

Students give BIA a report card on local business

By Peter Richardson

The Business Improvement Area of Shelburne met Tuesday night and one of the points of discussion, was the feedback from a recent Central Dufferin District High School I.C.E. Training initiative involving a group of Grade 11 students and the BIA.

I.C.E., or Innovation Creativity and Entrepreneurship, is a programme designed to get students involved in their community and to apply key skills to solve real world challenges, developed in consultation with employers and organizations.

The programme is part of the Ministry of Education's Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) initiative.

In the case of Shelburne, the students were tasked with examining the Town of Shelburne and its services and opportunities, with an eye to how they would improve them. They were expected to evaluate what the Town had to offer, as it related to their age group, and to suggest deficiencies and opportunities for improvements.

The students then presented the BIA with a list of these, as they perceived them.

Some of what was observed was already on the Town's and the BIA's radar, but many things offered new perspectives on existing and previously unperceived situations.

In the downtown core, the students cited a lack of retail diversity and a high concentration of service businesses versus retailers. They noted that the Town appeared to lack a family oriented restaurant in the core and also offered no places for people to gather, such as a bowling alley or a movie theatre.

They looked for more independent stores, offering brand name products more attractions of interest to young people.

Parking was cited as a problem, as were the condition of some sidewalks and the lack of public ashtrays to prevent the prevalence of discarded cigarette butts. It was also noted that more public benches and refuse containers would be beneficial.

Members of the BIA pointed out that during the warmer months, these were in place, but had been removed for the winter to facilitate snow removal.

The uneven paving stones in Jack Downing Park were a point of concern, as was the appearance and poor condition of the gazebo in that park. It was suggested that it could be painted and brightened up to encourage more use by the public.

Interestingly, the students questioned the possibility of a year round Farmers Market as well as utilizing more four season shrubbery downtown, and the creation of more murals on buildings, perhaps celebrating our cultural diversities.

Further, in the matter of businesses, it was suggested that they could stay open longer and be open on more holidays and that perhaps the buildings themselves could carry a historical theme rather than becoming modernized.

Turning their attention to matters of awareness and marketing, student suggestions ranged from a greater presence on social media, to shopper surveys and workshops on how to beautify the downtown.

They saw a place for more special events, perhaps even a New Year's party and definitely more youth entertainment activities. Finally, they expressed a need to clean up the streets and sidewalks of dirt and trash.

Many of the recommendations were both insightful and doable, while a few were more involved than perhaps the students realized.

Overall, however, they had a great many good ideas and some suggestions as to how best execute them, both economically and in a way that would energize the younger residents of Shelburne to help transform their community.

For example, the mural project was an area where the student arts programme, at the high school, could play an integral role and thus save a considerable amount of money and time. In fact, many of the suggested changes could be assisted by the students' requirements for hours of community service to be performed during the school year.

Generally speaking, the BIA was pleased with the project and its outcome, and was open to exploring its possibilities further in the months to come.