



Staff Report

Report Title: Ripley Outdoor Plaza and Parking Lot

Prepared By: Collaboratively prepared by Township of Huron-Kinloss Staff

Department: BED

Date: May. 3, 2021

Report Number: BED-2021-05-21

File Number:

R04 PLA19

Attachments: Plan A, Plan B, Detailed report from Have Your Say HK Project, 10 ingredients for a successful downtown; Roger Brooks – 20 ingredients of an Outstanding Downtown

Recommendation:

THAT the Township of Huron-Kinloss Committee of the Whole hereby receives for information report number BED-2021-05-21, prepared collaboratively by Township of Huron-Kinloss Staff AND authorizes moving forward with Option ____ for the Ripley Outdoor Plaza project.

Background:

In the Fall of 2012, the County of Bruce hosted a Destination Brand Camp with Roger Brooks. Mr. Brooks has assisted nearly 2,000 communities with their branding, tourism, downtown development, and marketing efforts and as one of the industry's foremost authorities on downtowns, tourism, branding, community development and marketing. Staff and champions from Ripley and Lucknow attended. During the camp we discussed development plans for the downtowns. This is where the idea of a downtown plaza for Ripley was born and a steering committee struck.

In 2015, the Township pursued a Community Branding proposal and started the process of plan development for the plaza. After the development of Lewis Park, we continued to fundraise for the downtown beautification of Ripley.

For Council's benefit attached is Roger Brook's 10 ingredients for a successful downtown as well as a website about placemaking. <https://www.pps.org/>

Staff has continued to work on this project, examining many different options for parking, plaza size, and design elements; taking into account feedback we've received from the community and other stakeholders along the way.

In 2019 students from Fanshawe came forward with design options.

From March to April 2021, the project was put on the "Have your Say HK" engagement platform to get input from the community on a preferred design option. The poll focused on two separate options (attached); however, participants were encouraged to provide additional comment and feedback.

- A) Parking only (36 parking spots)
- B) A modest sized plaza and parking (25 parking spots)

Discussion:

The summary of the feedback received from the poll on Have Your Say HK is attached, 13 votes were also received through email or phone.

For ease of reference, the feedback has been summarised by themes and staff comments have been included to mitigate or provide comment on concerns.

Total votes received: 132

Votes received for Plan A) Parking only (36 spots): 78

Votes received for Plan B) Modest plaza with parking (25 parking spots): 54

Comments and Questions:

Proximity to Fire Hall

- Concerns that the plaza will result in delayed response time to emergencies for the firefighters
- Concerns that the plaza would create a dangerous situation for responders and civilians
- Lack of parking for firefighters when responded to calls (up to 25 vehicles can be seen in the current parking lot during an emergency)
- Concern with firefighters responding to emergencies and having to be aware of kids or pedestrians in parking lot of plaza, as they are currently conditioned to pull in to the parking lot without concern for designated parking spots, pedestrians, etc.
- Questions about expansion of fire hall, if a plaza is built, it limits the ability for the firehall to expand if needed.

Staff Comments:

There is validity to the concerns about a lack of delineated parking spaces designated for the firefighters who respond to calls. As it stands the parking of firefighter's vehicles is scattered and random depending what space is available at any given date and time in that lot. Some members use the lot and others use Huron street across from the fire hall.

The Fire Chief supports any draft design idea that allows for both a plaza and designated parking for the firefighters that is segregated and not accessible to the plaza, or as some type of clear barrier in place dividing the two.

At present this area is used by local children which does create an overarching safety concern for responding members. Any design for the use of this area should factor

in the need to eliminate these concerns and address the plaza user safety. Again, this could be achieved by creating some type of barrier between the outdoor plaza design and the designated parking for firefighters.

The Fire Chief is of the opinion that the construction of an outdoor plaza at this location would not have any impact on the firefighter's response times so long as any parking that is assigned to the Fire Department is clearly marked and protected from the outdoor plaza area. There is no clear data or facts presented at this time that would justify a claim that a plaza would impede firefighter response times.

There are currently 27 active Firefighters at the Ripley-Huron fire hall including the Fire Chief. In the past 36 months, upon review of the incidents that have occurred, the greatest amount of people at any one time that has responded to the Fire Hall in those 36 months was 19 members. Any parking that is designated for fighter parking should factor in and accommodate this range of numbers.

The Fire Chief met virtually with the firefighters on April 29, 2021 to discuss the concerns and comments raised. The overarching comments was that they feel that designated parking was needed for the fire department members. They also felt any parking area that would be designated for fire department members should be laid out in a way that would allow for some of the bigger vehicles that fire fighters drive to be able to move around with ease.

Regarding the issue of building expansion of the Fire Hall. Any consideration by Council to expand the Ripley-Huron Fire Hall at its current location is at least 10 years away from being a brought forward. The Fire Chief supports the building of a new Fire Hall as opposed to adding a third addition to the existing building.

