owners to properly maintain their historic buildings.

## **2.3. Seaforth Heritage Conservation and Revitalization Reports**

Seaforth's historic downtown buildings are a great asset to the community and the importance of preserving Seaforth's heritage is evident in several reports.

The Heritage Conservation District Plan (HCDP) for Main Street Seaforth was enacted in 1984 to ensure the long-term viability, preservation and enhancement of the historic town centre. One of the main objectives of this plan is to guide future development to ensure the intrinsic heritage qualities of the area are preserved and enhanced. The plan reflects the prosperity of Seaforth in the late 19th century. In 2009, a Seaforth Heritage Conservation District Study was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the Seaforth HCDP. The study concluded the Seaforth HCDP is a valued tool by residents that has been effective in retaining and restoring heritage elements and protecting the small-town atmosphere of Seaforth; however some improvements and updates would be beneficial.

In 1986, The Town of Seaforth, in partnership with the BIA, entered into a three year agreement with the Heritage Canada Foundation to initiate and implement a Main Street Canada project. This project took a four point approach: organization, marketing, commercial and economic development, and design. As part of the program, a full-time Main Street Coordinator was hired and provided direction to the newly established Economic Development Committee and the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC). The LACAC made a commitment to provide historic design guidance to property owners downtown. This project also focused on improving communication and marketing efforts, attracting businesses, and improving downtown landscaping. Improving the appearance and image of downtown Seaforth through

increased signage, façade improvements and streetscaping was also the goal of the 1987 Downtown Improvement Strategy for Town of Seaforth.

A Seaforth Streetscape Study was completed in 1988. The goal of the study was to:

Prepare a Master Plan proposal for the redevelopment of the Seaforth Streetscape and Environs based on a theme of recapturing the character, quality and richness of the street at the turn of the century, which encourages the development of these intrinsic characteristics as a vehicle for the rejuvenation of the downtown core as a progressive and viable economic entity.

A number of historic photographs are presented in the study report with explanations of how historic elements can be incorporated into the present day streetscape. Suggestions of street furniture that would complement the 19<sup>th</sup> century downtown are also given. A detailed analysis of the downtown was conducted at the time of study, and it is interesting to note that many of the suggestions provided to improve specific areas of the downtown are still relevant today.

In 2017, the Seaforth Main Street Revitalization Report provided an update to the original Seaforth Streetscape Master Plan. Recommendations for downtown revitalization include:

- Adding landscape features (trees, greenery, planters, etc.);
- Rejuvenating buildings;
- Adding pedestrian amenities (parks, patios, street furniture, etc.);
- Preserving and enhancing historic character;
- Increasing signage;
- Improving lighting;
- Undertaking façade treatments (re-pointing brick, fresh paint, mural, etc.); and
- Enhancing back alley spaces.

A building pathology report was conducted in Seaforth in 2018. The report detailed various components of building facades for many historic Main Street buildings and highlighted areas that need cosmetic or structural repairs or restoration. The purpose of this report was to provide detailed evaluation of the exterior state of various historic buildings in efforts to preserve and restore heritage components of the Main Street. The report is helpful to the Municipality and building owners in assessing repair needs and may provide a basis for prioritizing future building improvements.

Financial-incentive programs included in this Plan address the needs identified in these plans and reports.

## **2.4. Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Studies**

Business Retention & Expansion Studies have been completed for both Vanastra (2013) and Brussels (2011). These reports highlight various priority areas for supporting

the local business community and ensuring sustainable business growth. Community appearance, signage, heritage development, small business support and downtown core revitalization were cited as prominent priority areas. To encourage growth, the need for greater access to government grants was mentioned in the Brussels BR+E Final Report.

## **2.5. Brussels Community Research and Reports**

A business and household survey were completed as part of the Brussels Community Economic Development Strategy in 1991. Forty-five (45) out of fifty (50) people from the Brussels business community responded to the business survey. The majority (95 percent) stated that improvements were needed to the core commercial area. Suggestions to improve the downtown included: store front improvements; cleaning up empty buildings; adding streetscape furniture; and increasing beautification efforts. The overwhelming majority of respondents (97.6 percent) stated that industrial/commercial development was also needed.

For the household survey, three hundred forty (340) out of approximately three hundred ninety-five (395) surveys were returned. Results showed that 93.8 percent of respondents believed that core commercial area improvements were needed and the most popular suggestion on how to do this was through store front improvements. A suggestion was made in the survey to offer incentives to attract industry to vacant lots.

The needs identified in these surveys are still relevant. A Façade Improvement Program was implemented in Brussels in 2017; however, there were no applications received. Verbal reports from the business community suggest that there was no uptake on the grants available because business owners either were not aware of the program or did not feel that the amount of funding available was worth their time and financial investment. Only having one program available also limits the scope of improvements. This will be taken into consideration when program guidelines are developed under this Plan.

The Brussels Streetscape Master Plan (2013) describes the existing Brussels downtown streetscape as very basic and lists the following challenges:

- High street lights give area a highway feel;
- Wide lanes create unstructured downtown;
- Lack of crosswalks; and
- Lack of greenery and colour throughout most of the year.

To address these challenges, the goals of the Master Plan are to make recommendations to:

- Improve storefront improvement projects;
- Maintain historically and culturally significant sites, such as the post office and library; and

- Generate more human activity and traffic within a new vibrant, walkable, sustainable and aesthetically pleasing downtown core.

