



Minutes

Municipality of Thames Centre

Economic Development Advisory Committee

June 21, 2024, 9:00 A.M.

**Municipal Office - Council Chambers
4305 Hamilton Road, Dorchester, ON**

Members Present: T. Heeman, Chair/Council Representative
S. McMillan, Council Representative
J. Baribeau, Community Representative
C. Hicks-Webster, Community Representative
J. Iglesias, Community Representative
D. Reiche, Community Representative
G. Thorel, Community Representative

Members Absent: J. Crosby, Community Representative
C. Green, Community Representative
A. McClean, Vice-Chair/Community Representative
H. Wilson, Community Representative

Staff Present: J. Nethercott, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk
A. Storrey, Interim Director of Planning and Development Services
S. Zylstra, Communications Coordinator
S. Henshaw, Recording Secretary

1. Call To Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

2. Disclosure Of Pecuniary Interest

No disclosures of pecuniary interest.

3. Presentations/Delegations

3.1 Economic Development and Tourism - Update Report

Cara Finn, Director of Economic Development and Tourism for Middlesex County, was in attendance to provide a presentation regarding Economic Development and Tourism, as appended to this meeting's agenda.

Ms. Finn provided overviews of the Economic Development and Tourism Department's Team Members, Strategic Priorities, Tourism Investment Tool-Kit and Commercial Investment Attraction.

Ms. Finn provided an overview of Manufacturing "Fam" (Familiarization) Tours, which allows subject businesses to give tours and be able to discuss their accomplishments and challenges.

There was discussion regarding Community Improvement Plans (CIP). Ms. Finn advised that Middlesex County is prohibited from having its own CIP, and instead provides funding to the lower-tier municipalities. Ms. Finn advised that funding is available for 50% reimbursement of local municipal contributions to the development and implementation of Community Improvement Plan projects that are completed and funded in 2024.

Ms. Finn provided overviews of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Trade Shows and 2024 Regional FDI Initiatives, and provided additional information with respect to the selection process when booking FDI shows and how leads are tracked. The committee discussed the value of trade shows, and how investments are made towards trade shows and the County's website.

The Committee inquired how businesses find us and decide to invest here. Ms. Finn advised that businesses have site selection consultants, who do online research and attend FDI forums.

There was discussion regarding Industrial Land Development, and the ratio of local to external businesses that purchase business park lands.

Ms. Finn advised on the process on certifying and marketing development-ready industrial lands, an example being Thorndale Industrial Park.

Ms. Finn provided overviews on Business Retention and Expansion, the County's Business Appreciation Program, Middlesex County Resources and a Feasibility Study for a potential future Economic Development Corporation.

Ms. Finn provided an overview on the County's Tourism Sponsorship Program and recent Tourism "Fam" (Familiarization) Tours. The Committee inquired as to when the Tourism Sponsorship Program opens each year, and Ms. Finn advised as soon as the Middlesex County budget is approved, usually in March. The Committee inquired about this program's budget and also discussed potential grants for art projects.

Ms. Finn provided an overview on the County's 2024 Culinary Guide. The Committee inquired about how the Culinary Guide is made available to the public and how businesses are included in the guide.

Ms. Finn provided overviews of the Dining Campaign "Hands to Table Harvest" and also how the County approaches Marketing and Investing.

Ms. Finn discussed the County as a resource to assist with videography and photography to help promote economic development and tourism in Thames Centre. Ms. Finn discussed the County's recent partnership projects, as well as provided information on Middlesex County Connect.

Member Delia Reiche retired from the meeting at 10:00 a.m.

Ms. Finn discussed the Infrastructure Loan Program being adapted to be made available to lower-tier municipalities to help ready lands for investment. The County can assist with the certification of industrial lands and marketing them.

The Committee discussed agritourism, sports tourism, as well as arts and culture within Thames Centre.

The Chair provided a recap of what was discussed in the previous committee meeting, regarding land strategies, tourism, local chamber activation and high-speed internet within Thames Centre.

The Committee inquired about identifying remaining lands that still do not have high-speed internet. Ms. Finn advised she could follow-up with mapped information on current and proposed projects.

The Committee discussed the Dragon's Den-style tourism investment events, as well as the local "Pitch Your Plan: Young Entrepreneur Business Plan Contest".

The Committee inquired on how municipalities can approach a land acquisition strategy or development. Ms. Finn advised there is historical evidence of municipalities purchasing land for employment and industrial purposes. Ms. Finn further discussed availability of land.

The Committee discussed Economic Development Corporations (EDC) and the importance of representation and accountability to ensure all interests are recognized from both the public and private sectors before moving forward with one. The Committee further discussed funding sources for EDC's. Ms. Finn advised that County Council made the decision to fund actual strategy development and feasibility until a recommendation is ready to be made.

The Committee inquired about how to approach potentially expanding Thorndale Industrial Park and the Dorchester/Donnybrook Road corridor.

Ms. Finn advised that a great deal of industrial land is owned privately, and there are many challenges with respect to servicing lands and that certification requires servicing. Ms. Finn again mentioned the Infrastructure Loan Program.

A. Storrey, Interim Director of Planning and Development Services, advised of the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) Draft Land Strategy. UTRCA is working on a 10-year draft plan to improve partnerships and collaboration and is conducting a land inventory analysis. UTRCA is looking for feedback from the Municipality with respect to any future proposals.

The Chair requested a copy of UTRCA's report to add to an upcoming agenda, to ensure coordination with the Committee regarding their trail's plan.

The Committee discussed the potential of a Chamber of Commerce within Thames Centre. Ms. Finn provided some background regarding Chambers of Commerce including discussions with the Strathroy and District Chamber of Commerce to extend their coverage area.

Resolution # EDAC-016-24

Moved by: J. Iglesias

Seconded by: J. Baribeau

THAT the presentation from Cara Finn of Middlesex County, regarding an update report on Economic Development and Tourism, **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Carried.

4. Scheduling of Meetings

Thursday, September 12, 2024 at 9:00 a.m.

Thursday, December 12, 2024 at 9:00 a.m.

5. Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss it was:

Resolution # EDAC-017-24

Moved by: S. McMillan

Seconded by: G. Thorel

RESOLVED THAT the meeting adjourn at 10:18 a.m.

Carried.