

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Improved Downtown Master Plan moving forward

Wasaga Beach – Here are the facts about the status of the Downtown Master Plan.

1. Council has not done away with or repealed the Downtown Master Plan.
2. Council has not done away with or repealed the related Official Plan Amendment (OPA 52).
3. Council has not done away with or repealed the implementing Zoning By-law.
4. Council has not done away with or repealed the Design Guidelines.

All of these planning policies remain in place.

One of council's goals for this term of council is to, "Determine the town's role in the development of the downtown and also the beachfront."

At the Feb. 28 Committee of the Whole meeting, committee met to discuss the downtown and beachfront and recommended some minor changes to OPA 52. These changes pertained to introducing flexibility in the plan so that certain requirements were no longer mandatory; they are now to be optional. In addition, the development of a Festival Square at the beachfront was confirmed, however, the need for a second square on Main Street is to be reviewed.

Committee of the Whole also approved proceeding with the Environmental Assessment on Main Street, Beach Drive, and the other streets in the beach area to determine the optimum configuration of the streets, sidewalks and bike lanes, including the need for roundabouts.

"Economic development remains a top priority for members of council," Mayor Nina Bifulchi said. "Moving our community forward in a fashion that reflects a vision shared by a broad segment of our residents is of the utmost importance."

Community Hub

As part of the Downtown Master plan there was an area identified as the "Community Hub." It was to contain public uses such as a twin pad arena, library, cultural centre and other public uses. This approach addressed a provincial initiative that was encouraging municipalities to develop community hubs to make it easier for the public to access a variety of uses in one location.

As part of the Downtown Plan a significant number of Wasaga Beach Community Hub components were identified to be located on private property. On January 8, 2019, committee was made aware of two factors related to the community hub:

1. The new provincial government cancelled the Community Hubs Program and advised that future funding for municipalities to help implement hubs is uncertain.
2. The appraised values of the property required for the community hub are estimated to be between \$7.9M and \$15.8M depending on the land required. This is in addition to the monies paid by the previous council for 140 Main St.

Because of these factors, and the feedback members of council heard during the election, members of council decided to pause the community hub component of the plan and requested that staff consider other locations for the twin pad arena and library. This review is underway.

“The majority around our council table heard loud and clear during the election that people wanted these issues reconsidered and that is what we are doing,” Mayor Bifulchi said. “The availability of tax dollars are limited for these types of projects. Council wants to ensure that it is investing these dollars wisely.”

Next Steps

Council is also consulting with the public on the review and update of the Official Plan as it pertains to where future commercial, tourism and employment growth should be located, building on the work that was done for the downtown area.

The first open house is this Wednesday, March 6, from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the RecPlex. The public are encouraged to get involved.

In the coming weeks council will be reviewing the Community Improvement policies to see how they can be used to further another council goal of “Supporting the private sector in growing and diversifying the tax base.”

“Continuing private sector investment in our community is important and council wants to determine what role it can take to support that investment,” said Mayor Bifulchi.

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