A conceptual diagram is included in the Plan, which illustrates what Downtown Brussels could look like with improvements to the streetscape. Improvements such as new streetlights, sidewalk treatments, landscaping, enhanced parkette and streetlight decorations. Some improvements have been made to date, such as sidewalk treatments, and adding street furniture and streetlight decorations. A new mural has also been painted on the wall of a building facing the parkette. The poor conditions of some of the downtown buildings and unattractive facades still plague Downtown Brussels. Incentives are needed to encourage property owners to invest in these dilapidated buildings.

## **2.6. Vanastra Community Research and Reports**

Over the years, Vanastra has struggled with its image. As a former top-secret air force base and military installation, Vanastra is a very unique community. Following the closure of the base in 1971, many of the military buildings fell into disrepair. A community survey was completed as part of the Vanastra Community Economic Development Strategy in 1991, and 69% of respondents (63 out of 240 respondents) said Vanastra had a problem with its image. Among the suggestions to improve the community's image were to: "clean-up the place"; develop vacant properties; and tear down unsafe buildings. A negative image and lack of community identity were concerns raised again through the BR+E Study in 2013.

A report entitled "Putting Vanastra on the Map: Community Guidelines and Policy Recommendations" was published in 2013 recommending strategies for revitalization based on the six priority areas identified in the Vanastra BR+E Final Report. Section 4 of the report, outlines the rationale for developing a Community Improvement Plan for Vanastra and recommendations for the types of programs to include. A key issue raised in the BR+E study, was the large number of derelict buildings in the community. The report suggests that financial incentives offered through a CIP, encourages private investment, which aids in the rebuilding of a community. A benefit of a CIP as well, is that you can support mixed-use development. Given the community's history as a military base, there is an existing mix of residential, industrial and commercial uses. The following financial incentive programs were recommended in the "Putting Vanastra on the Map" report:

- i. Façade Improvement Program
- ii. Professional Fees Assistance Program (or Site Design and Study Program)
- iii. Tax Increment Equivalent Grants
- iv. Brownfield Financial Tax Incentive Program
- v. Development Charges Rebate Grant Program
- vi. Heritage Property Tax Relief

The community of Vanastra is not included in the Brussels or Seaforth CIP. Both the Vanastra Community Economic Development Strategy and the Putting Vanastra on the Map justify the need for a CIP that encompasses Vanastra.

## **2.7. Economic Development Strategic Plans**

There are currently two strategic plans in place that guide economic and community development activities in Huron East. Seaforth has an active Business Improvement Area (BIA), which encompasses a large section of downtown Seaforth. Brussels has a business group; however, at the present time, they only coordinate marketing activities. Despite having a large industrial sector, Vanastra does not currently have a business group.

The purpose of the Seaforth BIA is to 1) revitalize and maintain a dynamic local neighbourhood and 2) promote the area as a business or shopping destination. The Seaforth BIA Strategic Plan (2022-2026) provides the following strategic directions and goals relevant to community improvement:

### **1. Physical Enhancements**

- create better directional parking, and information/street signage
- improve downtown's main corner (vacant lot)
- work with heritage committee on guidelines for businesses;
- improve façades
- celebrate our history

### **2. Infrastructure Enhancements and Event Planning**

- create shaded/attractive parkette area at BIA Centre
- improve and maintain back-alleys (posters, murals, colour, greenery, garbage cans, etc.)
- 'Green up' Seaforth downtown
- Emphasize heritage (e.g. install heritage blade building signs using old banner tops from Goderich Street and restore heritage colours to BIA identity)

Huron East's 2022-2027 Economic Development Strategic Plan was developed to produce actionable items that focus on both the long and short term needs for local development conducive to supporting its current businesses as well as attracting new and diverse businesses. Part of the updated plan involved thorough staff and stakeholder consultation as well as data analysis that helped formulate three key strategic goals for Huron East:

- I. Better understand what economic development entails and collectively work towards Huron East being investment ready;

- II. Effectively build positive relationships through productive communication and engaged collaboration with the business community and various levels of government;
- III. Build a Huron East business retention program that supports local business.

Actions to address these goals, which relate to community development are:

- Develop and implement a Huron East Community Improvement Plan that encompasses all of Huron East and includes all relevant legislatively permitted community improvement planning tools relevant to both the urban and rural areas. The following planning tools are examples of financial incentive programs that contribute toward improving one or more of the following areas:
  - Agriculture: to increase agricultural use and increased agri-tourism (i.e., tax increment financing, building and land improvement, etc.)
  - Industrial/employment: to provide opportunities for land development, redevelopment of brownfields, etc. (i.e., tax increment financing, vacant lands tax assistance, building permit and planning application fee, etc.)
  - Downtown improvement: revitalization (façade improvements; signage and property improvements, etc.)
- Consider opportunities to support local businesses by developing, promoting or encouraging increases in the local labour force through strategies such as affordable housing, government programs, attraction and retention of residents, etc.
- Strengthening downtown commercial cores (for example, in Brussels, work with the main street building owners to revert the residential spaces on the ground floor to commercial space to provide space to attract retail and service)
- Increasing tourism (for example, implementing the Huron County gateway and wayfinding signage program in Huron East)
- Strengthening the Agriculture Sector

Direction for support to local businesses and strengthening the economic base is also seen from the County level. The Huron County 2022-2025 Economic Development Strategic Plan identifies inclusion of everyone in the rural economy, collaboration with partners such as Municipalities, effective communication and sustaining a thriving business community as its primary strategic goals. From these goals, the plan outlines various objectives for success. Developing a municipal wide CIP serves to address the goal of inclusion by enabling diverse community members and businesses to fully participate in the community and access funding opportunities. The CIP also encourages the sustainability of the local economy through funding opportunities that seek to support businesses to grow and start and invest in a thriving local economy.

