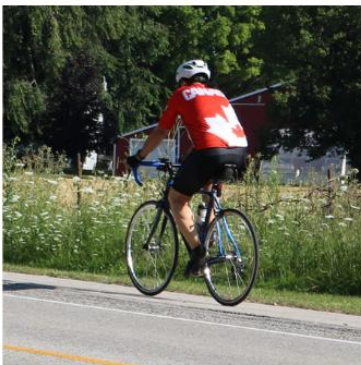




ACW COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

July 2026

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1.0 Introduction

The Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh (ACW) was formed as an amalgamation of the former Ashfield, Colborne and West Wawanosh townships in 2001, representing the wards of the Township. The residents of the township are spread out amongst its rural communities of Amberley, Auburn, Belfast, Benmiller, Dungannon, Kingsbridge, Kintail, Lochalsh, Nile, Port Albert, Saltford, South of Lucknow, St. Augustine and St. Helens. ACW has many cottage communities along the Lake Huron coast and a strong agricultural presence.

1.1 The Purpose of a Community Improvement Plan

A Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is a planning tool for municipalities that is used to focus on built and developed areas of need. It's a framework that aims to set the blueprint for revitalizing, sustaining and enhancing certain areas that can be defined as Community Improvement Project Areas. The CIP will allow the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh to direct funds to private properties to beautify, revitalize and/or redevelop.

This CIP provides strategies for the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh to allow growth and redevelopment within commercial hamlet/village areas, local industries and agricultural facilities and tourism businesses. The CIP uses relevant studies to establish goals and objectives and uses grants administered by the Township to achieve those goals and objectives. This Plan utilizes a long-term approach to revitalize Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh, it is the Township's expectation that small, incremental improvements will add up to more visible changes over time.

1.2. Legislation

1.2.1. Planning Act

Ontario's Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, includes direction for the creation and delivery of CIPs.

Section 28 (1) defines community improvement as “the planning or replanning, design or redesign, resubdivision, 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 therefor, as may be appropriate or necessary”

Section 28 (1) also defines what a community improvement project area is; “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.”

Section 28 (2) states that a municipality may “by by-law, designate the whole or any part of an area covered by such an official plan as a community improvement project area.”

Section 28 (6) says that once a CIP has come into effect a municipality may,

- a) “construct, repair, rehabilitate or improve buildings on land acquired or held by it in the community improvement project area in conformity with the community improvement plan, and sell, lease or otherwise dispose of any such buildings and the land appurtenant thereto;
- b) sell, lease or otherwise dispose of any land acquired or held by it in the community improvement project area to any person or governmental authority for use in conformity with the community improvement plan.”

1.2.2. Provincial Planning Statement (2024)

The 2024 Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) provides direction on matters of provincial interest relating to land use planning and development. The PPS generally promotes:

- i. Building healthy communities;
- ii. Providing accessible and natural settings for recreation;
- iii. Promoting efficient development and various land uses;

- iv. Improving accessibility;
- v. Ensuring that necessary infrastructure is available;
- vi. Promoting intensification and redevelopment, including brownfield sites;
- vii. Providing opportunities for economic activities within prime agricultural sites;
- 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 direction to municipalities when developing their own official plans. The Official Plan recognizes Community Improvement Plans and their importance to a community;

As stated in Section 3.3; “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. Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh Official Plan

The Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh (ACW) Official Plan provides a framework to guide land use decisions throughout the township. This CIP must conform to the policies of the Official Plan. Section 4.3 of the ACW Official Plan is relevant to the preparation of a CIP.

1.2.5. Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh Economic Development Action Plan

In 2024, the Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh Economic Development Committee (Committee) passed an action plan that detailed the Township’s goals and role in Economic Development from 2023-2028. This CIP is consistent with the goals of the action plan; leveraging the strengths and opportunities of the Township.

