



GRAND VALLEY

STRATEGIC PLAN

March 18, 2015

Prepared by: The Economic Development Committee for the Town of Grand Valley

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Introduction

In the spring of 2014 the Economic Development Committee (EDC)¹ began the process of working on a long-term strategic plan to create long-term economic benefits. At the onset, it was recognized that a defined process and methodology was required to create momentum and direction for the Town of Grand Valley. In the opinion of the EDC, this is paramount to be successful in mounting an Economic Development strategy that is supported by the community. Through community wide engagements it was recognized that a cohesive, inclusive plan was necessary to improve the overall community quality, facilitate direction and create an attractive environment for potential like-minded, mid-sized employers.

The core tenets of the draft plan are the following:

1. The plan needs to be based on community input and research to ensure a community approach
2. The plan needs to be based on mid-term (1 – 3 years) and long term (3 – 5 years) goals; and
3. The execution of the plan needs to be based on community commitment and engagement
4. The execution of the plan needs the formal and financial support of the Town's council

The EDC was tasked with undertaking the initial research for developing a strategic plan. During the research process it became clear that there were common challenges and aspirations within our community groups and business operations. These findings form the basis for this draft strategic plan.

¹ See Appendix C for EDC member list

Executive Summary

Two public workshops and thirteen group² meetings have provided good clarity on the needs of the Town. There is a community sentiment that the Town is declining in social vibrancy and economic strength due to the lack of a broad based community strategy. Further, there is an expectation that leadership for a plan should come from Town Council.

Implementation of the strategic plan is dependent on community involvement. The strategic plan cannot be implemented without this grass roots activity. The EDC has committed to provide long-term strategic guidance for the plan.

Through the EDC research, three primary areas were identified and common among all parties.

1. Township direction and focus needs to be defined and communicated
2. The community is declining in economic strength and social vibrancy
3. Leadership should derive from Town Council

The research activity to date has created a sense of hope and momentum in the 100+ participants. This represents a good starting point for community engagement. Recommendations for short and long-term activities are a result of this research.

This plan has been developed based on the following key elements:

Mid Term (1 – 3 years) Economic Development

1. **Tourism Based Economy** – Build five key social marquee events, which all community members, groups, business, and councils can support
2. **Establish a Vibrant BIA** – Support local businesses through numerous channels such as marketing, expertise, and provide a voice for concerns/wins
3. **Skilled Expertise** – Develop an expert group to provide volunteer professional services support to community groups
4. **Council Support** – Develop a community group to work with council to explore and enhance Council’s capabilities as it pertains to the strategic objectives
5. **Communication** – To maintain momentum, ensure inclusivity, and provide transparency of all activities surrounding the Economic Strategic plan and activities

Long Term (3 – 5 years) Economic Development

1. Undertake a research project to explore the creation of a **retirement residence**;
2. Undertake a research project to explore the creation of a **community center**; and
3. Undertake a research project to explore the creation of a **business park**.

This document will provide a methodology and process that outlines key areas of focus for both short-term and long-term activities recommended by the EDC. These activities are critical factors in the execution of a strategic plan.

² See Appendix B for listing of thirteen groups

Decision Process

The EDC is structured into two groups consisting of the main committee and a sub-committee. The EDC was formed as an advisory group by Town Council. The strategic planning process uses the following decision making process:

1. The EDC sub-committee has developed the draft strategic plan and all of the related content and processes
2. The EDC sub-committee presented all content and processes to the main EDC committee for input and approval
3. The EDC presents all content and processes to Town Council for approval
4. The approval process was based on each project milestone as presented and approved by Council
5. The draft strategic plan as presented in this document has been approved by the EDC and Town Council

The foregoing decision process has ensured accountability, transparency, and validation for the process.

Methodology

The following methodology was used in the creation of the draft strategic plan:

1. The EDC undertook the task of building a strategic plan.
2. A questionnaire³ was distributed to the whole community to gain input for the plan.
3. The questionnaire results were analyzed and a concept plan was created.
4. Two Town hall meetings were conducted in September 2014 to gain community input.⁴
5. The Town hall input and the questionnaire results were used to build another round of targeted community research with business groups and organized social groups.
6. Thirteen group meetings⁵ were held with specific business types/sectors and social/community groups. The round table discussions focused on specific plan based questions and discussions.
7. A workshop was held with Town Council to provide education on strategic planning.
8. The preceding seven action steps represent the input for this strategic plan.

Work Effort

This project has been created and executed by volunteer time and effort. This is a strong testament to the commitment of the citizens to the future of the Town of Grand Valley. Our future is in our hands. The goal of this plan is to increase the number of participants so the plan can become a reality.

³ See Appendix A for reference documents access

⁴ See Appendix A for reference documents access

⁵ See Appendix A for reference documents access

The Draft Strategic Plan

Mid-Term Objectives (1 – 3 years)

Outlined below are the EDCs recommended activities supporting the Economic Strategic Plan. The EDC leveraged information obtained during the working sessions as a basis for the outline.