## **2.8. Other Relevant Studies and Plans**



There are two other studies and plans that have been undertaken in Huron East, which relate to community improvement and the importance of encouraging private sector investment and revitalization efforts.

Facilitating an inclusive and accessible built environment for all community members has been an emerging priority in recent years. In a 2004 Huron East Community Survey (199 respondents), 90% of residents supported an effort for more retail/commercial/industrial development in Huron East. “Offering tax incentives to start-ups” was mentioned as a way to do that. When asked what the most important things are that would improve the downtown areas of Seaforth and Brussels, one hundred five (105) respondents said, “more shops providing variety”; ninety five (95) said, “dress up empty store fronts; and seventy six (76) said, “clean up messy properties”.

In 2015, the Municipality initiated an Age-Friendly Action Plan that highlighted the community’s strengths and weaknesses in various domains related to accessibility and building barrier free communities. The report concluded several recommendations that could be implemented to improve the accessibility and age-friendly design throughout the community. Recommendations that support the need for a more comprehensive CIP include:

- Improving outdoor spaces and public buildings by remove barriers and improving walkability to create a more pedestrian and age friendly environment; and
- Addressing housing needs by: improving access and availability of affordable housing; placing emphasis on the importance of secondary suites; further developing housing affordability programs and grants; improving options for implementing accessibility modifications for existing homes.

### **3.0 Goals and Objectives**

The goals of this CIP have been developed based on the comprehensive review of plans and reports and input from the public, staff and Council. Program applications will be reviewed against the goals of the CIP. Preference will be given to those projects which meet the goals of the Plan.

This CIP has the following goals:

1. To stimulate private investment through the use of municipal financial incentive programs.
2. To improve the physical appearance and economic health of the downtown commercial areas.
3. To encourage the maintenance and preservation of designated historic buildings and historically significant properties.
4. To promote the development, redevelopment or conversion of vacant or underutilized properties.
5. To support new business start-ups and expansions to existing businesses.

6. To retain and support existing businesses.
7. To encourage value-added agricultural activities and on-farm diversified uses.
8. To increase the supply of attainable housing, multi-unit housing and rental units.
9. To encourage energy conservation and support sustainable initiatives.
10. To create employment opportunities.

Financial incentives (including incremental tax rebates) may be offered to private landowners or commercial/industrial tenants to assist them in improving their buildings and properties. These may change from year to year, at Council's discretion, based on budget priorities and feedback about the CIP programs from municipal staff and stakeholders.

#### **4.0 Community Improvement Project Area**

As recommended in the Huron East Economic Development Strategic Plan (2022-2027), and supported by the background research to the Plan, the Huron East Community Improvement Project Area includes all lands within the municipal boundary. The Project Area is shown in Schedule A of the consolidated Municipality of Huron East Official Plan 2023, and provided in Appendix A of this CIP.

The programs authorized in this CIP may be carried out within the CIP project area. The settlement areas of Brussels and Seaforth each have defined Commercial Focus Areas (delineated in red), Industrial Areas (delineated in purple) and Future Development Areas (delineated in yellow), as shown in Appendix B and C. The settlement area of Vanastra includes a defined Commercial/Industrial Focus Area (delineated in green), shown in Appendix D. These areas may be prioritized for certain programs.

#### **5.0 Community Improvement Programs**

##### **5.1. The Façade Improvement Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The purpose of the Façade Improvement Grant is to cover a portion of the project costs for exterior improvements to the public-facing facades of existing commercial and industrial buildings. Agriculture properties which are open to the visiting public and which represent value added agricultural activity (e.g. farm retail outlet) may be eligible.

This grant is intended to encourage commercial, industrial and agricultural property owners and tenants to revitalize, rehabilitate and restore building facades. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a Facade Improvement Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs project costs. This program may be used in conjunction with the Municipality's Heritage Designated Property Tax Reduction and Loan Program.

##### **5.2. Signage Improvement Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The purpose of the Signage Improvement Grant is to cover a portion of the project costs for exterior improvements to the public-facing signage of existing buildings. Agriculture

properties which are open to the visiting public and which represent value added agricultural activity (e.g. farm retail outlet) may be eligible.

This grant is intended to encourage commercial, industrial and agricultural property owners and tenants to install clear and effective storefront signage, which is important in communicating the products and/or services a business offers. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a Signage Improvement Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs project costs.

### **5.3. Property Improvement Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The purpose of the Property Improvement Grant is to cover a portion of the project costs for public-facing exterior improvements to existing buildings. Agriculture properties which are open to the visiting public and which represent value added agricultural activity (e.g. farm retail outlet) may be eligible.

This grant is intended to encourage commercial and industrial property owners and tenants to create an inviting entrance to encourage both vehicular and pedestrian traffic to stop and discover what a business has to offer. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a Property Improvement Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs project costs.

### **5.4. Sidewalk Café and Outdoor Patio Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The Sidewalk Café and Outdoor Patio Grant may be available to eligible applicants to assist with the physical improvement and beautification of seasonal outdoor sidewalk café spaces and permanent outdoor patios. The grant is intended to promote a lively and vibrant streetscape in the downtown cores and support the establishment of restaurant patio space in other areas, where permitted and appropriate. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a Sidewalk Café and Outdoor Patio Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs project costs.

### **5.5. Historic Property Improvement Grant**

The purpose of the Historic Property Improvement Grant is to encourage the conservation of historic buildings and properties in the Municipality designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. This grant provides incentives for owners of historic properties to renovate or refurbish the properties in a manner that is consistent with and complementary to the heritage character. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a Historic Property Improvement Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs project costs.

