

CITY ADMINISTRATION DIVISION
OPEN SESSION REPORT

TO: Mayor and Members of Council
FROM: Kelly Provost, Director of Economic Development
DATE: September 15, 2025
SUBJECT: Neighborhood Revitalization Project (NRP) Final Progress Report

Recommendation

For Council's Information

Background

At its meeting on March 13, 2023, Sarnia City Council endorsed the City's application to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' (OMAFRA) Rural Economic Development Program for a Neighbourhood Revitalization Project (NRP) covering Downtown Sarnia and Mitton Village areas.

The City's application was successful, and the Neighbourhood Revitalization Project (NRP) was officially launched on August 15, 2023, with the hiring of an Economic Development Coordinator.

The first 8 months of the project were spent conducting background data collection, public engagement, business inventories, and business visitations. An online survey was launched, one-to-one meetings were conducted, pop-up events were held, and a strategic planning session was facilitated to allow businesses, residents, and visitors of both areas the opportunity to provide input into the action plan's development.

On May 6, 2024, Sarnia City Council received and endorsed the NRP Action Plan (Attachment 1). The plan outlined key initiatives to advance efforts towards revitalization in Downtown Sarnia and Mitton Village along 3 priority areas: business support services; marketing and promotion; and opportunities for improvements to the public realm.

On January 20, 2025, Sarnia City Council received the NRP Progress Update (Attachment 2) showcasing the first 6 months of the plan's implementation.

The NRP project concluded on July 31, 2025 as per the terms of the agreement with the Province of Ontario. This report is meant to serve as the final update on the accomplishments made through the term of the project.

Comments

Attachment 3 of this report outlines the key pillars and actions of the NRP plan, along with a final progress update on each item.

The project has been a significant success with all key performance indicators fully achieved. This outcome reflects the effectiveness of the planning and execution of the NRP action plan initiatives, which was made possible through collaboration efforts from within and outside the organization.

In addition to meeting the program targets, feedback received about the project's success have been overwhelmingly positive. Partners have expressed satisfaction with the outcomes, noting the improved communication and collaboration opportunities, and the valuable relationships established through these efforts. These developments are expected to have lasting benefits beyond the scope of this project.

Consultation

Significant consultation has been conducted through the two years of the project with business owners, property owners, residents, business groups like the Downtown Business Collective and Mitton Village Community Development Advisory Committee, and more. Ongoing collaboration with City Departments has also been maintained to align NRP activities with broader City initiatives and to strive towards a cohesive approach to revitalization efforts.

Financial Implications

None.

Reviewed by:

Kelly Provost
Director of Economic Development

Approved by:

Chris Carter
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared by Mykyta Ivanchuk, Economic Development Coordinator.

Attachments:

1. [Report to Council May 6, 2024](#) - NRP Action Plan
2. [Report to Council January 20, 2025](#) – NRP Progress Update
3. NRP Action Plan Final Progress Update

Attachment 3 - NRP Action Plan Final Progress Update

Goal #1: Businesses Support Services to retain, attract, and grow businesses in Downtown Sarnia and Mitton Village		
Key Actions	Timeline	Progress
1. Create and Maintain Inventories	Short Term	Completed, with ongoing maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inventory of 260 businesses and organizations developed Interactive Business Directory launched and maintained All business contact through NRP logged in departmental CRM system Additional inventories completed for both areas include: benches, bike racks, garbage bins, signage, vacant properties, meeting spaces, and areas in the public realm of concern to help assess future enhancement needs
2. Host Business Retention and Expansion Meetings	Ongoing	Completed, with ongoing efforts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approx. 120 business retention and expansion meetings were conducted across Downtown Sarnia and Mitton Village to identify challenges, barriers, and potential for growth Identified barriers have been addressed, where possible, and referrals made to external support organizations, where appropriate
3. Meet with Property Owners of Unoccupied Storefronts	Short Term	Completed, with ongoing efforts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inventoried 26 unoccupied storefronts Contact made with all owners of the properties with a meeting invitation 8 meetings with property owners were conducted to inform them about CIP opportunities, share marketing campaign ideas, ask about future occupancy plans, and offer assistance with listing the property on the department's site selection tool

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 8 of 26 vacant properties (approx. 31%) were occupied by a new business or organization through the project's duration
4. Host and/or Partner on Business Training Opportunities	Ongoing	<p>Completed</p> <p>Sessions hosted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. AI Renaissance*: Oct 2023 2. NRP Strategy Session: March 2024 3. AI Masterclass*: April 2024 4. Drive Sales with Digital Marketing: Dec 2024 5. Peer-to-Peer workshop: March 2025 6. Peer-to-Peer workshop: June 2025 <p>*Hosted in partnership with the Lambton Business Collaborative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peer-to-Peer workshops connected business owners from Downtown Sarnia and Mitton Village to share their journey with one another, and encourage new collaboration opportunities ▪ 46 business owners participated in the Peer-to-Peer workshops ▪ Feedback from attendees asked to conduct this type of workshop quarterly going forward
5. Improve Business Connectivity and Communication	Ongoing	<p>Completed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 707 business visits completed in 2025 to maintain connectivity and communication ▪ Approx. 260 businesses received regular updates through CRM campaign e-blasts, phone calls, and direct communication. Topics included: policy reviews, project developments, funding opportunities, business support, etc. ▪ Staff participated in the Downtown Business Collective; the Mitton Village Community Development Advisory Committee; the NRP Management Committee; and the Neighborhood Connects Committee