Marquee Events

Through the Community Group discussions, it was evident that there is value in [events, socials, meetings, the Town itself] that each provide to Grand Valley. Although each group runs their own events independently or collaboratively with other groups, it is the EDC's recommendation that five key social events are supported as marquee events. This will drive high value and visibility to Grand Valley and ensure community engagement creating a tourism economy and related community development funds. The benefits of this will directly impact our local economy and prospects for attracting business opportunities.

A priority focus on existing annual events should focus on the following key attributes:

1. Willingness of the event owners to work toward a broad based community extension of the event. Possible Town Council financial contributions to further the goal.
2. An event that enables exploitation of a strong theme. This will enable local businesses and groups to meaningfully support the event. This must create a "high spend" opportunity for event attendees.
3. Willingness of the event owners to be flexible in how the event is planned to grow over time as it relates to the strategic plan.

An example of a Marquee event could be the rodeo. If the rodeo was a marquee event it might have the following attributes:

1. All restaurants would decorate with a western motif and serve western theme food
2. Local businesses would promote their businesses with a western theme
3. The Town and relevant surrounding area would have a western theme
4. An "old style" western farmers market would be offered
5. Western activities that could be offered: horse rides, wagon rides, horse shoe lessons, food canning lessons, etc
6. Main Street could host a "sheriff and gunman" shoot out every hour

A committee needs to be formed to evaluate the current list of local events for marquee development. The goal is to have up to five marquee events running within the next 1 – 3 years. Focus could be on the Fall Fair, Duck Race, Santa Parade, John Deere Days, Rodeo, Garden Tour, Polar Bear Dip, etc.

The outcome of a marquee event must be the attraction of tourists who will spend money in our Town. It will take 2 – 4 years to build a sustained tourist draw by event. The communication strategy would support the objective of creating a tourism economy.

Business Improvement Area (BIA)

The BIA should be attended and run by local business owners/operators. The purpose of the BIA is to improve the economic environment in which these businesses operate. The BIA should not be focused on improving individual business operations.

The BIA should be reconstituted under new leadership to garner active engagement from its members to enhance its operations. A community group should be formed to provide guidance and assistance to the BIA as required to enhance its operations. This could include such support as:

1. Research the value and benefit of increasing the geographic size of the BIA;
2. Support in participating in the building a long term strategic plan;
3. Research provincial and federal grant opportunities; and
4. Provide communication guidance.

Volunteer Expert Group

Enlist an expert group to provide local volunteer professional services support to community groups. This should include such services as marketing, advertising, communications, planning, accounting, etc.

A community group should be formed to research what professional skills would be helpful to the local community groups. Then volunteers need to be sourced and engaged as a community based professional services group to our not-for-profit community groups. Existing county-wide organizations should be enlisted to assist i.e. Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Enterprise Centre, Georgian College Entrepreneurship Centre, educational facilities, etc.

Town Council Support Group

Develop a community group to work with Council to explore and enhance Council's capabilities to enhance support of the strategic plan. An example of this work would be:

1. Create a fictional business
2. Apply for all the necessary permits, etc. to locate the business in the Town of Grand Valley
3. Document opportunities to improve the process for businesses to locate here
4. Assess by-laws that could enhance local business operations
5. Assess by-laws that could enhance local community group operations
6. Research and evaluate any funding grants available in support of the strategic plan

This committee does not have the authority to do the work of Council. This committee is a research and advisory group for Council.

Communication

There is a clearly defined need to improve communication within and about the Town. Improved communication from Town Council will ensure better transparency. Broad communication about community events will draw better attendance and participation. External communication will improve tourism and investment attraction.

It is the EDC's recommendation that a community based committee should be formed to research and develop a sustainable and diverse communication capability. The communication tools should be

available to all community-based events, organization, businesses, strategic plan committees, and to Town Council.

Long-Term Objectives (3 – 5 years)

The EDC has outlined three areas of research into the viability of business types locating to our community. It should be the intent of each of these research projects to ensure that an established criterion is met prior to definitive conclusions.

Retirement Residence

Undertake a research project to explore the creation of a retirement residence. This is a long-term project that requires a long-term time commitment. The goal is to develop an expert level of knowledge within a committee on what it would take to build a retirement home in our Town. What are the guidelines, what are possible plans, what are the costs, what is the business case, who are possible contractors and/or operators, what are the local requirements, could local investment be possible, etc.

Once we have assembled all of the necessary information we would be in a position to seek builders, funding, professional planning, etc.

Community Centre

Undertake a research project to explore the creation of an expanded or new community centre. This is a long-term project that requires a long-term time commitment. The goal is to develop an expert level of knowledge within a committee on what it would take to build a community centre in our Town, which may include an expanded library. Activities would include assessing other Town efforts, building cost models, assessing community centre components such as a swimming pool, fitness facilities, playing fields, meeting rooms, etc.