All proposed improvements must be approved by the Huron East Heritage Committee. The design of improvements should be based on historical documentation and primarily be intended to restore or preserve the property's heritage attributes. Adaptive re-use of

heritage properties is also encouraged to ensure the long-term viability of these historically significant properties. This program may be used in conjunction with the Municipality's Heritage Designated Property Tax Reduction and Loan Program.

#### **5.6. Accessibility Improvement Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

Removing barriers and improving overall accessibility of our communities is of great importance to the Municipality of Huron East. The purpose of the Accessibility Improvement Grant is to cover a portion of the costs of improving the experience and accessibility of properties within Huron East, to remove exterior and interior barriers to the public and comply with provincial accessibility laws and standards, with the aim of helping to make Huron East a community for people of all ages and abilities. Designing for accessibility not only helps people with disabilities, it also improves access for others including seniors, families with young children, delivery drivers, and patrons.

It is intended that any improvements considered under this program will meet or exceed the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the Ontario Building Code. Accessibility projects can include the installation of ramps, elevators, lifts, automatic door openers, or any other improvements that improve accessibility and remove barriers, as approved by the Municipality. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, an Accessibility Improvement Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs project costs.

#### **5.7. Environmental Stewardship and Energy Efficiency Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

Not only does energy efficiency save money and increase the resilience and reliability of the electric grid, it also provides environmental, social, and physical benefits to the health of a community. The purpose of the Environment Stewardship and Energy Efficiency Program is to assist commercial and industrial property owners with improving their energy efficiency and conservation measures. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, an Environmental Stewardship and Energy Efficiency Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs project costs.

This program supports the following projects:

- I. Construction of new green buildings that meet LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification standards;
- II. Retrofit of existing buildings for energy efficiency and resource conservation (i.e. replacement of lighting, doors, windows, insulation, heating, etc. and installation of low-flush toilets, grease trap, etc.); and,
- III. Alternative energy generating sources (i.e. rooftop solar panels).

#### **5.8. Vacant and Underutilized Properties Conversion/Expansion Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The purpose of the Vacant and Underutilized Properties Conversion/Expansion Grant is to encourage the conversion and revitalization of vacant and/or underutilized commercial, industrial, agricultural or institutional properties in Huron East. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a Vacant and Underutilized Properties Conversion/Expansion Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs project costs.

This program may be available to eligible property owners to assist with:

- I. Conversion of an existing vacant upper storey space or ground floor space into a rental dwelling unit(s) provided that the project meets the provisions of the Huron East Zoning By-law;
- II. Conversion of an existing storefront into a permitted and more suitable commercial space (e.g. retail to restaurant use) in accordance with Huron East's Official Plan and Zoning By-law;
- III. Conversion of non-conforming or vacant building space into a new permitted commercial, mixed use or other eligible uses;
- IV. Expansions of existing commercial uses to increase the gross floor area within the footprint of the existing building;
- V. Re-purpose agricultural buildings to support value-added agricultural facilities, or on-farm diversified uses, such as agri-tourism;
- VI. New industrial development;
- VII. New commercial development; and,
- VIII. Remediation of a brownfield site.

#### **5.9. Building Improvement Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The Building Improvement Grant may be available to eligible applicants to assist with improvements to existing buildings that may otherwise be considered cost prohibitive. This incentive targets private sector investment in interior building renovations or building expansions which are intended to improve the viability of older commercial or industrial (employment) buildings. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a Building Improvement Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs project costs.

The Municipality of Huron East recognizes that there are buildings in our settlement areas that are in need of significant repairs in order to bring them up to Building Code and have them available for lease. It is important to have building stock available in our commercial and industrial areas for potential investors. This program is intended to support improvements to private property to meet the current Building Code and to provide for safe and usable eligible uses. The purpose of the Program is to offer incentives to private commercial and industrial property owners that propose significant projects that substantially renovate, restore, improve and update a prominent building or structure and accomplish more than one of the following:

- I. Address structural and life safety issues to create usable and efficient floor space;
- II. Improve property standards or preserve architectural significance; and/or,
- III. Preserve or enhance employment opportunities.

#### **5.10. Major Redevelopment Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The purpose of the Major Redevelopment Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG) is to stimulate investment by effectively deferring part of the increase in property taxation because of building and property redevelopment or rehabilitation, and retrofit works for commercial and/or industrial properties.

This Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG) program provides tax assistance to private land owners in order to encourage private sector investment in properties and buildings. The TIEG program will provide tax assistance equal to all or a portion of the municipal property tax increase (increment) following the completion of a project owned by a private land owner that has resulted in an increase in the assessed property value.

The time period for the TIEG program is subject to Council's discretion up to a maximum of 10 years per project, or until eligible remediation and redevelopment costs have been offset, whichever comes first. It is the intention of the Municipality of Huron East to provide the TIEG program for the following:

- I. Remediation purposes to assist in bringing existing buildings up to current Ontario Building Code standards;
- II. Accessibility enhancements to downtown and commercial businesses for wheelchair accessible entrances and ramps;
- III. Development or redevelopment of a vacant property for commercial, retail, office, industrial or a mix of uses; and
- IV. Adaptive reuse of a property to suit a new commercial, retail, office, industrial or a mix of uses.

#### **5.11. Branding, Design and Marketing Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

To catch the eye of a potential customer and create a positive first impression, businesses need professional, high-quality and attractive designs. Clear messaging is also important and it is through effective branding that a business can tap into people's emotions and make them feel a connection to you.

The Branding, Design and Marketing Program offers grants to business owners for professional design services to help them promote their business and stand out from their competition for one or more of the following:

- I. Logo development
- II. Brand development



- III. Design services for marketing material
- IV. Design services for exterior signage and façade improvements

Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a Branding, Design and Marketing Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs project costs.