2.0. Background Information

ACW's rural structure, strong agricultural economy, dispersed villages and hamlets, and emerging tourism sector create a distinct set of opportunities for a Community Improvement Plan (CIP). This CIP aims to improve the commercial areas of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh that will support rural business growth, agri-business innovation, accessibility and energy-efficiency upgrades and community beautification.

3.0. Objectives

The Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh Official Plan is guided by these objectives:

Sustain Hamlet and Village Vibrancy

To support and stimulate investment towards commercial and mixed-use development within the Township's hamlets and villages.

Support the Agricultural System

To encourage diversified uses, reduce barriers to accessing new revenue streams and promote economic resilience on agricultural properties.

Support Economic Development and Community Revitalization

To encourage local investment and business growth while enhancing character and functionality.

4.0. Community Improvement Project Area

The ACW Community Improvement Project Area includes all the lands within the Township boundary. The Project area is shown in Schedule B of the consolidated Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh Official Plan, 2003 and provided in Appendix A of this CIP.

5.0. Community Improvement Programs

The Township provides several financial incentive programs to support the community. Each program is designed to address specific needs and to achieve the objectives stated above (3.0). Application forms can be found in Appendix B.

5.1. Façade and Signage Improvement Grant

Purpose:

To encourage improvements to the public-facing facade of commercial businesses to attract visitors and enhance character.

Eligible Projects:

- Exterior repair, replacement or restoration of materials (brickwork, architectural detailing, masonry).
- Repairs, replacement or restoration of doors and windows, provided they enhance detailing, aesthetics or sustainability.
- New signage or replacement of existing signage.
- Installation or replacement of awnings or canopies.
- Accessibility improvements, such as automatic doors or barrier-free entrances; following the AODA guidelines.
- Installation and replacement of exterior lighting.
- Murals; when the subject matter involves the community's heritage.
- Landscaping and vegetative beautification efforts (i.e. tree planting, vegetative planters etc).
- Other similar projects may be approved by the Committee.

Grant Value:

Up to 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$5,000.

Eligibility:

Any commercial uses within the Community Improvement Plan Area.

5.2. Adaptive Reuse Grant

Purpose:

To assist in the conversion of aging, vacant or underutilized buildings into commercial, agri-tourism, on-farm diversified uses or community uses.

Eligible Projects:

- Upgrades to plumbing, electrical systems, insulation, doors, windows, and walls to comply with the Ontario Building Code.
- Installation of upgraded fire protection system elements (signage, alarms, sprinkler system).
- Installation of upgraded or new ventilation systems.
- Interior improvements such as roof leaks, plumbing leaks, stairs/railings, major additions.
- Interior accessibility improvements following the AODA guidelines.
- Other similar projects may be approved by the Committee.

Grant Value:

Up to 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$5,000.

Eligibility:

Any property within the Community Improvement Plan Area that has an existing building that is vacant, aging or underutilized shall be eligible.

5.3. Property Improvement Grant

Purpose:

To support landscaping, parking improvements, placemaking and active transportation features for commercial businesses, improving functionality and aesthetics.

Eligible Costs:

- Landscaping and private parking area improvements.
- Permanent outdoor seating areas and sidewalk cafes.
- Active transportation infrastructure and bicycle parking when located in proximity to a public trail.
- Improvements to pedestrian walkways.

Grant Value:

Up to 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$5,000.

Eligibility:

Any commercial uses within the Community Improvement Area.

6.0. Implementation

6.0.1 Administration

By offering financial incentive-based programs, we anticipate invoking positive change in our rural communities through a public-private collaborative effort. The township-driven and financial incentive-based programs described in Section 5 of this Plan are funded by the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh. The programs are funded by township budget allocations, reviewed annually on an as-required basis.

6.0.2 Staff Resources

The Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh CIP will require resources and staff time to implement. Staff will respond to inquiries and handle applications.

Staff duties include but are not limited to:

- Responding to inquiries about the CIP;
- Scheduling pre-consultation meetings (when required);
- Receiving applications;
- Collecting and maintaining data relating to applications;
- Reviewing applications, preparing recommendations, and providing reports and presentations to Committee and Council;

- Administering grant payments for approved projects;
- Tracking the progress of approved projects and the financial health of the CIP;
- Marketing the available incentive programs within the ACW CIP.

