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Consulting group identifies 12 ?big moves? to revitalize Shelburne

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Shelburne's new Council sat down Monday evening to begin their four year journey into the heart of governance.

Fresh from their preceeding Oath of Office Ceremony, the new Council heard their first delegation, from Ron Palmer of the Planning Partnership, a consulting group hired by the Town to assist with the formation of the Shelburne Community Improvement Plan. This would be the first of three or more presentations to Council from this organization, as the CIP slowly takes form.

The Plan, is intended to present a vision of the Downtown and other key areas that need improvement.

After outlining the Economic Development Strategy for 2015-2019 and discussing previous initiatives from the Town, Mr. Palmer outlined the current approach. The three phase plan from his organization began with a background review, business meetings and a design workshop, and the first report to Council. An online survey is being prepared and a Public Realm Plan will headline Phase II. This plan includes public input on streetscapes, trails and parks and open spacers, followed by an open house. Phase III will be the final CIP report, with supporting documents and a Public Meeting. All of this will hopefully be completed by March of 2019.

From the work done so far, the Planning Partnership has developed twelve, ?big moves?. These outline the initiatives and direction that they see as the steps towards a revitalized Shelburne.

Now, accepting that these are preliminary ideas, they nevertheless come across as rather grandiose and most definitely costly, to this writers eyes.

The first is the restoration of all the downtown building facades to represent Shelburne's past heritage.

The second involves enhancing Main Street, by narrowing the sidewalk areas and creating ?extensive public realms?, read painters and trees and centre of the road islands.

This leads to the third big move, which is to reduce truck traffic, by making it impossible or very difficult for large trucks to navigate Main Street.

Unfortunately, this option was predicated on the misinformation, supplied to Mr. Palmer, that a bypass already exists to circumvent Shelburne. No such bypass exists, despite the mistaken belief by some and is, by MTO assessment, several years away, at best.

Several of the other ?big moves? involved welcoming signs at Town entrances, inter connecting the trails, sidewalks and parklands, redesigning Fiddle Park, turning Jack Downey Park into the Town Square and improving homes in the historic residential neighbourhoods.

The remaining ones, involved improving all the back lanes and making them more public acessable, promoting a wider range of retail and commercial spaces in downtown, developing a mural programme to beautify buildings and improving the East Commercial Corridor.

All of these ideas are currently on the Council radar, but most are fiscally impossible at this time and/or require the agreement of higher government ministries. Although possible, in the future and with substantial funding initiatives, the package presented was largely beyond the current abilities of the Town, unless taxes were to be extraordinarily increased. Nevertheless, the exercise is fundamentally only an exploratory venture and it can never hurt to see new ideas and make new plans or adapt old ones.

Council committees

The remainder of the meeting, primarily revolved around general business issues and housekeeping, as well as the selection of councillors to sit on various community Committees and Boards. These included the CDRC, the Library, the Fire Department, the BIA and the Police Services Board. Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson and Councillor Lindsay Wegener were appointed too the CDRC, Councillor Shane Hall to the Library, Councillors Hall and Benotto to the Fire Board, Councillor Buffett to the BA and Mayor Mills and Deputy Mayor Anderson to the Police Services Board.

Cannabis retail model

The issue of whether to opt in or out of the Provinces Retail Cannabis Model, was briefly discussed and CAO Morrissey stated that Staff would have a full report for Council at the January 14 meeting.

At the moment, the province is offering a monetary incentive to communities that allow retail cannabis outlets however the decision to opt out must be made prior to January 22, 2019. Otherwise, communities will automatically be included in the program. Remuneration, is provided according to population and will happen if the province received in excess of $100 million in revenues from cannabis sales. One half of the surplus, will be allocated to those eligible communities. Shelburne's share would amount to $5,000, based on our population. A decision on the matter was put off until Staff presents their report in the New Year.

Waiving facility fees

Council also discussed the waving of fees for events and use of Town facilities and the CAO brought up the point that currently, the

bylaw states that the Town may wave fees up to a maximum of $500 for any one event or usage, but that the Council has been regularly exceeding that amount, in spite of the bylaw. She also pointed out that many Town fees are extremely low and need to be reviewed. Over the course of a year, the Town loses a not inconsequential amount from waiving fees, in their entirety.
The request Monday, from LP Stage Productions, amounted to a total of $2,500 according to the Treasurer's calculations. Although granted, the matter of fees and their waving will be reviewed for 2019.