#### **5.12. Start-up Space Leasehold Improvement Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The Municipality of Huron East recognizes the importance of supporting business start-ups to drive economic growth, create jobs and foster innovation. The purpose of the Start-up Space Leasehold Improvement Program is to assist new businesses and start-up companies to 'set-up-shop' by providing grants towards permanent leasehold improvements to commercial or mixed use spaces that increase the marketability of the property and commercial rental units. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a Start-up Space Leasehold Improvement Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs project costs.

#### **5.13. Site Design and Study Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The Site Design and Study Grant may be available to eligible applicants for the completion of studies, plans, or designs that will investigate the site-specific potential of an improvement project.

This program is intended to aid with initial background planning and design in support of development or redevelopment projects on eligible properties.

#### **5.14. Planning Application and Building Permit Fee Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The Planning Application and Building Permit Fee Grant may be available to eligible applicants to offset the planning and building fees required by the Municipality. This program is intended to help encourage new development efforts by reducing regulatory costs associated with major improvements to private properties.

The planning and building permit fee rebate program offers rebates on required fees including the Municipality's planning application fees and/or building permit fees, where a building permit is required for a construction project.

Fee reductions apply to the following applications types:

- I. Site Plan Approval;
- II. Minor Variance;
- III. Severance;
- IV. Demolition Permit
- V. Building Permit; and/or
- VI. Sign Permit.

### **5.15. Residential Conversion, Rehabilitation and Intensification Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The Residential Conversion, Rehabilitation and Intensification Grant aims to support existing residential units and increase the number of residential units available in and around the Downtown of the urban centres. This grant provides an opportunity to property owners who wish to convert/rehabilitate/intensify their properties for residential purposes.

The program is intended to focus on the Downtown of the urban centres and mixed-use zone (i.e. commercial/ residential) to promote the conversion of existing vacant buildings for new residential units or to increase the occupancy of existing units. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a Residential Conversion, Rehabilitation and Intensification Grant may be provided for up to 50% of the eligible costs.

### **5.16. Rental Housing Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The purpose of the Rental Housing Grant is to create a wider range of rental housing options in Huron East by increasing the number of residential units available for rent throughout the settlement areas. Residential units which are intended for rent and are structurally sound may be eligible for financial assistance with:

- I. Renovation or improvement of an existing unit related to exterior/functional design
- II. Construction of new residential rental units

Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a Rental Housing Grant may be provided for up to 50% of eligible costs.

### **5.17. Additional Residential Unit Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The Additional Residential Unit Grant is intended to provide financial assistance in support of establishing a new Additional Residential Unit. Through this grant the Municipality will encourage further diversification of the housing base allowing for more attainable options, where appropriate, and providing the increased availability of rental housing accommodation. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, the Additional Residential Unit Grant may be provided to cover up to 50% of eligible project construction costs.

The Additional Residential Unit Program provides a one-time grant to help offset project costs for the construction of an:

- I. interior accessory apartment dwelling unit within an existing principal dwelling unit or as an addition thereto; or,
- II. exterior accessory apartment dwelling unit within an existing or new detached accessory structure.

This grant is intended to support a greater mix and size of housing types in Huron East, and the increased availability of rental housing accommodation.

#### **5.18. Publicly Accessible Private Spaces and Public Art Grant (Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The Publicly Accessible Private Spaces and Public Art Grant may be available to eligible applicants to assist with the permanent installation of Publicly Accessible Private Spaces and outdoor artworks on private property.

The grant is intended to promote a vibrant streetscape in the settlement areas of Huron East and encourage the creation of spaces that enhance the pedestrian experience, and complement the public network of parks, trails, community gardens and public art. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, the Publicly Accessible Private Spaces and Public Art Grant may be provided to cover up to 50% of eligible project construction costs.

#### **5.19. Streetscape Beautification, Signage and Landscaping Improvement (Municipal-Driven and Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The Municipality of Huron East recognizes the importance of creating functional and vibrant spaces in our communities, which foster local pride and create a welcoming environment for visitors. The Municipality partners with community groups on streetscape beautification efforts, including the installation of street furniture (waste receptacles, benches, planters, pole decorations, etc.), and the maintenance of flower beds.

The purpose of this program is to support streetscape beautification efforts and other community improvements, such as sidewalk and lane treatments, parking and signage, which strengthen community identity. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, funding may be available to community organizations or private individuals through the Streetscape Beautification, Signage and Landscaping Improvement Program to encourage improvements on publically owned property.

#### **5.20. Public Space, Parks and Recreation Works (Municipal-Driven and Financial Incentive-Based Program)**

The Municipality of Huron East recognizes the importance of enhancing and preserving our public spaces, parks and recreational areas as they generate economic, environmental and social benefits for our communities. The Municipality partners with community groups to improve our public spaces, parks and recreational areas.

The purpose of this program is to support enhancements to our public spaces, parks and recreational areas that benefit the community. Where all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, funding may be available to community organizations or private individuals

through the Public Space, Parks and Recreation Works Program to encourage improvements on publically owned property.

## **6.0 Implementation**

By offering financial incentive-based programs, we anticipate invoking positive change to our rural communities through a public-private collaborative effort. The municipal-driven and financial incentive-based programs described in Section 5.0 of this Plan are funded by the Municipality of Huron East with current and/or potential funding from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Regional Tourism Organization 4, County of Huron, or similar. The programs are funded by municipal budget allocations, reviewed annually on an as-required basis.

The CIP shall remain in effect for ten (10) years following its adoption by Council. Programs and incentives offered under the CIP may vary from year to year at the discretion of Council, based on recommendations from Municipal staff. The programs in this CIP will be administered through Huron East Council, through an established committee overseen by the Economic Development Officer. Program guidelines affirming eligibility requirements and application forms will be established once funding is allocated to a Program.