6. Facilitate discussion on a Business Improvement Area (BIA)	Mid Term	<p>Completed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordinator contacted communities across Southwestern Ontario to speak with BIA reps to discuss best practices ▪ Information on BIAs was shared with groups/committees where applicable ▪ A business training session on BIAs was offered, but feedback indicated a preference for training or Peer-to-Peer events in place of this topic ▪ An in-person meeting with a neighbouring BIA is planned in fall 2025
7. Increase Participation in Policy Review	Ongoing	<p>Completed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Coordinator engaged in ongoing discussions in-person and through email distribution regarding policy review ▪ Staff also used committee participation as an avenue to engage in discussions on proposed policy changes ▪ Feedback was accepted and changes made where applicable/appropriate
8. Promote City Programs for Business	Ongoing	<p>Completed</p> <p>The NRP Coordinator actively promoted and raised awareness of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Downtown/Mitton Village Community Improvement Program (CIP) which saw a 30% increase in eligibility reviews submitted ▪ Temporary Sidewalk Patio Program – a website and marketing campaign launched to streamline the process to expand their operations outdoors ▪ Custom post cards of the program were distributed to every business unit in the project area ▪ Coordinator provided ongoing promotion of the services available from the City's Economic Development department and coordinated meetings where appropriate

Goal #2: Marketing and Promoting Downtown Sarnia and Mitton Village		
Key Actions	Timeline	Progress
1. Encourage, Cultivate, and Promote Events	Mid Term	<p>Completed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agreement signed in August 2024 with Neighborhood Connects to help plan, market, and coordinate up to six events in the Mitton Village parkette: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "Mittens for Mitton" event in Dec 2024 ▪ "Earth Day Community Cleanup" event in April 2025 ▪ "Schools Out" event in June 2025 with approx. 290 attendees ▪ "Valentine's Day" event in Feb 2025 and "Gentle Chair Exercise Class" in May 2025 planned but cancelled due to weather ▪ Coordinator provided support with marketing materials, graphic design, promotional efforts, and logistics ▪ Coordinator attended the B2B Resource event and the Sarnia Lambton Chamber Business Showcase events ▪ A community events calendar was created and launched with support from the City's Communications department
2. Develop Marketing Tools and Channels	Ongoing	<p>Completed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Paid advertisements were purchased in several tourism-focused publications to promote Mitton Village and Downtown ▪ Promotional content and updates from both areas were increased through Invest Sarnia and Explore Sarnia social media channels ▪ Photography captured during community events, business workshops, and grand openings for use in promotional campaigns and social media ▪ Additional photo and video assets have been developed for both areas

3. Create and Deploy Custom Marketing Campaigns	Short and Mid Term	<p>Completed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Over 1,500 Downtown and Mitton Village branded totes were distributed as part of a “Place you want to be” branded campaign ▪ An interactive Municipal Parking Lot map was developed to highlight all publicly available municipal parking lots across the city <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The map allows users to click on each lot to view detailed information, including location, availability, and any applicable restrictions. ▪ Custom marketing pieces were developed to promote the Parking Map including a window decal QR code. The decals were distributed to business owners within the NRP boundaries, allowing customers to access the digital map while visiting local businesses ▪ Coordinator designed and personalized invitation cards to business owners for Peer-to-Peer workshops ▪ Coordinated designed, printed, and distributed posters to support Neighbourhood Connects events ▪ Two municipally-owned public information boards were updated with new marketing materials to direct residents and visitors to the Business Directory, Parking Map, Event Calendar and more
Goal #3: Identify Opportunities for Improvements to the Public Realm*		
Key Actions	Timeline	Progress
1. Beautification*	Long Term	<p>Initiated, but requires long term support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consultation has been conducted to identify highest-priority public realm improvements for both areas ▪ In coordination with the City's Engineering/Operations department,

		<p>16 outdated or missing street signs were updated or added to align brand consistency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support was provided to the Downtown Collective to pilot a Curb Clean-Up program to encourage owners/tenants to maintain spaces in front of their properties ▪ In response to feedback on garbage issues, the City's Environmental Services inspector distributed friendly reminders to commercial and residential units about proper garbage disposal times ▪ A communications process has been established to advise the City of public realm matters of concern including graffiti, repairs, maintenance requests, etc.
2. Improve Safety Measures*	Long Term	<p>Initiated, but requires long term support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conversations and consultations regarding safety were conducted throughout the project ▪ Sarnia Police Service introduced a pilot project for a "Downtown Village Constable" covering Downtown and Mitton Village during the program term, increasing the sense of safety in both areas
3. Develop Engaging Infrastructure*	Long Term	<p>Initiated, but requires long term support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff have engaged with external parties to identify, review, and consider opportunities for funding public realm improvements

* Public realm improvements were not within the scope of the NRP project or its budget. Progress made towards these actions, outside of consultation efforts, were made possible due to support from City departments, community partners, and/or alternate funding sources.