Applications found under Appendix B must be filled in completely and correctly, so staff can deem it acceptable.

6.0.3 General Eligibility Requirements

The following General Eligibility Requirements are applicable to all incentive programs, and must be met in order for an applicant to participate in any of the Financial Incentive Programs to be approved. The General Eligibility Requirements must be read by the applicant in association with program specific eligibility requirements and program details as outlined.

General eligibility requirements include:

1. A CIP application form must be submitted and approved prior to commencing any improvement works in addition to all required supporting information. Supporting information may include detailed work plans, cost estimates and contracts, applicable reports, and any additional information as required by the Township.
2. A building permit must be obtained as required. Planning approval, including site plan approval, may be required.
3. Eligible applicants must be either the owner of the property, an agent for the owner of the property, or the tenant of a property to whom the owner has provided written consent for the application. Should a property be sold between the time of approval and completion of the project, the approved grant will be forfeited unless the applicant provides a written request for the grant to be transferred to the new owner; these decisions will be at the sole discretion of the Committee.
4. All proposed projects must be within the designated Community Improvement Project Areas. Also, all proposed projects must be compatible with the goals and objectives as presented in the CIP.

5. The property owner must be in good standing with regard to taxation and any other township financial obligation at the time of application and throughout the duration of the project construction period as identified within the Community Improvement Plan.
6. Community improvement works associated with a grant program applications must be in accordance with all township by-laws, policies, procedures, standards, and guidelines in order to be approved. Existing and proposed land uses must be in conformity with the policies and standards provided by the Township's Official Plan, Zoning By-law, and all other planning documents.
7. Grants are awarded annually on a per-property basis. Property owners with multiple properties may submit one application for each legal property, but not for multiple projects on the same property. (ie. multiple incentive program categories cannot be used together on the same property).
8. Buildings must be structurally sound to be eligible for a CIP grant program. Should there be a question regarding the structural soundness of a building, the Chief Building Official has sole discretion in requiring an engineer's report regarding the structure (the cost of which will not be an eligible cost under the program).
9. Community improvement works undertaken and completed that are associated with an approved incentive program application must be consistent with the project description contained in the application form and supporting materials, and with the program agreement. Should the undertaken or completed works not be consistent with the original project description, to the satisfaction of the Township, the Township may delay, reduce, or cancel the approved incentive program benefits, and may require repayment of any of the incentive program benefits, at the discretion of the Township.
10. Home based businesses will be required to provide proof of their Business Identification Number.

6.1.3 Application Process

Step 1: Applicants should submit a brief proposal to staff outlining which program they would be applying for. This should include proposed scope of work, project

timing, supporting documentation requirements, etc. A preconsultation meeting may be required to determine eligibility.

Step 2: Submission of a complete application form to the township office, which will include all of the required application forms in addition to any supporting documentation required by the Economic Development Committee which may include but is not limited to:

- photographs of the existing building condition;
- historical photographs and/or drawings if applicable;
- a site plan;
- specifications of the proposed work including a work plan for the improvements and construction drawings;
- two (2) cost estimates/quotes for eligible work provided by licensed contractors as deemed necessary by the committee.

Step 3: The committee will review applications against the goals and objectives of the CIP and specific program criteria, and make a recommendation to Council to approve or deny the application. All applications will be subject to review by the Committee.

Step 4: Council makes final decision on applications. The Committee prepares a report to Council with recommendation on the proposed CIP Grant Request. There is no appeal of Council's decision.

Step 5: If approved, the applicant has eighteen (18) months to complete the project as approved. No variations from the approved project are permitted without written approval from Council. Successful applicants will be required to enter into an agreement with the Township which will outline the terms, duration, default, and any other provisions of the incentive program as well as obtain any necessary permits.