The financial incentive-based programs will be administered on a first come, first served basis to the limit of the available funding in accordance with any administrative rules governing this and other grant or loan programs. The CIP will be reviewed by the Economic Development Officer every six (6) months to one (1) year.

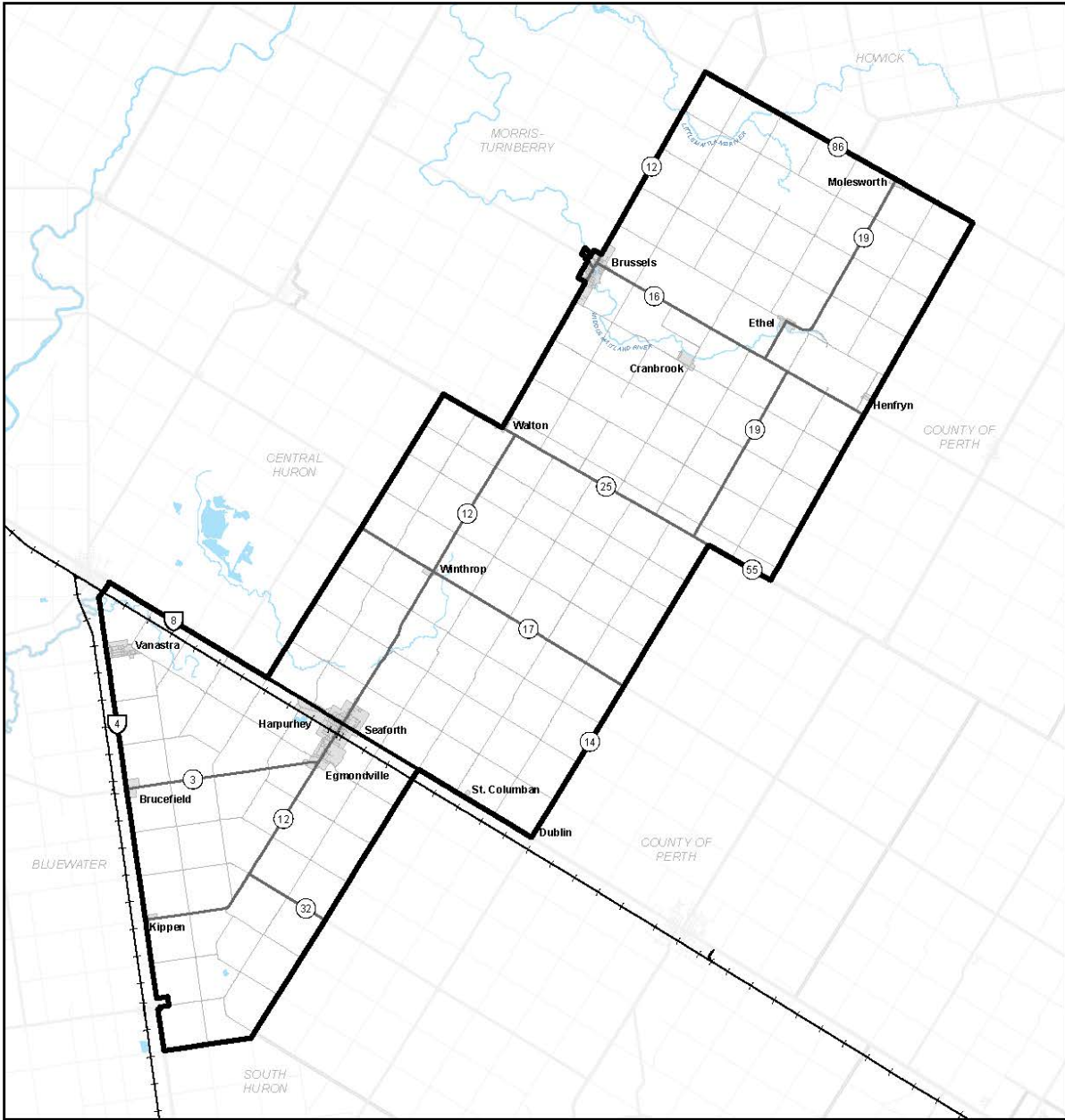
## **7.0 Conclusion**

This CIP is a Municipal-wide planning document that is focused on improving Huron East's local economic base. Through implementation of this Plan, the Municipality of Huron East is demonstrating that it is highly committed to encouraging local investment, revitalization and beautification, and working with property owners and tenants to support economic development.

Property owners and tenants who are interested in any of the programs identified in this CIP or who require additional information should contact the Municipality of Huron East's Economic Development Officer for more information.