Lewis Park

Questions were received about the need for a plaza on the corner of Jessie St. and Huron St. when Lewis park is only a block away. There were recommendations to use the funds to invest in Lewis Park to beautify it and create space for markets/events, as was noted would be the purpose of the plaza. It was also noted that the BBFG is a great place for events and markets and we should be assisting/supporting the BBFG by using there space more.

Staff Comments:

The Ripley Food Art Craft Festival was held in Lewis Park and moved to the arena as the vendors complained that the ground was uneven and unstable for some of their delicate works and weather is always a concern.

Downtown Parking:

The need for parking downtown was reinforced through the feedback received. It was noted that some residential tenants along the main street are taking up prime parking spots and there was concern that these vehicles would move to the parking lot, creating less space for firefighters and plaza users.

It was also noted that a paved parking lot would be easier for the Township to maintain.

We received suggestions to consider municipal parking lots away from the firehall, for example the lot between Lewis Park and Hensall Co-op or behind the curling club in the well-head protection zone.

Staff Comments:

The Township is planning to apply line painting for the parallel parking spaces on Huron Street from Tain St. to Queen St. this year. We expect that improved parking organization will increase the access to parking in the downtown core.

The property owner of the downtown buildings containing apartments was consulted during the process and they indicated that they do have sufficient private parking for the tenants.

If Council decides to move forward with public parking, it is recommended that there be no overnight parking permitted and a two-hour limit.

Beautification

A comment was received in particular that questioned both design options, suggesting a larger plaza was needed to beautify the downtown. This particular respondent questioned the need for additional parking in Ripley.

Another respondent noted that the original plan that was a large plaza with only 9 parking spaces was their preferred option but had additional questions about washroom availability (if events were planned at the plaza) or access to water.

There were additional comments suggesting planters and park benches to beautify the space if it was used for parking only.

A response received encouraged the municipality to integrate more greenspaces into our community to aid in the fight against climate change.

Staff Comments:

We do have some members of the public who are in support of the project who are willing to assist with choosing landscape materials and site furnishings.

Commercial Opportunities

There were concerns noted about turning this prime commercial lot into parking and a plaza. The respondents questioned whether this was the right spot for a municipal parking lot, parking is required but municipal parking lots are usually built off the main downtown core to ensure prime commercial areas are available for investment.

We have received a couple of concerns and suggestions regarding the state of other properties in the downtown core of Ripley. While the goal of the plaza is to encourage investment in the downtown it was mentioned that with the vacant lot beside FIG and the state of the commercial buildings on Queen St, investors would be reluctant to invest in Ripley. Furthermore, there were questions about what other beautification/economic development projects the Township should be prioritizing before a plaza or parking. One respondent suggested approaching the owner of the vacant lot beside FIG to create a temporary gathering space/plaza to encourage investment in that prime commercial lot.

Staff Comments:

Attached is an article which speaks to the locating municipal parking lots off the main street.

Options:

1. Plan A) Parking only (36 spots)
2. Plan A) Parking only (36 spots)- Designated Parking reserved for firefighters only
3. Plan B) A modest sized plaza and parking (25 parking spots)
4. Plan B) A modest sized plaza and parking (25 parking spots)- Designated Parking reserved for firefighters only
5. Do nothing leave vacant property as is.
6. Leave property as is and designate as firefighter parking only

Recommendation:

Upon review of the comments and mitigation measures, staff supports moving forward with a type of beautification design in downtown Ripley that provides segregated parking area for our firefighters when responding to calls.

The Ripley 4-way stop and Crosswalks

Letters were sent out to request feedback regarding the rehabilitation of the interlocking bricks 4 way stop at Huron St. and Queen St. in Ripley and the interlocking bricks crosswalks. We received no feedback from these letters.

The recommendation for this project is to pave the 4 way stop and the crosswalk to save considerable funds in construction and maintenance, and to ensure accessibility at these locations.

Funds from this project can be used towards the parking area of the Jessie St. and Huron St. vacant lot.

Financial Impacts:

The current estimate for options 1 through 4 is approximately \$190,000. The 2021 Capital Budget includes \$290,000 for the replacement of the interlocking bricks with concrete pavement, however the current estimate for converting the bricks to asphalt is \$120,000. It is our expectation that by combing the Ripley Outdoor Plaza, the Ripley Main Intersection, Melville Lane Reconstruction and the construction of sidewalks on Queen St. and William St. N into one tender, we will take advantage of economies of scale and the totality of the projects will be within budget. There is sufficient funds from the Ripley Beautification Reserve to pay for the concrete plaza and landscaping.

Strategic Alignment / Link:

The information provided in this report is consistent with and in keeping with the Municipality's Vision & Mission. The recommendations contribute to the goals in achieving a prosperous community, a spirited community and a vibrant community.

Projects in this report assist staff in achieving the following projects in the 2019-2023

Strategic Plan Action Plan:

V1.2 Ripley Outdoor Plaza

Respectfully Submitted By:

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