Step 6: Upon project completion, applicant provides the Township with copies of paid receipts for the work involved in the approved project. Provided the project is completed as approved and to the satisfaction of the Township, the Township's Treasurer will issue payment to the applicant.

6.1.4 Payment of Grant

Grant payment will be provided upon the successful completion of the project pending the submission of paid receipts and the approval by the Township that the project was completed as approved. Should the actual costs be less than the quote provided at the time of application, the Township retains the right to lower the amount of the grant to fifty percent of the actual costs to a maximum of \$5,000.00. Should the actual costs be greater than the quote provided at the time of the application, the Township is under no obligation to change the amount of the grant as approved by Council.

Applicants have eighteen (18) months to complete the project from the time of approval or will forfeit the grant. In the case of an unforeseen circumstance, the applicant may apply in writing to the Committee for consideration of an extension to this timeline. This decision will be at the sole discretion of Council.

In the event that any portion of the approved project remains incomplete, as determined by the Township, on the final completion date and an extension was not requested or granted, neither the funding nor any portion thereof shall be payable by the Township. The Township shall not be liable for any loss, costs or damages arising as a result of the applicants failure to obtain funding due to the failure to complete the approved project within the project completion timeframe. No grant payment will be made at any time prior to the completion of the planned project in its entirety.

6.1.5 CIP Implementation and Review

The CIP shall remain in effect until Council amends or repeals the by-law. Amendments to the CIP may be required to: modify the geographic area (i.e., the Community Improvement Project Area) to which Financial Incentive Programs apply; change the eligibility requirements of a program included in the CIP; or add a new township driven or financial-incentive program. Such amendments require pre-consultation with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. An amendment to the Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh CIP will not be required to discontinue or cancel any of the programs identified. The CIP will be reviewed by the Committee on an annual basis to ensure the Plan meets the needs of the community. Programs and incentives offered under the CIP may vary from year to year at the

discretion of Council, based on recommendations from the Committee. The programs in this CIP will be administered through ACW Council, through the Committee. Program guidelines affirming eligibility requirements and application forms will be established by the Committee once funding is allocated to a program. Programs may prioritize focus areas as shown in Appendices.

6.1.6. Application Intake Process

Applications will be evaluated in the order received. Approved applications will receive funding on a first-come, first-served basis until the yearly funding limit is reached. In the event multiple applications are received, the Committee, at its sole discretion, determine priority based on an assessment of how the application meets the goals and objectives of this Plan.

Council may establish an annual/semi-annual deadline for the submission of applications (i.e. applications submitted by Q2) and all applications will be received and evaluated in accordance with this deadline. If projects are not submitted by the defined application date, it is at the discretion of the Committee, based on funding, if project proposals will be accepted later in the calendar year.

Consecutive allowance for a program is allowed, but an applicant who has not been approved before will be given precedence. One application per year is permitted for property façade. One property façade cannot apply for more than three consecutive years in a row.

The Committee will review all applications and supporting materials and may conduct a site visit to ensure that proposed projects meet general eligibility requirements and that submissions are complete. Applicants will be notified if their submission is incomplete or ineligible. Staff will notify applicants of Council's decision.

For applications that are approved, a Financial Incentive Program Agreement will be prepared and executed between the Township and the successful applicant. Any program commitments may be cancelled if work is not completed by the completion date indicated in the Financial Incentive Program Agreement. In cases where the Committee refuses an application for financial incentives, all applicants will have the right to appeal the decision to ACW Council. If a decision is appealed, a

report will be prepared for Council detailing the Committee's decision. The applicant can appear at Council to detail their appeal.

7.0 Conclusion

This Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is a detailed document aimed at strengthening Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh's local economy. By carrying out this plan, the Township of ACW highlights its deep commitment to encouraging local investment, renewal, beautification, and partnering with property owners and tenants to support economic development.

For those interested in any programs within this CIP or who require additional assistance, contact the ACW Township Office.

Appendix A