Schedule A

Municipality of Huron East  
Community Improvement Project Area

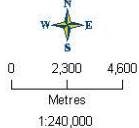


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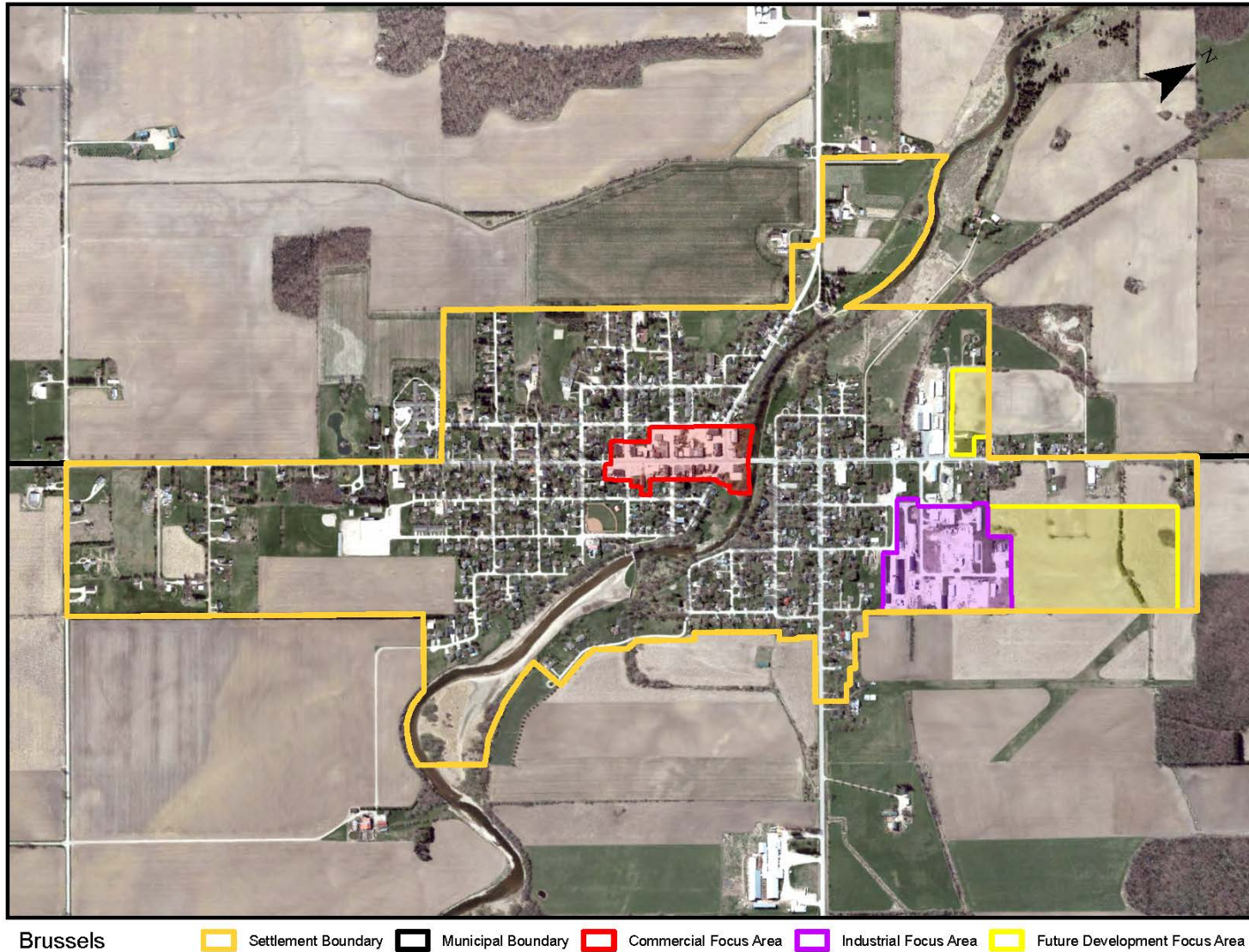
Last Modified 2023-12-12



- Provincial Highway
- County Road
- Municipal Road
- Railroad
- Waterbody
- Municipal Boundary
- Community Improvement Project Area