Once we have assembled all of the necessary information we are then in a position to explore funding options, professional planning, etc.

Business Park

Undertake a research project to explore the creation of a business park. This project will involve understanding what the basic servicing requirements are and what ownership models are possible for these services. Additional work will focus on sizing, location, and presentation options.

This work is to be undertaken by a committee of constituents appointed by Town Council.

Implementation Process

Community Engagement

This strategic plan will only be implemented with strong community engagement. The Town Council and EDC are not able to implement this plan without community support. The thought leadership and overall direction for each of the parts of the plan will be provided by the EDC and the Strategic Plan subcommittee. The work effort will have to come from community volunteers. If the community is not willing to participate in the plan development and execution then the plan will not be implemented.

There are a number of relationship barriers to success that must also be addressed. There are a number of legacy barriers between some community groups that must be laid aside. There is also some sense of tension between some areas within Town. This must also be put to rest so that we can all work together.

Committee Structure

Each committee, as described below, will consist of a member of Town Council in a non-leadership role, an EDC member, and members of the community. In addition, it is strongly recommended to have at least one agricultural representative for each committee. Meetings will likely be one night every two weeks for the first 2 – 4 months. Once the work effort is well underway the meetings will likely reduce to once per month. In general, a 2-year commitment is preferred to ensure continuity of work and progress.

Initial direction and guidance will be provided to each group by the EDC.

Communication Committee

Preferred number of members is five. Skills that would be helpful are marketing, communications, and writing.

Marquee Event Committee

Preferred number of members is seven. Creative thinking and a willingness to look at our community events differently are strong assets. Planning and logistics skills would be helpful. A willingness to accept change is a must. This committee will be working closely with willing community groups. Forward thinking members of current community groups would be a strong asset.

BIA Support Committee

Preferred number of members is five. Professional business skills would be helpful. Research skills and creativity would be helpful. This committee is for non-BIA members.

Volunteer Expert Committee

Preferred number of members is five. Any certified professionals IE accountants, project managers, administrators would be helpful. Experienced managers in marketing, sales, distribution, etc. would also be a strong asset.

Retirement Residence Committee

Preferred number of members is seven. This committee requires a three plus year commitment. A passion for having a retirement residence in our Town is a must. General mature life skills would be helpful. Any business / work place experience would be of value. Trades experience would also contribute well.

Community Centre Committee

Preferred number of members is seven. This committee requires a three plus year commitment. A passion for having a community centre in our Town is a must. General mature life skills would be helpful. Any business / work place experience would be of value. Trades experience would also contribute well.

Business Park Committee

Preferred number of members is five. This committee requires a three plus year commitment. A passion for having a business park in our Town is a must. Contracting skills, trade skills, and / or business skills would be preferred. Formal representation on the envisioned Town's "Employment Lands Corporation" would be helpful.

Summary

The draft strategic has four key elements:

1. The plan needs to be based on community input and research to ensure a community driven approach;
2. The plan needs to be based on mid-term (1 – 3 years) and long term (3 – 5 years) goals;
3. The execution of the plan needs to be based on community commitment and engagement; and
4. The execution of the plan needs the formal and financial support of the Town's council.

The Town of Grand Valley needs a strategic plan or it will continue on its current slow decline. The best short-term opportunities are building a tourism based economy and the related external reputation. This will also have the added benefit of drawing our community closer together and enhance sustainability.

Grand Valley must establish itself as a regional hub within the County of Dufferin and as a vibrant viable business location. The long-term strategic plan must include for an expanded set of services that will drive job creation. We must understand the barriers that employers see and create a plan to overcome these barriers. These activities will raise the profile of the township, improve our ability to attract medium to large employers, and arm the community to drive economic development.

A strategic plan must be based on community and Council's engagement. Without this engagement there will be no strategic plan.

Appendix A – Reference Documents

The following documents are available from the Town of Grand Valley municipal office.

1. Community Questionnaire mailed July 2014
2. Verbatim results from Community Questionnaire
3. Presentation for September 2014 Town hall meetings
4. Thirteen group meetings: List of attendee's and meeting notes

Appendix B – Community Group Listing

1. Commercial group
2. Restaurant group
3. Retail group
4. Horticultural Society
5. Riverbend Artists
6. Lions Club
7. Rodeo group
8. Santa Parade group
9. Agricultural Society
10. Library
11. Farmers
12. John Deere group
13. Town Council

Appendix C – Economic Development Committee (EDC) Member Listing

1. Larry Acchione
2. Tracey Atkinson
3. Kathy Chambers
4. John Ince
5. Bruce Hostrawser
6. Demetrius Marshall, Sub-committee member
7. Ron Munro, EDC Chair & Sub-committee member
8. David Reimer, Sub-committee member
9. Elizabeth Taylor