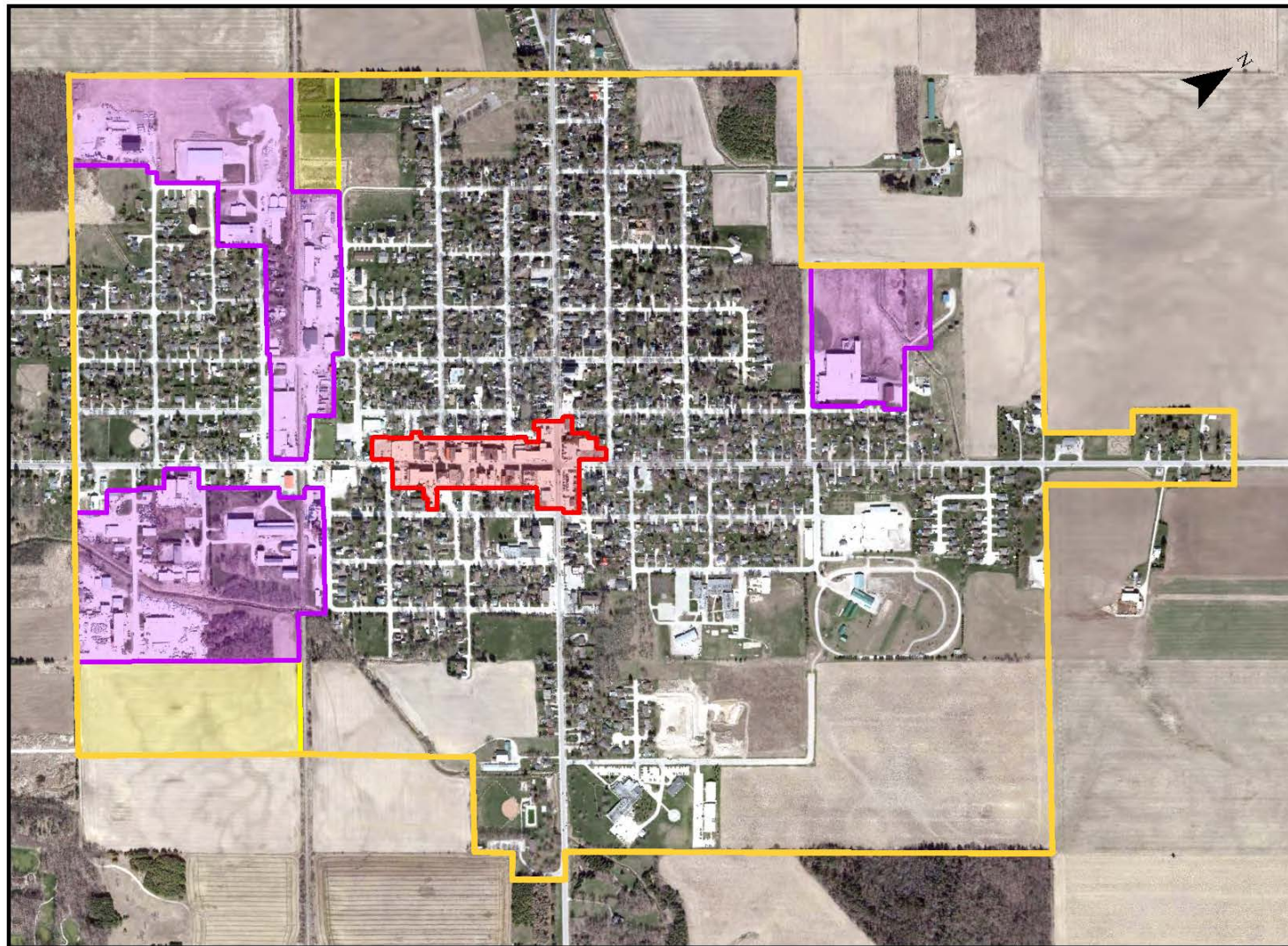


## Schedule B





## Schedule C

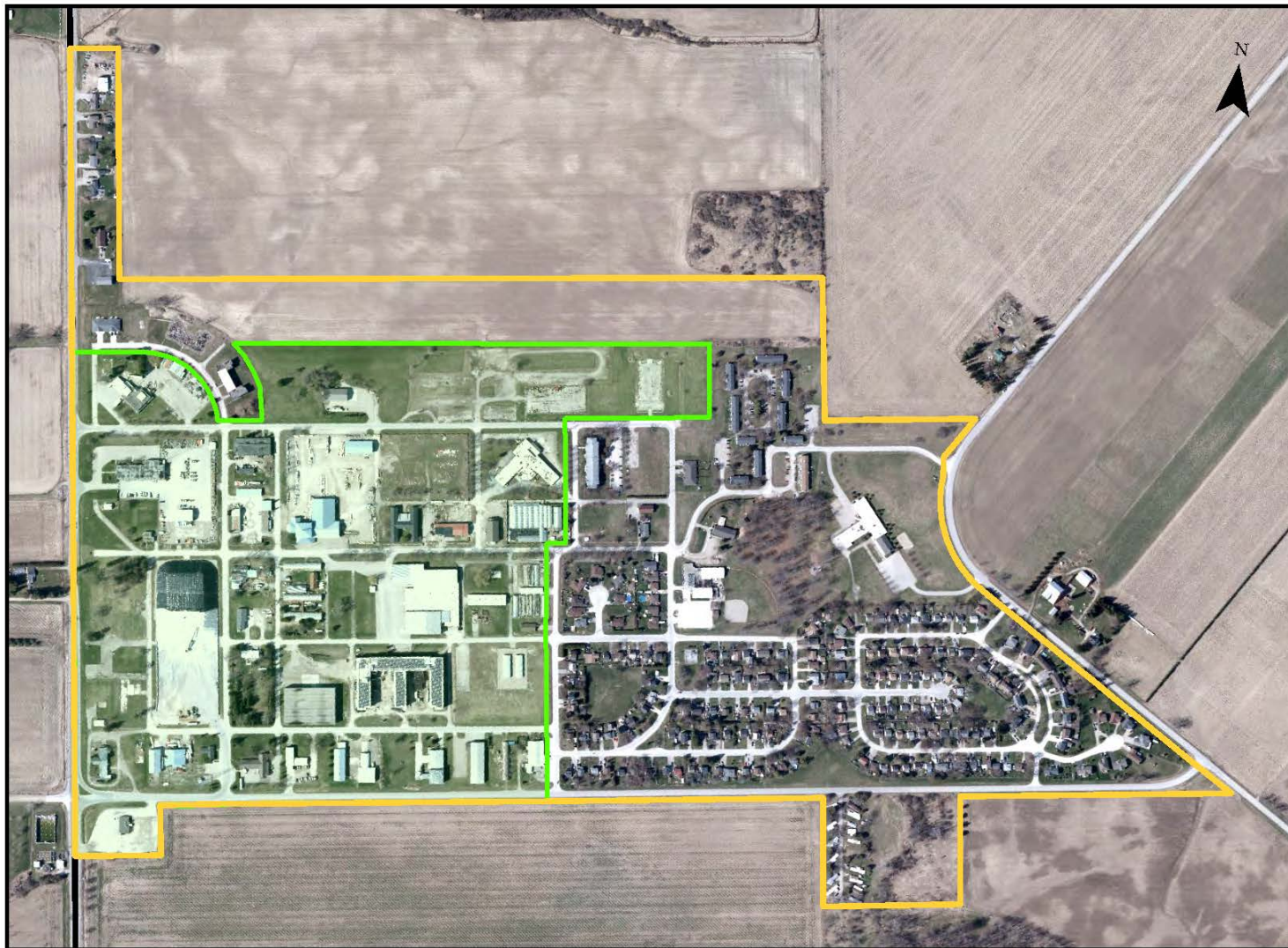


Seaforth

Settlement Boundary
  Municipal Boundary
  Commercial Focus Area
  Industrial Focus Area
  Future Development Focus Area



## Schedule D



Vanastra

 Settlement Boundary  Municipal Boundary  Commercial/Industrial Focus Area